

In Remembrance of Thomas F. Ferris, MD, Former ASN President (1987–1988)

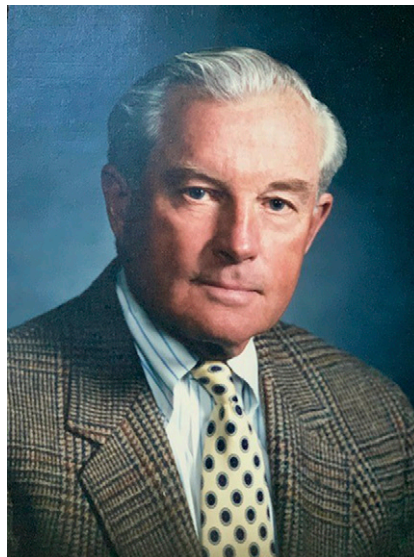
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Thomas Francis Ferris died on July 19, 2019 at the age of 88 years. Tom was born in Boston. His father was a railway man and his mother a bank telegrapher (“the fastest”). He graduated from the Boston Latin School (“I could never figure out what point Cicero was trying to make.”) and then Georgetown University. He attended Yale Medical School where he graduated Alpha Omega Alpha and fell under the influences of John Peters, Frank Epstein, and Pat Mulrow. He became and remained forever a pathophysiologist, with Bernard’s constancy of the internal milieu a centering concept for him; he often quoted Bernard’s famous line, “It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning.” After an internship at Johns Hopkins, he was a resident and chief resident at Yale. He served in the army and again returned to Yale before becoming a fellow and visiting investigator at Oxford University while another mentor, Paul Beeson, was regius professor. He next founded the Renal Division at Ohio State and, after being there for 11 years, he moved to the University of Minnesota as chairman of medicine. When told chairs were called heads at Minnesota, he said “That sounds too much like a bathroom on a boat, I’ll be chairman.” And he was. Tom built a formidable department where, by the end of his 17 year tenure, every division chief was a member of the American Society for Clinical Investigation. In the 1980s, when the field of oxidative stress and tissue injury was developing, multiple faculty members were at the forefront of this field. By his leadership and personality, and by ensuring attendance at various departmental meetings, Tom inculcated a departmental *esprit de corps* and collaboration. He was strong minded and, while having a formidable emphasis on research, was a superb



clinician and teacher. He had firm beliefs about futile care and often acted on them. He wrote the best consultation notes we have ever seen, less than one half page in an admirably legible hand, incorporating all relevant points and a clear message.

Tom’s landmark contributions elucidated such fields as renal hemodynamics, sodium and potassium transport, and the renin-angiotensin and prostanoid systems in health and disease; mechanisms underlying AKI including oxidative stress; regulation of uterine blood flow during pregnancy and the adverse effects of antagonizing the renin-angiotensin system; models of preeclampsia; and the effects of cyclosporine on renal hemodynamics and the renin-angiotensin system. He edited a standard text *Medical Complications of Pregnancy* with Gerald Burrow, which went through six editions.

Tom was prescient. His 1967 *New England Journal of Medicine* paper “Recurrent Hematuria and Focal Nephritis” foreshadowed the description of IgA nephropathy. Tom mitigated the existing resistance to thiazide use in hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, successfully arguing for such a role for these agents; he was proud of this, saying that this should be “etched on my tombstone.” Well before the significance of cardiovascular disease was recognized in CKD/ESKD, he saw this connection (“A serum creatinine is more important than a serum cholesterol in predicting cardiovascular disease”). His American Society of Nephrology (ASN) president’s address in 1988 sounded the alarm for the declining recruitment of the “best and the brightest” to nephrology, a problem now broadly felt by nephrology training programs. He maintained that the most valuable research findings were unexpected and research

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targeting the interface of different fields was uniquely rewarding; this, he said, drove his interest in pregnancy, hypertension, and kidney disease. His premonitions regarding ongoing changes in medicine (“This increasing bureaucracy, administrative burden, and need for documentation detract from the fulfillment and joy in caring for patients”) have now materialized in physician burnout and a trying health care system. Although he foresaw looming problems, he was unfailingly optimistic and resilient.

Tom’s trainees are widely placed among the leadership of academic medical centers and foundations, and in the practice of nephrology and internal medicine. Tom mentored three individuals who became ASN presidents, one who is now president-elect, and another who served as editor-in-chief of *JASN*.

Tom was a committed sailor and golfer. He loved baseball and was a vendor for the Boston Braves in his youth. He liked to tell the story of meeting the long-retired hall of famer and former Cleveland Indian, Lou Boudreau, in a hotel lobby (probably at an ASN meeting) and asking him why he thought Joe McCarthy, Red Sox manager, had pitched Denny Galehouse

in the tie breaker for the 1948 American League pennant between the Red Sox and Indians. He was for many years a season ticket holder for the Minnesota Twins and generously shared tickets, even to World Series games.

His wife Carol, to whom he was married for 62 years, died in December 2018 after a long illness during which Tom devotedly cared for her entirely in their own home. “Carol did most of the cooking before. Now it’s my turn.” One cannot help wondering whether his passing, little more than 6 months after Carol’s, reflected that a sustaining purpose for him had now ebbed and was no longer there to countervail the gathering infirmities of his advancing age. As is emblematic of who he was, when Tom committed to someone or something, his will and follow-through were adamant. He and Carol had four children to whom Tom was very close and loving. They, five grandchildren, and two brothers survive him.

Tom Ferris was of his generation but he was one of a kind. We will miss him, and the business of academic nephrology and the practice of nephrology and internal medicine will all miss him. His kind is gone.