



William J. 'Billy' Parker,
Caney Fork Confederate Soldier
(1845-1915)

Billy Parker was the firstborn son of John A. Parker, and his second wife, Nancy Phillips.¹ John married Nancy on 18 November 1844² in (what was then, still) Haywood county. Billy followed less than 3 months later being born on 18 February 1845³ in Caney Fork. Although Billy was the firstborn in his family, it is likely that he didn't enjoy the typical privileges of a firstborn, given that there were at least five of his eight older half brothers and sisters growing up with him⁴:

*Jane Parker, b. 1824. aft 1850, d (md. Thomas A. Brown, (1824-bef 1850)

*Melvina 'Lavinia' Parker, b. 1827, d. 1893 (md. Hugh Rogers (1817-1896)

*Pleasant Parker, b. 1829⁵, d. 1895 (md.. Rachel Phillips (1832-1903)

*Hugh A. Parker, b. 1829, d. 1902 (md. 1st, Mary 'Polly' Hawkins, (1833-ca 1873, 2nd Martha J., (1832-bet 1900-1910)

*John P. Parker, b. 1831, d. 1864 (md.. Nancy Queen, (1829-bet 1880-1900)

*Mary Parker, b. 1833, d. 1900 (md.. Archibald Nelson 'Arch' Price, (1830-1915)

*Jefferson Davis Parker, b. 1837, d. bef 1850

*Elizabeth Tabitha Parker, b. 1840, d. 1911 (md. James A. Moore, (1830-1910)

When the '*Great War of Northern Aggression*' exploded officially on April 12, 1861, Billy was 16 years old. However, when the recruiters came around in August of that same year, he had become an 18 year old, thus qualifying for service.⁶ This strong desire to defend his homeland is thus evidenced in having changed his age, in order to join the Confederate forces. He was mustered into Company F, of the 29th NC Infantry unit on

August 31, 1861⁷, made up of young men from Buncombe, Cherokee, Haywood, Jackson, Mitchell, and Yancey counties.

His years of service were quite eventful. On October 10th, 1864 in the Battle of Allatoona, (Bartow county, Georgia) an especially bloody battle where almost half of both Federal and Confederate forces died⁸, Billy was wounded.⁹

The battle resulted in a Federal victory:

*"Maj. Gen. Samuel G. French's Confederate division arrived near Allatoona at sunrise on the 5th. After demanding a surrender and receiving a negative reply, French attacked. The Union outer line survived a sustained two and a half hour attack, but then fell back and regrouped in an earthen "Star" fort of Allatoona Pass. French repeatedly attacked, but the fort held. The Rebels began to run out of ammunition, and reports of arriving Union reinforcements influenced them to move off and rejoin Hood's force."*¹⁰

He was able to nurse his wounds, and recover to the point of continuing to serve. On December 15-16th, the Battle of Nashville was fought, and ended as well with a Federal victory. General George Thomas summarizes some of the Confederate losses:

*"During the two days' operations there were 4,462 prisoners captured, including 287 officers of all grades from that of major-general, 53 pieces of artillery, and thousands of small-arms. The enemy abandoned on the field all his dead and wounded."*¹¹

Billy was one of those prisoners captured and hospitalized, having been wounded again in the fighting.¹² He was also promoted to sergeant, apparently during the battle.¹³ After about 6 weeks of recovery, he was transferred to the POW camp in Louisville, KY on January 27th, 1865. On February 3rd of this same year, he was again transferred, this time to Camp Chase POW camp in Columbus, OH.¹⁴ There he was to wait out the remaining four months of the war until his oath of allegiance on June 13th, 1865¹⁵:

*"As the war wore on, conditions (in Camp Chase) became worse. Shoddy barracks, low muddy ground, open latrines, aboveground open cisterns, and a brief smallpox outbreak excited U.S. Sanitary Commission agents who were already demanding reform. Original facilities for 3,500-4,000 men were jammed with close to 7,000...crowding and health conditions were never resolved. As many as 10,000 prisoners were reputedly confined there by the time of the Confederate surrender."*¹⁶

When the war was over, as so many others, Billy returned home a broken man, suffering from wounds that would afflict him for the rest of his life. His first petition for a pension was submitted on 1911; however it was rejected and he was forced to resubmit it a year later in July of 1912:

SOLDIER'S APPLICATION FOR PENSION

*State of NC
co. of Jackson,*

On this 1st day of July A.D. 1912, personally appeared before me, _____ C.S.C. in and for the state and co. aforesaid, W.J. Parker, age 67 years and a resident at Whittier post office, in said co. and state, and who, being duly sworn, makes the following declaration in order to obtain the pension under the provisions of an act entitled "An act for the relief of certain Confederate Soldiers, Sailors and Widows" ratified March 8, 1907; that he is the identical W.J. Parker who enlisted in Co. F, 29 Reg., NC State Troops on or about the 31st day of Aug 1861 to serve in the armies of the late Confederate States, and that while in said service at Altonna Heights, Georgia and Nashville, Tenn. about Dec or Jan 1865, he received a wound or wounds, etc.

(Applicant will here state the nature and extent of his wounds and disability, so that a proper classification can be made under the new Pension Law passed by the General Assembly of 1907. Read said section of said law carefully and to accomplish the classification therein called for let statement here as to nature and extent of wounds, etc. be very full and explicit.)

*First wound shot through the body
Second " shot in the head*

He further states that he is and has been for twelve months immediately preceding this Application for pension, a bona fide resident of NC; that he holds no office under the United States or under any State or co. from which he is receiving the sum of three hundred dollars as fees or as salary annually; that he is not worth in his own right, or the right of his wife, property at its assessed value for taxation to the amount of five hundred dollars (\$500) nor has he disposed of property of such value by gift or voluntary conveyance since the 11th of March 1885, and that he is not receiving any aid from the state of NC or under any other statute providing for the relief of the maimed and blind soldiers of the state.

Sworn and subscribed to before me this 6 day of July, 1912

*J.P. Sherrill
Signature of J.P.*

*W.J. Parker
Signature of applicant*

Also personally appeared before me W.A. Eular who resides at Dillsboro post office, in said co. and state a person whom I know to be respectable and entitled to credit, and being by me duly sworn, says he is acquainted with W.J. Parker, the applicant for pension, and has every reason to believe that he is the identical person he represents himself to be, and that the facts set forth in this affidavit are correct to the best of his knowledge and belief, and that he has no interest, direct or indirect, in this claim.

W.A. Eular

Also appeared before me J.H. Teague a physician in good standing in said co. and state, and being duly sworn, says that he has carefully and thoroughly examined W.J. Parker, the applicant for pension and finds such disability for manual labor as is described below by reason of wounds received while in the discharge of his duty as a soldier or sailor of NC in the service of the late Confederate states.

(Let physician here give full and explicit professional information as to the nature and extent of wounds, disability, stating particularly whether disability amounts to three-fourths or not, in order to accomplish the classification called for under the new Pension Law by the General Assembly of 1907)

I find the above applicant to be suffering with some _____ of lungs _____ as caused by a gunshot wound _____ the lungs causing terrible _____ disables him duly _____ from doing regular manual labor.

Sworn and Subscribed to before me, this 6th of July 1912 J.H. Teague M.D.¹⁷

This time accompanied by this clarification:

*Webster, NC
July 22nd, 1912*

State Pension Board

Raleigh, NC

Gentleman

If you will refer to your files for last year you will see we had some correspondence as to Wm. Parker.

You turned him down on the grounds that the Dr. certificate only read 2/3 disability.

I know of my own knowledge that the Dr. last year intended to write 3/4 disability and he had good and sufficient causes to pass upon the disabilities of Mr. Parker in his _____

As I have previously stated there were no better soldiers than Parker.

You can see from his application that he received some very serious wounds.

I hope you will allow this man a pension and place him on the rolls.

Yours truly

M.D. Cowan, C.S.C.

Sworn and subscribed to before me this 22 day of July 1911

M.D. Cowan

*Wm. Self
Signature of Physician¹⁸*

However, in spite of his war wounds and the trauma of the whole experience, he got on with his life. He married C. Jane Chastain ca 1868, a descendent of Dr. Pierre Chastain, a French Huguenot fleeing from religious persecution who arrived with his family in James River, VA in 1700.¹⁹

Billy and Jane raised their family in Caney Fork, which consisted of the following children:

Samantha J. Parker, 3 Mar 1869-31 March 1944 (md. Rufus Wood, 1867-1944)

Sarah 'Alice' Parker, 22 Sep 1871-27 Sept 1933 (md. Wm. Floyd Cook, 1865-1920)

Arilla Elizabeth Parker, 13 Oct 1875-5 June 1949 (md. William Bryson Morris, 1876-1951)

Erastus Sylvester Parker, 27 Aug 1876-11 May 1946 (md. Barbara Teresa 'Teola' Stephens, 1879-1956)

Andrew T. Parker, Jul 1878-16 June 1952 (md. Mary 'Etta' Stephens, 1882-1963)

Alfred Miles Parker, 8 Jul 1880-17 August 1944, (md. Lavanda Catherine Phillips, 1881-1966)

Maude Parker, b. ca. 1886

Jesse Oscar Parker, 16 Jun 1887-2 January 1951, (md. Bessie Victoria Beck, 1887-1959)

According to Zinnie Hooper Willis²⁰, Billy Parker was half Cherokee. An oft-repeated story among many western North Carolina families is that of a Cherokee grandmother; many of these rumors likely being true. However proving and documenting this fact for many is unlikely. If Billy Parker were indeed half Cherokee, that would likely mean that either his father, John A. Parker, or his mother, Nancy Phillips, was a full-blood. To date, there is no documentation to prove this for either one of them. Were Billy one quarter Cherokee, (a more likely possibility) that would mean one of his grandparents was full-blood. Were that the case, the only possibilities are the following:

William Parker Sr.

Elizabeth (Pleasant?)
Daniel Phillips
Ruth/a (Farris/ies?)

Daniel and Ruth Phillips migrated from SC at some point before 1830.²¹ It is thought that they came from 96 District, which included the present day counties of Oconee and Pickens, and which were in fact, part of Cherokee territory. There are family ties in this area to this day, stretching from about two centuries ago. However to date, this author has not encountered the typical ‘Cherokee rumor’ stories among descendants that could be attributed to this couple. It is interesting to note the time frame though: they moved directly to Caney Fork, which was somewhat of a refuge for those trying to avoid the Indian Removal Act, and the resulting Trail of Tears march in 1838.²²

William Parker and his wife Elizabeth seem more likely candidates; Elizabeth’s elusive identity seems to lend more credibility to her being the Cherokee of which some of her descendants speak. Another possibility is that two or more of Billy’s grandparents were part Cherokee, adding up to him being half. For example if each of his grandparents were ¼, that would add up to Billy being ½. But, this is an area of ongoing research, and hopefully at some point in the future Parker researchers will be able to uncover some documentation.

Billy Parker lived his last years as a widower in Qualla, Jackson county.²³ Jane having died in 1894.²⁴ He is said to have been a basket weaver²⁵. Being right on the border of the reservation, these interesting notes also add to the intrigue of a possible Cherokee connection.

His health was probably never very good, and it can be attested by a report in the Jackson County Journal:

*“Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Cook went to Soco last week to see Mrs. Cook’s father, who is seriously ill.”*²⁶

This visit could possibly have been Alice’s last time to see her father. Billy’s oldest daughter, Samantha Wood, and her family had already moved to Washington state by this time²⁷ but the rest of the children were still living in the area.

A 50th reunion celebration for Confederate veterans was held on the county courthouse grounds on September 18th, 1915 with a special monument being dedicated and a picture taken of all veterans present.²⁸ However, as a sad final note, Billy had passed away just a month earlier²⁹, missing out on what surely would have been a proud and meaningful moment for him and his military years.

¹ *Journeys through Jackson, Vol. XVII, No. 1, Winter 2007, pgs. 27-34*

² *“Neath Western’s Sod,”* compiled by Howard R. Symours Jr., p 68.

³ Tombstone, Lower Coward cemetery, Caney Fork, Jackson county, NC. It should come as no surprise that Nancy was obviously pregnant (6 months) with Billy when they married. This author has come across the same circumstance several times in Caney Fork, where the law was far away, and traditional moral values were easily compromised. In fact, it has been assumed that John A. Parker’s first wife died, but there has been no record found neither of her name, nor of her death date. Had she died, one questions why John waited so long to marry Nancy, especially considering that he was a widower with 8 children to feed? The likely answer is that Nancy, (she and her family apparently from SC) and having moved to Caney Fork ca. _____, moved in with John to help with the children, became pregnant, and they simply put off marriage until a convenient time.

⁴ 1850 Haywood county, NC census: household 807; those who appear on this census are: P.M. Parker, 20, Q.A. Parker, 20, John Parker, 19, Mary Parker, 16, Elizabeth Parker, 10. Jane and Lavinia both had apparently already married when the census was taken, and Jefferson Davis is assumed to have died.

⁵ It appears that Pleasant and Q.A. (or ‘Hugh’: this writer theorizes that Q.A. and Hugh were the same person) were twins. It has been theorized but never documented, that John A. Parker’s mother was Elizabeth Pleasant. Given the typical naming customs of this day, the existence of ‘Pleasant Parker’ lends credibility to this theory

⁶ *“NC Troops 1861-65, A Roster, vol VIII”*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ www.cr.nps.gov/hps/abpp/battles/ga023.htm

⁹ *“NC Troops 1861-65, A Roster, vol VIII”*

¹⁰ www.cr.nps.gov/hps/abpp/battles/ga023.htm

¹¹ www.civilwarhome.com/thomasnash.htm; the Union forces numbered some 49,000, and the Confederates, 31,000. Deaths:

Union: 2,900; Confederates; app. 13,000

¹² *"NC Troops 1861-65, A Roster, vol VIII"*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ www.civilwarhome.com/campchase.htm

¹⁷ Application for State of North Carolina Pension

¹⁸ Application for State of North Carolina Pension

¹⁹ Two Ships to Virginia, "Huguenot Refugees to Virginia 1700" Mary & Ann, 12 August 1700. *"Pierre Chastain, a femme et cinq enfante."* Orem, UT: Ancestry, Inc., 1999

²⁰ Personal interview, 2 July 2003. Zinnie is one of Billy's great-grandchildren.

²¹ 1830 Haywood county, NC census

²² Linda Hoxit Raxter, Jackson county historian

²³ 1910 Jackson county, NC census: district 91, household 110

²⁴ *"The Cemeteries of Jackson co., NC,"* p 57. Published in 1998 by the Jackson Co. Genealogical Society

²⁵ Personal interview, Zinnie Hooper Willis.

²⁶ Jackson Co. Journal, July 30, 1915, microfilm #Sy-JCN 3. Hunter Library, WCU, Cullowhee, NC

²⁷ 1910 Skagit co., WA census; p 8B, household #71, town of Hamilton

²⁸ www.thomaslegion.net/pictures.html

²⁹ Tombstone