

Louis Edward Gott, M. D.

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Richard Gott, the founder of the family in Alexandria County, was born in Baltimore County, Md. Family tradition says that his father lived near Towson, Md., and that after his father's death, his mother remarried. An uncle of Richard Gott's, Maj. James H. Hook, undertook to educate the youngster toward an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Major Hook was also an uncle of Admiral Benjamin F. Sands, U.S.N., who was in command of the Naval Observatory in Washington after the close of the War Between the States. Richard Gott married in Washington, D.C., in 1831, Ann Gordon, of Fredericksburg. For many years he lived in Washington, D.C., where he was the Chief Clerk of the Subsistence Department of the War Department. While living in D.C., Major Gott built a hunting lodge near Falls Church on land his wife had inherited from her father, William Gordon—other sisters and brothers had inherited land near the now Army-Navy Country Club and on Arlington Ridge Road—the Slaymakers and Heiners. This lodge became his home after the War Between the States.

Louis Edward Gott, the only child of Richard and Ann Gott, was born in Washington, D.C., in 1838. As a boy he attended William Abbott's Select School in Georgetown and was later a student at the Episcopal High School in Alexandria and also at Bloomfield Academy in Virginia. After leaving school he entered the University of Maryland, School of Medicine, completed the course of that institution and was graduated as an M.D. in 1861. In the same year he entered the Confederate service, passed the examination of the medical board, and received a commission as assistant surgeon. His first duty was at Yorktown, where he was given charge of the men of the heavy ordnance division, and afterward at Williamsburg, Va., was in charge of the hospital. From there he went to the James River for active duty in the field. On leaving Yorktown he was relieved by Surgeon Todd, of the Confederate States Army, a brother-in-law of President Lincoln.

Some years after the War he wrote an autobiographical sketch of his services to the Confederacy for a former patient who was greatly indebted to him, and had written him thus: "It has been so long since the war that you have doubtless forgotten me among the thousands who came under your treatment during the war, but you will perhaps remember me as the beardless boy brother-in-law of Col. T. C. Glover of the 21st Ga. You may remember the incident of my being shot through the right forearm and the bones all shattered to pieces at Drury's Bluff in May 1864—and of Dr. Coward and others having me under the influence of chloroform in

the field hospital and were in the act of amputating my hand when you stepped in and discovering who I was, stopped the doctors, made an examination yourself, reset my arm and took the shattered bone and saved my hand. While it took the wound three years to get well, pieces of bone working out frequently during that time, you can see from this letter that I still have fairly good use of it."

When McClelland appeared at Yorktown the company to which Dr. Gott was attached was taken to Richmond to join its regiment according to his account which continues: "I reported to the surgeon general and was ordered to Camp Winder Hospital, just outside of Richmond. This was some weeks before the battle of Seven Pines. After the seven days' fight was over I was ordered to report to the 49th Va. Regt., commanded by Col. William (Extra-Billy) Smith, subsequently Governor of Virginia. The regiment was soon after transferred to Early's Brigade, and saw service with that Regt. up to and including the battle of Gettysburg, taking part in the battle of Slaughter Mt., 2nd Manassas, Antietam, F'burg, Winchester and finally Gettysburg, after which I became attached to the 21st Ga. as its surgeon. After the battle of Gettysburg I was ordered to remain with the wounded of Early's Div. at the hospital 5 miles from Gettysburg on the Fairfield Road. I was there about 3 weeks when I was taken as a prisoner of war to Fort Henry, near Baltimore, and confined therein about 6 weeks when I was exchanged, and returned to Richmond. Again reporting to the Surgeon General I received my orders to report to the medical director of the Army of No. Va. for assignment to duty. My place in the 49th Va. Regt. having been supplied, I was ordered to report to the medical director of Rodes' Div. and he assigned me to the 21st Ga. Regt., stationed near Orange C.H. The Regt. accompanied Gen. Pickett to N.C. for the purpose of capturing New Bern, which we failed to accomplish. We came back to Kinston, N.C., remaining there for some time. Pickett went back and subsequently we were put under command of General Hoke, under whom we participated in the battle of Plymouth. The Col. of the Regt., John Mercer, who commanded the left wing of the Army in that fight was killed by a shot in the head.

"After the battle of Plymouth we were hurried back to Petersburg, and then followed the battle of Drury's Bluff, in May 1864. From Drury's Bluff we went to Guinea Station on the Richmond and Fredericksburg Railroad. There we joined the Army of Northern Virginia as a part of Dole's Brigade, Rode's Div. When we got around in front of Richmond we pushed on to Lynchburg to attack General Hunter, he falling back at our approach, retreating by the Peaks of Otter up the Kanawha Valley, while we went by way of Staunton and Winchester, crossed the Potomac below Shepherdstown and hurried on unimpeded to Frederick, Md. There we had a fight with Gen. Lew Wallace, driving him off, he retreating towards Baltimore. We marched to Rockville, from which place we ap-

proached Washington, and had a skirmish with Federal troops at Brightwood, within site of that city. The 19th Army Corps under Wright coming up next day, we were compelled to fall back to Rockville, from which point we marched towards the Potomac, crossing at Edward's Ferry to Leesburg. Pushing on to the Blue Ridge we crossed to Shenandoah at Snickers Ferry, followed closely by the 19th Army Corps. Here Early fell back, and after permitting Wright to cross the Shenandoah he attacked and drove him back, when the enemy gave up the chase and we proceeded."

After taking part in the Battle of Kernstown, Winchester, Ceder Creek, and Fishers Hill, General Early was compelled to retreat. Dr. Gott continues: "After this the division was sent back to the Army of No. Va. at Petersburg, and put in the trenches around the City. We remained in the fortifications in front of Petersburg until the army fell back to Appomattox C.H., where I surrendered with the Regiment."

At the time of his death in 1916 a writer in the *Commonwealth*, a newspaper published in Rosslyn, stated that the above "tells the story of this honored man's life—his activities, his sacrifices, his sufferings, his courage and humanity. But those who knew him in his daily and nightly rounds and tender ministrings in Falls Church and who experienced his kindness that he gave most generously feel that they knew and esteemed him best."

After the surrender, Dr. Gott returned to Falls Church, where he began general practice. His father, who had served throughout the war in the Confederacy also returned to his home, Buena Vista, formerly his hunting lodge, to begin farming. Major Gott soon turned the farm over to his son, Dr. Gott, and went to Annapolis, to become Secretary-Treasurer of the C & O Canal, a position he held until the late 1870's. It was at this time (1868) Dr. Gott married Amanda Gale Dyer, who was born in Alexandria County, in the home of her grandfather, Robert Ball. This home was on the present site of Swanson Jr. H.S.

Dr. Gott later built his home on North Washington Blvd., just off Lee Highway. His courtesy was proverbial, and by those who remember him he is spoken of as "a gentleman of the old school." And to those of you who know the expression, that is about the highest compliment which can be paid to a man. He lived quietly, intensely loyal and true to his family and friends—the night was never too dark, the day never too hot, nor was it too cold for him to respond to a call. His buggy was never unhitched and he was never found wanting where he was needed—his medical knowledge was highly esteemed by his colleagues and he was often called to Washington as a consultant because of his reputation as a diagnostician.

On May 25, 1894, *The Fairfax Herald*, reported what was headlined as a "Skillful Operation," in these words: "Drs. O'Brien and Ashby of Alexandria and Dr. Gott of Falls Church, on Saturday last, performed the very delicate operation for appendicitis upon Mr. Elisha Cleary of



Dr. Gott's House on North Washington Boulevard

Mason's Hill, Fairfax Co. About a week ago, Mr. Cleary while drinking lemonade swallowed a seed which lodged in his vermiform appendix, causing inflammation and producing an abscess. On Saturday it was found necessary to perform the operation to save the patient's life. The abdomen was skillfully opened and the appendix skillfully removed. This operation has been but seldom performed in the vicinity, and the doctors expect their patient to be about again in a short time." I might add that the family story is that this operation was performed on a kitchen table.

There was no unlisted telephone for his home, for peace and quiet at night—no question of whether a patient could pay—they paid with what they had: hams, eggs, chickens, a day's work in the garden or field or nothing! None of his medical instruments have been preserved, but I doubt if they were elaborate, as I doubt if his office was elaborate. I have a walnut, glass front wine cabinet he had painted black with the word: PRIVATE on the glass, which he used for the storage of his drugs. One who knew him reports that he was of a most genial disposition and magnetic temperament and a devoted son of the South. He served twice as President of the Fairfax County Medical Society and served in a number of organizations in Falls Church. He was a member of the first Town Council.

Dr. Gott died on October 29, 1916, after a brief illness, having served the community for fifty-one years. He is buried in the Falls Church church yard, where his neighbors erected a stone to his memory, with the following inscription: "For 51 years he practiced medicine in this vicinity. Skillful, loyal, charitable, brave, he was a noble example of the COUNTRY DOCTOR."



Samuel Gott