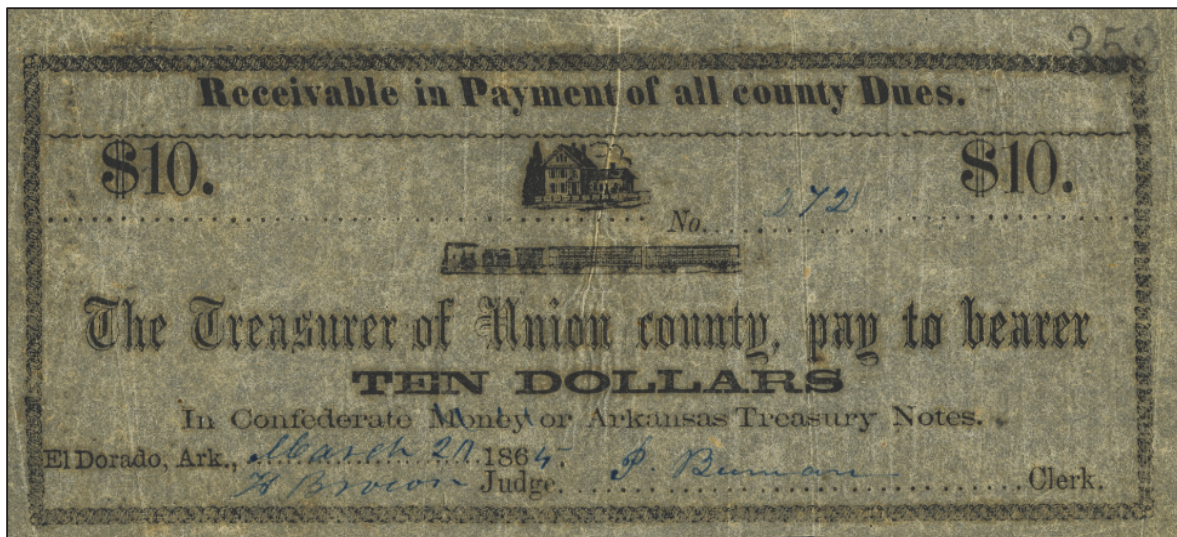


From the Gilded Road: John Benjamin Burton and his Civil War Currency for W. E. Morgan, Clerk of Union County, El Dorado, Arkansas by Charles Derby



Near the Ouachita River in the Timberlands region of south-central Arkansas is the town of El Dorado.¹⁻⁴ It became the county seat of Union County in 1843, when county residents persuaded their commissioners to move the seat from Scarborough's Landing, primarily because El Dorado was closer to the major cotton farms. Matthew Rainey sold a ridge of land to the county, and commissioners adopted John Hampton's suggested name for the new county seat, Spanish for "The Gilded Road," in anticipation of prosperity. The original town was laid out around a wooded area with a duck pond, and as El Dorado prospered, the central town was expanded in 1859. By 1860, Union County had become an important farming community with more than 12,000 residents, over half

war began, currency was hard to come by in Arkansas, after the state lost trust in its banks and the state legislature passed a law in 1846 that prohibited the incorporation of banks in Arkansas.¹ With the onset of the war, specie was almost non-existent and the usual sources of paper money, banks, were outlawed. But there was still a need for currency, so local communities often offered their own notes and scrip,⁵ sometimes by "exchanges" of local merchants and in other cases by city or county governments. What did El Dorado and Union County do? From existing notes and scrip, we know of two solutions by them. One was late in the war: notes dated March 1865 by the Union County treasurer that are "Receivable in Payment of all county Dues" (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1. \$10 note of March 1865 from the Treasurer of Union County, El Dorado, Arkansas.
Courtesy of Heritage Auctions.**

of them slaves, growing and selling not only cotton but also corn, peas, bean, and sweet potatoes. The growth and relative prosperity did not last, with the coming civil war. Arkansas was among the last of states to secede from the Union, on May 6, 1861, three months after the Confederacy was formed, and Arkansas joined the Confederacy 12 days later. Even before the

A second set of notes and scrip exists: printed by "The Bulletin Office" for W. E. Morgan, and though undated, are thought to be from 1860-1864.⁵ A 10 cent scrip from this series is shown in Figure 2. This article tells the story of these El Dorado notes and scrip.

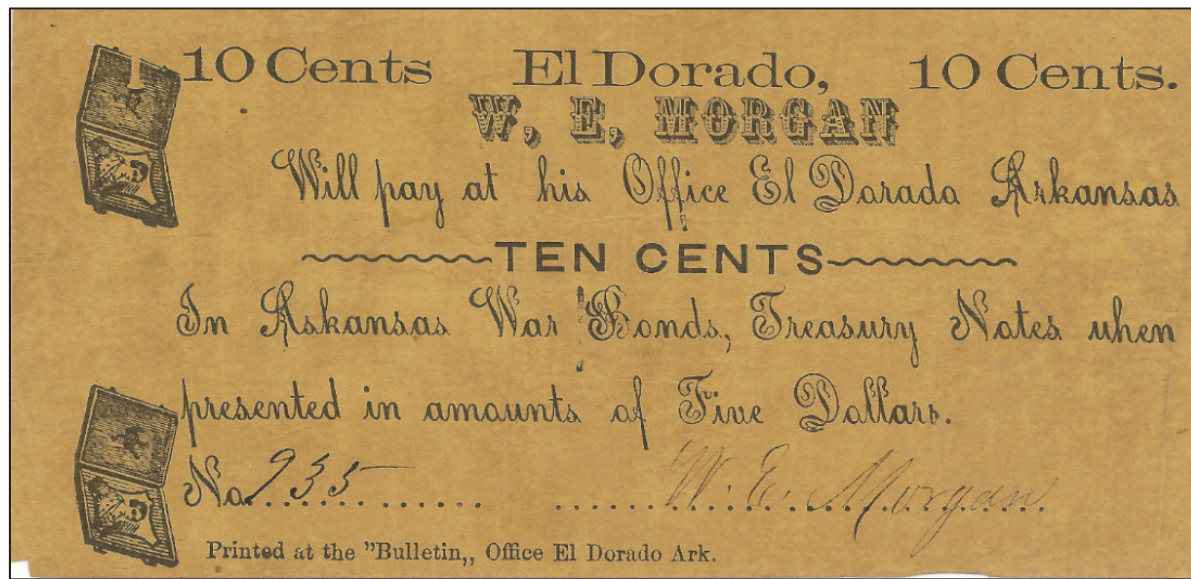


Figure 2. Ten cent scrip printed by The Bulletin Office of El Dorado, Arkansas, for W. E. Morgan (R165-8).

The W. E. Morgan–El Dorado Notes and Scrip

These notes and scrip were printed for W. E. Morgan, who promised to pay in specific currencies when his money was presented at his office. Some but not all of the El Dorado notes and scrip bear the imprint, “Printed at the “Bulletin” Office El Dorado Ark.,” referring to the job print office of the newspaper, *The El Dorado Bulletin*, owned and edited by John Benjamin Burton. Started in 1860, *The Bulletin* was a weekly newspaper published each Thursday. The run of *The Bulletin* was short, being discontinued near the beginning of the civil war when Burton joined the military in May 1861. However, after Burton left, a printer named J. T. Osborn used the former *Bulletin* office during and briefly after the war to print a newspaper called *The Post Boy*.⁶

Rothert⁵ lists ten Morgan–El Dorado notes and scrip: R165-1 to 5 and R165-8 to 12 (the reason for the omission of 6 and 7 is not clear.) I have seen one additional 10 cent scrip not listed in Rothert. I list these 11 notes and scrip in Table 1, with their distinguishing features. Based on these characteristics, they appear to constitute two series, each series with denominations of 10 cents, 25 cents, 50 cents, \$1, and \$2 (Figs. 2-4). I list R165-1 to -5 as series 2, since I surmise that they were printed after the series 1 of R-165-8 to -12 plus R165-UNL, as explained below. Series 2 currency are all very similar, with the only difference besides denomination being a period after the denomination for the \$1 and \$2 notes but not the fractional.

Series 1 currency, on the other hand, differ in a range of features, detailed in Table 1, including the following: vignettes (none used for series 2, three used for series 1 – eagle and flag, carte de visite, and slaves in the field); fonts for “W. E. Morgan;” presence or not of an imprint; the type of currency in which the notes and scrip were payable; font and presence or not of scroll for the serial number; and other features. Despite the fact that only two of the scrip, both series 1, have an imprint (*Printed at the “Bulletin” Office El Dorado Ark.*), the series 1 and 2 notes and scrip have so many similarities that they must have all been printed at that print job office.

Exactly when these notes were printed remains uncertain. All were payable in Arkansas War Bonds, Treasury notes, or other current funds, and series 2 notes were also payable in Confederate currency. Arkansas War Bonds were authorized by an Act of May 24, 1861. Arkansas Treasury Warrants were authorized by Acts of November 14 and 18, 1861. The first, second, and third series of Confederate notes were authorized by Acts of March 9th, March 16th, and August 19th, 1861, respectively. Since some of these dates are after Burton’s May departure from *The Bulletin* and El Dorado to join the army and Osborn took over the print office, an argument can be made that some were printed later in 1861, possibly even in 1862, by Osborn. I hypothesize that Burton designed all of the Morgan currency, produced the plates, and printed series 1, since some bear the “*Bulletin*” imprint. Then, after Burton’s departure, Osborn produced the series 2 currency from his print office, without the imprint of the now defunct *Bulletin*.

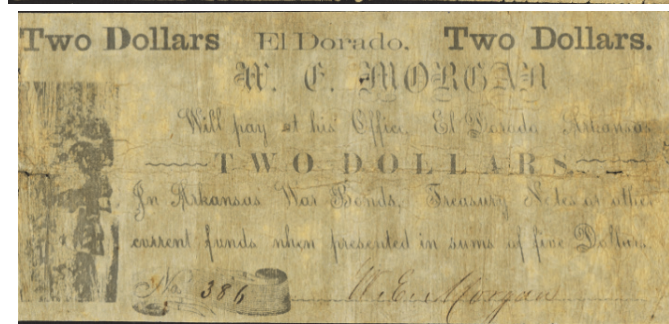
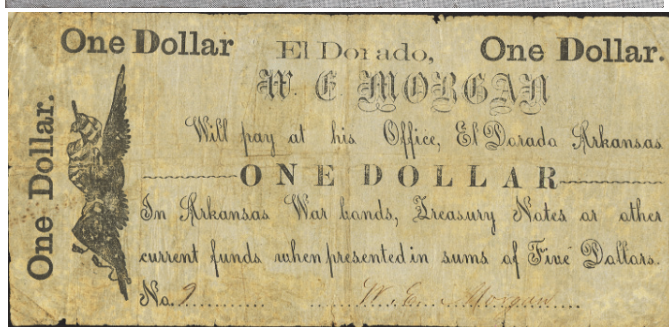
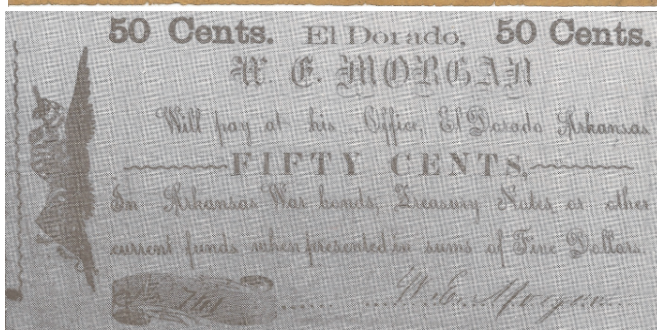
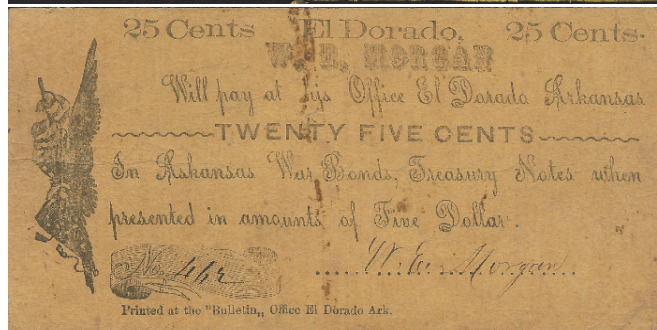
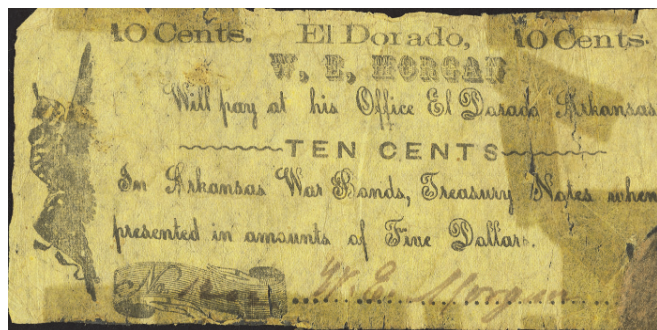


Figure 3. El Dorado scrip, series 1.
From Heritage Auctions and Rothert.⁵

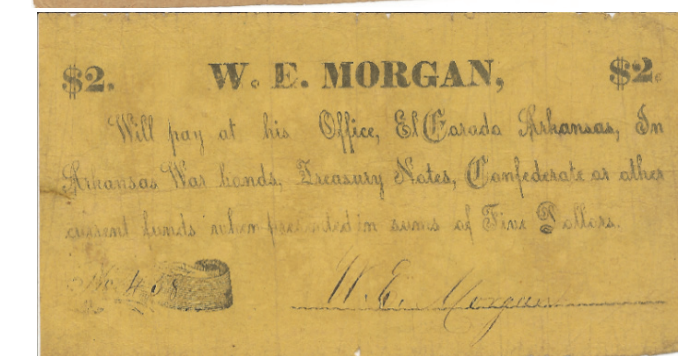
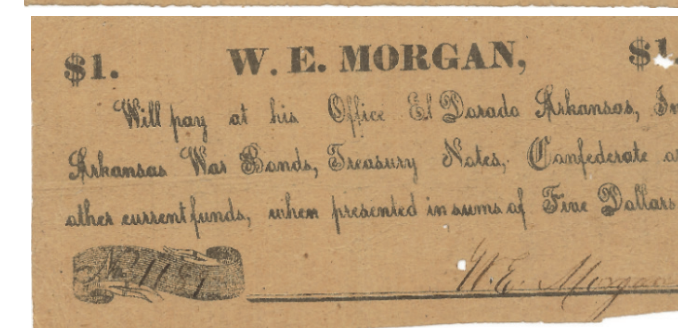
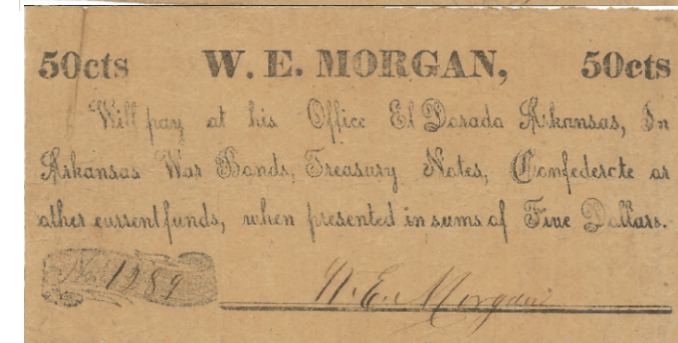
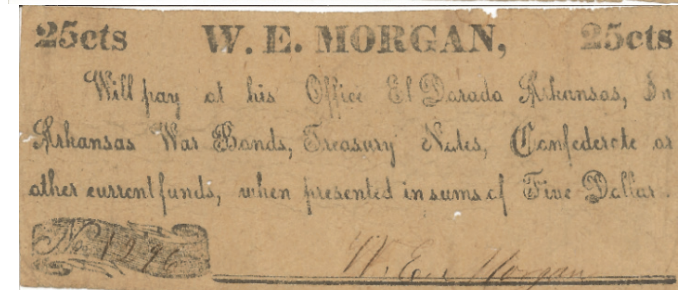
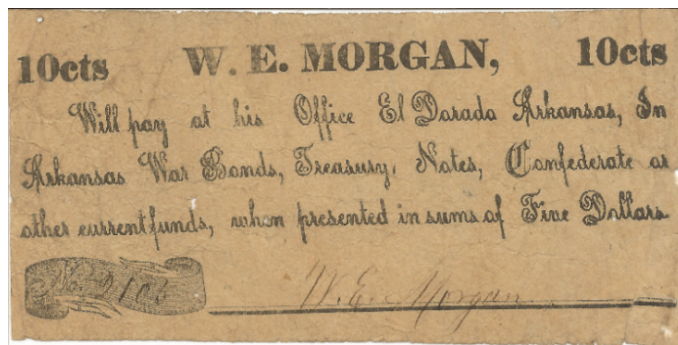


Figure 4. El Dorado scrip, series 2.

Table 1. Distinctive Features of Notes from W. E. Morgan, El Dorado, Arkansas

Series	ID	Denomination	Vignette	W. E. Morgan	Imprint	Payable in	"No."	"Five" case	Period after Denomination at top	Demonination at Vertical Left End	Horizontal Line at Denomination
1	R165-8	10 cents	Carte de visite	Ornate Block	"Bulletin"	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes"	no scroll	Upper	Second only	No	Short (to indent)
1	R165-UNL	10 cents	Eagle & Flag	Ornate Block	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes"	scroll	Upper	First only	No	Short (to indent)
1	R165-9	25 cents	Eagle & Flag	Ornate Block	"Bulletin"	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes"	scroll	Upper	Second only	No	Long (to margins)
1	R165-10	50 cents	Eagle & Flag	Old English	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes"	scroll	Upper	First and Second	No	Medium (near margins)
1	R165-11	\$1	Eagle & Flag	Old English	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, or other current funds"	no scroll	Upper	Second only	Yes	Long (to margins)
1	R16512	\$2	Slaves in field	Old English	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, or other current funds"	scroll	Lower	Second only	No	Medium (near margins)
2	R165-1	10 cents	none	Plain Block	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, Confederate, or current funds"	scroll	Upper	none	No	none
2	R165-2	25 cents	none	Plain Block	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, Confederate, or current funds"	scroll	Upper	none	No	none
2	R165-3	50 cents	none	Plain Block	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, Confederate, or current funds"	scroll	Upper	none	No	none
2	R165-4	\$1	none	Plain Block	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, Confederate, or current funds"	scroll	Upper	First and Second	No	none
2	R165-5	\$2	none	Plain Block	none	"Arkansas War Bond, Treasury Notes, Confederate, or current funds"	scroll	Upper	First and Second	No	none

John Benjamin Burton

John Benjamin Burton lived an expansive life on his terms.⁹⁻¹² He was willing to make big decisions, take risks, and work for what he thought was right. Burton was born October 22, 1836, in Drummondville (later Accomac), Accomack County, on Virginia's eastern shore. He was the youngest of seven children of John Bayly Burton (1773-1836) and Sarah Poulson Bagwell (1790-1840), whose deaths left young John orphaned by the age of four years old and without financial security. John, who was called "Ben" as a child because his father was John, was raised by his older sisters, friends, and relatives, and quickly became self-reliant. He learned life at sea, as did most on Virginia's eastern shore and as his father was a sea captain. At the age of ten, he became assistant to the county clerk at Accomack Court House, while also attending school. With the help of friend and relative Percy Duffield, Burton attended Princeton University¹³ and graduated with honors in Greek, Latin, and French.¹² Then, rather than choosing to return to Accomac, the twenty-year-old Burton, *"full of ambition and hope and a firm belief in honesty and goodness of mankind,"*¹² chose adventure and moved west. He landed in Arkansas in 1856, which was *"full of a rough element from the Eastern States – where a man, to be a man, must be ready to fight like the rest if he wanted the respect of the community where he lived."*¹²

Burton landed in El Dorado to become editor of the local newspaper,⁶ *The El Dorado Union*, which was established in 1846 by William H. Hines.⁷ In August 1859, Burton started a new paper, *The El Dorado Times*, in partnership with Matthew Milton Barron.⁷ According to Allstopp,⁷ *"the editors complained in the first issue that they were unable to obtain the kind of type and paper ordered,"* but still, *"the newspaper was a credible one."* But within a few months, Barron left the partnership and El Dorado, and in 1860, Burton

was sole editor of a new newspaper, *The El Dorado Bulletin*. Four years as newspaper editor in El Dorado gave Burton a central place in the El Dorado community, though it did not make him rich; in 1860 he reported only \$1,100 in personal estate and no real estate.¹¹ The May 9, 1861 edition of *The El Dorado Bulletin* was an important one. That was the day that Arkansas seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. The headline and key select articles in that issue are shown in Figure 5. Notice that the graphic on this issue is the same eagle and flag vignette that Burton used on the W. E. Morgan series 1 currency. In this issue of *The Bulletin*, Burton wrote that this was his last, as he was joining the fight for the Arkansan and Southern cause, and he called for others to join him:

"Valedictory. My editorial connection with the Bulletin has ceased, and the time has arrived for me to say, farewell to its readers. Duty points to another field of action, and I cheerfully obey the summons.... Let us bid defiance to the black flag of the North, and bid what is sacred, good and noble, that it will never wave in triumph over us.... We the Sentinals who will be 'off to the wars' when you read this, will endeavor to do our duty as soldiers. We will add lustre to old Union county, or our bones will lie bleaching on the plain or buried in the lap of mother earth. We expect you to follow us. I am done – farewell."



Figure 6. Major John Benjamin Burton. This carte-de-visite was made by William Brown at Brown's Gallery, Main Street, Little Rock, between 1863 & 1865. From ⁸.

Burton joined the Arkansas militia in May 1861, as private. But given his advanced education, literacy, organizational skills, and energy, he was quickly promoted and played important roles in the Eastern and Western theaters for the rest of the war¹³⁻¹⁹ (Fig. 6). He first joined the 1st Arkansas Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Company A, which was the Union County company of volunteers raised, equipped, and commanded by Captain (later Colonel) Asa Stokely Morgan. Company A was one of ten county-based companies of volunteers organized into a regiment in Little Rock by Colonel Thompson Breckenridge Flournoy, and offering their services to the Confederacy. James Fleming Fagan (Fig. 7), captain



Figure 7. Burton's commanding officers. Left to Right. Col. (later Brig. Gen.) James Fleming Fagan. Brig. Gen. John George Walker. Lt. Gen. Theophilus Hunter Holmes. Courtesy of U.S. War Records.

of the Saline County Volunteers, was elected to lead the regiment. They were shipped off to Virginia, and Burton was promoted to captain and quartermaster of his regiment in June 1861. The regiment was present at the First Battle of Manassas on July 21, 1861, but its men did not engage in the fighting and could only watch. Burton served under Colonel (later Brig. Gen.) John George Walker, in the division of Brig. Gen. Theophilus Hunter Holmes (Fig. 7). On January 21, 1862, Burton was promoted to Major and Quartermaster of Walker's brigade. By March, Holmes ordered Burton to leave the 1st Arkansas Volunteers and transfer to the Trans-Mississippi Department to serve in the Arkansas District, Little Rock, as Assistant Quartermaster (Fig. 8). There appears to have been a delay in his transfer, but he was fulfilling his duties in Little Rock by August 1862. In October, Holmes promoted Burton to Chief of Clothing Bureau of the Trans-Mississippi Department in Little Rock. By June 1, 1863, he was Purchasing Quartermaster and Inspector of the Quartermaster for

the District of Arkansas of the Trans-Mississippi District. He served as Chief Quartermaster of the District of Arkansas through the end of war, under Gen. Holmes and Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith. For a time, he simultaneously served the stand-in role as Chief Engineer of the Arkansas district.²⁰ Henry Merrell called Burton "*from first to last one of the very best executive and administrative men in the Army.*"²⁰ As Union forces squeezed the Confederacy and occupied Arkansas, by March 1865, Burton and his district were relocated to Shreveport. But soon after, Shreveport itself fell and the entire Confederacy capitulated. Burton surrendered, and in June 1865 was paroled (Fig. 8).

After the war, Burton moved to New Orleans, set up an office, and became purchasing agent for Imperial Army of Mexico, which upon its disbandment in 1867 Burton returned to Arkansas.⁸ It was said of Burton, "*He fought bravely for the 'Lost Cause,' but when lost was more ready than most rebels to shake hands 'across the Chasm.'*"¹² He purchased land in Lewisville, Lafayette County, Arkansas, as an early settler to that area. He had a successful career as a lawyer, having offices in both Lewisville and Texarkana, Arkansas⁸ and working throughout southern Arkansas

(Fig. 9). As was his nature, Burton gave back to his community, including serving as his district's representative in the Arkansas House (1874) and Senate (1874-1876).

On August 6, 1873, at the age of 36, he married Cora Holmes Mack, 18 years his junior (born 1854 in Camden, Arkansas), and they soon began raising a close-knit and striking family. Between 1874 and 1884, they had six children, which John called "*my jewels*":¹² John Bayly (1874-1962), Percy Duffield (1876-1958, named after his benefactor in Accomac), Ashby Prior (1878-1963), Ralph Mack (1879-1965), Louise (1882-1944), and Cleveland C. (1884-1950). But alas, tragedy struck: at only 47 years old, still in the prime of his life, Burton developed cancer. He traveled to Brooklyn, New York, for treatment, but died there of pneumonia on December 18, 1883. His body was returned home, and he was buried in State Line Cemetery in Texarkana, honored with an impressive memorial statue (Fig. 10). Cora honored

*Clothing Bureau
Trans-Mississippi Army
Little Rock, Ark.
Sept 10 1862*

*Captain A. Cabell
A. G. M. D. &
Paris Texas*

By order of the Genl. Commanding the Department, I am constituted Chief of the Clothing Bureau empowered and directed to make all arrangements for procuring clothing for the Trans-Mississippi Army. The following articles are needed in large quantities: Pants, Jackets, Over Coats, Over Coats, Shirts, Flannel Shirts, Drawers, Socks, Shoes, Blankets, Quilted Coverlets or Comforters. You will therefore make contracts and set on foot enterprises at your posts and in the surrounding country, so as to collect and continue to collect as large a quantity of the above articles at your depot as the country can produce.

I wish you to act in the counties near you - as more remote places my special agents are sent and authorized to contract.

*I am Captain
Wash. Ricketts, Jr., Major & C. & C.
Signed: John B. Burton
Special A. G. M.
Chief of Clothing Bureau
Trans-Mississippi Army*

Extract from the Original

No. 110

I, the undersigned, Prisoner of War, belonging to the Army of the Trans-Mississippi Department, having been surrendered by General E. Kirby Smith, U. S. A., Commanding said Department, to Major General E. R. S. Canby, U. S. A., Commanding Army and Division of West Mississippi, do hereby give my solemn PAROLE OF HONOR, that I will not hereafter serve in the Armies of the Confederate States, or in any military capacity whatever, against the United States of America, or render aid to the enemies of the latter, until properly exchanged in such manner as may be mutually approved by the respective authorities.

Residence *Shreveport, La.*

Done at *Shreveport, La.* this *7th* day of June, 1865.

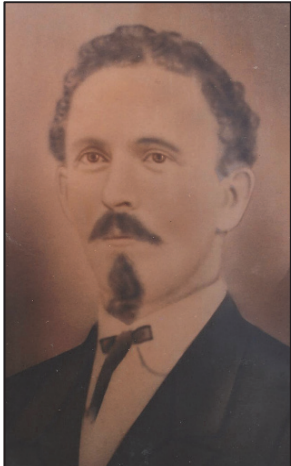
Approved: *John B. Burton* C. S. A.
G. L. Andrews Brig. Genl. U. S. A. Commissioners.

The above named officer will not be disturbed by the United States Authorities, as long as he observes his parole, and the laws in force where he resides.

GEO. L. ANDREWS,
Brig. Gen., U. S. A. and Provost Marshal General.

Figure 8. Top: letter from Major Burton as Chief of the Clothing Bureau of the Trans-Mississippi Department, to Captain Cabell, on September 1862, regarding procurement of clothes for troops. Bottom: June 1865, parole document for Major Burton, Shreveport, Louisiana. Courtesy of U.S. Civil War Records, Fold3.com.

his life and memory, stayed in Texarkana, and raised their children, including son Cleveland, born three months after John died (Fig. 11). Cora died in 1927 in Lewisville and is buried next to John. John Burton is remembered and memorialized for his Confederate service by having a Sons of Confederate Veterans camp named after him, the Arkansas Sons of Confederate Veterans Major John B. Burton Camp #1664, Texarkana.²²



JOHN B. BURTON,
ATTORNEY
—AND—
Counselor at Law,
LEWISVILLE,
LAFAYETTE COUNTY, ARKANSAS

WILL practice in the courts at Lewisville, Washington, Magnolia, Locksburg and Rocky Comfort, and attend to professional business in any portion of South Arkansas. Special attention given to securing and collecting claims. Will also buy, sell, lease, rent and attend to the assessing and paying taxes on lands. Titles to real estate investigated, and when desired will furnish valuable information to non-residents, land owners, capitalists and creditors. References furnished when desired.
May 1, 1872. tistjan

OFFICE OF
JOHN B. BURTON,
Attorney and Counselor at Law,
REAL ESTATE AGENT.

Lewisville, Ark. June 24 1873.

Special attention given to any legal business in the Counties of Lafayette, Columbia, Nevada, Hempstead, Sevier & Little River.

Figure 9. John Benjamin Butler, attorney in Lewisville. From ⁸ and the *Washington Telegraph* issue of May 8, 1872.



Figure 10. John Benjamin Burton's grave, Texarkana, Arkansas. From ⁸.

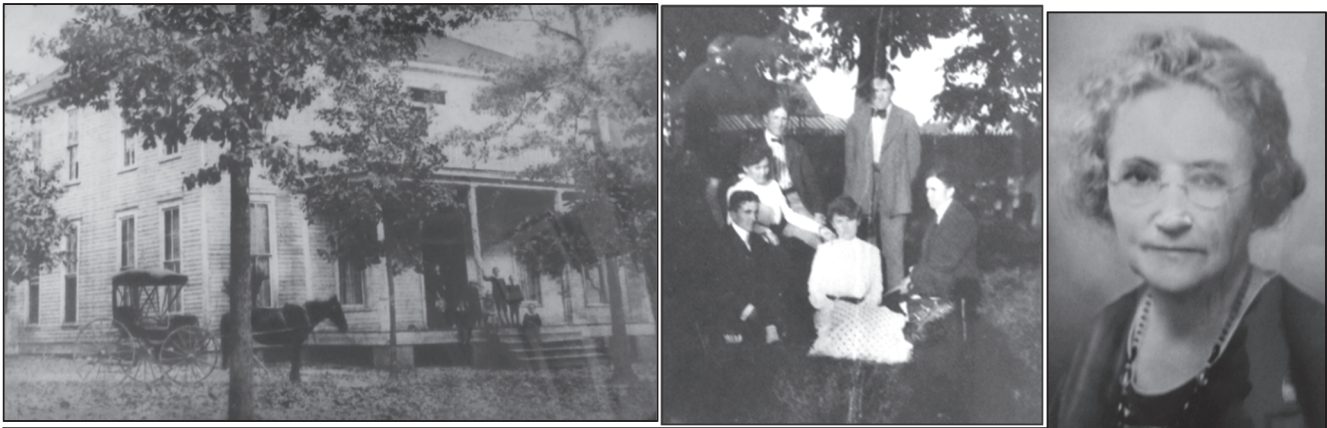


Figure 11. Burton's family. Left: home of John and Cora in Texarkana. Center: Burton family photo of February 22, 1903. Clockwise from left front: son Percy Duffield Burton; wife Cora Mack Burton; son Ralph Burton; son Ashby Burton; son John Bayly Burton; daughter Louise Burton. Right: Cora Burton. From ⁸

J. T. Osborn

J. T. Osborn was born in Georgia ca. 1837. By age 23, he was a printer in La Fayette, Chambers County, Alabama, living in the house of James Jones McLemore and printing for McLemore's newspapers.¹⁰ McLemore (1831-1882), from an influential family, was a planter and editor of the *Opposition Paper* in 1860, *The Southern Sentinel* in 1861, and *The Chambers Tribune* in 1863.^{6,7,10} Osborn must have left McLemore and Alabama by 1861 to take over Burton's job print office, where he worked during and after the war at least through 1865.^{6,7} By 1870, Osborn was printing in Camden, Ouachita County, Arkansas, married to Sarah (Sarah Jane Wells, 1843-1929, born in Old Choctaw Corner, near Thomasville, Alabama, grew up and died in Clarke County, Alabama) and with two young daughters (Alice Irene born in 1864, and Emma born in 1866).¹⁰ The ultimate fate of Osborn is uncertain to me, but I believe he is the 43 year old "J. T. Osborne" from Georgia who died on October 4 in the 1878 yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans.²³

Washington E. Morgan

The El Dorado currency of interest were printed for and signed by W. E. Morgan. He was Washington E. Morgan, born in 1811 in South Carolina.^{10,11} He married Sarah Anah Elizabeth Stevens Morgan (born Feb 26, 1826) in Troup County, Georgia, in 1844 when he was 33 years old and Sarah 17 years old. Morgan purchased 160 acres of land in El Dorado in November of 1848,²⁴ where he and Sarah built their home. They had several children, two who lived into

adulthood: Bernice (Berry) W. Morgan Graham (1853-1883), and William Wright Morgan (1856-1921). W. E. Morgan was a planter, starting off modestly but in time becoming quite successful. In 1850, he owned only \$500 in real estate, but by 1860, he owned \$3,500 in real estate, \$6,000 in personal estate, and six slaves.¹¹ Morgan joined in the war effort, but he was 50 years old when it began, so rather than serving in the regular army, he joined the El Dorado Township Home Guard, beginning July 1861.²⁵ Sarah lived a long life, dying in 1891 in El Dorado; she is buried in Presbyterian Cemetery. The fate of Washington is less clear, but he probably died between 1864 and 1870.

Morgan Issued the El Dorado Currency as Clerk of Union County

Why was W. E. Morgan's name on these El Dorado currency? Some merchants issued currency, but rarely did planters. The notes and scrip bear the text, "*W. E. Morgan will pay at his Office El Dorado Arkansas,*" but as a planter, Morgan would not have needed an office to redeem the currency. The answer lies in his civil service: Morgan was clerk of Union County in 1854-1856 and 1860-1864.²⁵ Thus, when these notes and scrip were printed, Morgan was responsible for collecting county taxes, debts, and such. Thus, the W. E. Morgan currency is a predecessor of the county treasurer notes issued in 1865 and illustrated in Figure 1, and Morgan signed his notes and scrip in the same capacity as Parks Beeman (1805-1873) signed the 1865 notes: as county clerk of Union County.²⁶

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- 6 *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*. 1890. Goodspeed Publishing Co., Southern Historical Press, Chicago, Nashville, and St. Louis.
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- 8 Matthew Milton Barron (1829-1895), like Burton, moved to El Dorado to run a newspaper and lived there only briefly. Barron was born in Clinton, Georgia. He lived in Randolph County, Alabama, by 1850, where he married Eliza Anne Stephens (1836-1897) in 1851 and had five children over the next six years. He moved to El Dorado by 1859 and was working with Burton on *The El Dorado Times*, and had a son born in Little Rock in 1860. He left Arkansas soon thereafter, even before he sold his house: the advertisement for a “House and Lot for Sale” in the May 9, 1861, issue of *The El Dorado Bulletin*, shown to the right, was for his house. Barron joined the war in April 22, 1862, in Louina, Randolph County, Alabama, enlisting into Company K of the 46th Alabama Infantry Regiment, at the rank of Sargent. He was captured at Vicksburg, Mississippi, July 4, 1863, and was paroled. He returned to Louina and had four more children. By 1870, he had moved to Newnan, Georgia, by 1870, and lived there until his death in 1895. He is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery, Newnan, Georgia.⁸⁻¹⁰
- 9 Documents kindly provided by Charles Walthall and courtesy of the John B. Burton family
- 10 Ancestry.com
- 11 U.S. Censuses
- 12 Letter dated September 24, 1886, from Cora Mack Burton in Accomack, Virginia, to her children in Lewisville, Arkansas (provided by Charles Walthall courtesy of the J. B. Burton family)
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Acknowledgment. This work would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Charles Walthall and the John B. Burton family. They provided records, photographs, and insight into Burton, allowing his nature and accomplishments to be portrayed here. I am deeply indebted to their generosity. I also thank Bill Gunther and Rodney Kelley for their helpful comments about the manuscript.