

A Doctor, His Enslaved Man BY DAVID T. DIXON And North Georgia's Union Circle

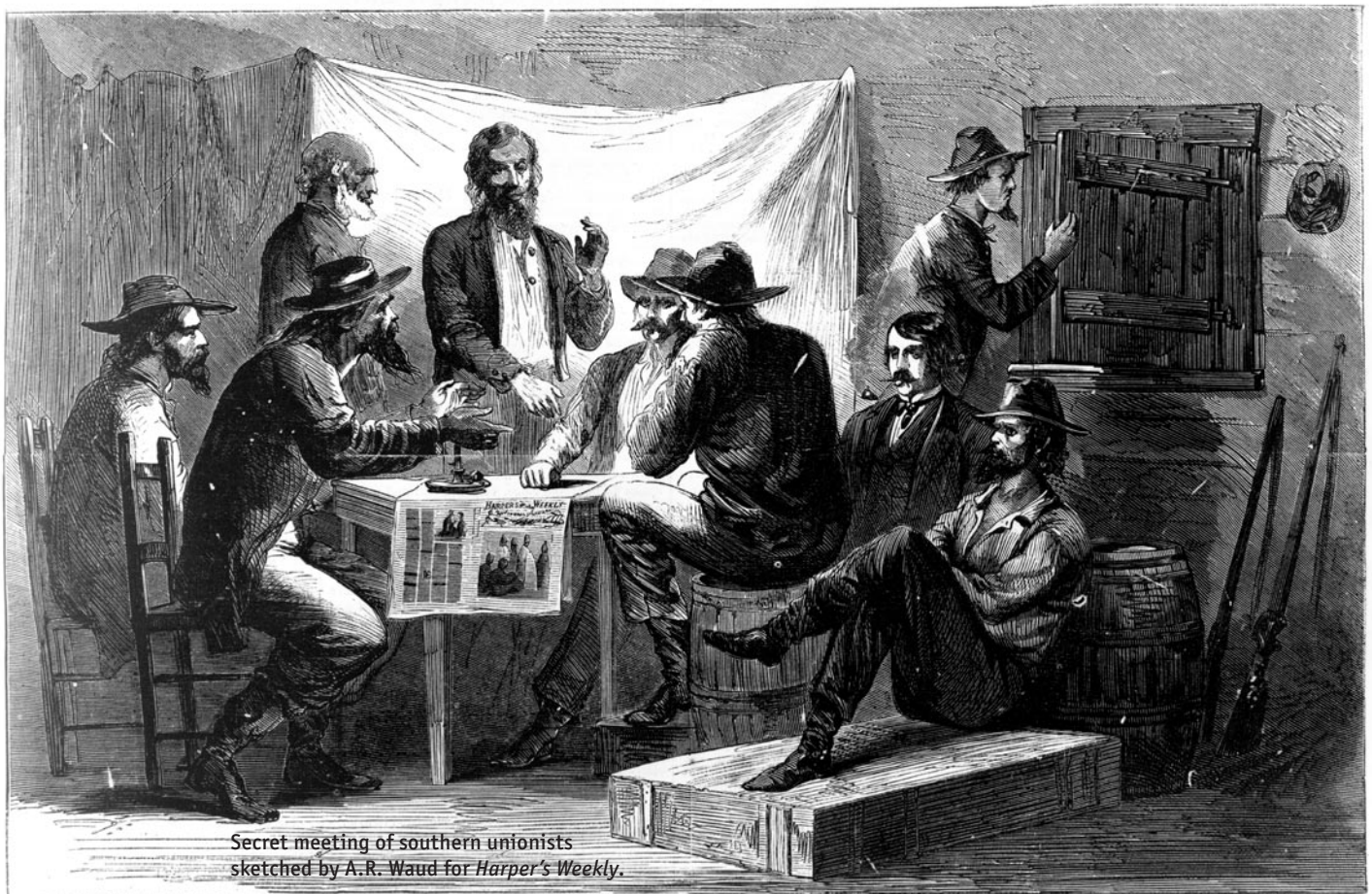
Dr. Berry Gideon, his wife, and seven daughters watched helplessly as flames devoured their home next to the Western and Atlantic Railroad, between the towns of Calhoun and Resaca, on June 18, 1864. Union soldiers allowed the family fifteen minutes to remove their most precious belongings before setting the dwelling ablaze. Locals had suggested that the doctor was complicit in the recent bombing of a Union train on the tracks near his house. In reality, it was irregular Confederate scouts who had placed the bomb under the engine during the night. Many of Gideon's neighbors were happy to see their local physician punished for his stubborn loyalty to the old Union.

Berry Gideon was born in 1801, the second son of the Rev. James Gideon Jr. of Washington County. His father died when Berry was just fifteen years old, but left most of his estate to ensure that his two sons would receive a classical education. Berry served in the Seminole Wars in 1818, first residing in Cassville, the seat of Cass (now Bartow) County. Dr. Gideon was just one of a large number of Georgia residents who had opposed disunion from the onset of America's sectional strife. In 1835, he spoke out strongly against those South Carolinians

and Georgians who believed that state authority superseded that of the federal government. "Perseverance and consistency, tempered with wisdom, made the Greeks wise, and the Romans great," he argued. "Unionists of Cass, never forget this." He refused his party's nomination to the state legislature in 1839.

The young doctor was one of Gordon County's pioneer white residents, settling on 420 acres of Cherokee lands about two miles north of what later became the town of Calhoun. He owned a subsistence farm of about 83 cleared acres, worked by one enslaved man. An enslaved woman and her daughter did household chores for Gideon's wife and their eleven children. By 1860, the fifty-nine-year-old country doctor had amassed a modest fortune, including a valuable library of medical texts and a large inventory of drugs and medicine.¹

Gideon engaged in public debate on the secession question shortly after Lincoln's election, arguing that slave states had neither right nor cause to separate from a constitutional Union that had brought them unparalleled prosperity. Committed Unionists like Gideon did not cooperate with the new Confederate government; rather, they conspired to thwart the



Secret meeting of southern unionists
sketched by A.R. Waud for *Harper's Weekly*.

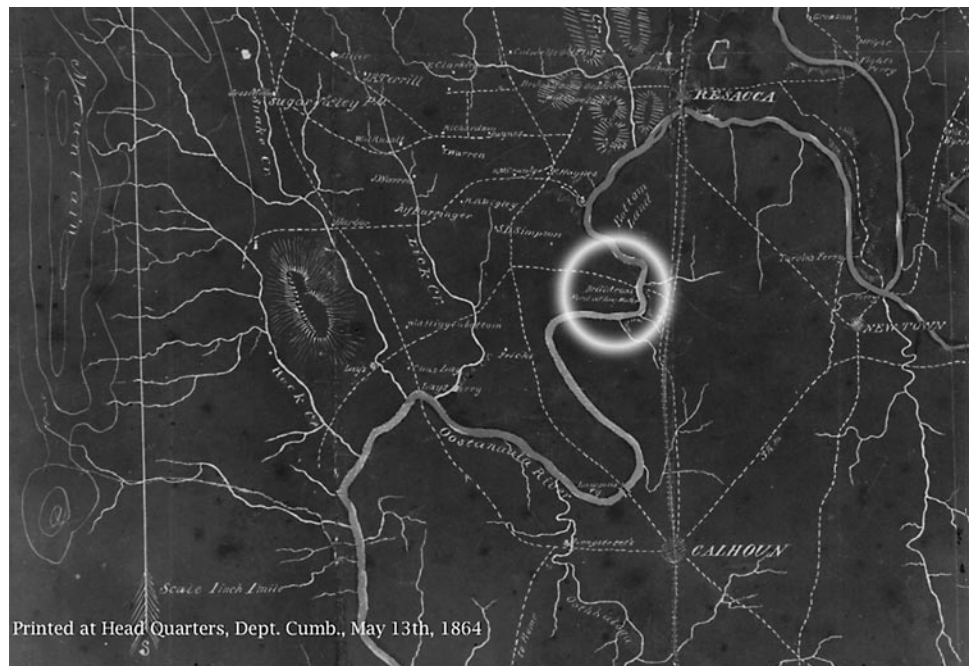
rebels. Such efforts were fraught with risk.²

Resistance to the new Confederate government was widespread in north Georgia from the very beginning of the Civil War. In December 1861, Georgia governor Joseph E. Brown learned that Gordon County Unionists were meeting in secret and organizing armed militias to safeguard themselves and their families against threats from local officials and rebel neighbors. These men vowed to avoid serving in the Confederate Army, aid Federal troops if they reached the Empire State, and even “help the Negroes” in the event of slave insurrection.³ Many remained true to this oath during the summer and fall of 1863 and again in 1864, when the war came to their doorsteps.

Confederate legislators passed the first of three conscription acts on April 21, 1862. By the fall, the age range for draftees had been extended upward to 45 years. An exemption for owners of at least twenty slaves was added and exempted occupations scaled back. Union men who could previously avoid rebel military service were hounded by conscript agents in a furious attempt to replace dead, sick, and deserting rebel soldiers as the scale of the violence grew to epic proportions. As Union armies crept closer to Chattanooga in the summer of 1863, the secret circle of Gordon County dissidents, including Dr. Gideon, became bold in their efforts to disrupt the Confederate war machine.

Georgia Unionists had an “underground railroad” that had nothing to do with escaped slaves. Its purpose was to aid Confederate deserters and Union dissenters in getting to safety behind Union lines. Dr. Gideon’s property included a shallow ford on the Oostanaula River, where he would float refugees across on log rafts. Networks of safe houses, secret passwords, and secure communications created a refugee aid effort that was organized, efficient, and highly successful, despite consistent attempts by Confederate authorities and irregular scouts to hamper the initiative. Nevertheless, numerous Union men and at least one woman were killed by rebel guerillas and bandits roaming the countryside, targeting “tory” families. Others were hanged or shot, yet still managed to survive.⁴

One of the ringleaders of the underground railroad in north Georgia was Jeremiah B.N. Adams of Tilton. On one occasion in February 1864, Adams organized a company of 49 men to go through the lines to Chattanooga. All but six made it. Their guide was captured but later escaped. Adams remained behind Union lines from early 1864 through the end of the war, working as a foreman on the railroad.⁵ Other Union men evaded conscript agents by joining state guard units, which many volunteers did not expect would see more than home guard service. In Gordon and Murray counties, the preferred “Yankee lay-out” was Colonel Edward M. Galt’s First Georgia State Guards, more popularly known as “Joe Brown’s Pets.”



This map, likely drawn by a local Union man who fled to Federal lines, shows the location of the shallow ford on Dr. Gideon’s property, where deserters and Union soldiers could cross the Oostanaula River.

Captain Blair Mays’s company, a home guard unit nicknamed the “Resaca Guards,” included dozens of leading Unionists who lived in the vicinity of the Western and Atlantic Railroad south of Dalton and whose main charge was guarding the railroad line. In August 1863, Mays complained to his superiors that he had 57 volunteers and “nearly all refuse to be mustered in.” He feared that his company “would go by the board in Georgia,” and that the governor might need to “order a draft for our special benefit.”⁶

Dr. Gideon’s two sons served in the Confederate Army. Such intergenerational splits between strong Unionist fathers and eager rebel sons were common in north Georgia. The doctor’s eldest son Galen had moved to Texas in 1850. He enlisted as a private on July 2, 1862, at Sherman, Grayson County, Texas, in Capt. John L. Randolph’s Company of the First Battalion of Texas Partisan Rangers. His younger brother Gilead Gideon joined Joe Brown’s Pets on May 13, 1862, but later claimed that he deserted “at the first opportunity.” Given that he did not desert until August 5, 1864, that claim may be exaggerated. He was released on September 1, 1864, by Gen. George H. Thomas to work on the Union railroad.⁷

By the fall of 1863, the Confederate Army was running out of food. Foragers made numerous expeditions to area farms, stripping corn off the stalks. They visited Dr. Gideon’s property, taking corn and oats. When Gideon asked for payment vouchers, the soldiers laughed at him. Then they made the mistake of killing his sheep. The doctor grabbed his shotgun and wounded one soldier, driving the rest of the small party away. A month later, a Confederate quartermaster arrived at his door and threatened to hang him. Gideon denied shooting the poachers.

Nervous Georgians anticipated Union General William T.

Sherman's eventual move south from Chattanooga during the spring of 1864. The first major battle of Sherman's Atlanta Campaign was waged just a few miles north of the Gideon homestead on May 13–15. In the aftermath of the Battle of Resaca, nearly 100,000 Union troops and their animals needed food, so they fanned out across the region. On May 16, Federal soldiers reached the Gideon farm, taking some of his bacon and a cow but leaving some food for the family. They took about a third of his drugs and medicine for their wounded and sick comrades. They returned for more the next month.

Dr. Gideon convinced General Green Berry Raum to post a guard at his house, but after the captain left, looting Federals ransacked the premises. One soldier slipped away with a jar filled with more than \$700 in gold and silver. Others dismantled his barn, stable, office, and blacksmith shop to use for shanties and a blockhouse fortification on the railroad line. The doctor was left with little to help feed his large family.



Owen Gideon and his comrades with the 44th U.S. Colored Infantry tried to take refuge in a blockhouse similar to this one on the Nashville and Chattanooga Railway line while under attack from Confederate cavalry in December, 1864.

lives in the Confederate Congress, for the 1st Congressional District. sep11-1863

HEADQUARTERS GA. STATE LINE, }
Cartersville, Sept. 9th, 1863. }

General Orders No. 9.

On account of official information recently received, the members of the six months contingent force, ordered to rendezvous at Kingston, by the Governor's General Order No. 24, will report at Cartersville or Resaca, as may be most convenient. Those going to Cartersville will report to Col. W. H. Sales, 60th Regt. Ga. Vols., and those to Resaca, to Colonel E. M. Galt, commanding 1st Regiment Ga. State Line.

sep10-3t HENRY J. WAYNE,
Adj't and Insp'r Gen. Com'a'g.

The call to muster the 1st Georgia State Line Regiment, popularly known as "Joe Brown's Pets," came in September 1863. Companies recruited from north Georgia contained many reluctant volunteers and conscripted Union men.

Only aid from U.S. Army authorities kept them and dozens of other area families from starvation over the next year.⁸

Other loyal neighbors were in similar circumstances, yet many continued to aid the Union cause. In July, a group of local men captured a rebel lieutenant and eight soldiers of the Ninth Kentucky Infantry near the village of Fairmount, a noted Union neighborhood. While marching their captives to Calhoun, the loyalists were intercepted by Confederate scouts and captured. Two hours later, The Fifth Kentucky Infantry (US) came to their aid, recaptured the rebels, and transported them to Calhoun.⁹

The devastation and upheaval created in the neighborhood near the Battle at Resaca gave people like Dr. Gideon's enslaved man, Owen, their first viable opportunity to aid the Union

cause. Owen Gideon was born into slavery about 1834 in Hall County, Georgia. Owen was five feet, eight inches tall, a cobbler by trade, and a farmhand by necessity on the small cultivated acreage owned by the doctor.

Once the U.S. Army secured the region, recruiters scoured the countryside, encouraging enslaved men to abandon their former masters and help fill the ranks of the newly-established Forty-Fourth U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment, which had begun enlisting Rome-area blacks in early May. Their colonel, Lewis Johnson, and the commissioned officers were white men. In June, 1864, pay of black Union troops was increased to \$13 per month to gain parity with the pay for white volunteers. A call to fight for their own freedom was irresistible to many men who scarcely dreamed that their jubilee might actually arrive, so the regiment's ranks filled rapidly.

Owen left the Gideon farm in early June.

Alongside thousands of other black refugees, he headed north, filling small towns like Chattanooga and Hamilton, Tennessee, with newly-liberated former slaves. He may have had the assent of his master, who gave him, in Owen's own words, "my first lesson in radicalism."¹⁰

Owen Gideon enlisted in Co. E of the Forty-Fourth U.S. Colored Infantry on June 5, 1864. He and 41 others somehow avoided capture when the regiment was confronted at Dalton in October by John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee and forced to surrender. Dozens of his comrades were either imprisoned in Griffin or Columbus, Georgia, sent to work on rebel fortifications in Mississippi, or returned to their former masters. Their white officers were paroled and released.

Owen Gideon and a reorganized Forty-Fourth Colored Infantry left Chattanooga at the end of November, bound for

Nashville. They were part of a force sent to help defend the city against a desperate attempt by John Bell Hood to disrupt Sherman's supply lines and defeat the army led by George H. Thomas. Unfortunately, the train carrying them derailed seven miles north of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on December 1. Union troops rushed toward the shelter of Blockhouse Number 2 near Mill Creek Bridge, but General Nathan Bedford Forrest's rebel cavalry were already in the area. Twelve black soldiers were killed and 46 were wounded. The following day, 33 men, including Owen Gideon, were captured and placed in a holding pen. After two days without food, the prisoners were marched through the snow to Meridian, Mississippi. Gideon stole a blanket from a rebel captain on the way and slept better than many of his fellow captives.¹¹

Owen Gideon did forced labor in Meridian for more than five months, finally escaping his confinement in May 1865. By the time he had walked nearly three hundred miles back to Calhoun, he was exhausted and sick. Dr. Gideon nursed him back to health, and he returned to his regiment at Dalton on June 16. Owen served the balance of his term of enlistment, was honorably discharged, and mustered out on April 30, 1866.

Dr. Gideon offered Owen the opportunity to move back and run the farm, as his younger son Gilead had moved to Arkansas. The formerly enslaved man said he "would have done so if I could have lived there in any safety."¹² Instead, Owen Gideon settled in the Turkey Foot neighborhood of

Hamilton, Tennessee, across the river from Chattanooga, where he married Nettie Clark and worked as a shoemaker. The couple had fourteen children before Owen died in his early 70s in 1905. His widow collected his pension until 1924 and died sometime after 1930.

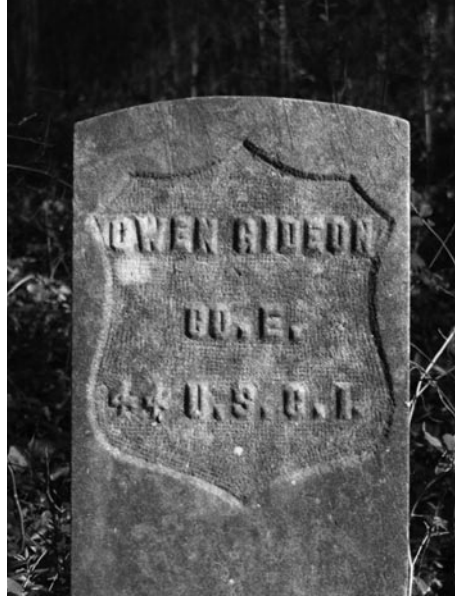
Dr. Gideon never recovered financially from the war. Few neighbors had money to pay for a physician of his talents. He and his neighbors struggled for years just to feed their families. He became a leader in the Gordon County Republican Party in the post war years, but he and his allies had little power or influence. In 1870, for example, the party decided not to field a local candidate for the state legislature.¹³

In 1872, Dr. Gideon applied for war damages to the Southern Claims Commission. Owen Gideon served as one of his witnesses. After a thorough investigation by claims commissioners, Dr. Gideon was found to have been a loyal man throughout the rebellion; yet most of his claim of more than \$10,000 in damages was rejected, and he received only \$975 from the U.S. government. The commissioners paid only for legal takings of food and supplies needed by the army. Pillaging done by renegade Union troops was not reimbursed, and although he was judged innocent in the train bombing, the cost of his burned home also did not qualify.¹⁴ He died on his farm north of Calhoun in 1884 at the age of 82.

While the brave deeds of local Confederate soldiers were celebrated in Civil War memory, Gordon County's significant

LEFT: Escaped slaves like John W. Pollard (photographed in 1906) served in U.S. Colored Troops regiments during the Civil War. **RIGHT:** Soldier in uniform, wife and two daughters. In May 1863, U.S. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton issued General Order No. 143 creating the Bureau of U.S. Colored Troops. This image was found in Cecil County, Maryland, making it likely that this soldier belonged to one of the seven U.S.C.T. regiments raised in Maryland.





LEFT: Grave marker of Dr. Berry Gideon in a private family cemetery north of Calhoun, Georgia. Dr. Gideon struggled financially in the years following the Civil War. CENTER: Grave marker of Private Owen Gideon of the 44th U.S. Colored Infantry, Turkey Foot neighborhood, Hamilton, Tennessee. RIGHT: Gaylen Gideon, eldest son of Dr. Berry W. Gideon, volunteered for the Confederate Army in 1862 while living in Texas. He never returned to Georgia.

Union circle has been largely forgotten.

A significant number of Georgians remained loyal to the U.S. government despite danger to themselves and their families. Dissent on the home front did considerable damage to Confederate efforts to establish a separate republic that would have perpetuated slavery.

White Unionists and their enslaved counterparts encouraged and protected deserters, actively aided Federal troops, and, in the case of men like Owen Gideon, liberated themselves from perpetual bondage by fighting for their country in America's bloodiest conflict. Remembering them adds a balanced perspective to local Civil War history. 📌

David T. Dixon is the author of The Lost Gettysburg Address and Radical Warrior: August Willich's Journey from German Revolutionary to Union General. His website is <http://davidtdixon.com>.

Endnotes

1. Claim #11,472, Berry W. Gideon, Gordon Co., Ga., 1874, Southern Claims Commission (hereinafter abbreviated as "SCC." Accessed through Ancestry.com. Testimony of claimant. Will of James Gideon, Jr., 1817, Jackson Co. will book A, p. 68. Thanks to Harold Duke, the ggg grandson of Berry Gideon and to Jeff Henderson of the Gordon Country Historical Society for information on Berry and Owen Gideon.

2. Claim #11,472, Berry W. Gideon, SCC. Georgia Pioneer, 13 July 1835, 29 March 1839.

3. L.R. Ramsaur to Gov. Joseph E. Brown, 14 December 1861, Governor's Incoming Correspondence, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow.

4. Numerous witnesses used the term "underground railroad" to describe the network aiding deserters and Unionist refugees in north Georgia. See, for example: Claim # 15,829, Daniel L. Cline, Whitfield Co, Ga., 1877, SCC. Testimony of

Francis M. Anderson; Claim #2590, Sidney Defoor, Gordon Co. Ga., 1878, SCC. Testimony of claimant; Claim #801, Thomas Bird, Sr., Gordon Co., Ga., 1878, SCC. Testimony of claimant.

5. Claim 13,385, J.B.N. Adams, Whitfield Co., Ga., 1877, SCC. Testimony of claimant.

6. Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Georgia, B.R. Mayes. RG 109. Microfilm publication M266, Roll 129, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

7. Records of the War Department Relating to Confederates, Records relating to prisoners, oaths, and paroles. Microfilm publication M598, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

8. Claim #11,472, Berry W. Gideon, SCC. Lt. Albert Snow, "List of Destitute Citizens that are entitled to Govt. Rations." July 4, 1865. Gordon County Historical Society.

9. *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series 1, vol. 38, pt. 2, p. 866.

10. Claim #11,472, Berry W. Gideon, SCC. Testimony of Owen Gideon.

11. Owen Gideon Pension File WC599132, Civil War Pension Files and Compiled Service Records, RG 94, National Archives, Washington, DC. William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The US Colored Troops, 1862–1867* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 2011), 287–89.

12. Claim #11,472, Berry W. Gideon, SCC. Testimony of Owen Gideon.

13. Sugar Planter (Port Allen, LA), 4 May 1867 reported that 75 women walked as much as ten miles into Calhoun in one day seeking food. The *Weekly New Era* (Atlanta), 5 October, 1870.

14. Claim #11,472, Berry W. Gideon, SCC.