What is Medical History?

By John Burnham PhD
MHC Scholar-in-Residence

Medical Heritage Center Scholar-in-Residence John Burnham, PhD, has written a unique work that describes the field of medical history. In the following piece, Burnham discusses the book’s central theme.

A review of all of the MHC Scholars-in-Residence recent activities is located within the newsletter.

For decades, the field of the history of medicine has been expanding with almost explosive rapidity. It can include historical accounts of the most esoteric biomedical science, such as how certain drugs or toxins work. Or it can include the unionization of hospital workers. Or it can still include the work and personalities of outstanding clinicians and teachers of the past, from Sydenham to Helen Taussig. Or it can deal with ancient medical systems in Africa and Asia or with the economics of health care delivery in seventeenth-century rural England or twentieth-century city slums.

In the book called What is Medical History?, I have tried, with the support of my colleagues in the Medical Heritage Center, to draw it all together and describe the problems and rewards.

I found that the work of medical historians falls into one or more of five narrative categories or dramas:

· Healers
· Patients
· Diseases, individual, epidemic, old, and new
· Discovery and communication of clinical and laboratory science
· Impacts of health with society, social institutions, and general history

Whatever the approach, people who look into the past of medicine have found themselves drawn in, not only by narratives and dramas of the past but by old medical books and instruments. On another level, we are also attracted to powerful role models of those who work with humans’ confrontations with nature and existence.

While medical history nowadays includes far more than the biographies of great doctors, a core orientation for even the most distant part of medical history is the encounter of the healer with the patient. It is a lodestone that produces endless fascination from the center to the fringes.

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2004 was another busy year for the Medical Heritage Center Scholars-in-Residence, John Burnham, PhD, George Paulson, MD, and Charles Wooley, MD.

John Burnham, PhD, concluded 2004 on a high note with the publication of his book, *What is Medical History?* (see page one). His other 2004 publications include:

- “Clark, Norman Howard (1925-),” published in *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia* (ABC Clio)
- “Medical Historians and the Tobacco Industry,” (correspondence) published in *The Lancet*, volume 364, page 838

Burnham’s presentations included lectures at Carnegie-Mellon University and the University of Ottawa and the concluding commentary at an international symposium on the historiography of psychoanalysis held at the Freud Museum in Vienna. Burnham taught a mini-module in the history of medicine for The Ohio State University second-year medical students. During the Autumn Quarter, he taught the popular *History of American Medicine* course for The Ohio State University History Department.

George Paulson, MD, had an equally prolific scholarship year that included several publications on the history of medicine. These publications include:

- “Samuel Thomson and Lobelia,” (co-authored with R. Stuckey), published in *Lloydiana*
- “Garfield’s Assassination,” To be published Summer 2005 in *Timeline*
- “George Huntington in Ohio.” To be published in *Timeline*
- “Civil War Horses.” To be published in 2005 in *Civil War Times*
- “Two Lives, Two Deaths, Two Autopsies,” submitted to and favorably received by the *Journal of History of Neuroscience*
- “History of Tardive Dykinesia,” published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*

Paulson also published two articles in neurology journals and served as the editor of the “Science” and “Medicine” sections of the *Encyclopedia of the Midwest*. The encyclopedia is to be published in 2005 by Indiana University Press.

Two of Paulson’s manuscripts written in 2004 are currently under editorial review. The works concentrate on the lives of William Thornton, MD, and James Baldwin, MD.

Paulson gave six presentations on historical topics and is a teacher for the “History of The Ohio State University” undergraduate course.

Charles Wooley, MD, has been working with the staff and collections of the MHC to complete the research and writing of a book dealing with the origins of medicine, medical education, health care, and philanthropy in Columbus and Central Ohio during the nineteenth century. The work is a collaborative effort between the late Barbara Van Brimmer of the MHC and Dr. Wooley and is supported by a grant from the Columbus Medical Association Foundation (CMAF).

Wooley received the 2004 New York Medical College Alumni Medal of Honor and gave a presentation at the New York Medical College Alumni Banquet at the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City.
22 May 2004. At this event, Dr. Wooley presented the Award Recipient Address to the Alumni Members of the Classes of 1954 and 1979 and the members of the Graduating Class of 2004. Wooley also received a certificate of recognition as an editorial board member from the American Heart Hospital Journal in March 2004.

At the OSU College of Veterinary Medicine and also at the American Osler Society 34th Annual Meeting, Wooley gave presentations in the history of cardiology.

Among Wooley’s publications in 2004 were:

- “Military Heart Hospital at Hampstead, England-World War I,” published in the American Heart Hospitals Journal, volume 2, pages 175-177
- “Dr. Sam, Uncle Henry and The Little Green Book (Dr. W. Proctor Harvey, Dr. Samuel A. Levine, Dr. Henry A. Christian),” soon to be published in the American Heart Hospitals Journal

Save the Date: Winter and Spring Lectures at the MHC

The Medical Heritage Center at The Ohio State University is proud to announce the following lectures in its history of the health sciences lectureship series:

**John C. Burnham Endowed Lecture**

**February 9, 2005**

Professor Vivian Nutton of the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at the University College of London

“Well Clinicians in Search of Their Past: Osler, Allbutt, and the Greeks.”

4-6 p.m. at the Medical Heritage Center at The Ohio State University

This lecture is co-sponsored by the Medical Heritage Center and The Ohio State University Department of History

**February 17, 2005**

Dr. Janet McCalman, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science, University of Melbourne

“But the Unfit Died ... History, Health, and the Life Course: The Australian Working-Class Experience, 1854-1985.”

12:00-1:30 p.m. in Room 090 of The Ohio State University Science and Engineering Library.

This lecture is sponsored by the Medical Heritage Center, The Ohio State University Initiative for Population Research, and The Ohio State University Departments of History and Economics.

**Annual James V. Warren Memorial Endowed Lecture**

**April 21, 2005**

Professor Michael Bliss, University of Toronto

Bliss will present a lecture about his latest work, a biography of neurosurgeon Harvey Cushing.

4:30-6 p.m. at the Medical Heritage Center at The Ohio State University

All lectures are free and open to the public.

Directions and further details can be found on our website: http://mhc.med.ohio-state.edu/

Please contact Medical Heritage Center Curator, Judith Wiener at (614) 292-9273 for further information.

MHC Volunteer Receives Award

The MHC Scholars were not the only ones who received recognition in the past year. Long-time MHC volunteer Ann Heineman received an honorable mention in the High Street (Columbus) Neighborhood Volunteer of the Year Award.

Heineman, a retired art teacher in the Columbus Public Schools, volunteers at the OSU Fine Arts Library and the Medical Heritage Center. She has completed a number of projects for the MHC, including the processing of the center’s photographic and historical file collection.
Recent Donations
The Medical Heritage Center thanks those listed for their recent support:

Anonymous • Marjorie and John Burnham: books and journals • Margaret K. Burns: books • Jerry T. Guy, MD: copies of Dr. Warren’s Explorer’s Club files • James A. Lantz: book • Molly Moran, MS, APRN, BC: 2 student nursing uniforms from the OSU Graduating Class of 1973 • Kathryn Peppe: books • Mrs. Annetta A. Rini: postcard and picture from Protestant Hospital • Reba Cobb Schanz: binder from the 1950s with St. Francis Hospital School of Nursing procedures

Monetary Donations:
American College of Physicians • Anonymous • Dr. Donald Bowers • Jennifer Clark • Marjorie and John Burnham • Si and Barbara Sokol (in honor of George Paulson) • Joanne Sparks • Dr. Charles and Lucia Wooley