Torrence A. Makley, Jr, MD (1918-2005)

Torrence A. Makley, Jr, MD, professor emeritus and former chairman of the Department of Ophthalmology at the Ohio State University College of Medicine and Public Health, passed away on January 3, 2005, just 8 days prior to his 87th birthday. His passing marked the end of a significant period in the history of our department as well as that of the College of Medicine at Ohio State. Not only was Dr Makley a major player in the development and growth of the ophthalmology department, but he was also an important contributor to the progress of the college.

Just a few years ago, with the help of 2 of his colleagues who were also pioneer members of the faculty, Dr Makley developed an informative document concerning the history of the department and that of the college. This document was a source for some of the comments in this obituary. Few individuals remain who could provide this historic perspective. To all of us, Dr Makley was our senior colleague and friend. He was always there to provide us with needed insight and sound wisdom. He was a relatively quiet, modest man and rarely talked about himself or his accomplishments, but those who knew him were well aware of his many contributions to the profession and his devotion to the department. Dr Makley was highly respected and loved; he will surely be missed.

Dr Makley was born January 11, 1918, in Dayton, Ohio. He graduated from the University of Dayton in June 1940. He then attended Washington University Medical School in St Louis, Mo, graduating in December 1943. He interned at Barnes Hospital in St Louis from December 1943 to September 1944. He spent 2 years in the US Army and was assigned to Fort McKinley, a general army hospital in Manila in the Philippines, where he was eventually made head of the eye, ear, nose, and throat department. This experience stimulated his interest in ophthalmology. After his discharge, he found that residency spots were unavailable because so many discharged doctors were looking for further training. It was nearly a 2-year wait for a residency in ophthalmology. For this reason, Dr Makley took a basic science course in ophthalmology at Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago from 1946 to 1948. He then obtained a fellowship in eye pathology at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, DC, studying under the direction of Helenor Wilder. The next 3 years were spent in the eye residency program at the Ohio State University Hospitals in Columbus.

After his residency, Dr Makley went into practice in downtown Columbus with Dr Arthur Culler for a short period of time. He eventually established his own private practice, which he continued for a period of 10 years. During that time, he maintained a close relationship with the eye department at Ohio State as a part-time faculty member. With his interest and training in ophthalmic pathology, he established an eye pathology laboratory, a major addition that provided a needed service for ophthalmologists in Ohio and surrounding states and for teaching residents and medical students. This laboratory is still an active part of the department with more than 40,000 accessions.

In 1961, at the urging of then chairman Dr William Havener, Dr Makley gave up his practice to become the department’s second full-time faculty member. Soon after joining the faculty, he was appointed chairman of the department, a position he held until 1972. After being appointed, he recognized that it was now his responsibility to continue the development that had been started by his predecessors. His first effort was to expand the full-time faculty, and he was able to recruit key individuals so that all the subspecialties were covered. Many of those faculty are still active in the department today.

Dr Makley supported the clinical and basic science research activities by recruiting top researchers in those areas. He made significant efforts to expand research funds. Teaching was very important to him, and with the help of former chairman Dr Havener, he made major changes in resident and medical student education within the department. He was also able to expand the opportunities for residents to obtain additional clinical and surgical experience by establishing a relationship with a veterans clinic. When the opportunity arose for the department to occupy space in a new facility that was being constructed, Dr Makley was able to oversee the design of the administration offices, examination and treatment rooms, resident clinic, and support areas, all of which still serve the department well.

Dr Makley was a superb clinician and surgeon. His primary interests were uveitis and orbital diseases. For many years, he was the orbital surgeon for the department and would take on the most challenging cases. He served as the director of the uveitis clinic, which was widely used by physicians in central Ohio to refer their difficult cases. His rapport with patients was exemplary. He never seemed to get upset; his manner was always pleasant, considerate, and understanding. Patients loved him; residents and
young facility tried to emulate him. Faculty and residents often remarked about his surgical knowledge and how skilled he was in the operating room. At the operating table, his hands never seemed to waiver, hesitate, or shake. It was always a great educational experience to be his assistant at surgery.

From his clinical, surgical, and pathology cases, Dr Makley was able to publish a number of articles, some of which are classics and are still being referenced. He had more than 50 peer-reviewed publications and book chapters. Among the many medical societies in which he held membership, he most enjoyed those related to ophthalmic pathology. He was an active member of the American Association of Ophthalmic Pathologists, Ophthalmic Pathology Club (Verhoeff Society), Midwest Ophthalmic Club (Theobald Society), American Uveitis Society, and Association for Research in Ophthalmology. He regularly attended their meetings, many with his first wife, Ann, and he became well-known for his presentations and participation. Dr Makley often commented about the wonderful friends they made at those meetings. I recently learned from Dr William Spencer, a long-time close friend of Dr Makley, that he was the last surviving charter member of the Ophthalmic Pathology Club.

Even after retiring from practice and assuming an emeritus status in 1983, Dr Makley never lost interest in the department. He attended most departmental meetings and activities. He took great pleasure in interacting with the residents and was a faithful member of the resident selection committee. He loved to teach and would visit the pathology area to spend time with residents, going over interesting cases both current and old from his extensive archives. In some of the old cases, the slides were pretty faded, but he knew all the details about each of them. Because of his outstanding teaching, the department’s teaching award is named the Makley-Battles Teaching Award.

Dr Makley maintained a strong interest in keeping current with events in ophthalmology. He would read journals and other materials, and if he read something that was new to him, he would seek someone to explain it to him. He would not stop until it was clear to him. In the last months of his life, he was writing an atlas of interesting cases that he hoped to publish. When asked why he was doing it at this time in his life, his comment was, “This will help residents better understand ophthalmic pathology and how it has evolved over the years.” He was always a teacher.

Dr Makley loved ophthalmology, but his greatest love was his family and friends. He had a long and happy life with his first wife, Ann, who died in 1992. They had 7 children. Two years after his wife’s death, he married Jo. Dr Makley often stated that he was doubly blessed to have the opportunity to marry a second wonderful woman. Jo has 8 children. This union created a large extended family, which includes all the children, brothers and sisters, 38 grandchildren, 8 great-grandchildren, and numerous nieces and nephews. It was easy to see why he was so proud of his family and why he was so well cared for.

Dr Makley was an active member of his church. He was a lecturer in the church, and he served as a Eucharistic minister. He was also a member of the Sierra Club for which he was voted the volunteer of the year. In discussions with him, it was evident that he was devoted to his church and true to his Christian faith.

I remember Dr Makley as a remarkable person whose professional and personal life represents a model that we all should try to emulate. He was a kind, caring person who touched many lives and was loved by all. His soft-spoken but sincere manner was evident in all that he did. Colleagues, residents, students, staff, and patients all perceived his outstanding quality as a person and a physician.

Elson L. Craig, MD

Correspondence: Dr Craig, Department of Ophthalmology, Ohio State University College of Medicine and Public Health, 456 W 10th Ave, Columbus, OH 43210-1240 (craig.1@osu.edu).