

Dawes Case #4541 Choctaw Freedman The Story of Alex Austin

**Native American Research Case 4
Compiled by Helen C. Austin**

Alex Austin, a resident of Starkville, Mississippi made application to the Dawes Commission at Meridian, Mississippi in 1902 as a Choctaw Freedman. He was born in 1849 in Starkville, Oktibbeha County, Mississippi to Daniel Austin and Else. Alex is a one quarter Choctaw Indian and was born a slave in the Choctaw Tribe. His parents were also slaves to the Choctaw. Alex said he has lived all his life in Mississippi and Alabama. After Emancipation, he left Starkville but stayed in Alabama for eight years before returning to Oktibbeha County.

It is not known if his grandparents were runaway slaves belonging to white men named Austin who were captured by the Choctaw for use as their own slaves, or if it was a Choctaw named Austin who gave them their surname. It could just be a word "Aw-stn" that sounded good in the Choctaw language. In South Carolina about 1800 there were some Austin families who owned plantations and some of their slaves took the surname out of respect, or because of some blood relationship, or because Austin was the place-name for the farm where they lived.

APPLICATION FOR IDENTIFICATION AS A MISSISSIPPI CHOCTAW: National Archives and Footnote.com. MCR Card #4541 Alex Austin, Starkville, MS. Dawes Packet of letters: DC 2324-1903 Dept of the Interior, Jan 21, 1903. To Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, Muskogee, Indian Territory: "Applicant Alex Austin appeared before you at Meridian, MS, Jan 17, 1902 and you refused to identify him as a Choctaw." He stated that he is a 1/4 blood Choctaw Indian now 54 years of age, and was formerly a slave.

Alex Austin was denied citizenship in the Choctaw Tribe and was refused an allotment. His case was closed in 1903. Some of the reasons for denial were that he looked black, did not speak any Choctaw, had only a small percentage of Choctaw blood, and had left the tribe for eight years to live on his own in Alabama.

The father of Alex, Daniel Austin, was born 1815 in South Carolina and was a Black. He died before 1903. Daniel married about 1847 to Else who was born in 1816 in Virginia and lived in Mississippi all her life. She was a slave, her father was named John. He was a 3/4 blood Choctaw Indian. Else's mother, Christian, was 3/4 blood Choctaw and her grandmother, also named Christian was a full blood Choctaw woman. Elsie died before 1903 in Mississippi.

The children of Daniel Austin and Else (1/8 blood Choctaw) were:

1. Alex Austin, born 1849 in Starkville, Oktibbeha, MS. He died 1911/19 in Starkville, Oktibbeha, MS. He married Harriett Nabers. She died before 1903.
2. Edward Austin was born 1838 in MS. He married Maria born 1841 in MS. He lived in Texas.
3. John Austin was born in MS.
4. William Austin was born about 1855 in MS.
5. Joel Austin was born Oct 1857 in MS. He married Cora A. Their children were: Jessie James, D. Dove, Sherman, and Payten D. Austin, all born before 1900 in Starkville.
6. Patsy Austin was born in MS, married a Mr. Gray and lived in Curve, TN.
7. Jane Alston was born in MS.
8. Cornelia Austin was born in MS.

Alex Austin married Harriett Nabers in Alabama about 1861. She was born 1848 in Alabama. Included in Dawes Packet MCR4541 is a certified copy of the marriage record for Alex Oyster (sic) and Harriett Nabers (colored).

The Children of Alex Austin and Harriett Nabers were as follows:

1. Mary Austin was born 1862 in AL.
2. Louis Austin was born 1864 in AL.
3. Sam Austin was born 1866 in AL.
4. Annie Austin was born 1868 in MS.
5. James A. Austin was born Nov 1869 in Starkville, Obtibbeha, MS; lived in Chicago, IL.
He married Luella King. They had a son named Julius Austin born in St. Louis in 1899.
6. Tommie (Thomas) Austin, born 1874 in Starkville, Obtibbeha, MS; lived in St. Louis MO.
7. Tres Austin, born May 1875 in Starkville, Obtibbeha, MS He was living in St. Louis, Missouri in 1900. His residence was 2228 Papin Street. He was a day laborer.
8. Malory Austin, a son, born 1877 in Starkville, Obtibbeha, MS.
9. Joel Austin, born 1879 in Starkville, Obtibbeha, MS.

The family of Alex Austin is listed on the U. S. Census of 1870, 1880, 1900, and in 1910. Using information from the Dawes Packet, some of the children of Alex were found listed on the Census of Chicago, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri.

When the railroads came to Mississippi and the route included Starkville, the town prospered. Working for the railroad was considered a good occupation with many benefits. At the train station the porters who carried luggage and escorted passengers to their seats, wore spiffy uniforms with buffed brass buttons and decorated red caps. They kept their shoes polished and were proud of their neat appearance. A wide smile and attentive service ensured a good tip from considerate travelers. This was the job that Alex Austin had in 1910. He was age 68, a widower and rented a house by himself. His children were all living on their own. They had jobs in St. Louis, Chicago and Starkville.

Although he did not get a land lot from the Dawes Commission and was not declared a citizen of the Choctaw Nation, Alex Austin had a good life. He was a citizen of the United States. His Choctaw cousins did not get that citizenship until 1924.

An article in Wired Magazine.com by Brendan I. Koerner titled, *Blood Feud* September 2005, Issue 13.09 describes the problem that Native American Blacks have. They are still trying to get their tribal citizenship. They are submitting swabs for DNA tests from a company named DNA Tribes in Arlington, VA which is a SNP test that will identify descendants of the Five Civilized Tribes and descendants of individual African tribes. He says that the Familytreedna.com tests cannot give those results. Because the Dawes Commission was so arbitrary in their decisions when awarding tribal citizenship to the Black Freedmen it is still a problem for their descendants. The Tribes will not recognize DNA as a proof of Native American ancestry and continue to use the Dawes records as the only document that will prove ancestry in the Tribe.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,

COMMISSION TO THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES.

In the matter of the application of Alex Austin for
identification as a Mississippi Choctaw, M C R 4541,

List of papers forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior
with the record in the above case, together
with the page occupied by each
in said record.

	Page.
Original application of Alex Austin before the Dawes Commission at Meridian, Mississippi, January 17, 1902, for identification as a Mississippi Choctaw.	1
Certified copy of marriage record of Alex Oyster and Harriett Nabers.	8
Affidavit of M. F. Ames as to Alex Oyster in marriage record being the same person as Alex Austin.	10
Affidavit of Tom Peterson supporting application.	11
Final decision of the Commission in the case of Alex Austin, an applicant for identification as a Mississippi Choctaw, refusing said applica- tion.	12

Final letter of rejection of Alex's application for identification as a Mississippi Choctaw