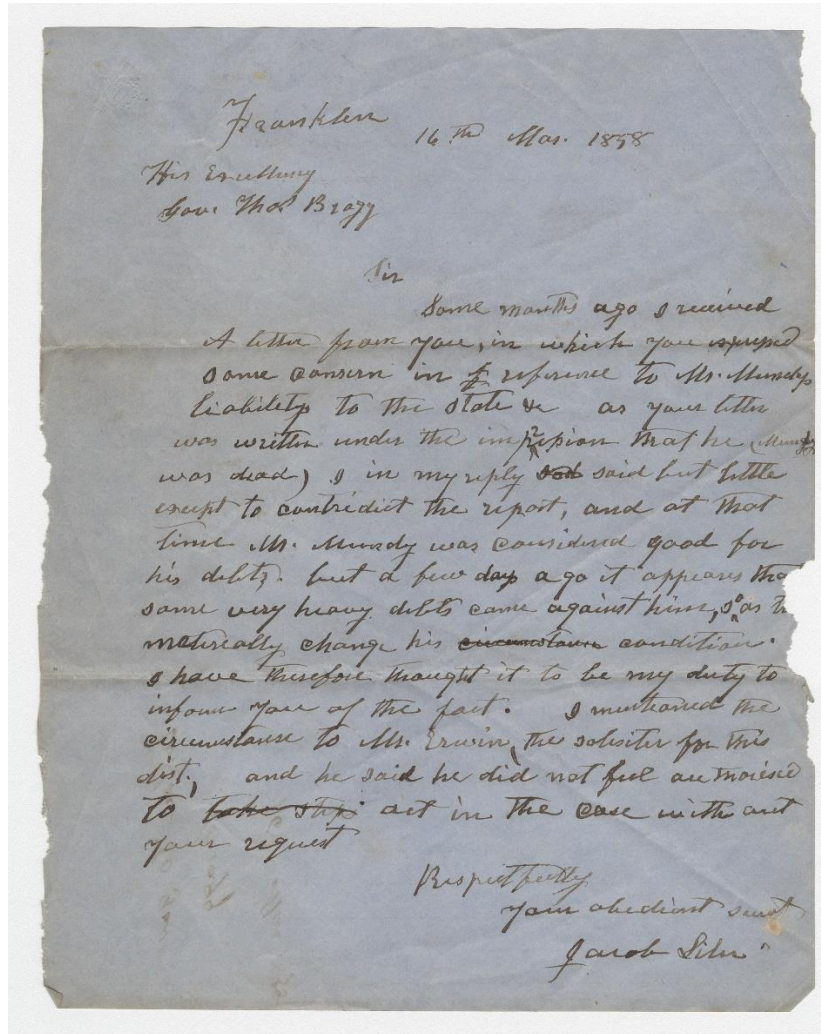


Letter from Jacob Siler to Gov. Thomas Bragg
March 16th, 1858

Manuscript: HL_MSS05-08_01_03_02



Edited and transcribed by Kate Stone

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 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 the Document

The manuscript is a letter from Jacob Siler to NC Governor Thomas Bragg dated March 16th, 1858. Siler is writing to Governor Bragg to inform him of outstanding debts from a man named Mr. Munday though the amount of the debt is never specified. According to Siler, Governor Bragg was under the impression that Munday was dead, but that was not the case. In this letter, Siler responds to contradict this report and explains that Mr. Munday's status as a debtor had changed. It is stated that Siler also mentioned the situation to Mr. Erwin, the solicitor for the district, who claimed he was not authorized to act without the consent of Governor Bragg.

Jacob Siler was born on June 1, 1795, in South Carolina's Pendleton district. Sometime in his youth, his family relocated to Buncombe County, but in 1817, he left the area to explore the land along the Upper Little Tennessee River with William Britton. He eventually settled in Macon County and was appointed magistrate of the county in 1828, an office he also held for Haywood County. Siler and Colonel Joseph Cathey established the line between the two counties. He then took the position of county surveyor before resigning in 1835 to serve in the North Carolina legislature. In 1839-1849, he served as an Agent for the state of North Carolina. Around the time this letter was written, Siler was in his early 60s. This is the same year Siler's first wife, Matilda, passed away. The two had five children together. In 1864, Siler married Mary Thornton Highsmith. The couple had two children together before Siler died in the spring of 1871.

Governor Thomas Bragg was born in 1810 in Warrenton, North Carolina to Thomas and Margaret Crossland Bragg. He was one of six sons. He studied law under Judge John Hall of the North Carolina Supreme Court and after being admitted to the bar in 1832, he began a private law firm in Northampton County. He married his wife Isabelle M. Cuthbert in October of 1837. He began his political career as Democrat and served a single term in the North Carolina House of Representatives in 1842. For the next ten years, he would serve as a delegate to the Democratic conventions of the years 1844, 1848, and 1852. In 1854, Bragg was elected Governor of North Carolina. He was a strong supporter of states' rights and opposed a strong federal presence. In 1859, after serving two terms as Governor, he was elected to the United States Senate. In 1861, he withdrew from the Senate though some sources argue Bragg was actually expelled for supporting secession from the Union. Later that same year, Bragg took the position of Attorney General under Jefferson Davis who was president of the Confederate states. After the war, Bragg returned to practicing law and passed away in 1872.

In this letter, Jacob Siler mentions a man named Mr. Erwin. While he doesn't give a first name, he is likely referring to Marcus Erwin who was the solicitor for this district at the time. Erwin was born in 1826 in Burke County, North Carolina, but his family moved to New Orleans shortly after. He attended Transylvania University and studied law in New Orleans. After six months of military service during the Mexican War, he returned to Asheville, NC to practice law and was elected Solicitor for the Seventh District which extended a decent distance across Western North Carolina from Cherokee County to Cleveland County. In the 1850s (the exact date could not be found) Erwin engaged in a duel with Judge John Baxter at Saluda Gap on the Greenville, South Carolina Turnpike. The duel was likely caused by a political feud between the two.

The letter also mentions the name Mr. Munday. This is likely referring to Captain Stephen Munday, born in 1800 in Person County, North Carolina near Roxboro. Munday served as the Superintendent of the Western Turnpike before resigning. He owed a debt of \$696.31 to the state, but never paid it, and his death was falsely reported by an Asheville newspaper in 1857. Newspaper clipping included in Appendix.

This letter would be of interest to those who study North Carolina government officials due to its mention of Governor Bragg and Marcus Erwin. North Carolina historians would also be interested in the correspondence because of the insight into the political and fiscal underbelly of Western North Carolina in the 19th century.

Editorial Statement

The letters were written on thin paper that has become discolored and fragile over time. The ink is still visible though there are places where it has grown lighter. There are several stains on the pages as well. The document measures 9.5 in (length) x 7.5 in (wide). There are creases where the paper was folded three times width wise and there are other various other creases on the document likely from being stored away. There is no indication as to how the paper was packaged or folded for mailing. There is a tear on the right side of the letter, restricting the view of two small words and measures about 1 ½ inches long. The left side of the paper is also worn and tattered in several places. There is a seal in the top left-hand corner of the document. It is faint, but upon closer viewing, two flowers and stems can be made out.

This is a diplomatic transcription which means the text has been transcribed as close to the original manuscript as possible. To stay as true to the original document as possible, this means spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, or other syntactical issues were included in the transcription. Any illegible or misspelled words will be clarified with the use of footnotes. If a word is questioned, I will have the word placed it in brackets []. Jacob Siler's handwriting in this document is illegible in some places, but here are some noticeable features:

- If a word begins with a lowercase “r” there is usually no upward stroke.
- Siler tends to write pushed up against the write margin of the paper, meaning some words are squished into the corner.
- He abbreviates certain titles and names, such as “Gov. Tho. Bragg,” rather than” Governor Thomas Bragg.” The abbreviations can also be seen in the in the closing of the letter. He abbreviates the word “servant” as “sevt.”
- When Siler uses a lower case “e,” it can easily be confused with an “i.”

Franklin
16th Mar. 1858
His Excellency
Gov. Tho. Bragg¹

Sir,

Some months ago I received
A letter from you, in which you expressed
some concern in reference to Mr. Munday's²
liability(s)³ to the state and as your letter
was written under the impression that he (Munday was
dead).⁴ I in my reply said but little
except to contradict the report, and at that
time. Mr. Munday was considered good for
his debts, but a few days ago it appears that[t]
some very heavy debts⁵ came against him so as t[o]
[materially] change his ~~circumstance~~ condition.
I have therefore thought it to be my duty to
inform you of the fact. I mentioned the
circumstance to Mr. Erwin⁶, the soliciter⁷ for the
dist⁸., and he said he did not feel authorised

¹ For more information about Governor Thomas Bragg, see introduction.

²The Mr. Munday that Siler is referring to is likely Stephen Munday. See manuscript HL_MSS05-08_01_03_05 for more information and introduction.

³ Due to age of the document and the inconsistent spelling, it is hard to tell whether the word reads "liability" or "liabilitys".

⁴ For more information, see Introduction and Appendix, Fig. 1.1.

⁵ Munday owed a debt of \$696.31 to the state. For more information, see manuscript listed in footnote 2.

⁶ For more information about Marcus Erwin, please see introduction.

⁷ Misspelling of "solicitor." The Oxford English dictionary defines as a solicitor as "One properly qualified and formally admitted to practise as a law-agent in any court; formerly, one practising in a court of equity, as distinguished from an attorney."

⁸ Abbreviation for district.

to ~~take—this~~ act in the case without
your request.

Respectfully,
your obedient servt⁹
Jacob Siler

⁹ Abbreviation for “Servant”

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Appendix

Fig. 1: False Death Report of Munday

faith to believe, secure all we want: a

Death of Capt. Munday.

We regret to hear that Capt. **Stephen Munday** of Macon county died a few days since. Capt. M. represented Macon in the State Legislature some years since, and was for a long time State Superintendent of the Western Turnpike Road. An energetic, public spirited man, his death is a serious loss to Macon county.

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“Munday Death.” *The Asheville News and Mountain Farmer*, 19 Nov. 1857.
<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn84020688/1857-11-19/ed-1/seq-2/#pageinformation>

Fig 2: Report of Munday’s Resignation

Gov. Bragg has appointed the Rev. Bannister Turner, of Haywood county, Superintendent of the Western Turnpike road, in place of Capt. **Stephen Munday**, resigned.

“Munday Resigned.” *The Wilmington Daily Herald*, 19. Feb. 1857,
<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn88067196/1857-02-19/ed-1/seq-2/#words=Munday+Stephen>