

Wills Eye Alumni Society News Bulletin

Spring 2023



THE COLLECTOR

PRESERVING SIGHT, PROTECTING HISTORY

By Ravi Goel, MD



Jacques-Emile Blanche 1861-1942; Portrait of James Joyce (1882-1941) Author; 1934; Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Ireland.



I COLLECT HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS AS A HOBBY. Since 2008, I've donated manuscripts, rare books, and collections to Amherst College, Dickinson College, Forest History Society, Harvard Law School, Minnesota Historical Society, Princeton University, and Yale University.

WILLS EYE AND THE OPHTHALMOLOGY COLLECTION

SIX MONTHS AFTER STARTING PRIVATE PRACTICE with Regional Eye Associates (“REA”) in my hometown of Cherry Hill, New Jersey, I was asked to visit former CPEC Director Raymond E. Adams, MD at his home. Dr. Adams had retired from clinical practice a few days before I joined REA.

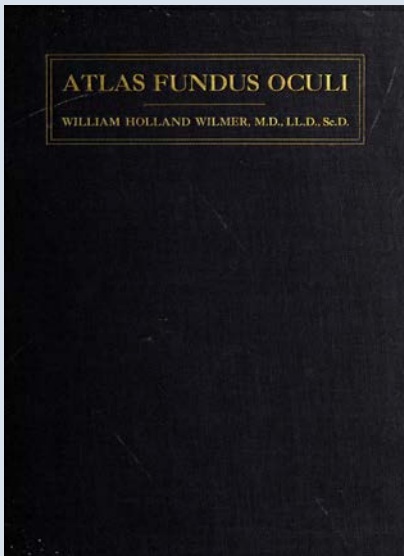
On a cold February afternoon, Dr. Adams greeted me at his front door. The house was empty save for two cardboard boxes in the garage. There was an 18-wheeler truck ready to move Dr. and Mrs. Adams to Florida. Dr. Adams said, “Ravi, these boxes include old medical books and ophthalmic instruments. I’ve spoken with Dr. Tasman (then Wills OIC and Adams’ fellow residency classmate), Dr. Miano, and the Wills Eye librarian. None of them want this stuff. If you want it, it’s yours. If not, I won’t be offended. Please just help me carry the boxes to the curb as they’ll be going out with tomorrow’s trash. These boxes are not getting onto the moving truck [which was filled!].”

I advised Dr. Adams that he could easily sell these books online. (eBay was founded in 1995, and used book sites such as AbeBooks were a cottage industry.) The surgical instruments might also have historical value for the Mutter Museum or the American Academy of

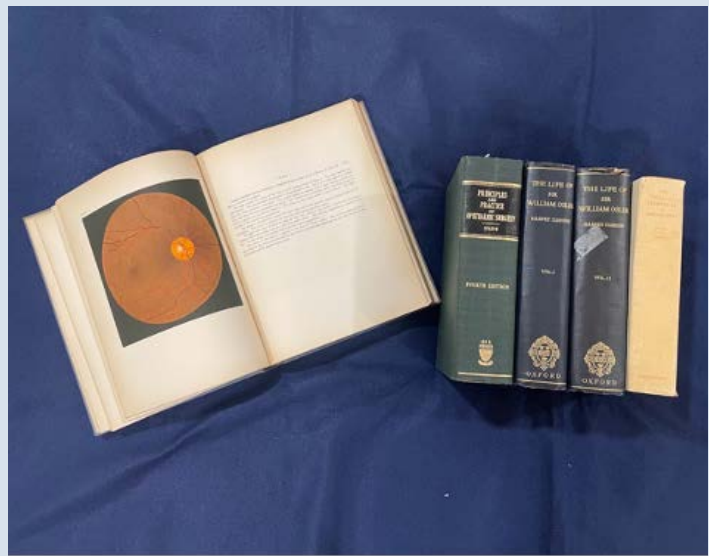
Ophthalmology, I explained. Dr. Adams decreed that he had no more interest in these artifacts and told me to do with the items what I wished. In between seeing patients and studying for my written boards, I marveled at the rare books and surgical instruments now in my possession.

A few months later, I ran into William “Dick” Green, MD, who also had been a Wills Eye resident with Dr. Adams. At the time, I was among the many Baltimore-area ophthalmology residents who rotated in Dr. Green’s Eye Pathology lab at Wilmer Eye Institute. (The post-rotation nightmares are real, and I never hid slide sets in the ceiling). I shared my new found treasures with him and exclaimed, “Dr. Green, the collection includes a first edition of William Holland Wilmer’s *Atlas Fundus Oculi!*” Dr. Green

Regional Eye Associates was started by Wills alumnus James S. Shipman, MD, namesake of the Wills Eye Shipman Award, in Camden, NJ in the 1930s. The practice moved to different locations throughout South Jersey with the addition of Dr. Adams in the 1960s and Michele Miano MD in the 1990s. In the early years of practice, I remember seeing patients (then in their 70-80s) who spoke of knowing Dr. Shipman when they were children. Our old charting system with ½ page index cards included a rare Dr. Shipman notation.



(Image Credit: Atlas fundus oculi / by William Holland Wilmer. [Wellcome Collection](#).)



Edmund B. Spaeth's *Principles and Practices of Ophthalmic Surgery* (1948, 4th edition)

immediately recognized the landmark 1934 work and told me about the book's 100 chromo-lithographic plates that had been reproduced from paintings by Annette Smith Burgess, the first ophthalmic illustrator at Wilmer Eye Institute. Highlights of the Adams collection included:

- ❖ Edmund B. Spaeth's *Principles and Practices of Ophthalmic Surgery* (1948, 4th edition), with Dr. Spaeth's notation, "To Ray Adams, with the very

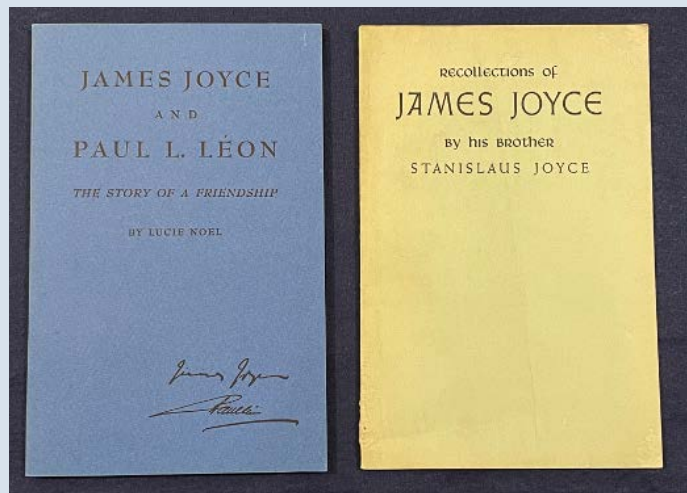
best of wishes—also with great affection. Edmund B. Spaeth July 14, 1964."

- ❖ Harvey Cushing MD's two-volume biography *The Life of Sir William Osler*.
- ❖ Drs. Posey and Brown's *The Wills Eye Hospital of Philadelphia* (1931) in commemoration of Wills Eye Hospital's 100th anniversary.
- ❖ Dr. Shipman's bookplates in the Wilmer and Cushing volumes.

THE JAMES JOYCE COLLECTION

IN JULY 2017, A FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE WAS BROWSING THE SLOCUM ESTATE SALE IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND. She noticed a letter on Yale Library stationery and texted to see if I might be interested in items marked, "John Slocum's 'James Joyce' Collection Correspondence." We spent the next 30 minutes exchanging texts (cell phone calls would not connect!) as she successfully negotiated the purchase from the Slocum estate.

The Slocum letters and correspondence in this collection are filled with "Joyceana after Joyce." In addition to the Yale Library materials, the letters include correspondence among the leading Joyce collectors of the early 20th century. The details complement Joyce-related



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Ravi D. Goel on his passion for collecting historical documents, why art should be made accessible worldwide, and the importance of having a creative outlet in a high-powered career

Sarah Healey | 06/09/2023 | 5 min read | [Interview](#)



In 2013, Mary Miller, the Dean of Yale College, estimated that [99 percent of all art](#) ever created is “lost to us forever” (1). Ravi D. Goel, ophthalmologist and collector from New Jersey, believes that historical documents are pieces of art – and that art should be made accessible to scholars around the world. Having donated [12 named collections](#) to universities, including Yale and Harvard, Goel’s contribution to our understanding of key figures, such as James Joyce, has been invaluable. In this interview, Goel shares his initial inspiration for collecting documentation, how to balance outlets for passion with ophthalmic practice, and why art should be made accessible to all.

I finished college in 1993 and the Clinton Healthcare Plan was all the rage in society – they were trying to push everyone into primary care. I went to a medical school that didn’t have an ophthalmology residency program, and so I always thought that ophthalmology was “in the other building” and not in the main medical school. I

realized that ophthalmology was what I wanted to pursue because it is outpatient based, it combines medicine and surgery, and it is cutting edge – it is an inspiring field but you first have to know that it exists.

I have always been fascinated by colonial history. When I arrived at college in New Haven, I was overwhelmed by the architecture and history of the place. More specifically, I love learning about the relationship between Universities and US Presidents. A significant moment that piqued my interest occurred on a Sunday morning auction in Moorestown, New Jersey, back in 2003. There were around 40 dealers selling antiques and I came across a postcard collector. I asked if he had any postcards related to Yale and he gave me a binder of all his college postcards. I came across [one signed by Edward A. Bouchet \(2\)](#). Interestingly, Bouchet was, in 1874, believed to be the first African American student to attend Yale. I knew this because when I was a freshman at Yale, his portrait was put up in the library. A few years later, I bought a manuscript letter online written in 1851 and [signed by Y Wing \(3\)](#). I quickly realized that this “Y Wing” was in fact Yung Wing – the first Chinese student to attend college in the United States. Again, I knew this because his bust had recently been unveiled at Yale.

My friend, Heather Smith, has known for 15 years that I collect historical documents. When she was browsing the Slocum estate sale, she contacted me about a collection titled, “John Slocum’s ‘James Joyce’ Collection Correspondence.” After some research on John Slocum, known as one of the pre-eminent collectors of James Joyce, I decided to purchase the collection. It included a manuscript copy of Lucie Noël’s “James Joyce and Paul Léon: The Story of a Friendship.” Paul Léon was Joyce’s assistant and confidant until the 1940s when he was tragically captured and executed by the Nazis. His widow, Lucie Noël, kept a trunk of James Joyce documents that were later discovered by her son. The Slocum estate collection also included an English-translation manuscript of Stanislaus Joyce’s “Recollections of James Joyce By His Brother.”

It was actually pure coincidence. But, once I was interested in Joyce, his ophthalmic history became fascinating. I am interested in the development of his uveitis, glaucoma, and cataracts – he very probably had acute angle closure glaucoma. People thought he was nearsighted but he was probably far sighted – he had an onset of pain in his left eye which could be a combination of his uveitis and an acute angle closure attack. A junior resident could manage this with lasers and surgery nowadays, but obviously this technology wasn’t available a hundred years ago.

I view historical documents as pieces of art and I believe that art should be accessible. Part of the joy in donating my collections to Universities and libraries is that scholars are able to access the documents from all around the world. Two days after posting the announcement that my collection of John J. Slocum Papers were at the Beinecke Library, I received an email from Ronan Crowley, the President Elect of the International James Joyce Foundation, inquiring about specific books mentioned in the letters. I knew then that digitizing my collection was worth it as it reached out to people, such as Crowley. My hope is that one day we can digitize all historical documents. By keeping them for myself, my collections would eventually become lost. The ultimate goal is seeing a document that you have donated being quoted in a book or an article.

The former CEO of the American Academy of Ophthalmology, David Parke, collects maps – but Bill Gross, the co-founder of PIMCO, collects stamps and David Richards, a real estate partner at McCarter & English, has amassed the largest collection of Rudyard Kipling works. My point is that I think all individuals need an outlet for their passion – whether that’s maps, stamps, or historical documents. Once you have a passion or an interest, it sustains you and provides joy. I have tried mimicking the collecting pursuits of others, but they simply don’t sustain me. Unsurprisingly, it is important to find what interests *you*.

Communicating stories in a way that is accessible to all was one of the focal points of my Creative Writing degree. Although writing magical realism is a fun endeavor (and one I still dabble in), getting to the heart of human stories has always been the driving motivator behind my writing. At Texere, I am able to connect with the people behind scientific breakthroughs and share their stories in a way that is impactful and engaging.