THE NEUROLOGICAL INSTITUTE AND EARLY NEUROSURGERY IN NEW YORK*

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Your presence here today honors the creators and builders of the Neurological Institute, whose vision and foresight brought to New York, and indeed to this continent, the first hospital devoted to diseases of the nervous system.

On March 9, 1909 Dr. Joseph Collins invited a few public-spirited men of affairs to dine with him and Dr. Fraenkel at the Century Club on March 18 to enlist their approval and obtain their opinion concerning the establishment of a neurological hospital. Mr. Adrian Iselin, Mr. Otto Kahn, Mr. H. K. Knapp, Mr. R. P. Perkins, Mr. Isaac Townsend, Mr. Paul W. Warburg, Dr. Leighton Whitmer, and Mr. R. H. Williams accepted and, with the exception of Dr. Whitmer, subsequently became the Board of Trustees.

It was their unanimous opinion that such an institution was needed. To this end an application for a charter was filed with the New York State Board of Charities, and on April 14, 1909, a certificate of incorporation was granted. A search for a suitable building was undertaken immediately and a few weeks later 167–169 East 67th Street was rented and alterations were begun to convert it into a hospital of 85 beds.

On May 7, 1909 Drs. Collins, Fraenkel and Pearce Bailey met to draft a letter to the Trustees setting forth their views concerning the proposed hospital. As they conceived it, the object of the hospital was twofold—to demonstrate the necessity for a hospital for nervous diseases where patients suffering from these illnesses could be studied and interpreted, helped or cured and, secondly, its most vital function was to serve as an educational center. "Not only shall those who are sick profit from the Institute's existence now, but great profit to all mankind will come through the ministration and example of those who are taught here." There was no place in America where patients with functional disorders and those with some impending mental disorder could be treated and restored, and where bedside instruction could be given with laboratories and surgical facilities available. To fill these needs the Neurological Institute was founded.

Several out-patient neurological clinics had been in existence, notably the clinic of Weir Mitchell in Philadelphia and the Vanderbilt Clinic in New

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York, begun by Edward Seguin in 1888 and carried forward, as part of the Department of Neurology of Columbia University, by Allen Starr and Frederick Tilney, professors in this department. The Vanderbilt Clinic served as the training ground for many New York neurologists—Joseph Collins, Pearce Bailey, Frederick Peterson, Ramsay Hunt, Walter Timme, Smith Ely Jelliffe and Abraham Brill, to mention but a few. But no opportunity existed for bedside instruction and study other than an occasional patient in a general hospital. To become an adequately trained neurologist several years of study abroad were essential.

From the very first year of the Neurological Institute’s existence the imperative need for such a hospital was amply demonstrated and in each succeeding year the hospital ran to capacity. It served as a pilot plant to demonstrate the value and practicability of such an institution; it developed a Therapeutic and Rehabilitation Department and an Occupational Therapy Department to serve the special problems of neurologically disabled patients. Pearce Bailey established a Laboratory School for backward children and a Classification Clinic to give complete neurological and mental examinations to non-indigent adolescents who were failing in some way to meet what was required of them and, on the basis of demonstrated capacity, to help the individual attain his potentialities. Teachers, headmasters and headmistresses were greatly interested; a course of lectures for their benefit was begun. Nurses were trained in the care of neurological problems and many other innovations were made.

The Institute began in a rented building without endowment, its requirements from year to year being met by the Trustees. Attempts were made in 1910, 1911, 1912, 1916 and 1917 to raise money for a new building, the last efforts being interrupted by World War I. The idea of such a hospital was too new, and a generous public was not yet aware of the great need, now so universally recognized, to study mental and nervous disorders. Foundations were unwilling to finance a project, the necessity for which they felt required further demonstration. Years later, when the advantages of such a hospital had been proven, large foundations were interested and generously helped to establish similar institutions.

Pearce Bailey, foreseeing the likelihood of our entry into the first World War was granted leave of absence in 1914 to go abroad to study the management of mental and nervous diseases, and injuries of the nervous system resulting from the war. In 1917 he was called to the Surgeon General’s office where, among other important innovations, he was able to secure an order requiring a neuropsychiatrist in each base hospital and combat organization. Bailey’s outstanding contributions in the direction of the neuropsychiatric service won for him the Distinguished Service Medal.

A school for neuropsychiatrists was established at the Neurological Institute under Dr. Timme and one for neurosurgeons under Dr. Elsberg. Three 10-week courses were given to each group of 30 men.* These courses,

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* In this connection it is interesting to note that during the Civil War the Surgeon General’s office issued a circular dated December 22, 1862 requiring surgeons to attend lectures on military surgery.