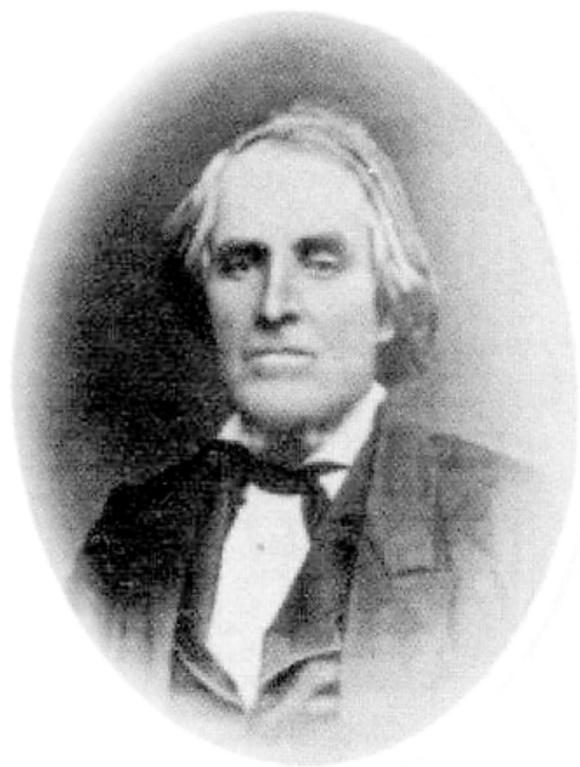


## A Step Back in Time By Bobbie Sue Shelton



Edward McClelland, grandson of George and Flora Lowe and great-great grandson of Chesley Williams, “The Father of Eagleville”, wrote the following article. Edward lives in Texas and has in his possession copies of many documents that belonged to the Williams family.

Chesley Williams was born July 22, 1809 in Williamson County about two miles west of College Grove, to the Rev. James and Sarah (Allison) Williams who were both born in North Carolina. Sarah was the daughter of Robert Allison Jr. and Sarah Ogilvie. Chesley was the eldest of five boys and five girls. By 1812 the Williams

family resettled two and one half miles north of Chapel Hill on what is now 31A and established their home *Civil Order*. That name was coined after a permanent house was built and James declared, “Here I will have law and order.”

In addition to being a Methodist minister, James Williams was a farmer, skilled tailor and merchant. *Civil Order* had many activities that were not the usual farming operations of that day. It had a sawmill, tannery, gristmill, blacksmith shop, cotton gin, church, tailor shop, post office, store, wine cellar and silk worms to produce that fiber.

James would ride horseback to Cincinnati to order new goods for his store and have them sent by riverboat to Nashville. Slaves would then haul them the remaining distance. The Methodist Conference met at *Civil Order* one year and James went to the church conference in Baltimore in 1814. It was from this latter trip that he introduced a new poem to the area that would become our national anthem – the *Star Spangled Banner*.

It was undoubtedly this varied production and merchandising environment that Chesley learned and honed his business acumen. During his youth he had ample opportunity to observe numerous business activities in which he engaged throughout his lifetime.

One story survives from Chesley’s boyhood. John Weakly Covington told of a young Triune couple, William Demonbreun and Mary Adaline Patton, who decided to elope and get married at Sister Charity Allison’s near Unionville. It was decided that Rev. James Williams perform the ceremony. Young Chesley accompanied his father to the wedding.

As the wedding began with everyone in place, the best man could see out a side window that two boys were in a spirited fistfight. The two scrappers were Chesley and his first cousin, James P. Allison. Following the nuptials as the reception began; the sweaty and bruised boys came in for pound cake and cider.

\*“This rivalry between the two cousins was to be instilled into the people of the two villages that they would sponsor. Chesley Williams has often been referred

## Chesley Williams

to as ‘the daddy of Eagleville’ and James P. Allison deserves the same title at College Grove. This rivalry continues until the present day as the annual Christmas Eve basketball game attests.”\* (Tales My Grandmother Told Me”, by John Weakly Covington, 1963 Triune: Two Centuries at the Crossroads, 2004).

Chesley Williams married Elizabeth Jordan, daughter of Thomas Jordan and Sophia Reeve Hyde of Triune, on December 10, 1830. They had ten children – three boys and seven girls.

The center of Chesley’s business ventures was the Williams Store, which he started in 1832 in Eagleville. He also became a partner in the Hawkins Store in Triune with Tom Perkins and Edward L. Jordan. After a short time Chesley resigned from this partnership in the Triune community.

The Williams Store operated under Williams’ ownership for 135 years until it closed in 1967. Many will remember the store as more than a retail outlet. It was a spot where the community could gather to chat and hear the news and gossip of the day. Tobacco was allowed as the spittoons attested.

Chesley passed the store on to his sons, James Chesley (JC) and Robert Edward about the time of his death in 1892. But Robert soon left Eagleville, so JC assumed ownership until 1910 when he gave it to his son, Edward Lesley Williams who became the last proprietor. As the façade on the building indicates, the store was remodeled in 1936. During the Civil War the store was burned on an Eagleville raid by Union troops, and Chesley attempted to be paid reparations from the federal government. It is not known whether he was successful.

For such a small outlet the Williams Store sold a wide range of goods. A 1909 inventory valued all the merchandise at \$8,368, or about \$170,000 in today’s dollars. Mainstays were dry good and clothing, including foot ware. House wares and flat ware were also inventoried, as well as such foods as coffee and tea. Hardware and farm implements were available for sale.

As the local pharmacist Chesley sold a wide range of medicines and chemicals. Inventory records show that many of the substances available for sale would be illegal today. Such narcotics as codeine, morphine, cocaine and opium were stocked. How many of these products were purchased without a doctor’s prescription is not known, but addictive substances were widely used in the last 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Another area of sales was to the Greenwood, Vernon, Little Rock, Williams, and Eagleville Public Schools. The Eagleville Academy also had an account. Schools did not buy and inventory their supplies as they do today. They bought them as needed. Expendables such as crayons and chalk were bought at a dime a box on a weekly basis. The Williams Store also stocked textbooks.

Schools also made other seasonal purchases. A number of brooms were sold at the beginning of each school year, and when they were worn out. This was also the peak sale of buckets and dippers, indicating public water supplies were truly public at local educational institutions. In addition, the Williams Store sold the school ropes and well buckets.

Records show Chesley sold regularly to the Eagleville Baptist Church, but there are no records that he sold to other local churches. They may well have made cash purchases, while the Baptist’s maintained a credit account. The most frequent sales were coal oil and lamp chimneys. From time to time new windowpanes were needed.

Sales activity at the store can be gleaned from the collection of Chesley Williams’ records that have survived. First, cash sales show that business was highly seasonal, mirroring activity in the local agricultural community. A small increase in sales in the spring coincides with the higher spending to meet the needs

required for planting, while the larger increase in sales at year-end reflected annual harvest income by farmers.

The percentage of cash sales to total sales is not known, but credit sales were significant to overall operations of the Williams Store. Accounts receivable records show most local families, including the Williams, purchased most goods on credit. Interestingly by today's standards, Chesley did not charge interest on outstanding balances and no minimum monthly payments were required.

To be successful for such a long period of time the Williams's operated profitably. First, profits were ensured by wide margins to offset the lack of interest on outstanding balances. Credit accounts were paid down whenever the customer acquired cash, even small sums. Payments in the summer suggested sales of such items as fruits, vegetables, etc. Seasonal sales of fall crops provided farmers with most of their income. These payments funded the annual peak in sales and allowed customers to pay down outstanding debts. By in large, credit accounts were paid off at yearend.

The second thing that Chesley did was to take advantage of the trade credit that was offered to him by wholesalers and manufacturers. Payment records show that cash discounts of 1% or 2% were available on most merchandise sold at the Williams Store and occasionally 10% was offered. A 2% discount may seem slim. However, if the turnover of the item was fast enough the annual rate of discount, or savings, could be well into double digits.

<b>Month</b>	<b>1882</b>	<b>1883</b>	<b>1898</b>	<b>1899</b>	<b>1900</b>
January	426	481	513	634	757
February	331	544	537	503	588
March	406	715	791	696	844
April	369	591	797	957	1,057
May	413	617	882	1,055	1,055
June	393	450	694	794	673
July	557	566	697	662	718
August	620	619	791	733	809
September	644	624	789	806	740
October	581	706	1,134	1,151	1,060
November	634	697	1,298	1,433	1,295
December	735	1,019	1,533	1,487	1,366

Chesley Williams was the second postmaster in Eagleville, succeeding William Nunn in 1836. He held the office 30 years, longer than any other person. John W. Christopher assumed the office in 1866, and was replaced by Robert S. Brown, a Republican, in 1870 that ran the post office until 1885. Then Chesley's youngest son Robert held the office for four years and was succeeded by James W. Brown and then Robert S. Brown again until 1891. The Williams held the

office once more from 1893 to 1897 with James C. Williams at the helm. From 1897 to 1909 the Republicans again got the job, Robert S. Brown, Jr., holding the office.

Republicans holding the office of postmaster must have been a thorn in Chesley's side. Surviving correspondence shows he challenged the Browns' appointments, which turned heads in the government. Chesley wrote to U.S. Representative James D. Richardson in Washington, D.C. in the 1880s asking the Postmaster General to make a change in the job in Eagleville. That request was turned down because the policy was not to remove any incumbent from office except for just cause. An example of the policy was the Shelbyville post office where someone wanted a Mrs. Wisener removed, but that request was positively denied by the Postmaster General. A change in Eagleville was not made until Brown's term expired.

*(Chesley Williams articles to be continued.)*



**Elizabeth Jordan Williams**

## Chesley Williams: Toll Road Owner/Manager

This is a continuation of "The Chesley Williams" article.  
Written by Ed McClellan, a great, great grandson of Chesley Williams.

Chesley Williams was a major shareholder and manager of the toll roads in the Eagleville area. His involvement began in 1855 and ended at his death in 1892. This activity was likely his second longest running obligation aside from the management of his store.

By the authority of Governor Andrew Johnson, stock was issued for the Eagleville, Unionville & Shelbyville Turnpike Company (EU&S) on January 5, 1855. It was part of the road system running from Nashville into Alabama and was an extension of the Nolensville Turnpike south of Triune.

The company was organized in two divisions. The northern division with three tollgates ran roughly from south of Kirkland to Unionville, and the southern division was in Bedford County south of Unionville to Shelbyville. The two southern tollgates were located one mile from Shelbyville, the "town gate", and the Fall Creek gate was six miles from Shelbyville.

The first board of directors of the northern division was Chesley Williams, president; William Collins, secretary; Williamson Jordan; Noah Scales; and Alford Ransom. The principle stockholders were Williamson Jordan, Noah Scales and Chesley Williams, with \$1,500 stock each. The other 66 stockholders raised the total equity to \$18,925. The company also had an initial debt of about \$2,600.

The first board of directors of the southern division was John T. Neil, William G. Cowan, John F. Thompson, David Williams and Garret Phillips. In October 1855 all the directors of both divisions met to relinquish all claims on profits and dividends generated in the division that they did not manage. The north gave up the profits earned in the southern division, and the south gave up the profits earned in the northern division.

Because initial travel was light, it took time to collect enough money to acquire the required tollgate houses. The first in the northern division was purchased from Williamson Jordan about three miles north of Eagleville. And for several years tolls were collected at the homes of Ivey Phillips and W.S. Marshall. (Tollgate house one was subsequently owned and operated by Leonard K. Lowe and then his son George K. Lowe.)

The second tollgate house was built at W.G. Osborns, and a third house was not built until 1869 or 1870. These gates were located between the Rutherford County line and Rover and between Rover and Unionville. (In 1900 the three toll gates were run by Mrs. Ann Glimp at gate one, Mrs. Tennis Allison at gate two,

and A.N. Vincent and E. Blanton at gate three.)

In 1860 a company was organized to build the Eagleville and Chapel Hill Pike. Chesley Williams invested in that company. The EU&S Turnpike subscribed \$500 to that project, but because of the Civil War the sum was not paid until 1866. This investment increased travel on the EU&S Turnpike.

Tollgate records survive for the years 1900 through 1905. Tolls were levied on the number of travelers and means of transportation. Loaded wagons paid more than empty ones. Tolls were geared to type of wagon or buggy, loaded or empty, as well as number and kinds of animals being herded along the pike. One-horse buggies were the most frequent means of conveyance on the turnpikes and paid a toll of 10 cents. One interesting feature was a hearse without a corpse paid a 25-cent toll, implying a hearse with a corpse paid nothing.

Access to toll roads was free during the night as the tollgates were open, but the gates were closed about 6AM each morning. Tolls were collected during the day, and the gates were again raised about 9PM.

According to the 1986 edition of History of Rover and the 10<sup>th</sup> District of Bedford County, Humphrey H. Boyce became suspicious of the large number of wagons traveling after midnight. One night he closed the gate and when the wagons arrived, he checked them out. They turned out to be grave robbers hauling disinterred corpses.

The Civil War added heavily to the cost of operating the turnpike. The bridge over the Harpeth River was made impassible by the large number of Confederate soldiers that crossed it.

The original bridge was located immediately east of the present bridge on US41A, and the turnpike ran along the west bank of the river and on the east side of the old Pinson's house and barn. Construction of US41A required a fill at the Harpeth River and a cut on the west side of the old Cook home that burned. The property is now home of the Tuckaway Country Gardens

After the Union forces arrived the bridge was burned down. The EU&S Turnpike had to be rebuilt three different times. The Yankees also burned down the Hailey tollgate house. It is highly likely that the fires were started by the Third Indiana Cavalry.



Eagleville Tennessee 1910

Home of Chesley Williams - 1910 (The old road was located on the west side of the home instead of the east side, as the present road

\*In an Official Report by Brigadier General Jefferson Davis, U.S. Army, from the headquarters, First Division, Twentieth Army Corps, on March 16, 1863, he wrote that a large storehouse in Eagleville (most likely the Williams Store as it was burned down during the war) was burned by the Third Indiana Cavalry on March 11. And two days later two other houses in the town were burned. (Chesley's house was spared, but the Missionary Baptist Church, which was used as a Confederate hospital, was also torched at some point in the war.) (\**The Official Records of the War of Rebellion, Chapter XXV, pp. 144-45.*)

The Hailey tollgate house was rebuilt, but remained unoccupied. Not until traffic increased sufficiently was a replacement house built at Mrs. Reedder's in 1877.

Eagleville was in a difficult location in the southeastern corner of Williamson County.

A long hard trip was required to get to the county seat of Franklin. Hills between the two towns deterred construction of a direct road between the two. The steep grades of the existing roads that ran through the hills were known as the “pull tights” since teamsters had to maintain a tight rein on their teams when crossing them.

The longer and more expedient route to Franklin was via Triune and the Murfreesboro-Franklin Road. That trip more closely followed the Harpeth River Valley crossed over smaller hills.

The difficulty of getting to Franklin led to moving the Williamson-Rutherford County line to the west in March, 1874, so Eagleville became part of Rutherford County. Traffic then shifted to the closer county seat of Murfreesboro, and demand for additional roads increased.

About 1877 the Eagleville and Salem Turnpike Company was formed to improve travel to Murfreesboro. Chesley Williams purchased the largest number of shares, 22% of the total, among the 25 initial stockholders. He was also president and treasurer of the company. Richard Ransom was secretary.

The road was built through Concord, despite the best efforts of the citizens of Versailles to run it through the Rockvale community. The route chosen is now State Road 99.

The EU&S Turnpike had been profitable during the early years of the 1880s. Annual surpluses were loaned to “good and solvent men.” Chesley Williams wrote that notes were collected and were sufficient to pay court costs, lawyers’ fees, and a 5% dividend to shareholders. There were also “some funds to commence putting our pike in first rate repairs and condition.”

But then a costly problem proliferated. Many people with little or no money traveled many miles around the turnpikes to avoid paying tolls. To minimize this extra travel shunpikes -- run rounds -- were built in close proximity around the tollgates.

In 1878 a shunpike was attempted to bypass the Hailey tollgate. This led to a costly lawsuit, which forced the company to cut back on all expenses and “use all economies to save funds.”

The case, in which Chesley was deeply involved, was tried and won in 1888.



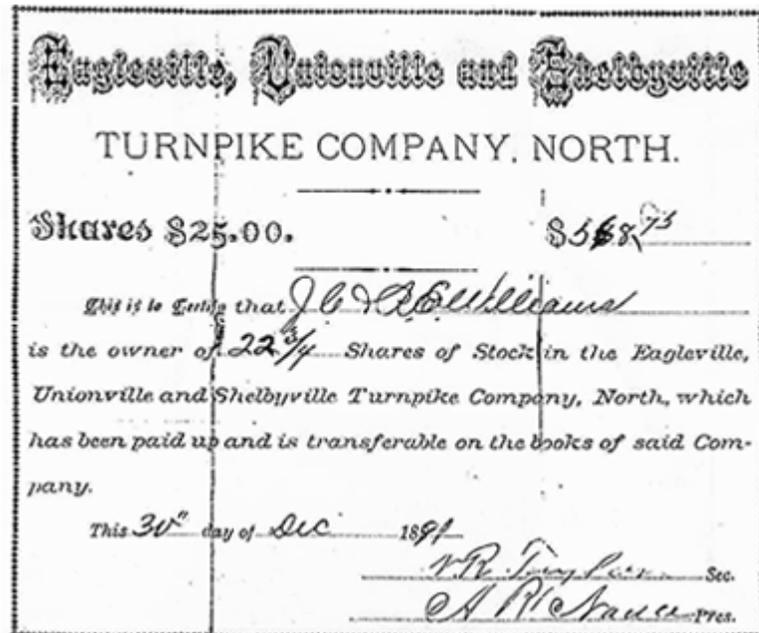
**Tollgate House Between Rover & Unionville - Circa 1896**  
L- R: Elish Blanton, gate keeper, Don Farmer (on horse), Lucy Blanton, Marion Vincent, Netta Vincent, Allene Vincent, Parilee Vincent

A judgment of \$2,500 and court fees were recovered. But the case was then appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court.

Chesley Williams retired as an active manager of the toll roads just a short time before his death. A proclamation by Richard Ransom at Chesley’s retirement noted that although

he was a beloved president and treasurer, age, infirmity and deep affliction made him unable to attend to the duties incumbent upon him.

*(The Chesley Williams Papers, 1856-1927, are the primary source for this article. They are available on microfilm from the Tennessee State Library.)*



**Tollroad Shares Certificate - 1891**



The early tollgate house near the Rutherford-Bedford County Line. (A tollgate was not a gate, but a pole that was attached at one end and lowered across the road to close it. The purpose was to collect a fee for the privilege of using the road. Ones who lived in the house collected the fee.)



**Former Tollgate House near the Rutherford-Bedford County Line**