

Pharaoh Jackson Chesney

by Paula Gammell



Back in 1902 “Uncle Ferry” Chesney became the subject of a short little book with a very long title called, “Last of the Pioneers, or Old Times in East Tennessee, Being the Life and Times of Pharaoh Jackson Chesney (Aged 120 Years),” by J.C. Webster.

We are told that Uncle Ferry was born in Clarksville, Mecklenburg County, Virginia, a slave owned by Johnathan Jackson and then by his son Corbin Jackson. Uncle Ferry was brought to East Tennessee in the mid-1820s and in 1841 sold to John Chesney, who lived in the portion of Grainger County that later became Union County. There Uncle Ferry spent the rest of his long life.

Says author Webster: “[N]early all of [the stories in this book] were narrated by this old man within the present year (1902).” One just wishes the author would have included more of those, and less of his own musings.

Uncle Ferry died shortly after the book was written. But at 120 years old? Well, author Webster’s proof is less than persuasive on that point. That and other such shortcomings aside, however, this is a recommended read if your interests include the Union County area, slavery, or the Jackson or Chesney families. That’s why we’ve published it in its entirety in “East Tennessee Roots.” You can read it all in Volume 5, Numbers 2, 3, and 4.

Above:
Pharaoh Jackson Chesney, born a slave, brought to East Tennessee by his Masters Jackson, sold to John Chesney, and living in Union County in 1902.

Right:
Pharaoh Jackson Chesney and some of his family members at his home in Union County, Tennessee.

– Both pictures taken from the book, “Life and Times of Pharaoh Jackson Chesney,” by J.C. Webster, published in 1902.

