

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

JOHN L. WILSON, M.D.

(1914-2001)

John Long Wilson was born in Sturgis, Kentucky, and received his undergraduate education at Vanderbilt University, graduating in 1935. He went on to Harvard Medical School where he received his medical degree in 1939 as a member of AOA. John stayed in Boston for his residency in surgery at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Although he was a peaceful man, John saw his duty clearly and enlisted in the Navy the day after Pearl Harbor. He served on active duty for 5 years, much of which time was spent as a flight surgeon in the Pacific Theater, finishing his Naval career as a Lt. Commander. John continued his training after the war and completed his residency in surgery at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1949.

At this point in his career, John had planned to join the faculty of the Chelco Medical School in China. He was in San Francisco on his way to China when he learned that the Communists had closed the school to Americans, so he joined the faculty of Stanford University School of Medicine in San Francisco as a Clinical Instructor. However, he remained intent on serving abroad, so in 1953 John joined the faculty of the American University in Beirut. Thus began a distinguished career as Chairman of the Department of Surgery, then Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences at that University.

In 1968, John returned to Stanford University School of Medicine, now in Palo Alto, as Professor of Surgery. In addition, he became the first Coordinator of the California Regional Medical Programs, a federally-supported program designed to accelerate the transfer of new medical knowledge and technologies useful in the management of the three leading causes of death in the United States, heart disease, cancer and stroke, from the Medical Center to the communities in the region. Only two years later, John was appointed Acting Vice President and Dean of the Medical School, a post he held for a tumultuous year. This was a time of campus unrest nationwide and nowhere greater than at Stanford. Emotions ran high in all constituencies. Activities of the protestors affected the very fabric of the University, including attempts to shut down the hospital. Only

one person remained calm throughout and that was John L. Wilson. He was willing to talk at any length to anyone, to meet with all sides and urge a peaceful and non-destructive settlement to all issues and differences. He refused to be intimidated or pressured at the negotiating table, even when the leader of the protest placed a loaded Colt 45 on the table. It was only when one realized that John had been Dean at the American University of Beirut that his calm and grace under unbelievable pressure became understandable. Paraphrasing Rudyard Kipling, John truly kept his head about him when many were losing theirs. From at least this time forward, he was affectionately known as “Saint John”.

From 1971 to 1985, John was the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs. In this job, John was, among many other things, guardian of the “long form”. Many department chairs can attest to his devotion to this aspect of his position. John would never forward such a form to the Provost without making absolutely sure that it was incontestably complete, crystal clear and provably accurate. None ever bounced on John’s watch. He took on special assignments, many of them thankless tasks, with his characteristic grace, and produced thorough and timely results.

Although John formally retired from administrative and clinical duties in 1985, he was prevailed upon to return to active status in 1987 to serve of as Acting Chief of Staff at Stanford University Hospital for one year. In that year he also received the Alwin C. Rambar Award for excellence and compassion in patient care and in dealing with all members of the Hospital community.

One might have thought that by this time, at age 74, John had earned a real retirement and he surely had. But he was not idle. John became the Lane Medical Library’s Honorary Curator of Archives and Special Collections. It was in this capacity that John embarked on a 7-year labor of love, working to integrate the historic records of Stanford University School of Medicine and those medical schools that were merged into Stanford. This effort resulted in a 1500-page manuscript entitled “Stanford University School of Medicine and the Predecessor Schools: A Historical Perspective”, which has been published in digital form as an e-book. This monumental work will remain a treasured resource and an everlasting tribute to John L. Wilson.

John Wilson was a tall, slim grey-haired eminence, always properly clad in his long white coat while at work. His favored mode of transportation from his home in Palo Alto to the Medical Center several miles away was his old black

bicycle, which he rode daily, in fair weather and foul, bundled up in cold weather with scarf, gloves, warm coat and ear muffs. His health deteriorated in his later years and he died peacefully, as he had lived, on April 5, 2001, at age 87. He is survived by his wife, Janice, their 5 children and 4 grandchildren. John was held in great affection by all in the Stanford University Community. He will be greatly missed and long remembered.

Quoting Geoffrey Chaucer: “He was a verrey parfit gentil knight”.

Committee:

Eugene A. Bauer, M.D.

Lawrence G. Crowley, M.D.

Robert J. Glaser, M.D.

James B. D. Mark, M.D., Chair