



## Susanna McGavock Carter

1829-abt.1893

### Enslaved at Carnton

1829 Susanna McGavock was born to Joe and Clara McGavock, most likely at Carnton<sup>1</sup> in Williamson County. Her parents were slaves owned by Randal McGavock. Clara and Joe had six children: Ann, Martha, Patrick Henry, Fannie, Susanna and Joanna. She was named Susanna, her grandmother Suky was enslaved at Carnton as well. “Suky” was a common nickname for Susanna.

1830 The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in Williamson County, TN listed Randal McGavock as head of household. The rest of the household members were listed with slash marks in their category designated by age, gender and race. The household consisted of seven free White people and nineteen enslaved Black people. Four female slaves under the age of ten, fitting Susanna’s age, were listed.

1840 The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in Williamson County, TN listed Randal

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<sup>1</sup> Note: It is entirely possible that Fannie could have been born in Nashville. Her brothers’ pension application for the U.S. Navy listed Nashville as his birthplace and Randal McGavock lived and worked in Nashville consistently until after the mid 1830’s.

McGavock as head of household. The rest of the household members were listed with slash marks in their category designated by age, gender and race. The household consisted of four free White people and twenty-one enslaved Black people. Three female slaves between the age of ten and twenty-three, fitting Susanna's age, were listed.

- 1843 Randal McGavock died. Susanna was listed as one of Randal's twenty-two slaves in the inventory of his estate. All twenty-two of Randal McGavock's slaves were bequeathed to his wife Sarah Rodgers McGavock. "Susanna, 14" was listed along with the rest of her family.

Negroes

Sterling aged 60 Richard aged 15 Ben aged 45  
 Michael aged 43 Joe aged 17 Wm aged 21 Madison  
 aged 19 Lewis 18 Edmund 11 Jack 8 Maria 5 George 3  
 Carry 17 months Turkey 70 Mary 45 Betty 32 Francis 17  
 Susanna 14 others Eliza 7 Julia 6  
 Stock

- 1846 Sarah McGavock bequeathed Susanna to her granddaughter Selena, daughter of Elizabeth McGavock Harding. "To my grand daughter Mary Salina, infant daughter of Elizabeth Harding I give and bequeath my servant girl Susannah—and in case of the death of the child before mine, then I give Susannah to my daughter, Elizabeth Harding."

Item 4 To my grand daughter Mary Salina,  
 infant daughter of Elizabeth Harding  
 I give & bequeath my servant girl  
 Susannah—and in case of the death  
 of the child before mine, then I give the  
 said girl Susannah to my daughter, Eliza  
 both Harding

At some point during this time period Susanna went to Belle Meade in Nashville, which was the home owned by Elizabeth McGavock Harding and her husband

<sup>2</sup> Inventory of Randal McGavock, Williamson County Archives, Franklin, TN.

<sup>3</sup> William Hicks Jackson Papers, Special Collections, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN, Box 4, Folder 26

William Giles Harding. Susanna was owned by Mary Selena Harding and worked in the home. She married a man named Isaac Carter

1857 November 29: Susanna gave birth to her oldest child Robert Porter Carter, called "Porter."



1858 (abt) Susanna gave birth to daughter Alice Carter.

1861 August 5: Susanna gave birth to son Joseph H. Carter, named after her father.



1862 April 27: Excerpt from letter from Elizabeth McGavock Harding to William Giles Harding.<sup>4</sup>

*"Susanne says she intends to get Lena to write you a letter expressly for her, and she will tell you everything that has occurred since you left."*

May 11: Excerpt from letter from EMH to WGH.

*"I have promised the children a visit to Franklin with Susanna to go with them, as a protector, and think they will go tomorrow, and return Wednesday; that is as long as I can spare them."*

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<sup>4</sup> All letters are from the Jackson/Harding Collection, Special Collections, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN

May 15: Excerpt from letter from EMH to WGH.

*“I told you in my Monday’s letter, I had promised the children a short visit to Franklin; I permitted them to go this morning, accompanied by Susanna, to stay two days.”*

May 18: Excerpt from letter from Mary Harding to her father WGH.

*“Susanna begged Sister this morning, to write to you for her, but I said wait, I am writing today and you must take another time.”*

May 21: Excerpt from letter from EMH to WGH.

*“The children returned from Franklin on Monday, accompanied by Sister Louisa and the two youngest boys, Stephen and Van, who are still with us; the reason Louisa came with them was, Susanna’s baby, was taken sick while there, with brain fever; and Dr. Hughes pronounced it hazardous to bring him home Monday, and L. knowing how uneasy I should be if the children did not get home, came with them, and Randal promised to write today, how Joe was, and if well enough, to send them home, no letter came neither Susanna and baby, and I feel quite anxious, hope they will come tomorrow.”*

May 26: Excerpt from letter from EMH to WGH.

*“Susanna is still in Franklin with her sick baby. Dr. Hughes is attending him and says it would endanger his life to bring him home yet, and I wrote Randal Ewing to have her remain until it was safe to move him.”*

May 31: Excerpt from letter from EMH to WGH.

*“Susanna got home this evening, with her child, he is much reduced, but quite fat enough for health now.”*

June 3: A letter to William Giles Harding, written by an amanuensis.

*My kind and affectionate Master,*

*I would have written before this, but Miss Selene, Mary and myself and Joe, payed a visit to Franklin, expecting to stay three days only. My two young Mistresses returned at the end of that time, but I unfortunately had to stay two weeks on account of my baby’s illness. I returned last Saturday, and am glad to say that Joe is well again.*

*I left all the Franklin relatives well. Miss Ellen Ewing, Miss Bettie and Mars John’s children are improving rapidly. I heard Mars. Randal E. say that you might expect a long letter from him soon. Miss Mary S. received a letter from mars. Randal and he was well, and was delighted to tell us, he had received a letter from you. Her health is as well as usual, but is improved by receiving letters often from Mars. Randal and yourself. I can assure you that Mistress’s health is better than when you left: yes, a great deal better; she does*

*not complain of that pain in her side, and is a great deal more cheerful than when you left. I am sorry to hear that you and Gen B. have been moved but hope you find your present quarters comfortable. Does Gen. B. keep you in good spirits yet? I hope he does for our sake.*

*Well I will endeavor to give you a little news of the farm. In the first place, Mistress rode over it last Friday; she found things looking very well. Mr. Beasley says the crop is fine as he ever saw, ad the hands working well. We have 14 or 15 beautiful young calves. Mr. Hague had the sheep sheared a few weeks ago, they were looking well and the lambs also. Now you know that they have been so stingy that we have not had a lamb this spring. The excuse is "nobody lobes lamb and peas but Master." I know if you were here I would have two killed just for you. The stock had the distemper, as you know, before you left home, but is getting better; you know that is a slow and troublesome disease. We lost one or two yearling colts, one of them was Della's Glence filly's colt. Rial tells me his hog department is getting along finely. I hope you will find it so when you get home.*

*I have to fill up with this Master for Mistress and Miss Seny have written up everything else We have lost poor old Uncle Alek. He has left a large family to mourn his death. We also lost Aunt Isabel, after a few weeks illness. I know this will astonish you, two deaths so near together. She died 25<sup>th</sup> May. She was taken as we thought with rheumatism, but terminated in paralysis.*

*Mars. John Harding and his family have been down for 3 or 4 weeks, but we are expecting them the latter part of this. Miss Mary S. has just received a letter from Mars. Randal, and he was very well, and he writes that Gen Murey (who was at the prison at Nashville with you) died there the 28<sup>th</sup> May, with consumption and grief.*

*We are having fine and healthy weather now, and no complaint for rain. WE have had a great many fine strawberries, unless there is a remark made by some one, "I wish Master had these." I do assure you your presence and familiar face are both missed as the little group sit at the table, and that vacant chair looks so lost and forsaken, but a short time will pass I hope, before it will be filled again. You know very well what you used to do after breakfast; that was to meet the sick, you would laugh to see Mistress trying to fill your place, but I believe she gives it up that I can beat her, and says that you taught me and that is the reason I can beat her.*

*I must leave room for Bob, Susan and Milly. Bob says he is still hauling to town, William also. He sends much love and may thanks for your kind remembrance of him and hopes with all the rest that you will soon be at home again. Milly sends much love and says she prays for you as well as herself, and says if you are in need of a cook, let her know it, and she will come and cook and black your boots. Susan joins Bob in love and says she has more right to say*

*that she misses you than any of the rest. You do not know Master how much you are missed at home and especially by me.*

*It is now ten o'clock and I must close. If you knew how hard it was to get this letter written, I know you would appreciate it. Now, good-bye. May the Angels of Heaven guard and protect you, while is far from your beloved home, is the prayer of*

*Your unworthy servant,*

*Susanna*

June 29: Excerpt from letter from EMH to WGH.

*“Susanna received your letter yesterday, and I have never seen her so gratified, and proud, not only of the letter itself, but your commendation and appreciation of her fidelity, and devotion to yourself. I amused at her this morning; she was looking at your photograph, and remarked, “Master looks as if he was about to say to you “Wife, I want big Lou, little Lou and Kingston, today to save hay, it looks like rain, and we must push ahead; “singularly enough, just then, Mr. Beasley stepped in and said, “Mrs. Harding, I have a great deal of hay down, and it looks very threatening, can’t you spare me a few hands?” I laughed and told him what Susanna said, and that I could not resist your request, though I was expecting company; he thanked S for the suggestion, and added that he would have to call on the photograph often, if the weather continued rainy.”*

August 25: A letter to William Giles Harding, written for Susanna by Randal Ewing.

*My dear and honored Master,*

*You said in your letter to me that I could pretty near always find some idle fingers to write for me. In this you were partly right and partly wrong; there are idle fingers in abundance, but it is hard for me to make them industrious. I have at length engaged Mars Randal Ewing as my amanuensis, and he has most kindly offered to do all my writing for me, in consideration of certain glasses of peach cordial, black-berry wine and other knick-knacks, to be paid by me for his services in this behalf. Mars Randal and Miss Ellen and their three children are here now and will remain a week or two. Their infant child, a fine little fellow, is now quite sick “teething” Dr. Bowling came out to see him tonight, he seems to be resting better now since the Doctor’s visit.*

*Mars John and Miss Mag were here a week or two ago and we hear from them every day or two. Little William is sprightly and intelligent as ever, he is one of the smartest and most interesting little fellows in the world, and talks a great deal about his Grand-Pa, and says he means to kill dem old mans that took his “Ganpa” and put him in prison.*

*You have no idea of the pleasure your letter afforded me and all the servants, we felt that we were loved and remembered by you in the midst of your own trouble, and we felt doubly encouraged and bound to be obedient, dutiful and industrious, in your absence. Many servants have run away from their homes, and sought a new home and destiny with strangers. Many who have tried it have returned to their duty, repentant and satisfied that their true happiness consisted in doing their duty and remaining in their former condition. I am happy to say that so far not one of yours has disgraced himself and you by such conduct. I hope this state of things will last, and I think it will unless they are tempted and lured away with false hopes of equality and freedom.*

*Miss Malvina Bass read your letter to me, and said it was one of the best and most appropriate letters she had ever read indeed it went the rounds, I was proud of it and showed it to every one who came, and they all agree that it was most kind and appropriate and say I ought to feel highly “complimented.” [sic] I do feel more than “complimented” my dear Master, I feel happy and proud of it, that you should think so much of me, and the word “complimented” too feebly expresses what I feel.*

*I have taken your advice about trying to fatten Mistress on mutton [we killed a fine \_\_\_\_\_ and] Aunt Chloe says she knows she could make a steak out of it that you would love to eat yourself. I cannot succeed, however, in making her ride it out. Mars Randal takes the children to the Bosley Sulphur Springs every evening and morning but Mistress seems to be always too busy to ride out, and I have given up that part of the prescription as a bad job. She is thinner a good deal than when you left home, and complains frequently of a pain in her side, but she has not been in bed one hour from sickness since you left. This is surprising to me for you have no idea what Mistress has to go through. Since Mars Randal has been here he has taken some things off her mind and saved her some anxiety, but the load thus lightened is far more than she is able to bear up under without feeling it's great weight.*

*We have lately been greatly annoyed by marauders coming out and shooting turkeys and sheep, and stealing water melons and the like—but all these things have to borne for there is no redress now for any wrong however grievous. Law and order are at an end, and the law of might is now the rule by which all govern themselves. Uncle Rial tells me to say to you, that his hogs have had cholera and a great many have died, but he says we have fared better than any of our neighbors around, the disease seems to be now at a stand. We have given them arsenic as a medicine.*

*We have succeeded this evening for the first time in three or four weeks in making our own meal. Mars. Randal and Mr. Beasley took up the grist mill from the steam power and attached it to the horse power at the barn—and this*

*evening after being out of meal for three days, we got a turn ground on our own mill. An embargo has been laid upon all the mills near us, and we had to wait until we could make our own meal. The boiler kept getting out of order and there is a great crack in it, and Mars. Randal thought it would endanger life to attempt to raise steam in it, and the chances of getting a new boiler now is about equal to that of buying a seventy-four gun ship—it can't be done. Besides at the present price of labor would cost 5\$500., Mars Randal says to buy and put in a new boiler—and Frank and George have made this horse power answer every purpose without spending one cent in money.*

*Uncle Manuel says the mares and colts and the four stallions are all doing well. Mars. Randal says that Gazelle's colt is a perfect beauty, the colts all look well. There was a requisition made on the place the other day for horses by the Government for cavalry horses. Six were taken out of the Park, none of your horses were taken. Mars Randal took a receipt from the officer who came to press them, and then sent word immediately to the owners of the horses that they were taken so that they might take such action to secure pay for them as they thought best. Mistress loaned a horse to little Johnny Martin, your former race rider, who was here as a paroled prisoner, he said he wanted to go south to his Sister, having taken the oath of allegiance, and Mistress loaned him a horse to go on. He looks like a mere child, and home will suit him much better than soldiering.*

*Mars. John's family are all well, or were so on Last Sunday evening. Mars. Frank McGavock is well and also Miss Amanda, and the family in generally. He bears up under the loss of his property more cheerfully than you can imagine—indeed he always seems to be in the best of spirits. Major Graham is just the reverse, and told Mars. Randal the other day that he would give half he was worth if he could die that night with a stroke of apoplexy. He comes over nearly every day, and sits and talks an hour or two with Mars. Randal, who tries hard to cheer him up. He says he is too old to work, and he believes he will have to beg his bread, and he would rather die than do that, he says.*

*The servants are all well as usual—those that are here, twelve have gone to work on fortifications, they come home every Saturday night and stay until Monday morning. Miss Mary's health is not so good for the last week or so. I think it is owing to her anxiety and suspense about Mars. Randal getting exchanged. All the servants send their love and desire to be affectionally remembered, and you know I join tem sincerely. Farewell dear Master, may you soon be with us again is my prayer. Your faithful servant, Susannah.*

*P.S. This letter was dictated by Susannah. R.M.E.*

*P.S. I had almost forgotten to say that old Master was out her on Sunday last, and looked well and hearty indeed. His health is as good as I ever knew an*



*old man of his age to enjoy, and he can ride about as well as he could when you went away.*

1865(abt) Susanna gave birth to son William “Willie” Carter.

1869-70 Son, Porter Carter, was listed as being a student at Fisk University in the Fisk University catalog.<sup>5</sup>

1870 August 19: The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in District 12, Davidson County, TN showed Susanna and Isaac living with their children. Isaac “works on farm” and Susanna “keeps house.” Neither Susanna nor Isaac could read or write. The family is designated as “B.” Isaac, age 41, Susanna 39, Porter 11, Alce, 10, Willie, 9, and Joe, 6.

1871 March 6: Susanna gave birth to son Isaac Carter.

September 17: At the first “Colored People’s Fair” Susannah, her sister Joanna Lytle and other family members won many premium prizes.<sup>6</sup> Joanna won Premium in “Best Blackberry Wine” and Susanna won a certificate in the same category! Joanna was an accomplished cook and was employed by the Harding family at Belle Meade with Susanna after the Civil War.

Mrs. S. Carter—Premium—Best Pumpkins

Mrs. S. Carter—Premium—Best display of garden seeds.

Mrs. Joanna Lytle—Best quince preserves.

Mrs. S. Carter—premium—Best can blackberries

Mrs. J. Lytle—premium—Preserved citron

Mrs. J. Lytle—premium—Best blackberry wine

Mrs. S. Carter—certificate—Best blackberry wine

Mrs. C.H. White—premium—best peach cordial (Carrie Richardson White, Susannah’s niece)

Mrs. S. Carter—premium—best apple cordial

Mrs. S. Carter—premium—Best canned pears

1872 February 17: Susanna’s sister, Joanna McGavock Lytle, opened a freedman’s bank account. On her application she listed her siblings as well as her parents. Parents: Joe and Clara, Siblings: Patrick Henry, Fanny, Ann, Martha and Susanna.

1874 Susanna’s daughter Alice attended Fisk University.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S., School Catalogs, 1765-1935, Fisk University 1869 & 1870 (accessed ancestry.com)

<sup>6</sup> Nashville Union and American, Nashville, TN, Sunday 17 Sep 1871, pg. 4 (accessed newspapers.com)

1880 Susanna's sister, Joanna, accompanied Selene Harding Jackson to Colorado Springs, CO. Selene's health was poor and her doctors sent her to Colorado for treatment. Selene's husband W.H. Jackson wrote his wife detailing events at home for his wife.

February 15: "Suzanna has returned from McGavocks and goes out to see Jas Southall who is very sick."<sup>7</sup>

June 14: The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in District 12, Davidson County, TN showed Susanna living with her husband Isaac, a farmer, and their children: Robert Porter, 28, Alice 22, Joseph H., 18, Willie, 15, Isaac 9 and grandchildren, Robert, 4 and Susanna, 2. Interestingly, Isaac was listed as "Insane" by the enumerator. Neither Susanna nor Isaac was literate. The entire family was designated as "MU."

1883 May 8: "*.....I shall insist on Cousin L going to get Susanna if she is not engaged as she is now at Mrs. Whartens near the Vanderbilt for the next month....*" This is an interesting snippet, as it shows that Susanna was not working exclusively at Belle Meade.

1884 An article in the Daily American described the old slave cabins at Belle Meade, this is most likely where Susanna would have lived before and after the Civil War.

Gen. Jackson then escorts us to the outer-walls. A castellated stone ice-house, a dainty bit of Tudor-Gothic, is devoted to the dairy department. Here spring water flows out of the rock. In an adjacent enclosure are a dozen cabins, relics of the old ante-bellum way of doing things. There the slaves lived and here the emancipated slaves yet live. None of them left the place when made free. Gen. Jackson has about 200 colored people on the place—living in the old slave quarters, contented and happy. They receive wages and are cared for in a patriarchal way. Gen. Harding never sold his slaves, and his kindness was so conspicuous that now they are free, they cling to the old cabin home. You will find few such patriarchal pictures in the South.



1887 July 6: Selene Jackson wrote a letter to her cousin Carrie Ewing at Riverside. She mentioned Susanna and relayed a message from Susanna to her sister Martha who lived and worked at Riverside. *Riverside was the home of James Randal McGavock in Franklin, TN. "Susanna is here with me while Cousin L is at Fernvale. Susanna says tell Martha we shall expect her down on a visit to us when she is through waiting on your mother. All well at Susanna's yesterday.*

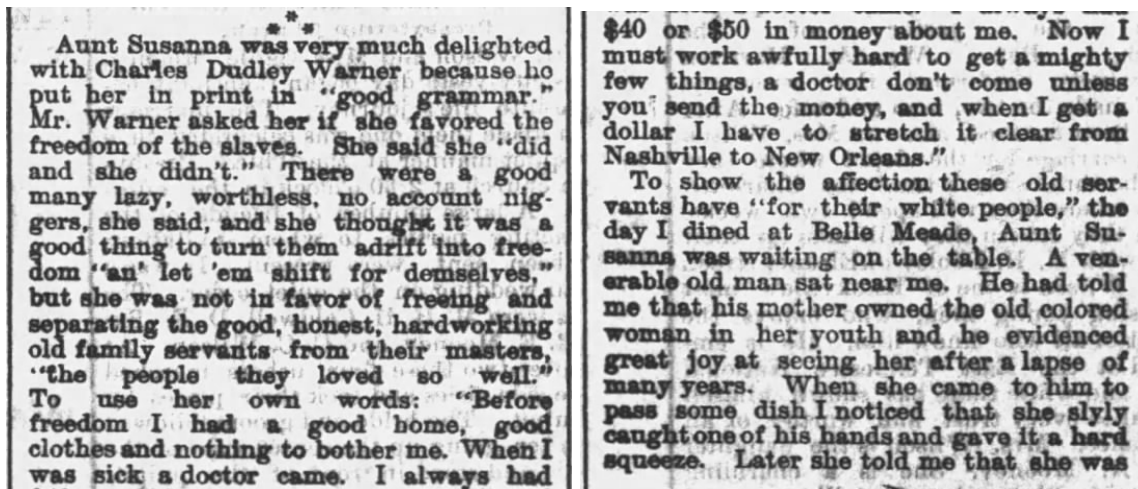
<sup>7</sup> Jackson, W.H. to Selene Harding Jackson, 15 Feb 1880, Harding Jackson Papers, TSLA

<sup>8</sup> The Daily American, Nashville, TN, Saturday 7 June 1884, pg. 6

<sup>9</sup> "Former slave quarters at Belle Meade Plantation," Library Photograph Collection, Drawer 2, Folder 102, 347, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Tennessee Virtual Archive

*Susanna sends love to your mother and says tell her she would have offered to come and wait on her but she felt as is she was too little account but when she comes down to see me she Susanna will be at her service as the worst work will be over.*"<sup>10</sup>

- 1888 October 25: A newspaper interviewer reinforcing the "Old Time Negroes" happy slave narrative interviewed Susanna. The reporter had an agenda but her interview is indicative of the times and part of her story. The "venerable old man" who Susanna was happy to see would have been John McGavock. His mother owned Susanna when she was young.



where I buried that silver, so he could come down and get it." The younger generations of darkies

- 1889 November 25: Selene Harding Jackson, wrote about Susanna in a letter to her mother-in-law about a birthday party held for her daughter Eunice. *"Cousin Lizzie and Susanna both broke down after the party—Cousin L is just recovering now but my dear old Susanna is still very bad off—has had a hemorrhage of the lungs & I fear will never be well again—she has been failing for 6 months is so poor & looks so bad I am having her fed on beef tea, cream, punch, eggnog & Cod liver oil; but nothing seems to build her up—nothing to work on she s so run down in her general health. I and all at Belle Meade will miss her as she was one of our best friends. She may live until xmas & there is a possibility of her living through the winter unless she takes cold (she don't know how to take care of herself). I go up every day or two to see her."*

- 1891 August 26: Sister Johanna Lytle died.

<sup>10</sup> Harding, Selene. to Carrie Ewing, 6 Jul 1887, Harding Jackson Papers, TSLA

<sup>11</sup> Knoxville Daily Tribune, Knoxville, TN, Thursday, 2 October 1888, g. 6 (accessed newspapers.com)

**FUNERAL NOTICE.**  
The funeral of Mrs. Joanna Lytle, mother of Green Lytle, will take place to-day (Thursday evening) at 8 o'clock at Spruce-street Baptist Church. Service by Rev. Purdy.

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1892 December 16: Selena Harding Jackson died and "Aunt Susanah" attended her funeral. Selena had been an infant when she had been bequeathed Susanna as her personal slave by her grandmother. Susanna outlived Selena, both were plagued by health issues late in their lives.

The remains were borne to the vault on the grounds by the old family servants, who had been reared on the place, and their attachment to their deceased mistress was shown by their manifest grief. Aunt Susanah, Mrs. Jackson's aged nurse, and Uncle Bob, the chief groom, were both deeply moved.

\*\*\*Susanna died sometime before 1900.\*\*\*

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<sup>12</sup> The Daily American, Nashville, TN, Thursday, 27 August 1891, pg. 3 (accessed newspapers.co)