

Ochsner Profiles

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Francis LeJeune, MD

Not long after Alton Ochsner had settled in New Orleans, he received a telephone call while attending a medical meeting in El Paso, Texas, from Isabel Ochsner informing him that their older sons, Alton Jr and John, had undergone mastoid operations performed by Dr. Francis LeJeune (1 p55). It took Dr. Ochsner 36 anxious hours to get home by train. Isabel met him at the station and drove him to Touro Infirmary, where he encountered LeJeune for the first time. “As soon as I met him, I relaxed,” Ochsner recounted years later. I knew our boys were in good hands.”

Dr. LeJeune was involved from the time the idea of the group practice was first conceived. Many years later, his wife Anna LeJeune recalled that Alton Ochsner had told her husband before the Clinic was founded, “If you don’t come in, I’ll drop the matter” (1 p55). Like the other founders, Dr. LeJeune not only provided a steady flow of patients to the newly founded Clinic but also brought national attention: he was a pioneer and a recognized giant in field of Ear, Nose, and Throat medicine.

LIFE AND MEDICAL CAREER

Francis E. LeJeune was born in Thibodaux, Louisiana on August 26, 1894. His father was a sugar engineer whose work took the family to Mexico for a year and Puerto Rico for 3 years (1 p54). During this time LeJeune added Spanish to the French and English he had already learned to speak in his bilingual Acadian household.

After a stint as an Army private during World War I, LeJeune entered Tulane University as an engineering student, but after 3 years he switched to medicine because, he said, he found mathematics incomprehensible (1 p54). After graduation, he completed his residency at the Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital in New Orleans and was invited to join a practitioner at Mobile (1 p54). His fiancée, Anna Lynne Dodds, was agreeable to living in the Alabama city. He had made up his mind to accept the offer when Robert Clyde Lynch, the most respected otolaryngologist in the South, invited LeJeune to become a partner in his New Orleans practice. Afterwards, all paths led upward. Dr. LeJeune began teaching part-time at Tulane University and inherited most of Lynch’s patients when the latter was killed in an automobile accident in 1931.

As the founding member and Head of the Otolaryngology Department at the Ochsner Clinic, Dr. LeJeune became one of America’s most eminent otolaryngologists and certainly brought a great deal of prestige to the new Clinic. Among his achievements, Dr. LeJeune pioneered the use of color motion pictures in laryngology

and helped perfect suspension laryngoscopic techniques (1 p54). He received numerous awards and was the second doctor in history to win all three major ENT prizes: the Casselberry, Newcomb, and deRoaldes awards. He served as president of the Triological Society, the American Laryngological Association, the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology, and the American Broncho-Esophagological Association. He retired from active surgery at the age of 70, but Dr. LeJeune continued to spend hours watching others operate, offering advice when asked (1 p54-55). Up until the end, he delighted in extending his right arm to demonstrate how steady his hand still was. He passed away on October 13, 1977 after a full life and a distinguished career.

PERSONAL CHARACTER

Dr. LeJeune was a hard-working, fun-loving Cajun. His wife and closer friends called him Bobilo, but his colleagues dubbed him “Duke de Thibodaux” in acknowledgement of his birthplace (1 p54).

Alton Ochsner never disguised his great admiration for Dr. LeJeune as both a physician and a friend. After Dr. LeJeune’s operations on Dr. Ochsner’s sons, the two men established a friendship and professional relationship that was everlasting. The families frequently saw each other socially, and the Ochsner family occasionally joined fishing trips on the LeJeune’s boat (1 p55).

Dr. LeJeune’s son, Dr. Francis E LeJeune, Jr, followed in his father’s footsteps as Head of the Ochsner ENT Department. After training in Iowa, Dr. LeJeune, Jr joined the Ochsner Clinic in his father’s department in 1959 and worked with him for 19 years. He describes his father as “a gentle soul and a gentleman. I enjoyed working with him. He politely told me what I could do better and had a nice way of suggesting what I should do differently.”

“My father had great hand skills and kept a little repair carpenter shop in the back of our house where he used to work with wood. He passed that to me, and now I do the same in my house.” The magnificent woodwork of Dr. LeJeune, Jr testifies to both the manual skills and the discipline of these two great surgeons.

My father always wanted to bring the ENT community in the city together, and he tried several times to combine LSU and Tulane ENT services. He also was in favor of a combined Ochsner/Tulane endeavour. I continued the tradition by creating the Francis E. LeJeune lectureship. Our last program brought together 110 physicians in the specialty.

THE OCHSNER CLINIC

Dr. LeJeune, Sr’s contributions to the creation and success of the Ochsner Clinic were many and varied. He added prestige to the group on his own account and was paramount in the development of ENT at Ochsner Clinic and in the city of New Orleans. He participated in all the decisions taken by the partners and was instrumental to designing the future of the Ochsner Clinic and the Ochsner Foundation Hospital. He was not interested in the day-to-day

administrative routine, but he contributed superb patient care and referral business to the developing institution.

The first two patients seen in the founding Ochsner Clinic on the corner of Aline and Prytania streets were referred to Dr. LeJeune. Patient 000001 was Mrs. George Willings of Pensacola, Florida (1 p34). Dr. LeJeune had previously diagnosed and treated her for an otitis media. He marked on her admission card that there would be no charge for the visit, no doubt in recognition of the fact that she was a trailblazer. Patient 000002, the first to be referred by an outside practitioner, was Anna Meeks of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Dr. Earl Green sent her to LeJeune for the treatment of a tumor in the nose. Referring to the great controversy stirred up in the New Orleans medical community by the founding of the Ochsner Clinic, Dr. LeJeune used to lament, half jokingly, “Until I went into the Clinic I didn’t have an enemy. Now I’m an SOB” (1 p52).

CONCLUSION

A perfectionist, Dr. LeJeune was fond of saying, “If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing right. If it is not worth doing right, don’t waste time on it” (1 p54). His commitment to perfection set a precedent for excellence in the newly established Clinic. Like the other founders, he had a vision of an institution greater than the individual achievements of the men who created it (1 p55). He lived a full life and had no regrets over the career he chose. His colleagues, and more importantly his patients, were the beneficiaries of his friendship and expertise.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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REFERENCES

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