

Dr. James Carroll, Yellow Fever Commission Letters

Dates Created: September 1900 to October 1901

Date Donated: 2004 December 6

Extent: 37 Letters (1 linear foot)

Creator: Carroll, James, 1854-1907

Subjects:

Carroll, James, 1854-1907; Reed, Walter, 1851-1902; Yellow fever.; Yellow Fever Commission (U.S.); Yellow fever—Research—Cuba—History.; Mosquitoes as carriers of disease.; Medicine—Research; Medicine—Research—United States—History;



Abstract:

The Dr. James Carroll, Yellow Fever Commission Letters contain original letters to Janetta “Jennie” Carroll, Dr. Carroll’s wife as well as letters from Dr. Walter Reed, head of the United States Army Yellow Fever Commission in Cuba in 1900 and 1901. The research and experimentation completed by the Commission found that Yellow Fever was carried by Mosquitos and transmitted through their bites. The letters in this collection shed light on the research and experimentation process as well as the living conditions in Cuba during the Commission’s work. The letters provide a personal insight into the men who discovered the cause of Yellow Fever.

Biographical History:

Dr. James Carroll was born on April 7, 1854 in Woolwich, Kent County, England. At the age of 16, Carroll emigrated to Canada. In January 1874, Carroll once again relocated, this time to the United States where he joined the U.S. Army. He spent his early military career in the Western United States, gaining experience as a hospital steward and pursuing his medical education anywhere he could until completing his degree at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore in 1891. While in the Army, Dr. Carroll married Janetta “Jennie” George Lucas on May 3, 1888 in Ohio. The two had seven children.

After graduating from the University of Maryland, Dr. Carroll was assigned to the Army Medical Museum under the curatorship of Dr. Walter Reed in 1895. Thus began the collaboration between the two doctors that would last until Dr. Reed’s death in 1902. In 1899, Dr. Carroll was assigned to the Yellow Fever Commission lead by Dr. Reed in Cuba as second in command. The Commission included Drs. Reed and Carroll as well as Dr. Aristides Agramonte y Simoni and Dr. Jesse Lazear.

The Commission was charged with investigating the cause of a yellow fever outbreak among American troops in the region. They tested two theories: that Yellow Fever was contagious and spread by germs or carried by mosquitos, a theory put forth by Dr. Carlos Juan Finlay of Cuba. The doctors used human volunteers as well as themselves as test subjects. Dr. Carroll was the first to become infected through a mosquito bite on August 27, 1900. He suffered a severe case of Yellow Fever but survived to prove through additional tests that the mosquito was in fact the carrier of the disease.

After nearly dying from Yellow Fever Dr. Carroll returned to the United States to fully recover where Dr. Reed had already published an article about the Commissions' findings. Dr. Carroll returned to Cuba in August 1901 to do further tests on the causes and spread of Yellow Fever. Through these experiments he contributed additional understanding of the causes and spread of Yellow Fever and how it could be contained.

In 1902 Dr. Carroll became a lieutenant in the Army Medical Corps. He was appointed Professor of Bacteriology and Curator of the Army Medical Museum following Dr. Reed's death and later held the title of Professor of Pathology and Bacteriology at George Washington University. In March 1907 Dr. Reed was promoted to Major by an act of Congress.

Unfortunately, his bout of Yellow Fever in Cuba ultimately left Dr. Carroll with acute dilation of the heart. This led to his death on September 6, 1907.

Scope and Content:

This collection contains 37 letters written during the 1900 United States Army Yellow Fever Commission and subsequent Yellow Fever Research in Cuba from August 1900 to October 1901. The majority of the letters are written from Dr. James Carroll to his wife, Jennie (28) but there are a few letters from Dr. Walter Reed to Dr. Carroll (7), as well as a letter from Dr. Carroll to Dr. Reed and a letter from Dr. Carroll to the Adjunct General.

This collection includes a September 7, 1900 letter from Dr. Reed that asks: "Did the mosquito do it?" This letter hints at what the Commission was seeking to discover; whether the mosquito was the carrier of Yellow Fever or if it was a contagious disease. It was sent after Dr. Reed found out about Dr. Carroll's bout with and recovery from Yellow Fever after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Other letters from Dr. Reed discuss his excitement for the accomplishments of the commission and his admiration for Dr. Carroll and his work.

The letters to Mrs. Carroll, in addition to personal family matters, provide insight into Dr. Carroll's work in Cuba and his demeanor. At times he expresses frustration with the work, delays in progress, life and conditions in Cuba, slow moving promotions, and occasionally Dr. Reed, his superior. He also writes about the successes he and his colleagues experience and sadness for the loss of Dr. Jesse Lazear who passes after infecting himself with Yellow Fever.

The letters provide a personal insight into the men who discovered the cause of Yellow Fever.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged chronologically.

Access Restrictions: This collection is open for research.

Language: Materials entirely in English.

Custodial History: The letters in this collection were held by Dr. Carroll's family, specifically his daughter Mrs. Ethel McClung, after his death. Mrs. McClung passed the papers onto Carolyn Morris at the time of her death. The Morris Family gave the materials to Dr. Theodore E. Woodward, professor of medicine at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. The collection was held in Dr. Woodward's office until December 2004 when they were transferred permanently to the Historical Collections in the Health Sciences and Human Services Library at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Acquisition: Donated to the library in December 2004 by Dr. Theodore E. Woodward.

Related Photocopies: Reproductions of the letters in the Carroll Collection as well as five letters not found in the collection are available in the Historical Collections at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

Related Photocopies: Photocopies of the letters exist as part of the University of Virginia's Philip S. Hench Walter Reed Yellow Fever Collection, Series XVI. Edward Hook Additions:
<https://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/uva-lib:2232367>.

Letter Inventory:

<i>Date</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>From</i>
<i>August 5, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>August 27, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>August 31, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>September 7, 1900</i>	James Carroll	Walter Reed
<i>September 7, 1900 (1:15 pm)</i>	James Carroll	Walter Reed
<i>September 19, 1900</i>	James Carroll	Walter Reed
<i>September 26, 1900</i>	James Carroll	Walter Reed
<i>October 1, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>October 3, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>November 24, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>November 27, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>December 1, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>December 5, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>December 28, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>December 30, 1900</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>January 8, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>January 11, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>January 19, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>February 2, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>February 22, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>February 28, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>March 1, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>August 20, 1901</i>	James Carroll	Walter Reed
<i>August 24, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>September 1, 1901</i>	Walter Reed	James Carroll
<i>September 3, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>September 5, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>September 6, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>September 20, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>September 20, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>October 3, 1901</i>	James Carroll	Walter Reed
<i>October 3, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
<i>October 6, 1901</i>	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll

October 8, 1901	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
October 20, 1901	Jennie Carroll	James Carroll
October 24, 1901	Adjunct General	James Carroll
October 26, 1901	James Carroll	Walter Reed

Sources Used:

G.M.S. (1907). James Carroll. *Sciences, New Series*, 26 (666). Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1633918>.

Kelley, Howard A. (1908). James Carroll. *Proceedings of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, 10. Retrieved from: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/33720>.

Del Regato, Juan A. (1998). James Carroll: A Biography. *Annals of Diagnostic Pathology*, 2 (5). Retrieved from: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1092-9134\(98\)80027-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1092-9134(98)80027-0).

Processing Information: Dr. Theodore E. Woodward organized and foldered the letters chronologically. Finding aid written in June 2018 by Tara Wink, Historical Librarian and Archivist.