

Civil War doctor fled to Canada to avoid charges

Yorkville man was accused of helping kill leader of black militia

James Rufus Bratton was born at Brattonsville, York County, in 1821. He was a grandson of Col. William Bratton, Revolutionary War hero. His parents were wealthy and able to see that he received an excellent education. He chose to practice medicine and graduated from S.C. Medical College.

Bratton purchased a fine home on South Congress Street in Yorkville in about 1847. Five years later, he married Mary Rebecca Massey of Lancaster County. Bratton soon had a prosperous medical practice, but when the Civil War broke out in 1861, he volunteered to serve the Confederacy as a surgeon. Leaving his wife and three young sons in

Yorkville, he served the next four years both in the field and in Confederate hospitals.

In May of 1862, Bratton was made head of the Richmond, Va., hos-

pital. Near the end of the war, he was made surgeon general of the Georgia region. He amputated many limbs and the records showed that every soldier on whom he operated survived.

Bratton returned to Yorkville at the end of the war and resumed his medical practice. It was a time of great upheaval. Federal troops occupied the state. York County unwillingly hosted a large contingent. Among many things that upset the whites was a black militia captained by Jim Williams who had served in Gen. William T. Sherman's army during the war. Unfounded rumors floated around that Williams had threatened to kill whites "from the cradle to the grave."

The Ku Klux Klan, led by James Avery, decided to silence Williams a.k.a. Jim Rainey. On the night of March 6, 1871, Dr. Bratton took 70 Klansmen, often called Night Riders, on a search for Williams. On the way, they found several other blacks on their list and whipped them soundly. Bratton and about a dozen of his followers

A warrant was issued from the office of Gov. Robert Scott for the arrest of Bratton and Avery. Bratton fled to London, a town in Ontario province, Canada. In June 1872, two U.S. detectives from the Secret Service Department were in London. They located Bratton's residence and made plans to kidnap him and return him to the United States for trial.

Bratton was out for a walk about 4 p.m. when two horse-driven cabs approached traveling at full speed in opposite directions. When they were opposite Bratton, the cabs suddenly stopped and a detective leapt from each. They grabbed Bratton and choked him until he was unconscious, chloroformed him and threw him into one of the cabs. There were witnesses, but no one came to Bratton's assistance.

Bratton was taken to Detroit where a warrant was issued for his arrest. Bratton refused to give his name and the warrant was made out in the name of James Simpson.

Bratton was able to send a telegram from Leavittsville, Ohio, to friends who immediately began planning for Bratton's release. There was sympathy in high places in the Canadian government for Confederate refugees such as Bratton.

The Canadian government contacted U.S. officials and told them that they were outraged. "We trust that the matter will not lead to any international difficulties, but whatever the cost may be, our honor must be sustained. If a criminal escapes to Canada, we have extradition laws which will secure his punishment. The very fact that the kidnappers made no attempt to appeal to those laws fully explains the nature of their mission..."

Dr. Bratton was returned to Canada where he spent several more years in exile. He returned to South Carolina in 1877. In 1881, he was appointed to the State Board of Health and served as its chairman for a number of years before his death in 1897.

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