

The Johnson-Alford Connection

Why did the Robert F. Alford Family Break Up in 1880?

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Below is an article about my Alford ancestors which explains at least some of the reasons why the family dissolved in 1881. It is a follow up to the article previously published in AAFA ACTION #55. This article was originally published August 2002 in the "West Line Outlook." J.J. has given express permission to reproduce the article in its entirety in "AAFA ACTION."

Another article entitled, "The State of Texas vs. Tom Alford" is referenced in this article and follows.

In 1881, part of the Robert F. Alford family moved from Tarrant County, TX, to Roane County, TN. The immediate party included Alsa Evans-Alford, Robert's wife of thirty-two years, Robert Henry Alford, his twelve year old son, Minnie Louella Alford, his eight year old daughter and Ida May, his six year old daughter. At a later time, Alsa Eveline Alford, his fifteen year old daughter, would join her family in Roane County. The purpose of this article is to explain at least some of the reasons for the dissolution of this family.

Remaining in Tarrant County, TX or its environs were Robert F. Alford, his sons, William Thomas Alford (Tom), George Mashack Alford (Zack) and Patrick Mason Alford (Mace and Paddy). Also remaining there were his daughters, Sarah Elizabeth Alford (Sissy), Rachel Rebecca Alford (Becky) and Susan Isabelle Alford (Belle).

The events leading to the dissolution of the family go back to the summer of 1879. At this time, the majority of the family was intact. Sarah Elizabeth married J.R. Moore around 1876 in Tarrant County, TX and in 1877, she and her husband had a child there, who they named Lenora. Beyond this marriage, everyone lived either with Robert and Alsa Alford or nearby.

In the spring of 1879, Mr. Charles McCafferty of Fort Worth, TX bought a mare from William Thomas Alford (hereafter called Tom Alford) for \$17.50. It was discovered later that the mare was stolen from a man named O.C. Strum. Representing Strum in this matter, Mr. John Shaddy swore out a warrant for the arrest of the person or persons responsible for stealing Mr. Strum's mare. Not knowing the name of that person, the warrant was made out for one "John Smith."

Not long after the issuance of this warrant, Mr. McCafferty learned the location of the man from whom he bought the mare and wrote Tom Alford a letter explaining that the animal had been identified as a stolen horse and that he (McCafferty) was exploring means by which he could recoup his funds.

In receipt of McCafferty's letter, Tom Alford rode from Arlington to Fort Worth to see Mr. McCafferty and showed to him a legal bill of sale for the mare. He told McCafferty not to give the horse up without good proof and, he added, "If the mare is taken from you, I will make it right by providing another horse of equal value or I will return your money."

Soon after that, McCafferty was forced to give up the mare to John Shaddy and then set out in a buggy for Arlington to recover his losses from Tom Alford. In his company and on his own horse was one George H. White, a twenty-one year old Tarrant County Clerk, who rode along with McCafferty on the pretense of going to Arlington to see the races.

During the conversations with McCafferty, White learned the name of the individual McCafferty was visiting. Unknown to McCafferty, White had brought the arrest warrant with him and along the way, changed the name on it to Thomas Olford."

On the morning of August 2, 1879, they arrived at the home of Robert F. Alford where they met Robert and his son, George Mashack Alford (hereafter called Zack). When McCafferty explained the nature of his trip, Zack volunteered to guide him to the home of Tom Alford. At this point, George White said that he had decided to ride along with McCafferty and gave up his plans to go to Arlington to see the races.

As promised, Zack lead the men to the home of Tom Alford. Upon arrival, Tom put up and fed the horses of McCafferty and White, invited them into his home, prepared a meal for them and spent a few hours hosting his visitors. Eventually, McCafferty explained the reason for his visit and Tom said that he had another horse of equal value that he would give him. Tom sent his younger brother, Patrick Mason Alford (hereafter called Mace) to fetch the new animal.

While they waited, some other men arrived at Tom's house, including Marion Stowe, Mitch Harrison and

William "Bill" Lytle. They had come to go squirrel hunting with the Alford boys later in the day. As they arrived, they placed their shotguns against the fence outside of Tom's house.

When Mace returned with the new mount, McCafferty seemed satisfied with the exchange but, at White's insistence, he asked Tom to saddle it and ride it down the road for a while to determine if the animal would buck, pitch or rear. So White removed his saddle and placed it on the new animal, which Tom mounted and began to ride down the road toward Fort Worth with White and McCafferty in the buggy. Riding with them was Mace Alford on his horse.

After riding for about a quarter of a mile, Tom said that the animal was gentle and he would return with Mace to his home. At that moment, White announced that he was a sheriff and that he intended to take Tom back to Fort Worth to stand trial for horse stealing. Tom was taken aback but agreed to go if they could collect some clothes for him to take with him to Fort Worth.

White would have none of it and, with drawn pistol, informed Tom that he was going to Fort Worth just as he was. At this, Mace drew his riding crop and advanced on White who told him to stop or "... I'll blow the top of your head off."

Mace stopped his advance and said to White, "You'll pay for this, young man." And to Tom he said, "You will have your clothes and don't you forget it." Mace then remounted his horse and raced back toward Tom's house.

With his pistol trained on Tom, White had McCafferty tie Tom's hands to the saddle and tie his legs beneath the horse so that he could not dismount. The horse was then tied to the back of the buggy and they continued toward Fort Worth. White told McCafferty to hurry because he was sure that the Alford boys would return and try to free their brother.

When Mace reached Tom's house, he dismounted and entered the house. After a few minutes, he came out with a handful of Tom's clothes. When asked what was going on, Mace informed the men that Tom had been arrested and he was taking him his clothes. (In later testimony, each of the men there said that Mace was completely calm and not at all upset.) Mace remounted, carrying the clothes, and Zack, Tom's brother, and Bill Lytle, their friend, rode with him. Both the Alford boys had pistols, which they always wore, and Bill Lytle picked up one of the shotguns leaning against the fence.

When they caught up with the buggy and Tom, they yelled for them to stop. At that, White got off the buggy with his pistol drawn and shots began to be fired. Who fired first was never known. McCafferty said that Lytle and White began to shoot at the same time.

Immediately, White was hit in the groin with the squirrel

shot. As he was falling, he shot Lytle, who fell off his horse into the brush. Meanwhile, Zack found refuge behind a tree and Mace helped untie Tom's horse from the buggy while he was dodging more shots from White. McCafferty testified that he (McCafferty) remained at the front of the buggy, holding his startled horse. There was never any evidence presented that even suggested that Zack and Mace fired their pistols.

But White continued to fire, hitting Tom in the back. Tom yelled, "Shoot him, Mace." But the boys simply made their way into the underbrush while White emptied his six-shooter at them.

White and McCafferty got back into the buggy and continued on till they reached the home of Robert F. Alford. There they requested water, which was provided to them, and when Robert asked what had happened, White said that he had gotten into a shooting scrap with the boys. Then they continued to Arlington to find a doctor.

Meanwhile, Lytle, who was mortally wounded, was taken to the home of Robert Alford, where he died later that night. Later that same night, Zack Alford was arrested for the shooting of George H. White.

Tom, who was injured, and Mace, his younger brother, fled the area.

On 10 Aug 1879, George H. White died of his wounds in Arlington, TX.

On September 26, 1879, three indictments were handed down by the Grand Jury of Tarrant County, TX, charging Bill Lytle, Zack Alford and Mace Alford of the murder of George H. White.

On October 3, 1879, a Grand Jury of Tarrant County, TX handed down an indictment entitled, State of Texas vs. Thomas Alford, Case No. 1823, in which he was charged with "Theft of a Mare." (See *The State of Texas vs. Thomas Alford*, (Case No. 1823 for details, follows).)

In the latter part of 1879, Zack Alford went to trial for the murder of George H. White; he was convicted and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary.

During this period, the Alford family was under enormous stress. One son Zack was imprisoned. Two sons Mace and Tom were in hiding. The newspapers, particularly the ones from Fort Worth, were denouncing the family as "well known horse thieves" and murderers. Family history says that many stores refused to sell to them; that they were asked to vacate their rental property and the schools would not accept the Alford children. George H. White was treated as a hero, and the Alford boys were depicted in the worst way.

Things became more unbearable in the latter part of 1880 when the Appeals Court of Texas overturned Zack

Alford's murder conviction for three reasons:

(1) George H. White was not a sheriff nor was he a peace officer of any sort. At most, he had served as a bailiff during one trial in Fort Worth, TX.

(2) The arrest warrant had been issued for one "John Smith" and no one but a magistrate had the authority to change the name. George White had changed the name to

"Tom Olferd."

(3) Under the current law in the State of Texas, it was legal to resist an unlawful arrest. George H. White arrested Tom Alford unlawfully, and it was proper for Tom or his family and friends to resist it.

The following is an overview of the case No. 1823, The State of Texas vs. Thomas Alford.

On October 3, 1879, the Grand Jury of Tarrant County, TX handed down an indictment entitled, The State of Texas vs. Thomas Alford, case no. 1823. The charge was "Theft of a Mare."

The Grand Jury, under Foreman W.A. Huffman, alleged that on July 9, 1879, Thomas Alford stole a mare from O.C. Strum of Tarrant County, TX.

On February 21 of 1880, a Capias order was issued from the District Court of Tarrant County, TX to any Sheriff in the State of Texas. On May 24, 1880, Joseph M. Henderson, the Tarrant County Sheriff, reported that the order had not been executed because the defendant was "not found in Tarrant Co."

On November 18, 1882, a second Capias order was issued for the arrest of Thomas Alford, however, no record of a Sheriff's return has been located.

On December 5, 1882, another Capias order was issued in the same case for the arrest of William Thomas Alford.

W.J. Maddox reported on December 21, 1882 that he had executed the order by arresting Alford. A bail was set for \$1200.00.

On the day of his arrest, Alford executed an Appearance Bond in the amount of \$1200.00 promising, under penalty of forfeiture of those funds, to appear at his trial in the pending case. With his signature on this document was Pat G. Dalton, a distant relative, and Henry H. Furman, a lawyer who earlier had represented George Mashack Alford, Tom Alford's brother.

On February 7, 1883, W.S. Pendleton, the Tarrant County District Attorney filed a motion with the District Court in the case of The State of Texas vs. Tom Alford, no. 1823, in which he moved that the charges pending against William Thomas Alford be dismissed because of a lack of evidence.

The motion was carried and charges in case No. 1823, The State of Texas vs. Thomas Alford, were dismissed.

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off. I am hoping that Jim and Sue will be flooded with these stories or turning points during the next year. How many of you out there who have lost your parents haven't at one time or another wished that you had sat down with them and let them tell you their life stories. I know I have done that a lot. There were stories I heard at family gatherings long ago but that I can't recall now. Don't let your children be wishing they knew more about your past. Help the genealogists of the future by writing your life

history as you live it in your own words. Ask any true genealogist and they will tell you what a treasure it is when they find a journal or diary written in the first person. We have an opportunity to leave hundreds and hundreds of treasures for the future but it is up to you. You are the only one that can do it. Please don't disappoint!

Max Alford, #0233, Member AAFA Hall of Fame

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Thank you one and all for your support of AAFA. The officers and board members continue to work towards our goal of searching and informing all Alford's of their ancestors.

Let's all offer up a prayer for peace and the safety of our servicemen, fire and police forces.

Doris Vetri, Secretary, #0303