

Today in Columbus History:

On September 2, 1876, an article appeared in the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* under the title "Grantism in Columbus" about the misdeeds of local post office employee A. T. (Alpha or Alfred) Calhoun.

Republican Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and political enemy of President Ulysses S. Grant coined the term Grantism in a speech on May 31, 1872. It denotes the corruption in the form political patronage and nepotism associated with Grant's presidency. Although most remember Grant's administration for the scandals surrounding it, many forget that Grant established a Civil Service Commission, eliminated corrupt privateer tax collectors and included reformers in his Cabinet. However, this story has more to do with moral failings in Columbus than in Washington.

The real story was about A. T. Calhoun a former Confederate soldier who joined the Republicans in order to procure a spot in the Post Office (hence the Grantism). It started when Postmaster Walter H. Johnson determined that his clerk, Calhoun, had stolen money from the registered mail and alerted the authorities.

The story developed further over the next week. Both the *Columbus Times* and *Enquirer-Sun* reported Calhoun's arrest the next day. After attempting suicide by taking laudanum, he turned himself in and provided a tearful confession of his crime. Calhoun gave whiskey and gambling as reasons for his theft of \$112. He then lost the money in a card game called faro, one of the most popular gambling games of the time. Both Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday dealt faro in Tombstone, AZ. It was more popular in North America than poker in the 19th Century, even though it was widely known for rigging.

The papers also identified the victims by name and amount lost: George M. Lawton to his wife in Rhode Island, \$17; John McCarty to Miss Mary Dolan in Kentucky, \$10; Blanchard, Williams & Co. to R. W. Pruitt in Alabama, \$25; A package to Georgia Home Insurance Co from Tennessee, \$40; a letter from Griffin, Georgia to Hamilton, Georgia, \$20.

A few days later, the unidentified gambler who won the money from Calhoun came forward and returned it to the rightful owners. Although he claimed that he won it fair and square, he did not want to profit from the theft.

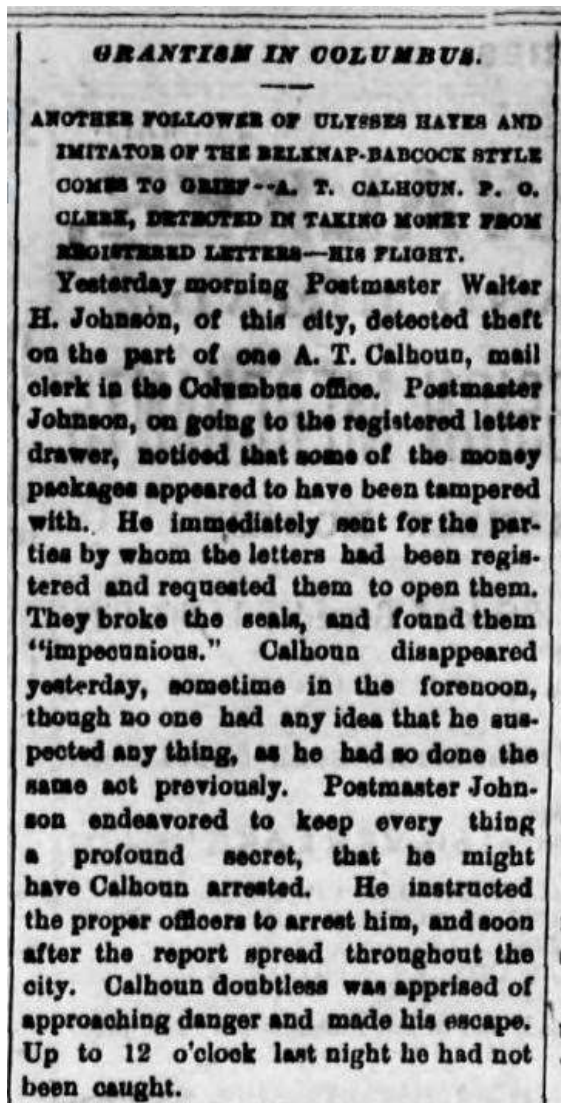
Calhoun's little family all died rather young. Calhoun married Nannie McClary in 1866 and they had Alpha E. Calhoun in 1867. They appear together in the 1870 census. FindAGrave lists another son of A.T Calhoun, Lonnie, buried in 1872 in Linwood, age unknown, though likely under two years old. Nannie died in 1875 and is buried in Linwood. In 1880, Alpha, Sr. was living in Atlanta and working as a bar tender while Alpha, Jr. was living with his uncle James Calhoun in Columbus. Alpha, Sr. died in 1882 and is buried in Linwood, as well. Alpha,

Jr. moved to Atlanta where he worked at the Gate City Bank before dying in 1894. FindAGrave lists the Calhoun graves in Linwood as unmarked. However, a note on Alpha's (listed as Alfred T. "Alpha" Calhoun) says that a government issued gravestone is available free of charge if a family member can be located to authorize it.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.



Here's the first part of the article, September 2, 1876, *Columbus Enquirer-Sun*

