

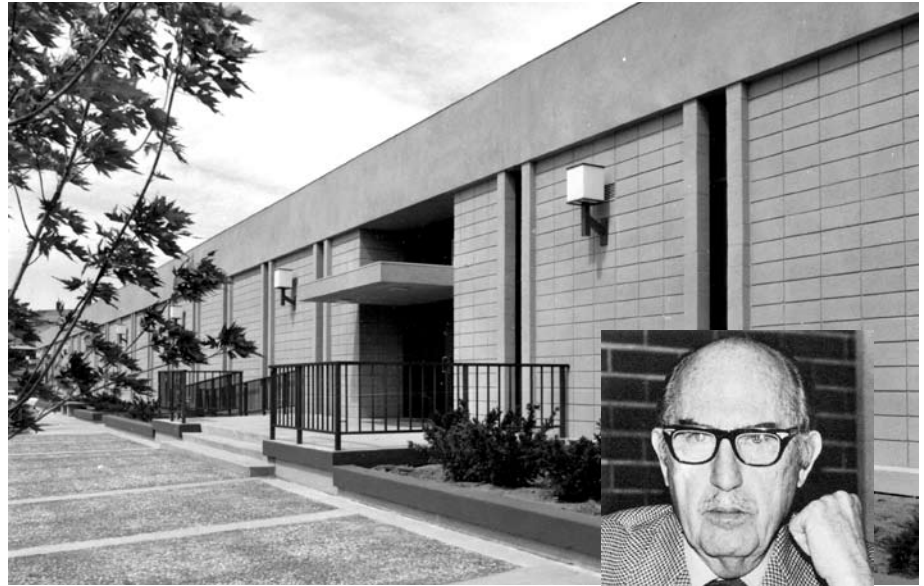
Fred Anderson: Father of the School of Medicine

The University of Nevada School of Medicine has a father. He was a special man who gave birth to a program, as well as a building to accommodate all of the aspiring doctors in Nevada and beyond.

Fred Anderson was born Jan. 17, 1906 on a small ranch in Secret Pass, Elko County. Those who knew him only as an adult may be surprised to learn that the sophisticated, urbane and distinguished surgeon was a product of rural Nevada who spent most of his boyhood and youth on ranches in Elko and White Pine counties and in the copper towns of Ruth and McGill, working variously as a cowboy, a “soda jerk” and as a laborer on the “bull gang” for the copper company. Fred graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno in 1928 with a bachelor’s degree in zoology. He had the privilege of being the mentee of Peter “Bugs” Frandsen, for whom Frandsen Hall was named. With his assistance, Fred obtained the Rhodes Scholarship and attended the highly acclaimed Oxford University. With his elite education, he was accepted into Harvard Medical School.

He returned to the Silver State, where he set up a medical practice. It was a success from the beginning, but before it could get firmly established World War II broke out in Europe and Fred volunteered for service in the army. He served from October 1941 until December 1945.

Although medicine was his primary activity, Fred’s interest in the University of Nevada and its Alumni Association projected him into a major role in the development of the Nevada System of Higher Education. Elected to the Board of Regents in 1956, he served for 22 years, four of these as chair. His service corresponded to the period of the University’s greatest growth, and he took a leading role in



The Anderson Health Sciences building as it appeared in 1980. The building is located just north of Mackay Stadium. RIGHT: Fred Anderson in 1972.

Photos courtesy University Archives.

the development of many of the new programs and in the establishment of new buildings. As a regent, his work culminated in the development of the School of Medicine or more correctly, the School of Health Sciences. The title, “Father of the School of Medicine,” given to him by the school’s first graduating class, is quite appropriate, as was the naming of the first building at the school, the Anderson Health Sciences Building. Fred passed away at age 97 in 2003. Here are some of his recollections, in his own words:

College Days

“I came down to the University of Nevada as a pre-med student in 1924, not very solvent, but with a little help from home. While attending the University, I was active in Campus Players and the Blue Key service organization. I was editor-in-chief of the University newspaper, the *Sagebrush*, which paid my senior year expenses and even allowed me to buy a car; assistant editor of the yearbook, the *Artemisia*; did small bits in Campus Players; and was a member of the InterFraternity Council. I was elected to Phi Kappa Phi in junior year,

became a Coffin and Keys member also in my junior year, and was a chairman of the Premedical Society.

“I went over to England in the fall of 1929. At Oxford we took parallel courses to those at the second year in the United States, but in a slightly less organized fashion and with some other things thrown in.

“Among my most vivid recollections of this year are autopsies. Each of us had to do 12 or more autopsies and write reports on them. The cadaver could be examined only to the extent approved in the permit. Some authorizations might allow explorations through the chest or abdominal incisions, and in some cases autopsy material could only be studied through organs that could be reached through the mouth or rectum. I can remember some of us trying to do a complete autopsy from the anus to heart and lungs through the anus, and by means of long rubber gloves we did them. Also, we were thrown into the emergency room under supervision of a middle-aged nurse, or sister as they were called there, to patch up minor wounds, do dressings, inject varicose veins and anything not serious

enough to require a doctor's skill.

"When I went to Harvard Medical School in my junior and senior year, I worked both of those years. I worked taking tickets at football games, and as a subject in physiological experiments. I gave transfusions as often as they'd let me and got paid for that.

Election to the Regents

"Sometime during 1955, I was invited to a meeting of Coffin and Keys, the group to which most of the student leaders and campus student achievers belonged, and of which I had been a member when a student. This group requested that I file for election to the Board of Regents in 1955, which I did.

"It was an eye-opener when I made my campaign for regent in 1956, the last year when there were statewide elections. I had some information cards printed and hit nearly every town in the state in one statewide tour, in some places staying with friends. I used no newspaper or television ads or programs, but did talk to some service clubs and other organizations. Altogether I spent \$250 on the campaign.

Medical School Beginnings

"A letter from Kevin Bunell, who was assistant director of the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education [WICHE], informed me that he had had a phone call from Art Palmer of the Nevada Legislative Council asking questions concerning the success of Nevada students in gaining admission to medical school. Art Palmer undoubtedly was calling at the behest of Senators Lamb and Brown, who were opposed to the school, to see if he could get testimony against the school. However, Bunell was favorable toward it. He conveyed that information with a statement that a medical school in the state surely would make a substantial difference in numbers of entering medical students and ratio of doctors to population, and would, in his opinion, be a desirable thing.



William O'Brien, Silas Ross and Fred Anderson place items into a box for the Anderson Health Sciences Building cornerstone ceremony in 1972.

"Representatives from the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare and foundation members—such as Kellogg and Commonwealth and Carnegie and other foundations—had been going through here and were impressed with our research programs and the many supporting programs in our 100-year-old University, especially our premedical, psychology, engineering, nursing and other areas. These were the years when the United States, in general, was thought to be short of doctors—particularly family doctors—by the Public Health Service, by the American Medical Association and by everyone concerned who did studies. There was much sentiment in Congress and money and encouragement by the accreditation officials for starting even two-year medical schools where states were unable to start four-year ones. "I was still chairman of the Board of Regents at that time, and on Feb. 11, 1967 I stepped down from the president's chair and made the following motion: I move that both medium and long-range planning be instituted to provide for the devel-

opment of a health sciences center associated with the University of Nevada in Reno, and in conjunction with Washoe Medical Center and other health facilities in the area.

"Perhaps the thing that affected the [legislature's decision to approve the medical school] more than anything we did was that Howard Hughes—who had not long before that moved to Las Vegas, bought the Desert Inn and occupied the entire top floor—communicated with our governor, Paul Laxalt, by letter, offering us a sum of \$6 million. Hughes's interest in the Medical School continued, and he was a major factor in its realization."

This oral history was initiated by Mary Ellen Glass in 1978. The process was interrupted shortly thereafter to be resumed and completed by Tom King, professor and director of the Oral History Program, between 1983 and 1985.

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