

The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* Year One: 1903

Earl Thayer

The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* exists today because two Milwaukee physicians had both keen business acumen and political savvy. Whether out of envy at a colleague's journal, simple competitive instincts, pure desire for professional excellence, or some of each, they launched the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* as a private business venture in January 1903.

Arthur J. Patek, MD, an internist, and Otto H. Foerster, MD, a dermatologist, were both native to Milwaukee. They graduated medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in 1892 and 1898, respectively. In forming the *Journal*, Patek was editor and Foerster, associate editor.

In a wise political move, they involved a band of 20 professional brethren whom they called "collaborators," whose lives and medical practices intertwined their own. The collaborators were also financial backers of the *Journal* venture, thus providing some measure of truth to the masthead's declaration that the *Journal* was "owned by and devoted to the interests of the Medical Profession of this State."

These collaborators were an interesting lot. Almost all were pro-



Arthur J. Patek, MD



Otto H. Foerster, MD

fessional heavyweights in medical practice or public health around the state. Six were "provisional" councilors in the reorganized State Medical Society of Wisconsin (Society) and seven had been or would be presidents of the Society between 1870 and 1909.

At this time, Wisconsin physicians numbered about 2500. Only 700 were members of the Society. Back then, about 440 physicians practiced in Milwaukee at 10 hospitals. One of them, Walter H. Neilson, MD, president of the Milwaukee Medical College, owned and edited the three-year-old *Milwaukee Medical Journal*.

Milwaukee hosted several medical societies, including the long dormant Medical Society of Milwaukee County. The largest and most influential was the Milwaukee Medical Society, later named the Milwaukee

Academy of Medicine, and regarded by many as the birth-parent of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*.

Patek was a frequent presenter of scientific papers at the Milwaukee Medical Society's meetings. He was interested in child health and committed to expanding Milwaukee's already recognized emergence as a specialty medical center. He was a concert violinist, a collector of etchings, and a patron of Milwaukee's growing arts community.

Foerster had close friendships with many of the city's leaders in business and industry, especially in the brewing, financial, and real estate sectors. Both hoped to turn the Milwaukee Medical Society, with its already huge medical library, into a midwestern version of the New York Academy of Medicine. They also wanted to create a hospital-laboratory-clinical center in Milwaukee

Mr Thayer was Secretary and General Manager of the Wisconsin Medical Society from 1971-1987. He joined the Society in 1947 as Director of Public Information and served in various roles thereafter.

along the lines of the Cleveland Clinic or the Mayo Clinic.

The founders of the *Journal* were men of extraordinary accomplishment. Included in the group was a doctor who dedicated his life to the eradication of tuberculosis, and founded the Anti-Tuberculosis Association in 1908. The man who, in 1893, founded the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons was also among this elite group, as was the city health commissioner, who in 1880 was credited with turning a struggling department into a model of responsible government.

In its first 12 issues, the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* leaned heavily toward the scientific with papers on vaccination, the smallpox epidemic in Milwaukee, tuberculosis, x-ray apparatus and methods, various surgical procedures, practical bacteriology of the blood, rabies, and abuses in obstetrics—everything from adenoids to Zimmerman on meningitis. Papers were selected with an obvious eye to helping the average practitioner achieve better results with patients. All of this was topped by pithy editorials, mostly written by Patek.

At the same time, Volume I (January-June, 1903) and Volume II (July 1903 to May 1904) of the *Journal* carried regular reports of the business of the Society and its local units, news of legislative affairs, city and state health information, and reports of medical licensing. A section truly unique to medical journals of that day was a monthly article devoted to medical-legal issues affecting medical practice. The average issue ran 66 pages. The annual subscription rate was \$2.

Within six months of starting the *Journal*, Patek and Foerster, probably sensing the need for greater circulation, invited the Society to

make the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* its “official organ.” In return, the part-time, paid secretary of the Society, Dr. Charles S. Sheldon of Madison, would become an Associate Editor of the *Journal*, and the *Journal* could solicit subscriptions from the entire membership of the Society. The deal was struck, and the first “official organ” issue came out in July 1903.

The *Journal* continued its private ownership, but dedicated a good deal more of its content to the activities of the Society and the many new county and specialty societies energized in the reorganization ordered by the American Medical Association. This state of affairs continued until 1915 when the Society purchased the *Journal* outright.

Patek and Foerster and their collaborators had made a serious contribution to Wisconsin medicine, while Neilson’s *Milwaukee Medical Journal* slipped quietly into oblivion in 1908.

The men went on to a variety of works. Foerster engineered the founding of Columbia Hospital in 1909. Patek was elected president of the Society in 1914, with Sheldon following as president the next year. In 1922, the Milwaukee Medical Society was renamed the Milwaukee Academy of Medicine, and Patek became its ninth president.

Patek died on October 12, 1950, while Foerster passed away on July 18, 1965. Foerster’s obituary, published in *The American Journal of Roentgenology, Radium Therapy and Nuclear Medicine*, in April 1966, stated that he was the first professor of dermatology at Madison’s University of Wisconsin Medical School “and was an organizer and associate editor of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, which began publication in 1903.”

Editorial Leadership

Unless otherwise noted, those listed below served as medical editor of the *Journal*.

Arthur J. Patek, Milwaukee
1903 to 1909

A.W. Meyers
1910 to 1915

Louis M. Warfield, Milwaukee
1915 to 1917

Rock Sleyster
1918 to 1923

Mr. J. G. Crownhart, Milwaukee
Managing Editor
1923 to 1935

John Huston, Milwaukee
1935 to 1937

George H. Ewell, Milwaukee
Acting Medical Editor
1937

Paul F. Doege, Marshfield
1938 to 1939

Karl H. Doege, Marshfield
1939 to 1950

R.S. Baldwin, Marshfield
1950 to 1962

Victor S. Falk, Edgerton
1962 to 1987

Richard Sautter, Marshfield
1987 to 1995

Thomas C. Meyer, Madison
1995 to present

Wisconsin Medical Journal

The mission of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* (ISSN 1098-1861) is the official publication of the Wisconsin Medical Society and is devoted to the interests of the medical profession and health care in Wisconsin. The managing editor is responsible for overseeing the production, business operation and contents of *Wisconsin Medical Journal*. The editorial board, chaired by the medical editor, solicits and peer reviews all scientific articles; it does not screen public health, socioeconomic or organizational articles. Although letters to the editor are reviewed by the medical editor, all signed expressions of opinion belong to the author(s) for which neither the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* nor the Society take responsibility. The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is indexed in Index Medicus, Hospital Literature Index and Cambridge Scientific Abstracts.

For reprints of this article, contact the *Wisconsin Medical Journal* at 866.442.3800 or e-mail wmj@wismed.org.

© 2004 Wisconsin Medical Society