



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Alexander E. MacDonald scrapbook, letters and documents

1873-1902

MssCol 24537

Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2018.

Summary

Creator: MacDonald, A. E. (Alexander E.)

Title: Alexander E. MacDonald scrapbook, letters and documents

Date: 1873-1902

Size: .21 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Purchased from Glenn Horowitz, 2018.

Abstract: Alexander E. MacDonald, M.D. (1845-1906) was a prominent American physician and psychiatrist, and a leader in the development of New York City's public institutions for the treatment of mentally-ill persons. The collection consists of Dr. Alexander MacDonald's scrapbook of entertainments held for patients in New York City public hospitals on Blackwell's Island and Ward's Island, 1873-1875, and several letters and documents relating to his professional activities, 1897-1902. The scrapbook, dated 1873 August 30-1874 June 19 and 1875 June 9, contains pasted newspaper clippings and programs documenting part of a series of weekly entertainments initiated by MacDonald for patients of Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island), 1873-1874, with an 1875 clipping for an entertainment at the New York City Asylum for the Insane on Ward's Island. Letters and documents chiefly pertain to MacDonald's attendance at professional conferences abroad, certifying his membership and credentials; there is also a personal letter from George E. Dodge (1849-1904) to MacDonald, 1902 June 28, regarding MacDonald's work on Ward's Island. A civil service flyer and a half-tone photographic portrait of MacDonald are included.

Preferred citation: Alexander E. MacDonald scrapbook, letters and documents, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2018.

Creator History

Alexander E. MacDonald, M.D. (1845-1906) was a prominent American physician and psychiatrist, and a leader in the development of New York City's public institutions for the treatment of mentally-ill

persons.

Born in Toronto, Canada, MacDonald moved to the United States to continue his medical studies, receiving his degree in 1870 from what is now New York University. He then took work as a physician on Blackwell's Island, the home of many of the City's social welfare and correctional institutions. The calibre of his work was such that he was appointed Chief of Staff of Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island in 1871. MacDonald resigned in 1874 to take the position of Resident Physician at the New York City Asylum for the Insane on Ward's Island, becoming Medical Superintendent the following year. In 1886 he was appointed General Superintendent of New York City Asylums for the Insane, continuing as such when those asylums were reorganized as Manhattan State Hospital in 1896. He retired as Superintendent of Manhattan State Hospital East (Ward's Island) in 1904. In addition, MacDonald was Professor of Psychological Medicine and Medical Jurisprudence at New York University, having received a Bachelor of Laws degree there in 1881. He was also recognized for instituting open-air tent treatment on Ward's Island for asylum patients suffering from tuberculosis. MacDonald was a member of several professional organizations, including the American Medical Association and the American Medico-Psychological Association, and was a fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of Dr. Alexander MacDonald's scrapbook of entertainments held for patients in New York City public hospitals on Blackwell's Island and Ward's Island, 1873-1875, and several letters and documents relating to his professional activities, 1897-1902.

The scrapbook, dated 1873 August 30-1874 June 19 and 1875 June 9, contains pasted newspaper clippings and programs documenting part of a series of weekly entertainments initiated by MacDonald for patients of Charity Hospital on Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island), 1873-1874, with an 1875 clipping for an entertainment at the New York City Asylum for the Insane on Ward's Island. Clippings for Charity Hospital cover over forty performances, and include two illustrations from *Harper's Weekly* (February 14, 1874) and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (following the program for February 27, 1874).

Entertainments, or staged recitals of song, music, poetry, and comic pieces, as well as plays, were performed before an audience of several hundred patients under the City's care at Charity Hospital. Among the amateur and professional entertainers were musicians and vocalists, magicians, ventriloquists, humorists, and members of church choirs, glee clubs and dramatic groups. Performers, some from theatrical venues such as Niblo's Garden, are identified by name, and prominent invited guests are sometimes mentioned. As a result of MacDonald's attention to press coverage and visitors, the performances not only achieved the goal of raising the patients' spirits, they brought the island's welfare population to public notice and helped garner community support.

Letters and documents chiefly pertain to MacDonald's attendance at professional conferences abroad, certifying his membership and credentials; there is also a personal letter from George E. Dodge (1849-1904) to MacDonald, 1902 June 28, regarding MacDonald's work on Ward's Island. Dodge was a member of the Board of Managers of Manhattan State Hospital. A civil service flyer and a half-tone photographic portrait of MacDonald are included.

Key Terms

Subjects

Arts -- Therapeutic use

Public welfare -- New York (State) -- New York -- History -- 19th century

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Certificates

Photographs

Programs (documents)

Scrapbooks

Occupations

Entertainers.

Musicians.

Physicians.

Psychologists.

Singers.

Geographic Names

Roosevelt Island (New York, N.Y.) -- History

Names

Dodge, George E., 1849-1904

MacDonald, A. E. (Alexander E.)

Charity Hospital (New York, N.Y.)

N.Y. City Asylum for the Insane