

Second in a Series—Biographies of our Ancestors

Adam "Ad" Wilson Ancestor of Sam Wilson

Adam "Ad" Wilson was born Feb. 9, 1840, according to census records and his death certificate. He was the second oldest child of John and Sarah "Polly" Wilson; the family lived in the Eusebia/Prospect area of Blount County. He and several young men from Blount and Sevier Counties walked or rode to Kentucky in the fall of 1862 to enlist with the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry. Because Confederates held East Tennessee at this time, they had to travel under cover of darkness to avoid capture. Ad's father, John Jackson Wilson, also enlisted in the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry and was later discharged for a medical disability.

Ad was a Private in Company A, and was captured by Confederate Nathan B. Forrest's cavalry on September 24, 1864 at Sulfur Trestle, Alabama, along with many others in the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry. They were incarcerated on Sept. 25, 1864 at Cahaba Prison (Castle Morgan) in Alabama, where Ad contracted rheumatism. He and his fellow soldiers were released in March, 1865, and they marched from Cahaba to Vicksburg, Mississippi to a parole camp.

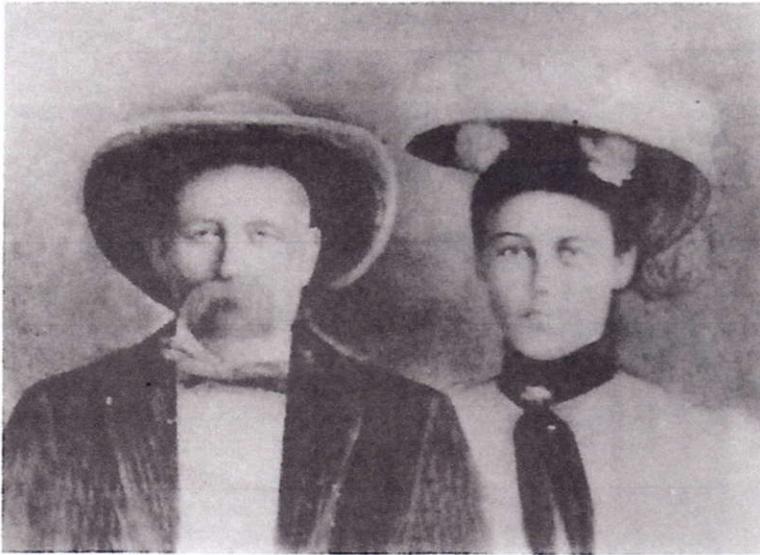
They were among the many released Union prisoners who eagerly awaited transport by steamer to Camp Chase, Ohio, where they would be exchanged and mustered out. Tragically, the steamer Sultana was grossly overloaded, and on April 27, 1865 the boilers exploded about six miles upriver from Memphis. Over 200 men in the 3rd Tennessee Cavalry were either killed by the explosion or drowned. Ad was one of the lucky 170 survivors of the regiment. After receiving medical treatment in Memphis, they were sent on to Camp Chase and were mustered out in June, 1865.

After the war Ad returned home and married Margaret McGhee. The 1870 census shows that they and their baby son, Thomas, were living in Crab Creek Township in Swain County, North Carolina. By the 1880 census Margaret and their five children (William Thomas "Tom", James P. "Pink", Mary C., Nathan Oliver "Ollie", and Martha O.) were living in the 13th District of Blount County. (At the time of the 1880 census, Ad was in the state penitentiary in Nashville, as explained below.) Ad was a blacksmith, but he also was a moonshiner, as were many mountain men as it was necessary to take care of their families. As sons Tom and Pink grew up, Ad brought them into the business and taught them all he knew. They had 19 stills at various locations. They worked three or four stills/locations at one time then moved to other locations. This was done to keep the law officers from pinpointing where they were.

According to son Tom, Ad was a mean man, and "we all were scared of him". He always carried a gun and had several shootouts. In August, 1878 Wilson and two other moonshiners, Hut Amerine and Fletch Emmett, were involved in shootout with Federal Revenue officers from Knoxville along with Blount County deputies. After fatally wounding one of the Revenue Officers, John Cooper, the three moonshiners took off. Several substantial rewards were offered for their capture. In January, 1879 Ad was sentenced by the Federal court to 22 years in the U.S. Prison at Albany, New York for various offenses, but not murder as the Federal court had no jurisdiction in the case of murder. However, his conduct was such as to warrant a pardon; and in February, 1886 he was returned to Blount County.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Adam and son Tom were arrested on moonshining charges. Although they were sentenced to four years in prison, they were released after serving six months.

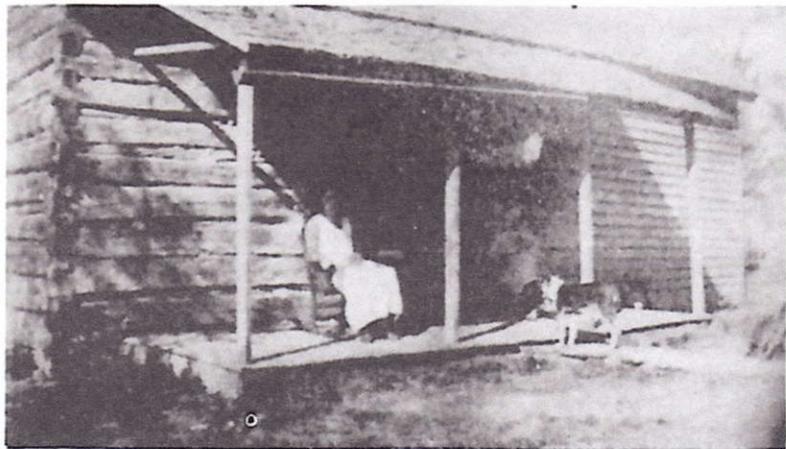
In 1915 the East Tennessee Sultana Survivors Association, which was established in 1892, began to raise funds to erect a monument to honor those who had died in the Sultana disaster. On July 4, 1916 the monument was unveiled at Mount Olive Cemetery in Knoxville. According to newspaper accounts, Ad attended the annual reunions until his death from a stroke on Nov. 20, 1919. He was buried at Bethlehem Cemetery at Ellejoy, and his grave is marked with a military marker. After his death, his widow received a Federal pension until her death on Dec.23, 1935. Callie was buried beside her husband at Bethlehem Cemetery.



In 1896 Ad divorced his wife, who then lived with their son James Pinkney in District 13 in Blount County. In 1904 Ad married Callie Brogdon, a 17 year old from Roane County.

Ad and Callie's Wedding Picture

They lived in a log cabin near Eusebia/Prospect in District 13 of Blount County. Their children were: Sarah (adopted), Jack Corbin (the author's father), Mary Alice, and Polly Ozella.



Ad & Callie's log home in Eusebia/Prospect area