

The Mystery of Edwin A. Wright

On October 24, 1864, during the latter days of the Civil War, Edwin A. Wright, a prominent Floyd County "planter", was allegedly captured by Union troops while at home on furlough from Company C of the First Regiment, Alabama Calvary of the Confederate Army. His home, with a Floyd County Georgia address, was located in the country a few miles from the small town of Cave Spring, Georgia, close by the Alabama-Georgia line. He resided there with his wife, Adriana (Connor) Wright (Mrs. H.A.) and their five young sons. Edwin was supposedly taken away by his captors to Rome, Georgia, some sixteen miles away. Although there were various rumors about what happened to him, he apparently was never heard from again and it was generally assumed that he had been killed or died soon after the abduction.

Edwin Wright, approximately 38 years old and a native Georgian, was the youngest of four siblings. His older brother, Augustus R. Wright, a Colonel in the Confederate Army during the war, was an eminent lawyer and jurist, a distinguished congressman of the 5th District of Georgia. Although opposed to secession, he was a member of the Confederate Continental Convention, and a public speaker of national prominence. He was once described as a man of "unimpeachable character, of unusual intellectual endowments and a charming personality." Another brother, Moses Rochester Wright, who was next to Edwin in age, died at a relatively early age in Louisville, Kentucky, where he had gone because he was bitterly opposed to secession. Edwin had one sister, Anne Elizabeth Wright, who died in 1870. She was married to Dr. Charles Andrew Wheeler, a gentleman of culture and wealth. So very little is known about Edwin, but ironically there is considerable information about other members of his family.

Adriana, wife of Edwin, grew up on a plantation near Cokesbury, South Carolina, and she was one of seven children. Her father, a physician, committed suicide in middle life, and her mother, Henrietta Mason Connor, was well known for her beauty as well as for a formidable family background. Family legend has it that General Lafayette, while visiting this country in 1825, described Henrietta as the most beautiful lady in America. Like her husband Edwin, very little is known about Adriana, where there is considerable information about her parents and siblings. However, Adriana did gain lasting family recognition and admiration for successfully raising five sons without assistance in a war-torn, impoverished rural setting during a very difficult period in Georgia. Her five sons were reasonable well educated and became professional and business men.

General Sherman and the Occupation of Rome

Because the events under consideration relate to Federal or Union troops, it should be noted that General Sherman supposedly entered Rome on October 12, 1864. The evacuation of Rome started November 10, 1864, and was completed on November 11th. All of the mills and factories were burned on the night of November 10th. The preliminaries to Sherman's march to the sea supposedly started there and other points north of Atlanta according to George M. Battey's "A History of Rome and Floyd County."

Documents and Other Evidence

On June 27, 1891, Mrs. H. A. Wright (Adriana Connor Wright) applied to the State of Georgia for Confederate widow's pension and in her petition made the following statement, under oath, regarding Edwin Wright (husband): "He was at home (in the country near Cave Spring, Georgia) on furlough about October 25, 1864, and at that time captured by a squad of Sherman's (General Sherman) Army and carried off and has never been heard from."

Additional sworn statements were included in the application from J. R. Graham and John McGugan, "reputable citizens," a Mrs. E. A. Dent, supposedly a neighbor, Connor Wright, son of Adriana and Edwin Wright, and W. O. Connor, brother of Adriana Wright.

Graham and McGugan stated that, "He was on furlough (from Company C, First Regiment, Alabama Calvary) and came home about December 1864, and never returned to his command and that we have never seen him since ... for knowing the above fact because they said Edwin A. Wright belonged to the same company and regiment that ... did."

According to Connor Wright, who stated he witnessed the capture (at the age of eleven) on or about October 25, 1864, his father Edwin was home on furlough. He further explained that "the Yankees stole up through the backyard," captured him and took him as a prisoner to Rome and has never been heard of since. However, it was rumored by some that he was taken north and died in prison and by others that he made an effort to escape in Rome while a prisoner and was killed. Mrs. Dent explained that she witnessed the capture while in the Wright's home on or about October 25, 1864, and she gave essentially the same testimony as Connor Wright.

W. O. Connor stated: "The written statements correspond to the one given me by Mrs. H. A. Wright, while I was at home on furlough in January and February, 1865."

In another document, a family history by Ann Willingham Willis of Rome, Georgia, there is a brief statement about Edwin Wright as follows: "Edwin Wright, fourth child of William Wright and Mary McCall, was born at Wrightboro, Richmond County Georgia; during the war between the states he one day disappeared mysteriously and was never heard of again, the family fear something tragic must have happened to him because of his loyalty to the Union, so one of his granddaughters told me."

From the western branch of the Connor family (Adrianna's family), the story was passed down that he was killed by "bushwackers" between Cave Spring and Rome, and there was something mysterious about it.

The wife of one of the Edwin Wright's grandsons vaguely remembers some rumors in the far distant past of a Wright relative serving in the Union Army during the Civil War.

Hal Wright, a seventy year old grandson of Edwin Wright, living in Kansas, reported as follows: "About all dad ever told me of his father was he went away to war and never returned. He did say his father was very good friends with Robert Toombs, and it is possible they may have been together some during the war period. I do not remember my history too well, but as I recall Mr. Toombs was very well known in Georgia."

While the Department of Archives and History in Georgia had on file the pension application of Adriana Wright as provided above, the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the National Archives reported "no information" on Edwin A. Wright.

An inquiry has been made to numerous people who might possibly have known or heard something about this event, and especially descendants of Edwin and Adriana. Other than the data given above, no significant information has been forthcoming.

In view of available data one might conclude that Edwin Wright was taken from his home and family willingly or forcefully in late 1864 and was never heard from again. It would have to be further concluded that there must have been circumstances, related to the event, that were unacceptable to his immediate family and perhaps the next generation. Otherwise, it would seem that Edwin would have been a family hero and his capture by Yankee soldiers legendary in the folklore of the Wright family.

In the absence of valid documentation, there are many intriguing and agonizing questions which stimulate the imagination and leads to a number of highly conjectural conclusions. For example: Could the capture have been a planned collaboration? Could "bushwackers" (Confederate guerrillas), tipped off by hostile neighbors, have ambushed and destroyed Edwin along with those with him as they traveled from Cave Spring to

Rome? Was Edwin Wright a courageous man of high principle and conviction, who stood fast to his beliefs in a hostile environment? Or conversely, was he an opportunist chafing under the burden of an older brother's image, a demanding family, a devastated homeland and an ominous future? What manner of woman was Adriana, and what did she know, if anything, above and beyond the sworn testimony? Why was the story of his capture never passed down?

It is improbable that the full truth of Edwin Wright's abduction and disappearance will ever be known. However, the episode, regardless of the circumstances, suggests high drama, deep feeling, and agonizing reality that often engulf people in the wake of war, bringing the whole range of human emotion together in one fateful event. Such was the case with the Edwin Wrights on that fateful day in 1864. It is with a sense of timelessness that we, the descendants of Edwin and Adriana, cherish their memory and without knowing the entire story, understand the human condition of raw tragedy that ravished this young family so many years ago.

Connor Wright Hollingsworth,
Great Grandson of
Edwin and Adriana Wright
December, 1981
Jacksonville, Florida