

# Chatham County Amputees Civil War Amputation and North Carolina's Artificial Limbs Program

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*“And, whereas it is considered an eminent work of charity and of justice to assist all with the common funds of the State to procure necessary limbs, and thus to restore them, as far as practicable, to the comfortable use of their persons, to the enjoyment of life and to the ability to earn a subsistence.”*

More than 30,000 Union soldiers and at least an equal number of Confederate soldiers lost limbs between 1861 and 1865. At the time of the Civil War, the surgical experience of most American doctors consisted of pulling teeth and lancing boils. Bacteria and germs were unknown. The benefits of cleanliness and sanitation were not recognized—for example, bandages were used repeatedly and for different people without being cleaned. Therefore, doctors were not capable of conducting tedious surgical repairs, and many wounds that could be treated easily today became severely infected. So, the army medics amputated limbs -- lots of limbs. About 75 percent of the operations performed by surgeons during the Civil War were amputations.



A Jewett leg manufactured in Raleigh.

Amputations were conducted by removing the limb quickly, in a circular-cut sawing motion, in order to keep the patient from dying of shock and pain. Remarkably, the resulting blood loss rarely caused death. Such amputations often were left to heal by granulation, the body's natural healing process by which new capillaries and thick tissue form, much like a scab, to protect the wound. When surgeons had more time to operate, they might employ the “fish-mouth” method, by which flaps were cut (resembling a fish's mouth) and sewn to form a rounded stump.

For those who survived amputation and the resulting infections, the pursuit of artificial limbs was natural. While an artificial arm will not provide a firm handshake and an artificial leg will not rid the amputee of his limp, the prosthetic device helps an amputee to be less noticeable in public and offer the opportunity to resume a more routine daily life. Artificial legs, and to a lesser extent, arms, also helped the amputees get back to work in order to support themselves and their families. Since agriculture had suffered a decline due to soldiers being away from home, after the Civil War it was important for the men—including amputees—to return to their farms and increase production of food and money-making crops.

North Carolina responded quickly to the needs of her citizens and became the first of the former Confederate states to offer artificial limbs to amputees. North Carolina newspapers encouraged support for the initiative. Nowhere can any opposition to the program be found. In response to the mandate, Governor Worth in February 1866 asked each county sheriff to compile the number of limbs (legs and arms) that would be required for his county. Most sheriffs did not simply provide the number of limbs needed, but provided names of amputees and which limb was missing.

Wm. W. W. W.  
December 5 1866  
Mr. J. F. Nason Esq.  
This is a list of names  
so far as I am able to get at this time I had all  
the names sent to Raleigh and have  
lost the list of ~~more~~ names that I had  
that last summer to suit  
J. B. Hook; Mack Fields; James Kelly; J. B. Spear  
J. B. Lacey; James F. Cooke; J. F. Cooke;  
A list of names that last legs to suit  
them by Faister; M. H. Leary; Joseph Bacon;  
Sam. Mason; E. W. Hall; Love Cardell.  
If I find out any more names I will  
send them to you as soon as I can get  
them I have given your certificate  
to you  
J. Williams, Sheriff

Among Governor Worth's papers is a letter from Chatham County Sheriff George J. Williams, listing thirteen Chatham soldiers who would require an arm or a leg. Williams indicates that this may be a partial list, as he has already sent a list to Raleigh and has lost his copy. Indeed, additional names must have been found as the list later in this paper indicates that at least twenty-six Chatham men received artificial limbs from this state program.

At first, revised legislation provided only artificial legs at no charge, or gave \$70 to amputees who wished to procure their own choice of leg or who did not want one. Arms, which were considered to be less

functional, could be purchased through the state for \$50. The policy was changed a year later when the General Assembly approved a resolution to provide artificial arms or \$50.

A contract was arranged with Jewett's Patent Leg Company whereby North Carolina would provide Jewett's with a building where limbs could be manufactured and pay a \$5,000 advance to the company. Jewett's would then sell legs to the state for \$75 dollars each. Selected as the manufacture site was the Raleigh bayonet factory, located near the terminus of the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad, facing Salisbury Street between North and Johnson Streets. Once the facility was in operation, the amputees were notified as to when they should report to Raleigh for fittings. Details of the program appeared in newspapers throughout the state.

The state devised a plan by which the amputees incurred no out-of-pocket expenses while in Raleigh and were issued railroad passes for the trip to and from the capital. The fittings and adjustments usually took a couple of days, and a house was provided for the amputees during this time. The governor advised the amputees to bring blankets for bedding and a basket of bread and dried meat for their meals. The total cost of the artificial limbs program to the state from 1865 to 1871 was \$81,310.12. While the state operated the artificial limbs program, 1,550 Confederate veterans contacted the state for help. The facility in Raleigh remained open until June 18, 1867. At that time, it was reported that the shop no longer had enough work to continue on-site manufacturing.

Few of the Jewett legs exist today. Most artificial limbs did not last even for the lifetime of their users. One exception is the artificial leg of Robert Alexander Hanna, who enlisted in the Confederate army on July 1, 1861. Two years later at Gettysburg, he was wounded in the head and the left leg. He reported later that his leg was wounded just above the ankle joint and that the wound oozed pus for about a month before the amputation was performed. Hanna received a wooden leg, a Jewett's Patent Leg, from the state in January 1867. According to family, Hanna saved the Jewett Leg for special occasions, having made other prosthetics to help him perform his farm work. (One of his homemade legs even had a bull's hoof for a foot!) This special care helped insured the survival of his Jewett Leg. Robert Alexander Hanna died in 1917 at about 85 years old—having had his artificial leg for fifty years. You can see Hanna's wooden leg and Civil War surgical equipment at Bentonville Battlefield in Four Oaks.



Hanna family photo showing Robert Alexander Hanna on right wearing his Jewett leg.

Among the veterans receiving artificial limbs from the North Carolina program were twenty-six Chatham County men. A list of recipients of the artificial limbs was constructed from several sources and is contained in *Phantom Pain: North Carolina's Artificial-Limbs Program for Confederate Veterans*. From this list, the names of the Chatham recipients were extracted and are produced on the next page:

Chatham County Claimant	Confederate Unit	Limb
Adcock, J. C.	Co. G, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Arm
Boling, Nicholas	Co. H, 47 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Leg
Boon, W. Joseph	Co. A, 5 <sup>th</sup> NCST	Leg
Burns, Elisha	Co. G, 48 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Leg
Campbell, W. R.	Co. I, 32 <sup>nd</sup> NCT	Leg
Caudle, David also, Cardel	Co. D, 61 <sup>st</sup> NCT	Leg
Cook, James F. also, Cooke	Co. A, 5 <sup>th</sup> NCST	Arm
Cook, Levi H.	Co. E, 5 <sup>th</sup> NCST	Arm
Davis, Thomas E.	Co. A, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Arm
Fields, Noah		Arm
Forester, Manly also, Foister	Co. E, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Leg
Godfrey, Pleasant	Co. E, 10 <sup>th</sup> NCST 1 <sup>st</sup> NC Artly.	Arm
Gunter, W. W.	Co. G, 7 <sup>th</sup> NCST	Arm
Kelly, Jefferson J.	Co. F, 24 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Arm
Lassiter, T. B. also, Lasater	Co. I, 32 <sup>nd</sup> NCT	Arm
Maron, Sam		Leg
Nall, Irvin also, Ervin	Co. E, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Leg
Ramsay, William S.	Co. D, 61 <sup>st</sup> NCT	Arm
Sloan, A. H.	Co. B, 61 <sup>st</sup> NCT	Arm
Smith, Fred	Co. G, 48 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Fingers
Terry, W. H. also, Teary	Co. G, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Leg
Tyson, T. B.	Co. I, 32 <sup>nd</sup> NCT	Arm
Vestal, O. D.	Co. E, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Arm
Vinson, G. W.	Co. G, 26 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Arm
Whitfield, W. T.	Co. D, 15 <sup>th</sup> NCT	Arm
Williams, John A.	Co. H, 6 <sup>th</sup> NCST	Arm

Further reading:

Ansley Herring Wegner, *Phantom Pain: North Carolina's Artificial-Limbs Program for Confederate Veterans*, 2004.

Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein, *The Encyclopedia of Civil War Medicine*, 2008.

Julian E. Kuz and Bradley P. Bengston, *Orthopaedic Injuries of the Civil War*, 1996.

\* This article is an adaptation of an article that appeared in the Tar Heel Junior Historian in Fall 2008, with additions from Ansley Herring Wegner's book, *Phantom Pain: North Carolina's Artificial-Limbs Program for Confederate Veterans*, 2004. Edited by Beverly B. Wiggins, March 2020.