

Overcoming Challenges: Lamar Soutter, M.D. (1909-1996)

The Lamar Soutter Library, University of Massachusetts Medical School

1930-1935

Voyages Lay Foundation For Medical Career



As a student at Harvard College, Lamar Soutter developed an interest in science and history. In the early 1930s he and a friend took a 1500-mile canoe trip in the wilds of the Yukon, much of it through unmapped territory. Lamar's friend sustained a serious injury and both young men barely made it out of the wilderness alive.



In July 1931 Lamar signed on to be a crew member on the maiden voyage of the *Atlantis*, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution's first research vessel. Beginning in Copenhagen, Denmark, the ship soon encountered rough weather and experienced several mechanical problems. The crew was immobilized from seasickness; there was no doctor on board to deal with injuries and several serious accidents that occurred. It was this experience that made Soutter, then a young college graduate, decide to continue on to medical school, even though he was still not 100% committed to that course of action at the time.



Upon his 1935 graduation from Harvard Medical School, Dr. Soutter signed on with the schooner *Morrissey* as medical officer and chief scientist for an expedition to northwest Greenland, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, the Field Museum, and the National Museum. Soutter gathered fish samples and conducted almost 100 plankton experiments, which provided a wealth of knowledge of the sea and its inhabitants in cold climates. As the ship headed for home, she ran into a fierce gale just off the coast of Labrador, losing its fore-sail and some of its rigging. It took three hours of adroit seamanship to keep her from crashing into the base of the cliffs.

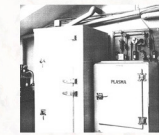
1933

Noted Surgeon Dies At 63 Son Lamar Perseveres at Harvard Medical



Dr. Robert Soutter, 1870-1933

Boston--Dr. Robert Soutter, noted orthopedic surgeon, died on February 21 of blood poisoning. He had contracted the infection from a small scratch, which he sustained while performing surgery on a pediatric patient. Despite the untimely death of his father, Lamar Soutter continued on with his studies at Harvard Medical School, graduating in 1935.



1942

Blood Bank At Mass General Stored Plasma Saves Nightclub Fire Victims

Boston--Dr. Soutter was instrumental in establishing the blood bank at Massachusetts General Hospital and was its first Director.



To fund the blood bank, Soutter solicited money from outside sources to pay for the refrigerator and other equipment. He also actively sought out donors. Soutter and his staff created new techniques for blood filtration and purification. When the Coconut Grove nightclub fire occurred in November, stored plasma from the blood bank saved many lives.



1944



Soutter Glides Into Action Field Surgery Saves Lives of Many Wounded

Bastogne, France--When World War II erupted, Dr. Soutter enlisted and joined the Army's Fourth Auxiliary Surgical Unit. He later volunteered to assist the wounded at the Battle of the Bulge in Bastogne, Belgium in December 1944. In order to reach the surrounded Allied forces, Soutter and his medical team had to be towed by a C47 cargo plane in an engineless glider loaded with medical supplies. Once on the ground, the occupants had to wait for a lull in the fighting to leave the glider, and then they had to run for the medical tent where the wounded awaited treatment. Dr. Soutter and the other medical personnel performed 63 operations in the next 24 hours. For their valiant efforts, Dr. Soutter and each member of his team were awarded the Silver Star, the second highest military medal presented, for "conspicuous gallantry in action."

1937

Soutter Treats Hindenburg Victims



New York--Soutter's medical residency was spent in the Surgical Department at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City in the late 1930s. The routine life of residency was shattered when, in May 1937, the zeppelin Hindenburg exploded at Lakehurst, New Jersey. Soutter assisted in many surgeries on victims of the tragedy.



1963-1975

Ground Broken For Worcester Med School Major Triumph Over Adversity for Dr. Lamar Soutter



Worcester--Lamar Soutter's innovative ideas in the training of new physicians were the catalyst for him being named Dean of the first state medical school in Massachusetts in 1963. Dr. Soutter took on the monumental task of planning and creating the new school. Many obstacles had to be overcome: the Massachusetts gubernatorial position changed hands four times, federal funds given during the Johnson administration were rescinded during the Nixon administration, building costs soared from \$75 million to \$125 million, faculty had to be hired and students selected. By 1969 Acting Governor Francis Sargent wrestled with the prospect of cancelling the project. Finally in 1970, the University of Massachusetts Medical School opened its doors in Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1973 the new School building opened at its permanent location at 55 Lake Avenue, and in 1976 its adjunct facility, the University of Massachusetts Hospital, began to admit its first patients.