

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Orvan W. Hess was born on June 18, 1906, in Baoba, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Lafayette in 1927 with a Bachelor of Science degree and from the University of Buffalo (SUNY) School of Medicine in 1931 with his M.D. After completing internships and residencies at the Buffalo Children's Hospital and Yale-New Haven Hospital, he began a research fellowship in obstetrics and gynecology at the Yale University School of Medicine. He was named clinical instructor in 1937. Five years later, he left Yale University to serve in World War II. During the war, he served as a surgeon in the 91st Evacuation Hospital attached to General George Patton's 2nd Armored Division during the invasions of North Africa, Sicily, and Normandy. By the end of the war, he had achieved the rank of Colonel. For additional information on the 91st Evacuation Hospital, visit <https://www.med-dept.com/unit-histories/91st-evacuation-hospital/>.

After he returned from the war in 1949, Hess continued to work at the Yale University School of Medicine, where he delivered thousands of babies and pursued his medical research. He advocated for the return of natural childbirth methods and was instrumental in the first successful clinical use of penicillin. He is best known for his pioneering work developing a fetal heart monitor, which was credited for reducing the number of stillbirths and helping hospitals run more efficiently. Along with his research partner, he became the first in the world to detect and record electric cardiac signals.

Orvan was the co-director of the Fetal Heart Institute and the Fetal Cardiovascular Center at Yale-New Haven Hospital. He was also elected president of the Connecticut State Medical Society in 1966. He was a consultant to President Lyndon B. Johnson's White House Conference on Medicare. He was awarded the Scientific Achievement Award of the American Medical Association in 1979 in recognition of his accomplishments in fetal heart monitoring, as well as the Lafayette College George Washington Kidd Class of 1836 Award in 1980 for distinction in his career and medical research. Orvan married Carol Woodruff Maurer, and they had two children: Katherine and Carolyn. He passed away on September 6, 2002, at the age of 96.

PROVENANCE NOTE

The Hess Collection was donated by Carolyn Westerfield, daughter of Orvan Hess, in June of 2018.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Orvan W. Hess Collection (1 box; 3 linear inches) consists of documents, photographs, and postcards from Hess's life, the bulk of which date from 1942 – 1945 during his time with the 91st Evacuation Hospital.

INVENTORY

Box 1

1:1 Miscellaneous Documents, including "A Pocket Guide to France" published by the U.S. War and Navy Departments and "A Chronological History of the 91st Evacuation Hospital."

**HESS, ORVAN W. COLLECTION,
1942 – 2002**

**SKILLMAN LIBRARY
LAFAYETTE COLLEGE**

- 1:2 Correspondence: ca. 1943-74
- 1:3 Photographs of the 91st Evacuation Hospital
- 1:4 Postcards from various cities that Hess visited with the 91st Evacuation Hospital
- 1:5 Personal Photographs
- 1:6 Watercolor painting of a church in Bouteville, Normandy
- 1:7 Watercolor painting of a church in Bouteville, Normandy
- 1:8 Biographical material; ID cards; certificates; miscellaneous scientific articles by Hess