A CENTURY of ACHIEVEMENT

A History Of The American Society Of Colon & Rectal Surgeons

Following is the first of seven excerpts Diseases of the Colon & Rectum will publish from a fully illustrated hardcover book, A Century of Achievement: A History of the American Society of Colon & Rectal Surgeons, 1899-1998. The book is scheduled for publication next year as part of the commemoration of the Society's 100th anniversary. This excerpt covers the first phase in the Society's drive to gain recognition for the specialty, 1899-1929. The complete history will be available for members at the annual meeting in Washington, DC, May 2-7, 1999.

I. The First Phase of Recognition: Founders' Era to 1929

At the dawn of the twentieth century, 13 physicians with a special interest in proctology met in Columbus, Ohio, on June 7, 1899, to form the American Proctologic Society. William McKinley was in the White House. The gold rush was on, and Jack London had just published The Call of the Wild. The automobile industry had not started yet. A motor car might be found, but horse and carriage was the preferred mode of transportation. It would be four years before Orville and Wilbur Wright made their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The 13 physicians were the only specialists in colon and rectal disease available to treat 75 million Americans.

The Columbus founders had been meeting informally for a number of years and discussing mutual problems. Proctology was not then a well known or respected medical specialty. The new Society's charter members were pioneers who had chosen a specialty ignored by mainstream medicine, leaving patients with rectal diseases in the hands of quacks and charlatans. Reputable physicians of that time would not even examine the rectum. In part, this attitude was due to ignorance. The curriculum in medical schools had not included instruction in rectal diseases throughout most of the nineteenth century.

The young specialty's most eloquent voice belonged to Dr. Joseph M. Mathews, of Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Mathews was admired for his mental and oratorical ability. He was extremely popular with his fellow physicians and had recently become the first proctologist elected president of the American Medical Association. Virtually every organization he had joined, beginning with the Louisville Surgical Society, had elected him to its presidency. The charter members of the American Proctologic Society (APS) followed suit, choosing Dr. Mathews as its first president.

A prolific author and renowned orator, Dr. Mathews published the first professional journal devoted to proctology, known as "Mathews Medical Quarterly." His books included Treaise on Diseases of the Rectum, Anus and Sigmoid Flexure, 1890, and a popular volume entitled How to Succeed in the Practice of Medicine (1902).

THE FOUNDERS' ERA

Eleven of the 13 charter members of the American Proctologic Society went on to serve as President, filling the new organization's top leadership ranks for more than a decade. This period in the Society's history, known as the Founders' Era, extended until 1915. Dr. Mathews served twice, 1899-1900 and again in 1913-1914. He is one of only five leaders to serve two terms as President; the others are Dr. Louis A. Buie (1927-1928 and 1934-1935), Dr. Walter A. Fansler (1929-1930 and 1960-1961), Dr. Dudley Smith (1930-1931 and 1938-1939), and Dr. Robert A. Scarbrough (1951-1952 and 1963-1964). Another leader who missed becoming a charter member by a quirk of fate, Dr. Louis J. Krouse, of Cincinnati, became President in 1914-1915. Dr. Krouse had come to Columbus to attend the founding meeting but was misinformed about the time of the session and so was not present to become a charter member.

In its early years, much of the work of the Society between annual meetings was the province of the Secretary, a position first held by Dr. William M. Beach, of Pittsburgh. It was the Secretary's task to keep the records of the organization and to make all arrangements for the meetings, including the program. Moreover, until 1939, the Secretary also served as the chief financial officer in the combined office of Secretary-Treasurer. Even before the Society's founding in 1899, Dr. Beach had organized preliminary meetings of proctologists at AMA conventions. He was in large part responsible for drafting the Constitution and Bylaws of the new Society. In 1903, Dr. Beach ascended from Secretary-Treasurer to President. Dr. Beach was respected for ingenuity in devising methods and instruments. He invented one of the first good sigmoidoscopes. He is also remembered for contributing to the informal, social side of the Society's annual gatherings. The records note that at the 1905 meeting in his hometown of Pittsburgh Dr. Beach arranged an informal "evening smoker," enabling members to meet a number of prominent local physicians.

Dr. J. Rawson Pennington, a native of Indiana who settled in Chicago after taking special rectal surgery courses at St. Mark's, London, became the next APS President (1904-1905). His important compilation of proctology from an historical standpoint, Treatises on the Diseases and Injuries of the Anus, Rectum and Pelvic Colon, was published in 1923. Dr. Pennington was respected as a mechanical genius who developed many instruments for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the colon and rectum. He was given deference for his quick temper and the strength of his convictions.
At this distance in time, we may want to believe that gentlemanly decorum prevailed at Society meetings, but there is evidence that this was not always the case. At the 1907 meeting, it was reported, Dr. Leon Straus, of St. Louis, another charter member, made a remark critical of the Pennington clamp that quickly brought Dr. Pennington to his temple to a boil. He knocked Dr. Straus to the floor with a well-directed blow. To his credit, it is said that Dr. Pennington was the first to help Dr. Straus to his feet and beg forgiveness for the intertemporal assault, believed to be unique in Society history.

In 1909, the year that William Howard Taft succeeded Theodore Roosevelt in the White House, Dr. Dwight H. Murray, of Syracuse, New York, became the first non-charter member elected to the Society's presidency. He had joined APS in 1904 and never missed a meeting after that until his death in 1921. His presidential address discussed the status of undergraduate training in proctology, reporting on two surveys he had made. In one, he found that 32 medical schools only one attempted to teach proctology. In a questionnaire of 110 young practicing doctors, he found that they knew little about rectal examination or treatment and wished they knew more. He repeated the call for establishing a journal and suggested that the specialty include the entire intestinal tract.

The period in the Society's history that we might call "the founders' era" was nearing its end. In another area of scientific inquiry, Sigmund Freud had just published his landmark work, *Psychoanalysis*, when Dr. John L. Kelks, of Memphis, became President in 1911. Dr. Kelks joined APS just three years after it was founded and knew all the founding members, as did his successor, Dr. Louis J. Hirschman (1912-1913). The Society held a symposium on constipation at the 1911 meeting, with discussions on medical treatment and the management of obstruction. Acute obstruction was treated by cecostomy, while simple, long-standing constipation was handled by admitting the patient to the hospital "to teach him how to eat." One speaker mentioned resecting the sigmoid colon for constipation in some patients.

Dr. Hirschman was the first active APS leader from Detroit, a city whose colon and rectal surgeons, many educated as he was at Wayne State University, would contribute much to the Society. Much later, in the 1930s, Dr. Hirschman played an important role in the development of the American Board of Proctology and received its first certificate, No. 1 from the new Board in 1944, becoming the first physician certified in proctology. He established a Department of Proctology in Wayne State's medical school, directed it for over 30 years, and trained Dr. Norman Nigro (President 1965-1966), among others. Dr. Mathews returned for a second term as President in 1913-1914. Dr. Louis J. Krouse (1914-1915), of Cincinnati, succeeded him. Dr. Krouse's term may be said to mark the end of the founders' era. His absence from the charter group was due to an error in timing, as we have noted. His presidential address reviewed the Society's history to 1915, concluding that the most urgent need was better teaching of proctology in the medical schools.

**WHY PROCTOLOGY A SPECIALTY?**

The subject of the next presidential address was "Why Proctology Has Been Made a Specialty." The answer that Dr. T. Chittenden Hill (1915-1916) gave, in one word, was fistula, a common ailment caused by an infection in a cavity near the anal opening. Dr. Hill cited the fact that the two specialty hospitals in London used the word "fistula" in their name. He reviewed a survey made by Dr. James Tuttle, the Society's second president, who found that in 2,000 cases of fistula, the cure rate was only 45 percent. The conclusion, of course, was that surgeons of that time had too little experience to be proficient in the management of fistula and other anorectal conditions.

Two important events in the Society's history occurred in 1917: the first was the first meeting of the Section on Proctology of the American Medical Association, and the second was Dr. Walter A. Fansler's initiation of a training program in proctology at the University of Minnesota.

The Society had 50 fellows at the time of President Dr. Alolis B. Graham's address to the 1921 meeting in Boston. A then virtually unknown physicist, Albert Einstein, had just won the Nobel Prize. In his presidential address, Dr. Graham recommended that all meetings should include papers on cancer.

In the 1923 address, President Dr. Emmett H. Terrell (1922-1923), a native of Virginia who practiced in Richmond, talked about friendship among the Fellows and the frank discussion of the papers. He warmly applauded the value of the meetings and the honorable place proctology had then begun to hold in medicine, largely through the efforts of Dr. Mathews and his associates. He urged the formation of a journal and suggested that someone present a review of current literature, as Dr. Samuel Earle had done many years earlier.

To celebrate the Society's 25th anniversary in 1924, the annual meeting was held in two sessions—one in the United States (New York) and another in England (London)—as guests of the Royal Society of Medicine. This was the first joint meeting of the two groups, and there was no other joint meeting until 1949. The Society's new President was Dr. Ralph W. Jackson, of Fall River, MA, a leader appreciated for his executive ability. At the first session, Dr. Jackson reminded members that the Society had been founded because of the need for better patient care for those with rectal diseases, an area previously treated largely by quacks. He spoke of the need for more proctologists, as many cities still had none. The Society's 1927-28 President, Dr. Louis A. Buie, of Rochester, MN, was to play a major role in the Society's history. He had become chief of the Mayo Clinic Section of Proctology in 1919 and headed it until 1953, when he became a senior consultant. He served a second term as President in 1934-35 and later became the first editor of the Society's journal, *Diseases of the Colon & Rectum*, when it was established in 1957. He was also one of the founders of the American Board of Proctology. Dr. Buie was an internationally recognized teacher of proctology and author of three textbooks on the specialty. He also designed several instruments for improving rectal examinations, including a sigmoidoscope, a proctoscopic table, and a biopsy forceps used worldwide. He was chair of the specialty Section of the AMA and gained national acclaim in 1951 as a leader of a revision of the AMA Code of Medical Ethics.

The Society's President in 1929, when the "Roaring 20s" ended with the stock market crash, was Dr. Edward G. (Ned) Martin, of Detroit, the first of several leaders mentored by Dr. Louis Hirschman. The annual meeting held in Detroit, was the first after the death in December 1928 of the Society's first President, Dr. Joseph Mathews. His passing might be said to conclude the first phase of the Society's drive to gain recognition for the specialty. Much had been accomplished, and much still lay ahead. Past President Dr. George Evans gave a short memorial speech for Dr. Mathews, and Dr. Granville Hanes prepared an extensive review of his life as a memorial for publication in the Society's publication, *Transactions*. Exhibits are mentioned for the first time in the report of the 1929 meeting. They list the following: books on proctology and allied subjects, the Hanes table, the Buie table, proctologic instruments, exhibits showing circulation of the sigmoid and rectum, specimens of carcinoma of the sigmoid, and other mounted specimens.