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Transylvania Medical Alumni Served Both Sides during the Civil War

Charles T. Ambrose
University of Kentucky, cambros@uky.edu

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In the several decades before the Civil War, most of the doctors practicing in the South and the far West had trained at Transylvania University's medical school. Through 1857 this school had enrolled 6,456 students and granted 1,881 medical degrees. Founded in 1799, it was the fifth medical school in the U.S., following that of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia (1765), King's College in New York City (now Columbia, 1767), Harvard (1783), and Dartmouth (1797).

For a decade or so during the 1820s-30s Transylvania's Medical Department rivaled Philadelphia's—then the largest in the country and judged its best. Transylvania's prominence was due to its richly endowed medical library and its respected medical faculty.

Initially, Transylvania medical students were taught by preceptorship, or one-on-one instruction. In 1817 scheduled classes began with the reorganization of the faculty to include five medical professors, each of whom gave three lectures a week per term. A term lasted four months, beginning on the first Monday in November and ending on the first Saturday in March. To earn a degree, students were required to take two years of courses (first-year lectures were repeated largely verbatim in the second year), write a short thesis (medical dissertation), and pass two oral exams. Alumni of Transylvania's Medical Department were represented by three groups: graduates whose theses are extant, graduates for whom no theses are available today, and those who took courses for only one or more sessions without graduating but later worked as successful physicians. Transylvania's Special Collections library preserves theses of about 1,770 graduates. These documents are a rich source of information about what early nineteenth-century physicians in the Ohio River Valley thought and taught concerning the diseases and medical conditions they encountered.

The Medical Department attracted 37 pupils during its 1819-20 term. The number rose to 281 in 1825-26 and remained at this level for a decade or so. Medical students from 11 Southern states numbered 262 of the 282 matriculating in 1828-29 and 200 of the 203 enrolled in 1820-30. While most graduates returned to their home states to practice medicine, some went west.

Several factors led to the demise of the Medical Department, which closed after its 1858-59 term. By the late 1830s rival medical schools had been established in Louisville and Cincinnati. The advent of steamboat traffic on the Ohio River in the 1820s accounted for the gradual economic eclipse of Lexington by these two growing cities. Louisville had the Marine Hospital, where medical students could obtain clinical training, while Lexington students had no comparable hospital.

Up through the nineteenth century, anatomical studies filled a greater part of the medical curriculum than today. In 1834 the Kentucky legislature rejected a bill that would have allowed the bodies of executed criminals to be delivered to chartered colleges for dissection and experiment. Medical students were thus obliged to procure their own anatomical subjects by robbing fresh graves or buying bodies from "resurrectionists." Cadavers for anatomical study likely were more readily obtained from the latter sources in the river towns.
Medicine During the Civil War

In 1859, fights erupted in Philadelphia between Northern abolitionists and Southerners sympathetic to the idea of being taught by abolitionist-minded professors. On Dec. 22 a trainload of 244 angry medical students left the city to complete their education at the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, which welcomed them with free tuition. Had Transylvania’s Medical Department still been in operation, some of these students might have enrolled and perhaps helped in its survival. This dramatic migration of medical students has been viewed by some historians as the beginning of the story of Civil War medicine.

When the War Between the States erupted in the spring of 1861, the U.S. Army included 131 physicians, who were termed either surgeons or assistant surgeons. Twenty-four resigned to join the Confederate States of America.

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Together, the two armies suffered 618,000 fatalities, two-thirds of them from infectious diseases such as typhoid, dysentery, typhus, and malaria. Transylvania medical graduates’ familiarity with these diseases can be gleaned from their medical dissertations.

The Northern Army Medical Corps

Various accounts give estimates of 11,000-13,000 doctors having served in the Union Army, but a roster compiled by N. A. Strait and published in 1882 listed 7,106 entries. Because many worked in successive regiments, the total number of surgeons and assistant surgeons was only around 6,280. Strait’s roster listed the names by regiment. New York provided the largest contingent of surgeons (around 900), while about 260 served the 72 Kentucky regiments.

To identify Transylvania alumni who served in the Union Army, I compared Strait’s roster of the Union regimental surgeons and assistant surgeons with a list compiled by Transylvania Special Collections Librarian B. J. Gooch of those having attended the Transylvania Medical Department and found 89 names common to both. Among them, five names corresponded to five pairs of identically named Transylvania students. The correct member of three such pairs could be distinguished based on the dates of their theses, which preceded the Civil War. Because no theses are listed for two pairs of like-named students, it is uncertain which of the following served: Wm. Campbell of Kentucky, 1824, or of Tennessee, 1837; and John H. William of Tennessee, 1838, or of Kentucky, 1840. In the table on Page 9, both pairs of these names are listed but indented together.

The largest number of Transylvania medical alumni in the Union Army were from Kentucky and Tennessee. Seven were from Northern states (Indiana, Ohio, and New York), but, surprisingly, 21 were from slave states, including five from Alabama and six from South Carolina. Of these 89 Transylvania surgeons, 44 are immortalized in the Special Collections by their student medical dissertations. The theses reviewed various medical topics, of which half concerned infectious diseases: typhoid (3), dysentery (2), cholera (3), tuberculosis (6), and other fevers (10). Four discussed botanical medicines or other remedies.

The Southern Army Medical Corps

Many of the records concerning Confederate medical personnel were destroyed near the end of the war to keep them from falling into enemy hands, and countless government records were lost in the fires that swept over Richmond, the Confederate capital, in April 1865.

Nonetheless, a database of 10,563 names of Confederate physicians has been laboriously compiled by F. Terry Hambrecht and others at the Medical College of Virginia. Because of multiple spellings of surnames, he estimates that about 9,000 individuals served the Confederate States of America as surgeons, assistant surgeons, and acting assistant surgeons (contract civilian physicians). The largest group came from Virginia, and the number from Kentucky is not accurately known.

Hambrecht identified 62 Transylvania medical alumni who served the Southern forces as physicians. Comparing this list with a master list of medical students at Transylvania, I found that the largest number serving in the Southern army were from Kentucky (20), followed by Tennessee (11), and other southern states (27), but also two Northern states (New York and Delaware). All 62 names are represented by medical dissertations in the Transylvania Special Collections. Their subjects involve various areas of medicine, but again most notably infectious diseases: typhoid (1), dysentery (3), malaria (1), and various other fevers (20).

A Caveat

It is unlikely that either of the lists of Transylvania alumni serving as army doctors is complete. According to Hambrecht, Strait’s roster of Union Army physicians contains very few acting assistant surgeons (contracted civilian physicians, some of whom might have trained in Lexington).

Additionally, among the Union Army surgeons, 44 of the 89 Transylvania alumni are repre-
A comparative ratio would be expected among Transylvania alumni in the Confederate Army medical corps. The fact that all 62 names on Hambrecht's list of Southern army physicians wrote a thesis suggests that others who did not are missing from this list. 'T'

Charles T. Ambrose is a Professor in the Department of Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine. In recent years, he has published widely on medical history.

4. Ibid., p. 609.
5. Peter, *The History (1. above)*, p. 55, see table.

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**Transylvania University Medical Graduates Who Served in the Confederate Army**

Listed by name, home state, beginning year’s at Transylvania, and thesis subject:

Akin, Joseph William; Ky.; 1834/50-51; effect of the mind on disease
Avent, Benjamin Ward; Tenn.; 1832-33; scarlatina
Baldwin, William O.; Ala.; 1835-36; puerperal fever (see Union roster)
Barton, Wellborn/Willbern; S.C.; 1844/45-48; syphilis
Beale, Andrew Jackson; Ky.; 1854; dysentery
Benton, Charles H.; Ky.; 1858-59; inflammation
Blair, James M.; Tenn.; 1846-47; tuberculosis
Bouchelle, Ezza F.; S.C.; 1836; puerperal fever
Boyd, Montgomery W.; Ala.; 1843; climate
Boykin, James Owen; Ga.; 1840-42; intermittent fever
Bronaugh, George W.; Ky.; 1841-42; endermic medication
Brown, Bedford Jr.; Mo.; 1846-47; local disease
Cabaniss, Alfred B.; Ala.; 1831-32; cutaneous diseases
Cochran John Lynch; Miss.; 1844-45; proof of pregnancy
Coffey, Ephraim McDowell; Ky.; 1851; congestive fever
Coombs, Samuel William; Ky.; 1823-24; power of passions on disease
Cooper, William H.; Mo.; 1844-45; genital organs
Core, Jesse G.; Tenn.; 1840-41; variola
Crockett, Greenbury F.H.; Del.; 1820-21; asthma
Dabbs, Christopher Hunt; Ala.; 1827/29; sedatives
Dulaney, Joseph D.; Tenn.; 1854; dysentery
Dunlap, Albert; Ark.; 1850; malaria (see Union roster)
Duvall, Benjamin F.; Ky.; 1855-56; blood letting, phlebotomy
Fox, Henry Thomas; Calif.; 1855-56; bandages
Frierson, James White Stevenson; Tenn.; 1821-23; fashions in female health

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9. Roster of All Regimental Surgeons and Assistant Surgeons in the Late War, with their Service, and Last-known Post-Office Address. Compiled by N.A. Strait, Washington, D.C., 1882. (This was not an official government listing but, according to Hambrecht [see below], one apparently intended by Strait for his profit by its private sales.)
10. Communications by e-mail from F. Terry Hambrecht on Sept. 10-Dec. 13, 2010. Hambrecht is Senior Technical Adviser to the National Museum of Civil War Medicine, Frederic, Md.