

Introduction of Dr. A. Ashley Weech for the John Howland Award

From the American Pediatric Society, April 27, 1977, San
Francisco, California

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Dr. Margaret Smith, Dr. Ashley Weech, Members of the Weech Family, Fellow Members and Guests:

Five years ago, a communication was circulated by Dr. Gerold L. Schiebler, chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Florida. It announced that Dr. A. Ashley Weech will be joining our faculty. This announcement engendered a variety of reactions: smiles appeared on the faces of some, expressing their delight at having the opportunity of getting to know and work with this outstanding teacher and physician. A few others smiled, for a different reason: this was their golden opportunity to get back at the man who tormented them with his questions when they faced him at the Pediatric Board Examination. Many others frowned. They were concerned that they had to face the ordeal of having to listen to "war stories" of days gone by, to be constantly reminded that the old way was the better way, that there was now too much of this and too little of that

The cautious reception that greeted his arrival soon turned to adulation. Young and old were impressed by this gentleman who had mastered the art of human relations; the man who expressed his thoughts with firmness or subtle humor; the teacher with a deep well of knowledge and valuable experience who sometimes conveyed the most pertinent ideas in a meek and almost apologetic manner; the scholar who, while loving to teach, also loved to learn. Young and old were moved by the wisdom of his silence. It was no coincidence, therefore, that a member of our faculty, not known for his humility, was heard to say "Isn't it a sign of the times that the brightest member in our department is 80 years old"

Dr. Weech's 80-year-old career starts with two lovely parents; Robert William Henry Weech and Clara Elizabeth (Ashley) Weech. Born on November 10, 1895, in Baltimore, Maryland, A. Ashley Weech was reared in an environment that emphasized hard work, creativity, love, and compassion. Those of us who have been stung by criticism of improper expression during the 15 years of his tenure as Editor of the *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, and those of you who will soon wonder at the grace of his diction, have only to know that his tutor was no other than his father, the Reverend Robert Weech, a Methodist Minister. As Dr. Weech fondly remembers, he and his brothers were required to deliver each week, after Sunday school, a sermon on a topic of their choice. There, proper diction was taught. The privilege of this tutelage has not gone in vain. In the words of his colleague, Dr. Rustin McIntosh, "Ashley Weech cares about the English language, its literature and its idiom. He can still quote verses from Chaucer with the accent and inflection meticulously taught him in college undergraduate days at Hopkins. He is careful to use words in their strict sense: children are "reared," for example, while laboratory rats are "raised." Although the style of his writing tends to be somewhat formal, with a touch of Edwardian dignity, his meaning is conveyed with

complete clarity and in impeccable grammatic construction—no unattached participles, no ambiguity in the use of pronouns, never a split infinitive, always a parsimonious doling out of superlatives—in short, the work of a craftsman who takes pride in his task."

Alexander Ashley Weech, Physician, Investigator, and Teacher. Dr. Weech received his M.D. from Johns Hopkins in 1921. His three year internship in Pediatrics was completed at the Harriet Lane Home of the Johns Hopkins Hospital. It was there that he had the opportunity to meet and work with that unique gentleman whose name honors the present ceremony, Dr. John Howland. It is appropriate to note that Dr. Ashley Weech is the last living disciple of this great tutor. During this period and under what I am told were different and somewhat more hush-hush and strenuous circumstances, he met and married Clara Thomson Handy, mother of his children: Margaret, Elizabeth, and Alexander Ashley Jr. This marriage was brought to a tragic end by Clara Weech's demise in 1963. In 1964, Ashley Weech took the hand of his lovely second bride, Antoinette Abbot, fondly known to all friends as Judy, who was to become his support and guiding light through the next twelve years.

In 1928, Dr. Weech left for China where, from 1928 to 1930, he was Pediatrician-in-Chief at the Peking Union Medical College. Tales of his unique experiences during those two years abound. However, it was during his next appointment at Babies Hospital in New York that Dr. Weech placed a milestone in the medical history of this country, a fact recently documented by his friend, Dr. Hugh Carithers. For on July 10, 1935, Dr. Weech became the first physician to use an antibiotic in America; on that day, he initiated therapy with a sulfa compound called Prontosil to treat a child with *H. influenzae* meningitis.

A first rate clinician and a "complete pediatrician," Dr. Weech strongly believes in the essential relationship between scientific research and medical progress. He views the importance of disciplined thinking, the quest for new knowledge and the need to keep abreast of medical progress as a necessity, if one is to practice good medicine. Despite the fact that some of his colleagues commented on his fundamental research on bilirubin synthesis by saying, "Well, Weech is still engaged in his bile-stained career," his publications in the field of deficiency diseases in children, protein metabolism, and liver function, even the use of statistics in medicine, are abundant and outstanding. For his contribution in these fields, Dr. Weech received the Borden Award of the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1956 and the Abraham Jacobi Award of the American Medical Association in 1967. No other fact reflects his zeal for medical progress more clearly than the type of faculty he gathered and supported following his appointment in 1942 as Professor and Chairman of Pediatrics at Children's Hospital of the University of Cincinnati. A list that would completely

include all the outstanding individuals who had the pleasure of his association would be too long. Suffice it to name three of those: Drs. Albert Sabin, Joseph Warkany, and Carleton Gajdusek, and to note that the former two are past recipients of the Howland Award while the latter is one of last year's Nobel Laureates.

After my arrival in this country, a common question that I heard from medical students was "what are you in this for?" An analysis of the recombination genes of this expression led me to the following translation "What pleasure do you derive from doing what you're doing?" For Dr. Weech, the ultimate pleasure of his academic life is the opportunity to teach. This is where he shines. This is where his contagious verve, his power as a raconteur of medical history, his capacity to convey facts in a planned sequence and with admirable clarity, mark him as the gifted teacher he is. What student will forget the story of typhoid fever, his experience with polio, and the discovery of polio vaccine, or even his account of Dr. Howland's specially groomed finger nail which was reserved for incision of retropharyngeal abscesses? The impact of his talents have not gone unnoticed. The Vice-President of the College of Medicine at the University of Florida, Dr. Chandler A. Stetson, relates with pride last year's recognition by our medical students who, within one year, dedicated their yearbook to Ashley Weech, chose him as the welcoming speaker for the arriving class, as well as the person to deliver the commencement address to the graduating class.

The painting of this picture will not be complete without talking about Ashley Weech's person (Fig. 1). In preparing this script, I contacted several of his old friends and asked them about events that could characterize this man. The amount of material gathered was both astounding and fascinating; some of it publishable and the other not (even in San Francisco . . .). One particular story that I felt was worth mentioning occurred while he was chairman in Cincinnati. Towards the end of June, when a young intern had just arrived and was looking for the apartment assigned to him, a venerable gentleman accosted him to ask if he could be of help. Realizing his plight, this man showed the young man the location of his apartment and then



Fig. 1B.

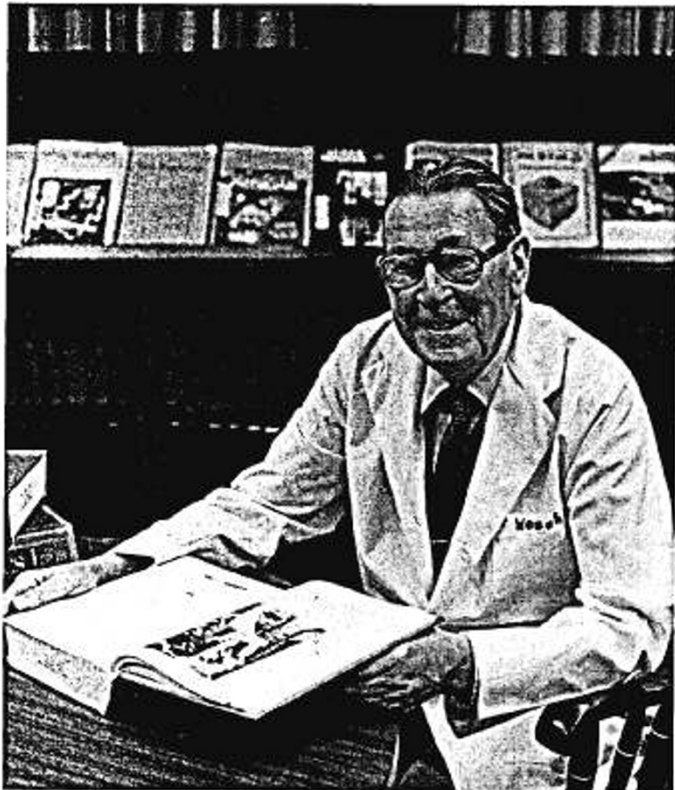


Fig. 1A.



Fig. 2.

proceeded, with alacrity and vigor, to carry his luggage to his room. Little did the young intern realize, as he thanked his kind helper, that he was no other than the Chairman of the Department, A. Ashley Weech. No other person I know derived a more vicarious pleasure in helping young individuals mature and develop. To be kind to others and to help young people is a major aspect of his personality. In turn, this concern and love

for his students were reciprocated. A somewhat painful personal incident illustrates this best. One day, as we were making our rounds, one of our attractive students who had just returned from an externship abroad for several months, as is customary nowadays, beamed at the sight of our group approaching her. Her arms opened for an embrace as she rushed towards us. I closed my eyes preparing for the delightful impact and, as there was none, opened them only to see Pamela fondly embracing the person next to me — no other than Ashley Weech.

Ashley Weech's love for people can only be matched by his love for work. No better words could echo Dr. Weech's feeling than those of James A. Michener when he said "Whenever I have watched luminous potentials destroy themselves through laziness, inattention to detail or wastage of ability, I am content that if I erred in working too hard, it was an error in the right direction. I still believe hard work is the salvation for many of us and one of the principal agencies whereby our society achieves its goals." Very few in this audience are aware of Dr. Weech's recent tribulations: on three occasions within the last few months he had to be admitted for defibrillation. He was in cardiac failure. His confinement to bed made him edgy and resentful. He remained so for several days despite the care and devotion rendered by his loving wife and constant companion during these difficult times. It was only when he was asked to review some manuscripts that his blithe spirit returned. Within two

days, leaning on his faithful cane, he was back in his office. For Ashley Weech, to work is to live.

Rather than leave you with the impression that our honored scholar does not enjoy other things, let me say categorically, this is not the case. Dr. Weech has developed one hobby, appreciation for the good things in life. I have had the pleasure of tasting some of the most delicious wines from the collection of this oenophile. His appreciation for the beautiful is illustrated in an evaluation remark made following his interview of a housestaff candidate which read "Good candidate, easy on the eyes, likes fishing." It is no surprise, therefore, that this same candidate — who was accepted into our program mainly on the strength of that remark — came to share with him his appreciation for the hobby he has long enjoyed: fishing (Fig. 2). It did not take long before she even surpassed her tutor in this skill. But this "fish story" illustrates what has been said, "The young must not ape the old — indeed it is the responsibility of the beginner to move far beyond the master." That Alexander Ashley Weech has achieved remarkably well.

Dr. Weech, the pleasure and privilege of my being associated with you over the past years can only be exceeded by the honor that you provided me by allowing me to share you with this august audience. May I express my appreciation for this privilege and thank you for what you have done for your children in pediatrics and for all children throughout the world.