



Bowers (John Z.) papers

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Summary Information

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Biographical / Historical

John Zimmerman Bowers was born in Catonsville, Maryland on August 27, 1913. He received his B.S. from Gettysburg College (1933) and his M.D. from the University of Maryland (1938). During World War II, he saw active duty in the Naval Medical Corps and was wounded at the battle of Guadalcanal. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for Combat and the Purple Heart. Before his discharge as a commander in 1945, Bowers was sent to Harvard University for six months of training in pathology at the New England Deaconess Hospital under Dr. Shields Warren, a noted pathologist and a specialist in radiobiology. From 1947 to 1950, Bowers served as Deputy Director of the Biology and Medicine Division of the Atomic Energy Commission, and in this capacity witnessed the nuclear weapons tests at Eniwetok.

In August 1949, Bowers was sent to Japan to monitor the long-term biological effects of atomic radiation on the survivors of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He collaborated with Warren on studies of acute radiation syndrome and investigated changes in electrolytes produced by exposure to radiation. He served as director of the Radioactive Isotope Laboratory in Baltimore, and, in 1950, as a director and research fellow at the Crocker Radiation Laboratory of the University of California at Berkeley. His broad experience with the effects of radiation led to his appointment in 1981 to the Advisory Committee

to the Radiation Effects Research Foundation of the National Academy of Sciences. He wrote *The History of the U.S. Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission* for the National Academy of Sciences in 1983 and *Radiation Effects Research Foundation -- Its Origins and Growth*, published in 1985.

Bowers served as Assistant Professor of Preventive Medicine at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, and in 1950, at age thirty-seven, he became the youngest medical dean ever chosen when he was appointed Dean and Professor at the University of Utah College of Medicine. As director of the University's Radiology Laboratory, he launched a significant research project for the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission to study the effects of radioactive substances. In 1955 he was chosen as the Dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine. From 1958 to 1961 Bowers served as a member of President Dwight Eisenhower's Health and Resources Advisory Committee, which made recommendations on national problems in medicine and health care.

When the China Medical Board awarded him an Alan Gregg fellowship to study in the Far East, Bowers selected Japan, for he wished to study medical education in a country which shifted from a traditional system to a modern system and developed strong research. He subsequently chose Kyoto as the base of his studies because of the quality of its university and its historic significance. He served as a visiting professor at both the Kyoto University School of Medicine and the University of the Philippines during 1962-1964. His keen interest in ancient and modern Japanese medicine and his extensive research were reflected in his many scholarly papers and books, and earned him acclaim as one of the foremost authorities in the U.S. on Japanese and Chinese medical education and history.

Bowers joined the Rockefeller Foundation in 1964 and the next year became president of the Josiah Macy, Jr., Foundation, a position he held from 1965 until 1980. Under his innovative and effective guidance, the Macy Foundation instituted programs designed to bring more women and minority students into medical careers, and the foundation won international recognition for fostering education in the health sciences. Bowers also organized and presided over a series of highly successful international conferences on various aspects of medical care and education, and the proceedings of many of these Macy Conferences were published.

As president (1968-1978) of Alpha Omega Alpha, the National Medical Honor Society, Bowers continued to be outspoken in his insistence on excellence in scholarship as well as personal distinction. He guided the society in initiating its Leaders in American Medicine program, which published the autobiographical memoirs of contemporary distinguished men and women in medicine.

In 1980, Huang Chiassu, president of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences (formerly the Peking Union Medical College), personally invited Bowers to visit China. The invitation was Chiassu's compliment to Bowers' book, *Western Medicine in a Chinese Palace: Peking Union Medical College, 1917-1951* (1972), which was based on twenty-three years of research. This invitation was one of many honors that Bowers received for his accomplishments. Others include the Legion of Honor of France, the Order of the Rising Sun of Japan, and numerous fellowships, honorary degrees, and other awards.

After his retirement from the Macy Foundation in 1980, Bowers maintained his affiliation with the Rockefeller Foundation as a consultant and in 1983 wrote *The Health of Mankind*, a history of its health and natural science programs. He died in 1993.

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Scope and Contents

The collection contains books and manuscripts, journal articles, book reviews, and reprints; material on Japan and China, and on the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission; three volumes of annual reports of the Radiation Effects Research Foundation, 1975-1980; and the published proceedings of the Macy Conferences. Also included are Shields Warren's photographs of Nagasaki in 1947 and diaries of observations he made during tests of the atomic and hydrogen bombs at Eniwetok in 1948.

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Arrangement

The John Z. Bowers papers is arranged in two accessions, each comprised of multiple series. The accessions and associated series numbers are representative solely of when the materials were processed by RAC, and do not imply an original order of the records.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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