

In 2019 a large collection of family history of the Trotter and Wynn families of Sevier County was donated to the East Tennessee Historical Society & Museum by the Great Grand-Daughter of Dr. Ashley Wynn Trotter and Julia Belle Wynn, Nancy Wynne Childress. The physical artifacts of this collection are stored with the E.T.H.S & Museum while the letters and photographs are stored with the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection of the Knox County Public Library. The story of this collection dates back to some of the earliest families in Sevier County, Tennessee with the Wynn family establishing themselves in Sevier County in 1801 and the Trotter family dating back to the late eighteenth century. These two families would go on to open a store together and name children after one another before the union of Ashley Wynn and Julia Belle in 1878. So who were the Trotters and the Wynns? And why is this collection important to the preservation of East Tennessee history?

Trotter Family Background and History

The Trotter family of Sevier County can trace their lineage back to the Trotters of England with James Trotter of Scotland being the first of his line to immigrate to the colonies. The family first settled in the part of Virginia which would become Kentucky. James' grandson, John Sevier Trotter would move the line to the newly established State of Tennessee in the Middle Creek area of Sevier County. The first Tennessee born children of this line came in 1801 as Archibald A. Trotter was born. John's second wife, Asa White would give birth to William Harrison Trotter in 1814. And William Harrison would be Ashley Wynn's father. Both William Harrison and Ashley Wynn would pursue careers in the medical field with Ashley Wynn being a dentist; both serving

their community. One of William Harrison's brothers, Isaac Trotter, would serve the community as a Reverend for a small church.¹

By the 1860 census there were ten Trotter households in District 5 of Sevier County with nine of those households being farming households and the other being a merchant household running the Trotter & Wynne Store which would hold a central place in the community acting as both a store and a meeting house for the community.² The 1860 Census Records show that the Trotters of Sevier County owning real estate averaging between \$1,000 and \$2,000 in value and personal wealth averaging above \$1,000 with one household holding \$10,000 in real estate value and over \$5,000 personal value.³ This places the family as one of the more influential and wealthy families of the area. Adding in their history of settling in Sevier County at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Trotters are an integral part of Sevier County, and East Tennessee, history.

Wynn Family Background and History

The story of the Wynn family in Sevier county follows a similar path as the Trotter family. Ashley Wynne was born in Virginia in 1801 and in 1830 married a woman from Sevier County

¹ "Biographical/Historical Note", Trotter Family Papers, MS.0230. University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, Betsey B. Creekmore Special Collections and University Archives, <https://scout.lib.utk.edu/repositories/2/resources/5107>.

² Newspaper accounts state that the store was the site of a meeting to discuss the construction of a wagon road through the Smoky Mountains into North Carolina. The modern US Route 441 runs along what would be a similar path to the route they discussed.

"The Road Across the Smokey – Public Meeting – A New Beat between Sevierville and Knoxville, etc", *Daily Press and Herald*, 27 April 1875, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/584937253/?terms=Trotter&match=1>.

1860 Census Records, District 5, Sevier County, Tennessee, Pages 85-101.

[https://www.fold3.com/search?view=BROWSE&columnStates=!\(\(facetType:general.title.id,selectedLabel:Census%20-%20US%20Federal%201860,selectedValue:%2719%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.1,selectedLabel:Tennessee,selectedValue:%27tennessee_TAB_Tennesseef%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.2,selectedLabel:Sevier,selectedValue:%27sevier_TAB_Sevierf%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.3,selectedLabel:District%20No%205,selectedValue:%27district%20no%200000000005_TAB_District%20No%2051%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.4\)\)&docQuery=\(filters:!\(\(type:place,values:!\(\(label:United%20States%20of%20America,value:rel.148838\)\)\), \(type:general.title.content.type,values:!\(\(label:Census,value:census\)\)\)\)](https://www.fold3.com/search?view=BROWSE&columnStates=!((facetType:general.title.id,selectedLabel:Census%20-%20US%20Federal%201860,selectedValue:%2719%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.1,selectedLabel:Tennessee,selectedValue:%27tennessee_TAB_Tennesseef%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.2,selectedLabel:Sevier,selectedValue:%27sevier_TAB_Sevierf%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.3,selectedLabel:District%20No%205,selectedValue:%27district%20no%200000000005_TAB_District%20No%2051%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.4))&docQuery=(filters:!((type:place,values:!((label:United%20States%20of%20America,value:rel.148838))), (type:general.title.content.type,values:!((label:Census,value:census)))))

³ 1860 Census Records.

and had settled in Sevier.⁴ The 1850 census shows him holding real estate value of \$1,200 and being a Methodist Preacher.⁵ By the 1860 Census Ashley's real estate holding had increased to \$4,000 and his children had established their own households in the county living and farming right alongside the Trotter family.⁶ One of these two children, Thaddeus Daugherty (T.D.) would become a lawyer and be Julia Bell's father.

The Wynn family traces back to the Wynne's of Wales. The first Wynne to settle in the colonies was Robert Wynne who had immigrated sometime between his birth in 1622 in Kent, England and his marriage to the widow Mary Poythriss. The Wynns would establish themselves through military service British officers in the colonies. Four generations of this branch of the Wynn family would live in Virginia until Ashley moved to Sevier County setting his roots there. Roots which would link them to the Trotter family through marriages, operating a store together, and even naming children after each other's family. It shouldn't be taken as a coincidence that the first Wynn in Sevier County was Ashley Wynn, and the Great Grandfather of Nancy Childress who donated the collection was Ashley Wynn Trotter. These two families had entrenched themselves into Sevier County history and established a strong bond with each other that impacted their communities.

⁴ Phillip Ashley Wynne Family Tree Page, Acestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/100409606/person/342280683801/facts?_phsrc=pxg379&_phstart=successSource

⁵ 1850 United States Census, Tennessee, Sevier, Eastern Subdivision 12, Ashley Wynne, Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/8054/images/4206053_00130?pId=6531761.

⁶ 1860 United States Census, Tennessee, Sevier, District 5, [https://www.fold3.com/search?view=BROWSE&columnStates=!\(\(facetType:general.title.id,selectedLabel:Census%20-%20US%20Federal%201860,selectedValue:%2719%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.1,selectedLabel:Tennessee,selectedValue:%27tennessee_TAB_Tennesseef%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.2,selectedLabel:Sevier,selectedValue:%27sevier_TAB_Sevierf%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.3,selectedLabel:District%20No%205,selectedValue:%27district%20no%200000000005_TAB_District%20No%2051%27\),\(facetType:general.title.browse.4\)\)&docQuery=\(filters:!\(\(type:place,values:!\(\(label:United%20States%20of%20America,value:rel.148838\)\)\), \(type:general.title.content.type,values:!\(\(label:Census,value:census\)\)\)\)\),keywords:Wynn\).](https://www.fold3.com/search?view=BROWSE&columnStates=!((facetType:general.title.id,selectedLabel:Census%20-%20US%20Federal%201860,selectedValue:%2719%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.1,selectedLabel:Tennessee,selectedValue:%27tennessee_TAB_Tennesseef%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.2,selectedLabel:Sevier,selectedValue:%27sevier_TAB_Sevierf%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.3,selectedLabel:District%20No%205,selectedValue:%27district%20no%200000000005_TAB_District%20No%2051%27),(facetType:general.title.browse.4))&docQuery=(filters:!((type:place,values:!((label:United%20States%20of%20America,value:rel.148838))), (type:general.title.content.type,values:!((label:Census,value:census))))),keywords:Wynn))

The story of the collection and its journey to the ETHS begins with Ashley Wynn and Julia Bell. Dr. Ashley Wynn Trotter was among the first graduating classes (1889) of Vanderbilt's Dental School which opened in 1879. The letters he would exchange with Julia would record his homesickness, his searches for less expensive places to board, and the passing of their first-born child while he was away in Nashville.⁷ They would have six children together, but their first two children both died in infancy. Of their surviving children, Jess would go on to travel extensively and the family collection held in the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection contains many letters written by Jessie during her travels as well as a large collection of postcards which she collected during her travels.⁸ Their youngest child, Lucile, would marry Robert Brooks Childress, a prominent stock dealer, and move into his home in Laurens South Carolina.⁹ Some of the family heirlooms in this collection traveled with her to South Carolina. There the couple had just one child, Robert Brooks Jr. He would go on to become a prominent illustrator of the mid-twentieth century illustrating the likes of the Dick and Jane children's books, the Duncan Hines portrait used on their boxes, and the Great University Portrait Series.¹⁰ Robert Childress would marry Nannett Hutchings of New York and move to Trumanburg, N.Y. where he became an established illustrator. Together Robert and Nannette had five children, the youngest of which was Nancy C who would go on to donate the family heirlooms and treasures to the ETHS, in effect bringing them "back home".

The bulk of the collection comes from Dr. Trotter and Julia, and their children with many of the items in the collection come from the life of Lucile Trotter and Richard Childress, but there

⁷ Julia Bell Trotter to Ashley Wynn Trotter Letters, Trotter Family Collection, Box 1, Folder 6, MSC 0969, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection.

⁸ Trotter Family Collection.

⁹ "Weddings", *Knoxville Sentinel*, 18 June 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586666729/?article=240ca7a2-9fd3-456b-997e-0b5f8134320f&terms=Trotter>

¹⁰ "Robert Childress", Norman Rockwell Museum, <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/robert-childress>.

are items such as the letters between Ashley Wynn and Julia that make this collection so valuable to the history of Sevier County. These letters show the spread of illness throughout the county during the 1880s and how it impacted the communities. The collection also shows the luxury that the Trotter family enjoyed through their economic status with the collection containing numerous letters that Jess Trotter has written to her family back home and postcards that she had collected during her extensive travels through the Americas, the Middle East, and Europe. The letters from Jess show that she traveled well and stayed in hotels such as the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City.¹¹

The artifacts held by the ETHS such as the child dresses and christening gown are seen through the photographs in the McClung collection¹² This collection highlights the Trotter family's service to their community through artifacts such as Dr. A.W. Trotter's writing desk and mortar and pestle. It also shows a family steeped in the farming heritage of East Tennessee with various pottery, pots, and a yoke for carrying buckets. These artifacts show a family which enjoyed the rewards of their labor and service such as a ladies change purse with a 14k gold chain. And most importantly, they show a family that had strong bonds and cared for one another.

¹¹ Jess Trotter to Julia Bell, Trotter Family Collection, Box 1, Folder 12, MSC 0969, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection.

¹² Family Photographs, Trotter Family Collection, Box 1, Folder 16, MSC 0969, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection.