

RADFORD GATLIN
GATLINBURG'S FIRST TOURIST

by J. A. Sharp

If a tourist could be defined as a short-time resident, perhaps Radford Gatlin could have qualified as Gatlinburg's first, although he antedated by a hundred years the millions who, in recent years, have made Gatlinburg the tourist Mecca of eastern America. He arrived there about 1854, remained only four or five years, left hurriedly, and apparently the local populace had something to do with his hasty departure and considered it good riddance.

Gatlin's brief stay in Gatlinburg left its mark, including the name of the place, but after the passage of one hundred years it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. Accurate facts in the lives of all local historical characters are hard to find; a sketch on the life of Andrew Jackson would be much easier. Radford Gatlin was truly Sevier County's will o'-the-wisp. This article will not rehash the various stories and traditions concerning Gatlin, but will attempt to cite a few facts relative to his short residence in Sevier County.

Our first contact with Gatlin was in the neighboring county of Jefferson, where he was living as early as 1825. In 1833, he purchased seventy acres from Calloway Hodges on Blue Springs Creek in the Strawberry Plains section of Jefferson County, and in 1836 he obtained an additional fifty-five acres in the same vicinity from James A. Thornton. Later, in 1838, he entered one hundred acres nearby the first two tracts.

Gatlin was engaged in many petty lawsuits with his neighbors in Jefferson County and lost most of them. However, he demonstrated his qualities of leadership by serving as captain of a militia company for a few years, but was never a member of the county court, as he was later in Sevier County. He did sometimes serve as juror and as road overseer.

In 1842, Gatlin sold his land in Jefferson County to Thomas Stringfield, and made his first appearance in Sevier County the same year, when he bought one hundred twenty-five acres from John Kellein in the "North of the River" section, not far from his old Jefferson County home on Blue Springs Creek. This tract joined the lands of James Ash, James Hamilton and Alexander Douglas. Later, in 1849, he enlarged his farm by the purchase of another tract on Tuckahoe Creek. This farm was known as the "Gatlin Place" for many years. While living here Gatlin represented the twelfth civil district in Sevier County Court.

The Sevier County Census of 1850 shows that Gatlin was born in Georgia about 1798. Nothing is known of his ancestry. His wife was Elizabeth, born in Tennessee about 1802, but her maiden name is unknown. If there were any Gatlin children they were not living with their parents in 1850, and no other Gatlins were living in Sevier County at that time. The Gatlins were still living in the north of French Broad country in 1850, here they were neighbors of the Douglas, Hickman, Underwood, Huffacker and Cate families. The census listed Radford as a "Merchant," with real estate worth \$500.00.

Mr. Sam J. Thornburgh, Knoxville attorney, recalls that his mother, Mrs. Jane Hamilton Thornburgh, attended an "Old Field" school taught by

Gatlin in the Paw Paw Hollow community. Mr. Thornburgh also remembers that Gatlin was a part-time Baptist preacher who could, however, at times use language closely approaching the profane, as he did one hot Summer day when he returned home and found his cow out of the pasture field. After chasing the cow for some time Mr. Gatlin yelled to his wife in these not very complimentary terms: "Elizabeth, you damned old hellion, head that cow off." Mrs. Gatlin, very sharply, replied, "What did you say, Mr. Gatlin?" To which, Mr. Gatlin, in more conciliatory tones, answered: "I said, Mrs. Gatlin, will you please head that cow off?"

The old minute book of the Paw Paw Hollow Baptist Church records that Gatlin and wife Elizabeth became members of the Church in September, 1841, following a revival. Within one year, the Church ordained Gatlin as a regular minister, and almost immediately after joining the Church he became assistant clerk, and wrote the minutes in a very legible and beautiful hand and his spelling, punctuation and grammar were almost perfect in an era of atrocious spelling and poor English composition in East Tennessee.

On December 9, 1843, Gatlin was the major actor in a big Church dispute that resulted in a split-up of the Paw Paw Hollow Church. Sometimes previously Gatlin had written a letter to the local Baptist Association condemning the Tennessee Baptist Convention for adopting a missionary program at Jonesboro in 1842. Apparently Gatlin's position in this bitter Baptist missionary controversy was that neither the anti-missionary Baptists nor the pro-missionary Baptists should be denied "fellowship" in the Church. But the Association interpreted Gatlin's letter as "offensive," and sent a committee of their leaders to investigate the trouble at Paw Paw Hollow. Gatlin refused to let them use the Church, and the visiting committee reported him most "rude and uncivil."

Two days later the committee made the second attempt to use the Church and met with the same treatment from Gatlin. The committee's report sounds like there may have been fist fights in the Church yard. Mr. Thornburgh recalled that his mother told him that they "fought for half a day in the Paw Paw Hollow Church yard." After being told by Gatlin that they could only use the Church if they would not discuss the subject which brought them and if they would "make up their minds in ten minutes," the committee with part of the Church members met in a shed attached to the Church. Here they proceeded to prefer "Articles of Complaint against Radford Gatlin," and voted "forth with to exclude Gatlin" from the Church.

On July 1, 1854, Gatlin sold his Tuckahoe Creek farm to Alexander Douglas and Edward Douglas, and received \$1,000.00 for it which gave him a nice profit. Soon afterwards he must have moved to the White Oak Flats, or the future Gatlinburg, because, on September 2, 1854, he obtained fifty acres there from Elisha Ogle. He paid \$30.00 for this tract which joined the lands of Thomas Ogle, Sr. and Thomas Ogle, Jr. Gatlin's fifty acres were on the east side of the West Fork of Little Pigeon, starting at the river bank "twenty poles below the mouth of Roaring Fork Creek." His land extended up the river to a point where the old Roaring Fork road left the main road in front of and northwest of the Mountain View Hotel. Here he lived and operated a store at the later site of Calvin Ogle's store, just as he had done "North of the River." Gatlin's fifty acres also went to the top of "Burg Hill" and down the hill to Roaring Fork and down the creek to the beginning on the river.

On September 4, 1854, about the same time that he obtained his fifty acres in the White Oak Flats, Gatlin entered 5,000 acres, described in the Tennessee grant, issued on October 30, 1855, as follows:

"Lying ... on the west fork of Little Pigeon River, Beginning at a Sycamore on the east bank of the river, below and near the third ford, below the long ford on Said river, running East 2240 poles to a stake, South 5824 poles to the top of Smoky Mountain on the State line, thence west 2240 poles to a State, North forty five west 1900 poles to the head waters of Little River, thence north 4480 poles to a Stake, thence East to the Beginning, Supposed to include the complement, of 5,000 acres, after deducting all former entries out of this Survey."

Acually this grant covered a wide area in Sevier County, over 100,000 acres and all of the White Oak Flats country, but as stated above Gatlin only claimed 5,000 acres "after deducting all former entries." The tract was shaped almost like a rectangle, with north-south lines, 18.2 miles, and the east-west lines, 11.2 miles. If local people of the White Oak Flats believed that Gatlin intended to dispossess them of their lands, as tradition stated, their fears may well have arisen as a result of the fact thousands of acres of settled lands were included in his grant.

In 1931, collateral heirs of Gatlin sued the Champion Fibre Company for recovery of title to lands included in the Gatlin grant. After a ten days' trial in the Sevier County circuit court, Judge James L. Drinnon instructed the jury to render a verdict in favor of the Company. We are indebted to Mr. John O. Morrell, one of the lawyers for the Gatlin heirs, for the following identification of some of the land marks in the old grant:

"The beginning corner of this grant was on the east bank of the West Prong of Little Pigeon River above the old Banner Church and Schoolhouse, and something like 100 yards upstream from the bridge that recently crossed over to the Bill McCarter place. The "Long Ford" did not cross the river, but ran in the river along the its east bank just above the mouth of Dudley Creek. There were apparently two fords, one near the lower end of "Bent Field," and another about opposite the residence of D. C. Maples, Sr.; then at the third ford crossed to the west bank of the river, forded Norton Creek, and went up toward Rel Maples' dude ranch, and down Flat Branch, coming back to the river at Charley Perry's old place. The second corner of the grant was at or near the "Shin Bone" on the Cam Butler farm on the Big East Fork of Pigeon River, and the third corner would have been some 2 or 3 miles in North Carolina if the distance were carried out, but as it called for the top of Smoky Mountain and the State line, it would to stop there."

Although few records of Gatlin's activities in the White Oak Flats have come to light, there is strong evidence that his feud with his new mountain neighbors may have started over Gatlin's attempts to change the main road through the settlement. Sevier County court records show that Gatlin was able to get the court, in January, 1857, to appoint a jury of view to mark out an "alteration in the road to run immediately from the north bank of Roaring Fork up Pigeon River along the eastern bank to the corner of Radford Gatlin's field opposite the farm occupied by Caleb Ogle, thence along the south side of said Gatlin's field so as to intersect the old road again at the fork of the road which leads to the Glades."

It appears that nothing was done about this road change, but Gatlin was persistent and over a year later, in April, 1858, he had the court app-

oint a second jury to mark out an "alteration in the road in the White Oak Flats - to commence at the mouth of Roaring Fork and running as near as practicable with the river to the upper end of Radford Gatlin's enclosed land thence with the enclosed land on the south side of the fence intersecting the old road at the fork leading to the Glades."

The original location of this part of the old road is unknown. But the change proposed by Gatlin must have been partly, if not wholly, for his own benefit, because the new road was to follow Gatlin's fifty acres along the river and also along the "south side" of his field. If Gatlin was successful in getting the road changed no record has come to the writer's attention. However, after Gatlin's departure the road was located exactly where Gatlin proposed, at least from the mouth of Roaring Fork along the river and it remains there today as a part of the Parkway through Gatlinburg.

Gatlin's first trouble with the White Oak Flats natives came when both he and his wife Elizabeth were indicted by the Sevier County grand jury for assault and battery "upon the Body of Thomas Ogle, Sr." Separate trials were held in the circuit court. This fight occurred on June 10, 1857, but the cases were postponed and Elizabeth's case did not come to trial until March 21, 1859. The testimony of Thomas Ogle, Sr. at her trial was summarized as follows: "Elizabeth Gatlin struck him in the hand with a stick that she had been striking the cattle of Witness, but when he came up she hit him in the hand with a pine stick, that he caught hold of said stick and jerked her on the ground and that Defendant was striking at Ogle several times with the stick and she hit him in the hand as he caught stick." Thomas Ogle's daughter-in-law, Charity Ogle, wife of his son, Levi Ogle, stated that she "turned the cattle into the road by the house of Mrs. Gatlin and saw Elizabeth Gatlin strike Thomas Ogle." Mrs. Gatlin was convicted and fined one dollar.

Gatlin's trial occurred on November 15, 1858 and also resulted in conviction, but he was granted a new trial which occurred on November 24, 1859, again resulting in conviction. No details of Gatlin's part in the fight were found, but he apparently intervend in the fight between Ogle and Mrs. Gatlin, perhaps at a later date. His fine was also one dollar. The extent of the bitterness in this Gatlin-Ogle feud may be indicated by Gatlin's appeal of both cases to the Tennessee Supreme Court rather than pay the small one dollar fines. The high court affirmed the decisions of the local court.

The writer believes that the above fight resulted from a dispute between Gatlin and the Ogles over the road change. Gatlin, an outspoken and educated "furriner" and a newcomer in the White Oak Flats, tried to change the road and his Ogle neighbors objected. Further evidence of this was Thomas Ogle's request of the County Court, in January, 1858, that he be allowed to "remove the bars from across the road running through his field and close up said road," which request was granted on the ground that the "road around his (Ogle's) field had been opened and in good repair."

Edward Douglas and John Douglas, two of Gatlin's old "North of the River" neighbors, proved their friendship by serving as bondsmen in these assault and battery cases. Also, James McNelly, Samuel Pickens and David McMahan, three of the County's most prominent citizens and large land owners, served as Gatlin bondsmen. Gatlin himself paid his wife's fine and costs, but his bondsmen had to pay his fine and costs, in July 1861, after Gatlin had left the County.

Not long after the fight Gatlin's "barn and Stables" were "burned up with his grain and horse, and his cattle killed in the woods," according to a record in the archives of the Tennessee Supreme Court. Gatlin brought an arson charge against Levi Ogle and Thomas Ogle, but after a five days' investigation the Sevier County grand jury brought no indictments. Witnesses that appeared were Isaac T. Ogle, Elisha Ogle, William R. King, Hercules Ogle, Serena Ogle, Margaret Huskey and Mary Huskey.

Then, on December 14, 1857, Gatlin appeared before Philip S. Shults, a justice of the peace, and swore out a peace warrant against "Thomas Ogle Senr., William Ogle known as the son of said Thomas Ogle Senr., Isaac Ogle Senr., Elisha Ogle and a certain Aaron Onsley." Gatlin made oath that he was afraid that these men would "burn his...dwelling house and other buildings and perhaps destroy the lives of him... and his wife or that they will procure or cause the same to be done by putting into circulation false reports, by making misrepresentations respecting said deponent and wife, by suppressing the evidence of the late burning of Said deponent's stables, barn and property, thereby giving encouragement and inciting incendiaries to further acts of felony on the buildings and property of said deponent."

Trial of these defendants was before John T. Havis, justice of peace on December 20, 1857. Witnesses for the defendants were Levi Ogle, Stephen Huskey, Nathaniel King and Jesse Stafford. They testified that they did not think the Gatlins were in danger from these men "on account of the trial just over about the burning of the barn," that they had not heard the defendants threaten the Gatlins, and that all of the defendants were "respectable, quiet and truthful men." Justice Havis dismissed the case on the ground that the "prosecution was frivoulous," and Gatlin was charged with the costs.

On March 17, 1858, in a petition filed before the Sevier County circuit court for a hearing before the latter court, Gatlin objected to the procedure in Havis' court. He said that when the peace warrant arrests were made by Constable C.A. Clementson he was "quite Sick and unwell so much so as to be confined to his bed in very bad weather," and that Clementson agreed to bring the defendants to his (Gatlin's) house for trial, but instead "Esq. Havis and defendants and witnesses went to a small church or meeting house" for the rial, and the "cold and rainy" weather and his "feeble health" prevented him from attending the trial. Gatlin also complained that he had no witnesses and that the bill of costs, about \$30.00, was exorbitant.

Gatlin's petition was dismissed by Thomas W. Hurley, circuit judge, but his appeal to the Supreme Court was granted. Again the higher court affirmed the decision of the local court; thus, Gatlin lost again in his recourse to the courts to obtain a redress of his grievances against the White Oak Flats natives. And as far as we know this was the last of the "lawing between Gatlin and the Ogles."

The oft-repeated story that the natives told Gatlin they would name the place for him if he would leave does not sound very logical, or consistent with the revengeful attitude of clannish mountain people toward a despised and obnoxious outsider. A more plausible explanation is that Gatlin was able to get his name perpetuated before the feuding started. Proof of this may be indicated by the National Archives' record of the establishment of a post office at "Gatlinburg, Sevier County, Tennessee, on January 29, 1856." The road dispute and the Gatlin-Ogle feud did not begin until January, 1857, a year after the "White Oak Flats" off-

icially became "Gatlinburg." Perhaps a more appropriate name would have been "Ogleburg."

It was said that Gatlin was also able to get the post office located in his store and that Richard Reagan became the first postmaster. And on April 24, 1858, a mail route was established between Sevierville, and Casher's Valley, South Carolina by way of the new "Gatlinburg" post office; the mail contractors were Daniel W. Reagan and J.S. Conner who received \$309.00 per annum for the weekly roundtrip of 176 miles.

As the years passed stories about Gatlin's brief sojourn in Gatlinburg were enlarged and embellished, with telling, until he became an almost legendary figure. Careful research has unearthed no proof the Gatlin even owned a "negro servant", much less that he buried her by the side of his store in Gatlinburg after whipping her unmercifully. That Gatlin held pro-southern and pro-slavery views is undoubted, but it is unlikely that White Oak Flats natives in the 1850's were too much concerned with such political questions. Elizabeth Gatlin certainly did not die in Gatlinburg, as was told; neither does this writer believe that she burned the Gatlin barn and stables, nor that she killed the Gatlin cattle in the woods to get even with a husband who had mistreated her. And Gatlin could not have been the lone Sevier Countain who voted for secession in 1861, because he left the County at least two years before.

The exact date of Gatlin's leave-taking from his namesake village in the Great Smokies is unknown, but by 1858 or 1859, it must have been clear to him that his presence was unwanted. Apparently he returned for a few years to the neighborhood of Strawberry Plains, his old Jefferson County home. Miss Laura Luttrell, former McClung Room custodian of the Lawson-McGhee Library of Knoxville, whose old home was at Strawberry Plains, remembers talking to old residents who knew Gatlin. Some of these men told Miss Luttrell of being students in Gatlin's school on Lyon's Creek near Trentville and Strawberry Plains, about the beginning of the Civil War; they recalled that Gatlin, in addition to being a "real character" was a good teacher, wrote a beautiful hand and carried a pistol to his school.

Gatlin was still at Strawberry Plains on the night of November 8, 1861, when eight or ten Sevier County Unionists attempted to burn the railroad bridge across the Holston River at that place and were prevented from doing so by a lone Confederate guard, James Keelan. Gatlin wrote a very exaggerated and bombastic account of this affair, making Keelan a great hero and claiming that forty "Lincolnites" attacked the bridge and that Keelan killed three of them with his dagger, all of which was untrue. In 1862, Gatlin's bridge-burning story was published in the form of a pamphlet entitled, "The Immortal Hero—James Keelan," by the Atlanta newspaper, "Daily Intelligencer" and was doubtless used as Confederate propoganda and morale builder among Confederate troops during the Civil War.

Miss Luttrell also learned that Gatlin left Strawberry Plains about the year, 1863, when Federal troops occupied East Tennessee. She was told that he went back to his native state of Georgia, and was associated the Confederate provost marshall in Atlanta until the end of the war. And the late Mr. A.C. Parrott, local historian of Strawberry Plains, told Miss Luttrell that both Gatlin and Elizabeth were living in Union, South Carolina, as late as 1879 or 1880, and that both were then quite feeble.
