Cushing at the Countway

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O
n April 12, 1978, at the Countway Medical Library, Boston, a program honored Harvey Cushing (1869–1939). This program was part of an ongoing series, “Leaders in American Medicine,” which utilizes films about significant medical men and distinguished discussants to put the person into historical perspective. The series, originally conceived as a part of the history of medicine program at Boston University School of Medicine, is now cosponsored by Tufts Medical School, Brown Medical School, the Boston Medical Library, and the Benjamin Waterhouse Medical History Society, and has been funded by grants to the Section on the History of Medicine, Boston University School of Medicine from the Josiah Macy, Jr., Foundation.

The program on Cushing featured a film of Harvey Cushing removing his 2000th brain tumor at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. The film was presented to the Countway Library by the late Franc D. Ingraham. Each discussant was chosen specifically to review an aspect of Harvey Cushing’s life; each was from a different specialty, bringing its own perspective. Dr. William Sweet, Professor of Surgery Emeritus, Harvard Medical School, spoke on, “Harvey Cushing: Author, Investigator, Neurologist, Neurosurgeon.” Dr. Elias E. Manuelidis, Professor of Pathology and Neurology, and Curator of the Brain Tumor Registry, Yale University School of Medicine, spoke on, “A Neuropathologist’s Perspective on the Celebration of the 2000th Operation of Harvey Cushing.” Dr. Derek Denny-Brown, James Jackson Putnam Professor of Neurology Emeritus, Harvard Medical School, spoke on, “Harvey Cushing: the Man.” This collection of papers was submitted to the Journal of Neurosurgery in consideration of its historical appropriateness.

At the conclusion of the meeting on April 12, 1978, Mr. William Cushing, son of Henry Cushing and grandson of Harvey Cushing, presented to the Countway Library, a silver bowl which had been given to Dr. Harvey Cushing in 1928 (Fig. 1). The bowl was inscribed, “The Chief” from “Pa” Cutler’s Boys January — 1928

“Pa Cutler’s Boys” were the neurosurgical residents and staff who worked with Dr. Elliot Carr Cutler, who succeeded Cushing as Surgeon-in-Chief at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in 1932. The bowl was accepted by Dr. George E. Gifford, Jr., organizer of the “Leaders in American Medicine” series, Consultant to the Historical Collections of the Countway Library, Head of the Section on the History of Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine, and Secretary, Board of Trustees at the Boston Medical Library. The bowl is on exhibit at the Library along with the portrait of Harvey Cushing which hangs in the Minot Room of the Countway (fron-tispiece). The portrait was painted by Will James in 1937, just two years before Cushing’s death. Will James was the son of the famous William James, philosopher and psychologist.

Since the classic Cushing biographies by John Fulton in 1946 and by Elizabeth Thomson in 1950, there have been a few subsequent biographical accounts. Francis D. Moore, who, like Cushing, held the Moseley Professor of Surgery Chair at Harvard Medical School, contributed two articles in 1969. The same year Harvey Cushing’s papers were collected in Harvey Cushing’s Collected Papers on Neurosurgery. In addition to her biography of Cushing, Elizabeth Thomson wrote on Harvey

FIG. 1. Dr. Cushing’s silver bowl.
Cushing for the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography.* Another biographical account of Cushing followed in 1975, authored by Paul Bucy. The most recent article about Harvey Cushing appeared in 1977, entitled “Harvey Cushing: From Tallow Dip to Television.”

It is highly fitting that in 1979, 40 years after Cushing’s death, the *Journal of Neurosurgery* publish these three accounts of Harvey Williams Cushing by distinguished contributors — about the man described in the seminal “Editorial note” of the *Journal of Neurosurgery* as “the foremost neurosurgeon of our time.”

**References**


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