

JOHN WHITFIELD PURIFOY AND ESTHER ANN MADDUX

John Whitfield Purifoy (1829–1900) married his third cousin **Esther Ann Maddux (1839–1909)** (called Hettie by her family) in Barnesville, Lamar County, Georgia, on January 21, 1871. At that time, John Whitfield Purifoy was a forty-one-year-old widower with four young children. Esther Ann was thirty-one years old and living with her forty-one-year-old sister. John Whitfield and Esther Ann Maddux Purifoy were both children of Methodist ministers.

John Whitfield Purifoy, who adopted the earlier spelling of his family surname, was the oldest son of **Rev. Stanley Peurifoy (1800–1864)** and **Martha Neal Persons (1809–1889)**. He was born on October 27, 1829, and raised on the Purifoy plantation near Yatesville, in the eastern part of Upson County, Georgia. In the 1850 census, John Whitfield Purifoy is listed as a twenty-one-year-old single farmer with property worth \$1,000 and the owner of two slaves.

Sometime around 1853, John Whitfield Purifoy married Mary Lucinda Greene (1835–c. 1863). In the 1860 census, John Whitfield and Mary Lucinda Purifoy* were enumerated in Russell County in southeastern Alabama. The couple had four children: **R. S.**, a male born in 1854; **E. E.**, a female born in 1856; **Mary Lucinda Purifoy (1859–1927)**; and **Julia Purifoy (1861–1949)**.

During the Civil War, John Whitfield Purifoy served three different terms of service with three different Confederate military units.¹ On August 8, 1861, at age thirty-one, he enlisted as a drummer in the Tom Watts Rifles (later Company F of the 18th Regiment, Alabama Infantry) at Butler Springs in Butler County in south Alabama. In November 1861, he was appointed drum major for his regiment. His first stint in the Confederate military ended on April 16, 1862, when he was discharged on account of an illness.

In May 1862, John Whitfield Purifoy began his second term of service as a private with the 39th Alabama Infantry Regiment. He joined the Confederacy on that

**In the 1860 U.S. Federal Census, John Whitfield Purifoy and Mary Lucinda Greene Purifoy are listed as John W. Purafy, age 30, and M. L. Purafy, age 25, both born in Georgia.*

occasion in the town of Opelika, Alabama, in Lee County, which abuts Russell County, where his family was living. We believe that his wife's death (probably at sometime in 1863) ended that term of service.

John Whitfield Purifoy's third term of Confederate service began in January 1864, when he enlisted as a private in the 29th Georgia Cavalry. This time he joined in Stewart County, Georgia, which is just across the Chattahoochee River from Russell County, Alabama. He apparently spent the last year of the Civil War hunting Confederate deserters in the Okefenokee Swamp in southern Georgia.

John Whitfield Purifoy's first wife, Mary Lucinda Greene Purifoy, died in late 1862 or 1863. In 1870 their two youngest children, Mary Lucinda Purifoy (age eleven) and Julia Purifoy (age nine), were living with their paternal grandmother, Martha Neal Persons Peurifoy, at the Purifoy plantation in Upson County. In early 1871, John Whitfield Purifoy married Esther Ann Maddux.



*Esther Ann Maddux
Purifoy, c. 1900.*

In 1871, after they married, John Whitfield Purifoy and Esther Ann Maddux Purifoy moved from Upson County, Georgia, to Union Church, Jefferson County, Mississippi. Interestingly, the church and the town were founded by Presbyterian Scottish settlers, including my Cameron ancestors, in the early 1800s. Accompanying the Purifoy family to Mississippi were Mary Lucinda Purifoy and Julia Purifoy, John Whitfield's two daughters from his first marriage, as well as **Mary Amelia Maddux (1829–1896)**, Esther Ann's older sister. In the early 1880s, the Purifoy family moved to Crystal Springs in Copiah County, which adjoins Jefferson County. They lived on a farm there.

John Whitfield Purifoy remained a pious and devout Methodist throughout his life. In a letter, his granddaughter, Ruth McPherson Thompson (1903–1996), wrote, “Mother [**Martha Elizabeth Purifoy McPherson (1876–1962)**] and Dad [Robert Albert McPherson (1875–1964)] had to wait until after his death to be married, as he [John Whitfield Purifoy] bitterly objected to Dad's religion, Baptist.”

John Whitfield Purifoy died at age seventy, on January 7, 1900, in Crystal Springs.



Esther Ann Maddux was born in Warrenton, Georgia, on September 28, 1839. She was the seventh child of **Rev. Patrick Neal Maddux (1801–1870)** and **Martha Neville (1807–1873)**.

Esther Ann Maddux married John Whitfield Purifoy, a widower, at the relatively old age of thirty-one. She had not been previously married. The couple and their relatives undoubtedly moved to Mississippi because Esther Ann's three brothers—**Thomas Hodges Maddux (1832–1920)**, **Wesley Neville Maddux (1834–1905)**, and **Emory Anthony Maddux (1841–1884)**—had moved there shortly after the Civil War.

Between 1871 and 1879, Esther Ann Maddux and John Whitfield Purifoy had six children, all born in Union Church, Jefferson County, Mississippi. Their youngest was Neville's grandfather **Stanley Neville Purifoy (1879–1942)**.

Esther Ann Maddux Purifoy died on December 21, 1909, at age seventy, while visiting the home of her daughter Martha Elizabeth Purifoy McPherson. Her obituary states, “Reared by godly parents, she was impressed with the beauty and truth of Christianity.”²

John Whitfield Purifoy and Esther Ann Maddux Purifoy were the last of Neville’s Mississippi ancestors. They are buried in the Crystal Springs Cemetery in Copiah County, Mississippi.



The tombstone of John Whitfield Purifoy in the Crystal Springs Cemetery in Copiah County, Mississippi.

The tombstone reads:

John W. Purifoy [an error]
 Oct. 27, 1829
 Jan. 7, 1900
 His many virtues form the noblest
 monument to his memory



The tombstone of Esther Ann Maddux Purifoy in the Crystal Springs Cemetery. The last number of her death date is unreadable and is often recorded as a one or a seven.

If correctly recorded, it would be a nine.

The engraving on the stone reads:

Esther Ann Purifoy
 Born Sept. 23, 1839
 Died Dec. 21, 190?
 She's gone to a world above
 Where saints and angels meet
 To realize our Savior's love
 And worship at his feet

JOHN W. PURIFOY | ESTHER A. MADDUX

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1. JOHN WHITFIELD PURIFOY: HIS CONFEDERATE SERVICE

When the Civil War began in April 1861, **John Whitfield Purifoy (1829–1900)** was married with four children and living in Russell County in southeastern Alabama. He was thirty-one years old.

During the Civil War (1861–65), John Whitfield Purifoy* had three different service terms in three different Confederate military units. Our research of Confederate records, along with family recollections, has allowed us to sort out his rather complicated Confederate service career.

FIRST TERM OF CONFEDERATE SERVICE: DRUM MAJOR

John Whitfield Purifoy enlisted as a drummer on August 2, 1861, in the Tom Watts Rifles, a group organized in Butler Springs, Alabama. The next day, the company marched to Auburn, Alabama, in Lee County, adjacent to Russell County, where they attended a camp of instruction. On August 12, the Tom Watts Rifles mustered into Confederate service and became Company F of the 18th Alabama Infantry Regiment on September 4. The company traveled around Alabama in September and October, before arriving in November at Camp Governor Moore, just north of Mobile, Alabama.

Sometime in November 1861, John Whitfield Purifoy was named drum major of the 18th Alabama Infantry Regiment. This was a noncommissioned officer title. It was not meant to be a combatant position but was nonetheless a dangerous role.



A photograph of a Confederate military band attached to the 26th North Carolina Regiment in 1862.

Music played an important role for both Confederate and Union troops during the Civil War. Bugles and drums were used for issuing orders and sending signals between camps. Music was also played to boost morale. “Dixie,” the patriotic Confederate anthem, was often played as Rebel soldiers marched into battle. Most Confederate regiments organized a band, at least at the start of the Civil War. Each

regiment was allowed two musicians per company, two musicians from regimental headquarters, and a drum major assigned to regimental headquarters. Most of the Confederate regimental bands existed for only the first year of the Civil War, so it is likely that the 18th Alabama Regiment abandoned its marching band in early 1862.

**John Whitfield Purifoy should not be confused with his cousin John Wesley Purifoy (1823–1897), the captain of Company C of the 44th Alabama Regiment, who was seriously wounded at the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, and later was a planter in Wilcox County, Alabama.*

John Whitfield Purifoy's records indicate that he was granted a furlough for illness on December 29, 1861. He returned to Butler County, where he is recorded on January 31, 1862. John Whitfield's regiment did participate in the Battle of Shiloh in early April 1862, but he was not there. He received a discharge on April 16, 1862.

SECOND TERM OF CONFEDERATE SERVICE: PRIVATE

Less than one month after his discharge from the Confederate Army in April 1862, John Whitfield Purifoy re-enlisted at Opelika, Lee County, Alabama, near Auburn. This time he joined Company E of the 39th Alabama Infantry Regiment as a private.

On May 26, 1862, John Whitfield Purifoy's regiment departed by train, via Mobile, for Corinth, Mississippi. Planning to arrive in Corinth on May 29, the soldiers actually ran directly into the 65,000 Confederate soldiers retreating from that city. They encountered the retreating soldiers at Guntown, near Tupelo, Mississippi, on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. The following day, their train reversed direction and returned to Saltillo, Mississippi, where the men detrained and were issued arms. For the next couple of months, the 39th Alabama was encamped around Tupelo. John Whitfield Purifoy was present at a roll call in Tupelo on June 30, 1862.

Around that same time, the 39th Alabama was absorbed into the 22nd Alabama Regiment, a unit that was transferred in late July to Chattanooga, Tennessee. The 22nd Alabama fought at the Battle of Perryville (October 8, 1862) and at the Battle of Murfreesboro (December 31, 1862–January 2, 1863). John Whitfield Purifoy is not listed as present at the September roll call or any subsequent ones for the Alabama 22nd Regiment. It is therefore unlikely that he participated in the Confederate invasion of Kentucky or the Battle of Murfreesboro.

There is, however, a contradicting note in family files, for John Whitfield Purifoy's granddaughter Ruth McPherson Thompson (1903–1996) wrote in a note dated 1925, "*At age 29, my grandfather, John Whitfield Purifoy was in Georgia Infantry, serving at Murfreesboro, around the year 1864.*"*

We simply do not know for sure where John Whitfield Purifoy was during the nineteen months between June 30, 1862, and January 29, 1864. However, since his wife, Lucinda Greene (1835–c. 1863), died during that time, John Whitfield Purifoy was probably tending to his ailing wife and four children during that period.

*John Whitfield Purifoy was actually thirty-four or thirty-five years old in 1864, and the Battle of Murfreesboro occurred at the end of 1862. The information in Ruth McPherson Thompson's 1925 note is attributed to her uncle William "Will" Patrick Purifoy (1873–1945), John Whitfield Purifoy's son.

THIRD TERM OF CONFEDERATE SERVICE: TRACKING DESERTERS

On January 29, 1864, John Whitfield Purifoy enlisted in Company E of the 29th Georgia Cavalry, a unit that had been organized one year earlier in Lumpkin, Stewart County, Georgia, near his earlier home in Russell County, Alabama. John Whitfield enlisted as a thirty-four-year-old private.

According to Ruth McPherson Thompson's 1925 note, John Whitfield Purifoy "*put in 1 year tracking deserters in the Okonugo (?) Swamp.*" It is highly likely that this information is accurate. John Whitfield Purifoy is noted in three roll calls with the 29th Georgia Cavalry during 1864. He was present at the first roll call, which took place in Troy, today a ghost town on the Suwannee River in Lafayette County in northern Florida. Troy was once the county seat of Lafayette County.

At the other two roll calls, he is listed as "*absent sick*" and "*absent on sick furlough.*" These two roll calls took place near Savannah, Georgia, where the 29th Georgia Cavalry was preparing for the defense of Savannah, which finally fell on December 21, 1864. We presume these sick reports were meant to conceal John Whitfield Purifoy's "dirty" assignment to chase deserters* in the Okefenokee Swamp** during the final year of the Civil War.



In 1864, during the Civil War, John Whitfield Purifoy spent about a year tracking Confederate deserters in the Okefenokee Swamp, a shallow, peat-filled wetland straddling the Georgia–Florida border.

*Military desertion, often considered the ultimate disgrace, was a fairly common occurrence during the Civil War. It is estimated that there were 200,000 deserters from the Union Army and 104,000 on the Confederate side. Although the death penalty was a well-known punishment for deserters who got caught, it was rarely carried out. Occasionally, deserters were branded with a hot iron to create a stigmatizing scar on their body, and captured deserters were often flogged. However, most of the time, deserters were simply deprived of their compensation and reinstated into their military unit.

**The Okefenokee Swamp is located between Troy, a ghost town in northern Florida, and Savannah in Georgia. It is a vast (438,000 acres) wetland, mostly lying in southeastern Georgia. It was a haven for Confederate deserters during the Civil War.

2. THE DEATH OF ESTHER ANN MADDUX

Neville's great-grandmother **Esther Ann Maddux (1839–1909)** married **John Whitfield Purifoy (1829–1900)** on January 21, 1871. They moved from Georgia to Jefferson County, Mississippi, in late 1871. Esther Ann Maddux Purifoy died at age seventy, on December 21, 1909. We do not know the source of the obituary below.

It is with a sad heart we record the death of Mrs. ESTHER A. PURIFOY on Dec. 21 at the home of her daughter, Mattie McPherson, Hazlehurst, Miss., where she was visiting. She was born in Warrenton, Ga., Sept. 28, 1839, and was the daughter of Rev. Neal Maddox and Martha Neville. Reared by godly parents, she was impressed with the beauty and truth of Christianity and baptized by Rev. T. Anthony, presiding elder, and became a member of the Methodist Church at an early age. She was married to John Whitfield Purifoy, Jan. 21, 1871, at Barnsville, Ga., and one year later moved to Union Church, Jefferson County, Miss. Living there a number of years, the family located in Crystal Springs, Miss., where they all became active, useful members of the church. Mr. Purifoy, a good and pure man, passed away Jan. 7, 1900, and on Sept. 20, 1907, her sweet daughter, Lela, who was constantly her companion and advisor. During a revival held by Rev. W. W. Hopper, both sought and obtained the blessing of sanctification. Their love for the church of their choice was constant, always in their place in Sunday School and teaching class; hearing the word preached; getting thereby strength for daily needs, when it was possible to attend service. Often her soul was burdened for the salvation of the lost; yet while too timid in her nature to talk to them about the salvation of their souls, she would modestly tell her friends of her anxiety for those out of Christ, and bear them to the throne of grace in her daily prayers. Before a foolish and gainsaying world she exemplified the doctrine of Christ, and looked forward to that "home of the soul," that "mansion prepared," which she has entered. One loving, yet lonely daughter, three noble sons left behind, two brothers and one sister, besides numerous friends, grieve for the absent, until we too shall be called away.
Her true friend,
(MRS.) EMMA SIEBE.