

A Debt Repaid



It is always uncomfortable to come across family members who participated in the reprehensible practice of slavery but this story, passed down through the generations, is worth telling. Just prior to the Civil War, a young Georgian farmer named Thomas Reese, purchased a slave named Nathan to help him work his fields. A short time later, Nathan asked Thomas if it were possible for him to purchase another slave, a woman named Adeline, who worked on a neighbor's farm.

Thomas did and shortly thereafter Nathan and Adeline were married. Thomas then presented Nathan with two sets of documents and told him to keep them safe. They were emancipation papers. Nathan couldn't read but believed what Thomas said so he locked them in a box he kept on his fireplace mantle. When told that they were free to go, neither Nathan or Adeline had that desire. "Where would we go? We don't know any other place." They chose to stay and work the farm alongside Thomas's family. The family referred to them as Uncle Nathan and Aunt Adeline. All this happened before Fort Sumter was fired upon, marking the beginning of the Civil War.

Nathan and Adeline remained on the farm throughout the entirety of the war. During its waning days, a group of Union soldiers under the command of General James Wilson was

sweeping through the area, tasked with destroying any property that could be used by the Confederates. They came upon Thomas' farm while Thomas was away. As they prepared to set fire to the buildings, Nathan came out and asked why the soldiers were going to burn the place down. The officer replied that all slave-holders' property was to be destroyed.

"But we ain't slaves!" Nathan exclaimed and ran off to get the papers he had safely stored years ago. The officer read through the documents and then told his men to stand down and move on. Thomas' farm was one of the few places in the area that was spared destruction.

Thomas Clopton Reese was the great-grandfather of my grandaunt.

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