



# The Oslerian

## *A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT*

### "The Only People Worth Talking To"

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ABSTRACTS



Michael Bliss, 42d President of the AOS, installed at the 2011 meeting of the Society at Penn's Landing, Philadelphia

Greetings fellow Oslerians!

Test your expertise: Who was Osler referring to as "the only people in life worth talking to"? Is the answer (a) Doctors; (b) Patients; (c) Medical students; (d) None of the above?

Of course you know. The answer is none of the above, except insofar as children – the group he was actually referring to – could be Osler's patients. In the letter to an Oxford don in which he made the remark, Osler did add, tactfully, "except an occasional College fellow", but I think that was only to butter up his correspondent.

The day I became an admirer of William Osler, as opposed to being just a detached biographer, was June 15, 1995. On that afternoon in the Osler Library, working at Osler's own desk, I read the thick file of Osler's letters from Philadelphia in the mid-1880s to the three children of his cousin Marion Francis. They are in the W.W. Francis Papers, and are an amazing outpouring of love, imagination, wit, and verbal play. I quote from the letters on pp. 162-4 of my *Osler*. Here is a condensed version of notes to five-year old Bea Francis: I love you a thousand pounds. ... I would give half my mustache to hear you laugh this minute. ... My heart bleeds for you in three places. ... You are the apple of my other eye.

The left one. Gwen is the apple of the right. ... I love you 1000000000000 pounds and don't you forget it. ... Why did I go away and leave you? I have been homesick all the week and wished very often to fly away to the Island. I sing to myself. Who will take her on their knee? & who is smoking my meerschaum pipe? ... I am so glad you are better. Is your nose very sharp? Can you use it as a Knife to cut bread & butter? Glad you liked the ice cream – was it cooked enough?

I defy anyone to read this file – look it up next time you're in the Osler library – and not fall in love with the author, Mailliw Relso, MD, a.k.a. Doccie O.



Alas, you can't have the even more moving experience I had in Toronto on February 25, 1997. That was the day I interviewed the person mentioned by Cushing (II, 614-6) as one of the

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“adorable children” Osler befriended in 1918. Betty Harty Osler Nelles (a distant relation, whose first marriage would be to an Osler) was probably the last person alive with clear memories of meeting Sir William. She was eighty-five years old, blind, but with a completely clear mind when I talked with her for about ninety minutes in her Toronto apartment.

She told me she had been collecting mental memories of Osler all week before our interview. Out they poured. You’ll find my account of the best of them on pp 446-7 of the biography, including “He told them [the Harty girls] ghost stories, did card tricks and gave them maple sugar, told them that even girls could grow up to be doctors if they worked hard enough, and promised Betty that when she left England she could have the rabbit from the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. The children never thought of him as a grown-up but as one of their own.”

There was much, much more - stories beautifully recounted by a dear lady still deeply in love with Osler. I tend to work quickly and informally, and it was only several months later when I suddenly realized how wonderful it would be to have Betty Harty’s memories recorded for posterity. I went to do this, only to find that she had died. How stupid I had been to let slip the last opportunity we would have to hear the first-hand experiences of someone who had known Osler. (So far as I know there is no recording of anyone else who knew Osler, let alone any film or recording of Osler himself).

At least the memories survive, as do many other memories of Osler’s affection for children of all kinds, in sickness and in health, not least of course his love of his son, Revere. Betty Harty thought that Osler liked her company in 1918 as a way of getting his mind off his grief at Revere’s death a few months earlier. Probably true, but in fact all his life Osler treated his young friends, relatives, medical students, patients, Rhodes scholars, as surrogate children. He and Grace gloried in being surrogate mothers and fathers to the young, and they mourned deeply for all of the beautiful children slaughtered during the Great War. I notice that in my *Osler* index, there are more entries under “love of children” than there are to “religious views” or “therapeutic principles”.

We know from a number of stories how particularly effective Osler was as a doctor to children, not only as an expert in various childhood diseases, but also as a bedside magician, sometimes literally so. The famous E.L. Chase painting \* of Osler playing with dolls at a little girl’s bedside was commissioned

by Parke-Davis years later, but surely captures reality better than any photograph. “Oh dear,” exclaimed a real little girl Osler was treating for diabetes when she heard he had become only a baronet. “They should have made him King.”

Many specialties claim Osler as one of their founding fathers. Pediatrics has at least as good a claim as internal medicine, for in 1892 Osler served as president of the American Pediatric Society. In his remarkably interesting and prescient presidential address, “Remarks on Specialism,” Osler spent most of his time warning against the narrowness of specialized practice (“no more dangerous members of our profession exist than those born in it, so to speak, as specialists”). He partially exempted children’s doctors as urban “vestigial remnants” of the general practitioners who he always thought represented medicine at its best. At the risk of losing friends, I want to go on record as saying that pediatricians are also my favorite specialists. Show me a doctor who loves children and I’ll show you a doctor worth talking to.

As a historian I don’t normally meet children in any professional sense. But I am a dad and now a grampa. In 2005 as I walked across the campus with a student after the last class I taught at the University of Toronto he asked me why I would want to retire now that compulsory retirement had been abolished. I told him that I did not want university obligations to continue to conflict with opportunities to spend time with my grandchildren. Except for those pediatricians, and perhaps all other members of the AOS, Kate Bliss (age 8), Michael Rhodes-Bliss (7), and Jasmin (4) and Joe Macdonald-Bliss (2) are certainly the people I think are most worth talking to. Imagine Osler as a grandfather – in a word “awesome”!

Best wishes to everyone during the holiday season.

— Michael Bliss

[m.bliss@sympatico.ca](mailto:m.bliss@sympatico.ca)



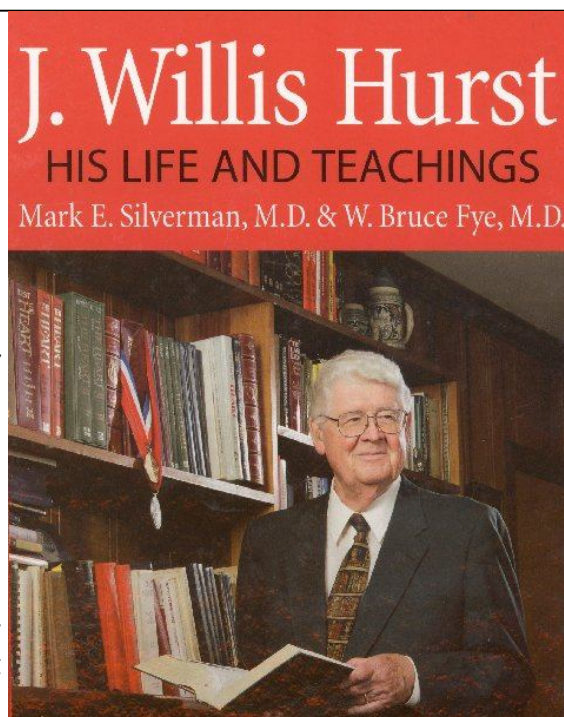


## **A BELOVED OSLERIAN TEACHER PASSES ON**

J. Willis Hurst, M.D. a member of the AOS since 1985, died October 1 of complications of a stroke at age 90. A 1944 graduate of the Medical College of Georgia, he joined in the army, then served a cardiology fellowship with Paul Dudley White in Boston, and gave the memorial address after White's death.

After a move to Atlanta in 1949, Hurst began a long, celebrated teaching career at Emory, interrupted by service at Bethesda Naval Hospital during the Korean War. He cared for Senator Lyndon Johnson, who had a heart attack at that time (later Hurst became a consultant to Johnson as president). At age 35 Hurst became Professor and Chairman of Medicine at Emory, a post he held for thirty years. After his "retirement" he continued active as a consultant and author, and in his career published 461 scientific articles and 68 books; several of the latter were novels. His textbook *The Heart* went through seven editions (revised every four years) and was internationally recognized.

He was a beloved and gifted teacher who received many awards and served many professional societies. He was president of the American Heart Association in 1971 and of the American Society of Professors of Medicine in 1985. Nellie, his wife of 61 years, died in 2004; in a novel, *The Last Leaf Has Fallen*, Hurst described his life following her death.



(In 2007 Oslerians Mark Silverman and Bruce Fye published their biography.)

## **OSLERIANS IN THE NEWS**

Immediate AOS **Past President Charlie Bryan** delivered the eighth annual Weisse Lecture to the Medical History Society of New Jersey on September 20. The lectureship, endowed by **Oslerian Allen Weisse and his wife, Laura Weisse, M.D.**, has featured several other well-received Oslerian lecturers over the years. Charlie's topic was "**Yellow Fever and 'The Myth of Walter Reed.'**" A summary of his presentation is available from the NJ society's secretary, Oslerian Sandra Moss at ([sandra.moss3@verizon.net](mailto:sandra.moss3@verizon.net)), who is also the First Vice-President of the AOS. The NJ Society meetings are excellent.



**If you enjoyed** the Bliss biographies of Osler and Cushing, a newly published volume will be of interest. In September Dundurn Press of Toronto released a 420 page memoir by **AOS President Michael Bliss**, entitled ***Writing History: A Professor's Life***. (It has much material about the other biographies.) It's available on order through bookstores, or from the University of Toronto Press at 1-800-565-9523 (E-Mail: [utpbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca](mailto:utpbooks@utpress.utoronto.ca)).

Those Oslerians who attended the PHL meeting reception at the CPP that was underwritten by the Oslerian Scholars from Galveston will be pleased to know that Freelance writer and Editor **Lynn M. Alperin** (wife of Oslerian Jack Alperin) has just completed a superb history of UTMB's Academy of Oslerian Medicine, entitled ***The John P. McGovern Academy of Oslerian Medicine: The First Ten Years***. Your editor reviewed an advanced copy: It's not only well-written and imminently readable; in it Lynn describes many projects and accomplishments of the UTMB Osler Scholars, great ideas and activities other Oslerians might duplicate on our own campuses to venerate the memory of Sir William. We will keep you posted as to when and where it is published.

# American Osler Society

42d ANNUAL MEETING

The Carolina Inn  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**April 22-25, 2012**

## Meeting at a Glance

### Sunday, April 22

2:00-6:00 p.m. Registration  
3:00-5:00 p.m. Readings Session  
6:00-7:00 p.m. Past President's Dinner  
7:00-9:00 p.m. Board of Governor's Meeting

### Monday, April 23

7:00 a.m.-4:45p.m. Registration  
7:00-8:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast  
7:00-8:00 a.m. Art Exhibit Setup  
8:00 am-5:00p.m. Art Exhibit – North Parlor  
8:00 a.m.-Noon General Session – Hill Ballroom  
12:00-1:00 p.m. Luncheon – Old Well Room  
1:00-5:00 p.m. General Session – Hill Ballroom  
6:30 p.m. Barbecue and Blue Grass

### Tuesday, April 24

7:00 a.m.-noon Registration  
8:00 a.m.-noon Art Exhibit – North Parlor  
8:00 a.m.-noon General Session – Hill Ballroom  
12:00-1:00 p.m. Bus Transfer to Duke (box lunch)  
1:00-2:40 p.m. General Session  
3:00-4:30 p.m. Tour/Video  
4:30 p.m. Return to Chapel Hill via bus  
6:00-7:00 p.m. Social Hour – Old Well Room  
7:00-9:00 p.m. Banquet – Old Well Room

### Wednesday, April 25

7:30-8:30 a.m. Annual Business Meeting – Hill BR  
8:30-12:00 a.m. General Session – Hill Ballroom  
12:00 noon Adjourn



*n.b.* – This ↑ is not Swick!

## HAVE YOU RESERVED YOUR COPY YET?

### *The Persisting Osler IV*

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Edited by: **Jeremiah A. Barondess, M.D.**  
**Charles S. Bryan, M.D.**

#### Table of Contents Sections:

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[*Volume IV* contains some of the best papers from AOS Annual Meetings, 2001-2010. If you order before November 15, postage charges are waived. (Contact AOS Administrator Renee @ [aosrenee@gmail.com](mailto:aosrenee@gmail.com)).]

### PENCIL IN THESE FUTURE AOS MEETINGS!

***Tucson, AZ***

April 7-10, 2013

Loew's Ventana Canyon Resort

***Oxford, England***

May 11-14, 2014

(Hotel TBA)

### MEMBERS & SPOUSES! PLEASE

**BURNISH UP THOSE ART WORKS! ↓**

The AOS meeting in Philadelphia this spring was marked by great papers, convivial camaraderie and, for the first time, a showing of art by AOS members. This inaugural **Art Exhibit** added a new dimension to the annual meeting by highlighting the broad range of interests and talents of Oslerians. The exhibit included the works of six members and one spouse, and included painting, photography, woodworking and needlework. The artwork, and the idea of having an exhibit, drew positive comments from a number of attendees and stimulated interesting conversations during breaks and receptions.

The AOS is pleased to announce that the 2012 meeting in Chapel Hill next April will once again feature an **Art Exhibit**. AOS members and their spouses are encouraged to share their creativity and talent by exhibiting their original works of art. Please watch for the first Call for Art in the Jan-Feb 2012 *Oslerian*. Questions about plans for the exhibit should be directed to Herbert M. Swick, M.D., at [hmlswick@msn.com](mailto:hmlswick@msn.com) or 406-542-6560.



## — UPDATE —

13 NORHAM GARDENS, OXFORD  
*former*

HOME OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER

(Looking toward AOS 2014 Oxford)



Dr. Terence Ryan\* writes from the U.K. —

“Regarding the ‘Open Arms’ – Sir William Osler’s home in Oxford – this year has seen the most complete refurbishment of the ground floor of 13 Norham Gardens since perhaps Osler’s time. His library there has been looked after for some 60 years, but since his books went to McGill the library content at Oxford has been varied. Now it is mostly appropriate to his memory.

“I call the collection of books in the library ‘Public Health before and after Osler’. Included are a substantial number of his signed publications and reprints, his book on Oriental Medicine, and papers related to Leprosy. (You may recall a recent article from McGill about Osler visiting a leprosy hospital with Grace before their marriage.) Some of the most remarkable items are the archives of Alastair Robb-Smith, 60 files of interesting papers about Osler and about Oxford.

“It is a delight to have some of his furniture back from the Royal College of Physicians in his refurbished Consulting Room. We now have the dining room also refurbished and transferred to the McGovern Osler centre. In the Seminar Room previously the Osler’s sitting room there has always been the fireplace from the home of Lady Osler in Philadelphia. The Garden, drive and veranda pavement are also now receiving attention.

“Readers of the *Oslerian* will perhaps know that the Radcliffe Infirmary has been closed and demolished but the 18<sup>th</sup> Century hospital in which Osler taught is being “done up” for other university purposes. The Green Templeton College in the 18th Century Radcliffe Observatory overlooks the site and is also splendidly refurbished. What we now need to do is to take the servants quarters at the ‘Open Arms’ and do them up as a visitors centre for the American Osler Society and others to **stay in!**”

*\*(Dr. Ryan and Dr. John Ward are helping plan  
and coordinate the Oxford 2014 AOS Meeting.)*

**Attention Oslerians!** As we look toward meeting in Oxford in 2014, please consider a gift to the Osler McGovern Centre, that its refurbishment might be fully completed by that time! They are seeking, in addition to financial support, bona fide Oslerian artifacts, including first editions of Osler’s work. Donations should be directed to Green Templeton College, marked for the Osler McGovern Centre. To donate please see this site: [http://www.northamerica.ox.ac.uk/giving\\_americans.htm](http://www.northamerica.ox.ac.uk/giving_americans.htm) .

### **OSLERIAN QUOTE OF THE ISSUE**

Asepsis was never defined more succinctly than by an old Yorkshire veterinary surgeon. This old man was the most successful vet in the north of England. Before every operation he performed he insisted on being left alone in the farm kitchen for half an hour. What he did in that time no one knew.

When at last he was on his death bed, his son begged him to tell the secret of his success. The old man looked around the room to make sure that no one else was in earshot, then he leaned forward and whispered to his son,

“I boils my tools.”

— Harvey Graham, *The Story of Surgery*, pg 366.



## AMERICAN OSLER SOCIETY

**PRESIDENT:** Michael Bliss  
Toronto, ON, CANADA  
m.bliss@sympatico.ca

**SECRETARY:** Paul S. Mueller  
Mayo Clinic, 200 First ST SW  
Rochester, MN 55905  
mueller.pauls@mayo.edu

**TREASURER:** R. Dennis Bastron  
Tucson, AZ  
rdbastron@comcast.net

**The Oslerian EDITOR:**  
Joseph B. VanderVeer, Jr.  
10 Sugar Knoll Drive  
Devon, PA 19333  
joebv2@live.com



### Aequanimitas

*The AMERICAN OSLER SOCIETY exists to bring together members of the medical and allied professions, who by common inspiration are dedicated to memorialize and perpetuate the just and charitable life, the intellectual resourcefulness, and the ethical example of Sir William Osler, who lived from 1849 to 1919. Its OSLERIAN is published quarterly.*

**We're on the Web!**  
√ us out at:  
[www.americanosler.org](http://www.americanosler.org)

## FINAL CALL for ABSTRACTS for AOS Meeting in Chapel Hill, April 22-25, 2012

**Abstracts** should be sent by e-mail to aosrenee@gmail.com with a copy to and must be **received** by 15 November 2011. Abstracts submitted mueller.pauls@mayo.edu by e-mail will be acknowledged. The abstract should be no longer than one page. It should begin with the complete title, the names of all co-authors, and the corresponding author's mailing address, telephone number, FAX, and e-mail address. This should be followed by a two to three sentence biographical sketch indicating how the author would like to be introduced. (This will probably be your entire introduction. Don't be modest!). The text should provide sufficient information for the Program Committee to determine its merits and possible interest to the membership. The problem should be defined and the conclusions should be stated. Phrases such as "will be presented" should be avoided or kept to a minimum.

**Three** learning objectives should be given after the abstract. Each learning objective should begin with an active verb indicating what attendees should be able to *do* after the presentation (for example, "list," "explain," "discuss," "examine," "evaluate," "define," "contrast," or "outline"; avoid noncommittal verbs such as "know," "learn," and "appreciate"). The learning objectives are required for Continuing Medical Education credit.

**A cover letter** should state: Whether any of the authors have a potential conflict-of-interest such as direct financial involvement in the topic being discussed, and whether there will be any mention of off-label use of drugs or other products during the presentation.

**Standard audiovisual equipment** will consist of a laptop computer and LCD projector. Presenters should carefully weigh, and justify, requests for *additional* AV equipment since this will add substantially to the cost of the meeting. (*Specifically request for additional equipment.*)

**Each presenter** will have a 20-minute time slot, which will be strictly enforced. *Presenters should rehearse and time their papers to 15 minutes*, in order to permit brief discussions and to be fair to the other speakers. Although 20 minutes might seem quite short for a paper in the humanities, our experience with this format has been overwhelmingly favorable.

**Abstracts will be accepted by e-mail up until 15 November 2011.** Send with objectives and cover letter to: aosrenee@gmail.com with a copy to: mueller.pauls@mayo.edu. Please make your submission in Microsoft WORD format.

**AOS Members** — Please forward to the editor information worth sharing with one another for **MEMBERS IN THE NEWS** column, including awards and publications for yourself or other Oslerians. - JBV