

JOHN GUNTER AND HIS FAMILY

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One of the stops made by DeSoto on his excursion across the southeastern section of the United States was at the island village of Tali, which was probably on McKee Island near the bend of the Tennessee River at the present town of Guntersville. James Adair related in his *History of the American Indians* (1775) that the strength of the Creek Confederation was increased by the addition of "two great towns of the Koo-asah-te." From the Marcos Delgado narrative it appears that the first movement of those people was before 1686. A fraction of the tribe remained on the Tennessee River and later settled near Gunter's Landing.¹

Around 1700, during the Shawnee war, the Creek Indians pretended to be friends of the Cherokees, but all of the time they were secretly aiding their enemies, the Shawnees. The Cherokees learned of this treachery, and when a party of Creeks came to a dance at Echota, the Cherokee capital, they massacred almost all of the Creeks and that brought on a war between the two tribes. The Creeks were obliged to abandon all of their settlements upon the Tennessee River and withdraw south to the Coosa and the neighborhood of Creek Path, an old trading trail from South Carolina which struck the Tennessee at the present Guntersville, Alabama.²

According to the Alabama historian, Thomas McAdory Owen, Guntersville was started in 1790 and the Indian name was Kusanunnahí, meaning Creek Path, from its location near the great trail leading from the Creek country in middle Alabama to the hunting grounds in the valleys of the Tennessee, Cumberland and Ohio rivers.³

¹John R. Swanton, *The Indians of the Southeastern United States*, Washington, 1946, pp. 27, 28. Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 137.

²James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokees*, Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, 1900, p. 383.

³Thomas McAdory Owen, *History of Alabama*, Chicago, 1921, vol. I, pp. 677-78. Guntersville at the maximum had a population of six to eight hundred Indians who traveled up and down the river in their canoes.

Among the early citizens of Alabama was John Gunter, a Scots trader who arrived in the country about 1750 or 1760. One account states that Gunter settled among the Cherokee Indians during the Revolution because of his Tory sentiments; another that he was captured by the Indians in South Carolina and brought up as a member of the Cherokee tribe. He became head man of the settlement on the south side of the Tennessee River in Marshall County, Alabama.

John Gunter is described as a man of ability and exemplary character. He married Katy, a fullblood Cherokee of the Paint Clan and a cousin of Major George Lowery, second chief of the nation. She bore three sons, Samuel, Edward and John, and four daughters, Aky, Martha who married Hugh Henry, Elizabeth and Catherine. Samuel married A-yo-ku; Edward married first Elsie McCoy and for his second wife Letitia Keys.

Gunter's sons were conspicuous figures in the old Cherokee Nation and west of the Mississippi their descendants are influential.

The place where John Gunter located was first known as Gunter's Ferry because his son, Edward, operated a ferry on the Tennessee River as early as 1818. It was next called Gunter's village, then Guntersville and later it became Gunter's Landing. The town is about thirty-three miles southeast of Huntsville and it was an important place on the river. Flatboats were sometimes eight or ten rows deep and they were loaded with merchandise, corn, whiskey, and apples, etc.⁴

Gunter's Landing was known far and wide, as flatboats plied between the village and New Orleans. When the steamboats started running on the Tennessee they made a turbulent boom town of the place. "Backwoodsmen and Indians lived for 'boat day' and crowded the banks when the boats, jammed with

⁴Report of Alabama History Commission, "Cherokee Towns and Villages in Alabama" by O. D. Street, vol. I, p. 419; *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Commission*, "The Indians of Marshall County, Alabama," by Oliver Day Street, vol. IV (1899-1903), pp. 207-08; "Sketch of Family History" by Major DeWitt C. Lipe, grandson of John Gunter—typescript in Grant Foreman Collection.

Vann presided and Daniel McCoy Gunter acted as secretary. Men wishing to join a party for California were directed to apply to A. D. Wilson at Fort Gibson, W. H. Holt at Flint, or Daniel M. Gunter at Tahlequah.

The route taken by the Cherokees ran north of the base of Pike's Peak, followed Cherry Creek from its source to its confluence with the South Platte River, and over the site of the present Fort Collins, Colorado. Daniel M. Gunter wrote from Pueblo that his brother and James S. Vann were in the party with him and that they were packing over the mountains."

Mrs. M. M. Schrimsher (Elizabeth Gunter) was living at Fort Gibson in April, 1859, when the steamboat *Violet* delivered a consignment of groceries and furniture to the port of Fort Gibson from John Henry Williams & Co. of Van Buren, Arkansas. Goods for the Schrimsher family consisted of a sideboard, rocking chair, box sofa, washstand and chairs; a bag of coffee, barrel of sugar and one of molasses and a box of candles.

D. N. Gunter, merchant, received at the same port, a large assortment of merchandise, consisting of six boxes of candles, sixteen of merchandise, in addition to raisins, ginger, starch, blacking, tobacco, 20 bags of coffee, shoes and hats, sugar, indigo, molasses, lead and powder, sieves, axes, nails, tubs, pails, cigars, harness, scales, churns, coffee mills and rope. The demand for candles at Fort Gibson was satisfied by D. N. Gunter when the steamer *Muscogee*, in December, 1859, delivered a consignment at that post.

During the Civil War Generals P. G. T. Beauregard and John Bell Hood decided that Guntersville would be the point where the southern army would cross the Tennessee to destroy the railroad bridge which had been rebuilt by the Federal troops. General Wheeler's cavalry would guard the south side while Forrest would watch Sherman from the north.

After the Federal success at Chattanooga it became important to patrol the upper Tennessee and four small gunboats were built; the *General Grant*, No. 62, under Acting Ensign J. Watson, early in January, 1865, single-handed silenced the Con-

"Grant Foreman, *Marcy and the Gold Seekers*, Norman, 1939, pp. 66, 75; T. L. Ballenger, *Around Tahlequah Council Fires*, Muskogee, 1935, p. 23.

federate batteries at Guntersville. A few days later she destroyed the entire town as punishment for hostile demonstrations against the gunboat."

According to the Cherokee Advocate of March 21, 1877² Edward Gunter was a member of the senate from Chattanooga District, Alabama, a Methodist preacher, the owner of a large cotton plantation, and considered wealthy. He owned land in Alabama, a ferry on the Tennessee River. It was said that he resembled Jeremiah Evarts, the distinguished lawyer and editor of the *Missionary Herald*. According to this account Edward was a "son of a Scot, who came here as a young man, and was a merchant . . . and has a nice farm and dwelling not far from the Landing. Mrs. Gunter is a near relative of 'White Horse'."

The will of Edward Gunter, written in 1842, reveals that he was the father of seven children, that his wife's name was Letitia and that he was the owner of considerable property, real and personal.

"THE LAST WILL & TESTAMENT OF EDWARD GUNTER

In the name of God Amen—

"I Edward Gunter, of Tahlequah District, Cherokee Nation, of unusual health and sound mind and memory, for which I am thankful to the great author of my being, Do make and ordain this my last Will & Testament—

"1st. I design that all my just debts shall be paid by my Executors as soon as convenient after my decease.

"2d. I give and devise to my children, Daniel Gunter, John Gunter, Margaret Gunter, Catharine Gunter, Martha Gunter, Elizabeth Gunter, & Madelinar Victoria Gunter, the following property Viz. My plantation up[on] which I now reside. All my Farming Tools & gearing, my carpenter Tools, my Black-

²Francis Trevelyan Miller (editor-in-chief), *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, New York, 1911, vol. 6, p. 233; Davidson, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 104.

³Page 2, col. 4.

smith Tools, my new waggon drawn by mules at this time. Six of my largest & best with all the necessary gears belonging to , my bald horse known as the family Horse, six Feather Beds, four bed steads and one pine bed stead, & one Feather Bed more at the Store near Daniel McCoy's, two Cherry Dining Tables, one Cherry stand, one Doz. Silver Table Spoons, one doz Silver Tea Spoons & all of my household & kitchen furniture not herein specified. I have sent by Andrew Miller for one Doz Windsor Chairs, 1 Cherry dining Table, two Cherry breakfast Tables, one hundred pound feathers, 1 doz Silver Table Spoons, 1 Doz Silver Tea Spoons. It is my will that all of which shall equally belong to my children, Daniel Gunter, John Gunter, Margaret, Catharine, Martha, Elizabeth and Madelenar Victoria. It is also my will that there shall be bought by my Executors, for the seven-children above mentioned three bureaus and four bed steads. I further will that those of my family of seven children shall be furnished by my Executors with all articles necessary for family use, including clothing. I design that the above family shall be supported until as they become of age or become separte families by marriage, then their support shall cease. It is also my will that my new house now in contemplation shall be completed without delay in the following manner. Viz the out side weatherboarded and Painted white, the roof shingled and Painted Brown, the inside lathed & Plastered, all the floors laid, all the doors made, the lower doors to be pannel, the upper doors to be Batten. The folding door I had directed to be between the two family rooms, I now wish to be a plain common size pannel door, and the wall between the two rooms to be lathed & plastered, all the windows sash, with good strong shutters, and all the windows I had directed in the roof of the house without shutters. I direct all the doors, mouldings & mantle pieces to be painted in a plain manner. When the whole building is completed necessary Locks, Hinges, Satched &c, it shall considered as a part of my plantation mentioned in this my 2nd Article. I wish the above building if possible to be completed, so that the family may occupy it this fall 1842.

"3rd. It is my will that the following property and Negroes Viz. Bill, Grace, Beśsie, Alfred, Jack, Rachel, Dred, Caroline, Sylvia, Sophia, Mary, Solomon, Suce, & Ara, my Reservation of six hundred & forty acres of land lying & being [in] Marshall County, State of Alabama, on the North side of Tennessee River

(Except three and a fourth acres heretofore sold in lots) together with a share of the Ferry & appertences belonging thereto, all my stock of Cattle, Horses, Mules (Except six mules mentioned in Article No. 2) all my Hogs, sheep, two waggons, two carriages, all my store goods now on hands near Daniel McCoy's & between eight & nine thousand dollars in Cash, sent for goods by Andrew Miller. My store house at Tahlequah, my cash on hand, all monies that may be due me by Notes accounts or otherwise & all my claims of or whatever against the Government of the United States, all of the property & effects mentioned in this Article it is my will shall be divided into ten equal shares, of which my children, Daniel Gunter, John Gunter, Margaret Gunter, Catharine Gunter, Martha Gunter, Elizabeth Gunter & Medelenar Victoria Gunter each to have one share or one tenth of the whole amount & my daughter Nelly Beauert, Nancy Shipley, Sarah Nicholson, Eliza Keys, Jane Keys, & my wife Letitia, each to have one half share, or one twentyeth of the whole amount.

"4th. For the purpose of making a division of the property mentioned in the 3rd Article. It is my will that the reservation be sold, also the store goods as soon as convenient and in a manner the Executors may deem it most advantageous and proper, the proceeds of which, it is shall be divided in a manner as stated in Article No. 3. As I wish the negroes to remain amongst the family. It is my will each negro shall be valued and taken by the several legatees agreeable to their valuation.

"5th. It is my will that no division of the property shall be made before all my debts are paid. It is also my will that all the Negroes & other property now on my plantation shall remain for the benefit of my family of seven children, Daniel, John, Margaret, Catharine, Martha, Elizabeth, Medelinar Victoria, until a division shall be made.

"6th. It is my will that my son Daniel Gunter, have the following property viz one Derringer Rifle and my large pair of Derringer belt pistols and shot pouch.

"7th. It is my will that my son John Gunter have the following property viz one pair of Horse Pistols with Holsters, my Gold patent lever Watch which Andrew Miller has taken to

Philadelphia to have repaired and the gold chain & seal belonging to said watch & my small Double Barreled Shot Gun.

"8th. It is my will that my Books shall equally belong to my sons Daniel & John.

"9th. It is my will that my sons Daniel & John remain at school at Lawrenceville New Jersey until they obtain an Education sufficient to enter upon a College Education when it is my wish they shall return home & that my daughters Margaret, Catharine, Martha, Elizabeth & Medelenar Victoria to be sent to school until they obtain a common English Education. Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar & Geography.

"10th. It is my will that the expences for all the Education mentioned in the above Article shall be paid out of my Estate until such a time a division shall be made of all the property, from that each child's Education shall of its own share of the Estate.

"11th. I have sent for a side saddle, Bridle & martingales by Andrew Miller, which it is my will shall become the property of my daughter Margaret Gunter.

"12th. It is my will that my wife Letitia shall be furnished with all necessaries for family use like my children specified in Article No. 2 except clothing, until, such a time she quits the family, or marries, then her support shall cease.

"13th. It is my will that the necessaries for the support of my family, mentioned in Article No. 2 and 12 shall be furnished by the Estate, until a general division of the property shall be made, from that time each child's share be applied for its own support.

"14th. And for the purpose of carrying into effect, This my last will & Testament. I name for my Executors Riley Keys and Larkin Beavertt both citizens of Tahlequah Dist. Cherokee Nation."

On December 30, 1883, Mrs. Nancy Gunter Shipley died at the home of her cousin Mrs. Martha Schrimsher Gulager in the Tahlequah District, at the age of seventy-two. Her husband,

it was said, was killed through a mistake by a scouting party of his friends during the Civil War. Mrs. Shipley was a daughter of Edward Gunter, a signer of the Act of Union between the Eastern and Western Cherokees in July, 1839, and of the Constitution adopted by the Nation after the Union, in September, 1839."

The Cherokee Advocate, March 24, 1884, carried an account of the death on March 20 of Mrs. Eliza Gunter Adair, widow of John Adair and "second daughter of the late Edward Gunter a man of wealth and distinction among his people." She was born near Creek Path Mission in Alabama and would have been sixty-six years old if she had survived until the twenty-third day of the month. Eliza Gunter followed the "Trail of Tears" in her father's detachment of Cherokee emigrants in 1838 and when she died at Vinita she was survived by a daughter and four small grand children.

John Edward Gunter, a son of Judge Gunter, lived at Redlands, Sequoyah District; he served as sheriff of his district in 1875 and 1877. He was a senator from Skin Bayou District in 1885 and succeeded Joseph Absalom Scales as chief justice of the supreme court. In 1891 he was on the committee to negotiate with the commissioners to the Five Civilized Tribes. He was a member of the senate in 1893, 1897 and 1899 and that year he was a candidate for chief on the Downing ticket." John Thomas Gunter was a Cherokee senator from Cooweescoowee District in 1895. George M. Gunter, a prominent Cherokee, fell from a Kansas City Southern train near Redlands, broke his neck, and died instantly. He was a member of the Cherokee Council and sheriff of his district."

Some interesting litigation before the Department of the Interior was that of Nancy Gunter in the Cherokee enrollment case. The decision was that she was born a Cherokee; "that she did not forfeit her rights because there had not been a concurrence of removal of her person and effects from the nation; that she had been born in it, and while she may have at some

"The Cherokee Advocate, Friday, January 4, 1884.

"Starr, op. cit., pp. 271, 288, 293; The Daily Chieftain, Vinita, Indian Territory, May 12, 1899, p. 1, col. 1.

"The Kingfisher Free Press, May 3, 1906, p. 2, col. 3.