
Russell P. Hall III, MD

The Genesis of the Department of Dermatology at Duke

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Russell P. Hall III". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned to the right of the title.

This essay, in slightly altered form, was originally presented as a speech celebrating the newly created Duke Department of Dermatology, at a dinner held on July 15, 2009.

On July 1, 2009, the Duke University School of Medicine created the Department of Dermatology, the first new clinical department created at Duke since 1991.

This marked the culmination of more than five years of work by many people within Duke University, the School of Medicine, and the Health System. This process was truly a “university” experience, and it has illustrated, once again, to all the faculty of our new department the wonderful depth and breadth of talent and ambition at Duke University and the medical school.

The true history of this event, however, dates back much further than five years ago; indeed, it dates back to the very first days of Duke University.

In June of 1931, Jasper Lamar Callaway arrived by train in Durham after two years of medical school in his native Alabama. Alabama was only a two-year school, and Callaway felt that Duke, which just beginning to develop its

tradition, would be the perfect place to continue his education. He traveled down a gravel-covered Erwin Road to Duke Hospital, where he went to the office of Dean Wilburt C. Davison and after finding out Dr. Davison was on rounds, he was directed to go to the bursar's office to pay his fees (\$150 per quarter). A lifelong association with Duke Medicine had begun.

At that time, the Duke University School of Medicine had four departments: Medicine, Surgery, Pediatrics, and Obstetrics and Gynecology. "Cal," as he was nicknamed, started as a junior, joining what would be the second graduating class of Duke's medical school. These were truly the first days of Duke Medicine. The School of Medicine had been established six years earlier, the first class of medical students had begun in 1930, the hospital had opened to patients that same year, and Duke Chapel was under construction.

Cal began his clinical rotations, and it was on his medicine rotation that Dr. Frederic Hanes told Cal that he would be Duke's dermatologist. Dr. Hanes arranged for Cal to train with Dr. John Stokes at the University of Pennsylvania, home of the first department of dermatology in the United States, to become Duke's first dermatologist. Cal spent much of his senior year there, and also returned to Penn after his internship and residency in medicine to complete his dermatology fellowship. While at Penn, Cal was trained by the early greats in American dermatology. Drs. Stokes, Beerman, and Pillsbury instilled in Cal the core belief that a great dermatologist was an excellent clinician who was curious about the science of dermatology and committed to teaching.

In July of 1937, Dr. Callaway returned to Duke University from the University of Pennsylvania as Duke's first dermatologist, and in 1939 the Division of Dermatology was established, the third division in the Department of Medicine at Duke. Dr. Cal would remain at Duke for his entire career, starting a pattern of loyalty and commitment to Duke that continues today.

The seeds of Duke Dermatology were sown in those early days, as Dr. Cal built the foundation of the department. He established a

distinguished heritage of teaching, investigating, and caring for patients with skin disease. Dr. Cal became a national and international leader, establishing the role of Duke Dermatology beyond Duke. He served as president of all of our most prestigious professional societies, including the American Academy of Dermatology, the Society for Investigative Dermatology, and the American Board of Dermatology. He received numerous awards, including the Gold Medal of the American Academy of Dermatology and the Stephen Rothman Award of the Society for Investigative Dermatology. Dr. Cal trained numerous clinicians, investigators, and department chairs and firmly established Duke Dermatology as a leader in academic dermatology.

The creation of the Department of Dermatology at Duke is a result of Cal's commitment to Duke, to his students, his patients, and his chosen specialty. We all owe so much to his vision, his commitment, and his hard work.

In the early 1970s, Cal spearheaded the next step in our journey towards becoming a department. Cal recruited a quartet of outstanding young academic dermatologists: Gerald Lazarus, Lowell Goldsmith, Brian Jegasothy, and Sheldon Pinnell. Over the next decade these four individuals would build Duke Dermatology upon the foundation established by Dr. Cal. In 1975 Dr. Cal stepped down after 36 years as division chief, and Dr. Lazarus took the reins of the Division of Dermatology. Over the next seven years Duke's national profile in dermatology grew with a strong program in investigative dermatology. Eventually three members of this group of four left Duke to become chairmen of departments of dermatology at other institutions, and ultimately two became deans of schools of medicine. However, Sheldon Pinnell, who had originally come to Duke as an undergraduate, remained at Duke, demonstrating the loyalty and commitment to Duke Dermatology that had marked Dr. Cal's career.

In 1982 Dr. Pinnell became division chief with a vision to take us to the next level -- a vision to take us where we are today -- from a division to the Duke Department of Dermatology.

In 1983 Dr. Pinnell visited me at the Dermatology Branch at the NIH, where I was a postdoctoral research fellow, and suggested that Duke Dermatology would be a great place for me to start my independent career. Having trained in medicine under Dr. Charles Mengel, who had been a chief resident at Duke, the possibility of coming to Duke held a special appeal for me. I remember so clearly my recruiting visit to Duke some 26 years ago. Dr. Cal was still practicing in a small office in the basement of Duke South. There were no windows, very little light, and books filled the room. Cal told me with a firm and confident voice, "Sheldon will make Duke Dermatology greater than it has ever been."

It was a bold declaration, and towards that goal, Dr. Pinnell aggressively set about building the Division of Dermatology. He recruited new investigators and clinicians. He established new areas of research in immuno-dermatology and connective tissue, as well as new clinical efforts in wound care, laser medicine, dermatologic surgery, and pediatric dermatology. More than anything else, however, Sheldon instilled an atmosphere of learning, teaching, and having fun. Duke Dermatology was an exciting place, and we were on the path to his goal of becoming the Department of Dermatology.

Cal would be proud of where Duke Dermatology is today, but frankly I don't think he would be surprised. He knew Sheldon would do great things for Duke Dermatology.

Having now become a department of dermatology, it is important to look back and to look forward: Looking back helps us focus on whom we owe for the success we enjoy today. Looking back tells us that we have many people to thank for getting us to where we are today.

We all owe a great debt of gratitude and admiration to those in our department who came before us -- from Dr. Cal to all of our previous faculty members to the large number of fellows and residents that have trained at Duke. They have all contributed so much.

Dr. Dzau, Dr. Andrews, Dr. Cuffe, and the entire staff of the Dean's Office, the Health System, and the PDC have provided great

practical knowledge and philosophical guidance as we made this important transformation. They have been supportive at every step of the way and deserve great thanks from all of the faculty and staff of Duke Dermatology. Dr. Harvey Cohen and the entire faculty and staff of the Department of Medicine are owed special thanks. The Department of Medicine has been the home of Duke Dermatology for more than 70 years. Duke dermatologists have enjoyed many wonderful scientific and clinical collaborations with faculty throughout the Department of Medicine. I know that our continued collaborations will be of benefit to us all.

This transitional growth process, which has brought together so many different aspects of Duke Medicine, has made us all very proud and appreciative of what it means to be a part of the family of Duke Medicine.

We also owe special thanks to Sheldon Pinnell and his wife, Doren. The Department of Dermatology at Duke would not have been possible without the leadership and support of both Sheldon and Doren. Since Sheldon's days as an undergraduate at Duke, he has had an unfaltering loyalty to every aspect of Duke University. The creation of our Department of Dermatology is strong testament to that loyalty. For many of the current faculty of the Department of Dermatology, we are at Duke because of Sheldon. His enthusiasm for the academic life, his unquenchable intellectual curiosity, and his relentless optimism were what drew us to Duke. Sheldon made Duke Dermatology a fun and exciting place to work and learn. Sheldon created an environment that allowed us to thrive both as individuals and as Duke Dermatology.

Sheldon and Doren have always been, and remain, committed to making Duke Dermatology the best. The creation of the Department of Dermatology is the lasting legacy of their leadership and commitment to that goal. They were integral in creating an environment of intellectual curiosity here, combined with the highest level of education and patient care.

Looking forward, we as a department pledge to do everything possible to ensure that

Dr. Pinnell and all who have gone before will be proud of the Department of Dermatology at Duke. This is an exciting time for dermatology, and we are dedicated to developing the next generation of investigators and clinicians. We will be focusing on developing the highest quality of research into the pathogenesis and treatment of skin diseases. We will re-double our efforts to train young physicians to become leaders in the clinic and the laboratory and to deliver the highest quality of care to all of our patients. We pledge that the history and culture that was established by Dr. Cal and that grew on Dr. Pinnell's watch will drive our future. We pledge that the Duke Department of Dermatology will continue that tradition of excellence and leadership with an unwavering commitment to teaching, to investigating, and to caring.

Seventy-eight years ago, Dr. Jasper Callaway began at Duke University School of Medicine. He was excited and energized to be present at the beginning of a new adventure. Today, as we begin life as a department, all of us in Duke Dermatology feel the same way -- and we are honored and privileged to build on the legacy of Dr. Cal, Dr. Lazarus, Dr. Pinnell, and all who preceded us.



Russell Hall is the J. Lamar Callaway Professor of Dermatology, professor of immunology, and the interim chair of the newly created Department of Dermatology at Duke. He joined Duke's faculty as assistant professor of medicine in 1984 after residencies in internal medicine and dermatology at the University of Missouri–Columbia and Johns Hopkins, as well as five combined years in the Dermatology Branch of the National Cancer Institute. He previously served as the deputy editor for the *Journal of Investigative Dermatology* and is currently the secretary–treasurer for the Society for Investigative Dermatology. He and his wife, Jean, also a physician, have two children.