

THE PIERCE FAMILY

Some time between 1848 and 1850, somewhere in Virginia, an enslaved woman gave birth to her son, Edward Jerome, who was called by his second name, Jerome.

By 1850, a wealthy farmer named Samuel Pierce held Jerome and his mother along with five other individuals in Sullivan County, Tennessee in bondage.

By 1860, Samuel Pierce enslaved fourteen people and reported an estate worth \$34,000, or ~\$1.2 million in modern value.

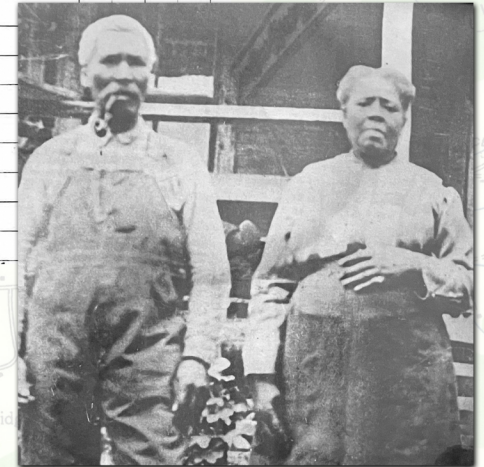
As a teenager, possibly as young as thirteen years old, Jerome made several attempts to escape slavery. Between 1863 and 1865, he successfully broke free, traveling north on foot with several other men, walking to emancipation before the Civil War was out.

The U.S. Army paid him ten dollars a month to haul supplies to Union troops stationed in the south. He often rode on the back of the lead horse, fording the rivers where bridges were destroyed, and he learned to count the wages he saved in order to purchase his mother's freedom.

At the close of the war, Jerome once again took the route south, hiding his blue uniform as he returned to Sullivan County, where he would permanently settle.

"	1	5	Mo M
Samuel Pierce	1	55	Mo B
"	1	59	Mo M
"	1	81	Mo B
"	1	57	Y B
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Samuel Pierce's listing in the 1860 Slave Schedule. Jerome Pierce is included here, as a nameless piece of property.



Jerome Pierce & wife Alice Luvenia Brown



Hauling logs from Bays Mountain for Eastman Kodak with a Studebaker wagon; Jerome Pierce (seated on horse) with sons Albert J. and Samuel Patton Pierce, 1927-1928

On March 27th, 1888, Jerome Pierce purchased 163 acres of land on Bays Mountain from Nancy Hayes Vincent for \$53.00. There, he constructed a two-story log cabin with a rock chimney, living room, kitchen, and three bedrooms for his family. Jerome would marry Alice Luvenia Brown Pierce and together they would have seven children: Samuel Patton (1884), Albert Jerome (1886), Francis Virginia (1888), William M. (1889), Oscar L. (1892), Edward (1899), and Doug M. (1902).

The onset of Jim Crow followed the end of Reconstruction, but Alice and Jerome Pierce provided powerful tools for their family to weather this turbulence: land ownership and reliable income. Living on the side of Bays Mountain, they farmed their own food, and Jerome's reputation as a skilled horseman garnered local acclaim. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing in the United States at this time, and Kingsport's infrastructure began to change radically as a result. Industrial development required extensive construction work, and Jerome Pierce with his draught horses were in demand to haul lumber and other materials for building projects.



Bays Mountain Dam at Kingsport Reservoir

Of these projects, perhaps the most notable came in 1914, when Kingsport Waterworks Corporation purchased 1300 acres on Bays Mountain where they would build a dam to create a water reservoir for the city. The Corporation contracted Jerome along with his two eldest sons, Samuel and Albert, to haul stone and concrete for the dam using their Belgian draught horses. Jerome and Albert went on to haul lumber for Tennessee Eastman Company (at the time, still in its infancy in Kingsport), as well as rock, sand, and concrete for projects such as the construction of First Baptist Church. In the ensuing decades, Albert continued to work with horses, as well as blacksmithing and farming.

Albert Pierce and his wife, Orlena Fitzgerald Pierce, had thirteen children together. Unfortunately, Lena passed in 1932, three years after the birth of her youngest child, Jack Pierce. Jack later recounted to Vince Staten for the Kingsport Times-News that his father performed part-time blacksmithing for Pet Dairy Company and spent the rest of his time farming; his family always had food on the table, even when money was tight. Albert's family lived in what is now called "Old Kingsport" (*then just Kingsport*) where they were the only Black family in their neighborhood. The children attended Douglass School, and walked several miles to catch a ride to that school in "New Kingsport." On Friday, September 17, 1954, Albert Pierce passed away at sixty eight years old, leaving behind ten children and twenty one grandchildren.



Albert J. Pierce & Lena Fitzgerald

Virginia Pierce married Alfred Bond in 1908. Upon the occasion of her marriage, Jerome built his only daughter and her husband a cabin nearby his own on the side of Bays Mountain. The Bonds had a dairy on their property, which was refrigerated by a spring. Virginia and Alfred's third child, Oscar Bond would grow up to have a very impactful career of public service in the city of Kingsport.

Alfred Bond passed on Friday, February 15, 1952, four-and-a-half years before his fiftieth anniversary with Virginia. On July 27th, 1958, the family gathered to celebrate the anniversary together. That annual tradition continues today and over the decades, the family reunion grew from backyard cookouts to events held at the Masonic Lodge or Shiloh Baptist Church. On the centennial of Virginia and Alfred's wedding in 2008, Kingsport Mayor Dennis Phillips named July 27th Pierce-Bond Day.

Jerome Pierce himself passed away in 1945. He was preceded in death by his wife Alice Luvenia, who passed in 1928. They are buried next to one another in the Pierce Chapel A.M.E. Cemetery. Today, much of Jerome's real estate belongs to Bays Mountain Park, although the Bond-Pierce family retains ownership of the original cabin site. In July of 2000, the historic resting place of the Pierce-Bond family was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This designation is an echo of Jerome Pierce's legacy, which is woven into the foundation of Kingsport itself and continues to live on as his descendants tell their stories, so their children, too, can shape the world themselves.



Jack Pierce, Grandson of Jerome Pierce & Alice Luvenia Brown