

# **Jacob Siler's Letter to William H. Thomas**

**December 22, 1854**

**Manuscript:** HL\_MSS05-08\_01\_03\_03

Edited and transcribed by Daniel Acocella

For English 618: Research Methods in English

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES**

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography were prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English at Western Carolina University. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship
  - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
    - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
  - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
    - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
  - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
    - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
  - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the students. While these students take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are always possible. As these students learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources.

It is hoped that the transcription and annotation of WCU Special Collections materials will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections materials

If you wish to submit an emendation or correction for this document, please email Dr. Brian Gastle (bgastle@wcu.edu).

## INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENT

This manuscript is a letter written by Jacob Siler, a former Agent of the State<sup>1</sup> (1839-40) working within North Carolina and nearby states and sent to William Holland Thomas. In the letter Jacob Siler is requesting payment for services which he performed for the State. Of note is Siler's mention of counterfeit money, which proliferated in eighteenth and nineteenth century America, with British government forging large amounts currency before the colonies even proclaimed independence (Rhodes). There was a great resurgence of counterfeit money with Andrew Jackson vetoing the bill to recharter the second bank of America, which would prevented individual states from minting their own currency. North Carolina was uniquely susceptible to forgery and inflation as it disobeyed the federal government by making its own currency while still prohibited in 1815, 1817, and 1824 (Fulghum). Until the Legal Tender Act of 1862 there was a continually growing number of currencies, many of which were able to be forged. Following this, the Civil War prompted the Union to forge large quantities of the still burgeoning Confederate "grayback" in order to destabilize their economy (Rhodes).

Jacob Siler was born June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1795 in the Pendelton district of South Carolina and died on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1871 (Powell, *vol. 5* 345). Before becoming an agent in 1839 he had been a soldier, merchant, magistrate in both Haywood and Macon counties, surveyor, and representative in the North Carolina legislature. At the time of creating this document, he is working as an agent of Cherokee lands. His work would aid in the creation of present-day Cherokee

Jacob Siler had five children with his wife Matilda Swain whom he married in 1822. Following Matilda's death in 1858, he married Mary Thornton Highsmith in 1864 and had two more children before his passing on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1871

William Holland Thomas was born in Haywood County on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1805, and died on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1893 (Powell, *vol. 6*, 25). He represented the Cherokee of North Carolina in Washington from 1836-1843 as they contended that they were exempt from the removal mandated by the Treaty of New Echota. Despite speculating in the land from which the Cherokee were to be removed during this time he used his personal wealth to support many Cherokees after the removal and continued to pursue the treaty awards agreed to by the federal government. In 1848 he succeeded in this, and the government recognized the Eastern Band of the Cherokee and most of their claims. Thomas had also, in his name, purchased the majority of what is now the Qualla Boundary.

He voted for southern succession in 1861 and joined the confederacy in 1862. During his service he was promoted to Colonel and placed in command of the Sixty-ninth North Carolina regiment, which contained several Cherokee companies. Following the war, he was declared insane and placed in the Raleigh state asylum in 1867. In the years before his death, he would go on to lose much of the land he had previously secured for the Cherokee.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Siler is often referred to as a "Cherokee Indian Agent," which is inaccurate. An "Indian agent" was an official appointed by the Federal or state government to transact business with Native Americans. There is not currently compelling evidence to suggest that Siler served in this capacity. Jacob Siler was an agent of the state who dealt with former Cherokee lands and with the sale of land bonds within newly established Cherokee County.

## **Editorial statement**

The manuscript is written on fairly thin lined paper that has begun to yellow. The writing is still crisp and readable, with any lack of clarity being due to the handwriting not the age or condition of the document. The manuscript is 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length and 8 inches in width. The protrusion on the right-hand side (when looking at the front) has not been included in this measurement. There are several small stains and marks, but for the most part they do not reduce the readability of the document and any passages that have been significantly impacted will have an attached footnote.

This transcription is a diplomatic edition, which aims to communicate the wording and formatting of the original document as faithfully as possible. There have not been any alterations or additions made to the punctuation or verbiage. Line breaks appear at the same intervals, with page changes and other textual features such as stains and crossed out words being denoted in brackets. Significant persons, places, and abbreviations or alternative forms of words will have explanatory and/or contextual footnotes attached. Some features of note in this document are:

- The letter T which appears at times to be incorrectly capitalized but has been transcribed as lowercase when appropriate under the assumption that that was his intention, and their appearance in the manuscript is a characteristic of his hand, not an intentional choice.
- The protrusion on the bottom right of the manuscript, which suggests that the paper was ripped out of a notebook or journal.

## Transcription

[MS page 1]

Franklin Macon Co. N.C.

Dec 22<sup>d</sup> 1854

WM H Thomas ESQ

Sir

Enclosed you will please find a statement of certain services that I have performed for the state without compensation. The service was required by law. I can present the claim on oath if required as this power has not been prescribed however I state it whom honor. The legislature has from time to time granted allowances to the public treasurer<sup>2</sup> for services no more disconnected from the regular train of official duties. The enactment of relief laws<sup>3</sup> have<sup>4</sup> required work in the Agency office that was not contemplated when the pay for that office was fixed. While the same laws have in effect greatly reduced the amount of pay originally set apart. The legislature has not allowed the Treasurer to suffer loss on account of receiving counterfeit money. As I have received but 19 Dollars in all of my collections I think it right that should include that amount in my claim

yours very Respectfully

Jacob Siler

[MS page 2]

[The following is written horizontally, across the length of backside of the document]

WM. H. Thomas Esq

Raleigh

N.C.

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel William Courts, North Carolina Public Treasurer at this time (*The North Carolina Standard*).

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that this is the same legislation Siler refers to in his December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1854 letter to Governor Reid (Hunter Library MSS 05-08\_01\_02\_22).

<sup>4</sup> Speculative. What I am transcribing as “ve” has been written over and could read as “hast,” but I have transcribed it as “have” due to his usage of that in this document as opposed to the archaic version which does not appear.

## Annotated Bibliography

Rhodes, Karl. "The Counterfeiting Weapon." *Region Focus*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2012, pp. 34-37.

Fulghum, Neil. "A Brief History of North Carolina Money." Keeper, *North Carolina Collection Gallery, 1986-2008*. Historic Moneys in the North Carolina Collection.

<https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/exhibits/show/historicmoneys/numishist>

This article provides an overview of counterfeit currency in the United States

Powell, William S. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: vol 5*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 194.

Powell, William S. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: vol 6*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1996.

This is a reference work containing information on a number of significant topics to North Carolina.

"Election of Treasurer." *The North Carolina Standard*, 23 Dec. 1854, p. 3.

<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn83045450/1854-12-23/ed-1/seq-3/#words=Courts+Daniel+ELECTION+W>

This is a newspaper article declaring Daniel William Courts Reelection in 1854.