

Boston City Hospital: The Cradle of American Neurology: Part I

Raymond D Adams and C Miller Fisher: From the Microscope to the Ward

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Raymond Delacy Adams was born February 13, 1911 in Portland Oregon. His father had built the house where Ray was born; The home had no gaslight or electricity; heated with logs and a furnace. His father's family were farmers- none had ever gone to high school; they read little; there were "few if any books in the home." Ray walked a mile to get to elementary school; worked many jobs after school hours during high school to help the family finances. His grades in high school were average.

After high school and before college, Ray signed on for \$30/month to work an oil tanker (The S.S Moffett) that sailed from Alaska to San Diego to San Salvador and back. As a seaman he scrubbed decks, took turns at watch, and performed other tasks on board- recognized the "rather seamy side of life." He entered the University of Oregon. Played tennis on the team. He became interested in Physiology and Psychology during his last two college years. He supported himself at college by working at the fraternity house and library. He worked on a construction crew digging ditches and hard labor. He was stimulated by his future wife whom he met in college to pursue more academic inquiry.

Ray entered a masters degree program in psychology. He became dissatisfied with the way psychology was trending. "I saw

the weakness of psychology in general and the difficulty in doing experimental work. That influenced my decision to get a sound grounding in nervous system anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology and to get a medical degree rather than a doctorate in psychology."

He happened on a catalogue that announced that Duke University was accepting medical school applicants. He sent an application to the Dean Wilbert Davidson explaining that he "wanted to study medicine to find out more about the nervous system." He soon got the response "Come Along" He was the last of 60 students admitted to the third class at Duke Medical School.

As the son of a baggage handler, Ray travelled free by train from Portland to North Carolina. He only had funds to pay one year Medical School tuition. He could not afford the dorm and so lived in a janitor's closet under the auditorium. The room and \$1 a day were his compensation for delivering ice. He needed to arrive at the hospital at 6AM to deliver the ice. Ray would push the ice wagon and scoop it out on each ward into the kitchen that distributed food.

After Medical School graduation, Ray arranged a one year Residency position in the Neurology Department at Mass General Hospital under Dr. Ayres. He impressed the chair of medicine, Dr. Hanes, who was able to obtain for Ray a 3 year Rockefeller fellowship. It was understood that he would return to Duke as a Psychiatrist after the fellowship.

The MGH Neurology residency program was in its 6th year. Ray was one of two residents. Dr. Ayres paid half his salary, the

Rockefeller foundation the other half. After the Neurology year, Ray stayed at MGH in the Psychiatry department under Stanley Cobb but also did Neuropathology with Dr. Charles Kubik and attended Dr. Paul Yakovlev's weekly Neuroanatomy discussions at the Fernald School. The third and last year of psychiatry fellowship was at Yale where he was exposed to John Fulton, the Neurophysiologist.

After his 3rd year as a Rockefeller fellow, he was scheduled to join the psychiatry Department at Duke. The prospect did not appeal to him since he was more attracted to Neurology and Neuropathology than to Psychiatry. In 1941, Ray received an invite from Houston Merritt to join the Neurological Research Unit at BCH; he promptly accepted. BCH had 1800 patients at that time. Dr. Derik Denny-Brown (a New Zealander working at Queens Square in London) had been appointed Neurology Chair in 1939. He was later released from his war duties to come to BCH. There were only 2 salaries (Denny-Brown and Merritt) so in order to keep Ray on staff and pay his salary he was appointed Neuropathologist for the hospital at the Mallory Institute. Ray then trained in general pathology, performed autopsies, became the Neuropathologist of the hospital, and worked part time in Neurology.

Ray decided to study all of the brains posted (800-900/year) and the clinical notes of the patients. He initiated brain cuttings each Tuesday afternoon. Doctors from MGH, Brigham, BI would often attend As his reputation as a Neuropathologist grew, formalin fixed brains (uncut – about 100/year) would be sent to

Ray for his opinion. In 1949, Dr C. Miller Fisher came as a fellow to the Neuropathology Unit at BCH to study under Adams and Denny-Brown.

Miller Fisher was born Dec 5, 1913 in Kitchener-Waterloo Canada He was the fifth of 9 children. He attended the University of Toronto College and Medical School from 1931 to 1937. He had a medical Internship at Henry Ford Hospital 1938-9. He began medical residency in Montreal 1939 in Internal Medicine at the Royal Victoria Hospital and was most interested in infectious disease and diabetes.

Canada entered the war with the UK in September 1939; In April 1940 CMF enlisted in the Navy and was assigned to examine recruits on His Majesty's Canadian Ship *Donnaconna*. He was later posted overseas to the HMS *Voltaire*. The ship was sunk by the Germans on April 4, 1941. Fisher spent the next 3 ½ years in a POW camp in Germany as a physician. He was repatriated to Canada during September 1944.

During a 6 month refresher course in Medicine at the Royal Victoria Hospital, he had a 6 week rotation on the Neurology Service at the Montreal Neurological Institute under the neurosurgeon Dr. Wilder Penfield. He became a registrar at MNI and at St Mary's Veteran's hospital. In 1949, he came to BCH for Neuropathology training with Raymond Adams, DDB and Joe Foley. During 1950-1953 he worked in the Neuropathology laboratory at Montreal General Hospital and did clinical work at St Mary's. During this time he encountered the famous patient with TMB and he wrote reports on Carotid Artery Disease. In 1953,

RDA invited CMF to join him at MGH in Boston. From 1954 until his retirement he worked at MGH. He started the Stroke Service and also worked in the Neuropathology lab.

RDA and CMF were both Neuropathologists and clinicians. They believed firmly in elucidating the nature of disease by careful thorough study of patients clinically during life and then defining the nature of their brain and vascular (and systemic pathology) at necropsy.

References

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