

Attuned to the Past:

The Civil War Legacies of the Parton Brothers of Sevier County, Tennessee

By David J. Gerleman*



Dolly Parton has long been hailed as Sevier County Tennessee's most celebrated resident and as a national cultural and entertainment icon, but there is little information about her ancestors. In recounting her upbringing near Sevierville in the Great Smoky Mountains in the audio version of *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (1994), Parton detailed how long-standing Appalachian customs, traditions, and wisdom had been passed down through her family over the years. Biographer Stephen Miller's revised book *Smart Blonde* (2015) supported this enduring oral tradition and declared that few detailed written records of Dolly's ancestors existed. For the Parton family, he stated, "much of what is known today has been passed down anecdotally from one generation to the next."¹ But is such a pronouncement correct?

It is certainly true that the 1860s represent a conspicuous gap in the Parton family history. East Tennessee has been the location for much of her family's history, but none of the existing sources on the Parton family include discussion of the Civil War. How the struggle affected the lives of Parton's predecessors and whether her East Tennessee ancestors participated in the bloody conflict remain

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¹ Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (New York, 1994); Stephen Miller, *Smart Blonde: Dolly Parton* (London, 2015), 14.



perplexing questions. Yet if irregularities in spelling the name Parton (such as Partin, Partain, Pardon, Parden, or Parten) are taken into account, a study of her nineteenth century ancestors is indeed possible due to the wealth of military service and pension records on file at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C.²

Those files verify that Dolly Parton had not just one Civil War ancestor but several—four brothers Elisha, John, Moses, and Benjamin. For historians seeking to better understand the complex story of war-torn East Tennessee, the Parton family pension files, military records, and census data can demonstrate how previously unknown lives can be unearthed and used to illustrate the war's larger legacies. All four Parton brothers served in the same unit and reflected in microcosm a wide spectrum of East Tennessee wartime experiences: those who left early-on to join Union forces; those who remained at home awaiting federal occupation; those who “temporarily” deserted to attend to nearby families; those who suffered severe health problems; and those who died because of their service. These records tell stories of wartime patriotism, apprehension, and hardship as well as of postwar struggles, selective memory, and the difficulties encountered by aging veterans and their families seeking to claim federal pensions.

Studying Dolly Parton's Civil War ancestors is of beneficial interest to historians, country music fans, and East Tennesseans alike. The 150-year-old omission has great significance today. In January 2018, Parton's long-running Civil War-themed dinner show in Gatlinburg and Branson, Missouri, altered its name from “Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede” to just “Dolly Parton's Stampede.” The branding change came in the wake of criticisms from reviewer Aisha Harris who described the performance as “a play-acted version of the Civil War” tinged with a slavery-free romanticized Lost Cause narrative. Published barely a week after deadly violence flared over removal of Confederate statues in Charlottesville, Virginia, the review

² In postwar testimony Benjamin C. Parton stated he was unsure how to exactly spell his surname saying “some people spell my name Parton and some Partain, I do not know which is correct. I am no scholar.” Deposition of Benjamin C. Parton, April 24, 1890, Pension File, Entry 15, Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (RG 94, NARA).

added to the growing national debate over Confederate iconography and public memorialization.³

This essay presents the lives and Civil War military service of four Parton ancestors. Siblings Elisha, John, Moses, and Benjamin who each served in the Union Army and chalked-up uneven military careers. Benjamin lived into the twentieth century and was Dolly Parton's great-great-grandfather. Like other East Tennesseans during the Civil War, they lived in a strongly pro-Unionist section of a Confederate state. Throughout the conflict the brothers had to face accusations of being spies, struggled to care for their families during active service, tried to avoid Confederate bushwhackers and home guards, and suffered from poor health because of their participation in the war. The Parton family's forgotten saga, as detailed in original documentary evidence, contributes to our understanding of the complexities of the Smoky Mountains in wartime and runs counter to the Lost Cause narrative of universal southern loyalty throughout seceded states such as Tennessee. Instead, Dolly Parton's ancestors, just like the majority of the poor non-slaveholding East Tennesseans, declared continued allegiance to "the old flag" and took up arms against those who supported the Confederacy.

The Setting

The Great Smoky Mountains along the Tennessee-North Carolina border were not only home to generations of the Parton family, they also were the site of some of the Civil War's most bitter fighting. In these mountains, the 1861 secession crisis openly divided communities, pitted family and friends against each other, and morphed into what Noel C. Fisher called an "intensely personal conflict that was undeniably ugly, destructive, and full of cruelties often inflicted by long-standing neighbors."⁴ Yet, for a century the

³ Aisha Harris, "Springtime for the Confederacy," *Slate*, August 24, 2017, <https://slate.com/culture/2017/08/visiting-dolly-partons-dinner-show-dixie-stampede.html>; John Freeman, "Dolly Parton's Civil War-Themed 'Dixie Stampede' Attraction to Change Name," *Rolling Stone*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/dolly-partons-civil-war-themed-dixie-stampede-attraction-to-change-name-200725/>; Maggie Jones, "Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede gets name change, now called Stampede," January 9, 2018, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, <https://www.knoxnews.com/story/entertainment/2018/01/09/dolly-partons-dixie-stampede-gets-name-change-now-called-stampede/1017388001/>; "The Dinner Attraction Company Retools and Readies Expansion," January 28, 2018, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20180108006809/en/World-Choice-Investments-Reveals-Growth-Plans>.

⁴ Noel C. Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies* (Gatlinburg, 2005), viii.



The Parton family settled in Emerts Cove in Sevier County, which is in the shadow of the iconic Mt. Le Conte. In this Thompson Brother's photograph Emerts Cove is in the foreground, leading to Greenbrier, Brushy Mountain, and the northeast side of Mount Le Conte. Mt. Le Conte in Fall, Thompson Photograph Collection, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

region's wartime role was aptly categorized by historians Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson as an "acoustic shadow" within Civil War studies—a raging battle for those directly engaged in it but largely unknown to others not too far distant.⁵ This occurred largely because of slanted postwar southern-penned histories and the rise of a powerful Lost Cause narrative that denied the existence of loyalists, fostered the faithful slave trope, and cast southern Unionists as renegades, turncoats, Tories, and betrayers of their section and race.⁶ By the start of the twentieth century, those able to offer a counter-narrative were either dead or not of a class powerful enough to protect their part of the historical record. Mark T. Banker's *Appalachians All* (2010) reminds us of how astonishingly effective that

⁵ Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson, eds., *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays* (Knoxville, 1997), ix.

⁶ Barton A. Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy: North Carolina's Unionists* (New York, 2014), 2-3; James Alex Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees: Tennessee's Union Cavalry in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2009), 2.

erasure could be noting that many descendants of East Tennessee Unionists, himself included, grew up without any knowledge of their family's loyalist past.⁷

The United States Census and other official records from the Civil War era help reconstruct a general picture of the antebellum Parton family. The family's roots can be traced to North Carolina. Benjamin Parton [Sr.], was born the waning years of the eighteenth century in Burke County, North Carolina. In the mid-1820s he married Hannah L. Cole and together they had five surviving children, Elisha (born 1828), John (born 1829), Benjamin (born 1832), Martha (born 1833), and Martin later called Moses (born 1841).⁸ Around 1830, the Parton family left North Carolina and crossed the mountains into East Tennessee.⁹ Like many pioneering families, the Partons moved several times, including a stint in Greene County. They eventually settled in Sevier County near the middle prong of the Little Pigeon River in Emerts Cove, named for fellow North Carolina transplant Frederick Emert who had arrived in 1790. In the mid-1840s Benjamin, Hannah, and their three youngest children trekked to Murray County in the northwest corner of Georgia not far from Chattanooga, where Benjamin was employed as a laborer. The two eldest Parton sons, Elisha and John, remained in Sevier County as both had married, had young children, and had property of their own.¹⁰ However, by the mid-1850s, Benjamin and his family had returned to Tennessee and settled outside Sevierville not far from his older brother Moses.¹¹

The Partons were shaped by their geographic surroundings. While sometimes described as the "Switzerland of America" for its rugged landscape and supposed healthful climate, East Tennessee was a distinct economic and cultural region of the antebellum South.¹² Sevier County, the Parton's home, had close social, economic, and commercial ties to nearby Cocke County and Blount County. East

⁷ Mark T. Banker, *Appalachians All: East Tennesseans and the Elusive History of an American Region* (Knoxville, 2010), 17, 20.

⁸ "Hannah L. Cole," <https://www.smokykin.com/tng/getperson.php?personID=I30644&tree=Smokykin>; U.S. Census, 1850, Murray County, Georgia, 254.

⁹ "Benjamin Parton," <https://www.smokykin.com/tng/getperson.php?personID=I30643&tree=Smokykin>.

¹⁰ U.S. Census, 1850, Murray County, Georgia, 254; U.S. Census, 1850, 12th Sub-District, Sevier County, Tennessee, 401-402.

¹¹ U.S. Census, 1860, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee, 24.

¹² Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (New York, 2006), 16-17.



Tennessee's agriculture largely centered on the French Broad and Little Pigeon River valleys. The Little Pigeon's three prongs drew together near the county seat at Sevierville, and from there flowed northward until confluence with the French Broad River. Farmers raised wheat, corn, oats, hay, fruit, and livestock on plots ranging from subsistence operations to large market concerns. Most of the land in the mountain counties remained in pasture and timber with unfenced grazing a common practice.¹³

In 1850, Sevier County had nearly 7,000 residents and 403 slaves; a decade later those numbers had grown to over 9,000 residents and 538 slaves with approximately 15 percent of the total population illiterate. Road, bridge, and railroad construction increased connections to larger markets in Virginia and to the lower South via Chattanooga, but the region was still isolated.¹⁴ The region's terrain and isolation proved to be both a wartime blessing and a curse. On one hand its rough landscape barred the maneuvering of sizeable armies and its limited provender prevented billeting of large military garrisons, but those limitations also magnified the war's destructive effects and increased the burdens on families who already had few resources even in good times. The remoteness of the area also made it a haven for deserters, draft dodgers, and bushwhackers who used the war as an excuse to settle personal vendettas and grievances.¹⁵

If family bonds were a predominant characteristic of southern society, it was an even more conspicuous facet of Appalachian life. Historians agree that the most consistent determinant of one's loyalty to either the Union or the Confederacy lay in the allegiance of one's family.¹⁶ As Barton A. Myers posited in *Rebels Against the Confederacy* (2014), many East Tennesseans may have been illiterate but they were not unaware or ambivalent about the national crisis and refusal to join the Confederate army was by itself an overtly political act.¹⁷

Other historians argued that Unionism pervaded East Tennessee because of long-standing hostility to slave owners and lingering

¹³ Noel C. Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 17.

¹⁴ Robbie D. Jones, *The Historic Architecture of Sevier County, Tennessee* (Sevierville, 1997), 23-25, 27.

¹⁵ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, viii.

¹⁶ John C. Inscoe and Robert C. Kenzer, eds., *Enemies of the Country: New Perspectives on Unionists in the Civil War South* (Athens, GA, 2001), 63; Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 19, 56.

¹⁷ Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, xi-xii.

Whig political ideals that made the Republican Party and Abraham Lincoln's election less threatening than to other parts of the South.¹⁸ Prominent Unionist Oliver P. Temple put it more simply by claiming that secessionists found so little support in Sevier County because the unlettered men of the mountain coves possessed an unwavering love of country and deep regard for the memory of Colonel John Sevier and other "sainted sires" that had fallen during the American Revolution.¹⁹ Alongside a filial loyalty to the Union forged by their forefathers, there were prevailing sentiments among many East Tennesseans that life would be intolerable under a Confederate government which persecuted their leaders while protecting the interests of a slaveocracy.²⁰ In two separate canvasses held in February and May 1861, Sevier County returned huge anti-secession majorities with a mere 3.8 percent voting in favor of secession. Such lopsided results were one reason why it became known as the "Union banner county."²¹ On May 4, 1861, thousands gathered near the railroad tracks at Strawberry Plains to pledge all-out resistance to separation from the federal union. In a foretaste of the fratricidal violence to come, the event concluded when northward bound train filled with Confederate recruits took pot-shots at the assemblage provoking return fire from armed members of the crowd.²²

When the war began, East Tennesseans who wanted to fight for the Union faced the challenge of actually joining federal forces. Many East Tennesseans left their homes in hopes of reaching Camp Dick Robinson, the first Union base south of the Ohio River near Danville, Kentucky. Such a decision required the courage and willingness to abrogate familial responsibilities as well as defy rebel authorities and face imprisonment if captured. Nearly 30,000 East Tennesseans would join Union forces during the war, far more than from any other southern state.²³ As early as summer 1861, East Tennesseans tapped into family and local networks dedicated to helping southern men join the Union ranks.²⁴

¹⁸ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 37.

¹⁹ Petition of East Tennessee Citizens to Abraham Lincoln, July 1863, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²⁰ Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 381.

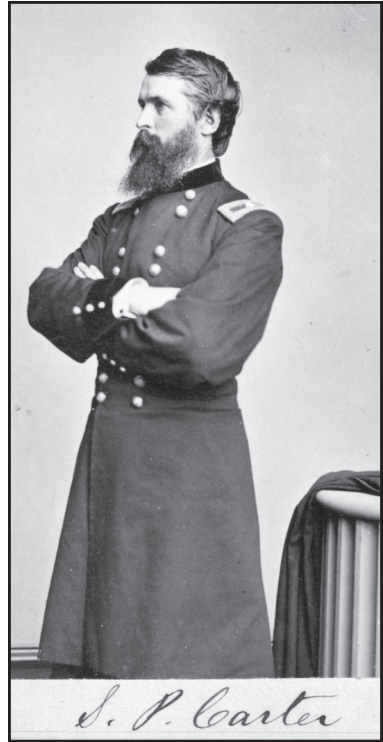
²¹ Oliver P. Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War* (Cincinnati, 1899), 174, 176-77, 199.

²² Jones, *The Historic Architecture of Sevier County*, 33; Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 36; James B. Jones Jr., *Tennessee in the Civil War: Selected Contemporary Accounts of Military and Other Events, Month by Month* (Jefferson, NC, 2011), 21.

²³ Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 68; Affidavit of Newton C. Hartman, October 2, 1884, Alden T. Tucker Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

²⁴ Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 81.

Union leaders expected that Tennessee born officers would lead to more Tennessee recruits. General Samuel Powhatan Carter was one of the first Tennesseans appointed to help organize Tennessee regiments for the Union Army. General Samuel Powhatan Carter, by George N. Barnard, ca. 1862-1865, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016652118/>.



Federal leaders sought to encourage such loyalty by appointing trustworthy Tennessee officers, such as Samuel Powhatan Carter, to command positions.²⁵ Carter and others sought to harness the manpower flowing out of East Tennessee by organizing them into infantry regiments, although some argued that East Tennesseans with intimate knowledge of the countryside would be more useful as cavalry instead.²⁶ Sevier County native Daniel M. Ray organized one of Tennessee's first mounted units initially named the 2nd East Tennessee Cavalry, but later rebranded as the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry. Recruitment efforts near Cumberland Gap in September 1862 coincided with Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith's two-pronged Confederate invasion of Kentucky from Middle and East Tennessee. Faced with an enemy onslaught, Union forces in the region, including the not yet fully formed or equipped 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, withdrew northward, first to Lexington, Kentucky, then onto Gallipolis, Ohio, arriving on October 1, 1862.²⁷

²⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Edwin M. Stanton, March 19, 1862, Entry 2971, Appointment, Commission and Personal Branch, Letters Received, 1863-1894, C48, CB-1863 M1064, roll 11 C4-C198, RG 94, NARA.

²⁶ Richard N. Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (Boston, 1992), 104-106; Grenville M. Dodge to William T. Sherman, January 12, 1864, in U.S., War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901) (OR), Series I, Vol. 33, Part 1, 74-75; Grenville M. Dodge to Theodore S. Bowers, January 29, 1864, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 2, 255-56.

²⁷ Second Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 111-15, RG 94, NARA; "2nd Tennessee Cavalry Regiment," <http://tngenweb.org/civilwar/2nd-tennessee-cavalry-regiment/>.

The First Parton Goes to War

Along with the retreating federal forces was twenty-two-year-old Moses F. Parton, who had the distinction of being the first Parton brother to join the Union Army. On September 16, 1862, he enlisted in Captain John Henry's Company E of the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry. Originally named Martin Franklin Parton, Moses was described as five feet eleven inches tall, with black hair, blue eyes, and a fair complexion. Although he had injured his left hand with an ax in 1860, he was judged fit for cavalry service.²⁸ He and his older first cousin, Albert H. Parton, who likely accompanied him on the journey to reach federal lines, both joined the same regiment and were mustered in as corporals. Their regiment was populated almost entirely with volunteers from Knox, Blount, and Sevier counties.²⁹

Why might have Moses undertake so risky a venture? One reason may have been political as he was known among his neighbors as "a strong Union man."³⁰ Another may have been more personal in that his first wife "Lizzie" had died in early January 1862 and they had no children.³¹ Additionally, there is no evidence that Moses owned property that might be despoiled in his absence. He was not listed in the 1860 census which suggested that he worked as an itinerant laborer and did not own any real estate or livestock.

Moses and his fellow recruits received orders on November 4, 1862 to proceed via Cincinnati and Bowling Green to Nashville. The unit was diverted to Louisville where they finally drew horses and equipment on December 14. Despite an outbreak of measles in the unit they marched by way of Elizabethtown and Bowling Green to reach Nashville on Christmas Eve. Thereafter they joined Major General William S. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland already engaged in a cautious winter advance southward toward Confederate

²⁸ U.S. Census, 1850, Murray County, Georgia, 254; Moses F. Parton, Surgeon's Certificate, July 21, 1897, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

²⁹ Descriptive Book, Company E, 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15, RG 94, NARA; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Tennessee of the Military Forces of the State, from 1861-1866* (Nashville, 1866), 341.

³⁰ Descriptive Book, Company E, 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15; Affidavit of Perry C. Whaley, March 14, 1894, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, all in RG 94, NARA.

³¹ Moses first wife was Eliza A. Brissontine [Briscantine]. U.S. Census, 1850, Greene County, Tennessee, 134; J.L. Davenport to Moses F. Parton, September 11, 1897; Reply September 18, 1897; Affidavit of Jesse L. Shults, October 1, 1898; Application for Accrued Pension, July 12, 1898, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; "Eliza A. Brissontine," <https://www.smokykin.com/tng/getperson.php?personID=155033&tree=Smokykin#cite1>.



forces near Murfreesboro.³² Assigned to General David S. Stanley's Division, the 2nd Tennessee was ordered to cover General Alexander McDowell McCook's XIV Corps positioned on the far right of Union lines. The unit's first encounters with the rebel army came near Triune, Tennessee, as Union forces edged closer to Braxton Bragg's Army of the Tennessee camped along the Stones River. In the last days of December, the 2nd Tennessee engaged in skirmishing and picketing, but only on the final day of the year did a surprise rebel offensive touch off a drawn out three-day battle. During the first day of fighting, Parton's regiment shifted to the rear to protect the supply line to Nashville. They camped in cold and disagreeable weather without tents as most of the regiment's equipment and baggage had been lost early in the fight.³³

Like so many other green volunteer units, the 2nd Tennessee's first major battle was not a resounding success. Lewis Zahm, colonel of the 3rd Ohio Cavalry reported that when subjected to artillery fire during a rebel attack at Overall's Creek on the first day of the battle, "the 2nd East Tennessee broke and fled like sheep." However, for a regiment given little time to properly drill, riding newly-issued horses, and freshly arrived at the seat of war, it is hardly surprising that they failed to stand enemy pressure for long. Other units joined in the precipitous retreat yet Zahm added that the "skedaddled" units later rallied and behaved well for the rest of the day repulsing enemy advances.³⁴ The result of the bloodletting at Stones River was Confederate withdrawal which allowed Union foraging parties greater access to the countryside, although lurking rebel cavalry made it necessary for all wagon trains to be guarded.³⁵

In late January 1863, a contingent of the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, including Moses, escorted a Nashville-bound wagon train. According to one account, he and comrade Ad Tucker dallied too long at a local house buying chickens and were "gobbled up" by a group of

³² Special Orders No. 114, November 4, 1862, 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15, RG 94, NARA; McCammon, *Mountain Troopers*, 38.

³³ Report of William R. Cook, January 9, 1863, Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15, RG 94, NARA; William S. Hall to Elmer Otis, January 9, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 3, 647-48; McCammon, *Mountain Troopers*, 39.

³⁴ Lewis Zahm to M.B. Chamberlin, January 6, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 3, 637; Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 58-59.

³⁵ Complaints had reached army headquarters that wagon guards were too lax and were placing their weapons in wagons and strolled along without their cartridge boxes in the near presence of the enemy's cavalry. William S. Rosecrans to John G. Webster, January 6, 1863, Second Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 111-15, RG 94, NARA.

John Hunt Morgan's Confederate cavalry.³⁶ Another version claimed that Parton and Tucker had deserted the 2nd Tennessee and were attempting to return to East Tennessee when they were captured by the Confederates. Whether Moses was captured faithfully on duty or was instead attempting to desert from the Union Army when taken would be a future bone of contention.³⁷ After his capture, Moses spent three weeks as a prisoner. The Confederates sent him to Knoxville where he was paroled and allowed to return to Emerts Cove. Shortly after his return, Moses married Nance E. Pate.³⁸

Returning home was not without danger. Rumors circulated that Moses was a spy and such speculation could be deadly as relations between Unionist and Confederate sympathizers had only grown more violent since 1861. In Sevier County, loyalists cooperated with those from Carter and Johnson counties to threaten secessionists, prowl rebel camps ambushing errant soldiers, and block roads. Under constant threat, Confederate troops and their civilian partisans (often guerilla bands themselves) responded with equal terror committing some of the war's worst atrocities sparing neither gender nor age. Recognizing that women kinfolk often actively aided and abetted men's avoidance of Confederate service, many secessionists viewed the torture of opponent's wives as an effective necessity.³⁹

In such a charged atmosphere, Moses Parton was concerned for his safety. He later claimed that sometime in the summer of 1863, he was seized by members of William H. Thomas's Legion, a motley Confederate force made up of secessionists and Cherokees from Western North Carolina renowned for their skills in tracking escaped prisoners and bushwhackers. Moses was taken to Gatlinburg and imprisoned for two weeks, likely at Thomas' semi-permanent base on "Burg Hill" in the middle of White Oak Flats. He escaped and traveled to Greenbrier Cove to gather up a group of Unionist

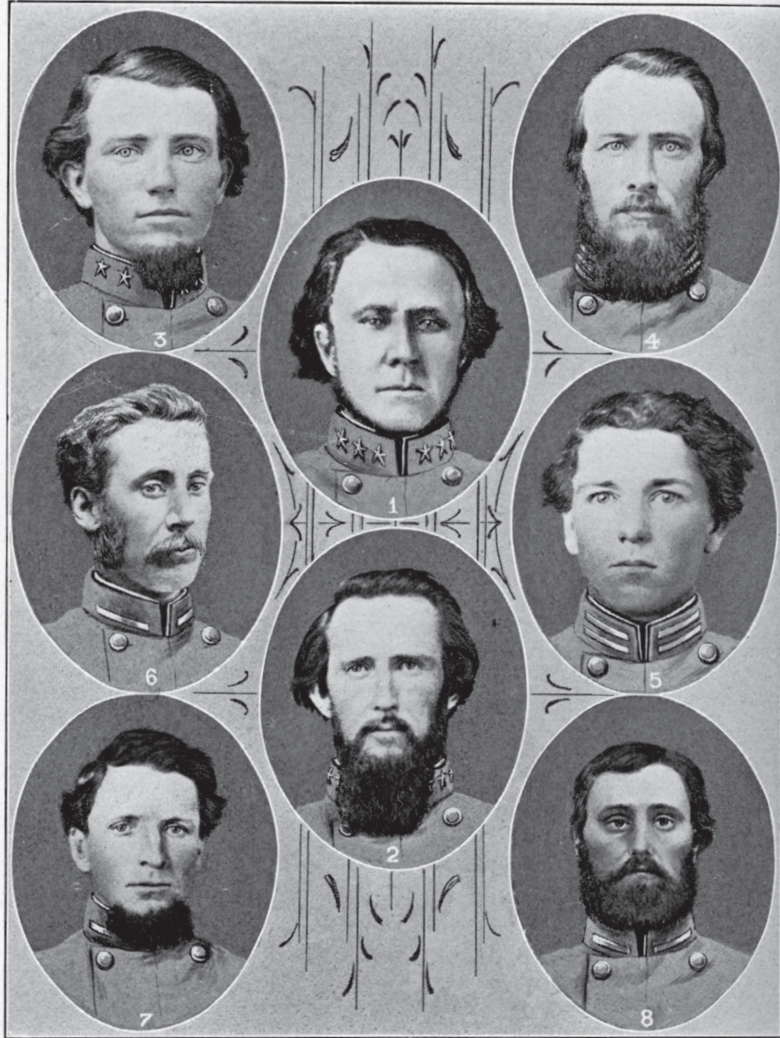
³⁶ "Ad Tucker" has not been identified. The closest possibility may have been Alden Tucker of Company F, 1st Tennessee Cavalry whose unit was near to Parton's, but he did not join the command until March of 1863 after six months in a Confederate prison. Deposition of Moses F. Parton, March 15, 1894, Pension File of Moses F. Parton, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

³⁷ Dates for his capture or desertion vary between January 25, 26, or 27, 1863. Compiled Military Service Record of Moses F. Parton, 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA.

³⁸ J.L. Davenport to Moses F. Parton, September 11, 1897; Reply September 18, 1897; Affidavit of Jesse L. Shults, October 1, 1898; Application for Accrued Pension, July 12, 1898, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

³⁹ Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 62-64, 70-71, 86; Inscoe, *Enemies of the Country*, 12; Bynum, *The Long Shadow of the Civil War*, 44, 47.





SIXTY-NINTH REGIMENT.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. William H. Thomas, Colonel. | 5. R. T. Conley, 1st Lieut., Co. F. |
| 2. James Robert Love, Colonel. | 6. D. K. Collins, 2d Lieut., Co. F. |
| 3. W. W. Stringfield, Lieut.-Colonel. | 7. James Conley, 2d Lieut., Co. F. |
| 4. J. W. Cooper, Captain, Co. H. | 8. Wm. T. Welch, 2d Lieut., Co. F. |

In late 1862, William Holland Thomas, Cherokee leader and North Carolina state senator, organized a group of Cherokees and secessionists as the 69th North Carolina Regiment.

Also known as the Thomas' Legion of Cherokee Indians and Highlanders, the regiment carried out a number of raids in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina.

Thomas is pictured in the above middle alongside the other officers of the 69th North Carolina Regiment. *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-'65*, Walter Clark, ed. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 3:729.

neighbors. The group returned and set fire to the rebel camp and storehouses.⁴⁰ Accusations later surfaced that Moses had actually joined Thomas' regiment "and went to stealing the Provisions from the women whose husbands were at the front fighting for a good cause," but such claims were made years after the war with no corroborating evidence.⁴¹

The Parton Family and the 11th Tennessee Cavalry

By 1863, mounting casualty lists and the Union Army's constant need for fresh troops made the organization of more Tennessee regiments a necessity. In May 1863, Colonel Isham Young began recruiting three-year enlistees at Camp Nelson, Kentucky for the newly organized 11th Tennessee Cavalry. That summer, Ambrose E. Burnside led the Army of the Ohio through Cumberland Gap, brushed aside Confederate resistance, and occupied Knoxville. The liberation of East Tennessee which had stalled for two years due to logistical problems and the strategic priorities of other fronts was at last achieved.⁴²

The arrival of federal occupiers resulted in a new wave of East Tennesseans enlisting in the Union Army. In *Homegrown Yankees: Tennessee's Union Cavalry in the Civil War* (2009), James Alex Baggett argued that there were distinctive differences in the type of recruits who joined these new units. He explained that regiments raised in 1862-1863 overwhelmingly consisted of unconditional Unionists, but those organized after spring 1863 were largely composed of deserters, youths just coming of age, and those who previously would not or could not leave their families. Many of these recruits likely harbored scores to settle with secessionists and were commanded by local men who either lacked the will or interest in imposing strict military discipline.⁴³

⁴⁰ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 45-47, 125; "Civil War Journal: Thomas' Legion," <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/historyculture/civil-war2.htm>; "Thomas' Legion: The 69th North Carolina Regiment," <http://thomaslegioncherokee.tripod.com/>; Affidavit of Perry C. Whaley, March 14, 1894; Affidavit of Moses F. Parton, July 30, 1890; Affidavit of J.D. Shults and Joel Lindsey, July 30, 1890, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁴¹ John B. Ownbey to Commissioner of Pensions, May 26, 1890, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁴² *History of Tennessee: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (Nashville, 1886), 509, 945, 947; Ambrose E. Burnside to Henry W. Halleck, September 5, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 30, Part 3, 333.

⁴³ Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 381-82.



These descriptors seem to fit, in one way or another, each of the four Parton Brothers who enlisted that fall. John, Elisha, Benjamin, and Moses Parton all signed on for three years of service as privates in 11th Tennessee Cavalry at Sevierville on September 20, 1863. All joined Captain Frank P. Peace's Company K. Among the brothers, only Moses signed his name the others signed their enlistment papers with an "X" as their mark, a common practice for unlettered men joining the military.⁴⁴ The existing records do not specify what propelled the Parton brothers to enlist (or in Moses' case to re-enlist). Common reasons included patriotism, enlistment bounties, and perhaps fear of a return to Confederate rule. Whatever their reasons, the Partons, like other members of their regiment, would have checkered and uneven wartime careers.

It is important to note that Moses Parton was never formally discharged from his previous three-year commitment to the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry. Likewise two of his company commanders Brumit M. Rose and Frank P. Peace had served in the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry and also had not secured formal separation from it before blithely accepting new commissions in the 11th Tennessee Cavalry. The need for soldiers familiar with East Tennessee who could also drum-up additional enlistments made it easy to ignore official regulations.⁴⁵

The existing records tell us some details about the other three Parton brothers when they joined the Union Army. The eldest brother, Elisha W. Parton, aged thirty-five and father of five, was described as six feet tall with black hair, blue eyes, and a dark complexion and a farmer by trade.⁴⁶ John Parton, who was a year younger than Elisha, stood at five feet and eleven inches. He had blue eyes, light hair, and a fine complexion. John had five children, worked as a farm laborer, and lived near his younger brother Benjamin and his first cousin

⁴⁴ Compiled Military Service Record of Benjamin C. Partin; Compiled Military Service Record of John Partin; Compiled Military Service Record of Elisha W. Partin; Compiled Military Service Record of Moses F. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, all in RG 94, NARA.

⁴⁵ Pension File of Frank P. Peace, 11th Tennessee Cavalry; Pension File of Brumit M. Rose, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, all in Record Group 15, Records of the Veterans Administration, NARA (RG 15, NARA).

⁴⁶ Descriptive Book, Company K, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15, RG 94, NARA; U.S. Census, 1850, 12th Sub-District, Sevier County, Tennessee, 401-402; U.S. Census, 1860, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee, 25; Compiled Military Service Record of Elisha W. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA; Widow's Application for Army Pension, January 25, 1868; Declaration for Pension or for Increase in Pension for Children under Age Sixteen Years of Age, May 11, 1891; Affidavit of William Whaley, October 3, 1867, Pension File of Elisha W. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, all in Entry 8, RG 15, NARA.

Albert H. Parton.⁴⁷ Finally, Benjamin Christopher Parton was six feet tall with blue eyes, a dark complexion, and a farmer. The records mentioned his skills for log-rolling or house-raising which was much in demand before the war. He was married with four children. Listed as age twenty-five at the time of enlistment, he was actually twenty-eight years old and later had to correct this mistake in order to receive a pension payment increase.⁴⁸

In early October 1863, Moses and his three brothers departed for Knoxville for their regiment's official muster-in at the fairgrounds. The command, however, had little time to train or congeal as a cohesive unit because advancing Confederate forces threatened the Union's hold on East Tennessee. Confederate leaders assigned General James Longstreet and his corps to reclaim East Tennessee. On November 29, 1863, the rebels assaulted Fort Sanders, but the short, sharp, and costly attack failed completely and without sufficient resources or reinforcements. Longstreet admitted defeat and withdrew to the northeast.⁴⁹ While Knoxville remained secure, Confederate retreat did not mean fighting ceased as both sides frequently clashed and skirmished while attempting to sweep the surrounding countryside for provisions.

The four Parton brothers did not take part in the Knoxville Campaign's actual fighting. The 11th Tennessee Cavalry's activities during the siege had been limited, in large part because it was newly organized, had little time to drill, and lacked horses and accouterments forcing it to function dismounted for more than six months after its muster-in. While recruits of the 8th, 9th, 10th, and

⁴⁷ Descriptive Book, Company K, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15, RG 94, NARA; Widow's Pension Application Form; Statement of Martha Parton, June 11, 1870; Statement of Catherine Evans, June 4, 1870, all in Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA; U.S. Census, 1850, 12th Sub-District, Sevier County, Tennessee, 401-402; U.S. Census, 1860, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee, 28.

⁴⁸ Compiled Military Service Record of Benjamin C. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519; Affidavit of Mitchel D. Shults, April 25, 1890, Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15; Descriptive Book, Company K, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15; Declaration for Pension, April 8, 1907, Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15; Benjamin C. Parton to H. Clay Evans, May 4, 1898, Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, all in RG 94, NARA; U.S. Census, 1860, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee, 28; U.S. Census, 1880, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee.

⁴⁹ McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 158-60; Ambrose E. Burnside to Abraham Lincoln, November 17, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 43, 268; Ambrose E. Burnside to Ulysses S. Grant, December 6, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 43, 271; Itinerary of the Ninth Corps, October 20-December 31, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 43, 339-40; Roy P. Basler, et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, 1953), 7:5-6; 14; James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (Philadelphia, 1895), 524-25; Jones, *The Historic Architecture of Sevier County*, 37.





On November 29, 1863, Union forces at Fort Sanders repelled Confederate forces led by General James Longstreet, which solidified Union occupation of East Tennessee for the remainder of the Civil War. Pictured in this stereoview photograph created just after the battle are U.S. Army Engineers Orville E. Babcock (left on tree stump) and Orlando Metcalfe Poe (standing at right) with Fort Sanders in the background. Ft. Sanders, Knoxville, Tenn., by George N. Barnard, ca. late 1863-early 1864, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005681112/>.

11th Tennessee cavalries may have joined largely out of patriotic zeal, their collective unit histories were neither happy nor distinguished ones. East Tennessee horseman gained a reputation as being among the Union Army's most undisciplined. A large part of the problem was that the regiments were insufficiently organized, inadequately equipped, and poorly led and relegated to serving on the periphery of Union-occupied enclaves. Guarding railroads and skirmishing meant that regiments had to be divided up, rarely ever operating together as a whole thus making command and control cohesion difficult to achieve. Such far-flung deployments also magnified the weaknesses of homegrown cavalry when faced by opponents such as Nathan Bedford Forrest, John Hunt Morgan, and Joseph Wheeler who excelled at destructive hit-and-run raids.⁵⁰

Official inspections of the 11th Tennessee Cavalry found it continually under strength, ill-equipped, and without discipline "principally composed of raw, undrilled troops" possessing little ammunition and no revolvers or other necessary equipment.⁵¹ In March 1864, General Theophilus T. Garrard listed the 11th Tennessee as having ten companies, but tallied only 252 men fit

⁵⁰ Special Orders No. 103, Department of the Ohio, April 12, 1864, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 3, 338-39; Michael C. Hardy, *Kirk's Civil War Raids along the Blue Ridge* (Charleston, SC, 2018), 8; Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 2-3, 7, 14-15, 380, 382.

⁵¹ John De Courcy to John Parke, August 24, 1863, in OR, Series I, Vol. 30, Part 3, 158.

The 11th Tennessee Cavalry had high rates of desertion. In March 1864, Major General John Schofield who commanded the Army of the Ohio remarked on the large number of absent soldiers in the 11th and questioned the efforts of the officers to locate the missing men. Gen. John Schofield, ca. 1860s, Brady-Handy photograph collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017895794/>.

for duty, all dismounted and therefore of “little value” to the Union Army.⁵² So close to home, the temptation to slip off and check on family, avoid irksome duty, or put in a crop proved to be irresistible. Like other Tennessee loyalist mounted units, the regiment suffered high rates of desertion (both temporary and long-term)

because the unit never left the area from where the men had been recruited. Chronic absenteeism also seemed to be a vice that the regimental officers were unable or unwilling to prevent despite such defections being noted at army headquarters. After reviewing the list of soldiers in March 1864, Major General John Schofield declared: “I notice also a large number of the Eleventh Tennessee Cavalry ‘absent without authority.’ Do you know where they are? Have any steps been taken to bring them back to duty?”⁵³

The end of the siege of Knoxville found half the 11th Tennessee stationed near Morristown and the remaining five companies, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Reuben A. Davis scouting along the Virginia state line near Cumberland Gap. In late February 1864, that portion of the command, plus a company of the 2nd North Carolina Mounted Infantry, was surprised and captured by Confederate forces at Wyerman’s Mills. Sixty-four men escaped the debacle, but an exact tally of the damage was difficult as the regiment’s administrative



⁵² Theophilus T. Garrard to J.A. Campbell, March 15, 1864, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 3, 74.

⁵³ John M. Schofield to Theophilus T. Garrard, March 20, 1864, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 3, 97-98.

affairs were in disarray. The brigade commander was forced to tell headquarters that “on account of never having been able to obtain a correct report from that command it is very difficult to arrive at exact numbers so as to represent the loss of the 11th Tennessee Cavalry proper.”⁵⁴

The remaining rump of the command spent the rest of 1864 protecting communications between Knoxville and Cumberland Gap. In early January 1865, the War Department announced the consolidation of the 11th Tennessee with the similarly depleted 9th Tennessee Cavalry. On March 24, 1865, the regiment officially ceased to exist, but by that time, only one of the Parton brothers still remained with the unit. What follows are the details of each brother’s wartime contributions to the 11th Tennessee Cavalry.⁵⁵

Moses Parton Returns to the Colors

Moses had mustered in with the 11th Tennessee Cavalry when it formally assembled near Knoxville in mid-October 1863, but his time with the unit was limited to one month and fourteen days, the shortest of any of the Parton brothers. In early November 1863, just as Longstreet’s rebel forces began their move northward, Moses departed the regiment’s encampment and returned home to Sevierville. Exactly why he left remains murky and in postwar testimony he made conflicting claims that he did not desert but departed with the permission of his company officers who detailed him to seek out additional new recruits. His father-in-law, Tennessee Pate, later swore to have seen recruiting papers from Moses’ lieutenant to that effect. A possible second explanation was that he had an altercation or falling out with Lieutenant John Curtis, who allegedly threatened to kick Moses out of the company and to deny him any enlistment bounty.⁵⁶

Whatever the truth of the matter—desertion, irregularly assigned recruitment duty, dislike of army life, fears for his family, or the call

⁵⁴ Theophilus T. Garrard to E.E. Potter, February 24, 1864, in OR, Series I, Vol. 32, Part 1, 412; James Longstreet to Samuel Cooper, February 27, 1864, in OR, Series I, Vol. 52, Part 2, 631.

⁵⁵ *The Union Army: A History of Military Affairs in the Loyal States, 1861-65* (Madison, 1908), 6:387; Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines, 1908), 1641; “Union Regimental Histories, Tennessee,” <http://www.civilwararchive.com/Unreght/untnrcav.htm#11thcav>.

⁵⁶ Adjutant General Case File, Moses F. Parton, September 25, 1883, Entry 409; Compiled Military Service Record of Moses F. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519; Application for Removal of Charge of Desertion, December 27, 1882, Moses F. Parton, Entry 409, all in RG 94, NARA.

of the guerilla's more unrestricted life—an increase in rebel activity in Sevier County caused Moses enough concern to join the roving Unionist partisan band led by George W. Kirk for protection. Kirk hailed from Greene County, Tennessee, a familiar area to the Parton family. Kirk had been drafted into the Confederate army, but deserted and took refuge in the mountains where he served as a pilot aiding other deserters and organizing Unionists for espionage and hit-and-run raids on rebel supply depots in Western North Carolina. At some point, Kirk enlisted in the 8th Tennessee Cavalry, but in summer 1863 he disappeared from the records. He reappeared in February 1864 with the authorization to raise troops to be mounted on captured or private horses. Kirk commanded the 2nd and 3rd North Carolina Mounted Infantry, two small regiments consisting of rebel deserters, Unionists, and Cherokee Indians.⁵⁷ Moses Parton claimed to have traveled with Kirk's forces for approximately three months, but the exact dates are difficult to determine. In all likelihood, he remained near Sevierville, close to his new wife and baby, and extended family.⁵⁸

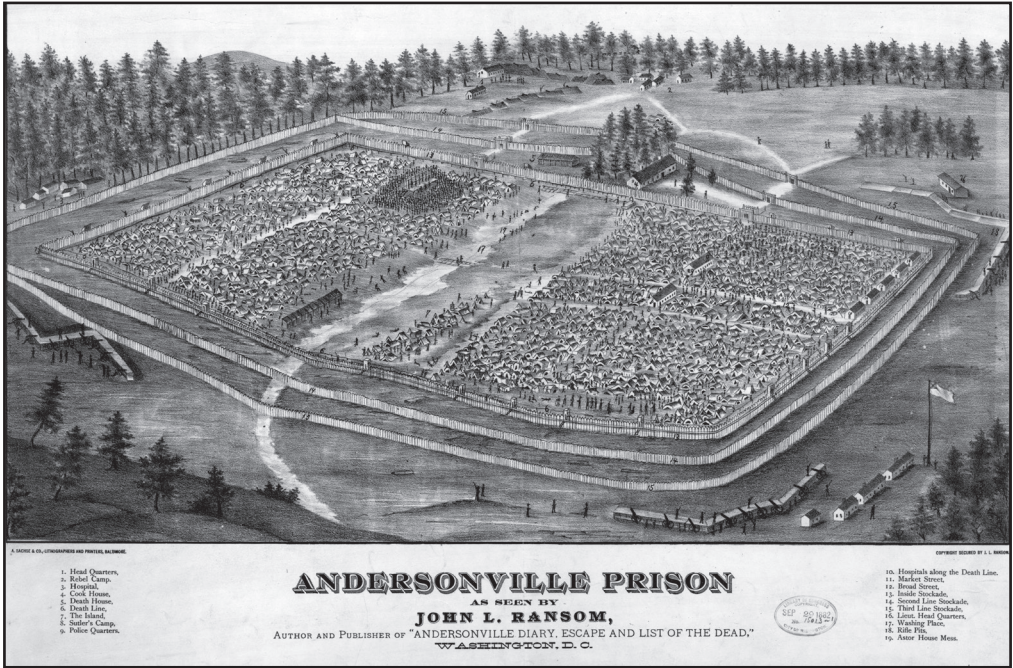
Elisha Parton's Military Service

Elisha, the eldest Parton brother, had the most tragic fate of all his siblings. In 1863, he was thirty-five years old with a wife and five children, all of which made military service unlikely. But as a member of the 11th Tennessee Cavalry he was part of the maneuvers connected to the Knoxville Campaign. Following the Battle of Fort Sanders, the 11th pursued Longstreet forces to Blain's Crossroads in Grainger County. By this time, mid-December 1863, Elisha had become so ill that he was rendered unfit for duty. Because Knoxville's hospitals were overcrowded, Lieutenant Thomas J. Pritchett granted Elisha a thirty-day sick furlough commencing on January 6, 1864. This furlough would allow Elisha to go home, recover, and then to collect and return with neighborhood men who were AWOL from the regiment. Not long after Elisha returned to Emerts Cove, Confederate success at the late January Battle of Fair Gardens

⁵⁷ *History of Tennessee: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (Nashville, 1886), 504; Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 151; Deposition of Moses F. Parton, March 15, 1894, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; Civil War Journal: Thomas' Legion," <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/historyculture/civil-war-2.htm>; Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 87; *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 70-71; Hardy, *Kirk's Civil War Raids along the Blue Ridge*, 91.

⁵⁸ Affidavit of Moses F. Parton, July 30, 1890, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.





Andersonville Prison was designed to hold 10,000 prisoners, but the total population reached over 26,000. Over 13,000 prisoners died and thousands more contracted diseases which shortened their lives. This bird's eye view, later created by John L. Ransom who escaped and later wrote about his imprisonment, captures the massive scope of the complex. Andersonville Prison as seen by John L. Ransom, lithograph by A. Sachse and Company, Washington, D.C., ca. 1882, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2013645342/>.

in Sevier County resulted in his capture along with several other furloughed members of Company K.⁵⁹

In late January 1864, Confederate forces seized Elisha at his home. Elisha and his fellow prisoners were transported to Richmond. They arrived in the rebel capital on February 17 and the next day began a six-hundred mile trip to "Camp Sumter" in Americus, Georgia. In late February 1864, Parton was among the very first batch of Union prisoners to arrive at the prison which would be known as Andersonville. The prison site initially covered nearly seventeen acres enclosed by a stockade wall fifteen feet high, but that would

⁵⁹ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 130; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 532-33; Compiled Military Service Record of Moses F. Partin, 2nd Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA; Declaration for Pension or for Increase in Pension for Children under Age Sixteen Years of Age, May 11, 1891, Pension File of Elisha W. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA; Statement of C.P. Whaley, February 5, 1870; Statement of Isaac Whaley, February 4, 1870, all in Elisha W. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

not be sufficient to contain a burgeoning prison population that increased by hundreds daily. By June 1864, over 26,000 prisoners were confined in a stockade designed for 10,000 with inadequate housing, food, clothing, and medical care. Andersonville operated for only fourteen months yet nearly 13,000 men died there from disease, poor sanitation, malnutrition, overcrowding, or exposure.⁶⁰

On May 31, 1864, Parton was admitted to the prison hospital suffering from chronic diarrhea. He lingered there for two weeks before finally succumbing on June 18, 1864. He was buried along with thousands of others in the prison graveyard. Parton's body was later reinterred in Andersonville's National Cemetery, designed and laid out after the war as part of an effort to memorialize the soldiers who died while imprisoned.⁶¹

John Parton's Military Service

While Elisha did not live to see the end of the war, his three brothers did. John Parton's stint in the Union Army followed a regular and seemingly uneventful pattern after his enlistment in the 11th Tennessee Cavalry in September 1863. Unlike his brothers, John served with the regiment throughout 1864 and after its consolidation with the 9th Tennessee.⁶² In spring 1865, however, John became ill enough that both his company commander and the colonel of the 9th Tennessee Cavalry granted him a ten-day medical furlough.⁶³

John arrived at his home on the road leading from Sevierville to Greenbrier Cove in early April 1865. Local doctor Y.J. Morris was summoned and found John suffering from "chronic diarrhea of a very malignant type." While Parton expressed an interest in returning to his regiment or seeking medical treatment at a hospital in Knoxville, Morris explained that the case was "beyond reach of medicine" and would likely prove fatal. As no army surgeon was

⁶⁰ Declaration for Widows Pension, November 11, 1865; War Department Endorsement, May 17, 1890, all in Elisha W. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 86-87; "History of Andersonville Prison," https://www.nps.gov/ande/learn/historyculture/camp_sumter_history.htm.

⁶¹ Elisha W. Parton [Parten] is buried at section K, Site 2146 at Andersonville National Cemetery. Compiled Military Service Record of Elisha W. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA; <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-prisoners-andersonville-detail.htm?prisonerId=312DDA68-AF02-4117-832D-BE7FCA2845B1>.

⁶² Compiled Military Service Record of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA.

⁶³ The pass stipulated that Parton was to return in ten days or he would be considered a deserter. Pass for John Parton, [1865], Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA.



within reach, Morris returned to the Parton home a second time but found no improvement. A few days later on May 8, 1865, John succumbed to his illness and died.⁶⁴

Benjamin Parton's Military Service

Benjamin C. Parton, like his younger brother Moses, had a complicated military experience and his later testimony about his service was filled with contradictions. After enlisting in the 11th Tennessee at Sevierville, Parton joined the mustering companies in Knoxville two weeks later. He bunked with neighborhood friends David and Mitchell D. Shults. Adding to the difficulties of adapting to military life were poor food, unsanitary camp conditions, and the onset of colder temperatures. Less than a month after joining the military Benjamin developed either pneumonia or typhoid fever and was sent to an improvised Knoxville army hospital for treatment. Disturbed by some of the remedies used by army doctors, he returned to the 11th in early December just in time to begin the pursuit of Longstreet's army heading northeast toward Cumberland Gap. The December weather was not propitious for army movements and the harsh winter of 1863-1864 was the most severe of the war. Still horseless, the 11th Tennessee marched on foot over frozen ground and waded through ice laden creeks. Barely three miles outside of Knoxville, Parton's left leg began cramping and he dropped out of the march but was prodded along by the rear guard.⁶⁵

Benjamin crossed the frigid Holston River mounted on a sympathetic officer's horse, as the 11th continued on to Rutledge and then toward Blain's Crossroads in Grainger County. At this point in the march, Benjamin's leg swelled up to near to bursting the skin, turned purple, and rendered him unfit for duty. When the swelling subsided, his damaged leg had knotted veins stretching all the way to the groin. After showing his leg to his company commander, Benjamin asked for a furlough. According to Benjamin, Captain Peace denied the request, but allegedly added that he could

⁶⁴ Affidavit of F.L. Emert, Robert Evans, and Isaac Whaley, August 11, 1866; James Brownlow to J.J. Norwood, June 29, 1866; Samuel Breck to Commissioner of Pensions, June 8, 1868; Statement of Y.J. Morris, December 23, 1870, all in Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA; Compiled Military Service Record of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA.

⁶⁵ Affidavit of Joseph S. Ford, December 5, 1888; Affidavit of Joseph S. Ford, November 3, 1888; Affidavit of Joseph S. Ford, April 30, 1890, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 524.



go home as long as he came back as soon as possible. During the night of December 23, 1863, Benjamin, along with Perry C. Whaley and Daniel Shults, left camp at moonrise on a thirty mile journey home. Benjamin's claim of having received clandestine permission to leave his regiment is at odds with surviving regimental records. The company book filled out by Captain Peace in December 1863 listed both Parton and Shults as deserters who departed by stealth late at night.⁶⁶

Parton and his compatriots reached their Sevier County homes by the end of December, but it was not entirely a happy homecoming. Within a few days of Benjamin's return, his second child, William, died. Benjamin's leg was so badly inflamed that he could not attend his son's burial. While certainly better able to recover at home, Benjamin had to be wary of roaming bands of Confederate cavalry, self-appointed guerillas, and even Union Army patrols searching for deserters. Like other East Tennessee families, Benjamin had a hiding place for such emergencies which a family member referred to as "the big hole."⁶⁷

Moses and Benjamin Return to the Union Army

Was fear of court-martial what kept both Moses and Benjamin from promptly returning to the 11th Tennessee? Or might weighty family factors have intervened to prevent it, such as the need to provide for or protect Parton families and farms? By 1863, violence in the region had escalated to a frightening degree as the authority of the Confederate, state, and local governments collapsed. In the absence of order, bushwhackers, deserters, and renegade troops pillaged, plundered and murdered almost at will. Benjamin and Moses spent all of 1864 away from the Union Army. After the war, both claimed that they would have returned sooner but were prevented by bushwhackers and other armed groups roaming the

⁶⁶ Peace's company book noted deserters who voluntarily returned to the regiment, which indicated that the practice of being AWOL with the intention of returning was not a total anomaly. Bookmark 4917-B-1886, Entry 409, RG 94, NARA; Deposition of Benjamin C. Parton, April 24, 1890; Affidavit of Perry C. Whaley, April 10, 1886; Affidavit of Perry C. Whaley, April 24, 1890; Affidavit of Samuel Messer, February 29, 1888; Affidavit of George Messer, October 29, 1888; Affidavit of George Messer, April 20, 1890, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; Morning Reports, Company K, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Orders and Letters Books, Entry 112-15, RG 94, NARA.

⁶⁷ Affidavit of A. Davis Evans, September 24, 1890; Affidavit of Sarah Parton, April 26, 1890, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.



region. There was some truth in such claims as law and order in parts of East Tennessee was limited.⁶⁸

In March 1865, seeking extra incentives to recall absent men like the Parton's back to the colors, President Lincoln issued a proclamation allowing deserters to return to their units without fear of punishment or court-martial.⁶⁹ Whether it was word of this proclamation or Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9 or a desire to finish out the war, in mid-April, both Moses and Benjamin returned to their regiment now identified as the 9th Tennessee Cavalry. The brothers shared a tent. With the war over the regiment saw no hard fighting, only patrolling and a few skirmishes. The 9th Tennessee marched from Rogersville to Sweetwater then Lenoir City, and finally to Knoxville where the members were formally mustered out of service on September 11, 1865.⁷⁰

Other Parton Family Members and the Civil War

The non-combatants of the Civil War are difficult to follow, especially since many of them had no voice in society and seldom appeared in official records. The pension records say nothing of the role that Parton family women played during this period. We do, however, know that the Parton family women kept farms running under wartime conditions, likely helped kinfolk evade Confederate authorities, and may have even assisted deserters when necessary. As the war dragged on the struggle for survival and the difficulty of protecting property and dwindling food supplies became the priority for those on the homefront.⁷¹

In many parts of the mountainous borderlands like East Tennessee and Western North Carolina, the people who stayed behind developed warning systems. Such networks spread the

⁶⁸ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 84; Banker, *Appalachians All*, 70; Benjamin C. Parton, Application for Removal of Desertion, April 10, 1886, Entry 409, RG 94, NARA; Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 76, 99, 103, 114.

⁶⁹ Proclamation Offering Pardon to Deserters, March 11, 1865, Entry 23, Record Group 11, General Records of the U.S. Government, NARA; John B. Ownbey to Commissioner of Pensions, May 26, 1890, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁷⁰ Adjutant General Case File, Benjamin C. Parton, September 25, 1883, Entry 409; Deposition of Moses F. Parton, March 15, 1894, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15; Affidavit of Mitchel D. Shults, April 25, 1890, Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, all in RG 94, NARA; Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 1640.

⁷¹ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 87; Inscoe and Kenzer, eds., *Enemies of the Country*, 9.

alarm at the approach of strangers, which allowed livestock to be hidden in caves, sinkholes, or cellars to protect them from seizure or confiscation. Further, mountain women devised numerous methods to hide or camouflage foodstuffs or other valuables from the prying eyes or hungry mouths of both foe and friend. Even Union soldiers became dreaded for requisitioning food and fodder even though their commanders bemoaned the necessity for doing so knowing that the loyal people of Sevier and Blount counties would be unable to raise a crop for the following year.⁷²

East Tennessee Veterans and the Postwar

In 1865, the Partons and other East Tennessee veterans were eager to go home and rebuild their lives. Those who returned faced enormous challenges in reassembling families, regaining lost property, and resuming life in a still bitterly divided area. The war's end brought little peace to the Smokies. The economy was in shambles afflicted by cash shortages and rampant inflation, farms lacked animals to till the fields or supply milk and meat, fencing had been destroyed, mills and ferries burned, and many leading merchants did not return. Roaming lawless bands operated for months following Lee's surrender and conflict between East Tennessee loyalists and ex-Confederates continued with rebel conscription officers, provost marshals, and prominent secessionists targeted for retribution. In Sevier County, several secessionist ministers found bundles of switches placed at their church doors as an intended warning from local Unionists.⁷³

The rapid muster-out of Union and Confederate troops also intensified tensions as ex-soldiers returned to the mountain coves eager to avenge the "murder, thefts, [and] midnight marauders" endured by their families.⁷⁴ In some areas farmers were afraid to work their fields. Although East Tennessee supported the Union during the war, the state had supported the Confederacy and was aligned with defeat. In the ensuing decades, the war became the ready rationalization for a host of Appalachian ills as formerly progressive areas became immobilized by bitterness, a distrustful intolerance of any innovation, and suspicion of strangers. Yet as Mark T. Banker

⁷² Hardy, *Kirk's Civil War Raids along the Blue Ridge*, 96, 135; Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 74, 86-87.

⁷³ Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies*, 142-45, 148; W. Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville, 1999), 155.

⁷⁴ Hardy, *Kirk's Civil War Raids along the Blue Ridge*, 151.



noted, the Civil War was only the last in a series of mid-nineteenth century setbacks that pushed the Appalachian region from the nation's mainstream to its margins.⁷⁵

As the uncertain postwar world took shape, many East Tennesseans questioned whether or not the federal government would recognize and reward Tennessee's Unionist loyalties. For those East Tennesseans who fought for the Union or the widows of those who died, they wanted to know if they might receive the same pension rights as other Union Army veterans. On July 14, 1862, Congress passed the pension act intending, in Lincoln's words, to "care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." It provided eligibility to veterans or their dependents who claimed legitimate military service since March 4, 1861, but no one was exactly sure how the law might be applied to southerners who fought for the Union.⁷⁶

The success or failure of those attempts also reflected the increasing political power of veteran's groups. The Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) proved enormously successful at pressuring Congress to liberalize the pension laws by increasing payment rates and expanding veteran eligibility. Although neither of the surviving Parton brothers ever formally joined a G.A.R. chapter, they nevertheless benefited from the group's lobbying influence, and most specifically from the Act of June 27, 1890, which allowed any soldier who served 90 days with a physical disability that was not necessarily war related, to apply for a pension, including their widows so long as they had married the claimant before the enactment date.⁷⁷

Even if a veteran's application was rejected, he could ask his congressman to have it reopened or to sponsor a private bill for relief. By 1893, there were almost a million pensioners on the rolls costing the U.S. Treasury \$165 million annually.⁷⁸ The continual expansion

⁷⁵ Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 154-57; McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 212-13; Groce, *Mountain Rebels*, 127; Robert Tracy McKenzie, "Oh, Ours is a Deplorable Condition," in Noe and Wilson, eds., *The Civil War in Appalachia*, 199; Banker, *Appalachians All*, 49, 70-71.

⁷⁶ Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865* (New York, 1989), 687; Claire Prechtel-Klusens, "A Reasonable Degree of Promptitude": Civil War Pension Application Processing, 1861-1885," *Prologue Magazine* 42 (Spring 2010): 26-35, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/spring/civilwarpension.html>.

⁷⁷ "The Act of June 27, 1890: It Opened the Treasury to an Altogether New Class of Beneficiaries," *New York Times*, March 19, 1894; Stuart Charles McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 152-53.

⁷⁸ Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Dread Federal Surplus," *American Heritage Magazine* 40 (April 1989): 22, <https://www.americanheritage.com/dread-federal-surplus>.

of the pension rolls made it easier for East Tennessee veterans to apply, although claimants had to tender increasingly detailed paperwork and often submit to visits from special agents who roamed local neighborhoods interviewing family members, neighbors, and old army comrades. It was a bureaucratic fight conducted by letter, deposition, affidavit, and special inspectors for which literacy was vital. Pension applicants had to swear that they had been in good health prior to their enlistment, that their injuries or disabilities were not due to any vices or vicious habits, like alcohol, or if they had ever assisted the Confederacy. Southern pension claimants faced an extra hurdle of having to prove their steadfast loyalty as Congress initially forbade any monies going to men or their widows and heirs who had aided the Confederacy. A vital component in securing a pension approval was to establish the legality of a claimant's marriage and a strict accounting of the names and birth dates of all dependent children.⁷⁹

The Parton Family and the Bureau of Pensions

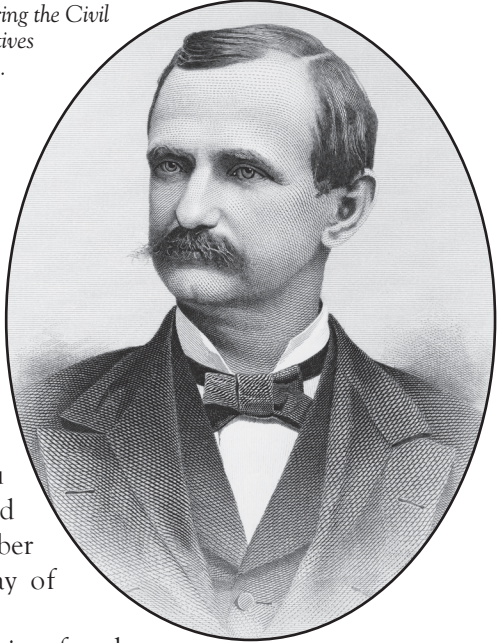
The Parton family dealt with many of the problems, delays, and frustrations that other Civil War veterans faced when attempting to claim their military pensions. Martha, Elisha Parton's widow, had a seemingly indisputable claim to a federal pension. Her husband had died while a prisoner of war and she had minor children to support. Martha submitted a pension application in November 1865. She requested the standard rate of \$8 per month with an extra \$2 per month for each minor child. The Bureau of Pensions denied the claim and subsequent re-filings.⁸⁰ The denial appears to have been connected to a legal question whether or not Elisha's capture while on sick furlough counted as "line of duty." Other sticking points in the application were the verification of several of the children's birth dates since they were only eligible to receive pension funds until they reached the age of sixteen. On November 19, 1873, Martha Parton died. Her orphaned children were placed under guardianship with the last appointed guardian listed as Pink Maples. As adults, Elisha's children continued to press for claims for back payment of

⁷⁹ H. Day Evans to Jacob H. Gallinger, March 18, 1902, Papers Pertaining to Senate Bills, 57th Congress, Senate Bill 693, Entry 851, RG 46, NARA.

⁸⁰ Declaration for Widow's Pension, November 19, 1865; Widow's Pension, February 23, 1866; Widow's Application for Army Pension, January 25, 1868, all in Elisha W. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.



Originally from Sevier County, Leonidas C. Houk served as a Union colonel of the 3rd Tennessee Infantry during the Civil War. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives for the 2nd congressional district from 1878-1891. While in Congress, Houk helped many Union veterans including the Parton family secure their federal military pensions. Leonidas Campbell Houk, representative from Tennessee, 1892, Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91480798/>.



the amounts owed to them. They secured the help of Sevier County Congressman, Leonidas C. Houk. Finally, in January 1892 the Bureau of Pensions agreed to pay pro-rated outstanding amounts up to September 30, 1872, the sixteenth birthday of Elisha's youngest child.⁸¹

John Parton's widow Catherine faced similar pension claim challenges. Her husband had died while on sick furlough. Catherine, like many Civil War widows, used a pension agent, usually a local attorney, to prosecute government claims on her behalf. Pension agents were often a vital necessity in isolated regions where applicants could not make the journey to a district pension office. In November 1865 and again in August 1866, Catherine applied for her husband's back pay, the remaining \$75 of his enlistment bounty, and an award of a military pension.⁸² In February 1871, the Bureau of Pensions approved the application. Catherine drew payments for herself and her minor children until 1873 when the Bureau of Pensions suspended her

⁸¹ Letter of Guardianship, July 8, 1889; Affidavit of George B. Whaley, September 24, 1889; Commissioner of Pensions Memorandum to Guardians of Pensioners of the United States, [1901]; Envelope endorsement to Leonidas C. Houk, September 5, 1888; File wrapper endorsement to Leonidas C. Houk, April 16, 1891; Original Pension of Minor Children, January 6, 1892, all in Elisha W. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁸² Commissioner of Pensions (unsigned) to William J. Hannah, September 11, 1908, Alden T. Tucker Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; Widow's Application for Army Pension, November 9, 1865; Widow's Application for Army Pension, August 11, 1866; Statement of Frederick Locke Emert, October 31, 1865, all in Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA; Compiled Military Service Record of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA.

claim. Catherine was dropped from the pension rolls for alleged adultery and producing a bastard child since her husband's death. The Bureau of Pensions received reports of Catherine's supposed "immorality," specifically that she kept a house of prostitution, "the proof of which can be made very handy," and that her "continued acts of impurity" threatened to contaminate her children who she had neglected and abandoned.⁸³

Neighbors told pension officials that Catherine was a poor manager who had difficulty providing for her children, yet investigators judged her veracity and virtue sound in every way. Catherine explained that her children were taken care of as best as her means could afford. The reviewer in the Washington Bureau of Pensions marked the charges as insufficient. He added that "keeping a house of prostitution may mean much or little" and having an alleged bastard child did not itself prove gross immorality or negate a rightful pension claim. In addition, he explained that the charges of child abandonment were too vague to warrant action.⁸⁴

The Bureau of Pensions authorized Catherine to resume receiving payments for her claim, but her pension agent, Cam Murphy, failed to tell her. After several years of no news, Catherine believed that the pension had been abolished or was being drawn by someone claiming to be her children's guardian. In 1881, one of Catherine's sons traveled to the district office in Knoxville and once there he learned that reapplication instructions had failed to be acted upon and were out of date. The 1877 letter ordering resumption of Catherine's pension payments had never been given to her. She admitted "I am an ignorant woman" who had believed too strongly that her pension agent would do right by her. In October 1881, a new pension attorney petitioned to have her claim restored backdated to September 4, 1873 when it had been suspended. It appears that this request was granted in early 1882 yet the file documentation stops with no indicators that Catherine or any of her children ever collected further payments. This may mean she died before receiving

⁸³ Statement of John R. Lindsey, September 22, 1873; Affidavit of D.H. Emert, July 24, 1874; Affidavit of John J. Emert and A.D. Evans, July 24, 1874, all in Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA.

⁸⁴ Affidavits of Y.J. Morris and Hannah Shults, October 4, 1874; Affidavit of William A. Smith and William J. Yarberry, January 25, 1875; Statement of Catherine Parton, October 4, 1873; Endorsement of J.C. O'Connell and J.H. Baker, August 3, 1874, all in Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA; U.S. Census, 1870, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee, 4.

word that her claim was reopened or that, for whatever reason, she did not pursue any further action on it.⁸⁵

However onerous and time consuming the federal pension process had been for the widows of Elisha and John Parton, they at least had generally solid claims supported by military documentation. Moses and Benjamin C. Parton, on the other hand, had far more difficult cases to make to convince pension examiners that they both deserved and were legally entitled to federal pensions. When Moses received his formal military discharge in September 1865, he was paid the \$60.61 due him but was denied any pay and or allowances for his absent period November 4, 1863-May 8, 1865. He returned to his family and in the postwar years farmed or worked at various jobs for neighbors, such as clearing ground, splitting rails, and grubbing trees. Despite his brief time actually serving with the Union Army, Moses claimed to have developed chronic diarrhea in August 1865 which he admitted to periodically self-medicating with whiskey. He also claimed that an intestinal rupture (possibly a hernia) had resulted from contact with his Army saddle, which by 1897 had rendered him able only to do half a normal amount of manual labor.⁸⁶

Beset by health related issues, Moses first applied for a military pension in 1882. The Bureau of Pensions denied the request and questioned the standing desertion charge against Moses from his brief service in the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry. Upon further review, the Bureau of Pensions determined that the Presidents Amnesty Proclamation had discharged Moses from the 2nd Tennessee Cavalry and cleared him of desertion from the 11th Tennessee Cavalry. But the charge was not expunged from the records and continued to be reevaluated with each new application. Moses unsuccessfully reapplied in August 1887 and again in 1891. He cited the need for an invalid pension due to catarrh, disease of the rectum, and injury to his lungs, liver, and kidneys from exposure of lying on wet ground. In 1891, the Bureau of Pensions approved the claim, but three years later rescinded the decision due to lack of satisfactorily evidence that the

⁸⁵ Affidavit of Catherine Parton, July 7, 1881; Affidavit of Benjamin Parton, September 29, 1881; Declaration of Pensioner for restoration to the rolls, September 29, 1881, all in Pension File of John Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, RG 15, NARA.

⁸⁶ Compiled Military Service Record of Moses F. Partin, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519; Adjutant General Case File, Moses F. Parton, September 25, 1883; Application for Removal of Charge of Desertion, December 27, 1882, Moses F. Parton, Entry 409; Affidavit of Albert Lowe, March 15, 1894; Moses F. Parton, Surgeon's Certificate, July 21, 1897, Entry 15, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, RG 94, NARA.



occurring illnesses had been contracted while in the Union Army.⁸⁷

In 1894, Moses submitted yet another pension application. Following the Bureau of Pensions protocol, special field examiners were sent to investigate Moses' claim by selecting neighbors to testify regarding the claimant's case, rate their reputations for truth and community standing, and send reports with recommendations back to Washington. Examiners had to remain sharp-eyed for collusion between applicants and witnesses for even though the



After the Civil War, the Bureau of Pensions received thousands of applications. To meet the growing needs of processing applications, the Bureau of Pensions moved into a new building in 1887 (today it is the National Building Museum). Pictured are employees in the main hall of the building processing applications during the early 1920s. Pension Office Building, Interior, by Theodor Horydczak, ca. 1920s, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/thc1995002916/PP/>.

latter took oaths swearing they had no personal interest in the claim. The special examiner in Moses' case reported it was "hard to obtain the true character of these affidavits" as all of the witnesses were put forward by Moses and most were related to him. Adding that "the claimant himself is without any character in the community" and claimed that one witness, C.P. Whaley, was "a whoremaster" running a house of prostitution at Emerts Cove. The examiner's final verdict was that "I am of the opinion that the claim is not meritorious."⁸⁸

The Bureau of Pensions did not agree with the investigator's assessment and in June 1895 awarded Moses a new pension certificate. However, two years later on November 4, 1897, Moses died leaving his widow less than \$50 in assets. Because his pension had last been paid that August, his wife, Nancy E. Parton, had to apply to secure the balance due and establish her own pension claim as a widow. Three years later pension records show Nancy

⁸⁷ U.S. Census, 1880, District 2, Sevier County, Tennessee, 13; Application for Removal of Charge of Desertion, December 27, 1882, Moses F. Parton, Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 409, RG 94, NARA; Declaration for Original Invalid Pension, June 1, 1882; Declaration for Original Invalid Pension, August 17, 1887; Record and Pension Office Brief, May 2, 1898; J.L. Davenport to Chief of Record and Pension Office, April 10, 1899; Invalid Pension Application, June 20, 1891; Affidavit of Moses F. Parton, March 16, 1889, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁸⁸ Index to Special Examiners Report, 1894; G.E. Brown to William Lochren, March 21, 1894, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

was declared “a person of unsound mind” with A.D. Martin initially appointed to serve as her guardian, followed by Joseph Whaley in 1906, and finally her daughter Sarah, with whom she lived with until her death on April 18, 1915. In a final act of bureaucratic stringency, the Bureau of Pensions informed her daughter that the submitted claims for \$75 for nursing and \$35 for food and clothing consumed by her mother up to her death were not deemed expenses incident to the last sickness of the pensioner and therefore not reimbursable.⁸⁹

Benjamin C. Parton was the last Civil War survivor among his three siblings and the only one to live into the twentieth century. Along with his brother Moses, Benjamin had rejoined the Union Army in late April 1865 and thereby accepted loss of any claims to back pay or enlistment bounty. He last served with the consolidated 9th Tennessee Cavalry as it sought to suppress continued guerilla and outlaw activity during the summer of 1865. Benjamin was formally discharged at Knoxville in September 1865 and returned to his family. Like Moses, Benjamin filed his first pension claim in June 1882, and like his brother’s application, it was rejected because he was listed as a deserter. Examiners noted that Parton would have difficulty proving that his alleged physical disabilities were incurred in military service.⁹⁰

In 1884, Benjamin attempted to have the desertion charge removed from his record after Congress passed legislation making clearance possible if a soldier had been “prevented from completing his term of service by reasons of wounds received or disease contracted in line of duty.” Both Moses and Benjamin made the argument that they were not deserters. As they remembered it twenty years later, their commanding officers had given them verbal permission to leave camp.⁹¹ Such claims might have been verified or disproved if the officers involved, Captain Frank P. Peace and Lieutenant Brumit M.

⁸⁹ Moses F. Parton to [the Commissioner of Pensions], March 25, 1893; Application for Accrued Pension, November 28, 1898; Application for Accrued Pension, July 12, 1898; Nancy E. Parton Burial Expenses, February 18, 1916, all in Moses F. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁹⁰ Compiled Military Service Record of Benjamin C. Parton, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 519, RG 94, NARA; Declaration for Original Pension, June 1, 1882; Benjamin C. Parton to U.S. Adjutant General, October 17, 1887; Medical Examination, August 26, 1885; “Examiner Prentice” Carded Endorsement, December 10, 1887, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁹¹ Benjamin C. Parton to Richard C. Drum, October 17, 1887, Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA; Benjamin C. Parton, Application for Removal of Desertion, April 10, 1886, Bookmark 4917-B-1886, Entry 409, RG 94, NARA; An Act to Relieve Certain Soldiers from the Charge of Desertion, July 5, 1884, *Statutes at Large*, 48th Congress, Session 1 (1882), Chapter 22, 119, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/48th-congress/Session%201/c48s1ch222.pdf>.

Rose, had been deposed yet no records have been found indicating that either was ever interviewed.⁹²

Benjamin Parton first agreed to use J.W. Cooksey as his claim agent but found him inattentive at pressing his claim and hired John L. Brown of Pokeberry, Tennessee. Benjamin reapplied in 1885 and had his case promptly denied barely a month later. With help from Representative Houk, Benjamin had his case reopened in 1889. Special Examiner D.S. McIntyre arrived in Sevierville in spring 1890 to take depositions. McIntyre's questions centered on whether witnesses had ever seen Parton's naked legs before the war and if so whether they were visibly damaged. Several family members admitted they had indeed seen knotted veins on one leg when Benjamin went swimming at the "Long Rock Hole" in the Little Pigeon River prior to the war.⁹³

Robert McIvans, a Sevierville neighbor, claimed that Parton had varicose veins before joining the military. Benjamin responded to this charge by having five people submit affidavits saying that McIvans harbored twenty-year-old hostile feelings against him and lacked a truthful reputation.⁹⁴ Benjamin also clarified his previous statements and grudgingly admitted to having some knotted veins and leg cramps before enlisting. But he asserted that Army life made it far worse. The special examiner added that these admissions were made only after much quibbling and evasion because of fears of criminal prosecution. McIntyre added, "I am satisfied the witness Sarah Parton knew more than she would tell" and thought that Parton's claims to ill health were highly exaggerated as "it would be difficult to find a finer specimen of physical development than this claimant."⁹⁵

⁹² Peace and Rose had their own tangled relationship with the Bureau of Pensions; both had resigned their commissions in the summer of 1864 and each had previous desertion charges against them which later hampered award of federal pensions. After Rose's death in 1908 it was also discovered he had twice committed bigamy after deserting his legal wife in Sevier County to join the Army in 1863. Pension File of Frank P. Peace, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8; Pension File of Brumit M. Rose, 11th Tennessee Cavalry, Entry 8, all in RG 15, NARA.

⁹³ Affidavit of Benjamin C. Parton, April 26, 1890; Affidavit of Benjamin C. Parton, December 5, 1888; Original Invalid Claim, December 12, 1885; File wrapper endorsements to Leonidas C. Houk, September 22, 1888; Notice of Special Examination, April 24, 1890; Affidavit of Joseph S. Ford, November 3, 1888; Affidavit of Joseph F. Ford, April 30, 1890; Affidavit of William A. Parton, February 2, 1889; Affidavit of Sarah Parton, April 26, 1890, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁹⁴ Affidavit of Robert McIvans, April 25, 1890; Affidavit of Benjamin C. Parton, April 26, 1890; Affidavit of F.L. Emert, and others, April 29, 1890, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

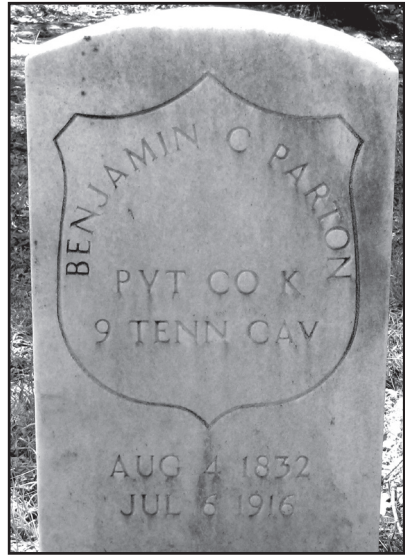
⁹⁵ Original Invalid Claim, May 6, 1890; Report of D.S. McIntyre to John C. Black, April 30, 1890, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.



McIntyre recommended that Parton's claim lacked merit and should be denied. But before the Bureau of Pensions rendered a final decision, the claim unexpectedly benefited from changes to the pension laws and procedures. On June 27, 1890, President Benjamin Harrison signed into law the expansive Dependent and Disability Pension Act which was muscled through Congress by the political clout of veteran's organizations like the G.A.R. A more liberal pension law enabled Parton to have his claim approved at a monthly allotment of \$12. Additional tweaks to the pension laws in the years that followed increased his benefit payments. By June 1912, Parton was receiving \$22.50 per month, which would be the amount he continually received up to his death.⁹⁶

In the early twentieth century, Parton still lived on his Emerts Cove farm with his wife, an adult relative-by-marriage Hannah Pate, and his eighteen-year-old grandson James Parton. By the turn of the century, Civil War veterans were still much admired and honored, yet they were fading from the scene in increasing numbers. Southern Unionists were at a significant disadvantage to combat their erasure from the historical record and organizations that might have offered resistance, such as regimental veterans associations, were never formed for units like the 11th Tennessee Cavalry.⁹⁷

Benjamin Parton outlived his brothers and his other Civil War relatives. In March 1915, Margaret Parton, Benjamin's wife of more than sixty years died. By this time, Benjamin suffered from Bright's disease and tuberculosis. He died on July 6, 1916, and was buried the next day in the Parton family cemetery near Greenbrier Road



Benjamin C. Parton was buried in the Parton family cemetery near Greenbrier Road. Pictured is his gravestone which recognizes his military service to the Union during the Civil War. Photograph by Mike Gourley.

⁹⁶ Declaration for Invalid Pension, September 10, 1890; Report of D.L. Frisk, February 27, 1893; G.M. Saltzgaber to Benjamin C. Parton, May 24, 1915, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁹⁷ U.S. Census, 1900, 2nd Civil District, Sevier County, Tennessee, 21.

not far from the banks of the Little Pigeon River where he used to swim. This location is a dozen miles from where his most famous descendent would build the entertainment complex “Dollywood.”⁹⁸

Parton’s status as Civil War veteran entitled him to a regulation military headstone at government expense, even if buried in a private cemetery. Any veteran’s death inevitably left behind unfinished details to be sorted out, such as award of accrued pension funds and reimbursement of medical expenses or burial costs. If the deceased veteran left behind property or real estate valued at more than \$100, those assets were considered sufficient to meet final expenses, and payment of accrued pension monies was denied. Benjamin Parton’s last pension check for \$67.50 (three months’ worth) arrived four weeks after his death and according to law was promptly cancelled and returned to the Bureau of Pensions. His son Albert Huston Parton then wrote to the Bureau of Pensions seeking payment of \$47.25 which he believed was due him as his father’s executor as well as submitting final expenses (\$4.50 in doctor’s fees, \$1.00 for medication, \$75.00 in nursing care costs, and \$6.60 for the undertaker). Because Benjamin Parton’s estate amounted to \$100 in real estate, \$70 in property, and \$15 in cash, well over the government’s set limit to pay for burial expenses, the request was denied. Citing outstanding debts left by his father, Albert Parton wrote a series of letters to the Bureau of Pensions in 1916 and again in 1918 seeking payment of any remnant of the accrued pension only to be denied each time. After a final appeal in 1919, no further attempts were made and the paper trail ended.⁹⁹

* * * * *

The closing of the sole remaining Parton brother’s pension file severed the last direct link to their Civil War service. But what can be missed if we do not remain attuned to fully seeking out the past? It has only been in the past thirty years that scholars have been able to begin rebalancing the historical scales to judge southern Unionists

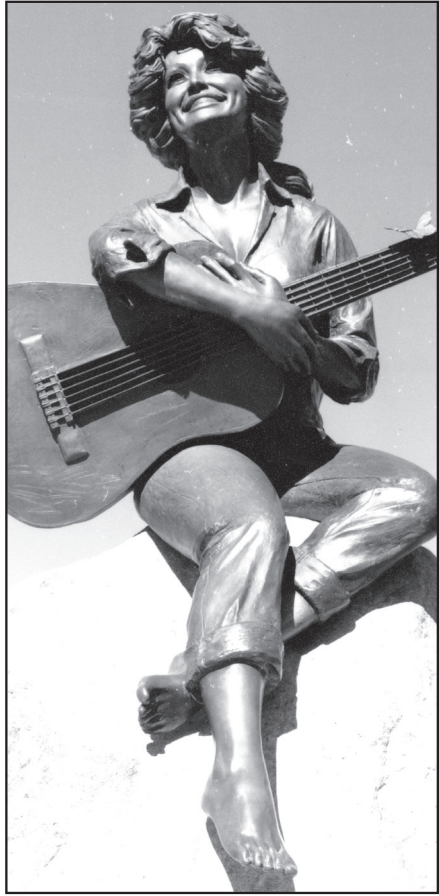
⁹⁸ Benjamin C. Parton to G.M. Saltzgeber, March 17, 1915, Affidavit of Robert P. Clark, M.D., November 25, 1916; Guy O. Taylor to Chief of Finance Division, August 25, 1916, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.

⁹⁹ Sevier County Tennessee, Applications for Headstones in Private Cemeteries, 1909-1925, Entry 592, Box 290, Record Group 92 Records of the Office of the Quartermaster, NARA; Albert H. Parton to the Commissioner of Pensions, October 23, 1916; Albert H. Parton to the Commissioner of Pensions, November 8, 1916; Reimbursement Form, December 12, 1916; Albert H. Parton to the Commissioner of Pensions, December 12, 1918; Albert H. Parton to the Commissioner of Pensions, May 17, 1919, all in Benjamin C. Parton, Pension File, Entry 15, RG 94, NARA.



and their struggles in proper context.¹⁰⁰ What started out as a small project of idle curiosity instead morphed into a quest to reconstruct one family's collective war-related experiences over a fifty year period to better understand a region too often bypassed within Civil War history. The Parton records available at the National Archives are a valuable trove of information which answer many questions about the unchronicled past of one of East Tennessee's most famous families. These official documents open a window into the family's missing Civil War history.

The Partons and other families who sacrificed for the Union cause provide insight into the complex role of East Tennesseans during the Civil War, even if their military service was far from glorious and does not fit a traditional standard narrative. Although Benjamin Parton faded into historical obscurity his great-great-granddaughter Dolly Parton brought international attention and acclaim to the mountains of Sevier County. In fact, many of her recordings and interviews include reminiscences about the strength of her ancestors—simple mountain folks who provided for their families the best they could and hoped for a better future for the next generation. This confluence of memory and stories told and retold by the cabin fire sometimes bolsters the idea that the past



A bronze statue of Dolly Parton was officially unveiled on May 3, 1987 in front of the Sevier County Courthouse to commemorate her contributions to the region. Local artist Jim Gray sculpted the statue. The Dolly Statue, by Peter H. Prince, March 12, 1996, Peter H. Prince Papers, MS-2921, Betsey B. Creekmore Special Collections and University Archives, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

¹⁰⁰ Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 198-99.



was a simpler and perhaps easier time, but as the Civil War legacies of the four Partin brothers make clear, the past is never simple, easy, nor even clear.

Luckily, family folklore makes for great songwriting, such as Dolly's "The Better Part of Life" from her 1973 album *My Tennessee Mountain Home*. Given that Dolly Parton's narrative sparked this unexpected research journey into the lives and legacies of the Parton brothers, the final words should be hers:

Life was simple for us then
If only it could be again
How I wish we could go back in time
But time moves on and nothin' lasts
Except the memories from the past
Memories from the better part
Of life we left behind.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Dolly Parton, "Better Part of Life," *My Tennessee Mountain Home* (Sony Music, 1973); Dolly Parton Lyrics, "Better Part of Life," <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/dollyparton/betterpartoflife.html>.