



DR. ELEAZOR AARON PYATT  
ASS'T. SURGEON, CSA (1832-1902)

by Daniel E. Johnson IV

Dr. Pyatt was a country doctor from the hills of western North Carolina born 9 October 1832 in what was then Burke county,<sup>1</sup> to JOSEPH PYATT/E, JR. (1790-1864)<sup>2</sup> AND JEAN BROOKS PYATT/E (1797-1879).<sup>3</sup> He was the fourth of six children<sup>4</sup> born to this couple: Dr. Pyatt's siblings were Sarah Elvira Piercy (1820-1877); Mary 'Caroline' Blalock Winters (ca 1825-1882); Leander Pyatt (1828-1864);<sup>5</sup> Rachael Evaline Carpenter (1835-1926); and Almira Bolick (1837-1909).

Dr. Pyatt was a gifted, high-achieving individual as shown in a

biographical summary that was written about him:

“(of his family) he was the only one to choose a profession, as the others have all been abundantly satisfied with the pursuit of agriculture... When Dr. Pyatt arrived in Bethany (IL) he had to borrow money to pay for the medicine. By practicing economy, he later owned 900 acres near Bethany, and he left a \$100,000 estate. His residence... was considered the finest in Moultrie county at the time.”<sup>6</sup>

He attended Burnsville Methodist Academy in Burnsville, Yancey Co., North Carolina<sup>7</sup>, and then went on to attend the Jefferson Medical College, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, today known as Thomas Jefferson University.<sup>8</sup> He graduated from medical school on March 10,

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<sup>1</sup> Burke Co., NC 1830 census, Joseph Pyatt, head of household, p 161. Written alongside: ‘In the bounds of the 1st and 2nd regiments of the county of Burke.’ Yancey County was created in 1833 from areas of Burke and Buncombe Counties.

<sup>2</sup> Portrait and Biographical Record of Shelby and Moultrie Counties, Illinois. Chicago, IL, USA: Biographical Publishing, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. 1850 Yancey co., NC census, family number 541

<sup>6</sup> Portrait and Biographical Record of Shelby and Moultrie Counties.

<sup>7</sup> Portrait and Biographical Record of Shelby and Moultrie Counties.; “Hanged by a Dream?” by Perry Deane Young, iUniverse, 2005, p 20.

<sup>8</sup> “Thomas Jefferson University began as a medical school. During the early 19th century, several attempts to create a second medical school in Philadelphia had been stymied,...[so] a group of Philadelphia physicians led by George McClellan sent an 1824 letter to the trustees of Jefferson College (now Washington & Jefferson College) in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, asking them to establish a medical department in Philadelphia. The trustees agreed, establishing the Medical Department of Jefferson College in Philadelphia in 1825. In response to a second request, the Pennsylvania General Assembly granted an expansion of Jefferson College's charter in 1826, endorsing the creation of the new department and allowing it to grant medical degrees. ...The first classes were held in the Tivoli Theater on Prune Street in Philadelphia. ...In 1828, the Medical Department moved to the Ely Building. ...This building had an attached hospital, the second such medical school/hospital arrangement in the nation, servicing 441 inpatients and 4,659 outpatients in its first year of operation. ...The relationship with Jefferson College survived until 1838, when the Medical Department received a separate charter, allowing it to operate separately as the Jefferson Medical College. At this time, all instructors, including McClellan, were vacated from the school and the trustees hired all new individuals to teach. This has been considered the time at which the school came to be considered a "legitimate" medical school. In 1841, Jefferson Medical College hired what would be dubbed ‘The Faculty of ‘41.’ ...This collection of professors would institute numerous changes to Jefferson—including providing patient beds over a shop at 10th and Sansom Streets in 1844—and the staff would remain unchanged for 15 years.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Jefferson\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson_University)

1861,<sup>9</sup> on the eve of the terrible Civil War. Had he remained at home in N.C., he may have remained relatively removed from the growing division in the country, but certainly living in Philadelphia, he would have been bombarded daily by worrisome news reports and speculations. His sympathies were likely divided, but as in so many cases in western N.C., when the time came to choose between his country and home, he chose home, and when the call went out for service, he signed up.

In fact, the day he graduated from medical school, the following appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper:

“FEDERAL FORTS TO BE EVACUATED

Washington, March 10—The city is quite excited by the probability that Lieutenants Anderson and Slemmer will be ordered to evacuate respectively Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens. This statement was made last night and tonight seems to be generally entertained as the policy of the Administration.”<sup>10</sup>

Just a month later the famous first shot of the Civil War was fired at Fort Sumter, South Carolina.<sup>11</sup> Before the Confederate Conscription Act in 1862,<sup>12</sup> Dr. Pyatt had presented himself as a Confederate volunteer. Pyatt enlisted on June 1, 1861, and was commissioned into Field & Staff as an Assistant Surgeon for the 19th Infantry (TN).<sup>13</sup>

Now, why would Dr. Pyatt choose to serve with Tennessee instead of his home state of North Carolina? Well, Yancey County, N.C.<sup>14</sup> borders his “volunteer state,” so that region has always had a great deal of interchange between the two states, but the answer appears to be found in the 1860 census: In Holston Valley, Sullivan County, Tennessee, Dr. Pyatt was listed as residing with “Rob’t. Wallace,” a sixty-year-old shoemaker.<sup>15</sup> “E A Piatt,” was listed as a twenty-five-year-old “M.D.”<sup>16</sup> Apparently, Dr. Pyatt had found work in Tennessee. He was admitted to practice medicine by the State Board of Health in 1877.<sup>17</sup> He was described as an “allopath,”<sup>18</sup> the equivalent of which would probably be general practitioner today.

He lived his entire war experience as a single man; during the war, he not only saw so many of his comrades suffer terrible injuries and sicknesses and/or die, but he suffered grief from the loss of beloved family members, too. His brother, Leander, was mustered into the 58th NC Inf. and lasted only a month, dying in January 1864.<sup>19</sup> Their father followed just a few days later.<sup>20</sup> [According to Leander Pyatt’s military records, he was a thirty-seven-year-old farmer who resided in Mitchell County, N.C. when he enlisted as a Private on Dec. 10, 1863 at Dalton, Georgia. Pyatt served in Company A of the North Carolina 58<sup>th</sup> P. Rangers Infantry and died on Jan. 10, 1864 at an Atlanta, Georgia hospital. (North Carolina Troops 1861-65, A Roster)]

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<sup>9</sup> The Philadelphia Inquirer, 11 March 1861; 187 graduates received doctorate degrees

<sup>10</sup> The Philadelphia Inquirer, 11 March 1861

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/sumter.htm>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/twenty-slave\\_law](https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/twenty-slave_law)

<sup>13</sup> Index to Compiled Confederate Military Service Records; <https://www.fold3.com/image/71227451>; He was reappointed on Jan. 11, 1862 and resigned his post in Sept. 1863. The 19th TN Infantry was merged into the 3rd TN Consolidated Reg. on April 9, 1865.

<sup>14</sup> The family homestead was originally in Burke county, but in 1833 Yancey county was formed and encompassed this tract of land: <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/yancey>. See Yancey County, N.C., 1840 census, p 16. Joseph Piatt.

<sup>15</sup> 1860 Sullivan Co., TN census, household 1125.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Decatur Weekly Republican (Decatur, IL) November 15, 1877: State Board of Health: ‘The certificates admitting the following gentlemen to practice medicine under the new law have been received by Dr. J. Stebbens King and are ready for distribution at his office: Dr. E. A. Pyatt, Bethany, Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, March 9, 1861. No. of certificate 1614.’

<sup>18</sup> Deceased American Physicians, 1804-1929

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.fold3.com/image/55468265> and *The Pyatte Family of Western North Carolina* by Martha A. Pyatte, Banner Elk, NC: Puddingstone Press (1977).

<sup>20</sup> Pyatte, *The Pyatte Family*.

Dr. Pyatt's experiences as an army doctor were brutal and affected his own health: He was only able to endure a couple of years of service. The following was Dr. Pyatt's resignation letter:

"Polk Hospital  
Rome, GA  
Sept 30, 1863  
General Samuel Cooper, Adj't. Inspector Gen'l

Sir: Having been in very bad health for the past eight or nine months, the result of a complication of diseases malarial fever, chronic diarrhea and dysentery, I am now afflicted with enlargement of the mesenteric gland and a general derangement of the digestive system probably the result of diarrhea. I am not able to perform the duties of my office and fear never will be. Therefore, I respectfully tender my resignation as ass't surgeon, 19th Tennessee Reg't P.A.C.V. to take effect immediately and unconditionally.

I at the same time certify that I have not been absent without leave, that I have no government property in my possession. That I am not in arrears with the Confederate states or any account whatsoever and that there are no charges against me that would affect me or my pay in any way whatsoever.

I am sir very respectfully yours,  
Eleazor Pyatt, Ass't Surgeon 19th Tennessee Reg't P.A.C.V"<sup>21</sup>

His reputation with his superiors may have afforded him the quick acceptance and approval of his resignation, and, in addition, he was granted a thirty-day leave of absence.<sup>22</sup> To put this time in the context of the war, the bloody Battle of Gettysburg had happened that June/July, and the Battle of Chickamauga, had just occurred that month.<sup>23</sup>

Was it during this leave of absence that he began a relationship with his future wife, Ann Mahaffey? When (and where) did they meet? Had they met prior to his service and have to put off their marriage until the end of the war? She was from Washington County, Virginia, so the proximity to Eleazor's childhood home was about 100 miles—quite a distance normally for a mountain boy to travel. But even more intriguing, is that Washington County, Virginia, is only about 20 miles from Holston Valley, Sullivan County, Tennessee, where Dr. Pyatt had been living and working— was there a family connection between his hosts and Ann? [Ann Mahaffey Pyatt's mother, Mary George Mahaffey, was born and got married in Sullivan County, Tennessee. In fact, two of Mary George Mahaffey's children, James and Mary Jane, were born there. Thus, Ann Mahaffey Pyatt had relatives who lived in the Sullivan County area.<sup>24</sup>] Ann Eliza Mahaffey and Dr. Pyatt were married just a few months after the war ended, on October 16, 1865, at Ann's hometown in Washington County, Virginia.<sup>25</sup> That month, Dr. Pyatt was documented as living in Abingdon, Virginia.<sup>26</sup>

A couple of years later, they moved north to Illinois, where they spent the rest of their lives. Dr. Pyatt prospered in his new home, becoming one of the most successful landowners in Moultrie County at that time.<sup>27</sup> His family grew, too: He and Ann had six children. Their first child—a son—died while still an infant. Their other children were Mary Grace Pyatt Wilkinson, 1868-1891; Edward Charles (married 1. Esther, 2. Minnie), 1870-1929; George A. (married Lilla,

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.fold3.com/image/71227602>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.fold3.com/image/71227516>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-war-glass-negatives/articles-and-essays/time-line-of-the-civil-war/1863/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/K24T-B75>; *Portrait and Biographical Record of Shelby and Moultrie Counties*

<sup>25</sup> Virginia, Select Marriages, 1785-1940, p 365

<sup>26</sup> U.S. I.R.S. Tax Assessment lists 1862-1918. He was assessed \$18.50 in taxes.

<sup>27</sup> Herald & Review, (Decatur, IL) 22 October 1891

'Belle,' or 'Tilla'), 1872-1943; Lula Pearl Pyatt Noble, 1877-1917; and Dorothy Anna Pyatt Williamson, 1885-1958.<sup>28</sup>

Information about Dr. Pyatt's political and civic views were revealed in his biography: "Dr. Pyatt is a Democrat in his political views. but is not extremely partisan, notwithstanding the fact that he was connected with the Confederate service, but he esteems it his duty to take enough interest in local matters to cast his vote on election day."<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Pyatt died on May 5, 1902 at Bethany, Moultrie County, Illinois,<sup>30</sup> and he was buried in the Marrowbone Cemetery at Bethany.<sup>31</sup> His obituary states: "Dr. E.A. Pyatt died at his residence Monday evening. He came home from Louisiana sick a week ago. Dr. Pyatt was nearly 70 years of age and had resided here about 35 years. He owned several farms and a nice residence property here in town. The funeral services were conducted at the residence Wednesday afternoon by Rev. Sylvius. There was a large attendance. All the business houses were closed during the funeral."<sup>32</sup>

The reverend who conducted Dr. Pyatt's funeral services was Rev. George H. Silvius (b. 1862 in Tennessee).<sup>33</sup> He was commissioner of the Tennessee synod of the Presbyterian Church,<sup>34</sup> and he was the pastor of Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Bethany.<sup>35</sup> Presumably, Rev. Silvius moved from Ohio with his family to Bethany, sometime between June 1900 and May 1902.

An interesting note is also included in this obituary, i.e. that Dr. Pyatt had just returned from Louisiana and was sick upon returning. So, the question is, what was he doing there? Did he have business there? It appears that he might have, based on the information contained in the following newspaper announcements: In 1900: "Frank Ward, Sam Moody, Dr. E A Pyatt, W L Collier, George Recus (sp) went to Louisiana on Tuesday."<sup>36</sup> In 1901, the following was printed: "Among the people who went from here to Louisiana on Tuesday were Dr E A Pyatt, W L Collier, Walter Roney, Charles Esry, and Rick Crowder and wife."<sup>37</sup> And finally, in 1907: "Mrs. E A Pyatt and family 906 W Main Street leave Tuesday for Lake Charles, Louisiana where Mrs. Pyatt has extensive interests. They expect to make Lake Charles their home for one year after which they hope to return to Decatur. Miss Dorothy Pyatt will attend the Sophie Newcomb boarding school during the year. Miss Pyatt is well known in local university circles having been a student there for two years."<sup>38</sup>

About 1926, the Pyatt's residence was purchased by the Tohill family, and became known as the Tohill Memorial Home, afterwards becoming part of the Tohill Funeral Home in Decatur.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Portrait and Biographical Record of Shelby and Moultrie Counties.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Decatur Herald*, 10 May 1902. See also, Deceased American Physicians, 1804-1929

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40419210/eleazar-a-pyatt>

<sup>32</sup> *Decatur Herald*, 10 May 1902.

<sup>33</sup> 1900 Turtle Creek, Warren Co., Ohio census, household 251

<sup>34</sup> *The Semi-Weekly Knoxville Sentinel* (Knoxville, TN) 30 August 1893.

<sup>35</sup> *The Daily Review* (Decatur, IL) 22 Feb 1905. However, the exact date of when he started as official pastor of the church has yet to be determined. According to *A History of Bethany*, written by Jim Scott and published by Bethany Chamber of Commerce, "the Presbyterian Church, [which was] founded July 3, 1906 by G.H. Silvius, built its present brick structure in 1916." However, G.H. Silvius was already pastor of the church in Dec. 1904 (*Herald & Review* newspaper, Decatur, IL, 28 Dec 1904, front page).

<sup>36</sup> *The Daily Review*, (Decatur, IL) October 18, 1900.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3, 1901.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1, 1907.

<sup>39</sup> *The Decatur Daily Review* (Decatur, IL) Feb. 15, 1968.