

Albert Herman Aldridge, M.D.

July 19, 1893 - November 13, 1983

By

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Albert Herman Aldridge, born in Victor, New York on July 19, 1893, died in his 91st year at his retirement home in Pinehurst, North Carolina on November 13, 1983. So ended the life of one of America's foremost gynecologists of his day.

Born and raised on a farm and educated at the local high school, Dr. Aldridge entered Syracuse University in 1911 and graduated with a B.S. degree. He was then admitted to the medical school at the University of Syracuse and graduated with honors in 1918 and was elected a member of The Alpha Omega Alpha Fraternity.

After serving two years as a medical officer at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Chelsea, Mass., Dr. Aldridge came to New York City for a fourteen month residency in Obstetrics under Dr. William E. Studdiford at The Sloane Hospital for Women, and subsequently, two years of residency in Gynecology under Dr. George Gray Ward at the Woman's Hospital in the State of New York, the only hospital at that time solely devoted to gynecology and the teaching of gynecologic surgery in America.

Dr. Aldridge remained on the staff of Woman's Hospital throughout his professional career and maintained a private practice of Obstetrics Gynecology that continued for more than fifty years. In 1938 he succeeded Dr. Ward and became the fifth Surgeon-in-Chief of The Woman's Hospital, a position he held for eighteen years until his academic retirement in 1955. With this position he held the academic rank of Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University. He maintained a large and prestigious practice until his full retirement in 1977 and ending

almost six decades of obstetrical and gynecological practice and experiences.

Dr. Aldridge lived in a time when maternity services and gynecologic surgery were being united under one Director and as a single medical service or department in teaching hospitals and medical schools around the country, and particularly in New York.

As "Chief" of The Woman's Hospital, he was in a position to play an influential role in the development of obstetrics and gynecology as a major specialty as we know it today - first as a teacher directing a strong training program both in obstetrics and gynecology, and secondly as a clinical investigator in both obstetrical and Gynecological problems. Under his leadership and guidance clinical managements and surgical techniques were always being tried, tested and standardized through constant improvement and comparison with documented end results.

His personal writings consisted of twenty-eight major, and timely contributions to literature on such diverse subjects as improved surgical techniques in performing a total abdominal hysterectomy, repair of a vesico-vaginal fistula, extraperitoneal Cesarean section, urinary stress incontinence, temporary surgical sterilization, management of pelvic infections and the radiation therapy for cancer of the uterine cervix. In addition to his active teaching and training program, and his busy private practice, he was constantly sought after for lectures, postgraduate sessions, and surgical demonstrations throughout the United States, Canada, and England. He thus maintained, and furthered the pre-eminent heritage of his illustrious predecessors at Woman's Hospital, and that of the Hospital itself

as a leading institution and training center for future generations of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in America and abroad.

In 1946 Dr. Aldridge became instrumental in initiating the union of Woman's Hospital with St. Luke's Hospital - a process that took over a century to be realized and a decade to accomplish. Another decade saw the completion in 1965 of the new and fourth building of The Woman's Hospital, adjoined to St. Luke's on Morningside Heights, across the street from the Columbia University campus. As a consequence of this envisioned union, the St. Luke's Hospital Center was created and became a full fledged teaching hospital of The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University.

Dr. Aldridge was a life member and past President of The New York Obstetrical Society, The American Gynecologic Society, The New York Hospital Graduates Club, and The American Gynecologic Travel Club. He was honored in 1952 by the University of Leeds, England with an LL.D degree, honoris causa.

Dr. Aldridge was a stern, soft-spoken disciplinarian, often held in awe by his residents, and warmly and highly respected by a loyal and devoted staff. His quiet and irrepressible sense of humor, fortified with a good joke would, as I remember him, often suffice to put at ease a young, unsuspecting resident assigned to assist him with a major operation.

Although I only knew Dr. Aldridge for the last twelve years of his professional career, when I first came to Woman's Hospital, I was well aware of his tactfulness, his unconcealable integrity and rectitude, his sympathetic and warm human

understanding, his soft, quiet mode of speech, and his infectious sense of humor. He was as devoted to his patients as they were to him and still today many recall how kind and comforting he was to them, or their family, at a time of need.

These were the qualities of the man as I knew him who gave so much to the Woman's Hospital and to the specialty of Obstetrics and Gynecology in America during his lifetime, qualities that are always enviable and so worthy of emulating in our own ways.

He is survived by his wife, Nancy Symington, a charming, compassionate lady, to whom he was married for fifty-five years, and two sons, John, an obstetrician/gynecologist practicing in Ithaca, New York, Richard, a teacher of English, and poet of no small repute in Phippsburg, Maine, and three grandchildren.

Richard wrote a poem entitled, "To My Father", which may be found in a collected edition of his poetry entitled, "Red Pine, Black Ash". The last few lines of that poem are reprinted here, for I believe they are appropriate for what we all must feel in paying tribute to a dedicated colleague and one of America's foremost gynecologists:

"And when the day that every leaf
Must fall arrives to waft him free,
Then I must yield with reasoned grief,
And pray that some of his strength that I
For one have now in me
May stay with us, and in us grow,
And so live on, and never die."