

PINTLALA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Next Meeting:

July 19, 2026 at 2:30 p.m.
Pintlala Baptist Church



c/o Pintlala Public Library
255 Federal Road
Hope Hull, Alabama 36043

Volume XL, Number 3

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July 2026

Bowie Knives of Pintlala: Craftsmanship, Cavalry, and Family in Civil War Alabama

Bowie Knife, originally belonged to George Washington Shackelford- Believed to have been crafted by Lewis Crenshaw of Lowndes County, Alabama on plantation of Rev. C. E. Crenshaw, ca. 1861.



George Washington Shackelford's Knife
The Antique Bowie Knife Book, page 432-433

Bowie Knife, originally belonged to William Lafayette Allen- Believed to have been crafted by Lewis Crenshaw of Lowndes County, Alabama on plantation of Rev. C.E. Crenshaw, ca. 1861.



Bill Allen's Knife - Confederate Memorial Park
Overall length 20 13/16th inches-Blade length: 15 3/4 inches
Photo by Steve Williams

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President's Message

I hope you and your families will enjoy the Fourth of July holiday and will celebrate our country's 250th birthday! I would like to invite you all to attend the next quarterly meeting of the PHA on July 19th. Our guest speaker will be addressing two Pintala families and their Bowie knife connections. This will be a very interesting meeting and your participation is vital to the success of our Association. Thank you for your continued support of PHA and I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Thanks,

Frank Ellis

PHA NEW MEMBER

Carolyn Golowka
Cambria, California

Thank you Ricky McLaney for the gift to PHA of two notebooks compiled by his grandmother, Zerah Larkin McLaney, containing a brief history of Providence Presbyterian Church of LeGrand, Alabama plus Church Minutes primarily for years in the 1930s and 1950s. These records may be seen by appointment due to their delicate condition.

PHA July 2026 Program

Pintlala Historical Association will meet on Sunday, July 19th at 2:30 in the Fellowship Hall of Pintlala Baptist Church. Our program will be presented by Calvin Chappelle, site director of two historic sites managed by the Alabama Historical Commission; Confederate Memorial



Park located in Marbury, and Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson Park located in Wetumpka. Calvin is a native of Montgomery, Alabama. He earned his B. A. degree in Art History from the University in Knoxville and his M.A. in Museum Studies from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Prior to working for the Alabama Historical Commission, he was executive director for the Hazen Historical Museum Foundation in Knoxville that oversees two Civil War era sites. Calvin has worked in the museum field for over 25 years.

He is currently President of the Elmore County Historical Society and Treasurer for the Alabama Museum Association.

Please join PHA to learn about the Confederate Memorial Park and the Bowie knife that had belonged to William Lafayette Allen which is now in the permanent collection of the CMP Museum.

Calvin Chappelle

Bowie Knives of Pintlala: Craftsmanship, Cavalry, and Family in Civil War Alabama

By Steve Williams

Among the most recognizable weapons associated with the American frontier and the Confederacy is the Bowie knife. More than a weapon, the Bowie knife became a cultural symbol of self-reliance, personal toughness, and Southern identity. Current research draws a conclusion that there are two known surviving Bowie knives that connect two local families of Pintlala, Alabama to a remarkable account of war, craftsmanship, and oral family history.

This account explores the origins of the Bowie knife, the Confederate cavalymen from the Pintlala community who carried them during the War Between the States, and the enslaved blacksmith believed to have forged some of the finest examples associated with this region.

Origins of the Bowie Knife

The Bowie knife originated on the American frontier during the 1820s and became famous through the exploits of frontiersman James Bowie. The weapon gained national attention following the infamous Sandbar Fight near Natchez, Mississippi, in 1827, when Bowie reportedly used a large fighting knife to survive a brutal encounter. Although the knife was associated with James Bowie, historians generally believe that its original design came from his brother, Rezin Bowie.

Early Bowie knives resembled large butcher or hunting knives, but by the 1830s the design evolved into the familiar form recognized today: a large, fixed blade featuring a clipped point and hand guard. The knife proved popular among hunters, soldiers, Texas Rangers, gamblers, and frontiersmen because it functioned equally well as both tool and weapon during America's westward expansion.

Over time, the Bowie knife became closely connected with Southern and frontier culture. By the outbreak of the Civil War, many Confederate soldiers carried Bowie knives into service, particularly cavalymen who found them practical in mounted combat.

Bowie Knives in Confederate Service

Early in the Civil War, both Confederate cavalry and infantrymen carried Bowie knives, but cavalymen used them more practically and kept them longer. Cavalymen could carry heavier weapons while on horseback and close-range cavalry fighting made large knives somewhat useful alongside pistols and sabers. Confederate infantrymen mainly carried Bowie knives because they expected hand-to-hand combat and saw the knives as symbols of toughness and Southern identity. However, infantry combat usually happened at long range with muskets and artillery, and the heavy knives became burdensome during long marches. Many infantry soldiers eventually discarded their knives.

A large number of volunteer soldiers brought into battle with them shotguns, hunting rifles, pistols, and Bowie knives from their homes. Local blacksmiths and Southern arsenals both produced large fighting knives because they were generally easier and less expensive to manufacture than firearms.

As the war progressed, the Bowie knife became increasingly associated with cavalymen rather than infantrymen. Popular images of Southern horsemen often emphasized cavalry units such as those serving under commanders such as General Nathan Bedford Forrest and General J. E. B. Stuart. While such imagery was often glamorized in later years, surviving examples of these knives from local communities demonstrate that they were indeed carried and valued by many Southern soldiers during the war.

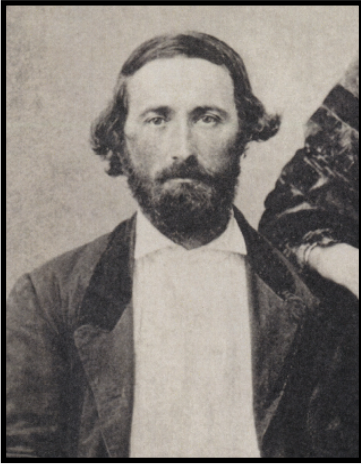
A number of rare examples survived the war, including knives believed to have been carried by members of the Shackelford family of Pintlala and their brother-in-law, William Lafayette Allen.

The Shackelford Family of Pintlala

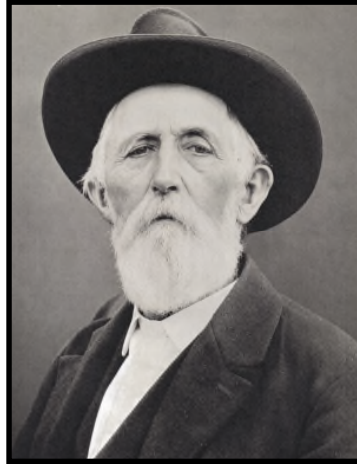
The Shackelford family formed one of the earliest and most respected pioneer families in the Pintlala com-

munity. Family patriarch George Shackelford (1779–1852) emigrated from North Carolina to Alabama in 1818, settling near the Federal Road at the small frontier settlement that developed around Sam Manac's tavern/store. In 1824 Shackelford married Annette Jeter (1805–1870), and together they established a prosperous family in southern Montgomery County.

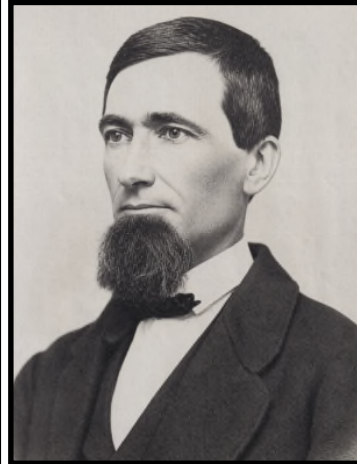
Among their ten children were four sons who served in the Confederate Army: George Washington Shackelford (1827–1867), Francis "Frank" Shackelford (1830–1905), Joseph "Joe" Shackelford (1835–1902), and Madison "Mat" Shackelford (1838–1905). All four enlisted as privates in Company F of the 2nd Alabama Cavalry in the spring of 1862. Joseph and Madison later earned commissions as lieutenants.



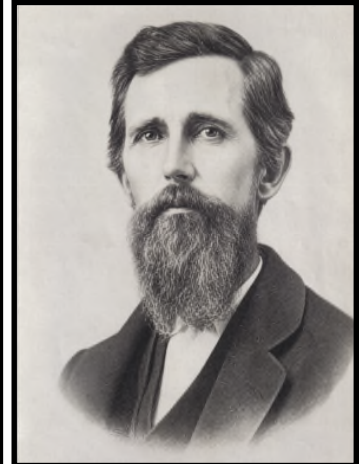
George Washington Shackelford



Francis "Frank" Shackelford

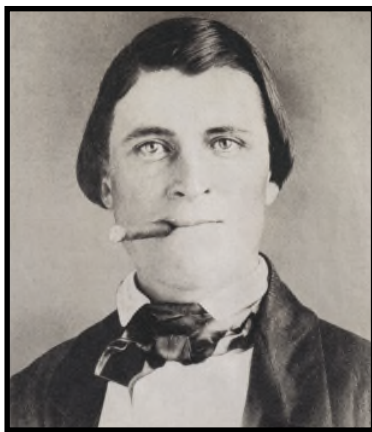


Joseph "Joe" Shackelford



Madison "Mat" Shackelford

Their brother-in-law, William Lafayette "Bill" Allen (1824–1864), also joined the company. Allen had worked as a stagecoach agent along the Federal Road before becoming part-owner of a livery stable, carriage business, and planter property. An accomplished horseman, he organized a volunteer cavalry company known as the "Prairie Rangers" early in 1861. This group eventually formed the nucleus of Company F of the 2nd Alabama Cavalry.



William Lafayette "Bill" Allen

Bill Allen's livery stable and carriage shop advertisement, 1856 *Tri-Weekly Reporter* (Selma newspaper) Newspapers.com Courtesy Annie Crenshaw

HORSE MANSION.

—————

THIS CELEBRATED ESTABLISHMENT, formerly occupied by ALLEN & REYNOLDS, is again opened by ALLEN & SWIFT, and under the immediate supervision of

WILLIAM L ALLEN,

Although our *Elephant* has not arrived, we are, in all other respects, prepared to accommodate the riding public.
We have just received a very superior lot of

CARRIAGES, BUGGIES, ROCKAWAYS, &c.

which are of the most convenient and comfortable construction. And our HORSES are of the finest quality—all gentle and well broke. In addition to our facilities for travelling on Wheels, we have some fine

SADDLE HORSES,

AND THE NECESSARY EQUIPAGE,

FOR LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

To STOCK-DRIVERS, we will simply say, that we have a **LARGE AND WELL CONSTRUCTED LOT**, watered by an *ARTESIAN WELL*, and that we can accommodate all who will give us their patronage.

Our Establishment is complete, or will be when our *Elephant* arrives, and all we ask of the public, is a liberal share of their patronage

W. L. ALLEN.
W. P. SWIFT.

Selma, May 20th, 1856.

P. S.—As soon as the *Elephant* arrives, we will be able to accommodate Families, or excursion parties, at reduced rates.

Service in the 2nd Alabama Cavalry

Allen was elected captain of Company F in 1862, and the regiment soon entered service in Florida. Confederate correspondence recorded an engagement near Milton, Florida, in June 1862: Private Harden Perkins Cochrane of the 2nd Alabama Cavalry described an encounter at Milton, Florida in a letter to his mother dated June 17, 1862:

We marched at a very fast walk, until a little before dark, when we met Captain Allen, of our cavalry, who had just escaped from the Yankees at Milton... He escaped and lost his hat and horse.¹

Though his reports made no mention of Bowie knives, it is likely the men continued carrying their prized weapons. Horses, however, represented a major financial and military loss, especially for cavalymen early in the war.

The 2nd Alabama Cavalry later served in several important theaters of the conflict, including Florida, Mississippi, the Atlanta Campaign, the defense of Savannah, and the Carolinas Campaign. During the final days of the Confederacy, the regiment formed part of President Jefferson Davis' escort as he fled southward from Virginia. The regiment ultimately surrendered at Forsyth, Georgia, in May 1865.

Captain Bill Allen did not survive the war. He died of pneumonia during the Atlanta Campaign in June 1864. The four Shackelford brothers survived the conflict, though George Washington Shackelford died only two years later, leaving behind a widow and eight children. Joseph, Frank, and Madison lived into the early twentieth century. Frank and Madison died only five weeks apart in 1905.

Today, the brothers and Bill Allen are buried in the Shackelford family cemetery near the site of their ancestral home in Pintlala.

A Family Tradition of Military Service

The military service of the Shackelford and Allen families reflected a broader Southern tradition of inherited patriotism and military duty. Both families descended from Revolutionary War veterans. Genealogist Annie Crenshaw has provided Revolutionary War ancestors of the Pintlala Confederate soldiers:

Francis Shackelford (1739–1823), father of George Shackelford, served from North Carolina during the Revolution. Bill Allen's grandfather, Robert Allen, Sr. (ca. 1752–1829), served as a mounted soldier from South Carolina and later filed claims for a horse lost during military service. Robert's father, Josiah Allen, Sr. (ca. 1720–1781), also served in the colonial militia and was reportedly captured and killed by Loyalist forces in 1781.

Lewis Crenshaw: The Enslaved Blacksmith

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of this account concerns the man believed to have forged the Bowie knives carried by the Pintlala soldiers.

James Frederick Shackelford, III of Trussville, Alabama and a descendant of George Washington Shackelford, has preserved an oral family tradition stating that the Shackelford and Allen men commissioned their knives from an enslaved blacksmith named Lewis Crenshaw. According to the account, Crenshaw was highly respected locally for his exceptional smithing skills.

Collectors and historians today regard the surviving knives as remarkable examples of Southern craftsmanship. Josh Phillips, co-author of *Confederate Bowie Knives*, described one Crenshaw knife by observing:

1. Private Cochrane became Sgt. Major Cochrane and was known to write to his family in Tuscaloosa, Alabama during his 2nd Alabama service. The quoted lines used in this paper were written June 17, 1862 from Bluff Springs, Florida which was near Milton, Florida. The 2nd Alabama served for 10 months in this vicinity according to Willis Brewer in *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Records and Public Men from 1540 to 1875*. Cochrane's letters were published in the *Alabama Review*, VII, October 1954, pp. 287-289.

"There is beauty in the simple lines of this knife. Nothing fancy or extra, but everything was done well with a precise fit."

Phillips referred specifically to the knife made for George Washington Shackelford. **(See cover photo)**

Research into the identity of Lewis Crenshaw has proven difficult. Enslaved people were rarely documented fully in historical records, and many adopted surnames after emancipation. Genealogist Annie Crenshaw identified Reverend Charles Edward Crenshaw (1821–1905), a slaveholder in nearby Lowndes County, as a likely connection. Crenshaw owned thirty enslaved people in 1860, including several adult men of working age.

Evidence from probate records provided an important clue. Estate documents of James Hagood from Lowndes County reveal payments owed to C. E. Crenshaw for blacksmith work performed during the early 1860s, including the repair of agricultural tools and household items. Since Rev. Charles Edward Crenshaw himself was neither a blacksmith nor a tradesman, the work was almost certainly performed by an enslaved craftsman under his ownership.²

James Hagood Estate File Transcription

Upper left corner: \$70 - January the 1st 1867

One day after date I promised to pay C. E. Crenshaw or bearer the sum of seventy 70/100 dollars for Black Smith work done for the Estate of Jas Hagood for the years 1860 & 1861.

W.S. Hagood

Whether this individual was indeed Lewis Crenshaw cannot be proven conclusively, but the surviving oral traditions and possible evidence suggest the story is grounded in truth.

The Surviving Knives

Two knives currently attributed to Lewis Crenshaw are known to have survived. Their rarity, craftsmanship, and documentation make them important historical artifacts connected not only to the Civil War but also to the overlooked contributions of enslaved artisans in the South.

One surviving knife attributed to Lewis Crenshaw and carried by George Washington Shackelford measures approximately 20.5 inches in length and retains its oak grips and original leather sheath. The knife is especially significant because the maker and original owner are possibly known. Its current location/owner is unknown. At the time *Confederate Bowie Knives* was published in 2012, collector Roger Ballard owned George Washington Shackelford's knife. Since then, the weapon has been sold at auction and Roger Ballard is deceased. Bill Allen's knife is currently displayed at Confederate Memorial Park in Marbury, Alabama.

Concluding Thoughts

The Bowie knives of Pintlala are more than rare Civil War artifacts. They connect us to the men who rode away from this small Alabama community to serve in the Confederate cavalry, the families who preserved their oral histories, and the skilled blacksmith who possibly forged the blades they carried. While many details have been lost in time, the surviving knives and the traditions surrounding them offer a rare glimpse of the people and events that helped shape Pintlala's history. More than 160 years after the guns of the Civil War fell silent, these artifacts continue to preserve a small but important piece of that past.

2. Lowndes County Probate Records were located by historian, Annie Crenshaw, on the LDS FamilySearch web site (<https://www.familysearch.org>.) Lowndes Court Records 1852-1865, Image 2792 of 2,826.



D Guard Bowie Knives with leather sheaths
Steve Williams Collection



Sergeant John Jasper Pritchett
45th Regiment , Company D, Georgia Infantry

Confederate soldier posing with his Bowie Knife
Courtesy Collection of Derek Ennis Veal

Sources

Books:

Adams, Bill; J. Bruce Voyles and Terry Moss. *The Antique Bowie Knife Book*. Conyers, GA: Museum Publishing Company, 1990.

Brewer, Willis. *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men, From 1540-1872*. Republished by Photo Lithography, Tuscaloosa, AL: Willo Publishing Company, 1964.

Melton, Jack; Josh Philips and John Sexton. *Confederate Bowie Knives*. Woonsocket, RI: Mowbray Publishers, Inc., 2012

Shackelford, Edward Madison and Franklin Shackelford Moseley. *George Shackelford and Annette Jeter and Their Descendants*. Montgomery, AL: Paragon Press, 1941.

Bulletins and Journals:

"The Shackelford Family of Pintlala, Alabama." *The Pintlala Historical Association Newsletter*, XXV, No. 2, (April 2011) 5-19.

"The Letters of Harden Perkins Cochrane, 1862-1864" Arranged by Harriet Fitts Ryan in *The Alabama Review : A Quarterly Journal of Alabama History*, VII, October 1954, pp.287-289.

Internet Accessed:

Web Sites: Morphy Auction pages

Poulin Auction pages

Acknowledgements

PHA appreciation to Annie Crenshaw, of the Butler County Historical Society, for her research assistance with this article.

PHA appreciation to Confederate Memorial Park, Marbury, Alabama; Site Director, Calvin Chappelle and his staff for their gracious accommodation to PHA members who visited the Museum in preparation for this article



**PINTLALA HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION**

*c/o Pintlala Public Library
255 Federal Road
Hope Hull, AL 36043*



NEXT MEETING

JULY 19, 2026

2:30 P.M.

**PINTLALA BAPTIST
CHURCH**



Join the Pintlala Historical Association

Please mail completed form & dues to:

Pintlala Historical Association

Ina Slade, Treasurer

15212 Highway 31

Hope Hull, Alabama 36043

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

Phone (Home & Office) _____

E-Mail Address _____

Areas of Interest _____

If you are interested in genealogy, please indicate family surnames _____

\$25.00 Annual Dues