

RICHARD DICKERSON GHOLSON

In 1915, I published a little book on the Governors of Washington, at which time the materials available for a biography of the third Territorial Governor were searched, the Library of Congress and the Department of Historical Research of the Carnegie Institution of Washington were helpful, but only the smallest items of information were gleaned. The chapter on Governor Gholson was at that time closed with the sentence, "The search is still in progress."

One method of searching was the use of directories of American cities. From these were obtained a list of addresses of various Gholsons to whom letters of inquiry were sent. One reply was interesting and quite indicative of experiences in the Old South when slaves took the names of their masters. This Gholson said he would like to help, but he supposed we were looking for a white man, while he belonged to the black family of that name.

The best reply to the letters was from L. T. Gholson of Kevil, Kentucky, who is a nephew of Governor Gholson. He kindly sent a brief manuscript and promised to render any further assistance in his power. Victor J. Farrar, Research Assistant in the University of Washington, while on a journey to his former home in New York State, took occasion to visit Kevil, Kentucky, and was rewarded by being able to glean a number of facts that make for a much better understanding of the man.

First let us have the brief statement written by L. T. Gholson: "Richard Dickerson Gholson was born near Culpepper, Va., January 31, 1802.

"His father, William Jarrell Gholson, was Welch and English, his mother English and Cherokee Indian. He was educated in Virginia, moved with his parents to Kentucky when a young man, studied law and soon rose to prominence among his people.

"In the early fifties he went to Indian Territory with a view of locating and securing land which was due him as a Cherokee descendant, but, upon the protestation of his wife that she would never live among the Indians, he gave up the idea. He was an ardent supporter of President Buchanan, stumping the State of Kentucky for him in his race for the presidency and by whom he was appointed third Governor of Washington Territory.

"He had been appointed assistant commissary of United States Volunteers in the Mexican War, June 26, 1846, with the rank of cap-

tain. His widow drew a captain's pension until her death. Governor Gholson died at Troy, Tennessee, August 28, 1861, from injuries received from a runaway team.

"He was married in 1826 in Kentucky to Miss Jane Martin and to this union eleven children were born. Two of these are now living—Mrs. A. L. Steel, Weatherford, Texas, and Mrs. S. F. Baker, Duncan, Oklahoma. The eleven children were as follows:

1. Agnes, born 1827, married Seymore Puryear.
2. Martin Frederic, died when a young man.
3. Angelline, married Harlerson Millican.
4. Richard D., Jr., died when young.
5. Phoebe, died young.
6. William Samuel, married Mary Brooks.
7. Sarah, died when a child.
8. Susan Frances, married Robert Wilson.
9. Marguerite, died at age of 17.
10. Birdine, married Les Shubert.
11. Daniel, died an old bachelor at Lawton, Oklahoma, December 10, 1913."

When Mr. Farrar called upon Mr. L. T. Gholson at Kevil, he was quite willing to add to the biography, but he felt as though he had written all the facts in his possession in that sketch. However, there was another source of information in that neighborhood. When his uncle had gone out to Washington Territory as Governor he took along his younger brother, Samuel, to act as his private secretary. Samuel had a sweetheart who afterwards married a man named Lovelace. She is now a widow, living near Kevil and she has a keen memory. She remembered much about "Dick" Gholson, as she called him.

He was a tall, lean man with high cheek bones, black hair parted in the middle and falling down over his ears. He wore a square-cut black beard. His eyes were blue, but otherwise he had much the appearance of an Indian.

He was an eloquent orator and was passionately fond of politics. In fact he neglected his family to follow his political plans and schemes. One evidence of his method of "politics first and business afterward" was the way he conducted a little gristmill. He was rarely there to attend to the grinding, but he left all the necessary apparatus and farmers would grind their own grain and leave a portion to pay the miller. He built himself a large house so arranged that he could turn it into a sort of hotel when entertaining political guests or friends. He never held large numbers of slaves, just a few to care for his place. In all his political activities he was a thorough-going Demo-

crat and he most cordially hated the Whigs. He was very ambitious to become a Congressman, a Senator or to secure some other position that would allow him to live in Washington City. In that he was disappointed, but he did get to be Governor of Washington Territory.

He had gone to Texas two or three times and acquired some property there. When he went to Washington Territory, he left his family on the property in Texas and the leave of absence he got from his new office was largely for the purpose of taking Mrs. Gholson from Texas back to their old home in Kentucky.

Before he returned to his work in Washington Territory, great changes became imminent. Governor Gholson wrote to Jeremiah S. Black, Secretary of State, that he would not serve even for a day under a Republican president and he resigned before President Lincoln was inaugurated.

Mrs. Lovelace says that Governor Gholson was quick-tempered and did not hesitate to draw his pistol when the argument gave any excuse for such added force. She says he would have had a part in the fighting for the Confederacy if he had the physical strength. She says he was suffering from tuberculosis. Even at that, he went from Kentucky into Tennessee to take some part when he suddenly died. Mrs. Lovelace says the home place in Kentucky was "full of Yanks" and they could not bring his body there for burial. He was buried in Tennessee.

So far no picture of Governor Gholson has been found and his descendants fear none was ever taken.

EDMOND S. MEANY.