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In Memoriam: Remembrance of Barton Childs, 1916–2010

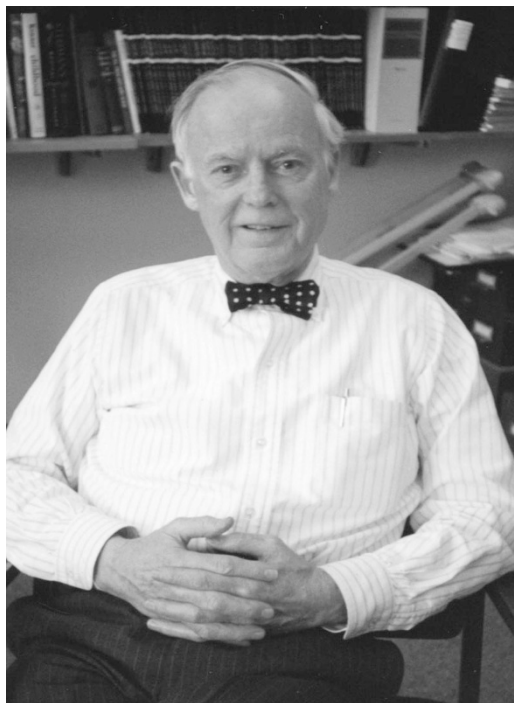
Barton Childs – eminent pediatrician, geneticist, and educator – died on 18 February 2010 at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He was 93. A tireless proponent for understanding the importance of individuality, Barton was his own best example. He was a leap-year baby, born on 29 February 1916 in Chicago, where he was raised by adoptive parents. He received his A.B. from Williams College in 1938 and that year entered the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, beginning an association of more than 70 years with an institution he loved. He completed his residency in Pediatrics on the Harriet Lane service of the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1948, following three years of active duty in the U. S. Army during World War II.

Thereafter, he was away from Hopkins only for a research fellowship at Boston Children's Hospital in 1948-49 and, most important, a one-year Commonwealth Fellowship in 1952-53 at University College London, where he interacted with some of the giants of genetics including Lionel Penrose, JBS Haldane, and Harry Harris. Barton was stimulated to pursue a career in genetics by exposure to children with developmental defects. At the time, many viewed that decision as one that would divert a promising young clinician into a lifetime spent in the backwaters of medicine. How wrong they were.

One could characterize Barton's career during the next six decades as being dedicated to advancing our understanding of the role of the genes in health and disease across all areas of medicine. That passion drove him to the very end; he was a regular attendee and active participant in journal clubs, house staff conferences, and graduate student activities until the last few months of his life. To be his colleague was to be recurrently challenged, supported, and enlightened.

Barton's involvement in genetics education was not simply an appendage to his scientific and clinical work in pediatrics and genetics. It was, rather, central to his mission to integrate genetics into all of health care in a manner that would bind health professionals and the public in a partnership where genetic perspectives inform decisions about personal and public health, with prevention as the ultimate goal.

Barton was, therefore, as interested in genetics education for school children and the public as for medical students, residents, and practicing physicians, and he lent his expertise to the development of educational programs for all of those audiences. He was at pains to distinguish education from



training, the latter an exposure to facts and procedures, the former rooted in enduring concepts such as variation and evolution that could serve as the basis for life-long learning. For his contributions to genetics education, Barton received the 1996 Award for Excellence in Human Genetics Education from the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG), an apt complement to his 1973 Allan Award from ASHG, which recognized his scientific contributions to human genetics.

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