

# **Alice Williamson's Diary**

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## Duke University Libraries

### *About Alice Williamson.*

We know very little about Alice except what we can learn of her attitudes and circumstances through her own words. A visit to the 1860 US Census for Sumner County, Tennessee gives us some basic facts about Alice and her family. Through the [census record](#) we can see that Alice would have been 16 years old at the time she wrote her diary. R.[Robert] Williamson is listed as the head of household and his place of birth is listed as Virginia. His occupation is listed as a farmer with the family's real property valued at \$3,000 and personal property valued at \$2,000.

The [census](#) lists R.R. Williamson, aged 19 and Joseph Williamson, age 15, presumably her brothers Rush and Jo mentioned on pages 23, 34, and 35 in her diary. Other household members listed on the 1860 census include mother Elizabeth Williamson, age 45, born in Tenn.; Thomas Williamson, age 16, also listed as being a farmer; Harris and Thomas Ocburn (sp?), ages 12 and 13; Jane, age 5; a 91 year old male Williamson (first name illegible); Eskill and George Williamson, ages 9 and 7.

**Rebellion Revisited, a History of Sumner County, Tennessee From 1861 to 1870**, a book by Walter T. Durham, tells us that she would have been a member of the senior class of 1862 at Howard Female Institute, if the war had not closed the school. In 1866, the school reopened, and she graduated in 1867. Alice Williamson died in 1869, at a young age of 21.

We have no other papers of Williamson or her family nor are we aware of any other family papers in another library or archival repository. Even so, this tiny diary provides a colorful window into one girl's Civil War experiences and an interesting view of the changes the Civil War and emancipation brought in her small rural community.

**Feb. 19th 1864** What a negligent creature I am I should have been keeping a journal all this time to show to my rebel brothers. I have been studying all the morning and talking all the evening seeking & sighing for rebels. Our king ([old Payne](#)) has just passed. I suppose he has killed every rebel in twenty miles of [Gallatin](#) and burned every town. Poor fellow! you had better be praying old Sinner! His Lordship left Tuesday. Wednesday three wagons loaded with furniture came over. I do not pretend to say that he sent them. No! I indeed, I would not. I would not slander our king. Any old citizen can see by going to his (Paynes) palace that his furniture was not taken from Archie Miller's house & other places near by. He always goes for rebels but invariably brings furniture. I suppose his task is to furnish the contraband camp, i.e. the camp of his angels (colored).

**March 2d** Snow four inches deep, no winds and the air is quite pleasant, just cold enough to skate. Our king left Monday with a few soldiers in the direction of [Hartsville](#). All the stores are closed by his order and no passes given till his return. Mr. D. has come to get Pa to go and hear what he says to his negroes as he is going to drive them off & he has been so ill used by old Payne that he is afraid to speak without a witness to prove what he said.

**March 3d.** Snow all melted and weather fine. Gen. Payne rode out this evening to look at the stock, in his last trip he killed only one man (citizen, he always kills citizens when he cant find soldiers) swears he will kill every man in Gallatin and [Hartsville](#) if bush whacking isn't stopped shortly.

**March 11th** Yesterday was the day of elections and as only the union men were allowed to vote nobody knows how it turned out nor do they care. Sallie Montgomery rode out this evening, the pickets would not let her pass, so she slipped them as many do. I suppose they are scared again. Perhaps that scamp [John Morgan](#) is about. I only hope he is, for we have not seen a rebel for more than a year and our day must come soon

**March 12th** Old Payne dined at Mrs. Hales today: every one despises him but are afraid to show it. Yesterday he went up the country a few miles to a Mr. Dalton's whose son came home from the Southern Army the day before and had the same day taken the Amnesty Oath. Riding up to the door he enquired of Mr. Dalton if his son was at home but before he answered his son came to the door. Old Nick then told him to get his horse and go with him. After insulting the father he carried his son a half mile away and shot him six times. One of Payne's escort hearing the young man groan with pain placed a pistol to his temple and remarked, I will stop that, sir, he shot him again. But this is nothing new this is the fifth man that has been shot in this way, besides numbers that have been carried off by scouts and never return.

**March 11th** I learn today that Gen. Payne had no charge against Mr. Dalton, so he told his (Dalton's) father. After killing him he rode back to the house and told Mr. D. that his son was in sight - he could bury him if he wished. Today a gentleman (Col. E\_\_\_\_) was in Paynes office when he was trying a young man about sixteen years old and the only support of an aged father who was with him. His crime was being a rebel. Payne sent the young man to jail telling the guard to bring him out a seven o'clo. The father actually fell upon his knees before the heartless tyrant but was heartlessly bidden to rise and go home, the young man has never been heard of since.

**March 12th** Weather moderate; so is old Payne, but as weather is changeable our general is too.

**March 16th** Pleasant weather cannot last always and as old Hurricane changes with the weather a rainy day bodes no good for us. Today a scout was sent out under [Capt. Payne \(son of Tempest\)](#) and a man with him a stranger. Everyone knows his fate; and many were the prayers that ascended to Heaven for his sake.

**Mar. 22.** Cold and windy. Paynes behavior moderate. No murdering going on. [Grand Military Ball](#) coming off Tuesday 29th Mrs. P. looked for daily.

**Mar. 30th.** I have started to [school](#) and have not had time to write for Mrs. Cage keep the pupils busy for fear of having to sit on the disgrace bench with that horrid old dunce cap. The ball came off with great splendor. Old Dilsy (Mrs. Payne) came down Monday. Every negro in the country was pressed Monday to work on the fortifications to keep that thief [Morgan](#) out-so the Gen. says

**April 1st.** Unusually cold for this month; rainy and windy. Old Dilse brought another daughter down. I wonder how many more there are.

**April 5th.** My hours for writing are few and far between. Mrs. C. is so very strict that we are obliged to study from morning till night to please her. The weather is pleasant. Thunder cloud is very mild. Every one is lowspirited because he is in a good humor: they think he has heard good news and it must be very good to spread a smile over Thunder Storm.

**April 6th.** Payne is himself again. A few days ago he went to Mrs. Princes with a young gentleman of elegant appearance and demanded said gentleman's baggage. Mrs. Prince told him it was not there and that she had never seen the man before. The stranger vowed he had never seen the house or lady before. Payne said he would carry the 'feller' back to jail and he should share the fate of 107. He has never been seen since. It originated from a lie that a contraband had told of Mrs. Prince: the gentleman was found walking on the railroad in the direction of [Nashville](#) and because he was alone he was taken for a spy.

**April 7th.** Another soldier was shot yesterday. The yankees went to jail and brought him while a citizen was standing near. He said the soldier was very poorly clad but his countenance was that of a gentleman. When the guard brought his horse to him (a broken down one from the camp) he asked what they were going to do with them. On being told to "Mount that horse and say no more . . ." he did so remarking that he supposed they were going to shoot him. They took him to the river to shoot him but finding some gentleman there - Mr. H. & M. they said they had gone in a hornet's nest to shoot and went somewhere else. When they carry them out to shoot them they given them a worn out horse and tell them if they can escape they may: they say they "have fine fun chasing the boy with fresh horses" I am sorry I did not commence my journal when old Payne first came; he was worse then than now.

**April 8th** The young man that was shot Friday was from Sumner but no one can find out his name. Mrs. A and W was going from Col. G. and me! I think carrying him out to the pines. They say he wore a look of calm despair. The Yankees pretended that they were tired and sat down on the side of the road but made the soldier stand in the pike: he stood with arms folded across his

noble heart (for well I know he was a noble Southron and eyes bent toward the ground as a pale as death while the yankees taunted him with such remarks as 'I will have his boots;' another would name something that he would.

**9th.** It has been a beautiful day but that kind only make us sad: it was not so once. The yake officers who stay at Paynes carried their wives out to see the soldier shot. Friday came back and said it was "quite funny to see the boys chase them."

**April 11th** Another man was shot today at the race track: the yankee women went to see this one shot too; they say [Capt. Nicklen](#) is the one to work the prisoners and they intend to go and see them all shot.

**April 15** Yankees scared to death; they are looking for [Forest](#). No passes given all the stores are closed by order of "Old Marster."

**April 20th** Yankees moderate; cooled down a little. -- Two men from Wilson, one from Hartsville brought down 3 days ago and put in jail they have not been seen since; if they are not already shot they will be. One of them had a brother shot last week: the charge against him was that he had been a soldier.

**April 21.** "All quiet in Gallatin to-day." Old Payne and all the rest are mad about the [Fort Pillow](#) affair. This vengeance will be taken out on the citizens of G. in a few days.

**April 22.** No arrests have been made yet on account of the "butcher at Fort Pillow." Don't be uneasy gentlemen your time will come soon.

**Apr. 23.** Well, well, was ever such a time seen before since E.A. Payne has been here, they have neither burned any houses or killed anybody in three whol days. What is going to happen? surely the rebels are coming once again to this God-forsaken village.

**24th** About an hour ago That Payne passed with his daughter and escort in the direction of the river; they are passing now going back Miss P. and two orderlies have a woman behind each one of them. I wonder what that means. They are "white contraband's ("refugees) I suppose.

**Apr. 25th.** Gen. P. and lady have just passed again They are gone to bring over more passengers from the boat I 'guess'. Mrs. G.Love and Mrs. Cartwright were buried this evening.

**Apr. 26th** Weather beautiful. Yanks behaving like human beings with a few exceptions. Today a Yankee officer made his appearance in the school room accompanied by a Northern being whom I supposed to be a man, as he was not a gentleman; he came to look at the church saying that he was president of a school and that six of his assistants had just arrived and was going to teach the "freedmen" He says he will have 3 or 400 scholars and will need the largest house in town. What a learned city -- or rather yankee nest -- this will be. I suppose some of us citizens will get a situation as assistant teacher in the "[Freedmens University](#)".

**April 27th** Sis has just come home from Mrs. Lanes: while there she visited the grave of the stranger soldier who was shot Friday. The yankees took his coat and boots off and put him in the grave without coffin or wrappings of any kind.

**Apr. 28th** Remarkably quiet: no murdering for several days

**Ap 30th** Gen. Payne leaves tomorrow for Nashville. I recon we will have rest now for awhile.

**May 1st** This is the dullest May-day Gallatin ever seen; no picnics or anything else.

**May 2nd** A reg. of [East Tennesseans](#) have come to hold this Post. They are the meanest men I ever saw; but they have one good trait they make the negroes 'walk a chalk'

**May 3rd** The East Tennesseans burnt a school hous last night it was a contraband school. They say they will have none of that while they stay here.

**May 4th** The soldiers are behaving very well I do not suppose the negroes think so though they threatened to burn the old tavern last night (that like every thing else is filled with contrabands.) but the citizens told them if they did Gallatin would burn; they let it alone but say if they get up a school in it they will burn it and G. may go to H\_\_\_

**May 5th** A contraband was killed today; he insulted one of Miss B's scholars & a soldier being near killed him. Go it my East Tenn

**May 6th** Col. Miller of East Tenn takes command to-day. The soldiers say if Capt Nicklen leave they will kill every negro in G in less than a week

**May 7th** Capt N. is gone now is your time East Tenn

**May 8th** It is Sunday and very lonely. Nothing is to be seen but yankees who generally spend the day riding

**May 9th** Capt Nicklen come back today and the "Freed pussons of cullers " commensed their school today. They were dressed in style with their white swiss and hats. The citizens look for the tavern to be burnt every night

**May 10th** It has been raining all day I did not go to school.

**May 11** It is raining again today and cold enough for fires.

**May 12th** Weather pleasant, yankees behaving very well.

**May 13th** The Gen came up yesterday I suppose he came to see how we were behaving and if his 'pets' got their rights.

**May 15th** Gen. P. left-today no negroes killed; indeed the East Tennesseans are exceedingly quiet. -Capt K thinks he has nearly cured them of "Negro on the brain".

**May 16th** Mrs. Cage has gone to Nashville. The scholars went to school this morning expecting her up on the train Before the train come the President of the contraband school came over with twenty negro men and took every bench in the school house except one that was greasy; the girls told him to take that, it was good enough for negroes: but no, he said it would "soil the ladies dresses." The girls took that and threw it into the street. Mag King took the broom and threatened to break his head if he came up the step again: he seen she was determined and left.

**May 19th** We received a letter from brother [Rush](#) this morning by [Flag of Truce](#) the first for months. None from Brohter J. yet.

**May 20th** Citizens are afraid to speak to each other when they meet. The yankees have said they should not talk together since the late fight in Ten.

**May 21st** The yankees say they won a glorious victory in Ten but we know who won the victory for them being so crabbed. The citizens dare not smile for fear of being thrust into jail 'for rejoicing' as many are.

**June 5th** Our school will be out in two weeks and I have been so busy preparing for an examination that I have neglected my journal though nothing has transpired of interest. The Tennesseans set fire to the contraband school, but by ringing bells and firing gun Nicklens men assembled and put it out

**June 10th** The country is overrun with Yanks: they are camped in the woods in front of us and have already paid us several visits killed sheep, goats and chickens Our new yankees are very neighborly. They come over to see us every few minutes in the day. Some came today and demanded their dinner at two o'clock but did not get it. They went off cursing us for being d\_\_n rebels

**June 13th** Nothing has happened today, Yankees racing aroud as usual. I see two officers coming, and as there is no one down stairs I suppose I will have to go. Now for a quarrel Yanks.

**June 15th** In all the doings of the Yanks their fiendish acts today will ballance them all. They brought a man in today and hung him up by the thumbs to make him tell where he came from: he told them but they would not believe him. He fainted three times. They took him down at three o'clock to shoot him. I have not heard whether they did so or not. They would neither give him food or water though he begged for the latter often. This was done by order of 'The Nicklen'.

**June 16th** The man that was brought in yesterday was shot today without any charge only that the Yanks believed him to be a spy. He was an irishman. Capt. Nicklen shot him today at 11 o'clock

**June 30th** Everything is going on very quietly now. Old Man and Son has been back to see the good rebs of G.

**July 2d** Yanks as usual. We have one of them sick here

**Aug 14** I have been 'running around' all vacation. Nothing has taken place except a [fight at Atalanta](#). Yanks say they whipped; Rebs say they whipped and East Tennessee says both are telling d\_\_n lies about. Brother Joe was taken prisoner at Lexington in Morgans last raid: he is now at [Camp Morton Ind.](#) We had a letter from Rush last week: he is well but low spirited because he cannot hear from home

**Aug 15.** "All's quiet in G. today." This mornings paper brings a long list of names of persons ordered from Paducah to Conrad by Gen Payne: he has only been there a few days. Sambo in his political sermon says he has conquered "the great city of Gallatin which was so 'ceeding by 'bellions" and gone to conquer Paducah. I pity that place.

**Aug 16.** Our teacher Mrs. Cage has gone to Dixon Springs to teach. I suppose we will have to go to the 'Contraband Academy.' Sis is in debt to me. I must put it down or she will never pay it. She owes me a brass button for a remark made on the camp flies.

**Aug 17** It is raining and very gloomy. We spent the day at Mrs. T's.

**Aug 18th** Sis owes me another button for my remark on her soda and exercise.

**Aug 19** No news. Jimmie H. was brought down on the cars yesterday to be buried at the old homestead. Two sisters are all that remain of that once large family: they were driven South and know nothing of his early death. He died at Camp Douglass.

**Aug 20th** I have been visiting all day but did not hear any news.

**Aug 21.** Raing again. Sallie L. spent the night with sis. Jenny G. has just come to spend a week

**Aug 22** Sallie M. and I have been enjoying ourselves finely today. Jennie Griffith has lost none of her wild way.

**Aug 25** I went home with Sallie, Monday and just got back. No news. Gallatin is commanded by Col. Patten. The yanks have just left with one of Pa's horses they swore it was a government horse and took him off.

**Aug 29** There has been great excitement for several days The yanks are looking for [Wheeler](#). Pa is in Louisville

**Aug 30** Yankees all ran in the fortifications today and carried with them all the citizens they could find. They are going to shell the town if Wheeler comes Aug 30st Wheeler has not come yet. Yanks still frightened.

**Sept 1st** The yankees turned the citizens out today. Wheelers men have never been this side of Lebanon.

**Sept 5th** A few days ago 40 yankees crossed the river scouting; they came back yesterday in every direction scared to death. They say Wheeler took their arms others say they never seen Wheeler, but got frightened and threw them away. We have not had a letter from brother Joe for a month

**Sept 10** The widows and widowers who married last winter are seperating. Mrs. Trimble an Mrs. Joiner left their husbands last week. There was a man shot last week and anoth today; both citizens. Mr. Patterson (the one who was shot yesterday by Col. Trimble) is not dead yet.

**Sept 11** No news; we went over to Mrs. Lanes this evening I met my friend Miss Boude there.

**Sept 12** Morgans death is confirmed. The yankees are in a great glee. Never mind; his band are still living; you had better stop rejoicing. I suppose Nicklen feels at rest he knows Morgan was the only one that cared for us. I think the citizens should put on mourning for him. No letter from Jo or Rush yet.

**Sept 16** Todays paper brings sad news "Atlanta has certainly been taken: Sherman has ordered every man, woman and child from that place Payne has been ordered from Paduca because he treated the citizens so bad. Why couldn't he have been ordered from here, he did a thousnd times worse here than there I suppose there a few union men at Paduca.

**Sep 17** Gallatin is guarded by one regt. of white yankees and part of a regt. of black

**Sept 18** No news; yankees behaving very well.

**Sept 19** Cold and windy: every one has fires

**Sept 20th** The citizens are running in very direction trying to get to the Southern army The yankees are drafting everyone between the age of seventeen and fifty I wonder what the deserters will do now

**Sept 21st** No letters from Rush or Jo yet: we are very uneasy

**Sept 22** Gen. Payne stayed at Paduca 56 days and shot 67 men: he is under arrest Paduca is a union place. The noblehearted patriots who suffered here will never be cared for save by those at home whom their wrongs have made desolate. A company of negroes have just passed well armed they are going out to forage & steal I suppose.

**Sept. 24** Spent the evening at Mrs. Lucas with N.T. No news

**Sept. 26th** Very cold for this month: Frost two nights The eighth Tenn. regt. left Saturday

**Sept 27th** Tom Miller is to be hung Friday week for resenting and insult offered his mother by a yankee. He has been in the penitentiary a long time. His mother has gone to Washington to petition for a pardon.

End