



WILLIAM C. BRAISTED, M.D.
Washington, D. C.
1864-1941

*Seventy-third President, A. M. A.
New Orleans Session
April 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 1920*



William C. Braisted

DR. WILLIAM C. BRAISTED, Admiral M.C., U. S. Navy, was the only Surgeon General of the United States Navy elected to the presidency of the Association. His selection was a further recognition of the efficient services rendered by the Medical Corps of the United States Navy during the first World War.

He was born in Toledo, Ohio, October 6, 1864. He received the degree Bachelor of Arts from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in 1883, and the degree Doctor of Medicine from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, in 1886. After the completion of a two year hospital internship at Bellevue Hospital, New York City, he practiced medicine in Detroit from 1888 to 1890, and then entered the Medical Corps of the U. S. Navy as assistant surgeon. He had his full share of sea duty, and served on many naval vessels. His first sea duty was on the celebrated dynamic gunship the "Vesuvius"; it was while serving on this ship that he was decorated by the President of Venezuela for caring for the wounded after a battle at Puerto Cabella during a revolutionary outbreak. In 1904 he fitted out and equipped the Hospital Ship "Relief." During the Russo-Japanese war he was stationed in Japan and represented the medical department of the Navy. His report on the "Naval Medical and Sanitary Features of the Russo-Japanese War" covered 82 pages and was a most accurate and informative narrative and of definite historic value.

In 1906 and 1907, during the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, he was an attending physician at the White House. From 1906 to 1912 he was assistant chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, and assisted in its re-organization. Doctor Braisted was fleet surgeon of the Atlantic fleet from 1912 to 1914, when he was appointed by President Wilson, Surgeon General, Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery with the rank of Rear-Admiral. Thus as Surgeon General he had official responsibilities through the trying times before, during and after the first World War; the personnel of the Navy expanded from 55,000 officers and men to over 600,000; the tasks of the Navy increased in magnitude, including the protection of convoy lanes, the transport of the American Expeditionary forces, and vast quantities of military material. It required the maintenance of naval patrol in all oceans. All vessels were manned with medical personnel and in addition three hospital ships were fitted out and medical units served with the Marines fighting on the Western front of the Army. For his services as Surgeon General of the Navy he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, and he also received a decoration from the Emperor of Japan.

He was elected an honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1919. The University of Michigan conferred upon him the degree Doctor of Laws in 1917; Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, conferred the same degree in 1918. In the same year he received the Doctor of Science degree from Northwestern University, Chicago. He was a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons (Founders Group). In 1913 he served as president of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States.

When the National Board of Medical Examiners was organized in 1915, Surgeon General Braisted was chosen as the first president and continued in that position until 1920. While stationed in Washington he served as president of the Board of Directors of Columbia Hospital for Women, and was on the board of visitors of St. Elizabeth Hospital.

The presidential address of Admiral Braisted presented at the New Orleans session in April 1920, while rather lengthy, was a comprehensive exposition of the subject "Obligations of Medicine in Relation to General Education." He emphasized the need of educating the public in matters of health, and the teaching of hygiene in primary and secondary schools; he reviewed the work of the National Board of Medical Examiners of which he was president, for its first five years, and outlined the influence on medical education particularly in stimulating the addition of preventive medicine and public

health to the courses of study in medical schools. He also urged the need of a Federal Department of Health.

Doctor Braisted retired from the medical corps of the Navy soon after the end of his term as president of the Association, with the rank of Rear Admiral, and then accepted the offer to become president of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, in which position he served until 1926. Several years afterward Admiral Braisted withdrew from all medical and civic activities largely because of impaired health, and died at his home in West Chester, Pennsylvania, January 18, 1941 at the age of seventy-six years.

