IN MEMORIAM

Clayton E. Wheeler Jr. 1917–2007:
The Early Years as Teacher, Clinician, and Scientist

Clayton Wheeler accompanied Edward Cawley to Charlottesville, Virginia, from the University of Michigan in 1951 when Dr. Cawley assumed the chair of the Department of Dermatology at the University of Virginia. It was there that he met his wife, Brooks, and started his family.

I consider it one of the most fortunate elements of my professional career to have had Clayton Wheeler as a mentor, adviser, and close personal friend from the very outset as I began my residency at the University of Virginia, where Clayton was one of my two professors, the other being Dr. Cawley, the department chair.

It was evident to me from the beginning that Clayton was a dedicated teacher, a compassionate and skilled clinician, a scholar, and a tireless investigator, but in addition he was a very approachable individual and a wise advisor. I was very fortunate to have had an opportunity to assist Clayton in his laboratory, and he was always ready to offer advice and stimulation, largely through his own enthusiasm for his research.

One of his colleagues in another department once said to me, “Clayton never bought a wooden nickel”—Clayton’s entire career was a tribute to his superb judgment and unfailing common sense.

Clayton was a modest and unassuming individual with a sly wit, a hearty chuckle, and a wonderful sense of humor, and so it was easy to overlook at first the fact that he possessed the skills, ambition, and creativity that made him one of the truly great leaders in our specialty. I recall with gratitude many of the times I went to Clayton for advice, and he never failed to set me on the best path.

One could not wish for more interesting and delightful companions than Clayton Wheeler and his wife, Brooks, who, like Clayton, was a truly delightful and down-to-earth friend to both my wife and me.

Peyton E. Weary
Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

Clayton E. Wheeler Jr.: The Early Years at the University of North Carolina

This is a brief story of how one man built a top-notch academic department of dermatology from scratch. When Clayton Wheeler came to the University of North Carolina (UNC) in the winter of 1962, there was no residency program, no research in dermatology, and only modest facilities for either clinical or research dermatology. Clinical dermatology was being provided by two part-time clinicians, Joe Hitch and George Crane, who graciously came to the University Hospital to see dermatology consults one or two half days per week. Dick Dobson had left the previous year to join his mentor, Wally Lobitz, in founding a new department at the University of Oregon. In a talk given on the 50th anniversary of dermatology at UNC in 2002, Dr. Wheeler described his coming to the university as follows: “I came to UNC in 1962 because I thought I could help develop an excellent dermatology program here. I was offered and promised very little and asked for very little because I thought the young Department of Medicine had little more to give. Essentially, I came on faith—faith in myself that I could do a good job and faith in the people at UNC that they would support dermatology if I did a good job.”

At the outset, dermatology was a division of medicine, with Dr. Wheeler as the division chief and sole full-time faculty. Some of his first efforts were to establish a residency program and a dermatology clinic with the continued assistance of Drs. Hitch and Crane. Dr. Wheeler brought two research grants for the study of herpes simplex virus with him from the University of Virginia. He applied for and received a research training grant. The research training grant and the research grants “kept us going” during