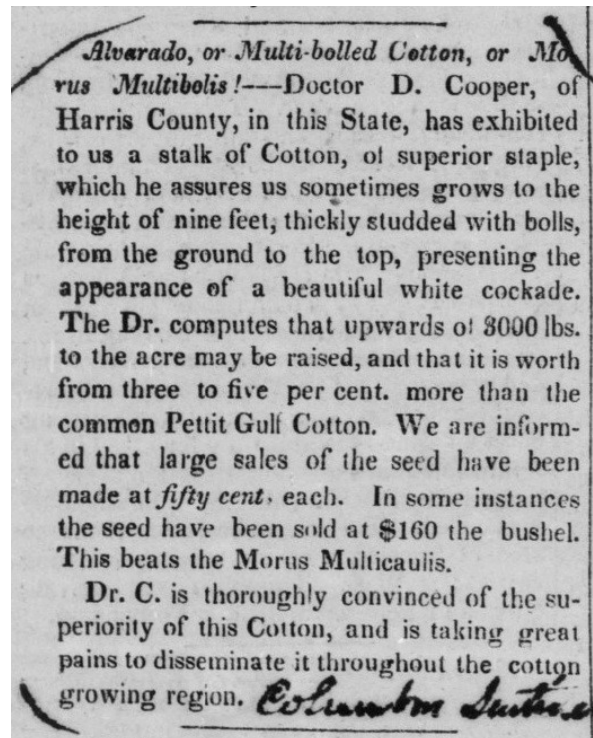


**On this day, September 5, 1839**, the *Columbus Sentinel and Herald* published a story about an amazing boll of cotton, which its farmer, “Dr. D. Cooper” of Harris County, had delivered to the editors to show off. Dr. Cooper claimed this particular plant could “sometimes grow to the height of nine feet.” The editors went on: “Dr. C. is thoroughly convinced of the superiority of this Cotton, and is taking great pains to disseminate it throughout the cotton growing region.”

This Dr. Cooper is likely the same as Dr. David Cooper, a physician who, besides cotton-growing, may have also had his hand in horse-raising and was, as I was surprised to discover, also the first superintendent of what is now the Central State Hospital at Milledgeville. Following a quick survey of family trees in Ancestry.com, I believe that this physician/agriculturalist Dr. David Cooper was born about 1790 in South Carolina to Joseph and Martha Cooper.



According to *Men of Mark in Georgia*, a Dr. David Cooper taught the young Mark Anthony Cooper (1800-1885, later celebrated Indian fighter, Georgia banker, and industrialist) in Hancock County, sometime between about 1810 and the year the latter Cooper graduated from South Carolina College in 1819. (I so far have found no family connection between the two Coopers.)

A David Cooper appeared in the 1820 census in Captain James Wright’s District (“Wrightsborough”) in Columbia County, Georgia. In 1820, he would be the free white male 16-25 years old with his wife (probably Fannie or Frances Winfrey, later named in their daughter’s death certificate) and a son, under 10 years old. Cooper held five enslaved people: three boys under 14, an enslaved man 14-25 and a female the same age. This David Cooper’s near neighbors were Joel Cooper and James A. Cooper (who one Ancestry researcher claims is David’s brother).

The earliest state licensing board, the Central Medical Society of Georgia, was founded in 1826. At a meeting in Milledgeville in 1828, “The following physicians were elected to membership: Drs. Cooper, Columbia County [and others] ...” In 1829, a member named “Cooper” was elected “Orator.” (Cecilia C. Mettler, “The Central Medical Society of Georgia,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2, June 1940, pp. 145-149.)

Also, in 1829, in an advertisement for the breeding availability of a horse named La Fayette, Dr. David Cooper of Wrightsboro, Columbia Co., gave a vivid testimonial about the worthiness of the horse’s lineage. Cooper claimed that the mother of La Fayette “sustained the burthen of my practice in medicine” and that he rode her “not less than 50,000 miles” on rounds to see his patients and other errands between 1818 and 1825. (*Rural Cabinet* (Warrenton, Ga.), March 21, 1829, 4.)

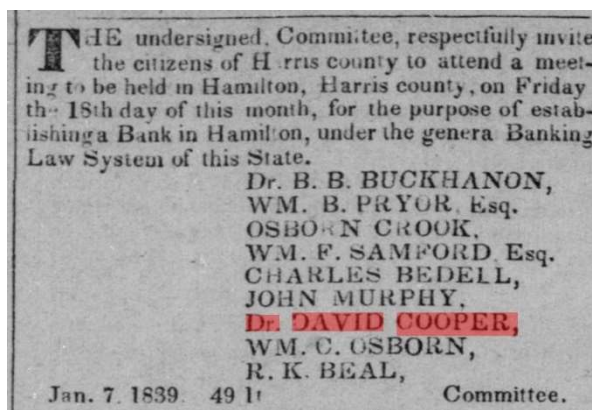
In 1830, likely this same David Cooper lived with his growing family in District 12 of Columbia County, Ga.: his wife and eight children as well as seven enslaved people. No Coopers lived nearby. Soon after this, the Coopers moved to west Georgia, for, in 1832, John Martin named Dr. David Cooper as a doctor in Columbus, Georgia (p. 38). That summer, Dr. David Cooper made a toast at the 4th of July dinner at

Tarver's Hotel: "prosperity to the town of Columbus." He would have been 42 years old. (*Columbus Democrat*, July 14, 1832, 3.)

By 1836, the Coopers were probably living in Harris County. Two "D. Coopers" are listed in the Property Tax Digests, 1793-1892, one in Captain Swan's District and one in Captain William's District – and this second one is a defaulter.

The year 1839 – the same year that mentions of "okra cotton" or "Alvarado cotton" began to crop up in newspaper articles – was a fertile one for Dr. Cooper's career growth. He is part of a group in Harris County inviting people to invest in a new "Bank of Hamilton." (*Columbus Sentinel & Herald*, January 10, 1839, 3.) He also may have been experimenting with growing the new species of cotton plant (botanical pursuits were not unusual as a side interest of physicians) and may have made a large investment in okra cotton seed, as he began selling the seed through an agent by November 1839

(*Savannah's Daily Republican*, issues from Nov. 26, 1839 through Jan. 2, 1840).



*From the Southern Silk Journal.*  
**ALVARADO, OR MULTI-BOLLED COTTON.**  
We have seen a specimen of this new species of Cotton. It was in the hands of Dr. Cooper, from Harris county, and may well be considered a vegetable wonder.— The stalk was about 14 inches long, having short limbs projecting at distances of from two to four inches apart, on the extremities of which were from one to five bolls of matured Cotton, of a superior staple. The most experienced cotton planters present pronounced it the most remarkable product they had ever witnessed. This stalk contained on the above short space, only 14 bolls, and was stated not to be a fair specimen of the growth of the Alvarado Cotton. In confirmation of this, we perceive in the Macon Georgia Telegraph that "Mr. Stephen S. Wright, of Knoxville, Crawford County, of this State, has a few stalks from seed obtained of Dr. Cooper of Harris. They are about 6 feet high, on one 96, on another 110 good bolls, besides forms that would not mature, were counted. One contains 27 matured bolls on a single foot!" It is by some called *okra* or *twin* cotton, on account of its resemblance to the okra plant.

In late September, the story appeared in the *Sentinel & Herald* from the *Southern Silk Journal* about David Cooper's "multi-bolled cotton." At the end of the month another article appeared in Athens' *Southern Banner* (September 27, 1839, page 2) about Dr. Cooper and "Okra Cotton," which again also quotes the *Southern Silk Journal*. This article gives a little more detailed information about the plant and then reprints much of the info from previous newspaper articles.

<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn89053812/1839-09-05/ed-1/>

Dr. Cooper was a member of the Southern Central Agricultural Society, a group of politicians, businessmen, and planters, who joined together to try to solve some of the economic problems that planters had, for example, with the price of cotton and the amount of money needed each year to invest in planting crops. The society was founded by two bankers, John G. Gamble of Florida and James Hamilton, Jr., of South Carolina. The [first?] "Planters' and Merchants' Convention" met in Macon, Ga., October 22,

1839 and Dr Cooper was one of three delegates from Harris County. (*Georgia Constitutionalist*, November 01, 1839, 1, reprinted from *Macon Telegraph*.)

There are two D. or David Coopers who are heads of household in Hamilton in Harris County in 1840. A family headed by "D. Cooper" live in Hamilton in 1840, a man 50-59 (Dr. David Cooper would have been 50) and a woman, 30-39, with six children ranging in ages from 10 to 29, and four enslaved people. Another family in Humphries District of Harris County was headed by David Cooper, but he is between 30 and 39 years old and living with a female in the same age range, as well as an older female 60-69, with children ranging from under five to age 14, and no enslaved people. It seems less likely that this second family is that of Dr. David Cooper born in 1790, married to Fannie Whitney, and growing cotton.

By 1843, Dr. David Cooper was elected first superintendent of the newly established Lunatic, Idiot and Epileptic Asylum of the State of Georgia. According to the historic marker on site, he served through 1846.

In January of 1845, Cooper, still superintendent, was again appointed a trustee of the asylum by the governor (*Southern Banner*, January 23, 1845, 2). He wrote and published the hospital's first annual report in 1845 (*The Christian Index* (February 28, 1845, 3), but his writing style, among other characteristics, must have come under some scrutiny and it seems as if Dr. Cooper's mental state might have been an open secret. *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1846 quoted Cooper's annual report and wrote derisively: "it might well be doubted whether the resident physician or one of his patients was its author." The Boston journal suggested that if Cooper published the new journal he was proposing, he should "amend his style of writing" or, judging by what the Boston doctors read in the annual report, he would "make the institution the laughing stock of the country." (*The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, p. 224-5.)

According to Gerald N. Grob, the author of several books on the history of institutions for the mentally ill, Dr. Cooper

"was highly eccentric and indeed, perhaps, insane. Upon reading Cooper's bizarre and barely comprehensible first Annual Report, the editor of the new *American Journal of Insanity* questioned its very authenticity. [Dorothea] Dix [the noted nurse and mental health reformer] wrote to a correspondent that she had been informed that Cooper "is really insane, but being harmless, the Trustees consent to his remaining in charge of the Institution.'" (Grob, *The Mad Among Us*, 48; and *Mental Institutions in America*, 361-2.)

By 1850, Dr David Cooper, his wife Frances, three girls were living in Hancock County, along with two enslaved women, and he was working in the field of "Medical and Other Health Services, Except Hospitals." And on November 14, 1854, the *Southern Recorder* noted briefly that Dr. David Cooper had died on October 27, "an old and worthy citizen."

**DIED,**  
In Hancock county, on the 27th ult., Dr. DAVID  
COOPER, an old and worthy citizen.

*Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.*

**GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.**

**Executive Appointments.**

The following appointments were made by the Governor, on the first Monday of this month:

John S. Thomas, Director of Central Bank.

Anderson W. Redding, Principal Keeper of the Penitentiary.

Chas. W. Choate, Book Keeper of the Penitentiary.

Abner Hammond, Inspector Penitentiary.

Thos. F. Green, Physician, " "

Rev. F. Blake, Chaplain, " "

John C. Hunter, Military Store Keeper at Savannah.

John R. Cotting, Military Store Keeper at Milledgeville.

Anthony Newsom, Capt. State House Guard.

*Trustees Lunatic Asylum*—M. J. Kenan, R. H. Ramsey, **Dr. David Cooper.**

The Principal Keeper has re-appointed Capt. H. Germany Assistant Keeper Penitentiary.—*So. Rec.*

## SOURCES

Georgia Historic Newspapers: <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

Census and Tax Digest records via Ancestry.com. For information on tax defaulters, see: [https://www.georgiaarchives.org/research/tax\\_records\\_faq](https://www.georgiaarchives.org/research/tax_records_faq).

*Men of Mark in Georgia – A Complete and Elaborate History of the State from its Settlement to the Present Time, Chiefly Told in Biographies and Autobiographies of the Most Eminent Men of Each Period of Georgia’s Progress and Development*, ed. William J. Northern, volume II (Atlanta, Ga.: A.B. Caldwell, 1910), 208. (Google Books)

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Cecilia C. Mettler, “The Central Medical Society of Georgia,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 1940), pp. 145-149. (JSTOR)

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Laurie Jane Varner, “Gone to Milledgeville?: Northeast Georgia Women and the Georgia State Sanitarium, 1886-1936,” Ph.D.diss., University of Georgia, 2011.  
([https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/varner\\_laurie\\_j\\_201108\\_phd.pdf](https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/varner_laurie_j_201108_phd.pdf))

Photo of Milledgeville State Hospital historic marker available [here](#).

Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad Among Us – A History of the Care of America’s Mentally Ill* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 48.

Gerald N. Grob, *Mental Institutions in America: Social Policy to 1875* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 361-2.

*The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, ed. J.V.C. Smith, M.D., Volume 33 (Boston: D. Clapp, Jr., 1846)] pages 224-225, from Google Books, where an excerpt of the annual report can be read.)

**Rachel Dobson**