THE HARVEY CUSHING SOCIETY
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE*
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It is grateful and sincere appreciation that I extend to the members of
the Harvey Cushing Society for the honor that has been extended me in
allowing me to represent you as your president during the past year.
It has been a very pleasant task, and it has been made doubly so by the
excellent cooperation of the other officers and of the committees of the
society who have given so much time and effort to make this an outstanding
meeting. May I assure you that election to this office constitutes a very
great honor and marks, for me, the highest point in my career in the field
of neurological surgery.

We are now embarking upon the second quarter century since the
founding of the Harvey Cushing Society, and it would therefore seem
appropriate at this time to review the founding and early days of this or-
ganization; to trace its development, growth and accomplishments during
the past twenty-five years, to evaluate its present status; and surely most
important of all, look ahead to our future—its goals and the policies we
must pursue in achieving them.

First, let us examine the reasons for the formation of this particular
group. The Society of Neurological Surgeons was founded by eleven neuro-
surgeons in 1920 and was, prior to the founding of the Harvey Cushing So-
ciety, the only one in the United States representing this particular spe-
cialty. The membership maintained in this group was restricted to a small
number despite the rapid growth of neurological surgery during the next
ten years. Many of the younger neurosurgeons keenly felt the need for con-
tact with their colleagues in order to effect an exchange of ideas that would
advance their knowledge and improve their skills in this chosen field. On
June 24, 1931, Doctor R. Glen Spurling wrote to Doctor W. P. Van Wagenen
suggesting the formation of a new society and mentioning the names of
other neurosurgeons who might be interested. Following further correspond-
ence, a meeting was held at the Hotel Raleigh in Washington, D.C., on Oc-
tober 10, 1931 and was attended by Doctors Temple Fay, Eustace Semmes,
R. Glen Spurling, and W. P. Van Wagenen. The decision was made to
form a new society, the preliminary purposes and plans, including establish-
ment of a central brain tumor registry, were discussed and names of poten-

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tial members were considered. Doctor Harvey Cushing was advised of the proposed formation of the new group, and he expressed his approval and invited the group to hold their first meeting at his clinic.

Thirty charter members were chosen and the first meeting was held in Boston, May 6, 1932, with twenty-three members of the charter group present. The society was named in honor of its patron, Doctor Harvey Cushing. Doctor William P. Van Wagenen was elected the first president of the Harvey Cushing Society.

At the beginning, the purpose of this society was the promotion and the advancement of the various fields of organic neurology, and this was changed later to the advancement of neurological surgery. The active membership at the beginning of the society included not only neurosurgeons but those in the fields of neurology, neuroanatomy, neuro-ophthalmology, neuropathology, psychiatry, psychology, roentgenology, and other scientific works bearing on neurology. Subsequently, the neurosurgeons have constituted the active membership and the members of the allied fields have become associate members of the society.

![Fig. 1. Dr. W. P. Van Wagenen, Dr. R. Glen Spurling and Dr. R. Eustace Semmes—three of the four original founders of the society.](image)

In order to have closer contact and allow an exchange of ideas it was felt that a small group was desirable, and the society was numerically limited to thirty-five members at the outset. The first program included various scientific papers, and the presentation of operative cases by Doctor Cushing. I could not be otherwise than amused by the title of the paper given by Doctor Stafford Warren who is now the Dean of the University of California School of Medicine at Los Angeles. The name of this paper was the “Treatment of Diseases of the Nervous System by Hyperthermia.” In the past twenty-five years the mercury has fallen. The emphasis is now at the other end of the thermometer.