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Ramon Guiteras, MD: Surgeon, Statesman, Big-Game Hunter

Bristol native founded the American Urological Association

MARY KORR
RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

Like his Harvard friend and classmate Teddy Roosevelt, Ramon Guiteras, Jr., lived a life of adventure and achievement. Named for his father, a Cuban businessman, Ramon was born in 1858 and grew up in Bristol, his mother Elizabeth Wardwell’s hometown.

He attended Mowry & Goff’s preparatory school in Providence, and studied at Harvard, where he became a winning heavyweight collegiate boxer, much to his friend Teddy’s delight. After a year at the Ivy, Ramon left for Europe to study languages and then travelled to Africa, to caravan for big game. Upon his return, he entered Harvard Medical School and graduated in 1883.

After studying in Europe under notable surgeons, Dr. Guiteras was appointed a surgeon at Charity Hospital on Blackwell’s Island in New York City. He worked there for 18 months and then opened a surgical practice in New York City in 1887. Three months later he caught diphtheria from a patient and went to Cuba to recuperate for six weeks. He spent his time on the Guiteras’ family coffee plantation, and rode horseback across the island. No doubt he had much to discuss with his cousin, Dr. Juan Guiteras, who would later work with Walter Reed in ascertaining the mosquito as the carrier of yellow fever.

When Dr. Guiteras returned to New York, he enjoyed the fellowship of his colleagues, and attended meetings of the N.Y. Genito-Urinary Society, a convivial group who gathered over wine and cheese to discuss the latest advancements in their chosen field. In 1902, the group disbanded and Dr. Guiteras is credited as the founder of the American Urological Association.

At this time, the Rhode Island Medical Society accepted his application to become an honorary member. President of the Latin-American Medical Association, he also served on many U.S. advisory boards. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson sent him to Cuba to assess the country’s sentiment regarding World War I.

He died suddenly, in December 1917, of meningitis, at age 59. His friend, attorney Augustus Bourn, Jr., delivered a memoriam before the Rhode Island
In his will, Dr. Guiteras bequeathed $325,000 for a school, in honor of his mother. The handsome limestone and pale brick building on Hope Street, opposite Bristol Harbor, is a town landmark. He also left $5000 to the Bristol Yacht Club and stipulated it was to be used to “buy catboats and rowboats for the use of guests.”

Dr. Guiteras was inducted into the R.I. Heritage Hall of Fame 2009.

This article on big-game hunting was written by Dr. Ramon Guiteras and published in 1909.