

Robert M. O'Reilly papers

MC 34

Finding aid prepared by Faith Charlton and Amanda McKnight.

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Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center

; Summer 2011

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Summary Information

Repository	Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center
Creator	O'Reilly, Robert M. (Robert Maitland), 1845-1912
Title	Robert M. O'Reilly papers
Call number	MC 34
Date [inclusive]	1862-1925
Extent	0.4 linear feet (; 1 box)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Robert Maitland O'Reilly (1845-1912) was the 20th Surgeon General of the United States Army serving from September 7, 1902 to January 14, 1909. O'Reilly served a long military medical career beginning as a medical cadet in August 1862 during the Civil War. Other notable appointments include physician at the White House during both of President Grover Cleveland's administrations, attending surgeon in Washington, D. C., and chief surgeon for several units during the Spanish-American War. He also served as a delegate at the International Conference for the Revision of the Geneva Convention in Geneva in 1906. During his time as surgeon general, O'Reilly made significant improvements by elevating the status and personnel of the army medical corps and furthering medical research. This collection contains both personal and professional correspondence, much of which documents O'Reilly's service during the Civil War. Also included are personal papers, including certificates of appointment and assignments, military circulars, and ephemera as well as a scrapbook documenting the 1906 Geneva Convention Conference.</p>

Cite as:

Cite as: [Indicate cited item or series here]. O'Reilly, Robert M. Papers, 1864-1916 (MC 1), Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center.

Biography/History

Robert Maitland O'Reilly (1845-1912) was born in Philadelphia to John O'Reilly and Ellen (Maitland) O'Reilly. He was one of at least five children: Mary O'Reilly (b. circa 1842), Margaret O'Reilly (b. circa 1847), William O'Reilly (b. circa 1849), and Isabel M. O'Reilly (b. circa 1852). Isabel M. O'Reilly was a contributing writer for the *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society*.

O'Reilly received his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1866. O'Reilly interrupted his studies in 1862 to enlist in the Military Hospital Service during the Civil War. Appointed as an acting medical cadet, he served in several army hospitals, including Cuyler General Hospital in Philadelphia, a hospital in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and in the office of the medical director of the Army of the Cumberland.

After receiving his medical degree, O'Reilly was appointed assistant surgeon in the army with the rank of first lieutenant and sent to Fort Trumbull, Connecticut. O'Reilly was involved in a good deal of active field service, and suffered a couple significant injuries during his military career. After only a few months at Fort Trumbull, O'Reilly was sent to several army posts in the southwest and was then stationed at Fort Laramie, Wyoming. While there, he served as chief surgeon in clashes against the Sioux Nation in 1874 and 1880.

For a time, O'Reilly was stationed at Red Cloud Agency, one of the first reservations established by the U.S. government, located in the northwestern corner of present-day Nebraska. This agency served as one of the centers of activity during the Sioux Wars of 1876-77. The government assigned troops to Red Cloud Agency in March 1874 after the killing of an agency clerk. The military encampment was named Camp Robinson (Fort Robinson).

Shortly after O'Reilly was sent back east, he was detailed to duty for the railroad strikes in Maryland and Pennsylvania that took place during the summer of 1877.

O'Reilly was appointed attending surgeon in Washington, D. C., a position he held from 1884 until 1889. He became a well-known figure in the capital. A close friend of Grover Cleveland, O'Reilly served as the White House physician during Cleveland's two presidential administrations (1885–1889, 1893–1897).

During the Spanish- American War, he served as chief surgeon of the First Independent Division, the 4th Army Corps, and later chief surgeon on the staff of Major General James F. Wade in Havana. While in

Cuba, he was sent to Jamaica for a time to gather information relating to the British army's hygiene in tropical climates. His report with recommendations proved very useful.

Returning from Cuba in November 1899 he commanded the Josiah Simpson Hospital at Fortress Monroe, Va., and later was transferred to the headquarters of the Department of California at San Francisco as chief surgeon. He was appointed surgeon general of the army in 1902. He served in this position until his retirement in 1909.

During his career, O'Reilly quickly rose through ranks. He received his captaincy in 1870, became major and full surgeon in 1886, lieutenant colonel in 1900, colonel on February 14, 1902.

During his time as surgeon general, O'Reilly made significant improvements by elevating the status and personnel of the army medical corps and furthering medical research. He made a concerted effort to follow through on the recommendations of the Dodge Commission appointed by President McKinley to address the unsatisfactory conditions in the army that were revealed during the Spanish-American War. During his term "every medical department activity was studied, overhauled, and improved...O'Reilly and his staff achieved a relation with the army, with Congress, with the medical profession, and with the public never visualized by any previous administration."

O'Reilly and his staff increased and reorganized the Medical Corps and the Hospital Corps. The Medical Reserve Corps was created during O'Reilly's term. He was president of the board that recommended the adoption of preventative vaccinations against typhoid fever for the army, and in 1906, he reconstituted the Board for the Study of Tropical Diseases in Manila. Also in 1906, O'Reilly served as a delegate to the International Conference for the Revision of the Geneva Convention.

During his tenure as surgeon general, O'Reilly collaborated with Major William C. Borden and contributed a chapter on military surgery to the fourth edition of W.W. Keen's *American Textbook of Surgery*.

On August 6, 1877 O'Reilly married Frances L. Pardee of Oswego, New York with whom he had two children, Frances T. O'Reilly and Philip M. O'Reilly (Jack). Frances married Frederick B. Hennessy, a captain in the U.S. Army. Philip, a cadet in the U.S. Navy, died in 1901 at age 22.

After a lengthy illness, O'Reilly died on November 3, 1912. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

Scope and Contents

This collection includes correspondence, military paperwork, personal papers, and ephemera. The majority of the collection is correspondence between O'Reilly and his family and friends, the bulk being letters sent to his mother, Ellen O'Reilly, and his sister Mary O'Reilly between 1864 and 1900. The letters that O'Reilly sent in 1864 document his service during the Civil War when he was stationed in Chattanooga, Tennessee. There are also a good number of letters that date from O'Reilly's time at Fort

Trumbull, Connecticut and his time in California where he stayed to recover from a wound caused by the accidental discharge of a revolver.

Letters to his sister Mary document O'Reilly's time stationed in Havana, the death of his son Philip M. O'Reilly, and his travels abroad to Europe between 1903 and 1909. One letter documents his service during the Spanish American War. The correspondence between O'Reilly and his friend Tom primarily pertains to O'Reilly's marriage to Frances Pardee. Also included in the collection is correspondence relating to Robert's sister Isabel M. O'Reilly, including one letter that appears to be from Robert.

Also contained in the collection are O'Reilly's professional papers and correspondence dating from 1864 to 1906, including information about his assignments, pay stubs, and certificates for most of his appointments. Most of these relate to O'Reilly's service during the Civil War. There are also some army and War Department circulars regarding general court martials and general orders.

The collection also contains some miscellaneous correspondence and materials relating to O'Reilly and his family, including ephemera, newspaper clippings, and two photographs, including one of O'Reilly circa 1875. There is also Philip M. O'Reilly's certificate of appointment as a Navy cadet, and a military insignia with golf motif on green sateen.

There is also a notebook labeled "Robert O'Reilly with Charles Ellis and Co., 724 Market St., Philada, 1861-62." Charles Ellis and Co. were druggists. The volume includes notes relating to medicine, and also appears to have lecture notes. During this time O'Reilly was studying at the University of Pennsylvania.

Lastly, the collection contains a scrapbook compiled while O'Reilly was a delegate at the 1906 International Conference for the Revision of the Geneva Convention. The scrapbook contains calling cards, menus, invitations, and notes. Most of the contents are in French.

Administrative Information

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Finding aid prepared by Faith Charlton and Amanda McKnight.

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Accession number 1990.035

Existence and Location of Copies note

Digital reproductions of the Elizabeth Sarah Kite papers are available at <http://digital.library.villanova.edu/Item/vudl:414334>

Controlled Access Headings

Form/Genre(s)

- Certificates
- Circulars
- Clippings
- Correspondence
- Ephemera
- Letters
- Notebooks
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks

Occupation(s)

- United States. Dept. of the Army. Office of the Surgeon General

Personal Name(s)

- O'Reilly, Ellen Maitland
- O'Reilly, Isabel M., b. circa 1852
- O'Reilly, Mary, b. circa 1842
- O'Reilly, Philip M., 1879-1901

Subject(s)

- American Civil War, letters and diaries
- Conference for Revision of the Geneva Convention of 1906 (1929 : Geneva, Switzerland)
- Medicine, Military--United States--History--19th century.

- Medicine, Military--United States--History--20th century.
 - Spanish-American War, 1898.
 - United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.
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Other Finding Aids note

This is a revised finding aid. An older finding aid is available in hard copy at PAHRC.

Provenance

It is possible that Isabel M. O'Reilly, sister of Robert M. O'Reilly donated this collection, as the former was a contributing writer for the Records of the ACHS.

Bibliography

Garrison, Fielding H. "In memoriam: General Robert Maitland O'Reilly, Surgeon-General, United States Army, 1902-1909." A.R. Elliott Publishing Co., 1912.

Surgeon Generals. "Robert Maitland O'Reilly." *U.S. Army Medical Department, Office of Medical History*. U.S. Army, 2009. August 2001. http://history.amedd.army.mil/surgeongenerals/R_OReilly.html (Accessed August 2011)

Collection Inventory

	Box	Folder
Letters to Ellen M. O'Reilly, 1864-1900.	1	1-4
Letters to Mary O'Reilly, 1864-1909.	1	5-6
Letters to Tom, 1876-1877.	1	7
Professional correspondence and papers, 1862-1906.	1	8-9
Robert M. O'Reilly family - miscellaneous correspondence, personal papers, ephemera, and photographs, circa 1870-1916.	1	10
Military circulars, 1870.	1	11
Isabel M. O'Reilly- incoming correspondence, 1877-1925.	1	12
Robert O'Reilly and Charles Ellis and Co., Phila notebook, 1861-1862.	1	13

	Box	Folder
Scrapbook- International Conference for the Revision of the Geneva Convention, 1906.	14	