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## Saving the Best to Last: OHSU's Classic Medical Article Collection

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# Saving the Best to Last:

## OHSU's Classic Medical Article Collection

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When scholars talk of the importance accorded to older material in research work, they seem to think of the corner stone articles of a given field, the classics, rather than the run of the mill publications (Nicholas, et al., 2005.)

[The] multisensory experience of seeing, handling and even smelling the actual historic articles and skimming the adjacent articles in the retained volume seemed like a more appealing alternative for future researchers (Eldredge & Guenther, 2001.)

Like any library during the past few decades, Oregon Health & Sciences University Library (OHSU) has been challenged to find space to accommodate the growth of our print collections. How fortunate, then, that the digital revolution has given libraries greater flexibility in how we offer access to the information our users need! In particular, the increasing availability of digital backfiles for journals provides our users with immediate content retrieval and creates opportunities to weed older runs of print volumes. But simply pulling, de-processing, and recycling older volumes is not an activity to be approached lightly. As a profession that must respond to the competing demands of providing content in the formats our users want, while also supporting the longer term mission of preserving our cultural heritage, we should take time to seriously consider what might be weeded and what should be retained.

In 2007, OHSU Library staff launched an in-depth journal weeding project, starting with extensive research on best practices before we even began to identify likely candidates. Criteria included use (circulation, interlibrary loan, core titles, curriculum support); bibliographic (citation analysis, indexing, WorldCat holdings, alternative formats); physical condition; and completeness of holdings. We also wanted to make sure that we kept historically significant volumes that could be of value to our faculty and researchers. Nicholas et al. (2005) notes that, “when scholars talk of the importance accorded to older materials in research work, they seem to think of the cornerstone articles of a given field, the classics, rather than the run of the mill publications” (p. 1445). How could we identify which volumes in a journal run to retain, without feeling obligated to keep the entire holdings for a title?

One health sciences library provided a model for identifying historic articles. In 1998, library staff at the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center Library (UNM HSC) began to assess their collection in anticipation of weeding a large portion of their journal runs. Although the library did not hold substantial runs of older journals, a significant percentage of titles identified as weeding candidates had been published before 1950. Because staff were concerned that volumes with historical value might be inadvertently discarded, a more in-depth review of the older collection was conducted (Eldredge & Guenther, 2001).

Using Ash's *Serial Publications Containing Medical Classics* and Morton's *A Medical Bibliography* as a guide, staff identified 47 journal volumes that contained classic articles. Morton's bibliography, now in fifth edition, is the standard reference list of the most seminal literature in medicine and related subjects, starting with antiquity and extending well into the 20th century. Ash's index lists the actual citations for the journal articles Morton has included in his bibliography. The two works are usually used in conjunction with each other. The UNM HSC library staff felt that it was critical to retain the physical volumes because the “multisensory experience of seeing, handling and even smelling the actual historic articles and skimming the adjacent articles in the retained volume seemed like a more appealing alternative for future researchers” (Eldredge & Guenther, 2001, p. 7). Identified volumes were marked for permanent retention, with the remaining volumes designated for weeding.

Excited by the possibilities this approach offered, OHSU Library staff began work on assessing what journal volumes we might hold that were also listed in Morton's bibliography.



OHSU is the oldest academic health sciences institution in the Pacific Northwest. We also have an extensive History of Medicine collection, so we expected that our holdings of historical medical journals would be significantly larger than that of UNM HSC. Nonetheless, we were astonished to find that we held 1522 individual volumes, dating from 1803, and containing 2027 classic medical articles! After marking each volume as “Historically Significant” and “Permanently Retained,” and updating every associated item record with collection notes, we re-shelved the volumes in a closed stacks area specifically set aside for the now officially titled “Classic Article Collection.” We also encased some of the more fragile volumes in custom made archival boxes to ensure preservation. Volumes in the collection are designated as library use only.



To view a training video for OHSU Library student assistants about the Classic Article Collection (2:31) go to: <http://tinyurl.com/ydgnd3o>

Now that we have preserved the print, we have begun work on creating the digital collection. With the help of our library student staff, we are slowly, but steadily, creating metadata for each article. Without the invaluable work of Ash and Morton, this aspect of the project would have been nigh impossible to address, given the constraints of staff time. Once the basic metadata has been created, (see Figure 1) the next step will be to scan and upload each article into our digital library. Of the 2027 articles in the collection, 325 were published before 1923, so we are pleased that once they are posted, we will be able to offer these historic articles to anyone in the world with Internet access. By thoughtfully identifying, preserving, and digitizing these historically significant items for permanent retention, we support two of the primary missions of libraries: to ensure that hard won knowledge is available for future generations, and to provide access to information in the formats users prefer. We are saving the best in order to last. 🌿

Journal Title	Vol.	Year	Pages	Morton #	Author(s)	Author Dates	Article Title	Description (from Morton)
American Journal of the Medical Sciences	v.2	1828	pp. 116-177	3255	Physick, Philip Syng	1768-1837	Description of a forceps, employed to facilitate the extirpation of the tonsil.	Invention of the modern tonsillotome.
	v.3	1828	pp. 1-3	5742	Warren, John Collins	1778-1858	On operation for the cure of natural fissure of the soft palate.	Operation in May 1824--the first staphylorrhaphy in America--performed without direct knowledge of Roux's operations. Nathan Smith (1762-1829) published an earlier paper on staphylorrhaphy in America: Am. Med. Rev., 1826, 3, 396.
	v.3	1828	pp. 100-108	4452	Mott, Valentine	1785-1865	An account of a case of osteo-sarcoma of the left clavicle, in which excision of that bone was successfully performed.	Valentine Mott was an outstanding figure in American surgery during the first half of the 19th century. A pupil of Astley Cooper, he particularly distinguished himself in vascular surgery and in operations involving the bones and joints. See No. 4463.
	v.5	1829	pp. 297-300	2951	Mott, Valentine	1785-1865	Aneurism of the arteria innominata involving the subclavian and the root of the carotid; successfully treated by tying the carotid artery.	First application in the United States of the Pierre Brasdor (1712-97) operative technique by distal ligation. Second report, 1830, 6, 532-34.
	v.5	1829	pp. 307-309	6027	Strachan, John B.	No author dates	Case of successful excision of the cervix uteri in a scirrhus state.	First successful excision of a cervix in America.

Figure 1: Preliminary metadata for OHSU's Classic Article Collection

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