

**PUTNAM COUNTY AND THE WALTON ROAD:**  
**MARINA GUNTER, A CIVIL WAR HEROINE**  
**GEN. ALVIN C. GILLEM**

By Ernest H. Boyd

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The Walton Road was of such vital importance to the pioneers of Putnam County that a reference to it could not be overlooked with propriety in an article on the early history of the county. It was of great to the Putnam County pioneers for several reasons. One outstanding reason was that almost all of the early settlers of Putnam county came to what is now Putnam County, from either Virginia or North Carolina, over the Walton Road. Another reason is that two of the four original "stands" of the Walton Road were located in Putnam County. Another reason is that Putnam County had more miles of the Walton Road than any other county, as it traveled this county lengthwise, from the Eastern to the Western boundary line of the county.

For several years before the Walton Road was built there had been a trace or roadway across the mountain from South west Point, near Kingston, to the Cumberland settlements, but the Walton Road, a wagon road, was surveyed and built under the authority of an Act of the General Assembly of 1797, the first General Assembly of Tennessee, the act of the General Assembly authorized Capt. William Walton, a Captain in the Revolutionary War, who had located his military land warrant on the North side of the Cumberland river, at its confluence with the Caney Fork river, to construct a direct wagon road from Southwest Point to this section of the state, over which emigrants could travel and merchandise and live stock could be transported. The Walton Road, from Southwest Pint, near Kingston, to the junction of the Cumberland and Caney Fork rivers, near the present town of Carthage, was completed in 1801. The road was surveyed by Moses Fisk, the founder of Hilham, and was constructed under the direction of Capt. William Walton. The Walton Road was about one hundred miles in length. It contained four stands for the accommodation of travelers. Coming West from Southwest Point the first of these four stands fro the accommodation of travelers. Coming West from Southwest Point, the first of these four travelers' stands was at Kimbrough's, at the Eastern foot of the mountain; the second stand was at Crab Orchard, in Cumberland County. The third stand was at White Plains, in Putnam County, near the Western foot of the mountain, and the fourth stand was near the old Pekin post-office, in Putnam County, this stand, for many years and until it ceased to be used as a traveler's stand, was known as the McKinley stand. There are numerous people yet living who remember when this stand entertained many travelers. It was conducted for many years by the late James and Robert McKinley, well known citizens of this county.

Of course, the road opened up and built by Capt. William Walton, which road bears his name to this day, was not an Appian Way or modern highway, but it served a great purpose and was a public necessity. Over that road many thousands of emigrants from North Carolina and Virginia and some from other states, with their belongings, passed en route to Middle Tennessee and to West Tennessee and points farther West, and practically all of the early settlers of Putnam County came overt that road to this country.

It is indeed strange how soon local history is forgotten by most people, and in the course of a few generations not many people are informed concerning the early history of their own communities. An illustration of this fact is afforded with reference to the old "Burnt Stand" location, just a short distance North of the present location of Tennessee Tech. When the oldest living life long residents of this community were children, that location was known as the "Burnet Stand," but no one now knows whose stand it was, nor when it was burned. It was not one of the original stands on the Walton Road, but evidently, at some date subsequent to the establishment of the four original stands on the Walton Road, there was another traveler's stand at that point and in its day it was a well known stand and after a period of operation it was destroyed by fire. Though the years, there has been an opinion expressed by some that it was a stand owned and conducted by a man named Byrne, and that with the passage of the years, the uninformed referred to it as the Burnt Stand, but there is no information or tradition in the Byrne family of anyone by that name ever having owned or conducted a stand at that point on the Walton Road.

THE HEROISM OF MARINA GUNTER:

The writer is aware that in one book, published at a comparatively recent date, there is given a different version of the cause leading up to the heroic deed of Marina Gunter to that given in other books of generally unchallenged accuracy, and as to that particular it is not the purpose of the writer to indulge in controversy but to merely refer to what occurred on the night of the tragedy, which happened in the early part of 1865. The writer of the book referred to gives the time of the occurrence as during March 1865, which was before the close of the Civil War and when no Courts were functioning in this section of the State.

The well known historian, Bromfield L. Ridley, who was on the Staff of Lieut. General A. P. Stewart, in his book "Battles and Sketches of the Army of Tennessee", at pages 492-5, in his account of that occurrence, which contains a picture of Marina Gunter Harris, concludes his account by stating "this is the greatest achievement of female heroism of its kind that has ever been recorded, and places Miss Gunter on the pinnacle of glory that belongs not alone to patriotism, but to the grandeur of filial affection "the time that stretches from the cradle to the grave, spans the Heavens and is riveted through eternity to the throne of God on high".

Judge Ridley was a resident of Murfreesboro and, while collecting the data for this book he visited Putnam County and procured a picture of Miss Marina Gunter Harris, who was then living and from sources which he regarded as dependable and trustworthy obtained the particulars which he published in his book. In his book he states that he was indebted to a prominent Methodist minister, a native of Putnam County, for a record of Marina Gunter. In his book he states that Larkin Gunter, the father of Marina Gunter, was a Southern man and that three men, claiming to belong to the Federal Army, resolved to kill him. That one night these three men, Maxwell, Patton and Miller, went to Gunter's home and told Gunter, in the presence of his family that his time had come to die and that they took him out of his house and that in a short time his daughter Marina Gunter, then seventeen years old, heard the licks and her old father's groans, when she rushed to the woodpile got an ax and hurriedly approached the scene, that the night was dark and drizzly and that the men were standing by a log, on which they had placed her father and that he was pleading for the for his life. That she killed two of the men with the ax and broke the third one's arm and that he hurriedly escaped. That she lifted up her father and helped him into their home, that soon she sought and obtained protection from the Federal General at Nashville. That she said afterwards, that upon hearing her father's groans she grew frantic and did not know how she managed it, nor did she know anything until she had rescued her father.

It is known that Patton held the horses, and that passing him, Marina Gunter struck him with the ax almost severing his arm and that she then commenced slashing Miller and Maxwell with the ax. Miller and Maxwell both desperately wounded, were found the next day in a large hollow stump near the scene of the tragedy. They were taken to the home of near by farmer where they both died within a few days.

Miller is said to have been a Federal soldier from Kentucky.

The matter of variance in one particular, to which I referred in the beginning of this account, is that in the account of this tragedy contained in the comparatively recent book referred to, the writer stated that he had information which he regard as reliable to the effect that Marina Gunter's father and the father of Patton had swapped horses and that Gunter claimed to have been cheated in the horse swap, and was preparing to bring suit against Patton's father for damages, and that thinking to head suit off, the elder Patton induced his son, Tom and Maxwell and Miller to go to Gunter's home, call the old man out and give him a whipping with some advice about leaving the country, and that Civil War issues were not involved in the affair and that Gunter was understood to be a Union man. Since there were no Courts functioning in this county during the Civil War, that account did not state when or where Gunter was threatening to bring suit against the elder Patton fro damages growing out of a horse swap, no did it state how Miller, understood to have been a Kentucky Federal soldier, became so desperately involved in a Putnam County horse swap.

The scene of this tragedy was in the 18<sup>th</sup> District of Putnam County about two miles from Bloomington Springs.

Marina Gunter married Joseph Harris. She lived to a ripe old age and died only a few years ago. She was a quiet, unassuming lady and one, not knowing her history, would never have suspected from her quiet, friendly manner that she had played the leading role in this much heralded tragedy of the Civil War.

#### GENERAL ALVIN C. GILLEM

Tennessee furnished three Federal Generals to the Northern Army and one of them was a native of Putnam County, General Alvin C. Gillem, who was born and reared on the old Gillem farm on Martin's Creek in the 18<sup>th</sup> District of Putnam County.

Upon the death of his step-mother, Mrs. Ruth Gillem, about 35 years ago, this farm was purchased by John Vantrease and Morgan Long and divided between them. Gen. Gillem graduated from West Point in July 1847. He was (contined).....

\*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>