

**Finding Aid for the Dr. Sumner Merrill  
Wells, Jr. World War I and personal papers  
Collection 146**

**Finding aid prepared by Rachael Drenovsky Kozal**

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department  
July 1992  
111 Library Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 49503  
616-988-5400  
[localhis@grpl.org](mailto:localhis@grpl.org)

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
<b>Creator</b>	Wells, Sumner Merrill, Jr., 1889-1966
<b>Title</b>	Dr. Sumner Merrill Wells, Jr. World War I and personal papers
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1865-circa 1970
<b>Extent</b>	6.13 Linear feet 12 boxes
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Sumner Merrill Wells, Jr. (1889-1966) was a prominent physician in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The bulk of his papers document Hospital Unit Q, during World War I. Wells served in this Red Cross Hospital unit, which was formed by the Grand Rapids Chapter of the Red Cross. Included are official reports and records of Hospital Unit Q, several drafts of "The History of Hospital Unit Q," photographs, postcards and some maps and clippings. In addition to the World War I materials are family papers, as well as images covering about 100 years, including images of Wells. Many of the images are from other portions of Michigan or the U.S., and several images remain unidentified.</p>

## Biographical/Historical note

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Sumner Merrill Wells, Jr. (1889-1966), a prominent physician in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the son of Sumner Merrill Wells, Sr. (1862-1931), a wholesale grocer and mercantile broker, and Sarah Althea (Stephenson) Wells (1867-1937), an active member of First Methodist Church and various civic clubs.

Merrill Wells graduated from Central High School in 1907 (class president), the University of Chicago in 1912 (cum laude), and Rush Medical College in 1914. He interned at Children's Memorial and Presbyterian Hospitals in Chicago. In October 1936, the younger Wells married Minerva Ford, the daughter of J.E. Ford of Grand Rapids.

During World War I, Wells served in the Red Cross Hospital Unit Q. Unit Q was formed by the Grand Rapids chapter of the Red Cross, which raised close to \$90,000 for its outfit. The majority of the unit's personnel--doctors, nurses, and enlisted men--hailed from Michigan, many came from the western part of the state. By December 1917, the unit mobilized at Ft. McPherson, Georgia, to train for duty in Europe. Called up the following May, Unit Q left from New York, arrived in England, and was located at Knotty Ash, a hospital camp outside Liverpool. In June 1918, the unit relocated to the American Red Cross Military Hospital (ARCMH) #5 on the Auteil horse racing course near Paris, France. Housed in tents, the hospital could be loaded on trucks and moved within a few hours. ARCMH #5 was the largest of its kind in France and at times cared for as many as 2,400 patients. In January 1919 Unit Q moved to Bordeaux to form part of Base Hospital #208. During the next month the Unit began to demobilize. Some personnel returned to the United States and others transferred to Germany or Romania.

Wells was commissioned on August 8, 1917, as a first lieutenant in Unit Q. At Auteil he worked in the laboratory studying infectious diseases. Later, in Bordeaux, he remained in medical service and was also appointed historian of the hospital. Sent stateside in March 1919, Dr. Wells was promoted to captain and stationed in New Jersey. Upon his own request, he was transferred to Fort MacArthur, California and remained there until his discharge in April 1919. At that time he became a member of the Medical Reserve Corps.

Following the War, Dr. Wells returned to Grand Rapids. From 1919 to 1921 he served as medical Director of Blodgett Memorial Hospital. In 1921 he returned to private practice in internal medicine. Following the discovery of insulin in 1922, Wells became one of the first doctors in West Michigan to use it in the treatment of diabetes. Interest in chest diseases led him to contribute time to free clinics of the Kent County Anti-Tuberculosis Society. In 1924 Dr. Wells was instrumental in establishing the Grand Rapids Clinic. He worked there until 1929 when he returned to private practice in offices downtown. In 1944-45 he served as chief of staff at Blodgett, and from then until his retirement in 1962, he was a consultant at Blodgett and a member of the courtesy staffs of Butterworth and St. Mary's Hospitals.

Wells was a fellow of the American Medical Association and the American College of Physicians, and a member of First Methodist Church, American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, the Kent County and Michigan State Medical Societies, Delta Upsilon fraternity and Alpha Kappa Kappa medical fraternity.

## Scope and Contents note

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The collection documents the American Red Cross Military Hospital Unit Q from its formation to its work in France and also a portion of Dr. S.M. Wells' personal papers and photos. The bulk of the collection dates from 1917 to 1932, covering Dr. Wells' involvement in World War I, an extensive history of Unit Q which includes excerpts written by other members of the unit, correspondence from the period in which he was medical director at Blodgett Hospital, and documentation of his work as executor of his father's estate. Outside these dates appear nineteenth century photos of both his and his wife's ancestors and also more recent photos of vacations and family friends.

The photos include all aspects of life for Unit Q from daily scenes to extraordinary events. A few photos show African-American soldiers--wounded, a barber, and a military band as well. There are also a series of photos of various wounds that seem to document some sort of experimental treatment. One final word of note, many of the loose photos which have no original documentation also appear in the albums with detailed identification.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department July 1992

### Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Minerva Wells Estate, 1979; accession numbers 1979.021, 1986.192.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Archival Materials note

Coll. 218, Kent County Chapter American Red Cross History

Coll. 318, Grand Rapids in World War I Collection

Grand Rapids Sampler, pg. 139, contained an image of a group of nurses from Medical Unit Q in France. This image is cited in the Sampler book as being from the Cudney Coll. 119, but is in fact part of the photos in Coll. 146-6-4.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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### Genre(s)

- personal papers

### Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

### Subject(s)

- World War, 1914-1918 -- France
- World War, 1914-1918 -- Medical care

**Series I. World War I Related materials.**

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**Collection Inventory****Series I. World War I Related materials.****Subseries A. World War I Papers, 1917-1919.****Scope and Contents note**

Includes personal and professional papers from Dr. Wells' service in Hospital Unit Q. Folders are arranged alphabetically by title and chronologically there under.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
American Red Cross Hospital Unit Description	1	26
Book Lists.	1	27
Correspondence, 1917-1919, n.d.	1	28
Discharge.	1	29
Laboratory Reports.	3	4
Medical Procedure Manuals.	1	30
Medical Publication Catalogues.	1	31

## Subseries A. World War I Papers, 1917-1919.

Medical Reports.	3	5
Memorabilia.	3	6
Newspaper Clippings, 1918, n.d.	1	32
Notes on Tuberculosis.	1	33
Official History of Red Cross Hospital Unit Q.	1	34
Personnel List.	1	35
Poems and Songs.	3	7
Programs, Entertainment.	1	36
Programs, Medical Conferences.	1	37
Receipts, 1917-18, n.d.	1	38
Shell Shock.	1	39
Travels of Unit Q.	1	40
Miscellaneous.	1	41

**Box**



**Subseries B. "The History of Medical Unit Q".**

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Medical Unit Q American flag.

12

**Subseries B. "The History of Medical Unit Q".****Scope and Contents note**

Consists of several drafts of "The History of Hospital Unit Q" and supplementary material written by other members of the unit. The drafts had no original order within the collection and so were separated into drafts as well as possible; some remain incomplete. The supplementary material is arranged alphabetically by author.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Chapter I [a].	2	1
Chapter II [a].	2	2
Chapter III [a].	2	3
Chapter IV [a].	2	4
Chapter V [a].	2	5
Chapter VI [a].	2	6
Chapter I [b].	2	7
Chapter II [b].	2	8

**Subseries C. Publications and Periodicals, 1917-1922.**

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Chapter III [b].	2	9
Chapter IV [b].	2	10
Chapter V [b].	2	11
Chapter I [c].	2	12
Chapter II [c].	2	13
Chapter III [c].	2	14
Chapter IV [c].	2	15
Chapter V [c].	2	16
Chapter VI [c].	2	17
Chapter VI [d].	2	18
Supplementary Material.	3	8
Various Manuscripts.	2	19

**Subseries C. Publications and Periodicals, 1917-1922.****Scope and Contents note**

**Subseries C. Publications and Periodicals, 1917-1922.**

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The majority regard the World War I period. Most journals concern medical treatments. Many of the other publications address the life and travels of an American in France. Finally, the newspapers cover the war years, Unit Q, and some of the places where its members were stationed. Arranged alphabetically by title and chronologically there under.

	<b>Box</b>
American officers of the Great War, n.d.	10
Carry On, June 1918, September 1918.	10
A Day at Versailles, 1918.	10
Journal of the Michigan State Medical Society, May 1919	10
Le Soldat Americain en France, 1917.	10
Medical Bulletin, May 1918.	10
Medical Supplement, June 1, 1918.	10
Nice and Its Neighborhood, n.d.	10
Petit Almanach pour 1919"	10
Plan de Paris par Arrondissement,"" n.d.	10
A Popular History of the War from 1914 to 1918, 1918	10

## Newspapers

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Sprechen Sie deutsch and 'Parley Vool!!', n.d. 10

War Medicine: Surgery and Hygiene, June-July, 1918; August, 1918 10

The War Record of the Chicago Tribune, no. 2, n.d. 10

### Newspapers

#### Camp MacArthur Bugle

**Box**      **Folder**

October 23, 1917.      11      3

October 26, 1917.      11      3

October 30, 1917.      11      3

November 2, 1917.      11      3

November 6, 1917.      11      3

November 9, 1917.      11      3

#### Chicago Tribune

**Box**      **Folder**

## Constitution

December 2, 1922	11	3
<b>Constitution</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
March 6, 1918	11	3
<b>Forward March</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
September 1918.	11	3
October 1918.	11	3
<b>Grand Rapids Herald</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
November 11, 1917.	11	3
<b>New York Herald</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
October 6, 1918.	11	3
October 10, 1918.	11	3

## Sphere

October 16, 1918.	11	3
October 17, 1918.	11	3
October 18, 1918.	11	3
October 19, 1918.	11	3
October 21, 1918.	11	3
October 22, 1918.	11	3
November 11, 1918.	11	3
November 12, 1918.	11	3
November 13, 1918.	11	3
December 14, 1918.	11	3
<b>Sphere</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
January 25, 1919.	11	3
<b>Stars and Stripes</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>

**Subseries D. Photographs--World War I, 1917-1919.**

September 28, 1918.	11	3
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February 21, 1919.	11	3
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**Subseries D. Photographs--World War I, 1917-1919.****Scope and Contents note**

Consists of photos of Unit Q--its members, its patients, its functions, its travels, etc. Arranged alphabetically.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Air Raid. (3)	5	5
Ambulances. (5)	5	6
A.R.C.M.H. #5 Views. (11)	5	7
ARCMH #5 Views (9)	5	8
Artillery Shells. (1)	5	9
Building. Unidentified. H.C. Ellis, American Flashlight Photograph, Paris. n.d.(1)	5	10
Captured German Armaments, most in a city plaza context. Ellis (24)	5	11
Cathedral Destroyed by War. (4)	5	12

## Subseries D. Photographs--World War I, 1917-1919.

Convoys of Wounded. (12)	5	13
Crowds. (9)	5	14
Dentist at work, Interior. (1)	5	15
French Bivouac on the Acropolis. From an unidentified publication (1)	5	16
Halloween 1918 Party. Uniforms and costumes (4)	5	17
Piles of Helmets. (1)	5	18
Hospital. Exteriors (12)	5	19
Kitchen. Interiors. (4)	5	20
Laboratory. Interior. Ellis photos.(8). Includes S.M. Wells, Liet. Handling, Liet. Coward	5	21
Mess tent interior with soldiers at meal. (3)	5	22
Observation Tower. #26 of a set? 5 men in helmets with equipment on platform atop a building next to a brick building. (1)	5	23
Operating Room most during surgery. (4)	5	24
Paris. Includes Eiffel Tower, the Arc, outdoor markets, etc. (10)	6	1



**People. Soldiers. (20)**

People. Wells, Sumner Merrill, Jr. (6)	6	2
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People. Groups. Interiors and Exteriors. Mostly men, but some women. Some African Americans including one near view labeled Major Smith. (30)	6	3
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People. Nurses. (5)	6	4
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**People. Soldiers. (20)**

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
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1. Major Pilcher, Cap. Newton and 9, few men of F.H. #108. [field hospital?]	6	5
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2. Atlanta Constitution, May 6, 1918. L-R Major Smith, Capt. Whinery, Lt. Wells, Capt. Campbell. Wells is the man in front, all seated on barracks steps.	6	5
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3. Fort McPherson, Capt. Campbell, seated on barracks steps.	6	5
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4. Capt. Campbell standing	6	5
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5. Merrill at Camp. Group, including women.	6	5
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6. Capt. Whinery, Fort McPherson.	6	5
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7. Capt Campbell in group.	6	5
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## People. Soldiers. (20)

	6	5
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
8. Officers of Unit Q. Left to right: Lt. McNabb, Lt. Deaver, Lt. Severy, Capt. Campbell, Capt. Bower, Major Smith, Capt. Bruce, Capt. Whivery, Lt. Currier, Lt. Swapp(?), Lt. Wells. Lt. Hodgen away on leave.	6	6
People. Soldiers. Groups mostly (13) Several of these images are numbered. Includes: Dup. Of Atlanta Constitution image above, young man in a sports uniform, Group. 3 rows, including some ID's, with Deaver, Whinery and Wells as the three at the left on the back row. (2 variant versions) 31, 31A, 31B. group outside a tent, seated and standing. Wells is at the far right on the back row.	6	7
People. Soldiers. (8 copies or versions of the same photo shoot)	6	8
People. Unidentified. African American in profile. #122 A.	6	9
Pharmacy. Interior. Two men in lab coats and one in uniform.	6	10
Post-mortem Room. (4) 3 copies of #121 = A.R.C.M.H. #5 Post-mortem room. Lieut. Hundling (right), Sgts. Patsch and Corocran, and Pvt. Campe. Unidentified on table.	6	11
River Scene. (1)	6	12
Supply Tent with two nurses, interior. (1)	6	13
Town Destroyed by War. (7)	6	13

**Subseries E. Published graphics and Postcards, 1915-ca. 1919.**

Transporting Troops. (1) Ellis. Men in open truck on city street. Maison Esther Meyer(?) sign on building behind truck.	6	14
Wards. (9) Patients, nurses.	6	15
Wounds (9)	6	16
Wounds (10)	6	17
YMCA in Waco, TX (8). Gildersleeve. Includes Donald Wells	6	18
Miscellaneous (10)	6	19
		<b>Box</b>
Album #1		7
Album #2		7
Album #3		8
Album #4		8
Album #5.		8

**Subseries E. Published graphics and Postcards, 1915-ca. 1919.****Scope and Contents note**

**Subseries E. Published graphics and Postcards, 1915-ca. 1919.**

Includes scenes of World War I France, England, and Georgia, and also Illinois and Yellowstone Park. Arranged alphabetically by location.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Souvenir Letter Card of Southampton. Includes two folded sheets, 8 published images, of Southampton.	6	20
Atlanta, GA.	9	1
Battle of Marne.	9	1
Bordeaux.	9	1
Evanston, IL.	9	1
La Ferte-sous-Jouarre.	9	1
Liverpool.	9	1
Paris.	9	1
Salvation Army Hut and Hotel.	9	1
Southampton.	9	1
Versailles.	9	1
Yellowstone Park.	9	1

**Subseries F. Maps, 1917-1918. (3)****Subseries F. Maps, 1917-1918. (3)****Scope and Contents note**

Documents the War and the composition of Europe at that time. Arranged alphabetically by title.

**Box**

FF.IX.D

Europe Centrale, c.1918.

FF.IX.D

Western Battle Front in Europe, 1917.

FF.IX.D

Western Theater of the European War, 1918.

**Series II. Personal Papers****Subseries A. Personal Papers, 1865-1932.****Scope and Contents note**

Contains papers from Dr. Wells' personal and professional life excluding his years of war service. Folders are arranged alphabetically by title and chronologically there under.

**Box****Folder**

Bible Record Pages.

1

1

Correspondence--Ford, Minerva, n.d.

1

2

Correspondence--Wells Sumner Merrill, Jr. 1902, 1920-1921.

1

3

**Estates**

	<b>Box</b>	
Miscellaneous	10	
Delta Phi Secretary Book, 1912.	10	
Diary, 1914.	10	
<b>Estates</b>		
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Sadie Wells	1	4
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Aetna Life Insurance.	1	5
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Commercial Travelers.	1	6
Mutual Accident Assoc.	1	6
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Correspondence, 1931-1932.	1	7
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Income Tax, 1931.	1	8
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance.	1	9
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Probate Court Records.	3	1
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Property.	1	10

## Estates

Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Receipts.	1	11
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Strauss Brothers Investment Co.	3	1
Sumner M. Wells, Sr., Sumner M. Wells Co.	3	3
	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
First Methodist Church.	1	12
Ford, J.E., Wallet Contents.	1	13
Ford, Model T.	1	14
Ford, Morris M.	1	15
Greeting Cards and Invitations.	1	16
Newspaper Clippings.	1	17
Notes on Diseases.	1	18
Ogden Canyon Brochure.	11	2
Travelers Mutual Accident Association.	11	2
Receipts, 1920-1922.	1	19

**Subseries B. Photographs--Personal, ca. 1870-ca. 1970.**

Rush Medical College.	1	20
Trip to Yellowstone.	1	21
War Ration, World War II.	1	22
War Risk Insurance.	1	23
Will--Sumner Merrill wells, Jr.	1	24

**Subseries B. Photographs--Personal, ca. 1870-ca. 1970.****Scope and Contents note**

Comprised of family photos of relatives, friends, and vacation spots. Most remain unidentified, although some research time spent within the collection would identify others as Wells, and/or as area events. Arranged alphabetically. Some tintypes, colorized photos, and other historical image formats here. Also a few later color views.

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Baseball Game. (1)	4	1
Boating and Fishing. (17)	4	2
Boats and Ships. (15)	4	3
Crystal Lake, Frankfort, MI. (1)	4	4



## Subseries B. Photographs--Personal, ca. 1870-ca. 1970.

Homes, Exteriors and Interiors. (11)	4	5
Horace Mann School, Winnetha, IL. (2)	4	6
Lakeside, Coryell Islands, MI. (26)	4	7
New Orleans, LA. (4)	4	8
People. Ford. (1)	4	9
People. Hardy. (1)	4	10
People. Prats, H.D. (1)	4	11
People. Shuart (3 color) Katie, Mark, Davy, Anne.	4	12
People. Stephenson, Dr. Henry C. (1)	4	13
People. Wells, Donald M. (2) Sumner M.	4	14
People. Children. Unidentified. (10)	4	15
People. Groups. Unidentified. (4)	4	16
People. Groups. Unidentified. (32)	4	17
People. Groups. Unidentified. (16)	4	18

**Subseries B. Photographs--Personal, ca. 1870-ca. 1970.**

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People. Men. Unidentified. (35)	4	19
People. Women. Unidentified. (30)	4	20
People. Women. Unidentified. (16)	4	21
People. Women. Unidentified.	11	1
Stores, Interior. 1895, n.d. (2)	5	1
Trip to Yellowstone and Estes Park. (30 b/w snapshots)	5	2
Yellowstone continued (28 b/w snapshots)	5	3
Miscellaneous travel images (18 various formats)	5	4