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Contributors

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JOHN RIDLON

H. WINNETT ORR, M.D., F.A.C.S., LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

JOHN RIDLON was born in the township of Clarendon, Rutland County, Vermont, on November 24, 1852. He was one of three boys, but the two others died in infancy. His father, Noel Potter Ridlon, was a farmer who became a dairyman just before the Civil War. His mother was Nancy Bromley Hulett Ridlon, of Pawlet, one of thirteen children. Dr. Ridlon always spoke highly of his Grandmother Ridlon whose husband died at the early age of fifty-five, and who with forty acres of land and about eight hundred dollars in money at interest, raised eight children and five grandchildren.

When John was fourteen his father was killed in a railway accident while driving home from Rutland. The next year he and his mother left the farm for Poultney, Vermont, where he attended a commercial college. Not long afterward they went to Marengo, Illinois, making the trip over the New York Central and Michigan Central railroads before the days of sleepers, diners, or even wash basins on the train. At this time there came an opportunity to sell the Vermont farm which was supposed to contain marble, and John and his mother were left in comfortable possession of about fifteen thousand dollars.

During the next few years Ridlon worked at various times as book salesman, grocery clerk, and helper to a civil engineering corps. His mother remarried. After contracting malaria and losing eighteen pounds in weight, John returned to Vermont to attend the Vermont Central Institute and later Tufts College. Through a miscarriage of college justice, he was expelled from Tufts at the end of his sophomore year and so went to the University of Chicago, graduating in 1875. An early indication of intellectual independence was his class oration on "The Infallibility of the Pope"; its departure from orthodoxy creating a stir in that Baptist institution.

At his various colleges, Ridlon played baseball, taught boxing and fencing, organized a debating club, started a library, and pulled No. 5 on the crew. He also played bass viol in the orchestra and became a member of Theta Delta Chi, Delta Kappa Epsilon, and other college societies. In 1899 he was recalled to Tufts to receive an Honorary M.A. degree, and again in 1926 to be awarded the degree of Sc.B.

In 1875 Ridlon entered the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York with Prof. E. G. Seguin as his preceptor. When he graduated, March 1, 1878, he

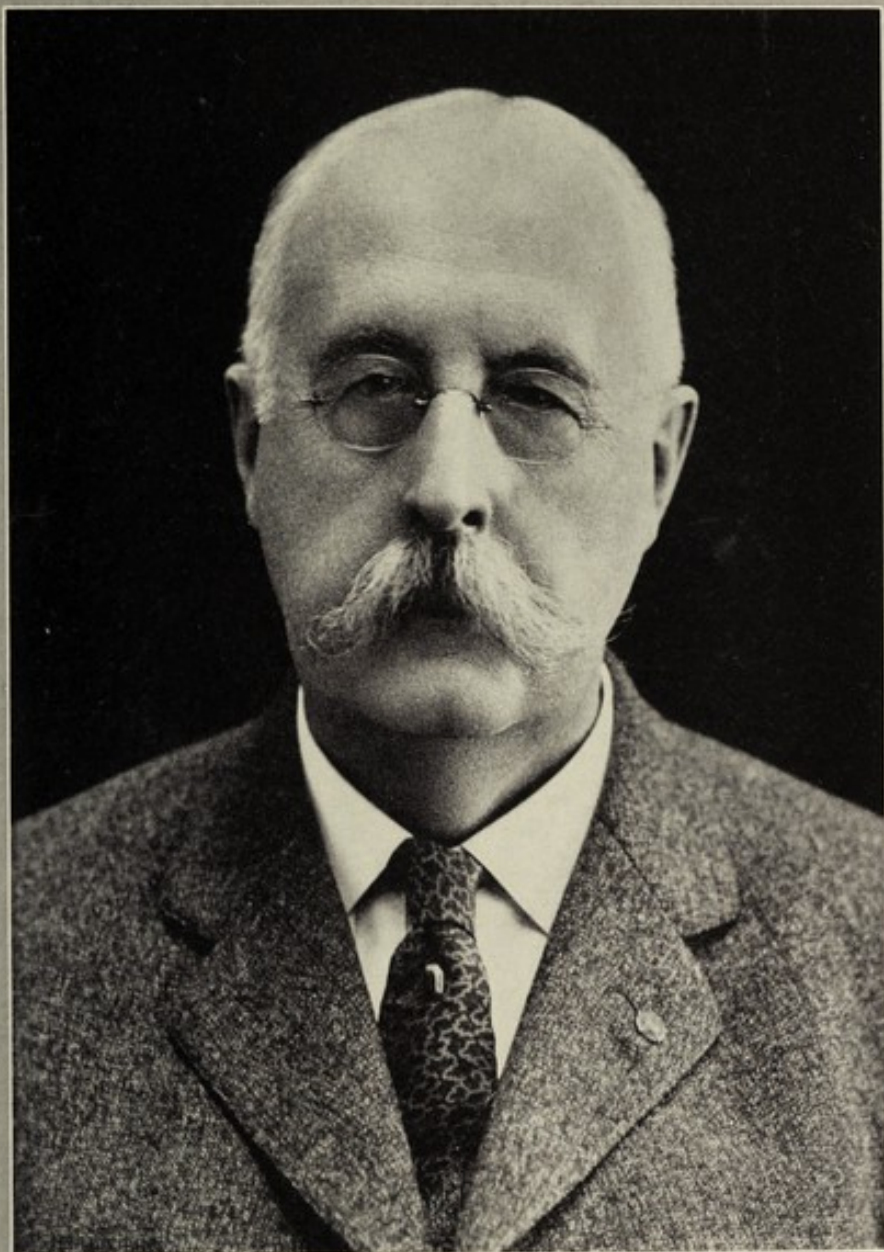
was Class Marshal. He obtained a staff position at St. Luke's Hospital in New York, serving as house officer for two years. On June 4, 1879, he married Emily Caroline Robinson of Newport, Rhode Island. Mrs. Ridlon's father was a sea captain of many years' service. From him they inherited the home at No. 1 Sea View Avenue in Newport where were spent the last years of Dr. Ridlon's life.

Dr. Ridlon left St. Luke's Hospital in 1880 at the time their first child was born. For the next two years he was in general practice at 152nd Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. In 1880 also he received his first orthopedic appointment as assistant to Dr. Newton M. Shaffer at St. Luke's Hospital, going later to the New York Orthopedic Hospital and Dispensary.

Dr. Ridlon was one of the first in America to be attracted to the work of Hugh Owen Thomas in Liverpool. He went to see Thomas' work first hand, and became one of his very few close friends and a lifelong friend and associate of Thomas' nephew and successor, Sir Robert Jones. When Dr. Ridlon visited Mr. Thomas first he expressed skepticism as to the results claimed for the Thomas traction splints in hip, knee, and ankle disease. Mr. Thomas was able to convince him of their utility and efficiency, however, and Dr. Ridlon became and remained the leading American exponent of Thomas' principles of treatment for diseases and injuries of the extremities. Thomas' splints and the principles he taught received world wide recognition during the World War and led to the saving of thousands of lives and limbs.

When Dr. Ridlon returned from Liverpool in 1887 he made and applied at St. Luke's Hospital the first Thomas hip splint ever to be used in this country for tuberculous hip disease. Dr. Shaffer ordered the splint removed but Dr. Ridlon refused to remove it on the ground that he was responsible for the welfare of the patient. At the end of his year's service Dr. Shaffer prevented his reappointment and Dr. Ridlon went with Dr. McBurney to the Vanderbilt Clinic. A little later, when Dr. Gibney was elected to a professorship which Dr. Ridlon had expected, he moved, in 1889, to Chicago. Concerning the New York controversy over the use of the Thomas splint, it is interesting to read in Dr. Judson's book (1905): "Flexion and abduction [in hip disease] are rapidly reduced . . . by the use of Mr. Thomas' hip splint in the skillful hands of Dr. Ridlon."

In June, 1890, Dr. Ridlon returned to Europe to assist in the organization of an orthopedic section of the International Medical Congress. He called upon Grattan (of the osteoclast) at Cork, Thomas and Jones at Liverpool, George Arthur Wright at Manchester, Florian Beely of Berlin, and many others. Dr. Ridlon and T. L. Stedman of New York had been commissioned by the *New York Medical Record* to report the Congress. Dr. Ridlon gathered the news while Dr. Stedman, from his room at the Kaiserhof Hotel, cabled fifteen thousand words to New York, thus "scooping" all other American medical journals by two weeks!



John Ridgway



When Dr. Ridlon came to Chicago in 1889 he was made instructor in orthopedic surgery at Northwestern University by Dr. N. S. Davis I. A year later he was made professor and served for sixteen years. Subsequently, he was professor at Rush for three years, professor and secretary of the faculty at the Woman's Medical College for three years, orthopedic surgeon at St. Luke's Hospital for ten years, and attending orthopedic surgeon for a time at Michael Reese Hospital. He organized the orthopedic services of the Evanston Hospital and the Home for Destitute Crippled Children. He was chief surgeon at the latter institution for twenty years, leaving there with regret and a tinge of bitterness at being displaced by younger men. At the time of his retirement, however, he was made consultant and life member of the corporation.

Dr. Ridlon was a charter member of the American Orthopedic Association (1887). At its tenth meeting, he was president. In his presidential address, he called attention to the presence of fifty-two members from sixteen cities and spoke of the value to the association of having not only those from the larger centers with abundant opportunities "to see" but of having also those from the smaller towns who had time "to think." It is significant that among those from the "smaller towns" at that meeting were Gillette of St. Paul, Griffith of Kansas City, Moore of Minneapolis, Packard from Denver, Sherman from San Francisco, Steele from St. Louis, and Weigel from Rochester, all of whom have placed their names permanently upon the roll of honor in orthopedic surgery.

That Dr. Ridlon dominated the affairs of the American Orthopedic Association for many years was not only charged by others but admitted by himself. Indeed he said: "When I returned from the International Medical Congress (in 1890), I rushed back to New York to be in time for the meeting . . . in Philadelphia. DeForest Willard was president and George F. Ryan was secretary. I proceeded to elect A. B. Judson as president and myself as secretary. At that time the secretary was also treasurer and editor of the *Transactions*. I served as secretary for sixteen years and one year as president. I was counted as 'Boss' of the Association because I elected every officer except Weigel during that time." Dr. Ridlon later completed the unexpired "war terms" as secretary for Ralph Fitch of Buffalo in 1915 and for the writer in 1918.

For several years Dr. Ridlon served on the editorial staff of SURGERY, GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS and did much to assist the staff in building up the journal.

At sixty-five, Dr. Ridlon reported September 22, 1917 for active military duty at Fort Benjamin Harrison. He had already joined the Medical Reserve Corps in 1909 and had attended a Plattsburg Medical Training Camp in 1916. During his military service, Dr. Ridlon was instructor and inspector in orthopedic surgery at various forts and camps, finally becoming instructor in the Army Medical School from which he was honorably discharged February 8, 1919. Later he joined the Public Health Reserve, serving at the U. S. Marine Hospital and later

at the Veterans Hospital from which he was transferred to the Edward Hines Jr. Hospital in Chicago when that institution was established.

One of Dr. Ridlon's outstanding characteristics was his generosity both professionally and financially to younger men. There was never a time when he would not give his energy or his money to assist especially one who was disposed to devote himself to the study and practice of orthopedic surgery. Many of the men of rising prominence in the middle west and even the far west have been Dr. Ridlon's students in orthopedic surgery, a number having been undergraduates during his professorship at Northwestern University.

In 1923 it was the privilege and pleasure of this group of students and a few other friends of Dr. Ridlon to gather in Chicago and to present to him and Mrs. Ridlon the fine portrait painted by Mr. Carl Bohnen which hangs in the Archibald Church Library of Northwestern University Medical School. At the close of the presentation exercises, Dr. Ridlon remarked that he realized for the first time that he had always had what he knew he had always wanted, namely, the friendship and regard of the men whom he had looked upon somewhat too formally as students and professional colleagues.

After 1928 Dr. Ridlon retired from practice in Chicago to make his home at Newport, Rhode Island. Even as he approached eighty years of age, however, he remained active. During 1931 he conducted an inspection of the school children of Newport for physical defects. He traveled to meetings of his orthopedic associates in Boston, New York, and elsewhere, and in 1933 was guest of honor at the Washington, D.C. meeting of the American Orthopedic Association under the presidency of Dr. Arthur Steindler. For several years he applied himself almost daily to typewriting notes regarding the personalities and surgical experiences of his earlier days. He kept alive an extensive correspondence with many of the men in orthopedic practice in whom he always maintained a keen personal and professional interest.

When he left Chicago, Dr. Ridlon distributed a small but choice collection of books on the history and practice of orthopedic surgery. Many of these are to be found now in the special collection accumulating under the direction of the writer in the library of the American College of Surgeons in Chicago. The forthcoming catalogue of this collection will contain many references to Dr. Ridlon and many quotations from his letters and conversations.

Dr. Ridlon's patients, pupils, and professional contemporaries will always hold him in high esteem. His devotion to his specialty and his ideals for the care of his patients were often expressed in criticism of those who fell short of his standards. Those who profited by his teaching and by the example of his methods, however, cannot but feel that they are much the better for his guidance, for his industry, and for his constant inspiration.