

To Paul Heilpern - for your interest and files.

HISTORICAL NOTES*

Harold Dux

The Founding
of the Neurosurgical Unit at the Jewish General Hospital

The possibility of developing a Neurosurgical Unit at the Jewish General Hospital was first discussed in 1951. The "conception" took place in 1962, when serious correspondence on the matter began between various Hospital authorities and myself. After a rather lengthy "incubation", the Unit was finally born in 1968. In its Bar Mitzvah year, in 1981, the Chiefship passed from me (at age 60) to Dr. Steven Brem (at age 34). Now, after surviving a relatively difficult year during 1989, the Unit has reached full manhood (or should I say "personhood"?), having completed its first 21 years of existence. Dr. Brem therefore considered it opportune to use today's Neuroscience Symposium as a forum for my recounting the story of the Unit's founding, hopefully for your interest, and so that it may remain part of the recorded history of the Jewish General Hospital.

As you will soon hear, the history of our Unit is closely bound to that of the Montreal Neurological Institute. This is due partly to our geographic proximity, partly to our joint association with the Medical Faculty of McGill University, but mainly because of the specific individuals involved in the story. By coincidence, too, the JGH and the MNI both opened their doors to patients in the same year, 1934.

In 1951, I was in the final year of my resident training in Neurosurgery, at the Institute, serving as chief resident to Dr. William Cone. One of the neurologists on the Institute staff was Dr. John Kershman, Jack Kershman, as he was known, was one of the pioneers (with Dr. Herbert Jasper) in the field of electroencephalography. He also served as neurologist to the JGH. On several occasions during the early part of that year, he discussed with me the possibility, on completion of my training, of

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organizing a joint Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery at the JGH. During those discussions it was fully realized that Dr. Penfield was not in favour of such a venture. At that time he was concerned with the building and development of a new wing at the Institute, the McConnell Pavilion, to replace the wartime so-called "Military Annex". On the other hand, Dr. Cone was openly supportive. Dr. Kershman was a very able and aggressive individual, and he seemed intent on pushing the project. However, in August 1951, after presenting a paper at the annual meeting of the American Neurological Association, in Atlantic City, he suffered a major coronary artery occlusion, and passed away about a week later.

The possibility of a Neurosurgical Unit at the JGH, at that time, died with Dr. Kershman, though I am far from certain that even his continued dynamic involvement would have been practically fruitful, given the specific circumstances in those days. Nevertheless, when I left Montreal, in late 1952, to organize New Brunswick's first Department of Neurosurgery, at the Saint John General Hospital, Dr. Penfield, in bidding me farewell, did indicate that I (as he put it) was "not burning (my) bridges behind" me, and that the possibility of my returning to Montreal as a neurosurgeon, at a later date, should not be ruled out.

The Department of Neurosurgery in Saint John flourished, though it remained essentially a "one-man show" for the first 9 or 10 years. By 1962, however, I had the assistance of an associate, and I was convinced that the Unit would survive my departure. Thus I could respond in a cautiously positive manner, when in late 1962, with the initiating help of Dr. Harry Ballon, the Chief of Surgery at the JGH, and with the tangential support of Dr. Harold Elliott, with whom I had previously worked

at the Queen Mary Veterans' Hospital, a lengthy correspondence began between the JGH administrating staff and myself, in respect to the organization of a Neurosurgical Unit at the JGH. The Hospital was planning a major extension to its building facilities, and it was hoped that Neurosurgery could be added to its patient services in the new wing. Mr. Samuel Cohen, who was the Executive Director, played the major role in the correspondence, but other individuals were involved as well, including Dr. William Slatkoff, Dr. Michael Gold, Dr. Israel Shragovitch, and Mr. Archie Deskin. Messrs. Sam Steinberg and Philip Garfinkle, successive Hospital Board presidents in those days, provided background support.

It is of specific interest and significance that Dr. Penfield was the guest speaker at the inaugural dinner of the drive for funds for the expansion project, in early 1963. In his address, as reported in the Montreal Star, he mentioned the inclusion of a "neurological unit" in the new building. He was quoted as stating that "this is a proper development, made necessary by the evolution of modern medicine in large city hospitals. As neurosurgeons, we are glad to see this development go forward".

However, as usual, "going forward" meant progressing one small step at a time - occasionally even delayed by several backward steps. The correspondence between the Hospital and myself continued intermittently from 1963 to 1967. I was increasingly involved in the specific building plans, so far as the projected Neurosurgical Unit was concerned. Neurology at the JGH was at that time a subdivision of the Department of Medicine, and though the possibility of a combined Department of Neurology and Neurosurgery was seriously discussed, that idea was temporarily shelved. Nevertheless, I insisted that Neurosurgery be organized as a separate Department, and not as a division of General Surgery - mainly to facilitate its likely junction with Neurology at a later date.

The negotiations were even affected by the general socio-political scene in Quebec in those days. Major negative factors in that respect were the bombings of several postal boxes in Montreal, as well as the "strike" by Quebec radiologists in late 1967. On the positive side were the "good feelings" emanating from Montreal's Expo 67, and the hopes generated by the election of Pierre Trudeau as Prime Minister of Canada, in early 1968. I returned to Montreal on July first of that year, and during the subsequent 6 months the organization of the new Department of Neurosurgery was completed.

The relationship between our Department and the MNI was also reflected in our Nursing personnel. When I left for New Brunswick in early 1951, I was fortunate in being able to entice two excellent MNI nurses to accompany me - Dorothy MacQuarrie and Donna McTavish. I have no hesitation in stating that I could not have developed the unit in Saint John, neurosurgically isolated in other respects as I was there, without the magnificent assistance and concern of those two great ladies. (Indeed, at times, my name was facetiously changed to "McRosen", so that I could be identified as part of their team!) In the latter years of my stay in Saint John, one of the nurses trained by the team was Jacqueline Doucet (later to be known as Jackie Leblanc). Jackie came south to Saint John from New Brunswick's North Shore, and quickly exhibited her prowess as a Neurosurgical Nurse, organizer and teacher. Hence, when the plans for my move to the JGH solidified, I prevailed on Jackie to come with me to Montreal, to organize the nursing services in the new Unit. Most of you are aware of how well she succeeded in that task. It is safe to say that the nursing provided on our (her) Ward, 3 Northwest, was the highlight of the Unit's function, and remained the beacon which the other nursing units in the Hospital strove to emulate, during her entire tenure.

There are only a few additional historical facts which I wish to mention in this brief presentation, though from a strict standpoint they are not parts of the actual founding story. Firstly, there is no doubt that the development of "Neuroscience" at the JGH took a significant step forward when, in July 1973, Neurology was officially separated from the Department of Medicine, and joined with Neurosurgery, to form a combined Department of Neurological Sciences, with Dr. Israel Libman and myself as co-chiefs. The Neurosurgical Service became progressively busier; in a representative annual report, for the year 1975, the major operations totalled 250, including 60 craniotomies for trauma, neoplasm, aneurysm, etc., and 20 laminectomies for intraspinal tumor. In July 1981, the chiefship of the Division of Neurosurgery was passed to the capable hands of Dr. Steven Brem. Dr. Brem came here from the northeastern part of the United States, together with Dr. Ehud Arbit, to replace Drs. Gonzalo Chong and Leon Ravvin, who had served the Neurosurgical Unit well, during their respective tenures, but who had departed to pursue their careers elsewhere.

During the period of which I have spoken today we have been involved, perhaps without fully recognizing it, in a revolutionary time in Neurosurgery. The use of the operating microscope, tremendous advances in imaging techniques, constantly improving methods for physiological monitoring, and new devices for tissue removal, have all combined to make our field a different specialty from that of only 20 years ago. In our own small area, under the leadership of Drs. Brem and Libman, we are achieving continuous improvements in the clinical and nursing services provided to our patients; an increasing involvement with the University Department and its resident training programs; as well as rapidly expanding and excitingly promising basic and clinically applied Neuroscience research projects. From strength to strength! The future has no bounds.