

Journal d'un étudiant en médecine à Paris. Par Lactance Papineau. Texte établi avec introduction et notes par Georges Aubin et Renée Blanchet. (Montréal: Varia, 2003. 612 p., app., bibl. ISBN 2-922245-94-2 \$39.95)

Caroline Hannaway

Volume 28, 2005

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/800495ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/800495ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (imprimé)

1918-7750 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Hannaway, C. (2005). Compte rendu de [*Journal d'un étudiant en médecine à Paris*. Par Lactance Papineau. Texte établi avec introduction et notes par Georges Aubin et Renée Blanchet. (Montréal: Varia, 2003. 612 p., app., bibl. ISBN 2-922245-94-2 \$39.95)]. *Scientia Canadensis*, 28, 102–104.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/800495ar>

Medicine / Médecine

***Journal d'un étudiant en médecine à Paris.* Par Lactance Papineau. Texte établi avec introduction et notes par Georges Aubin et Renée Blanchet. (Montréal: Varia, 2003. 612 p., app., bibl. ISBN 2-922245-94-2 \$39.95)**

The publication of Lactance Papineau's journal is a contribution not only to the history of medicine but also to Canadian history. Lactance was the second son of Louis-Joseph Papineau, leading political figure in the nationalist movement in Lower Canada in the 1830s. It was the elder Papineau's exile from Canada following armed uprisings that led to the family spending four years in France and gave his son Lactance the opportunity to investigate the rich diversity of medical clinics and courses in Paris in the early 1840s. Lactance Papineau's diary descriptions give historians of medicine new insights into the medical world of the Paris Clinic and supplement those already known of other North American medical students who sought to broaden their educational experience in

France in the nineteenth century. His comments on family activities add background on how Papineau *père* spent his time in exile abroad.

This published version of Lactance's journal is taken from manuscripts in the Archives nationales du Québec. The book consists of an introduction sketching the life of Lactance Papineau, the text of his diary for the years 1836 to 1846, five appendices, and a bibliographical reference section. The journal text is divided into three parts. Part One, which is short, relates to the years 1836 through 1839, first outlining Lactance's activities at the Collège de St-Hyacinthe near Montreal and then detailing the family's removal to the United States in the summer of 1838 after the enforced exile of his father and brother from Canada. After a period in Albany, New York, the family, although not all at once, moved to Paris in 1839. Part Two covers the years 1840 to 1844 and offers the most significant material for the historian of medicine. Brief notations of "dissection" and "cours d'Orfila" on particular days by the diarist in 1840 blossom, by 1842, to several-page detailed descriptions of interesting cases that Lactance Papineau saw in clinics or was involved in treating, primarily at the Hôpital Beaujon, under the guidance of his mentor, the surgeon César-Alphonse Robert. He also notes a range of cultural activities in which he participates. By 1843, his enthusiasm for fuller description of his days had waned and the Paris experience ended in mid-1844 when he returned to Canada. Part Three, the Return, has some brief entries for the second half of 1844, mostly relating to the expenses of his travels, and two or three entries for the year 1846. The diary came to an end after Lactance had a breakdown in mental health in May 1846 from which he never recovered. He died in 1862 in a mental health asylum in Lyon, France.

There are a number of striking elements in the medically related material in the diary. One is that Lactance Papineau's experience on a regular basis of seeing a case in the clinic and then seeing the autopsy if the patient died reflects what has been identified as a hallmark of the Paris Clinical School. He also refers quite often to the recently introduced diagnostic methods of percussion and auscultation to determine the state of things in the interior of the body. He attends a large number of courses by different professors. He undertakes extensive dissections himself with great frequency in the course of his studies. He relates in a matter of fact way the operations that are undertaken at the Hôpital Beaujon, particularly for cataracts and the reduction of various swellings or removal of "tumours." What is notable from the diary accounts are the number of cases of fractures admitted to the hospital, a sign of the dangers of daily life from falls, being hit by solid objects, or being run over by carriages. Many of these broken bones result in amputations, and

also gangrene and death. Burn and accident victims feature frequently in case descriptions, another indication of the hazards of both private and public life. The way wounds heal is an important topic of study. Pulmonary consumption and syphilis are perhaps the diseases mentioned most. Treatment is often depletive, by bloodletting, use of leeches, or purgatives. Papineau is aware of the differing opinions of Paris clinicians on a number of topics. His education includes study of skin diseases at the Hôpital Saint Louis. He has a group of friends with whom he works. He is a frequent buyer of books and the list of his purchases provided in an appendix to the diary reveals that, in addition to the treatises of nineteenth-century clinicians, medical authors of the second half of the eighteenth century are still regarded as worth reading in the 1840s.

The diary is very nicely organized and presented by two editors who have much experience in working on materials relating to the Papineau family, having produced, among other publications, editions of the correspondence of Lactance, as well as of his brother Amédée, his mother Julie, his father Louis-Joseph, and his aunt Rosalie. In this instance, they do an excellent job in explaining the outlines of Lactance's life and family background, setting out the journal text, and identifying for the reader the luminaries of the French medical world of the time.

In sum, I would recommend this diary as valuable reading for a personal view of a French Canadian on the important developments in Paris medicine of the first half of the nineteenth century.

CAROLINE HANNAWAY
National Institute of Health