



Thomas Angell Warthin



Thomas Angell Warthin died at home in Walpole, Massachusetts, on August 12, 1997 in his eighty-ninth year. Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan of physician parents, Katherine Angell and Aldred Scott Warthin, he had his primary education in the local schools and received his A.B. degree from the University of Michigan.

When he entered Harvard Medical School Warthin was a bright and serious young man with an affable and outgoing nature. He quickly developed many friends and became a role model to all of warmth, cordiality and humor. He took part in a number of student organizations, including Nu Sigma Nu. Tom saw to it that whenever Nu Sigma Nu had a major party virtually all the members of the class were invited. The occasions were always

delightful.

Warthin interned from 1934 to 1936 at Boston City Hospital on the Fourth Medical (Harvard) Service, which was affiliated with the Thorndike Memorial Laboratory at that time. The teaching staff included George R. Minot, Soma Weiss, Chester Keefer, Clark Heath, Henry Jackson, Jr., Alfred W. Palfrey and a sequence of promising young research fellows. Warthin then served as assistant resident in medicine on Francis G. Blake's service at the Yale-New Haven Hospital from 1936 to 1937 and was a research fellow in medicine at Johns Hopkins Hospital from 1937 to 1939. He returned to Boston where he practiced with a small group of internists at 226 Marlborough Street for several years. During this time he was an assistant in medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital and an HMS instructor.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Warthin immediately decided to enter the service, and on June 20, 1942 reported for active duty to the U.S. Army Air Force. After flight surgeon training, he was assigned to the Fifth Army (MacArthur's tactical) Air Force in the Southwest Pacific.

*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**.*

Following his release from active duty as a lieutenant colonel, with four campaign ribbons and a letter of commendation, he continued to be active in the Army Medical Corps Reserve. He served as a commander of the 804th Army Hospital Center in Boston and as a consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army, retiring in 1969 at the compulsory age of 60. Four years earlier, after two months active duty at the Leavenworth Staff and Command School, he was promoted to brigadier general. He continued his duties in Boston and at the time of retirement in 1969 was in command of all the Army Medical Reserves in New England.

At the close of World War II Warthin was impressed by the progress in reorganizing the system of Veteran's Administration hospitals so that most would be located close to academic medical centers. In 1948 Warthin became chief of one of two parallel medical services at the then new Boston Veteran's Administration Hospital on South Huntington Avenue, sometimes jocularly referred to as the Taj Mahal. He was also both a clinical professor of medicine at Tufts Medical School and an instructor at Harvard, but the arrangement was not entirely to his liking, and in 1952 he welcomed the opportunity to become chief of the medical service at the Veteran's Administration Hospital (now VAMC) in West Roxbury.

At that same time he commenced regular teaching at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. He was full professor from 1970 to 1975 and professor emeritus thereafter.

Warthin demonstrated not only thoroughness in caring for his patients but care and concern for the welfare of the resident staff. He had a large unpretentious frame house with seven acres of low-lying fields in Norwood. Every spring he invited the entire house staff to a picnic and ball game. This annual event was seen by his colleagues as the social event of the year. Warthin's generosity and his gift for hospitality were a reaffirmation of the concern for others that he had demonstrated earlier when entertaining classmates in medical school. Warthin enjoyed particularly his professional collaboration with Richard Warren, a classmate who served as chief of surgery at VAMC West Roxbury, and with David Littman, the cardiologist.

In addition to patient care and training his house staff, Warthin enjoyed the fellowship and exchange of ideas in several medical organizations. Perhaps he enjoyed most the American Clinical and Climatological Association, to which he was elected in 1951.

From 1958 to 1965 he was a trustee of the American Board of Internal Medicine and active on its residency review committee. He was a master of the American College of Physicians and served many years on its international committee. He did work for the International Society of Internal Medicine and was an affiliate member of the Royal Society of Medicine in London. He was a trustee of the Boston Medical Library, which later became part of the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard. He was past president of the Aesculapian Club of Boston and of the Society of Medical Consultants to the Armed Forces.

Warthin enjoyed seeking out tidbits of New England history that he found of interest. His mother's name Angell went back to Thomas Angell, a subaltern of Roger Williams when the Rhode Island colony was established. Warthin was interested in William Beaumont (1785-1853), the U.S. Army surgeon who in 1822 cared for Alexis St. Martin, a trapper for the American Fur Company in Michigan who had been accidentally shot in the stomach from a distance of three feet. Warthin was also intrigued by the peripatetic life of Noah Webster, whose dictionary was published in Springfield.

Warthin retired from the care of patients in 1983 with a feeling of unease about meeting the rapid changes in medicine. Some years after retirement, he and his wife, Virginia, a graduate of Middlebury College and Yale University School of Nursing whom he married in 1938, moved to New Pond Village, a retirement community in Walpole, Massachusetts. Here, he became chairperson of the landscape committee and exerted his influence to build a garden of raised flowerbeds that were cared for and enjoyed by the residents. He also struggled with planning and building pathways through marshy, wooded terrain, to the edge of the pond. During his retirement he was in constant touch as class agent with the HMS Alumni Office and remained concerned and friendly with his surviving classmates.

Virginia was Warthin's partner for 57 years and predeceased him in 1995. He is survived by his three sons, Jonathan Carver, Richard Scott and Thomas Whittier and seven grandchildren. His sons' testimonials at the memorial service revealed Tom's family life. His relations with his sons reflected tough love. The boys were expected to do their share of work on their seven-acre backyard. If tough words were required, tough words were spoken, and the interview was closed with a firm handshake. Their father had been drawn to West Roxbury partly by its access to the Roxbury Latin School, which all of them attended. Its headmaster, the Reverend F. Washington Jarvis, conducted Warthin's memorial service.

Dr. Gordon J. Strewler, current chief of the medical service at VAMC, West Roxbury recalls "Doctor Warthin" as a "chief of medicine of the old school, who delighted in bedside teaching, demanded rigor amongst the house staff and students and taught respect for their patients." Strewler is setting up a series of annual Warthin Memorial Lectures, the first of which will be presented on May 6, 1998 at grand rounds by Marshall Wolfe, vice-chair of education at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Tom Warthin was a man with high ideals for himself and others, and along with his honesty and frankness, reached out to others with warm and loving concern. In working with the resident staff at West Roxbury he insisted that every resident, when breaking off a professional contact with a patient, take the time for some expression of hope or at least a reassuring word.

Respectfully submitted,
Benjamin V. White

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