In Memoriam

Ophthalmic Res 1995;27:366-367

Waldon Wacker, PhD

R.	Robert	Nussenblatt
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Waldon Wacker passed away June 11, 1995, after a short but painful illness. A man of few words, he touched the hearts and careers of many in his chosen field. Waldon's seminal role in the development of Ocular Immunology as we know it will really not be known to those starting out today. I am sure that it is the way he would want it, since his strong sense of responsibility was equally measured by his self-effacing attitude.

Waldon was born in North Dakota, and saw duty in World War II as a Medical Laboratory Technician. After doing his undergraduate studies at the Washington University, he obtained an M.S. from the University of Michigan, and in 1957 his PhD from Ohio State University; his thesis was entitled: 'The immunologic responses of rabbits injected with homologous and heterologous corneal and uveal tissue'. This work launched a distinguished career in Ocular Immunology. Waldon came to the University of Louisville in 1959, and stayed for the rest of his career, becoming Professor of Ophthalmology and then Professor Emeritus.

Waldon's professional career centered around the identification of uveitogenic antigens and the development of an animal model for uveitis. By 1965 he had demonstrated the presence of such an autoantigen in retinal homogenates. In 1977, his now classic paper, 'Experimental Allergic Uveitis. Isolation,

Characterization, and Localization of a Soluble Uveitopathogenic Antigen from Bovine Retina', appeared in the Journal of Immunology. This work has been the cornerstone for so much in the field of Ocular Immunology. It is important to bear in mind the academic environment that

Waldon found himself at that time. The mechanism of ocular inflammatory destruction was 'known' to be due to immune complexes, and if any autoantigens existed in the eye, they were 'known' to be in the cho-

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roid, and certainly not in the retina, as Waldon had evidence to believe. It was only Waldon's strong character, keen intellect and his steadfast devotion to seeking what is true using the scientific method that permitted him to have the strength to withstand the scorn some threw on him. His observations not only led to the isolation and characterization of the retinal S-antigen, but it permitted for the first time a reliable, reproducible model for human uveitis. He touched so many in the field of ocular inflammation, including Narsing Rao, George Marak, Carolyn Kalsow, Larry Donoso, Toshi Shichi, Daniel Organisciak, Igal Gery, as well as the one writing these words. His work and influence have led to a better understanding of human disease, from the role of T-cells (and not immune complexes) as major players in human disease, the role of adhesion molecules, and the study of lymphokines. The experimental autoimmune uveitis model induced by the retinal S-antigen model has become a template by which new and innovative modes of immunosuppression are evaluated for use in the treatment of human disease. This has led to the use of cyclosporine and FK 506 in the treatment of human uveitis and the ongoing development of newer methods such as monoclonal antibody therapy and oral tolerance.

Waldon authored or co-authored over 50 refereed publications, and was honored by his confreres with the Proctor Medal by the Association of Research in Vision and Ophthalmology in 1991. He was a member of numerous academic societies. For those of us who were honored to know him, what made Waldon so special was not only the science, but the man; always correct, supportive and complementary to others, always self-effacing and minimizing when speaking about himself. He was always grateful for having the support and love of his best and most important partner, his dear wife Jean, and their lovely children. It is clear that we will miss him, but he has truly left us with a wonderful legacy.