A Brief History of
The Early Years of the Congress
of Neurological Surgeons

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Historian and Archivist
51st Past President
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
The CNS Seal
(Officially Adopted November 1954)
The Congress of Neurological Surgeons was founded in May 1951 by 22 neurosurgeons, mostly mid-westerners, outside the world of established elitist “societies”

The Founders had met and “conspired” on the fringes of the Inter-Urban Meeting in Chicago in recent years, and decided to act on February 24, 1951.
The Founding Meeting
Jefferson Hotel, Saint Louis, Missouri
May 11, 1951

22 Founding Members, 11 would later become presidents of the new organization

The name CNS was chosen with care. The word “American” was dropped, to symbolize international outreach. The initials would also reflect the central nervous system!
Follow-up to The Founding Meeting

Principles to Guide the new Organization

May 29, 1936

Dr. Bland W. Cannon
1902 Madison Avenue
Memphis, 3, Tennessee

Dear Bland:

I am sorry to have been delayed in writing you regarding the report of my Committee; however, on returning home from St. Louis I found myself in and out of the hospital for most of the next 10 days as a result of a severe penicillin reaction taken for that finger infection.

The following is the report of the committee set up to consider Articles I, II, and IV of the constitution and the annual membership dues. The committee was composed of myself as Chairman, and Doctors Baranger, Heatherington, and Paleson.

Article I: Name of the organization: The Congress of Neuro-Surgeons.

The committee suggested the possibility of altering the title to The American Congress of Neuro-surgeons. This was disapproved on presentation to the group as tending to destroy the international connection of the Association and as adding unnecessarily to the length of the title.

ARTICLE II: Purpose: The purpose of the Congress shall be:

1. To form an association of contemporary neurosurgeons which would meet annually for the purpose of expressing their views on various aspects of the principles and practice of neurological surgery.

2. To exchange technical information and experience.

3. To join in discussion and study of the developments in scientific fields allied to neurological surgery.

4. To honor living leaders in the field of neurological surgery.

Comment of the Committee: After considerable discussion, the committee felt that the purposes as set fourth in Article II, most adequately express the intent of the society and no changes were recommended.

Dr. Bland W. Cannon

May 29, 1936

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Article IV: The officers of the Congress shall consist of a President, First Vice-President, Second Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. The committee made the suggestion that the office of Secretary and Treasurer might be covered by one individual. On presentation to the group, this was disapproved. Article IV was then accepted as originally presented, but following discussion later in the meeting regarding the various committees, this matter was reopened and the officers were approved as being President, President Elect, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

The final matter for the committee's consideration was the annual membership fee. It was recommended that this be $25.00, which could be varied as necessary. The question of non-payment of dues for members recalled to the Armed Forces was brought up. Dr. Tyrie suggested that meetings for stationery, correspondence, and running expenses of the Society. Dr. Cannon suggested that the registration fee at the meeting would take care of the cost of the banquet and it was also suggested that additional levies could be made as necessary. Dr. Decky suggested that a fee of $15.00 might be levied on those members just out of residency but it was felt on the whole that this would unnecessarily complicate the procedure.

I will be glad to be on the Steering Committee for this section of the country and will be glad to help in any way I can. The only limitation would be that I have no one covering me here, and getting away again anytime very close to our recent meeting will be rather difficult.

Things seem to be going along very nicely and we are all looking forward to a very valuable and stimulating group.

Sincerely yours,

Philip D. Cordon, M.D.
Elmer C. Schultz, First CNS President
Nine Guest Speakers, No Honored Guest

- “Honorary Guests,” Professors Semmes and Gotten were invited, but did not actually attend this first CNS meeting
- Legal advisor Mr. Dunlap Cannon, Jr. prepared the Charter of the new organization, incorporated in the State of Tennessee on November 15, 1951
The 1st CNS Annual Meeting Included 63 neurosurgeons, 33 guests and 30 spouses (126 registrants)

- The CNS held its first Scientific Meeting November 15-17, 1951 in Memphis, Tennessee.
- It was a small affair, each of the 22 Founders committing to bring one or two partners or colleagues while a few also brought their spouses.
Hendrik Svien, age 41, from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota was chosen as the 2nd CNS President.

The “Second Annual Convention” would need a great venue, a stellar program, substantial attendance or the CNS could not survive as an organization.
The 22 Founders of the CNS had met before at the Inter-Urban Meeting and they knew Chicago well.

They selected the Palmer House, one of the most magnificent hotels in the city. The venue would be a great destination.
The Membership Committee went on a recruitment spree. Each attendee at the first meeting in 1951 was contacted and asked to recruit another partner or colleague.

Lists were drawn of young neurosurgeons in every city and a few foreign colleagues.
The founding pledge “To honor living leaders in the field of neurological surgery”, was finally fulfilled in 1952

Herbert Olivercrona, from Sweden, a towering figure was chosen

Many of the early CNS Honored Guests were foreign leaders, uncommitted to other established American neurosurgical societies
Emerging Prominence
The 1952 CNS Meeting in Chicago

- Total of 316 registrants (a record not surpassed until the 6th CNS Annual Meeting, also in Chicago!)
- These included 116 declared members, 101 guests, 28 residents and 71 spouses
- The attendance of 28 residents was a major coup – establishing the CNS as a leader in Neurosurgical Education
Emerging Prominence
The 1952 CNS Meeting in Chicago
The Attendance of Spouses

- Traditional neurosurgical meetings were “smoke filled” affairs purposely excluding women
- The CNS would be different, with the venue and evening events designed to welcome accompanying spouses
- The attendance of spouses forever altered the culture of neurosurgical meetings
Establishing the CNS Meeting Tradition

The Third CNS Annual Meeting
November 12 – 14, 1953
The Roosevelt Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana
The Third CNS Annual Meeting
November 12 – 14, 1953
New Orleans, Louisiana

The first CNS Newsletter:
Promoting the local venue,
“New Orleans, the Paris of America”
Introducing the Post-meeting Travel Group to Havana, Cuba

“For those who have a few additional days (plus a few dollars)”
The Third CNS Annual Meeting
November 12 – 14, 1953
New Orleans, Louisiana

Photo & Signatures
of the Post-meeting
Travel Group
Follow-up correspondence to the CNS members, with highlights of the Scientific Program:

- “All-Star Revue”
- “Top Brass”...if I know Army lingo!”
The Third CNS Annual Meeting
November 12 – 14, 1953
New Orleans, Louisiana

Rave Reviews!

"I want to congratulate you on the excellent organization that you have." Dr. John M. Meredith, 1200 East Broad Street, Richmond 19, Virginia.

"It was a pleasure to be associated with the Congress of Neurological Surgeons." Dr. Eric Oldberg, University of Illinois, Chicago, Illinois.

"I certainly enjoyed that meeting as much as, or more than any of the other neurosurgical meetings that I have attended." Dr. R. B. Raney, 1136 West Sixth Street, Los Angeles 17, California.

"I think you have a splendid, well-run organization." Dr. Adrien Ver Bruggen, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago 3, Illinois.

"In my opinion it was without question the finest meeting of that type that I have ever had the privilege of attending." Dr. Paul G. Floto, Seattle Neurological Institute, 1317 Marion Street, Seattle 4, Washington.
Membership grows dramatically after 2 years!
The CNS becomes the second largest neurosurgical organization in the world
• Congress Newsletter, February 1952 (Roy Tyrer, first editor)

• Directory of Neurological Surgeons in the United States, 1957 (John R. Russell, Chairman of the CNS Survey Committee)

• CNS Executive Committee authorizes the expenditure of funds for the lodging of residents attending the Annual Meeting (May 1958)

• World Directory of Neurological Surgeons, 1967 (George Ablin, Editor)
Other Notable CNS Firsts (International Stewardship)

- Founding member in the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies in 1955
- The CNS commissioned the “International Gavel” and presented it to the WFNS at its first meeting in Brussels in 1957
Other Notable CNS Firsts (Socioeconomics)

• **Fee Survey** (Edward Bishop, CNS Socio-economic committee, 1966)
• **Neurosurgical Utilization Guidelines** (Utilization Guidelines Committee, Walter Lockhart, Jr. 1969)
• The CNS hosted the first meeting of *Presidents of State Neurosurgical Societies*, 1978
• 1977, the CNS publishes the peer reviewed journal *NEUROSURGERY* (Robert H. Wilkins as its first Editor)
CNS Tribute to its Founders
CNS History Archives!
www.cns.org/about/history

- Documents and photographs, logos, mementos from each CNS Annual Meeting, 1951 through the present
- Photos of Past CNS Presidents and Honored Guests
- Annual CNS Presidential Addresses in print or audio since 1969...
- Walter Dandy Archives...
- Special historical essays, exhibits, and more!