



## Clyde F. Barker

August 16, 1932 - October 2, 2025

Clyde F. Barker, who over a 57 year career at the University of Pennsylvania became one of America's leading surgeons, died on October 2 at his home in Haverford, Pa, surrounded by family. He was 93.

Born in 1932 in Salt Lake City, much the youngest of four brothers, he lost his father early. His brothers – two physicians and a quantum chemist – pooled resources to send him to Phillips Exeter Academy, Cornell University and Cornell Medical College. Guided by his eldest brother he chose a surgical residency at the University of Pennsylvania, where he remained for his entire career, training at first under I.S. Ravdin and Jonathan Rhoads. He began his laboratory career with transplantation immunologist Rupert Billingham, publishing seminal papers on immune privileged sites, while acquiring vascular surgery skills in fellowship.

In 1966, his first year on the surgical staff, he performed the Delaware Valley's first organ transplant with Brooke Roberts, his vascular mentor, assisting and under Rhoads' watchful eye. He had only seen the operation performed once, by Tom Starzl three years before, and in 1966 only one chronic renal dialysis machine was available in Philadelphia. The implanted living-donor kidney would function for 48 years while Dr Barker and his growing family attended in turn the recipient's wedding and the baptisms of his children. As the only transplant surgeon in Philadelphia for many years thereafter, he was on call

around the clock every day of the year, often performing both donor and recipient operations while running the tests needed to match donated organs to compatible patients. But the program he built grew rapidly, and by 2011 – when the Clyde F. Barker Transplant House opened, a home away from home for families of patients undergoing transplants – Penn’s transplant service was performing nearly 400 transplants per year.

Establishing first a Division of Transplantation and then his own lab, he rapidly rose to Professor and became Chair of the Department of Surgery in 1983, serving until 2001. A technically superb vascular and transplant surgeon, he was confident, seasoned, and always calm inside the operating room and out. NIH funded for 25 years, his laboratory advanced diabetes treatment using islet cell transplantation and probed mechanisms to thwart rejection of human transplants. He received the Society for University Surgeons’ Lifetime Achievement Award, the Thomas E. Starzl Prize for Immunology and Surgery, and the Medallion for Scientific Achievement from the American Surgical Association, and was elected to the Institute of Medicine. Nationally, he served as President of the American Society of Transplant Surgeons (of which he was a charter member), the Halsted Society, the United Network for Organ Sharing, and – one of surgery’s highest honors – the American Surgical Association. In 2011 he became President of America’s oldest learned society, the American Philosophical Society, a rare honor for a physician. With his daughter Elizabeth he wrote his final book, *Surgeons and Something More*, a lively, richly illustrated history of the Penn Surgery Department published by the American Philosophical Society in 2024.

Outside of surgery he had a long competitive tennis career. A successful captain of the Exeter and Cornell teams, he played in the main draw of the U.S. National Championships twice at Forest Hills, and competed in veterans’ national singles and doubles tournaments nearly every year into the 85-and-over division, reaching national doubles finals 5 times. He won singles and

doubles grass court titles at both Germantown and Merion Cricket Clubs and competed in many smaller international clubs and tournaments.

His 63-year marriage to his college sweetheart, Dorothy “Dode” Bieler, was without question the center of his life until her death in 2019. Together they raised four children, Fred, John, Bill and Elizabeth, whose careers spanned medicine, theater, law, financial services and education.

He met the many challenges of raising a large family in the 1960s with the same unflappable calm he brought to his toughest operations. Sometimes it seemed that serendipity was simply the assistant on his team, as when the tickets bought months in advance for the Friday night hockey semifinal at the Lake Placid Olympics admitted his family to the US-Russia “Miracle on Ice.” More often, he stitched together his complex life through determination, as when, returning home long after midnight from an emergency case, he left his car mired in a snowdrift and walked the rest of the way to be there for his young family first thing Christmas morning.

The generations of surgeons he trained and his children and grandchildren will long remember him, especially when facing their toughest challenges, whether in technical surgery, in leadership, or in life.

Memorial service arrangements are pending. For those wishing to honor his memory, the family suggests contributions be made to the Clyde F. Barker Penn Transplant House at the University of Pennsylvania: Credit card donations can be made at <http://givingpages.upenn.edu/ClydeBarker>. For checks, please make payable to “Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania,” noting “in memory of Dr. Clyde F. Barker” and mail to Penn Medicine Development, Attn: Andrew Deal, 3535 Market St., Ste. 750, Philadelphia, PA 19104.



# Tribute Wall

SG

“ *What a wonderful doctor and mentor. As a young person working at Penn in the early 80s, I had the privilege to meet Dr. Barker as part of my duties. He was so kind, patient, and gracious despite being so busy. An inspiration for many. Condolences to his family and friends.*

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**Sharon Gallagher** - November 05, 2025 at 10:35 PM

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“ *I was very saddened to hear of Dr. Barker's passing. As one of his patients, I owe my life to him & Dr. Perloff. May his memory be a blessing to his family.*

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**Stu Cohen** - November 01, 2025 at 03:42 PM