

Carl Koller Papers

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Prepared by T. Michael Womack

Collection Summary

Title: Carl Koller Papers

Span Dates: 1866-1988

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1884-1934)

ID No.: MSS82987

Creator: Koller, Carl, 1857-1944

Extent: 2,100 items ; 6 containers plus 1 oversize and 1 vault container ; 4.4 linear feet

Language: Collection material largely in German, with English and French

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Summary: Ophthalmologist and surgeon. Correspondence, diaries, speeches and writings, reports, laboratory notes, subject files, biographical material, certificates, awards, newspaper clippings, and other papers documenting Koller's career.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Becker, Hortense Koller--Correspondence.

Breuer, Josef, 1842-1925.

Donath, Julius.

Donders, F. C. (Franciscus Cornelis), 1818-1889.

Einthoven, Willem, 1860-1927.

Fabritius, August.

Freud, Sigmund, 1856-1939--Correspondence.

Gerlach, Leo von.

Javal, Émile, 1839-1907.

Knapp, Herman, 1832-1911.

Koller, Carl, 1857-1944.

Kölliker, Albert, 1817-1905.

Königsstein, L.

Landolt, E. (Edmond), 1846-

Liljestrand, G.

Lustgarten, Sigmund.

Mauthner, Julius.

Moore, William Oliver.

Nordenson, Erik Wilhelm, 1847-1919.

Paneth, Josef.

Rosanes, Ignaz.

Schiff, Emil J., 1869-1927.

Snellen, H. (Herman), 1834-1908.

Organizations

Universität Wien.

Subjects

Anesthesia in ophthalmology.

Chickens--Embryos.

Cocaine.

Eye--Surgery.

Ophthalmology.

Occupations

Ophthalmologists.

Surgeons.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Carl Koller, ophthalmologist and surgeon, were given to the Library of Congress in two installments. The bulk of the collection was given by Koller's daughter, Hortense Koller Becker, in 1994. A small addition was subsequently given by Becker through Albrecht Hirschmüller in 1996.

Processing History

The papers of Carl Koller were arranged and described in 1996. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

Transfers

Photographs have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of the Carl Koller Papers.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Carl Koller is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Carl Koller are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Carl Koller Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1857, Dec. 3	Born, Schüttenhofen, Bohemia, Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Susice, Czech Republic)
1882	M.D., University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
1882-1884	Intern and house surgeon, Allgemeines Krankenhaus, Vienna, Austria, where he was a colleague of Sigmund Freud
1884	Discovered use of cocaine as local anesthetic in eye surgery Presented paper, "Vorläufige Mittheilung über locale Anästhesirung am Auge," at meeting of German Ophthalmological Society, Heidelberg, Germany Presented paper, "Ueber die Verwendung des Cocaïn zur Anästhesirung am Auge," at meeting of Society of Physicians, Vienna, Austria
1885-1887	Assistant to Drs. Snellen and Donders, University of Utrecht, the Netherlands
1888	Emigrated to United States

1888-1930s	Private practice, ophthalmologist and ophthalmic surgeon, Mount Sinai and Montefiore hospitals, New York, N.Y. Authored many articles pertaining to biology and ophthalmology
1893	Married Laura Blum
1902	Became naturalized United States citizen
1922	Awarded gold medal, American Ophthalmological Society
1929	Awarded Kussmaul Medal for his services to science, Heidelberg University medical faculty, Heidelberg, Germany
1930	Awarded medal of honor, New York Academy of Medicine
1934	Awarded medal of honor, Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology
1944, Mar. 21	Died, New York, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Carl Koller (1857-1944) span the years 1866-1988, with the bulk of the items concentrated in the period between 1884 and 1934. The collection focuses on Koller's work as a ophthalmologist and surgeon and his discovery of cocaine as a local anesthetic. It consists of four series: [Correspondence](#), [Writings](#), [Subject File](#), and [Oversize](#).

The [Correspondence](#) series comprises correspondence of Carl Koller and that of his daughter, Hortense Koller Becker. Following her father's death, Becker devoted considerable time to insuring her father's priority as discoverer of cocaine as a local anesthetic. Her correspondence consists primarily of letters from her father and from scholars seeking information about him for publication purposes, mostly from the 1960s through the 1980s. Becker was not fluent in German and frequently sought the aid of native German speakers to translate important letters in her father's papers. Correspondence with Ernst Freud serves as an example. Sigmund Freud's letters to Koller were translated by Freud's son, Ernst.

The correspondence of Carl Koller consists mostly of letters written during the 1880s by fellow medical students, professors, and other physicians during his medical school days at the University of Vienna, subsequent internship at Allgemeines Krankenhaus in Vienna, and assistantship at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, some of whom continued to correspond with Koller after he emigrated to the United States in 1888. The fields of physiology, neurology, psychiatry, surgery, and ophthalmology are well represented in the correspondence by such notables as Josef Breuer, Julius Donath, Franciscus Cornelis Donders, Willem Einthoven, Sigmund Freud, Herman Knapp, Sigmund Lustgarten, Julius Mauthner, Erik Nordenson, Josef Paneth, Ignaz Rosanes, Emil Schiff, and Herman Snellen. Koller and Sigmund Freud were both colleagues and friends, as Freud's letters attest. Letters from family members are also included. The majority of Koller's correspondence is in German.

The [Writings](#) series comprises writings by Koller and writings by others. Of the over forty articles, speeches, and reports by Koller, approximately half relate in some way to his discovery of cocaine as a local anesthetic, while the remainder concern defects and diseases of the eye and Koller's early work on the mesoderm of the chick. A few discuss papers by others. Approximately twenty-five percent of these writings are in German. Also, many of Koller's notes and drafts are written in shorthand. Writings by others consist of over fifty articles by physicians and scientists spanning the past century. Subjects include the discovery and application of cocaine as a local anesthetic specifically relating to eye surgery, the embryonic development of the chick, and the fiftieth anniversary of Koller's discovery. Individual authors of note include August Fabritius, Sigmund Freud, Leo Gerlach, Emile Javal, Herman Knapp, Albert Kölliker, L. Königstein, Edmond Landolt, Göran Liljestrand, William Oliver Moore, and Erik Nordenson. Many of these articles are offprints bearing an inscription to Koller by the author. Hortense Koller Becker's 1963 homage to her father, "Carl Koller and Cocaine," is also among these writings. Approximately forty percent of these writings are in German, while nearly twenty percent are in French.

The [Subject File](#) contains material of a more personal nature, such as Koller's birth and marriage certificates, awards, biographical material, diaries, immigration and naturalization papers, medical school and military service records, and newspaper clippings. The series contains Koller's laboratory notes during his experiments with cocaine as well as letters of congratulation and newspaper articles praising his discovery. Of interest also are a number of controversies involving Koller, the foremost of which concerns the issue of priority as discoverer of cocaine as a local anesthetic. Many ascribed credit to Sigmund Freud, who indeed had experimented with cocaine prior to Koller. Freud, however, failed to make a practical application of the drug's numbing effect, as Koller later realized in surgery on the eye. In 1954 Koller's daughter strongly urged Ernest Jones to note her father's contributions in Jones's biography of Freud, but to no avail. Letters and articles by G. Gärtner and L. Königstein substantiate Koller's claim to priority.

After receipt of his medical degree and until his immigration to the United States, Koller held a medical commission in the Austrian army reserve. In 1885, while an intern in the Allgemeines Krankenhaus, he was challenged to a duel by a fellow medical reservist. Although untrained in the use of sabers, he nevertheless won the duel. Court charges were presented but later dropped. Throughout Koller's career in New York, he made a number of contributions to the field of ophthalmology, including the invention of an illuminating system for the electronic ophthalmoscope. His idea was acquired by an ocular instruments manufacturer, however, and Koller received no credit. Newspaper clippings in the Subject File contain numerous articles of interest, particularly the 9 December 1881 issue of the *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, which details the burning of the Ringtheater, during which over 200 people lost their lives. Rooms in the Allgemeines Krankenhaus were used as a temporary morgue.

[Oversize](#) material consists of offprints of articles, illustrations, newspapers clippings, certificates, official records, and programs.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in four series:

- [Correspondence, 1875-1988](#)
- [Writings, 1878-1985](#)
- [Subject File, 1866-1984](#)
- [Oversize, 1875-1934](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-2	<p><u>Correspondence, 1875-1988</u></p> <p>Letters received, with attached and related material by Koller and his daughter, Hortense Koller Becker.</p> <p>Arranged according to recipient and thereunder alphabetically by name of individual or organization.</p>
BOX 2-5	<p><u>Writings, 1878-1985</u></p> <p>Drafts and offprints of articles, illustrations, reports, speeches, and discussions of papers by Koller and others.</p> <p>Writings by Koller are arranged alphabetically by title or subject and writings by others alphabetically by author.</p>
BOX 5-6	<p><u>Subject File, 1866-1984</u></p> <p>Awards, biographical material, diaries, newspaper clippings, records concerning medical school, military service, and other professional activities, and material relating to the discovery of cocaine as a local anesthetic.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by subject, type of material, or name of organization and therein chronologically.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p><u>Oversize, 1875-1934</u></p> <p>Offprints of articles, illustrations, newspaper clippings, certificates, official records, and programs.</p> <p>Arranged and described according to the series and containers from which the items were removed.</p>

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-2	Correspondence, 1875-1988 Letters received, with attached and related material by Koller and his daughter, Hortense Koller Becker. Arranged according to recipient and thereunder alphabetically by name of individual or organization.
BOX 1	Becker, Hortense Koller (daughter)
BOX 1	Böck, Josef, 1963-1964
BOX 1	Byck, Robert, 1974
BOX 1	Freud, Ernst, 1963, undated
BOX 1	Hirschmüller, Albrecht, undated
BOX 1	Holmstedt, Bo, 1964, 1987-1988
BOX 1	Keys, Thomas E., 1963
BOX 1	Koller, Carl, 1915-1943, undated (3 folders)
BOX 1	Koller, Laura Blum, 1953-1954
BOX 1	Laible, Eva, 1974-1984
BOX 1	Lebensohn, James E., 1934, 1962
BOX 1	Liljestrand, Göran, 1964-1969, 1984, undated
BOX 1	Meller, Josef, 1964
BOX 1	Stetson, John, 1987
BOX 1	Vail, Derrick, 1964-1966
BOX 1	Koller, Carl
BOX 1	American Medical Association, 1901
BOX 1	Basch, Samuel, 1884
BOX 1	Breuer, Josef, 1881-1894
BOX 1	"B" miscellaneous, 1884, undated
BOX 1	Cohn, Alfred E., 1908-1936
BOX 1	"C" miscellaneous, 1884, 1941
BOX 1	Dimmer, F., 1920
BOX 1	Donath, Julius, 1880-1883
BOX 1	Donders, Franciscus Cornelis, 1887
BOX 1	"D" miscellaneous, 1886, undated
BOX 1	Einthoven, Willem, 1886-1887
BOX 1	<i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i> , 1923
BOX 1	Ewing, A. E., 1893-1894
BOX 1	Fabritius, August, 1928-1937
BOX 1	Freud, Sigmund, 1880-1887, undated
BOX 1	Fuchs, Ernst, 1884-1924
BOX 1	"F" miscellaneous, 1884
BOX 1	Hamburger, Carl, 1939
BOX 1	Howe, Lucien, 1895-1938

Correspondence, 1875-1988

Container

Contents

BOX 1	"H" miscellaneous, 1879-1904, undated
BOX 1	Knapp, Herman, 1895-1896
BOX 2	Koller, Clara (sister), undated
BOX 2	Koller, Laura Blum (wife), 1916-1938
BOX 2	Koller, Leopold (father), 1885-1887
BOX 2	Koller, Lewis R. (brother), 1918
BOX 2	Koller, Luise (sister), 1886
BOX 2	Koller, Mathilde (sister), 1886-1894
BOX 2	Koller, Minna (sister), 1886
BOX 2	Koller, Wilhelmina Rosenbaum (mother), 1885-1887, undated
BOX 2	"K" miscellaneous, 1882-1941, undated
BOX 2	Le Plat, L., 1884
BOX 2	Leber, Thomas, 1885-1887
BOX 2	Ludwig, E., 1886-1899
BOX 2	Lustgarten, Sigmund, 1880-1887
BOX 2	"L" miscellaneous, 1882-1884
BOX 2	Mauthner, Julius, 1886-1915
BOX 2	Mayo, Charles H. and William J., 1915-1941
BOX 2	"M" miscellaneous, 1885, 1942, undated
BOX 2	Nordenson, Erik, 1884-1886, 1934
BOX 2	Nordman, G. A., 1886
BOX 2	"N" miscellaneous, 1884
BOX 2	Paneth, Josef, 1884
BOX 2	"P" miscellaneous, 1928
BOX 2	Rosanes, Ignaz, 1885-1887
BOX 2	Rosenbaum, Paul (nephew), 1934
BOX 2	"R" miscellaneous, 1946
BOX 2	Schapring, A., 1895
BOX 2	Schiff, Emil, 1886-1899
BOX 2	Snellen, Herman, 1884-1914
BOX 2	"S" miscellaneous, 1884-1920
BOX 2	Wahle, Richard, 1881
BOX 2	Widder, J., 1884-1885, undated
BOX 2	Winter, Joseph, 1880-1897
BOX 2	Woodman, DeGraaf, 1940
BOX 2	"W-Z" miscellaneous, 1880-1884, undated (2 folders)
BOX 2	Unidentified, 1875-1884
BOX 2-5	Writings, 1878-1985 Drafts and offprints of articles, illustrations, reports, speeches, and discussions of papers by Koller and others. Writings by Koller are arranged alphabetically by title or subject and writings by others alphabetically by author.
BOX 2	By Koller
BOX 2	"As to the History of My Connection with Local Anesthesia," 1927

BOX 2	"Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Hühnerkeims im Beginne der Bebrütung," 1879
BOX 2	"A Case of Military Tubercle of the Choroid," 1910
BOX 2	"Cocain als örtliches Anaestheticum," 1885
BOX 2	"De l'emploi de la cocaïne comme anesthésique en ophthalmologie," 1884 See Oversize
BOX 2	"The Discovery of the Anesthetic Properties of Cocaine," 1920
BOX 2	Discussions of papers by others
BOX 2	Harrower, Dr., "A Report on Several Cases of Chronic Simple Glaucoma Treated by Iridodotasis," undated
BOX 2	Knapp, Dr., "Salvarsan in Interstitial Keratitis and in Other Nerve Lesions," undated
BOX 2	Roy, Dr., "Report on a Case of Nodular Scleritis," undated
BOX 2	Sattler, Dr.
BOX 2	"Review of the Glaucoma Question," undated
BOX 2	"Surgery of Glaucoma," undated
BOX 2	Thompson, Dr., "Outbreak of Glaucoma," undated
BOX 2	Tooke, Dr., "The Military Choroidal Tubercle as Associated with Tuberculous Cerebrospinal Meningitis," undated
BOX 2	"Erythroplaein," 1888 See Oversize
BOX 3	"The Form of Retinal Images in the Astigmatic Eye," undated
BOX 3	"Historical Notes on the Beginning of Local Anesthesia," 1928
BOX 3	"Historische Notiz über die ersten Anfänge der Lokal-anästhesie," 1934
BOX 3	"Local Bloodletting in Ophthalmic Practice," 1938
BOX 3	"Miotics and Mydriatics in Relation to Ocular Hypertension," 1942
BOX 3	"Nachträgliche Bemerkungen über die ersten Anfänge der Local-Anästhesie," 1935
BOX 3	"Notes historiques sur les débuts de l'anesthésie locale," 1928
BOX 3	Notes on a case of bilateral rodent ulcer, undated
BOX 3	"Occasioned by the 50th anniversary of the introduction of cocaine as a local anesthetic..., " 1934
BOX 3	"On the Beginnings of Local Anesthesia," 1940
BOX 3	"On the Determination of Astigmatism with the Ophthalmometer (Javal-Schiötz)," 1890
BOX 3	"On the Use of Cocaine for Producing Anaesthesia on the Eye," 1884
BOX 3	"Personal Account of the First Use of Cocaine as a Local Anesthetic," 1927
BOX 3	"Preliminary Report on Local Anesthesia of the Eye," 1934
BOX 3	"Reading Difficulties," undated
BOX 3	"Reading Difficulties," undated
BOX 3	<i>Reference Handbook of the Medical Sciences</i>
BOX 3	"Cocaine," 1893
BOX 3	"Ophthalmometer," 1893
BOX 3	"Shadow Test," 1893
BOX 3	"Remarks Accompanying the Demonstration of Corneal Nerves," undated
BOX 3	Report on the first use of cocaine as a local anesthetic, 1915
BOX 3	Report on two cases of epibular sarcoma, 1912
BOX 3	Speech in honor of Willem Einthoven, undated
BOX 3	"The Subconjunctive Application of Cocaine in Eye Operations," 1892
BOX 3	"Über die Bildung der Keimblätter im Hühnerkeim," 1880
BOX 3	"Ueber Cocain," undated
BOX 3	"Ueber die Verwendung des Cocain zur Anästhesirung am Auge," 1884
BOX 3	"Untersuchungen über die Blätterbildung im Hühnerkeim," 1881 See Oversize

BOX 3	"Vorläufige Mittheilung über locale Anästhesirung am Auge," 1884
BOX 3	Unidentified
BOX 3	Draft fragments, undated
BOX 3	Drafts, undated
BOX 4	By others
BOX 4	Altman, Adam J., et al., "Cocaine's Use in Ophthalmology: Our 100-Year Heritage," 1985
BOX 4	Anonymous, "Dr. Rudolph Matas: A Man of Remarkable Energy, Enthusiasm and Dedication," 1982
BOX 4	Armaignac, H., "Travaux originaux: De la cocaïne de son emploi en chirurgie oculaire pour produire l'anesthésie locale de la cornée et de la conjonctive," 1884
BOX 4	Babcock, James, "A Résumé of the Progress in Otolaryngology," 1951
BOX 4	Baldwin, Benjamin J., "Observations of Fifty Operations on the Eye under Kollerism," 1885
BOX 4	Balfour, F. M., and F. Deighton, "A Renewed Study of the Germinal Layers of the Chick," 1882
BOX 4	Becker, Hortense Koller, "Carl Koller and Cocaine," 1963
BOX 4	Benson, Arthur, observations on the action of hydrochlorate of cocaine on the eye, 1884
BOX 4	Böck, J., "Anästhesie und Narkose bei Augenoperationen," 1963
BOX 4	Bosworth, F. H., "An Additional Note on the Therapeutic Action of Cocaine," undated
BOX 4	Bradford, Henry W., "Rapid Cocainization," 1884
BOX 4	Cohn, Hermann, "Schmerzlose Augenoperationen: Ueber das Cocain in der Augenheilkunde," 1885
BOX 4	Darmstaedter, Ernst, "Begründung und Ausbau der Cocain-Lokalanästhesie," 1938
BOX 4	Euler, Ulf S. von, "Göran Liljestrand, 1886-1968," undated
BOX 4	Eversbusch, O., "Ueber die Anwendung und Wirkung des Cocainum muriaticum als locales Anaestheticum," 1885
BOX 4	Fabritius, August, "Die Einführung der Kokainanästhesie in der Ophthalmologie durch Dr. Carl Koller vor 50 Jahren," 1934
BOX 4	Freud, Sigmund
BOX 4	"Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Cocawirkung," 1885
BOX 4	"Über Coca," 1885
BOX 4	Gavarret, J., "Astigmatisme et ophthalmométrie," 1882
BOX 4	Gerlach, Leo
BOX 4	"Ueber die Anlage von Doppelbildungen beim Hühnchen," 1880
BOX 4	"Ueber die künstliche Erzeugung von Doppelbildungen beim Hühnchen," 1880
BOX 4	"Ueber ein neues Verfahren, kleinere anatomische Objecte zum Zwecke der Demonstration dauernd zu fixiren und ohne Anwendung von Alcohol zu conserviren," 1881
BOX 4	Glas, Emil, "How Medical Science Found a Way to Look into the Respiratory Tract," 1943
BOX 4	Goetsch, Emil, "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met [William Stewart Halsted]," 1958
BOX 4	Grasselli, Giovanni, "La cocaina nella terapie oculare," 1884
BOX 4	Hillischer, H. Th., "Vorläufige Mittheilungen über die Anwendung des Cocains in der Zahnheilkunde," 1885
BOX 4	Hirsch, Caesar, "Fünfzig Jahre Lokal-Anästhesie," 1934
BOX 4	Holmstedt, Bo, and Arne Fredga, "Sundry Episodes in the History of Coca and Cocaine," 1981
BOX 4	Howe, Lucien, review of the sixteenth meeting of the German Ophthalmological Society, 1884

BOX 4	Javal, Emile
BOX 4	"Contribution à l'ophtalmométrie," 1882
BOX 4	"Quatrième contribution à l'ophtalmométrie," 1883
BOX 4	"Un l'ophtalmomètre," 1880
BOX 4	Javal, Emile, and [?] Schiotz, "Un l'ophtalmomètre pratique," 1881
BOX 4	Keys, Thomas E., "The Development of Anesthesia," 1943
BOX 4	Knapp, H., "On Cocaine and Its Use in Ophthalmic and General Surgery," 1884
BOX 4	Kölliker, A.
BOX 4	"Der W. Krause'sche menschliche Embryo mit einer Allantois," 1882
BOX 4	"Die Entwicklung der Keimblätter des Kaninchens," 1882 <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX 4	"Histiologische und embryologische Mittheilungen," 1882
BOX 4	"Ueber die Chordahöhle und die Bildung der Chorda beim Kaninchen," 1882
BOX 4	Königstein, L., "Ueber die Anwendung des Cocain am Auge," 1885
BOX 4	Kupffer, C., and B. Benecke, "Die ersten Entwicklungsvorgänge am Ei der Reptilien," 1878
BOX 4	Landolt, Edmond, "La Cocaïne," 1884
BOX 4	Lebensohn, Zigmond M., "A Note on Wagner-Jauregg," 1958
BOX 4	Liljestrand, Göran
BOX 4	"Carl Koller and the Development of Local Anesthesia," 1967
BOX 4	"The Historical Development of Local Anesthesia," 1971
BOX 4	Liljestrand, Göran, editor, "Briefe Carl Kollers an Erik Nordenson," 1965
BOX 5	Meller, Josef, "Gedenkworte zum 50. Jahrestage des Vortrages von Dr. Karl Koller über das Kocain vor der Gesellschaft der Aerzte in Wein," 1934
BOX 5	Moore, William Oliver, "The Physiological and Therapeutical Effects of the Coca-Leaf and Its Alkaloid," 1884
BOX 5	Motais, [?], "Instruction pour l'emploi de l'ophtalmomètre," 1890
BOX 5	Nordenson, Erik, "Recherches ophtalmométriques sur l'astigmatisme de la cornée chez des écoliers de 7 à 20 ans," 1883
BOX 5	Roosa, D. B. St. John, "The Human Eye as Affected by Civilization," 1892
BOX 5	Sulzer, [?], "Description de l'ophtalmomètre Javal et Schiotz," 1890
BOX 5	Vail, Derrick, "Lucien Howe: The Laboratory and Experimental Ophthalmology," 1962
BOX 5	Vogl, August, "Histologisch-pharmakognostische Notizen," undated
BOX 5	Wagenmann, A., "Bericht über die 50. Zusammenkunft der Deutsche Ophthalmologischen Gesellschaft," 1934

BOX 5-6

Subject File, 1866-1984

Awards, biographical material, diaries, newspaper clippings, records concerning medical school, military service, and other professional activities, and material relating to the discovery of cocaine as a local anesthetic.

Arranged alphabetically by subject, type of material, or name of organization and therein chronologically.

BOX 5

Affidavit and invoices of medical instruments and implements for export from Austria to the United States, 1888

BOX 5

Allgemeines Krankenhaus records, 1882-1886

BOX 5

Awards and honors, 1885-1934

BOX 5

Biographical material, 1899-1944

BOX 5

Birth certificates, 1866, 1880, 1896

BOX 5

Cocaine as a local anesthetic, discovery of

Subject File, 1866-1984

Container

Contents

BOX 5	Centennial anniversary, reprinted articles, 1984
BOX 5	Controversy over priority
BOX 5	Articles
BOX 5	Gärtner, G., 1919
BOX 5	Königstein, L., 1934
BOX 5	Correspondence
BOX 5	Freud, Sigmund, circa 1884-1886
BOX 5	Gärtner, G., 1919
BOX 5	Jones, Ernest, 1953-1954
BOX 5	Königstein, L., 1884-1885
BOX 5	Letters to the editor, 1904-1941
BOX 5	Laboratory notes, 1884
BOX 5	Letters of congratulation, 1884-1885, 1934
BOX 5	Miscellany, 1927
BOX 5	Newspaper clippings, 1884-1940 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 5	Photograph of envelope containing cocaine used in first successful experiment, undated
BOX 6	Diaries of Carl and Laura Koller, 1894-1926
BOX 6	Duel, 1885 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Gymnasium certificate, 1875
BOX 6	Immigration and naturalization papers, 1888, 1902 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Marriage certificate, 1893 <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Medical school records
BOX 6	Curriculum
BOX 6	Course transcripts and official records, 1875-1882 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Lecture notes, 1876-1880 (3 folders)
BOX 6	Extracurriculum
BOX 6	Billroth, Theodor, commemoration by students, undated
BOX 6	Musical chorus performance programs, 1880-1883 <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Student health insurance organizations, 1878-1881
BOX 6	Military service records (medical commission), 1876-1882 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Miscellany, 1868-1923
BOX 6	Newspaper clippings, 1881-1895 <i>See also Oversize</i>
BOX 6	Ophthalmoscope, invention of illuminating system for electric, 1917-1919
BOX 6	Passport, 1888
BOX 6	Professional affiliations, 1889-1891 <i>See Oversize</i>
BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1875-1934
	Offprints of articles, illustrations, newspaper clippings, certificates, official records, and programs.
	Arranged and described according to the series and containers from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Writings
BOX OV 1	By Koller
BOX OV 1	"De l'emploi de la cocaïne comme anesthésique en ophthalmologie," 1884 (Container 2)
BOX OV 1	"Erythrophaein," 1888 (Container 2)

Oversize, 1875-1934

Container

Contents

BOX OV 1	"Untersuchungen über die Blätterbildung im Hühnerkeim," 1881 (Container 3)
BOX OV 1	By others
BOX OV 1	Kölliker, A., "Die Entwicklung der Keimblätter des Kaninchens," 1882 (Container 4)
BOX OV 1	Subject File
BOX OV 1	Cocaine as a local anesthetic, discovery of
BOX OV 1	Newspaper clippings, 1884-1934 (Container 5)
BOX OV 1	Duel, 1885 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Immigration and naturalization papers, 1888 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Marriage certificate, 1893 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Medical school records
BOX OV 1	Curriculum
BOX OV 1	Course transcripts and official records, 1875-1882 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Extracurriculum
BOX OV 1	Musical chorus performance programs, 1880-1883 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Military service records (medical commission), 1882 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Newspaper clippings, 1881-1895 (Container 6)
BOX OV 1	Professional affiliations, 1889-1891 (Container 6)