

Chattanooga Was His Town: The Life of General John T. Wilder

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General John T. Wilder was one of Chattanooga's most distinguished citizens in the last half of the 19th century. He wasn't a native, but a northerner, who relocated to the city after he attacked it as a Union officer during the Civil War. Once the war was over he was readily accepted into the city, and was even elected mayor just six years after the war ended. He developed industry around the city, the state and the South, and in the process became one of the South's leading industrialists. A major monument at the Civil War battlefield at Chickamauga bears his name, as well as an area of Signal Mountain near Chattanooga, and a small town in north central Tennessee. When he died in 1917 his funeral was conducted by Chattanooga Presbyterian minister Jonathan Waverly Bachman, the Chaplain-General of the United Confederate Veterans Association. How was it that a northerner, in a Southern city, came to be so well respected and admired, even among Confederate veterans? How could a northerner and a Union general be so accepted into a major Tennessee city?

The story of John Thomas Wilder's life begins in the Catskill Mountains in the small town of Hunter, New York. He was born in 1830 to Reuben and Mary Wilder. That he would distinguish himself as a military man, despite no formal military training, might have been predicted from his ancestry. His grandfather and great-grandfather both

fought in the Revolutionary War, his great grandfather losing a leg at the battle of Bunker Hill. His father fought in the war of 1812. John Wilder spent his younger years in Hunter where he attended school. When he turned nineteen, his school days over, he decided to head west to make it on his own.

Wilder soon arrived in Columbus, Ohio, nearly penniless, and found employment as an apprentice at a local foundry. This training would lay the groundwork for his career. He received experience in mechanical and hydraulic engineering, as well as drafting, pattern-making and mill-wrighting. Wilder showed great promise as an apprentice, getting several promotions, and was eventually offered a share in the foundry which he refused, having a different plan for his future. In 1857, eight years after he arrived in Columbus, he relocated to Indiana, first to Lawrenceburg and then Greensburg, where he established a small foundry of his own. It rapidly became a success. At his foundry Wilder invented many hydraulic machines which he patented, and he sold equipment, building mills and hydraulic works in many of the surrounding states. He also became nationally renowned as an expert in the field of hydraulics. In 1858, at the age of twenty-eight, he married a Greensburg woman, Martha Stewart, whose family had been one of Greensburg's founders and earliest citizens. He was now prospering and by 1861 his Greensburg plant was employing nearly one hundred men.

When the Civil War began in spring of 1861 Wilder, who was eager to serve his country, cast two six pound cannons at his foundry and recruited a company of light artillery. He also closed his plant and produced bullets from the metal on hand. His artillery was not accepted into the army so Wilder enlisted as a private in the First Independent Battery of Artillery, and was elected captain on his second day of service.

Several months later he was made lieutenant colonel of the 17th Indiana Infantry by the governor of Indiana, bypassing the rank of major.

Wilder's first service was in Virginia (now West Virginia). In an early skirmish at Elkwater, Virginia a Confederate soldier named John A. Washington was seriously wounded. Washington was a nephew of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. According to Wilder biographer, Samuel Cole Williams, Wilder and his men came across Washington and assisted him, giving him water. Washington died shortly thereafter and under a flag of truce Wilder escorted the body of Washington to General Lee who thanked Wilder for this courtesy.

Wilder did not shy away from combat, as evidenced in a letter to his wife in October 1861: "I had been sick for nearly two weeks and did not know whether I could ride a horse or not; but I was bound to be in the fight if I had to be carried."

He goes on to describe a fight: "The first gun fired by the enemy threw a twelve pound ball directly over my head; the wind it made taking my cap off, but I caught it. The ball struck the earth within ten feet of General Reynolds who was in the rear." In November 1861 Wilder went to Louisville, Kentucky and then to Tennessee, where he was stationed at Columbia.

In March of 1862 Wilder was promoted to colonel and now had men serving under him. His first major battle after this was the battle of Shiloh, but he arrived too late to get in on the major fighting. He wrote his wife: "I will not attempt to tell you of the awful destruction on the battle ground which covered the space of about 25 square miles- the dead lay on every acre of it when we came here. There was just about two rebels for each one of ours- probably about 9000 in all dead- hundreds of trees shivered to splinters,

gun carriages torn to bits, dead horses by the droves, heads, arms, legs and mangled bodies strewn around, all combined to make up a picture of horrors that it would be well for our infernal political leaders to look on, and if they did not then learn to mind their own business. You cannot imagine how little value one puts upon human life after riding among such scenes for days.”

After Shiloh, Wilder and his men went to Corinth, Mississippi. His attack on the town drew commendations from Union General Don Carlos Buell. Wilder next moved through northern Alabama to McMinnville, Tennessee and attacked General Nathan Bedford Forrest’s troops.

While home in Greensburg on furlough for health reasons in 1862, a Confederate cavalry made a raid into the state. Wilder assembled a thirty day regiment, mounted them, and drove the Confederates back. (This was one of the earliest uses of a mounted infantry during the war and they soon began appearing on the Confederate side led by General Forrest.) Shortly after this Wilder went to Murfreesboro where he was given permission from General William Rosecrans to lead expeditions into middle Tennessee to seize horses and to destroy grist mills that supplied enemy troops.

Early in the war Wilder distinguished himself in the battles of Cheat Mountain, Shiloh, Corinth and the siege of Munfordville in Kentucky, where he was captured in September of 1862. General Braxton Bragg, the Confederate commander of the Army of Tennessee, was attempting to draw out Union troops from Kentucky and Wilder, on his way to Nashville, had been sent to protect a railroad bridge near Munfordville. He had 3500 men under him. Wilder and his men came up against some Confederate troops that had been sent to intercept trains and destroy the rail line. The Confederate regiment was

led by General J.R. Chalmers who intended to capture Colonel Wilder and his troops. He sent a message to Wilder that he was surrounded and should surrender to which Wilder replied that they would try to fight nevertheless. Wilder's soldiers fought back and protected their position. Union Colonel Cyrus Dunham soon arrived with additional troops and, being of senior rank, took command of Wilder's brigade. Dunham telegraphed his senior commander and suggested that they should surrender. A telegraph was returned placing Dunham under arrest and directing Wilder to once again take command. His brigade was now completely surrounded by General Bragg's troops. General Chalmers again demanded surrender, claiming superior numbers and unnecessary loss of soldiers on the Union side if they resisted, but again Wilder refused, telling the courier: "Tell General Chalmers that I have excelled him in fighting; I can also excel him in courtesy. You can leave your flag of truce on the field, bury your dead and remove your wounded until 2 p.m." Beginning to realize he was truly outnumbered Wilder eventually proposed to General Bragg that he personally see how many troops were surrounding him. Under an escort Wilder was given a tour and viewed the forty-five cannons and 25,000 men under Bragg's command. Wilder saw no course after this than to surrender and got permission from his senior command in Louisville. He was held briefly before being paroled and exchanged, and then rejoined General Rosecrans.

Assigned commander of a new brigade Wilder was sent to Gallatin, Tennessee in December of 1862 and soon was pursuing General John H. Morgan, the Confederate raider. Wilder and his brigade were able to prevent Morgan and his raiders from joining Confederate forces at Stone River, near Murfreesboro. Wilder's brigade also protected

the railway lines for Rosecrans in Tennessee. Impressed by Morgan's methods Wilder and his brigade soon conducted raids of their own, procuring horses for themselves.

Wilder's brigade built its own wagons, shod its own horses and secured its own coal. Every man carried a two foot hatchet, handy in both camp life and in fighting. A commendation he received for his brigade and himself in early 1863 stated: "The Command presents a fine appearance and will, no doubt, under the command of so efficient and energetic an officer as Col. Wilder, do very good service in their new capacity. I take this opportunity to make mention of the energy and perseverance with which Col. Wilder is untiringly working to fit out his command, without causing any extra expense to the Government." For a time they were known as the "Hatchet Brigade" but this name would be short lived in favor of a more popular name. Their official title was "The First Brigade of the Fourth Division of the Fourteenth Corps."

Wilder's effectiveness and accomplishments were well-proven by 1863 and in a letter to his wife from that year describes a brief meeting with General Rosecrans: "I sent in my resignation last week, and Gen. Rosecrans sent for me, and gave me a scolding, winding up complimenting me very highly, and refusing to accept it." Upon attempting to secure ten day's leave to deal with an emergency at home when his house caught fire again Rosecrans complimented him, but refusing his request: "We can't spare you. The government might better build you half a dozen houses than to have you away ten days."

Wilder's brigade soon gained a significant advantage by the procurement of Spencer repeating rifles, which every member soon acquired. They became some of the first soldiers from either side to fight with them. Wilder became familiar with the Spencer rifles from a gun seller he met in Murfreesboro, and was quick to realize the

advantage they gave his soldiers. With Spencer rifles a soldier could get off seven shots in the amount of time a soldier equipped with a Springfield musket could get off two. Wilder purchased rifles for his men with money borrowed from bankers in his hometown of Greensburg, Indiana, with each soldier agreeing to pay Wilder back in increments. Wilder offered to mortgage his property but the bankers made the loan without him doing this. (The government would eventually reimburse the soldiers for the guns.)

Wilder's Brigade used the Spencer rifles to great effect at the battle of Hoover's Gap, near Mufreesboro, in June of 1863. There they defeated five regiments of Confederate troops, breaking through their lines. Wilder had been sent out to drive the Confederates back to Hoover's Gap but when approaching the site found only one brigade of Kentucky cavalry. Going beyond his orders Wilder drove the brigade completely out of the Gap. Upon reaching the south end Wilder could hear the "long roll" from the Confederate camp two miles away, which was now sending up reinforcements to counter Wilder's charge. Given orders only to hold the Gap, Wilder now had pushed two miles further than ordered and had captured seven supply wagons. Confederate soldiers now had taken position on the side of a hill, taking a defensive advantage. For an hour the two sides engaged in a bloody battle, the Confederates losing one hundred and forty-six officers and men and Wilder's brigade losing fifty-one. Because of the Spencer rifles, the Confederate general, General Bate, estimated the Union brigade to be five times his size. Rosecrans remarked after this battle that Wilder had saved them thousands of men. The effectiveness of the Spencer rifles were quite evident by now and soon all the Union officers and men were demanding them. Because of his success and bravery, Wilder's brigade was dubbed "Wilder's Lightning Brigade."

When General Rosecrans advanced on Chattanooga in the late summer of 1863, Wilder was placed at the head. Along the way the brigade destroyed railroad rails making them unusable for future use. For this they used a device Wilder invented called a “rail twister” no doubt springing from his mechanical mind. Upon reaching Chattanooga on August 21 Wilder’s brigade drove General Forrest and his troops out of the city.

Wilder attempted to get a surrender from remaining Confederate troops in Chattanooga but received cannon fire from Cameron Hill instead. Eli Lilly’s Indiana battery, now under Wilder’s command, answered from Stringer’s Ridge with cannon fire of their own, one hitting the Presbyterian Church on the corner of Seventh and Market Streets. There was a special prayer service being held in the church at the time and the preacher was in mid-prayer when the cannon ball struck the roof. Many in the congregation wasted no time beating a hasty retreat to a safer environment but the preacher continued his prayer for those who waited for the prayer to conclude before exiting the church. Among them was journalist Henry Watterson, editor of *The Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, who later remarked it was the longest prayer he ever heard. As it turned out, the church was not the target but rather, the office of the *Daily Rebel* nearby. They shelled Chattanooga for eighteen days and finally entered the city on September 9th.

Later that month Wilder’s brigade participated in the battle of Chickamauga. Wilder later remarked that it “seemed a pity to kill men so” with the Spencer rifles. Stationed at Chickamauga River to prevent the Confederates from crossing, the “Lightning Brigade” began driving the Rebels back. Later that night the brigade

prevented the Confederates from advancing while guarding another site. During the next day Wilder's brigade was engaged in some of the fiercest fighting. Throughout this battle his brigade served as an independent regiment, often being sent to where the need was greatest. Eventually things got so hot for Union troops that orders were given to Wilder for "get out of there." Wilder was intent on charging the Confederates anyway but Assistant Secretary of War, Charles A. Dana, who was present, absolutely forbid him to do it. Instead, the "Lightning Brigade" continued to hold their ground and protected General George H. Thomas's retreat to Rossville. They did not leave the battlefield until the next morning, having been among the first Union troops to arrive and the last to leave. Wilder's brigade were so effective that General Thomas recommended Wilder for promotion to Brigadier General "for his ingenuity and fertility of resource in occupying the attention of the entire corps of the Rebel army while our army was getting around its flank, and for his valor and the many qualities of commander displayed by him in the numerous engagements of his brigade with the enemy before and during the battle of Chickamauga, and for the excellent service rendered by him generally, I would respectfully recommend him to the President of the U.S. for an appointment of Brigadier-General."

Wilder's health was again poor, and he spent the next several months back home in Indiana. His brigade was next sent up to McMinnville where they engaged in several skirmishes and occupied the town. They missed the battle of Missionary Ridge, instead being sent to destroy Confederate wagon trains and supplies near Cleveland and Ringgold. He re-joined his brigade in early 1864, but they did not participate in any major battles after that.

Wilder got his promotion to brigadier general on August 6, 1864. He was thirty-four years old and in poor health by this time, having suffered typhoid fever in 1862 and constantly battling dysentery. Because of this he retired in early October of 1864.

After the war ended in 1865 Wilder decided to move to Chattanooga. Many other northerners did the same over the next several years. (An advertisement in the 1868 *Chattanooga Daily Republican* suggested Chattanooga as a place one could live where his political and religious views and personal freedoms would not be endangered, “those having capital, brains and muscle preferred.”) Wilder hoped a milder climate might do him good, and he was by now well aware of the mining potential in the region.

It was during this time that Wilder came to the aid of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, who was to be arrested for breaking the terms of his parole for his association with the Ku Klux Klan. Wilder paid Forrest a visit in Memphis and interviewed him as to his intentions. Learning that Forrest intended the Klan only to protect Southerners Wilder then went to Washington and with the help of several senators from Indiana and Illinois persuaded President Grant not to have Forrest arrested. Afterwards General Forrest and his wife visited Wilder and his wife in Chattanooga and stayed an entire week.

After moving to Chattanooga Wilder investigated the Cumberland Range on horseback, from Cumberland Gap to northern Georgia, in the hopes of finding a suitable location for a mine. Armed with a copy of a book on Tennessee geology Wilder became more familiar with the mineral resources of Tennessee. He found large amounts of brown hematite in the mountains as well as red ores, limestone, and coal deposits on Walden’s Ridge. These coal deposits eventually brought him to Roane County. Visiting

with a friend from his war days Wilder was directed to a nearby area that was rich in iron ore, coal, and red fossil hematite.

In 1867 Wilder established the Roane Iron Company at this site, at what is now the town of Rockwood. Wilder had several partners, including Hiram S. Chamberlain, who had been operating a small rolling mill in Knoxville. Chamberlain was born in 1835 in Ohio and early in the Civil War had enlisted in the Second Ohio Volunteer Cavalry and later became chief quartermaster of Union troops in East Tennessee. Together they had purchased nine hundred and twenty-eight acres of land in Roane County in September of 1865. They would eventually own over 20,000 acres. Chamberlain was able to provide some contacts to Midwestern investors and East Tennessee industrial promoters. The town was named Rockwood after another partner in the mine, William Rockwood, an Indianan whom Wilder had known during the war. They had a blast furnace shipped from Ohio and soon added a second. They mined ore at the base of Walden's Ridge and set up beehive coke ovens at the coal pits, which negated transporting raw materials. With the two blast furnaces it became the largest and most successful mine in the South, at one time turning out one hundred tons of railroad iron a day and employing over a thousand workers. It was also the first to manufacture coke-fired pig iron in the South.

In 1868 Wilder set up a home in Rockwood and supervised construction and workers at the mine, as well as negotiating land deals. The northern market was unpredictable and the South was still recovering from the war. They built a railway that would carry their products to the river and then on to Chattanooga. They shipped most of the iron to Knoxville and Chattanooga by the river. (One of the ships was dubbed the

J.T. Wilder.) In 1870 Wilder merged the Roane Iron Company with the Southwestern Iron Company, a rolling mill in Chattanooga that Union General William Tecumseh Sherman had established during the war. Wilder paid \$225,000 for the mill, which they named the Roane Rolling Mill, and it included 100 acres of land along the Tennessee River, between Cameron Hill and Lookout Mountain. Together they produced the first steel in the South. (The Chattanooga portion of the Roane Iron Company was sold in 1889 and became the Southern Iron Company.)

During these early years the Roane Iron Company's success was uncertain, although it quickly became the largest employer and economic foundation for postwar Chattanooga. Its size and scale of operations far exceeded anything seen in the antebellum south. The mill employed two hundred and twenty-five workers, paying them from one to five dollars a day. Wilder, along with other Union veterans in the area such as Hiram Chamberlain, H. Clay Evans and William Rathburn, ran the mill. On his unused land Wilder had built small homes for his workers and leased them for advances on the next month's wages.

About that same time Wilder built the Wilder Machine Works on the corner of 9th and Chestnut Streets in downtown Chattanooga. It employed seventy-five workers. It was here that Wilder invented the Wilder Turbine Wheel, which was widely marketed. He also helped in the development of the Southern Car and Foundry Company, the Durham Coal Company, and the Dayton Coal and Iron Company. For the next two decades Chattanooga served as a center for iron and steel in East Tennessee. Blast furnaces began popping up all around, including at Dayton and South Pittsburg.

In 1871 Wilder was elected Mayor of Chattanooga, taking the position from banker William Rathburn. Wilder only served a small portion of the term, resigning less than a year into office due to conflicts with his private businesses, and to what he perceived as shady dealings of the city council. While he was Mayor he established the free school system in Chattanooga. He also established the Four Mile Law which prohibited the establishment of maintenance of any saloons or liquor stores within four miles of an iron works or school.

Hiram Chamberlain moved to Chattanooga that same year to become Vice President and general manager of the expanded Roane Iron Company. Chamberlain became the president of the company in 1880 and held that position until his death in 1916. Wilder sold his interests in the company in the early 1870s and resigned as superintendent in 1875. He purchased a portion of the Cranberry Mine just over the border in North Carolina a few miles from Roan Mountain.

In 1873 Wilder was appointed to represent Tennessee at the Vienna Exposition. He took native ores and other materials and returned with a first place award for Tennessee as a “mineral state.” He also sent an exhibit of Tennessee minerals to the centennial exposition at Philadelphia. He ran for Congress as a Republican in 1876 but lost, although he did cut down the normal Democratic majority to a narrow margin. In 1877 he was appointed postmaster of Chattanooga and served one term. Wilder found the time, in 1878, to tour Great Britain and became a member of Britain’s Iron and Coal Institute. Having become acquainted with the Duke of Marlborough during this visit, he was later visited in Tennessee by the Duke, who received a tour of the Cranberry mine

from Wilder. The Duke asked Wilder how far the vein of ore extended? Wilder's reply was "The Devil is now making iron from the bottom of it."

During the 1870s many of the local transplanted northerners began discussing the need for a college in Chattanooga. The charter for the school was filed in 1886 with twenty-eight names, including Wilder's. Together they raised over \$10,000. In 1886 Chattanooga University was founded (now the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga) and Wilder was on the first board of trustees and served in this capacity for two years.

As Wilder investigated other parts of Tennessee in his pursuit to find new suitable locations for his mines he went to Johnson City, in the northeast corner of the state. There he found an area in which he could bring together the iron ore of North Carolina, and the coal of Virginia and Kentucky. Nearby was Roan Mountain, one of the highest mountains in the Appalachian Mountain range, and it reminded him of his boyhood home in the Catskill Mountains of New York. He purchased the land on the sides and top of the mountain in 1870 at the cost of fifty cents an acre whereas the land he purchased in the valley went for \$25.15 per acre. Over the next few years he built a small house, to which he constantly added rooms, to accommodate the steady stream of friends and family that came to visit. By 1877 he was taking paying guests at what turned out to be his first hotel on the mountain.

At Roan Mountain Wilder found huge deposits of magnetite. There were already beehive iron furnaces at nearby Buladean and the Cranberry furnaces at the northeast end of the mountain, just inside North Carolina. Whereas the ore from his Rockwood furnaces contained too much sulfur, which produced a too brittle iron for train rails and wheels, the Cranberry ore was sulfur-free. Transporting this ore from Roan Mountain

down to the Nolichucky River on to Rockwood via the Tennessee River proved to be too expensive so a narrow gauge railway was added.

By 1882 the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad carried the Cranberry ore to Johnson City by way of Roan Mountain. This also enabled passenger access to the top of Roan Mountain from the Tennessee side. This allowed Wilder to build a home, inn and luxury hotel at the top of the mountain. By 1885 this hotel, the Cloudland Hotel, had one hundred and sixty-six rooms (and supposedly one bathroom!). The top of the mountain had long been referred by locals as Cloudland, after the clouds that often obscured the peak. People came from miles around and found, because of its high altitude at 6285 feet, that it gave relief from hay fever. The rates were \$2 a day, \$10 a week, or \$30 for four weeks.

The Cloudland Hotel was heated by steam, still uncommon in that day. A spring eight hundred feet below the top supplied the water, which was delivered via hydraulic units which filled tanks next to the hotel. There was a golf course, croquet grounds and a bowling alley. A doctor, butcher, baker and barber were all available. Wilder advertised both nationally and internationally. One advertisement for the hotel stated: “Come up out of the sultry plains to the Land of the Sky- Magnificent views where the rivers are born. One hundred mountain tops over 4,000 feet high, in sight.”

The Cloudland Hotel straddled the Tennessee-North Carolina state line and it was said that some guests could sleep with their bodies in two different states. A line was painted in the middle of the hotel so guests would know which state they were in. This may have served a practical purpose: Liquor was legal in Tennessee but illegal in North

Carolina. Here the Wilder family gathered in large numbers, along with countless friends, neighbors, scientists, and visitors, and these gatherings were happy occasions.

The expense of maintaining a hotel such as the Cloudland for a short holiday season (because of its high altitude) proved to be its undoing. Wilder eventually hired managers for the hotel and not all were scrupulous in their care and spending. It began to decline in the early 1900s and was abandoned in 1910. The locals took to ransacking the hotel and within a few years the Cloudland was rapidly decaying. Wilder sold the property and the new owner began selling off items room by room.

Wilder purchased a home in Johnson City, and became Vice-President of the Charleston, Cincinnati, and Chicago Railroad, later to become the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railroad. In 1892 he organized the Carnegie Iron Company in Johnson City, which he sold in 1897.

Wilder's military service was never forgotten and in 1889 veterans of both sides of the war met in Chattanooga to discuss creating a national military park at the site of the battle of Chickamauga. Wilder was elected president of the Chickamauga Memorial Association

In 1892 wife, Martha, died while they were living in Johnson City. Her body was brought back to Chattanooga and buried at Forest Hills Cemetery. He remarried twelve years later, in 1904, to a twenty-six year old lady who was serving as his nurse at the time. He was seventy-four. Her name was Dora Lee and she was from a Southern family. Her father had served in the Confederacy during the Civil War. Wilder put his new wife through the College of Medicine in Knoxville and she became the first woman

to pass the medical exam in Tennessee. This marriage raised some eyebrows in his family- some of his daughters were older than her!

In 1897 Wilder was appointed Pension Agent for Knoxville by President McKinley. Later reappointments were made by Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, and Wilder served in this position for eight years, until 1905. When the Spanish-American War began in 1898 the sixty-eight year old Wilder offered his services to President McKinley. Commissions had already been given to two veteran Civil War generals, Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of Robert E. Lee, and Joseph "Fightin' Joe" Wheeler, both who had served in the Confederacy. Wilder was informed that these commissions were special cases in recognition of all the Southerners who were currently fighting under the Stars and Stripe again. He nevertheless traveled to Washington at his own expense to promote Knoxville as a possible training camp. A camp was eventually established there and named Camp Wilder.

Wilder was a republican. He was never a gambler, and didn't drink nor use tobacco. He sought out difficult things to do, and by his own methods and inventions found ways to be successful. He was six feet, two inches tall, weighed two hundred and ten pounds, had an easy kind hearted temper, was fond of conversation and had a pleasant but vigorous speaking voice, and was known to be honest and trustworthy. He frequently visited the sites of his brigade's battles, sometimes in the company of Confederate veterans. He attended many of the Lightning Brigade's reunions and often hosted the members in his homes throughout Tennessee. Wilder has been described as a carpetbagger. He definitely was not that! He gave more to the area than he extracted from it, unlike the traditional carpetbagger. He was not an opportunist but a shrewd

businessman who took occasional risks. Wilder profited from his mines and businesses over the years but lost much of his wealth in the great Baring Brothers Panic of 1893 and never fully recovered. Through all his innovations, labors and businesses he helped establish Chattanooga as an industrial center. He was twenty years ahead of TVA when he established a power company and acquired water rights along the Little Tennessee River.

He was a friend of Alexander Graham Bell but declined an opportunity to invest in Bell's invention, thinking it would not amount to much. In 1892 Adolph Ochs, then editor of the *Chattanooga Times*, praised Wilder: "He is a true-trying, never flinching friend of Chattanooga in sunshine, stormy adversity and prosperity. He cannot be forgotten or neglected but by the ungrateful." He was a member of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Society of the Army of the Cumberland, the National Geographic Society, the Loyal Legion, and the Iron and Steel Institute of Great Britain.

Always moving to new homes, General Wilder purchased, in 1912, a plat of ground up on Signal Mountain near Chattanooga. In this spot, known as Wilder's Point, he had set up a signal corps during the Civil War and it has been known by this name ever since. His house, said to have been large, housed his military collection.

In 1913 General Wilder moved to Monterey, Tennessee, where he developed the Wilder-Davidson Coal Mine for the Fentress Coal Company. He had built a smaller hotel there a few years earlier and called it the Imperial Hotel. Not nearly as majestic as the Cloudland it had only twenty rooms. He began spending his winters in Jacksonville, Florida, where his son Stuart lived. He died there during a visit on October 20, 1917, at

the age of 87. With him were his wife and children. He was laid to rest in the Wilder family plot in the Forest Hills Cemetery in St. Elmo. The funeral was conducted by the Reverend Jonathan Waverly Bachman, the “Pastor of Chattanooga” and the Chaplain-General of the Confederate Veterans Association. In the service Dr. Bachman stated “The world is poorer since General Wilder died. He made the world brighter and happier while he lived in it. It used to be said of this man that he was visionary. So he was. He was a seer. In his citizenship, like the soldier, he was in the front rank in all good works. He was devoted to the welfare of Chattanooga and this section. His brain and his heart were at the service of the people. He loved his fellow man. This was his town and this was his country and his people.” General John T. Wilder was survived by his second wife, five daughters and one son.

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