

# The Oslerian

*A Message from the President*

## Osler's Bedside Library: A Survey and a Proposal

*Greetings, Fellow Oslerians*

In one of his final acts as president of the American Osler Society, Chester Burns asked that I form a small committee to look at revising and updating Osler's "Bedside Library for Medical Students." Robert Rakel and Herb Swick joined me on that committee, and we soon decided that "improving" Osler was beyond our meager abilities. We carried out an informal survey of American Osler Society members, asking them to give us their personal list of ten book titles that they would recommend to medical students (I think for our purposes we can consider all sentient doctors as students, not just the tyro students of an organized medical school). We also asked respondents to tell us how many of Osler's ten books they had themselves read and to comment on what they saw as Osler's purpose in making the original list (Table 1). We got 19 responses from 18 Oslerians (one sent the questionnaire twice—and, interestingly, the two responses were not identical, which tells us something about the will-o'-the-wisp nature of the task Chester set for us). Those 19 responses form the basis of this report and have led to a proposal that I think would satisfy Chester's original charge.

**Table 1. Osler's Bedside Library for Medical Students**

I. Old and New Testaments	VI. Epictetus
II. Shakespeare	VII. <i>Religio Medici</i>
III. Montaigne	VIII. <i>Don Quixote</i>
IV. Plutarch's <i>Lives</i>	IX. Emerson
V. Marcus Aurelius	X. Oliver Wendell Holmes— <i>Breakfast-Table Series</i>

It seems to me that Chester was quite correct in his implication that the original list is unlikely to appeal to twenty-first-century medical students in part because of the ponderous prose style of some of Osler's authors (Plutarch and Brown, for example). This sentiment is borne out by the responses of our survey participants, who were asked to note whether they had read little-to-none or much-to-all of the entries on Osler's list. Their responses are shown in Table 2, where "0%" means that little or none of the item was read by any of our respondents and "100%" would mean that much or all was read by the respondents. If this were a report card, Shakespeare would get an "A" and the Old and New Testament a "B"; *Don Quixote* would have a "D+" and all the other entries would flunk (poor old Epictetus doesn't even get on the radar screen).

This brief survey implies that even dedicated (and not young) Oslerians ignore the master's advice when it comes to reading to prepare for a life in medicine.

*(Continued on page 2)*

**Table 2. Indications of 19 respondents as to whether they'd read items in Table 1**

Shakespeare	95%
Old and New Testaments	84%
<i>Don Quixote</i>	68%
Oliver Wendell Holmes	53%
<i>Religio Medici</i>	42%
Emerson	42%
Marcus Aurelius	37%
Plutarch's <i>Lives</i>	32%
Montaigne	21%
Epictetus	0%

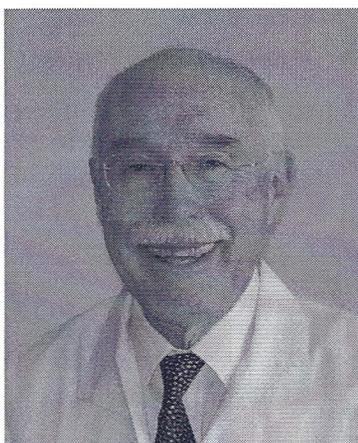
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**Frank A. Neelon**

**President's Letter (continued)**

Respondents were asked to submit their own candidates of books for a twenty-first century reading list. A total of 124 book titles were provided (the final tally does not include entries such as "internet access" or "*The Times Literary Supplement*"). Seventy-eight titles appeared only once; these ranged from the *Q'uran* and other non-Biblical holy books and *The Gospel According to Peanuts*, to the New Fowler's *Modern English*, Toynbee's *A Study of History*, Orwell's *1984*, and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. I could discern no pattern in the sum of responses except to assume that they represent each respondent's list of personal favorites at the moment. No one made clear the reasons for their choices.

Thirteen of the cited works were listed by multiple respondents. Interestingly, Osler's original list fares pretty well in the sense that contemporary respondents would retain four of Osler's choices and the rank order of these four mirrors their positions in Table 2. Still, none of the works was listed on even half of the responses, which really brings us to the crux of the problem of "updating" Osler's selections—it seems unlikely that we will ever get a consensus, and certainly not of ten.

At least five other authors<sup>1-5</sup> have looked at Osler's recommended Bedside Library and offered comments and suggestions. The papers by Reynolds, Rakel, and Pai and Gurashani provide new lists based on surveys carried out by the authors, while Massey and Goldman mediate on Osler's original list, but don't give us new ones. The paper by Hallberg<sup>6</sup> lists books the author and some colleagues consider worth reading, but it does not mention or allude to Osler's list. To my eye, the single most striking thing about these newer lists is the lack of any common thread that links the choices. At best, the authors give brief comments about their books and why they are worth reading or try to ferret out the motives lying behind the choices.

Perhaps the wild diversity of recommended books (Table 3) reflects the absence of any stated criteria for choice. It is not even clear what were Osler's motives in proposing his ten works. I suspect that behind all the array of nominated readings is the sense that medical practice, despite its reliance on and celebration of biological science, remains a somewhat mysterious enterprise, full of "snarled problems and pratfalls"—the moral and ethical and spiritual dimensions of practice that are not illuminated by scientific inquiry. Medical doctors, asked to describe what they do that is helpful to the sick, give only superficial and unsatisfactory answers (in the words of Michael Polanyi, we "know more than we can tell"). This inability to describe the doctor's job in simple, declarative phrases, leads us to recommend that students read books that seemed to have helped us mold strongly-held, if difficult to articulate, ideas about what constitutes doctoring. This is akin to the idea of Carl Rogers that little that is of value can be taught, but that much that is of value can be learned. Given the shifting sands on which the various reading lists are constructed, it is not surprising that they should be so diverse.

Chester Burns's exercise has brought me to the conclusion that the world does not need another print version of an "updated" Osler's list. Print is too rigid for this purpose. What we need is a living document, capable of change and revision as times and respondents' moods change. Because print can't do this but com-

**Table 3. Suggestions for a Twenty-First Century Bedside Library for Medical Students (number of citations)**

Works of Shakespeare	8
Old and New Testaments	6
<i>Don Quixote</i> (Cervantes)	4
Poems in English (various anthologies)	4
<i>The Doctor Stories</i> (William Carlos Williams)	4
<i>William Osler: A Life in Medicine</i> (Blss)	4
<i>Religio Medio</i> (Brown)	3
Life of Johnson (Boswell)	2
<i>Man's Search for Meaning</i> (Frankel)	2
Osler's Collected Essays	2
<i>The Prince</i> (Machiavelli)	2
<i>The Story of Civilization</i> (Durant)	2
Works of Winston Churchill	2

puters can, I propose that the American Osler Society sponsor a web-based catalogue of recommended books. This would include more than just recommended titles, though. We would need a brief but cogent paragraph outlining the nominator's reasons for suggesting the work and why it is of value for "medical students" (that is, all of us). We could attach "reviews" of each entry by anyone who wants to respond. We could keep submitted titles on a probationary list; if no seconding comments are received, they would be deleted after six months; if there is at least one positive seconding comment, those items (and the accompanying comments) would be moved to the "permanent" list where further commentaries would be solicited and stored. If the list becomes so large as to be unwieldy, items that do not stand the test of time (based on received comments) would be removed. The list would doubtlessly be longer than 10 items, but we could organize it into sections with common themes.

I would very much like to hear what Oslerians think of this idea and whether we should move forward with it.

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## REFERENCES

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## Minutes, Board of Governors, American Osler Society, 30 April 2007

1. Members of the Board of Governors of the American Osler Society met in the Printemps Room of the Hotel Omni Mont-Royal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Present were Drs. Charles Ambrose, Charles Bryan, Stephen Greenberg, Joseph Lella, William McMillan, Robert Martensen, Sandra Moss, Paul Mueller, Jock Murray, Francis Neelon, John Noble, Claus Pierach, Clyde Partin, Charles Roland, and Marvin Stone, and Ms. Pamela Miller. Jock Murray, president, called the meeting to order at 7:20 P.M.

2. A moment of silence was observed in memory of Chester R. Burns, who died in December 2006.

3. Dr. Murray called for additional agenda items. Sandra Moss added one, conveyed to her by Allen Weisse (see below).

4. Minutes of the 2006 Board of Governors meeting held 1 May in Halifax, Nova Scotia, were approved as written and previously distributed in the August 2006 issue of *The Oslerian*.

5. *Secretary-Treasurer's Report*: Dr. Bryan gave this report, reference being made to information published in the February 2007 issue of *The Oslerian*. There are at present 172 members, distributed in the following categories: 6 honorary members, 111 active members, 2 associate members, 45 emeritus members, 5 student members, and 3 inactive members. Year-end liquid assets (31 December 2006) was at an all-time high of \$543,221.51 distributed (for internal accounting purposes) as follows: \$239,918.73 (44.2%) in the John P. McGovern Lectureship Fund, \$111,320.81 (20.5%) in the William B. Bean Educational Endowment; and \$191,982.97 (35.3%) in uncommitted funds. Liquid assets on 27 April 2007 (with all outstanding bills paid prior to the annual meeting) were \$568,347.70, distributed as follows: \$536,599.57 in the Fidelity Y99 account (an investment account), \$12,286.80 in the Fidelity X15 account (an interest-bearing checking account), and \$19,461.33 in the Bank of America Account (an escrow account). During 2006 there were no unusual expense items. A large deficit incurred at the annual meeting in Halifax (see the February 2007 issue of *The Oslerian*) was offset by a favorable (9.61%) return from the Fidelity Y99 account. Dr. Bryan reported on steps taken to avoid similarly large deficits in the future, specifically (1) issuing tickets for the two luncheons, at near-cost; (2) avoiding or minimizing the expenses for receipt-free receptions; and (3) cash bars this year's and future banquets. Two unusual expense items anticipated for 2007 have now been paid, as follows: \$20,851.79 for the supplement issue of the *Journal of Medical Biography*, paid on 12 March 2007; and \$2,307.24 for the purchase of 30 new president's plaques, paid on 17 April 2007. Dr. Bryan's only recommendations for 2007 were for (1) fiscal conservatism; and (2) enhanced long-range planning. This report was accepted as information.

6. *William B. Bean Student Research Award Committee*: Robert Kimbrough's report was given *in absentia*. There were nine applicants, which probably constitutes a record. The recipients are Neil T. Jenkins of Ohio State University College of Medicine and Paul J. Krezanoski of Boston University School of Medicine. Dr. Bryan reported that the recipients have been notified and have been given their research stipends. All nine applicants have been given copies of this year's program and encouraged to continue their interest in

the medical humanities.

7. *John P. McGovern Award Lectureship Committee*: Claus Pierach reported that this year's recipient is Abraham Verghese.

8. *Nominating Committee*: Marvin Stone reported recommendations as follows: for second vice-president, John Noble; and for three-year terms on the Board of Governors, Robert G. Mennel, Paul S. Mueller, and Steven J. Peitzman.

9. *Finance Committee*: Paul Dymont's report was given *in absentia*. The Society's portfolio with Fidelity Investments is distributed among 24 funds, with a target allocation of 50% in stock funds, 40% in bond funds, and 10% in money market funds. During the fiscal year 2006 the return in the Society's principal investment fund ("Y 99") increased by 9.61%, compared with a 15.8% return for the Standard and Poor 500 Index (U.S. stocks) and 4.3% for the Lehman Brothers Aggregate bond index. Dr. Dymont concludes that the Society's investment funds continue to bring a satisfactory return, historically doing somewhat better than such indices as the S & P 500 Index and the Dow-Jones Industrial Index during "lean" years although not quite as well during "growth" years. Put differently, the Society's investments are oriented toward conservative growth.

10. *Membership Committee*: Daniel Morgan's report was given *in absentia*. Recommended for membership were Drs. Darryl Bind-schadler, Robert A. Kyle, and Robert I. Levy. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to admit all three to membership based on their complete applications and superb qualifications.

11. *Historian-Archivist's Report*: Charles Roland presented his report along with a two-page handout. The Osler Library's History of Medicine series now includes Richard Golden's edited volume, *The Transatlantic Voice*, and two additional manuscripts are being considered for future publication. Dr. William Feindel reports progress with the archives of Dr. Wilder Penfield, a founding member of the AOS, and also a republication of *No Man Alone*, Penfield's autobiography. The archivist regularly handles, with Mrs. Pamela Miller and the Osler Library staff, requests for information, photographs, and reprints. Dr. Feindel provided a memorial tribute to the late Archibald Edward Malloch (1926-2006), a longtime supporter and curator of the Osler Library and, through his mother, a relative of William Osler. Professor Malloch had contributed substantial information for Charles Roland's forthcoming biography of his grandfather, another Archibald Edward Malloch (1844-1919). Dr. Roland, at the request of the Malloch family, recently presented Revere Osler's christening cup to the Osler Library. Finally, Dr. Roland reported that he has continued to collect and submit various materials to the AOS archives maintained by the Osler Library.

12. *Program Committee*: Frank Neelon reported on the status of this year's meeting program and on the selection process for submissions.

13. *Publications Committee*: Clyde Partin reported that a major activity during the past year has been work toward an electronic data base, conducted primarily by Michael Jones with support by

Frank Neelon. Dr. Neelon reported that, during his forthcoming presidential year, he planned to donate to the Society a one-year subscription to the AskSam database. Dr. Partin also reported the following: (1) Publications included *The Transatlantic Voice: A Philological Study*, edited by Golden RG, Bryan CS, and Golden JT (Osler Library Studies of the History of Medicine #10) and a supplement issue of *The Journal of Medical Biography*; (2) Dr. Partin submitted to Dr. Golden, the historian-archivist, a synopsis of the 2006 annual meeting; (3) a PowerPoint presentation by Charles Ambrose entitled "The Immortal Osler: Reflections on the Life of Sir William Osler" will be put on the Society's website; (4) Dr. Bryan has communicated with Ms. Julie Mitchell of the John P. McGovern Foundation about the possibility of beginning a John P. McGovern Fund for the Society's publications; (5) The idea of publishing a distillation of Earl Nation's writings remains on the table; and (6) The committee continues to encourage members who have no intention of publishing their presentations to submit their manuscript and/or PowerPoint presentation to the Osler Library, as from time to time researchers request information about past presentations.

14. *AOS-AAHM Liaison Committee*. Charles Bryan reported that this committee, which was structurally a committee appointed by the American Association for the History of Medicine (AAHM) rather than the AOS, now appears to be defunct.

*Lifetime Achievement Award*. Bruce Fye's report was given *in absentia*. The 2007 recipient is Dr. Lawrence D. Longo.

15. *AOS Visiting Professorship Committee*. John Noble reported that the activities of this committee are currently on hold, as relatively little interest has been forthcoming from members.

16. *Ad Hoc Committee on Professionalism*. Charles Bryan reported that the activities of this committee are currently on hold. Paul Mueller reported that a major conference on medical professionalism will be held in Rochester, Minnesota, 4-5 October 2007.

17. *Ad Hoc Committee to Compile a Recommended Reading List for Twenty-First Century Medical Students*. Frank Neelon reported that 24 members have submitted lists, with little commonality among them. Dr. Neelon has concluded that the idea of such a list does not appear to be especially practical, given the diversity of today's reading tastes even among members of the AOS. Several members present suggested that, while a circumscribed list of, say, 10 books does not appear especially practical, a list might nevertheless be generated indicating the merits of various books—that is, "here's why" a book might appeal to medical students.

18. *President's report*. Jock Murray reported briefly on activities during the past year. He noted that four founding members of the AOS will be present at this year's meeting: William Gibson, Albert Henderson, Earl Nation, and Charles Roland.

19. *Rob Stone's video project*. As old business, Marvin Stone reported that this video has just recently been completed. It will be shown at this year's annual meeting.

20. *Item of New Business*. Sandra Moss reported that Allen Weiss has asked why there is a limit to the number of active members (currently, 125). Several members present pointed out that this issue does not seem especially urgent, since the current number of

active members (111, or 114 after the current meeting) is well shy of this ceiling. Jock Murray suggested that we review the criteria for membership. He pointed out that William Osler might consider the Society's mission statement to be somewhat odd, since it seemed to be focused mainly on him. Robert Martensen commented on the importance of reflecting on the "DNA of an organization" and agreed that the mission statement should perhaps be adjusted. There was general consensus that Allen Weiss's question contains merit.

21. *Committee appointments*. Jock Murray, with input from those present, made the following appointments:

*Nominating committee*: Claus Pierach (chair), Jock Murray, Marvin Stone

*William B. Bean Student Scholarship Award*: Mark Silverman (chair), Charles Ambrose, and Clif Cleaveland.

*John P. McGovern Award Committee*: Marvin Stone (chair), Lawrence Longo, Jock Murray.

*Membership Committee*: Pamela Miller (chair), Frank Neelon, John Noble.

*Program Committee*: Joseph Lella (chair), Philip Leon, Pamela Miller, Sandra Moss.

*Finance Committee*: Paul Dymont (chair), Dee Canale, Bruce Fye, Perry Hookman, Charles Wooley, Charles Bryan (*ex officio*).

*Publications Committee*: Clyde Partin (chair), Frank Neelon, Joe Lella, Charles Roland, Preston Reynolds, Mike Jones, Arthur Gryfe.

*Visiting Professionalism Committee*: John Noble (chair), Herbert Swick, Clyde Partin, Joseph Lella, Marvin Stone, Charles Bryan.

*Lifetime Achievement Award Committee*: Bruce Fye (chair), Cynthia Pitcock, Robert Kimbrough.

22. *Honorary Membership*: There were no recommendations.

23. *Local Arrangements Committee*: Pamela Miller reported on arrangements for this year's meeting, which will include at least two opportunities for members to visit the Osler Library.

24. *Future meeting locations and dates*:

*The 2008 meeting*: This is scheduled for Boston, Massachusetts, 4-7 May. John Noble reported on progress made thus far.

*The 2009 meeting*: No site has been chosen or strongly recommended. The following suggestions were made: Baltimore, Cincinnati, Glasgow, London, New York City, and St. Louis. (Following the meeting, Pittsburgh was also suggested.)

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles S. Bryan

Secretary-Treasurer

## Minutes, Annual Meeting, American Osler Society, 2 May 2007

1. Members of the American Osler Society met in the Salon des Saisons in the Hotel Omni Mont-Royal, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Jock Murray, president, called the meeting to order at 7:40 A.M.

2. A moment of silence was observed in memory of Chester R. Burns, who died in December 2006.

3. *Secretary-Treasurer's Report*. Dr. Bryan gave this report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting. This report was accepted as information.

4. *William B. Bean Student Research Award Committee*. Robert Kimbrough's report was given *in absentia*, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

5. *John P. McGovern Award Lectureship Committee*. Claus Pierach reported that this year's recipient is Abraham Verghese.

6. *Nominating Committee*. Marvin Stone reported recommendations as follows: for second vice-president, John Noble; and for three-year terms on the Board of Governors, Robert G. Mennel, Paul S. Mueller, and Steven J. Peitzman. A motion was made, seconded, and approved to accept this slate by acclamation.

7. *Finance Committee*. Paul Dymant's report was given *in absentia*, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

8. *Membership Committee*. Daniel Morgan gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting. Allen Weisse asked why no action had been taken on his previous suggestion that the Society's limitation (cap) on the number of active members should be removed. Reference was made to Article XII of the Bylaws, which stipulate: "The members of the Society may recommend amendment of these Bylaws by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members of the Board [of Governors] who are present at any meeting of the Board if notice of the meeting and the proposed amendment has been duly given. Recommendations must be passed by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of those members present at any annual meeting of the Society. A suggestion was made to Dr. Weiss that he put this request in writing so that it can be published in *The Oslerian* and voted upon at next year's meeting of the Board of Governors and then, if approved by the Board, at the annual meeting. Dr. Weiss accepted this suggestion.

9. *Historian-Archivist's Report*. Charles Roland gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

10. *Program Committee*. Frank Neelon gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

11. *Publications Committee*. Clyde Partin gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting. He reported that he would still like to obtain copies of papers presented at the annual meeting, either as manuscripts or Power-Point presentations.

12. *Lifetime Achievement Award*. Bruce Fye reported that this

year's recipient is Dr. Lawrence D. Longo.

13. *AOS Visiting Professorship Committee*. John Noble gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

14. *Ad Hoc Committee on Professionalism*. There was no report.

15. Ad Hoc Committee to Compile a Recommended Reading List for Twenty-First Century Medical Students: Frank Neelon gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

16. *Committee appointments*. Jock Murray gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

17. *Future meeting sites and dates*. Jock Murray gave the report, reference being made to the minutes of the Board of Governors meeting.

18. *Expression of gratitude to this year's John P. McGovern Lecturer, Abraham Verghese*. Jock Murray conveyed his appreciation.

19. *Introduction of new members and presentation of certificates*. The following were welcomed into the Society: Darryl Bindschadler, Robert A. Kyle, and Robert I. Levy.

20. *New Business*. John Carson moved that the Society go on record as willing to give financial support to Rob Stone's video project. The motion was seconded and approved by acclamation.

21. *Introduction of new president*. Jock Murray introduced Francis A. Neelon as president of the American Osler Society for 2007-2008 and presented him with the latchkey, symbol of office.

22. *Expression of appreciation to outgoing president*. Frank Neelon expressed his appreciation to Jock Murray and presented him with a plaque containing a replica of the latchkey and also a gift from the Society.

23. *Address by Dr. Richard Levin, Dean of the McGill University School of Medicine*. Pamela Miller introduced Dr. Levin as the recently-arrived dean. Dr. Levin welcomed the AOS to Montreal. He commented briefly on two issues facing medical education: (1) the loss of the hospital as a "human classroom" wherein the main focus is on the patient-physician encounter at the bedside; and (2) the limited contact between today's medical students and the laboratory. These comments were well-received.

24. *Adjournment*. The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles S. Bryan  
Secretary-Treasurer

## AMERICAN OSLER SOCIETY

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Spend the last half-hour of the day  
in communion with the saints of  
humanity.

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### Aequanimitas

*The Oslerian is published approximately four times a year by the American Osler Society, Inc., a non-profit organization. Members of the American Osler Society are encouraged to send news items of interest, including but by no means limited to their personal activities and accomplishments and accompanied by photographs or other illustrations. For distribution of reprints and other materials of possible interest to AOS members, please send 180 copies. Your ideas for The Oslerian are of course most welcome! Direct all correspondence by mail, fax, or e-mail to the Secretary-Treasurer.*

The American Osler Society has been founded for the purpose of bringing together members of the medical and allied professions who are, by their common inspiration, dedicated to memorialize and perpetuate the just and charitable life, the intellectual resourcefulness and the ethical example of **William Osler** (1849-1919). This, for the benefit of succeeding generations, that their motives be ever more sound, that their vision be on everbroadening horizons, and that they sail not as Sir Thomas Browne's Ark, without oars and without rudder and sails and, therefore, without direction.

## Local Arrangements for the 2008 Annual Meeting, Boston, May 4-7

John Noble reports that plans continue to come along nicely for the 2008 annual meeting, which will include the following schedule:

*Sunday, May 4:* Literature and Medicine Discussion Group; Board of Governors Meeting

*Monday, May 5:* Evening boat cruise of Boston Harbor

*Tuesday May 6:* Banquet at the Harvard Club, with reception in the Aesculapian Room and dinner in Harvard Hall

There will be both morning and afternoon program sessions on Monday and Tuesday, and a morning session on Wednesday. John is planning a special event in the famed Ether Dome, which will feature a presentation on the history of anesthesia. Members from Georgia are especially invited, to state their case for the priority of Crawford Long!

## Dates and Locations for 2009 and 2010 Annual Meetings

The 2009 meeting is tentatively scheduled for Cleveland, Ohio, April 20-23 (Monday evening through noon on Thursday). This will be in tandem with the annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine, which is scheduled for Cleveland, April 23-26. (Cleveland was chosen over other sites after much deliberation, which took into account the desideratum of holding a meeting equally convenient to members from either coast. St. Louis had been the initial choice, but our members there suggested Cleveland on account of the AAHM meeting there.) Our member James Young, who chairs the Division of Medicine at the Cleveland Clinic, will be our local arrangements chair.

The 2010 meeting is scheduled for Rochester, Minnesota, April 25-28. This will again be in tandem with the AAHM meeting.