

# Editorial

## My Boston Family's New Orleans Connection

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Included in a box of my father's effects, which I recently inherited, is a bronze medal inscribed with the image of Léopold Ollier (1830-1900), a pioneer of orthopedic surgery and chief of surgery at l'Hôtel Dieu in Lyon, France (Figure). Dr Ollier helped develop split-thickness skin grafts and techniques for bone resection, and multiple enchondromatosis is also known as Ollier disease. The medal is large and quite lovely, yet I had no idea how it came into the family. Three of my forefathers were surgeons, but none specialized in orthopedics. Which Dr Richardson had been given this treasure? When and why? The answer

to these questions led me to discover more about my family history than the acquisition of a mere piece of metal.

Through multiple searches I found a letter published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1901;144:269) signed by a committee of surgeons requesting donations to a fund for a bronze statue in Dr Ollier's honor to be erected in the center of Lyon. One of the signatories was my great-grandfather, Maurice Howe Richardson (1851-1912), who was a general surgeon at the turn of the last century at Massachusetts General Hospital. I was intrigued to

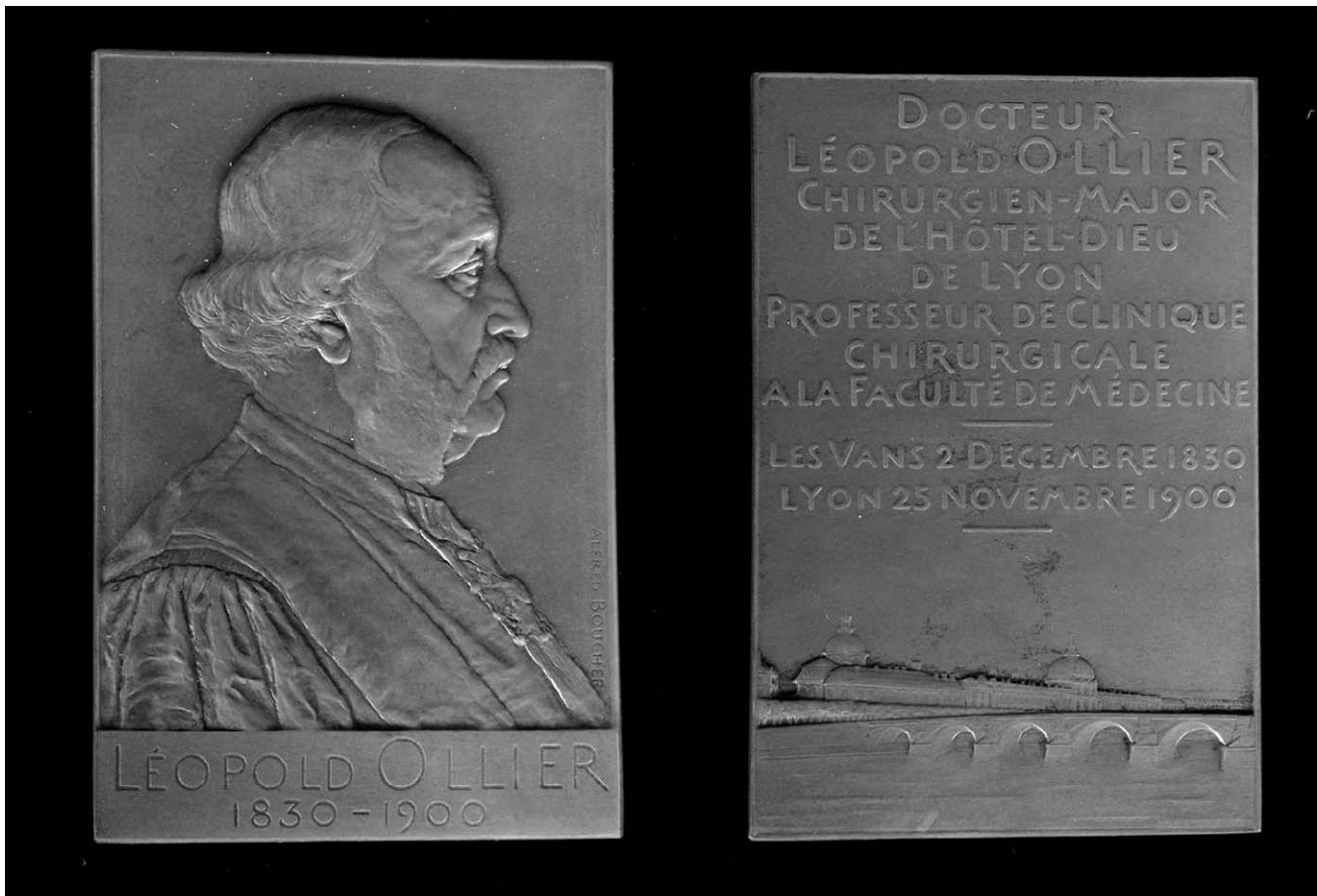


Figure. The Ollier medal.

learn that one of the others to sign this letter was Dr Rudolph Matas (1860-1957) of the Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans.

While searching a historical collection of the Rudolph Matas Health Sciences Library, I came across an image of the exact same medal, confirming my hunch that this was a gift to those who raised money for Dr Ollier's statue. I wondered if my great-grandfather was further connected to Rudolph Matas. Richardson and Matas were both members of the American Surgical Association and likely met through that society. In reviewing the *Transactions of the American Surgical Association* from the meeting in 1897, the year my great-grandfather was vice president of the society, I read that the next meeting was to be organized by Rudolph Matas and held in New Orleans.

I have long believed that I am the only one in my family to have a medical connection to New Orleans. Was it possible that my great-grandfather had traveled here a century before I took up practice in the city? I sought the answer in the transactions of the

American Surgical Association meeting of 1898. There I saw it: "A Case of Apparently Hopeless Infiltration of Left Axilla and Scapula by Round-Cell Sarcoma; Extirpation Attempted and Abandoned; Extensive and Severe Wound Infection followed by Disappearance of the Tumor. By Maurice H. Richardson, M.D." I had found my family's New Orleans connection.

As an aside, this story contains another oblique, although sad, New Orleans connection. The statue of Léopold Ollier that Dr Richardson and Dr Matas worked to fund was melted down by the Nazis for munitions during World War II. This desecration of the art and monuments of Europe and the Allied fight to stop it is the subject of *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* by Robert M. Edsel, who serves as a member of the Board of Trustees for the National WWII Museum in New Orleans. The story of the Monuments Men has been made into a movie, and an exhibit honoring their work is planned at the museum in the future.