

Kennesaw Mountain

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Kennesaw Mountain
National Battlefield Park



The Dallas Road Community and the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain



Before the Civil War, a small community consisting of middle-class homes, several small farms, a schoolhouse, a doctor's office, and a Primitive Baptist church stood along the Dallas Road. From the 1830s to the 1860s, Northwest Georgia families lived, worked, studied, and worshipped in this thriving rural neighborhood. But when Northern and Southern armies descended upon Kennesaw Mountain in June 1864, the Dallas Road community became a battle zone.

Pre-Civil War Medical Practices

Three doctors lived in the Dallas Road community before the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain: Dr. John S. Bellinger, his son J. F. Bellinger, and their neighbor, Dr. Thomas Wilcox.

Although not much is known about the specific ways in which these three men practiced medicine, medical technology in the years before the Civil War was primitive. In those days, doctors did not need medical licenses to practice. Some physicians, like the Bellingers, actually attended medical school, but others simply opened offices after reading some textbooks and watching local doctors treat patients.

Ante-bellum physicians relied upon herb- and root-based concoctions to cure everything from malaria, yellow fever, scarlet fever, smallpox, polio, measles, mumps, and typhoid to headaches, stomach aches, colds and flu. The results of these potions were questionable at best. Some common medications were toxic and harmful. Calomel, a drug containing mercury, was given to patients for cholera and joint pain. Antebellum doctors were unaware of the negative effects of this drug. Many patients in the 1800s

(including Mary Custis Lee, General Robert E. Lee's wife) contracted mercury poisoning from the very medication that was prescribed to help them.

Bloodletting and purging, designed to rid the body of harmful "humors," were widely accepted forms of treatment. The practice often weakened patients so much that some of them died. (It is surmised that George Washington would probably have survived his final illness if doctors had not removed several pints of blood from his body in trying to cure him.) Blistering, or applying skin-irritating plasters of powdered mustard and water to a patient's body, was also thought to be a beneficial treatment for various complaints.

Before the Civil War, doctors knew little about infection control. Physicians who helped deliver babies often transmitted bacteria to their female patients through unwashed hands or instruments; this contributed to the era's soaring death rate of women during and after childbirth. Surgical procedures (which, until the 1840s, were performed without anesthesia) often resulted in post-operative gangrene and sepsis.

Despite unfortunate occurrences, most physicians in the nineteenth century cared for their patients as best as they could by applying the knowledge and technology available to them at that time. Medical science advanced rapidly after the Civil War, which provided scores of injured and ill patients on whom new procedures could be tested.



Doctor bleeding a patient, 1864



Physician's pocket case containing vials of handmade pills, 1860s

The Bellinger House



Sign on Dallas Road marking 1864 site of Dr. John S. Bellinger's House

A present-day sign on the south side of Dallas Road marks the spot where the home, farm and cotton gin of 60-year-old Dr. John S. Bellinger stood. A log cabin which once stood across the street from the residence served as a doctor's office. Dr. Bellinger lived on 640 acres with his wife and one of his sons, 22-year-old J. F. Bellinger. J.F. was also a doctor, and so was his older brother, Moore S. Bellinger.

When he was not attending to patients, Dr. John Bellinger managed his small plantation. Eight slaves lived on the property and worked in the fields. Each year, huge crops of wheat, maize, and oats sprang from 245 acres of improved farmland. The Bellingers owned more livestock than any of their neighbors, including four horses, four mules, four milking cows, four oxen, 18 heads of cattle, seven sheep, and 28 hogs. Their milking cows alone

produced 400 pounds of butter each year.

On June 19, 1864, Union Major General Joseph Hooker used the Bellinger house as his headquarters, as evidenced by a dispatch he wrote from that location to Major General John Schofield. By June 27, Brigadier General Thomas Wood's division of Major General O. O. Howard's corps was entrenched in the fields surrounding the house and cotton gin.

Although J. F. Bellinger joined Company D of the Seventh Georgia Infantry Regiment in 1861, it is unknown if he put his medical training to use while in the service. He resigned and returned to his home in August 1862 after a wound disabled him from performing further field duty.

The Wilcox House

In 1864, the Bellingers' next-door neighbors were an older married couple, the Wilcoxes. Fifty-eight-year old Thomas Wilcox was a doctor and an Englishman. He lived with his wife, Louisa, also a native of England. Apparently, the Wilcoxes owned vicious pets. Lucinda Hardage, who lived about a mile north of the Bellingers, later recalled that her younger brother, Lucius, had been badly bitten by the Wilcoxes' dogs. Dr. Wilcox, however, gave immediate medical

attention to the boy, treating him free of charge until he was completely cured.

The Wilcox house fell within Confederate lines during the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. On June 27, 1864, Brigadier General Hiram Granbury's Texas Brigade occupied earthworks positioned immediately east of the residence.

Shiloh Church and School

In 1864, a Primitive Baptist church called Shiloh stood on the north side of the Dallas Road, very close to a small schoolhouse and not far from the Bellingers' log-built doctor's office. A present-day sign marks the site where the Shiloh Church and the neighborhood school once stood side-by-side. Residents who lived in the area during the war later remembered that Shiloh was a "hardshell Baptist church." Lucinda Hardage described the church as a frame building with one large room measuring about 24 feet long by 20 feet wide. Shiloh stood near an old graveyard of the same name.

In 1853, five-year-old Lucinda attended the school on

the Dallas Road with her seven-year-old sister. She later described the school as "a frame building, with no veranda, and no hall. It had two rooms with a fireplace on each end of the building." It was a rather large building: each room measured about 36 feet long by 32 feet wide.

On June 22, 1864, a small battle took place on the Dallas Road directly in front of the Shiloh Church and schoolhouse when the Nineteenth Ohio Infantry Regiment, Colonel Frederick Knefler's Brigade, fought off skirmishers from Lieutenant Colonel William Martin's First and Fifteenth Arkansas Regiment (Consolidated).

The Guess House

Sixty-year-old Henry Guess lived on the north side of the Dallas Road, about 350 yards west of the Bellinger house. He could not read or write, but he and his family planted crops and raised livestock on 130 acres of cleared land. While Henry sold his cotton, corn, wheat, butter, and wool on the market, his wife Jerusha earned extra cash by selling hand-made goods. Of their seven children, one stayed at home and worked on the farm while the rest went to school. Four young slaves – an 18-year-old man and three female children – lived and worked on the Guess's farm.

After the fighting at Mud Creek on June 18, 1864, the divisions of Union brigadier generals Alpheus

Williams and John W. Geary moved eastward on the Dallas Road, entrenching all around the Guess house. Here, Federals fought off an attack by the Third Confederate Infantry Regiment, Brigadier General Daniel Govan's brigade. When the divisions of brigadier generals Thomas J. Wood and John Newton, Major General O. O. Howard's corps, occupied the Guess house earthworks on June 20, Williams and Geary were relieved of the position. This movement enabled Major General Joseph Hooker's corps to "operate more strongly against the enemy's left flank" and "support General Schofield's army... on the Sandtown Road." Schofield, at that time, was "endeavoring to cross [Nose's] Creek" against fierce Confederate resistance.

War's Aftermath

The area was never the same again after the armies marched through the Dallas Road community in 1864. Cobb County census records for 1870 show that none of the Bellingers, Guesses, or Wilcoxes returned to the community after the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. Soldiers building miles of trench-lines and scores of forts had destroyed farms by digging up fields and tearing down buildings. As freedmen walked away from their former masters' property and livestock fell victim to stray bullets and artillery shells, plantation operations shut down. The neighborhood was slowly abandoned. Even the Shiloh Church was forced to close its doors: "I don't

believe it was there very long after the war," recalled Lucinda Hardage.

As time passed, people eventually moved back to the Dallas Road area. In the early twentieth century, Lucius Hardage acquired the land on which the church and schoolhouse stood. He built his residence around the framework of the abandoned school. In his last will and testament, Lucius gave his land to Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park for enjoyment by future generations.

Bulletin created by Angela Tooley, Kennesaw State University history student, in cooperation with Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.