

Atlanta railroad magnate Raoul an early supporter of health care

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Georgia was the last unit of the Confederacy to be fully reconstructed. By a twist of fate, it was the man who accepted Lee's surrender at Appomattox who signed final peace terms. By a stroke of Ulysses S. Grant's pen, Georgia was re-admitted to the United States on July 15, 1870.

Less than six months later a former captain of C.S.A. forces returned to the South for a place of special opportunity. At age 28, Louisiana-born William Greene Raoul selected Atlanta — still deeply scarred by war.

His decision couldn't have been better. During more than 40 years as an Atlantan by choice, Raoul rose to the top of the railroad world.

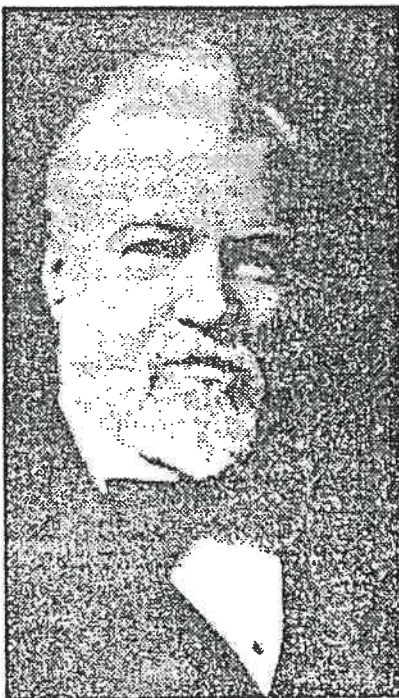
He was president of the Central Railroad and Banking Co., of which the Ocean Steamship Co. was a major subsidiary. From 1887 to 1904 he headed the Mexican National Railroad plus the Texas-Mexican Railway.

Raoul helped to launch the Atlantic and Birmingham Railway and was president of the line until 1905. He gave up that post only because of the fast-growing Southwestern Railroad, of which he was head, demanded all the time he could devote to it.

For years, he reserved much of his time and energy for volunteer work. Tuberculosis had claimed the lives of his daughter, Rosine, and he was determined to do all he could to foster the health of all Georgians.

That's why he took an active role in Associated Charities of Atlanta when he returned here in 1904, after having put the Mexican National Railroad on a solid footing.

Offices of Associated Charities, in the old Gould building, were enlarged by one room in 1907. Raoul had learned of the National Tuberculosis Association, launched the previous year. With the help of John Eagan, he rented space for the Atlanta Anti-Tuberculosis and Visiting Nurse Association.



William Greene Raoul

Health specialists note that it was one of the nation's earliest local programs aimed at mastering what was then America's No. 1 killer disease.

Though it claimed more lives than any other malady, consumption — as it was often called — was considered to be "a Northern disease" until the time of the Civil War.

No one knows precisely why it was comparatively insignificant in the South. Some research specialists think yellow fever and malaria took lives of so many babies and children that survivors were sturdy enough to resist tuberculosis.

This germ, which can invade any tissues or bone but most commonly attacks the lungs, was so fearful in Northern industrial centers that Oliver Wendell Holmes called it the White Plague.

Sidney Lanier contracted it in a Yankee prison camp and died of it. So did thousands of other Confederate soldiers.

Raoul's pioneer program was not only one of the earliest; it put Atlanta in the national limelight because of its work among blacks.

Visiting the North to learn what he could about tuberculosis, Raoul

had seen the tiny shack in New York, built by Dr. Edward L. Trudeau, that was America's first sanatorium. So he came home and put up a one-story frame sanatorium at Alto. Too small before it was even completed, it led Raoul to push for establishment of Battle Hill — for Atlanta and Fulton County.

A bequest of \$50,000 established the Raoul Foundation in 1913. It was influential in the legislature, which set up county health departments just as Raoul workers launched a statewide fight against tuberculosis.

Christmas Seals, introduced to the U.S. from Denmark only a few years earlier, were distributed annually by the Raoul Foundation. As income from distribution of seals grew, this program was turned over to the Georgia Tuberculosis Association.

That organization, in turn, became the American Lung Association of Georgia. With tuberculosis down but not out, today's programs center upon respiratory ills such as asthma, emphysema, and bronchitis.

Along with colorful tags for use on packages, this year's Christmas Seals went out in November. They constitute one of the biggest and most significant direct-mail programs for support of the cause of health.

This year's seals include, for the first time, the Jewish Chanukah light. They went out from 2452 Spring Road, Smyrna (30080). That is the location of the brand new state programming center dedicated to the memory of Raoul.

Raoul's associates sometimes weren't sure which came first — work as a health pioneer, or railroading. Today's staff members and volunteers are positive. The fight against lung disease mounts in significance as air quality deteriorates and hazards of smoking are pinpointed. ■

Webb Garrison has written extensively on history and biography. His latest book is "Behind the Headlines," a history of important but little-known people and events.