



## **Dr. Bigelow: Yesteryear's Angel of Mercy** **by Samuel Meites, Ph.D.**



*Bigelow as President of the Ohio State Medical Association, 1927*

After 32 years of service, Dr. Leslie Lawson Bigelow gave his valedictory address at the 47<sup>th</sup> annual open meeting of the Children's Hospital Board of Trustees on January 25, 1940. He said, "What we are trying to do here, all of us who work for the Children's Hospital, quite simply, is to be kind and generous to little children who are in need of help; and that in a world where there is so much unkindness and little generosity is a very

important thing." This came from a man who with most of his medical and dental colleagues donated his professional skills and time, thereby laying the foundation that today makes the hospital a current leading center of pediatric care and a hallmark of Columbus' humanity.

Earlier in his life, before the Great Depression struck the nation in 1929, you would think that perhaps Dr. Bigelow was more an angel of wrath when he became president of the Ohio State Medical Association in 1927. His long inaugural address was a bilious attack on what he perceived as the growing intrusion of state and federal government into

private medical practice, its paternalistic infringement on "individualism" eroding doctor-patient relations, and the physician's economic stability. He deplored indiscriminate "free" services including immunizations and diagnostic tests not totally restricted to indigents whether offered by public health agencies or free clinics. Earlier he condemned the social worker's practice of offering medical services without prior consultation with the physicians involved. This outburst represented deep personal convictions that he published in the Ohio State Medical Journal and elsewhere during his unparalleled voluntary medical and administrative tenure at Children's Hospital. His gratuitous professional services, characteristic gentle kindness and sense of humor were undisturbed by his philosophic convictions.

Dr. Bigelow was one of the few physicians able to provide his free time to Children's Hospital while he was establishing his private practice. He had spent 8 years at Harvard University, having obtained an AB in 1903, an MD in 1906, and completing a 2-year surgical internship at Massachusetts General Hospital in 1908. Upon return to Columbus in 1908 he married Elizabeth Cole, opened an office at 185 E. State St. and became involved with Children's Hospital not far from where he lived. In 1913 he built and moved into his permanent home at 45 Franklin Park West, two blocks from the hospital at Miller and Fair Avenues. He served as an assistant to Dr. James F. Baldwin (1850-1936), then a leading surgeon in Columbus, and the founder of Grant Hospital in 1900, as well as a surgical consultant to Children's Hospital. As early as 1911, Bigelow became a surgeon, later chief surgeon, to the Hocking Valley Railroad, and surgeon with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad.

The board of trustees at Children's Hospital formally appointed Bigelow to the surgical staff in 1910 and later referred to him as the secretary of the medical staff. By 1915, he was chief of staff. In all medical matters the

## In Our Mailbox

*This anecdote was received from  
Richard C. Carlisle, M. D.*

Dr. George Curtis was a great and beloved teacher. He was always at our class early and was busy writing an outline of the lesson on the blackboard. After we were all seated we were given time to copy these notes. Then he would proceed with the class. Well, years later, after WWII, Dr. Curtis had a stroke and Dr. Harry Lefever (Uncle Harry to all of us) reported on George's condition at our dinner table at old White Cross.

Time went by. It was customary to have a large dinner banquet for our attending staff at the Grandview Inn. Just before this particular occasion, who came in but Dr. Harry Lefever arm in arm with Dr. George Curtis now totally recovered.

As one man, everyone of our assembly leaped to his feet and the ovation was thunderous and really "shook the rafters". As Dr. George Curtis came forward we could all see the tears flowing down his cheeks with our heartfelt appreciation of our great and beloved teacher.



*George Curtis, M. D. (from The Caducean, 1950)*

## 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.

Clara Doubledee: Books ■ Dr. Howard R. Mitchell, Jr.: 2 rare books ■ Geraldine Price, RN: Nursing materials ■ Manuel Tzagournis M.D.: Large book and archive collection ■ Albert W. Van Fossen M.D.: Ophthalmological Society pamphlets ■ Charles Wooley, M.D.: "Autobiographical ANA of Robley Dunglison" ■ Frederick Zuspan, M.D.: Books, archives and medical instruments

Monetary donations: Dr. Edwin and Nancy Hamilton: in honor of Howard Lowery on his retirement; and in memory of Mrs. Ruth Ebert Vincent ■ Richard Johnson Ireton M.D. ■ Robert Murnane, M.D. (to help support our newsletter for the upcoming year) ■ Alfred Stockum, M.D.

## Endowment Established for Medical Heritage Center

The Medical Heritage Center recently became the beneficiary of an endowment fund established at the Columbus Medical Association Foundation. Dr. George Paulson provided the initial gift to establish the endowment. Recently, the endowment has grown with an additional gift given by Dr. Donald Vincent. The Medical Heritage Center, which is supported primarily through private contributions, is grateful for the continued support of community members.



*Paulson*



*Vincent*

For more information on this Medical Heritage Center endowment, contact Weldon E. Milbourne at the Columbus Medical Association Foundation, (614) 240-7420.



## Continued from page 1

board consulted Bigelow and Dr. Dickson L. Moore, who served as one of the hospital's earliest house officers (1895) and as a staff member until his retirement in 1930. Dr. Bigelow was also on the surgical staff at the charitable St. Francis Hospital as well as at Grant Hospital, Protestant (White Cross) Hospital, and at the Ohio State University (OSU) College of Medicine when it opened in 1914. Prior to its closing in 1914, Dr. Bigelow was an instructor in surgery for two years at Starling Ohio Medical College. Dr. Bigelow was actively involved in teaching surgery to OSU medical students beginning as instructor in 1914, as a full professor from 1938-43, and as acting dean of the College of Medicine (March 1942-January 1943). He also served during the US WW I years (1917-1918) as Acting Head of the Department of Surgery. This wreaked havoc on his private practice. He was heavily involved in performing surgery, and frequently substituted as a medical examiner on the local draft board. Dr. Bigelow's free services to Children's Hospital during that time were unparalleled among his medical colleagues. Dr. Bigelow was the first of three Harvard educated physicians who served as chiefs of surgery at Children's Hospital. After WW II, H. William Clatworthy, Jr. joined and headed the surgical staff from 1950 to 1972. He was the first specialty-oriented pediatric surgeon in Ohio, a specialty that matured at Harvard long after Bigelow's time there. Clatworthy established one of the earliest programs for training pediatric surgeons in the USA, and contributed heavily to pediatric surgical research. He was soon joined in these endeavors by E. Thomas Boles in 1954, who followed Dr. Clatworthy as chief of surgery from 1972-1991. Boles added solidly to the pioneering tradition initiated by his predecessors in both research and education. The three directors of pediatric surgery at Children's Hospital were also professors of pediatric surgery in the OSU College of Medicine.

All of Bigelow's publications appeared between 1920-1930. Although he authored only six scientific papers, it is a tribute to his interests and ingenuity that he could publish any at all, in view of his responsibilities as a teacher, a practicing surgeon at five hospitals, and an absence of financial and physical resources needed to conduct research. Two of his papers dealt with case reports and

discussion of the need for early pediatric surgery in the relatively rare and fatal lymphosarcoma of the mesentery. Three papers involved the need for early diagnosis and surgical treatment of acute and chronic appendicitis. Of special interest was his review of 288 cases of so-called "minor surgical treatments" made in one of his years as chief surgeon of the Hocking Valley Railroad. He showed that the surgery merited closer attention, bringing about significantly decreased morbidity, which benefited both the patient's health and the railroad's economy.



*Bigelow as Acting Dean, OSU College of Medicine*

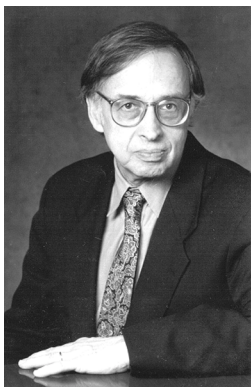
Dr. Bigelow's dozen or so non-scientific publications were centered on social and economic problems adversely affecting the medical profession, medical ethics, and as mentioned previously, the encroachment of governmental and other institutions on private medical practice. Following his presidency of the Ohio State Medical Association (1927-1928), Bigelow and his family (wife and 3 sons) spent a year abroad, mostly in Paris. He used much of his time observing neurosurgery while he incidentally made a determined effort to learn both the beneficial and detrimental effects of socialized medicine on the medical profession in France and Germany. His prior strongly negative convictions were enhanced by this experience.

During the 1930s, Dr. Bigelow was heavily involved in his teaching and surgical activities particularly at St. Francis Hospital before the outpatient services of the OSU College of Medicine were developed, and as the Children's Hospital expanded to meet the charitable needs of a growing city. The new Marks Wing of 1939 provided much needed facilities for patients, surgery, laboratory and physical medicine. By 1940, Bigelow stepped down as chief of the medical staff, but remained as head of the surgery department until his appointment as dean of the College of Medicine in 1942.

Dr. Bigelow died suddenly on January 15, 1943. OSU President, Howard L. Bevis stated that during Bigelow's tragically brief (9-months) tenure as acting dean of the College of Medicine and director of the University Hospital, he guided the college into an accelerated program that hastened the preparation of students for military service in WW II, while he coped with increased demand for hospital services.

# Coming Up

*The First John C. Burnham Lecture in Medical History* is being held THURSDAY MARCH 1, 2001, 4:00 P.M., at the Medical Heritage Center, 5th Floor, Prior Health Sciences Library. Please contact Gail Summerhill at (614) 292-3001 if you plan to attend.



Professor Charles Rosenberg of Harvard University will be presenting

**CONTESTED  
BOUNDARIES: BEHAVIOR,  
DISEASE, AND DIAGNOSIS.**

Sponsored jointly by The Department of History and The Medical Heritage Center.

*The second annual James V. Warren Humanities Lecture* is scheduled for TUESDAY MARCH 13, 2001, at 4:30 P.M., in the Medical Heritage Center, 5th Floor, Prior Health Sciences Library.



Peter E. Dans, M. D. will be presenting

**HOLLYWOOD'S VIEWS  
OF DOCTORS FROM  
THE 30'S TO THE 90'S.**

Dans is an associate professor of medicine, and health policy and management at Johns

Hopkins University and a clinical professor of medicine at Marshall University.

A book signing will be available after the lecture.

**For more information about either lecture, please contact Barbara Van Brimmer, (614) 292-4891**



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