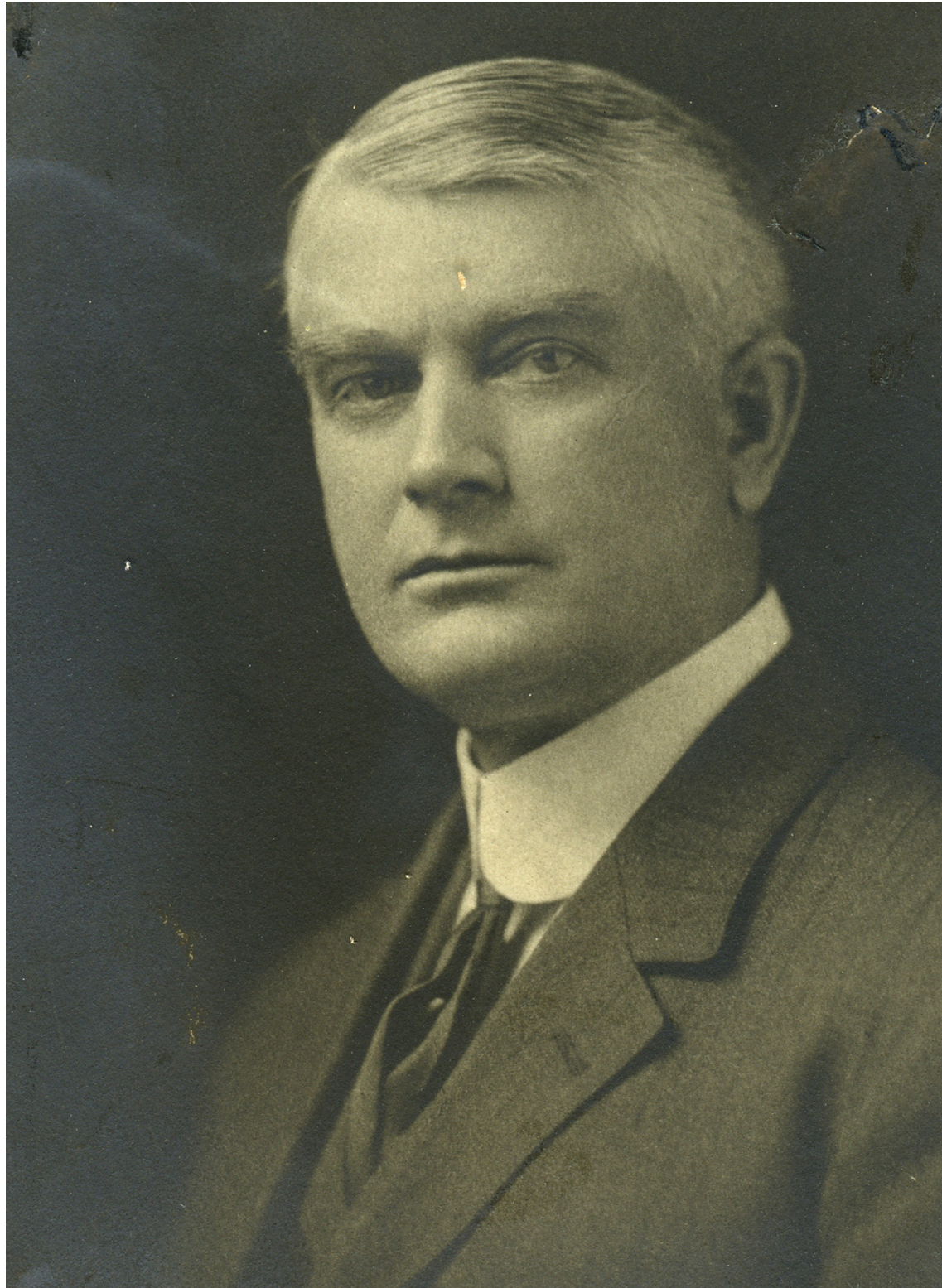


William James Mayo

Surgeon and co-founder of the Mayo Clinic (1861 – 1939)



William Mayo with his brother,
from a sculpture by JAMES EARLE FRASER

Mayo was born in Le Sueur, Minnesota in 1861, and his brother, Charles, was born four years later in nearby Rochester. Their father had come to the United States from England in 1845 and settled in Rochester as a country doctor.

The Mayo brothers frequently accompanied their father on professional visits, observed his methods of treatment, and helped with operations. William graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1883 and also took degrees in New York. He joined his family in practice, as did Charles after his 1888 graduation from the Chicago Medical School (later Northwestern University Medical School). William was quiet and reserved; Charles was lively and friendly, with a love of practical jokes. They were known as “Dr. Will” and “Dr. Charlie.”

In 1889, the Sisters of Saint Francis opened Saint Mary’s Hospital in Rochester and asked the Mayo brothers and their father to help in planning the hospital. The three Mayos named their part of Saint Mary’s the Mayo Clinic in 1903. It began as a surgical clinic but became a full medical center in 1915.

During World War I William served as chief adviser for the surgical services in the office of the army’s surgeon general. When President WOODROW WILSON organized the Committee of American Physicians for Medical Preparedness in 1916, William was named chairman and Charles one of its members.

The brothers divided their time between their clinic and their duties in Washington so that one of them would always be in Rochester. The strain of their war service, added to the effort needed to keep the clinic functioning, affected the health of both men. Charles contracted pneumonia, and William came down with jaundice in 1918.

William retired in 1928, and a series of strokes brought Charles’s career to an end a year and a half later. The famed brothers, who had worked together so closely, died within a few months of each other in 1939—Charles on May 26 and William on July 28.