

Brodnax, John Grammar ^[1]

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by Lindley S. Butler, 1979

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John Grammar Brodnax, physician and Confederate ^[2] surgeon, was born in Dinwiddie County, Va. He was the son of Brigadier General William Henry Brodnax of Greensville County, Va., and Ann Elizabeth Withers. General Brodnax was a prominent Virginia legislator, active participant in the African Colonization Society, and commander of the militia during the Nat Turner insurrection (1831). After graduating from Virginia Military Institute ^[3] in 1848, John G. Brodnax decided upon a medical career, and the following year he completed the course of study at the Medical College of the University of Virginia ^[4]. He spent a year in postgraduate study at Jefferson College ^[5], Philadelphia, and finished his general preparation as the resident physician of the Baltimore Almshouse. Determined to procure the finest medical education that could be obtained, he sailed for Europe, continuing his studies for three years (1851–53) in Paris. He enrolled in the School of France as a student of surgery, medicine, and percussion under leading physicians of the hospitals of the Hotel Dieu, La Charitie, and St. Louis. For nearly a year he concentrated on furthering his knowledge of skin diseases and diseases of the eye.

He returned to Virginia in November 1853 and began a successful general practice of medicine in Petersburg. Soon he renewed his acquaintance with his first cousin, Mary W. Brodnax, daughter of Robert Brodnax of Cascade Plantation, Rockingham County ^[6]. Upon the death of her father in 1854, Mary Brodnax and her brothers inherited in trust the extensive family acreage on the Dan River. When Mary and John G. Brodnax married on 1 Oct. 1856, they established residence at Cascade Plantation. In addition to continuing his medical practice, Brodnax managed the farm operation for his wife. By 1861, when Mary Brodnax died, they had had two daughters, Nancy Wilson (b. 1857) and Mary Withers (b. 1860).

With the coming of the Civil War ^[7], Brodnax entered the Confederate service as a surgeon. In 1862 he was appointed the director of the South Carolina Hospital; at that time he was supervising five general hospitals in Petersburg, Va. The next year he was named director of the North Carolina hospitals at Petersburg and served as president of the examining board for furloughing and discharging disabled Confederate soldiers. He directed the exchange of prisoners in 1864, and when the exchange was discontinued, he was assigned to oversee the general hospital at Wake Forest. At the end of the war he was in charge of two general hospitals in Greensboro ^[8].

After the war he returned to Rockingham County, where he reopened his medical practice and managed the family plantation for his two daughters. On 24 Apr. 1866, he married Ella Preston Burch; they had one son, John Grammar, Jr. (b. 31 Aug. 1868). In 1887, Brodnax moved to Greensboro; he remained there until his death thirty years later. In Greensboro he conducted a large medical practice, examined for insurance companies, and for fifteen years served as a surgeon for the Southern Railway Company ^[9]. He was appointed to a board for examination of disabled soldiers applying for government pensions in 1887, and he was a member of the State Medical Society ^[10], the International Association of Railway Surgeons, and the Association of Southern Railway Surgeons. In the antebellum period he was a Whig ^[11], and after the war he became a Democrat ^[12]. He was an active member of the Episcopal church ^[13].

References:

Samuel A. Ashe, ed., *Biographical History of North Carolina*, vol. 3 (1905 [photograph]).

John Grammar Brodnax Papers and John Wilkins Brodnax Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

L. MacMillan, *North Carolina Portrait Index* (1963 [portrait of Mary Brodnax]).

Transactions of the Medical Society (1907).

Additional Resources:

John Grammar Brodnax Papers, 1827-1920 (bulk 1850s) (collection no. 00088-z). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/b/Brodnax,John_Grammar.html ^[14] (accessed April 30, 2013).

Brodnax, John Grammar 1829-1907 in WorldCat: [https://www.worldcat.org/identities/np-brodnax,%20john%20grammar\\$1829%201907](https://www.worldcat.org/identities/np-brodnax,%20john%20grammar$1829%201907) ^[15]

Mrs. John Grammar Brodnax (Mary Wilson Brodnax) (1830-63), (painting), Smithsonian Institute:

http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID:siris_ari_194643 [16]

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