

The Brattons - A Family of Physicians

The Bratton family has been associated with the practice of medicine in York County since the Battle of Huck's Defeat in 1780, and it still continues to this day. Whether trained by family members, by apprenticeship, or through professional schooling, the Brattons have served this area and the medical profession for over 200 years. It is rare for any family to claim at least six generations of involvement in any profession. Let's look at the Bratton physicians while traveling up their family tree!

Martha Bratton (1749/50 - 1816)

Home of Martha and William Bratton
Bratton family tradition states that Martha Robinson (or Robertson) was born on the ship bearing her parents to the American colonies from Northern Ireland. She grew up learning about herbal medicines and home health care from her Ulster-Scots elders in Virginia or North Carolina. She brought that knowledge with her when she married William Bratton and moved with him to the area that would become York County in the 1760s.

She likely doctored her family, her neighbors, and her husband's slaves. One story that illustrates her talents as a healer took place after the Battle of Huck's Defeat, fought near her homestead on July 12, 1780. British casualties were brought into her house after the morning battle. It appears that most of them were able to leave the Brattons by that evening, with one notable exception. Captain John Adamson, a Loyalist officer who came to Mrs. Bratton's aid the previous day, fell off his horse during the battle and was impaled on a pine sapling. He stayed with the Brattons for several days, while Martha nursed his wound.

William Bratton (1773-1850) and John Simpson Bratton (1789-1843)

William and John Simpson Bratton, two sons of Martha and William Bratton, worked as physicians. According to family tradition, they both trained in the medical profession under Dr. James Simpson. Simpson was connected to the Bratton family in several ways; he was married to Jane, William and John's sister, and was a son of Rev. John Simpson of Fishing Creek Presbyterian Church, who had been a rebel leader with their father during the Revolutionary War.

William lived in York County until sometime after the 1800 census, in which he was listed as "Dr. William Bratton." He moved to Winnsboro with his second wife, and continued his practice there.

John remained at Brattonsville, and built the Homestead in 1823. He was a successful business man as well as a physician, having established stores at both Brattonsville and Yorkville (now York). He lent money and extended credit to a wide circle of people. At the time of his death, he held debts totaling nearly \$50,000 - many for medical services and treatments. He also owned the largest plantation in York County, with over 6000 acres and 139 slaves.

John Bratton (1831-1898)

The son of William Bratton of Winnsboro, John was schooled at Mount Zion Institute in that town. He then attended South Carolina College at Columbia, and graduated in 1850. He went on to the Medical College of the State of South Carolina at Charleston. His thesis was titled "Fecundation" (studies of fertility and pregnancy).

After finishing his training in 1854, John set up a practice in Fairfield County, and continued to farm his father's plantation. He also had an illustrious military career, rising to the rank of Brigadier General in the Confederate Army. He entered politics after the war, serving as a delegate to the 1865 South Carolina Constitutional Convention, as a South Carolina State Senator from 1865 - 1866, and then as a member of the United States House of Representatives from 1883 - 1885.

John Simpson Bratton Jr. (1819-1888)

John Simpson Bratton John Simpson and Harriet Rainey Bratton had 14 children, three of whom studied medicine. John Simpson Bratton, Jr. attended Mount Zion Institute in Winnsboro, and probably the South Carolina College in Columbia. In January, 1843, he and his brother J. Rufus studied anatomy with Drs. Fair and Wells in Columbia. They completed their study in April, just before their father's unexpected death. Instead of starting medical school, John remained at Brattonville to run the family plantation and businesses. He and his wife Harriet Jane Rainey Bratton built Forest Hall (now known as Hightower Hall) in 1854 - 1856.

Samuel E. Bratton (1820-1893)

Samuel E. Bratton and Laetitia Samuel E. Bratton was able to continue his education at the Medical College of the State of South Carolina after the death of his father John Simpson Bratton. He graduated in 1844, after writing a thesis on dysentery. He worked as a physician in York County, and married Laetitia Alison Torrance, the daughter of a prominent Mecklenburg County planter in 1847. They moved to Georgia in 1859.

James Rufus Bratton (1821-1897)

James Rufus Bratton Like his brother John Simpson Bratton Jr., Rufus Bratton attended Mount Zion Institute, and went to the South Carolina College in 1840. In 1843, he and John studied anatomy with Drs. Fair and Wells in Columbia. According to his reminiscences, the doctors had "dissectory rooms in their garden in the rear of their office." The Bratton boys returned home, intending to study medicine with their father, before beginning the course of study at the Medical College of the State of South Carolina at Charleston. After his father's death in 1843, Rufus went on to Charleston and graduated in 1845, writing a thesis titled "Menstruation." He traveled to Philadelphia in April of that year, and studied at the University of Pennsylvania and worked in its hospital. Two of his sisters went with him, and they traveled extensively in the mid-Atlantic and New England states.

After returning home in October, 1845, Rufus established a practice in Yorkville with Dr. William Moore. Unsatisfied with his profits the first year, he struck out on his own in 1847. At the start of the Civil War, Rufus enlisted as Assistant Surgeon to

Colonel Micah Jenkins of the 5th Regiment, South Carolina Volunteers. He went with his regiment to Richmond, Virginia where he became a full surgeon in January 1863. He was placed in charge of the Fourth Division of Winder Hospital. He was then sent to LaGrange, Georgia to take charge of a division there for the Army of Tennessee. By 1864 he was posted to Madison, Georgia and then to Milledgeville, where he was the post surgeon. General Sherman marched through Milledgeville on his way to Savannah on November 19, 1864. Rufus and other doctors were taken prisoner for several days, after which they closed the hospital and began the difficult journey home to await further orders. He arrived in Yorkville about the 9th of April, 1865, and learned that General Lee had surrendered at Appomattox. President Jefferson Davis was traveling through the area, and Rufus invited him to stay for a night at his home on Congress Street in Yorkville.

With the end of the war, Rufus' life changed a great deal. He resumed the practice of medicine in 1866, and continued running his plantation, although most of his slaves had left the property after emancipation. In response to perceived threats from the now-free black community, Dr. Bratton and many others joined the Ku Klux Klan. Because he was wanted for questioning after the lynching of Jim Williams in 1871, Dr. Bratton fled first to Alabama, and then to London, Ontario. His wife and several of his children joined him there, and he established a thriving medical practice. They were able to return home in 1878. Dr. Bratton's reputation as a physician remained strong, and he served as the President of the South Carolina Medical Association from 1891 – 1892. He became a member of the Executive Committee of the State Board of Health in 1881. He was elected Chairman in 1888, and held that office until his death in 1897.

Rufus Andral Bratton (1859-1942)

Andral Bratton was a small boy when his father served as a surgeon in the Civil War. He traveled with his mother and brothers to visit Rufus in Virginia and later in Georgia, and lived with them in exile in London, Ontario. Upon returning to the United States, he studied at the Medical College of the State of South Carolina, where he was class valedictorian. He did post-graduate study in New York City, and then established a general medical practice in York. His home and office were located on South Congress Street, next to the Rose Hotel. He served on the state board of medical examiners, was president of the York County Medical Association, and was a medical member of the draft board for western York County during World War I.

Besides having a thriving medical practice, Andral Bratton continued to farm on land located near York. When he died in 1942, Dr. Bratton was described as "the oldest physician in York County." His obituary in the Rock Hill Evening Herald read, "He was truly a physician of the old school. He practiced medicine not as a means to earn a livelihood but to relieve suffering – to help his fellow man. He considered not a person's station in life or his race if that person stood in need of medical aid."

Lawrence Bratton

Lawrence Bratton is the only known Bratton to pursue pharmacy as a career. He owned a drug store in Atlanta, Georgia, and according to family tradition, was either the first or second pharmacist in town to serve Coca-Cola in his store.

James Rufus Bratton, Sr. (1913-1979)

James Rufus Bratton, Sr., son of Rufus Andral Bratton, was a popular pediatrician, serving Rock Hill for 39 years. His college years were spent at Duke University, and he graduated from the Medical College of the State of South Carolina in 1937. He completed his residency in Louisville, Kentucky in 1940. After serving in World War II, he returned to Rock Hill. He became president of the South Carolina Pediatrics Society, and was active in the York County Medical Society as well as the American Medical Association.

James Rufus Bratton, Jr.

James Rufus Bratton, Jr., is the last Bratton physician in the Carolina Piedmont. Like so many of his ancestors Rufus attended the Medical College in Charleston, now known as the Medical University of South Carolina. After completing his residency in Charleston, Dr. Bratton established a practice specializing in ears, nose and throat in Florence, South Carolina