

A Celebration of the Life of
John Davidson Constable

June 21, 1927 – June 6, 2016

Ushers

David Alexander, John Mittermeier
Tim Paine, Bruce Struminger

Pianist

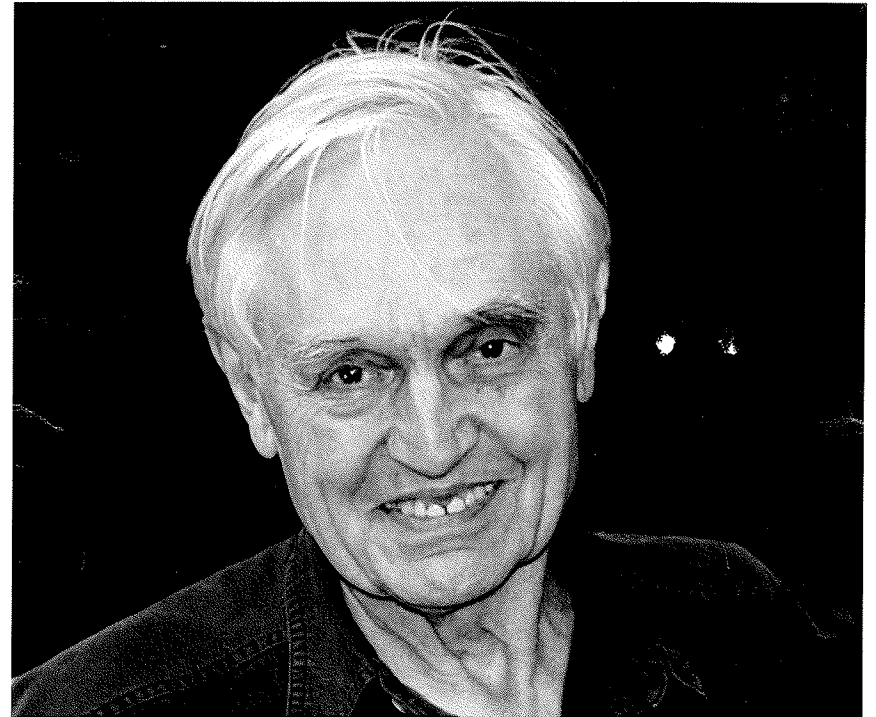
Kazuko Cleary

String Quartet

Alexander Romanul, violin
Abigail Hong, violin
Dominick Douglas, viola
Cynthia Forbes, cello

Refreshments

Lisa Shaw



First Church in Cambridge
Saturday, 1st October 2016

PRELUDE MUSIC

Air from Orchestral Suite no. 3 in D major
by Johann Sebastian Bach

OPENING WORDS

Family Member

MUSIC

“Bist du bei mir”
by J.S. Bach (also attrib. to G.H. Stölzel)

REFLECTIONS

Bryant Toth, Michael Moses, Gurmander Kohli,
Eric Chivian, James McCarthy

MUSIC

Impromptu, Op. 90 No. 3
by Franz Schubert

Serenade from Schwanengesang, D. 957
by Franz Schubert

REFLECTIONS

Daniel Posnansky, Ronald Lee Fleming,
Giles Constable, John Constable Mittermeier

MUSIC

Lake Misty Blue
by Yuhki Kuramoto

CLOSING WORDS

Isabel Dora Constable

POSTLUDE

“Ode to Joy”
by Ludwig van Beethoven

“Entrance of the Queen of Sheba” from Solomon
by George Frideric Handel

Rondo from Serenade in G, K.525
by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

You are warmly invited to a reception in
First Church's Margaret Jewett Hall
immediately following the service

A remembrance of John by Jim May, friend and MGH colleague

On June 6, 2016, the MGH Community lost a remarkable and unique human being, John Davidson Constable. John was in his 88th year of life and died peacefully at home in Sherborn, Massachusetts with his wife Sylvia and family at his side. He had struggled with Parkinson's Disease the last few years of his life.

John was born in London, England to Olivia and William G. Constable. His family relocated to Boston where John's father was appointed as the curator of the Museum of Fine Arts. John's intellect and curiosity led him to Harvard College and Medical school. John was accepted as a surgical intern at MGH in 1953 and completed his general surgical training, culminating in appointment as Resident in surgery in 1959. After completing his training as chief resident on the East Service, John completed a preceptorship in Plastic Surgery under Dr. Brad Cannon at the MGH. John was thus the first and only surgical resident to be chief surgical resident and then to train in plastic surgery. He was also the first person to train in Plastic Surgery at MGH and Harvard. John served his entire clinical career at the MGH and also served as Chair of Plastic Surgery at the Shrine Burn Institute and Mt. Auburn Hospital. He was also consultant in Plastic Surgery to many other institutions both locally and abroad.

As a resident, I observed that when John, as the attending, was asked about a clinical problem, he would always ask, "Where is the patient? Let's go see for ourselves." This approach taught that we as surgeons are not treating a diagnosis, but rather a patient with a problem. The treatment solution was not found only in a text book, but rather was heavily influenced by the specific findings, symptoms and desires of the individual patient. The first successful MGH microsurgical tissue transfer was done on our resident service with John as the attending overseeing surgeon. John had never done microsurgery, but we all felt confident when he agreed to support our efforts and apparently had confidence in us. A small bowel transfer, to reconstruct the esophagus in a patient with cancer, was begun at 7:45 AM and twelve hours later we were ready for the repair of the vessels. After multiple attempts to construct patent blood flow, each effort was greeted by anastomosis thrombosis. In the small hours of the morning, I called John to report our failure. I expected John to say "Well you and the team gave it your best shot" but instead he said, "Get a cup of coffee and I will be right in." I did what I was told and shortly afterward I was looking with John through the microscope at thrombosed vessels of the doomed piece of small bowel. After a pensive moment, John said, "I know just what you should do." I was stunned as John had never repaired a micro vessel. He said, "Just do it again." So away we went for another attempt and for reasons unclear to this day, it worked! The patient did well, gained weight with his new esophagus and lived for another decade. This case is an example of the respect we all had for John and his support for us. It is no wonder that he influenced so many of us to choose Plastic Surgery as a career.

John was truly a Renaissance man with interests broadly cast across the spectrum of human endeavor. He was equally at home in discussing Asian ceramics as he was in leading a bird expedition in Maine or Madagascar. Throughout his clinical activity, he was admired as a role model surgeon with excellent judgment. Remarkably, other friends outside of the MGH barely knew of his medical career and respected him as a major contributor in their spheres of interest. The common denominator in John's engagement was his insatiable curiosity in all conditions involving mankind. In 1983, John received the prestigious Golden Door Award. This honor, given by The International Institute of New England, is extended annually to a foreign-born person who has made an extraordinary impact on the lives of others. At the awards dinner, seven people were chosen by the awards committee to speak of John's accomplishments. Only one was a surgeon. The other six were experts and leaders in the broad array of John's other interests. I learned that evening of the remarkable breadth of John's impact on those with whom he worked, served and learned. This quality encouraged me, and many of my fellow residents in Plastic Surgery, to expand our interests beyond flaps and grafts and to embrace interests outside of medicine.

In 1972, John was elected to The American Association of Plastic Surgeons. This prestigious organization is the oldest Plastic Surgical group in the world and selects members based upon their contributions to the specialty. Over the years, John's interaction and teaching internationally became increasingly appreciated. In 2008, The Association established The John D. Constable International Fellowship in Plastic Surgery with endowment creation by support from Association members and the Constable family. This fellowship allows international plastic surgeons to come to the United States to add to their training experience and foster educational cross-fertilization.

John leaves behind his devoted wife Sylvia and their three daughters, Isabel, Mia and Clair, their husbands Bruce Struminger, David Alexander and Mogador Empson and grandchildren. John also leaves his younger brother, Giles.

Thank you, John, for your friendship and wonderful mentorship for us all. You led and taught by example. Your curiosity, integrity, loyalty and humor will be missed and never forgotten.