



BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

The Good Doctor

William M. McKinnon M.D., November 20, 2020

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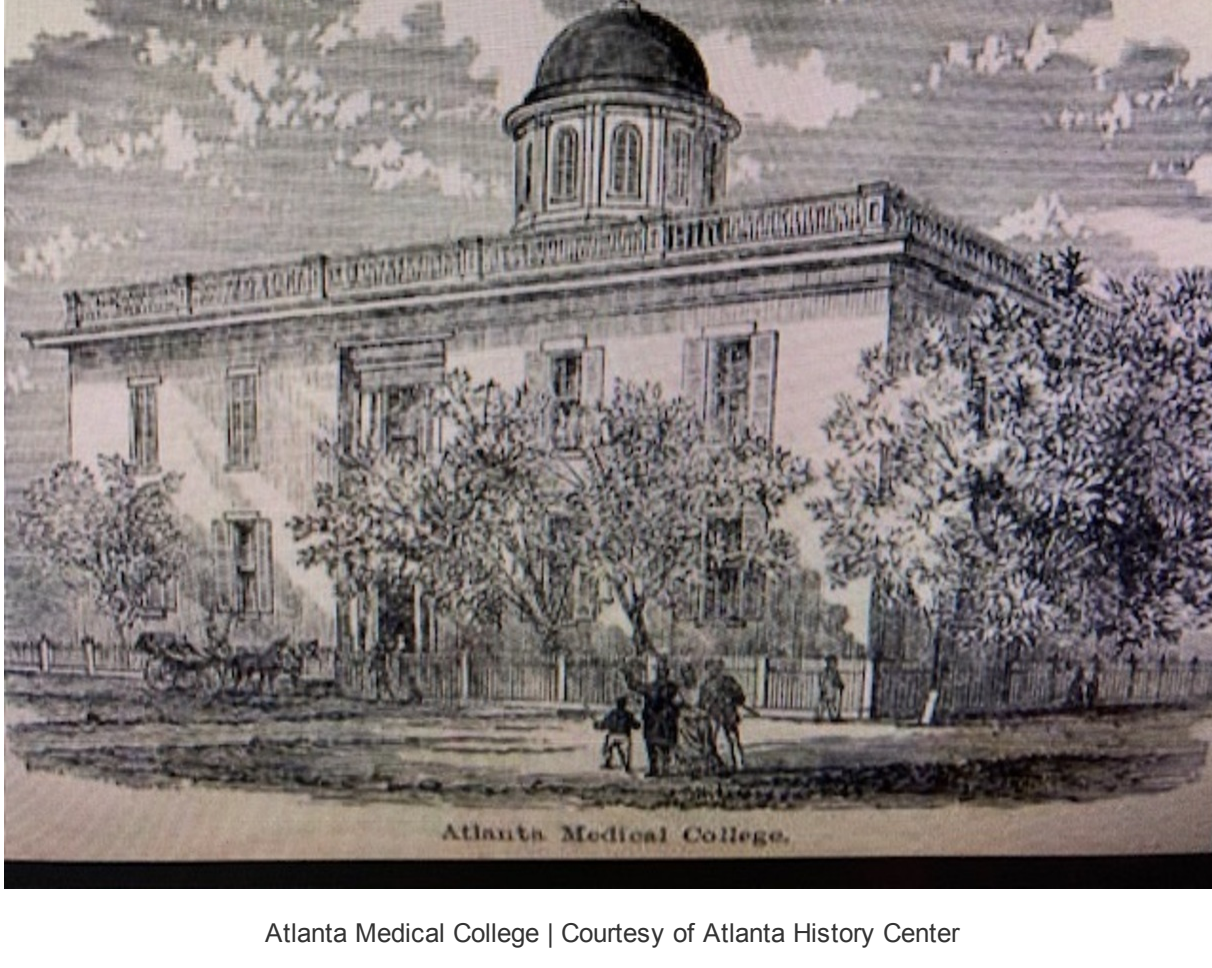


Dr. D'Alvigny | Courtesy of Joseph McCullough

Medical care during the Civil War was basic, to say the least, and doctors did their best to help the wounded and dying with little experience and lack of equipment or modern medical knowledge. One of the most experienced surgeons of the times was Dr. Noel D'Alvigny.

Dr. Pierre Paul Noel D'Alvigny was born in Paris, France, on April 13, 1800, the son of minor aristocrats who survived the Revolution. When the Napoleonic Wars began, D'Alvigny joined the legions of Napoleon and, according to Joseph McCullough, his great-great-grandson, family lore holds that he ended up receiving the Legion of Honor for saving the life of either a general or a surgeon. In 1832 D'Alvigny was involved in the riots made famous by Victor Hugo but managed not to be arrested. He later moved to America, and by 1835 was practicing as a dentist in New York City. In 1836 he married Emiline de la Foy, the daughter of a French aristocrat who had fought at Waterloo. They moved to Charleston and, unfortunately, lost two children at an early age. A third child, Charles, would be born in 1843, and daughter Pauline arrived in 1848. Both survived and lived long lives; Pauline would years later assist her father as a nurse. Emeline died of consumption in 1848. Noel would marry again, this time to Caroline M. Crovatte, the children's nurse. Family history would indicate that Emiline had suggested and blessed the union before her death.

When the new Atlanta Medical College opened in 1855, Dr. D'Alvigny accepted the position of professor and curator of the museum of the school. He was soon recognized for his surgical skills, and quickly became one of Atlanta's most prominent physicians. He taught at the medical school until 1861, when all the students departed to enlist in the Confederate Army. Son Charles joined the artillery of Cobb's Legion and his father volunteered his own services, at age 60, as surgeon with the Ninth Georgia Light Artillery Battalion (Leyden). He served for a brief time in 1862 until poor health required him to resign and return to Atlanta. He was again a civilian, but, not surprisingly, the war followed him home.



Atlanta Medical College | Courtesy of Atlanta History Center

Following his return to good health, Dr. D'Alvigny served all comers, treating soldiers, civilians, families of serving soldiers, white patients and black. In August 1864, during Sherman's bombardment of the city, he was the surgeon at the Medical College Hospital, often operating outdoors beneath the trees in the Atlanta summer heat until bullets and shells began to come too close. That month Sherman's artillery rained some 10,000 shells upon Atlanta and its citizens. Surprisingly, civilian deaths totaled less than 25 as best can be determined.

One of these victims was a free black man named Solomon Luckie, who owned and operated a very prosperous barber shop in the Atlanta Hotel. One day he was walking on the street not far from his shop when a shell struck a lamppost and shattered, sending a fragment into his thigh. Several city fathers were nearby and they raced him to Dr. D'Alvigny at the Medical College. The doctor promptly amputated the leg to control bleeding, but the patient succumbed a few hours later in the absence of modern measures taken for granted today such as IV fluids, transfusions, and antibiotics.

During August Dr. D'Alvigny remained at his post as the other hospitals closed and physicians like Dr. Logan were evacuated with their patients. When the Confederate forces withdrew, he was apparently the only doctor still in town. He continued to treat all, including Union soldiers, Confederates, and civilians. In his papers at the Atlanta History Center, in addition to his medical school diploma, is a Union Army commission awarded him that allowed this ex-Confederate surgeon to treat soldiers from the North.

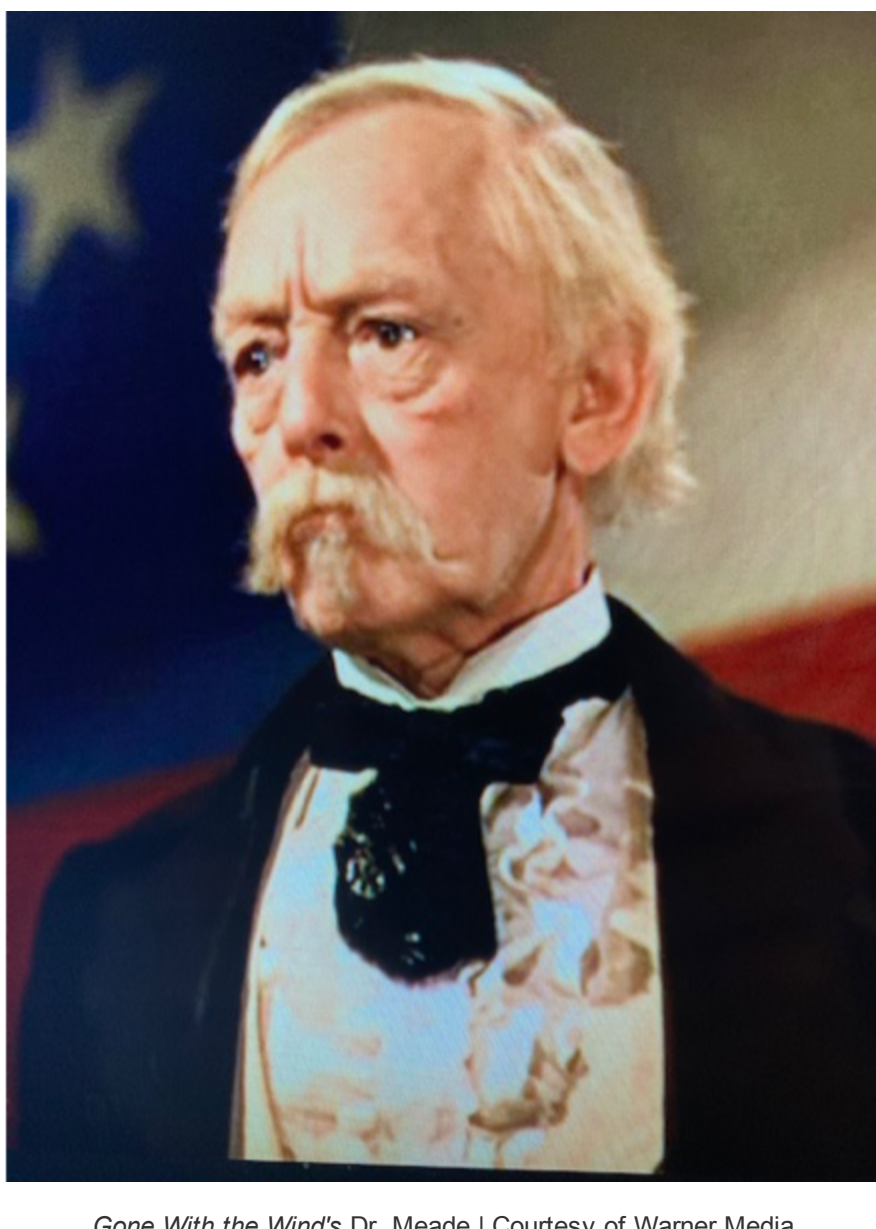


Solomon Luckie | Courtesy of Atlanta History Center

At the end of Sherman's occupation of the city, Dr. D'Alvigny received word that all buildings useful to the military were to be burned before the Union army left town. He knew that the empty Medical College building would be at risk. He filled the ward beds with attendants and other imposters, whom he plied with whiskey and gave instructions to feign illness if Union soldiers arrived for inspection. As expected, Union troops soon came to torch the Medical College building. When Dr. D'Alvigny took the officers on a tour of the wards, they found the beds full of groaning and obviously suffering patients. The indignant doctor told them forcefully that he had served through two revolutions and in three armies and had never seen a plan so cruel as to burn a building down over the heads of sick and dying men. Convinced, the Union officers retreated after saying they would return the next morning to complete their mission. When morning came, orders had been changed and Sherman's army marched out of town. The Medical College was saved and reopened after the war; in the next century it would become the Emory University School of Medicine.

At the end of the war, D'Alvigny continued to practice and teach as the students returned. He became involved with the Black community, which had no professional medical care. He took a post in a facility established by the Freedman's Bureau, the Black Georgia Hospital. After nearly dying from infection after accidentally cutting himself during an autopsy, he lived another decade and rests now in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery in a prominent plot near that of Gen. John B. Gordon.

Never famous in life despite his good works, the good doctor is remembered mostly today as the savior of the Medical College and as the likely role model for kindly Dr. Meade, played by Harry Davenport in the film version of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.

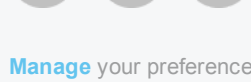


Gone With the Wind's Dr. Meade | Courtesy of Warner Media



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