

# DERMATOLOGIC HISTORY

## Uncle Charlie: Dennie-Morgan Lines

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Charles Clayton Dennie became a prominent figure within dermatology in the twentieth century. In 1883, Dennie was born in Excelsior Springs, Missouri, but spent most of his youth in Kansas. He received a BS degree at Baker University, pursued a medical degree at the University of Kansas Medical School, and completed postgraduate training at the Kansas City and the Massachusetts General Hospital.<sup>1</sup> Upon finishing his training, Dennie became an instructor at the Harvard Medical School. In 1914, he pursued his studies in dermatology and syphilology at The Hospital St. Louis in Paris.<sup>1</sup> When Germany declared war on France, Dennie's professional trajectory took an unexpected turn.

From 1914 to 1918, he served in the war as a military medical officer and was in charge of an embarkation camp in Bordeaux, France. Dennie returned to Kansas City and was appointed assistant professor in dermatology at the Kansas Medical School.<sup>1</sup> In 1921, Dennie was elected to the American Dermatological Association, and was one of the first members of the American Academy of Dermatology. Dennie was promoted to head of dermatology at the Kansas Medical School in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Dennie had major interests in congenital syphilis, which led him to establish a congenital syphilis clinic at the Children's

Mercy Hospital. While he made valuable discoveries within the study of syphilis, Dennie made innovated contributions for the field of allergy and immunology. Charles Dennie was the first to detail the presence of a new sign for atopic diseases. While Dennie was the first to discover this sign, his colleague David Morgan was the first to write about it in the medical literature. In 1948, David Morgan, a Kansas City dermatologist, published an article reporting this new sign describing it as a wrinkle beneath the lower eyelids primarily seen in people with a history of eczema, hay fever, and asthma.<sup>2</sup> These wrinkles are now commonly referred to as Dennie-Morgan (DM) lines and are indicative of atopic diathesis. Since their discovery, DM lines have been closely associated with atopic dermatitis and have been reported to have a predominance in certain ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> In current practice, DM lines are part of a collection of signs that are used to support the diagnosis of atopic dermatitis.

Dennie continued with his role at the Kansas Medical School and was later recognized as Emeritus Professor of dermatology. Between 1949 to 1950, he served as vice-president and later president of the American Dermatologic Association.<sup>1</sup> Affectionately known as Uncle Charlie, Charles Dennie played various roles throughout his career with the ultimate goal of contributing and advancing the field of dermatology.

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**Figure 1.** Photograph of Charles Clayton Dennie.

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