

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS JOHN TALCOTT MENDENHALL

Dr. John Talcott Mendenhall was born in Chicago, Illinois on May 8, 1913 to the late Charles Elwood Mendenhall, Ph.D. and Dorothy Reed Mendenhall, M.D. His father was a distinguished University of Wisconsin physicist and first chairman of the University of Wisconsin Department of Physics. His mother, Dorothy Reed Mendenhall, M.D., was a noted pathologist/pediatrician and founder of Madison's Well Baby Clinic. Dr. Mendenhall's father began his career on the east coast where he participated as a physicist working on synchronizing machine gun bullets with airplane propellers; while his physician mother was a medical officer in the US Children's Bureau where she surveyed war orphans in Belgium and France and studied the nutrition of English children. Dorothy Reed was a descendent of 17th century English settlers and one of the first women graduates from the John Hopkins University Medical School in 1900. She interned at Hopkins under Dr. William Osler and subsequently was a pathology fellow in the study of Hodgkin's disease - then thought to be a form of tuberculosis. She conclusively disproved the TB connection and demonstrated the presence of a type of giant blood cell or the Reed-Sternberg cell. Additionally, Dr. Mendenhall's grandfather was a geologist who helped establish the border between Alaska and Canada, and is remembered with a glacier and lake in Alaska named after him. Another ancestor, Jack Mendenhall, was former mayor of Bozeman, Montana, and his brother, Tom, was president of Smith College for many years.

Dr. Mendenhall's youth was spent in Madison and the family lived on a campus resident home on Observatory Drive, which is now the agricultural dean's residence house. As a small boy, John attended Madison's first Montessori school held in the home of Mrs. Lewis Hanks and attended Wisconsin High School and Central High School.

Before college, Dr. Mendenhall spent two years at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts graduating in 1931. He then went to Harvard University, graduating in 1935, and then Harvard Medical School graduating in 1939. His internship was at Boston City Hospital, and he completed a pathology residency at The Johns Hopkins Medical School. He met his wife, Sally Cornell of New York City while at Hopkins and they were married in New York City on December 19, 1942. Shortly thereafter John, a navy lieutenant, was shipped overseas where he was stationed in Cornwall, England. He participated in the second wave of the D-day invasion of Normandy in 1944, helping to set up a hospital in a nearby French town. His wife, Sally, during this period of time trained in pediatrics. After the war, John returned to Madison in 1946 where he completed his residency in general and thoracic surgery at the University of Wisconsin in 1951. Shortly after returning to Madison, he had a reactivation of tuberculosis acquired during the war, resulting in the surgical removal of a lung segment and a year in the Lakeview Tuberculosis Sanatorium on Madison's east side. In 1953 John became Chief of the VA Hospital Surgical Service, and remained in that capacity until 1979. He retired from surgical practice in 1986 and rewarded emeritus professor status. During the 1950's and 1960's as a thoracic surgeon at the VA Hospital, as well as the Wisconsin General Hospital, he performed approximately 3,000 segmental pulmonary resections for tuberculosis, more than any other surgeon in the United States. John and his co-surgeons treated patients suffering from complications of chest surgery throughout the midwest. Long before the open heart pump was developed for clinical use, John and fellow surgeons Jack Longley and William Young, treated children and adults with difficult and novel heart surgery. He also worked out the technique of transplanting lungs long before clinical transplantation became a reality. Beyond his teaching and operating room responsibilities, John was the long-time head of the UW Human Subjects Committee and served as secretary and president of the Wisconsin Surgical Society.

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Outside of medicine, John's interest lay in reading, traveling, fly fishing, and sailing. He was a long-time member of the Madison Literary Society. During summers in Madison, John and his brother Tom, as well as a friend Lucien Hanks purchased a sailboat named Pretzel from a boathouse near where the Edgewater Hotel is now located. He raced in land lake class C scows until 1980 when he acquired a cruising class keel boat. He was a founder of the re-organized Mendota Yacht Club in 1930.

The entire Mendenhall family played a significant role in the Veterans Administration Hospital, the University of Wisconsin, as well as the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics for many years. Complementing John's influence on thoracic surgery at the VA/University was John's wife Sally who expanded on John's mother's work with Madison's Well Baby Clinic. Sally directed the City Health Department Well Child Clinic for 25 years. This clinic helped to earn Madison's recognition as having the lowest infant mortality rate in the United States in the 1950's and 60's. Sally finished her medical career at the University Health Services.

Hundreds of medical students and residents over the past years have benefited from John Talcott Mendenhall's work ethic, expertise, charming personality, and infectious wit. His mother, father, and wife have all contributed greatly to the legacy of our university.

MEMORIAL COMMITTEE

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