

Biographical/Lineage DUNNING PRESLEY

LINE OF ANDREW PRESLEY, JR

Dunning (Dunnan) Pressley/Presley Myth and Misconceptions

Regarding His Service Enlisted at Grenada, MS, on 11 May 1863, a Private in Co. E, Ham's Regiment 7th MS Cavalry.

Dunning Presley, b. 1 July 1827 in Monroe County, Tennessee, was not a shirker of his duties, that is his patriotic obligation to defend his country in times of war. There is a lingering myth that Dunning, a/k/a Dunnan, was a “deserter” and a “coward.” *The Kin of Rock and Roll* aims to put this theory to rest. Thanks to Albert Goldman's cruel biography of Elvis Presley, Dunning has been painted with a brush forever damaging to him. Many biographers after Goldman have carried on his total myth and misconception about the service and poor charges of Elvis' 2nd great-grandfather.

Dunning enlisted in the CSA after having given the matter some thought. For almost two years after the war began Dunning remained unattached, perhaps undecided or unconcerned about the alleged cause of the war. Remember, the Presleys were a patriotic people and Dunning's ancestors had fought to preserve their freedom in both the French & Indian War and in the American Revolution. Presleys have fought in every war since the early years of our nation and up through the present.

The story of Dunning Pressley does not begin with his Confederate service, but instead begins with his service in the Mexican War (1846-1848).

At 20 years old, Dunning Presley enlisted in Knoxville, TN, on 1 November 1847, in Capt. Jno Vaughn's Co. C, 5th Tennessee Volunteers. Private Presley shipped out to Mexico, thoughts of home penetrating his anxious awareness of impending battle. It was a first time as a soldier for Dunning, who may have heard earlier stories from his father, Dunning, Sr., recalling his own war service in the War of 1812.

Dunning hadn't seen his father for a time as the older man had nestled in hibernation in the backwoods of Tennessee. Dunning's thoughts of home included his wife, Elizabeth, whom he had married in 1845, and their first child, Elvira, born in 1846. Four more children would follow: Elizabeth in 1848, Joshua in 1851, Dunning in 1852, and Nancy Jane in 1854.

From February to April of 1848 Dunning is present at the battles in San Juan. In May of 1848 he is at Natural Bridge, Mexico. In Vera Cruz, he contracted a severe gastrointestinal disease which remained with him throughout his life. He had served nobly and on 2 July 1848 he is back on ship for home where he is discharged from service on 20 July 1848 at Memphis, TN.

For his honorable service, Dunning received a land grant for 160 acres of land. He returns home to wife Elizabeth and eventually sires four more children between 1848 and 1854. Dunning seems to be content with his renewed civilian life but could have had what is termed today as "PTSD" or combat fatigue.

Dunning applied for a service pension from the Mexican War from his residence in Washburn Twp., Barry County, MO, in the late 1880's which he received and was awarded the sum of \$8.00 monthly. In 1860, Dunning Presley's life is again touched by despair when his beloved, Elizabeth, died. Left with five children, the oldest fifteen, the youngest six, Dunning leaves them in

the care of relatives and sets out to claim the land awarded him from his grant. He heard that land in Mississippi was fairly cheap and so he heads into northern MS. While in MS, Dunning meets a young lady, several years his junior, whom he marries on 15 August 1861. His first wife is gone over a year and Dunning is in need of companionship. The joy of their marriage is overshadowed by a new and different war which began in April of 1861.

Martha Jane Wesson, the daughter of Edward Wesson and Emily Ferguson of Itawamba County, MS, is young and vibrant, and ready for marriage and motherhood. In February of 1862, the couples first child, Rosella Elizabeth Pressley, is born.

Dunning involves himself once again in family life, but his thoughts are disturbed by a family left behind in TN, and also by the effects of a new war happening on native soil, a fight taken between fellow Americans; kinfolk. Dunning is not quite sure what to do at this point, as he waivers for almost two years since the onset in 1861 until 1863 before he takes a stand. He had served his time faithfully and was tired of the fight. He is fully aware that the South is being invaded, and destroyed by the Union army. Tupelo is burnt to the ground and the Union cavalry is trampling through MS with a vengeance toward Confederate cavalry in that area. The state of MS puts cavalry to good use and begins to convert some of its regiments for state guard duty. There is much confusion among Ham's Regiment and many of the soldiers who serve in this regiment are not pleased with the conversion process. Other regiments under General Nathan Bedford Forrest take off in separate campaigns throughout the state during 1864. The thought of the south now being invaded heeded another call to arms and Dunning, like most southerners, was not about to sit idle and watch the south fall.

Unit History Links

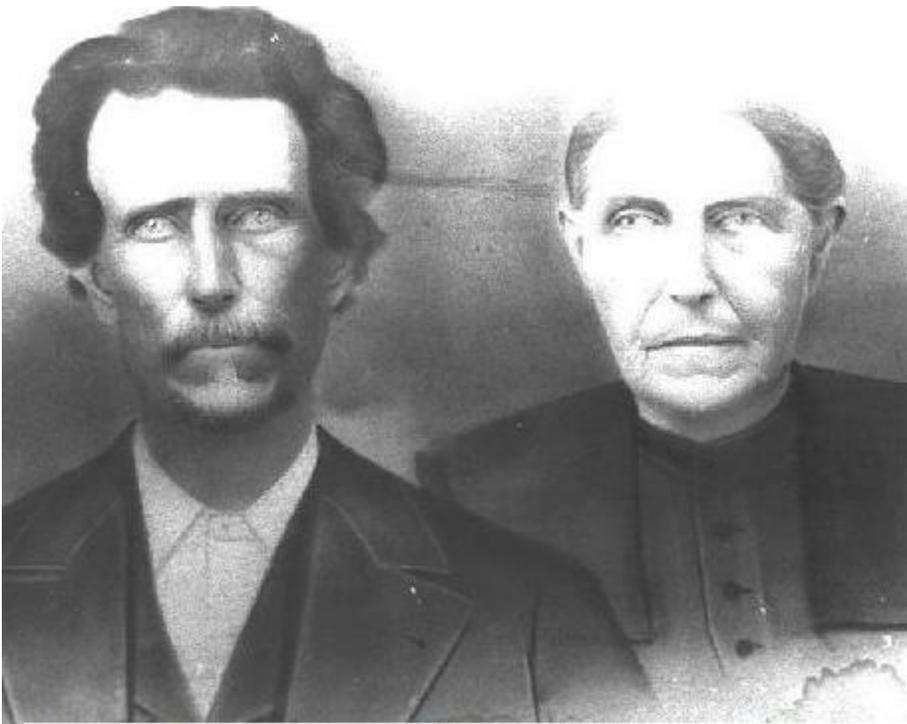
http://mississippiscv.org/MS_Units/Hams_MS_CAV.htm

Ham's Regiment, 7th MS Cavalry

http://mississippiscv.org/MS_Units/Hams_1st_MS_ST_CAV.htm

Ham's 1st Battalion of MS Cavalry

In Fulton, where Presley and his family lived, old man Warren's Mill is one of many mills and businesses burned to the ground by Union cavalry. Eighty-nine-year old S. John Warren is beaten and harassed by the Yankees and later dies. He is not only a neighbor of Dunning and Martha Jane, he is Elvis' 5th great-grandfather, though at the time such a relation is unknown to either man.



Samuel John and Sarah Robinson Warren
1776-1863 1803-aft. 1870

*Above portrait said to be of Samuel John Warren b. 1776 and his wife, Sarah Robinson, b. 1803.
Photo submitted by their 6th ggranddaughter, Jan Dane.*

Dunning Presley: A Deserter?

The need to protect his family and neighbors obviously became strong as the Union closed in on Fulton, MS. Dunning takes an authorized “leave of absence” from January until June of 1864. It is not that he is a coward, and it is important to note that his reasons for same were due to a combination of factors including the confusion in the regiment itself tied together with the cavalry of Gen. Forrest taking off on a massive campaign, and the home guard left to defend other areas in Gen. Forrest's wake. If Dunning had intended to “desert,” he would have done so early on and would have never gone back to his unit, to which he did return for the final roll call in 1864. Hamm's Regiment disbanding into two separate units could have easily wrought havoc with the attendance records, and Dunning, with obvious proof, was no coward.

Suffering still from his colon malady, Dunning was 37 years old during the War of Northern Aggression. He had already served in a previous war and was still adjusting from the effects of that service when he chose to enlist again. It could be also that having been in the cavalry, he had had a horse shot from under him and may have taken some time to go in search of another. Horses were hard to come by in MS as nearly everything in that path had been destroyed, farms, families, livelihood.

Throughout this time there seems to be problems in the Presley household. Perhaps Martha Jane could not deal with the continued absence of her husband,

meanwhile, Dunning had returned home to be with her while she was pregnant with their second child. Perhaps Dunning could not adjust to civilian life. At this time, in MS, and across the entire South, a man was truly tested as to how much he could endure. We may never know the true answers to the mystery of Dunning Pressley, however, we can begin securing some answers by fitting the pieces we do have together as new information presents itself.

Here is what we do know: Martha Jane gives birth to the couple's second daughter, Mary Jane "Rosalinda" Presley in 1864.

Dunning goes back to his unit in 1864, probably after Rosalinda's birth. He stays there until the end of the war, 1865. He returns home at the war's end and there are problems in the household.

On a Sunday while Martha Jane and his daughters attend Mass, Dunning walks away from that family, never to see them again. We are told that he had gone back to TN and assume it was to check on his family there. Was his leaving planned that way by both he and his wife? Martha Jane would have known for it was believed she was having an affair with William Steele for awhile before she married him between 1866 and 1867.

Martha Jane died in 1868, during childbirth, quelling any further myth and misconception that Dunning Presley was a "bigamist." After Martha Jane's death in 1868, Dunning did not marry again until 1882 when he eventually found himself in Missouri where he met and married Harriet Henrietta Toy on March 18, 1882 in Benton County, Arkansas. Harriet was born October 11, 1862 in Lawrence County, Missouri, and died May 16, 1937.



Mary Jane Wesson b. ca. 1853 in Pontotoc, MS, ggrandniece of Edward Wesson, daughter of Sanford Pinkney Wesson and cousin of Martha Jane Wesson. There is an amazing strong family resemblance to the Presleys.



Harriet Toy Presley, left, third wife of Dunning Presley.



James Presley, son of Dunning and Harriet, here with wife, Mildred