

Tribute to Edward G. Rennels  
1920-2010

Edward G. Rennels was born May 7, 1920 in Charleston, Illinois where he was reared on a farm with his 3 siblings. He began his collegiate studies at Eastern Illinois State College (renamed Eastern Illinois University) but his pursuit of his baccalaureate was interrupted by World War II. During the war, Ed served as a flight instructor in the US Naval Air Corps, stationed primarily at the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Following his military discharge, he returned to Eastern Illinois State, where in 1947 he was awarded his B.Ed. with high honors. After briefly serving as an instructor in zoology, Ed matriculated at Harvard University where he completed his M.A. in 1948. From 1948 to 1950, he was a teaching assistant and an Atomic Energy Fellow while working on his doctorate at the Biological Laboratories at Harvard University under the tutelage of Professor Alden B. Dawson. It was there that he was first introduced to the mysteries of the histophysiology of the anterior pituitary gland and the interactions between the “master gland” and the male and female reproductive systems.

In 1950 after receiving his Ph.D., he was recruited to the faculty of the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston by Dr. Donald Duncan as an Instructor in the Department of Anatomy, and he quickly rose through the professorial ranks becoming a full professor in 1961. For the rest of Dr. Duncan’s life he remained a mentor and close friend of Ed’s.

When a new medical school of the University of Texas opened in San Antonio in 1966, Ed was selected as the founding Chair of the nascent Department of Anatomy. Over the next 14 years, he recruited faculty who shared his vision to build a department committed to excellence in scholarly achievement, graduate education and teaching. In 1980, he voluntarily resigned as Chair and in 1982, was named Professor Emeritus upon retiring from the University.

During his long and prodigious scientific career, Ed built a reputation as one of the world’s foremost authorities on the structure and function of the anterior pituitary gland. His seminal work on the ultrastructure of the gland brought a number of invitations to national and international meetings,

including the 10th International Congress of Anatomy in Tokyo where he captivated the attendees with his opening comments in Japanese.

In both Galveston and San Antonio, he always attracted undergraduates, medical students, graduate students (working on both their Master's and Ph.D. degrees) and post-doctoral fellows to his laboratory. One of these individuals was his long-time collaborator, Dr. Masataka Shiino. With the late Dr. Akira Arimura and Nobel laureate Andrew Schally, they published a series of studies in which the effects of GnRH were evaluated on the ultrastructure of the gonadotrophs of the male and female rat pituitary gland. Ed's scientific expertise was consistently solicited to review manuscripts for a number of scientific journals as well as to serve on the editorial boards of *The Anatomical Record* and *Endocrinology*.

Ed was a member of numerous scientific societies, including the American Association of Anatomists in which his membership dated from 1952. During his tenure as Chair, he encouraged/cajoled his faculty to submit abstracts to the Association's annual meetings and took great pride in the fact that for many years the most submissions came from San Antonio!

The emphasis on teaching was not lost with Ed. He was active in the histology courses for the dental and medical students, giving lectures and staffing all of the laboratories. He thoroughly enjoyed his pedagogical time with the graduate students to the point that he told one of his faculty members that teaching the medical and dental students was a necessary evil while teaching graduate students was pleasurable!

Ed's passion for science was eclipsed only by his love for his family. He met his future bride Ruth while they were both undergraduates at Eastern Illinois State College, and they married in October of 1942. They had two children; Beth is a retired elementary school teacher and Doug is a practicing physician and the father of 7 children. Several of the grandchildren are married and have given Ed and Ruth 3 great grandchildren. Ed's hobbies included reading (his favorite subject was military history and WWII) and gardening, as well as collecting and restoring vintage 1953/1954 Chrysler automobiles. At one time, he owned more than a dozen! Ed and Ruth lived on five acres of land surrounded by deer, sheep, cats and innumerable dogs.

In his latter years, his health declined which necessitated that he be relocated to an assisted living facility near his home in San Antonio. He quietly died in the early morning of January 31, 2010 at the age of 89. Ed will forever be remembered as a respected scholar, scientist, administrator, and colleague but more importantly as a devoted family man who showed by example how to balance family life with that of a successful academician.

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