

# DR. JEAN ALEXANDER FRANCOISE LE MAT AND THE NEW ORLEANS AFFAIR

By Edward N. Simmons



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One of the most ingenious — certainly the most unusual — of handguns to emerge from the War Between the States is the Le Mat “Grapeshot” revolver. Invented in 1856 for use in the United States Army, and portrayed as being especially deadly against Indian attack, it nevertheless saw eventual service almost exclusively by Confederate fighting men. The combining of the principles of the six-shot revolver and the single barrel shotgun is a distinct feature that has made it of interest to collectors for the past several decades. More recently, the documentary proof the Le Mat revolvers were produced under contract for the Confederate States Army and Navy has added greatly to the appeal of these colorful weapons.

The Census records of New Orleans reveal that Dr. Jean Francois Le Mat was born in France during the year of 1824. The Medical Register of the same city show he was issued a diploma by the University of Montpellier giving him the right to practice medicine on the 15th. of July 1842. His granddaughter Mrs. Eugenie Le Mat Eggleston has recounted of how he came to America and married her grandmother Sophie Justin Le Pretre, the daughter of John Baptist Le Pretre planter and prominent merchant of New

Orleans. The 1850 city directory shows the couple living at the Le Pretre house at 188 Dauphine Street.

During the summer of 1854, a terrible yellow fever epidemic struck the Crescent City and the death toll was appalling. The New Orleans Bee carried this tragic notice (in French) on July 13, 1854, “Died Wednesday, the 12th of this month, at 5 o’clock in the morning at the age of 13 months, F.A.R. Le Mat, son of Dr. Le Mat and Sophie Lepretre.” This type of insertion was a sad and common one during that dreadful summer as New Orleans was devastated by the deadly fever.

Two years later, during 1856, the New Orleans Directory shows the Le Mat residence as being 184 Saint Peter Street and in 1858, they removed to 215 Bourbon Street. The last address for the Le Mats is given in the same directory in 1861, and it is listed as being at 203 Rampart Street.

On October 21, 1856 Dr. Le Mat received patent number 15,925 for his “grapeshot” revolver. One-eighth of this patent was ceded to Dr. H. Daret of 117 Philip Street in New Orleans. His interest or assistance in the matter is not known, or material. His name and the mention of the one-eighth interest appear no more in the records.

On April 4, 1859 Le Mat and Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, a veteran of the Mexican War, formed a partnership. Beauregard was at this time a Major in the United States Army and was in charge of the building of the custom house in New Orleans. He was destined to become one of the more famous Generals in the Confederate Army.

The contract between Le Mat and Beauregard plainly indicates that the two fully intended to first protect themselves from imitations by securing patents in all major countries and after this was done, to manufacture and sell the revolver. It provided that one quarter of Le Mat’s patent rights be ceded to Beauregard in exchange for certain favors which Beauregard as Major, United States Army would be in a position to bring about, plus certain financial commitments.

After the signing of the partnership papers, Beauregard lost no time in using his influence to get the “Grapeshot” revolving pistol adopted into the military service of the United States. A semi-official local board composed of prominent military and political figures put the revolver through a public trial. This trial firing of the gun resulted in an enthusiastic recommendation that the revolver be introduced into the United States military services.

Several advertisements pertaining to the results of the local trials were inserted into the New Orleans newspapers. These appeared on May 21, 1859, in: The True Delta, The Bee and The Crescent. The aid of local politicians was secured by Beauregard and Le Mat was provided with letters of introduction to Honorable John B. Floyd, Secretary of War.

Early in May Le Mat presented the following letters along with the recommendations of the New Orleans board to Colonel Samuel Cooper, Adjutant General in Washington, D.D.

New Orleans 25th April, 1859

Mr. John B. Floyd  
Secretary of War

Dear Sir,

I take great pleasure in introducing Col. Le Mat of New Orleans who is about to visit Washington for the purpose of exhibiting to the War & Navy Departments a weapon of his invention. Col. Le Mat is a gentleman in whose success a large number of persons here will take great interest and a kind notice at your hands will be most gratefully appreciated by,

Your Obet. Servant  
George Custis

As a result of Le Mats interview with Col. Cooper a board of Officers under Colonel Joseph E. Johnston, Brevet Major George D. Ramsey and Theo T. J. Lardley, Ordnance Department was slated to hold trials at the Washington, D.C. Arsenal on May 11, 1859. The board held extensive trials and submitted to Col. Cooper the recommendation; "that this arm be subjected to trail in the hands of troops, in actual service in the field." No further records of the revolvers having been used by the United States Army has been found.

While in Washington Le Mat took patent papers on a "new and improved hammer for revolving firearms." It was given the patent number of 24,312 and dated June 7, 1859. On the same date a patent was also taken out on an "improvement in automatic fingers for closing the vents of cannon."

Upon the approach of the Civil War Beauregard sold his interest in the grapeshot revolver to Charles F. Girard.

#### THE LE MAT AND CHARLES GIRARD PARTNERSHIP

Although Dr. Charles Frederic Girard had joined Le Mat in Paris early in 1860, it was not until July of that year that he became a full partner instead of "Special Agent." That Girard was an accomplished and rather remarkable person is demonstrated by his biography, as it appears in Smithsonian Institute Bulletin Number 42; "Born March 9, 1822, he was educated at Neuchatel, Switzerland under Louis Agassis who brought Girard to the United States in 1857. He remained at Cambridge under Agassis until the fall of 1850 at which time he came to Washington D.C. and worked under Spencer F. Baird as Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington. Baird gave Girard the opportunity to become associated with him in the plan and work resulted in the establishment of the United States National museum in 1857.

During the decade before the War Between the States, Girard published more than 170 notices, papers and reports dealing with the large variety of animals. His taste was most surprising for while fishes and reptiles became his chief interest, he wrote of quadrupeds, spiders, centipedes, insects and worms as well.

The decade was notable for exploration in the far west, particularly in connection with the surveys of the Mexican boundaries and for a trans-continental railway, and Girard was looked to for reports on the fishes and most of the reptiles collected by the exploring parties. Some of these reports were made in collaboration with Baird but even in such cases, the work was chiefly Girard's. The most important report are: "Researches upon the Cyprinoid Fishes Inhabiting the Fresh Waters in the United States, west of the Mississippi Valley." which appeared in 1856. "Herpetology of the Wiles Exploring Expedition" - 1858.

Girard became a naturalized citizen in the year 1854, and attended medical school at Georgetown College. In 1856, he graduated from Georgetown with a degree in medicine. He returned to the Institute until 1860 when he left America for France. He remained in France during the first part of the Civil War having accepted a commission to supply the Confederate Army with drugs and surgical instruments under the firm title of Gautherin & Girard. In 1861, he was awarded the Cuvier prize by the Institute of France. In 1863, he returned and made a tour of the Southern States at which time he gathered material to write a book called "Les Etats Confederes d' Amerique visite en 1863." In 1865, he returned to Paris."

## LE MAT CONTRACTS WITH THE CONFEDERATE ARMY & NAVY

Daily Delta in June 1861, states; "The firm of Cook and Brother contemplate the manufacture of Dr. Le Mat's grapeshot revolver." So far as the records show the manufacture by Cook and Brother never got beyond the contemplation stage.

The Confederate Government was formed in the Spring of 1861, at Montgomery, Alabama. Undoubtedly both Beauregard and Le Mat were present during those first hectic weeks when all kinds and types of contracts and positions were being awarded.

Through Beauregard, Josiah Gorgas, previously Captain, U.S.A., was offered and on April 8, 1861, accepted the rank of major in The Confederate States Army with the title of Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance.

July 27, 1861, The Confederate Congress formally inquired of the Bureau of Ordnance as to arms on hand and as to what steps had been taken to secure additional weapons. This interrogatory was answered August 12, 1861, and it is interesting to note that at that time the Confederacy had only one contract for the manufacture of revolvers. This was "Mr. Le Mat of Louisiana has an order to deliver 5,000 of his revolvers."

The Field Manual for the Use of the Officers on Ordnance Duty, prepared by the Confederate Ordnance Department in the Fall of 1861, contains the following "Grapeshot pistol — This pistol is manufactured by M. Le Mat of Paris. It has a cylinder which revolves, containing nine chambers, a rifled barrel and a smooth bore barrel. The latter receives a charge of buckshot, and is fired by a slight change in the hammer. Some are in our service."

While contracting with the War Department for 5000 revolvers, Le Mat also secured one with the Navy Department although the exact date is unknown, and first mention of same does not appear until July, 1862.

Leaving Montgomery, Alabama with the juicy contract in his pocket, Colonel (or Doctor) Le Mat proceeded to Europe to fulfill same. First, however, he stopped at Milledgeville, capitol of Georgia, long enough to receive a commission to purchase 2,000 English Enfield rifles at \$35.00 each for that state.

Meanwhile, the Confederate Government had chosen James N. Mason of Virginia and John Slidell of Louisiana to proceed to Europe to establish credit, by selling bonds or otherwise securing loans. Mason was being sent to England and Slidell to France where he was to be successful in floating Confederate bonds through the Paris banking house of Emile Erlinger & Company. In the Charleston Mercury's account of the sailing of Mason and Slidell it said they were accompanied by "Colonel Le Mat, the inventor of the grape shot revolver." Eluding the blockading Federal squadron on the night of October 12th, 1861, they soon reached Havana, where they awaited the British steamer Trent.

The subsequent capture of the English steamer Trent by the U.S.S. San Jacinto and the forcible removal of Mason and Slidell by Captain Wilkes, U.S.N., is too well known to here repeat. However, the Richmond Daily Examiner of December 19, 1861, quotes the London News "The Federal Navy has struck a better blow for the Confederate cause than either General Beauregard or Johnston has been able to do."

## LE MAT AND THE NEW ORLEANS "AFFAIR"

How long Le Mat remained in Europe is not known, but probably only long enough to deliver the contracts to his partner Girard and to make sure their Paris manufactory was capable of handling the job. At any rate, early in 1862, we find Le Mat in New Orleans where he remained until that city fell to the Union forces in April the same year.

Having set up for the manufacture of the grape shot revolvers in Paris with Girard in charge, Dr. Le Mat returned to New Orleans. Here he entered into an association with the Edward Gautherin Company, composed of Edward and Emil Gautherin, the Le More brothers, Alfred and Jules. Joining the company at approximately the same time as Le Mat was Jules DesMartines.

Located at 28 Carondelet Street, the firm, until the war had been tobacco merchants, but in 1861 had received a contract to furnish gray cloth to the Confederate Government.

"Contract with the Confederate Government and Edward Gautherin & Co. to furnish gray cloth.

Confederate States of America  
Quartermaster's Office  
Richmond, Va. July 29, 1861

To: Ed. Gautherin & Co.

Your proposition to supply cloth for the Army of the Confederate States is accepted. The Quartermaster Department agrees to receive and pay for 175,000 yards of sample "C," 150,000 yards of sample "D" and 50,000 yards of sample "B." The color of B and C to be CADET GRAY and the texture fully to equal the samples.

B to be six-quarters wide at . . . . . \$2.55 a yard.  
C to be six-quarters wide at . . . . . \$1.97-1/2 a yard.  
D to be three-quarters wide at . . . . . \$ .18 a yard.

The understanding between yourselves and the department is that the above must be delivered between the 15th of November next and the 15th of January, 1862 or sooner if possible. The delivery to be made at a port of the Confederacy as near Richmond as possible.

Very Respectfully, Your Obt. Ser.  
James B. M. Smith  
Major-Asst. Quartermaster, CSA."

Evidence that Gautherin Co. delivered at least a substantial amount of the cloth in the time specified by the contract is revealed by the following receipt by Edward Gautherin.

New Orleans, April 17, 1862

E. - B.F.B.

J. B. D. DeBow, esq., Superintendent Produce Loan Office, Confederate States of America, to Ed. Gautherin & Co., Dr.

E.G.C.	B.	182 bales gray cloth, measuring 54,743 5/8 yards, at \$2.55 . . . . .	\$139,596.24
E.G.C.	C.	427 bales gray cloth, measuring 134,626 28 yards, at \$1.97-1/2 . . . . .	\$265,886.84
		609 bales, measuring 189,368 7/8 yards . . . . .	\$405,483.08

Received from the Bank of New Orleans in payment of the above invoice the sum of four hundred and five thousand dollars, leaving unpaid a balance of four hundred and eighty-three dollars and eight cents.

Ed. Gautherin & Co.

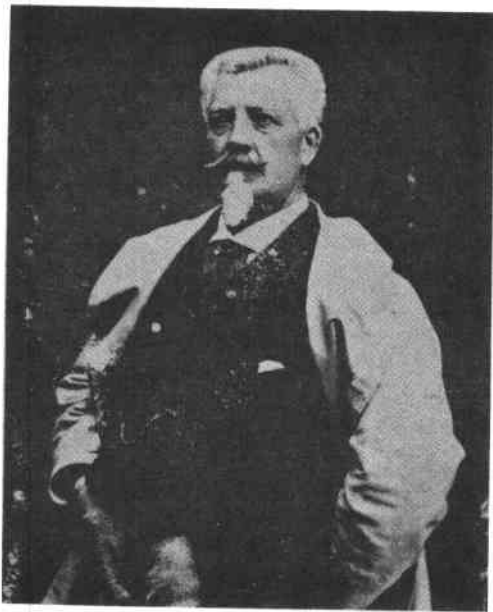
\$405,000

Six hundred nine bales of gray cloth amounting to 189,368 yards had been shipped from Harve, France to Havana, Cuba. On August 31, 1862 Gautherin and Co. paid their shipping agents in Havana \$1,846.75 to get the cloth through the blockade to Brownsville, Texas at which point it was received by the Confederate agent a Mr. Sharkey.

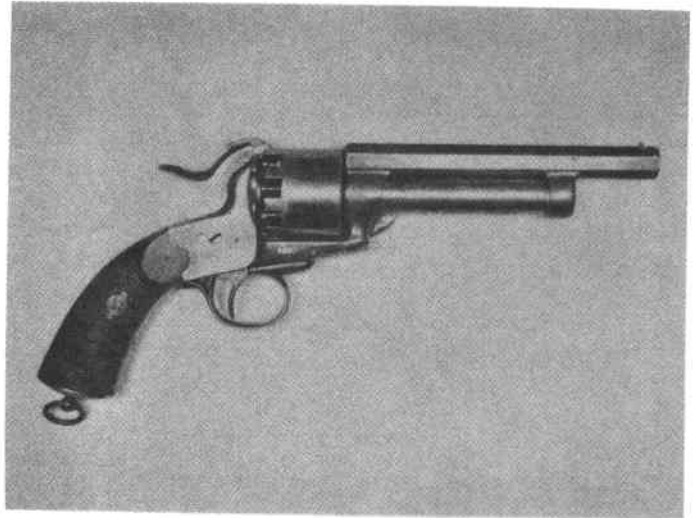
As late as August 10, 1862 the \$405,483.00 received in April was still secreted in New Orleans by Gautherin and Co. On that date Dr. Le Mat paid out of the firms money an amount of \$2,500. "as a bribe for the affair to start." It was apparent to the members of the firm that General Butler was leaving no rocks unturned in ferreting out monies received from Confederate contracts. They were taking desperate means to remove the gold in the safest way, if not the only way possible.

Three weeks later on August 31, 1862 a lawyer, Robert Bengereel, was paid \$500.00. The entry in the Gautherin books was "fees for proceedings near the authorities and Consul."

The gold was contained in nine boxes and although the Gautherin and Company ex-bookkeeper, Etienne Nicholas Montardier later testified before General Butler there had been no attempt to bribe anyone in the



COL. JEAN ALEXANDRE FRANCOISE LE MAT AT THE AGE OF 36 IN NEW ORLEANS. Photograph by William A. Albaugh, III, Falls Church, Virginia.



LEFT SIDE OF LEMAT REVOLVER WITH SERIAL NUMBER ONE. THERE WERE DUPLICATIONS OF SERIAL NUMBERS IN THE EARLY MODELS. THE GRIPS OF THIS GUN WERE NEVER CHECKERED.



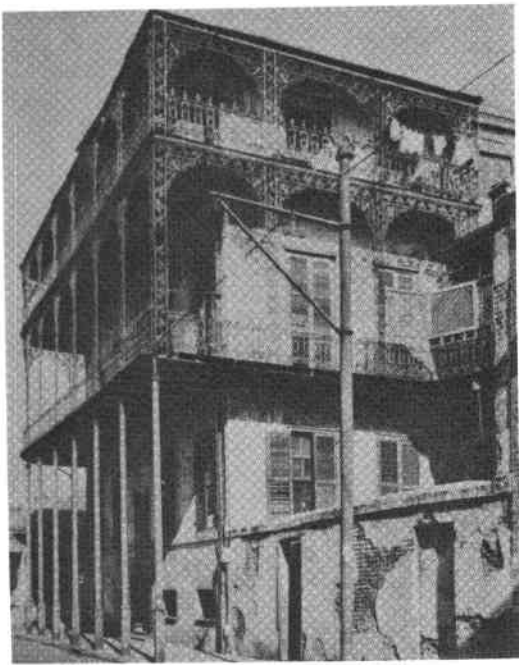
RIGHT SIDE VIEW OF LEMAT PERCUSSION REVOLVER SERIAL NUMBER 309.

This is the lowest serial number Le Mat revolver with second model that we have record of in our files. It is at least 150 numbers less than any other second model or transition model revolver and may have been the first trial revolver designed for use as a Confederate States Army revolver. It has all the features of revolvers with serial numbers above one thousand.

Photo by the late Miles W. Standish, Kansas City, Mo.



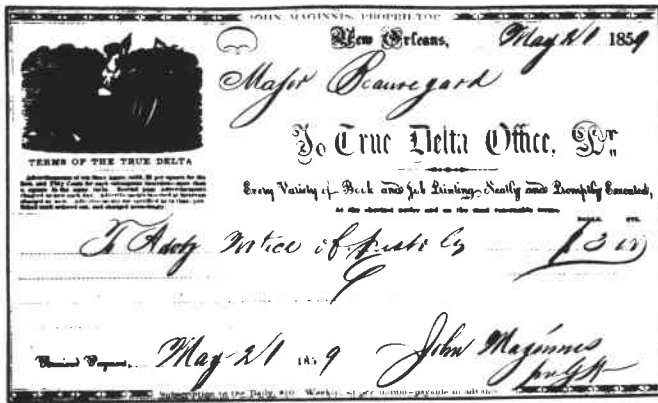
MAP OF NEW ORLEANS with four residences of Dr. Le Mat number as follows: NO.58 - The Le Pretre mansion at 188 Dauphine Street. NO. 2 - the house on St. Peter Street. NO. 3 - the site of the residence on Bourbon Street next to Jean Laffite's Blacksmith Shop. NO. 4 - the last address found in the city directory on Rampart Street. Due to a fire in the Vieux Carre (Old Town) the numbers were all changed after 1893.



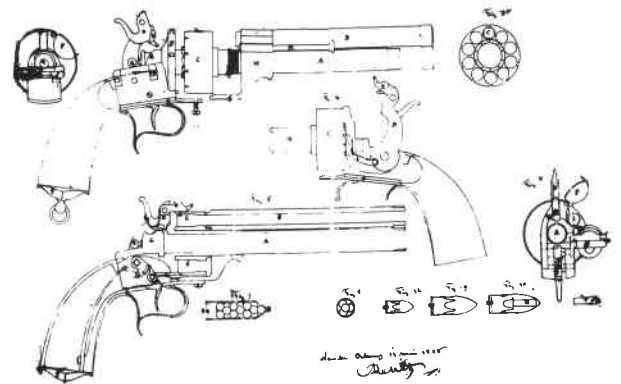
LE PRETRE HOUSE AT 188 DAUPHINE STREET IN WHICH LE MAT LIVED FROM 1850 UNTIL 1856 HAVING MARRIED THE DAUGHTER OF LE PRETRE WHILE VISITING NEW ORLEANS.



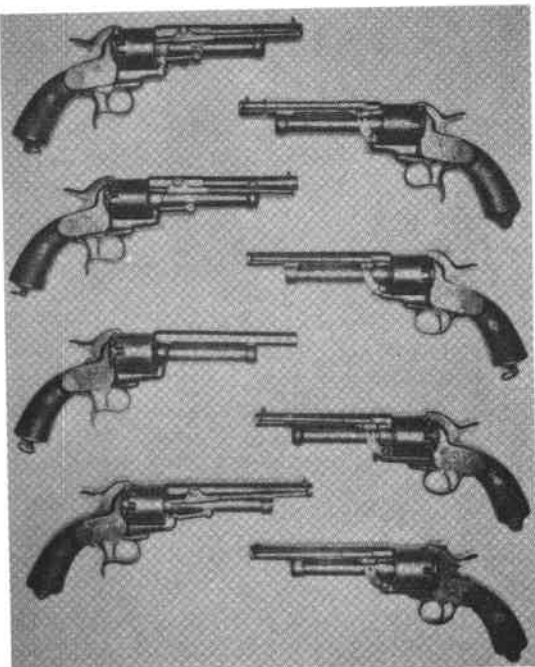
NUMBER 203 PAMPART STREET IS NOW 912 RAMPART STREET. THIS WAS THE 1860 RESIDENCE OF DR. LE MAT. Photo by Charles L. Durour, New Orleans, Louisiana.



RECEIPT FOR ADVERTISEMENT PLACED IN NEW ORLEANS PAPER BY MAJOR BEAUREGARD PUBLICIZING THE TRIAL OF THE GRAPESHOT REVOLVER. Photo courtesy L.S.U. Archives, Baton Rouge, La.



DRAWING OF LE MAT REVOLVER DATED NEW ORLEANS, MARCH 11, 1858. Drawing courtesy Dr. Virgel Bedsole, L.S.U. Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

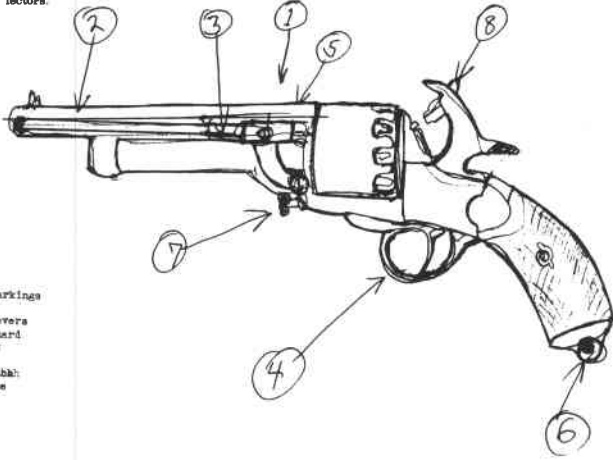


EIGHT LE MAT REVOLVERS SHOWING SOME OF THE CHANGES FROM EARLY TO THE LATE MODELS. FROM TOP TO BOTTOM ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE PICTURE THE SERIAL NUMBERS ARE 21, 314, 663, and 101. AT THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE PICTURE ARE NUMBERS 850, 309, 2448 AND LE MAT & GIRARD PATENT - LONDON NUMBER 9. Photo by Miles W. Standish.

Some variations to be noted on the Le Mat revolvers are as follows:

1. The barrel markings as pictured and described in the book "Confederate Arms" by William A. Albaugh, III.
2. The barrels were round in the early models and octagonal in the later guns.
3. The loading levers were on the right side of the barrel up to 450 serial number, with the exception of the numbers of 309, 343, 390 and probably many others as this indicates a duplication of numbers from 300 to 450.
4. The trigger guards contained the spur up to number 941 with the exception of gun number 309.
5. The Le Mat trade mark as found on the early guns was retained up to serial number 450 at which point it was changed to the stamped letters of L. M. surmounted by a star.
6. The lanyard rings were full swivel up to serial number 800 at which number they were cast into the butt frame.
7. The barrel latches varied greatly through the manufacture of the guns as did the hammer selector for the shot barrel.

Special thanks should be given to William A. Albaugh, III of Falls Church for his advice and valuable help in compiling this information on Le Mat as did so many members of The American Society of Arms Collectors.



Barrel markings  
Barrel  
Loading levers  
Trigger guard  
Trade mark  
Lanyard  
Barrel latch  
Hammer nose



LEMAT AND GIRARDS PATENT - LONDON WITH SERIAL NUMBER 3 SHOWING PROVISIONAL PROOF MARKS OF CROSSED SCEPTERS AND BORE NUMBER OF 18. Photo from the M. Clifford Young collection.



PHOTOGRAPH OF DR. LEMAT MADE IN PARIS, FRANCE IN 1879 AT THE AGE OF 55 YEARS.

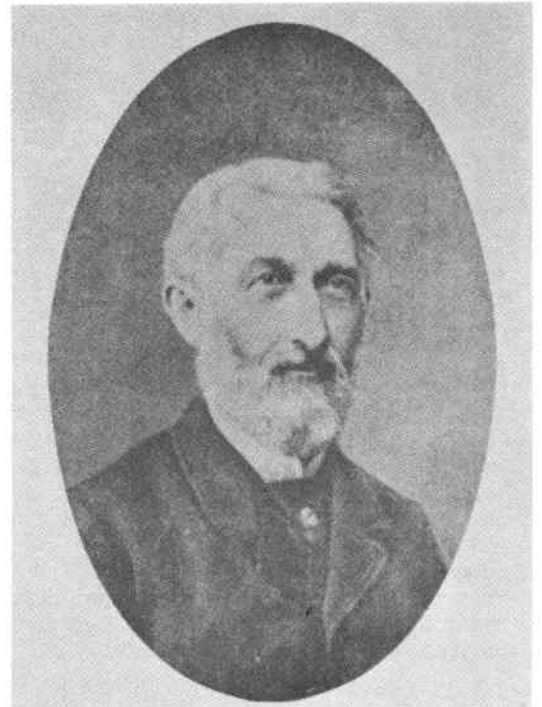
The reverse side is inscribed in French as follows:  
My Dear Children,

The Distance which now separates us does not permit me to say good bye because of my age, but my wishes for happiness will accompany you until my last hour.

1879

(Signed) Le Mat

Photo Credit: William A. Albaugh, III, Falls Church, Virginia.



CHARLES FREDERIC GIRARD, FRENCH SCIENTIST, PARTNER OF DR. LEMAT AND MEMBER OF THE FIRM GAUTHERIN AND GIRARD WHO CONTRACTED WITH THE CONFEDERATE ARMY TO SUPPLY DRUGS, SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS, UNIFORM CLOTH AND NUMEROUS OTHER NECESSITIES OF WAR. THEY WERE REPUTED TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MOST RELIABLE OF THE OVERSEAS  
Photo courtesy Dr. W. Stanley Hoole, University of Alabama.

French Consulate an examination of further expenses paid out by the Company seem suspicious. A clerk for the French Consul listed as Kossuth received \$528.25 from the firm for keeping nine boxes in the French Consulate. A "douceur" was given to Madame Mejen, wife of Count Mejen, French Consular, for "carrying out the affair well." The meaning of the French word "douceur" in this instance was "plus fait douceur que violence," i.e., "kindness does more than harshness." Further entries in the Gautherin books list "\$2,025. for instance on nine boxes." and a final "river insurance on the spanish ship Blasco-de-gary for nine boxes." The Blasco-de-gary sailed from New Orleans for Europe early in September.

Further entries in the Gautherin books list \$2,125 having been paid for insurance on nine boxes for a period of six months. A drayage fee for transporting the boxes to the Spanish ship Blasco-de-gary which sailed with the boxes as part of her cargo insured at a price of \$312.50.

On September 26, 1862 H. S. Sanford, the United States minister resident at Brussels, Belgium wrote to the U. S. Secretary of State Washington, D. C. as follows,

"Sir:

When in Verviers a few days ago I was told that the payments for the Revel contracts for military cloths amounting to 1,750,000 Francs had not been made, but assurance had been given that the monies for the same had been deposited with the French Consul at New Orleans and would be shortly received.

Large purchases of cloth, blankets, shoes and arms, & etc. were made for account of the Edward Gautherin & Co. New Orleans for the Rebels, whose agents they appeared to be, through their correspondents, G. Le More & Co. of Harvre, France."

This letter was forwarded to Federal General Benjamin Butler, in command of the Army occupying the captured city of New Orleans. A full scale investigation was conducted by General Butler as to the activities and finances of the Edward Gautherin Company.

On November 12, 1862 General Butler questioned the Le More brothers at his headquarters. For having refused to answer questions by Butler, Alfred was sent to Fort Pickens to be held until further orders. Alfred protested that "he did not hold himself bound to answer to the extent of criminating (sic) himself." Jules Le More was ordered to be confined to Fort Jackson for the same reason.

The following day Etienne Nicholas Montardier, ex-bookkeeper of Gautherin and Co. was called on to testify before General Butler and he suddenly became extremely loose tongued. Having heard, no doubt, of the fate that befell the two Le More brothers the preceeding day. The contents of his testimony was recorded as follows,

"

Headquarters, Department of the Gulf,  
New Orleans, November 13, 1862

Memorandum of the statement of Etienne Nicholas Montardier before Major-General Butler this day:

I am bookkeeper in the house of Ed. Gautherin & Co., 28 Canal Street, and have been so employed over four years. The partners are Edward Gautherin, Alfred and Jules Le More. Alfred is the older of the two. When I was first with them they used to buy tobacco for the contractor of the French Government. They had been so doing two years; since then they have been shipping cotton to Europe for joint account with other parties. They were also engaged in the tobacco business at the same time. They had no other regular business. Their correspondents at Havre were J. R. LeMore & Co. — LeMore's brother — but I believe J. R. LeMore is alone in that firm. I know something of the house being engaged in trade in military clothing. It was an outside transaction in which the three partners and two other persons were engaged. No entry was entered in the books as the business was going except after the money was received. Colonel Le Mat I have not seen for some time and don't know whether he is here or in Europe. The other man concerned is Jules DesMartines. I don't believe Mr. Pretat (sic) (Le Pretre) had any contract with the Confederate Government. He was in Richmond and acted as the friend of Gautherin and the partners. I was sent to Richmond about four or five days before the Federals came to New Orleans. I staid there about ten or twelve days. I got back here May 27.

E. N. Montardier"



It seems that General Butler had obtained some knowledge of the nine boxes in the possession of Count Mejan and demanded they be turned over to himself. He received the following communication from Mejan,

“

Consulate of France  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
November 14, 1862

To: Major Gen. Butler  
Commanding Officer  
Army of the Gulf

Sir:

The box which you demand as belonging to Mr. Alfred Le More is no more in my possession. As I had the honor to inform you, it has been withdrawn from the Consulate on the morning of the 12th. I have not been informed of the hour in which these gentlemen have been arrested. I cannot know, therefore, if it had been withdrawn before or after the arrest.

With Respect,  
Count Mejan”

This was the final document on record in connection with the “New Orleans Affair” of Dr. Le Mat and the Edward Gautherin Co. It evidently left General Butler empty handed and raging.