

2014

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Stephen Logsdon

Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis

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Recommended Citation

Logsdon, Stephen, "In memoriam - Bernard Becker (1920-2013)." *Missouri Medicine*, 111, 5, 398,. 2014. Paper 51.
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In Memoriam – Bernard Becker

Stephen Logsdon, MA, MLIS
Archivist, Washington University School of Medicine



Bernard Becker (1920-2013) joined the Washington University School of Medicine faculty in 1953 as Head of the Department of Ophthalmology. During his remarkable 35-year tenure as department chair, Dr. Becker established one of the most outstanding academic ophthalmology departments and residency programs in the country. Under his leadership, the department became internationally known for exceptional research and teaching. Many of his trainees now serve as department heads at other institutions, or hold other prominent positions and leadership roles.

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Born and raised in New York City, Dr. Becker attended Princeton University and then Harvard Medical School, both on full academic scholarships. After serving as a captain in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, he joined the Wilmer Eye Institute at Johns Hopkins University as a fellow, and later a resident where he studied with Jonas Friedenwald. By the time of his arrival in St. Louis in 1953, he was already establishing himself as an early leader in academic ophthalmology.

During the course of his outstanding career, Dr. Becker became a world-renowned expert on glaucoma. He discovered one of the first treatments for this disorder when he determined that a drug called acetazolamide, which had been used to decrease pressure in the brain, could also decrease pressure in the eyes. Dr. Becker authored or co-authored nearly 400 articles. He was the co-author of the first two editions of *Diagnosis and Therapy of the Glaucomas*, one of the classic textbooks in ophthalmology. He was a founding member of the Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology. He served as founder and first editor of *Investigative Ophthalmology*, and was instrumental in establishing the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO). He also played an essential role in the establishment of the National Eye Institute.

Dr. Becker is fondly remembered by colleagues, friends, and library staff for his long-time habit of browsing through the latest medical journals. He would spend hours upon hours reading journals in all branches of science and medicine at the library that would eventually bear his name. Dr. Becker knew the research interests of nearly everyone he was acquainted with, and he would regularly send personalized annotated copies of articles to interested coworkers and students.

Dr. Becker chaired the committee that oversaw the funding, design, and construction of a new library for the medical school. It was completed in 1989, and then renamed the Bernard Becker Medical Library in his honor in 1995. He was a collector of rare medical books, and accumulated over 600 volumes of rare medical books on the sciences of the eye and light. He generously gave his collection to the medical school, where they are housed in the Archives and Rare Books Department of the Becker Library. The Bernard Becker Collection in Ophthalmology and Optics span some five hundred years and include works such as Georg Bartisch's 16th century monograph *Ophthalmodouleia*, which was the first comprehensive work on eye diseases and their treatments; two incunabula (books printed prior to 1500), and works by key scientific figures such as Antonio Scarpa and Francesco Redi.

Among the myriad awards bestowed upon Dr. Becker were the Helen Keller Prize, the Mildred Weisenfeld Award for Excellence in Ophthalmology, the Proctor Award, the New York Academy of Medicine Award, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology's Laureate Recognition Award. He also was a recipient of the Washington University Medical Alumni Association's Distinguished Service Award and the School of Medicine's Second Century Award.