

The National Library of Medicine

THE Armed Forces Medical Library has been transferred to the Public Health Service and is now operating as the National Library of Medicine.

Although as early as 1876 the library was called the National Medical Library on the title page of one of its publications, the designation did not become official, and the national character of the library was not legally recognized until 80 years later. On August 3, 1956, President Eisenhower signed the act (Public Law 941) of the 84th Congress establishing the National Library of Medicine "to assist the advancement of medical and related sciences and to aid the dissemination and exchange of scientific and other information important to the progress of medicine and to public health."

The transfer, observed with ceremony on October 1, 1956, involves the largest collection of medical literature in the Western Hemisphere and one of the largest research libraries in any special subject field. Colonel Frank B. Rogers will continue as director of this institution.

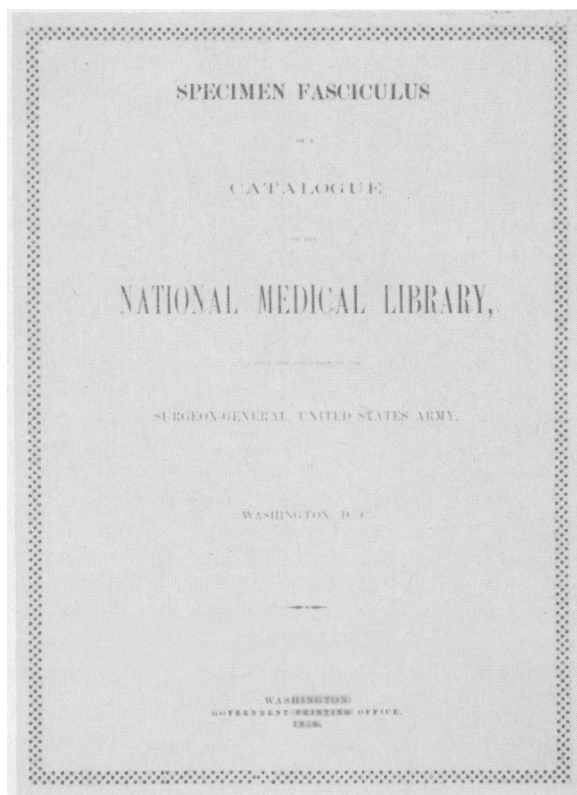
The act places the library under the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service. On matters of policy, scope of collections and services, and the rules under which the facilities of the library are to be made available to users, the Surgeon General will be advised by a 17-member board of regents, 7 of whom will serve ex officio. In addition to the Surgeon General, these are the Surgeons General of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, the Chief Medical Director of the Veterans Administration, the Assistant Director for Biological and Medical Sciences of the National Science Foundation, and the Librarian of Congress. The 10 other regents will be appointed by the President from the fields of medicine, library science, or public affairs.

Now entering its 121st year, the National Library of Medicine was founded as the Library of the Surgeon-General's Office (United States Army) in 1836, when Andrew Jackson was

finishing his second term as President. It was a time when the heroic therapeutic measures of men such as Bard and Rush were beginning to fall into disrepute. It was the time when Beaumont in the United States and Hodgkins, Addison, and Bright in England were ushering in a new era of medicine.

In those early years the library was little more than a few shelves of books. The manuscript catalog of 1840 listed only 228 volumes. The library grew slowly until after the Civil War. Then two things happened: It received a large sum of money remaining from wartime hospital accounts, and Dr. John Shaw Billings was named librarian. With tireless energy and determination, he began to amass books, reports, transactions, and periodicals from all over the world.

By the end of his 30-year administration, the library's collections had increased from 2,000



volumes to more than 100,000, and the *Index-Catalogue*, which Dr. William Welch, of Johns Hopkins University, once called the most important contribution the United States had made to medicine, had come into being. Dr. Billings had, in fact, accumulated for the library the world's greatest collection of medical literature.

Likewise, but as a private enterprise, the *Index-Medicus* owes its origin to Dr. Billings' vision. Begun in 1880, the index was united in 1927 with the *Quarterly Cumulative Index* to form the *Quarterly Cumulative Index Medicus*. It is now published by the American Medical Association.

After the First World War the library was renamed the Army Medical Library, and again, in 1952, its name was changed to the Armed Forces Medical Library.

Today the library possesses half a million bound volumes and more than a million titles in medicine, public health, dentistry, and allied sciences in all languages and of all times. More than 10,000 serials are acquired yearly by purchase, gift, or exchange, including about 4,500 journals.

Not only does the library have more than 500 incunabula and many thousands of rare books of later dates, but its collection of theses, also started by Dr. Billings, is unsurpassed. The long runs of periodicals give it a character possessed by few other scientific libraries. Its collection of portraits of medical men and pictures of hospitals is growing daily. Its section of American and foreign government and statistical documents is probably unique.

In addition to acquiring medical literature on a worldwide basis, the library organizes its acquisitions by appropriate bibliographical listing, makes them available to users through interlibrary loans and photographic copies, and provides reference and research assistance. From its beginning, in addition to serving military users, the library has been used extensively by the civilian medical profession.

The library publishes the most extensive periodical index in existence today, the *Current List of Medical Literature*. The current list appears monthly, and its subject and author indexes are cumulated semiannually. It has a circulation of 4,500 copies.

A published *Catalog* appears annually and is cumulated quinquennially. It lists by author and subject the books added to the collections.

The *Bibliography of Medical Reviews*, an experiment undertaken in 1955, contains citations for the review literature of medicine which appeared during that year. A second edition is in preparation covering the review literature of 1956.

A series of occasional long bibliographies on topics of current interest has been published since 1950. The most recent example is a study on cancer chemotherapeutic agents, prepared in cooperation with the National Cancer Institute, Public Health Service, now in press as a supplement to *Cancer Research*.

About 15,000 interlibrary loans and about 100,000 photoduplicates are made yearly as an extension of the library's services to other libraries, institutions, and to those users who cannot consult the collections in person. Each month the reference staff answers about 1,000 questions received by mail and over the telephone. The staff numbers more than 200 persons, including several physicians, chemists, and other specialists in the biological sciences. In response to the nature of the literature acquired, the staff embraces an unusually wide range of language competency.

The library has long since outgrown the old red brick building, next to the Smithsonian Institution, into which it moved in 1887. Since 1942, the oldest part of the collection, some 40,000 volumes of its most valuable materials, have been shelved in Cleveland, 400 miles distant from the government agencies which most use the library's facilities. Additional stacks recently built into the old building will provide for the library's needs only for about 2 more years. More than 50 years ago Dr. Billings was saying that "the library is in urgent need of shelving for its additions, some of which are being stored on window sills or on the floor."

In giving a new status and name to the National Library of Medicine, Congress has authorized the construction of a new building on a site to be selected by the Surgeon General at the direction of the Board of Regents. Funds for architect's plans have been appropriated.