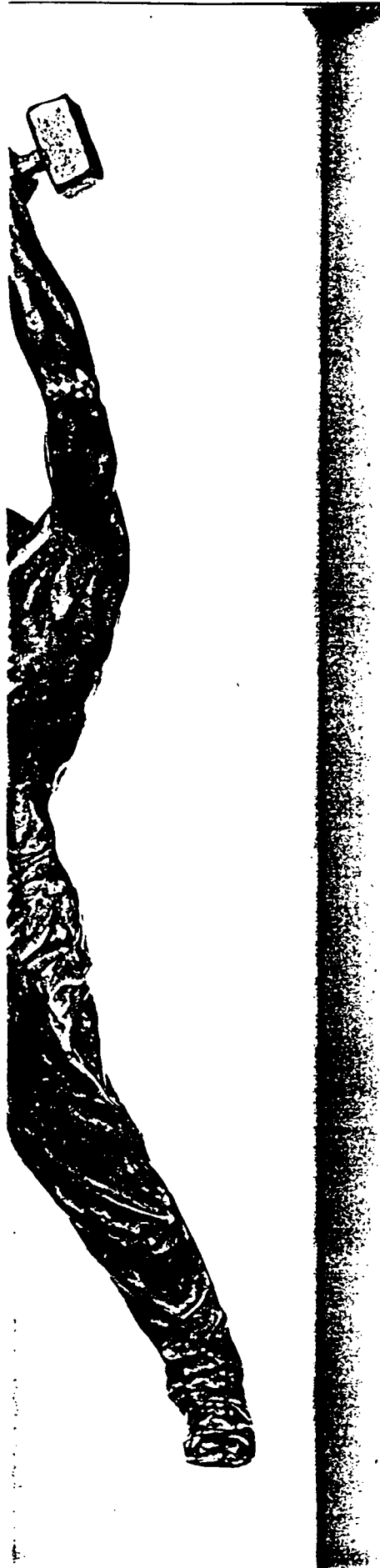




# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN AMERICA

*by Henry B. Selleck*

*in collaboration with Alfred H. Whittaker, M.D., F.A.C.S.*

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THE HISTORY COMMITTEE OF THE INDUSTRIAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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ers is credited to Frank Fulton, of Providence, Rhode Island, who examined the employees of a large saw company in 1906 as part of a campaign to stamp out tuberculosis in the plant. Other industrial physicians were beginning to realize that physical examinations, both preplacement and periodical, were a fundamental requirement in any effective health program.

Harry E. Mock started the examination of employees of Sears, Roebuck & Company, Chicago, in 1909 to discover and isolate those who were tuberculous. He quickly became convinced of the economic as well as the medical value of thorough examinations and complete case records. Yet these basic procedures, now universally established, remained for many years the source of bitter controversy with both labor and management.

In the period from 1910 to 1915 other medical directors were reporting equal success from similar programs in important industrial plants. These included Irving Clark (Norton Grinding Company, Worcester, Massachusetts); S. M. McCurdy (Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company); Otto P. Geier (Cincinnati Milling Machine Company); Wilbur Post (Peoples' Gas Company, Chicago); C. G. Farnum (Avery Company, Peoria, Illinois); W. G. Hudson (E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, Wilmington, Delaware).

Because of its size, the large number of workers it employed, and the new health hazards originating in its manufacturing processes, the automobile industry presented special medical problems from its very beginning. Early in their history, leading companies established medical departments; and the industry has been a potent force in the development of occupational medicine to its present stature.

The first medical director of the Ford Motor Company, James E. Mead, of Detroit, was appointed in 1913 and served the company continuously for twenty-five years. A copy of the *Ford Times* shows that more than 200,000 cases required treatment in the year ending August 31, 1915, about 164,000 of which were handled in the dispensary. Two-thirds of the injuries were received in line of duty and, with few exceptions, were of a minor nature.

In 1916 Mahlon H. Sutton joined Buick as assistant medical director and in 1915 A. Willis Hudson took a post as medical director at Northway Motors, a G. M. subsidiary. They were the first full time physicians employed by General Motors, whose component divisions were in 1954 responsible for the health of some 600,000 workers.

From three men—Mock, Legge, and Otto Geier—we have obtained a great deal of information about events leading directly to the organization of the AAIP&S. Our information has been drawn from personal memories, from reminiscences of chance meetings and conversations, and from correspondence and other scattered records. Without these, along with dates and other basic information relating to events and personalities, some of the most colorful pages in the history of industrial medicine in America would remain, irreparably, a blank.

Harry E. Mock first entertained the idea of industrial practice as the result of a

friendship with Jule Sears, Roebuck. On resign, his chief re- membership becaus

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the time to drive for the most desired goal of all, certification of physicians and surgeons in industry by an American board of occupational medicine. The battle was to be long and hard fought. We shall hear more of it in later chapters.

It was in 1937, too, that the association's concept of annual meetings was broadened to open up a new and inviting vista. Largely through the efforts of a committee consisting of Selby (consultant, General Motors), McCord (consultant, Chrysler Corporation), and J. J. Prendergast (medical director, Chrysler), members were offered "two great attractions for the price of one" for the week of May 3-8.<sup>15</sup>

The occasion was the twenty-second annual meeting of the AAIP&S, held jointly in Detroit with the Midwest Conference on Occupational Diseases, under the auspices of both the American and the Michigan Associations of Industrial Physicians & Surgeons, the Michigan and Wayne County Medical Societies, the Michigan and Detroit Boards of Health, and the Engineering Society of Detroit.

The conference brought together, for the first time in representative numbers, important figures in industrial medicine, public health and industrial hygiene. Doctors who crowded the meeting rooms were well rewarded with a star-studded program covering almost every phase of occupational medicine and hygiene.

In addition to the three Detroit committeemen, the list of speakers figuring prominently in group and general sessions included Harry Mock, Otto Geier, Robert T. Legge, and Loyal Shoudy; C. F. Kettering (vice-president in charge of research, General Motors) and Detroit Health Commissioner Henry F. Vaughan; E. R. Hayhurst and C. O. Sappington (then a Chicago consulting hygienist); A. J. Lanza, McIver Woody, and J. J. Moorhead (Columbia Post-Graduate Medical School).

Industrial medicine had indeed progressed since the small group of dedicated physicians and surgeons met in Detroit in 1916 to launch the first industrial medical organization of its kind in history. In 1937 several of the same men were present in the same city to help write the preface to a new chapter on progress. So successful was the first Midwest conference that it was renewed in Chicago in 1938. These joint gatherings led, thereafter, to the merging of other industrial and medical interests in joint annual meetings of national scope and importance.

At the business session in 1937 Knapp yielded the presidency to Royd R. Sayers; and the association named Selby as president-elect, with McIver Woody (medical director, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey), and D. L. Lynch (New England Telephone and Telegraph Company) as first and second vice-presidents, respectively.

Sayers, educated at Indiana University and the University of Buffalo School of Medicine, brought to the presidency an enviable record in the fields of military and industrial medicine, public health, and industrial hygiene. His diverse experience had convinced him that cooperative effort by agencies interested in occupational health and hygiene could accomplish more than scattered, independent action. To that end, his administration concentrated on the development of closer relations with

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The banquet at the close of the convention was a gala affair, carefully planned to reflect the size and dignity of the association. It attracted a record-breaking attendance. An imposing array of prominent medical men and local dignitaries filled the head table, and the guest speaker was Rear Admiral Clifford A. Swanson, surgeon-general, United States Navy. The importance of the occasion, the Convention Committee had concluded, called for a fair amount of formality.

It so happened that on the same day, April 27, Otto Geier celebrated his 76th birthday. His thoughts, on that anniversary, could well have run parallel to those of Daniel Lynch, who, from retirement in Connecticut, had written to Whittaker a few days before: "How the little army of despised 'company doctors' has grown, and what a grand job they are doing!"

At the business session the association followed traditional procedure in its choice of executive officers. As president-elect, Edward Carleton automatically moved into the presidency; Adolph Kammer was named president-elect, E. A. Irvin, first vice-president, and George Wilkins, second vice-president.

Reporting for the Nominating Committee, Henry Brown paused in his reading of the list of candidates to announce, regretfully, the resignation of Secretary Slobe because of the press of professional duties. He had served the association with distinction for nearly five years after completing his term in the presidency (1944-45). As new secretary the membership elected Arthur K. Peterson, medical director of the R. R. Donnelley and Sons Company, Chicago.

In November, 1949, the association had been shocked by the sudden death of Clarence O. Sappington. Editorial consultant for the association's official journal from its inception, he was named chairman of the first Committee on Publications and Editorial Policy in 1939 and became editor-in-chief of the magazine in 1940. Sappington's loss not only necessitated changes in the staff of the journal but created a vacancy on the Board of Directors. To fill the unexpired term on the Board, the members endorsed Carey P. McCord, then medical adviser to the Chrysler Corporation and consulting editor of *Industrial Medicine and Surgery*. It was a significant choice, in view of the part he was soon to play in shaping the subsequent progress of the journal.

New directors elected for 1950-52 were James M. Carlisle (Merck & Company), Robert C. Page (Standard Oil Company, New Jersey), Max Burnell (General Motors Corporation), Floyd Shaffer (Bethlehem Steel Company), Russell Birrell (Imperial Oil Company of Canada), and Daniel Braun (Consolidated Coal Company).

The incoming president, Edward H. Carleton, was born in Massachusetts but received his higher education at the University of Louisville and its medical school, from which he was graduated in 1932. After two years in general practice and two more in orthopedic surgery he made, in 1937, his first and only industrial affiliation with the Inland Steel Company, which he has served since 1957 as general medical director.