

John Musser Pearce

October 23, 1908 — March 22, 1960

Dr. John Musser Pearce was born in New York City, October 23, 1908, the son of Mary Musser and Richard Mills Pearce. His father was an eminent physician and scientist. He received his undergraduate degree from Yale in 1930 and his M.D. degree from Harvard in 1934. He married Moira Brady on September 14, 1932. While on a holiday in Florida he met a tragic death by drowning on March 22, 1960. His widow and their two daughters, Mary and Jane, survive, as do also his mother and a sister.

Dr. Pearce interned and had resident training in pathology at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York from 1934 to 1938. Desiring further experience in research, he then worked for one year in the Princeton division of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Following this he became Associate Professor of Pathology in Long Island College of Medicine, serving in that post, in association with Dr. Jean Oliver, until 1948 when he came to the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center as Professor of Pathology, Professor of Pathology in Surgery, and Surgical Pathologist and Attending Pathologist. He was a member of the American Association of Pathologists and Bacteriologists, the American Society for Experimental Pathology, the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine, the American Public Health Association, and the New York Pathological Society, of which he was secretary from 1940 to 1942 and president for two years beginning in 1951.

Dr. Pearce was elected a resident member of the Century Association in 1953, his father having been a member during the period 1919-1930. He took great pleasure in the art exhibits and in the monthly meetings of that association. He also very much enjoyed gardening at his delightful summer place in Dorset, Vermont.

While at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, Dr. Pearce discovered the important fact that certain viruses bring about myocarditis under experimental conditions, notably when the host is rendered hypoxic. Working further on this theme throughout a substantial part of his subsequent career, he had recently uncovered another noteworthy finding, namely that materials which work against the enzyme hyaluronidase will suppress the lesions caused by certain viruses but do not interfere with the development of immunity in the infected host. He conceived that this fact might well have practical importance in the study of means whereby vaccination can be effected against virus diseases in human beings.

Dr. Pearce became Surgical Pathologist to the New York Hospital on July 1, 1948, succeeding the late Dr. N. Chandler Foot. In this position he was in constant and close association with all members of the surgical staff. His

responsibility was great in diagnosis at operation and in definitive evaluation. He was truly an able and articulate consultant to his associates in the Department of Surgery.

Perhaps Dr. Pearce's greatest contribution rested on his teaching of surgical pathology to the residents as they rotated through his laboratory. They accompanied him to the operating rooms to see pathological lesions in situ and at his direction often made frozen sections to establish immediately the diagnosis. The young men participated in the day's work of the Laboratory of Surgical Pathology with members of the resident staff in pathology. Dr. Pearce made this a most valuable experience for the surgeon in training. He had the wisdom and understanding so essential in the guidance of medical students and resident staff, and these together with his pleasant and friendly personality placed him high in the esteem of those who came under his instruction.

At the weekly grand rounds Dr. Pearce usually had the final word to answer the most complex clinical problems presented by the staff. Not only did he provide the unequivocal pathologic diagnosis but often outlined the probable ensuing clinical course. His was an enviable and respected position at these Saturday morning sessions when the follow-up results of surgical problems were reported.

The death of Dr. Pearce is a great loss for the Medical Center as a whole. In the Department of Surgery, where he was so intimately associated with the relatively small group, his death is keenly felt. Not only are we deprived of his knowledge and counsel, so important to the daily activities of the department, but also of his enthusiasm, loyalty, and pleasant personal association. The accomplishments of the twelve years of participation in the work of the Department of Surgery and Pathology established him as one of our more able teachers and investigators. His death interrupted a career dedicated to training and teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level, in both departments at the Center.

Frank Glenn, John G. Kidd