

Walter Reed/James Carroll letters

Walter Reed was the commanding officer of the U.S. Army's Yellow Fever Commission working in Cuba at the turn of the Twentieth Century to determine the cause of that dreaded disease. One of the members of the team was Dr. James Carroll, an 1891 graduate of the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

This collection consists of forty-four original pieces of correspondence, many of them between Carroll and Reed. After Reed returned to the States, Carroll became the principal on-site authority, and the two men had much to coordinate in fulfilling the Commission's charge. The letters reflect a growing animosity in Carroll as the ordeal continued to wear onward toward its conclusion.

Also, many of the letters are from Carroll to his wife Jennie back home. They are genuine and tender, reflective of Carroll's dedication in keeping his wife apprised of the serious conditions under which he was living and working.

Carroll volunteered to be bitten by an infected mosquito, in attempt to prove whether the insect was indeed the carrier. Carroll contracted the disease, but fortunately survived, while one of his colleagues died as a result of his own infection. Perhaps the center jewel of the collection is the letter dated September 7, 1900 from Reed to Carroll, in which Reed expresses his jubilation that Carroll was improving, and declares, "Did the mosquito do it?" Reed adds his personal vow to "... simply go out and get boiling drunk!"

These letters present the very human dimensions of one of the most momentous events throughout the whole of medical history.