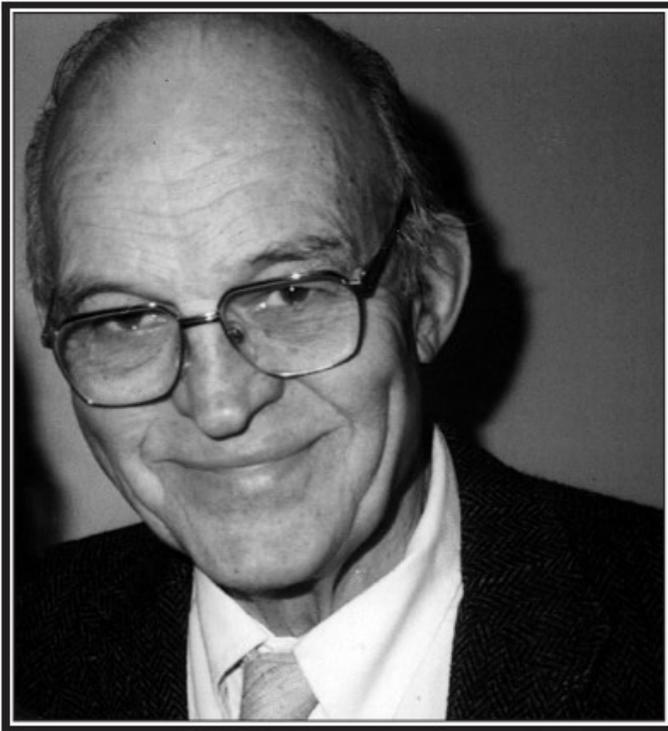




# Thornton Brown



Thornton Brown was born in 1913 at home in Boston, and died in Canton, Massachusetts, on July 4, 2000, at the age of 86. His early life was spent in Boston, and his education and professional life were centered in the Boston area as well.

At Milton Academy, Thornie played fullback on the football team; when tough yards were needed, his number was called, and he could be depended upon to produce them, thus earning the nickname of “five-yard Brown.” This trait of quiet tenacity was evidenced throughout his life.

After graduating from Milton, Thornie attended Harvard College, graduating in 1936, and Harvard Medical School, earning his M.D. in 1940. His postgraduate medical training was interrupted by World War II, during which he served in the Navy as a battalion surgeon with the Marines in the Pacific Theater.

Thornie and Sarah Tyler Meigs were married in 1944, and made their home in Milton for most of their fifty-four years of married life. Following his discharge from the Navy, Thornie completed his orthopaedic residency as Chief Resident at the Massachusetts General Hospital and Children’s Hospital in 1948. His interest in the field of orthopaedics was undoubtedly stimulated by the fact that his father, Lloyd Thornton Brown, was an orthopaedist at the Robert Breck Brigham Hospital in Boston. Lloyd was known for his treatment of children with club feet.

Thornie entered practice in Boston with Drs. Frank R. Ober, Albert H. Brewster, and Joseph S. Barr. Other associates were Paul W. Hugenberg, Eugene E. Record, and Thomas L. De Lorme, Jr. Thornie’s quiet demeanor and attention to detail characterized his approach to patient care and clinical orthopaedics. When presenting a case to Dr. Brown in the clinic or on rounds, the resident was well advised to be fully prepared, otherwise weak spots would be noted with a mild, constructive (and long-remembered) reprimand.

One of Thornie’s clinical interests was the lumbar spine; he and Dr. Paul Norton engaged in pioneering work on the biomechanics of the lumbar spine. They designed the Norton-Brown brace, which

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*In tribute to their dedicated efforts to science and medicine, deceased members of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine (those at the rank of full or emeritus professor) receive a review of their life and contributions with a complete reflection, a **Memorial Minute**.*

immobilized the lumbar spine more effectively than previous braces, thus allowing patients following lumbar arthrodesis to escape cumbersome plaster casts and prolonged bed rest.

In 1958, Thornie began a new career as editor of *The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery*, succeeding Dr. William A. Rogers. Thornie served as editor for twenty years and was followed by Dr. Paul H. Curtiss, Jr. in 1978. Thornie inherited a publication that was, and remains, the leading journal in orthopaedics and one of the premier peer-reviewed journals in all of medicine.

Under Thornie's guidance, *The Journal* increased to eight issues a year and cemented ties with its British counterpart (founded in 1947). He initiated the publications of *Orthopaedic Transactions and The Annual Bibliography of Orthopaedic Surgery*. He worked to decrease the time from submission to publication of articles without lessening the peer review process. Aspiring authors knew that several rewrites were the standard before muster would be passed with Dr. Brown and his editorial board. One grateful author commented: "I gave him the ingredients! He made the cake!" His battered briefcase, heavy with manuscripts in various stages of the editorial process, was never far from his side.

Thornie served two terms as Interim Chief of the Orthopaedic Service at MGH. Dr. Joseph S. Barr was forced to retire for health reasons in October 1964, and Thornie took over until Dr. Melvin J. Glimcher was appointed Chief in 1965. Dr. Glimcher transferred his laboratory to Children's Hospital in 1970 and again Thornie served as Chief until 1972, when Dr. Henry J. Mankin was appointed Chief. During this time, Thornie was appointed Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at Harvard Medical School.

After retiring from *The Journal*, Thornie continued to assist Drs. Paul Curtiss and Henry R. Cowell, his successors, into his eighties. Dr. Cowell remembered Thornie as one who did not offer advice unless asked, and commented that Thornie was "the quintessential New Englander" and "the epitome of the work ethic." He sharpened pencils with his trusty pocket knife and used them down to the nub. He carted away used office furniture to be recycled! Soup and salad was his daily lunch, without variation.

In 1979, Thornie served as President of the American Orthopaedic Association, a fitting tribute to his contributions in orthopaedics. His presidential duties were carried out with typical thoroughness and modesty. In 1987, he published *The American Orthopaedic Association – A Centennial History*.

Outside his professional life, Thornie was devoted to his family and to their church. He served the First Parish Church, Unitarian Universalist, in Milton for many years as a perpetual member of the Building and Grounds Committee and as Chair of the Parish Committee more than once. On Sundays, he often went home, changed his clothes, and returned to church to fix whatever needed attention. His minister noted that he was "far beyond a pillar of the church," he was the "foundation of the church." He was "the divine gardener" with animate objects and would recycle or repair inanimate things with typical Yankee frugality. His home used solar energy and he often had some left over to sell to Boston Edison!

Thornie and Sarah had four children: son Edward, an endocrinologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, and daughters Marian, a teacher in Grafton, Nina, a landscape architect in Brookline, and Dixie, a writer in Amherst. Ed's daughter, Rebecca, is now a student at HMS and will be a fourth-generation physician in the family. How proud Thornie would be of her! At his memorial service, Dixie remembered his "amazing energy" and that "he brought care to what he did." Each morning he would "prepare six oranges with surgical precision" while emphasizing the need for "bone-building milk and oatmeal" as her mother cooked the eggs.

Sarah died in 1998. Thornie's last years were plagued by metastatic carcinoma of the prostate; he met that challenge characteristically with quiet resolve, and with no complaints or self-pity. Thornton Brown, M.D. was born to a proud orthopaedic tradition; he carried that banner forward with pride, dignity, and unfailing energy.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph S. Barr, Jr., *Chairperson*

Henry R. Cowell

Paul H. Curtiss, Jr.

Melvin J. Glimcher

Henry J. Mankin