

Louis W. Allard: Polio Patients and Kangaroo Tendons

Louis W. Allard was born in 1887, on a sheep ranch near Laurel, to parents who had come to Montana well before the arrival of the Northern Pacific railroad. A Wisconsin-based uncle was a doctor, and his nephew was inspired to follow him into medicine. After college in Bozeman – where he played on the 1907 champion basketball team – he started medical school at the University of Wisconsin. He finished his training in Chicago, and turned down offers from big city hospitals to return home to Montana. He started his Billings practice in 1914, specializing in orthopedics.

Dr. Allard was instrumental in the development of St. Vincent's Hospital, providing support to the Sisters of Charity as they got the facility going. And in 1916, when a dreadful polio epidemic hit the state, the Billings area was hardest hit, with nearly half the state's cases. Allard and nursing supervisor Sister Mary Arcadia Lea partnered together to battle the disease, which then had no cure or even a vaccine until Salk's arrived in 1955. They treated so many children that hospital staff called the patients "Allard's Kids". Lea and Allard convinced the hospital to open an annex just for polio patients.

Though the 1916 outbreak was the worst, polio outbreaks recurred regularly. Allard opened specialty clinics in Billings and Butte. He also opened up a camp for patients south of Red Lodge, getting them out of the hospital for part of the summer. Allard and Lea's nursing sisters had treated 467 patients from all over the state by 1922. They also developed a treatment program, teaching parents care techniques and instructing them in physical therapy.

Allard's most notable patient was undoubtedly Ernest Hemingway. In 1930, Hemingway had been staying at the L Bar T Ranch near Cooke City, where he was fly fishing, hunting and working on *Death in the Afternoon*. Driving west of Billings with writer John Dos Passos and Floyd Allington from the L Bar T, Hemingway put their car into a ditch, resulting in a bad break to his right elbow. Allington's shoulder was dislocated, while Dos Passos was uninjured. Hemingway's break did not heal properly, so Dr. Allard had to operate on it and reset the break. He also used an unusual procedure utilizing kangaroo tendons to stabilize the arm. Hemingway ended up spending seven weeks in St. Vincent's, resulting in a short story called "The Gambler, the Nun and the Radio." The character based on Allard was described as "a most excellent Doctor."

Allard was a busy man, who freely shared the credit for his successes, but honors came his way without the need to seek them out. Gonzaga University cited his services to



Dr. Louis W. Allard, 1931

crippled children in award him the DeSmet Medal in 1932. In 1953, the American Medical Association's gave him their Physician's Award for his rehabilitation work. He was the guest of honor at the dedication of a new wing at the hospital in 1956. But his biggest honor was in 1930, when Pope Pius XI made him a Knight of the Order of St. Gregory for his service to humanity. True to form, Allard only hoped that the acclaim and notice of such awards would serve to bring in more donations for his polio clinics, so he could help more children.

Dr. Allard died in Billings in November 1971, just shy of his 84th birthday. He is buried in the St. Anthony Catholic Cemetery in Laurel.

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