

Lest We Forget...

BY DAVID W. LEVY

LeRoy Long: Father of OU Medicine

On June 3, 1912, the Council on Medical Education of the American Medical Association (AMA) announced that conditions at the University of Oklahoma's Medical School were so poor that the school's rating was being lowered from "A" to a "B." The humiliating demotion was a blow to practicing doctors holding degrees from the school, a catastrophe to current students and a notice to potential applicants that they should look elsewhere for their medical credentials.

The first two years of pre-medical courses given on the Norman campus were deemed satisfactory. The problem was the two years of clinical training in Oklahoma City: no full-time faculty, grossly inadequate equipment and laboratories, and the lack of a real training hospital. On May 27, 1915, the University Regents finally persuaded the right leader to accept the deanship of the struggling school and fix things.

LeRoy Long was born in rural North Carolina on January 1, 1869. Influenced by a local doctor, he elected to pursue that profession. He proved an outstanding student at the Louisville Medical College and was asked to stay on and teach there. Instead, he accepted an offer to fill in temporarily for a doctor in Atoka, Indian Territory. He promptly fell in love with the area (and with a young Choctaw schoolteacher) and decided to stay. He eventually moved to McAlester and gained a reputation as a superb physician. He began to specialize in surgery.

Long quickly became a prime mover in the organization of Oklahoma's medical profession. As a leader in the Indian Territory Medical Association and the Choctaw Medical Board, and, after statehood, the Oklahoma Medical Association, his reputation for intelligence, diplomacy and absolute integrity made him perhaps the most respected physician in the state. Tall and lanky, gifted with a deep voice and a natural eloquence, he was a persuasive advocate for high professional standards and rigorous medical ethics. He declined offers of the deanship at least three times before reluctantly saying yes. He was forty-seven when he took office.

By tireless effort, patience, speaking and lobbying, LeRoy Long transformed the School of Medicine. He hired faculty to augment the volunteer doctors who had been doing the bulk of the teaching. He coaxed the Legislature into funding such basic equipment as X-ray machines and laboratories. He increased entrance requirements and insisted on strict academic standards. With the help of Governor Robert Lee Williams, Long finally got money for a University Hospital, which opened in November 1919. On March 11, 1920, the Council on Medical Education removed the "odious stigma" of being second-rate by restoring the school's "A" rating.

In 1925, Long convinced the Legislature to fund a new medical building in Oklahoma City and moved the entire four-

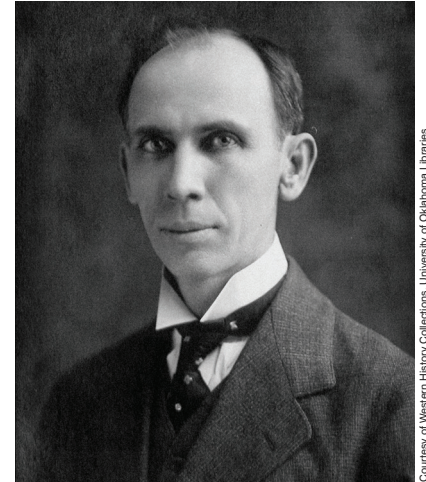
year program to the city. He supervised the building of a hospital for children and a residence for student nurses. By 1930, the school was annually graduating dozens of well-trained doctors and nurses, most of whom stayed in Oklahoma. Dean Long accomplished these things (and others) with openness, diplomacy and principle. For sixteen years, he held the confidence, the respect, and the admiration of his faculty, the officials of the University, and the Oklahoma medical community.

And then, in July 1931, Oklahoma's capricious and headstrong governor, "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, issued one of his innumerable orders permitting chiropractors to practice in the University Hospital. The rules of the AMA stipulated that only medical doctors could practice in accredited hospitals. Murray's order would result in a loss of accreditation and a new demotion to a "B" ranking for the school. The faculty was outraged; the students were frantic; the Oklahoma Medical Association was aroused; both the director of the American College of Surgeons and the secretary of the AMA begged Murray to reconsider. But when Long went in person to explain the consequences of the impending action, he found the governor defiant.

On August 7, Long called an emergency meeting of his faculty. After he summarized recent developments, he stepped aside, and a faculty committee presented a resolution, affirming that "we absolutely concur in the stand taken by Dr. Long." Then the dean took the podium again: "After carefully, deliberately and sadly thinking over the whole matter," he told his faculty, "I regret to have to advise you that . . . it will be impossible for me to continue my duties." He (and his two physician sons) resigned from the school. Long resumed his surgical practice until his death on October 7, 1940.

An obituary in *Sooner Magazine* called him "a man of highest ethical standards and one who lived his convictions . . . The services rendered to this school and to the State of Oklahoma by this outstanding man cannot be too highly valued." The present quality and reputation of the University's Health Sciences Center owes more than a little to the foundations put in place by this remarkable man.

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