

FELPS READ - 1771-1835

I see that Felps had to use glasses, as three pair of spectacles are listed. A bottle of castor oil, some calomel, and a thermometer are his medical supplies. (Maybe he had stomach trouble?) He enjoyed a good cup of coffee because coffee pots, coffee, and a coffee mill were on the inventory. Straw beds and feather beds were listed, so I know the kind of bed he slept on. Although he was a good Methodist and supporter of the church, he liked his port wine, as shown by his yearly purchase of several gallons. He was also buying Leas pills several months before his death, so he was not feeling well for some time. I know he was an educated man, but where and how he was educated is not known, but he evidently he liked to read and to keep up with events, as he subscribed to something called "National Intelligence."

Seven slaves were listed in the inventory after his death, and his administrator petitioned the court to grant him permission to sell said slaves. Since Felps' property was to be evenly distributed, this seemed to be in the interest of the distributees, according to George Gideon Read, the administrator. These slaves were: Tenor, John, Elias, Sucky, Judy, and Polly, plus another female whose name was not recollected by the administrator. Felps had already given a Negro woman to each of his daughters.

The petition by George Read further stated that Tenor and her three youngest children, Judy, Polly, and one unnamed child, were in the possession of Elias, a free man of color, who resided in Cocke County, and who laid claim to them, as petitioner was informed, by virtue of an obligation entered into by him (Elias) and Jeremiah Inman, as his security, to said Felps Read, in his lifetime, to indemnify said Read from their support until the youngest (at that time, Polly) should attain the age of ten years. Petitioner stated this circumstance on account of the fact that he may not be enabled shortly to get said Negroes in his possession. The petitioner asked the court to direct him to sell said slaves.

An article was located by me titled, "A Property of Special and Peculiar Value"; The Tenn. Supreme Court and Law of Manumission, pages 304-305. This article states that Elias, a free black, was married to Tenor, a slave owned by Phelps Read. "Elias and Read had agreed that Tenor and her children would live with Elias and be supported by him until the children became ten years old. At that time, the children would be returned to Read and Tenor could continue to live with her husband. At the time of Felps' death, Elias and Tenor had one son, lately born, living with them. After Read died, the administrators of his estate advised Elias to agree to the sale of his wife and son. Elias was assured that he could "bid for and buy them at a trifle." After much importunity and with great reluctance, Elias agreed and purchased his wife and son for ten dollars. Some time later, one of Elias' creditors tried to force the sale of Tenor and the child to satisfy a debt owed him by Elias. Elias asked the courts to prevent such a sale on the ground that the title to the slaves was vested in him for the purpose of emancipating them, and that they

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were entitled to their freedom, and not subject to his debts. The Supreme Court supported Elias, and halted the sale of his wife and child.

The circumstances surrounding Elias' purchase of his family clearly demonstrated that Tenor and the child, Daniel, were meant to be free. Elias not only underscores the Tennessee Court's recognition of slave humanity, but it makes clear the great latitude that the court allowed masters in emancipating slaves. Read had never freed Tenor. She and her children were purchased by Elias and legally were slaves, pure and simple. However, the Court believed that by their acts and conduct, Read and his heirs had meant Tenor to be free"

On September 12, 1835, along with the dishes, plows, and feather beds, the slaves went on the auction block. George T. Gillespie bought a Negro girl for \$616.00 and a Negro man, Elias, for \$740.00. Joseph Shannon bought three Negro women, Judy, \$352.00, Polly, \$257.00, and Susan, \$411.00. This was the auction at which Elias, a free man of color, bought his wife, Tenor and her child Seythia.

As previously stated, on February 15, 1835, Felps Read's burial expenses are listed in an account with George G. Read. It appears from this record that George may have been in some sort of mercantile business. These expenses were: 5 yards of cambric, 1 white cravat, 1 pair stockings, and boss (which is thread). There was also a \$6.00 expense for the casket.

Felps was probably in his sixties when he passed away, and was most likely laid to rest in a cambric shirt and that white cravat, in the old Read Cemetery on the peaceful rolling hills outside of Morristown, Tennessee.

REST IN PEACE.