

I THE BIRTH OF THE WORLD FEDERATION
OF NEUROSURGICAL SOCIETIES

A. EARL WALKER † AND H. AUGUST VAN ALPHEN

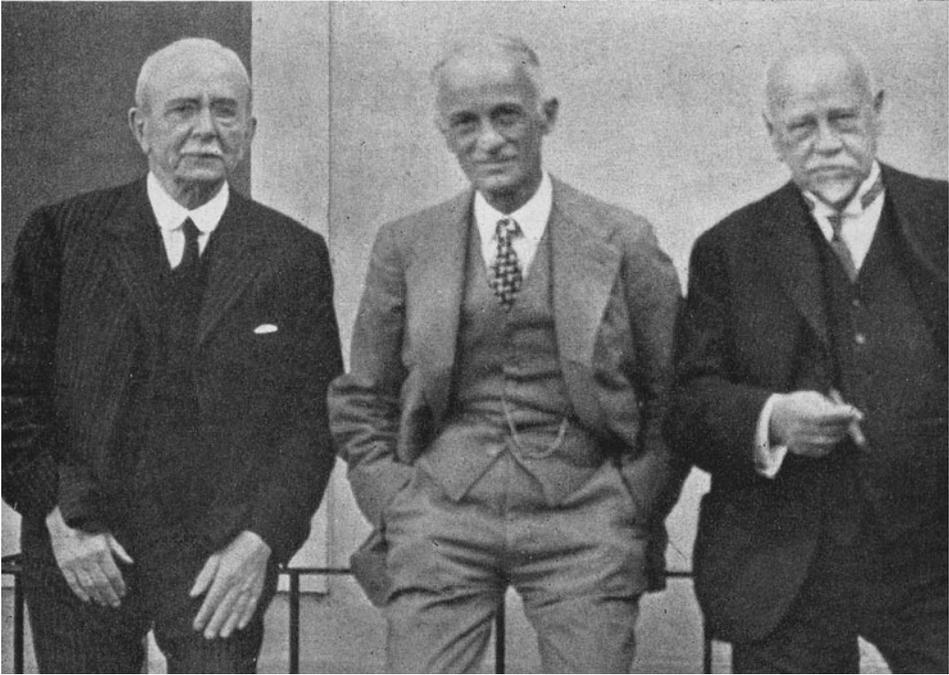
BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION

Modern neurosurgery can be considered as dating from the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. With steady development over subsequent decades, its position as an independent medical discipline was secured in the United States by the beginning of the Second World War. In many European countries, however, neurosurgery remained under the control of neurologists and sometimes also general surgeons, which inevitably led to conflicts and a demand for the emancipation of neurosurgery as a separate discipline.

This situation was reflected in the way the International Neurological Congresses were organized, neurological subspecialties such as neuropathology, clinical neurophysiology and neurosurgery being subsumed from the beginning. The first International Neurological Congress was held at the Municipal Casino in Berne from 31st August until 3rd September 1931, as a result of a generous initiative by the American Neurological Association. It was the first time since the World War of 1914-1918 that neurologists from Germany, France and England, as well as from other countries, had found it possible to have a joint meeting, and it proved to be a gathering little marred by politics or the old animosities of war. At that time in Germany, where neurology was born out of psychiatry, the neurologists still formed a joint body with the psychiatrists in the *Gesellschaft Deutscher Nervenärzte* and neurology was still not recognized as a separate discipline. This was probably the reason why the attendance of German neurologists at the congress was relatively poor.

Although no records are available of the number of neurosurgeons in attendance, their presence certainly did not pass unnoticed, as can be learned from an elegant article by the neurophysiologist, John Fulton, on the reunion of Harvey Cushing and the Swiss tuberculosis specialist, Arnold Klebs. The latter had previously worked in Chicago and had returned to his native city, Berne, after retirement. Both were friends of William Osler and they had become very close.

At the Opening Ceremony of the congress, on Monday 31st August 1931, the honorary degree of Member of the University of Berne was conferred on both Harvey Cushing and Sir Charles Sherrington by the Rector Magnificus, Professor Asher. After this formal part of the morning session the scientific programme began with a number of important papers by Clovis Vincent (Paris), Percival Bailey (USA), Wilder Penfield (Canada) and several others. On Monday afternoon, Harvey Cushing read, as the third speaker on the scientific programme, his celebrated report on two thousand verified tumours of the brain, which was published in monograph form a year later. John Fulton wrote about this event: 'At least a thousand people attended, and for the first time (and probably the only session during the Congress), all of the side foyers were empty. Dr. Cushing, speaking slowly into a microphone which seemed perfectly tuned to his voice, began with references to his early physiological experiments in Berne carried out in 1900-1901, mentioning



Sir Charles S. Sherrington, Harvey Cushing and William Welch (from left to right). Photograph taken by Arnold Klebs after the First International Neurological Congress in Berne 1931 at his home in Nyon, the town in Switzerland where the Central Office of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies would be located seventy years later. (from J. Fulton: Harvey Cushing: a Biography)

that he had now come to give an account of the work he had done in the interval. He referred to the various factors which had led to the dramatic fall in mortality rate for cerebral operations. 'Younger men', he went on to say 'picking up where I leave off, can reduce the mortality still further'. He reviewed the life history of the various categories of brain tumour and then ended with a somewhat unexpected climax: 'Gentlemen, this will be the last report on the statistical results of brain tumours as a whole which I shall ever publish.' For a moment there was complete silence, then a burst of prolonged applause. Professor Ariëns Kappers (neuroanatomist, Amsterdam), who was presiding, broke the precedent by offering a vote of thanks to Dr. Cushing in the name of the Congress for placing before them in this inspiring way the brilliant results of his life's work.'

That evening, Arnold Klebs, in the true spirit of Swiss hospitality, gave a dinner for Harvey Cushing and his pupils to which he invited many old friends.

The following day began with a morning session devoted to muscle tone and the postural reflexes, with Sir Charles Sherrington in the chair. There were many papers. Little in the way of new information was, however, presented and the session was chiefly remarkable for the nationalities represented and for the brilliant summing-up by Sherrington. In the afternoon there were demonstrations and endless fascinating anecdotes.

On the same day Harvey Cushing was inspired to invite many of his former pupils and colleagues to dinner, to meet his 'masters' Welch, Sherrington, de Martel

 Harvey Cushing (Boston)

Thierry de Martel (Paris)		Dimitri Bagdazar (Bucharest)
Paul Martin (Brussels)		Percival Bailey (Chicago)
Daniel Petit-Dutaillis (Paris)		Georges Schaltenbrand (Hamburg)
Tracy Putnam (Boston)		Frederic Schreiber (Detroit)
Jean Morelle (Louvain)		Richard Light (Boston)
John Fulton (New Haven)		Herbert Olivecrona (Stockholm)
William Welch (Baltimore)		Arnold Klebs (Nyon)
Richard Meagher (Boston)		Hugh Cairns (London)
Francis Grant (Philadelphia)		Ignaz Oljenick (Amsterdam)
Norman Dott (Edinburgh)		George Armitage (Leeds)
Frank Fremont-Smith (Boston)		Gaston DeCoppet (Berne)
Frédéric Bremer (Brussels)		Franc Ingraham (Boston)
Sir Charles Sherrington (Oxford)		Geoffrey Jefferson (Manchester)
		Otfrid Foerster (Breslau)

 Wilder Penfield (Montreal)

Seating arrangement at Cushing's dinner party at the
First International Neurological Congress, Berne 1931

and Klebs. The table arrangement, devised by Cushing himself, gives an impression of the neurosurgical attendance at the meeting and the dinner.

Arnold C. de Vet, at that time Ignaz Oljenick's trainee in neurosurgery in Amsterdam and one of the future members of the founding group of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies, also attended the Congress in Berne.

During the Executive Meeting of the Congress, it was decided to organize an International Neurological Congress with neurosurgical participation every four years, the next one being held in the Claridge Hotel in London in 1935. This Congress was attended by forty-three neurosurgeons from twelve countries, including Argentina, Australia, Canada and USA. The third meeting in Copenhagen in 1939, interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, was attended by twenty-four neurosurgeons and spouses, representing seven countries. During the war years, the congresses were not held, but stimulated by the advances in neurological sciences as the result of the war, they were resumed in 1949. By that time, however, the neuropathologists and electroencephalographers had become independent from the neurologists and were holding separate congresses. At the first post-war International Neurological Congress, held in Paris in 1949, Alfonso Asenjo from Chile arranged for a meeting with a group of neurosurgeons to discuss how neurosurgery might present itself at international congresses in future. Daniel Petit-Dutaillis from Paris favoured meeting with the surgical congresses, but Hugh Cairns, Gilbert Horrax and Geoffrey Jefferson argued for joint sessions with the neurologists. Ultimately, it was decided to participate as a separate group within the International Neurological Congress. Two years later, at an interim planning meeting prior to the International Neurological Congress in Lisbon, neurosurgery was proposed as one of the official scientific topics, but this proposal was only partially accepted

by the neurologists on the Organizing Committee, who were planning to honour Egaz Moniz, the Nobel laureate in Medicine for 1949, and his neurosurgical associate P. Almeida-Lima at the Lisbon Congress in 1953. Despite the success of this Congress, growing discontent was developing among the neurosurgeons, who realized that their specialty was not being given an opportunity to develop to its full potential. Sir Francis Walshe, a leading neurologist from London, described these rebellious neurosurgeons as 'another splinter group'. To alleviate this discontent, the 1957 Congress in Brussels was retitled an 'International Congress of Neurological Sciences', with representation on the organizing committee of all participating disciplines. The Secretary-General of this congress, Dr. Ludo van Bogaert (Belgium), assured the Interim Planning Meeting that: 'the 1957 Congress will be dedicated to the constructive coordination of neurosurgery, neuropathology, electroencephalography, clinical neurophysiology and even the activities of the International League Against Epilepsy. All these branches can, while retaining their autonomy, be grouped around the central core of clinical neurology'. This, however, failed to satisfy the neurosurgeons. The group strongly advocated the formation of an organization 'which would meet with and cooperate with International Neurological Congresses whenever and wherever possible'. This pronouncement met with an impassioned plea for unity. Sir Francis Walshe pleaded: 'do not desert us now, neurology is at the crossroads'. But Geoffrey Jefferson's retort set the stage: 'Sir Francis, where else has it ever been?' Thus began the divorce of neurosurgery from the international neurological organization. The successful South American international congresses, held biennially since 1947, suggested that a world congress of neurosurgery would be quite feasible. European neurosurgeons, however, dominated by neurologists and general surgeons in their countries, considered it undiplomatic to establish an autonomous congress of neurosurgery. But, if American neurosurgeons were to initiate such a venture they would support it wholeheartedly. So, Dr. W.B. Scoville was entrusted with the task of giving it shape. On 16th March 1955, he wrote an extensive and memorable letter explaining the situation to the officers of the neurosurgical societies in Europe and America and to some outstanding leaders of neurosurgery. The great majority of answers to his letter being affirmative, Dr. Scoville arranged a meeting of several senior European neurosurgeons and representatives of seventeen national neurosurgical societies. This was to be held in Brussels on 4th and 5th September 1955.

At about the same time, the American delegates to the Organizing Committee of the International Neurological Congress were apprised of the desire of the neurosurgeons to hold an independent congress. Both Drs. H.A. Riley and H.H. Merritt were receptive to the idea and offered their assistance. In a letter dated 29th June 1955, Dr. Riley wrote to the Secretary-General of the Congress, Dr. van Bogaert, informing him of the plans of the neurosurgeons and suggested: 'If it would seem desirable to you to have a committee from this neurosurgical group meet with us either the 7th or 8th of September, would you be so kind as to write to Dr. Scoville, whose name and address I have given above, and extend an invitation to a committee of three or four neurological surgeons appointed by their group to discuss their conclusions with us and to learn of our own decision in regard to a continuation of the various disciplines as separate organizations or a grouping of these disciplines

[Opposite page] Letter written by Dr. W.B. Scoville to representatives of neurosurgical societies in Europe and the Americas proposing the establishment of a separate International Congress of Neurosurgery

WILLIAM BEECHER SCOVILLE, M.D.
 BENJAMIN BRADFORD WHITCOMB, M.D.
 REMBRANDT HARVEY DUNSMORE, M.D.
 FRANCIS GEORGE REILLY, M.D.

NEUROSURGICAL GROUP
 85 JEFFERSON STREET
 HARTFORD 14, CONN.
 CHAPEL 6-1636

COMMUNICATION TO CERTAIN REPRESENTATIVE
 NEUROSURGEONS OF EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS.

An increasing number of neurosurgeons in various countries in Europe and South America have approached this writer concerning the formation of an International Congress of Neurosurgery. The reasons given indicate that neurosurgery has now become a mature surgical specialty sharing common research and clinical problems throughout the world. It contains a sufficient number of qualified neurosurgeons to warrant formation of its own representative scientific congress. The past method of sharing these ideas as an offshoot of the International Congress of Neurology has certain disadvantages. Neurologists, neurosurgeons and their allied fields now constitute too vast a number to permit presentations of papers at which all members may attend as one body. This forces the presentation of papers simultaneously in multiple subsections, a source of discontent and confusion. Although neurosurgeons feel great congeniality with and stimulation by neurologists and their research confreres, they have drifted far afield from many of the other allied dependents attending such a congress.

In brief, too many people now attend the Neurological Congress to permit that sharp focus on surgical neurology and physiology, so necessary to neurosurgeons the world over. A separate congress is probably the proper solution but a compromise between complete divorce and permanent dependency could well be the organization of an International Congress of Neurosurgery to be held just before the Congress of Neurology with certain overlapping days for joint papers. In addition, qualified neurologists, neurophysiologists and neuropathologists should be welcome guests to this congress.

Preliminary discussions can well take place at the Latin-American Congress to be held in Montevideo in March 1955. There is some urgency to these preliminary discussions because of other proposals for the organization of a congress of North and South America. This memorandum to our neurosurgical confreres will therefore be tendered for their consideration during the Latin-American Congress and in letter form to those confreres unable to attend this Congress. Subject to the approval of the Secretary General, those expressing interest will meet in order to form a preliminary organizational committee and for consideration of holding its first meeting the week preceding the next International Congress of Neurology in 1957. It is hoped that the organization can be along lines similar to the Congress of Neurology and with the blessing and approval of that organization. At this preliminary meeting and by letter, proposals will be requested for nominations of representative members from each country who will help in the final organization of this congress, to be completed at the next Congress of Neurology. In the two-year interim much of the spadework can be accomplished by mutual correspondence and even an abbreviated scientific program can be planned for this organizational week.

In closing, this writer realizes that every effort should be made to obtain the wishes of ALL qualified neurosurgeons throughout the world and to assure representation by each and every country. He presumes to write his letter only as a starting impetus, and believes that any committee appointed at the preliminary meeting should act in only a temporary capacity to aid in the democratic election of permanent representatives.

William Beecher Scoville, M.D.
 Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.A.

wbs: en
 March 16, 1955

American Academy of Neurological Surgery	W.B. Scoville
Canadian Neurological Society	A.R. Elvidge
	J. Sirois
Congreso Latino-Americano de Neurocirugía	R. Arana Iñiguez
Congress of Neurological Surgeons	H.J. Svien
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Neurochirurgie	A. Stender
Harvey Cushing Society	P.C. Bucy
	W.B. Scoville
	H.J. Svien
	A.E. Walker
Nederlandse Vereniging van Neurochirurgen	A.C. de Vet
Neurosurgical Society of America	H.J. Svien
Nordisk Neurokirurgisk Forening	E. Busch
Sociedad Luso-Española de Neurocirugía	D. Almeida-Lima
	E. Tolosa
Società Italiana di Neuro-Chirurgia	G.M. Fasiani
Société de Neurochirurgie de Langue Française	L. Christophe
	M. David
	H. Krayenbühl
	P. Martin
	D. Petit-Dutaillis
Society of British Neurological Surgeons	Sir G. Jefferson
	B. Hughes
Society of Neurological Surgeons	P.C. Bucy
	A.E. Walker

Constituent neurosurgical societies of the World Federation and their representatives

in a larger organization, such as a congress of neurologists, neurosurgeons and allied sciences. The name of this larger organization can of course be anything that we choose, which would make manifest the character and the constituent parts of such an organization. As I have continued to give further thought to this subject, it has seemed to me that the organization of a larger group, representing all phases of our science, would be highly desirable and would bring into, I hope, harmonious relations all of the various groups interested in neurology in its broader aspects.'

Dr. van Bogaert was quite receptive to the suggestion and invited a delegation of neurosurgeons to attend the meeting of the Organizing Committee on 6th September 1955.

On the morning of 4th September 1955, eighteen representatives from thirteen national neurosurgical societies met at the Fondation Universitaire, Brussels, Belgium. Two members of the group, Drs. E. Tolosa (Spain) and P. Almeida-Lima (Portugal) were absent. Dr. Scoville welcomed the delegates and explained the purpose of the meeting. Because previous neurological congresses had had inadequate neurosurgical representation in the organizational and scientific sessions and because neurosurgeons had expressed a desire for an independent congress, this group, representing most of the national neurosurgical societies, had been convened to deliberate upon the desirability and means of forming an international organization to promote the special aims and purposes of neurological surgery. After considerable discussion of the problems encountered at previous neurological con-

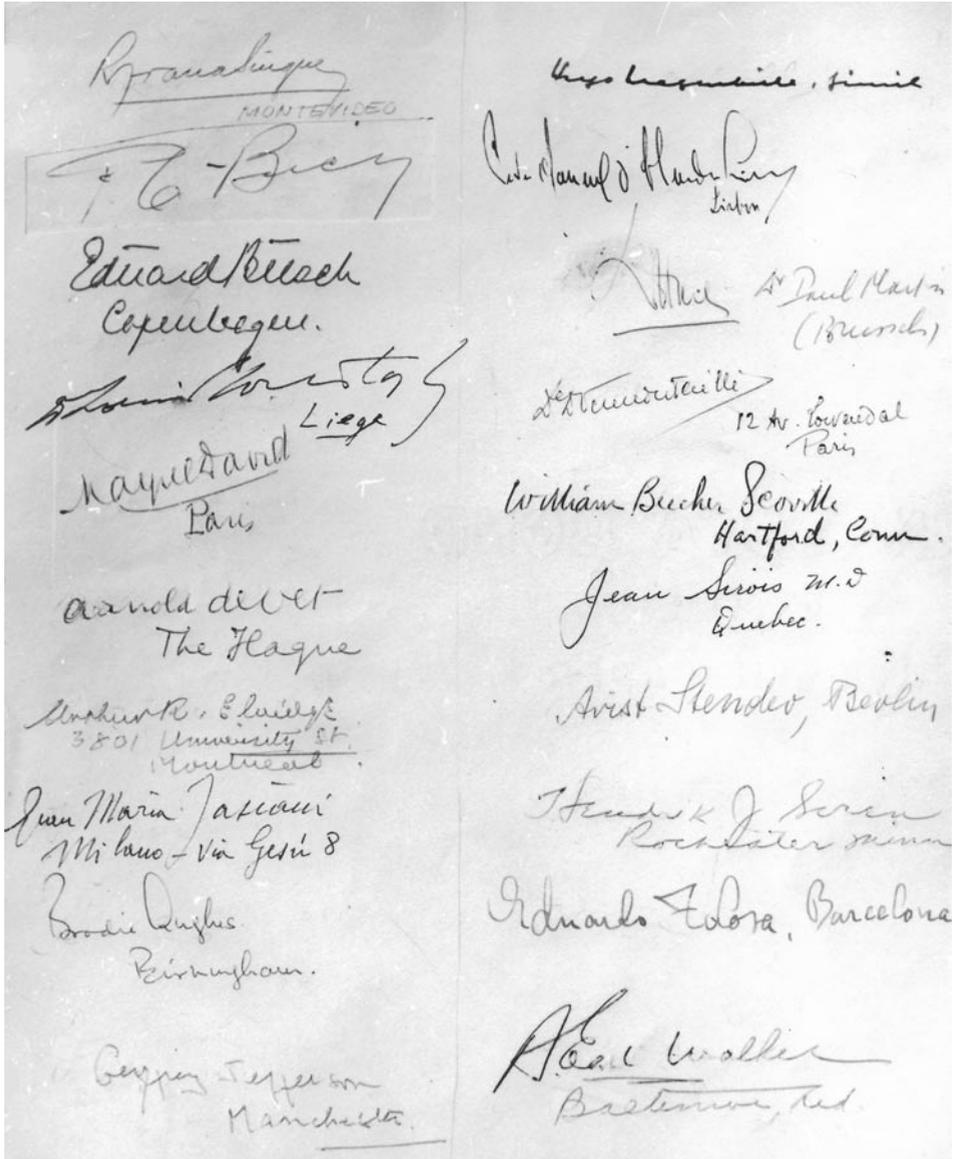


Founding members of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies at the inaugural meeting in Brussels, 4th-5th September 1955. From left to right: H.J. Svien (USA), R. Arana Iñiguez (Uruguay), A.C. de Vet (The Netherlands), H. Krayenbühl (Switzerland), Sir Geoffrey Jefferson (UK), J. Sirois (Canada), A. Stender (Germany), P. Martin (Belgium), L. Christophe (Belgium), E. Busch (Denmark), B. Hughes (UK), A.R. Elvidge (Canada) and A.E. Walker (USA). The following members were absent: P. Almeida-Lima (Portugal), P.C. Bucy (USA), M. David (France), D. Petit-Dutaillis (France) and E. Tolosa (Spain). W.B. Scoville (USA) was in a meeting. J.M. Fasiani (Italy) was taking the picture.

gresses, of the advantages and disadvantages of breaking ties with the neurologists, the decision was taken to institute 'an international organization composed of and controlled by the component neurosurgical societies', and thus the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies was born. Its official baptism, the formal receipt of its name, did not, however, take place until some time later once the Constitution had been drafted and ratified at an executive session during the International Congress of Neurological Sciences in Brussels, on the historic date of Saturday, 20th July 1957.

The immediate aim of the organization after the first meeting was to organize a neurosurgical programme which, it was hoped, would be incorporated into that of the International Congress of Neurological Sciences in Brussels. To this end, committees were appointed to formulate a Constitution, to organize a scientific programme for the congress and to nominate officers for the organization.

The neurosurgical delegates received the reports of the committees on 5th September 1955. The Programme Committee recommended the following subjects for symposia at the congress: 1. extrapyramidal disease, 2. the interpretation and significance of changes in consciousness, 3. the surgery of supratentorial angiomas and 4. the therapeutic uses of hypothermia. The Nominating Committee presented its report with the slate of officers for the 1957 congress. These were elected unanimously by the organizing committee. Dr. G. Jefferson (UK) became the first Presi-



Signatures of the founding members of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies

dent. Drs. P. Bailey (USA), P. Martin (Belgium), H. Olivecrona (Sweden), W. Penfield (Canada) and D. Petit-Dutaillis (France) were appointed Honorary President. The Constitution Committee, meanwhile, had drafted a Constitution for the new organization. This was to be circulated to the member societies for their review and comments and to be presented for ratification at the executive session to be held at the time of the congress.

At the first meeting of the Organizing Committee of the International Congress of Neurological Sciences, also held in Brussels on 6th September 1955, Geoffrey



Percival Bailey †
Honorary President



Paul Martin †
Honorary President



Herbert Olivecrona †
Honorary President



Sir Wilder G. Penfield †
Honorary President

Jefferson introduced a delegation of half a dozen neurosurgeons, including Drs. Scoville and Fasiani with the words: 'these brash young men want a congress on their own'. The neurological members of the Organizing Committee were not entirely taken by surprise when they heard of the desires and actions of the neurosurgeons. Accordingly, most of the delegates accepted the announcement graciously, and offered full cooperation even though this meant rearranging the format of the 1957 Congress and abandoning certain programme items. Their generous offer to cope with the administrative arrangements, in view of the short time available, was gratefully accepted.

References

- Alphen, H.A.M. van: Neurosurgery. In: J.A.M. Frederiks, G.W. Bruyn, P. Eling (eds): *History of Neurology in The Netherlands*. Amsterdam, Boom: 93-121, 2002
- Alphen, H.A. van: Why collect Medical Books? *Acta Neurochir. (Wien)*, Suppl. 83: 127-131, 2002
- Cushing, H.: *Intracranial Tumours. Notes upon a series of two thousand verified cases with surgical-mortality percentages pertaining thereto*. Springfield, Ill., Charles C. Thomas, 1932, 150 pp
- Edited on behalf of the German Society of Neurosurgery: *Neurosurgery in Germany, History*. Lübeck, Hansisches Verlagskontor, 2002, 244 pp
- Fulton, J.F.: Arnold Klebs and Harvey Cushing at the 1st International Neurological Congress at Berne in 1931. No place (bound Xerox copy from the library of L. van Bogaert, Antwerp): 332-354, 1941
- Fulton, J.F.: *Harvey Cushing. A Biography*. Springfield, Ill., Charles C. Thomas, 1946, 754 pp
- Luyendijk, W., Mullan, S.: The Birth and Early Development of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies. *Newsletter WFNS*, Spring 1993
- Scoville, W.B.: The World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies. A brief history. *Surg. Neurol.* 7: 185-187, 1977
- Walker, E.A.: *The History of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies*. New Mexico, University of New Mexico Printing Plant, 1985, 141 pp
- Walker, E.A.: The evolution of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies. *Acta Neurochir. (Wien)*, 94: 99-102, 1988

HONORARY PRESIDENTS AND OFFICERS ELECTED IN BRUSSELS 1955

Honorary Presidents

P. Bailey (USA)
P. Martin (Belgium)
H. Olivecrona (Sweden)
Sir Wilder Penfield (Canada)
D. Petit-Dutaillis (France)

Federation Officers 1955-1957

President:

Sir Geoffrey Jefferson (UK)

Vice-President:

A.E. Walker (USA)

Secretary-General:

M. David (France)

Assistant Secretary-General (International):

W.B. Scoville (USA)

Assistant Secretary-General (Local):

J. Brihaye (Belgium)

Treasurer:

A.C. de Vet (The Netherlands)

Assistant Treasurer:

R. Arana Iñiguez (Uruguay)

Editor of Transactions:

H. Krayenbühl (Switzerland)
