

# The Medical Heritage Center

# HOUSE CALL



VOL. 3 NO. 1

FALL 1999

## "IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE A DOCTOR, BE A GOOD ONE" a biography of Robert M. Zollinger, MD

by Laura Lewis

Robert Milton Zollinger, M.D. was one of the giants of American surgery. With a career that spanned much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Zollinger was respected by his peers, feared by his students and loved by his patients. Zolly, as his friends called him, had a knack for being successful at whatever he did. He was the president of almost every society he belonged to, including the American Board of Surgery, the American Surgical Association, the American College of Surgeons and even the American Rose Society.

Born September 4, 1903, Zollinger was raised on his family's farm in Millersport, Ohio. He attended grade school in a one room schoolhouse a mile from his home. For high school, he had to travel three miles into town, so he rode his pony, Bob, and stabled him at the barbers during classes. Zollinger was industrious, even at an early age. Utilizing his pony and a cart, he developed a thriving business delivering milk and vegetables from the farm to his neighbors. This was considered his job and he had to tally his receipts each night after supper with his parents. Besides running his business, he also found time to earn a varsity letter in basketball; Zollinger learned all the plays during lunch since his delivery route and chores kept him from staying after school to practice.

As a young man, Zollinger wanted

to attend West Point. That dream faded when he decided to become a surgeon, even though he hated the sight of blood. When he told his parents his plans, his father gave him one piece of advice, "If you're going to be a doctor, be a good one." His parents always expressed an absolute confidence

surgical master, Harvey Cushing, M.D. Before he began his internship, Cushing sent Zollinger to Western Reserve in Cleveland for six months to work with one of Cushing's favorite pupils, Elliott Carr Cutler, M.D. Their association would span the next twenty years and Cutler would

become one of the great influences in Zollinger's life.

Zollinger returned to PBBH in 1928 to begin his internship. There he was regarded as a country boy from that "cow town" Columbus. He was determined to know the answer to every question in order to prove that his education was every bit as good as his Ivy League peers. This endeavor proved time consuming, but provided Zollinger with a strong knowledge of his subject matter. When his internship was over, Zollinger renewed his association with Cutler by returning to Western Reserve in 1929 for his residency. Since

PBBH interns had been forbidden to marry, that same year he finally married Louise Kiewet. Louise supported the couple in their early days of marriage by teaching, since "Z" was only making fifty dollars a week as a resident.

Cutler returned to PBBH to take over for Cushing as the Moseley Professor of Surgery in 1932. Zollinger went with him as his chief resident and by 1939, he was an Assistant Professor of Surgery. During their time together at Harvard and PBBH, Zollinger and Cutler would publish the first of seven editions of the now

*cont. on p.3*



*Cutler with Zollinger, Boston 1932*

that he and his brother Richard would be successful at anything they attempted. This was a trait that Zollinger carried into his adult life, always expecting the best from everyone and keenly disappointed when he did not get it.

Showing early on that he was not afraid to do things differently, Zollinger was the first person from his high school to attend college. He graduated from The Ohio State University in 1925 with his B.A. and earned his M.D. two years later. After graduation, he was offered an internship at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (PBBH) in Boston, under the tutelage of another

## SOCIETY CONTINUES TO HONOR DISTINGUISHED SURGEON by Darrell Peters

Founded to honor Robert M. Zollinger, M.D., for his many accomplishments and contributions in surgical education, the Zollinger Surgical Society originated in 1955 as the Robert M. Zollinger Club.

The Zollinger Club was conceived by Edwin H. Ellison, M.D., then professor of surgery. The membership was composed of Dr. Zollinger's former surgical residents and many of his colleagues, who surprised Dr. Zollinger at a Grand Rounds with the inaugural meeting of the club.

Known for his masterful surgical technique and exacting standards as a teacher, Dr. Zollinger trained a generation of exemplary surgeons, researchers, and educators. Four of his trainees became chairmen of departments.

In 1989, members of the Zollinger Club founded the Robert M. Zollinger – Ohio State University Surgical Society, an alumni association composed of surgeons who received some or all of their surgical education at Ohio State. The Zollinger Society honored Dr. Zollinger annually with a lectureship and symposium.

More recently, the Society shortened its name to the Zollinger Surgical Society, but the association continues to regularly honor Dr. Zollinger's memory with a lectureship and scientific meeting.

The first triennial meeting of the Zollinger Surgical Society will be held Friday and Saturday, September 10–11, at The Ohio State University Medical Center, in Rhodes Hall Auditorium.

Donald L. Morton, M.D., surgeon-in-chief and medical director of the John Wayne Cancer Institute, in Santa Monica, California, will deliver the Robert M. Zollinger Lecture at 4:00 p.m. on Friday. A banquet will be held at 7:00 p.m., at the Capital Club, and paper presentations will be made on Saturday, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.



*First Meeting of the Zollinger Club - October 15, 1955*

### New Advisory Committee Term Begins

A new term has begun for the Medical Heritage Center Advisory Committee. Re-appointed members from the Columbus Medical Association are: Dr. Louis Goorey, Dr. Michael Mishkind, Dr. Tom Lewis, and Dr. Paul Metzger. University representatives Dr. George Paulson, Dr. Charles Wooley, Susan Kroll and Ron St. Pierre, Ph. D. were also re-appointed. One at-large member, Dr. Edwin Hamilton, was selected by the committee.

### Displays

For fall quarter, the exhibits in the main hall of the Medical Heritage Center includes items of interest from the Robert M. Zollinger Collection. Also featured is former Dean Charles Austin Doan and items from his archives. As always, a sampling of some recent donations to the Medical Heritage Center will be on display. A special feature on the "30 Books", which are identified by the Los Angeles County Medical Association as significant to medical history, will be installed. Several of the books on display are from the collection of Dr. James and Gloria Warren. The displays may be viewed Monday-Friday from 1-5 p.m. through fall quarter.

### Recent Donations

The Medical Heritage Center thanks those listed for their recent support. If you are interested in making a donation to the Center, please contact Barbara Van Brimmer, 614.292.4891.

John A. Burkhart, MD: bedpan, "Grundriss zum Studium der Geburtshilfe" by Bumm • Dr. John C. Burnham: "The Medical Telephone" (1883) • William W. Davis, MD: Donated ledgers from Dr. Matthew Samuel Holt (uncle), and assorted artifacts • Charles Meckstroth, MD: two pneumothorax machines, plethysmograph (heart motion), blood analyzer (Ph machine) • Howard R. Mitchell, MD: Materials about St. Clair Hospital • Jane Morse: microscope, medical kit, blood pressure kit, "Nervous System" (Ciba V.1), "Atlas of Neuropathology" • Gwen Trudeau, MD: numerous books including a "Starling-Ohio Medical College Annual Commencement Invitation" from 1912 • Tennyson Williams M.D.: personal archives and numerous instruments • Mrs. Lola Davis: 2 physicians bags • Dr. Ron Stuckey: personal archival collection • Madonna Argood: St. Francis nurse's cape • Olivia Corson: archival collection of her mother and father, Drs. Samuel and Elizabeth Corson • OSU Dept. of Ophthalmology: book collection

Monetary Donations: Karl H. Wegner, MD • Dr. Edwin C. and Margaret Shuttleworth • Larry Copeland, MD

Cont. from p. 1

famous *Atlas of Surgical Operations*. "Z" did much of the work on the text; yet, Cutler's name appeared first on the cover. When Zollinger asked him whose name should be first Cutler had responded that they should be listed alphabetically.

Zollinger joined the army in 1941, when war seemed imminent for the United States. In doing so, he gave up a thriving practice and four years with his family. He felt that if he joined the Harvard Unit so would many of his younger colleagues. Zollinger hoped to be commissioned as a Colonel and the commanding officer of the unit. Instead, he was made a Major and the Assistant Chief of the Surgical Service. Immediately upon reaching camp in Ireland he called upon his early farm experience



*Dr. and Mrs. Zollinger with son Robert Jr. and daughter Myra Lou*

and began planting a garden. He had gathered money from everyone in the unit and purchased seeds before they had left the US. Because of this foresight he was soon appointed the Post Beautification Officer, a job which allowed him to nurture another of his passions, roses. Over the next four years, Zollinger would rise to the rank of Colonel and command the 5<sup>th</sup> General Hospital. He would also earn the Legion of Merit Award for the development of mobile surgical teams and Battle Stars for Normandy, Northern France and Rhineland.

Zollinger returned to his position at Harvard in 1946. He was soon offered a position as a Professor of Surgery at Ohio State; within a year he became the Chairman of the Department of Surgery, beginning a nearly thirty year reign. In 1955, working with Edwin Ellison M.D., he

discovered the Zollinger-Ellison Syndrome, which dealt with the relationship between non-beta islet cell tumors of the pancreas and diseases of the gastrointestinal tract. He also started the medical illustration division as a part of the Department of Surgery. This was surely influenced by the need for new illustrations for each subsequent edition of the *Atlas of Surgical Operations*.

Despite his busy schedule, Zollinger was the editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Surgery* from 1958 to 1986. He traveled the country lecturing on Z-E syndrome and received numerous awards for his efforts. Zollinger published over 300 articles in professional journals and encouraged those around him to research and write prolifically. He was the recipient of honorary degrees from the University of Lyon, France (1965) and held honorary fellowships in the Royal College of Surgeons of England (1965) and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh (1966). The American Medical Association bestowed their highest honor, the Sheen Award, upon him, recognizing him as the Outstanding Doctor of Medical Science in the United States for 1977. Zollinger was even offered the presidency of The Ohio State University, but turned it down. He felt that he would not have any time left for surgery. Besides, he reasoned, "There are a lot more out of work college presidents than surgeons."

Dr. "Z" was a difficult taskmaster who expected nothing less than perfection from himself and his colleagues. On rounds he would fire a resident on the elevator for some misdemeanor, only to rehire them by the time they had reached the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. As hard as he was on his students, he was equally kind to his patients. He believed that they should always be the top priority of a surgeon and would remind his staff of that when necessary. Once, he had a large chart made of the golf handicaps of each surgery department member, clearly showing where he felt their priorities lie.

Outside of surgery, Zollinger was a man of many interests. He raised prize-winning gourds. He loved roses and was an accredited rose judge. He constantly grumbled that his frequent lecturing and travel kept his roses from winning first prize. He also developed a passion for photography, which he indulged, every winter, on Sanibel Island.

Despite his numerous honors and

international recognition, Dr. Zollinger never rested on his laurels. Even after his retirement in 1974, Zolly continued to lecture around the world. He remained involved in the Department of Surgery as Professor and Chairman Emeritus. His quest for excellence continued up until his death in 1992 from pancreatic cancer. Perhaps he is best described in his own words. Once, when asked how he would like to be remembered he replied, "They should write on my tombstone: 'teacher, surgeon, soldier and farmer.' And my wife may remember that she says I'm an amusing fellow to live with."



*Laura Lewis was hired to sort and inventory the Zollinger Archives in January. It is estimated to be a 1-year project. The collection contains papers from his office, publications and his role in various organizations, as well as much personal memorabilia. Laura has a degree in history from OSU and has especially enjoyed the WWII information collected by Dr. Zollinger. Once the archive is completed, an inventory will be available for use in the Medical Heritage Center, as well as on-line. The goal of the Center is to make the material accessible to researchers internationally. Our thanks to the Department of Surgery and Dr. E. Christopher Ellison, the Zollinger Society and Zollinger supporters for providing the funding for this project.*

Last spring, the Medical Heritage Center began using a new logo. It is seen below on our return address, and a modified version graces our cover. This design was chosen because it reflects the arch of Starling-Loving Hall, our first medical building, as well as the arch of the fireplace in our meeting room. We feel the doorway is a fitting symbol of moving forward, with an open door to our past. You will notice the logo more prominently on our future publications.

*From the Editor:*

*As always, if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, please contact us (see information below.)*

*Conversely, if you enjoy the newsletter and know of a friend or colleague who is not currently on our mailing list, we would be happy to add them.*

*Feedback and story ideas are always welcome.*

## Donor Wall Honorees

The Medical Heritage Center (MHC) staff wishes to recognize and honor Dr. Paul and Lee Metzger, Drs. George and Ruth Paulson, and Dr. Charles and Lucia Wooley for their continued support and various contributions to MHC. Name plaques have been placed for them on the Donor Wall located in the MHC lobby. The Donor Wall is divided into three categories at the following levels: "Endowment" (\$10,000+); "Founders" (\$50,000+); and "Heritage Society" (\$100,000+). Through financial support and hours of time, these people have helped the Medical Heritage Center implement a "future through the past."

If you would be interested in supporting the continued growth of the Medical Heritage Center and wish to make a financial contribution, please feel free to contact Barbara Van Brimmer, MHC Curator. Contributions can also be sent directly to: Medical Heritage Center, Prior Health Sciences Library, 376 W. 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Columbus OH 43210. Various OSU contribution credits are available at your request.



**5th Floor**  
**Prior Health Sciences Library**  
**376 W. 10th Ave.**  
**Columbus, OH 43210**

METER  
204610-361

Editor-in-Chief: Barbara Van Brimmer  
Production Editor: Jane Witherspoon  
e-mail: medhist@osu.edu,  
telephone: 614.292.4891  
fax: 614.292.9919  
<http://bones.med.ohio-state.edu/heritage>