

David Chears  
1836-1916  
Enslaved at Rippa Villa

- 1836 March: David was born a slave owned by William McKissack in Pulaski, Giles County, TN. We do not know for certain who his parents were, but from later records, we know they were both born in North Carolina. Of his family, we know for certain he had a sister, Martha, about ten years older than him.
- 1850 U.S. Federal Census enumerated in Maury, Giles and Lawrence Counties.  
District 2, Maury County: William McKissack, slave owner, seven slaves  
District 7, Giles County: William McKissack, slave owner, thirty four slaves.  
District 5, Lawrence County: Glen Mills Company, owned by William McKissack, forty-three slaves.  
District 6, Giles County: McKissack & Guthery & Co., thirteen slaves.  
David and his family were enslaved at the Giles County property of Vale Mills.
- 1856 After William McKissack died in 1855, his human property was listed in an 1856 inventory in the courts in Maury County, TN. The slaves were split into six lots and distributed to William's six children in January of 1856.

David was "drawn" by Susan McKissack Cheairs, the married daughter of William McKissack. Susan and her husband, Nat, lived in Maury County, TN on the Rippa Villa plantation.

- 1860 U.S. Slave Schedule-N.F. Cheairs owned seventy-five slaves and had fifteen slave cabins on the property, included in this count would have been David, although his wife Susan Cheairs would have been the legal owner of many of the enslaved people at Rippa Villa.
- 1862 Deposition of George McKissack, "*I think after the Fort Donelson fight, Major Chears sent his slaves from Spring Hill to McKissack farm near Vale Mills. Soldier [David Chears] remained there until he went into the war. He was around here for at least a year, when he and I enlisted in the same company, D, 110th USC Infantry. We were always together while in the army and were discharged together. This was in February, 1866. We came back together to the McKissack farm.*"<sup>1</sup> George was David's nephew, the son of David's sister, Martha.

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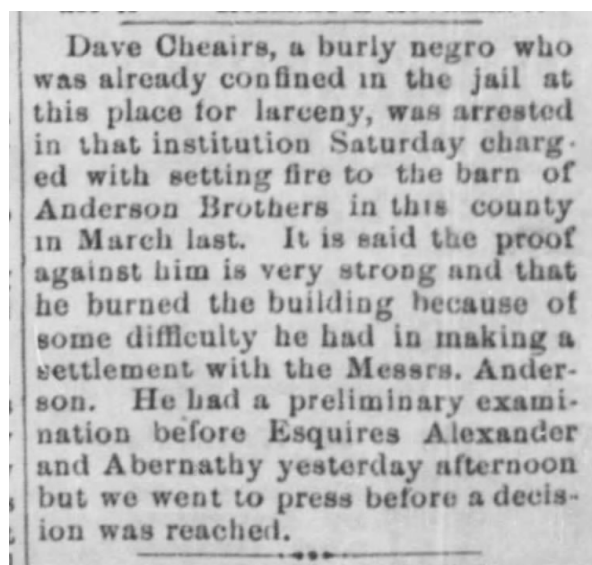
<sup>1</sup> Chears, David, Deposition of George McKissack, U.S. Military Pension application, NARA, Washington D.C.

- 1863 November 15: The U.S. Army took control of Vale Mills, Lieutenant Barnes commanding the mill by the order of Brig. Gen. G.M. Dodge. Many of the enslaved teenage boys and men joined the U.S. Army after this.
- 1864 January 1: David enlisted in the U.S. Army in Pulaski, TN. He enlisted under the name of David Chears, taking Susan's surname. He mustered into Co. D, 110th USCT as a private.

\*\*\*In July 1864 or 1865, David had a daughter, Georgiana "Dolly", with Carmilla Bailey. Carmilla was a slave owned by A. Bailey in Maury County. The Cheairs and Bailey farms shared a border. In his military pension, David said Carmilla was his slave wife but she died before the war. This is incorrect information, as she was still alive in 1870 living in Maury County and Carmilla was a cook for William Cheairs of Ripa Villa from 1874-1875, which was when she died. Her brother took Dolly with him to Kansas when he left Tennessee shortly after her death.<sup>2</sup>

- 1867 David had a child, James, with Nancy Malone in Giles County, TN. David and Nancy were not married and never lived together. But James was known by the entire community where they lived as David's son. George McKissack said David had a "wood's colt," meaning an illegitimate child with Nancy.

1880 May:



Dave Cheairs, a burly negro who was already confined in the jail at this place for larceny, was arrested in that institution Saturday charged with setting fire to the barn of Anderson Brothers in this county in March last. It is said the proof against him is very strong and that he burned the building because of some difficulty he had in making a settlement with the Messrs. Anderson. He had a preliminary examination before Esquires Alexander and Abernathy yesterday afternoon but we went to press before a decision was reached.

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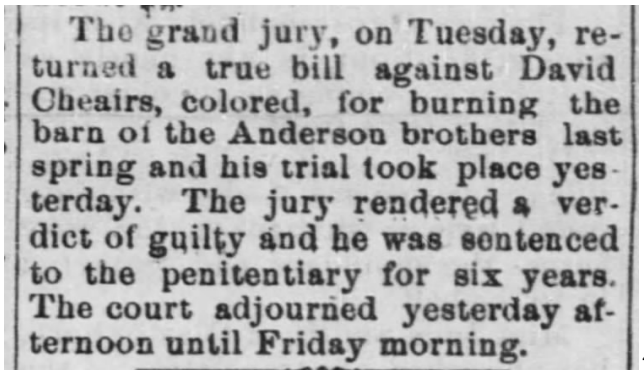
June 30: The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in Giles County, TN showed

<sup>2</sup> Chears, David, U.S. Military Pension Application, NARA, Washington, D.C.

<sup>3</sup> The Pulaski Citizen, Pulaski, TN, Thursday, 13 May 1880, pg. 3 (accessed newspapers.com)

David Chairs as a state prisoner in the Giles County Jail.

August 5: A snippet in the paper explained why David was in jail in June.



The grand jury, on Tuesday, returned a true bill against David Cheairs, colored, for burning the barn of the Anderson brothers last spring and his trial took place yesterday. The jury rendered a verdict of guilty and he was sentenced to the penitentiary for six years. The court adjourned yesterday afternoon until Friday morning.

- 1885 July 18: David did not serve out his entire six year sentence, because he and Fannie Brown were married in Giles County, TN only five years later. Fannie described David in a later document. She said *“he was a low, chunky man. He was tolerably dark in color and had black eyes and hair. He had a big hard knot on the left side of his neck.”*<sup>5</sup> This was an interesting description and relates back to the previous newspaper article, which described David as “a burly negro.” His size must have made him very recognizable.
- 1887 October 28: Fannie gave birth to daughter Virginia “Virgie” Cheers in Giles County, TN.
- 1890 September 14: David Cheers applied for and was granted a pension for his military service during the Civil War.
- 1900 June 12: The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in Giles County, TN showed David, a farmer, and his wife, Fannie, living with their children: James<sup>6</sup>, age 32, William<sup>7</sup>, 17 and Virgie, 14. David owned his farm, free from mortgage. He was unable to read or write. Fannie was noted as having given birth to three children, with only two living.
- 1910 May 16: The U.S. Federal Census enumerated in Pulaski, Giles County, TN

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<sup>4</sup> The Pulaski Citizen, Pulaski, TN, Thursday, 5 Aug 1880, pg. 3 (accessed newspapers.com)

<sup>5</sup> Witness deposition, pension application of David and Fannie Cheers.

<sup>6</sup> James was David’s son with Nancy Malone.

<sup>7</sup> William was Fannie’s son with second husband, John Brown. David raised William as his own and William used the last name Cheers.

showed David and Fannie Cheers living with their one year old grandson, Franklin McNairy. David had no occupation listed but was listed as having his “own income.” This would most likely have referred to his military pension.

1916 April 10: David Cheers died in Pulaski, Giles County, Tn. He was buried in Maplewood Cemetery with a military headstone.



<sup>8</sup>

April 15: Fannie Cheers applied for and was granted a widow’s pension for her husband’s service during the Civil War.

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<sup>8</sup> findagrave.com