



*This page:  
the frieze being  
installed in its new  
home in the Library  
Commons.*

On December 16, 2008, the frieze was finally ready to return “home,” and was hung on a specially prepared wall in the newly remodeled Library Commons, adjacent to the modern Library at 433 Bolivar Street. Shortly thereafter, the conservator completed the final steps of the restoration process.



Brochure design: AGW, 9-09

Artist **Enrique Alferez** was born in Mexico in 1901, and trained in the streamlined Bauhaus style at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1924. He began his career creating pieces for Chicago skyscrapers during the building boom of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Trying to work his way back to Mexico, he arrived in New Orleans in 1929, where he earned his first commission to build five figures for the Church of the Holy Name in Algiers, and he was hired to teach at the New Orleans Arts & Crafts School. He later served as director of the sculpture program of the New Orleans Works Progress Administration (WPA), during which he produced a large body of work for the city’s public spaces. More than twenty of his works grace City Park, and a park street is named for him. In addition to “The Conquest of Yellow Fever,” Alferez completed two reliefs for Charity Hospital: “Louisiana in Work and Play,” cast in aluminum, and a second work of medical themes carved in limestone. He also carved a mahogany panel depicting King Solomon for the St. Bernard Parish Courthouse in 1939. Admiration for Alferez extended well beyond New Orleans. He had commissions across the United States, as well as in Canada, South America, Europe and Asia. But the greatest concentration of his work is in his adopted hometown. Alferez continued to work and live in New Orleans, with extended stays in Morelo, Mexico, until his death in 1999.



*This page: the frieze mounted in restored glory.*

# The Conquest of Yellow Fever



The famous relief sculpture by world-renowned artist Enrique Alferez finds new life in the LSU Health Sciences Center Library



## HISTORY OF THE ARTWORK

### "The Conquest of Yellow Fever" (1931)

is an art deco plaster bas-relief sculpture that was originally housed in the LSU School of Medicine. It was commissioned from artist Enrique Alferez and is significant beyond its aesthetic appeal because of its connection to the city of New Orleans, to the history of medicine and to the LSU School of Medicine.

It depicts the U.S. Army Yellow Fever expedition to Cuba led by Dr. Walter Reed in 1899 and the ultimate conquering of Yellow Fever, which marked a turning point in medicine. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, New Orleans (and other cities) suffered from horrific epidemics of Yellow Fever. The germ theory of disease had not yet been fully elucidated, and cannons boomed through the night to ward off the disease. The Reed team, which is illustrated in the sculpture, put forth the first scientific theory regarding Yellow Fever (the source being discovered as the mosquito), and also became important to the LSU School of Medicine when Dr. Aristides Agramonte joined the faculty.

Dr. Agramonte is the central figure among the group of men illustrated in the sculpture. He functioned as the pathologist for the expedition and was later named LSU's first head of Tropical Medicine, but died shortly after his appointment. He willed his books to the LSU School of Medicine, which became the base for the current library. The library's original name, in fact, was the Agramonte Memorial Medical Library. Dr. Walter Reed, who led the expedition, is to Agramonte's right.



Additionally, the family groupings toward either end of the sculpture represent agricultural / rural life, and on the right, industrial science. On a more "local" note, a Charity nurse posed for the central female figure.

The sculpture's original coating was of ground aluminum and banana oil. It is twelve feet in length, weighs in at 600 pounds, and was originally hung in the lobby of the 1542 Tulane Avenue building, the first location of the LSU School of Medicine. At some point prior to 1961, the sculpture was accidentally painted over with institutional green paint. Years later, the sculpture was chiseled out



of its original location when the building underwent renovation work in the 1980s. After being re-hung opposite of the old Library on the second floor of the building, a proposed dropped ceiling was to cover it in 1986.



*This page: the frieze before restoration.*

Nearly everyone had forgotten how significant the work was, but LSU Medical Center librarian Judith Caruthers and School of Medicine Dean Robert Daniels both recognized the sculpture's significance, and were instrumental in its safeguarding. In 1987 they had it taken down by a local plaster artist, and stored away in hopes of being refurbished. The sculpture was kept safe, but out of public view for more than a decade.

The frieze was finally sent to a conservator for restoration in 1999. The LSU Medical Center Foundation initiated this effort, and began to reacquaint the local community with this important piece of art. Lynn Harrington carefully restored the piece to its original state, with support by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louisiana State Arts Council, and the Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism.



*Above, and below: the frieze during restoration.*

