

**Ground breaking ceremony: National Library of Medicine  
Friday June 12, 1959, 2:30 p.m. at the National Institutes of Health  
Bethesda, Maryland**

[ Music ]

[ Silence ]

[ Inaudible background discussion ]

**Dr. Champ Lyons:** Ladies and gentlemen will you please rise. Chaplain Andrew will offer the invocation.

[ Moving around ]

**The Reverend William R. Andrew:** Let us pray. Almighty God who dost inspire the hearts and minds of men we beseech thee to bless us as we dedicate this National Library of Medicine to the healing of thy children who are sick. O thou who declarest thine mighty power in showing mercy and who revealest to men in each new discovery a part of thy truth. Grant a new vision to all those who serve thee in their search for the cause of sickness and its cure. Mercifully direct them in thy path of knowledge. Grant them the realization that through thee all things are possible. Pour upon them the abundance of thy inspiration and finally lead them to victory that the scourge of disease may be ended and that thy people being freed from this burden of fear may live continually in thy love and service. Amen.

[ Moving around ]

**Dr. Champ Lyons:** We are met here today to celebrate an occasion of the very greatest interest to American medicine and to American librarianship and a very great import to the health and welfare of the American people. On this site there will soon begin to rise a new building to house an old and noble institution, the National Library of Medicine. When the Library was founded in 1836 it consisted of shelf of books located behind the desk of the Surgeon General of the Army. Today the Library's collections embrace over a million items and require many miles of shelving space. The nation, which was producing only 11 medical periodicals in the year of the Library's founding is today producing some 1500 medical periodicals. Production of medical literature elsewhere has increased in similar degree. This new building comes in just in time not only to provide adequate housing for the voluminous and important records of the past, but also to offer the promise of adequate housing to the burgeoning records of the present and immediate future.

The project for a new building for the National Library of Medicine has been under active consideration for more than 40 years. Some of the men who took a major part in bringing this project to fruition are seated here on the platform. Some I see before me sitting in the audience, some long since gone to their reward or here in hallowed memory. I am thinking particularly of Colonel Howard Wellington Jones, Librarian from 1936 to 1945 who did so much to advance the Library cause and who died only last year. What a pity he could not have lived to share this occasion with us. Since 1956 the National Library of

Medicine has had a Board of Regents, ten members are appointed by the President and seven members serve ex officio. It is the duty of the Board to advise, consult with and make recommendations to Dr. Burney, our dedicated Surgeon General of the Public Health Service on important matters of policy in regard to the Library. The present members of the Board and some of its past members as well as members of predecessor groups are here with me on the platform. We have with us today members of the old Armed Forces Medical Library Advisory Group, officers of the Friends of the Armed Forces Medical Library and officers of the Honorary Consultants to the Army Medical Library. These devoted people have maintained a special interest in this library throughout the years. And today's event is for them truly a special moment of history. I would like to acknowledge to all of them and to all of you the significant contributions of these devoted people by asking my worthy predecessor in office, in the Office of Chairman of the Board, Dr. Worthby Daniels of Washington to rise and receive your applause.

[ Applause ]

In 1956 the Library then in its 120th year was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Public Health Service of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare by Public Law 941 of the 84th Congress. John Shaw Billings had called it the National Medical Library 80 years previously. But now the Library enjoyed the jury, the status for which so long had been de facto only. With a statutory base for its operations specific legislative approval for its programs and the assurance of adequate and continuing budgetary support the National Library of Medicine has come into its own and the beginning of a new building symbolizes this. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare is in the capable hands of a man who at one time or another has been a journalist, a personnel expert and a university president. In this latter capacity certainly he has been exposed to the widely held contention that the Library is the heart of a University. All of us on the Board of Regents of the National Library of Medicine hope and expect that he will run his HEW University on that theory, with the National Library of Medicine as its heart. Ladies and gentleman it is an honor and a pleasure to introduce to you the distinguished Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Dr. Arthur H. Fleming.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Arthur H. Flemming:** Mr. Chairman, members of the Board of Regents, Senator Hill, Dr. Burney and friends of this Library, I can assure you that I am very, very happy to have the privilege of representing the Department of Health, Education and Welfare on this very significant occasion. As most who are gathered here know, this particular spot in the city of Washington or out in the metropolitan area rather of Washington is referred to as "The Campus." And I certainly agree with our Chairman that the heart of any campus is the Library. If we do not have effective and adequate library resources we cannot carry on the work of any campus in the way in which it should be conducted. This is not my first contact with the history of this Library and with the accomplishments of this Library. It was my privilege to serve as a member of both Hoover Commissions. Particularly in connection with the work of the second Hoover Commission very careful consideration was given to the role that this Library had played in the past and the role that it could play if it were provided with adequate resources and facilities. I remember very distinctly the discussions that took place around the conference table as the Hoover Commission gave

consideration to this matter. And I was very happy to be one of those who signed one of the Hoover Commission reports containing very definite and specific statements as to what should be done if this Library was to render the maximum of service.

In preparation for this occasion I went back and read the portion of our report dealing with the Library. We said, for example, that a cardinal necessity of effective health research is access to books, monographs and journals in medical and related fields. Without access to such materials research is seriously handicapped and research grants are wastefully spent. The largest and most important medical library in the world is the Armed Forces Medical Library in Washington. Originally organized for military use in 1836 this Library has become a great national research institution far surpassing the nature, size and level of activities required by the armed forces. No newly created library could ever hope to duplicate the present matchless collections. It is, in fact, the National Library of Medicine in the United States.

There is no clear statutory authority for the functions which it now serves. The Library is ineffectively placed in point of administration, inadequately housed and too poorly supported to permit effective conduct of its functions. For over 30 years we said the Library has needed a new building. It now requires an annual increase of a mile of shelf space. Its collections are constantly threatened by loss from fire and have undergone actual damage from exposure to weather and improper storage. But the cost of maintaining this Library is not a fair charge on any one or all of the military establishments. Its appropriations compete, in peacetime with the needs of the military to maintain the skeleton of an effective fighting force. In time of war it is hopeless to expect the preoccupation of the military to include the proper maintenance and continuing development of a National Library of Medicine. What is needed to enable the Library to function properly as a truly national institution is legal status with an administrative organization appropriate to a National Library of Medicine, an effective building, an adequate budget and an independent status just as is the case with university libraries.

Now we then went on to make I think the only mistake that we made in this report. We recommended that the Library be placed in another agency of the government. Certainly, if I had had the benefit of the experiences that I have had during the last 10 months, I would never have subscribed to that part of our report. I am convinced of the fact that the Congress of the United States exercised excellent judgment in deciding to make it possible to carry out the objectives set forth in the Hoover Commission report by placing the Library in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare under the United States Public Health Service. But in the last paragraph, which I just read it seems to me that those of us who served as members of the Hoover Commission set forth four very important objectives in connection with the operation of this Library. We said first of all that it needed legal status with an administrative organization appropriate to a National Library of Medicine. As the Chairman of the Board of Regents has pointed out it now has legal status and I feel has an administrative organization that is appropriate to a National Library of Medicine. We said it needed an effective building and we are gathered here today to celebrate the fact that we are going to have over a period of the next few months an effective building. We said also that it needed an adequate budget. This is true of all libraries. All libraries have to really push hard for an adequate budget. It's a little bit hard for me to understand why this is the case, but the nevertheless it is true in the educational world generally. All I want to say is that as long as I am in this

particular office I will certainly do everything I possibly can to realize this particular objective. And then we also said that it needed an independent status just as is the case with University Library. Sometimes we refer to that as academic freedom. And as long as I am in this particular position I can assure you that I will do everything I possibly can to guarantee this library independent status or academic freedom.

In the realization of the objectives that were set forth by those of us who have served on the Hoover Commission we have had outstanding help from leaders of both houses of Congress. But I want to say that I feel that it is particularly appropriate that the person who is really going to get this Library underway is Senator Hill of Alabama. All of us are deeply indebted to him for the leadership that he has provided, which in turn has made it possible for us to move in the direction of achieving these objectives. And I want to say to him that as long as I am in this office I look forward to working with him as together we endeavor to guarantee the fact that we continue not only to keep these objectives in mind, but to continue to move in the direction of their fullest realization. It is a thrilling experience for me to have the opportunity of participating in what is certainly a very significant occasion of the whole field of medical research throughout not only our nation, but throughout the world. And I am grateful for those who planned the program and being here and participating in this manner in this occasion. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Champ Lyons:** Thank you Mr. Secretary. It is now my pleasure to introduce to you the man who offered the bill making this--

[ Inaudible background discussion ]

**Dr. Champ Lyons:** I am delighted to acknowledge the arrival of a-- the distinguished Congressman, Mr. Melvin R. Laird. He's a member of Congress from the great Midwestern state, which supports two of our finest medical schools along with two fine medical libraries and has furnished another distinguished public servant, the former Dean of the medical school of the state university as one of the valued members of the Board of Regents of the National Libraries in Medicine. Ladies and gentleman may I present to your Representative Melvin R. Laird of Wisconsin.

[Applause]

**Mr. Melvin R. Laird:** Ladies and gentlemen it is indeed a pleasure for me to be here and take part in this groundbreaking ceremony as a representative of the House. I have just returned from the World Health Assembly, which was meeting in Geneva. And at this meeting the United States was looked to as the leader in the field of medical research and health. I think it is indeed fitting and proper that we here dedicate this new building which will be built to the furtherance of our position of leadership in the field of medical research and health. This indeed will be a great contribution. It will help us maintain our position and will go a long way in helping with the many breakthroughs in health activities that all of us are looking forward to. It is of great significance I think that this building will be built here near the great National Institutes of Health. And I know that with the completion of the building our progress in

medical research will go on to new goals, new heights in keeping with the great tradition of our country. Thank you.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Champ Lyons:** Thank you Mr. Laird. It is now my pleasure to introduce to you the sponsor of the legislation which made this new Library building possible. Son of a distinguished and fine cardiovascular surgeon, he has perpetuated the best motifs of surgical and medical research and investigation and now stands revered by public health teams and the medical profession of America as well as the throughout the world. It gives me great deal of pleasure to present to you Senator Lister Hill of Alabama.

[ Applause ]

**Senator Lister Hill:** Mr. Chairman, Secretary Fleming, my colleague Congressmen Laird, Members of the Board of Regents of the National Library of Medicine, distinguished guests and my friends. May I say how much we regret that the fact that my colleague, Congressman John Fogarty of the House of Representatives, is not able to be here at this time, due to circumstances over which he has no control. He has to be on the floor of the House of Representatives. My colleague Senator Gordon Allott of Colorado was also due to be here but he has to be on the floor of the United States Senate on a very important matter there. But I certainly rejoice and am most happy that I can be here with you.

Secretary Fleming has beautifully and well spoken of the Library of this fine new building, which will be constructed here to preserve and protect for us, for our children, for generations to come and for suffering humanity around this earth, this Library, the greatest medical library in all the world. There's nothing to be found in any other land or any other nation comparable to this National Library of Medicine. Our Chairman, Dr. Lyons, has so well spoken to us and told us that for 40 years efforts had been made that we might bring to pass this day; break the ground, begin the construction of the proper home for our National Library of Medicine.

May I say that some three years ago when Senator Jack Kennedy of Massachusetts and I introduced into the Congress the bill to authorize the construction of this home for the National Library after so many disappointments and so many failures we knew that we had to have real support to pass that legislation. And so we called on our friend who honors us with his presence here today, Dr. Worth Daniels. Dr. Daniels sounded forth the call. He marshaled the forces. He brought the support that made it possible for us to pass that bill in the Congress of the United States. And there ably helping Dr. Daniels were two other very wonderful men [inaudible]. One was Dr. Michael DeBakey the other was our Chairman today, Dr. Champ Lyons. And it's interesting to note my friends that the first Chairman of the Board of Regents after that legislation passed was Dr. Worth Daniels. Dr. Champ Lyons is the present Chairman of the Board of Regents and Dr. Michael DeBakey is the Chairman Elect of the Board of Regents. These three fine, outstanding, wonderful men, who did so much to bring about this great occasion today.

And may I say too, that we've had an awful, an awful good, an awful good friend in Secretary Fleming. I know no one who has or has shown a greater interest in the National Library of Medicine and the building of a proper home for it than Secretary Fleming. And surely his Stonewall Jackson in this matter

has as in all matters is our distinguished Surgeon General to the U.S. Public Health Service, General Roy Burney, who also honors us with his presence here today. And I think our thanks my friends are due to all of these members of the Board of Regents who have given of their time, of their thought, who've given of themselves to bring about this great occasion.

It's not possible to name all of those who have contributed to this incomparable Library. But I'm sure in the heart of each of us we are paying a special tribute today to Dr. Joseph Lovell who is Surgeon General of the United States Army in 1836 founded this Library. And also we are paying special tribute to that wonderful man, John Shaw Billings, who from 1865 to 1895, a period of some 30 years, was a Librarian of this Library. It was his deep interest and his loving care that made such a mighty contribution of the building of this Library. When I think of him and of all that he did I'm reminded that Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson told us, "An institution is but the length and shadow of a man" and surely in this institution, the National Library of Medicine we see so much of the influence of the devoted livers of the manifold sacrifices of John Shaw Billings.

As I stand here today thinking of what this Library has meant, what it will mean to medicine to relieve suffering humanity to the saving of human lives, I think of those words of Dr. Crawford W. Long, the discoverer of ether anesthesia. The words of his that we find on the pedestal to his statue in the nation's Capital. Dr. Long declared, "My profession is to me a ministry from God." And today we shall break the ground for this Library dedicated to the service of God through the service of his sons and daughters, his children.

[ Applause ]

**Dr. Champ Lyons:** In handing you this ceremonial spade Senator Hill I would like to mention the fact that it is the same instrument which was used at the groundbreaking at the new Armed Forces Institute of Pathology building in 1951. The Surgeon General's Museum and Library grew up together and for many years were housed in the same building. Now the museum has grown into the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology and the Library has become the National Library of Medicine. This spade was made from materials from the old museum. The handle was once the tube of a microscope. The shaft was once part of an old exhibit case and the blade was made from old and discarded equipment boxes which were melted down for the purpose. The use of this instrument adds another historical overtone to this occasion as it suggests the common ancestry of these two sister institutions.

[ Applause ]

[ Inaudible background discussion ]