Leo Max Davidoff: his formative years and participation in the MacMillan Arctic Expedition

Historical vignette

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Leo Max Davidoff was one of the outstanding students of Harvey Cushing, who helped create the discipline of modern neurological surgery. In his own right, Dr. Davidoff was a pioneer who made significant contributions both in neurosurgery and neuroradiology. He also helped to found the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University. This paper describes his early life and education, together with his participation in the MacMillan Arctic Expedition of 1925.

(http://thejns.org/doi/abs/10.3171/2012.4.JNS111211)

KEY WORDS • shortwave radio • Arctic • Cushing • Davidoff • MacMillan • National Geographic Society • US Navy • history

Leo Max Davidoff came to the US at 7 1/2 years of age from the Imperial Russian province of Courland—in the western region of what is now Latvia. He attended public school and learned English in Chelsea, Massachusetts. While in high school, he worked at Parker Brothers and graduated from high school in Salem, Massachusetts as salutatorian. In September 1916, he matriculated at Harvard College, where his tuition, room, board, and incidental expenses were paid by George S. Parker and a Crowninshield scholarship. During his sophomore year, he was accepted into the Harvard Medical School class of 1922.

Dr. Davidoff coauthored his first article in 1917 and 5 articles on urological subjects in 1921. He graduated from Harvard Medical School sixth in his class and was awarded an M.D. degree with honors.

Postgraduate training included pediatrics, medicine, and surgery. He worked in Dr. Percival Bailey’s laboratory, where he studied Dr. Harvey Cushing’s records of patients with acromegaly. Subsequently, through 1927, he was the author or coauthor of articles about acromegaly.

In 1925, Dr. Davidoff was the surgeon for the MacMillan Arctic Expedition. Home base for the expedition was Etah, Greenland, 800 miles from the North Pole. Three Loening Amphibians (amphibious biplanes) were reassembled at the base, and an 8-man all-volunteer Naval Arctic Unit, commanded by Richard Evelyn Byrd, piloted and maintained the airplanes.

With Dr. Walter N. Koelz, Dr. Davidoff helped collect and preserve flora, fauna, and catch from the sea. He left the expedition in Labrador during its return, and on October 1, 1925, started his 1-year neurological surgery residency with Dr. Harvey Cushing.

Dr. Davidoff married Ida Alice Fisher on October 3, 1926, and the couple left immediately for a 1-year honeymoon in Europe where Davidoff clerked in neurology in London, visited prominent neurologists and neurosurgeons in Paris, and studied in Alfons Maria Jakob’s laboratory in Hamburg, Germany.

1898–1908

Dr. Davidoff (Fig. 1) wrote that he was born during the reign of Czar Nicholas II on January 16, 1898 in the village of Talsen in the Russian province of Kurland (Courland), which is today part of Latvia.18

Israel Davidoff, Dr. Davidoff’s father, was born in 1861 in the village of Zibilin and became a master shoemaker. Dr. Davidoff’s mother, Liebe Lemkus, was one of the oldest children of her family. She lived in a village close to Zibilin.18

Liebe Davidoff gave birth to 9 children—5 boys and 4 girls—over a 20-year span. Her seventh child was a boy named Labe Michel after his maternal grandmother, Leah. When the family reached the US, this son would become Leo Max.18
At the time of Dr. Davidoff’s birth, the Davidoff family lived in the lean-to of a kosher abattoir owned by the Orthodox Jewish community of Talsen, where Israel Davidoff was the shochet (kosher slaughterer). After 4 or 5 years, the Davidoff family moved to a cottage in Talsen. One of Dr. Davidoff’s early memories of those years was about food. A particular treat was to have a piece of home-baked black rye bread on which was spread chicken fat, or, when available, goose fat.18

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Always concerned about the children’s educational opportunities and security, Israel Davidoff searched the Scandinavian countries and traveled to South Africa where his oldest son, Louis, joined him. They did not agree with the degree of orthodoxy as practiced in South Africa. In 1906, they decided to leave South Africa and traveled from Cape Town to America via London and then to Boston. Israel and Louis Davidoff settled in Chelsea, Massachusetts, where Israel opened a shoe-repair shop and Louis found employment in the stitching room of a shoe factory.18

Israel Davidoff sent for the family in Talsen after he and Louis had saved enough money for the family to come to America. Liebe Davidoff sold her few possessions for the cash necessary to bribe the policeman in Talsen, the railroad conductor in Goldingen, and the manager of the hostel in Libau. They traveled by horse-drawn carriage from Talsen to the nearby town of Goldingen, then continued on a train to Libau, where they boarded a Baltic steamer on the Gulf of Riga for the voyage to Hull, England. Sleeping was on wooden shelves in 3 or 4 tiers, which were covered with straw alive with cockroaches and bedbugs. Everyone was seasick.18

At Hull, Liebe Davidoff and her family were met by personnel of the Jewish Immigrant Society, who arranged an overnight train trip across England to Liverpool. The Davidoffs were housed in a barnlike shelter in Liverpool until the steamship RSS Saxonia was ready for boarding. On the steamship, the Davidoff family was assigned one stateroom. Young Leo was seasick during most of the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.18

1908–1912

Liebe and the children joined Israel and Louis in Chelsea, and they all moved into a 4-room apartment that Israel had rented in a 2-family house.18

Israel Davidoff accompanied his 7 1/2-year-old son to register him at school. Labe was surprised by his father’s command of English because he spoke only Yiddish at home. Although the boy’s Jewish name was Labe Michel, Israel stated that his English name was Leopold Maximilian. The principal reduced the name to “Leo Max” after seeing a “skinny little boy” as Dr. Davidoff described his physiognomy in his autobiography, A Tree Not For Myself. (The title of Dr. Davidoff’s 1975 autobiography, A Tree Not For Myself, is from the mid–19th century Scottish poet Alexander Smith’s essay “Books And Gardens,” which included the aphorism “A man does not plant a tree for himself, he plants it for posterity.”)30 Not long after starting school, he acquired the nickname “Chicken Neck.”18

Dr. Davidoff was the only left-handed member of his family, and his teachers tied his left hand behind his back. Frank F. Davidoff, M.D., related that his father, Dr. Leo M. Davidoff, was able to write identical signatures with both hands simultaneously (personal communication from Frank F. Davidoff, M.D.). It is my belief that the attempt to force the boy to be right-handed was probably partially responsible for the ambidexterity that allowed him to be facile with several surgical instruments in each hand.

On Sundays, young Leo shined shoes for a nickel in his father’s shop to help augment the family’s income. In the summer he sold flypaper and wire-mesh strainers that he purchased wholesale and sold at retail prices.18

His public school principal helped him find a job at the Parker Brothers factory in Chelsea. (Parker Brothers

**Fig. 1.** Hoffman portrait of Leo M. Davidoff, 1952. Courtesy of Albert Einstein College of Medicine.
Leo Max Davidoff

invented the board game Monopoly.) He received $3.00 per week for working 5 afternoons after school and from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Saturdays. Frank L. Ordway, the superintendent of the factory, recognized that he wasn’t just a “go-fer.” He sent Davidoff on errands to his wife so that she would become acquainted with him. She “adopted” him and he called her “Mother” Ordway and called Mr. Ordway “Daddy” Ordway. 18 Years later, Dr. Davidoff addressed Frank Ordway as “Daddy O” during Sunday 10:00 AM calls to Boston. 28

In early 1908, the Davidoff family moved to a third-floor apartment in a 3-story house in Chelsea. A fire on Sunday, April 12, 1908, destroyed half of Chelsea, including the Davidoff apartment with its contents and Israel’s shop. 8 Israel arranged a move to an apartment in Salem. Leo was registered in the fourth grade at the local public school. He either skipped grades or was placed in rapid advancement classes. 18

He attended the Salem Classical and High School, where he enrolled in the classical course in preparation for college. He graduated from high school in 1912 as the salutatorian. Dorothy Gifford, the daughter of the president of a local bank, was the valedictorian. Although Dr. Davidoff confessed that “I had a bit of a crush on her,” he did not pursue a relationship other than remaining school friends because he perceived the difference of their standings in the social pecking order. 18

1912–1918

A second fire destroyed the Davidoff home in Salem on June 12, 1914 after an unusually dry May and June. 29 Leo Davidoff and his mother were able to rescue a few possessions. 18

Davidoff discussed his financial problem as it pertained to going to Harvard College with Frank S. Ordway at the Parker Brothers factory. Mr. Ordway related his plight to George Swinnerton, the president of Parker Brothers. Mr. Swinnerton offered to pay for Davidoff’s 4 years at Harvard College and 2 or more years at Harvard Business School if he would agree to work for Parker Brothers for 5 years after his formal education was completed. The offer was declined by Davidoff, who declared that he wanted to become a doctor. Mr. Swinnerton agreed to pay all expenses for his freshman year at Harvard College and loaned him $500, interest free, to be repaid after 10 years. 18 Dr. Davidoff also received a Crowninshield Scholarship. The loan and scholarship were sufficient to pay for tuition, room and board, and necessary supplies.

The most unexpected money—a bonus—came from his father. Leo Davidoff went to his father’s shoe shop, and Israel unscrewed the “cobbler’s jack” from the floor. A shower of silver coins fell out of the hollow jack as it was lifted. It amounted to about $75. (Israel had saved the coins that were not needed for immediate support of the family.) 18

Leo Davidoff matriculated at Harvard College in September 1916. He was assigned to an attic suite in a new dormitory, Gore Hall, close to the Charles River. There were 4 boys in the suite; each had his own desk and bookcase. There was a common living room with a wood-burning fireplace. 30 At 18 years of age, Davidoff had no difficulty climbing the 5 flights of stairs to his aerie.

The refectory was particularly appealing to Davidoff. He described the tables as covered with white linen tablecloths, with a fresh cloth napkin provided at all meals. The African-American waiters wore white jackets at breakfast and lunch. They changed to black jackets for dinner. The food was so nutritious (cholesterol rich) that he gained 40 pounds during his freshman year and lost his sobriquet Chicken Neck. 18

His grades were “A” for all courses during his freshman year. He fluctuated between the third and tenth place in his class of nearly 1000. 18

1918–1922

Davidoff was accepted into the 1922 class of Harvard Medical School during his second year at Harvard College. Just prior to matriculating at the medical school in September, he worked as an orderly at Massachusetts General Hospital during the summer of 1918. He was proud that he did not faint while observing an operation for the first time—a laparotomy for a large fibroid. 18

He joined the Student Army Training Corps (SATC) and from 6:00 to 8:30 AM daily wore a uniform that was issued for basic training. He never passed the required arms inspection that occurred every Saturday. (He abhorred firearms.) The punishment was confinement to quarters for the remainder of the day. The punishment time was put to good use, as he had lost necessary sleep and study time because of early morning training. 18

The SATC was disbanded in December 1918 after the Armistice.

During his 1st year at medical school, Davidoff lived in a rooming house. He later occupied a room in Chelsea in a house owned by an older sister, Rosie, and her husband. An older brother, David, had an apartment in the same house and Davidoff studied there with light from a gas lamp. He never forgave his brother for charging him 50 cents per month for the gas. 18

Israel Davidoff died at 59 years of age in Beth Israel Hospital in Boston of renal failure during his son’s 2nd year at medical school. On his deathbed he explained to his nurse in fluent English that his most precious possessions were his children and he wanted them to be many things and to have faith in God. Leo Davidoff was very fond of his father and used to go to him to discuss personal problems. Israel’s usual advice: “My son, you understand these things better than I. I suggest that you do as you see fit, and trust that the Lord will guide your hand.” 18

Although Leo Davidoff had given up Jewish ritual in his teens, he recited the mourner’s prayer, Kaddish, for his father daily for 1 year at a synagogue or at a home with 10 men present. Liebe Davidoff, his mother, died at 75 years of age—16 years after Israel’s death. 18

Davidoff was employed as a “student intern” at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital toward the end of his sophomore year and continued in that role until graduation from medical school. 18 Duties were simple laboratory work and spinal taps on patients probably being treated
for tertiary syphilis. His first published article, coauthored with a fellow intern, Clarence Campbell, and the head of the laboratory, Dr. G. P. Grabfield (also an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School), showed that cerebrospinal fluid cell counts were accurate after storage for 7 days in a refrigerator and for 1–2 days if not refrigerated in warm weather.

Dr. Richard Cabot (1868–1939), professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, was presenting a case at a Friday afternoon clinical pathological conference at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. He digressed from reading the protocol and stated that the patient under discussion complained of night sweats. He commented that during World War I he was often called to treat a French woman who complained of night sweats that he ascribed to the woman’s heavy woolen nightdress and to closed doors and windows. Turning to Dr. Harvey Cushing, who was in the first row of faculty and students, he asked: “Harvey, didn’t you find that so when you were in France?” The response: “I can’t answer that Richard. I never slept with any of them.” The conference was terminated because of the ensuing bedlam.

In the summer of 1921, Davidoff worked in the Surgical Research Laboratory at Harvard Medical School on urological subjects. With Dr. Roger Graves, he was the coauthor of 5 published articles. The dean, Dr. David Linn Edsall (1869–1945), permitted him to continue work for tertiary syphilis. His first published article, coauthored with a fellow intern, Clarence Campbell, and the head of the laboratory, Dr. G. P. Grabfield (also an instructor in medicine at Harvard Medical School), showed that cerebrospinal fluid cell counts were accurate after storage for 7 days in a refrigerator and for 1–2 days if not refrigerated in warm weather.

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In 1922, Leo M. Davidoff graduated from Harvard Medical School as the sixth highest ranked student in his class. The Doctor of Medicine degree was conferred cum laude and he was elected to the Alpha Omega Alpha national medical honor society.

1922–1925

Davidoff had decided early in medical school that he wanted to be a neurological surgeon trained by Dr. Harvey Cushing. He had hoped to receive an appointment as a surgical intern at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital after graduation and concluded that failure to receive the appointment was because Dr. Cushing had not yet agreed to accept him as a resident in his neurological surgery residency program.

In July 1922, he was appointed a senior resident for 4 months in the newly formed pediatric department of Boston City Hospital to help fill the house staff positions. This was followed by a 1-year internship in medicine at New Haven City Hospital from November 1922 to October 1923.

He returned to Boston on November 1, 1923 and worked in the neuropathology laboratory of Dr. Percival Bailey (1892–1973) at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. Dr. Bailey was a neuropathologist, neurosurgeon, and psychiatrist who became Cushing’s assistant in 1919 at the Brigham. He created a classification of brain tumors in 1927. Bailey and Cushing first described medulloblastoma and coined the term hemangioblastoma. In 1928, Bailey became the head of the neurosurgical department at the University of Chicago. He was appointed professor of neurology and neurological surgery at the University of Illinois in 1939 and director of the Illinois State Psychiatric Institute in 1951 (personal communication, Society of Neurological Surgeons, 2011). Dr. Bailey presented an autobiographical lecture, HARUN-A-RASHID, to the Chicago Literary Club in 1966.

Davidoff studied the records of the patients with acromegaly who had been evaluated by Dr. Cushing. The analysis and correlation of the data ultimately led to several articles that were published through 1927 and were written with either Bailey or Cushing. Davidoff was the sole author of 3 additional articles on acromegaly. His final report on acromegaly, coauthored with Cushing, was a 131-page monograph: “The Pathological Findings in Four Autopsied Cases of Acromegaly, with a Discussion of their Significance,” published by the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in 1927.

Early in the spring of 1925 the superintendent of Peter Bent Brigham Hospital was told about a contemplated expedition to the North Pole to be led by Lt. Commander Donald B. MacMillan and Lt. Commander Richard E. Byrd. The US Navy made known that a surgeon must accompany the expedition, and the superintendent recommended Dr. Davidoff and another surgical intern, Dr. Red Armstrong, as candidates. Dr. Davidoff lost the toss of a coin. He then made inquiries for a laboratory appointment for the summer. MacMillan subsequently declared that he never had a surgeon on previous expeditions to the Arctic. Dr. Armstrong thought the Navy would not require a surgeon, based on MacMillan’s declaration, so he took a job as a physician at fashionable Bar Harbor. Thus, Dr. Davidoff immediately became the surgeon to the expedition. Mother Ordway came to Boston where she not only helped select the recommended clothing and equipment but also paid the bill.

Dr. Cushing finally told Dr. Davidoff that he could begin the residency in neurological surgery at the Brigham on October 1, 1925. He was appointed a surgical intern starting on January 1, 1924. The appointment was an 18-month nonsalaried position.

1925 MacMillan Arctic Expedition

At a dinner in March 1923, Lieutenant Commander Donald Baxter MacMillan (1874–1970) met Lieutenant Commander Eugene Francis McDonald Jr. (1886–1958). McDonald, president of Zenith Radio Corporation, educated MacMillan about the “FM/short wave” radio developed by his company. (FM or shortwave radio was able to penetrate the auroral zone.)

MacMillan and McDonald also discussed exploring the Arctic with fixed-wing aircraft rather than dirigibles and with shortwave radio. They presented their ideas at several meetings with Curtis D. Wilbur, the secretary of the US Navy, beginning in January 1925. He finally agreed to the proposal and called for naval personnel to volunteer for the expedition and join the naval Arctic unit. Lieutenant Commander Richard Evelyn Byrd Jr. (1888–1957) was appointed the commander of the volunteer unit.

Secretary Wilbur named the expedition the “1925 MacMillan Arctic Expedition,” and the National Geographic Society was declared the sponsor. Wilbur also negotiated with the Secretary of War for 3 newly designed fixed-wing aircraft called Loening Amphibians because...
they were designed by Grover Cleveland Loening (1888–1976) to land on and take off from ice, land, and water. The National Geographic Society was represented aboard the Peary, when it left Boston, by Professor Walter N. Koelz, Ph.D. (1895–1989), a widely acknowledged ichthyologist and ornithologist from Michigan (Cass City Chronicle, September 11, 1925).

MacMillan purchased a steel-hull coal-burning ship, which was prepared for the expedition at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. On May 19, 1925, it was christened SS Peary by Admiral Peary’s daughter, Marie Peary Stafford. In Boston, concrete was poured into the bow for reinforcement because the ship would be used as an icebreaker. A second ship on the expedition was the Bowdoin. It was named after Peary’s and MacMillan’s alma mater, Bowdoin College, in Brunswick, Maine.

On June 17, the Peary, with Dr. Davidoff aboard as the surgeon, departed from Boston and headed to Wiscasset, Maine, to join the Bowdoin. Both ships sailed from Wiscasset on June 20. Dr. Davidoff maintained a daily diary, with detailed information about the expedition beginning with the departure from Boston (Fig. 2). The original of this diary is in the Donald Baxter MacMillan Collection in the Bowdoin archives; a typescript, donated by Dr. Davidoff’s widow Ida, is located in the National Library of Medicine, although it is wrongly identified as the journal of Lee Davidoff.

Dr. Davidoff wrote a letter to The Jewish Advocate on July 2 from Battle Harbor, Labrador. He described Labrador as desolate and the men as all fishermen. The native population came to him with their ailments. He wrote, “Then I encourage the hopeless and advise the helpless and hand out a good deal of my ship’s medicines.” He concluded that this was a farewell communication until the expedition returned from its destination.

The SS Peary crossed the Arctic Circle on July 15 at 10:30 AM. The sea was calm and the air almost balmy (Fig. 3). Professor Koelz, the naturalist on the expedition, showed Dr. Davidoff how to preserve the flora, fauna, and aquatic specimens they collected after exploring the surrounding cliffs and casting nets into the sea (Fig. 4).

Some seal’s liver was sent to the Peary from the Bowdoin on July 29. Dr. Davidoff declared in his diary: “It tasted, if anything, better than calf’s liver... and the flesh—particularly since this was a young seal—was also excellent eating.”

A polar bear weighing approximately 750 pounds was shot and killed on July 31. It supplied fresh meat for the crews on both ships for a week. Parts of the bear were sent to Dr. Davidoff for examination, and he described his findings in his diary. “The liver looks smells and tastes quite like any other liver—for I have risked tasting—since I cannot see how a large glandular structure like this could contain a toxin which was not transmitted to the blood and poisons every other part which is obviously not
the case since the steak is relished. The bile passages and gall bladder are not distinctive.” The kidneys “maintain the lobulated character of the foetal kidney even to the extent of having completely separate capsules for each lobule…a moderately large coarsely lobulated bilobed thyroid and a large larynx. The dentition, except for its strength, was not remarkable. The eyes were extraordinarily small, no larger than a rabbit’s, and the optic nerves correspondingly small. This, I believe, accounts for the fact that this animal has poor vision. The olfactory tracts and lobes corresponding in the brain are quite large and the brain as a whole is relatively of fair proportion. The pituitary is about one half the size of this organ in a cow.”

Although vitamin A was discovered in 1917, hyper-vitaminosis A and its toxicity were not recognized until several years later.21 (It was not known in 1925 when Dr. Davidoff examined and tasted polar bear liver.) However, the risk of eating polar bear, seal, walrus, and husky (sled dog) liver was known to the Inuit.4

The 2 ships arrived at Etah, Greenland, on August 1 at 9:15 PM in the midst of a driving snowstorm and anchored in Etah Fjord. Etah was the northernmost village in the world at the time.6

Dr. Davidoff was seasick intermittently during the expedition, but this did not prevent him from participating in all necessary activities and duties to meet his obligation as the expedition’s surgeon. He had daily sickbay for the expedition’s crew and the Inuits; boils were lanced, rotten teeth extracted, and medication was dispensed.

MacMillan, with several Inuit, killed 3 walruses just outside the Etah Fjord. Dr. Davidoff’s diary entry on August 5: “Of all Arctic animals they are the most dangerous to hunt…must be harpooned before it sinks. This means close work and when you come close to a wounded walrus you are very close to danger. They are huge brutes, often weighing a ton, with fierce tusks which they use most effectively and when reinforced by a herd of some 25 or 30 others form one of the important causes of death among the natives. Their skill in quartering these beasts is remarkable: In less than 30 minutes the animal is cut up, the hind and fore quarters, head, neck and viscera dismembered and neatly stacked.”

Commander Byrd and his favorite pilot, Floyd Bennett, were unable to fly to the North Pole and back to Etah. Dr. Davidoff enumerated the reasons for failure to fly to the North Pole in a diary entry on August 18: “It is now an admitted fact that the flying mission of this expedition is a failure—from every angle…the planes are unfit for the work. Their cruising radius is only about six to seven hundred miles and they carry practically no load. Their amphibian qualities are of no avail since there is no place for dry landing anywhere in this country and unfortunately both the land and water landing arrangements are inferior to these machines—necessarily because something of each had to be sacrificed for the other. Now it transpires that beyond a few spots about 100 miles away, there is no open water to land in this year and often these few places are also blocked with ice. Well—rescatter in pace!”

On August 20, after 2 months at Etah, Dr. Davidoff was notified to start packing for the homeward journey. To celebrate, he shaved off his beard. He and Dr. Koelz bade farewell to the glacier and the Inuits.

Dr. Davidoff’s diary entry on August 22 was as follows: “The expedition is over: what remains is only to retrace our steps home—not a dangerless nor simple matter, but nevertheless a fifth act where the many loose ends of an involved and unskillful plot must be tied together in order to let the curtain fall on a happy ending. Whether my experiences balanced well between those pleasant and those unpleasant, or whether a few of each were thrown into a large scale of indifference, at least I am leaving here a wiser and I hope a better man.”

Dr. Davidoff left the expedition on September 27 in Newfoundland. He bid farewell to no one. The concluding sentence in his diary: “I am in the midst of my adieux to The Peary and I may admit to myself that I am not unhappy to say ‘Good Bye’.”

**October 1925–1926**

Dr. Davidoff entered Peter Bent Brigham Hospital on October 1 in time to wave hello and goodbye to Dr. Harvey Cushing (1869–1939), who was leaving on his annual pilgrimage to Europe. He was introduced to his duties by Dr. Gilbert Horrax (1887–1957) and Dr. William P. Van Wagenen (1897–1961). The latter had just completed his year as Cushing’s resident and stayed a couple of extra days to help Dr. Davidoff get started. (For more information on Drs. Horrax and Van Wagenen, respectively, refer to the biographical sketches on the Society of Neurological Surgeons website at http://www.societyns.org/society/bio.aspx?MemberID=99178.)

At the Brigham, the neurosurgical resident had to perform all diagnostic studies—hearing tests, visual acuity and fields, caloric tests, and so forth. There were no departments of ophthalmology or otolaryngology. The monthly pay was $25, and there were no vacations. The day’s work started about 6:00 AM, including Saturdays.
Adolph was the orderly in the operating room. He was almost a foot taller than Dr. Cushing. Only he could change the direction of Dr. Cushing's headlight beam. Adolph always carried a spotless white towel to wipe the perspiration off the chief’s brow. The scrub nurses were "usually very bright, very vivacious and very good looking." Eight girls were Dr. Cushing's scrub nurses during the 20 years he was at the Brigham. They were very possessive and competed with Adolph to serve him. A scrub nurse was on call for emergency surgery at all hours. Strict asepsis was the rule in the operating room and the preparation of the operative field was meticulous. Dr. Davidoff was invited to Sunday dinner at Dr. Cushing’s home 6 times during his residency. On one Sunday, during dinner, a telephone call from the Brigham informed Dr. Cushing that the relatives of a patient were waiting. Apple pie and coffee were served when Dr. Cushing declared: “Davey, I guess you’d better go and see those relatives.” Gus, Dr. Cushing’s chauffeur, drove Davidoff to the hospital.

During his residency, Davidoff established friendships with several voluntary fellows who came to the Brigham to observe and learn from Cushing. They included Francis (Chubby) Grant (1891–1967) from Philadelphia (trained with Dr. Charles Frazier); Loyal Davis (1896–1982) from Chicago (a pupil of Dr. Kanavel); Norman Dott (1897–1973) from Edinburgh, Scotland; George Schaltenbrand (1897–1979) from Hamburg, Germany; and Jean Morelle from Louvain, Belgium.

Ida Alice Fisher

About a month after Dr. Davidoff started his residency, Ida Alice Fisher (1903–2001) invited him to speak about the Arctic expedition to the young people’s group at Temple Israel in Boston. He was smitten by her at their first meeting in the lobby of the Brigham. Their courtship continued in a secluded corner of the lobby during her visits. The guards referred to her as Dr. Davidoff’s sister.

Dr. Leo Max Davidoff and Ida Alice Fisher were married on October 3, 1926 at the Fisher home in Brighton, Massachusetts. Dr. Cushing, who insisted that he be invited, watched as Dr. Davidoff’s 4 brothers kissed the bride and then their brother. Dr. Cushing rose and declared: “Davey, it is a pleasure to kiss your beautiful bride, but custom or no custom, I’ll be damned if I will kiss you.”

1926–1927

Dr. and Mrs. Davidoff left by train for Canada on the evening of their marriage and boarded a ship, RMS Empress of Japan, heading for England. They had $2000, which included $1000 cash from wedding gifts and $1000 from a Peter Bent Brigham Hospital traveling fellowship awarded to Davidoff as the first recipient.

In London, Dr. Davidoff was a clerk in neurology for 6 months under Dr. Gordon Holmes (1876–1965) at the National Hospital for Diseases of the Nervous System including Paralysis and Epilepsy (currently the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery), Queen Square. In February 1927, Dr. and Mrs. Davidoff traveled to Paris and visited Joseph Jules François Félix Babinski (1857–1932), Georges Charles Guillaume (1876–1961), Pierre Marie (1853–1940), Thierry de Martel (1875–1940), Jean Morelle (1899–1983), Jean A. Sicard (1872–1929), and Clovis Vincent (1879–1947). (According to Frank F. Davidoff [personal communication], his mother Ida was fluent in the French language and read a classical novel in French every year, but his father apparently did not avail himself of her command of French during his visits to the famous French neurologists and neurosurgeons.)

Dr. and Mrs. Davidoff arrived in Germany in March 1927, and Dr. Davidoff visited Otfrid Foerster in Breslau. In Hamburg, they were met by Dr. “Dick” Wilson, formerly on the Medical Service at the Brigham, with whom he would study neuropathology in the laboratory of Dr. Alfonso Maria Jakob (1884–1931). Dr. Davidoff wrote 2 articles while in Hamburg. One dealt with “Mongolian idiocy,” and the second was on the use of the Perdrau silver reduction method for demonstration of connective tissue fibers.

When Dr. and Mrs. Davidoff returned to America in June 1927, they initially resided in Boston and then moved to New York City in November. In New York, Dr. Davidoff was initially employed as a neuropathologist at the New York Psychiatric Institute. He was subsequently director of surgery and neurological surgery at several institutions. He established his own resident training program at the Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn in 1928. The approved program continued when he went to Montefiore Hospital, Beth Israel Hospital, Mt. Sinai Hospital, and the combined program at Montefiore Medical Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and Jacobi Hospital (Bronx Municipal Hospital Center). He was a founder of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University, and later assistant dean and chairman of the Departments of Neurological Surgery at Einstein and Montefiore in The Bronx, New York, until he retired in 1966.

Disclosure

The author reports no conflict of interest concerning the materials or methods used in this study or the findings specified in this paper.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks and is indebted to the late Ida Alice Fisher Davidoff, Ph.D., who gave him a signed copy of Dr. Davidoff's autobiography, A Tree Not For Myself. She was a good friend and offered sage advice. Frank Fisher Davidoff, M.D., provided personal observations that were incorporated into the text and suggested several key references. Leonore Davidoff provided correct dates for key events and further details of Israel and Louis Davidoff’s period in South Africa. Judie Malamud, the former director of the D. Samuel Gottesman Medical Library of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University, arranged to photograph the Hoffman Portrait of Dr. Davidoff, a framed oil painting that hangs in the library. The research librarians at the Microtext Department of the Boston Public Library, Bowdoin College Library (particularly the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives), Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center of Bowdoin College, the Dorot Jewish Collection of the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress were most helpful. The
staff at *Forverts* (*The Jewish Daily Forward*) searched their database for reports and published photographs of Dr. Davidoff associated with the 1925 MacMillan Arctic Expedition. (*The Forverts* was published only in Yiddish in 1925, and the editions were identical in New York and Boston.) Heartfelt appreciation for the search of the May and June 1925 microfilm in the Microtext Department of the Boston Public Library by my daughter-in-law Thérèse Au Buchon Wisoff and my granddaughter Alyssa Beth Wisoff, who searched the Dorot Collection of the New York Public Library. My grandson Benjamin Joel Wisoff helped by using his photographic expertise. Many thanks to the Bowdoin College Library and the Naval Institute Press for waiving copyright fees. Proofreading the manuscript was a family activity involving my children, grandchildren, and brother B. George Wisoff, M.D. Daniel Philip and Kimberly Dawn Solomon spotted typos that others had overlooked and provided the correct English spelling of Hebrew words. And most important, I am grateful to my wife Irene, helpmate for 6 decades, who encouraged this endeavor and also proofread, critiqued, and edited the manuscript. Her experience in research and lecturing in art history helped me present this biography in an appealing form.

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Manuscript submitted July 18, 2011. Accepted April 9, 2012. This paper was first presented as a precis at the 1956–1992 Einstein-Montefiore Neurosurgical Residents’ Alumni Event, in Philadelphia, on May 3, 2010, during the AANS annual meeting. Please include this information when citing this paper: published online June 22, 2012; DOI: 10.3171/2012.4.JNS111211. Address correspondence to: Hugh S. Wisoff, M.D., 321 Pennsylvania Avenue, Tuckahoe, New York 10707. email: drhsw27@gmail.com.