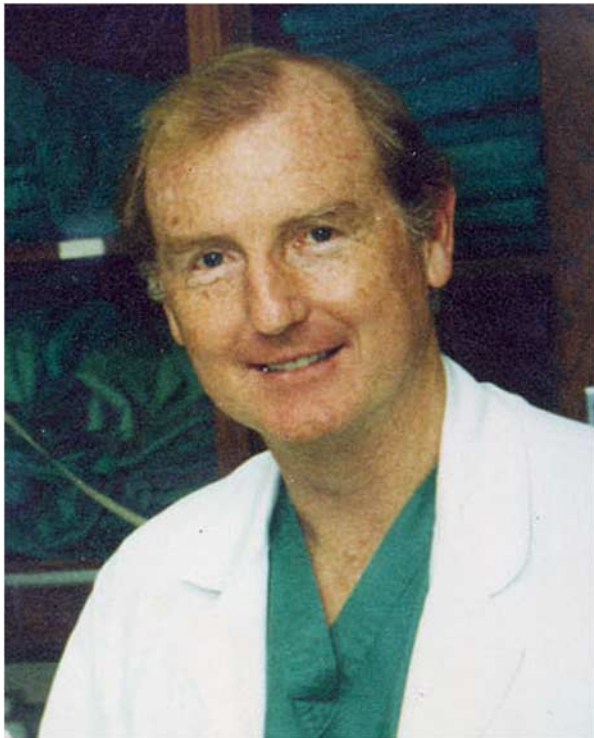


Obituary

Benson Reid Wilcox (26 May, 1932–11 May, 2010)

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WITH THE PASSING OF BEN WILCOX, PAEDIATRIC cardiac surgery has lost one of its founders and innovators. Ben was a true Southern gentleman. Born and raised in Charlotte, Ben spent almost his entire life working in North Carolina. He was intensely proud to be a Tar Heel, and devoted much time not only to the scientific and surgical development of the University of North Carolina, but also its sporting community. Following his undergraduate degree, in history, he continued at the University of North Carolina, graduating as Doctor of Medicine in 1957. His student achievements were as stellar as his subsequent postgraduate career. He was President of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, then his Medical Class, and became Rex of the intensely private association known as the Gimghouls. He had

already determined on a career in cardiac surgery while he was a medical student, and helped conduct laboratory research in Chapel Hill on the newly developed heart-lung machine. He served as a surgical resident at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis before returning for a further year to the North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill. After 2 years, conducting further surgical research at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, he returned again to the University of North Carolina, where he spent the remainder of his career. He was appointed to the faculty of the Department of Surgery in 1964, and became Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery in 1969. Retiring in 1998, he remained as Professor of Surgery within the faculty until his untimely death.

Although his interests in thoracic surgery were catholic, his greatest love was congenital cardiac surgery. The turning point in his achievements in this developing area came in 1980, when he was granted a sabbatical leave by the faculty. He asked his old friend, Chip McAllister, the location of the best congenital cardiac morphologist, since he was already convinced that the secret of operative success was total familiarity with cardiac anatomy. On being told that the best anatomist was then practising in Omaha, Nebraska, he inquired as to the location of the second best anatomist. Thus came the invitation to spend time at the Royal Brompton Hospital, and the subsequent lifelong collaboration with Bob Anderson that produced *Surgical Anatomy of the Heart*, now in its third edition, and looking for ongoing life under the supervision of Andrew Cook.

On his return from London to Chapel Hill, he built up the congenital programme at Chapel Hill, making many innovations, not least the suggestion that patients with atrioventricular septal defect and common valvar orifice could best be treated by suturing down the bridging leaflets of the common valve, thus turning them into “ostium primum” defects. This innovation, of course, set the scene for

the outstanding development of the concept by Graham Nunn and his colleagues in Australia. This, however, was but one of Ben's contributions to the scientific literature. During his career, he authored more than 100 scientific and clinical articles.

He was equally committed to medical education. His association with Bob Anderson was further cemented by collaboration with his clinical colleagues at Chapel Hill, notably Bill Henry and David Delaney. Together, they coordinated two excellent "Masterclasses" in clinico-morphologic correlations in congenital heart disease. Ben was equally strong in national associations, and was suitably proud when elected to serve as President of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, the largest society of thoracic surgeons in the world. He received their Distinguished Service Award in 2003. His interest in the training of surgeons resulted in the formation of the Thoracic Surgery Directors Association, of which he was its founding president from 1985 through 1987. The Association honoured him in 2009 by establishing the Benson Wilcox Award for the best paper presented by a resident at the Annual meeting of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons.

He retained his love of history throughout his life, and translated this into a substantial collection

of medical books. In 1998 and 1999, he donated the bulk of his collection to the Health Sciences Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the collection has since grown to more than 1400 books, journals, reprints, and other items.

His interests, however, were not confined to surgery and books. He was a true gourmet, and took great delight in visiting the very best hotels and restaurants throughout the world. A consummate sportsman, he turned relatively late in his career to golf, but rapidly become proficient, and spent many happy hours on the links. The most enjoyable part of his retirement, however, came from his marriage to Patsy Davis. He is survived by Patsy, his four children, and 11 grandchildren. To them, we express our condolences, but Ben will be missed by all those with whom he came into contact. To reiterate our opening statement, he was a true southern gentleman.

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