

William Holland Thomas's letters to Jacob Siler

MSS05-08\_01\_03

William Holland Thomas to Jacob Siler

May 18<sup>th</sup> 1859

Stepoa,  
May 18, 1859,  
Jacob Siler Esq  
agent of  
Cherokee

Dear Sir,

Under the act of 1856-57, the Trustees and Terrell Turnpike Company was authorized to open books for the subscription of stock to construct a Branch of this road to the mouth of the Ocmulgee, the required amount of stock was subscribed, and the road was put under contract. On the 3rd of [unclear] cost, and a few of the [unclear] and nearly finished. The total length of the road is about 18 miles. The total cost \$7787, under the acts of 1856-57 and 1858-59, the State is authorized

Transcribed by Johnny Holloway

For English 618: Research Methods in English

Instructor: Dr. Brian Gastle

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## **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](mailto:bgastle@wcu.edu)).

## Introduction to Document

This manuscript is a letter written from William Holland Thomas, political envoy and legal correspondent to the Cherokee Native Americans, to Jacob Siler, lawyer and friend to the Cherokee Native Americans. In the letter, dated May 18th, 1859, Thomas informs Siler that a new road was authorized, put under contract and subscribed with stock. Thomas goes on to instruct Siler that the state will pay in bonds and lands three-fifths of \$4672.20, or around \$2,803.32 dollars. Thomas instructs Siler to take out half of that amount, while the Indian Agent of Jackson County, likely James W. Terrell, pays the other half. If the Agent should not have that amount, Thomas informs Siler, Siler was authorized to supply the deficiency. Thomas sends extracts relating to the duties Siler would have to undertake under the act of 1858-59 which he marks A, but which are not included in the transcription. Also included in the correspondence but not this transcription are remarks from the North Carolina Attorney General, likely William A. Jenkins, marked B. Thomas informs Siler that the Governor would be his best option should he differ with the opinion forwarded by Jenkins. Thomas informs Siler that his debt with the state should be covered through contracts, and that he wants to arrive to make a settlement in full. Thomas finishes by suggesting Siler authorize Uanto Bale Haw to subscribe stock so that Siler would not have to do so himself.

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). Using scholar John L. Bell in the "Economic Development" chapter of *The History of Jackson County*, we can come to understand 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 reverseside can easily be seen, complicating the transcriptions quite a bit. There are two pages in total with writing on both the front and back. The paper measures 9.5-inches length by 7.5-inches width. The letter is quite long, so the writing appears dark and thick in some sections, and hardly visible in others, likely from the ink from the quill running out and being refilled. All four pages of the document have a large piece missing from one margin of the page, about 1-inch width by 2-inches length, and located about three-quarters of the way down the page

William Holland Thomas’s hand is difficult to read. His “e” is written similar to an “o,” which can be seen at the end of “Tuckasege” on the first page. His letter “t” is perhaps the most difficult to read, with the crossing line sometimes coming after the following line such that his “t” can look like an “l” with a line floating in the air after it. In other instances his “t” might have the crossing line squared high above the standing line, such that the line most belong to another letter, or to a different line altogether, as in the above line. The most noticeable part of his letter “t” is the crossing line, as it always appears quite dark and bold, thus its placement catches the eye and massively predicates how one reads the text. Perhaps most confusing, in the instance where a word contains two letters “t,” Thomas elects to use one single crossing line, and its placement is often in the middle of the two letters such that if they are separate, the line is in fact touching neither letter and appears to be a floating accent of some kind, as can be seen at the bottom of the third page in the word “state.”

I have not transcribed any words I am not sure of after having consulted multiple sources, including my peers, the research specialist, and my professor. Where the text is still illegible, I have noted as much and suggested the closest possible guess. Where the text is omitted due to the hole, I have noted as much. When there is anomaly, such as ink running out etc., I have duly noted as much. I acknowledge that I am merely human, and that mistakes do happen.

**Transcription**

**Page One:**

Stekoa<sup>1</sup>,

May 18, 1859

Jacob Siler<sup>2</sup> Esq<sup>3</sup>

Agent of

Cherokee

Dear Sir

Under the act of 1856-57, the Tuckasege<sup>4</sup> and Kewee Turnpike Company was authorized to open books for the subscription of stock to construct a branch of thin road to the mouth of the Nantihala<sup>56</sup>, the<sup>7</sup> required amount of stock was subscribed, and the road was put und<sup>8</sup> contract on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of<sup>9</sup> last<sup>10</sup>, and a few the lots are nearly finished. The total length of the road is about 18 miles, the total cash 7,787, under<sup>11</sup> the acts of 1855-57 and 1858-59. The state is authorized

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<sup>1</sup> Stekoa likely refers to Stekoa, Georgia

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Siler (1795-1871) was a state agent beginning in 1940. Before this, he learned to survey land as an assistant to Col. Forney, which got him a job as county surveyor until 1835, at which point he came a legislator in Macon County. During this time he was married to Matilda Swain, with whom he had five children, four of which survived (Porter, 64).

<sup>3</sup> William Holland Thomas uses "Esq" as an abbreviation for esquire

<sup>4</sup> William Holland Thomas writes Tuckasegee with one "e"

<sup>5</sup> Thomas spells Nantahala with an "I" in place of the "A"

<sup>6</sup> The road William H. Thomas mentions was incorporated in 1851 by the Tuckasegee and Keowee Turnpike Company. The route went from Webster to South Carolina, where it joined the Keowee Turnpike. It was later extended from Webster to Qualla. This latter extension is thought to have been completed by 1872, as it was ordered by county commissioners entirely "poasted, with mileposts."

<sup>7</sup> Here Thomas writes his "e" similar to an "o"

<sup>8</sup> Likely under, the tear omits the rest of the word

<sup>9</sup> The rest of the date, namely the month is omitted by the tear

<sup>10</sup> The North Carolina Standard reported that the Keowee and Tuckasegee Turnpike Road was complete on Wednesday, March 9<sup>th</sup> of 1859.

<sup>11</sup> Here Thomas's writing becomes very faded. It is likely his ink was running dry, but since he was nearing the end of the page, he decided to press on without refilling it until he turned the page, wherein the writing is much more legible.

**Page Two:**

to pay in bonds and lands three fifths of the amount \$4672.20 under the act of 1858-59, you are authorized to subscribe and pay out of any bonds on hand and half of that amount, and the agent of Jackson County<sup>12</sup> the other half. Unless<sup>13</sup> that agent of Jackson County should not have that amount on hand in that event, you are authorized to supply the deficiency, including<sup>14</sup> -so and pay for rails, -ng<sup>15</sup> the right of way not each aid in the foregoing estimate. The act of 1856-57. I [illegible]<sup>16</sup> you have<sup>17</sup> and I herewith enclose extracts from the act of 1858-59

**Page Three:**

So far as relate to your duties, with reference to this portion of the road marked A.<sup>18</sup>

I also herewith send you a communication with reference to the bonds which have been retained for the use of the state under the opinion of the Attorney general<sup>19</sup>, marked B<sup>20</sup>. If you should have any doubt respect -ing the opinion advanced it might be well to submit it to the governor<sup>21</sup>, and<sup>22</sup> may refer the quest- [omitted]<sup>22</sup> to the Attorney General I have made contracts for enough road certificates to settle all my debt with the state, a few of them have

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas is likely referring to James W. Terrell, Indian Agent for Jackson County before and after the civil war. Terrell began in Jackson County as a store owner in Qualla town, where he assisted Thomas with community affairs before he official stepped into the role of Indian Agent. Western Carolina University's Special Collections has records of Terrell in Qualla Town communicating with Secretary of Treasury Howell Cobb beginning in the year 1858.

<sup>13</sup> Here Thomas uses a "long s"

<sup>14</sup> Omitted due to tear

<sup>15</sup> Omitted due to tear

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps purchased, or prescribed

<sup>17</sup> Thomas here perhaps meant to spell "half"

<sup>18</sup> Thomas likely included excerpts from a map with this correspondence, not here included

<sup>19</sup> The Attorney General for North Carolina during from 1857-1862 was William A. Jenkins

<sup>20</sup> These opinions where likely included in the correspondence, but were not included with documents for transcription

<sup>21</sup> During this year Governor of North Carolina would either have been Willis Ellis or Thomas Bragg <sup>22</sup> Likely followed by he, torn from page

<sup>22</sup> Almost certainly "question"

**Page Four:**

been dispatched with you, I am informed. When the full amount is deposited I want to come over and make a settle -ment<sup>23</sup> in full.

Yours Truly W.H.Thomas

PS.

If you would authorize Coleshaw<sup>24</sup> he could make the subscription of stock required by the recited act and save you the trouble of accounting for that purchase at least to the extent of half the stock.

WHT<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas carried over this rest of the word "settlement" because space ran out on the page

<sup>24</sup> Coleshaw appears to be two words, "Cole" and "haw," owing to a small perforation caused by wear

<sup>26</sup> Thomas signs his name "WHT" in the post script

### **Annotated Bibliography**

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.

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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.

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