

Massachusetts General Hospital Archives and Special Collections
MC 35
William T.G. Morton and Family Collection of Cartes de Visites
1840s-1870s

0.5 cubic feet in 1 container
(1 oversize document box)

Processed: by Jeffrey Mifflin, 2016

Acquisition: Gift of Mrs. Ellen Morton, 1948

Access: There no restrictions on access to the collection.

Copyright: Requests to publish materials from the collection should be directed to the MGH Archivist.

Scope and Content Note:

This collection consists of about 100 original cartes de visites (albumen prints mounted on card stock the size of 19th-century visiting cards) and tintypes collected by William Thomas Green Morton and his family in the mid-19th century (ca. 1840s to 1870s). Photographs of Morton, his sons and daughters, and his grandson are included, as are photos of prominent members of the medical and scientific professions. The photos were formerly contained in two photograph albums; they were removed from the albums at some unknown date after being donated to the MGH.

People depicted include: MGHers Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, Henry Jacob Bigelow, Sturgis Bigelow, and Jonathan Mason Warren; as well as William T.G. Morton himself and members of his family; T.H. Huxley (who influenced Charles Darwin); Charles Sumner (Massachusetts senator and well-known abolitionist; Edward Everett (politician, orator, and Harvard President); and Princess Eugenie (wife of Napoleon III), often referred to as the most beautiful woman in Europe during the reign of her husband. Several photos of an unidentifiable infant with facial tumor and 19th-century medical apparatus are also included.

Historical Note:

William Thomas Green Morton (1819-1868) was a Boston-based dentist who administered ether in the first public demonstration of surgical anesthesia, October 16, 1846. He was poorly educated and seemed very concerned about social networking and establishing an elevated position in society. Collecting photographs of prominent people in society and in the medical and scientific professions may have been part of an overall desire for respect. Cartes de visites were a frequent object of exchange. Visitors left them when calling upon a family, but they were also mailed out by famous individuals upon request. Cartes de visites of famous politicians, generals, and members of royal families could also be purchased. Owning such a picture did not imply personal acquaintance. It implied, rather, that the owner of the photo admired the person depicted. The photos were typically displayed in photograph albums on a table in the parlor.

Related Collections Note:

Researchers will also find relevant information about W.T.G. Morton in Biographical Files and Subjects Files in the MGH Archives and Special Collections. Ask the Archivist for further guidance.

See also *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: a History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums*, by Elizabeth Siegel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).