

Dr. The Honourable Roberto Alexandre de Senna Fernandes de Castro Basto
Hong Kong Rotarian elected to serve Sanitary Board and Urban Council

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

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Dr. The Honourable Roberto Alexandre de Senna Fernandes de Castro Basto, DOMS, MRCS, LRCP, MBBS (*HKU*) (5 February 1898 – 18 November 1980), holding the Classification “Medicine – Ophthalmology”, was an Active Member of the Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) in the 1930-40s. He was a Macanese medical doctor and Elected Member of the Hong Kong Sanitary Board (潔淨局) and later Urban Council (市政局).

Roberto was born in the Portuguese Territory Macao (葡萄牙屬地澳門) to José Maria de Castro e Basto and Casimira de Sena Fernandes Basto. His elder brother was Carlos Henrique Basto (1890–1944). He was educated at the University of Hong Kong (香港大學) and got his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) in May 1921. He was the second local Portuguese to graduate in medicine from the University. He obtained his qualification to practice medicine in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong (英國殖民地香港) in July 1921.

Roberto was on the editorial staff of the 《Hong Kong University Medical Journal》, the journal of the University Medical Society, and changed its name into 《The Caduceus》 in 1928. He also had his study with Professor C. Y. Wang, MD, on a precipitation test for syphilis published on medical journals including in the 《American Journal of Public Health》.

Roberto was elected to the Sanitary Board which managed the Colony’s sanitary affairs, on 8 December 1930 without contest, replacing José Pedro Braga (布力架). He was re-elected uncontested on 27 December 1933. He continued to serve on the board and it was transformed into the Urban Council in 1936 and was re-elected on 13 January 1937.

During his service on the Urban Council, he protested against the Government’s proposal of setting up refugee sites in Kowloon in 1938 on behalf of the Kowloon Residents’ Association which he argued they were within or too close to the residential areas which the refugees would over-run the create nuisances to the neighbourhood and menace to the health of the residents. He suggested to build the sites in the New Territories.

In the 1940 Urban Council election, he faced challenge from Dr. Alberto Maria Rodrigues (羅理基醫生), later member of the Executive and Legislative Councils. He was nominated by Sir Henry Pollock (普樂爵士), his fellow Rotarian, and Major Charles M. Manners of Kowloon Wharf. He lost to Rodrigues on the election held on 29 February by 266 to 407 votes. His registered address at that time was Beau Sejour, 123 Argyle Street, Kowloon.

During the Pacific War (1941-1945), he moved to Australia and started his practice in Sydney since 1942. He later married Carol Small, with whom he had one child.

Correspondence — Is “Caduceus” a Proper Name for the Society Newspaper? II

R. A. De Castro Basto

1928 Volume 7 Issue 1

22nd February, 1928.

The Editor,

“The Caduceus.”

Dear Sir,

I note in the November issue of your journal that your Executive Committee proposes to change the name of “The Caduceus” to that of the “Hong Kong University Medical Journal.” Before adopting such a measure it is well to consider whether such an alteration would be advisable. Whereas the journals produced by the Universities and Colleges in England, depend for their graduates and undergraduates. “The Caduceus” unlike them, is fostered by a large number of medical men who have no link or tie of affinity with our University. Our journal is to-day not so much the official organ of the Medical Society, but as the representative of the medical opinion of Hong Kong in general. It has, in other words, attained that position which the founders had in mind at the time of its inception, when they said in the foreword of the first number of “the Caduceus” — “We do not intend merely to make this journal a record of the activities of the Medical Society of the University. We aim to make it one of the leading scientific journals in Asia. How far our aim will bear fruit depends a great deal on the support not only of the undergraduates and graduates of the Faculty but also of medical men and scientific workers throughout China.” It was pursuant to this idea that I suggested the name “Caduceus” as a title to the journal, and also submitted the design for the cover. For the name “Caduceus” apart from the beautiful association which it evokes has the advantage of being undenominative.

To it anyone may contribute articles or apply for enrolment as a subscriber without experiencing any sense of compunction. Should the underlying idea of the proposed alteration be founded on the desire to bring the name of University Medical Society into greater prominence abroad, then we would

be defeating our own object if the number of “outside” subscribers were to diminish.

“By their fruits you shall know them.” The Medical Society will gain all the recognition it wants if its product, “ The Caduceus,” continues to make that progress towards a higher and higher standard that has been characteristic of it hitherto, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of the present Secretary and Editorial Staff.

I am, etc.,

R. A. DE CASTRO BASTO.

