

**NOBLE SPROAT HEANEY**  
**1880-1955**  
**Obituary**

NOBLE SPROAT HEANEY, a past president and Fellow of the American Gynecological Society since 1921, died of cerebrovascular disease at his home in Los Angeles, California, Sept. 26, 1955. His death ended the career of one of the most distinguished gynecological surgeons and obstetricians of his time.

Dr. Heaney was born May 8, 1880, in a log cabin on his father's farm at Mendon, Illinois. His grandparents had originally purchased this farm on their arrival from Ireland in 1850. This heritage with its necessity for work and accomplishment undoubtedly formed the background for Dr. Heaney's freedom of thought and constant striving for improvement, which led to his outstanding achievements in the field of vaginal surgery. The traditional quick wit of his ancestors highlighted the teaching of this skill to his students and associates and helped to endear him to his many appreciative patients.

He finished his premedical education at near-by Knox College in '1898, graduated from the University of Chicago in 1902, and from Rush Medical College in 1904. During his premedical training the death of his favorite aunt, Alice Heaney, four days following a vaginal hysterectomy performed by a physician in Quincy, Illinois, crystallized his desire to excel in this branch of gynecological surgery. The internship at Presbyterian Hospital, Chicago, was competitive and Dr. Heaney was chosen for the appointment, beginning Jan. 1, 1905. A short period of locum tenens general practice in Mendon, Illinois, was followed by an assistantship and teaching position with Palmer Findley at the University of Nebraska. This he followed with postgraduate study at Heidelberg under Alfons Rosthorn and later with Wertheim in Vienna. Many extra experiences in vaginal surgery came to him during this time while his beer-drinking co-workers among the assistants and hospitants were away from the clinics having a good time.

Following his European training Dr. Heaney was appointed on Jan. 1, 1905, by Dr. Clarence Webster to take charge of the Gynecological Clinics in Central Free Dispensary. To augment his meager and now almost depleted finances he replaced Dr. Ernest E. Irons as assistant to Dr. James B. Herrick while Dr. Irons was abroad. This experience in the practice of internal medicine, combined with his contacts with Dr. Bertram W. Sippy, Dr. Bouffler, and Dr. E.V.L. Brown, from whom he rented his first office, greatly widened his medical horizons. It also formed an important background for his uncanny diagnostic

ability and choice of therapy for the patient as a whole, which is so necessary in dealing with the reproductive, functions of women. In addition to his membership in the component societies of Illinois and the American Medical Society, Dr. Heaney became a Fellow of the Chicago Gynecological Society in 1913 and its President from 1917 to 1919. He was admitted to Fellowship in the American College of Surgeons in 1913 and during 1939-1940 represented our Society on the Board of Governors of the College. Service on the Council of the American Gynecology Society came in 1921 and 1939, the Vice-Presidency in 1931, and the Presidency in 1938.

The theme of Dr. Heaney's Presidential Address set forth his concepts on a subject very close to his heart, the adequate training of young men in the practice of gynecology and obstetrics. In his characteristic way he carried this plan forward to its logical conclusion as a preceptor of assistants in the intricacies of practice in his private office.

To the many of us who were so fortunate as to work closely with him I believe three characteristics were most vivid. They were, first, his intense devotion to his patients' welfare day or night, second, his softness of heart, many times misunderstood because of the direct positive way he approached the problems of our training and the patients' care, and, third, his superlative diagnostic acumen and deft surgical ability, which have made his name in this country and abroad almost synonymous with vaginal surgery.

Fortunately, Sproat, as he liked to be called, was later able to give much from this rich experience to gynecological practice on the western seaboard and specifically to the Presbyterian and Hollywood Hospitals in Los Angeles, when he retired to consultation and practice in the needed sunshine of this area in 1945. He continued in this service until four years before his death.

To the surviving loved ones of this great man we offer our deep and heartfelt sympathy. We of the Society, his many faithful patients, students, and colleagues mourn his loss. Gynecology and obstetrics has lost one of its greatest practitioners.

*Edward Allen*

*Ref: Allen ED. Noble Sproat Heaney (obituary) Proc Inst Med Chicago 1956; 21: 43-45*