AAOS 75th Anniversary Tribute to Past Presidents

Editorial Comment

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This month, the first in the year of the 75th Anniversary of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, we pay tribute to the first 15 Presidents of the Academy by republishing their scholarly work and providing brief sketches of their lives. Locating the works of these men and learning of their lives has been an enriching experience, for each made major contributions to their specialty and the lives of their patients and students. Their pioneering works helped establish some of the principles on which we base much current practice. Without their political and organizational skills the AAOS would not likely have rapidly grown into the organization it has become. It is impossible in one or two paragraphs to capture their contributions, for some merit an entire biography and all of them led vigorous and productive lives.

The record of the formation of the AAOS is unclear, but it arose from discussions within two key organizations: The American Orthopaedic Association and the Clinical Orthopaedic Society [2, 4]. The American Orthopaedic Association had a limited membership until 1920 when the bylaws restriction was removed; the membership grew from 99 to 180 between 1919 and 1930 [2]. Despite, or perhaps because of removal of the restriction, there was continued concern over uncontrolled growth and the number of new members averaged only six per year in those years. However, the demand for a scientific forum was great and in 1931 165 of the 225 persons attending were guests. According to Heck, at their meeting in January 25, 1931, the Executive Committee of the American Orthopaedic Association formed a

committee “to consider the advisability of the establishment of a permanent committee to promote the advancement of Orthopaedic Surgery and that this Committee report to the Association at the next annual meeting” [4]. This charge apparently included but did not explicitly mention exploring the formation of a new group. The minutes of the April 1931 meeting of the AOA contained a reference to the need for “a permanent organization to promote the advancement of orthopaedic surgery.” The minutes of the second executive session of the AOA meeting in 1932 record comments by Dr. Gallie, who voiced concern about “‘an abuse that has crept into our Meetings and which threatens the value of our scientific sessions and the social side of our Meetings.’ This ‘abuse,’ he went on to explain, was the large number of guests” [2]. Apparently the question of whether the AOA should remain small and establish a new larger society, or to enlarge drove the early discussions.

During this same time, similar discussions occurred within the Clinical Orthopaedic Society (which had been formed in 1912 as the Central States Orthopaedic Club with 38 members, but had changed names in 1923 to the Clinical Orthopaedic Society owing to its growth) [1]. According to the minutes of the business meeting of the Clinical Orthopaedic Society October 30, 1931, Dr. Ryerson had been present at an executive meeting of the Society on October 11, with Drs. Campbell, Gaenslen, Jones, Mumford, Lewin, Orr, and Dixon [2]. At that meeting Dr. Ryerson apparently discussed the feasibility of a new national orthopaedic society, and (according to Brown) at the business meeting October 30 it was decided, “‘the Committee which had the formation of the society under consideration’ should invite orthopaedic surgeons from different parts of the country to attend the fall meeting of

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the Clinical Orthopaedic Society in Chicago [2]. This meeting was postponed to January 1933, presumably to provide time to organize a combined meeting of the Clinical Orthopaedic Society and the newly-formed Academy” [2]. However, Heck [4] states the AAOS was chartered October 11, 1931 which would have been prior to the October 30 meeting of the Clinical Orthopaedic Society. What is clear is the first annual meeting of the AAOS was indeed held in Chicago at Northwestern University Medical School January 12–14, 1933, as a joint venture with the Clinical Orthopaedic Society, and Dr. Ryerson presided over the meeting; presumably he was elected to that office by some founding group in 1931 or 1932 [2, 4]. (The AAOS considers the official year of a Presidency that in which the individual assumed the office, so they would have presided over the meeting the following year.) The records I found do not entirely clarify who could be credited with the founding, but an old photograph (Fig. 1) held by the AAOS suggests seven individuals were involved at the chartering October 11, 1931.

These 15 early Presidents were typically involved in many organizations. Six were Presidents of the American Orthopaedic Association: Edwin Ryerson (1925), Willis Campbell (1931), Melvin Henderson (1934), Frank Dickson (1940), George Bennett (1942), and Bruce Gill (1944). At least one, Frank Dickson, was President of the Clinical Orthopaedic Society that was so influential in establishing the AAOS.

The men of this generation were greatly affected by WW I. Most (including Drs. Ryerson, Campbell, P. Wilson, Dickson, J. Wilson, Shrock, Miller, Mumford, Thomson, and Diveley – and perhaps several others whose involvement I could not ascertain) served in the military abroad. Many traveled widely, developed lasting friendships with eminent surgeons abroad, and became members of international and foreign national orthopaedic societies. These men helped bring the advanced ideas from many of these countries to the United States.

I note three of the first Presidents, Philip D. Wilson, John C. Wilson, Sr. and Melvin S. Henderson, had sons, Philip D. Wilson, Jr., John C. Wilson, Jr., and Edward D. Henderson, who were Presidents in 1972, 1974, and 1976, respectively. One of the Presidents, E. Bishop Mumford (a founding member of the AAOS), served two years (1944 and 1945) as a result of the 1945 annual meeting being canceled at the request of the Office of Defense Transportation [3].

These first 15 Presidents served from 1932 to 1947. The first permanent staff was announced at the 1947 meeting; that staff served not only the AAOS, but also the ABOS and later the OREF [4]. Although a Committee to Study a Central Office was established at the January, 1946 meeting, a permanent office was not established until late 1948, and a report from the January, 1949 meeting noted “The Central Office of orthopaedic surgery is established at 122 S. Michigan Ave., of this city,” referring to the meeting site, Chicago [4]. Earlier resolutions of the Executive

Fig. 1 The seven founders of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons as depicted in a composite photograph (reprinted with permission of the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons).

Committee in July, 1947, stated a lease for a building should not exceed \$2,000 and funding of the office would not exceed \$10,000. Thus, these Presidents served at a time when the administration had no permanent home and Academy business was handled in the offices of members of the Executive Committee.

I am grateful to The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery American volume for granting permission for use of their obituaries on a number of these respected individuals and for permission to reproduce a number of the articles. Other material (including Dr. Heck's Commemorative volume) I obtained through Mark Weiting, Sandra Gordon, Joan Golembiewski, and Abram Fassler at the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; the AAOS also graciously allowed us to reproduce the photographs of the Presidents. Several of the biographical sketches came from the valuable resource, "Who's Who in Orthopedics" [5]. Dr. Charles Silverstein, at Johns Hopkins, provided information on George Bennett, and Dr. James Hamilton at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, on Drs. Dickson and Diveley. Drs. Tom Fehring and Forney Hutchinson of

Charlotte, North Carolina provided information on Dr. Miller. Elsewhere I have referenced sources.

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