

Doctor Wylie
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There were only three medical doctors in Riverton during the town's long history. One of them was Dr. John Wylie. Dr Wylie came to Riverton as a young man, fresh out of medical school, and practiced there until his death in the late 1890s. He never married. He had his office on the second floor of the Buchanan-Sloan General Store. There was a well-worn outside stairway that led to his office. There was never any shortage of patients. Dr. Wylie, in spite of his age was on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, made scarcely enough money to live on. This is because most of his patients were poor hill people who had no money to pay with. They paid him with pigs, chickens, eggs, hams -- everything but cash money. He ordered all his medical supplies through the Buchanan-Sloan Store and was always behind with his debts. It was said that the kind and generous man never refused his services to anyone, and that he never dunned a patient for an unpaid bill.

One story tells that when young Dr. Wylie first came to Riverton, he was engaged to marry a young woman named Barnett. The wedding day was set. The bride-to-be was at the church and ready, but the doctor never showed up. She was deeply hurt and humiliated. All her friends and her family had come for the wedding, but there was no bridegroom!

Later it developed that at the last minute the doctor had received word that a child, a little black girl, was severely ill over in Happy Hollow. Without hesitation he grabbed his big black medical bag, mounted his horse, and rode to the sick child's side. He spent the entire night saving the life of the little girl, but he lost his bride. She declared that any man who thought more of a sick child than he did of his own wedding would never make a fit husband. Most of the town's women agreed with her. But the black family over in Happy Hollow never ceased to be grateful to the doctor for saving the little girl's life. She grew up, married and reared a large family.

The years went by and the doctor grew old at his trade. He rode a big black horse in the winter, and drove a buggy in good weather. He kept his horse and buggy down the street at the Harland Livery Stables. People would see him at the end of the day climbing wearily to his upstairs office. In the coldest day of winter, when most people were at their firesides, a grim figure would pass their house, dressed in a long black overcoat, often drenched with rain or white with snow. The long hours and little sleep took their grievous toll and the robust health of the "Doc" began to decline.

The one day the faithful doctor failed to appear. People climbed the worn stairway and pounded on the door. There was no answer, so they broke the lock and went in. They found the doctor slumped at his desk; he was dead. The "angel of mercy" went to the rest he had so long denied himself.

When the people checked, there was not enough money in the doctor's bank account to pay for his funeral. Charlie Carrithers, of Dark Hollow, who made hand-made coffins, donated a casket. At the funeral it seemed half of Colbert County were present. Doctor Wylie had delivered many of them in his long career both black and white. They came because they loved this great man, this angel of mercy, and because many of them owed him a lot more than money.

After the funeral there was a lot of talk about making up money to buy a tombstone for the doctor. It never got beyond mere talk. Then one day a man came to Riverton riding a horse at full speed. They didn't need to buy a stone for Old Doc Wylie; and especially the parents of the little girl whose life had been saved, had taken care of the need. The whole town rushed out to the cemetery to see what the man meant. There it was, at the head of the grave: "Dr. Wylie, Office Upstairs".