

William Holland Thomas to Jacob Siler

11 Jan 1848

HL MSS05-08_01_01_10

Recd & Ans
Jan 11. 1848,

Mr. Jacob Siler,

Dear Sir:

In complying with the requirements of the Commission of Indian Affairs, I shall be detained here several days, unless prevented by accident. I will be at Jacksonville in this month, to arrange my land business. ~~My~~ ^{My} ~~other~~ ^{other} business should be transacted before I leave. I have informed you that I still contemplate taking up the ~~Business~~ ^{Business} plan on the terms agreed upon, and that I will attend to it in the time required by law. I have the necessary transfers in that case.

Yours &c
W. H. Thomas

Edited and transcribed by Johnny Holloway

For English 618: Research Methods in English

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gastle

December 11 2023

Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography was prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English degree program at Western Carolina University (WCU). 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 graduate students. While they take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are possible. As they learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires meticulous research and corroboration by authoritative sources. Our objective is to provide transcriptions and annotations of WCU's Special Collections materials that will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, patrons, and all users of our library's resources.

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 from William Holland Thomas, political envoy, confederate officer, and legal correspondent to the Cherokee Native Americans, to Jacob Siler, lawyer and friend to the Cherokee Native Americans. In the letter, dated January 11th, 1848, Thomas informs Siler that he will be detained in accordance with the commissioner of Indian Affairs, likely William Medill, the commissioner for Indian Affairs from 1845-1849. Thomas informs Siler that barring unforeseen circumstances, he will be at Franklin in the coming month to arrange land business. Thomas goes on to say that Mr. Ransome will be there before himself. Thomas asks Siler to communicate with Mr. Ransome that he will contemplate the plan, and if he agrees to it will attend to it in the terms required by law. Thomas concludes by saying he has the necessary transfers, likely funds, in that case. In a post-script Thomas directs Siler to answer Mr. Kingcaid in the event the letter is not taken up until by Mr. Ransome.

William Holland Thomas was born in Haywood County to a lower-middle class family, and was raised by his mother, his father having died by drowning. Thomas was adopted by the Cherokee clan and grew up learning to read and write in both English and Cherokee. Thomas's business in the area would become primarily dedicated to allocating monies dedicated to burgeoning road projects, likely stemming from his owning 34,000 acres, purchased from the Cherokee Cession lands in 1835 (Godbold, 68-69). John L. Bell, in the "Economic Development" chapter of *The History of Jackson County*, states that that roads were pivotal for eased transportation of humans and goods during the development of Jackson County. Maps from 1844 show only two roads in Jackson County, one from Balsam to Cowee, and the other from Waynesville to Charleston. The construction of roads began with state authorized toll roads, beginning with the Western Turnpike, authorized in 1848, which extended from Salisbury to the Georgia Line. The Western Turnpike was financed by money from the sale of Cherokee lands by the state, and was sixteen-feet-wide. Residents were allowed to travel freely within the county, but the turnpike operated as a toll roads to all others, creating revenue for the state. The turnpike was completed in the 1850s, and in 1851, around the same time, the state authorized the Tuckasegee and Keowee turnpike company to build a road from Webster to the South Carolina line, joining with the Keowee Turnpike, and was later extended from Webster to Qualla. This

road was likely completed at the latest by 1872, wherein it was commented by commissioner that the road was “poasted, with mileposts” (Bell, 193).

Editorial Statement

The manuscript itself is written on very thin paper, such that the writing from the reverse-side can easily be seen, complicating the transcriptions quite a bit. The dimensions of the letter are 9.75 inches height by 7.5 inches width. The letter is quite short, only covering about half the page in length. Thomas’s ink appears to have run out as he neared the end of the main body of the text, as the last line and signature get increasingly faint. The page appears to have been folded fourth times in equal segments. There are holes on the border of the page from age, but not such that the writing is impacted. The reverse side of the document carries the mailing address, as well as the another name and a few scratches with ink, as if to test out ink.

William Holland Thomas’s hand is difficult to read. In this letter his long “s” is highly variant, as can be seen in both “commissioner” and “business,” complicating the understanding upon first look. As with other letters transcribed by Thomas, the letter “t” is particularly difficult to read. In this particular letter, Thomas has crossed many of his with a nearly invisible line, giving the letter the appearance of an “l”.

With regard to the transcription itself, words that I am fairly sure of but cannot confirm are bracketed. I have not transcribed any words I am not sure of after having consulted multiple sources, including my peers, the resident research specialist, and my professor. Where the text is still altogether illegible, I have noted as much and suggested the closest possible guess. I acknowledge that I am merely human, and that mistakes do happen.

Transcription

Page One:

Qualla Town

Jan. 11, 1848

Mr. Jacob Siler

Dear Sir,

In complying with the requirements of the commissioner of Indian Affairs¹, I shall be detained for several days, unless prevented by accident I will be at Franklin in this month to arrange my land business. ~~Mr.~~²Mr. Ransome should be there before I come please inform him that I shall contemplate taking up the [Building]³ plan on the terms agree upon, and that I will attend to it in the terms required by law. I have the necessary transfers in that case.

Yours etc.

W.H.Thomas

If not received until taken up by
Ransome answer Mr. [Kingcaid]⁴

¹ William Medill was commissioner of Indian Affairs for the years 1845-1849. Medill's term as Commissioner was concerned with minimizing government spending, promoting civilization, improving trade with Native Americans, and dealing with the impact of growing civilization on Native American territory. For more information on Commissioners of Indian Affairs over the years and their duties, see David H. DeJong's *Paternalism to Partnership: The Administration of Indian Affairs*.

² Crossed out or blotted ink spot

³ Unclear.

⁴ This postscript is located slightly below the signature. "Kingcaid" is speculative.

Page Two:

Jacob Siler Esq.⁵

Franklin

Macon Co⁶

NC⁷

For Mr. M. Hall⁸

⁵ “esquire”

⁶ “County”

⁷ “North Carolina”

⁸ It is unclear who this is. It was likely a postal related matter, based on it’s being next to the address.

Annotated Bibliography

Bell, John L. "Economic Development." *The History of Jackson County*, edited by Max R. Williams, Jackson County Historical Association, 1987, p. 193.

DeJong, David H. "William Medill: Commissioner of Indian Affairs (October 28, 1845–June 30, 1849)." *Paternalism to Partnership: The Administration of Indian Affairs, 1786–2021*, University of Nebraska Press, 2021, pp. 69–75. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2cw0sp9.18>. Accessed 2 Dec. 2023.

Godbold, Stanly E. and Russell, Mattie U. *Confederate Colonel and Cherokee Chief: The Life of William Holland Thomas*. 1st ed. University of Tennessee Press, 1990.

Porter, Leona B. "The Families of Jacob Siler, Margaret Siler Gash, John Siler and Mary Siler Henley." *The Family of Weimar Siler (1775-1831)*. Franklin, NC Committee, 1952, p. 64.