

## **Osler Society and Osler Board of Curators Essay Contest: Reflective Essay**

Producing this essay for the Osler Society and Osler Library Board of Curators contest would not have been possible without the wonderful resources available at the Osler Library. Their collection houses an impressive number of volumes covering just about every imaginable topic in the field of medicine. The library holds every major work published about my topic, which simplified the task of tracking down sources.

Though I am no stranger to writing research papers, what made this particular experience special was the opportunity to work with an actual archive of primary sources dealing with my topic. Having chosen Norman Bethune as the focus of my essay, I was thrilled to find out that the Norman Bethune Collection at the Osler Library is a rich archival collection of primary materials, including Bethune's correspondence, his medical and political writings, countless press clippings, interviews with his contemporaries, photos, and various memorabilia such as stamps, brochures, pamphlets, and the like. In addition, the Roderick Stewart Fonds at the Osler Library contains material gathered by Roderick Stewart, Bethune's most prominent biographer, while the Bethune Foundation Fonds and the Louis and Irene Kon Fonds document attempts to revive Bethune's memory in the 1960s and 70s.

Though it was my first time working with an archive, the helpful library staff made accessing the files uncomplicated. Within my first visit to the library, I was already combing through a wealth of primary sources that gave me a unique and unadulterated glimpse into the life of Norman Bethune. Examining the unfiltered archive made me feel like I was digging deeper into the topic than secondary sources would allow. The information I was able to glean from the archive hopefully added balance and maybe even novelty to the information I used for my essay, which was taken from the existing and thorough treatments of his life that are available.

What struck me most about the experience was how much I enjoyed working with the archive. It is a true privilege to have such a rare collection at your fingertips, and I ended up spending many hours flipping through pages of materials, learning about not only Bethune, but also the Royal Victoria Hospital and Montreal in the 1920s and 30s. It was special to be able to learn the history of such an influential yet overlooked individual, and to learn that he was also one of us.