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Word from Huntsville

By

Marjorie Ann Reeves

Being born in 1810 in Virginia, James Watkins Fennell was brought to Deposit with his parents in 1818 making the family one of the earliest settlers in the Tennessee Valley. He married and made his home in the Gunter'sville area in the early 1830s. Fennell acquired large acreage of land developing a working plantation which was located near a crossing on the Tennessee River by various shoals. While Gunter'sville was under continuous attack by Union soldiers during the War Between the States, Dr. James Fennell and his family struggled to survive.

The Fennell family had four sons serving in the Confederate Army, a son-in-law, had a grandchild die, and James died in 1864 while being harassed by the Yankees. Cassie Fennell, the fourth child of James' children, was a young lady who kept a diary which aids the future in understanding what Gunter'sville and Madison County experienced during the unpleasant times of the 60s.

On January of 1861, Cassie wrote that she took part in a wedding and out of the six bridesmaids, five were Fennells. When Cassie sang a Union song during the reception, she was ignored but when she sang a secession song, the crowd was pleased. In April of 1861, Governor Shorter put out a call for 3,000 troops

and local males joined up. Cassie wrote, “Sister and I wish to make a flag for the Marshall Boys’ Company.

On May 29, 1861, she wrote, “We all went to Guntersville today to see the two volunteer companies leave on the boat. I have never witnessed such a scene before. There were several thousand persons there and all were bathed in tears while some of the ladies shrieks rent the air at intervals as they bid farewell to their husbands, brothers, and sons for they knew that it was a last farewell. The ladies were not alone in shedding tears for I believe there was not a man present who did not weep.”

Every July 4th all of United States celebrates the independence of this country. The populous, by 1860s, was made up of Revolutionary Veterans and their sons and daughters who understood fighting for one’s freedom. Cassie wrote, “We usually have a great rejoicing on this day but this year – how different! I see no reason why we should not; it was on the 4th of July that we declared our independence of the English as well as the North.” But, at last, there were no festive picnic held in 1861.

After the invasion by the yankees into Huntsville the mail delivery stopped leaving everything to be passed on by word of mouth or letters carried by friends and relatives. Cassie wrote on April 18, 1862, “It has been a week since Huntsville was taken and in that time scores of refugees from Madison County and from that city itself and Kentucky and Tennessee have passed

here and a greater part of them stopped as they said they felt safe on this side of the Tennessee River. Huntsville is about 30 miles from here. One of my uncles was taken prisoner there but they finally let him loose.”

“The yankees treat the Negroes very badly in Huntsville. The Negroes go to them for their free papers and they whip them and send them home. They have at last passed a law to shoot all who come to them as they are tired of them. They have shot several.” “The negroes here are badly frightened by the yankees because they treat the Negroes very badly over in Madison and Limestone counties.” On April 24, 1862, she wrote, “We heard the yankees were at Guntersville and Warrenton and they there were taking up all the refugees and all soldiers who were at home.” A fight near Camden in Madison County took place as “It was a part of the army that was fighting only about 100 of the citizens that were tired of the low Dutch ‘Lording’ over them. Most of the Northern Army at Huntsville are Dutch.”

A few days ago the yankees went to Uncle David Allison’s (he was taken prisoner when the yankees first captured Huntsville) house and did all the mischief they could; breaking up the furniture, boxes, trunks, tearing up clothes and dashing them into the yard and stealing money and letters to the amount of \$1,700. They tried to tear down the house. They are treating a good many of the Madisonites very badly.” Mr. Soott

was here this morning and says, “there is a complete reign of terror in and near Huntsville. Nearly every man there has been arrested on mere suspicion.” “People are almost afraid to offer resistance for fear the yankees will destroy all their property.”

Cassie’s June diary entrants included: “Heard today the Federals burned Bellefonte, Larkinsville, Stephenson, and Woodville in Jackson County. It is known Gen. Mitchel has sent forces to burn these places.” “I have two cousins in Madison County, Alabama, Isham Fennell and Hubbard Hobbs, who the yankees have ruined. They have taken all their meat and corn, torn up their beds, broken up their furniture and stolen their money. They even went so far as to examine cousin Hubbard’s wife and daughter’s persons to see if they could find anything.” “We understood today the Southern soldiers burned Aunt Charity Lea’s cotton because she sold it to the yankees. The yankees took her prisoner, as if a 60 year old lady could have stopped the burning. But that is like them, they make war on women and children as well as men.”

In July, she wrote that Gen. Buell arrived in Huntsville with 75,000 soldiers. “The people say he is more of a gentleman than Mitchel and if he is not he ought to be hung for Mitchel should be hung to the highest tree in Alabama. Everybody hates him, even his own men.” In September, she wrote, “A gentleman arrived here this morning directly from Huntsville and said the Federals had all left there Saturday. They

burned food and supplies before they left. Everybody is rejoicing and I am so happy that I do not know what to do.”

North Alabama did not see much action from the yankees until they came back in July of 1863. She wrote, “News came yesterday that the yanks were in Huntsville again. The refugees are crowding this side of the river.” “Firing heard nearly all day in the direction of Whitesburg.” “We heard this morning (on the 18th) that the Federals have left Huntsville. The yanks took all the citizens’ horses, pulled down their fences and turned the cattle into the crops. They also took all of their provisions.” By August, “The yanks have reoccupied Huntsville.” Refugees are coming thick and fast,”

In May of 1865, Cassie wrote, “Peace has been made and the South has gone back into the Union. There is very little rejoicing, the people know that they must submit but it is hard, after all the blood has been spilled, to go back to submit to yankee government.”

References:

- *Celebrating Guntersville Heart of the Old South Best of the New South* by The Heritage Committee
- Cassie Fennell’s Journal