

**APPENDIX 4 – Correspondence between Francis M. (“Frank”) Forster, M.D., Lewis P. (“Bud”) Rowland, M.D., and Robert B. (“Bob”) Daroff, M.D., from December 9, 1997 to April 7, 1998.**

Edited by Douglas J. Lanska, MD, MS, MSPH, FAAN

1. Forster to Rowland (with cc: to Daroff), December 9, 1997: Concerning the founding and early days of the American Academy of Neurology
2. Forster to Rowland (with bcc: to Daroff), December 30, 1997: Concerning family news, H. Houston Merritt, and some mention of Forster’s educational background.
3. Daroff to Forster, January 9, 1998, with appended quote from: Concerning H. Houston Merritt.

White BV, Wolfe RJ, Taylor E. Stanley Cobb: A Builder of the Modern Neurosciences. Boston: The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, 1984.

4. Forster to Daroff, April 7, 1998: Wide-ranging discussion touching on Stanley Cobb, H. Houston Merritt, Derek Denny-Brown, Eugene Stead, Soma Weiss, the Flexner Report, the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston City Hospital, and Columbia University.

**NOTE:** A “key” of abbreviations, expressions, terms, and individuals mentioned in the correspondence is included at the end.

Francis M. Forster, MD  
21 Fallen Branch Lane  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45241  
December 9, 1997

Lewis P. Rowland, MD  
Chairman, Dept. of Neurology  
Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.

Dear Bud,

It is good to hear from you and I hope I can be of some help. Actually, I do not recall Houston taking an active role in the formation and development of the Academy. He certainly was supportive for he did nothing to discourage us. His influence even at that early date was strong on the young neurologists.

Abe, Ady, Russ and I were already members of the ANA, albeit rather recently so. [Ady wondered privately to me if we might be expelled from the ANA for that venture!] The primary motivation of the AAN was not against the ANA but rather to create a more inclusive organization. This was sort of like the Rooseveltian New Deal. From the cradle to the grave became from first year resident to emeritus! And not only inclusive in membership but with active interplay between members. Of course this could appear as a direct challenge to the more senior members of the ANA.

Bernie Alpers was on the original list of some twenty-seven who were approached to join the AAN but he had his name stricken because of the possible antipathy between the organizations. The only older members of the ANA I can recall from the French Lick meeting were Wartenberg and Walter Schaller both of San Francisco. Dr. Wartenberg at the opening of the meeting, asked recognition from the chair and lambasted Abe Baker. He complained about the typing errors in, as he admitted, the otherwise excellent program! . At French Lick there were no outside distractions, except for golf. As soon as people gathered they checked on the town, found nothing, returned to the hotel and many of them began golfing. Neither Dr. Schaller nor I played golf. As we stood on the porch watching others lugging their bags he asked me if I played Chess and invited me to join him. We had many chess games in the ensuing years at the ANA meetings and even played by mail for several years.

But enough of the reminiscing. About Houston Merritt he was supportive in a quiet way. He did not attend the early meetings. He was aware of our activities and never chided us. As you know, I had been a resident for two years at BCH. The second year was the first year that Tracy Putnam had left and Houston was in charge. So we had a particularly close relationship. Ady Sahs had also been at the BCH in neuropath for six months in 1938. I do not know of the relationship between Abe Baker and Houston but know that Abe had the utmost respect for him . . . Nor am I aware of the relationship between Russ De Jong and Houston but each had a substantial respect for each other. Russ was the most scholarly of us all.

We were really an unusual combination. Abe was of a big city practicing Jewish family of the merchant class. Ady Sahs was from a small town in western Iowa and a Congregationalist. Russ was of Michigan Dutch derivation. His family included distinguished state supreme court judges. I was from a blue collar, Roman Catholic background on the edge of Cincinnati but had trained and remained teaching in the east. The differences in our backgrounds gave us an ecumenical approach to many problems.

You are correct in that in the beginning there some antipathy between the early members of the AAN and some members of the ANA. This, as you surmised, was due to the strong Eastern influence and the elitism of the latter.


A.R. Vonderahe of Cincinnati began to attend the AAN about the second meeting and made the astute observation that "The ANA is like the US Senate and the AAN is like the House of Representatives." With his urging I introduced this into the thinking of the officers and board of the AAN. Perhaps that helped to ameliorate the antipathies.

I do not recall when Houston attended an AAN meeting. Certainly he never dissuaded any of us from our activities and therefore was supportive. After all he was the heart of the ANA; He had an almost overwhelming academic load to carry. Also, his experiences at Harvard had made him much more cautious and deliberate in his actions. In his wisdom he probably could not overtly be supportive of the Academy but certainly did help it.

I do hope this is helpful. As "my bride" [of sixty years] puts it "If you ask me what time it is I tell you how to build a watch." Certainly to me Houston Merritt was the greatest neurologist of our time, truly a man for all seasons, one who survived adversity in academic life and rose to great achievements.

Cordially yours,

Francis M. Forster, MD

Dr. Robert Darro 

Bob, for your information. Happy Holidays to you and your Family. How is Joe Foley?

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*December 30, 1997*

Lewis P. Rowland, MD  
Chairman, Dept. of Neurology  
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Dear Bud

Thank you so much for the note of December 10 and the pictures of the Drum and Monkey Pub in Glasgow and of the plaque dedicated to ME! To paraphrase the New York Sun of exactly one hundred years ago "Yes, Bud Rowland, there is [still] a Francis Forster."

No wonder my joints are creaking and achy if they are more than three hundred years old!

It was so thoughtful of you and your "bride" to think of me when in the quiet solitude of a pub in the British Isles. I will keep it in the memorabilia of the family. My "bride" and I have completed the family histories of our various families, had them printed and bound for Christmas for our "children, and our children's children even unto the fourth generation."

My forebearers were Bavarian. There are many Forsters in England and also in Germany. I doubt they are related through the Saxon invasions, especially those in Bavaria.

Five years ago our oldest son, Denis for my eightieth birthday met me in Frankfurt and we drove through southern Germany looking up Forsters. It was a fascinating experience from many viewpoints. Denis and I have always been quite close [even though he is a lawyer] but pursuing a common goal [family history] in almost a retreat fashion being alone, on the open road, in little taverns in churches and cemeteries, meeting distant relatives and new friends, identifying with our background: this was truly invigorating. Especially since we capped it off with the Munich Oktoberfest.

Please forgive me for not waiting sooner. I haven't even finished the Christmas cards. Helen and I are considering changing from the Roman to the Orthodox Catholic Church. This would give us an extra ten days or so to get things done!

I am glad my notes on the early days of the Academy were helpful. I often wonder how different things would be if Harvard had appreciated Houston Merritt. Harvard obviously would be better off. Their failure to appreciate him was equivalent to the president of Harvard informing Leland Stanford and his wife that they needed no money from them in order to make Harvard better. Harvard was better. And thus came Stanford University.

If Dr. Merritt's case "Thus blossomed American neurology in general and New York Neurological in particular." I do not believe he would have had the broad impact operating from the James Jackson Putnam, chair at Harvard that he exerted at Montefiore, at New York Neurological Institute and as vice president of Columbia University.

Moreover, the Harvard rejection was a learning experience. While at Harvard he was much more outspoken and in a quite earthy fashion at times. This may well have alienated some of the Brahmins.

After he left Harvard for New York, he was much more contained and circumspect. He developed a shrewd, but kind, political sense. He still maintained an easy relationship with his old friends as Frank Braceland, Paul Yakovlev, etc. This was why and how he could favor and abet the AAN without drawing the fire of the old guard both in and out of the ANA.

Dr. Merritt was always a father figure for me. After the year in Fulton's lab I was appointed to instructor at Boston U. under Chester Keefer. During that year I spent a fair amount of time at the BCH. Dr. Merritt and I heckled back and forth pretty much. One day when I went to visit him his furniture was in the hall, presumably for a cleaning of the office. When I jokingly said "I see you didn't pay your rent" he glumly responded "Denny Brown is coming." That was a grim time at the Neurological Unit for Houston had the undying loyalty of everyone, even I believe of Donald Munro!

I hope you do not mind my rambling on about our mutual friend, colleague and mentor.  
Gratefully yours,

*The Original Francis Forster*  
[circa seventeenth Century.]

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January 9, 1998

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Dear Frank:

Thanks for the letter and copying me with yours to Bud Rowland regarding Merritt. I thought you would be interested in the enclosed paragraph from Stanley Cobb's biography, as to why Merritt "was not even considered for the permanent position" at Boston City.

See you Minneapolis.

Sincerely yours,



Robert B. Daroff, M.D.

RBD/gj

Enclosure

Regarding Houston Merritt: "A Southern farm boy with a background of medical internship at Yale, Merritt came to [Boston] City Hospital as a member of the house staff in 1928 and stayed on thereafter. He was described by Aring as the most consummate neurological diagnostician he had ever met. When called upon by a junior member of the staff he would enthusiastically respond at any time of day or night and lend reassurance that nothing important had been overlooked. ... Merritt was a rough diamond socially and even during the interview in late life had a somewhat gruff manner. At the neurological unit he worked principally with Putnam. When Putnam went to the New York Neurological Institute in 1939, Merritt was to become acting director of the neurological unit. However, probably because of what Cobb perceived as his lack of social grace, he was not even considered for the permanent position. Derek Denny-Brown was chosen, and Merritt went to New York, where a most distinguished career awaited him. He succeeded Putnam as the director of the Neurological Institute and was a phenomenal fund raiser. ... However, during the early thirties Merritt was indeed the clinical mainstay of the service in Boston, for Cobb was not always available and the other staff members were primarily involved in their research activities or special interests."

White BV, Wolfe RJ, Taylor E. Stanley Cobb: A Builder of the Modern Neurosciences. Boston: The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, 1984:164.

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*April 7 1998*

Robert B. Daroff, MD  
Chief of Staff, and Vice  
President  
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Dear Bob.

Please forgive my delay in replying to your very interesting letter of January 15 with the enclosure from the biography of Stanley Cobb. The delay was not due to disinterest Rather your note set in motion a chain of thoughts and a flood of memories. At first I wondered if Stanley Cobb was privy to the deliberations that bypassed Houston for the Chair. Did he play a role in bypassing him? I rather doubt that.

The chain of thought was augmented by the recall of an article by Eugene Stead. This was published in *Pharos* about a year ago. Gene Stead belongs to that Old Guard of holistic internists, pointing to Osler's famous textbook that includes neurology and fails to recognize the importance of a field now so complex that not even a neurologist can encompass the whole field

His idolatrous description of Soma Weiss places the role of neurology at the Brigham as served by a consultant, our Houston Merritt! At that very time Houston, across town, was making neurologic history with his clinical acumen, by his teaching, [especially residents], and in research.

The revolution in medical education, tripped off by the Flexner report, led to the development of the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. The Brigham, unlike "All Gaul..." was divided into only two parts, medicine and surgery. Two Harvard chairs were there: the Hersey in medicine and the Moseley in surgery. Soma Weiss filled the Hersey chair when Dr. Christian retired. The Oslerian tradition at Hopkins was thus installed at Harvard. [It is of interest that even Sir William, when at the University of Pennsylvania, could not shake the Philadelphia tradition of strong, independent neurology--thanks to S. Weir Mitchell et al.!]

In Boston neurology was nurtured and prospered at the Massachusetts General and the Boston City Hospitals. The program at the Boston City was launched with a grant from Rockefeller Foundation. Tracy Putnam, the James Jackson Putnam Professor of Neurology was the first chief at the BCH. The neurology program at Mass. Genmeral was older than that at Boston City. Stanley Cobb headed that program and I believe his professorhip was the Bullard Profesorhip in Neuropathology. These were the two teaching programs for neurology at



Harvard at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Both programs contributed greatly in research. Both were involved in the early development of EEG. The advances in epilepsy, both diagnostic and therapeutic at the BCH are legendary as were those in cerebro-vascular disease and in neurosyphilis at the MGH.

The above points out that while the status of neurology at the BCH and the MGH was modern and progressive this was not true of the Harvard picture as a whole. The holistic attitude of internal medicine, practiced at the Mt. Olympus of the Peter Bent Brigham, probably played a key role in the bypassing of Dr. Merritt for the James Jackson Putnam Chair of neurology. He was too devout a proponent of neurology. He might accomplish too much!

Stead, in his article, points out that Soma Weiss adhered firmly to the doctrine that the department of medicine included the subspecialties. He makes note of Houston Merritt being a consultant to the department of Medicine! Stead ignores the fact that, in those days, nothing was accomplished in neurology at the Brigham.

Eugene Stead was, and still is, a firm adherent to the old holistic concepts. At Duke years ago when I made a project site visit for the NINDB Training grant program his hostility to a separate department of neurology was very, very palpable.

Perhaps these notes add more insight to the Harvard decision to bypass Dr. Merritt. They chose, in his place, Dr. Derek Denny-Brown, better known for neurophysiologic studies, and not as ardent a proponent of Clinical Neurology!

I am sharing this also with Bud Rowland. Someday, someone will certainly write the biography of HHM. Perhaps some of the reminiscences from his days at BCH will be helpful as a backdrop for his great achievements at Columbia.

Cordially,



**KEY:**

**AAN** – American Academy of Neurology

**Abe** – Abraham B. “Abe” Baker, M.D. (1908-1988) – with Francis M. Forster, M.D., one of the “Four Horsemen” responsible for founding the American Academy of Neurology

**Ady** – Adolph “Ady” Sahs, M.D. (1906-1986) – with Francis M. Forster, M.D., one of the “Four Horsemen” responsible for founding the American Academy of Neurology

**“All Gaul...”** – This is a reference to a quote from Julius Casar (100 BCE – 44 BCE), Roman general, statesman, and author: *“Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres.”* [“All Gaul is divided into three parts”]. Gaul was a region of Western Europe during the Iron Age and Roman era, encompassing present-day France, Luxembourg, and Belgium, and parts of Switzerland, Northern Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany.

**Alpers, Bernie** – Bernard Jacob Alpers, M.D. (1900-1981) – American neurologist and neuropathologist who became head of the Department of Nervous and Mental Disease at Jefferson Medical College in 1939, and soon established an independent Department of Neurology there.

**ANA** – American Neurological Association

**Aring** - Charles D. Aring, M.D. (1904-1998), neurologist, formed two neurology departments: at the University of California, and at the University of Cincinnati, where he served as professor and department chairman (1948-1974).

**BCH** – Boston City Hospital

**Braceland, Frank** – Francis J. (“Frank”) Braceland, M.D. (1900-1985), a psychiatrist, who served in World War II (1943-1946) and was responsible for developing the Neuropsychiatry Branch. He was awarded the Legion of Merit (1946) and discharged from the military as a Rear Admiral. He was previously Dean of Medicine at Loyola University in Chicago and subsequently worked as a

consultation-liaison psychiatrist at the Mayo Clinic. He also served as editor of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

**Christian** – Henry A. Christian, M.D. (1876-1951) held the Hershey Chair of Theory and Practice of Physic and served as Dean of the Harvard Medical School (1908-1912). He was also Physician-in-Chief at Carney Hospital (1907-1912) and at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (1910-1939).

**Cobb, Stanley** – Stanley Cobb, M.D. (1887-1968) was a neuropsychiatrist, who served as director of the newly opened Harvard Neurological Unit at Boston City Hospital (1930-1934) and then moved to the Massachusetts General Hospital to build the department of psychiatry there.

**Denny-Brown, Derek** – Derek Ernest Denny-Brown, M.D., D.Phil. (1901-1981), born in New Zealand, did post-graduate research training in England (e.g., research under Nobel laureate Sir Charles Sherrington) and did his neurology training at the National Hospital, Queen Square, London with Gordon Holmes, Charles Symonds, and Samuel Alexander Kinnier Wilson. He later spent time as a Rockefeller Fellow with neurophysiologist John Fulton, M.D. at Yale University. He was later appointed as the James Jackson Putnam Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School and Director of the Harvard Neurological Unit at the Boston City Hospital (selected over H. Houston Merritt who then went on to Columbia).

**Flexner Report** – A highly influential study of medical education in the United States written by Abraham Flexner, M.D. in 1910. The report identified significant deficiencies in U.S. medical education and called for major reforms. This resulted in the closure or merger of numerous schools, and major reforms in medical education, with higher admission and graduation standards, and a focus on mainstream science in teaching and research.

See: Flexner A. *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, Bulletin No. 4. New York City: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1910.

**Fulton, John** – John Farquhar Fulton, M.D. (1899-1960), a neurophysiologist, was Sterling Professor of Physiology at Yale University. He worked closely with neurosurgeon Harvey Cushing, M.D. and was friends with Cushing and with William Osler, M.D. He wrote the most comprehensive biography of Cushing: *Harvey Cushing: A Biography* (1946).

**HHM** – Hiram Houston Merritt, M.D. (1902-1979)

**Keefer, Chester** – Chester Scott Keefer, M.D., D.Sc. (1897-1972), an internist, was Physician-in-Chief, Massachusetts Memorial Hospitals (what later became University Hospital, then eventually Boston Medical Center), Chairman of the National Research Council's Committee on Chemotherapeutics and Other Agents (WWII), Medical Administrative Officer of the Committee on Medical Research of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (1944-1946), and later Dean of Boston University School of Medicine (1955-1960).

**MGH** – Massachusetts General Hospital

**Mitchell, Silas Weir** – Silas Weir Mitchell, M.D. (1829-1914) was, with William Hammond M.D., one of the founding fathers of American neurology. Mitchell became famous for his studies of peripheral nerve injuries in the military hospitals of Philadelphia during the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), and then developed a civilian neurological practice and neurology-training program at the Philadelphia Orthopedic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases during the Reconstruction Period after the war. William Osler came to work with Mitchell there between 1884-1889 before Osler left to help found Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.

**Munro, Donald** – Donald Munro, M.D. (1889-1973), a neurosurgeon, was responsible for developing a prototype spinal cord injury center at Boston City Hospital in 1936, that became the model for the development of spinal cord injury centers in military hospitals during World War II, and that was subsequently disseminated to VA and civilian hospitals after World War II.

**NINDB** – National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Blindness [now the NINDS – National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke]

**Oslerian tradition at Hopkins** – William Osler, M.D. (1849-1919) was a Canadian physician who began his academic career as a professor of medicine at McGill University in Montreal. In 1884, he was appointed Chair of Clinical Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and while in Philadelphia he worked closely with neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell at the Philadelphia Orthopedic Hospital and Infirmary for Nervous Diseases. In 1889, he accepted the position as the first Physician-in-Chief of the new Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1893 he was one of the four founding professors of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (with pathologist William Henry Welch, surgeon William Stewart Halsted, and gynecologist Howard Atwood Kelly). In 1905, he was appointed to the Regius Chair of Medicine at Oxford, which he held until his death. So the Oslerian tradition at Hopkins was established from 1889 to 1905.

**Putnam, Tracy** – Tracy Jackson Putnam, M.D. (1894-1975), co-discoverer, with H. Houston Merritt, of the anticonvulsant phenytoin (Dilantin)

**Russ** – Russell N. “Russ” DeJong, M.D. – with Francis M. Forster, M.D., one of the “Four Horsemen” responsible for founding the American Academy of Neurology

**Schaller, Walter** – Water F. Schaller, M.D. (1879-1970) was President of the American Neurological Association (1944-1946)

**Sir William** – Sir William Osler, M.D. (1849-1919), 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet. Osler was created a baronet in the Coronation Honours List of 1911 for his many contributions to the field of medicine.

**Stead, Eugene** – Eugene A. Stead, Jr., M.D. (1908-2005), an internist, was a medical educator, researcher, and founder of the Physician Assistant profession. His research in the 1940s led to the development of cardiac catheterization. He served as Chair of Medicine (1942-1946) and Dean (1945-1946) at Emory University, and then Chair of Medicine at Duke University (1947-1967).

The article mentioned by Forster is: Stead EA. Soma Weiss: The characteristics that made us know he was a great man. *Pharos* 1987;Fall:11-12.

**Vonderahe, A.R.** - A.R. Vonderahe, M.D., neuropsychiatrist, anatomist, and neuroscientist at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, who was active from the 1930s to early 1960s.

**Wartenberg** – Robert Wartenberg, M.D. (1887-1956), a Russian-American neurologist. He was persecuted by the Nazis, and in 1935 he left Germany and settled in San Francisco. In 1952 he was appointed clinical professor of neurology at the University of California.

**Weiss, Soma** – Soma Weiss, M.D. (1898-1942) was a Hungarian-American internist who became Physician-in-Chief and Professor at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital (Harvard). He described the carotid sinus hypersensitivity syndrome, and with G. Kenneth Mallory described the hemorrhagic lacerations of the stomach associated with vomiting (Mallory-Weiss syndrome). He died prematurely of a ruptured intracranial aneurysm.

The article mentioned by Forster is: Stead EA. Soma Weiss: The characteristics that made us know he was a great man. *Pharos* 1987;Fall:11-12.

**Yakovlev, Paul** – Paul Ivan Yakovlev, M.D. (1894-1983), Russian-American neuropathologist, was a Director of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (1951-1958), and President of the American Association of Neuropathologists (1951).