
Broughton Brothers: Early Doctors in Wilson County

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Dr. Leonard Gaston "Len" Broughton practiced medicine in Wilson County for three years from 1885 to 1888. He was born in Wake County on December 5, 1865, the second son of Gaston and Louisa Hawkins Franks Broughton.¹ After completing public school in Raleigh, he enrolled at Wake Forest but became sick preventing him from completing his studies. Since his goal in life was to be a physician and surgeon, he enrolled at the Kentucky School of Medicine and graduated in 1885. In the same year, he appeared before the North Carolina State Board of Medical Examiners and was granted a license to practice

medicine.² At the time, he was one of the youngest doctors licensed in the state.³⁻⁵

Dr. Charles V. Broughton, Dr. Len Broughton's older brother, also graduated from Kentucky School of Medicine and received his medical license from the North Carolina Board of Medical Examiners at the same time as Dr. Len Broughton. Like his brother, Dr. Charles Broughton also set up a medical practice in Wilson County in 1885. However, Dr. Charles Broughton soon relocated his practice to Mount Pleasant, North Carolina, just north of Bailey in Nash County. While practicing medicine at Mount Pleasant, Dr. Charles Broughton met and married Bettie Farmer, daughter of Benjamin E. Farmer and the former Nancy Ann Deans. On August 21, 1885, they had a son, Needham R. Broughton, but a series of tragedies would soon strike the young family. On October 19, 1885, Dr. Broughton's wife, Bettie, succumbed to bilious fever. Five days after the onset of her symptoms she had a high fever and convulsions followed by death. Bilious fever was a 19th century diagnosis for any fever with nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. One common cause was malaria. Two weeks later, Dr. Charles V. Broughton died of brain fever. Brain fever was sometimes given as a diagnosis during the 19th century after a patient suffered a severe emotional shock which resulted in a high fever and delirium. A memorial marker in the Town of Bailey Cemetery marks a gravesite for the young doctor. Within two months, on January 6, 1886, Charles and Bettie Broughton's infant son, Needham, also died.⁶⁻⁹

Dr. Len Broughton continued his practice in Wilson County.¹⁰ While practicing in and around Wilson, he met and married Roxanna Barnes, the daughter of Elias G. Barnes and the former Harriett Ann D. Kent of the Buckhorn Community.¹¹⁻¹² Dr. Broughton and his wife, Roxanna, had four children, three died in infancy or early childhood and one, Leonard Gaston Broughton Jr., lived to adulthood.¹³

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Also, a local Wilson newspaper reported while Dr. Broughton was in Wilson County, he began studying medical applications of electrical current and eventually developed an electrical medical instrument. The instrument could be used in place of the surgical scalpel which would diminish blood loss and pain. Likewise, other physicians were researching applications using electricity in medical treatments.¹⁴

Then, in July 1888, after practicing medicine for three years, Dr. Broughton decided to move his medical and surgical practice from Wilson County to Reidsville. A newspaper advertisement announced he would attend calls day or night at his new office in Reidsville. His new office was located at Rominger and Sith's Drug Store.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

In 1888, he joined the North Carolina Medical Society. At the age of thirty-six, in April 1889, Dr. Broughton read a paper at the thirty-sixth annual North Carolina State Medical Society meeting in Elizabeth City on aseptic and antiseptic midwifery. Following the meeting, his paper, "History and Development of Aseptic and Antiseptic Midwifery," was published in the June 1889 *North Carolina Medical Journal*.¹⁷⁻¹⁸

In 1889, he performed an abdominal surgery on a patient in Reidsville and removed the patient's appendix. According to Dr. Joseph Howell Way, former chairman of the State Board of Health and president of the North Carolina Medical Society, Dr. Broughton was one of the first to perform an appendectomy in North Carolina.¹⁹

Dr. Broughton was a knowledgeable physician and skillful surgeon, but an accidental injury changed his life. In November 1890, Dr. Broughton had a serious buggy accident. He was traveling on Scales Street in Reidsville when a section of the harness broke, and he lost control of the buggy. The buggy hit a rock and the doctor was thrown to the ground. He suffered severe head and internal injuries.²⁰⁻²¹ Dr. Robert Young from Concord was summoned to treat Dr. Broughton for his cuts, bruises and injuries.²²

One newspaper reported, "he had a narrow escape from a horrible death."²³ His friends regretted his injuries from the accident but rejoiced "the life of the bright young physician has been spared and that he sustained no permanent injury."²⁴ During his lengthy convalescence after the buggy accident, he contracted typhoid.²⁵ In May 1891, Broughton was scheduled to speak at the thirty-eighth State Medical Convention in Asheville; however, he was unable to attend because he was still suffering from the ill effects of typhoid.²⁶

Subsequently, after his extended recuperation, Dr. Broughton made a major career change. In October 1891, Dr. Broughton decided to leave the medical field and enter the ministry. One reporter stated, "the medical society loses a strong practitioner, while the Baptist church gains a promising and strong laborer."²⁷

In March 1891, he became the pastor of a small church in Winston Salem. Dr. Broughton returned to Wake Forest, received his Doctor of Divinity degree, and in 1893, became an ordained minister.²⁸

He left the Winston Salem church and became pastor of the Calvary Church in Roanoke, Virginia. In 1898, he left Virginia to become pastor of the Third Baptist Church on Jones Avenue in Atlanta. His congregation grew quickly. To accommodate new members, he planned to build a larger church in Atlanta; however, the Third Baptist Church congregation was divided over his plan. Yet, the vote passed and he built the larger church near the center of town. The dissenting voters remained at the Third Baptist Church while the supporters followed Broughton to the larger Baptist church and it was named the Tabernacle. In 1901, he built the Tabernacle infirmary; later it became Georgia Baptist Hospital.²⁹

A younger brother of Dr. Broughton's, L. Joseph "Joe" Broughton, had a dental practice in Asheville. In September 1898, Joe moved to Atlanta to accept a position with the dental department of Atlanta College of Physicians and Surgeons as a demonstrator of crown and bridge work.³⁰

Joe Broughton lived in Atlanta for thirty years where he also practiced dentistry. He was an active member and Sunday School superintendent of the Druid Hills Baptist Church. He was also involved with his brother's church. Two months before his death in 1938, he participated in a Sunday school training institute at the Tabernacle.³¹

Although Dr. Len Broughton had a long tenure with the Tabernacle, in 1912, he decided to travel abroad. He was offered and accepted a position at Christ Church in London, England. He remained at Christ Church for two years but returned to the United States during World War I. Upon returning to the United States, he accepted a pastorate at the First Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. From Tennessee, Broughton returned to the Tabernacle in Atlanta and was there from 1929 to 1931. Then he became a traveling evangelist and toured the country until his health began to fail.³²

On February 22, 1936, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after an illness of several weeks, Dr Broughton died at his home, 1019 Peachtree Street, Atlanta. He was seventy-two years-old. Following funeral services at the church he founded in Atlanta, the Tabernacle, his body was transported to Knoxville, Tennessee. There, he was interred at Greenwood Cemetery.³³

References

1. Authors' Note: Gaston Broughton's brother and Dr. Len Broughton's uncle, was Needham Bryan Broughton, Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, Raleigh. The Broughton Printing Company was contracted by the State of North Carolina for many years to publish state documents. Another of Gaston Broughton's brothers, Joseph Melville Broughton, was a successful real estate developer and his son became a US Senator and the 69th Governor of North Carolina, 1941-1945.
2. "State Board of Medical Examiners," *The Charlotte Democrat* (Charlotte, NC), August 28, 1885, 2.
3. Samuel W. Kluttz, "Len G. Broughton, Atlanta World-Renowned Pulpit Conductor Conducts Revival Here," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), October 26, 1930, 34.
4. "Len Broughton Work as Surgeon," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), July 13, 1923, 8.
5. "Dr Broughton's Paper," *The Reidsville Review* (Reidsville, NC), May 1, 1889, 3.
6. Authors' Note: The term "brain fever" in 19th century medicine was described as inflammation of the brain with fever.
7. "Broughton," *Raleigh Christian Advocate* (Raleigh, NC), November 18, 1885, 5.
8. "Benjamin E. Farmer, I'm Thinking," *Rocky Mount Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), December 14, 1960, 4.
9. *Ibid.*
10. "Kenly Items," *Goldsboro Messenger* (Goldsboro, NC), June 9, 1887, 1.
11. "Obituaries," *Raleigh Christian Advocate* (Raleigh, NC), September 19, 1883, 6.
12. "Harriet Ann D. Barnes' Obituary," *Raleigh Christian Advocate* (Raleigh, NC), September 19, 1883, 6.
13. Leonard G. Broughton, 1900 United States Census, Atlanta Ward 5, Fulton, Georgia, Enumeration District 0067, FHL Microfilm 1240199, Page 15.
14. "A Progressive Physician," *The Wilson Advance* (Wilson, NC) October 2, 1890, 3.
15. "Dr. L. G. Broughton," *The Reidsville Times* (Reidsville, NC), July 6, 1888, 3.
16. "Dr. L. G. Broughton," *The Reidsville Times* (Reidsville, NC), October 26, 1888, 3.
17. "The North Carolina State Medical Society," *The Falcon* (Elizabeth City, NC), April 19, 1889, 3.
18. L. G. Broughton, "History and Development of Aseptic and Antiseptic Midwifery," *The NC Carolina Medical Journal*, (June 1889): 405-412.
19. "Len Broughton Work as Surgeon."
20. *Ibid.*
21. "Dr. L. G. Broughton," *The Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), March 18, 1891, 2.
22. "Dr Broughton's Condition," *The State Chronicle* (Raleigh, NC), November 30, 1890, 4.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. "Dr. L. G. Broughton," *The Biblical Recorder*, March 18, 1891.
26. "State Medical Convention," *The State Chronicle* (Raleigh, NC), May 24, 1891, 1.
27. "Left the Field of Medicine," *The Standard* (Concord, NC), October 15, 1891, 3.
28. "Famed Baptist Minister Dies," *The Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), February 23, 1936, 1.
29. *Ibid.*
30. "Goes to Atlanta: Dr. L. Joe Broughton to Leave Here Next Month," *Asheville Citizen-Times* (Asheville, NC), August 18, 1898, 1.
31. "Dr. Joseph Broughton Succumbs at Atlanta," *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), March 27, 1938, 10.
32. "Len G. Broughton, Noted Minister, Dies at Residence," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), February 23, 1936, 1.
33. *Ibid.*