

# THE FAVORED MIND OF HORACE DAVENPORT

From cable splicer for the telephone company during the Great Depression, to Rhodes Scholar, world-renowned physiologist and highly respected medical historian, Professor Emeritus Horace W. Davenport, Ph.D., stands as one of the icons of the University of Michigan Medical School. Chair of Physiology for 22 years, Davenport brought his inimitable style and sharp intellectual influence to bear on the lives and training of hundreds of students throughout his career before retiring in 1978.

Davenport recently recalled his era of medicine at Michigan; excerpts are slightly edited for presentation here.

*“I got [to U-M] on the 22nd of June, 1956, a Sunday, and on Monday the buildings and grounds department knocked out the windows and threw the Physiology Department out and rebuilt it. It was dreadful. The varnish was drying on the doors of the new laboratories when I held my first class. But because I was a chum of the head of buildings and grounds, he came in and looked at the floor and said, ‘Oh, this is terrible! Have it tiled and charge it to my account.’ The great advantage [of having been department chair at the University of Utah College of Medicine] was that when I came to Michigan, I knew exactly what to do. One of the things you do is butter up the department of grounds...*

*“I worked very hard to build up the Physiology Department, to do the teaching, and I did research. I became fed up with my research. I wasn’t getting any- place; I was going to quit.*



Every graduate student knew Davenport’s favorite science quote: ‘Chance favors the prepared mind.’

*“But then Charlie Code [a leading gastroenterologist at the time], who I worked with at the Mayo Clinic while a visiting professor there, posed a problem to me and I knew the answer ... When I got back to Michigan, I knew I had a problem that was important, and I worked on it.*

*“Code said that when he irrigated the pouch in the stomach with a substance*


*called eugenol — the active ingredient in cloves — that he stimulated the pouch to secrete, and it secreted very poorly. He thought that eugenol inhibited acid secretion. However, I demonstrated that it broke the gastric mucosal barrier and that, in turn, acids diffused back into the gastric mucosa. The whole physiology of that took me 16 years to work out, and it was a good job.”*

That good job revolutionized the world of gastroenterology and earned Davenport an international reputation.

But for those he trained and mentored, it was the impression as a teacher that Davenport made on them that colors their own memories. Teresa Bruggeman (Ph.D. 1974), an assistant professor in the U-M School of Nursing and adjunct lecturer in the Division of Kinesiology, remembers that *“Horace Davenport took great pride in his department’s graduate students; they were welcomed scholars and loyal members. He even added a great room to his home to accommodate his Friday night History of Physiology seminars, complete with fine hors d’oeuvre and good wine.*

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*We used it on guide signs to our picnics and canoe trips to northern Michigan. It was an acknowledgment that we belonged to something special.”*

Horace Davenport lives with his wife, Inge, in Birmingham, Alabama. 

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