

Choctaw Corner: A Dead Town in Alabama

by Bill Gunther

The only thing left of the town of Choctaw Corner, in Clarke County, Alabama, is a highway historical marker showing the direction to the once vibrant community. The historical marker is located west of Thomasville on County Road 48 near the community of Bashi. Here is what the sign says:

“CHOCTAW CORNER, Established by Choctaw and Creek Indians about 1808 as the northern limit of boundary line between their lands. This line begins at the cut-off in South Clarke County, follows the watershed between Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers without crossing water. The disputed territory boundary was settled by two ball games, one between the warriors and one between the squaws of each tribe. The Choctaws won both games clearing forever their title to the lands.”¹

The town of Bashi is located 1.3 miles south of the Marengo County line and about nine miles north west of the town of Thomasville, Alabama. When a railroad bypassed Choctaw Corner in the 1880s, most of the residents of Choctaw Corner moved toward the railroad route and created the town of Thomasville in 1888. The railroad was directly responsible for the demise of Choctaw Corner. One vestige of Choctaw Corner is the Choctaw Corner Cemetery, now located in the north-west corner of Thomasville.²

A couple of less depressing remnants of Choctaw Corner are the two pieces of scrip shown below, issued by the merchant firm of Carleton and Slade. It is their story that we recount here.

The Scrip of Carleton & Slade

The two notes shown below are unlisted in the major reference work on Alabama Obsolete Notes and Scrip.³ The 10 cent note was sold at Auction in 2015 and at that time was the only note known from Choctaw Corner.⁴ A second note from Choctaw Corner, the 25-cent note shown below, became available on eBay in November of 2016. Both notes exhibit some damage, but the two shown

here are the only two notes known in the collector community and thus are considered rare.



Carleton & Slade, 10 cents, No date (1862).

Image courtesy of Heritage Auctions.



Carleton & Slade, 25 cents, August 20, 18(62?).

Image courtesy of eBay.

Carleton & Slade

The company of Carleton and Slade in Choctaw Corner was formed in 1852 and continued until it failed in 1867.⁵ The two principals were Alexander B. Carleton and William H. Slade. The enterprise was, by all accounts, successful, doing some twenty-thousand dollars per year in business.⁶ However, the extensive use of credit and rapid devaluation of the Confederate currency eventually led to the failure of many businesses after the war. Ball commented on the use of Confederate currency that “during the (period of) depreciation the decrease

in value was so rapid that merchants could not turn over goods fast enough to save themselves from loss...Merchants were obliged to fail, as debts due to them were paid in a currency that became worthless before they could pay their own debts."⁷ Carleton and Slade both became farmers after the war (1870).

Alexander Byard Carleton⁸

Alexander Byard Carleton was born on February 16, 1816 in Wilkes, North Carolina. Alexander's father, Ambrose, relocated the family to Alabama sometime between 1816 and 1818 when Alexander's brother, Harrison, was born in Clarke County. The Carleton family was among the first to settle in Alabama while it was still a Territory and a year before it became a State in 1819.

Alexander was the sixth oldest of eight children born to Ambrose and Prudence Carleton. There were seven boys and one girl, the oldest being born in 1806 and the youngest born in 1821. Alexander had the distinction of outliving all but one of his siblings, passing away in 1870 at the age of 64. The longest living sibling was brother Montgomery who died at the age of 73.

Alexander Carleton "commenced business at Bashi in 1843." He reportedly had a bell shop that was connected to his store.⁹ On March 22, 1845, Alexander Carleton became a Justice of the Peace and on August 16, 1847 he became Postmaster in Bashi, Clarke County.¹⁰ Interestingly, his younger brother George followed him as Postmaster on August 24, 1852. This was the same year that Carleton and Slade began their business in Choctaw Corner and may be why Alexander did not seek reappointment as Postmaster. Their business was referred to by Ball as a "...large and once prosperous business house".¹¹

Alexander Carleton was said to often be at "Grove Hill as administrator of estates and tending to matters of business. He is a moralist and not a church member, and used to meet the principal lawyer of Grove Hill with the dignity of an old Roman Judge. He still retains his urbanity and dignity."¹² Ball also noted that Carleton was referred to as a very intelligent and enterprising man, sociable, hospitality, and pleasant as a friend.

There is no 1860 Census record for Carleton or any record of a marriage, but the 1870 Census record shows five children ranging in age from 5 to 28 but no spouse. In 1880, Alexander lists his

marital status as "widower". The oldest child listed in the 1870 Census was born in 1842, suggesting a marriage occurred in 1841 or 1842. The youngest child, born in 1864 or 1865, suggests the wife may have passed away between 1865 and 1870. The 1870 Census shows Carleton as a farmer with real estate valued at \$300 and a personal estate valued at \$250. No death record for Alexander Carleton could be located.

William H. Slade¹³

Alexander Carleton's business partner was William H. Slade. He was born in South Carolina on February 17, 1817 and was one year and one day younger than Carleton. It appears his family moved to Alabama by 1837 when his brother was born in Wilcox County. William Slade married on May 13, 1847 to Amanda Eleanor Vick. She was born in Alabama and only 16 years old at the time she married while William was 30 years old. The 1850 Census shows that the Slade family was living in Clarke County and he was a small merchant, with real estate valued at only \$200. They had a young son, Henry, who was born in June of 1850.

As noted earlier, Slade became a partner with Carleton in 1852. By 1860, the Slade's had become rather well off, with real estate valued at \$8,000 and a personal estate of \$40,300. While no 1860 Census record of Carleton could be found, we presume his relative wealth would be at least equal to that of Slades. The Slades had a second son, Willie, born in 1858, followed by Bennie in 1862, Earnest in 1863 and Millie in 1869. In 1870, William H. Slade reported his occupation as a "farmer", with a personal estate valued at \$2,300, a loss of \$38,000 in his personal estate likely the direct result of the war. It is interesting that in 1870, Slade did not list owning any real estate, or at least any real estate that had any value.

Farming, it seems, was a fall back occupation for many merchants whose businesses failed following the end of the war. All it took was land and a strong back. However, farming must not have been too enjoyable an occupation for Slade since he reported his occupation in 1880 as "Justice of the Peace." No death record for either William Slade, or his wife Amanda, could be located.

No record of either Carleton or Slade enlisting in any state militia or Confederate unit during the Civil War was found, perhaps because of

their ages, 43 and 42 respectively, in 1860. Those ages would have excluded them from service at the beginning of the war.¹⁴ An interesting fact shows the town of Choctaw Corner cast the third largest number of votes for secession in Clarke County in January of 1861.¹⁵ The “yeas” and “nays” totaled 154 (98 for, 56 against) in Choctaw Corner, compared to a total vote of 903 (733 for, 170 against) in the County. That makes Choctaw Corner’s voting population 17 percent of the voting population in Clarke County. If that ratio holds true for the population in general (15,049 in 1860), Choctaw Corner would have had a total population of around 2,558 (15,049* .17) in 1860.

As the prospect for war increased, a volunteer company was organized in Choctaw Corner. This company, as well as a second one in Grove Hill (the Grove Hill Guards), made their way to Jackson, Alabama on the Tombigbee River where the steamer “Cherokee” waited for their arrival. The troops left Jackson amid “the most deafening shouts

and cheers from boat and shore. As the beautiful steamer moved majestically away we noticed many tearful eyes.”¹⁶

After the war, economic recovery in Alabama included a strong focus on rebuilding and adding railroads to the infrastructure. By the late 1880s, plans had been developed for a railroad that would connect Birmingham with Mobile and would pass through Clarke County. However, when the plans were revealed it was noticed that the railroad would bypass Choctaw Corner to the east in an unsettled area. Merchants in Choctaw Corner recognized the advantages of being closer to a railroad for rapid shipment of goods and improved travel and decided to move closer to the railroad. These merchants were the first settlers in what would become Thomasville in 1888. Choctaw Corner, once the largest trade center in Clarke County in the 1850’s was replaced by Thomasville by the 1890s and Choctaw Corner slowly faded away.

Footnotes

¹See www.Ruralswalabama.org/attractions/Choctaw-corner-historical-marker-near-bashi-al/

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choctaw_Corner,_Alabama

³Walter Rosene, Alabama Obsolete Notes and Scrip (Society of Paper Money Collectors, 1984).

⁴Heritage Auctions Archives (www.ha.com)

⁵Timothy Horton Ball, A Glance into the Great South-East, or Clarke County, Alabama, Grove Hill, Alabama, and its surroundings, from 1540 to 1877. 1882. British Library Historical Print Collections. Reprint. P. 470.

⁶Ball, p. 471.

⁷Ball, p. 295.

⁸The following data are derived from Census records via Ancestry.com.

⁹Ball, p. 470.

¹⁰Ancestry.com.

¹¹Ball, p. 471.

¹²Ball, p. 471.

¹³The following data are derived from Census records via Ancestry.com.

¹⁴Margaret Wood, “Civil War Conscription Laws,” Library of Congress, November 15, 2012. Males between 18 and 35 were required to serve for three years effective April 1862. <http://blogs.loc.gov/law/2012/11/civil-war-conscription-laws/>.

¹⁵Ball, p. 295.

¹⁶Ball, pp. 269-262.