

THE ISAAC RAY PAPERS

The Oskar Diethelm Library
DeWitt Wallace Institute for the History of Psychiatry
Weill Cornell Medical College
525 East 68th Street
New York, New York 10065

Arranged and described by:
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Provenance

The original Isaac Ray Papers were purchased by New York Hospital – Cornell Medical Center, Department of Psychiatry ca. 1977-1981, but there is no written record of this transaction. The originals are a small segment of the collection.

The photocopies of Isaac Ray's correspondence and lecture notes, and the accompanying transcripts were made and donated to the Archives of Psychiatry (now the Oskar Diethelm Library) by Dr. Jacques M. Quen between 1965 and 1976. These comprise the majority of the Isaac Ray Papers.

Originals of the photocopies are housed in a variety of libraries and archives. The repositories are as follows:

American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts
Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
Butler Hospital, Providence, Rhode Island
College of Physicians, Philadelphia
Duke University, Durham, North Carolina
Harvard University
Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia
Massachusetts Historical Society
National Archives, Washington, D.C.

There are no restrictions regarding use of the original documents in possession of the Oskar Diethelm Library. However, most of the collection consists of photocopies, and publication rights of this material lie with the owner of the originals. Each repository must be contacted individually for publication purposes. The owner of each letter is noted on the typed transcription copy housed in black spring binders.

The collection consists of 1.2 cubic ft. of material.

Biography

Isaac Ray was born on January 16, 1807 in Beverly, Massachusetts and received his medical degree at the age of twenty from the Medical School of Maine at Bowdoin College.

Ray was superintendent of the Maine Insane Hospital in Augusta, Maine and of the Butler Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island. He retired from Butler Hospital in 1867 and moved to Philadelphia, where he became a controversial figure in social and hospital reform and helped to found the Philadelphia Social Science Association. He was a pre-eminent nineteenth century American psychiatrist, outstanding for his role in the development of the field of psychiatry and the law.

Ray insisted on protection and justice for the insane (from whom all legal civil prerogatives had been removed) while at the same time acknowledging society's right to protect itself against persons whose behavior may cause harm.

In *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity*, published in 1838, Ray called for reform of the criminal justice laws and for reform of the incompetency and commitment laws. In his discussion of the relative and different incompetencies of the mentally delayed and the insane, he favored respect for their rights to liberty and the exercise of control over aspects of what affairs they were able to manage. Later, Ray dealt with the question of illegal or malicious involuntary commitment of the insane.

Ray corresponded frequently with Judge Charles Doe of the New Hampshire Supreme Court concerning the insanity defense and involuntary commitment of the insane. Their viewpoints differed, but Ray's arguments had an evident impact on Judge Doe's position.

Scope and Content

The Isaac Ray Papers are subdivided into three series: Correspondence, Phillips' Will Contest, and Lectures.

The CORRESPONDENCE (1831-1881, 2 boxes) is largely comprised of photocopies and typed transcripts. Some originals are also included. There appear to be transcripts for nearly every day for which the collection houses photocopies. Correspondence was exchanged between Ray's colleagues and deals with professional matters involving hospitals, the insane, and opinions of the law. Ray also discussed personal and familial matters.

Some of Ray's frequent correspondents include: Judge Charles Doe of New Hampshire, with whom Ray exchanged ideas about laws of insanity; Dorothea L. Dix, a non-physician who helped to establish hospitals for the insane by exposing conditions in almshouses, jails and private homes where patients were confined; Pliny Earle, psychiatrist at the Northampton Lunatic Hospital, Massachusetts; Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride, a physician and advocate for the mentally ill who was involved in the construction, organization and general arrangements of mental hospitals; and Dr. John Sawyer, assistant physician at Butler Hospital during Isaac Ray's tenure, who became superintendent after Ray's retirement.

PHILLIPS' WILL CONTEST (1879, 3 folders) papers relate to a wealthy man, D. W. Phillips of Lebanon, Kentucky, who became paralyzed after making his will. Several years later a "quack" doctor advised him to change his will. The series consists of legal documents involving Ray who testified that Phillips was of unsound mind when making the second will.

The LECTURES (1870-1873, 2 folders) are typescripts of lectures on insanity delivered by Ray at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia. He discussed moral insanity, mental inequalities, the legal consequences of epilepsy, the treatment of insanity, insanity among seduced or deserted women, and other topics. Also included are notes concerning the testimony of Sam Adams, which were not written by Isaac Ray.

Inventory

Box #1

Series CORRESPONDENCE

Folder 1	A – D - Photocopies	1831-1877
2	Dorothea L. Dix - Photocopies	1843-1880
3	Justice Charles Doe - Photocopies	1866-1872
4	Pliny Earle - Photocopies	1844-1879
5	F – R - Photocopies	1862-1880
6	Dr. Thomas S. Kirkbride	1847-1880
7	Russell & Averitt, attorneys at law re: disputed will of L. N. Phillips - Photocopies	1879
8	S – T - Photocopies	1844-1877
9	Dr. John Sawyer	1873-1879

10	From Ray to unstated individuals - Photocopies	1844-1880
11	Letters, contents have been briefly summarized – Photocopies	1841-1881
12	Letters, contents have been briefly summarized – Originals	1841-1881

Series LECTURES

13	Lectures on insanity delivered at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia – Photocopies	1870-1873
14	Lectures on insanity delivered at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia – Photocopies	1870-1873

Box # 2

Series CORRESPONDENCE

Binder 1	Typed transcripts of correspondence	1835-1867
2	Typed transcripts of correspondence	1868-1888

Box # 3

Series CORRESPONDENCE

Folder 1	Undated letters and reports - Photocopies	1850's-1890's
2	Undated letters and reports - Originals	1850's-1890's

Series PHILLIPS' WILL CONTEST

3	Opinion of Isaac Ray on the mental status of O. W. Phillips - Originals	5/13/1879
4	Interrogatories used in court proceedings - Originals	1879?
5	Statement of facts and testimony of witnesses - Originals	1879?