

MAY 15, 2009

In Memoriam: Alexander G. Bearn, 1923-2009

Former Howard Hughes Medical Institute Trustee, Alexander G. Bearn, M.D., a distinguished physician, scientist, and author, died May 15, 2009. He was 86.

Dr. Bearn served as a Trustee of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) for 18 years, providing wise counsel and thoughtful guidance during a period of sustained growth and transformation for the Institute. He was an HHMI Trustee from 1987-2005.

Born in England, Dr. Bearn received his M.B., B.S., and M.D., degrees from the University of London. He came to The Rockefeller University in 1951, thereby beginning a 50-year association with Rockefeller that culminated in his election to its Board of Trustees in 1970. Dr. Bearn moved next door to The New York Hospital in 1966 where he served for 11 years as its physician-in-chief and as Chairman of the Department of Medicine for the Cornell University Medical College. He founded the first human genetics laboratory at the Medical College, and, with colleagues at Rockefeller, initiated the joint M.D./Ph.D. program at the institutions.

An expert on the genetics of rare metabolic diseases, Dr. Bearn defined the genetic nature of Wilson's disease – an inherited disorder that causes copper to accumulate in the liver and brain. He also demonstrated that the disease was associated with decreased function of a blood protein that binds copper.

After nearly 30 years in academic medicine, Dr. Bearn joined Merck & Co., as the senior vice president for medical and scientific affairs of its international division from 1979-1988.

In 1972, he was elected to membership in the American Philosophical Society, and served as the organization's vice president from 1988-1996, and later as executive officer from 1997 until his retirement in 2002.

In addition to serving as a Trustee of HHMI, Dr. Bearn was a Trustee of The Rockefeller University from 1970-1998, the Helen Hay Whitney Foundation, the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, and an overseer of The Jackson Laboratory.

Dr. Bearn was a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the Harvey Society, and the American Society of Human Genetics.

A prolific author and editor, Dr. Bearn wrote three scientific biographies: *Archibald Garrod and the Individuality of Man* (Oxford University Press, 1993), *Sir Clifford Allbutt (1834-1925): Scholar and Physician* (Royal College of Physicians of London, 2007), and *Sir Francis Fraser: A Canny Scot Shapes British Medicine* (Book Guild Publishing, 2008).