
*The Indianapolis Literary Club 2002-2003:
125th Anniversary Year*

Title of Essay: Burney's Burney: Leroy Edgar Burney (1906-1998)

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*"....the pursuit of any object depends for its value upon the worth of the object
pursued. If, then, you would avoid discouragement, never become unduly absorbed
in things that are not of the first importance."*

*~Marcus Aurelius. Meditations,
Book 4, No. 32. Penguin Books. New York, 1964, p 71*

"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible."

*~Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745 Thoughts on Various Subjects. Miscellanies, 1711.
Cited in Tripp, RT, The International Thesaurus of Quotations.
New York, Harper & Row, 1970. p 679*

*"If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are. With a sense of
place, your identity is defined."*

*~Wendell Berry quoted in "The Sense of Place" by Wallace Stegner.
Selection found in, Steger, W. "Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade
Springs. New York: The Modern Library. Pp 199-206. 2002.*

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Introduction

In southeast Indiana, near the western border of Decatur County and in the Township of Clay, there is an unincorporated village of 254 souls named Burney ⁽¹⁾. The U.S. Geological Survey places Burney precisely at: latitude 39 degrees, 19 minutes, 2 seconds north and longitude 85 degrees, 38 minutes, 25 seconds west ⁽²⁾.

Burney is located at the northern border of the Bluegrass Natural Region, an ecological area in southeast Indiana named for its similarity to the Bluegrass region of north-central Kentucky ⁽³⁾. The area has distinctive natural features, climate, vegetation, flora, and fauna. American beech, red maple, sweetgum and tulip trees dominate the woodlands.

Geologists call this area a hydrogeomorphic region of Bedrock Lowland and Plain ⁽⁴⁾. The bedrock is limestone and dolomite. The soil is glacial till with sandy loam deposits, the products of the Wisconsin Glacier, whose southernmost boundary in Indiana 20,000 years ago included Decatur County. Rivers and creeks flow through this area from northeast to southwest—part of the White River Basin. The village is bounded by Clifty Creek on the north and the Middle Fork and Fall Fork Creeks to the south.

Pioneers

Pioneers came to this region of southeastern Indiana in the late 1700s, up from the Ohio River along trails of the Whitewater River and the Indian-Kentuck Creek ⁽⁵⁾. They found hardwood forests, undulating hills, ravines, streams, and wetlands. Large mammals, including the buffalo, elk, timber wolf, cougar, fisher, and wolverine provided food and warmth ⁽⁶⁾. Clouds of migratory birds blackened the sky. The winters were harsh and settlers experienced the dread carried in the words of Edna St. Vincent Millay ⁽⁷⁾:

*S:13 Men say the winter
 Was bad that year.
 Fuel was scarce
 And food was dear*

*S:14 A wind with a wolf's head
 Howled about our door
 And we burned up the chairs
 And sat upon the floor.*

The process of transferring land occupied by Native Americans to the government had been accomplished by 1830⁽⁸⁾. The Indian Treaty of St. Mary's in 1818 transferred a large area known as the "New Purchase" to the U.S. Government. The southern part of this region included the area now called Decatur County. The John Fugit and Griffy Griffith families first settled this area. In 1821, Decatur County was platted and named for Commodore Stephen Decatur, a naval hero ⁽⁹⁾. The following year a government was established; the county seat was named, Greensburg.

Among the pioneer families that came to Decatur County were the Burneys, of Scotch-Irish stock, and the Pumphreys, from Cheltenham, England. Samuel Milton Burney migrated from North

Carolina to Clay Township in the early 1800s ⁽¹⁰⁾. There he married Sarah Pumphrey. They had nine children. In the 1880s, Samuel Burney, by then a wealthy farmer, donated land to build a station depot for the Big Four Railroad (later called the New York Central), whose tracks would connect Columbus and Greensburg. The stop was called Burney's Station. In 1882 the village was laid out by James C. Pulse and called Burney, Indiana ⁽¹¹⁾.

One of Samuel Burney's five sons, William Edgar, married Charlotte Suzanne Critser and they had one son, Robert E. (Ned) Burney. Robert and his wife Mabel Howell, in turn, had only one child, Leroy Edgar, who was born December 31st, 1906, in Burney, Indiana, the village named for his great grandfather.

From these humble beginnings in an inconspicuous corner of a rural county and barely one hundred years after pioneers discovered this howling wilderness, Leroy Burney would begin a life's journey that would lead him to the pinnacles of government service in public health and prominence on the world stage of international health.

Throughout his career, Burney reflected the traditions of his pioneer forebears, noting their strong belief in religion, the importance of freedom in a democracy, and the work ethic ⁽¹⁰⁾. He valued the place of his origins and its influence on his life. And, he likely contemplated his sense of place, perhaps as Longfellow did in:

"A Gleam of Sunshine"

*This is the place. Stand still, my steed,
Let me review the scene,
And summon from the shadowy Past
The forms that once have been.*

*The Past and Present here unite
Beneath Time's flowing tide,
Like footprints hidden by a brook,
But seen on either side.*

~ HW Longfellow ⁽¹²⁾.

Burney must have heard the echoes of the "past and the present" of his pioneer ancestors whose sense of place defined their identity for generations. Heidegger, the philosopher, called "place" the "typology of being." ⁽¹³⁾ The author and poet Wendell Berry said, "If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are. With a sense of place, your identity is defined." ⁽¹⁴⁾

But Burney's remarkable career, which I will share with you this evening, suggests that, while his life's work was rooted in a sense of being and place, it was neither limited nor constrained by history. Instead, his sense of place projected Burney into the 20th Century as one of America's visionaries in public health.

Early Years

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. said, "The axis of the earth sticks out visibly through the centre of each and every town or city" ⁽¹⁾. Decatur County was the center of the population of the United States in 1890, having moved from Kent County, Maryland only one hundred years earlier ⁽²⁾. And the axis of Burney was only a five-mile walk from the geographic center of America.

In 1900, Burney was a thriving city of several hundred people. There was a school, two churches, a state bank, a doctor and dentist, and thriving businesses, including two ice-cream parlors and a livery where one could rent a rig in summer. The Columbus, Hope & Greensburg train carried passengers twice a day with stops at Ewington, Burney, Hope, Nortonburg, and Columbus. (3) The Burney music festival was held under the big top, and John Phillip Sousa and his band played at one of the town's Chautauquas (4). The Burney Band had twenty-four members and even played at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. And, the Burney baseball team played the "Greensburg Grays."

In only a hundred years the howling wilderness of southeastern Indiana had been transformed. (5) The hardwood forests were gone, replaced by geometric one-mile squares of corn, beans, and wheat fields. More than one billion board feet of lumber was produced in 1899 when Indiana led the nation. Native Americans were gone. Clouds of migratory birds no longer blackened the sky. Wetlands had been drained. Most large mammals were extinct or had retreated to niches isolated from humans. Jessamyn West, the Hoosier author of "Friendly Persuasion, described southeastern Indiana winters during this time of transition from wilderness to farmland:

"Woodlots, gaunt and bare of leaves, alternated with cleared fields...It was a countryside neither rugged nor savage. Only ragged, desolate, unkempt, cold. Sorrowful, too..as land is which is neither completely wild nor completely cultivated; forests half-deadened earth half-farmed; orchards loosely rooted in the rock soil with nothing more than a snake fence to protect them from the dark woods which everywhere seemed to be threatening to slide down from the hills and overwhelm them." (6).

Young Leroy Burney would spend only a few years in this land of his pioneer ancestors. He attended grammar school in Burney and nearby Westport. (7) The family moved to Indianapolis, perhaps for better work—Leroy's father was a millwright and mechanic—or perhaps for the possibilities of a better education for their son, already a bright student with potential. (8).

Burney graduated from Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis and there he developed an interest in medicine. Burney's Aunt Mary-- Molly as she was called-- married the Burney town physician, Dr. Cecil Gardner Harrod in June 1917 (9, 10) Harrod would take young Leroy on house calls, first in a horse and buggy, later in a Model T Ford. By the time Burney was in high school medicine was his life's goal. In an interview in 1988, Burney, then 82 years old, said he greatly admired and respected Dr. Harrod. Burney commented, "It just seemed natural, for some reason or other, for me to follow in his profession. I had no other interest" (11).

After two years at Butler University in Indianapolis, Burney transferred to Indiana University and received the B.S. degree in 1928 and two years later the M.D. degree from Indiana University School of Medicine (12). In his senior year, an Assistant U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. AJ McLaughlin, visited the school to talk with students about a career in the Public Health Service (11). Burney described him as "a highly intelligent and engaging Irishman. McLaughlin later recalled that Burney "had an idealism, vision, and courage which made me think that he had a terrific potential for public health work" (13).

The seed for a career in public health had been planted. From landlocked southeastern Indiana, Burney would join the Public Health Service whose origin in 1798, was to serve medical care needs of merchant seamen.

Public Health Service

Burney interned in 1930 at the Merchant Marine Hospital in Chicago. He failed the exam for the regular commissioned corps of the Public Health Service. Burney commented years later that he thought he was the only Surgeon General in history that had failed the first exam (1). Burney's mentor, McLaughlin—the engaging Irishman—was upset by Burney's setback but worked on his behalf to secure a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship (1931-32) to Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. At Hopkins, the Nation's first school of public health, Burney studied under many of the leading experts in the world, including Wade Hampton Frost, the dean of epidemiologists in the U.S. and Professors Pearl and Reed, among the great biostatisticians of the 20th Century.

Burney graduated in 1932 with a Master of Public Health degree. He was urged to retake the PHS test and passed a grueling five-day exam in Washington, D.C. that included questions about characters in Dickens' plays and Indian tribes of Indiana. Burney passed 13th in a competitive class of 32, much to his pleasure (1). He was commissioned in the regular corps of the U.S. Public Health Service as an Assistant Surgeon at the U.S. Marine Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 14, 1932, at the age of 26 years. That same year, a blind date would lead to the marriage of Burney and Miss Mildred Hewins of Boonville, Indiana. A remarkably resourceful and resilient woman, Mildred Burney would create a home for their two children, despite almost constant moves as Burney was called to new duty stations. Leroy and Mildred Burney would be married for sixty-six years.

Burney's early assignments took him to Cleveland, Hot Springs, Arkansas, New York City, Springfield, Missouri, and the Marine Hospital in Chicago (2). His leadership potential was recognized early, and in February 1935 he and fifteen promising young officers were called to Washington, D.C. for a year of intensive education. They were being groomed for leadership roles in the PHS. (1). Following this training, Burney was appointed assistant to the chief of a fledgling venereal disease (VD) program. A new Surgeon General, Dr. Parran, was appointed in 1936 at a time when the terms, "syphilis" or "gonorrhoea" could not be used in the newspapers or on the radio (3). An advocate for VD programs, Parran would start a controversial public discussion about this taboo subject.

One of Burney's first assignments in venereal disease was to head a field study in South Carolina to determine the effect of malaria on the serologic test for syphilis (4). This project launched Burney's public health career in venereal diseases, at a time when public fear of syphilis and gonorrhoea was matched by their reluctance to talk openly about it.

Burney's next assignment--Brunswick, Georgia in 1937—had a novel challenge—to establish the first mobile VD clinic in the U.S.—the so called "bad blood wagon"--in three counties in rural Georgia (1, 5). He considered this his most challenging assignment. (6). A few VD control programs had been established for white people in the north, but no such programs existed for the Negroes in the south, whom Jim Crow segregation excluded from other facilities available to whites. Burney organized and led the effort. He even designed the trailer for the mobile clinic and had it outfitted in Richmond, Indiana.

Years later, Burney described the operation of the Georgia VD clinic (1, 5, 7). "We held our clinics usually in the front yard of a church out in the piney woods or next to a turpentine camp. We'd go in, listen to the preacher preach... At the end of his preaching and singing and the collection, he would lead them all and go right out the front door into the trailer, they'd all get blood tests, and they'd come back in." For an incentive, a ticket for a drawing for a pig would be given to those who gave their blood.

Within eighteen months of starting the "bad-blood wagon" mobile clinic, 80 per cent of the colored population of the three counties had been tested and treatment of infected persons begun. Burney was deeply affected by the experience and the people, commenting that, "They made little money, had

few pleasures but were very happy and loving people.” The mobile VD clinic was an early symbol of the PHS’s interest in addressing the major health disparities and needs of poor minorities in the south. Its successes were replicated across the U.S.

The tradition of the Public Health Service at this time was to send commissioned officers to wherever they were most needed. When Burney’s job in Georgia was completed, he was sent to Kansas City for three years to direct all USPHS activities for nine states from North Dakota to Oklahoma. The work was hard and tedious. But there were occasional interesting respites.

For example, Burney was sent to California to assist Twentieth-Century-Fox Studios create a VD movie entitled, “Know for Sure,” (1941) (8, 9), featuring Bob Mitchum and Gene Hersholt. Burney considered it a marvelous movie (1), but, before the film was released, Surgeon General Parran called him and asked that Burney meet with the Monsignor director of the Catholic Legion of Decency. The Monsignor disagreed with showing the movie in theaters, stating that health education on venereal diseases must be done in the home. Burney lost the argument with the Monsignor, and the Surgeon General scrapped the original idea of a national showing. Instead, the film was shown in health departments and small groups. Toward the end of WW II Burney would assist Universal Studios in creating another VD film entitled, “To the People of the United States.” (1944) (1, 8, 10)

Burney returned to Washington, D.C. in 1943 and served as deputy for the Assistant Surgeon General and chief of the Bureau of State Services. These were the war years and Burney was in charge of training all new PHS officers. (11). He also organized the newly created radiological health programs for states—a priority stemming from national concerns about radioactive fallout and nuclear waste (1).

In 1944, the War Shipping Administration detailed Burney to the U.S. Navy, where he traveled in convoys to Italy, Africa, and France investigating measures combat malaria, typhus and VD in Mediterranean ports (4, 12). On return to the States, Burney was sent to New Orleans as director of the Public Health Service’s fourth district that included Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, and South Carolina. He was made full colonel at the age of 38. Burney’s star as a career officer in the PHS was indeed rising (11). After only six months in New Orleans, the call came for transfer to Indiana—beginning one of the most rewarding phases of Burney’s professional life.

Commissioner, Indiana State Board of Health (1945-1954)

Many PHS Officers were loaned to states to serve as health officers. Indiana was in need of strong public health leadership in 1945. (1). Governor Gates and acting state health commissioner, Dr. Thurman Rice needed a talented leader such as Burney. As a seasoned career officer in the PHS, Burney seemed up to the challenges of Indiana’s struggling public health programs. (2).

Governor Gates formally requested the transfer of Burney to Indiana; Surgeon General Parran approved it, and Burney became Indiana’s ninth health commissioner. Additional duties at the medical school included teaching and strengthening the Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health. (3). Burney actively supported the medical school and was a major supporter of the medical center’s unsuccessful effort to start a school of public health. (4). President Herman B. Wells approved Burney’s appointment at a starting salary of \$3,000 a year, paid by a gift from Eli Lilly & Company (5).

From July, 1945 to August, 1954, Burney, worked closely with three Governors—Gates, a Republican, Schricker, a Democrat, and George Craig, a Republican. During Burney’s tenure state appropriations for the Board of Health quadrupled (6). Burney described Governors Gates and

Schricker as statesmen and shrewd politicians. Most of the legislation Burney drafted was passed during these years, including a monumental codification of all Indiana public health laws since 1881. (1,3,7). Gates saw public health as “good politics” and befriended Burney. Of nine bills Burney sent to Gates only one was not passed—a cigarette tax to support the local health departments. This was an ironic footnote to history in light of the remarkable national reforms in tobacco control that would be initiated in the next phase of Burney’s career. Burney also worked closely with Governor Schricker and respected his quiet yet shrewd demeanor. Burney commented that Schricker “was a more quiet person (than Gates), not quite as much of an extrovert, but a very solid, Christian man, with a charming wife” (8).

A gifted health educator and administrator, Burney would excel in delivering public health programs and communicating their importance to politicians, practitioners, the public, and press (1). Burney recalled with fondness the support given him by Maurice Early, whose column, *The Day in Indiana*, in the Indianapolis Star, often highlighted important public health measures (7). Burney reached the Indiana farming communities through a popular series of articles that appeared monthly for two years in the Farm Bureau’s *Hoosier Farmer* magazine (8).

Burney needed support as he grappled with a myriad of public health issues. He was fortunate to have allies in the State Chamber of Commerce, the medical society universities, the IU School of Medicine, Farm Bureau and Purdue Agriculture Extension Service, and local health departments. Burney’s engaging personality was a magnet for support. Today, prominent Hoosiers who knew Burney described him as a friendly, kind and engaging man—a visionary and pioneer—a person who was well-respected and able to work things out. (11 & 12). Herman B. Wells was fond of Burney and their friendship would be expressed in numerous letters between Burney and Wells for many years (13).

The issues Burney tackled included, chronic diseases of aging, enforcement of pasteurization of milk, dental health, water pollution, venereal diseases, industrial hygiene, fluoridation of water, licensing of hospitals, and immunization for the dreaded poliomyelitis (1).

Indiana lacked staff and facilities to serve the post--WW II public health needs. Burney secured the support and the funding to construct a new two million dollar building for the State Board of Health on the western edge of the School of Medicine campus. Indiana would become the first state in the U.S. to accomplish a physical and working relationship between an academic health center and a state health agency (1,3, 14). Burney described his major accomplishments during his tenure in Indiana, not in terms of new programs, but in terms of increased public appreciation for and support of the activities of the State Board of Health. The new Board of Health facility was an important and visible symbol of growing public interest in preventive medicine.

To bring public health to the people, Burney established five branch offices, the first at Columbus in January 1946. These offices cooperated with other community public health resources, including the Purdue Agricultural Extension offices (3). Under Burney’s diplomatic leadership, the branch offices worked to establish local health departments and break down the long-standing animosity between physicians and health districts (15). Citizen involvement in public health at the community level was a priority of Burney -- a strategy that would gain national recognition (1).

During his last year as state health commissioner, Burney directed the Indiana field trials of the Salk polio vaccine (1, 16, 17, 18) and completed the first systematic survey of nursing homes in Indiana. Many of the issues Burney dealt with in Indiana, including polio and aging would be would become agenda items during his next career as U.S. Surgeon General. Burney’s highly successful and nationally

recognized leadership in Indiana prepared him well to step onto the national and international stage of public health.

Under a newly elected Governor Craig, Burney would have some setbacks, ⁽¹⁾ but with diplomatic aplomb, he carried on with the effective programs he had shaped over nine years until he was recalled to Washington, D.C. The last several months of his tenure were distressing but his mood was about to lift.

United States Surgeon General, 1957-1961

In August 1954, Dr. Leonard A. Scheele, U.S. Surgeon General ⁽¹⁾ and a Fort Wayne, Indiana native, recalled Burney to Washington, D.C. and appointed him Assistant Surgeon General. Burney was responsible for all Federal grants-in-aid that were allocated to the states on a matching basis to promote public health.

Within two years Scheele retired for health reasons. Burney didn't realize he was being considered for Scheele's replacement until Secretary Folsom called him in and told him he was interested in someone who had experience in state government and who was interested in putting research to work ⁽²⁾. Burney later commented on the two ideas that he took to Folsom: first, the need to complement the growth in research with application of research to community health services and second, the need to focus on environmental health ⁽³⁾. Burney heard nothing for a while and then received a call from the White House confirming that he was to be appointed Surgeon General by President Eisenhower. Burney learned later that Secretary Folsom had asked each of his under secretaries to put the names of individuals best qualified for Surgeon General on a piece of paper and give it to him in an envelope. Only Burney's name was on all the lists. Burney's nomination had strong support from Indiana ^(4, 5, 6, 7). Indiana University President Wells wrote Secretary Folsom, commenting that, "His (Burney's) appointment to this position would be greeted with hearty and enthusiastic approval in the State of Indiana and, I am sure, throughout the country ^(4, 5). Purdue University President Hovde sent a similar letter ⁽⁶⁾. Verne K. Harvey, Sr., a former commissioner of health in Indiana (1933-40) had moved to Washington as Medical Director U.S. Civil Service Commission (1940-57) and was likely involved behind the scenes in lobbying Charles Halleck and Senator Capehart—both of whom promoted Burney's nomination. ⁽⁷⁾

President Eisenhower named Burney Surgeon General in a Recess Appointment on August 8, 1956. In his Senate Nomination Hearing (January 28, 1957), the Committee asked no questions of Burney, and on January 30, 1957, the Senate unanimously confirmed his appointment as the eighth Surgeon General of the United States ^(8, 9). At age 50 yrs., Burney had assumed the position that his early mentor and former Surgeon General Thomas Parran had called "the most important public health position in the world" ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The Press responded favorably to Burney's appointment ⁽¹¹⁾. Time Magazine said: "Burney surprised Washington by his appointment (ahead of other leading contenders) to boss the Government's vast health organization (annual budget: \$400 million)" ⁽¹²⁾. Bess Furman of the New York Times featured Burney in a front-page article ⁽¹³⁾. Another reporter described Burney's physical appearance, "on the slim side. He is 5 feet 10 inches tall. He has dark brown hair with a sprinkle of gray. He wears glasses only for close work. Today he wore a dark gray summer suit with an appropriate tie, diagonally striped in black, light gray and red" ⁽¹⁴⁾. An Indianapolis Star reporter added to these descriptions, "an exceedingly youthful-looking man of 50...an easy, graceful manner...his voice is soft and soothing, his eyes sparkle with interest...and he has a delightful smile. He has an easy dignity...appears easy going, but nobody pushes him around" ⁽⁴⁾. Burney's appointment seemed right. As reporter and author Furman said, "Dr. Burney's entire past life had fitted him for thinking of the country as a whole—its little towns as well as its big cities, its problems of air and water pollution

as well as the conquest of specific diseases through intense medical research, and even its seamen still subject to venereal diseases” (3).

Burney’s first challenges were the polio epidemic and the threat of the Asian Flu. His office received a report from the Army Medical Research Laboratory in Tokyo of epidemic influenza in China. Burney quickly convened experts who concluded that an influenza pandemic was likely and vaccine was needed immediately. Years later, Burney reflected on this crisis: “...in less than an hour’s time, I called Gene Beasley, the president of Eli Lilly. I called the presidents...in four other major pharmaceutical companies, and said, “...We want to get some vaccine...We’d like you to make the vaccine, but with the definite understanding that the U.S. Government may not buy the vaccine through their pharmaceutical outlets...Every one of them, ..., said, “We will go ahead and do it.” Burney concluded, “You couldn’t do that today of course; you’ve got the malpractice and some of the other things that complicate matters these days. I know I did it in less than an hour’s time” (2). Less than six months after receiving notice of the looming pandemic, vaccine was being administered in the U.S. before the outbreak had reached the States. Burney remembered that in the post-WW I flu epidemic, when he was only 12-years old, he wore a smelly asafetida bag around his heck to ward off the flu (14). As Surgeon General almost forty years later, Burney replaced the mysticism of the asafetida bag with the science of flu vaccine and thousands of lives were saved.

Many but not all tragedies of deaths from flu were prevented (16, 17). Despite this remarkable success there were critics of U.S. public health policies. In a letter in the Eisenhower Library Archives addressed to the President, Leroy Burney was taken to task in a citizen complaint for his comments published in Reader’s Digest regarding the usually benign nature of influenza (16). The author of the letter accused Dr. Burney of practicing medicine and blamed him for the death of his daughter (17).

The polio epidemic was still a major problem when Burney took office. His predecessor, Leonard Scheele and Secretary of HEW Oveta Hobby had announced to the public the availability of the Salk polio vaccine on April 12, 1955, the tenth anniversary of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s death from complications of polio. Scheele was faced with major vaccine supply problems that created public furor, headlines, and headaches for Scheele, Hobby, and President Eisenhower (2, 18). This problem was largely resolved when Burney assumed office and during his tenure the number of cases of polio in the U.S. decreased more than 80% (19). Near the end of his term, Burney approved the controversial oral Sabin vaccine (3). Today, the modern versions of the Salk and Sabin vaccines are used in the world- wide effort to eradicate polio.

Burney was proud of his ability to quickly respond to public health crises. He recalled that after only two weeks on the job, the President called. He had the Minister of a Central American country in his office who wanted 50,000 cc of polio vaccine. The President said to Burney, “General, I want you to send the vaccine.” Burney replied, “Yes sir.” That afternoon Burney called Gene Beasley from Eli Lilly and asked him if he could provide vaccine. Beasley said, “yes,” and the vaccine was flown to Panama that day (1).

Burney was adroit in managing crises such as Asian Flu and polio. He could reconcile conflicting demands of government, the private sector, professional and advocacy groups and the public. He was a visionary leader with consummate administrative skills, which earned wide and lasting respect (20). Here are a few of Burney’s accomplishments as Surgeon General, appropriately amplified or muted by historians who have more than forty years perspective on the events of the late 1950s.

With the polio and flu epidemics under control Burney focused on chronic diseases of aging, environmental health, biomedical research, health professions education, and international health. In

each of these areas, he was able to create reforms that would shape future health policy under Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

While in Indiana, Burney addressed the emerging problems of aging and chronic diseases. As Surgeon General, he promoted reforms to improve access of the elderly to care, and he supported research into chronic diseases. He advocated removing arbitrary restrictions on employment of persons because of older age (21, 22). And Burney was involved in formulation of the Kerr-Mills Act of 1960, which provided government financing of health services for needy elderly citizens---a prelude to the Medicare and Medicaid programs of the mid-1960s.

Burney expanded programs in environmental health; he convened the first national conferences on air and water pollution in the nation's history (2). He raised the discussion of environmental health to the national stage at a time when advocacy group, conservationists, and scientists were demanding action in Washington, D.C. Always the pragmatist, Burney searched for a balance between the risks of environmental degradation and business development. Referring to wastes of industry, he said, "Our goal is not conquest but containment. What must be sought is a balance, which permits maximum development at minimum hazard. We must continuously monitor the environment to determine where potential hazards exist, and in what concentrations (2). Burney developed a close relationship with Congressman John E. Fogarty, (D) RI, who helped move Burney's environmental health agenda into legislative action (2, 3, 23,24,25).

Besides air and water pollution, radiologic health was a Burney priority. As Indiana health commissioner, Burney anticipated the hazards of what he called, "Atomic Garbage" (26). He created the nation's first education and training programs in management of atomic radiation amid international concern over nuclear fallout from atomic bomb testing, radioactive waste from medical use and from nuclear power plants. (2). The first nuclear power plant in the U.S. was opened at Shippingport, PA during Burney's first year in office.

Burney also focused on education of health professionals. The burgeoning post-WW II health science establishment of the 1950s was outstripping the means to translate discovery into medical and public health practice. New vaccines, antibiotics, and other discoveries raised the promise of healthier lives, if there were a sufficient number of clinicians to put research into practice. Burney was interested in this problem. He organized and conducted landmark reports on medical education (20). In 1958, Burney convening a "blue ribbon" commission to address the question, "How shall the nation be supplied with adequate numbers of well-qualified physicians?" (27). The Bane Commission reported after a year's study, that there was a major shortage of doctors nationwide and that teaching institutions would have to train an additional 3,600 physicians annually to overcome the national shortage. Burney became one of the first public health leaders in the post-WW II era to address the role of universities in the health of communities and the adequacy of qualified health professionals in the U. S. (20, 27, 28, 29).

Another Burney priority was translating research into practice. Burney's personal research training was limited, but he was highly effective in developing legislative support for the emerging National Institutes of Health. When Burney came to office in 1956, the NIH budget was \$80 million; when he left office it was a billion (2). His office also provided major funding for the construction and expansion of university medical research laboratories in the 1950s (9). Two remarkable education and research legacies of Burney were the National Library of Medicine and the Center for Health Statistics, both world class resources for scientists, educators, policy makers, and clinicians. Burney was "the Surgeon General who approved the modernistic design of the National Library of Medicine" (3). Five long-range public health studies regarding education and research, each resulting in

important reports, were conducted during Burney's term of office. These reports would have lasting effects and shape public health policy for years to come (3).

Burney developed a passion for international health. He understood the global nature of health and became a prominent spokesman for collaboration among nations to improve health in developing countries. In March 1957, at the height of the cold war, Burney approved the funding of Excerpta Medica Foundation for the translation into English and publication of abstracts of Soviet scientific literature (9). President Eisenhower named Burney chairman of the U.S. delegation to the tenth World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. Burney was elected President of the Assembly providing him an international stage for addressing global health challenges—malaria, tuberculosis, typhus, and cholera. Burney emphasized the critical need for more research in public health practice and education of public health professionals (28, 29). He urged public participation and stated, “Man's reach must exceed his grasp.” And he stressed the important role of the universities and research centers in addressing the health needs of communities (30). At a testimonial luncheon given for Burney in July 1958, President Eisenhower sent this message: “Doctor Burney...added new luster not only to himself, but to the cause of public health in America and throughout the world in guiding the World Health Assembly...Doctor Burney works---and works well---in the noblest cause of all: the relief of human suffering” (15).

These many achievements in environmental health, chronic disease, aging, education and research, and international health are often not mentioned in descriptions of Leroy Burney's legacy in public health. Instead, it is his public announcement in 1957 of the causal link between smoking and lung cancer that is cited as his lasting legacy. And what a legacy that has been.

Burney made the following statement at a nationally televised press conference on Friday, July 12, 1957, “The Public Health Service feels the weight of the evidence is increasingly pointing in one direction; that excessive smoking is one of the causative factors in lung cancer” (31). The next day—Saturday—the New York Times ran a lengthy front-page article by reporter Bess Furman, entitled: “U.S. Links Cancer with Cigarettes. Health Service Cites Data—Industry Group Contends Proof is Still Lacking” (32). Immediately following the press conference, Burney sent copies of his statement to all state superintendents of education for inclusion in their health education programs; copies were provided to all state medical societies so that physicians might provide informed advice to their patients (2). Burney said later that, “I suppose, looking back at it with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been better to have made it (education program) a National program” (3).

Reflecting on these momentous events years later, Burney said, “It is interesting to note that when I discussed my plans and the supporting data with Secretary Folsom, his response was that it was my decision to make. All he and the White House wanted was a copy of my press release. Burney added, “What a contrast with the last 25 years.”

Eight days after Burney's announcement, John A. Blatnik, (D), MN, held one of the most remarkable public health Hearings in U.S. history (33, 34). Blatnik chaired the House Committee on False and Misleading Advertising regarding filter-tip cigarettes. Burney said there was no evidence that filtered cigarettes decreased the risk of lung cancer. In remarkably farsighted testimony, he discussed the need for research into how to modify tobacco to remove harmful substances. Chairman Blatnik raised questions regarding the role of government in preventing false and misleading advertising that encourage the use of unproven filter-tip cigarettes. The Hearings electrified a public that had been worrying about smoking and cancer.

Two years later, on November 28, 1959, Burney published an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (35) in which he referred to his 1957 statement and reiterated the belief of the

Public Health Service that: “The weight of evidence at present implicates smoking as the principal factor in the increased incidence of lung cancer,” and that: “Cigarette smoking particularly is associated with an increased chance of developing lung cancer.” Again, Burney’s paper received international reviews. In a New York Times front-page article entitled, “Cigarette Filter Held Ineffective,” Burney was quoted, “Filter-tip cigarettes have not proved effective in materially reducing the hazard of lung cancer in smokers.” The Tobacco Institute attacked Burney’s “extreme and unwarranted conclusions” (36, 37). The AMA and some prominent scientists disputed the report (38, 39).

Burney’s public statements would spur the U.S. government into action, but it would be Burney’s successor, Luther Terry, who would convene an Advisory Committee to review the evidence regarding the relationship between tobacco and disease. In 1964, the famous report of the U.S. Surgeon General regarding Smoking and Health was released on January 11---a Saturday—to 2000 members of the press crammed into the auditorium of the State Department (40, 41). The report stunned the public and Congress. Burney had started one of the most contentious and protracted arguments in U.S. history, involving all branches of government, health professionals, public health, the public, and, of course, the tobacco industry. Remarkably, more than forty years after Leroy Burney’s landmark public statements, on September 22, 1999, the U.S. Attorney General’s Office announced the basis of the Justice Department’s suit against the tobacco industry, alleging decades of fraudulent business practice. And on March 18, 2003, the Department of Justice disclosed in 1400 pages of court documents that it was seeking \$289 billion in damages from U.S. cigarette manufacturers for allegedly running what amounts to a criminal enterprise (42, 43).

John F. Kennedy became President on January 20, 1961, and in deference to the new President, Burney left office ---with much satisfaction but some regret. He later rationalized his leaving as being “the best thing in the world for me, because I would have had difficulty with Ribicoff...(and) ...with Wilbur Cohen, because admittedly, I’m a moderate and not a social activist” (2).

Burney attributed his successes as Surgeon General to several factors: 1. It was peacetime and the budget for the PHS was ample; 2. He had a good Secretary of HEW; 3. Congress was friendly with Ike, and Burney had good working relations with the President and policy-makers. Burney met several times with President Eisenhower, including one meeting where he briefed the President and Cabinet on air pollution—something that Burney thought had not been done either before or after the meeting (2). In another meeting with the President, Burney was given five minutes to introduce the Director General of W.H.O. to the President; they began talking about nutrition and spent almost an hour with Eisenhower.

Burney was also proud of his social interactions with the President and Mamie. He recalled that he and Mrs. Burney were always invited to White House parties. Burney remembered that on one occasion the President drank a toast to Mrs. Burney. She urged her husband to ask the President if they could take the glass home as a souvenir. Dr. Burney, commented years later, “Well, I didn’t have the nerve to do that!” (2).

Temple University, 1961-1970

As Burney left the Surgeon General’s Office, he could look back with pride on a remarkable thirty-one career of service to the country and the PHS. But he was looking to the future not the past. He received numerous offers for positions, including a position at Indiana University (1, 2). He chose Temple University and from 1961-1970 served as Vice President of a newly created Health Sciences Center. (3).

Burney faced a new set of challenges that were affecting major academic health centers. He brought his remarkable administrative experience and leadership to the position and over nine years left a legacy that would reorient Temple University to the realities of dramatic change in the scope and mission of health professions' schools of the 1970s and beyond.

Temple's aim was to improve relationships within the university and between the university and the community of Philadelphia. Burney was chosen to perform this administrative revolution. (4) Temple University and Philadelphia in the 1960s existed in a cauldron of social, political, economic, and racial discord. A collapsing economy and severe poverty in the areas surrounding the university, provided rationale for a vision of the university as an agent for social and economic change. Temple President Gladfelter and Burney were fond of saying that, Temple would no longer be merely in North Philadelphia, they would be of North Philadelphia. They sought to "revolutionize" the health care systems—to reverse the dehumanizing face of fragmented and impersonal health services. They had successes and failures in their efforts. Through it all, Burney would leave his mark as a visionary with a social conscience—an idealist who saw the university as an agent of social change. (5).

Milbank Memorial Foundation, 1970-1977

Burney's retirement from Temple in 1970 was the beginning of his third career that would take him to the leadership of the Milbank Memorial Fund in New York City, an endowed national foundation that, since its origin in 1905, has engaged in nonpartisan analysis, research, and communication on issues in health policy. (1) Burney was appointed as the fifth Executive Director of the Fund on September 1, 1970. He became President on January 1, 1971.

Burney's major focus would be health professions' education and international health. He established a Commission for the Study of Higher Education for Public Health. Burney became president of the board of the National Commission for the Study of Nursing Education. He also served on President Nixon's Committee on Health Education, created in 1971 to focus on health consumerism. (2).

While at the Milbank Fund, Burney would be brought into a highly contentious dialogue regarding the future of the Public Health Service, specifically the fate of the Commissioned Corps, which during the 1960s was beset by political, organizational, and morale problems. (3) Burney had previously fought hard when he was Surgeon General to save the PHS hospitals that threatened with closing and was familiar with the politics (4).

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare requested a review and report of the future of the Public Health Service. The Perkins Report recommended the elimination of the Commissioned Corps. In an impassioned, articulate, and reasoned three and one-half page letter to Elliot L. Richardson, Secretary, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Burney laid out his criticisms of the report's conclusions. Burney reflected his "consternation in observing the liquidation of the Service during the last eight or nine years..." (5). He continued, "It seems to me profoundly ill-advised to reach a series of conclusions when none of the diagnostic acumen necessary to an understanding of the process of pathology has been brought to bear on the problem."

The Perkins Committee's recommendations for eliminating the Commissioned Corps were not implemented. There is little doubt that Leroy Burney's strong opposition to the Report, given his stature as one of America's esteemed public health leaders, contributed to this outcome. Burney would live to see other attempts—some successful—to weaken the PHS and the role of the Surgeon General. Today, however, the PHS Commissioned Corps remains one of the seven Uniformed Services of the United States with 6,000 officers under the leadership of the Surgeon General (5)

Burney retired from the Milbank Fund on December 31, 1977. Reflecting on the Fund's accomplishments during his tenure, Burney cited the East African program that, "not only served the vital purpose of promoting medical education, public health, and preventive medicine in that part of the world but brought back to this country outstanding young Americans professionally enriched by their experience there" (6).

On May 14, 1991, after thirty-four years of service, Burney retired from the Board of Directors. But, in a Board Resolution for Burney, Samuel L. Milbank stated that the Fund would "look forward to your continuing future participation in the affairs of the Fund as a member of the Corporation." At the age of 85 yrs, Dr. Burney remained an admired and valuable resource for the Milbank Fund.

Awards and Honors

Burney received numerous awards and always accepted them with humility and some embarrassment—often stating that he was receiving awards for the good work of others.

Burney was honored at a testimonial luncheon at the Mayflower Hotel by the Secretary of H.E.W (Marion Folsom), the president of the American Medical Association (Dr. Gunnar Gunderson, and Sens. Hubert Humphrey (D. Minn), Lister Hill (D. Ala) and Homer Capehart (R. Ind). Burney's accomplishments in public health were praised. President Eisenhower's personal physician (Maj. Gen. Howard MacSnyder and Dr. Paul Dudley White, who cared for Eisenhower when the President had a heart attack were in attendance) (1).

He received the Indiana Junior Chamber of Commerce while Health Commissioner of Indiana. (2) Burney was awarded ScD honorary degrees from Jefferson Medical College (1957), DePauw University (1958), Indiana University (1959), and Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania (1960). In 1957, he received the LLD from Seton Hall University. Throughout his career Burney was active in the community. He became Elder in the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church and he was active in the Boy Scouts of America. After retiring from the Public Health Service, Burney maintained an active national presence. He was named President of the National Commission on Nursing and Nursing Education in 1970 and was appointed member of the President's Committee on Health Education in 1972. (3)

At the Annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, November 17, 1975, Burney was awarded the highest honor bestowed by APHA, the Sedgwick Memorial Medal. The letter informing Burney of the award stated, "Certainly your innovative leadership and pioneering efforts have helped shape many of our health services today; you have and continue to elicit the deepest respect from us all" (4). Ira V. Hiscock, ScD chaired the Sedgwick selection committee and stated, "This friendly, forceful, diplomatic, modest gentleman with a fine sense of humor, is a statesman of Burney, Indiana, with many meritorious achievements and decorations. ...The American Public Health Association honors itself by presenting this award for Distinguished Service to Dr. Burney."

In bibliographic material received by the Sedgwick Award Committee, Burney included a brief three-page review of his most significant "program areas initiated or expanded by the Public Health Service during the years of 1956-61 while he was Surgeon General (5). The three areas Burney listed were 1. Need for research and development in the application of knowledge in health services; 2. Environmental Health; 3. International Health. On a separate page entitled, "Other Significant Events," Burney made two entries: his 1957 "official position of the Public Health Service that "excessive and prolonged cigarette smoking is a causative factor in lung cancer" and "Initiative and leadership of Public Health Service in public health action to prepare, ahead of time, for the 1957 Asian Influenza epidemic.

Epilogue

On July 15, 1999, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health held the First Annual Dr. Leroy Burney Lecture. Two former Surgeons General, Antonio Novello and Julius Richmond reflected on an earlier gathering of all Surgeons General in April 1998, just four months before Burney's death ⁽¹⁾. Novello described 91 year old Burney as "the oldest yet sprightliest of the Surgeons General in attendance. Dean Sommer noticed Burney was fidgeting in his seat and asked Burney if he needed to use the restroom. Burney said, "No." Ask that moderator (Marvin Kalb) to call on me again, I have things to say."

At the Johns Hopkins Burney Lectureship 15 months later, Julius Richmond reflected on Burney's life and roots—a Midwesterner, a "man of mid-continent and the mid-century." A man with "consummate diplomatic skills whose time and influence extended over the period of the scientific revolution and the establishment of academic health institutions." A man who "quietly supported his colleagues and cultivated the leadership in Congress." A "man who taught us many things—most of all about leadership—that it doesn't need to be loud and brassy." ⁽¹⁾ Richmond concluded: Leroy Burney's "combination of high intelligence, sound knowledge, quiet courage, generosity, and strategic thinking helped shape the nation's health agenda for many decades. He leaves us a very important legacy."

What were the sparks that "lit the fire" and kept the "flames" of leadership and creativity burning throughout the life of this preeminent Hoosier? —loving parents of an only child with promise—a country doctor whose words would revolve round the mind of a youngster as the buggy wheels propelled them to a country home with its mysteries of suffering and hope---or perhaps an engaging Irishman in proper uniform. Once lit the flames would burn brightly for almost a century before they flickered out on July 31, 1998 ^(2, 3).

Burney's grave in Crown Hill Cemetery faces West. Close by are the graves of other prominent Hoosiers: Senator Capehart, who helped Burney's star ascend and called Burney "a true son of Hoosier soil." ⁽⁴⁾ And, in a remarkable twist of fate, Burney, who launched the ship of tobacco control worldwide, would come to rest near Thomas R. Marshall, the 28th Vice President of the United States from Indiana, who, during a Senate debate in 1917, blurted out one of the most famous quotes in history, "What this country needs is a good five-cent cigar" ⁽⁵⁾.

If by purpose or chance, you venture onto the back roads of southeastern Indiana, out near Clifty and Middlefork Creeks, near the intersection of county roads 850 West and 100 South, about three quarters of a mile south of the Pumphrey Cemetery, stop beside the road a few moments and reflect on the place and the person, Burney's Burney.