New Donaldsonville Hospital to Be Named for Dr. Prevost

French Physician Made Medical History

By CLAIRE PUNERY

DONALDSONVILLE, La. — It was in the 1820s that Donaldsonville, in a quiet and unobtrusive way, received a dramatic distinction in medical history that would forever go unnoticed and that even today is not fully realized within and outside of this community.

Here a French doctor performed the second successful Caesarean section in the United States and the first in Louisiana. He was Dr. Francois Marie Prevost.

Because of his achievement in what was then a new and tiny settlement of a city, local recognition is about to come to him as the now-growing community stands on the verge of a mighty industrial development.

A new hospital under construction along Bayou Lafourche in a recently-incorporated area is to be named for this man, whose work was first brought to light by a famed Philadelphia obstetrician who came across reference to Prevost while doing research for a history of his specialty that he planned to write. Dr. Rudolph Matas of New Orleans later did extensive research into Prevost’s work.

The West Ascension Hospital Service District board of commissioners, headed by Dr. Earl A. Schexnayder, decided that the $750,000 hospital should be named for this great man.

The first successful Caesarean section in the United States had been performed on Jan. 14, 1794, in Virginia by Dr. Jesse Bennett of Rockingham County, on his wife.

Dr. Prevost, whose claim to fame came in 1822, was born in 1771 in southern France, son of Jean Pierre Prevost and Marie Ann Kentaire Prevost, natives of Marbelveau. He studied in Paris at a time when the Caesarean section was under great discussion.

On graduation from the Ecoles de Medicine he gained the title of Officer de Medicine, which permitted teaching and practicing of both medicine and surgery, something not possible before the French Revolution.

He first practiced at Fort de Paix, Haiti, and later married his first wife, Marie Therese Burrochon, Dec. 13, 1799. When insurrection came to that island he and his wife came to Ascension parish.

He found the area sparsely settled, and settled down to the life of a frontier physician, in time becoming a sugar planter. He had noticed that this area was prone to rickets which caused many pelvic deformities.

It was in such an instant, a case resulting from such a deformity, that he successfully delivered a Negro woman by Caesarean section and both she and the child survived. He later performed similar operations.

His wife died in Donaldsonville Feb. 9, 1835. In 1838 he married Victorie Castellan of Donaldsonville, who survived him by five years. He had no children by either marriage, and an adopted son, John Roberson, died in 1850.

On May 16, 1849, at the age of 77, Dr. Prevost died on his plantation a mile below Burrow on the Mississippi River, a site that has long been taken by the great stream. His tomb in the Ascension Catholic Cemetery and a marker in the city are his only memorials here today. The great memorial, the hospital, is on its way to honor him and harbor those who will need medical and surgical help.