Another giant in Dermatology has gone. Walter B Shelley ("Shelley") left us no less than 15 books (the last, published when he was 90, being his amazing autobiography - The Skin around me: Adventures in Dermatology) and over 600 scientific articles. Born in St Paul, Minnesota, and adopted at the age of two, Shelley spent the first years of his life in rural Minnesota. His parents put their lifetime savings into his education and he graduated in Medicine at the University of Minnesota in 1943, acquiring a PhD (hyperthermia and the cardiovascular system) on the way. After army service, much of the time spent conducting research on heat stress in soldiers, he took his residency, under Pillsbury, at the University of Pennsylvania and embarked on a long and glittering career in clinical and academic dermatology.

Organized but restless, charming but firm, inquisitive, full of ideas and keen to discover, hating criticism, a lifelong student, Shelley never really retired and, staff at the University of Pennsylvania, met the new resident, John Crissey, who shared his historical bent. The first edition, published in 1953, became a classic in its own right. It must be something of a record that the second, by the same authors, appeared 50 years later! Shelley liked to change his direction of research every five years but he "was in the office every day for 50 years". The breadth of his reports and discoveries is astounding and reflects this. We can thank him for his extensive studies (with Hurley) on hyperhidrosis, and the development of anhydrous aluminium chloride antiperspirants, the surgery of axillary hyperhidrosis and the introduction of botulinum toxin for excessive palmar sweating. With Lennart Juhlin, he developed the basophil degranulation test and, later, reported the ability of Langerhans cells to engulf hapitans and antigens. He coined the word keratinocyte, and named many "new" conditions that he saw in the clinic, such as aquagenic urticaria, piezogenic pedal papules, pincer nails and autoimmune oestrogen dermatitis. When he left Philadelphia he waved goodbye to laboratory research, but continued to write, now with Dorinda. Case reports continued to pour out ("Case reports are the catalyst for the clinical mind") and Advanced Dermatologic Therapy (2 editions) and Advanced Dermatologic Diagnosis were large and successful reference books, complemented by frequent appropriate aphorisms (or Shelleyisms) to keep the reader interested ("Therapy sails on the winds of diagnosis", "The placebo effect comes from the physician; not the prescription", "A fully informed patient is a fully frightened patient", "Disease thrives on pessimism", "Patients hear better when you write it down" and "Therapeutic nihilism may be the best way to approach the facts, but not the patient" to mention just a few).

Shelley never really retired and, inevitably, received many honours including an Honorary Doctor of Medicine from the University of Minnesota, an Honorary Overseas membership of the BAD, an AAD Master of Dermatology, a Society for Investigative Dermatology Stephen Rothman Medal for Dermatological Research, the Gougerot Medal for excellence in medical writing and an Honorary Overseas membership of the BAD.

Outside Dermatology Shelley had a devoted and remarkable family life. He married Marguerite in 1942. Tragedy hit him twice; first when their youngest child, Barbara, died, aged 16 and then when Marguerite died too young. Aged 62, to the surprise but joy of many colleagues, he met Dorinda Loeffel, the only woman dermatologist in the USA at that time to hold a departmental chair. She soon became his adored wife, colleague at work and fellow writer. Twenty nine very happy and fulfilled years were to follow. Shelley leaves Dorinda, Peter (an ophthalmologist) and Anne from his first marriage, Tom, Katherine and Will from his second and hundreds of friends and colleagues around the world who admired this remarkable man and his work.

John Hunter