

NOTABLE NOTES

Jean Louis-Alibert—Physician, Teacher, Pioneer

Richa Taneja, BS; Eric Laurent Maranda, BS; Omar G Jarrett, BS; Robert Heifetz, BS; Shahjahan Shareef, BS; Joaquin J. Jimenez, MD

Physician Jean Louis-Alibert (1768-1837) rose to prominence during the French Revolution, a time of not only intense political and cultural turmoil, but also of drastic improvements in medicine. In the center of change—Paris, France—Alibert was put in charge of St Louis Hospital, an institution rife with chronic skin disease, a field he regarded as promising for scientific investigation.¹ However, his contributions to the field of medicine extend far beyond the field of dermatology.

During a time when hospital medicine was on the rise, Alibert began to institute changes in his way of practicing that were novel to the field. He followed the evolution of skin disease day by day, and treated patients by investigating their physiognomy and entirety of presenting symptoms, not simply a single lesion or area of skin.¹ This reinforced the concept that skin disease is a part of internal medicine. He was fascinated by the manifestations that skin disease could have on the entire body; however, his true passion was in disseminating this knowledge to his pupils and physician peers.¹

Alibert initially became famous for his interactive teaching, which drew audiences so large that he was forced to move from a lecture hall to the open air. He would describe diseases in a theatrical way, interjecting humor into his lectures and presenting skin diseases as paintings that could be studied pictorially. Alibert's dedication to his patients matched his passion for teaching, as he would generously take sick patients off the street and bring them to his hospital. He once even inoculated himself and 3 of his students with a substance taken from breast cancer, and later herpes and tetters.¹

An established teacher and physician, Alibert subsequently wrote 2 important books on dermatology, for which he is credited with first de-

scribing mycosis fungoides, keloids, cutaneous leishmaniasis, and dermatolysis, terms still commonly used today.² As his prominence and renown grew, King Louis XVIII took notice of Alibert's *Description des maladies de la peau* and appointed him as his personal physician. Later, King Charles X retained Alibert and even granted him title of "Baron."³

Alibert gained the most recognition for his accomplishments in his final years. He recognized that a methodology could be used to classify different dermatological disorders; he classified these manifestations according to their outer appearance, and divided them into what he called families, genera, and species. Although this "Tree of Dermatoses" eventually did not prove to be the most effective or accurate way to classify dermatological diseases, this forward way of thinking allowed Alibert to be recognized as a pioneer of the field and solidified his place in history as one of the founders of modern dermatology.¹

Author Affiliations: Department of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, Florida (Taneja, Maranda, Jarrett, Jimenez); Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, Bradenton, Florida (Heifetz); Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Fort Lauderdale, Florida (Shareef).

Corresponding Author: Eric Laurent Maranda, BS, Department of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, 1475 NW 12th Ave, Miami, FL 33136 (emaranda@med.miami.edu).

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