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Elizabeth Slatter was born 4 April 1788 in Greene County, Georgia, to Solomon Slatter and Nancy Flewellen Slatter. Elizabeth had five brothers and two sisters. Nancy F. Slatter's older brother Abner was one of the first settlers in Jones County, Georgia. Before Elizabeth's next sibling was born, the Slatters had moved to Jones County.[2]

Before Jones County's founding, numerous settlers lived there and had been establishing themselves for years. From 1790-1807, the area of Jones County was teeming with people and progress. In 1807, Jones County was formed. Jones County surpassed Baldwin County in growth as early as a decade later. By 1809, the name of the first county site of Jones County, which had been called Albany earlier, now became Clinton.[3]

Originally Jones County was formed from Baldwin County, which had been formed 11 May 1803. Prior to Baldwin's founding, treaties with the Creek Indians had pushed Georgia's western border from the Oconee River to the Ocmulgee River.[4] One such treaty was signed at Fort Wilkinson 14 November 1805; this treaty ceded all lands between the Oconee and the Ocmulgee and south of the Altamaha. The land between the two rivers, the Oconee and the Ocmulgee, was divided first into Baldwin and Wilkinson counties before being divided into other counties, such as Jones.[5]

According to Carolyn White Williams, Jones County historian, many families "as well as Indians" lived in the Jones County area by 1803, when the county was still Baldwin County.[6] Although Jones County did not have a courthouse in Clinton until 1818, Williams praises the county's early settlers as "a sturdy band of pioneers and settlers."[7] In fact one of James S. Billingsley's slaves, Sam, was said to live until he was 130 years old.[8]

By the time Clinton had a courthouse, it also had a jail; a Methodist and a Baptist church; male and female academies; three taverns; several boardinghouses; stores; a tannery; and mechanic shops. One of the first settlers of Jones County was William D. Bunkley.[9]

Elizabeth Slatter and William Dawson Bunkley married 30 January 1805. They had four children; their oldest son Jesse L. Bunkley was born 11 November 1806. Jesse Bunkley was the subject of the notorious Bunkley case, as later discussed. He would later go "to New Orleans and never [return]."[10] Jesse's father would not live to see his son's tenth birthday, as William Bunkley died 13 September 1812.[11] Upon Bunkley's death, his wife Elizabeth was left with three young sons, and she was pregnant with her last child with Bunkley, a daughter whom she would name Eliza Ann Slatter.[12]

Two years later, Elizabeth Slatter Bunkley remarried. James Billingsley's family had come to Wilkes County, Georgia, with his parents; they had traveled from Harford, Maryland. James Billingsley married Mildred Grant of North Carolina, but when he migrated to Jones County, he married Elizabeth, 5 October 1814. When Elizabeth was William Bunkley's widow, she inherited his land, since all of her sons were very young. By 1850, Elizabeth Lowther, as she was by the time, owned 91 slaves;[13] by 1860, she owned 204.[14]

However, James Billingsley was also a planter and "is believed to have inherited some property from his second wife Elizabeth . . ." Slatter Bunkley.[15] Major James Billingsley was then one of the richest planters in the state.[16]

When Elizabeth's oldest son Jesse went away to college, he was typical of most young men his age. Young boys whose parents were of means would leave home for an education. Moreover, poor whites and small farmers emulated the habits of their richer neighbors.[17] However, Jesse's family was of means as Carolyn White Williams has noted that "Mrs. [Billingsley] owned large plantations in [Jones County.]"[18]

Thus when Jesse Bunkley was nineteen and a half years old, he left his home on 17 May 1825 for college. When his mother had not heard from him for more than two years, she believed that he had died in New Orleans, where he reportedly had gone;

"rumors [had] reached Clinton that he had been seen chained to a block, working on the streets and the levee at New Orleans."[19]

A description of Jesse Bunkley's appearance was that he had a "light complexion, light hair" and eyes, a "full face" with a "deep dimple" in his chin, a "turned up" upper lip and nose, and a "full body." "The middle finger of the left hand" was missing a fingernail. He also had a scar on "the right side of his neck" and a scar "immediately under the left knee pan." A Mr. Williams also testified to a mark that was visible "on a private part of Bunkley" when Bunkley was wounded on his knee.[20]

The man on trial for impersonating Jesse Bunkley was Elijah Barber, who was in hopes of obtaining Jesse Bunkley's estate, or the estate coming to him from his father William D. Bunkley. Elijah Barber was, according to most witnesses, taller than Bunkley, bow-legged, "thin visaged, face rather long;" additionally, Elijah Barber had "no dimple" on his chin; he had a "long and sharp" nose and no missing fingernail. Curiously, Barber did have a scar on his neck, a scar on his left leg "below the knee," and "a peculiar mark on a private member,"[21] a "mark" which Jones County residents examined throughout the trial. Elijah Barber himself called it his "gauge," and from numerous descriptions, it is better described as an odd ring of hair rather than a "mark."

Although several witnesses believed Elijah Barber to be Jesse Bunkley, most thought otherwise, including Jesse's own mother Elizabeth Bunkley Billingsley. Elijah Barber was found guilty at the conclusion of the infamous Bunkley case.[22]

In describing Jesse Bunkley's character, most participants of the Bunkley case called him "a very dissipated boy."[23] Such a description was not unusual of young men of college age in the Old South. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown concludes that a boy grew "accustomed to male associations on hunts, fishing trips, and in farm chores" when he was about eight or ten. The mother whom he had adored so fervently as a young boy lost any authority over him; as boys began to identify with the men in their family, the influence of the women or girls diminished.[24]

When a boy reached the age of which he would go to college, "neither the religious nor the commercial experience was a common one in the Old South. Instead, boys' entry into young manhood took more social forms . . ."[25] Boys of Jesse Bunkley's age experienced two "interrelated" problems: "how to cope with his feelings of admiration and resentment toward his father," as many young men struggled to please their fathers; and the problem of "how to relinquish his independence upon the family in order to affirm his own right to reputation and deference among peers."[26]

As far as the mother's role went, she was expected to cheer her son(s)' "little victories of pride" or either step aside "in mortification and silence." Women admired male honor just as did other members of society, although male honor "deprived [women] of all but vicarious pleasure in the achievements of their men." For the son in the Old South, things were not easy, according to Wyatt-Brown.[27] However, if women, whether mothers, sisters, or wives had no choice but to praise the men in their lives no matter how they truly felt, things were not easy for them either.

Such an established mode of behavior could not have been a healthy upbringing for a young man, and "what began as a youthful display of virility often led to the dangers of heavy and solitary drinking."[28]

Place such a youth in such a notorious hotbed for leisure as New Orleans and Jesse Bunkley's death is easily imaginable and explained. Several travelers often commented on the New Orleans of the Old South, and "observers found the citizens of New Orleans devoted to 'pleasure.'"[29] Moreover, "one foreigner complained that killings in Louisiana, which 'would be called murder[s]in France' were as common as 'quarrels followed by fist fights.'"[30]

Thus Jesse Bunkley's dissipation is in no way traced to his training but to his social upbringing that was common among many

young men of the planter class. Williams also adds that "Clinton was noted for the fun and practical jokes played by the young men."[31]

Jesse Bunkley was not the only child Elizabeth Billingsley lost. James A. Billingsley, Elizabeth and James B. Billingsley's first son, was born 20 November 1816. In Jones County, he was known as "Mr. Gus" Billingsley. When he died in 1859, he was a "young man well known and well liked."[32]

Elizabeth's second husband James Billingsley died 26 April 1829. Elizabeth later married Samuel Lowther, Esquire, who died in 1837 "without issue." Mrs. Elizabeth Lowther lived in Clinton at "Lowther Hall" until after the Civil War.[33]

Just as the Civil War affected many Georgians, Elizabeth Lowther experienced it in her own home. When Major General George Stoneman raided Jones County, a journalist wrote that his conduct "'was such as to merit the most ignominious death.'" A party of raiders invaded Lowther Hall and forced Elizabeth Lowther "'to deal out wine in the wine cellar'" as the party stood by and threatened her death if they were not served.[34]

Regardless of such a misfortune, Elizabeth Lowther gave much of her "time and means to help the South" during the Civil War. She later moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to live with her daughter. Elizabeth Slatter Bunkley Billingsley Lowther died there 28 March 1871. Her estate was valued at $500,000. Her

home, the beautiful "Lowther Hall" burned in 1945. She is buried at Oakwood Cemetery in Montgomery, Alabama.[35] Most of her loved ones mentioned herein, including Samuel Lowther, are buried in the "old cemetery on the Hillsboro Road," also known as Clinton Cemetery.[36]

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Lowther Hall

[1]David Mitchell, a descendant of Mrs. Lowther, provided her portrait.

[2]From Archie Colburn's notes on his family history, Archie Colburn is a descendant of the Flewellen's.

[3]Carolyn White Williams, *History of Jones County, Georgia: 1807-1907* (Macon, Georgia: The J.W. Burke Company, 1957), 14.

[4]Williams, 16.

[5]Williams, 17.

[6]Williams, 21.

[7]Williams, 232-233.

[8]Ibid. Williams spells J.S. Billingsley as Billingslea. I will use the former spelling, as it is seen spelled most often. Noteworthy here is that James A. Billingsley was Elizabeth and James S. Billingsley's first son.

[9]Williams, 232, 233.

[10]Williams, 589.

[11]Williams, 554.

[12]Archie Colburn's family history notes

[13] Jack F. Cox, *The 1850 Census of Georgia Slaveowners* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1999), 191.

[14] Microcopy No. 653/Roll 147, Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States 1860, Georgia Slave Schedules, Volume 3, 251-510, National Archives and Records Service, 1967.

[15]Williams, 589.

[16]Archie Colburn notes

[17]Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 159.

[18]Williams, 485.

[19]*Pleadings and Evidence in the Trial of Elijah Barber, Otherwise Called Jesse L. Bunkley, for Cheating and Swindling*, printed at the Federal Union Office, Milledgeville, Georgia, 1838, 4.

[20]*Pleadings and Evidence*, 4.

[21]*Pleadings and Evidence*, 5.

[22]Ibid., 90.

[23]*Pleadings and Evidence*.

[24]Wyatt-Brown, 159.

[25]Ibid., 164.

[26]Ibid., 166.

[27]Ibid., 172.

[28]Ibid., 279.

[29]Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1988), 106.

[30]Ibid., 146.

[31]Williams, 495.

[32]Williams, 555.

[33]Williams, 589.

[34]William Harris Bragg, *Griswoldville* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000), 36.

[35]Williams, 589.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Picture of Lowther Hall from Williams, 226.

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