Arthur James (Jim) McAdams chaired the Division of Pediatric Pathology at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital from 1962 until 1995 during a period of unprecedented expansion in the mission of the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and its associated Research Foundation.

Jim briefly was attracted to work in Cincinnati with Ben Landing, who was the first pathologist to be recruited to the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. Jim departed shortly to his native California for a leadership position at the Oakland Children’s Hospital, and then was invited to return to Cincinnati when Ben vacated the Midwest in 1961 to seek his fortune in Los Angeles, CA. The pathology division (a component of the Research Foundation then and now) at the time of Jim’s arrival had its dwelling in a small wing that had been designed by Landing as an addition to the original Research Foundation building endowed and constructed in 1931. This new space was devoted to anatomic pathology only, as the clinical labs at that time were fragmented and under the leadership of academic pediatricians, as would continue to be the case, effectively, though increasingly anomalously, for the next 35 years. During this period, Jim expertly guided the pathology group and the tissue laboratory that supported its functions, as its work expanded in harmony with the steady growth and expansion of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in both the clinical and research spheres. A tradition of excellence had been established by Landing during the formative 5 years of Ben’s tenure. Subsequently, under Jim’s much longer leadership, the pathology division gained enormously in strength through increasingly successful recruitment of faculty and fellows (35 under his mentorship). The result was steady collaborations with a small but very high-quality clinical faculty and, as times changed, with newly recruited scientists in the emerging field of developmental biology.

Who was Jim McAdams? What was his style of leadership? Why was he so successful? What sort of things did he hold to be important? What was it about him that made many personal encounters with him so memorable? Why was he able to singlehandedly create and sustain one of the great departments of pediatric pathology?

Of Scottish heritage, son of a building materials dealer, grandson of a protestant minister, Jim was raised in Santa Barbara, CA, and attended the University of California (Berkeley) where, lacking credits in German, a degree was not conferred. He headed east to complete his education at Johns Hopkins University Medical School. Residencies followed in Internal Medicine in Cooperstown, NY, and Pathology in Boston, MA, where he eventually came under the spell of a host of generational leaders in academic pathology including Sidney Farber at...
Boston Children’s Hospital. Jim’s contemporaries and friends in Boston included Ben Landing, Harvey Rosenberg, Jay Bernstein, Kurt Benirschke and many others for whom passion was kindled early in their careers to grapple with the special and quite fascinating medical problems encountered in infants and children.

As director, Jim imposed his intellectual and emotional stamp on the tone of everything of importance that transpired within the department. If he thought a piece of equipment or a technical skill was lacking but was important to the quality of the service work or the research mission of the pathology department, he usually found a way, often through persuasion of the ever-friendly chairs of pediatrics, to remedy the situation to everyone’s satisfaction. His innate frugality and his substantial mechanical skills bore fruit when it came to maintenance of complex machines such as the first 2 generations of Technicon automated tissue processors, which we used for several decades without a service contract. When these very reliable machines occasionally malfunctioned, Jim could be found surrounded by a pile of parts that he systematically serviced and reassembled with nothing left over.

The location of the Pathology department in the basement of the Research Foundation was exactly where Jim wanted it to be as to facilitate close contact with emerging full-time hospital staff led by outstanding physician investigators including Clark West (nephrology), William Schubert (gastroenterology), Sam Kaplan (cardiology), James Sutherland (neonatology), Fred Silverman (radiology), Lester Martin (surgery), and Josef Warkany (teratology), who were the intellectual core of the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital at that time. Each one of these visionary men built powerful divisions in their areas of expertise during Jim McAdams’ tenure. Jim had warm relations with each of them. Mutual respect was palpable in the regular interdivisional conferences, both within the pathology division conference room and other venues throughout the hospital.

Over his entire career, Jim relentlessly pursued better understanding of difficult disease processes through his signature habit of disciplined, meticulous microscopy and literature study. He was exquisitely sensitive to the potential meaning of nuances of disease as expressed in tissue sections. He supervised the installation of the institution’s first electron microscope in 1965 and pioneered the application of this instrument to the study of childhood kidney disease with Clark West.

He maintained and shared well-organized paper files on hundreds of topics that had captured his interest. His observations and the scholarly attention he paid to the historical development of concepts dear to him regularly led to in-depth discussions of the meaning of his observations with pathologist colleagues or similarly motivated clinicians. He developed research collaborations with leaders in each of the relatively few (at first) major clinical divisions. His most academically fruitful research collaborations were with Clark West in Nephrology and Bill Schubert in gastroenterology and various members of the neonatology division such as Jim Sutherland. In addition, he regularly engaged junior faculty, pediatric pathology fellows, and occasional clinical fellows in projects usually borne from specific questions that arose during the course of autopsy signout and guided them in preparation of scientific reports for publication.

Approximately 35 fellows in pediatric pathology graduated from the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center program during Jim’s tenure as department director. A large contingent in the 1970s was from Japan. A committed mentor, Jim and his wife Helen always hosted his Japanese and other foreign fellows at their home. His fellows were fortunate beneficiaries of the intellectual ferment that was centered on better understanding through careful application of traditional and emerging techniques for morphological study. Jim was especially proud of the accomplishments of his fellows, many of whom became department heads such as James Dimmick, Goeffrey Altschuler, John Buchino, Carole Vogler, Jorge Himinez, Kazahiro Ueda, and Johann Johannsen.

Jim made certain that his pathology division kept pace with clinical colleagues by maintaining high standards of observation, performance, and record-keeping for decades without benefit of computers. Jim designed simple systems for cataloging the accession numbers, diagnoses, and images of all lesions he deemed important from autopsy and surgical services on file.
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Throughout the 60s and 70s, among joint interests of Jim with our neonatologists was the question of the length of interval between a live birth and death of a premature infant due to hyaline membrane disease (HMD) which could be documented at autopsy. Based upon the careful clinical observations of several neonatologists and autopsy findings, about 10 minutes of air breathing was required. Jim subsequently verified this observation in a premature rhesus monkey model of HMD. In that work, Jim established that breathing was a necessary condition for HMD of prematurity. In retrospect, the typically longer postnatal interval to onset of respiratory distress syndrome described in the literature was probably just an average. The now long-forgotten controversy surrounding the pathological basis for membranes of HMD seems to have died, unresolved in Jim’s view, when an effective treatment became available.

Great benefit to Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and to the Pathology Division resulted from the long tradition of gifted physicians who led the Department of Pediatrics in the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. These leaders during the McAdams era included Ashley Weech, Edward Pratt, William Schubert, and Tom Boat. All appreciated the contributions to clinical care and to the intellectual life of the institution made by the pathologists and trainees in pathology, all of whom were Jim’s protégés. The Pediatric Chairs faithfully provided administrative support as needed, or so it seemed to the rest of us. Tales of conflicts at other institutions between pathologists and hospital administrators over the value of essential but nonremunerative roles of hospital pathologists had no counterpart at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. Jim McAdams deserves full credit for his role in creation of this unique environment which endures to this day.

When the idea for creating the pediatric pathology club was being promoted by Eugene Perrin and a few others in 1965 while Gene was on the staff at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, Jim gave unqualified support. One little known benefit of the special relationship between McAdams and William Schubert, who later rose to the chair of Pediatrics and the CEO of the hospital, is the financial support quietly provided by the Department of Pediatrics to 3 permanent activities of the Society for Pediatric Pathology. These included help in the initial underwriting of the annual Farber Lecture established at Jim’s urging during his presidency of the Pediatric Pathology Club (the predecessor of the SPP), initial financial support for the creation of the journal Pediatric Pathology, the first name adopted by the official journal of the SPP, and permanent funding of the McAdams Travel Grant for fellows in pediatric pathology. Bill Schubert, a consummate pediatrician, leader and listener, and a firm believer in the importance of pediatric pathology, seems to have placed a very high value on Jim’s advice.

Jim possessed many attributes that were ideal for a leader of a small academically-oriented pathology department. He was a willing and sympathetic counselor to associates in need, a fierce defender of technicians against inappropriate behavior by physicians, an effective mediator of inter-personal disputes, and a source of numerous quirky one-liners that came to be known as McAdamsisms. The latter were uncharacteristically cutting, occasionally off-color surprise comments on someone that left us rolling our eyes in wonder. I thought of these as reminders that an adolescent boy had somehow survived underneath his grinding work ethic. Jim worked late, regularly supping in his office on food carefully packed in a workingman’s steel lunch pail. During evenings, he was always available for discussion with anyone who dropped in. If no one appeared, he relaxed, reading medical and nonmedical journals such as Foreign Affairs and The New Republic. The small British cars he drove daily seemed to tell a different story about his inclinations. He favored tiny agile Triumphs, a TR250 followed by a TR7 over about 2 decades. Jim especially enjoyed driving circuitous routes to the hospital on back streets of the city far from the efficiency and noise of expressways.

Jim was very fond of classical music and had more than a casual interest in public affairs; FM radio tuned to PBS was always playing softly in his office. He and Helen...
regularly attended cultural events and were particularly fond of student performances at the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. He habitually enjoyed a late evening martini at home with Helen before relaxing, as did most of us in that era, with Johnny Carson. He enthusiastically hosted 2 annual parties, an office Christmas party where in the lab he prepared his holiday special hot buttered rum for faculty and trainees, and a 4th of July picnic in his back yard for staff, fellows, and their families that was always memorable. It was at July 4th parties that all of us came to know Helen and their children: A. James Jr. (Mac), Robert, Peter, and Lori. Each child was as different and unique as Helen and Jim. Helen was a devoted member of the League of Women Voters. Mac, a political scientist, who specializes in German affairs and ironically speaks German, currently holds an endowed professorship at Notre Dame. Robert is an automotive engineer, and Peter is an entrepreneur in residential energy efficiency. Lori is a general radiologist. Their children are truly amazing examples of how the interests of parents can be redistributed in the meiotic shuffle and nurtured in a supportive environment.

According to Mac, everything that his dad accomplished should rightfully be credited to Helen who made it possible for Jim to spend late nights and weekends at work, and who supported him at every stage of his career. One can only wonder who actually packed his daily supper lunch pail.

To sum a life in a few words is neither possible nor wise. It can be said without fear of contradiction that Jim McAdams had a strong, occasionally gruff, quietly dominating effect on his surroundings, whether the object of his attention was the particulars of the pathology department, or at home, his children, his large and quite amazing vegetable garden, or his famous chili. A true intellectual with a scholarly approach to all of his interests, he was also a firm but tender counselor to his children and to his hospital family. Whether it was people, plants or machines that malfunctioned, he was especially adept at making things right, but always shunned credit for anything that prospered within his domain.