

Jacob Siler's Letter to Governor Reid

December 1, 1854

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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 document is a letter written by Jacob Siler, a former Agent of the State¹ (1839-40) working within North Carolina and nearby states, and sent to North Carolina Governor David Settle Reid. In the letter, Siler lists the different expenses and services which he performed for the government and for which he is requesting payment. A significant portion of the listed services involve the taking and cancelling of bonds, which can vary in their use purpose but are generally documents issued when an entity borrows or lends money to another.² Siler mentions a number of locations significant to the Trail of Tears removal which had taken place seventeen years previously:³

- Nantahala, a significant site in the 1938 removal spurred on by Treaty of New Echota, which was the primary focus of William Holland Thomas' opposition in Washington. Many former residents of Nantahala would go on to emigrate to Qualla town and found Wolf Town.
- Fort Hembree, which acted as a base of operations for the Cherokee removal, in 1837, fourteen years prior.
- Valley town, where the Valley Town Baptist Mission acted as a center of Cherokee resistance. Notable leaders like Peter Oganaya, John Wickliff, and James Wafford were trained there.
- Macon county contained Camp Scott, a temporary base used in the capture of Cherokee people from communities in the Nantahala river-valley.
- Murphy, formerly Fort Butler, which received a significant number of Cherokee people from the aforementioned camp Scott and sent them to detention centers located in Tennessee.

Jacob Siler was born June 1st, 1795 in the Pendelton district of South Carolina and died on April 25th, 1871 (Powell 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, is working as an agent for the state for Cherokee lands (Cherokee County).

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 25th, 1871

Governor David Settle Reid was born on April 19th, 1818, and died on June 18th, 1891 (Powell 192). He was elected colonel of the county militia and state senator in 1835. He was on the Education and Liberty fund committee which drafted the necessary legislation to create the first state public school system. During this time, he ran a tobacco plantation using slave labor. After an initial loss, Reid would go onto

¹ 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.

² At the time this manuscript was written North Carolina was using both federally and state issued currency, thus the relative value referenced payments and expenses cannot be ascertained through traditional means. For more information on the varied currencies at this time see Rhodes; for further information on bonds in North Carolina at this time, see Macon.

³ Information on the following locations are sourced from North Carolina Trail of Tears Association webpage, with the exception of Nantahala whose entry additionally includes information from Powel (vol. 6, p. 25).

be elected governor in 1850 and serve two terms. Following that, he was elected to senate in 1854 where he presided over many affairs, importantly Indian affairs. Following a defeat in his reelection campaign in 1858 he briefly retired to his plantation, before being elected to the general assembly in 1861 as one of five North Carolina delegates to the Washington Peace Conference. In the same year he was elected to the state constitutional convention, which voted to secede from the union.

Editorial statement

The manuscript is written on narrow-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 18 inches in width but is folded at its center so that the document has four pages measuring 12 ¼ inches in length and 9 inches in width. There are several small stains and marks, but for the most part do not reduce the readability of the document and any passages that have been significantly impacted will have an attached footnote.

Unless otherwise noted the information regarding the Siller Family was found using AO Siler's *The Siler Family Siler, 1755-1831* and Leona Bryson Porter's *The family of Weimar Siler, 1755-1831*.

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:

- On the first page Siler leaves a blank space when referring to an unknown act which he is referencing as the justification for his payment and reimbursement. The spacing is left intact
- 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 number four is in many cases transcribed speculatively. In cases such as the first use of the number in the dating of the manuscript the symbol is clearly an open top four with a crossbar connecting the ascender to the stem. Subsequently, the symbol often consists of the stem, and a disconnected horizontal line which appears to be a floating crossbar without its ascender. The symbol looks wholly dissimilar to Siler's ones which are consistently written as a single vertical line with no ear. The symbol cannot be a seven either as the manuscript was created in 1854, and the symbol is often used in dating the past services and expenses which Siler is requesting payment and reimbursement for.
- The symbol “, ,” is used to denote that the text which appears in the above line is to be read in the space the symbol occupies. The spacing and line breaks have been retained in such a way that the text is aligned with the symbol when it used.
- I have retained his single use of the “+” sign on the last page when referring to his “other business” in the months of September and October.

Transcription

[MS page 1]

Franklin Dec 1st 1854

To His Excellency

Gov. D. S. Reid

Sir

By two acts
of the general Assembly both passed during
the session of 1850-51 I have been required to
perform the services set forth in the following
statement. The section of an act entitled
An Act

provides that for
these services I shall be allowed payment the
amount of which shall be determined by
the governor and the publick⁴ Treasurer⁵ of
the state. Your Excellency will please ex-
amine the Statement and fix the amount.

Very Respectfully

Yours

Jacob Siler agt⁶

giving certificates for unsurveyed lands of
Cherokee county May 1854 and travelling 13 days

Paid J. H. Bryson⁷ as clerk 10 days \$15.00
, , For 3.00 blank certificate 3.00⁸
Issuing certificates in disputed cases fort Hembre
Murphy* and valley Town and Travelling 12 days

Paid clerk, J H Bryson for 5½ days \$8.25

⁴Antiquated spelling of "public." *Oxford English Dictionary*

⁵ Daniel William Courts was the North Carolina Public Treasurer in at this time (*North Carolina Standard*).

⁶ Abbreviation of agent. *Justia*

⁷ This is possibly referring to James Holmes Bryson Jr. uncle of Colonel Thadeus Dillard Bryson, the namesake of Bryson City, North Carolina (*Ancestry Library Edition*).

⁸ The ink has run slightly here, and while unlikely the second zero could be a six.

[MS page 2]

Selling land 1½ days June 1854

Selling land and making statement for commissioner (L. G. R. Mount)⁹ July 1854 4½ days

Paid John Hall¹⁰ for writing 2 days \$2.00

Selling Nantahala lands and giving certificates 4½ days August 1854

Selling lands and giving certificates 3 days

Taking bonds in Murphy and Traveling 12 days

Selling lands Macon count Sept 1854 2 days

Selling land at office , , 2 , ,

Selling lands ar Murphy and travelling October 1854 _13 days

Paid clerk, J H Bryson, 8 days \$12.00

Advertising the time for cancelling bonds and other services connected 3 days

Cancelling old and taking new bonds issuing certificates when former payments exceeded the valuation, at fort Hembre Murphy and walkers store and travelling 16 days

Paid John Hall clerk \$25.00

⁹ Likely a reference to Looking Glass Rock Mountain, a significant location for the Cherokee people. It is significant in the story of Tsul'kälû', or in its anglicized form Jutaculla or Judaculla (Rozema 175).

¹⁰ John Hall was Jacob Siler's brother in law, as Hall was married to Caroline, the sister of Siler's wife Matilda (Porter 82)

Jan 1852 Paid Dr Lyle¹¹ for writing \$5.00

Cancelling bonds and taking new bonds at fort
Hembree and Murphy and travelling Feb. 11 days

Paid Dr Lyle Clerk 5 ½ days Feb. \$4.50

Cancelling bonds at Franklin March 10th 1 day

Cancelling bonds and taking bonds for the
sold and unsold surveyed lands Murphy
and travelling 13 "days

Paid Dr Lyle for writing \$10.62

Cancelling old bonds and taking new bonds
at office May 1852 1¹² days

Cancelling bonds and taking others Murphy.
July 1852 and travelling 6 days

Paid Albert Siler¹³ clerk \$6.00

Cancelling old and taking new bonds Franklin
August 1852 4 days

Paid L.F Siler¹⁴ clerk 4 days \$4.00

Preparing books August 1852 1 day

Paid Parton for writing 60 cts

Cancelling bonds taking new bonds at office

¹¹ Dr. J. M. Lyle was the husband of Laura A. Siler (1824-1866) the niece of Jacob Siler and daughter of William Siler (Siler 60).

¹² Before the one, there appears to be a seven which has been crossed out

¹³ Albert Siler (1829-1904), nephew of Jacob Siler and son of William Siler (1790-1863) (Siler 58&61). Albert mountain and Silers Bald, in the Nantahala Mountain range, are named after them respectively (Powell 345).

¹⁴ Likely Jacob Siler's nephew Leonidus F. Siler (1830-18700), the son of Jesse R. Siler and often secretary of Siler family meetings (Siler 66, 91).

August 26th 1852 1 day

Paid Dr Lyle for writing Sept 1852 \$4.00

Cancelling old and taking new bonds at
Franklin Sept 1852 6 days

Paid T S Siler¹⁵ clerk 4 days \$4.00

Cancelling old and taking new bonds 8 days
Sept + Oct 1852 attending partly to other business
I only charge the clerks wages \$6.00

Base same as above December 1852 paid
T.S. Siler clerk 6 days \$5.00¹⁶

Cancelling old and taking new bonds at N.S.¹⁷
Jarets¹⁸ 1 day

Taking new bonds and cancelling old
at Murphy march 1853 and Travelling 6 days

Taking bond, for refused lands Franklin
March 1853 4 days

¹⁵ Likely Jacob Siler's son Thomas Summerfield Siler, (1834-1916) a surveyor employed by Haywood County (Siler 70).

¹⁶ This appears to have previously been a 6 but was changed to be a 5.

¹⁷ The transcription of this "S" is speculative

¹⁸ Possibly Nimrod Simpson Jarett, (1799-1871) a federal appraiser of Cherokee lands prior to the removal, (Riggs and Greene 43) and father-in-law to Jacob Siler's son Rufus (Porter 69).

Annotated Bibliography

“Agent (Agt.)” *Justia*. October 2023, <https://www.justia.com/dictionary/agent/>.

Justia is an online legal dictionary.

Ancestry Library Edition. Ancestry.com.

--. “Daniel Granderson Bryson” <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/32944081:60525?ssrc=pt&tid=35633382&pid=28654278065>

--. “Col Thaddeus Dillard Bryson” <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/4909636:60525>

--. James Holmes Bryson <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/family-tree/person/tree/49167896/person/12963068488/facts>

“Bond, n.², sense III.10”. *Oxford English Dictionary*. September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1036401695>.

“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.

Macon, Hershall L. “The First Tax System of North Carolina 1778-1814.” *The Bulletin of the National Tax Association*, vol. 21, no. 5, 1936, pp. 147–57. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41786185>.

This is an article detailing the North Carolina Tax system and details the significance of bonds

North Carolina Trail of Tears Association. Trail of Tears Association. 1993.

--. “Camp Scott.” <http://www.nctrailoftears.org/camp-scott/>

--. “Fort Butler.” <http://www.nctrailoftears.org/fort-butler/>

--. “Fort Hembree.” <http://www.nctrailoftears.org/fort-hembree/>

--. “Valley Town Baptist Mission” <http://www.nctrailoftears.org/valley-town-mission/>

The Trail of Tears association is a nonprofit organization that aims to provide education about the trail of tears as well as protect historic sites.

Porter, Leona C. B. *The Family of Weimar Siler, 1755-1831*. Committee Appointed at the 100th Meeting, Franklin, N.C, 1951.

Powell, William S. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: vol 5*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1994.

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.

“Public, n., sense 2.a”. *Oxford English Dictionary*, September 2023.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8104901389>.

Riggs, Brett & Greene, Lance. *The Cherokee Trail of Tears in North Carolina: An Inventory of Trail Resources in Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Macon, and Swain Counties*. National Park Service, 2006.

Rozema, Vicki. *Footsteps of the Cherokees: A Guide to the Eastern Homelands of the Cherokee Nation*. Blair, LaVergne, 2018.

This book details some of the significant locations to the Cherokee people.

Siler, A.O. *The Siler Family*. Tribune Printing Company, 1922.

This book contains a genealogy of the Siller family, along with biographies of individual descendants, and other materials that provide information on the family.