

The Oslerian

A Message from the President Osler and Writing

Inside this issue:

In Memoriam: Chester R. Burns

2

Income, Expenses, and Liquid Asset Balances, 2000-2006

3

Secretary-Treasurer's Report

4

Plans for 2008 Meeting in Boston, May 4-8

4



Jock Murray

Sir William Osler's publication record is impressive, with over 1600 papers, essays, books and reports, many of them classics. In the *British Medical Journal* some years ago a few prominent physicians were asked what book they would have liked to have written. One chose the life of a surgeon, but three others independently selected Osler's *Aequanimitas*.

Osler liked to write almost as much as he liked to read. Those who describe his hours away from the clinical setting often remember him reading or writing, especially when on prolonged train rides or transatlantic voyages.

He advised students to write, but to be careful what and how they wrote, not taking credit for others' work. He knew that "it is often harder to boil down than to write" and he may have recognized that a few of his published addresses would have benefited from more time to "boil down". He thought the young wrote too much and the mature too little, commenting "there is too much green fruit sent to market, and the fruit of too many of the fine trees is never plucked at all."

His style varies in his clinical papers, essays, textbook and after-dinner addresses, later published. In his textbook he is more succinct, clear and

clipped in his style, giving a personal but less adorned description of disease and patient management, even though he adds personal experience, literary references, and metaphorical descriptions. In his essays he shows more flourish, with many more elaborate metaphors and personal experiences and views.

I enjoy his metaphorical descriptions, such as his use of the image of freight trains to describe the life styles of busy people and how this can affect their health. When he was describing the observation of albumin and casts in the urine of business and professional men he talked of the signs as "nature's danger signal to slow down, like the red lights on the railroad. The person who lives fast and hard, with good food, liquor and cigars, ignoring the effect on the body, will deteriorate like the No. 15 yard engine being driven like the No. 580, the mighty express train." He went on to comment that the urine signs were not an indication of life-threatening Bright's disease, "and we must ever bear in mind the adage – true today as well as in the times of the old "Pisse-Prophets"; *urina est eretrix, vel mendax* – the urine is a harlot or a liar." It is a pleasure to read such writing, but how likely is it that the descriptions in this clinical

paper would get past the red pencil of a current journal editor?

Many recent authors have asked if the next generation will continue to read the writings of Osler. Perhaps he will suffer the fate of Dr. Samuel Johnson in the 18th Century – increasingly famous, admired as a fascinating giant of his age, representing all that was English, much quoted and increasingly written about, but seldom read.

Perhaps it doesn't matter. Perhaps, like Johnson, Osler will continue to be admired as a giant of *his* age, as he represents to all of us the humanistic physician, the lasting example of a balanced physician who encompasses the science and the humanities in medicine.

—Jock Murray

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The young physician should be careful what and how he writes. Let him take heed to his education, and his reputation will take care of itself.

—Osler

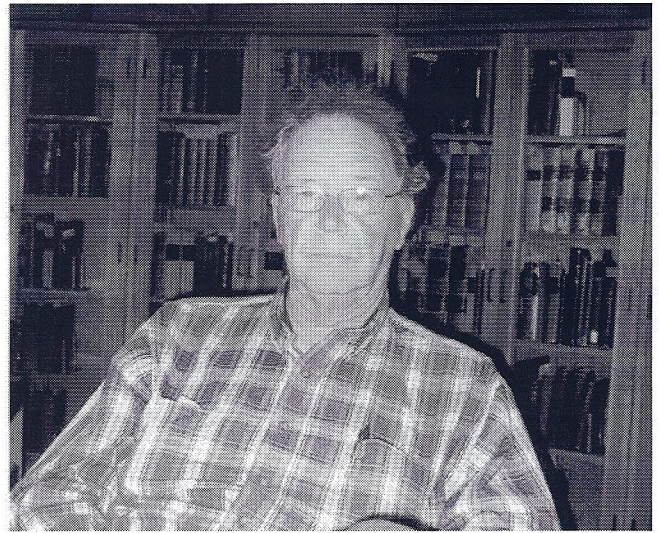
In Memoriam

Chester R. Burns (1937-2006)

Chester R. Burns died suddenly and unexpectedly on December 27, 2006, in New York City, where he and his wife Ann were visiting their daughter.

Chester was born on December 5, 1937 in Nashville, Tennessee, and received both his undergraduate and medical degrees from Vanderbilt University. Following an internship, he became a Fellow at the Johns Hopkins University Institute of the History of Medicine, where in June 1969 he became the first American-born physician to receive a doctorate in medical history from that institution. He then joined the faculty at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston where he taught for 37 years before retiring in March 2006.

As a young faculty member and founder of the Institute for the Medical Humanities at UTMB, Chester participated in what became the founding moment of the American Osler Society. The story, previously told in *The Oslerian* by Charles G. Roland, is briefly as follows. In 1968, John P. McGovern along with H. Grant Taylor resolved to mark the fiftieth anniversary of William Osler's death with a symposium. Truman R. Blocker, president of UTMB, agreed to sponsor the symposium at that institution. Entitled "Humanism in Medicine, as Portrayed by the Life of Sir William Osler," this symposium brought together persons who had known and studied under Osler. The list of speakers reads like a Who's Who in Oslerian studies: for example, William B. Bean, Wilburt C. Davison, George T. Harrell, Alfred R. Henderson, Emile Holman, R. Palmer Howard, James A. Knight, Wilder G. Penfield, and Charles G. Roland. Also present were such distinguished



Chester R. Burns in the Rare Book Room, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, December 7, 2006

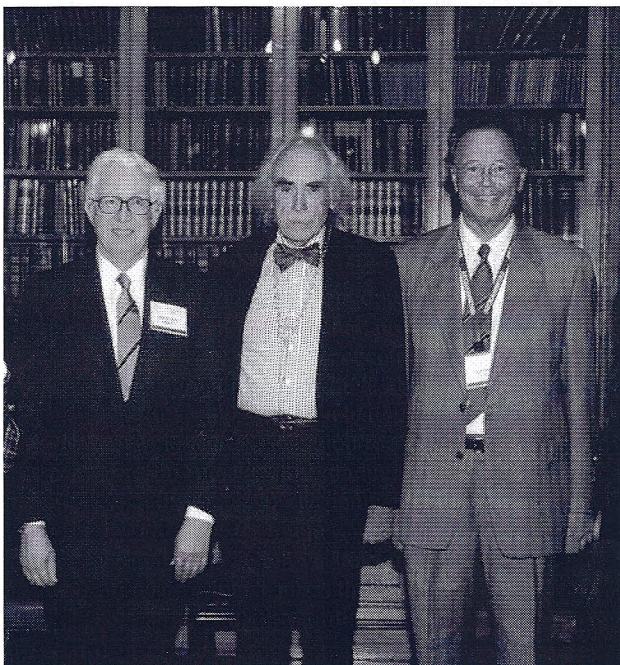
historians as Donald G. Bates and Lester S. King. With Dr. McGovern, Chester co-edited *Humanism in Medicine* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1973), a compilation of papers presented on that memorable occasion. Dr. McGovern's energy and enthusiasm soon led to the founding of the American Osler Society, of which Chester became a member in 1972.

Under Chester's leadership the Institute for the Medical Humanities at UTMB became one of the world's top centers of its kind. He became the James Wade Rockwell Professor of the History of Medicine, and also served as professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health and a member of the University of Texas Graduate School of the Biomedical Sciences. Chester's publications spanned a wide range of topics in general and local medical history, medical biography, the history of medical ethics, and the teaching of medical history and other medical humanities. A fixture at UTMB, Chester wrote the institution's definitive history entitled *Saving Lives, Training Caregivers, Making Discoveries*. He was also active in community affairs and especially the Rotary Club, which he served as a chapter president and district governor.

Lawrence D. Longo, recognizing that the American Osler Society must continue to value, promote, and model serious scholarship in the history of medicine, encouraged Chester to become more involved in our organization, which led to Chester's eventually serving as president (2004-2005). He made the relationship between the AOS and the American Association for the History of Medicine (AAHM) the theme of his presidency, conducting a survey of the membership of both organizations. On December 7, 2006, I was privileged to spend an hour with Chester in the Rare Book Room at UTMB (photograph, above) and reviewed the history of this effort which, regrettably, has yet to bear serious fruit as the predominant sentiment seems to be that of maintaining the cordial and comfortable status quo.

Chester is survived by his devoted wife of 44 years, Ann Christine Griffey Burns; their son, Michael Derek Burns; and their daughter, Margaret Christine Krause.

—CSB



Chester R. Burns (right; then, second vice-president) with Marvin J. Stone (left, first-vice-president) and Lawrence D. Longo (president) in the library of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, Scotland, May 2003.

Income, Expenses, and Liquid Asset Balances, 2000-2006

| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| START BALANCE, 1 JANUARY | 437,635.88 | 439,237.65 | 447,236.97 | 377,566.91 | 477,546.88 | 522,103.45 | 524,372.87 |
| <i>Income</i> | | | | | | | |
| Dues and initiation fees | 6,400.00 | 9,900.00 | 14,865.00 | 14,535.28 | 15,661.92 | 10,723.44 | 15,531.31 |
| Meeting income | 33,945.00 | 33,575.00 | 39,060.85 | 49,547.88 | 48,098.31 | 28,091.00 | 31,633.83 |
| Latchkeys, ties, T-shirts | 830.00 | 1,329.00 | 805.00 | 1,303.55 | 960.00 | 603.00 | 475.00 |
| Book sales and royalties | 135.00 | 85.00 | 5,831.50 | 15,247.45 | 4,732.12 | 2,908.36 | 2,091.00 |
| Educational Endowment Fund | 975.00 | 20,855.00 | 540.00 | 1,320.00 | 1,895.00 | 1,075.00 | 1,170.00 |
| Friends of 13 Norham Gardens | 355.00 | 355.00 | 185.00 | 345.00 | 680.00 | 425.00 | 230.00 |
| Friends of Osler Library | 455.00 | 460.00 | 160.00 | 195.00 | 1,065.00 | 700.00 | 255.00 |
| McGovern lectureship/contributions | 26,000.00 | 36,849.20 | 10,000.00 | | 12,500.00 | 12,500.00 | |
| Miscellaneous income | 30.27 | | | 750.00 | 15,273.90 | 243.71 | |
| Appreciation of equities | -13,001.98 | -22,233.11 | -48,670.55 | 91,610.34 | 34,966.62 | 28,405.24 | 51,463.64 |
| Total Income | 56,123.29 | 81,175.09 | 22,776.80 | 174,854.50 | 135,832.87 | 85,674.75 | 102,849.78 |
| <i>Expenses</i> | | | | | | | |
| Administrative assistant | 1,500.00 | 6,000.00 | 4,500.00 | 4,500.00 | 9,500.00 | 8,000.00 | 8,000.00 |
| Supplies and postage | 273.40 | 293.85 | 1,247.87 | 4,514.71 | 1,651.86 | 1,259.00 | 1,119.35 |
| Printing | 1,502.58 | 1,677.64 | 1,566.28 | 1,038.01 | 1,030.05 | 1231.22 | 1,105.71 |
| Latchkeys and other merchandise | 1,606.04 | | | | | | |
| <i>Persisting Osler I, II, and III</i> | | 882.00 | 3789.58 | | | | |
| Meeting expenses | 27,233.93 | 37,134.72 | 30,835.87 | 43,510.82 | 45,566.15 | 35,139.02 | 51,401.41 |
| McGovern Lectureship Account | 3,790.89 | 6,162.21 | 4,830.00 | 3,740.00 | 2,780.27 | 8,797.79 | 8,079.45 |
| Wm. B. Bean Educational Endowment | 3,775.60 | 4,388.00 | 3,309.05 | 2,738.07 | 139.99 | 4,500.00 | 5,736.42 |
| Deposits for future meetings | 4,500.00 | 1,271.18 | 19,457.03 | | 500.00 | 718.75 | |
| Friends of Osler Library | 1,000.00 | 610.00 | | | 505.00 | | 950.00 |
| Friends of 13 Norham Gardens | 500.00 | 480.00 | | | 380.00 | | 625.00 |
| Subventions for books | | 4,199.20 | 17,000.00 | 7,294.71 | 16,530.12 | 12,026.88 | |
| Web site | | 1,195.00 | 600.00 | | 500.00 | 500.00 | |
| Refunds | 1,275.00 | 790.00 | 1,630.00 | 45.00 | 2,345.00 | 1,960.00 | 1,610.00 |
| Money management fees | 3,567.64 | 3,460.02 | 1,661.18 | 3,107.87 | 6,201.25 | 3,874.47 | 4,119.84 |
| Miscellaneous expenses | 3,996.44 | 4,631.95 | 2,020.00 | 4,385.34 | 5,016.25 | 5,398.20 | 1253.96 |
| Total disbursements | 54,521.52 | 73,175.77 | 92,446.86 | 74,874.53 | 91,276.30 | 83,405.33 | 84,001.14 |
| END BALANCE, DECEMBER 31 | 439,237.65 | 447,236.97 | 377,566.91 | 477,546.88 | 522,103.45 | 524,372.87 | 543,221.51 |

AMERICAN OSLER SOCIETY

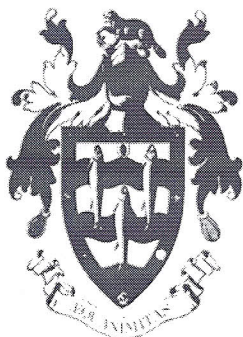
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Spend the last half-hour of the day
in communion with the saints of
humanity.

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

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Aequanimitas

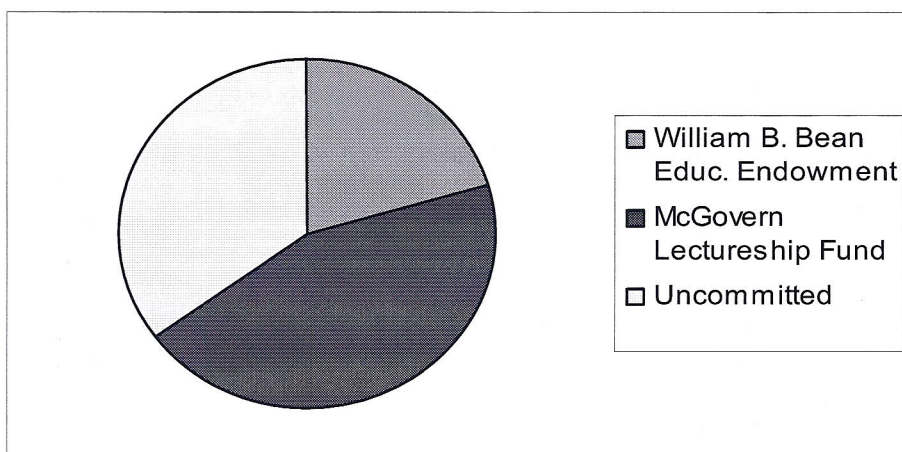
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Secretary-Treasurer's Report

Shown on the previous page is a breakdown of AOS income and expenses for the calendar year 2006.

1. The year-end balance of our liquid assets again stands at an all-time high (\$543,221.51).
2. Distribution of the balance (see figure, below) is as follows: \$239,917.73 (44.2%) in the John P. McGovern Lectureship Fund; \$111,320.81 (20.5%) in the William B. Bean Educational Endowment; and \$191,982.97 (35.3%) in uncommitted funds.
3. During 2006 the AOS incurred a record deficit for the annual meeting. This was largely explained by a reception at The Citadel in Halifax to which all members and guests were invited but not charged. Total costs for that event were \$10,307.18. Other unusual meeting expenses included \$1,623.69 for international shipping, \$783.04 for piano rental, and \$192.25 for a gift for the outgoing president.
4. Offsetting the meeting deficit was a good year with our investments, which continue to be managed by Fidelity Investments with diligent supervision by Paul Dymont, chair of the Finance Committee (other members include Dee Canale, Charles Wooley, Bruce Fye, Perry Hookman, and Charles Bryan [*ex officio*]). Royalties were received from the American College of Physicians for *The Quotable Osler*. There were no sales of *The Persisting Osler*.
5. Miscellaneous expenses were \$1,100.00 for review of financial records and preparation of a tax return; \$68.96 banking fees; and \$85.00 dues to the American Association for the History of Medicine.
6. Unusual expenses anticipated for 2007 will include the cost of publishing a supplement issue of *The Journal of Medical Biography* (included in this mailing) and the purchase of new president's plaques.
7. A more detailed report will be presented to the Board of Governors and summarized at the Annual Meeting in Montreal, May 2007.

—CSB



Plans for 2008 Meeting in Boston, May 4-7

John Noble reports progress on local arrangements for the 2008 meeting in Boston. May 4-7 has been chosen as the time frame in order to pose minimum conflict with other meetings frequented by AOS members (notably, those of the American Association for the History of Medicine and the American College of Physicians). The Holiday Inn at Blossom Street has tentatively been selected as the meeting site because of its affordable rates and its large conference room, located on the 15th floor and overlooking the Bullfinch Building, the Massachusetts General Hospital complex, and the entire Charles River Basin. We tentatively plan an evening dinner cruise around Boston Harbor on Monday, May 5. We're considering holding the banquet at the Harvard Club on Commonwealth Avenue, with cocktails in the Aesculapian Room and dinner in Harvard Hall. Other exciting venues and events including a session in the Ether Dome are being discussed. Stay tuned!

—CSB