



TRIBUTE PROFESSOR WILLIAM G. SHAFER

Dr. William G. Shafer, Indiana University's Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Oral Pathology and one of the world's most influential pioneers in the field of oral pathology, died in Indianapolis, Ind., on June 17, 2000. He was 76.

Serving on the IU faculty from 1950 to 1985, for most of that time as chairman of the Department of Oral Pathology, Dr. Shafer quickly developed a reputation as a brilliant and exacting diagnostician and teacher of oral pathology, but his vast knowledge of the field reached far beyond the walls of the IU dental school. Through the pages of his widely respected textbooks, he helped shape the dental education of students throughout the U.S. and in many parts of the world. Most notable was "A Textbook of Oral Pathology," for which he served as senior author.

Considered for decades to be the definitive text on oral pathology, this book was published in four editions between 1958 and 1983, and translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

Dr. Shafer was born in Toledo, Ohio. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II. The University of Toledo and The Ohio State University College of Dentistry awarded him degrees in 1947. Oral pathology teacher Hamilton B. G. Robinson, an associate dean at Ohio State who was about to become one of the eight founding fathers of the American Academy of Oral Pathology (since renamed the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology), inspired him. After earning his dental degree, Dr. Shafer completed a master's degree in general pathology at the University of Rochester, Rochester, N.Y., in 1949. He was also an Eastman Fellow at the University of Rochester. Oral pathology was still a little known field when Dr. Shafer launched his career in 1950 as a histopathology teacher at Indiana University. In 1950, oral pathology had been a specialty for only two years, and most dental schools didn't know much about it yet, Dr. Shafer said in an interview in 1989. Teachers wishing to enter this field first had to develop one. "We were learning oral pathology by the seat of our pants," he said.

In the early years after oral pathology became a recognized specialty, Dr. Shafer, one of the few oral pathologists, traveled to countless dental meetings across the USA. He attempted to acquaint dental practitioners with the field and to underscore the critical role that soft tissue examinations play in the overall well-being of patients' oral health. He established an oral pathology graduate program at IU, which became an advanced specialty training site for dentists in the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy as well as for students the world over. Many of his former students eventually became known for their own distinguished careers in oral pathology and dental education. Working with a team of faculty members and graduate students, he developed the IU dental school's oral pathology biopsy service, which became an invaluable and much-trusted resource for thousands of dentists across the nation.

Dr. Shafer's chief interests in research included studies on salivary gland pathophysiology, and investigations of odontogenic tumors and oral cancer. Within a scant 10 years, he rose from fourth-year dental student status to president of the American Academy of Oral Pathology. He was also a diplomate and past president of the American Board of Oral Pathology (now the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology). In the 1970s, Dr. Shafer was a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) International Reference Centre for the Histological Definition and Classification of Odontogenic Tumours, Jaw Cysts, and Allied Lesions; and of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Oral Precancerous Lesions, which established definitions of leukoplakia and related lesions. He was the only American oral pathologist to serve on both committees. He served as national civilian consultant in oral pathology to the surgeon general of the Air Force from 1960 to 1981. He was also a visiting professor and an educational consultant at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Throughout his career he was a much sought after consultant and lecturer at scientific meetings in the U.S. and abroad. He was a member of the American Dental Association, International Association for Dental Research, and the New York Academy of Sciences.

In 1970, The Ohio State University selected Dr. Shafer as one of its 100 outstanding alumni. A year later, Indiana University awarded him the rank of Distinguished Professor of Oral Pathology. His numerous other honors include the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology medallion; the American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology's Past Presidents Award; and the Maynard K. Hine Award, the highest honor bestowed by the Indiana Dental Association. Dr. Shafer is survived by his wife, Ruth Hertweck Shafer; daughter, Susan E. Shafer, who is an administrative assistant in IU's Department of Oral Surgery, Medicine, and Pathology; three granddaughters; and a great-granddaughter.