PAUL A. CHANDLER, MD

BY W. Morton Grant, MD

Paul Austin Chandler at the age of 90 died March 15, 1987 from a stroke, under conditions which he would otherwise have considered ideal. His daughter Jane was with him. He was at home. He had been exclaiming on how fortunate he was to be in his own home with a group of devoted young women taking wonderful care of him. Although in recent years he had increasing difficulty in walking, he retained his phenomenal great sense of humor, memory, and keen intellect to the last.

In 1986 Harvard Medical School established the Paul Austin Chandler Professorship of Ophthalmology, endowed by a bequest from a former patient whom Doctor Chandler had treated successfully for malignant glaucoma. Previously at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary a Paul A. Chandler Visiting Professorship had been established to make it pos-
sible each year for eye residents to invite their choice of celebrated ophthalmologists for a 3-day visit.

Paul Chandler was born November 19, 1896 on a small farm near New Virginia, Iowa. He had three younger and three older brothers and sisters. In 1912 the Chandlers moved to a farm near Emmet, Nebraska. The father died at that time. Paul was then going to high school. He worked hard at a variety of jobs to help support the family, yet graduated first in his class. He entered Hastings College in Nebraska possessing $84.50 and one suit of clothes. Throughout college he supported himself through hard manual jobs. College was interrupted for a while by World War I, with service in the Army in the Field Artillery in France.

One of Doctor Chandler’s college-time jobs was in a hospital in Hastings, Nebraska, where he met Doctor Eugene C. Foote, for whom he developed a great admiration. This influenced Doctor Chandler to consider going into medicine, and later into ophthalmology. Doctor Foote was himself a most remarkable self-made ophthalmologist. He thought so highly of Paul Chandler’s capabilities that he loaned him the money required to go to Harvard Medical School in 1924, and then through a residency in ophthalmology at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. Doctor Chandler gradually completely repaid Doctor Foote, and remained deeply thankful to him for the rest of his life, in fact he dedicated his privately-printed memoirs to Doctor Foote. Doctor Chandler made generous contributions to Hastings College and to the Harvard Medical School Alumni Association.

Doctor Chandler met his future wife, Polly (Marjorie Pollard) while he was in Medical School. They were married the day on which he graduated. Polly had been head nurse on the ward where the great brain surgeon Harvey Cushing had his patients. Paul and Polly were proud of the fact that Doctor Cushing came to their wedding.

Doctor Chandler practiced first with Doctor Foote, and then with George S. Derby, who was Professor of Ophthalmology at Harvard Medical School and Chief at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. Operating with Doctor Derby stimulated Doctor Chandler’s special interest in glaucoma, which was uppermost during the rest of his life.

When Doctor Derby died, Doctor Chandler took on the whole responsibility of the practice, which gradually grew to become the largest in Boston, especially the surgical practice, remaining so for 25 years, until Doctor Chandler at the age of 78 decided to stop operating, although still doing as well as ever.

In his practice Doctor Chandler had two associates, first Doctor Carl C. Johnson, for 20 years, and then Doctor Richard J. Simmons for 12 years.
They remained always the best of friends. Doctor Chandler also had a friend in Morton Grant who often assisted in surgery when his associates were not available. Doctor Chandler often visited Doctor Grant in the Howe Laboratory of Ophthalmology for coffee and discussion of interesting cases. These visits continued almost weekly up until Doctor Chandler’s death.

Doctor Chandler had long since become an authority on glaucoma when evidence of glaucoma in his own eyes was discovered by his son Hugh while learning ophthalmoscopy in medical school. Fortunately his glaucoma was adequately controlled, and never caused him significant impairment of vision. Four brothers and sisters also had glaucoma, which was medically controlled.

Beginning in the 1930s, and for about 50 years, Doctor Chandler traveled all over the world, in great demand as a truly authoritative and effective lecturer and teacher. Of great importance to his popularity and success was his warm and friendly personality, his sense of humor, his story-telling ability, and his great capacity for enjoying life. He felt a genuine interest in every colleague he met, from the youngest to the most advanced, and this won him friends wherever he went. When he traveled to give lectures, or to see special patients in consultation he and Polly Chandler always made the best of their opportunities for sightseeing, for shopping, and for fishing, and sometimes for hunting. Doctor Chandler was written extensively and in detail about his travels in his autobiographical memoirs.

Doctor Chandler’s patients knew him as a marvelously sincere and thorough physician. Many patients were referred by other ophthalmologists for consultation because of some uncertainty in the patient’s mind. When Doctor Chandler finished his examination, often doing visual fields and refraction himself, and after he had explained to the patient the basis for his opinion, his sincerity and honesty were so inescapable that even the previously most skeptical of patients went away confident and reassured that they had received the best possible advice.

Honored positions which Doctor Chandler held included presidency of the New England Ophthalmological Society, presidency and Howe medallist of the American Ophthalmological Society, and membership in the American Board of Ophthalmology. One honor that was particularly meaningful to him was a meeting of the New England Ophthalmological Society in May 1982 entirely in his honor. The annual meetings of the American Ophthalmological Society were high-points each year for the Chandlers, providing among other things the opportunity for a memorable annual golf game, which was always a fun event.
Doctor Chandler wrote many papers as well as two books on glaucoma. He was the first of many to recognize Chandler’s Syndrome. These accomplishments were based on close analytical study of individual patients or small numbers of patients. His reporting and teaching were based on what he called a case method. As evidenced particularly in his books, he showed how much could be learned and taught through the careful, thoughtful study of individual cases. His approach was successful, although it was not based on large numbers of cases nor on the statistical analysis of data which is more customary today.

Hobbies that Doctor Chandler particularly enjoyed included basketry, gardening, bee keeping, fishing and hunting. The basketry, fishing and hunting had their origins in Maine. Mrs Chandler came from Maine, where she had relatives whom she and Doctor Chandler often visited. There, Doctor Chandler became aware of the wonderfully sturdy baskets made by the Indians from strips of brown ash wood. Doctor Chandler learned the art, transferring it to his summer place on Martha’s Vineyard, where he made many wonderful baskets bearing the brand “PAC”. These have been greatly treasured by those friends who have been so fortunate as to have received one as a gift.

Son, Hugh Chandler graduated from Milton Academy, Harvard College, and Harvard Medical School. He is now an orthopedic surgeon at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Daughter, Jane Saltonstall, whom Doctor Chandler always called “Janie”, has been described by her father as “one of the finest and sweetest women I have ever known. She is all goodness.” Janie graduated from Vassar College, married and raised two children. Doctor Chandler is also survived by two sisters, Ruby Carl and Katherine Creech.

We all miss Paul A. Chandler.