Leonard Thompson Furlow, M.D., 1902–1980

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On June 3, 1980, Leonard Thompson Furlow died from widespread metastases secondary to a malignancy of his parotid gland. With his passing, neurosurgery lost one of its most respected senior citizens for, although he had retired from the active practice of neurosurgery in 1967 at the age of 65 years, he never lost his interest in neurosurgical training and the problems of neurosurgical education and manpower.

After his retirement, he moved to Crystal River, Florida, where he commuted weekly to participate in the residency training program at the University of Florida. Such was the esteem in which he was held at the University that the Neurosurgical Library was named for and dedicated to Leonard Furlow on January 5, 1980. Funds for the library were contributed by the University of Florida and by all his former residents who so much admired and respected him.

Leonard T. Furlow was born January 18, 1902, in Madison, Georgia, which has also become his final resting place. He received his B.S. degree in 1923, and his M.D. in 1925, both from Emory University. Following graduation, he was a house officer at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, from 1925 to 1928, and subsequently went into general practice in Brooksville, Florida, until 1933. By this time he had decided that he wished to be a neurosurgeon and had been accepted as a fellow by Dr. Ernest Sachs at Barnes Hospital, Washington University, where, upon completion of his training, he practiced until his retirement. During World War II, he was on active duty with the Navy, and was Chief of the neurosurgery section at the San Diego Naval Hospital. He was discharged with the rank of Captain.

On his return from the Navy, he rejoined Dr. Ernest Sachs in the practice of neurosurgery, primarily at Barnes Hospital, Washington University. During this period, he was actively engaged in the clinical training of neurosurgical residents. He was the principal author of about 40 scientific papers. At retirement, he was Clinical Professor of Neurosurgery.

Leonard Furlow was a member of all the most prestigious neurosurgical societies and of many less noteworthy. More important, he was president of the Society of Neurological Surgeons, the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (the Harvey Cushing Society), the St. Louis Surgical Society, the St. Louis Medical Society and the Missouri State Medical Society. In addition, he was secretary (1952 to 1955) and president (1955 to 1960) of the American Board of Neurological Surgery. He also served on the Board of Governors of the American College of Surgeons.

If one had to select a single event as the most important in Leonard Furlow's life, I think that it would be...
have to be his leadership of the American Board of Neurological Surgery, first as secretary and then as president, a period of almost 9 years. His presidential address at the American Association of Neurological Surgeons meeting in 1962 was entitled "The American Board of Neurological Surgery," for so great was his interest. When he became secretary in 1952, the Board was in a chaotic condition. Paperwork was in arrears and there was little organization for the orderly processing of the candidates. Failure rate was too great. While he was secretary, quick and efficient methods of dealing with the candidates and of giving the examination were instituted. Studies relating to the methods of training were begun, in an effort to increase the pass rate. These policies are still being followed by the Board and by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, and were probably the beginning of our present-day manpower study.

Leonard Furlow was indeed a unique man and I cannot close this brief obituary without attempting to give to those who read this a mental picture of the person whom I knew for over 30 years and with whom I was associated for the last 16 years of his active practice. He was an affable, easygoing individual. I rarely saw him angry and never without good cause because he could always appreciate another's point of view. This affability covered a very strong and determined personality and enabled him to accomplish much more than the average person because he never angered other people and was usually willing to compromise. He was also the most orderly and organized person I have ever known. Even in daily routine, he knew exactly how much time would be spent on each problem and he had the ability of eliciting the help of those about him to make a given situation work more easily. He was rarely late for an appointment.

Highly respected and modest, he never sought office, but was sought by the office of the many societies that needed his leadership. He had little prejudice, and others were aware that with any job undertaken, it would be done well. Neurosurgery will miss one of its most ardent supporters.

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