

Charles Townsend Olcott

March 28, 1890 — August 1, 1966

Dr. Olcott, Professor of Pathology, Emeritus, Cornell University Medical College, and Consultant Pathologist to The New York Hospital, died at his country home in Orillia, Ontario, on August 1, 1966.

Charles Townsend Olcott was born in New York City on March 28, 1890. He graduated A.B., Princeton, in 1911, and M.D., Cornell, in 1916. After holding an internship in The New York Hospital from July 1916 to January 1918, he entered the Medical Corps of the United States Army in February 1918 and served for some time at the Walter Reed Hospital. After the armistice he was medical officer with the American Expeditionary Force in Siberia. In 1920, Dr. Olcott taught at the Medical School of the University of Colorado and served as resident physician at St. Luke's Hospital in Denver. On leaving Colorado, he became research assistant in bacteriology at the Highland Hospital, Rochester, New York.

In 1926, he was appointed instructor in pathology at Cornell Medical College and in 1927, Assistant Pathologist to The New York Hospital. Dr. Olcott served under Doctors Ewing, Opie, Dock, and Kidd as instructor, Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor of Pathology until his retirement in 1958. Since that time, as Professor, Emeritus, he had worked constantly in the Department of Pathology until the time of his death—in all, a period of forty years.

Dr. Olcott was a former president of the New York Pathological Society, a diplomate of the American Board of Pathology, a member of the American Association of Pathologists and Bacteriologists, a member of the American Association for Cancer Research, a member of the International Academy of Pathology and a member of the New York Academy of Medicine. In addition, Dr. Olcott was formerly vice-president and a director of the Hudson River Day Line of which his grandfather, Alfred Van Santvoord, was founder and president.

Throughout his academic career, Dr. Olcott published numerous papers including some on experimental argyrosis and on spontaneous tumors in animals. In 1934, with Dr. Nathan Chandler Foot, he made observations on Letterer-Siwe's disease which led to a clearer understanding of this condition. He was greatly interested in the histological types of bronchogenic carcinoma and in 1955, propounded the hypothesis that one cell type of this tumor may transfer into other cell types. During the past few years Dr. Olcott became interested in the natural history of various types of malignant tumors, and this work was completed a few months before his death and is ready for publication.

Dr. Olcott was widely traveled and had a variety of interests, especially the history of medicine. In his youth he had visited many of the famous pathological institutes in Germany and was an authority on the history of pathology and especially its development in the United States.

Both students and colleagues respected Dr. Olcott; he was a gentleman of the old school with an air of kindness and friendliness about him which on numerous occasions gave encouragement to many an inexperienced member of the staff. He took a great interest in the young pathologists in training and on many occasions helped them, not only professionally but with their personal problems also.

Dr. Olcott will be remembered in this medical center not only for the help he gave to many but also for his personal characteristics. His tall, distinguished, white-haired figure was frequently seen at clinical pathological conferences, evening lectures, and many pathology meetings. He was never alone in the doctors' dining room. His humor, love of argument, friendliness and enthusiasm always ensured a gathering of young and old around him. Dr. Olcott lived a long life and a full one, to those who were privileged to know him and associate with him he was a steadfast friend and a most amicable companion.

Dr. Olcott is survived by his widow, the former Katherine Eaton; two sons, Peter Alexander, and Andrew Eaton; a daughter, Miss Kate Van Santvoord Olcott; a brother, Mason of Claremont, California; and a sister, Miss Katharine Van Santvoord of New York.

A. Whitley Branwood, M.D.