

## NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

*Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions*

*By Ned Hémard*

### **Medical Charges**

Or should I say doctors who've dueled?

Francois Charles Delery was born on January 28, 1815, in St. Charles Parish. His ancestors were among the first European settlers in the greater New Orleans area. He left Louisiana for France in 1829 where he was educated in the Medical School of Paris. Returning to the Crescent City in 1842, he became well respected in his profession. He was a regular contributor to the city newspapers on a wide range of practical subjects, and after the epidemic of 1867 he wrote a book with the purpose of destroying the myth of Creole immunity to yellow fever. He served as City Physician in the years leading up to the Civil War and was president of the Board of Health from 1857-1858. He even wrote a one-act comedy.



*Dr. Francois Charles Delery (1815 - 1880)*

With all the characteristics of a Renaissance man, he also had the reputation for being an inveterate practical joker. He devised a plan to present a newly purchased goose heart to cardiologist Joseph Rouanet for his diagnostic appraisal. After taking a "gander" at the specimen, Dr. Rouanet subsequently returned a positive exposition of the heart's pediatric abnormalities. Dr. Delery followed up this result with an essay entitled "The Doctor and the Goose" (which prompted being challenged to a duel). Both doctors fired and missed on the first round. Fortunately honor was satisfied, and no one was hurt. Perhaps they enjoyed some *pâté de foie gras* after tempers subsided.

Another great New Orleans physician could be called "One Gentleman of Verona", for that was where he was born on July 31, 1805. Of Austrian parentage, Karl Aloysius Luzenberg was educated at Landau and at Weissenburg College in Alsace. In 1819, he and his father (who had been a commissary in the Austrian army) arrived in Philadelphia. He attended lectures at Jefferson Medical College in 1825 and came to New Orleans in 1829. On a European visit from 1832-1834, he was made a corresponding member of the Academy of Paris. He continued to perform successfully a multitude of extremely difficult operations.



*Dr. Karl Aloysius Luzenberg (1805 - 1848)*

Dr. Luzenberg was one of the original professors who signed the prospectus creating the Medical College of Louisiana (later Tulane University). He played a vital role (along with Dr. Thomas Hunt, who also fought a duel) in the founding of the college. He served as the school's first Professor of Surgery and succeeded Hunt as Dean in 1835, serving until 1839. In 1843, he founded and presided over the Medico-Chirurgical Society. Dr. Luzenberg founded the Franklin Infirmary in New Orleans and served for many years on the board of

Charity Hospital. He is credited with being the first doctor in North America to prevent the pitting associated with small pox by the exclusion of light.

Still, he did have his detractors. After personal claims of a successful cataract operation, some of his contemporaries commented that "his merits lie within very narrow limits" and that he is "abrupt in speech, uncouth in manners, irritable and petulant in temper, and arrogant and overbearing in his demeanor". To Dr. Luzenberg, these sounded like fighting words. He had handled any number of these previous challenges before, but they were wisely settled short of duels. Some even alleged that he honed his marksmanship on suspended cadavers. Members of the medical society group that made these numerous comments were "called out" by Dr. Luzenberg, but they refused to duel. The Doctor's second challenged one of them himself, and he also declined to fight. For this the cheek-turner was called "a consummate coward and a dastardly poltroon", but to no avail. The whole thing became more and more involved until finally the authorities stepped in to cool things down.



*Third Charity Hospital building, above, built in 1832*

Doctor Thomas Hunt, whom I mentioned earlier, was one of three young physicians who in 1834 founded the Medical College of Louisiana, today's Tulane University School of Medicine. The other two young doctors were Dr. John H. Harrison and Dr. Warren Stone. The school opened in January 1835, and Dr. Hunt delivered the very first lecture. But on Saturday, July 12, 1851, in a fatal duel, Dr. Hunt delivered a ball through the heart Mr. J. W. Frost, one of the editors of the *New Orleans Crescent*.

The circumstances, which led to this fatal outcome, originated at a meeting of the Whigs of the second district of Louisiana for the

selection of a candidate for Congress. After a round of oratory by Mr. Frost, a voice from the crowd rang out, "You are a damned liar." The voice was that of Dr. Hunt. Frost responded that if he had said any thing offensive to the Hunt family, he held himself personally responsible. As a result, Dr. Hunt took him up on that assertion and a challenge to a duel was sent by Dr. Hunt, and accepted by Mr. Frost. Consequently, Mr. Frost was shot dead.

Then there's the story of Dr. Samuel Choppin who was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on October 20, 1828. He and Dr. John Foster were "competing" house surgeons at Charity Hospital in the 1850s. "Competing" doesn't begin to describe how extremely hostile it became between these two combatants. It became intensively competitive indeed.

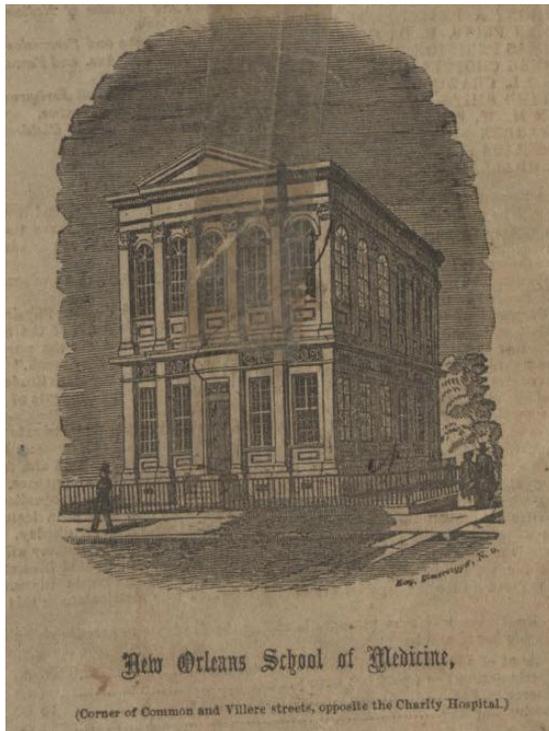


(1828 - 1880)

*Dr. Samuel Paul Choppin, CSA, surgeon-in-chief,  
General P. G. T. Beauregard's staff*

Dr. Choppin and Dr. Foster each claimed to be caring for a wounded law student and, in the process, began tearing up each other's prescriptions. This behavior was followed by fisticuffs bedside with the patient helplessly awaiting attention. Off the fighting physicians went, meeting outside the hospital, to draw their weapons. Two shots rang out. Foster's aim was good, and his first shot severed Dr. Choppin's jugular vein. Choppin's shot grazed his own hand. Then Foster shot through Choppin's thigh. They each missed each other on the third round, after which Choppin pulled out his Bowie knife. Finally some medical students separated the angry surgeons. Dr. Choppin pulled through his ordeal, but the neglected law student died of his wounds.

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse!"



*Located within thirty steps of the Charity Hospital, the New Orleans School of Medicine was founded November 1, 1856, in large part through the efforts of Dr. Erasmus Darwin Fenner. Dr. Samuel P. Choppin, Professor of Surgery, was also on the faculty.*

P. S. An outbreak of cholera in the Crescent City in 1854 motivated Dr. Choppin to attempt a blood transfusion on a man dying of the disease. Two ounces of blood were delivered to the patient via an exposed vein in his arm, and it is believed that air may have been accidentally introduced. Sadly, the patient died.

Eventually transfusions would save lives, the largest number of early successful ones taking place at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary during the years 1885 through 1892. It was not until 1901, however, when the Austrian Karl Landsteiner discovered that there were three distinct human blood groups (O, A, and B), that blood transfusions were performed on a safer and more scientific basis.

Dr. Samuel Choppin, in addition to his medical duties in New Orleans, served as President of the Boston Club.

Dr. Luzenberg's son, Charles Henry Luzenberg (1837 – 1897), and grandson, Chandler Clement Luzenberg (1867 – 1950), instead of following a medical profession, became attorneys. Father and son each served as Orleans Parish District Attorney. A sailing devotee, Chandler C. Luzenberg also served as Commodore of the Southern Yacht Club.

**NED HÉMARD**

New Orleans Nostalgia  
"Medical Charges"  
Ned Hémard  
Copyright 2008 and 2017