Commemorative Article

John F. Fulton, M.D., and the founding of the 
Journal of Neurosurgery

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The Journal of Neurosurgery, although the idea of a Chilean neurosurgeon, Alfonso Asenjo, was the product of a well-placed and energetic charter member of the Harvey Cushing Society, John F. Fulton. In the researched files the first formal correspondence is that of Asenjo dated May 20, 1943. When he received Paul Bucy's encouraging reply of June 19, 1943, he promptly betook himself to New Haven, where he spent July 3 and 4 with Fulton. Within a week of that visit, Fulton was writing to the Executive Committee of the Harvey Cushing Society recommending the establishment of such a journal. Fulton contacted his friend and publisher, Charles C. Thomas, and by the end of October he was meeting with representatives of the Banta Publishing Company to discuss matters relating to the printing of the Journal of Neurosurgery, in particular, the scarcity of paper. The twin problems of shortages of paper and financing were soon resolved under the guidance of Thomas, but other details remained. Thus, the first issue, scheduled to appear in January, 1944, was not mailed until the middle of March of that year, but thereafter a regular bimonthly schedule was maintained. While Asenjo should be given proper credit for the idea, this essay confirms the validity of Bucy's listing: "John F. Fulton — Founder (1944)."

KEY WORDS - Journal of Neurosurgery - John F. Fulton - neurosurgical history

The founding of the Journal of Neurosurgery was the happy product of an energetic man with a persistent idea, Alfonso Asenjo, setting out to meet with a dynamic man, John F. Fulton, with the ability to translate an idea into active reality. Between July 3, 1943, when the dreamer met with the doer and November 2, 1943, the idea had changed into concrete plans for a new journal devoted to neurosurgery. On that date the news broke in the form of a "Memorandum Announcing A Journal of Neurosurgery Under the Auspices of the Harvey Cushing Society" (Fig. 1). The announcement set forth the scope and style of the Journal for some time to come. This remarkable achievement should be judged in the light of the shortages, rationing, and personal dislocations of World War II. Many, among them neurosurgeons, had been called to active duty with the Armed Forces, while others not called were, nonetheless, deeply involved in various war-related committees and other efforts of wartime activity. Fulton was one of the latter. He was an active member of the National Research Council, with a special interest in aviation medicine. This led to his publication of A Bibliography of Aviation Medicine designed to make the management of its expanding literature easier. Fulton personified the old adage that if you want something done give it to a busy person. A man of boundless energy and ebullient enthusiasm, he could recognize a good idea and pursue it to the end with vigor, never letting protocol impede his progress.

Chronology of Events

Asenjo had written on May 20, 1943, to many neurosurgeons, one of whom was Paul C. Bucy, who had been a Research Assistant in Fulton's laboratory at Yale in 1933. Bucy's response with a copy to Fulton was dated June 19, 1943, heartily endorsing Asenjo's idea of a journal of neurosurgery. He agreed that Fulton, a charter member of the Harvey Cushing Society, was "uniquely gifted" to undertake the project. Within 2 weeks, on July 3, Asenjo was in New Haven visiting with Fulton. In his diary, Fulton has this to say about the encounter: "... receiving a rising tide of good feelings from good neighbors including a Mexican physiologist and Dr. Asenjo, the leading neurosurgeon of South America, head of the Cushing Neurosurgical Pavilion at Santiago de Chile, a particularly nice fellow who knows neurosurgeons all over the world and has come to this country hoping to establish a new Pan-American journal of neurosurgery. The only trouble is
that he does not speak English, and I don't speak Spanish. We got along pretty well in French. . . . " The holiday of July 4 was spent at Mill Rock, Fulton's home. Fulton described the day in his diary: " . . . Lucia put them all to work in the garden after lunch, Asenjo being a little startled by the sight of American womanhood in shorts weeding the garden, — so startled that he stayed until half past six."

Scarcely a week later, on July 12, Fulton sent a letter to each member of the Executive Committee of the Harvey Cushing Society proposing a journal of neurosurgery. Replies were received from all of the members of the Executive Committee, the majority expressing approval of the proposal. Asenjo had accomplished his mission. At the suggestion of Dr. Fincher as President, the idea was put into more concrete form.

Subsequent consultations with other members of the Society were carried on by personal interviews in order to save time. Because of his many war-related projects, Fulton travelled extensively, permitting him to make many of the personal interviews. Asenjo was also given a list of the members so that he could interview those not reached by Fulton. Since most of the interviews were favorable, the project was set in motion. The announcement of the Journal was a presentation of the results of these consultations, not only to the Executive Committee but to all the members of the Society for their approval or criticism (letter dated November 20, 1943, Louise Eisenhardt to Dr. Eric Oldberg).

Fulton contacted his friend, Charles C. Thomas, who had published several of his books and the Journal of Neurophysiology, which was founded by Fulton with J. G. Dusser de Barenne in 1938. They agreed to use George Banta Publishing Company of Menasha, Wisconsin, with offices in New York City.

By October 15, 1943, Fulton was in Washington attending the Second Conference on Wound Ballistics which he had organized for the Council several weeks earlier. From there, he went to Walter Reed Hospital for a conference with Lt. Col. Glen Spurling, Chief of Neurosurgery in the Army, and Capt. Winchell Craig, in charge of neurosurgery in the Navy, in furtherance of the plan to establish the Journal of Neurosurgery. They were most enthusiastic and Fulton concluded in his diary, "I think we shall carry the idea forward and get the Journal out if possible by January."

By October 29, 1943, negotiations had proceeded sufficiently for Reine Gehner, the New York representative, and Piet Peerenboom, President of Banta Publishing Company, from Wisconsin, to come to New Haven to discuss the Journal of Neurosurgery and, in particular, the paper shortage which even the established Journal of Neurophysiology was experiencing. Fulton complained of "the general iniquities of the War Production Board in relation to paper allocation. "Time, Life, P.L, Esquire, and other non-essential publications appear to have unlimited paper." Thomas came to the rescue by making available from his own allotment the paper for the Journal of Neurosurgery. It was then that the memorandum of announcement could be issued (Fig. 1).

The Journal was on its way, and by the middle of November the first 10 subscriptions were received. Among his many other activities, Fulton busied himself with the representative of the Banta Publishing Company over such details as the size and style of type, the paper, and the layout of the Journal. In this regard, Fulton had been fortunate enough to have the advice of the scholarly printer to the Yale University Press, Carl Rollins. Even the color of the cover became an issue as Fulton's choice of a blue cover was considered by Thomas to be confusing because it was the same as that of the Journal of Neurophysiology. So, Fulton agreed to change.

The Woes of Publication

Among the woes of publication were those of financing. In a letter to Fulton from Thomas dated January 21, 1944, the issue of financing was raised because subscriptions were slow in coming. Thomas' suggestion was that "several of us put up a reasonable amount of cash" and, according to Bucy, Fulton made a substantial contribution. However, by February 17, 1944, Thomas was able to write to Fulton that "we are likely to have 300 subscriptions by publication day of the first issue. " After the Journal had been published, Thomas wrote on June 2, 1944, that "subscriptions were well over 500 and 50 more were to be added from the Navy come July."

Throughout the month of January, 1944, Fulton had held several meetings with Reine Gehner and Thomas smoothing out details of publication. Thus, when he presided over the meeting of the National Research Council in Washington on February 8, 1944, so contagious was his enthusiasm about the Journal that it bubbled over at the meeting. His diary records that there was "much talk about the new Journal of Neurosurgery."

On February 19, Fulton was looking over the proofs of the first number of the Journal of Neurosurgery, "which should appear some time next week. It will be a bang-up number." Its appearance did not materialize. Among the delays was a problem in the mailing room of the George Banta Publishing Company, where a neophyte used the wrong mailing list. Piet Peerenboom of Banta, in a note of March 27, 1944, explained: "The people in the mailing room were aware that this [was] a new magazine and that a new mailing list had been cut: for it but went serendipitously to work, using the Journal of Neurophysiology stencils for addressing. " Four hundred and twenty-eight copies were sent from the incorrect mailing list. Fortunately, 59 went to subscribers whose names appeared on both lists, leaving a shortage of 369 copies. Fulton wired back " . . . all is forgiven. Both journals will survive. " Fulton and Thomas converted this situation into a seeming advantage by sending subscription blanks along with the postage-paid envelope for the return of the first issue. This offered the recipients the alternative of subscribing rather than returning the issue.
Jubilation in New Haven but One

The first issue arrived in New Haven on March 17, 1944, putting everyone but Dr. Eisenhardt in a congratulatory mood. She did not receive her copy! She spent the whole day in an uproar. Appeasement was quick in coming. The next day (March 18), in a tone of good-humored impatience, Fulton, the midwesterner, wrote to Thomas: “Pax vobiscum and Pax Louisecum... her copies of the Journal arrived at 10 p.m. last evening... a quaint New England sense of caution... restrained her from writing a check until she saw the first number.”4 Further soothing came from Thomas 2 days later when he wrote to her “... You did an absolutely superb job. A brass band will meet the three new subscribers.”4 And, the Journal of Neurosurgery was now launched in the turbulent seas of World War II. Yet, it was noticed in a brief article on the Harvey Cushing Society in the Journal of the American Medical Association4 and in a short article on fibrin foam in Time under the section heading “Medicine.” Cushing once said that it was not the man who proposed an idea but the one who convinced his colleagues of its utility who received the credit. So, it was not surprising to read that Spurling said that Fulton “had fathered the Journal of Neurosurgery.”1

The years passed and the Journal took on a life of its own. Asenjo served with justifiable pride on the Editorial Board for 7 years and on the Advisory Board for some 30 years. Fulton, on the other hand, found that his racing pace had finally exacted its toll. In 1951, he resigned as Sterling Professor of Physiology to become the Sterling Professor of the History of Medicine in the newly created Department of the History of Medicine at Yale. Yet, like a proud parent he never lost interest in the Journal’s progress. When, in 1958, the March number of the Journal did not appear until the first week in April, Fulton chided Eisenhardt thus: “You are slipping.”3 Again in a note, his last, of May 6, 1960, he pointed out that this was the 17th year of the Journal and suggested to her that a cumulative index would

FIG. 1. The first official announcement of the Journal, which preceded publication of the first issue, dated January, 1944, but mailed in March of that year (see text). (continued →)
and monographs should also include not only the title, but the publisher and date. References are to be arranged alphabetically and cited by date or number. Sample citations are as follows:


Proof corrections. Corrections in galley proof will be allowed free of charge up to 5 per cent of the original cost of composition. The cost for changes in page proof will be borne by the author. Charges, however, will be small and based upon actual time consumed by the compositor. Tabular matter in excess of 10 per cent of composition costs can only be included at the expense of the author.

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FIG. 1. (continued)

increase its usefulness. Fulton died on May 29, 1960. The index for the first 20 volumes did appear in 1964, edited by Dr. Bucy, as a supplement to Volume 21. This included Bucy's fine history concerning the origin and development of the Journal. At the head of the listing of those involved with the Journal over the years stands one name: "John F. Fulton — Founder (1944)."

Bibliographic Note

Two original sources were consulted in the preparation of this historical vignette. The first was the Fulton Diary, housed in the Cushing Room of the Historical Library at the Harvey Cushing-John Hay Whitney Medical Library of the Yale University School of Medicine. The two pertinent volumes are labeled Volume XIX, 28 December 1942—2 January, 1944, and Volume XX, 3 January 1944—1 January 1945. References to the diary are by date. The second original source was found at the Yale University Sterling Memorial Library-Manuscripts and Archives in the collection entitled "John F. Fulton Papers." This material is not yet fully organized so only the title rather than number of the folder can be identified.

References

3. Fulton Correspondence Folder — Fellows — Paul C Bucy (See Bibliographic Note)
4. Fulton Correspondence Folder — Journal of Neurosurgery — Charles C Thomas (See Bibliographic Note)
5. Fulton Correspondence Folder — Journal of Neurosurgery — Louise Eisenhardt (See Bibliographic Note)
6. Fulton Diary (See Bibliographic Note)
7. Cushing Society publishes journal. JAMA 124:661, 1944
8. Time: March 20, 1944, p 48

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