



Jackson McDowell: Picture taken from the book: Tennessee Tales the Textbooks Don't Tell by Jennie Ivey, W. Calvin Dickinson & Lisa W. Rand – 2002: Pg. 74

Anti-Civil War Cookeville  
Editor Barely Escapes Lynch Mob  
by Jennie Ivey  
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A jug of whisky saved the newspaper editor's life.

It was March 1862 that a drunken mob under the leadership of infamous Confederate bushwhacker Champ Ferguson stormed the offices of The Cookeville Times, a weekly newspaper owned, edited and published by White County native Jackson McDowell.

William Black had begun the paper in 1857. McDowell purchased it three years later when he was only 22-years old. In The Cookeville Times, he published 'hard' news along with a generous helping of light stories and verse, some of which he composed himself.

But McDowell's journalistic passion was editorials. He hoped to use his newspaper as a means to persuade rebellious Southerners that there was a better way to settle their differences with the North than going to war.

"It is a mistake for Southerners to destroy the country and themselves," he wrote. "Slavery is as bad for slave owners as it is for slaves; it damages all who practice it...Secession is wrong...Discussion is better than bloodshed."

Some of McDowell's readers agreed with him but many did not. Even though few people in the Upper Cumberland owned slaves, many of them believed the federal government had no right to interfere with the South's "peculiar institution."

Jackson McDowell's family owned and operated Cumberland Institute, a private academy located on a hilltop in the Cherry Creek community of White County. His father, Curtis, was the headmaster; sisters Amanda and Mary were teachers. As war fever in Tennessee reached a fevered pitch in the early 1860's, Curtis McDowell tried to avoid taking sides.

The same could not be said for his younger son, LaFayette.

"I intend to volunteer my services to the Confederate cavalry," he wrote to his father in April 1861. "I shall not be satisfied until I give aid to my countrymen."

And he urged Curtis to warn Jackson to stop the anti-secession editorials: “Persuade Jack to quit printing Union sentiments. He can do no good and is doing much harm.”

But Jackson McDowell would not be silenced. He believed that words were more powerful than guns and hoped that his newspaper columns might persuade people that war was madness.

“I am bound to stand for the government,” he wrote to Curtis soon after the Civil War began, “but a man is hardly allowed to express his opinion now unless he is for the South.”

Those words were soon to prove truer than he could have realized. In the dark of night in March 1862, an angry mob stormed The Cookeville Times. The small building that served as the newspaper office housed not only the printing press but also Jackson McDowell’s living quarters.

Crouched in a dark corner in the supply room, McDowell could see the blood lust in the intruder’s eyes. And he also saw a rope, already rigged as a hanging noose, in their hands.

He winced as he watched the mob topple his bookshelves and trample his beloved books. As they raised their axes against his printing press, the door opened to admit yet another ruffian. Much to the delight of the already – inebriated crowd, the newcomer bore a full jug of corn liquor which he proceeded to share with all who wished to partake.

McDowell realized that this was likely his only chance to escape. Pulling his hat low over his eyes, he melted into the crowd, hoping that in their drunken state none of them would recognize that he was the man they’d come to lynch.

He slipped out the door and began the eight-mile walk to Cumberland Institute, traveling the woods and back roads so as not to be discovered. When he arrived he gave his father as much money as he could spare and warned him and his sisters to be cautious toward both armies.

Mary pleaded with him to enlist with Confederate forces so that he and Fayette could be together.

“No,” he told her, “if I fight, I will fight against Fayette’s side, though I pray for his safety always. I will not oppose my country – the United States of America. I must go far away and live among strangers. That way, if I do have to kill, I won’t be forced to kill my neighbors and perhaps even my own brother.”

Then he was off, heading for the Kentucky line.

Jack eventually joined a Union Army company near Knoxville. Insisting that he supported their cause, he pleaded that they not force him to become a soldier. When the

commanding officer discovered that Jack had a photographic memory, he knew what job to assign him.

Jackson McDowell would become a courier for the Union Army.

He had no need to write notes on paper; he could memorized whatever was required of him. He carried information about battle plans and other news to scattered army camps, first in Tennessee and then throughout several other states.

For two years he rode his horse about the country delivering messages to Union troops, reciting what he had memorized word for word.

He never officially enlisted in the Army, though he was paid a lieutenant's wages for his work. He never wore a uniform. And during the entire two years he served his country, his family never heard a word from him.

But when the war ended, Jack kept his promise to come home. He returned to his beloved Tennessee and established a successful business with LaFayette but he never again worked as a newspaperman. All of the McDowell children married and had families, and all of them spent the rest of their lives in Tennessee's Upper Cumberland region.

The building where The Cookeville Times was published, located at the northeast corner of Broad Street and Dixie Avenue in downtown Cookeville, is no longer standing. And there is nothing left of Cumberland Institute save a few chimney rocks.

But those who are interested in the McDowells can visit their graves. Many of the family members, including Curtis and Fayette and their wives, are buried in the Cherry Creek Cemetery, not far from where Cumberland Institute once stood. Jackson's grave is located in the Mt. Pisgah Cemetery in White County, TN.

#### Poems by Jackson McDowell

"Fiddles on the Cumberland" by Amanda McDowell 1861-1865 pgs. 106 & 310

#### I Love to Hope

By Jackson McDowell

I love to hope when years have flown and gray hairs mark thy  
brow,

The love that now thy bosom owns will be as pure as now.

I love to hope when age shall move the beauty from thy face,  
Deep seated as thy youthful love, each virtue holds to its place

I love to hope thy path through life will lie right close to mine,  
And at the close of mortal strife my place will be with thine.

I love to hope no stain nor blot will mark thy history's page,  
That thou could'st wish had been forgot before thou reach old  
age.

I love to hope when future bliss, for us in days to come,  
For brighter treasures far than this, in the Eternal Home.  
I love to hope when death's dark shade shall dim thy mild  
blue eye,  
Thy maiden virtue may not fade, but guide thee safe on high.

To My Father

By Jackson McDowell

Written at Frank's Ferry – 20 January 1876

Dear Father, the locks on thy head have grown white,  
And dim is thine eye that once was so bright,  
The friends of thy youth are all scattered and gone  
Like autumn leaves when the winter has blown.

Thy form is now bowed, thy steps are not quick,  
Like the clock that's run down, now weak is thy tick;  
Like the clock that's unwound, thy voice must cease  
Till wound up for praise in the regions of peace.

Thy companion, my mother, has long gone away  
And waits for thy coming in eternity's day;  
Thy children are married and scattered and gone,  
And sad is thy lot as thou walkest alone.

The works of thy manhood are decaying with time,  
Thy lessons of virtue are still in their prime;  
Thy students though scattered abroad on the earth  
Remember thee yet, like thy children by birth.

Through the world has dealt hard, and fortune has frowned,  
With virtue and truth thy life has been crowned,  
All that e'er knew thee, if truthful, will say  
In the practice of virtue thy head has grown gray.

Though the sun of bright hopes in darkness may set,  
And thine eyes are oft dunned with the tears of regret,  
Be cheerful, thy virtues in Glory shall shine  
And thy lot cast in with Saints most divine.

To the Students of the Cumberland Institute  
By Jackson McDowell – 1876

Dear friends of the past, long years have gone by,  
Since students together on that mountain so high,  
We reveled, in hope of a future joy,  
And looked for much pleasure unmixed with alloy.

Sweet are the thoughts that run back to that place.  
And see for one moment, each separate face,  
Each character, though different with virtue is found,  
And good will and friendship to each other abound.

Sweet olden time, thou can'st not return  
No thought of the past can thy pleasure inurn.  
Thy rainbow of hope in its beauty hath passed,  
And mem'ry alone is true to the last.

Dear place of instruction, remember thee too,  
As oft I have seen thee in loveliest hue,  
When spring in her beauty had covered thy face,  
Or autumn had stripped thee, like one in disgrace.

Thy rocks and thy trees, how well I remember,  
Thy dogwoods in spring, and thy winds in December.

Thy scenery too, how rich to behold,  
When autumn has tinged it with purple and gold.

Thy founder and teacher, how true to the right, 's  
To the myst'ries of science how sure to give light.  
With ignorance and error forever at war,  
To virtue and truth a sure beacon star.

Curtis McDowell – February 1810, KY-1882 - md Margaret Jadwin – 1819-1848

Children:

Jackson McDowell md Mary Rascoe. They had four children: Gertrude, who died as a small child, Lucien Lafayette md Flora Lassiter, Lela md John Blankenship & Lula May McDowell who md Perry Stubblefield.

Amanda McDowell md Hazel Burns.

Lucien Lafayette md Mary Frances (Cotton) Cantrell. Mary Cotton md 1<sup>st</sup> William Cantrell, cousin of the McDowell's. William was killed in the Civil War. Child of Lucien Lafayette & Mary Cotton Cantrell: William Jackson McDowell

Mary “Molley” Ann McDowell – md 1<sup>st</sup> Pat Cantrell -  
 md 2<sup>nd</sup> 7 March 1868, White Co., TN, John Calvin Bartlett –  
*s/o Joshua Bartlett & Anna Meador "Annie" Anderson - \*See Chapter 3.*  
 Jimmy McDowell who was drowned as a young child.  
 Albina McDowell who died at the age of 15.

Amanda McDowell kept a diary during the Civil War. In it she told of the struggle in which her neighborhood, which lay in northern TN, the "No Man's Land" of that war, was alternately pillaged by both sides. Her two brothers took opposite sides in the conflict and this division colored her comments and opinions. Amanda wrote of Larkin Craig, the man she loved, on many pages of her journal and when she decided to marry another she cut each mention of her lover from the book. Paper had been scarce and she had written on both sides, so many interesting entries were cut out. The original diary and letters are in the possession of Mrs. J. E. Blankenship of Morrison, TN.

The book “Fiddles in the Cumberland” by Amanda McDowell 1861-1865 was compiled by Lela McDowell Blankenship and edited by W.J. McDowell in 1987 - publisher: Richard R. Smith - NY - 1943.

In addition to the family members mentioned in the book the names of many students of Cumberland Institute were mentioned: Jane & Milt Hickman; Sac Pointer and Dank; White Frost & his brothers, Winter and Snow; Harriet Anderson, Mary Aur, Jimmy Griffin & the Camron boys; John Choate, Prettyman "Purt" & his brother Wade Jones; Richard "Dick" Hill, J.Y. Crowell, George Palmer, Fayette, Pat & William Cantrell & Frances; Sallie & Pollie Stone, Pop Morris, Lina Hampton, the Clark boys; the Shugarts & the Williams; Hulda Weaver, Jack Lee, Sallie Jared, the Malones & Breedings; the Coopers, Snodgrasses, Lees, McGees, Simms, Ellers, and many others who attended school at Cumberland Institute & lived in the community. \*See Anderson family – McDowell Family Descendents – [ajlambert.com](http://ajlambert.com).



McDowell family graves,  
 Cherry Creek Cemetery, White Co, TN  
 Photo by Karl Klein  
 Picture in the book: Tennessee Tales the Textbooks  
 Don't Tell by Jennie Ivey, W. Calvin Dickinson &  
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Jackson McDowell's grave,  
 Mt. Pisgah Cemetery, White Co., TN  
 Photo by Karl Klein  
 Picture in the book: Tennessee Tales the  
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Jennie Ivey is a Cookeville writer. More about the bitter struggles that divided a family, a state and a nation can be found in Chapter 6: 'Brother Against Brother' of the book: Tennessee Tales the Textbooks Don't Tell by Jennie Ivey, W. Calvin Dickinson & Lisa W. Rand.

Members of the Gillem family purchased the land the Cumberland Institute was located at.

Terry Bassham wrote: Monday, 05 April 2004:

Do you have any photos of Amanda McDowell (Burns), or of LaFayette McDowell, or Mary. I have seen one of Jackson. Also, I searched Board Valley, where the Burns lived, for over ten years looking for there graves. They moved to Coffee County Tennessee in their later years and are buried, along with Mary McDowell Bartlett and her family in the Prairie Plains Church of Christ cemetery, outside of Hillsboro in Coffee County. Amanda's inscription uses her maiden name; thus, Amanda McDowell Burns, a very rare custom for that day.

If anyone has any photos of the McDowell family please contact me at:

[www.ajlambert.com](http://www.ajlambert.com).

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