

Gilbert Cheairs
“Nat or Nathan Perkins”
1841-1912
Enslaved at Rippa Villa

1841 February 5: Born in slavery, at Rippa Villa in Spring Hill, Maury County, TN. Gilbert’s mother, Mary, was a slave owned by Nathaniel Cheairs III. Gilbert’s father was Nathaniel’s youngest son, Nathaniel “Nat” Cheairs IV.

April 2: Three months after Gilbert was born, his father, Nat, married a white woman, Susan McKissack.

1846 Upon the death of his owner, Gilbert and his mother, Mary, were left to, Sarah Rush Cheairs. Sarah would have been Gilbert’s grandmother.

1858 June 26: Sarah Cheairs died. She bequeathed:

*Daughter Nancy R. Perkins-one negro man named Hal, one yellow negro man named Payton, and **one yellow negro boy named Gilbert** and the notes for the sale of a negro woman named Polly, and her two children, to dispose of as she may see fit, by deed, gift or otherwise.*

In his military pension application, Gilbert stated that, he was given to Nancy Cheairs Perkins and his mother was given to Louisa Cheairs Campbell. Gilbert also stated that when he went to the Perkins, they changed his name to Nat, after his father, because they already had two Gilberts.

Gilbert also very specifically said that he was raised by his father till he was 20. He very obviously thought he was owned by Nat Cheairs and not Nat’s parents, Nathaniel and Sarah. This is an insight into the enslaved at Rippa Villa after Nathaniel’s death, although owned separately by Nat, Sarah, and Susan there was probably not much separation in work and management.

Gilbert spent the next few years at the Perkins plantation abt 15 miles below Little Rock.

1861 Sometime after the war started Gilbert was conscripted by Gen. Price to drive a team for the Confederates. Gilbert said he followed orders and served as a slave without pay.

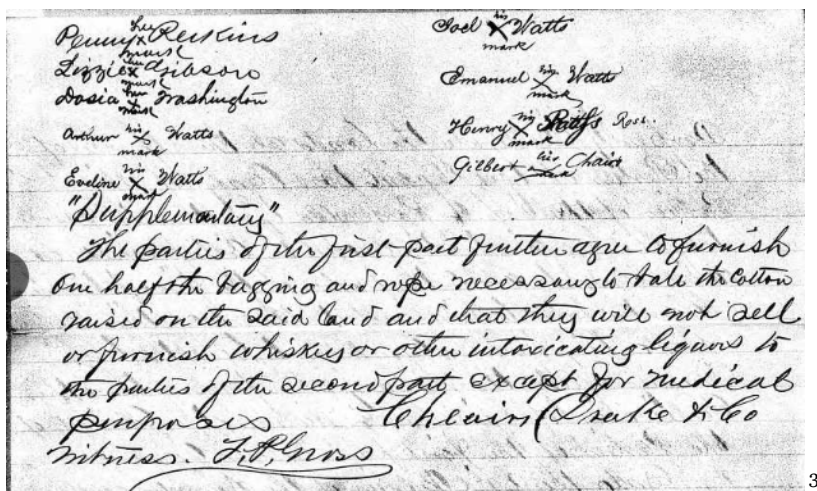
1864 April 12: After the Battle of D'Ane, Gilbert ran away to the U.S. Army commanded by Gen. Fred Steele at Camden, AR. He then enlisted in the 5th Arkansas Col. Infantry. But less than a month later he was captured by the Confederates at Marks Mill, AR. However, he escaped and hid out in the cane brake¹ until fall.

September 20: Enlisted into the 2 Regiment USCT LA company H, as a private in Pine Bluff Arkansas as Nat Perkins, the name the Perkins family gave him.

1865 September 15: Discharged from the USCT

1866 Gilbert said he went back to using the name Gilbert and took the last name Cheairs because "In 1866 I took the name of Gilbert Cheairs, my first owner was the cause of my taking that name he said that he was not ashamed to own me, and that I ought not to be ashamed to own him, I took the name then of Gilbert Cheairs, and I have kept it ever since."² He very clearly saw Nat and had a conversation with him.

1867 Gilbert Cheairs signed his "x" on a labor agreement in Arkansas.



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1870 June: Gilbert married a widowed woman by the name of Sallie King in Memphis TN. They were married by Parson Will Phillips.

1874 April: Gilbert's wife Sallie died in Lexington, Missouri. They had no children.⁴

¹ Sugar cane fields.

² Pension Application of Gilbert Cheairs, NARA

³ The National Archives in Washington, DC; Washington, DC; Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Arkansas, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1871; NARA Series Number:: M979; NARA Reel Number:: 41; NARA Record Group Num

⁴ Pension application of Gilbert Cheairs, NARA (both marriage and death dates of Sallie King)

1880 June 5: The US Federal Census enumerated in Shelby County, TN showed Gilbert lived with Addie Drake. Her relationship to him was listed as paramour⁵. His occupation was listed as a steamboat hand.

1880 December 15: Married Addie Drake in Memphis, TN.

1890 October 13: Gilbert filed for a military pension.

(3-11-8)

NAME OF SOLDIER: *Chairs, Gilbert*

NAME OF DEPENDENT: *Widow, Chairs, Adie*
Minor,

SERVICE: *1 Batty, Ark. Cold L. A. Co, 2d U. S. C. L. A.*

DATE OF FILING.	CLASS.	APPLICATION NO.	CERTIFICATE NO.	STATE FROM WHICH FILED.
<i>1890, Oct. 13</i>	<i>Invalid,</i>	<i>975,131</i>	<i>994,146</i>	<i>Tenn.</i>
<i>1912, Nov. 14</i>	<i>Widow,</i>	<i>997,085</i>	<i>765,186</i>	<i>Tenn.</i>
	<i>Minor,</i>			

ATTORNEY: *[Signature]*

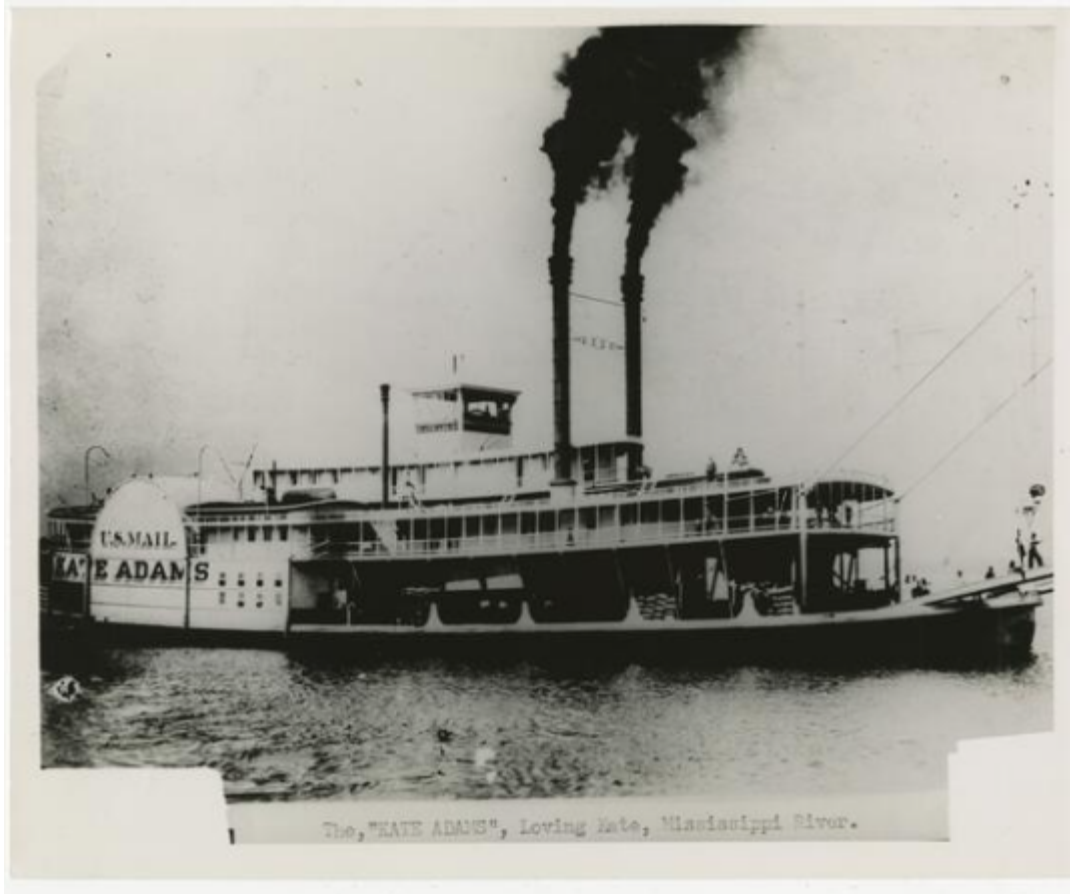
6-11

1900 June 1: The US Federal Census enumerated in Shelby County, TN showed Gilbert lived with his wife and six children. His occupation was listed as a fireman. He was listed as paying a mortgage for his own home.

1910 April 23: The US Federal Census enumerated in Shelby County, TN showed Gilbert lived with his wife and three children. His occupation was listed as a boat fireman. He owned his home free of mortgage.

Photo of the Steamboat Kate Adams which was one of the steamboats Gilbert worked on as a fireman.

⁵ A lover, not married.



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1912 October 27: Gilbert was robbed and murdered while working as a night watchman for the Friedel Lumber Manufacturing Company in Memphis, TN. Killed for \$10.00 in his pocket. Gilbert died thirteen months before his father, Nathaniel F. Cheairs IV died.

CHEASSE—Suddenly, Gilbert Cheasse, beloved husband of Mrs. Addie Cheasse, father of Sam, Mary, Gilbert and Willie Cheasse. Aged 75 years.
A member in good standing in Douglas Post, G. A. R. Funeral from late residence, 895 Linden avenue, this (Monday) afternoon at 1 o'clock. Interment in National cemetery. Friends are invited. Rev. L. James Johnson will officiate. For further information inquire of McCoy & Joyner.

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⁶ Photo of the steamboat Kate Adams accessed by louisianadigitallibrary.org

⁷ The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Tennessee, 28 Oct 1912, Mon, pg.7

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NEGRO NIGHTWATCHMAN MURDERED AND ROBBED

Gilbert Chairs at Friedel Lum-
ber Co. Is the Victim.

HIS SKULL WAS CRUSHED

**Aged Negro Was Struck Down White
Making His Round Yesterday
Morning, and Robbed of his
Week's Wages.**

Gilbert Chairs, aged 77, negro night
 watchman for the George O. Friedel Lum-
 ber Manufacturing Company, was mur-
 dered and robbed at the plant on Sledge
 avenue and the Southern railway yester-
 day morning by an unknown person or
 persons.
 The body of the old negro was found
 lying at the door of the engine-room,
 with the back part of the skull crushed.
 Death was instantaneous. He had never
 moved after he had fallen from the ter-
 rible blow that had been dealt him. He
 had fallen face downward on the lantern
 he carried and with his pipe in his mouth.
 Both the lantern and pipe had gone out
 when the body was discovered.
 Sergt. Brett and Officer Louis Davis,
 who were rushed to the scene by Capt.
 Couch when the report reached the police
 station, were unable to find the instru-
 ment with which the murderer had dealt
 the blow, but think that it was done
 with a piece of scantling or some billet
 of wood picked up about the plant, and
 which was carried away.

which was carried away.
 The pockets of the victim had been
 turned inside out and rifled of their con-
 tents. The old man had been paid his
 wages, \$10, about 6 o'clock Saturday eve-
 ning, and had never had a chance to
 spend any of it after he went on duty.
 This and his pistol are probably all that
 the murderer got. The keys, matches
 and other small articles taken from the
 old man's pockets were left lying near
 the body.

[View Full Resolution Paper](#)

Sergt. Brett, who is in charge of the
 slightest crew, thinks that the old man
 was killed by some one who knew him
 and knew that he had drawn the \$10 the
 night before.
 The body of the dead watchman was
 found by John Good, another negro, em-
 ployed at the plant. He always went to
 the mill about 6 o'clock on Sunday morn-
 ing to relieve the old man, who went
 home about that time. Good did not find
 the watchman in the accustomed place
 where he always met and relieved him,
 and went to look for him. He found the
 body and notified Mr. Friedel, who in
 turn notified Capt. Couch at the central
 police station. This was about 6:10 o'clock.
 The body was still warm when the offi-
 cers arrived on the scene.
 According to the record of the box sys-
 tem, the old man pulled the last box at
 4:15 o'clock.
 The old negro was for many years
 a steamboat fireman and worked under
 Charles Botto twenty-five years on the
 Kate Adams. He left the river, however,
 after Mr. Botto was drowned. He leaves
 several grown children, and lived with a
 son not far from the plant.

Gilbert was buried in the Memphis National Cemetery, Section K-1 Site 7100. His stone reads "Nathan Perkins," not Gilbert Cheairs, the name he chose.

⁸ The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, Tennessee, 28 Oct 1912, Mon, pg.4

WAR DEPARTMENT
Q. M. C. Form No. 14
Revised Oct. 6, 1923

Interment in the MEMPHIS, TENN. National Cemetery
To—The Quartermaster General, Washington, D. C.

NAME	RANK	COMPANY	REGIMENT OR VESSEL			DIVISION, IF WORLD WAR SOLDIER
			Number	State	Arm	
* CHAIRS, GILBERT	PVT.	H	2nd		U.S.C.L. ART.	

DATE OF DEATH			DATE OF INTERMENT			GRAVE MARK		REMARKS Date of discharge and number of Pension Certificate, Disinterments, etc.
Month	Day	Year	Month	Day	Year	Section	Grave No.	
Oct.	26	1912				23	7100	*Alias Perkins, Nathan or Nat. R. Oct. 1912

Shipping point for headstones _____

1-2533
SEM

(See Instructions on Reverse Side)

6 1 0 0 1 0 4 1 3 5

Superintendent.



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November 14: Addie filed for a Widow's Pension.

⁹ Photo taken by Eric in Memphis (accessed on findagrave.com)