

Hiram Corson Family Papers

Finding aid prepared by Nancy Sullivan
at the Historical Society of Montgomery County

Last updated December 16, 2015

Summary Information

Repository: The Historical Society of Montgomery County

Title: Hiram Corson Family Papers

Creator: Corson, Hiram, 1804-1896

Dates: 1827-1896

Accession number: 1956.10555

Extent: 4 linear feet, 4 linear inches

Language: English

Biographical Note:

Hiram Corson, MD, was born in 1804 in Plymouth Township to Joseph and Hannah Dickinson Corson. He was married to Ann Jones Foulke in 1833 and had nine children with her. He studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Corson was an early detractor of the medical use of alcohol and an active abolitionist. He took on his niece, Sarah Adamson (later Dr. Sarah Adamson Dolley) as an apprentice. After she earned her medical degree, he supported her application to Blockley Hospital in Philadelphia. Dr. Corson was widely published and honored by many professional societies, including the American Medical Association and College of Physicians of Philadelphia. At the end of his life, Dr. Corson was thought to be the oldest practicing physician in the United States. He retired from medicine in 1895 and died in 1896.

Alan W. Corson, Hiram's brother, was born in Whitemarsh, Pa. in 1788. He was a polymath and school teacher, first at Plymouth Meeting Friends School, then at his own boarding and day school. In his mid-life, he stopped teaching and worked on his extensive farm while also working as a land surveyor. He was married to Mary Egbert in 1811, and they had five children. Alan W. Corson was a strict Quaker who wore their tradition plain clothes. He should not be confused with his grandson with the same name. He died in 1882.

Scope and content: This collection of papers contains several volumes of Dr. Corson's diaries, his published works, correspondence (personal and professional), and notes. There are also newspaper clippings of Dr. Corson's writings and on topics that were of interest to him, particularly female physicians and care of the insane. Corson was a champion of asylum reform and promoted women in medicine, and many of his writings, correspondence, and newspaper clippings concern these issues. His published writings consists of medical treatises on pneumonia, diphtheria, and cholera. In addition to Dr. Hiram Corson's papers, there are some papers belonging to his uncle, Alan W. Corson, which consist mainly of correspondence. There is a small group of papers relating to the Montgomery County Anti-Slavery Society.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in seven series:

- A. Dr. Hiram Corson's Diaries
- B. Ledger

- C. Correspondence
- D. Letters relating to abolitionism
- E. Published writings
- F. Notes and writings
- G. Certificates, memberships, and licenses
- H. Alan W. Corson Papers
- I. Correspondence of Joseph K. Corson
- J. Papers relating to the death of Dr. Hiram Corson

Administrative information: This finding aid was prepared by Nancy Sullivan.

Conditions governing access: This collection is open for research.

Sources used: Augé, Moses, *Lives of the Eminent Dead and Biographical Notices of Prominent Living Citizens of Montgomery County, Pa.*

Controlled access headings:

Family names:

Corson
Dickinson
Dungan
Wright

Personal names:

Corson, Alan W., 1788-1882
Corson, Hiram, 1804-1896
Corson, Joseph

Subject names:

Abolition movement
Abolitionists
Asylums
Centennial Exhibition (1876 : Philadelphia, Pa.)
Childbirth
Cholera
Dickinson Family Association
Diphtheria
Keasbey & Mattison Company
Medicine
Pneumonia
Scarlatina
Smallpox

Temperance
United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865
Vaccinations
Woman's Christian Temperance Union
Women physicians
Women's suffrage
Yellow fever

Collection Inventory

Series A. Dr. Hiram Corson's Diaries

Extent: 1.5 linear feet

Dates: 1827-1896, bulk 1861-1896

Scope and Content Note: This series consists of sixteen volumes of handwritten diaries. The diaries were rebound in tan library binding by the Corson family in the 1950's. The earliest diary is from Corson's time as a medical student, 1827-28. The other fifteen diaries have been numbered one through fifteen. Each has a summery from the original diary pasted to the outside. All the diaries are annotated in the margins.

The diaries cover a variety of topics including family events, current events, and medical issues of the day. Much time is spent on the Civil War (1861-1865), small pox, Woman's Suffrage and women in the medical profession, and the temperance movement. Dr. Corson pasted many newspaper articles into his diaries, mainly obituaries, but also articles on the Garfield assassination, Charles Dickens, President Grant, and the Civil War. Other enclosures include many personal letters from family, colleagues, and patients. There are also funeral cards, Confederate money, and invitations.

Coverage is sporadic, especially in the early volumes. Most of the later volumes have an index in the front written by Corson. A modern transcription is available.

Existence and location of copies: A transcription by Dr. Louis A. Meier are available in the reading room and online at the Medical Heritage Library, <http://www.medicalheritage.org/2015/03/new-to-the-mhl-hiram-corson-diaries/>

Location: Lower:2L:1

Immediate source of acquisition: Dr. Edward F. Corson

Series B. Ledger, 1877-1890

Extent: 1 linear inch

Dates: 1887-1890

Scope and Content Note: This ledger records Dr. Corson's medical practice.

Location: Lower:2L:2

Immediate source of acquisition: Dr. Edward F. Corson

Series C. Correspondence of Dr. Hiram Corson

Extent: 12 linear inches

Dates: 1864-1892

Scope and Content Note: This series consists of the correspondence of Hiram Corson, consisting mainly of letters written by Dr. Corson to Joseph Corson. There are also letters to his daughter. There is some penciled annotation. Undated letters were kept in the order they were found. Letters written to Corson are foldered separately, but also in this series.

Location: Lower:2L:2,3

Immediate source of acquisition: Dr. Edward F. Corson

Subseries 1: Correspondence of Dr. Hiram Corson – professional

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains correspondence with other doctors, medical and alumni associations, and membership certificates.

Subseries 2: Letters Regarding Writing on Pneumonia

Subseries 3: Letters Regarding Female Physicians in Asylums

Series D. Letters to Hiram Corson regarding Abolitionism

Extent: .5 inches

Dates: 1894

Scope and Content Note: This series consists of letters written to Dr. Hiram Corson in response to his inquiries about abolitionism in Montgomery County.

Location: Lower:2L:2;3

Immediate source of acquisition: Nanay C. Cresson

Series E. Published Writings

Extent: 5 linear inches

Dates: 1876-1894

Scope and Content Note: This series contains the published writings of Dr. Hiram Corson. Topics include care of the insane, female physicians, and the treatment of various diseases. There are also copies of articles by others that mention Corson or his writings. Also in this series is Corson's copy of the Charter, Ordinances and By-Laws of the College of Physicians.

Existence and location of copies: Additional copies of several of Corson's writings are housed with other medical booklets.

Location: Lower:2L:3

Immediate source of acquisition: Dr. Edward F. Corson

Series F. Notes and writings

Extent: 9 linear inches

Dates: 1883-1892

Scope and Content Note: This series consists of papers written by Hiram Corson about various medical topics such as state insane asylums, female physicians, and pneumonia. There are notes, drafts, and other writings. There is also some related correspondence and newspaper clippings. Most items have been arranged by type of record or by topic. One folder consists of items that were found together in a folio which concern various topics also found in other folders. Corson's many newspaper clippings are also included in this series.

Location: Lower:2L:8

Immediate source of acquisition: Dr. Edward F. Corson

Series G. Certificates, memberships, and licenses

Extent: 1 linear inch

Dates: 1862-1884

Scope and Content Note: This series consists of Dr. Hiram Corson's certificates, memberships in various medical and historical organizations, and his licenses to practice medicine. Included in this series is a folder of three large certificates for Corson's appointment as a trustee of the State Hospital in Norristown. Also, there is a folder of invitations to events and a program from the 1888 session of the Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania.

Location: Lower:2L:8

Immediate source of acquisition: Dr. Edward F. Corson

Series H. Alan W. Corson Papers

Accession number: 1936.001, 1971.11511.002

Extent: 4 linear inches

Dates: 1836-1853

Scope and Content Note: This series consists primarily of financial papers and correspondence of Alan W. Corson, a school teacher, farmer, and land surveyor in Plymouth Meeting. One folder contains the will of Ann Reiff, which was witnessed by Alan W. Corson.

Location: Lower:2L:3

Immediate source of acquisition: unknown

Note: This series was originally assigned "9092" as an accession number under the old system. However, the accession book, number 2, notes that two accessions were assigned this number. It gives no other information about the Alan W. Corson papers.

Series I: Papers of the Montgomery County Anti-Slavery Society

Accession number: 1954.10354, 1971.11511.003

Extent: 1 linear inch

Dates: 1836-1853

Scope and Content Note: This series consists of papers relating to activities of the Montgomery County Anti-Slavery Society, including the circulation of abolitionist petitions.

Location: Lower:2L:3

Immediate source of acquisition: Edward Corson, George Corson

Series J: Correspondence of Joseph K. Corson

Accession number: 2015.051

Extent: .25 linear inch

Dates: 1861-1864

Scope and Content Note: This folder contains letters Joseph K. Corson wrote to various people including his parents. Corson was in the 6th Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment (or the 35th Pennsylvania Infantry). He spent part of 1861 at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. There are no letters from 1862 or 1865.

Location: Lower:2L:8

Immediate source of acquisition: unknown

