THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
WILLIAM HENRY CUYLER
by
Gail Moyer

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Dr. Warlick
History 500
Armstrong State College
Savannah, Georgia
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Abstract

William Henry Cuyler was born on December 2, 1794, to Jeremiah and Margaret Clarendon Cuyler. William was one of eleven children. He served his native Savannah, Georgia, as a physician, an alderman, and a judge of the Inferior Court of Chatham County. Dr. Cuyler never married. He died on November 12, 1869, at the age of seventy-four years and eleven months. Dr. Cuyler was buried in the family lot at Laurel Grove Cemetery in Savannah.
William's Roots

William Henry Cuyler was born on December 2, 1794,\textsuperscript{1} to Jeremiah LaTouche Cuyler and Margaret Clarendon Cuyler. The Cuylers traced their roots to Hendrick Cuyler, who was born in Hasselt, Holland, in 1637, and moved to New York City in 1650.\textsuperscript{2} Hendrick brought the Cuyler coat-of-arms, which was taken from the impression of his own seal. He married Anna Schepmore (Shepmoes)\textsuperscript{3} and had several children. Hendrick willed the seal to his youngest son, Henry.

Henry Cuyler was born in 1677.\textsuperscript{4} He became a prominent merchant in New York City. Catherine Cruger became his wife, and they had several children.

Catherine and Henry's son, Telemen (Telaman; Telamon)\textsuperscript{5} was born in New York City in 1732.\textsuperscript{6} He married Jeanne LaTouche, and they had several children. The family moved to Savannah, Georgia, and Telemen became a Revolutionary War hero. After Telemen's death and the death of a son, Jeanne Cuyler moved back to New York City, leaving young Jeremiah LaTouche Cuyler in Georgia.

Jeremiah was born in 1768\textsuperscript{7} He married Margaret Elizabeth Clarendon, and they had eleven children. The eldest child was William Henry,\textsuperscript{8} who would grow up to be a credit to his family and beloved by his fellow citizens.
William as Physician

Little information has been found concerning William's early life. School records were rarely kept during the early nineteenth century, and any records which may have been kept have probably been lost. Being the eldest of eleven children, it is remarkable that the family could allow or afford to allow William to attend school and the necessary training to become a doctor. No record of William's medical training has been found.

William practiced medicine throughout his life. The earliest reference to Dr. William H. Cuyler was on April 28, 1817, when he returned to Savannah from Philadelphia. Dr. Cuyler established his own practice and obtained an office. Unfortunately, William's office was destroyed in the fire of 1820, and so he needed to acquire temporary office space.

Due to the fire, William moved into the offices of Doctors Kollock and Berrien. William remained in partnership with Dr. Kollock until Dr. Kollock's death in 1823, when William decided to reopen his own practice.

Besides having a private practice, William occasionally served as the attending physician for the Savannah Poor House and Hospital. The people of Savannah realized a need for such a facility as early as 1795. In 1818, the City Council granted the Medical Society of Georgia a piece of land to build the institution. Incorporation finally occurred in 1835. Eventually the Savannah Poor House and Hospital became known as the Savannah Hospital.

As a practicing physician, William became a member of the
Medical Society of Georgia. He served as the secretary of the society for several years. Two of William's secretarial duties were to record the minutes of each meeting and to have society information published in the newspaper. One such piece of information was the notice and resolution of Dr. Kollock's death. Dr. Kollock had been a founder of the society and William's partner.  

Being an active member of the Medical Society of Georgia, William was probably involved in the reorganization of the society in 1837. The society changed its name to the Georgia Medical Society. Its purpose was to promote science and the means of relieving human suffering. William served the society until his death.

Another medical duty of William's was to serve on the Board of Health. His first appointment was in 1825, and he was assigned Percival Ward. In 1833, William became the acting Health Officer at a critical time. Cholera had broken out in Cuba, and the Board of Health feared that cholera would enter Savannah aboard ship. As the Health Officer of Savannah, William notified the pilots that all ships coming from Cuba had to anchor at Five Fathoms until they could be examined.

The Board of Health was involved in the attempt to drain the land surrounding Savannah. The Board petitioned City Council in 1838 to drain stagnant water from near the Thunderbolt Road to eliminate possible health hazards, such as yellow fever.

City Council was petitioned by a group of physicians who wanted a medical college built in Savannah. William was one of the signers of this petition. The city eventually granted the land, but the Savannah Medical College was not founded until the beginning of 1853.
Although William's name appeared on the initial petition to establish the college, he was not listed as a founder of the institution in 1853.

William as Politician and Civil Servant

Pursuing a medical career is usually enough to keep most people occupied. However, Dr. Cuyler became involved in politics as a city alderman and as a judge of the Inferior Court of Chatham County. The second quarter of the nineteenth century became known as the Jacksonian Era and was a time which saw the emergence of political and social reform. There was war with Mexico, and in 1860, the Civil War began. Secessionist politics had its roots in local politics as early as the 1820's, and sharp lines emerged in Savannah politics during the 1830's as William decided to become a city alderman.

William was an alderman from 1834 to 1837, 1840 to 1841, 1842 to 1843, and 1844 to 1845. The term of office was one year, with elections usually held on the first Monday in September. Fourteen aldermen were chosen; one from each ward. These aldermen selected the mayor from among themselves.

William was elected to his first term of city alderman in September of 1833. Shortly thereafter, he became involved in the Friends of the Union Society and was chosen as the organization's secretary. The primary function of this group was to resist the secessionist tendencies of John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. The Friends of the Union supported the federal Constitution and opposed men like Calhoun and their treasonous ideas.

The issue of secession became a hot topic throughout 1834, and
the Friends of the Union ran its own ticket in the city election, and William ran on this ticket. He won the September 2, 1834 election with 465 votes. The entire Union ticket won.

The trend continued in 1835 when William appeared again on the Union ticket for city alderman. In this election, there were no opposing candidates, and so the entire ticket was elected. Voter turnout was poor due to the lack of competition. The Union and State Rights Party appeared active in Savannah politics through 1836, after which there is no further newspaper reference to the party.

After finishing his term in 1837, William did not run for a City Council post until 1840, when he joined a newly forming association known as the anti-Harrison and Democratic Association of Chatham County. William served on the committee to prepare the association's constitution and by-laws. The Democratic Republican ticket was announced in August of 1840, with William's name on the ticket for alderman. The entire ticket was elected. Unfortunately, the same results did not occur in 1841, when William and ten others on the ticket lost the election.

William and his democratic friends did not give up so easily. The Democratic Republican ticket for the 1842 city election regained its standing in the community and won the election. William Cuyler was an alderman once again. The 1843 election was another unlucky one, but William regained his seat in 1844. He did not run for City Council again until 1853, when he lost the election. William's City Council days were over.

As an alderman, William was involved in several important projects. In 1834, William served on a special committee of council to study
the feasibility of building a canal or railroad from Savannah to Macon, Georgia. The committee reported that Savannah was flourishing and could be successful in such a venture. A railroad was decided upon and shares were to be sold at five dollars each. On May 4, 1835, Cuyler and two other aldermen were appointed to open subscription books at Macon, Milledgeville, and Sandersville for the Central Railroad of Georgia. The sale of subscriptions proceeded nicely and the railroad was completed. On March 31, 1836, Savannah Mayor Gordon resigned to become the first president of the Central Railroad of Georgia, and William was chosen to serve out the remainder of Gordon's term. Nothing unusual was recorded during William's brief tenure.

William was also instrumental in the passage of another bill pertaining to the railroad. Dr. Cuyler was a member of a special committee which appeared before the Georgia General Assembly in Milledgeville in December of 1835 to effect the passage of the Central Railroad and Banking Bill. This bill, which was passed, gave banking privileges to the Central Railroad Company and chartered the Central Railroad and Banking Company. Upon the committee's return to Savannah, a dinner and ball were held.

Asiatic cholera broke out in 1834. William served on a special committee to select a site for a lazaretto, which is a quarantine station for isolating contagious diseases. Lazaretto Point, three miles West of the Tybee Light House, was chosen. The state legislature promised to appropriate $15,000 for the building project, but City Council never received the funds. There was some concern over the distance the ill of the city would have to be transported, but
Lazaretto Point was ideal for removing the sick from ships. 41

Savannah learned of General Lafayette's death at the end of June in 1834, and William was appointed to a special committee to plan ceremonies honoring the general. The citizens were asked to wear black crepe on their left arms for thirty days. A civic and military procession was organized, as well as religious services. 42

Besides the three projects discussed above, William served on numerous committees throughout his term: streets, accounts, market, cemetery, health, lamps, jail, dry culture, a special committee to repair the Altamaha and Ogeechee Canals, and a special committee for the Central Hospital. 43

William performed other civic duties besides that of city alderman. William was elected as a judge to the Inferior Court of Chatham County from 1853 through 1868. 44 He served on the grand jury throughout his life. However, William's seemingly spotless record was stained when he was fined $40 in 1841 and in 1844 for not appearing for grand jury duty. 45

William and Religion

Originally, William's family was probably Lutheran. His younger sisters and brothers—John, Margaret, Caroline, Ann, Maria, and Telamon—were baptized on July 25, 1825, 46 at the Lutheran Church of the Ascension in Savannah. Jeremiah LaTouche Cuyler and Margaret Elizabeth Clarendon Cuyler were listed as the parents. William was not baptized at this time, nor were there any baptismal records for William found. It is possible that William and the other four Cuyler
children were not baptized, but it is more probable that the five older Cuyler children were baptized prior to 1823. Unfortunately, these records have been lost.

Soon after the baptism of the six younger Cuyler children, the family changed to Christ Episcopal Church in Savannah. No reason has been found to explain the change. The confirmation of Eliza in 1826 and of Caroline in 1830 are evidence of the change. The Christ Church Register and Vestry Minutes contain the baptismal, confirmation, marriage, and burial records of the Cuyler family throughout the nineteenth century.

The Christ Church records show that William was a sponsor at the baptisms of several nieces and nephews. He and his brother, Richard, were confirmed at Christ Church on August 7, 1842. There was no explanation for the confirmation being at such a late age.

William attended services at Christ Church until his death. He supported the church in various ways. Records show that William rented a pew for several years at $100 per year. He subscribed to the Bishop's Fund for several years at $15 per year. William was elected as a warden of the church in 1863, and served in that position until his death in 1869.

William as Proprietor

During his life, William was involved in at least thirty property transactions which included the sale of slaves, as well as land. Several of the deeds pique one's curiosity as to how William acquired the land. A few deeds were not indexed, and others were missing.
As early as 1826, William acquired the use of fourteen slaves from the estate of John Hobbes. There is no hint as to where these slaves were to be used, since the 1830 Chatham County Census lists William as having only six slaves at his Broughton Street home. Later deeds do show that William owned plantations. William purchased two more slaves in 1827 for $192.

William purchased large tracts of land. The first tract was over 1,200 acres located in Effingham County. According to this deed, William purchased the land from his father for $7,000. William borrowed the money from Planters' Bank in Savannah. Besides the land, William obtained all buildings, improvements, and slaves.

In Chatham County, William bought and sold several pieces of property. He bought a lot in Jasper Ward in 1837. For $9,000 William sold a 500 acre tract on the south end of Ossabaw Island. It is stated in the deed that William acquired the land in 1821, but there is no deed for the earlier transaction. Another unrecorded acquisition in Heathcote Ward was sold for $100.

In 1844, William sold a total of fourteen slaves for the sum of $4,600. From his father's estate, William received a share of a lot in Anson Ward. In 1847, another slave was sold for $600.

William sold an 840 acre retreat named Brampton for $2,500 in 1848. The property was located in West Chatham County and had no record of previous ownership. In 1849, William made a lucrative sale to the Central Railroad and Banking Company. William added another 1,150 acres to his land in Effingham County in two separate purchases. He also sold another lot in West Chatham County.

A curious deed appeared in 1858. William was recorded as being
indebted to the Superior Court of Chatham County for $2,350. The nature of the indebtedness was not explained. Nine slaves were to be sold to pay the debt. However, the debt was cancelled and fully satisfied in 1864. 66

From 1858 through 1868, the property which William sold was referred to as 28 Garden lots and 22 Farm lots. The land was bounded by Thunderbolt Road (Wheaton Street) on the North, Waters Road to the West, Estill Avenue (Victory Drive) on the South, and Skidaway Road on the East. The total of the sales was $45,910. This included the land and all buildings. 67 As with other pieces of property, there was no record of William's acquisition of this vast tract.

Another curious deed appeared in 1867. William was in debt for $1,519.92 to the Inferior Court of Chatham County, of which he was a judge. Five of the above Garden lots were ordered sold to satisfy the debt. 68 A notice appeared in the Daily News and Herald that another 450 acres of William's land had to be sold to satisfy state and county taxes. 69

William as Family Man

Throughout his long life, William never married. No explanation has been found, but a plausible reason may have been that William was just too busy.

Being the eldest son of a large family, William probably had many responsibilities. As discussed in an earlier section, William was a sponsor at the baptism of several nieces and nephews. These were probably happy occasions.
Unfortunately, William's other responsibility was probably filled with sadness. William was the executor of the estates of several family members. Being the eldest son, it was fitting that he was the executor of his father's estate. Jeremiah bequeathed the Cuyler home on Bull and Broughton Streets to William. 70 Caroline Cuyler, William's sister, died intestate of tetanus from an abscess on her hand. 71 As administrator of her estate, William was authorized to sell everything she had owned. 72 William was also the administrator of his sister, Jane's estate. 73

William's Other Interests

William had other interests which were not necessarily related to his medical and political careers, his church, or his family. On at least two occasions, William served on a committee to organize a dinner and ball celebrating George Washington's birthday. 74

On occasion, William travelled to Philadelphia and New York City. William's paternal grandmother and other relatives lived in New York City. At least once each year, William received sundries and merchandise from Philadelphia and New York City. 75

William was also interested in the banking world. For many years, he served on the board of directors of the Planters' Bank. 76 William owned shares of stock in both the Planters' Bank and in the Central Railroad Bank. 77 William had been instrumental in having the Central Railroad built and in being chartered with banking privileges.

In a general work about Savannah, William's name appeared in a list of charter members of the Georgia Historical Society. 78
William's Death

For the nineteenth century, William lived a long and full life. He survived the fire of 1820, the yellow fever outbreaks of 1820 and 1854, the cholera outbreak in 1834, and the Civil War.

William died at the age of seventy-four years, eleven months from senile apoplexy. He was attended by Dr. Johnston, who may have been the same Johnston named as one of the administrators of William's estate. William's brother, John, and nephew, Richard M., were also designated as administrators, as was John Williamston. Mr. Johnston's signature appears on the estate transactions.

William died testate. He bequeathed his key, gold watch, and seal to his nephew, William Clarendon Cuyler. Unfortunately, young William died a few weeks before his uncle. The seal William bequeathed to his nephew may have been the family seal brought from Holland by William's great-great-grandfather, Hendrick Cuyler.

William's silverware, furniture, and mother's picture were bequeathed to his brother, John. William left instructions for a monument to be erected for his siblings: Jane, Ann, Caroline, and Telamon. The rest of William's estate, including 2,000 acres of land in Effingham County and a pew in Christ Church, was bequeathed to his brother, John, or to the children of his deceased brothers, Richard R. and Telamon.

William's funeral was held at Christ Church. The pall bearers were six of William's former slaves. William was buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery North in lot 553, with his parents and several siblings. A monument to William H. Cuyler's memory stands there.
Appendix I. Cuyler Family Tree, Abridged

Georgia Historical Society,

Hartridge Collection
Appendix II. Maps of Cuyler Property:

Chatham County and Savannah

1. Lot 1, Hucks Tything, Percival Ward
   Cuyler Home on Bull and Broughton Streets

2. Lot 9, First Tything, Anson Ward
   Deed 3-F, p.294.

3. Lot 5, Jasper Ward
   Deed 3-E, p.172.

4. Lot 7, Belitha Tything, Heathcote Ward
   Deed 2-W, p.368.

5. Lot 3, Springhill Ward
   Deed 3-F, p.377.

6. 28 Garden Lots and 22 Farm Lots
   Bounded by: Thunderbolt Road-North
   Waters Road-West
   Estill Avenue-South
   Skidaway Road-East
Savannah Properties

1. Broughton St.  
   Whitaker St.  
   Bull St.  
   Drayton St.  
   South Broad St.

2. Broughton St.  
   Drayton St.  
   State St.  
   Habersham St.  
   South Broad St.  
   Lincoln St.

3. Liberty St.  
   Whitaker St.  
   Bull St.  
   Drayton St.  
   Jones St.

4. Broughton St.  
   Jefferson St.  
   Bard St.  
   South Broad St.

5. New St.  
   Oak St.  
   West Broad St.
6. Cuyler Land, Extending from Lover’s Lane to Estill Avenue and from Waters Avenue to Skidaway Road, after the land from Thunderbolt Road to Lover’s Lane was sold.
Appendix III. Etching of William's Name from His Monument

Laurel Grove Cemetery North

Lot 553

Savannah, Georgia
The etching could not be copied.
Appendix IV. Problems and Unanswered Questions
Problems

1. Brevity of summer quarter.
2. Curtailed summer hours of libraries and Georgia Historical Society.
3. Lack of early records and gaps in existing records.
4. Age of records made some poor microfilm copies.
5. Old handwriting.

Unanswered Questions

1. Where did William attend school?
2. Where did William receive his medical training?
3. Why did William never marry?
4. To what other organizations did William belong?
5. How did William acquire the property for which there are no deeds?
6. Why was William indebted to the Superior Court of Chatham County?
7. Why did William not appear for grand jury duty on at least two occasions?
8. Why did William not pay his state and county taxes on at least one occasion?
Notes

1 Monument to William H. Cuyler, M.D., Laurel Grove Cemetery North, Savannah, Ga., lot 553.

2 Georgia Historical Society (GHS), Savannah, Ga., Hartridge Collection, Box 14, "Lineal Descent of Alice Cuyler Staley Logan through the Correct Cuyler Line in America."

3 Ibid.; both spellings have been found within the collection.

4 Ibid

5 Ibid.; spelling variations within the collection.

6 Ibid

7 Ibid

8 Ibid., "Family Tree."

9 Columbia Museum and Savannah Daily Georgian, April 28, 1817, p 3, c 2

10 Ibid., January 20, 1820, p 2, c 4.

11 Daily Georgian, January 25, 1820, p 3, c 2; April 15, 1823, p 2, c 4.

12 Ibid., May 1, 1822, p 3, c 2; November 25, 1822, p 1, c 2; Georgian, August 31, 1833, p 3, c 4.


14 Daily Georgian, January 12, 1822, p 2, c 3; April 19, 1823, p 2, c 3.

15 Ibid., April 17, 1837, p 2, c 5.

16 Ibid, May 18, 1825, p 2, c 6.


18 GHS, City Council Minutes, Box M-11, July 19, 1838, pp 72-73.

19 Ibid, November 22, 1838.


22 Ibid., pp 1 & 184

23 Georgian, February 6 & 21, 1834, p 2, c 2.
24 Ibid., August 26, 1834, p. 2, c. 2; September 3, 1834, p. 2, c. 1.
25 Ibid., August 25, 1835, p. 2, c. 5; September 8, 1835, p. 2, c. 3.
26 Daily Georgian, July 6, 1840, p. 2, c. 2.
27 Ibid., September 8, 1840, p. 2, c. 2.
28 Ibid., September 7, 1841, p. 2, c. 2.
29 Ibid., September 5, 1842, p. 2, c. 2.
30 Ibid., September 4, 1843, p. 2, c. 2.
31 Ibid., September 3, 1844, p. 2, c. 2.
32 Daily Morning News, November 28, 1853, p. 1, c. 1
36 GHS, City Council Minutes, Box M-11, December 14, 1835, p. 257; Daily Georgian, January 9, 1836, p. 2, c. 6.
42 Gamble, p. 201.
43 GHS, City Council Minutes, Box M-11, June 24, 1834, p. 9; September 8, 1834, p. 46; September 18, 1834, p. 49; September 17, 1835, p. 221.
44 Daily Morning News, January 4, 1853; Daily News Herald, July 17, 1867, p. 4, c. 2; and others between these years, but too many to list here. Check the Savannah Newspaper Digests at GHS.
45 Daily Georgian, February 16, 1822, p. 2, c. 5; April 14, 1841, p. 3, c. 2; January 1, 1844, p. 4, c. 7. See comment in previous note.
47 GHS, Christ Church Register: 1822-1851, Box M-2, pp. 14 & 31.
48 Ibid., pp. 77 & 83. 49 Ibid., p. 79. 50 Ibid., 1839-1864, Minutes.
52 Superior Court of Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, Deeds: 2-0, pp. 137-138

53 GHS, 1830 Chatham County, Georgia Census, Box C-1, Roll 16, p. 261

54 Superior Court of Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, Deeds: 2-0, p. 128

55 Ibid., p. 521  56 Ibid., 3-F, p. 172.  57 Ibid., 3-F, p. 398


60 Ibid., 3-F, p. 294.  61 Ibid., 3-E, p. 383.  62 Ibid., 3-F, p. 64.

63 Ibid., p. 377.  64 Ibid., 3-H, pp. 139-140; 3-N, pp. 74-76.

65 Ibid., 3-H, p. 304  66 Ibid., 3-Q, p. 532.

67 Ibid., 3-R, p. 538; 3-W, pp. 85, 86, 95; 3-Y, pp. 274, 347;

4-A, p. 2; 4-B, pp. 238, 239, 240, 242-243; 4-L, p. 75.

68 Ibid., 3-Z, pp. 13-14.


70 Probate Court of Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, file 207 mRoll C-2, p. 1490. Jeremiah Cuyler's will

71 Chatham County Health Department, Savannah, Georgia, Vital Statistics Office, Death Certificate of Caroline Cuyler.

72 Probate Court of Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, file 207 mRoll C-2, p. 1560. Caroline Cuyler's will.

73 Ibid., file 305 mRoll C-2, p. 1859.

74 Georgian, February 7, 1834, p. 2, c. 5.

75 Daily Georgian, April 19, 1820, p. 3, c. 3; October 18, 1836, p 2, c. 4.

76 Ibid., January 1, 1838, p. 2, c. 2; Daily Morning News, July 8, 1863, p 2, c 5.

77 Daily Georgian, April 25, 1838, p. 2, c. 2; June 2, 1838, p 2, c 2.

78 Harden, pp. 345-346.

79 Chatham County Health Department, Savannah, Georgia, Vital Statistics Office, Death Certificate of William H. Cuyler.
Probate Court of Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, File 358. William Cuyler's will is not on microfilm.

Ibid.

Laurel Grove Cemetery North, Savannah, Georgia, lot 124; date of death, November 2, 1869.

Probate Court of Chatham County, Savannah, Georgia, File 358. William Cuyler's will.

Savannah Morning News, November 17, 1969, p. 3, c. 2

Laurel Grove Cemetery North, Savannah, Georgia, lot 553, William Cuyler's grave.
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*Cooper's Map of Savannah, 1856.*

*Howard's Map of Savannah, 1888.*

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*Christ Church Registers: 1822-1851, 1852-1892; Christ Church Vestry Minutes: 1839-1864, Box M-2.*

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