LW- The Frank O. Wood Memorial Lecture honors an outstanding former member of
the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Hartford Hospital. Dr. William
Tripp and I, LeRoy H. Wardner, are happy to have the privilege of recording
our knowledge of him.

WT- Dr. Wood was born in 1906 in Waco, Texas, the son of a physician. Most of
his life was spent outside of Texas but he never left it in his heart. This
was exemplified by the fact that he had the longest pair of mounted longhorns
outside the state of Texas. He was educated at Baylor University and Rush
Medical College in Chicago. He interned at Hartford Hospital from 1931 to 1932
where a romance began with Irene Klostermann, a graduate of the Hartford
Hospital Training School for Nurses Class of '32. A native of Germany, she had
come to Connecticut to live with a relative in 1927. Irene pursued her nursing
career at Hartford Hospital, becoming a night supervisor. Dr. Wood and Irene
Klostermann were married in November 1935. They had three children, Heidi
(1938), Patricia (1943) and John (1946). Mrs. Wood and her family have
graciously endowed this lectureship.

LW- Frank was active in general practice in Glastonbury from 1932 to 1935.
When I came to intern in 1934, the legends of his jokes and pranks were well
established. At the mention of his name, nurses would break out in a smile and
say, "That Frank Wood, he is always up to something which brings pleasure to
the people he is with. He enjoys his own jokes as much as anyone."

One of his stories had to do with a problem he ran into in an obstetrical
delivery in a home, of which he had quite a number. On this occasion, the
patient had been in labor for a considerable time and she did not appear to be
making the progress that he anticipated. An elderly woman of the neighborhood
was helping. She would say, "Dr. Wood, I think that you should quill her." Now,
he didn't know what "quill" involved and he didn't like to admit that he
was unlearned about it. Finally, however, he gave in and he said, "All right,
you can try your quill." And, with that, the woman produced a turkey feather
and, inserting it into the patient's nostril, twisted it so that she had a
tremendous sneeze. That effort brought the baby's head down to a point where
delivery became effective and happily accomplished.

In 1935, Frank gave up his practice in Glastonbury and went to Boston
where he spent two years in the obstetrical and gynecological residency at
Boston City Hospital. At the end period he had a six-month interval as the
resident and, finally, chief-resident at the Women's Free Hospital in
Brookline. He was always proud of the fact that, here, he was on the service
of the Harvard Medical School, as well as the Tufts Medical School. He gained
a great deal of surgical experience which served him very well after his
return to Hartford Hospital in 1938, where he was admitted to the Active Staff
in Obstetrics and Gynecology.

About this period, Frank became disabled by a back pain which was
diagnosed as Marie-Strumpell arthritis of the spine. It was treated by the use
of a plaster corset. The corset was always visible, when he was not on duty,
on top of his locker on the delivery floor. Because of this arthritis, during
the war years, when the rest of the younger men of the staff were called away
in service, Frank remained behind and was ever-present at the hospital. He
showed a great deal of ability, understanding, and good humor under the
tensions which this produced. He delivered ever-increasing numbers of
patients. Our estimate, over that period of time, undoubtedly was as many as a
thousand deliveries in the course of a year.
WT- In spite of the fact that Frank was probably the busiest obstetrician in the area, he never failed to show great kindness and gentleness to his patients and to his fellow workers. In spite of seeing an incredible number of patients every day, none of them ever felt rushed. He had the unique ability to make each one feel that she was his only patient that day. He was forever telling a funny story to relieve the tension when the going got rough in the operating room. Frank's technical skill was outstanding, and when the technique was not available, he invented it to solve the problem. His generosity is legend and many young physicians in the town today owe their beginning to Dr. Wood's kindnesses.

His inventive spirit produced a number of instruments which should really bear his name but probably don't and may very well be lost to posterity. The most outstanding one that I can think of is a modified Richardson retractor that had suction holes along the border of the extended blade and was attached to the suction for cesarean sections. As every obstetrician knows, one of the difficulties at the time of cesarean section is visualization of different parts of the anatomy because of the fluid and blood. The retractor proved very helpful in keeping the field clear.

LW- To this point Frank's experience had been in the days when there was no sulfa or antibiotics to control infection. Speed was an essential factor in surgery. He developed a great ability to get in and out in the shortest effective time. Somewhere he had had experience which made him feel that the appendix, which so often would rupture and cause prolonged drainage and abscess formation, was better removed whenever it appeared. He began to routinely remove the appendix at cesarean section. He extended this to his other surgery, so that, whenever the appendix was exposed, he was very apt to quickly remove it. He never charged or made any special point of it. After a period of time, he had developed sufficient experience and numbers so that he encouraged Dr. G. Lawrence Austin to report this in a presentation at the American Medical Association meeting in 1957.

WT- During the war years with the ever-increasing number of babies, Dr. Wood came to feel that a group practice would be a more efficient way of handling this vast number. In about 1945, an informal group of obstetricians was formed: Dr. Glover Howe, Dr. Ralph Storrs, and Dr. Frank O. Wood were the original members, later joined by Dr. Paul Johnson and Dr. LeRoy Wardner. This group provided excellent care with private duty obstetrical nurses for each of their patients in the labor room during the years that medication was used. It also afforded consultation among the doctors when difficult problems arose, giving the patient the benefit of several doctors' opinions instead of one.

I joined the group in 1956 after my training at the Woman's Hospital in New York. But my introduction was really when Dr. Wood left for Africa and he told me, "Take any one of my patients that you can, while I'm away, as your own." This was the most generous act that I had ever experienced. But, little did I know that Dr. Wood's patients would rather have died than leave him. It was all right for the first month when an obstetrical patient saw me. She would put up with this new, young physician. But, by the third month when they saw me, several broke into tears, always wanting to know, "Where is my Dr. Wood?"

LW- Dr. Wood was always eager to learn more. In 1954, he spent a period of time at the Radiumhemmet in Stockholm under the supervision of Dr. Kotmeier at the Karolinska Hospital where all patients under the socialized medicine of
Sweden, who had cancer of the genital tract, were brought together for radiation and other treatments. He returned with a number of new ideas as far as Hartford Hospital was concerned. He brought, particularly, the Heyman capsules which were used for the intraovarian approach of radium for cancer of the lining of the uterus or endometrium.

Likewise, in 1959, Frank asked for a leave of absence from his duties on the Ob-Gyn staff in order to accept an invitation to go to West Africa in the colonies of the former Belgian and French Congo where he expected to deal with vesicovaginal and rectovaginal fistulas which came about as a result of prolonged labors. He had a great deal of experience there. He used a transplant of the gracilis muscle for the closure of the vesicovaginal fistulas. He operated upon many patients who had huge tumors of the uterus due to fibroids and dermoids and brought back stories of dealing with medicine men whom he was able to present with hair and teeth which had been removed from a dermoid cyst at surgery.

During that period, he accepted an invitation to visit the clinic of Dr. Albert Schweitzer at Lambarone in the Congo. There, where he had expected to operate with Dr. Schweitzer, he collapsed, and Schweitzer recognized that he was a very sick man. In the Congo the tsetse fly had so decimated the cattle which were the normal source of meat that the greater amount of protein came from monkeys. Frank refused to eat monkey meat. This so depleted him that he collapsed when he got to Schweitzer's clinic. There was also a question of whether he had a typhus infection. At any rate, Schweitzer sent him home in the care of a returning missionary who insisted that he have an ambulance for his return to Hartford. He was a sadly depleted and sick man over the following six months.

WT: Dr. Wood probably, if all the records could be accounted for, delivered something over 15,000 babies in his forty-five years of practice. This seems an incredible number, but when you realize that, during the war years, some of those years averaged over a thousand babies, it is not inconceivable.

His advice to me when I started to practice was that there were three "A's" which were the secret to success for a physician: The first was affability; the second, availability; and the third, ability- in that order. Frank never deviated from this formula and, if there was one fault in his entire life, it was that he was unable to say "no." He accepted every assignment. He gave of himself 110% and frequently found himself committed to three places at the same time.

At the end of his practicing career, Frank was involved with setting up a gynecological clinic at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. He was in charge of about 6,000 female students and held bi-weekly clinics there. This was the era in which sexual promiscuity was rampant and there were many days in which he would see thirty to forty students with problems that would rarely have been seen twenty years earlier.

LW: At one of his later visits to Hartford Hospital at the time of the Centennial Baby Reunion in 1979, Dr. Wood was on hand to greet a number of the babies that he had delivered back in 1954.

Later that year Frank underwent a carotid angiogram study for partial obstruction of the carotid artery. In the process of that, a plaque was loosened which brought about practically a complete paralysis of his body. He was left with the ability to move only his left arm and his ability to talk was greatly compromised. Death followed on the 27th of November 1980 at the age of 74.

With his death Hartford Hospital lost an eminent physician, a great teacher, a fine humanitarian, and a good friend!