

DO YOU REMEMBER.....

Dr. Frederic J. Hofschneider, DDS: A RENAISSANCE MAN

A renaissance man is someone who has broad intellectual interests and is accomplished in areas of both the arts and sciences.

Frederic Hofschneider was born in 1893 and was a lifelong Rochesterian. He attended dental school at the University of Buffalo and received his diploma in 1914. In addition to his degree work, he wrote the U of B Fight Song, played piano professionally, orchestrated, arranged, and directed a number of plays, and was both an artist and an avid inventor.

Dr. Hofschneider married Catherine M. Vetter in 1916 and opened an office at the 848 Jay Street family home where he provided treatment seven days a week. Patients often paid for their care with produce from their farms or bread, pies, and cakes from their ovens.

His practice was an active one and he was always looking for ways to improve on the equipment and techniques used in the dental profession. Throughout his practice, he was instrumental in the early construction and refinement of the porcelain-jacket crown. He also developed the first non-backwash hypodermic syringe that eliminated Novocain-caused dermatitis which plagued early dentists.

In 1923, Dr. Hofschneider was awarded a patent for the Oratundra, which turned out to be an important dental invention that is still in use today. The name was changed to the Hofschneider Automatic Dental Lubricator, and promotional literature said it insured a steady flow of cool liquid, either water or an antiseptic solution, to the point of operation. The lubricator was used at the Dental Dispensary and over 100 pieces of the equipment were purchased for the education and use by graduating dentists in Switzerland.

The brochure went on to say that the equipment was finished in mahogany, black, and ivory enamel and was priced at \$25.00. The brochure listed parts and repair prices including \$1.00 for tubes and guards, 1.50 for long and short hand pieces, and \$.25 for resoldering clips.

Dr. Hofschneider was a member of the Dental Dispensary faculty from 1914-1930 and spent a portion of his time instructing residents on the use of the Oratundra. Dr. Dennis Leverett, a dispensary colleague who served as acting director from 1992-1994, remarked that he would always think of Fred Hofschneider as a “pioneer in the alleviation of dental pain.”

Unfortunately, Dr. Hofschneider’s life and career were drastically changed by several major occurrences. He experienced an injury to his right hand in 1930 and was unable to practice for 18 months. In 1932, his professional career ended when he suffered a massive and debilitating stroke that caused the paralysis of his entire right side including his speech. “People suffering paralysis in those days didn’t have the miracles of modern medicine or therapy, so they usually experienced a steady decline in their abilities,” said his daughter, Kathryn M. Schroth, the youngest of the five Hofschneider children. “However, my dad was strong and never lost hope that he would practice again.”

The Lubricator patent was later picked up by the Ritter Dental Company and a form of the equipment can be found in most dental offices today. Whether a dentist uses a drill or a laser, both water and air cool the tooth and clean the surface during removal of decay and bacteria. This procedure is done almost 170 million times a year.

Dr. Hofschneider always wanted to go back to his practice but it was up to his wife, and children to financially care for the family. Throughout the ensuing years, he struggled to regain all his faculties. “Often, he would ask... work again, me..? We’d tell him, maybe, dad, maybe,” said Mrs. Schroth. “He insisted that my mother keep his license updated just in case that miracle happened.”

Dr. Hofschneider died in 1950. “I was only 18 months old when my dad was stricken and so I never had the opportunity of having him as my dentist,” said Mrs. Schroth. “However, every time I visit my dentist, I’m reminded of how much my father cared about his patients and how that caring has touched so many people over the past 83 years.”

If you would like to recognize someone who has made contributions to Dentistry at the University of Rochester, please contact constance_truesdale@urmc.rochester.edu or call 585-275-5064.