Guide to the John Punnett Peters Papers

MS 897

compiled by Bruce P. Stark

May 1983

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
mssa.assist@yale.edu
http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/

CALL NUMBER: MS 897

CREATOR: Peters, John P. (John Punnett), 1887-1955

TITLE: John Punnett Peters papers

DATES: 1889-2006

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 18 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence, reports, writings, and personal papers of John Punnett Peters. The papers primarily document his crusade for national health insurance and his support for progressive causes and include materials on his disloyalty charge. Copies of many of his writings and speeches and personal correspondence and papers are also included. These papers are part of the Contemporary Medical Care and Health Policy Collection.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0897

Requesting Instructions
To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0897.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Conditions Governing Access

While this collection as a whole is available for research, parts of it may be restricted. Any restricted will be noted as such.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

John Punnett Peters Papers (897). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

John Punnett Peters, physician, received his A.B. degree from Yale in 1908, and his medical degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons (Columbia) in 1913. He was an instructor of clinical medicine at Columbia (1916-1917), a fellow at the Russell Sage Institute (1917-1920), and an associate professor of medicine at Vanderbilt (1920-1921). From 1921 until his death in 1955, Peters was associated with the Yale Medical School and the New Haven Hospital and New Haven Dispensary.

Scope and Contents

The John Punnett Peters Papers document several aspects of the professional life of Dr. Peters, John Slade Ely Professor of Medicine at Yale University. The Papers provide information on his battle for national health insurance under the auspices of the Committee of Physicians for the Improvement of Medical Care, Inc., his involvement in liberal causes, the loss of his security clearance, and his research interests and publications. They are divided into four series, PROFESSIONAL PAPERS, WRITINGS, PERSONAL PAPERS, and CASE FILES.

Series I, PROFESSIONAL PAPERS, is housed in Boxes 1-7, folders 1-198. It contains correspondence primarily, but also includes broadsides, reports, minutes of meetings, newspaper clippings, etc. Series I has ample material to document Peters’ crusade for national health insurance and his activity in support of progressive causes from the late 1930s to the 1950s, but much less on his professional activities and his relationship with patients.

Many of those represented in Yale’s Contemporary Medical Care and Health Policy Collection came from public health backgrounds, but Peters’ education and training were strictly in medicine. He became concerned with the backwardness in the delivery of medical services to the indigent and elderly during the 1930s. As Peters stated in 1937, “I have as you know always held a brief for socialized medicine, and have rather thought I was conducting a restricted experiment in my own clinic.” (folder 31) The impetus for action, however, was provided by a survey conducted by the American Foundation and its publication, American Medicine: Expert Testimony Out of Court (folder 63). As a result of this study, a group of liberal physicians, mostly associated with, medical schools, published in 1937 “Principles and Proposals” for the improvement of medical care and established an organization, the Committee of Physicians for the Improvement of Medical Care, Inc., for which John P. Peters served as secretary. The first two “Principles” forthrightly affirmed that “the health of the people is a direct concern of government” and that “a national public health policy directed toward all groups of the population should be formulated” (folder 50). The
Committee of Physicians had the support of only a small minority in the medical community, but was in the vanguard of the movement for national health insurance.

John Punnett Peters devoted a great deal of time and effort to the cause of national health insurance or "socialized medicine," as it was termed by its opponents. For material on this important subject, primarily see the folders for Committee of Physicians for the Improvement of Medical Care, Inc. (folders 23-82), plus the American Forum of the Air (folder 6), and the Physicians Forum, Inc. (folder 170). Series II, WRITINGS, contains articles and speeches on national health insurance.

Peters was also involved in several liberal causes, both because of his support for civil liberties and his devotion to national health insurance. Among the noteworthy files are those for the American-Soviet Medical Society (folder 10), Civil Rights and Bill of Rights Congress (folder 21), Committee of One Thousand (folder 22), Communist Party (folder 85), Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions (folder 109), National Committee to Repeal the McCarran Act (folder 155), National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions (folder 157), and Progressive Citizen of America (folder 171).

As a pacifist and socialist, Peters was associated with a variety of organizations in support of the Soviet Union, the loyalists in Spain, and in opposition to fascism. His involvement was generally at the level of petition signing, although he was occasionally more active. In 1941, for example, he was treasurer of the Spanish Refugee Ship Mission in New Haven (folder 177). Sometimes, however, Peters was embarrassed by his association with progressive causes. On August 14, 1939 Peters was one of some four hundred “leading Americans” to sign an open letter published in the Daily Worker appealing for greater unity among anti-fascist forces and for “close cooperation with the Soviet Union in behalf of world peace and security.” Ten days later the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed and the German invasion of Poland began on September 1, 1939 (folders 154 and 156). As a civil libertarian, Peters signed a number of petitions and was connected with several organizations in support of the rights of Communists, in opposition to the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, and in support of those taking the fifth amendment or refusing to divulge their past association with people or organizations characterized as Communist-front. See, for example, the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom (folder 5), Citizens’ Committee to Free Earl Browder (folder 20), Committee of One Thousand (folder 22), Federation of American Scientists (folder 94), and Institute for Medical Research, Cedars of Lebanon Hospital (folder 110).

This activity culminated in Peters’ being anonymously accused of disloyalty (folders 122-141) and a decision by the Loyalty Review Board dated May 22, 1953 that “there is a reasonable doubt as to Dr. Peters’ loyalty to the Government of the United States” (folder 135). As a consequence of this action by the Loyalty Review Board, Peters was prohibited from government service as consultant on health care matters. Peters had often worked in the previous decade for the War Department, Department of the Army, Federal Security Agency, and Public Health Service, but with his loyalty impugned he could no longer work for the government, and his entire reputation was threatened. His lawyers, Fowler V. Harper, professor of Law at Yale Law School, and Thurman Arnold, took his case to the Supreme Court. It ruled 7-2 on June 5, 1955 in Peters v. Hobby that he had been improperly discharged on disloyalty charges in 1953, but the Court sidestepped the crucial question, whether a federal employee can be dismissed as a security risk without being given the opportunity to confront his accusers. The files on “Loyalty case” contain correspondence, briefs and statements on behalf of Peters, petitions, and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings.

Series I contains much smaller amounts of material on the publication and research activities of John P. Peters. He taught and did consulting work for the Departments of War and Army from 1943 and 1951 (folders 153, 184-185, and 190). From 1949-1951 under the auspices of the National Research Council, Peters helped develop a “Handbook of Biological Data” (folder 161) and he was also on the editorial board of several journals (folders 114-116 and 147).

Although Dr. Peters only had a small practice at New Haven Hospital, he was considered an excellent physician who was devoted to his patients. Only a handful of letters, however, give a hint of the regard in which he was held by his patients and their families. As one person put it:

On behalf of my family and myself, I wish to thank you for the many kindnesses you showed to my sister Sadie. She thought of you not only as her most considerate physician, but also as a friend upon whom she could rely. We know she found a great deal of sympathy and comfort in her visits to
you. No matter how she felt physically, her mental attitude was better after she had been to see you (folder 174).

The restricted case files in Series IV, however, provide more information on his medical practice.

Series II, WRITINGS, fills Boxes 8-19, folders 199-432. The material is divided into four sections, Articles, Speeches, Books, and Writings of Others.

The section Articles fills Boxes 8-9, folders 199-291 and includes around forty percent of the articles published by Peters. In total he published over a forty year period more than two hundred articles. (See folders 450, 458, and 464 for bibliographies of his works.) Over eighty per cent of the published articles found in Series II, mostly offprints, concern his medical research interests, but eleven focus on improving medical care in the United States. The first such articles, "Improvement of Medical Card" (folder 235), appeared in 1937, while the last, "The Need for a National Health Program," was printed in 1946.

The Speeches section (Boxes 10-11, folders 292-364) contains texts of and correspondence about seventy-three speeches, forty-seven concerning national health insurance and the improvement of medical care. As secretary of the Committee of Physicians, Peters was a spokesman for the organization and the principles it espoused. He delivered eleven addresses in 1938 on the "Principles and Proposals" of the Committee of Physicians, "The Social Responsibilities of Medicine," medical care, and health insurance. Another thirty-six on similar subjects were given between 1939 and 1949. These speeches were delivered at county medical societies, national health conferences and symposia on medical problems, medical schools, hospitals, over the radio, and to civic groups. The remaining addresses deal primarily with medical subjects, such as water metabolism, diabetic acidosis, and fluids in the body.

The sections on Books (Boxes 12-18, folders 365-425) includes the typescript, correspondence, and memorabilia for Body Water: The Exchange of Fluids in Man (1935); correspondence concerning the first edition of Quantitative Clinical Chemistry (1931, 1932) written with Donald D. Van Slyke; chapter drafts, typescript, correspondence, and reviews for the second edition of Quantitative Clinical Chemistry (1946); and files for chapters and sections of books contributed to by John P. Peters.

The final section, Writings of Others, contains background material on such topics as national health insurance, A Physio-Chemical Introduction to General Chemistry, and Speaking of Peace.

Series III, PERSONAL PAPERS, is housed in Boxes 20-21, folders 433-469. It contains thirteen folders of chronologically arranged correspondence, eighteen folders of material on John P. Peters, four on other family members, and two on miscellaneous subjects.

Three major groups of letters are found in correspondence. From 1933 to 1942, the major correspondents are John F. Fulton, Sterling Professor of Physiology 1931-1951, and his wife Charlotte Hodge Peters, who was librarian to Dr. Fulton 1933-1943 (folders 433-437). The letters written when Dr. Fulton was away from New Haven give news of the department and mutual acquaintances, discuss manuscripts and publications, and tell of books received and catalogued on the history of medicine and surgery. Secondly, there are a series of letters of condolence addressed to Mrs. Peters following the death of her husband on December 29, 1955 (folders 438-441). Most of the remaining letters concern the disposition of the papers of John P. Peters. The correspondents are son John H. Peters, daughter Alice Peters Irwin, John R. Fulton, and Madeline Stanton, librarian of Historical Collections, Yale School of Medicine 1949-1968. In addition, Series III includes such things as biographical sketches, birthday celebrations, World War I military records, obituaries, and photographs of John P. Peters. There are also single folders on his father John Punnett Paners (1852-1921), his daughter Alice Peters Irwin, and two folders concerning Charlotte Hodge Peters.

Series IV, CASE FILES, is found in Boxes 22-25. Two boxes contain diabetes medical records and two have files on other diseases. These records are closed until 2025.

The John Punnett Peters Papers provide a great deal of useful documentation on the research interests and publications of Dr. Peters, his concern for national health insurance, and his involvement in liberal causes. The Papers do not, however, contain personal correspondence among family members and there is almost no information describing the duties of Peters at the Yale School of Medicine.
The John Punnett Peters Papers were donated to Yale University in 1983 by Alice Peters Irwin. For additional Peters material, see the Edward R Weinerman Papers, Ms. Gr. No. 692 and C.- E. A. Winslow Papers Ms. Gr. No. 749.

Arrangement

**Collection Contents**

**Series I. Professional Papers**

2.9 linear feet (7 boxes)

Series I, PROFESSIONAL PAPERS, primarily contain correspondence to and from John P. Peters documenting his professional career. The materials are arranged in a single alphabetical listing by person, organization, and subject and then in chronological order.

Individuals are separately listed if there are five or more items to or from that person. Other individuals and organizations are filed alphabetically with the first letter of the surname in "Letter" general.

Folders containing ten or more items are marked with an asterisk (*). Most of the individuals given an asterisk were associated with Peters in the Committee of Physicians for the Improvement of Medical Care, Inc.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>The American Foundation Studies in Government (*)</td>
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<td>Arnold, Thurman</td>
<td>See: <a href="#">box 4, folder 122</a></td>
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<td>The Association of Medical Students (*)</td>
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<td>Bishop, Charlotte</td>
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<td>Blake, Francis G. (*)</td>
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<td>1, f. 17</td>
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<td>Butler, Allan M. (*)</td>
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<td>Cabot, Hugh</td>
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<td>Committee of One Thousand</td>
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<td>Baehr, George (*)</td>
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<td>Cabot, Hugh (*)</td>
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<td>correspondence (*)</td>
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<td>2, f. 48</td>
<td>Frothingham, Channing (*)</td>
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<td>2, f. 49</td>
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<td>b. 3, f. 65-67</td>
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<td>Connecticut Citizens Political Action Committee (*)</td>
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<td>b. 21, f. 462-464</td>
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<td>Translations from German</td>
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<td>b. 21, f. 468</td>
<td>Photographs, other</td>
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Series IV. Case Files

1.5 linear feet (4 boxes)

Series IV, CASE FILES, consists of two boxes of medical case files of diabetes patients and two boxes of files for patients with other diseases. The diabetes and other disease files are each arranged by letter.

These records are closed until 2025.

Series IV, Case Files, is closed until January 1, 2025.

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Accession 1986-M-091. Additional Material

0.25 linear feet (1 box)

Addition inventory by Carol King, 1991 Apr

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<td>Obituary of John Punnett Peters, <em>Alumni Bulletin</em>, School of Medicine</td>
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## Accession 1986-M-112. Additional Material


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Accession 1991-M-035. Additional Material
1.50 linear feet (4 boxes)
Addition inventory by Carol King, 1991 Feb.

Received from: Alice Peters Irwin, 1990 Oct 30 (1991-M-35)

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<td>Response to disloyalty charges</td>
<td>1953, 1955</td>
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<td><em>The Century Association Year-Book</em>, containing memoriam to J.P.P. (correspondence laid in)</td>
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<td>“John P. Peters, 1887-1955,” by Max Miller: <em>Diabetes</em>, vol.6, no.1</td>
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<td><em>Gasometrische Methoden Zur Analyse von Blut and anderen Lösungen</em>, von John P. Peters and Donald D. Van Slyke</td>
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<td>“A Petition to the president of the United States;” a petition re: the Employee Security Program (Acc 91-M-54)</td>
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<td>Bowles, Chester</td>
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<td>Roosevelt, Franklin D.</td>
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<td>Condolences on the death of J.P.P.</td>
<td>1955 December-1956 Mar, undated</td>
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<td>Condolences on the death of her father</td>
<td>1955 December 29-1956 May 6, undated</td>
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<td>Attempt to obtain FBI and CIA files of her parents</td>
<td>1975, 1977-1978, 1981</td>
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<td>other materials Newspaper clippings</td>
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<td>Fiftieth congratulatory messages of J.P.P. (Acc 91-M-62)</td>
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Accession 1993-M-043. Additional Material

1.25 linear feet (4 boxes, 1 folio)
Addition inventory by Carol King, 1993 Feb
Received from: Alice Irwin, 1993 Jan 29

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Page 29 of 35
Peters, Charlotte Hodge (continued)

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<td>&quot;Applications of Gas Analysis,&quot; by Yandell Henderson: hand written copy by [CHP?]</td>
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Peters, Mrs. John Punnett, Sr. (mother)

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<td>John Punnett Peters</td>
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Peters, Frazier F.

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Degrees and certificate of John Punnett Peters

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Accession 1999-M-035. Additional Material

Peter, John P., Jr.

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## Accession 2005-M-076. Additional Material

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<td>John Hodge Peters to his mother (Charlotte H. Peters)</td>
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### Accession 2007-M-027. Additional Material

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### Accession 2007-M-082. Additional Material

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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.

Subjects
Allegiance
Clinical chemistry
Diabetes
Freedom of speech
Health insurance
Insulin
Internal security -- United States
Medical care
Medicine
Physicians
Public health
Social medicine

Preferred Titles
Contemporary Medical Care and Health Policy Collection

Names
Arnold, Thurman Wesley, 1891-1969
Butler, Allan Macy, 1894-
Cabot, Hugh, 1872-1945
Fulton, John F. (John Farquhar), 1899-1960
Harper, Fowler V. (Fowler Vincent), 1897-1965
Peters, Charlotte H. (Charlotte Hodge)
Peters, John P. (John Punnett), 1887-1955
Smith, Richard M. (Richard Mason), 1881-
Van Slylee, Donald D.

Corporate Bodies
American Foundation Studies in Government
Committee of Physicians for the Improvement
of Medical Care, Inc
Yale University -- Faculty