



Episode 912, Story 1 – Chandler Tintype

Wes: This case delves into the history of two families and one extraordinary image.

I'm Wes Cowan and I'm investigating a Confederate tintype I've seen once before when I appraised it on *Antiques Roadshow* in June 2009. The tintype had been handed down through a Mississippi family since the Civil War, and comes with a controversial story: that a young master and his former slave fought together for the Confederate Army. This image and a handful of others depicting African Americans in Confederate uniform have helped fuel a debate concerning black Americans who bore arms for the Confederacy.

A hundred and fifty years after the start of that fratricidal war, Bobbie Chandler and Chandler Battaile, direct descendants of the men in the tintype, want to know if there's any truth to their family lore.

Chandler Battaile: Hello, Wes.

Wes: Chandler, it's great to see you again.

Chandler: It's good to see you, thanks for coming over. I'd like you to meet my friend, Bobbie Chandler.

Wes: Bobbie, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Bobbie: Nice to meet you.



Wes: Guys, I can't tell you how exciting this is for me. After the *Roadshow* episode aired there were a lot of questions that were raised about the story.

Viewers wrote in droves to question whether the African American in the picture was a slave or a free man and whether so-called black Confederates were a myth. It's a story and a debate that I also find fascinating.

And it's just great to get together with both of you, to really now dig a little bit deeper.

Chandler: It's an image of my great-great grandfather Andrew Chandler, and Bobbie's great grandfather Silas Chandler, both in Confederate uniforms. The photograph was taken, I believe, in 1861 as they were going off to war.

Wes: Silas had been a slave in the Chandler household.

But according to their family story, the Chandlers granted Silas his freedom just before the war and that he fought heroically alongside his former master in the 44th Mississippi regiment.

Chandler: Andrew was shot in his right leg. And Silas, we believe, helped save his life. The Confederate surgeons were interested in amputating his leg, because of the injury. And Silas convinced the Confederate surgeons not to operate.

Wes: Okay. And Bobbie, did your family ever talk about this photograph?



Bobbie: Well, one of the stories was that he saved his pennies, and bought his freedom. The other story was that he was granted his freedom by the Chandler family, and they presented him with some land, and he built a church on it.

Chandler: We've been told that my great-great grandfather gave 80 acres to, // the freed slaves after the war, on the condition that they build a church on the land.

Wes: And you said this has caused some controversy even among your family?

Bobbie: That's right. Some members of the family don't think he fought as a Confederate soldier. They think that he was a slave, and doing what he had to do.

Wes: Bobbie has a copy of Silas' Confederate Army pension application; and Chandler lends me Andrew's only surviving wartime letter home and some other military records.

Bobbie: I want to find out if Silas really was a Confederate soldier, and if he was a freed man when he became a Confederate soldier.

Chandler: I'd be very interested to know if there are any title changes to land around there, after 1865, that record that as a gift.

Wes: I'd like to take all this stuff with me and when I come back, I'll have some answers.



This is the most amazing photograph. It's breathtakingly rare to see a Confederate with an African American in a Confederate uniform, sitting side-by-side. The images I have seen show the African American separated or standing when the white man is sitting.

In a wartime letter written to his mother from the Tennessee frontline, dated August 1862, Andrew writes that a Yankee raiding party is rumored to be pushing south into Mississippi. He's concerned about his family and about Silas who has returned home from the frontline. "*Do not let them catch Silas.*" Is he worried about his friend? Or, is he concerned for his property?

Part of the whole story here has always been that the family thinks that Andrew was wounded, and Silas saved him from having his leg amputated. And bingo here's this medical certificate dated in 1864, where it details the wound that Andrew had. Gunshot wound to the right leg and ankle, at Chickamauga. And then there's this application for pension.

A lifetime has passed. It's now fifty years after the war, in 1916, and Silas is listed as 78 years old. The application is for indigent servants of a soldier of the late Confederacy. So, what's that mean? Silas Chandler is not applying for a pension as a soldier, but it's very clear that he says that he served for nearly four years in the Confederacy. The application also asks about Silas' "owner." Do servant and slave mean the same thing on this form?

David Vaughn is a Confederate photo expert from Atlanta, Georgia and a friend. He meets me in New Orleans.

I'm sure you're familiar with this image.



David Vaughn: Wow. But to hold it in my hands for the first time is a real thrill for me.

Wes: David Vaughn agrees that the composition of the Chandler tintype, both men seated side by side, is unique.

David: Wes, I brought this along for comparison. It shows a white captain with his African American manservant, taken by A.J. Riddle. And the captain is in perfect focus, and the center of the focal plane is on the captain's face. The African Americans are pushed back into the photograph, and they're not as prominent as their white counterpart.

Wes: Though subtle, it's a common motif in both Confederate portraiture. As well as in images of union officers with escaped slaves, known as "contraband."

David: You've got a pepperbox in Silas's coat, and Andrew has two pistols, a pinfire, and revolver.

Wes: A pepperbox is a type of pistol usually carried as a back-up weapon.

Does this mean that both of these individuals were going off to fight together in the war?

David: It really tells me that the pistols were a photographer's prop.

Wes: So Silas's weapons weren't have been his, but costume pieces used to dress up photographs for the folks back home. I see two different kinds of uniforms. What do you make of that?



David: Well, they're completely different. Silas is wearing a short shell jacket and Andrew is wearing a Confederate jacket, with dark collar and cuff. A little bit more workmanship goes into Andrew's jacket. Both are Confederate uniforms, 100%, no question about that.

Wes: But David doesn't think the uniform proves Silas was a soldier. Instead, he suggests that Silas was Andrew's manservant, a slave brought to the frontlines to perform essential tasks for his master like hunting, foraging, cooking and laundry.

David: I tell you, Wes, there's not anything in the photograph that would suggest that he was free. And until I see the documentation, I would have to assume that he was a slave.

Wes: A website of Civil War rosters maintained by the National Park Service lists Andrew as serving in the 44th Mississippi, but not Silas. I wonder what I can find in the Mississippi state records. By the 1850s, Mississippi dominated the global cotton trade producing more cotton than any other southern state, nearly 600 million pounds in 1859 alone. On the eve of the Civil War, Mississippi's slave population had swelled to 430,000. But there were 773 free African Americans in the state, who were either born to free mothers, or had bought or had been granted their freedom.

Was Silas one of these free African Americans? I can't find any manumission or emancipation records for Mississippi. But here's the census. Okay. 'Free inhabitants in the state of Mississippi, So, these are the records that a census taker took in June of 1860. There's not a single free person of color listed in Chickasaw county, where the Chandlers had their cotton plantation.



Here's Louisa Chandler, Andrew's mother, the recorded head of household. Value of Real Estate' at \$24,000. \$24,000 in 1860, to own that much real estate would indicate that she's fairly wealthy. She also had a value of her personal estate, separate from the real estate, of \$40,000. \$40,000 could include livestock, any outstanding debts that were owed to her. But it could also include the value of slaves.

Now here's something interesting. This is the 1860 slave census. The Chandlers owned approximately thirty-five slaves. None are named, which is typical for the period.

Based on Silas' pension application, I calculate that he's about 22 or 23 years of age in 1860. And here's a 25 year old male. Is this Silas?

University of Pennsylvania historian Mary Frances Berry is conducting research at one of the largest African American historic archives in the country, the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University.

Wes: The family tradition is that Silas the black man, who was freed by the family, and went off to war with Andrew Chandler. Could an African American have been recognized as a soldier in the service of the Confederacy?

Mary Francis Berry: There were some free Negroes – free people of color, they were called – who came out to join the Confederacy in the first month of the war, in places like New Orleans.



Wes: Mary explains that the Louisiana native guards were a militia of mostly wealthy, free creoles who pledged allegiance to the Confederacy at the outset of the war. However, in early 1862, the Louisiana legislature disbanded the militia.

Mary: They never fought in the Confederacy. And they were never accepted as soldiers by the Confederate government.

Wes: There are other scattered instances of free people of color joining local southern militias, but Mary says, contrary to the family story, it was impossible for Silas to have been freed on the eve of the Civil War.

Mary: He was not free, under the laws of Mississippi. Mississippi did not permit the manumission of slaves at the time that this photograph was taken.

Wes: In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the state of Mississippi had enacted a series of increasingly draconian laws restricting slave emancipation and by 1856, a complete ban was passed.

Mary: Mississippi law made slaves slaves for life, *durante vita*. For their lives, they were slaves under the laws of Mississippi, and therefore Silas was a slave.

Wes: Professor Berry explains that only when the Confederacy was near collapse in March 1865 did Jefferson Davis agree to arm and train slaves with the goal of reinforcing his decimated army.

But it was too late to make a difference, and she says there is no substantiated evidence that the recruited slaves fought in the war.



Wes: African Americans then didn't serve in the army. But that doesn't mean they didn't *serve* the army.

Mary: Absolutely. African Americans were not soldiers for the Confederacy. But they in fact did almost everything that was needed.

Wes: Mary explains how the myth of black Confederates has its roots in the number of slaves who were pressed into labor to support the Confederate Army. They did virtually everything except fight. The concept of African Americans fighting for the Confederacy is no way, no shape, true?

Mary: It's not accurate to say that there's no way, because it is possible that some slave who was a personal servant or a groom or a cook, or was there with his master, who had a weapon – just as Silas had a weapon in the tintype, could have fired a shot at someone. But what you can say, that they were not legally soldiers, and were not accepted by the Confederacy as soldiers.

Wes: She points to Silas' pension application as further proof that he was a slave.

Mary: The state of Mississippi decided in 1888 to first start offering pensions. They included in this law of 1910, which is the application that Silas used, slaves as soldiers.

Wes: And why would they do that?

Mary suggests that servants' pensions were borne of something called the "lost cause," an ideology which emerged during reconstruction.



Mary: In the late 19th century and early 20th century, there was a great tide of feeling in the South about trying to justify the war itself and part of that justification was to say that slaves fought for the Confederacy, slaves were loyal to their masters. And so all of this was reinforced by including them in the pensions.

Wes: The pension application confirms that Andrew Chandler was indeed the owner of Silas during the Civil War.

Mary: Whether or not they had a close, personal relationship in some terms of intimacy that we would describe, we can never know. Slavery has its own compulsion and as long as compulsion is there, and force, you can never conclude anything about amiability.

Wes: At least some of the Chandler's family story isn't adding up. What about the final chapter: that land had been granted to Silas and other former slaves following the war?

The Chandler family land deeds are kept at the clay county court house in West point, Mississippi. Local historian, Jack Elliot, who is also a distant branch in the Chandler family tree, offers to help.

Wes: I'll say, god, where do we start?

Jack Elliot: Well, we'll start with the index right here. It's an index of land title.

Wes: There's a Callie Chandler, A.M. Chandler.



Jack: Yep, that's Andrew right there. Okay, that'll take deed book six.

Wes: We locate a warranty deed from 1883. It describes the sale of one acre of land from the three Chandler children, including Andrew, to deacons of the Palo Alto Baptist Church, which did have a congregation of ex-slaves.

And what'd they sell it for here? \$100. So, they're selling an acre of land for \$100 in 1883. Doesn't that strike you as a little bit expensive?

Jack: But it implies that there was something on it. I suspect there was most likely a church already in existence, and quite likely the Chandler family had built the church building or at least contributed substantially to it.

Wes: So the Chandler family was involved with a congregation of former slaves establishing a church after the Civil War. But there's a hitch.

Silas Chandler's name's not on this deed, though.

Jack: No, he's not.

Wes: Was Silas ever a member of the Palo Alto Baptist Church? Jack points to an entry in the history of Clay County. What he shows me next closes the final chapter in this family tale.

Well, this was a great story. And I was really anxious to sink my teeth into it. The question that you both wanted to know was, was Silas a slave, or was he free when that picture was taken?



I explain how because Silas had been from Mississippi that had serious consequences for our story.

I can tell you unequivocally, that Silas was a slave when that photograph was taken. A slave owner could not, by law, free his slave. It was against the law. It was illegal for slaves to enlist in the army. He couldn't have done it. Now, that doesn't mean that there weren't thousands of slaves supporting the Confederate Army. But they couldn't fight.

Then, I share my discovery from the Clay County courthouse.

Here's a warranty deed for the sale of land for a church in Palo Alto.

I explain that there's a kernel of truth to the Chandler legend. The family did substantially help a congregation of freed slaves acquire a church after the war, the Palo Alto Baptist Church.

But had Silas ever been a member of that congregation?

Jack points me in the direction of Mount Hermon Baptist Church, in West Point, Mississippi, fifteen miles away from Palo Alto. After the war, this is where Silas Chandler and his family settled. This church, founded in 1868, was established without Chandler family. That's where I find Silas Chandler's name, engraved on the cornerstone of the church he help build. A lasting testament to his life and achievements.

What do you think about all of this?



Bobbie: Well, this answers my question. This is what some members of my family thought. And you have verified what I wanted to know. It's a relief because now I know the truth.

Chandler: I think it's interesting to understand the place of stories in family histories. Obviously, the story that we've shared is one that is very comfortable, and comforting to believe. But without documentary evidence, it is a story. Our families' histories have been, and will always be, deeply intertwined and evolving with the times.

Wes: I'm just delighted I was able to be part of it. Thank you both.

Chandler: Thanks, Wes.

Wes: After the war, Andrew and Silas lived about fifteen miles from each other for the rest of their lives. Both married and had families, many of whom stayed in Clay County, Mississippi.