History of *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*

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Central Message

This paper recounts the history of the *Journal*, from its reasons for inception to the latest developments in its content and structure.

“Personal history is based on recollections. If you don’t write it, you will forget it.”

—Floyd D. Loop, MD
(78th AATS president)¹

The American Association for Thoracic Surgery (AATS) was founded in 1917 for the purpose of providing a forum for the “free exchange of view and experiences” in thoracic surgery.² Some were pessimistic, suggesting that a society dedicated to such a narrow field would not have long-term success. “In two or three years, everything will be said and the society will die for lack of interest.”³ Willy Meyer, a surgeon from the German Hospital in New York (later renamed Lenox Hill), pressed on and formed the New York Society for Thoracic Surgery, whose first function was to serve as a springboard for a national society. On June 7, 1917, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, the AATS became reality. The first meeting was held in Chicago in 1918 in conjunction with the American Medical Association (AMA) Annual Convention. The meeting included a 1-day program with 9 papers presented during the first day of the convention (Figure 1).

Initial thoughts were that discussions for each presentation during the meeting should be time limited, but the overwhelming majority felt strongly that “full and free discussion” was essential and that no time limit should be placed on the meeting.^{3,4} The concept of full and free discussion became one of the dominant early attributes of the AATS Annual Meeting, and as such the early officers felt strongly that publication of the meeting’s discussion was essential to preserve and maximize the relevance of the deliberations of its members. The 1918 meeting notes from Nathan Green, first AATS secretary and treasurer (the offices were not independent until 1928) declared that papers were important, “but of even greater importance would be the discussion provoked by each paper” and that these discussions “would prove to be the most valuable product of the meeting.”⁴ It was noted in

the minutes from the 1920 Annual Meeting in New Orleans that the discussion of the 12 papers on the program “ran well into the evening,” making it difficult for many to catch their trains headed northbound that night.⁵ Since the beginning, guests always were welcomed at the AATS annual meeting and were encouraged to participate in the discussion of any and all papers that were presented, a tradition that carries on to the current day.

At first, publication of the *Transactions of the Annual Meeting* was haphazard. The presidential address and full discussion from the meeting were published in the *New York Medical Record*, but not all of the manuscripts from the meeting were included. During the first few years, some papers were published before the meeting, whereas others eventually appeared in random journals independent of the published discussion. Samuel J. Meltzer (AATS president) and Willy Meyer (AATS vice president) encouraged manuscript submission to the *New York Medical Record* but it was not required, nor was acceptance assured. It was Meltzer and Meyer’s hope that the *New York Medical Record*, which was one of the most respected journals of the day, would eventually become the official organ of the AATS. The *Transactions of the 1918 Meeting* were published, including 5 of the 9 papers presented in the *New York Medical Record* in three parts beginning May 10, 1919. In 1920, an abstract summarizing each presentation from the previous year’s meeting, prepared by Dr Green, also was included in the *Transactions*, but publication of the full manuscripts remained inconsistent. The *New York Medical Record* went on to publish a minority of papers from the first 3 meetings as well as the presidential addresses and all of the discussions, but without

FIGURE 1. The First Annual Meeting of The American Association for Thoracic Surgery was held in Chicago on Monday June 10, 1918.

any reference to the location of the papers that had been published in other journals.

Starting with the Fourth Annual Meeting in 1921, Dean Lewis, editor of the relatively new *Archives of Surgery*, an AMA journal, agreed to accept any paper delivered at the AATS Annual Meeting for simultaneous publication with its incidental discussion. The arrangement with *Archives of Surgery* carried through the 1930 meeting. The AMA and AATS equally shared the expense of the supplement.⁶ From 1921 to 1928, the *Transactions* were published as a supplement to the January issue the following year. In 1929, there was a big push, led by then president John L. Yates from Milwaukee and immediate past president Evarts A. Graham from Washington University in Saint Louis, to have the *Transactions* published and in the hands of AATS members during the same calendar year in which the meeting was held. The 1929 Annual Meeting also was the first year in which previously published papers were not allowed on the program.⁷ Olin West was the AMA general manager and when he was first approached by AATS secretary Ethan Flagg Butler to publish the *Transactions* before the end of the year, West was found to be “cool to the idea.” A November supplement had already been promised to another organization and a December supplement was out of the question since that

was the month in which the index was prepared. With continued pressure, Morris Fishbein and Jewel Whalen, the editor and editorial executive, agreed to complete the supplement by year’s end, and the 656-page *Transactions from the AATS Twelfth Annual Meeting* were published in December 1929. Early publication again occurred following the 1930 meeting with another December supplement in the *Archives of Surgery*.

During the council meeting at the Thirteenth Annual Meeting in Philadelphia in 1930, the proposal to pursue an independent publishing venue for the Association evolved into a new journal dedicated to thoracic surgery. The AATS arranged with the C.V. Mosby Company, which was based in Saint Louis, to publish *The Journal of Thoracic Surgery* in 1931 as the official organ of the Association. The AATS bylaws did not yet include the office of editor, so Dr Graham was elected “unofficial editor” until the necessary constitutional amendment was passed at the 1932 Annual Meeting to legally create the office of editor.⁸ The *Journal* was to include 112 pages every other month. The primary goal of the *Journal* was to publish the manuscripts from the Annual Meeting with their accompanying discussion, but with its extra pages, it also included articles “not only dealing with clinical aspects of this field, but also reports of carefully conducted experimental investigations in physiology, bacteriology, pathology, etc., which may have a bearing on the clinical problems concerned.”⁹ The *Journal* became the first English-language periodical dedicated to thoracic surgery. The first non-English journal on this topic appeared in 1926: *Archives Medico-Chirurgicales de l’Appareil Respiratoire* from Paris. Dr Graham envisioned a wide readership when he included the following note in his foreword to the first issue: “It is noteworthy that many members of the Association are not surgeons at all but are physicians, roentgenologists, bronchoscopists, etc., interested in the diverse problems of thoracic disease.”⁹

The inaugural issue of *The Journal of Thoracic Surgery* was published in October 1931 (Figure 2). The issue totaled 112 pages including 6 manuscripts, all from the Fourteenth Annual Meeting earlier that year. Within 6 months, subscriptions totaled 600, a number Dr Graham felt was “quite satisfactory,” given that the Association had only 90 active members at the time.¹⁰ Interestingly that same year, AATS councilor John Alexander suggested allowing the Associated Press to cover the meeting, but Dr Graham thought it would be a “dangerous practice,” noting that members had been misquoted by the press in the past on numerous occasions.¹⁰ The council eventually decided against allowing the press to cover the meeting, concluding that a “properly censored statement might be beneficial in disseminating knowledge concerning surgery of the chest.” By 1934, subscriptions exceeded 1000 despite there being only 100 active members in the Association, but the *Journal*

FIGURE 2. The inaugural issue of *The Journal of Thoracic Surgery* was published in October 1931.

was still not self-sustaining, and a subsidy of \$1600 was given to C. V. Mosby Company to support publication.¹¹

Dr Graham remained editor until his death on March 4, 1957. Through 1939, he had one associate editor, Duff S. Allen from Washington University in Saint Louis. Dr Graham expanded to 2 associate editors in 1940 including Brian Blades, originally from Washington University then George Washington University in Washington, DC, after World War II, and Richard H. Meade, originally from University of Pennsylvania before moving ultimately to Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 1950, Meade was replaced by Thomas H. Burford from Washington University in Saint Louis. Following Dr Graham's passing, Dr Meade, who had been AATS secretary from 1935 to 1947, the longest tenure of any secretary or treasurer, made known his interest in becoming the second editor.¹² Meade was concerned that the AATS would want to keep the *Journal* headquarters in Saint Louis with Dr Burford assuming the editorship. Meade wrote Alfred Blalock at Johns Hopkins asking for his endorsement, ending his letter requesting support with, "I have written frankly to you about this matter. If you feel that I am not the right person for the office I shall not feel badly about it" (R. H. Meade, personal communication to A. Blalock, the Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives of

the Johns Hopkins Medical Institution, Alfred Blalock Collection, Baltimore, MD; April 22, 1957.) Instead of Meade, the position went to Emile Holman from Stanford, who served as editor until 1962, retaining Drs Blades and Burford as his 2 associate editors throughout his term.

In the late 1950s, the editorial board felt that the *Journal* needed a new name to recognize the great advances in cardiovascular surgery and the increasing number of contributions by thoracic surgeons to the relatively new, but increasingly important surgical subspecialty. The *Journal* maintained its intentions, though, to specifically not publish papers dealing with the peripheral vascular system, including only cardiovascular papers pertaining to problems contained within the thorax.¹³ Drs Blades and Burford assigned 2 of their junior faculty to compile a list of potential new names for the *Journal*.¹⁴ After multiple brainstorming sessions, Paul C. Adkins and Thomas B. Ferguson presented their list of about 10 permutations to Drs Blades and Burford. As the 2 associate editors were looking over the list, Dr Adkins asked Dr Blades if he wanted them to present the list to the AATS Council. "Hell, no!" Dr Blades replied, pointing to his favorite, "I pick this one!" and with that, *The Journal of Thoracic Surgery* became *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* starting with Volume 38 in July 1959 (Figure 3).

Throughout Dr Holman's time as editor, the administrative office remained in Saint Louis, the same city as the publisher C. V. Mosby Company. Editorial administration was run by the AATS administrative executive secretary, a position that was created in 1955. Ms Ada Hanvey, the former "confidential secretary" to Dr Graham, was the first to serve this role.¹⁵ This paid position was created by the AATS Council to relieve the secretary, treasurer, membership chairman, and editor of their routine administrative duties and provide continuity in the administration of the Association. Ms Hanvey had worked for Dr Graham for 29 years, which spanned the entire existence of the *Journal*. The administrative executive secretary established routine procedures to facilitate the work of the secretary and other officers and councilors, including providing data and supporting information to

FIGURE 3. The *Journal* officially changed its name in 1959 to incorporate the growing field of cardiovascular surgery.

facilitate decision making and expedite publication as the liaison to the editor. In addition, the system for handling manuscripts and editing the discussions from the Annual Meeting were developed by Ms Hanvey and continued into the editorship of Dr Blades, who succeeded Dr Holman in 1962. The AATS administrative offices remained in Saint Louis until Ms Hanvey's retirement on October 1, 1970, at which time Mr William T. Maloney replaced Ms Hanvey as AATS executive director, a position Mr Maloney held for 32 years until 2002. Mr Maloney remains an essential part of the team as AATS consultant today. The AATS executive director position morphed into AATS chief executive officer, a position now held by Cindy VerColen with her team of 20 full-time employees, when the AATS transitioned to freestanding management in January 2017.

Dr Blades maintained the second longest tenure as editor from 1962 to 1977, totaling 15 years. His associate editors remained consistent throughout his period of leadership, Dr Burford and Dr Adkins. In 1974, the AATS council empowered Dr Blades to publish the Annual Meeting papers from the Samson Thoracic Surgical Society, thus becoming the official organ of 2 thoracic surgical organizations.¹⁶ The Samson Society was renamed the Western Thoracic Surgical Association in 1984. The name change was to permit representation on the American College of Surgeons Board of Governors because the College did not otherwise recognize societies named after an individual. Dr Blades' term witnessed the surge of publication of cardiovascular versus thoracic papers, which grew from a ratio of 1.7 to 1 in 1962 to a ratio of 4.5 to 1 in 1977 (Figure 4).¹⁷ The crossover point at which cardiovascular papers outnumbered general thoracic papers was 1960, shortly after the *Journal* changed its name. Dr Blades' goals as editor were to ensure "reasonably prompt" publication of accepted manuscripts and to have the *Journal* assume a more prominent international status.¹⁸ It is important to note, however, that the AATS really has been an international organization from the beginning. Although the first name of the Association is "American,"

the first officers were all born outside North America: Dr Meltzer from Russia, Dr Meyer from Germany, and Dr Green from Ceylon. The first AATS member who practiced outside North America was Georges Dehelly of LeHavre, France, who was elected to membership at the First Annual Meeting in 1918. In addition, the first paper published in *The Journal of Thoracic Surgery* in 1931 was from Peiping Union Medical College in China.¹⁹

Dwight C. McGoon from the Mayo Clinic took over the reins from Dr Blades in July 1977. Dr McGoon's associate editors were Philip E. Bernatz (focusing on general thoracic) and Michael P. Kaye (focusing on laboratory research), both also from the Mayo Clinic. He added Frank C. Spencer from New York University in 1986, shortly before his decade-long tenure ended in 1987. Dr McGoon's concept was for the editorial board to focus on 3 considerations for publication: The subject of the paper, the quality of the information provided, and the adequacy of the presentation.²⁰ He felt the subject should be innovative, highly relevant, or contributory to basic knowledge, the information should be "scientific" with statistical validation and controls when possible, and the presentation should be polished, with no consideration given to the origin of the manuscript, including authors, institutions, or country of origin. In 1983, Dr McGoon published a cumulative index of the first half-century of the *Journal*, from which he noted some interesting trends, specifically in regards to general thoracic papers.^{17,21} During the first 15 years of the *Journal*, 50% of papers addressed thoracic infections, but this percentage decreased precipitously to account for only 2% of all general thoracic papers in the late 1970s. In contrast, although neoplasia accounted for only 3% of general thoracic papers when the *Journal* began, it steadily grew to account for 50% of papers the early 1980s. Always revered as a humble gentleman, Dr McGoon made note of the "shallowness of his own knowledge and experience" when, during his final editorial, he thanked his associate editors, editorial board, and guest reviewers for their exhaustive dedication to compensate for his own "deficiencies."²²

John W. Kirklin from the University of Alabama in Birmingham filled the editorial role starting July 1987. Dr Kirklin had only one associate editor during his tenure, Dr Eugene H. Blackstone. Drs Kirklin and Blackstone first met in the late 1960s when Dr Blackstone, who had recently graduated from medical school at the University of Chicago, asked Dr Kirklin if he could spend his intern year in surgery.²³ Kirklin asked, "So you want to be a surgeon?" to which Blackstone replied, "No, I want to be an investigator, and I figure the place to do that is in the Department of Surgery, where the action is." With Dr Blackstone's assistance, Dr Kirklin advanced the statistical quality of the *Journal* through dedicated

FIGURE 4. Total papers published annually in *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* during the first half century (1931-1982). CV, Cardiovascular.¹⁶

statistical review as well as expert tutorials on complex statistical techniques.^{24,25} During an interview in the late 1990s, Dr Kirklin reflected on his time as editor.²³ He said he enjoyed the role, noting that the time commitment was made most rewarding “by the 5% to 10% of papers” that were “positively and very favorably improved” by the suggestions he and the reviewers made to the authors. Dr Kirklin will always be remembered for his thorough, while both thoughtful and insightful reviews that brought the *Journal* to a new level of quality in publication.

John A. Waldhausen became editor in 1995. He was the first to assign specialty specific associate editors: Nicholas T. Kouchoukos in adult cardiac, G. Alexander Patterson in general thoracic, and Richard A. Jonas in congenital. He also added editorials and commentaries to selected manuscripts, increasing the number from zero in 1994 to 33 in 1999. Dr Waldhausen also introduced Basic Science Reviews for Clinicians written specifically for cardiothoracic surgeons and Clinical Pathologic Conferences.²⁶ During his tenure, Dr Waldhausen decreased the submission to publication time from 18 to 9 months and oversaw the institution of online publication of the *Journal* in July 1997. Dr Waldhausen electively stepped down as editor in 2000, “feeling that someone younger and closer to clinical activity should take the helm.”²⁷ Ralph J. Damiano, Jr, D. Craig Miller, and L. Henry Edmunds eventually joined the associate editorial team, and Dr Blackstone continued his role as the statistical guru. In addition, during Dr Waldhausen’s tenure, 3 sister publications came under direct AATS editorial control. There had always been a loose relationship between the AATS and *Seminars in Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*, *Operative Techniques in Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*, and *The Pediatric Cardiac Surgery Annual*, but the relationship did not become formal until 1998. Dr James L. Cox was the original editor of all 3 journals. In 2000, C.V. Mosby Company officially transferred ownership of *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* to the AATS, and that same year, Elsevier Sciences, Inc, purchased Mosby and has continued publishing the *Journal* through the Centennial in 2017.

Andrew S. Wechsler became Editor in 2000 and was the first to appoint an ethics editor, Martin F. McKneally. Dr Thomas L. Spray replaced Dr Jonas as the associate editor in congenital, and Richard D. Weisel was added in 2005. Dr Wechsler oversaw the transition to electronic manuscript processing, which was complete in 2001. Dr Wechsler noted that the “ultimate distinguishing feature of the *Journal* is its adherence to the peer review process to assure scientific validity and integrity.”^{28,29} He felt strongly that the *Journal* “remains the repository of the most enduring creative works in our specialty and retains the credibility that encourages us to alter our practice patterns based on the information that is published.”

Dr Wechsler’s keen editorial eye and overarching focus on stringent scientific contributions was the foundation for his famous quote, “If it appears in the *Journal*, you can ‘take it to the bank’!”³⁰

In 2008, Dr Lawrence H. Cohn took over the reins from Dr Wechsler with the plan to “preserve the great tradition of academic excellence by publishing the most important clinical findings in our field.”^{31,32} Dr Cohn invoked a service-line concept to the *Journal* to facilitate “changes compatible with the changing global scene.” To such, he added editorial board members from anesthesia, cardiology, pulmonary, and oncology. Dr Cohn also added State-of-the-Art review articles, Reflections of the Pioneers, a new section on Cardiothoracic Surgical Training and Education, and completion of the Historical Perspectives of the 96 past presidents, leading up to the Centennial in 2017.^{33,34} When Richard D. Weisel’s tenure began in 2014, he carried on the momentum that Drs Wechsler and Cohn had initiated and has brought the *Journal* to life not only visually with a modern appearance and appealing imagery but also with invited commentaries to accompany most articles and an intensified rigor to the academic process with complete statistical reviews to ensure the highest level of scientific precision.

The *Journal* remains the jewel of the AATS, and its impact in spreading the word among our community of thoracic and cardiovascular surgeons continues to grow. Circulation grew from 600 during the first year of its existence to 10,000 in 1981 during its fiftieth year to now more than 1.5 million full-text downloads in 2016 through various Internet platforms that can access the *Journal*. The international surge continues as the percentage of manuscripts that originate outside North America has risen from 29% in 1981 to 64% in 2016, but we are not done yet. Dr McGoon, the fourth and arguably most prophetic editor, expressed his thoughts on the impact of the *Journal* at the time of its fiftieth anniversary, thoughts which we believe are even more relevant today than they were in 1981³⁵:

The inexorable movement toward progress during the history of the Earth is nowhere better exemplified than in the discipline of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery during the lifetime of this *Journal*. When the first issue was sent to press by Dr Evarts Graham, neither he nor the most visionary of his contemporaries could possibly have foreseen the remarkable achievements which are now a part of daily surgical practice.

Heraclitus, Greek philosopher circa 500 BC, expounded the doctrine of Universal Flux: “Everything changes, nothing stands still.”³⁶ As the field of cardiothoracic surgery evolves, so too must the *Journal*. Most recently, a major shift from episodic print publication to early, almost-instantaneous online access has changed the way

the *Journal* looks and how it is used by readers. Periodic distribution of a fixed information profile has been supplanted by easy access to a wide array of related materials, and for thoracic surgeons, early online publication of articles and supplemental material as well as related video presentations are now part of the educational landscape and the *Journal's* offerings. It will be exciting to follow the evolution of *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* in the digital age.

We sincerely hope you have enjoyed reading the history of the AATS's flagship publication, *The Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery*, a history that began at the 1930 Annual Meeting, four score and seven years ago.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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