

## 6. GIDEON STEPHENS SENTELLE (1840-1936)

Gideon Stephens Sentelle was born, according to a statement in his own hand, in "Hendersonville NC March 22<sup>d</sup> 1840,"<sup>1</sup> the youngest of the eleven children of Richard Sentell and Sarah Robinson of the Big Willow section of Crab Creek Township.

His mother probably died soon after his birth, and his father married Elizabeth McCall of Little River community (11 July 1841) when Gideon was fifteen months old.

George Newton Sentell, their only child, was born to Richard and his new wife on 18 May 1843.

### Early Schooling

Gideon must have always appreciated the advantages of a formal education, for he encouraged all of his children to go to school and college.

The public schools first opened in 1840 in Henderson County, and his generation may have been the first in the family to enjoy free instruction.

We know there was a school house at the mouth of Big Willow during his childhood years,<sup>2</sup> and he probably took his introduction to books there.

Alva Sentell was six years the junior of his Uncle Gideon, but he grew up nearby and the description of his school days probably tells us much about those of Gideon as well.

**The schools of my boyhood days were of a kind that would be amusing at this age. The houses for schools were built of round logs with a big chimney at one end. No desks, no blackboards, no windows in the house, and sometimes a dirt floor.**

**The books we had were Webster's Spelling Book and an arithmetic. In addition to these we had a goose quill pen, a**

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<sup>1</sup> Gideon S. Sentell, Military Pension Records XC2576-133, National Archives Building. Gideon gave the above response to a pension questionnaire under date of 26 April 1915.

<sup>2</sup> **Beulah Church Minutes** copied by Bert J. Sitton, Hendersonville, North Carolina, 22 February 1969. Photocopy of original in possession of William Ernest Merrill. "March 4, 1843 . . . We agree to move Bulah Church to the mouth of Big Willow at the Public School House done by the order of the church . . . "

**bottle of home-made ink, and several sheets of fools-cap paper.**

**The seats we occupied were made of split logs, two legs in each end and the flat side turned up -- and they were so high that our feet could scarcely touch the floor. Our books were few, but we had to do good work in what we had. I memorized Webster's Blueback Speller, so I could spell every word in it. I had been to school some before we had any free schools in our community.**

**The teachers were not advanced much in education. I remember hearing my teacher say to my father that he had heard that the teachers would have to pass an examination on grammar, and if he had to pass an examination he would have to quit teaching, for he had never studied grammar. Just think of a school without a grammar, a geography, a history, or even a reader! But such was the case then, the only reading we had were the lines in the spelling book.**

**Sometimes the larger students would read in New Testaments. Blackboards and chalk were unknown to us, but I got a love for books then that has been with me until now -- and my books are yet my best friends.<sup>3</sup>**

Bruce Jones recalled that "Gid Sentelle had education." His right handed script we note was carelessly fluent and practical with no unnecessary frills or flourishes. He wrote like one who writes frequently and without effort or concentration.

Gideon enjoyed moralistic stories and didactic poetry of the type favored by the **Blueback Speller** and the readers of the day. Grandson Lynn Sentelle remembers committing one such poem to memory under his grand father's encouragement: "A man of words and not of deeds, Is like a garden full of weeds,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> W. Clark Medford, **R. A. Sentelle** (1958), pp. 6-7. Agnes Brown Beck, Gideon's granddaughter, has given us a copy of Webster's **Blueback Speller** with a notation inside the front cover, "Compliments of J. A. Pates to Mr. G. S. Sentelle Esqr. Feby. 27 -- 1914." Noah Webster, **The Elementary Spelling Book** (New York: American Book Company, 1908). Gideon's son, Mark, kept the **Speller** on his desk during the time he was Dean at Davidson College (1920-1941). For all his erudition in Hebrew and Greek, Dr. Mark himself seems to have been notoriously weak in spelling. He would write in a corner of his letters "dictated but not examined," as a disclaimer for spelling errors.

<sup>4</sup> . . . And when the weeds begin to grow, It's like a garden full of snow; And when the snow begins to fall, It's like a bird upon the wall; And when the bird away does fly, It's like an eagle in

## The Runaway

An age difference of two or three years has always been a difficult one for youngsters to get along, too close to keep them separated by different interests and yet too far apart for them to be playmates on equal terms. Such perhaps was the case with Gideon and his younger half-brother in their growing years, and the best of mothers might have been sorely tested as an arbiter in their numerous disputes.

When he was sixteen years old, Gideon had a set-to with his half-brother which must have been especially serious, and he believed his stepmother had unjustly taken the side of her son against him.

Gideon tended toward absolutes. And if so in his mature years, so much the more as a youngster. Of course the stepmother was against him! Folks always believe the younger child. And anyhow it was only the word of a stepson against her own blood -- this perpetual usurper of his privileged place as the youngest child.

In the anger and frustration of this altercation, Gideon wrapped his stock of worldly goods in a red bandanna handkerchief and set out on his own to make a new life across the mountains in Tennessee.

Big Willow Creek emptied into the French Broad River just above Bowman's Bluff, about two miles from the grist mill on the Sentell Branch of the South Fork. The river valley extending northward through Buncombe County formed a natural corridor through the high mountain country into East Tennessee, and this must have been the route Gideon traveled.

The wagon road which followed the river by way of Buncombe Court House (Asheville) and Warm Springs (Hot Springs) was a great connecting link for trade between Kentucky and Tennessee and the South Carolina low country.

**Along its route through Western North Carolina, the volume of travel was immense, as horses, mules, cattle, sheep and hogs were driven through here to market at Charleston, Augusta and other southern points. Writers in early days said that there annually passed through Buncombe County an average of 150,000 hogs, driven on foot. One stockman from Kentucky boasted that he had driven 2,785 hogs through here in a single drove. David Vance, at Marshall, claimed that he**

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the sky; And when the sky begins to roar, It's like a lion at the door; And when the door begins to crack, It's like a stick across your back; And when your back begins to smart, It's like a penknife in your heart; And when your heart begins to bleed, You're dead, and dead, and dead indeed. [Author unknown]. Ralph L. Woods, **A Second Treasury of the Familiar** (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1959), p. 380.

**had fed 90,000 in one month, -- a man named Barnard boasted that he had more than equaled this by feeding 110,000 in the same period of time. Turkeys in large droves were driven to market afoot over this road, and J. M. Edney reported that when he visited Warm Springs in 1857, his party met 373 head of Kentucky cattle in one lot, and another of four hundred ducks.<sup>5</sup>**

Gideon may have gone to relatives. His Aunt Patsy Sentell and her husband, Allen Johnson, moved to Greene County where they spent the remainder of their lives, and they were probably living there by 1856.

Paul Jones has told us that Gideon made his home at one time with E. M. Wright,<sup>6</sup> a school teacher who lived in Greene County near the present site of Jones Bridge on the north side of the Nolichucky River. This may have been during those early years between 1856 and mid-1863 when Gideon enrolled in the Union Army.

During these years he probably came to know the Balis Jones family which lived across the river, and the dark-complected youngest daughter, now in her middle teens, who would one day become his bride. Aunt May Lea has told us that her father first saw Rachel Jones at a distance boarding a carriage at the river crossing, and he announced to a friend his intention one day to make her his wife. "I'm going to have that woman," he declared simply. And his daughter chuckled in her recounting of the old story.

**When [Gideon] first saw the little lady, she was dressed in silks and satins and riding in as fine a carriage as ever was driven to the "meetin' house." At first sight of such a lady, [Gideon], leaning against the shady oak tree, swung his bare foot in the dust and vowed he'd marry that very fine lady.<sup>7</sup>**

## **His Appearance and Manner**

At the time of his military enlistment when he was twenty-three years old, Gideon was five feet ten inches in height, with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and auburn hair.<sup>8</sup> Half a century later in 1924 he described himself with the same

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<sup>5</sup> Sadie Smathers Patton, **The Story of Henderson County** (Asheville: The Miller Printing Company, 1947), p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Ebenezer Mathis Wright, later Superintendent of Schools in Greene County. His daughter married Bruce Jones, a nephew of Gideon's wife.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Virginia Anderson Knight. Unpublished paper, provided by her brother Richard Dawson Anderson, 2520 Sedley Road, Charlotte, NC 28211.

<sup>8</sup> Gideon S. Sentell, Co. B 8th Tennessee Cavalry, Military Service Records, National Archives Building.

physical features, except that his eyes were gray. He bore a striking resemblance to the oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, born the same year, and Hankins Sentelle says that he was questioned at least once by strangers on the streets of Knoxville as to whether or not he was indeed the millionaire.

"He was mighty proud," we have been told. He never wanted to claim a Sentelle nephew who lived nearby. The child had been left on his brother's doorstep by persons unknown, and was "no relation" of the family. "Why, Gid!" Rachel would exclaim whenever the subject came up. "He looks more like you than your own flesh and blood!"

**His children could not play with any of the "no 'count" mountain children. They had to have the best of companions and the highest education to be found -- a diploma from college.<sup>9</sup>**

Gideon was something less than objective, and may have tended a little toward a conservative bias. "He never could see but one side on anything," some of the grandchildren have told us, judging him somewhat harshly perhaps. "He never had any use for Grandpa Broyles (who, incidentally, was his wife's cousin). He called him an 'Old Mossback,' because he never fought in the War. . . . And he never did care for Uncle Marion [Jones]," who had been in the Confederate service. "But Grandma never seemed to pay him no mind."

Some of Eb's children saw a lack of warmth in the reserved manner and bearing of their grandfather. "I was always afraid of him," Macy Walters tells us. "Grandpa Broyles seemed to enjoy having the children around, and carried us to tend the hogs and chickens with him. But Grandpa Sentelle wasn't that way at all."

Eb Sentelle, of all the children except Jim, showed no interest in books or other things Gideon considered to be marks of gentility. And Eb and Jim went against their father's politics, in a day when a vote for the Democratic ticket was tantamount to treason and sedition. Relations between Eb and Gideon must have been less than cordial at times, and the impressions of the grandchildren probably were colored by these circumstances more than they knew.

Aggie Beck tells us that instead of "prideful," her grandfather was dignified and aristocratic -- better words perhaps.

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<sup>9</sup> Ruth Knight, *Ibid.*

And perhaps Gideon mellowed considerably in his later years, as our photographs of him suggest. In the years after 1915 when Aggie Beck lived with her brother and widowed mother at the old home place, Gideon had long retired from the demands of politics and the competition of life. He had time for his grandchildren in those years, probably more than for his own children when they were growing up. And no doubt their relations were colored accordingly.



**Gideon S. Sentelle**

This is probably a wedding portrait made in 1865 when he was 25 years old.

### **Military Service**

Charlie Wilhoit told us in 1967 that his family once tenanted on the Gideon Sentelle farm. "I 'member the Squire," he said, in reference to Gideon. "The Squire, he fit in the Republican Army."

### **Employment at the saltworks.**

Union sentiment was exceptionally strong in East Tennessee, and the growing threat of general conscription by spring and early summer of 1862 caused many men -- frequently entire communities -- to retreat to secret encampments in the nearby mountains. Perhaps fifteen to twenty thousand men were secretly conducted to the Federal lines in Kentucky during this period, traveling by night through woods and by backroads to avoid detection by government patrols.

Gideon may have avoided service for a time through exempted employment in a vital industry. If he lived on the north side of the Nolichucky with E. M. Wright, he would have been a neighbor of M. S. Temple who had an interest in the King Salt Works in Washington County, Virginia.<sup>10</sup>

We know that Gideon worked for some time without pay at the Salt Works, probably motivated by an offer of exempted status. After the war (28 December 1865), Gideon filed in Greene County Chancery Court to attach certain property to satisfy a claim of \$400 against M. S. Temple for work and labor performed at the Salt Works in 1862 and 1863. The claim was upheld by the Court.

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver P. Temple, **East Tennessee and the Civil War** (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1899), pp. 424, 428. Oliver P. Temple was a brother to M. S. Temple.

By mid-1863, the Confederate presence in the area had diminished considerably. Vicksburg had fallen, Lee was in retreat from Gettysburg, and with the Federals in control of middle Tennessee, all available men had been called to repel the invasion from the North.

Union men who heretofore had held their peace now came forward in substantial numbers.

Gideon Sentell enrolled in the Federal service in Greene County on 23 July 1863 for a tour of three years. This enlistment probably marked the beginning of a hazardous trek to muster with Union forces in Kentucky. There was a high risk of arrest on the way, and a captured soldier, subject to military justice, might fare better than a captured civilian.

**Flight to Kentucky.** Capt. Dan Ellis of Carter County guided several companies from East Tennessee to the Federal lines during the war.

**I do not now remember [he wrote] that I ever conducted a company of men through the mountains to Kentucky but what quite a number of them lost their hats and shoes before they got to the end of their journey, and I am very sure that none ever reached the Kentucky line with me without being perfectly ragged, and I have no sort of doubt but that the rebels might have often pursued us by the small pieces of the men's clothing which were left hanging in the brush and briers.<sup>11</sup>**

On 24 July 1863, Ellis departed from the Boatyard on the Holston (now Kingsport) with a company of at least fifty-five men "who had assembled there from every direction." Gideon very likely was with this group. The day (or night) since his enlistment in Greene County would have been sufficient for travel to this rendezvous.

The group crossed the North Fork of the Holston that evening in an old canoe which Ellis found, and then moved on to Clinch Mountain. They made fires "at a good situation" on the mountain, and rested there until about noon the following day (25 July).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Ellis, **Thrilling Adventures of Daniel Ellis the Great Union Guide of East Tennessee for a Period of Nearly Four Years During the Great Southern Rebellion** (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1867), p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

They crossed the Little Poor Valley after dark, and Copper Ridge. They took off their clothes to wade the Clinch River, and by daybreak (26 July) had pushed on to the spurs of Powell Mountain.<sup>13</sup>

**After we ascended the mountain some distance we came to water, where we stopped to rest our aching limbs and discuss the best way to cross over Powell's Valley. We had traveled thus far without any trouble with the rebels, and we thought it would be a considerable achievement if we should be able to pass this dangerous rebel rendezvous without being discovered. The sun shone out brightly, and we rested finally in the warm leaves.<sup>14</sup>**

Soon after dark the third night, the company moved on and reached the foot of Wallen Ridge about midnight. "Some of the men were now very much exhausted." They crossed this ridge in three hours of "hard traveling" and reached cleared land next to Powell Valley. "We now pulled off our shoes and walked in our stocking feet, in order to make as little noise as possible," says Ellis.

**As good luck would have it, we crossed the valley in safety, and hurried on to Powell's River, and when we got to it we did not even halt to take off our clothes, we marched straight through, and pushed on to Cumberland Mountain, and soon arrived at its foot. We continued our journey up the mountain until we came to water, when we stopped to wash the sand and mud out of our pants and socks, and, after wringing them as dry as we could, we put them on, and then traveled on over one of the roughest mountains that a set of poor lame, tired, and worn-out men ever attempted to travel over before.<sup>15</sup>**

**. . . We got to the Kentucky line about two o'clock [27 July], when the company appeared to be greatly rejoiced that they had at last escaped from the geographical limits of the so-called Southern Confederacy. . . . We went on to the house of Mr. Clark on Clover Fork [of the Cumberland], where we got an abundance to eat and drink, and the next morning [28 July],**

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181. Most of these names apply to a parallel series of mountains, rivers, and valleys which extend throughout East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia. The Ellis party probably moved across the southwest part of Scott County (Virginia) and passed near the boundary between Lee and Wise County.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.



**there being no danger now in their way, the men, with gay and light hearts, all started on to Louisville.<sup>16</sup>**

**Muster at Camp Nelson.** Two weeks later, on 10 August 1863, Gideon Sentelle mustered with E Company of the 8th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment at Camp Nelson, Kentucky, and on that same date was nominated to the rank of orderly sergeant. The period of training at Camp Nelson could not have exceeded three weeks, and perhaps for this reason, or perhaps because the high command had no wish to place East Tennesseans on the front lines against their neighbors and kin, the regiment seems to have spent much of its time guarding railroads and other vital facilities in the rear.

**Back in East Tennessee.** E Company was probably one of those which entered Knoxville under Maj. John Sawyers as part of Maj. Gen. Burnside's forces on 1 September 1863. The regiment was united at Greeneville, Tennessee, on 14 September.<sup>17</sup> Gideon probably saw his first action at Hall's Ford on the Watauga River near Blountville. Part of the 8th Tennessee was engaged for about four hours there on 22 September, and returned to Greeneville three days later.

The regiment was soon moved to Knoxville and participated in several expeditions during the month of October, one of which resulted in an engagement at Rheatown in Greene County on 11 October. Gideon later stated on a pension record that he had been in a battle at "Raytown."

**On October 29, the regiment went into camp at Henderson's Station [Afton] near Greeneville. Here, on November 2, 1863, Brigadier General Shackelford advised General Burnside: "I would suggest that the horses belonging to the 8th Tennessee Regiment, about 250, be turned over to one of the brigades; and that the regiment, or that part of it that is left, (for want of field officers a large number have deserted and absented themselves from the regiment and the balance are demoralized and inefficient) be sent to Morristown or some other point and be placed in camp of instruction under efficient field officers."**

**In accordance with this recommendation the regiment was dismounted on November 2, and went by rail to Knoxville, where it remained on duty during the siege of Knoxville by**

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> **Tennesseans in the Civil War, Vol. I** (Nashville, Tennessee: Civil War Centennial Commission, 1964), p. 341.

**Confederate General Longstreet. During this time the regiment was commanded by Major Sawyers.<sup>18</sup>**

**The siege of Knoxville.** The family later reported that Gideon Sentelle had been in the Battle of Ft. Sanders on 29 November 1863, but his unit was not among those which caught the brunt of the assault. His obituary notice stated that he "had charge of a company of men stationed at the old Southern Depot in Knoxville."<sup>19</sup> Following the Confederate withdrawal, the 8th Tennessee left Knoxville on 15 December 1863 with prisoners captured in the siege and battle, and arrived at Camp Nelson 185 miles away on 27 December.

**In middle Tennessee.** During January the regiment was transferred to Nashville. The following month, about 6 February, the 10th East Tennessee Cavalry was consolidated with the 8th, and perhaps in this reorganization Gideon was transferred to Company B of the 8th Tennessee, or his old E Company was renamed. Whichever the case, he first appeared on the muster roll of B Company dated 29 February 1864.

On 11 April 1864 at Columbia, Tennessee, Gideon was promoted to rank of 2nd lieutenant to fill the position vacated when Homer Gilmore had been promoted.

On 18 April the regiment was moved to Franklin, and was reported on 6 June as guarding the railroad between Nashville and Columbia. The regiment was moved to Gallatin, Tennessee, on 19 June where it remained until 24 September.

**Raid on the Saltworks.** Shortly afterwards, the 8th Tennessee was sent back to East Tennessee where it joined Gillem's Brigade at McFarland Cross Roads in Jefferson County on 9 October 1864.

**On October 12, 1864 Confederate General J. C. Vaughn reported the capture of a flag of the regiment in a skirmish near Greeneville. This was the 3rd battalion of the regiment, on a scout under Captains Rush and Denton. On October 28, the brigade was engaged at Morristown, and Brigadier General Gillem reported that Colonels Patton and Brown led their regiments in a sabre charge which broke the enemy's lines**

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> **Knoxville** (Tennessee) **Journal**, 21 April 1936. The Southern depot is north of the old city. The battle centered on the 17th Street and Highland Avenue intersection which was then west of the city.

**and captured McClung's battery.**

**The brigade fell back to Cumberland Gap on November 9, where on November 12, it was attacked by Confederate forces under Brigadier General Basil Duke, of General J. C. Breckinridge's command. The assault was repelled by the 8th and 13th Tennessee Cavalry Regiments, but on November 13, General Gillem, being short of provisions and ammunition, evacuated the Gap and moved toward Morristown. Near Russellville, he reported the rear was attacked, and the men became panic-stricken, and the brigade suffered "a terrible reverse." From here the regiment, with the brigade, moved to Knoxville, Tennessee.<sup>20</sup>**

The regiment left Knoxville on 10 December to join in an expedition which reached Marion, Virginia, and resulted in the destruction of the Confederate saltworks at Saltville -- where Gideon had worked in 1862 and 1863. In later years, he listed "Saltworks" as one of the two battles in which he had participated.

**Interception of Davis attempted.** The 8th Tennessee was one of the units sent on 27 April 1865 on an expedition to intercept the Confederate President Davis with the wagon-load of gold he supposedly had with him, and the problems on which Gideon later based his pension claim developed during this period of detached duty.

He stated in his original declaration for invalid pension that "at or near Anderson Court house in . . . Georgia (actually just across the Savannah River in South Carolina) on or about the 15th day of May 1865, he contracted Spinal Irritation, and Neuralgia of the head -- from which disease of the head and Spine he has not recovered (by 22 March 1874)."

The declaration continued "that he was not treated in hospitals at all -- but was treated on the line of March." In June 1865, the 8th Tennessee was united at Lenoir City where it went into camp.

This may be the incident in which Gideon thought he had been wounded in the stomach and he lay down under a tree expecting to die. But the shot had hit his belt buckle and so was deflected from the body.<sup>21</sup> The regiment was

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<sup>20</sup> **Tennesseans in the Civil War**, p. 342.

<sup>21</sup> Dr. Richard Dawson Anderson, 2520 Sedley Road, Charlotte, North Carolina 28211, interview on 27 December 1993. Anderson says he read the "wound" story in an old newspaper clipping preserved by the family.

mustered out of service at Knoxville the following September. On that date Lt. Sentelle of B Company had served more than twenty-five months of active duty in the "Republican Army."

## The Later Years

**Marriage.** Gideon married Rachel Louise Jones on 9 November 1865, less than two months after he had been mustered out of service. He was twenty-five years old and she was twenty-one.

The marriage ceremony was performed by Rev. William Milburn, a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and probably the same man who had served as chaplain of the 8th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment.<sup>22</sup>

Rachel's family had held strong Southern sentiments. At least three brothers were in the Confederate service, and two of these were killed near Murfreesboro a matter of weeks before Gideon had enrolled.<sup>23</sup>

We have been told that her family was opposed to the marriage to the extreme that she was disowned by her father and stepmother. Perhaps the Jones relations were less than favorably inclined toward the Union veteran, but the family **Bible** records that "Rachel L. Jones was mar[r]ied at home -- " And her father in 1872 deeded more than 146 acres of land to his daughter, a strange act for one who had disowned his child.

Such hostility as existed must have been subdued, but we know that the late War of the Rebellion was never a popular topic at the Sentelle home.

In correspondence with a close friend, we note with some surprise that apparently Gid failed to comment on his new wife or expected first child. We have a letter of 25 July 1866 to "Lieut Sentell . . . in reply to your kind letter bearing date July 10th," from Homer Gilmore, a "Brother Soldier" in the war. Gilmore wrote that "You said that you had spent a great many lonesome hours since you saw me . . . [I]f you haven[']t already you had better ged [*sic*] married but you need not raise a family without you want to."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> **Greene County** (Tennessee) **Marriage Record 4** (1865-1868), p. 318; **History of Tennessee** (Chicago and Nashville: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1887), p. 1890.

<sup>23</sup> The testimony of Bruce and Oscar Jones, taken together, holds that Green Jones, the older of the two brothers, was a lieutenant and a medical officer. His brother William was a captain. When William was killed (16 May 1863, according to the Balis Jones family **Bible**), Green was so angered that he threw away his commission and went to the front where he was killed two days later (20 May).

<sup>24</sup> Homer Gilmore, Knox County, Tennessee. Letter to Gideon Sentell dated 25 July 1866.

**Land entries.** About three weeks after leaving the service and a month before he married Rachel Jones, Gideon Sentelle first entered land in Greene County on 3 October 1865. He and John McCory paid James F. Kennedy \$7,000 for 216 acres on Camp Creek, south of the Nolichucky River, in the 22nd Civil District on that date.<sup>25</sup> This may have been the property on Hopson Branch of Camp Creek where the frame home place would be erected.

Rachel, as we have already noted, was deeded land from her father on 22 January 1872.<sup>26</sup> This land, also on Camp Creek, consisted of three tracts, one of forty and one-half acres, a second of fifty-six acres, and a third of fifty acres. A holding called the Camp Creek Forge was also included in the gift, and her father retained a life interest in the forge and the fifty-six-acre tract.

Gideon cited farming as his principal occupation, but if his pension papers are to be believed, he was never up to the extended physical demands of that rigorous calling. The numerous transactions in subsequent years in which he and Rachel appear both as grantors and grantees suggest that he was more of a dealer in land than a worker of the land.<sup>27</sup>

**The family.** Two weeks after their first wedding anniversary, Gideon and Rachel celebrated the birth of their first child. William Bruce Sentelle joined the family on 24 November 1866, but the baby died the following summer.

Elbert Mason Sentelle, named probably for Mason Elbert Jones, a brother two years older than Rachel, was born 8 April 1868.

Homer Eugene Sentelle was born 24 December 1869, but this third child survived only thirteen months.

The infants were buried at Harrison's Chapel near the grave of Rachel's mother and her Jones relations.

There were ten children in all, eight of which lived to maturity: Next was Mary Jane (Jenny, 6 February 1871), then Mark Edgar (6 October 1874), Kitty Mae (11 May 1876), Agnes Naomi (14 September 1878, although the family

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<sup>25</sup> **Greene County** (Tennessee) **Deed Book 34**, p. 173.

<sup>26</sup> **Greene County Deed Book 41**, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Among other citations, **Greene County Deed Book 42**, p. 144 (22 March 1877, 20 acres on Camp Creek to Martha E. Moncier for \$220); p. 145 (same date, 30 acres on Camp Creek to G. B. Moncier for \$375); **47**, p. 325 (8« acres sold); p. 326 (14 acres sold); **60**, p. 60 (land sold to B. M. Need & wife).

**Bible** says 1879),<sup>28</sup> James Robeson (20 June 1881), Chester Stephens (29 January 1884), and the youngest, Carl Leonidas (20 August 1888).

The many anecdotes we have heard all suggest that life in the Sentelle home was especially pleasant. Visitors came often, and if Gideon's kin lived across the mountains, the Jones relations could more than make up the difference.

**Aunt Betsy Jones.** One of them made her home with Gideon and Rachel from an early age. This was Florence Elizabeth Jones (1862-1934), known as Aunt Betsy to the family and reported in the Census returns as a niece. But the actual relationship was somewhat more involved. Her parents were first cousins, and both of them were first cousins of Gideon's wife.<sup>29</sup> Mason K. Jones, Betsy's father, drowned in the Nolichucky River about 1866, and sometime after this tragedy, early in her life, Betsy came to make her home with Gideon and Rachel. She gave herself entirely to her adopted family, neglecting over the years to marry or even go to school. Perhaps she was too busy with the Sentelle children to have much thought or desire for a man and family of her own.

She had a reputation for hard work and thrift. She earned a little money by raising and selling calves. What money she cleared, she saved, and she multiplied it by interest on loans to local farmers who came to her in the springtime for a planting stake.

Uncle Marion Jones came by now and then to visit his little sister. "I want to go see Puss," he would announce, using Rachel's pet name. He usually came on a mule. He would be well-fortified with home-brew before he got to Hopson Branch, and entirely uninhibited. They knew when he was coming, for he began announcing his arrival at the top of his voice long before he came into sight. But the folks never gave reason for the children to think anything was amiss, even when Rachel and Betsy had to half guide and half carry the visitor upstairs for an extended rest and recovery from his travel.

**Stories by the fire.** The grandchildren remember the chilly winter evenings when Gideon sat with his legs raised and spread, a foot against either side of the open fireplace, blocking heat from everyone else. Not that the man was selfish or less than considerate. In a time when the women indulged their

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<sup>28</sup> Vital data from pension office questionnaire submitted by Gideon 26 April 1915. Mark said the birthdate for Agnes was incorrect in the **Bible**. She had been born a year earlier than recorded.

<sup>29</sup> In addition, (1) Betsy's uncle James Bush Jones married his own first cousin Polly Jones, who was Rachel's sister. (2) Oliver Broyles was Betsy's uncle through her mother, Mary McCain Broyles, and therefore Betsy was a first cousin to Nannie Broyles, Oliver's daughter, who married Eb Sentelle, Rachel's son. (3) Betsy was also Eb Sentelle's second cousin through the Jones connections. Nannie and Eb, of course, were second cousins.

men, and the children indulged their elders, it was expected that the family patriarch should have the choice position before the fire. And the particular bent of mind that characterized the Sentelle family even found humor in such an outrageous habit.

There was always talk to while away the evening hours, about the weather and crops, or about the three Jones cousins who drowned in the Nolichucky River one Saturday afternoon,<sup>30</sup> or the gang out of Spillcorn community on Shelton Laurel that shot up the town of Greeneville and then ambushed the sheriff's posse at the Nolichucky River crossing. And often there were tales of the supernatural, related to the unquestioning children in strictest sobriety, which added an unnatural chill to the already cold outer limits of the circle about the fire. Someone walking along a lonely stretch of road behind Mt. Zion Church had passed a woman going the other way, and the apparition gave no sign of recognition either by eye or voice. Yet she was known to the speaker -- and to everyone else. And this was never said, although known to everyone, the subject of this encounter had departed this life many years ago.

Another speaker had heard sounds in the night like the hoofbeats of horses or cattle circling a house, but not a sign was visible the next day to explain the mysterious noises. And death was always accompanied by a multitude of premonitions and inexplicable happenings.

When bedtime came, bricks preheated in the fireplace were wrapped in flannel for use as bed warmers and foot comforters. In his later years, Gideon always had his bed warmed for him during cold weather before he turned in. And some of the grandchildren after such a session around the fireplace, even in their later childhood years, still sought the security of their parents' bed, listening all the while for ghostly hoofbeats outside the house, or similar manifestations of the spirit world.

**A visit from Cousin Alva.** Gideon had some contact from time to time with his family across the mountains on Big Willow. William R. Sentelle followed his younger brother to Greene County, and he and his family must have made their home nearby for a time. In the 1880 Census they appear next to Gideon's family. Their move to Tennessee would have come after the Civil War as Will had a daughter born in North Carolina in 1860 or 1861.

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<sup>30</sup> The Jones boys were considered the best swimmers on the river. On 29 April 1893 three of them in a boat teased another passenger who could not swim, and the boat capsized when they rocked it. Drowned were George N. (age 22) and Ada O. (age 20), sons of Rachel's brother Elbert Jones, and Thomas V. (age 20), son of Rachel and Elbert's brother Marion Jones. The non-swimmer survived.

Cousin Alva Sentell came to visit on occasion. We find in his personal diary an account of one visit to East Tennessee in 1891.

**Dec. Monday 21. Went home on the train[.] Found at town with horses saddled to go to Tenn. to visit Uncle Gid's, After Moving around for awhile we started and went Uncle Dave McCracken's. Nice weather.**

**Dec[.] Tuesday 22[.] Early next morning we are off. Bro. David McCracken goes with [us]. On we go with no dinner till we reach "Slab Town" in Tenn.**

**Wednesday 23. This is my birthday. 45 years old and out of my native state for first time in life -- on we go -- a hard day's ride and we got to Uncle[']s after dark. We are tired.**

**Thursday 24[.] Spent the day resting and looking around.**

**Dec[.] Friday 25[.] Spent a part of day at Uncle Gid's and then Uncle Gid and I went to Uncle Will's. May the Lord keep us all.**

**Saturday 26[.] Uncle Will and [I] went to Gree[ne]val. I saw the house where A. Johnson was tailor, the house where he lived and his monument[.] Gree[ne]val is nice town.**

**Sunday 27. I preached at a Methodist church called Hermon. A nice day. May the Lord ever guide us all.**

**Dec[.] Monday 28[.] John and I left for home[.] A nice day. It is sad to leave those we love. We went to "Slab Town" and I preached. Spent the night at Bro. Bailey's.**

**Tuesday 29[.] We crossed the mountains. Rain and snow and mud. We spent the night at Uncle David McCracken's.**

**Wednesday 30[.] Went home. Found all well and cheerful. Jennie May and the other little girls gay as birds. I am tired.<sup>31</sup>**

**In the community.** Gideon and Rachel may have gone to her family church early in their marriage. Their two boys who died in 1867 and 1871 were buried near the Jones family graves at Harrison's Chapel (Bethesda). Since Gideon had been a Presbyterian elder for some sixty years at the time of his death in 1936, however, he and Rachel may have begun their affiliation with Mt. Zion Presbyterian Church on Camp Creek about this time. Sons Mark and Carl were both ordained as ministers in the Holston Presbytery, and their parents probably heard them fill the home pulpit on occasion.

Gideon probably petitioned for admission into the Masonic Order late in 1872. He was awarded his first degree in Greeneville Lodge No. 3 on 6 January 1873. For some reason, perhaps financial, he waited over ten years before taking

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<sup>31</sup> Alva Sentell, **Personal Diary**. Unpublished manuscript, in possession of Mrs. Iola McElroy, Rt. 3, Box 485, Waynesville, North Carolina 28726.



his second degree on 4 June 1884. He became a Master Mason on 17 July 1886, and remained in good standing for the rest of his life.<sup>32</sup>

We find his name on an undated roster of the Grand Army of the Republic, Burnside Post No. 8, an organization of Union veterans which met monthly in the Odd Fellows' Hall in Greeneville.

**County politics.** Gideon may best be remembered outside his own family for his seat on the Greene County Court where he represented the 22nd Civil District for thirty-six years. He first appears in the official records of the Court in 1870, and he is seated every year through 1905 as a squire or magistrate of this legislative body.<sup>33</sup>



**Mt. Zion on Camp Creek**

At the memorial marking the graves of Gideon and Rachel are grandchildren (from left) Mac Sentelle, Agnes Houghton Anderson, Dr. William S. Lea, Pete Brown, Rev. Edgar Houghton, and Aggie Brown Beck.

His name also appears as one of the thirteen directors of the Greene County school system in 1881, and at the same time a member of the County Court.<sup>34</sup>

As a county officer in that time and place, Gideon probably performed many administrative and even judicial functions. These would have included the drafting of deeds and performance of civil marriage ceremonies. Charlie Wilhoit tells that J. R. Sentelle, who succeeded his father as squire in the 22nd, even counseled couples with marital

difficulties. "I didn't marry you two to have you break up, now," he would

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<sup>32</sup> J. Turner Williams, Masonic Grand Lodge Building, 107 7th Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee. Interview on 10 June 1976. A fifty-year certificate was issued to Gideon in 1936.

<sup>33</sup> **Greene County (Tennessee) Court Minutes**, *passim*. J. R. Sentelle, Gideon's son, was elected to the County Court from the 22nd District in 1916, and had almost tied his father's record for service on the Court at the time of his death in early 1952. Uncle Jim was a Democrat, contrary to his father's politics, in a strongly Republican district, but the family name and reputation assured a perpetual incumbency.

<sup>34</sup> "Greene County School Directory for the Scholastic Year Beginning July 1st, 1881." This Directory indicates 8,732 students, 131 schools, and only 98 teachers. Several teachers must have served more than one school. Each civil district had three school directors -- including O. M. Broyles in the 1st District.

admonish a troubled couple. And generally, the couple would work out their differences.

In the attic of the old home place on Hopson Branch we once came across a state **Code** with an index in Gideon's own hand inside the back cover. Among the citations he had marked for quick reference were sections on fees, mortgages, bail bonds, arrest procedures, warrants, and mode of examination.<sup>35</sup>

The grandchildren tell us of viewing with awe the "holding of court" on the front lawn of the Squire's home on Hopson Branch. Folks came from all over for this great social occasion, and excitement often ran high. We are told of tearful scenes by the womenfolk of the accused pleading that their men be spared from prison or worse. No one seemed aware, or perhaps did not care, that the limits of jurisdiction for the hearing extended only to a binding over for trial in a court of record.

**A final word.** Rachel and Betsy frequently cooked in the fireplace, rather than on the wood stove, using an iron kettle hanging over the fire to heat potato soup or cornmeal mush. Whatever mush remained in the kettle the next morning was fried in a skillet for breakfast.

For his drink, Gideon took hot water, "just as hot as he could stand it." And on occasion he mixed sugar and milk into the scalding water.

Gideon lived to a mature age of ninety-six years. And some say that he might have endured well into his second century had he continued the diet and regimen of his later years on Hopson Branch.

He was widowed in 1926 when he was about eighty-six years of age, but he continued to live in the old home until about the time of the death of Aunt Betsy in 1934.



**"Squire" Gid Sentelle**  
In front of the home on Hopson Branch.

Gideon lived in Knoxville with daughter May Lea and her husband during his last years. And there in the city where he had mustered out of Federal service

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<sup>35</sup> **Code of Tennessee** (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce, 1884).

more than seventy years before, at 1:30 on the morning of 20 April 1936, the lieutenant from the 8th Tennessee answered his last muster.

His passing was not unanticipated, but the **Knoxville Journal** reported that "Mr. Sentelle had been enjoying good health until recently. He celebrated his birthday anniversary a month ago."

Gideon Sentelle was laid to rest beside his wife and Betsy Jones at their Mt. Zion church on Camp Creek.

"In his own handwriting," says Aggie Beck, "Grandpa Sentelle copied this and sent it to all of his children. It was dated October, 1931. I do not know whether this was his composition or something that he read. At age 91, either would be a remarkable effort to reach again all of his children with a word of guidance that was in keeping with his values and his own way of life."

**We should move up a bit each year. No man has a right to be as ignorant, as sinful, as lazy as he was the year before. The law of life is the law of growth. We either go forward or backward. The road forward is uphill and hard to travel -- but the higher the hill the finer the view. Keep going up.**