

# The Amazing Story of Lucinda Felker and Her Benefactors

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This is an accounting of three people and their families who became inextricably connected during a turbulent time in Catoosa County's history and produced a story that could very well have come from a novelist's pen or appeared on the screen. This accounting could be thus introduced as:

***“The story of a saloon owner turned farmer, a Confederate soldier turned innkeeper and a young slave girl, and how their tangled lives played out in and around a small southern town during and after the Civil War.”***

The author readily concedes that this is perhaps the most interesting research projects that he has experienced in over 40 years of historical and genealogical research. We realize that this document does not include all the information that may exist for these individuals and their stories, but the information so far gathered represents a story that cannot wait to be told.

## **James Monroe Edwards**

He was the son of Ruel Edwards and his wife Elizabeth Abercrombie Edwards. Edwards was a pioneer settler in Woodstation Valley. He was born in South Carolina in 1796 and secured his land in (then) Walker County in the Cherokee Land Lottery of 1832. He settled around 1837 near the current location of Pleasant Grove Church. He accumulated a large tract of land and was a successful farmer. He was a founding member of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church and donated the land for the church.

James was born in the Pleasant Grove Community of then Walker County on January 8, 1843. In 1850 he was living with his parents, two brothers and five sisters. In 1860 he was living with parents and three sisters in (now) Catoosa County.

On May 15, 1862, he enlisted in Company K (the “Ringgold Rangers”) of the 4<sup>th</sup> Georgia Cavalry C.S.A. in Ringgold, along with his friends Newton J. Gilbert, John Bryan, G.W. Bryan and Hamilton “Hamp” Baker. Another member of Company K was Scott Myers, whose family played a role in the story of “The Incident” that follows. These young men were all from the Woodstation and Peavine Valleys.

The 4th (Avery's) Cavalry Regiment participated in the Chickamauga, Knoxville, and Atlanta Campaigns. James was wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga, which led to the “Incident at Cane Creek” which we will discuss later. He was wounded again at the Battle of Peachtree Creek. His unit skirmished in North Georgia and East Tennessee and took part in the defense of Savannah. In January 1865, the unit was reorganized and called the 12th Cavalry. It went on to fight in the Carolinas where he was wounded again at the Battle of Bentonville in April of 1865. His unit surrendered with the rest of the Army of Tennessee. He was discharged as a Sergeant in the 12<sup>th</sup> Georgia Cavalry Regiment.

James Monroe Edwards, Company K 4th GA Cavalry.



He married Amy Louisa Harden (born 1849) after returning from the war and they were living in Ringgold in 1870. They had two children Joseph Ruel Edwards (1871-1936), James Dallis Edwards (1875-1963) and a daughter born in 1880, who did not survive.

Amy Louisa Harden Edwards died in 1886 and is buried in the Edwards-Fuller Cemetery.

His second wife was Alice Cox Edwards (1856-1933). Sarah Alice Cox Edwards was born in East Tennessee in 1856 and came with her parents to Catoosa County one year later.

They married in Catoosa County in 1888 and had daughters Frances Cox "Miss Frankie" (1889-1975) Jamie (1891-1918), and Tommie (1898-1989).

In 1897, James was granted a pension of \$50 for disability from a leg wound suffered while serving in the Confederate Army.

Sometime around 1905, the Edwards family became owners and operators of the Cherokee Inn on Depot Street in Ringgold, and the family was living there in 1910.



*The Cherokee Inn (photo made from The Depot, Looking South on Depot Street)*

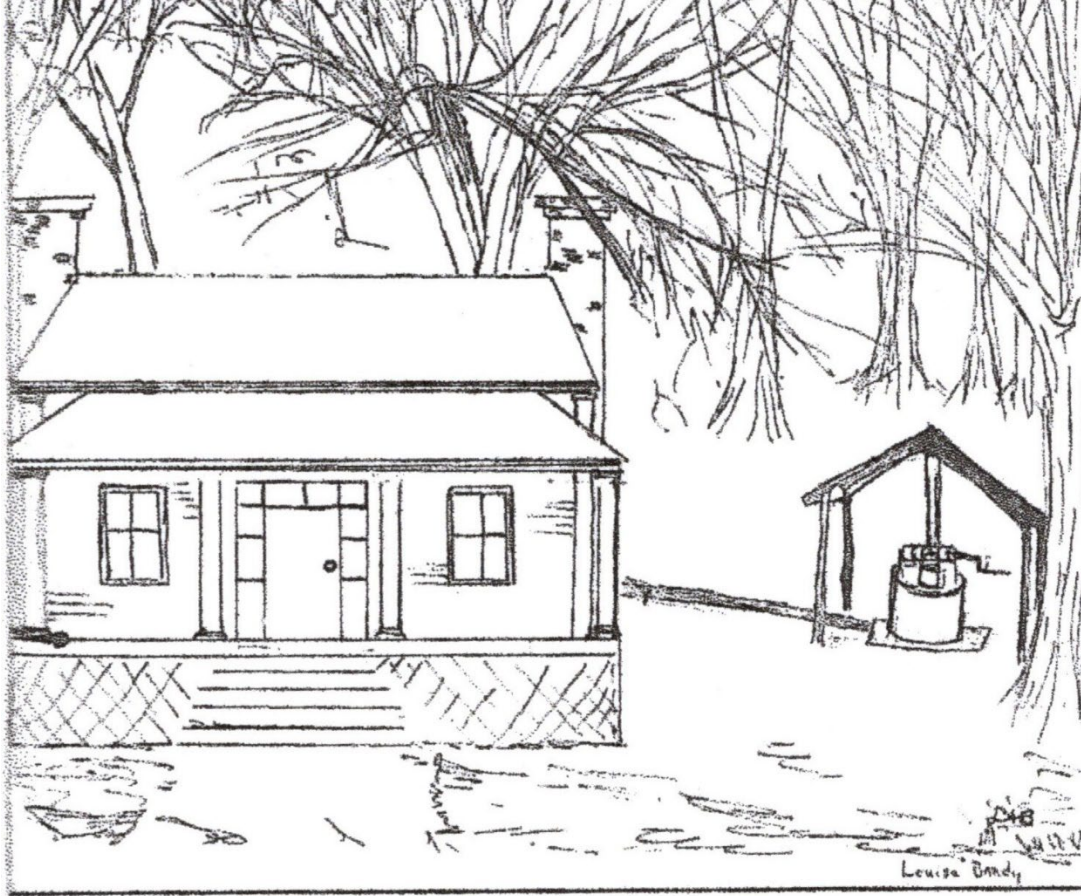
James died in 1925 and is buried in the Edwards-Fuller Cemetery in Pleasant Grove beside his first wife. Sarah Alice Edwards continued to operate the Cherokee Inn until her death on July 18, 1933. She is buried in Anderson Cemetery.

### **Jesse Felker**

He first appears in the 1850 U.S. Census, born in 1830 in Hamilton County and as a twenty-year-old farmer living with his parents Peter and Nancy Eaves Felker and brother William.

Between 1850 and 1854 he moved to Walker County (now Catoosa). In 1854 he was granted a license by to operate a saloon, which he did for several years, saved his money and purchased a farm.

The home known as the "Felker House", stood in Ringgold Gap and is reported to have been built around 1847, and later purchased by Jesse Felker.



*Old Felker House - Sketched by Louise Bandy*

By 1860 Jesse and his wife Eliza Adams Felker were living in Catoosa County, and he was farming. They had one son, Georgia A. 1894). Sometime after 1860, Eliza died enroute to Atlanta and was buried along the roadway.

In 1860, Jesse's parents, Peter (85) and wife Nancy (70) are living at Zion Hill in Hamilton County and have no one living with them.

On May 1, 1862, he enlisted as a private in 2<sup>nd</sup> Company "D", 1<sup>st</sup> Confederate Regiment, Georgia Volunteer Infantry. By Captain H.T. Sprayberry. Jesse furnished Justin C. Wells as his substitute. It has been reported that he was killed at the Battle of Franklin on November 30, 1864.

On September 7, 1862, he married Mary Thompson in Catoosa County.

In 1870 Jesse was enumerated as a grocer living in Ringgold with his wife Mary E. (38), son George (12), Nancy Thompson (52) who was his mother-in-law, and a black house servant by the name of Phoebe Thornton (18).

So, here begins some information that is the beginning of a mystery.

On April 25, 1867, the following letter was written by James M. Johnson, who was the Assistant Commissioner in the District of Chattanooga of the Freedmen's Bureau. It was presumably sent to someone in Ooltewah.

*Bureau of Refugees and Freedmen  
Sub Assistant Commissioner's Office  
Chattanooga, Tenn April 25, 67*

*Sir:*

*A colored woman named Easter Felker states that her children are living with their former owner Peter Felker some 4 miles from Ooltewah and that she is not allowed to stay there or take them away. She says they are not bound to Felker, and that she will not agree to bind them. I wish to ascertain whether these children are properly cared for and used properly by Felker and what the reason is there that the mother cannot be allowed to live near them. I advised the mother to leave the children there if they were not misused, as being better for them than bringing them to this city or any other. Thinking you might be personally acquainted with Felker and could give the desired information I concluded to address you.*

*Very respectfully,  
James M. Johnson  
AA. Sub-Asst. Comm.*

Remember that in 1860, Jesse's parents, Peter who was 85 and wife Nancy who was 70 were living in Hamilton County and have no one else living with them. But in 1870, when they are 95 and 80 respectfully, they have four black children living with them at Red Clay in Hamilton County. They are Lewis (12), John (11), Jasper (9) and Elizabeth (7). So, this 1870 census confirms the allegations detailed in Mr. Johnson's letter three years prior, and these four children remain in the Peter Felker household.

No record of the death of Peter and Nancy has been located but is assumed that they would not have lived long after this 1870 census as they do not appear in the 1880 census. So, what became of Easter Felker's four children?

In 1880, Lewis Felker, age 23, is living in the Blackstock Community of Catoosa County and is married to Lucinda, age 29, (an especially important participant in "The Incident at Cane Creek to be discussed later). They have in their household two children Harrison Taylor (18) and James Taylor (11) both listed as sons of Lucinda from a previous marriage. It is interesting to note that Lucinda and her sons Harrison and James are enumerated as "black", but Lewis is enumerated as "mulatto".

The 1880 Census shows Jesse and his wife Mary living alone in Ringgold and farming.

In 1880 Easter Felker, born in 1832 and the mother of the four black children referred to in the letter was living in Marion County, Tennessee and working as a housekeeper in the home of W.H. Williams, a dry goods merchant. As to the other children Jasper appears in the 1880 James County, TN census as a farm

laborer with no other record. There is no further record of Elizabeth, but John lived in Chattanooga and appears in the Census records of 1900, 1910 and 1930 (age 68) and had an exceptionally large family.

Back to the mystery. It had been discussed locally that Lewis was actually the son of Jesse Felker and a black mistress. We do know that Lewis Felker and his wife Lucinda came to live with Jesse Felker and his wife Mary prior to 1897 when Jesse died, because he left his home and furnishings to the couple on the condition that they live with and care for his wife as long as she lived (which they did) and they could continue to live in the house until the last of them passed. Remember that Lewis and his siblings had been held by Jesse's parents Peter and Nancy in Tennessee for years after they were freed following the Civil War. What was their reason for doing this? Was one (Lewis) or more of them their grandchildren?

Jesse died on November 16, 1897, and is buried in Old Stone Church Cemetery.

In 1900 Jesse's widow Mary was living in the Felker House with her brother T.B. Thompson

In 1900, Lewis and Lucinda Felker were living in Chattanooga, near where Lewis' brother John lived.

No record of the death and/or burial of his wife Mary have been located even though her mother is buried at Old Stone Church in the same plot as Jesse. We know she died after 1910 as she was still living in the Felker House then.

Lewis and Cindy were also enumerated in 1910 as living on Railroad Street so we assume they were living in the Felker House since it was listed alternatively as being on Railroad Street and Dalton Road.

It is interesting to note that on April 11, 1911, Lewis's application to be enrolled in the Eastern Band of Cherokees was rejected. Who knows if he had a basis for this application or was simply seeking the benefits of such an enrollment.

It cannot be determined exactly when Lewis and Lucinda came to live in the Felker House. Lewis died on December 16, 1934, and is buried in Anderson Cemetery. Lucinda continued to live in the Felker house until her death on July 22, 1949. She is buried in Anderson Cemetery.

### **Lucinda Myers Taylor Felker (Aunt Cindy)**

She was born a slave on June 15, 1833, somewhere in Georgia. Her first appearance in official records is in the 1850 Slave Schedule as a 4-year-old with a brother aged 6 and mother aged 21 on the farm of William Myers in Peavine, Walker County, GA. This conflicts with Cindy's accounting of her birth in 1833, as this would place her birth in about 1846. This corroborated by the 1840 Census record of William Myers of Walker County who stated he had one slave, a female age 10-23, which matches the records of 1850 and 1860 and leads to the conclusion that this was Cindy's mother.

By 1860 William Myers was living at Cane Creek (Waterville) in Walker County and he listed slaves as one female (35), one male (17) and one female (15).

Cindy is the one of the central characters in this report and much more about her rich life is reported in the concluding chapter.

She first appeared on a census in 1940 in Ringgold age 105, although she was most likely 94.



*Lucinda "Aunt Cindy" Felker in 1942*

She was a highly respected citizen of Ringgold and was known as the "Mother" of Mt. Peria Church. She provided the elements for communion services there.

#### **"The Incident at Cane Creek"**

This story is told from the lips of Lucinda Felker to a reporter for the Chattanooga Times in 1942. She opened the conversation with her remembrance of the Battle of Chickamauga that began on September 18, 1863, and she indicated that the "incident" was sometime later. Those quotes directly from Cindy are in quotations marks and italicized.

*"I was in the sweet tater patch getting' a watermelon. They planted watermelons amongst the sweet taters back then. It was on Myers place in Walker County about six miles east of Lafayette. William Myers raised me, bought my mama when she was 12. Scott Myers, he's dead now, lived at the old place until he died."*

William Myers moved to this Cane Creek area from the Peavine Community and had several children, among them was William Winfield Scott Myers, the Scott whom Cindy refers to above. He was the same age as Cindy and was likely raised alongside her. He was a soldier in the 4<sup>th</sup> Georgia Cavalry.

*"I was in the tater patch when the first gun was fired. We heard the little guns first and they sounded like the wind, then the big guns came in and they sounded like the storm. I went to the house. Some of the white children was with us and they went too."*

Sometime after the Battle of Chickamauga a group of young Confederate cavalrymen were taking a rest at the William Myers Farm in the Cane Creek Community of Walker County (near present day Waterville on GA 151). These young men were all serving in the 4th Georgia (Avery's) Cavalry and were likely there because the farm owner's son William W.S. Myers (Scott) was also serving in this same unit, although he was not with them on this day (or at least Cindy never mentioned that he was). Apparently, these men had left their horses in a lot but left them saddled. Back to Cindy:

*"Me and my brother were in the field breakin' a young mule. I was growed then. Mrs. Mary White came down to the creek and waved a white cloth to let us know the Yankees was comin' and I broke for the house. Them rebels ran for their horses down in the horse lot. Jim Edwards was on crutches, and I grabbed him by the leg and put him on his horse then run ahead and let down a gap in the rail fence. Hamp Baker run off without his horse and I rode it up to where he was, and he got on. Put Gilbert was there and John and Anderson Bryant".*

When asked by the reporter if they all got away, Cindy replied *"the last one of 'em"*

And what did the Yankees do?

*I didn't think they saw me, but they did. I was standing in the door when they come a ridin' up, about a hundred of 'em and they were mighty mad. One said, "that damn n\_\_\_\_\_r gal took them soldiers off". He shook his pistol at me, but he couldn't be sure I was the one. I didn't get scared until the next day."*

We have not been able to ascertain exactly when this event occurred but know generally where it took place. Cane Creek rises just north of Naomi and flows southward just east of present-day GA 151, crossing 151 just south of Waterville and west past present day US 27 where it merges with Dry Creek and flows south all the way to the Chattooga River. William Myers (the "owner" of Cindy and her mother and his son William Winfield Scott Myers (Scott) and their family members are buried in the Bryan Cemetery on GA 151 just north of Waterville.

At Chickamauga, Colonel Avery's 4<sup>th</sup> Georgia Cavalry was in Colonel Charles Crews' First Brigade in General Joseph Wheeler's Cavalry Corps.

### **Merging of the James M. Edwards, Jesse Felker and Aunt Cindy Felker Stories Following "The Incident at Cane Creek"**

So, here are the events or circumstances that led to this remarkable story, some of them heartwarming, some tragic and some unexplainable.

Jesse Felker was born into the home of his father Peter Felker in Hamilton County, who "owned" a slave girl named Easter who was about the same age as Jesse.

Lucinda (Cindy) is born on the Myers farm in Peavine, soon moving with the family to Cane Creek



Lewis Felker is born a mulatto on the Peter Felker farm just prior to Jesse Felker moving to Ringgold.

James Edwards of Ringgold joins the Confederate Cavalry along with several of his friends and others from Catoosa and Walker County

James Edwards, wounded at Chickamauga is assisted in his escape from capture at Cane Creek by Cindy, who apparently knew him and the men with him.

James Edwards returns to Ringgold after the war and became owner of the Cherokee Inn on the Dalton Road

Peter Felker (95) has Lewis and his siblings in his home in Hamilton County

Cindy and Lewis Felker marry in Catoosa County and first live in Blackstock, then in the home of Lewis Felker (an interesting unanswered question is the circumstance of their meeting)

Jesse Felker dies and leaves his home and furnishings to Lewis and Cindy Felker for as long as either of them shall live.

James Edwards leaves instructions in his will that Cindy is to be provided her meals and anything else she needs for so long as she lives as his expression of gratitude for her having helped him escape capture by the Federals at Cane Creek.

Cindy Felker lived in the Felker House until 1949 based on the will of her husband's benefactor and in her years as a widow took all her meals at the Cherokee Inn provided by James Edwards' daughters and based on his wishes.

### Summary



*Lucinda Taylor Felker*

Lucinda "Aunt Cindy" Felker lived a long and interesting life. She was born into slavery on the Myers farm and was always held in high regard by this family. She was visited at least once a year by Scott Myers, a Confederate veteran who lived on the Myers farm and was about her age. In an interview by Rev. Flavil Hall (a minister and Christian songwriter) in 1942, she stated that Calhoun Myers, son of Scott Myers still lived on the Myers Farm and had only recently visited her in Ringgold. During this interview she stated that "she gave the Myers' a clean record concerning their treatment of her in slavery and subsequently, and that in relation to them her heart throbs are warm and true".

## Sources

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## Epilogue:

The writer had the opportunity to interview someone who knew “Aunt Cindy” Felker and visited with her often. James Dunn (Jim) Callaway was a young teen-age farmer who traveled regularly from Ringgold, down Depot Street past the Felker House on his way to a farm located past Ringgold Gap. During the farming season he would pass by Aunt Cindy’s home in the morning about daylight. Most of the time she would be on her porch and they would pass pleasantries. In the afternoon he would often stop and sit on the porch with her and visit. When he was gathering produce, he would always bring her a basket of whatever vegetables were producing at the time. They developed a friendship that was meaningful to both – a teen-age boy and a 90+ year old former slave. What an experience for young Jim, and what a memory for someone of my own generation to have had this experience!

*Writer’s Disclaimer – We have made every effort to present facts, and ask for grace if we have made an error or two. We also know that there are always additional facts available on topics we write about. We will always appreciate hearing any additional information relative to the topic(s) covered herein. Please address such information to [rbowman@catt.com](mailto:rbowman@catt.com).*