

## 2. Hal Lovelace Foster

*The principal object of the practice of medicine is the benefit of the patient.*

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

*We are still trying to make people see and hear. May this high scientific work [of the Academy] continue and future generations yet unborn profit thereby.*

HAL FOSTER

**H**AL FOSTER was born on July 7, 1858, three years before the Civil War, in the town of Fosters, Ala, which had been named after his grandfather. He received his AB degree from the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa and his MD degree in 1882 from the University of the City of New York Medical Department (now New York University College of Medicine). In preparing for a career in ear, nose, and throat work, he studied at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, Manhattan Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital, Metropolitan Hospital, New York Post-Graduate School, and New York Polyclinic Medical School.<sup>3,4</sup>

After completion of his training, Dr Foster practiced for a short time in New York City and then headed West, arriving in Kansas City on Sept 17, 1882. To three things Dr Foster attributed his decision to begin practice in Kansas City rather than return to his native state of Alabama: the economic problems produced by the Civil War which had greatly affected his own family; Horace Greeley's editorial in the *New York Sun*, "Go West Young Man, Go

West"; and the suggestion of a fellow doctor that Kansas City was a growing city.

"I came," he said, "and fell in love with Kansas City."<sup>3</sup>

When he began practice, he was the only physician and surgeon in Kansas City specializing in the treatment of ear, nose, and throat diseases. He joined the staffs of St Joseph and General hospitals, the only ones in Kansas City at that time, and it is said he soon had a busy practice. A horse and buggy carried him on his calls in good weather, a horse and sleigh in the winter.<sup>4,6</sup>

Dr Foster's interest in the development of medicine in this country was broad and comprehensive. He taught for many years at Kansas City University Medical College and later at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. As well as founding the Academy, he was a charter member of the American College of Surgeons, charter member and president of the Kansas City Academy of Medicine, charter member and second secretary of the Jackson County (Mo) Medical Society, charter member and president of the Kansas City O.O.R.L.

Society, and charter member of the Kansas City Southwestern Clinical Society.<sup>4,6,7</sup>

After medicine, the second greatest devotion of Dr Foster's life was travel, and he combined his pursuit after further medical knowledge with his love of travel. For many years after entering practice he took biannual trips to study and visit clinics in New York, London, Berlin, Munich, Moscow, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires.<sup>3,4</sup> His travels took him through six continents.

On Dec 31, 1941, at the age of 83 and after almost 60 years of practice, Dr Foster closed his rolltop desk and retired "to read, study and attend medical meetings."<sup>6</sup>

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Academy, the Kansas City Society of O.O.R.L. held a meeting April 9 and 10, 1945, at which Dr Foster was honored and an oil portrait of him unveiled which was intended for presentation to the Academy at the Fiftieth Annual Session in October of 1945 (Fig 3). (The Academy was unable to convene for this 50th meeting because of a government ban on conventions and wartime restrictions of railroad travel. The portrait now hangs in the executive office of the American Academy of Ophthalmology in San Francisco.) From tributes paying homage to Dr Foster presented at this meeting and from a few original letters and newspaper clippings preserved in Academy files, it is evident that Dr Foster was a quiet, unassuming man who devoted his life to medicine and who sought no personal recognition or honors. In giving a short biography of Dr Foster at the anniversary celebration, John L. Myers, of Kansas City, noted:

Dr Foster's life has not been so colorful as the life of many men of his time. So modest and self-effacing has he been, and so quietly has he mingled with his fellows at each meeting, that the majority of the Academy membership is not acquainted with him, nor is it



Fig 3.—Portrait of Hal Foster.

generally known that he is the father of the organization. . . . Even the organizers of the Honor Group of the Academy overlooked making him one of their members for several years. . . .<sup>4(p33)</sup>

Dr Foster preferred to remain in the background. Referring to the meeting in 1896, he wrote: "My name was proposed for the first President, also at the second meeting. I gave way at the first for Dr Alt of St. Louis, and at the second for Dr Fryer of Kansas City, as they were older than I. I thought it best to begin with older men."<sup>3</sup> He served as secretary of the association from 1896 through 1898 and as first vice-president in 1920; he was never president of the organization he initiated.

Little more than a year after the Academy's 50th anniversary, on May 21, 1946, Dr Hal Foster, Father of the Academy, died of cardiorenal disease. He was 87 years old. He had said many times that "the money I spent in calling those specialists together was the best investment I ever made."<sup>7</sup> And in the previous year, he had written: "When I look at the large number of distinguished men at the annual meetings, giving private courses, I feel well repaid for what I did in trying to advance study and knowledge to the coming generations, all for the great benefit of humanity."<sup>3</sup>