HISTORY OF ELECTROCARDIOLOGY

Introductory Note to Alfred Nobel's Will

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A.N.E. 2007;12(1):79-80

In 1901, a little more than a century ago, the first Nobel prize was awarded. The yearly Nobel awards are for the most important discoveries or contributions in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace. Since 1969, the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in memory of Alfred Nobel has also been awarded, but there is controversy about whether the prize in economics should be considered a Nobel prize. I thought it would be important to reproduce Alfred Nobel's will to understand the background of these prestigious awards. Of note, Dr. Willem Einthoven received the Nobel prize in 1924 for his invention of the electrocardiogram, the device that was the true beginning of clinical electrocardiology.

Alfred Nobel was born in Stockholm, Sweden in 1833. His father, Immanuel, was an avid inventor who established a successful industrial activity producing mines for the Russian army in St. Petersburg, Russia. In 1850, Immanuel went bankrupt and returned to Sweden and set up a laboratory to manufacture explosives with his sons Alfred and Emil. A key factor in Alfred's life was an accidental laboratory explosion in 1864 that resulted in the tragic death of his brother, Emil, and severe injury to his father. Alfred Nobel continued with experiments related to explosives, and in 1866, he invented a safe method for blasting called "dynamite." This dynamite was used for good purposes like the construction of the Panama Canal, but was also used for destructive armaments. The erroneous publication in 1888 of a premature obituary of Nobel by a French newspaper, condemning his

invention of dynamite, is said to have made Alfred Nobel decide to leave a better legacy to the world after his death.¹ Alfred Nobel was called the "salesman of death" and it is clear that this factor played an important role in his will, for he wanted to leave a positive influence on mankind.

Alfred Nobel was a creative genius and a true inventor. He carried out experiments on synthetic silk, artificial rubber, and imitation leather, and he contributed to the improvement of the electrical battery, the electric bulb, and the phonograph. When he died in 1896, he owned 93 factories around the world, had registered 355 patents, and homes in six countries.

He never married, and at the time of his death at age 63 of a stroke, he was one of the richest men in Europe. During most of his adult life, he spent little time in Sweden. When he died at his home in Italy, he left a will in which the major part of the capital of his estate was to be "invested in safe securities by my executors, shall constitute a fund, the interest on which shall be annually distributed in the form of prizes to those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind."² His family opposed the establishment of the Nobel Prize, and the location of the funds and the country of origin of the awarded Nobel prizes were challenged by France in view of the time he spent and lived in one of his homes near Paris. However, his executors prevailed in following the details of Alfred Nobel's will, with the funds located in the Nobel Foundation in Sweden (31 million kronor equivalent to \$4,223,500.00) and

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the prizes originating from Sweden for the scientific awards and from Norway for the peace award. The will in its entirety is reproduced in English² in the accompanying historical article.

REFERENCES

1. Schück H, Sohlman R. The Life of Alfred Nobel. London, William Heineman Ltd., 1929.
2. Available at http://nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/will-full.html.