

The William Townsend Porter
Memorial Volume

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He believed that a meritorious discovery may fail of appreciation because of the faulty manner in which it is announced to the world, and that an editor may be of service to an investigator. He believed that a scientific journal, the organ of a national science, should be characterized by scientific merit, rhetorical excellence, and prompt publication of its contributions, together with typography and illustrations that are pleasing to the eye. These ideals he has maintained.

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHYSIOLOGY
Volume 37, 1915—Dedication
to William Townsend Porter



WILLIAM TOWNSEND PORTER

1862–1949

Editor of THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHYSIOLOGY, 1898–1914

THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT of physiology in the United States could be described very adequately by the lives of a small company of leaders each of whom contributed, during the period of 1890 onwards, his own complement of enthusiasm and particular talent. In this group Professor William Townsend Porter will always hold a major position. It was his keen foresight and self-sacrificing zeal that identified and provided several of the elements so essential for a growing science.

William Townsend Porter was born on September 24, 1862, in Plymouth, Ohio, the son of Dr. Frank Gibson Porter and Martha Townsend Porter. After receiving his doctorate in Medicine in 1885 from the St. Louis Medical College (later incorporated into Washington University), he spent a year in post-graduate study abroad under the tutelage of Flemming, Heidenhain, and Hürthle. In 1888, at the age of 26, he was appointed Professor of Physiology in the St. Louis Medical College and established at once what he called, with justifiable pride, the first physiological laboratory west of the Atlantic seaboard. Publications from this laboratory, appearing in British, German and American journals, promptly drew attention to the youthful William Porter. Called to Harvard Medical School under Professor Bowditch he was an Assistant Professor of Physiology from 1893 to 1898, Associate Professor from 1898 to 1906, and then Professor of Comparative Physiology until retirement in 1928, when he was made Professor Emeritus.

During his first few years at Harvard, while sending to journals of physiology abroad the results of his numerous studies on respiration and circulation, he repeatedly stressed, verbally and in writing, the urgent need for developing in this country a suitable medium for publishing the results of physiological research. When the young American Physiological Society debated from 1894 to 1898 the feasibility of establishing its own journal, it was W. T. Porter who resolved the problem by volunteering to undertake not only the managing editorship, but also full financial responsibility. To his activities as an investigator and teacher he added those of a zealous editor and astute business manager. The need for the journal can best be estimated by examining the contents of the first volume, which was published in 1898 and included papers by Porter, Howell, Lusk, Mendel, Cushney, Chittenden and A. N. Richards, together with Walter B. Cannon's paper on the use of x-rays to study gastric motility.

Having edited thirty-three volumes during the next sixteen years, W. T. Porter in 1914 turned over to the American Physiological Society an established journal of high standards and proved scientific value. In 1915 volume 37 of the *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHYSIOLOGY* was dedicated to him with these concluding words of tribute: "For his unselfish labors Professor Porter deserves the thanks of American physiologists and as an expression of this gratitude, they gladly dedicate to him this volume."

During this same period physiological research and teaching were hampered by the necessity of importing physiological instruments from Europe at costs which were prohibitive for many of the younger and newly established American laboratories. Professor Porter's devotion to physiology, together with his love of perfection in experimental technique and reasoning, led him again to use his own time, ingenuity and resources to the benefit of physiology and physiologists in general. In 1901 he established the Harvard Apparatus Company, an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to the "advancement of laboratory teaching in physiology and allied sciences." Instruments made by this Company's skilled mechanics can be found now in research and teaching laboratories the world over. In 1929, the Council of the American Physiological Society again expressed their debt to Professor Porter by recording that "there is no one agency, during recent years, which has contributed more to the development of sound teaching in experimental physiology in this country than the Harvard Apparatus Company."

Professor Porter realized that however good laboratories and journals may be, research depends finally and essentially upon trained investigators. To this end he made still another outstanding contribution. Because he would not accept any salary from the Harvard Apparatus Company, this avocation of his produced by 1920 an annual surplus which he devoted to the establishment of a Research Fellowship in Physiology. He entrusted the choice of Fellows and administration of the Fellowship to the American Physiological Society which named it, in his honor, the Porter Research Fellowship in Physiology. His philanthropy, using that term in its most literal sense, has made it possible, since 1921, for over a score of outstanding young students to devote a year or more to research in laboratories of physiology under experienced preceptors. This group already includes several professors and winners of distinguished prizes for outstanding research. Up to the last moment before his final illness and death on February 16, 1949, Professor Porter was trying to assure, through this Fellowship, continued funds for training young investigators. By the death of Professor William Townsend Porter, Physiology has lost not only an investigator and teacher whose researches advanced knowledge but also a benefactor whose influence will long be felt through the Research Fellows whose training in research he has made possible.

Among the honors which came to him, the one he appreciated most must have been his election as Honorary President of the American Physiological Society in 1937 on the occasion of its fiftieth annual meeting. The words by which he was introduced at the Semicentennial Dinner describe Professor William Townsend Porter's ruling passion and devotion. "Few indeed are the men who have had American Physiology so near the heart." The reality of this devotion he expressed in his own words in a recent letter: "To me Physiology is a religion. The *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHYSIOLOGY*, the Fellowship of the American Physiological Society, and the Harvard Apparatus Company are votive candles, burning with a steady flame on the high altar of a faith."

The American Physiological Society expresses once more its gratitude to a benefactor, friend and distinguished Honorary member by dedicating this volume to William Townsend Porter, Professor of Comparative Physiology, Emeritus, Harvard Medical School, and by listing the names of those who have held the Porter Research Fellowship from 1921 to the present.

—EUGENE M. LANDIS, 1949

APPOINTMENTS TO THE PORTER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP OF THE AMERICAN PHYSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

YEAR	NAME	DEGREES	CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY	SUPERVISOR	FIELD
1921-22	J. Hepburn	M.D., Toronto	Toronto	John J. R. Macleod	Respiration
1922-23	Florence B. Seibert	A.B., Goucher	Yale	Lafayette B. Mendel	Physiological actions of proteins
1923-24	Florence B. Seibert	Ph.D., Yale	Chicago	H. Gideon Wells	" "
1924-25	Howard H. Beard	A.M., Columbia; Ph.D. Yale	Yale	Lafayette B. Mendel	Metabolism
1925-26	W. H. Finney		McGill	John Tait	Nitrogen metabolism, hibernation
1926-27	Charles Stuky	A.B., Ph.D., Yale	Yale	Lafayette B. Mendel	Metabolism and vitamin B
1927-28	Dea B. Calvin	B.S., Rice Institute; Ph.D., Yale	Yale	Lafayette B. Mendel	Blood sugar
1928-29	Donald E. Gregg	B.S., Colgate	Rochester	John Murlin	Fat and sugar metabolism
1929-30	Donald E. Gregg	Ph.D., Rochester	Rochester	John Murlin	" "
1930-31	Herbert Silvette	B.S., Virginia	Virginia	Sidney W. Britton	Endocrines
1931-32	Herbert Silvette	Ph.D., Virginia	Virginia	Sidney W. Britton	" "
1932-33	Abraham White	B.A., Denver; M.A., Ph.D., Michigan	Yale	Arthur H. Smith	Acid-base equilibrium
1933-34	Nathan Rakiety	B.S., Wesleyan; Ph.D., Yale	Yale	John Fulton	Central nervous system
1934-35	Edward H. Kemp	B.A., Wake Forest	Clark	Walter S. Hunter	Auditory reactions
1935-36	Ellen Robinson	B.S., Radcliffe	Harvard	Alfred C. Redfield	Auditory action potentials
1936-37	H. C. Wiggers	A.B., Wesleyan; Ph.D., Western Reserve	Harvard	Hallowell Davis	Auditory action potentials
1937-38	Jane A. Russell	A.B., Ph.D., California	California	Hervert M. Evans	Pituitary and sugar metabolism
1938-39	Earl R. Loew	B.S., Michigan State; M.S., Wayne	Northwestern	A. C. Ivy	Duodenal hormone and sugar metabolism
1939-40	N. S. R. Maluf	B.S., American (Cairo); Ph.D., Cornell	Washington	H. L. White	Renal physiology
1940-41	Gordon K. Moe	B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Minnesota	Western Reserve	C. J. Wiggers	Heart and circulation
1940-41*	J. H. Wills	B.S., Va. Polytech. Inst.; M.S., Medical Coll. of Va.; Ph.D., Rochester	Harvard	W. B. Cannon	Gastro-enterology
1941-42	Milton J. Schiffrin	A.B., M.S., Rochester; Ph.D., McGill	Northwestern	A. C. Ivy	Ulceration of gastro-intestinal tract
1942-45 Porter Fellowship temporarily suspended					
1946-47	E. L. Chambers	B.A., Princeton; M.D., New York	California	S. C. Brooks	Permeability to radioactive ions
1947-48	Arthur F. Battista	M.D., McGill; M.S., Western Ontario	Harvard	Alexander Forbes	Neurophysiology
1948-49	Raymond F. Kline	B.S., M.S., Virginia	Maryland	W. R. Amberson	Anoxia
1949-50	Philip W. Hall, III	B.S., Bethany	Western Reserve	C. J. Wiggers	Renal vascular physiology

* Supplementary Fellowship

