

My dear Furman:

I have been anxious to write to you for sometime, but have been hindered. I promised to write about great grandfather and great grandmother, but I found I was mentally going into the particulars too much, so I stopped to read a history of the War of 1861-65, to see if anything was left for me to tell about that period of our history. The book is presented to me by a lady in Virginia. It is the only satisfactory history of the war I have ever read. I want you to get a copy. It is "A Youth's History of the War of 1861", by R.G. Horton. The Southern Publishing Company, Dallas, Tex., price 1.40.

About my father, your great-grandfather. He was born in 1798, and was 28 when Thomas Jefferson, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, died. He was a great reader, and having slaves to work his farm, he had time to read. He thought a great deal about the future of his children and educated them as best he could. His oldest son your Uncle James had a college education (at Center College) and afterward studied law under Gov. Lowell. He delivered his maiden address at the bar, of which address Gov. Lowell was proud. But Brother did not like the law. Then Pa sent him to medical school. Brother practiced medicine after that. My father was not able to educate the rest of us as well.

When a youth, Pa was a clerk in a store in Virginia. As a young man he was captain of the Militia. The title of Captain clung to him, he was known as Captain Hatchitt. After moving to Kentucky he was elected Sheriff of Henderson County. These various positions gave him a knowledge of human nature, and he knew its needs. A firm belief in and reliance upon God, he was eminently a religious man, believing the Bible was a revelation from God, and Jesus his Son was our Savior, was to him all that was necessary for belief, and he was devoid of the many superstitions of the day.

Although he thought the Bible justified slavery, and the Constitution of the U.S. recognized it, yet he hated it, and said "The masters are more to be pitied than the slaves, for they inherited the slaves and did not know what to do with them". He was kind to his slaves. I never knew him to whip one, and none ever ran away, which was very common, except two who were taken in part payment for the farm just before we went South. I remember a girl about 17 or 18 coming to him with a switch in her hand, saying "Whip me, master". He said "What for?" She said "Cause i have been bad". He took the switch, his lips trembling with laughter, gave her a few strokes across the shoulders, and she went off seemingly happy.

He was progressive and tried many things to learn what the community needed and the climate suited. He planted mulberry trees and tried raising silk worms. His land expanded nearly to the Barren Meeting house, where he had a tan yard near. He had a mill, run by horse power, which ground both wheat and corn. He contributed liberally to the County Fairs, and to building a plank road from Zion to town. He encouraged school teachers from the North who came among us, when we at the same time did not know whether they were abolitionists or not. He hired a negro girl once to a Mr. Scantlin and heard he was cruel to her. Pa got on his horse and rode through the woods the nearest way, through a deep snow, and brought the girl home. Her feet were so frostbitten the flesh had begun to slough off. We children and my mother collected around her, crying about those poor feet. Since the War I have heard a preacher intimate that our concern for the sick negroes was on account of the dollars of his money value. What a charge to bring against us!

My mother was the doctor of the family, she had two large doctor's books and a box of medicines. She made remarkable cures. I remember a negro came to the house from the field full of cramps and pain; he threw himself on the grass, crying, "Oh, mistis, mistis!" She called for a low chair and a bottle of lobelia, and gave him a small dose at a time until he relaxed, and the poison in his system counteracted. The negroes were proud of the appearance of their master and mistress.

You cannot imagine the excitement the Abolitionists created to free the negroes. We did not know when we would have an insurrection. The Dred Scott case, -- a negro who ran away from his master and the people would not return him -- the case was brought before the Supreme Court. Judge Taney decided he should, according to the Constitution, be returned to his master. I remember thinking Judge Taney would be mobbed on account of this decision. Then came "Uncle Tom's Cabin", which caused the people of Europe to weep. Then John Brown's Raid. He thought the negroes through the South would rally to him, and there would be a general insurrection. An old negro about (near) Harper's Ferry refused to follow him, and was shot to death. The Daughters of the Confederacy

have had a stone marked commemorating his loyalty, which they want to put over his grave; but the Secretary of War will not consent.

This brings up to 1860, the presidential campaign. The Democrats had too many candidates in the field. Northern Democrats had Stephen Douglas, for whom Pa, Mr. Kirby and Edwin voted, thinking that if Douglas should be elected a compromise would be made. But they were disappointed. In this campaign Lincoln said "This country cannot exist half slave and half free." Pa said, very emphatically, "That is a declaration of war". Lincoln was elected, South Carolina withdrew from the Union, five other states followed before the year was over. Virginia called a convention, twenty states send delegates, they could effect nothing. Pa still thought the people would come to their senses and compromise. We moved South in the fall of 1861. We were two years in Arkansas. Brother Dillard (Collins) had a hospital in Pine Bluff. Your grandfather entered the service. Finally the Federals made such inroads into Arkansas that he moved the hospital to Keachi, LA. Pa had bought a farm, but they thought it best for him, Ma and myself to go to LA, which we did, and went to Pleasant Hill, about 40 miles nearer New Orleans. This was about March 1864. In April General Dick Taylor began his retreat towards Texas. I have never heard how many men he had under his charge, but with several women I stood on a slight eminence when his infantry passes, four abreast, in close ranks, and I could see them forming in line a mile away. The cavalry I did not see; I suppose they passed at night. The next day about night the Federals under General Banks entered the town. I looked for the flag but it was not hoisted (Edwin had told me I would know by this where headquarters were, and to get a guard). Every living thing, chickens, calves, etc., was shot by Banks's mob, the fences were torn up, rails and plank and paling, and made bonfires of; the church and schoolhouse were ablaze. They broke open the store rooms, and robbed the rooms. They threatened to burn our house, but I said, "You will not, there is no sense in your doing that". A soldier told us to get a guard, where headquarters was, and to ask for General Cameron; that he protected the women and children. He, General Cameron, came and had the soldiers sent to the guardhouse. He asked if he could call in the evening. Brought a Colonel Lucas from Frankfort, KY and a Captain Dimmett of KY. The next morning he and Captain Dimmett came to tell us goodbye. I said "General, when you retreat you must call on us". "Retreat, why we are going to Brownsville, Texas". "No, you will not", I said, "What makes you think so? Why, you send on a brigade and the train of the brigade, then another brigade and its train. General Green will join General Taylor between here and Texas border, they will make a stand, you will get tangled up with your trains, and be defeated". The next day he came alone and said "It was as you said, we got tangled up with our train; I alone am left of my command". The next day they fought in Pleasant Hill. The Yankees retreated silently in the night, leaving the wounded on the field. Next day Pa hired a negro man and went over the field and made tents of their blankets to protect them from the sun. A wounded soldier told the Federal general to "thank the old man, for they would have died from the heat if it had not been for the little tents". This was told by Brother, who came through, looking for us. That was the last thing Pa did. He said 'I will turn aquatic and go into the gulf'. A sweet memory to think of such a brave, patriotic Christian.

With love,
Your Aunt Nee.

[Transcribed in 2002 by Gary S. Collins from what is apparently a typed copy of the original. At the top of the first page is the handwritten note: "Capt. John Archard Hatchitt, the father referred to, lived from 1837 to 1861 on his Thousand Acre Farm, about five miles from Henderson, KY."]

The author's family name 'Hatchitt' is an alternate spelling of the more common 'Hatchett'. Her father was Captain John Archer (or Avohard) Hatchett (b: 1798) and she married Harvey Meadows.

The letter is addressed to Furman Lester, Cornelia's nephew by her sister Virginia Hatchett and James B. Lester.]