

One of our great American Specialties

Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

James Wright Tracy, Confederate Surgeon



I added a couple of covers to stock recently that bear the most common of general issues, but are addressed to “Surgeon J. W. Tracey (sic), Hospital No. 7, Raleigh, N.C.” Research into Tracy’s military records showed that James Wright Tracy (1819-1896) began the war as the Assistant Surgeon for the 37th N.C. Infantry under Gen. A.P. Hill and later served as Surgeon of the 14th NC Infantry.

While trolling the genealogy websites for possible information, I came across Rocky Strickland’s family site and quickly knew that this was a poignant story that needed a wider audience. He graciously agreed to let me share the story with you.

Dr. Tracy’s father bred, ran, and bet on his own race horses, and young Wright was a jockey as a boy. At twenty years of age, he owned, rode, and bet on his own horses from South Carolina to Kentucky. He also played cards for money. This changed when he “got religion,” joined the Methodist Church, and was licensed as an exhorter.

He was studying theology preparing to enter the regular ministry when a man called him a liar, the greatest insult in his vocabulary. After the resulting fray, young Wright’s father, turned his theology books back to the Elder. Thus Tracy turned to the study of medicine instead.

In 1844, he married Regina Minerva Stone and they moved to Cleveland County, North Carolina, and bought a farm of about 150 acres. The young doctor established a medical practice and, after a few years, had accumulated enough money to attend the Transylvania Medical College in Lexington, Kentucky. He received his degree as Doctor of Medicine in 1850.

Dr. Tracy served as Cleveland County’s delegate in the Secession Convention in 1861, where he voted to secede. He immediately raised a company of volunteer cavalry in Cleveland and Rutherford Counties, and offered them to the State. The refusal of the state to equip his troops forced him to abandon that venture and

offer himself as a surgeon. As Assistant Surgeon in the 37th Regiment, he participated in the Battle of New Bern in March 1862.

In May, 1862, the brigade went to Virginia where it participated in the Seven Days’ battles around Richmond. On or about July 1, 1862, Dr. Tracy was transferred to the 14th Regiment, North Carolina Troops, as an Assistant Surgeon, and he was appointed Surgeon on or about July 25, 1862.

He served as Major and Brigade Surgeon in George Anderson’s Brigade, and participated in the Battle of Gettysburg and the Mine Run campaign. He was transferred out of the 14th Regiment on or about April 23, 1864, and was put in charge of the Confederate hospital in Raleigh, where he served until Sherman’s advancing army forced the Confederate’s retreat in April 1865.

During the retreat, Dr. Tracy passed a young Confederate lying face down by the roadside, apparently in great suffering. He got off of his horse and turned the boy over to see if he could help him. He found it was his own son, Rush, whom he had not seen for three years. Tracy put Rush on his horse and took him home, but Rush never regained full health and died a few years later.

After the War, Dr. Tracy continued his medical practice. He ministered to the physical ills of the people in a circle fifty miles in diameter around King’s Mountain for fifty-two years. At the time of his death, he had \$60,000 of uncollected accounts on his books for medical services rendered to the community. He ministered to their spiritual interests as well, and customarily filled in for pastors in their times of need.

Rocky Strickland recounts that after Tracy’s wife died in 1894, his dreams were filled with visions of her. He spoke of many spirit meetings with her. One day while sitting at the table eating dinner, he said, “Look! Look!” He gazed for several moments upon the wall across the room as if he saw something. Then he lowered his eyes, took his hands down from the table, breathed out a long breath which had the sound of a sigh, and died. ☒