

Collection of William T. G. Morton Materials
Wellesley Historical Society

Repository Identifier

mawelhs

Local Identifier

2016.23

Name and Location of Repository

The Wellesley Historical Society
229 Washington Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 235-6690
www.wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org

Title

Collection of William T. G. Morton Materials, 1847 - 1990

Date

1847 - 1990

Extent

.5 linear feet, 1 box

Name of Creator

Wellesley Historical Society

Biographical Note

William Thomas Green Morton, August 9, 1819 – July 15, 1868, moved to West Needham in 1845, which was later became incorporated as Wellesley in 1881. His home, which became known as Etherton Cottage stood on the land where the Wellesley Town Hall is now located. Morton was a dentist and manufacturer of artificial teeth. It was his desire to spare his patients from the pain of pulling teeth that led Morton to begin his early experiments with ether. Morton is often credited with being the first to successfully administer ether as an anesthetic during surgery. This is largely due to a demonstration which he took part in at Massachusetts General Hospital on October 16, 1864. The demonstration involved Morton administering ether to a young man undergoing surgery to remove a tumor from his jaw. The surgery and the effectiveness of ether was deemed to be a success.

Despite the success of the ether demonstration, Morton would spend the rest of his life in dispute with others in the scientific and medical community as to whom had made the discovery that ether could be used as surgical anesthesia. Although, Morton is still often credited with the discovery, many historians agree that the story is complex enough to suggest that Morton does not deserve sole credit.

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Scope and Content Note

This collection contains materials related to the William T. G. Morton and his work regarding ether. The bulk of the collection is made up of unpublished and published research regarding Morton's role in the use of ether as anesthesia.

Index Terms

Anesthesia — History

Clippings

Ether — History

Massachusetts — Anniversaries, etc.

Massachusetts — Wellesley

Morton, W. T. G (William Thomas Green). — 1819–1868

Wellesley (Mass.) — Biography

Wellesley (Mass.) — History

System of Arrangement

This collection is organized into four series arranged by subject:

- I. Personal Items; undated
- II. Visual Materials; undated
- III. Unpublished Research Materials Regarding Morton & Ether; 1946, 1960 – 1990, & undated
- IV. Published & Unpublished Writings Regarding Morton & Ether; 1847 – 1987, & undated

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research purposes by appointment only. Please contact the Wellesley Historical Society for more information.

info@wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org

(781) 235-6690

Physical Access

Some of the materials are fragile.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

Copyright restrictions may apply.

Languages and Scripts of the Material

English

Immediate Source of Acquisition

B.21

Accruals

The Historical Society may add materials to the Papers in the future; however, no further accruals are currently expected.

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Description

Processing of this collection was made possible through a grant from the Wellesley Community Preservation Committee.

DACS Finding Aid created by Taylor C. Kalloch in August 2016.

Bibliography

Hinchliffe, Elizabeth M. *Five Pound Currency, Three Pounds of Corn: Wellesley's Centennial Story*. Wellesley, MA: Town of Wellesley, 1981.

Lawrence, Christopher. "Morton, William Thomas Green". *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000. <http://www.anb.org/articles/12/12-00646.html>

Markel, Howard. "The Painful Story Behind Modern Anesthesia". PBS NewsHour: The Rundown, October 16, 2013. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/the-painful-story-behind-modern-anesthesia/>

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Container List

I. Personal Items; undated

This series contains items which belonged to Morton, such as his bible.

Box 1

Folder 1: Morton's Bible; undated

Archives Oversize Box 4

Folder 13: Personal Materials; 1847, 1857, & undated

II. Visual Materials; undated

This series contains visual materials related to Morton. Of note is a map detailing the location of his grave in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Box 1

Folder 2: Images of Morton; Photographs, Drawings, Etc.; undated

Folder 3: Mount Auburn Cemetery, Morton Grave Location and Map; undated

III. Unpublished Research Materials Regarding Morton & Ether Discovery; 1946, 1960 – 1990, & undated

This series contains unpublished research information concerning Morton and his discovery. This series includes correspondence discussing Morton and his work.

Box 1

Folder 4: Bibliographic Information Regarding Morton; 1970, & undated

Folder 5: Correspondence Regarding Morton; 1946, & 1960 - 1990

IV. Published & Unpublished Writings Regarding Morton & Ether Discovery; 1847 – 1987, & undated

This series contains published research materials regarding Morton and his discovery of Ether.

Box 1

Folder 6: Discovery of Anesthesia Anniversary and Remembrance Information; 1933, 1946, & 1972

Folder 7: "The Discovery of Anesthesia" by Elizabeth Whitman Morton, McClure's Magazine; July 1896

Folder 8: Further Study of Morton Field Land by Katherine Healy, Published in Townsman; January 11, 1959

Folder 9: Newspaper Clippings; bulk undated

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- Folder 10: “Memoranda Relating to the Discovery of Surgical Anesthesia, and Dr. William T. G. Morton’s Relation to this Event, by William James Morton, M.D.; 1905
- Folder 11: Published Writings Regarding Morton, Bound, #1; 1947, & undated
- Folder 12: Published Writings Regarding Morton, Bound, #2; 1847, & undated
- Folder 13: Published Writings Regarding Morton, Journal Articles; 1946 – 1987
- Folder 14: Unpublished Writings Regarding Morton; undated
- Folder 15: Wellesley Buttonwood Tree; 1902

Archives Oversize Box 4

- Folder 14: Oversized Materials Concerning Discovery of Ether & Hickley’s Ether Experiment Painting; undated