

Captain James Wharey Terrell

James Wharey Terrell (December 31, 1829-December 26, 1908), son of James Orville and Ermina Kilpatrick Terrell, he boasted that every drop of his blood descended to him from Revolutionary War soldiers. His grandfather Joel Terrell was wounded at the battle of Guilford when he was only sixteen; his great-grandfather John Williams was at Yorktown with General Washington; his mother's grandfather Kilpatrick fought under General Morgan at Cowpens; and her other grandfather Thomas Wharey was a prisoner of the British during the war. Perhaps he had a right to his dramatic claim.

He was born in a house built by his great-grandfather Thomas Wharey, on the French Broad River in Rutherford County, NC. When he was three years old, his parents moved to Rutherfordton, where he had the advantage of attending an academy until he was fifteen, acquiring a good basic education.

In 1846, he went to Bethel in Haywood County to his grandfather Kilpatrick's to learn the trade of tanning. He continued reading and studying in his spare time, alternately attending further school, teaching, and working in the tanyard.

In 1852, he came to Qualla, where he and William Holland Thomas, who was then in the State Senate, became partners in the tanning business. After a year, he sold his interest to Mr. Thomas and became manager of all Mr. Thomas's business at Quallatown: a store, tanyard, boot and shoe shop, a blacksmithy, and a wagon-making shop; he also served as Postmaster of Quallatown.

After the Cherokee Removal, he became Disbursing Agent for the Cherokee Indians, traveling across the Smoky Mountains from Knoxville, carrying in his saddlebags the gold which was due the Indians under the

terms of the Treaty of New Echota. During these trips, as was the custom, he often stopped overnight at houses of strangers, trying to act casual about his saddlebags which contained the gold, while keeping them always in sight; he told of hearing heavy breathing one night close to his bed, and fearing that he was to be robbed, was much relieved when he realized the sound came through the thin wall from the next room. Once during the family's absence at church, his house burned to the ground, presumably by thieves, as no trace of the gold was ever found.

In April, 1862, he joined the Confederate army in "Thomas's Legion," a company of one hundred Cherokees and a dozen white men, raised by Colonel William H. Thomas, who resigned his position in the Senate to lead this unit in defending the mountain passes from East Tennessee into Western North Carolina. This unit was the last unit east of the Mississippi to capitulate at the end of the Civil War. A marker erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy at White Sulphur Springs near Waynesville, indicates the spot where, on May¹⁸, 1865, the last shot was fired. In an autobiographical sketch in an early Jackson County Journal, Captain Terrell claims that he himself fired the last shot!

After the war, and some further association with Colonel Thomas in a general store, he was appointed in 1871 as Director of the Western Division of the WNC Railroad Company, contracting for railroad construction in North Carolina, Alabama and Georgia.

In 1880 he was elected to the NC Legislature from Jackson County; in 1885 he was elected Chairman of the Jackson County Board of Education with duties to receive school money, pay the teachers, and chair the committee which examined the teachers. He joined the Methodist

Church in his youth and throughout his life was an active leader in the religious, as well as the educational and political affairs of Jackson County.

Captain Terrell married Ann Eliza Keener (1834-1870), daughter of Ulrich and Sarah Duckett Keener, pioneer Methodist preacher and teacher for the Cherokee Indians at the Echota Mission on Soco Creek. They had six children, four of whom survived past infancy:

(1) Mary Jane "Molly" Terrell (1859- ?), who married Silas Teague and reared fourteen children in Bryson City, Swain County.

(2) Sarah Ermina "Sally" Terrell (1861-1943), who married Charles Asbury Bird and reared ten children at Qualla, Jackson County.

(3) William Davidson Terrell (1865- c.1940), who married Leo ? , had one daughter and lived in the state of Washington.

(4) Joel Keener Terrell (1869-1953), who married Viola Cooper and reared three sons and one daughter in Jackson County.

After Ann Eliza's death, Captain^{Terrell}/married, in 1875, Sarah Louise "Lula" Woodfin, who survived him by several years.

Captain Terrell was an avid reader, a lover of poetry, a good conversationalist; he loved children and was adored by his grandchildren who enjoyed brushing his sandy hair and fine red beard. He knew many myths of the Cherokees and recounted these and tales of his many adventures with relish; he played a fiddle; he could recite poetry from memory and even composed some of his own. His well-written letters and papers are preserved in the Special Collections at Hunter Library, Western Carolina University.

Captain Terrell died at the home of his daughter Sally Terrell Bird, December 26, 1908, at Qualla. He is buried in the Thomas Cemetery at Qualla.