

Quote of Rita Burleson Bryan BFA 4 from the Burleson Family Bulletin
Volume 1, No. 1, page 26, year 1981.

“The names of the children of Aaron Burleson (Aaron I of Wales) are TRADITIONAL. You will note that we can offer very little documented proof of names or birthdates of any of the children. The FAMILY TRADITIONS are repeated here only for the benefits of the clues they might offer other researchers. Our greatest challenge at this time is to verify the truths contained in these traditions, and to weed out from our conflicting records all that has not been substantiated through any credible source. A major problem at this time is that we have probably not yet investigated all possible sources in the records of MD, NJ, PA, VA, NC, TN and AL, so I urge our researchers to make an effort to locate primary source records in these states which may be used to prove or disprove our speculations.----”

Rita was our Genealogist from the beginning of the BFA, her quote is a fair challenge to all of us 34 years later. To my knowledge Dr. Rufus C. Burleson is the only source for the existence of a man named Aaron Burleson I of Wales.

To my knowledge no one has ever challenged Dr Rufus C Burleson’s account of our history. Today I would like to discuss and take a Second Look at the information in the Brief History of the Burleson Family

A Second Look at A Brief History of The Burleson Family

by John Hoyle Burleson 2015

The first National Burleson Family Reunion 1885

A Brief History of the Burleson Family was published in 1886 by Dr. Rufus C. Burleson of Baylor University in Waco Texas. There was no written Burleson family history before that. We all owe Dr Rufus Burleson a great deal for his efforts for placing the Burleson family into modern history. His book A Brief History of the Burleson Family was a collection of the speeches that was given at the first National Burleson Family Reunion held at New Orleans in 1885. This year thanks to the dictation and leadership of The Burleson Family Association we are assembled here today to celebrate the 130th anniversary of that first Reunion.

The main organizers of the first Burleson Reunion in New Orleans were; Rev. Dr. Rufus Burleson of Waco TX a descendant of Aaron of the Washington Co. Will, Rufus was the founder of Baylor University. Rev. Dr. Solomon Stevens Burleson of Wisconsin a descendant of Edward of Suffield Massachusetts Bay Colony, He was a missionary to the Oneida Indians, and the Honorable Wm. F. Samford of Alabama a descendant of Jesse Burleson of Georgia. He was a judge and former president of Oak Bowery Collegiate Institute. At the reunion William James Samford the son of the Hon. William F. Samford delivered his fathers written address to the audience. Wm James Samford became the 31st Governor of Alabama. These Burleson descendants were honorable men and in 1885 they were probably the most educated, and nationally known of our family.

Dr Rufus Burleson succeeded in contacting and bringing together for the first time, the many branches of the Burleson family from across the United States, and for the first time made us all aware that we are one family.

In William F. Samford's speech he laid out the importance of continuing the yearly reunions to gather information of our history for future generations. In Dr Rufus Burleson's Speech he recorded his version of the Burleson Family in America's early history. His speech is recorded on pages 28 thru 31 in his Brief History, but he did not list any sources for his information. Solomon S. Burleson spoke of the importance of religion. Salomon admitted that he knew little about the Southern Branch.

I feel sure that all three knew that the purpose of the first reunion was to gather the numerous branches of the family together and to lay out a history as known to them as a base for future generations to build on. Rufus himself said "But yet a great deal remains to be done" They accomplished this, but the facts as they knew them in 1885 must be proved or disproved by documentation not just accepted as fact today. With all the newest inventions and ease of gathering facts, we surely live in the days of enlightenment today compared to the days of the telegraph and steam locomotives.. Documentation is necessary to have a correct history and documentation is available today for the Burleson Family History.

The chapter by Rev. Solomon S. Burleson he stated;

1- "There is reason to conclude that our name is of Scandinavian origin. It is fairly formed from the Danish word "Burlase" and the common affix son or sen."

Solomon was correct, DNA has proven that fact.

2- Solomon stated; "The first marriage in the family, of which we have any knowledge from existing records, is that of John Burleson and Mehepzihah Branley in 1727."

Solomon apparently did not have access to all records of New England. Today we know that John b.1701 that married Mehepzihah Bromley was the grandson of Edward Burleson of Suffield Massachusetts Bay Colony who was an adult in the Puritan town of Suffield in the year 1674. Edward is the first Burleson in America to leave documented descendants.

3- Solomon stated; "Of the doings of the Southern branch of our family I know but little. Most of my information concerning them is contained in the circular calling this meeting."

Solomon is saying that the information of an Aaron of Wales did not come from him, and what he has learned about him came from Dr Rufus Burleson's circulars.

4- At the reunion, Solomon read a letter from his brother George W. Burleson that tells of his experience in the War Between the States when Captain George W Burleson of the 6th Vermont Infantry captured a Confederate prisoner with the name Burleson. This is a true first hand account. Remember the George Burleson was a Captain of Infantry, you will see why later.

5- Solomon stated; "We cannot now tell the exact relationship existing between Sir Edward Burleson of Connecticut, and Aaron Burleson of Carolina"

Solomon did not know the relationship because what he knows of the Southern Branch was information from the circulars sent out by Rufus. Solomon had never heard of an Aaron of Wales before the circulars in preparation for the Reunion.

William F Samford

In his chapter William repeats the Aaron of Wales story. He states that his grandfather Jesse Burlison of Georgia born 1751, was one of the three sons of Aaron of Wales that survived the Revolutionary War. This story is exactly the same story told by Rufus.

1- Samford stated; "I am now nearly 67 years of age, and for nearly 37 years I have been a hopeless and almost helpless invalid, confined for the most part to my sick room, and for much of the time to my chair and bed."

Mr. Samford's health forbade him from traveling to gathering any documentation of the family history therefore he only repeats the history as told by Rufus.

In a 1884 letter exchange between William F Samford and Miss Sarah Burleson of Illinois, (BFA Bulletin pg. 230) , Samford correctly identified his grandmother the wife of Jesse Burlison of Georgia as "---my grandmother Clifton a kinswoman of old President John Adams of Mass, was a great Methodist----". I have found that Elizabeth Clifton was the daughter of Captain Salathiel Clifton of Montgomery County NC where she married Jesse and where their first four children were born. They moved from Rocky River in 1786 to Georgia. Jesse and Elizabeth kept a bible where they recorded and the births of all eight of their children from 1779 to 1795.

Yet in the Brief History that Rufus wrote and edited, on page 30 Rufus writes "Jesse Burleson went into the French settlement, at Mobile, and married a brilliant, beautiful French lady, and finally settled in Georgia". William Samford in preparation for the Reunion was in communication with Rufus, William certainly knew who his grandmother ancestors were. Rufus speaking in New Orleans a French Catholic settlement, chose to pander to the audience instead of investigating for the truth.

Elizabeth Clifton Burleson, a Methodist of English descent was a bare foot backwoods daughter of a Revolutionary War hero and Kinswomen of a United States President.

Rev Dr. Rufus C. Burleson

On page 28 Rufus starts his History of the Burleson Family. He states; “The following facts have been gathered; “The Burleson Family is of Welch origins, and the name is derived from Burles or Burlez, from which our adjective Burly is derived.-----the name originated in the mountains of Wales. ----was spelled B u r l e y s o n 400 years ago.”

I remind you of the statement from Solomon about our name and it’s source. DNA proves Salomon correct. DNA was not available in 1885, both Salomon and Rufus made their statements on their knowledge of languages. There has never been an early Burleson family documented in Wales, how in the world could Rufus know of a Burleyson family in Wales in 1485? The Burleson family was well established in Durham County of East England in 1485.

2- Rufus stated; “All the Burleson Family in America originated from two brothers, Sir Edward Burleson, who settled in Jewett City Conn, in 1716 and Aaron Burleson who settled in (Buncombe Co) North Carolina in 1726”--- “after searching for his brother in vain”

This is the basic of Dr Rufus Burleson’s Brief history. Time and time again it has been documented that Edward Burleson was an adult in 1674 in the town of Suffield Massachusetts Bay Colony. Suffield was a chartered Puritan town. Edward was a “Freeman of that town” All townsmen were Puritans that had left England to worship God as they choose. They were dissenters to the Church of England. To hold the title of Sir one had to be knighted by the King and no dissenter to the Church of England could hold that title. Rufus was the one that said; “Aaron of Wales came to America to look for his brother “Sir Edward Burleson” The Northern Branch could not have any knowledge of an Aaron of Wales. That information came from Dr. Rufus C. Burleson only.

Edward Burleson is documented in 1674, nowhere is there a single document for the existence for an Aaron of Wales in 1726, before that date or since then up to today.

Rufus stated; “Aaron settled in Buncombe County NC in 1726.” My history of the settlement of North Carolina tells me that in 1726 all NC settlements were within 50 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. By 1740 some settlements had reached the Yadkin River in the middle of the state, but not west of it. By 1763 settlements had reached the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains but were forbidden by British law any farther west. In 1791 the County of Buncombe located in the mountains was created. In 1726 no white man lived within 200 miles of the area that would become Buncombe Co. 65 years later. The General that Buncombe Co was named for was not born until 1742.

3- In the next paragraph Rufus retells the story of Captain George W. Burleson of the 6th Vermont Infantry, experience in the War Between the States. Rufus had to have heard Solomon reading George's letter during the Reunion and he did publish George's letter on pages 14 and 15, but in Rufus's account on pages 29 and 30 of the Brief History, Rufus could not help himself from embellishing George's true account by promoting George Burleson to a Colonel of Cavalry.

4- Rufus stated; "Aaron of Wales reared seven sons and six daughters"

Nowhere is there a document that proves that there were any Burleson women that could be a daughter of an Aaron of Wales that came to America in 1726. Rufus named Hardeman, Shipman, Crawford, Kuykendall and Ellison as names of the husbands of the daughters. No documentation has been found to support a Burleson marriage and there is no documentation for any descendants from them.

5- Rufus stated; "The seven sons entered the Revolutionary War, four of them perished, three fell in battle, and the youngest Edward was caught and murdered by the British and Tories ----"

Again there is no evidence for the existence for an Aaron Burleson of Wales, and there is no documentation for the unnamed sons. Of the four named sons by Rufus, there is absolutely no documentation for an Edward.

6- Rufus named a Jesse, Thomas and Aaron as surviving sons

There was a Jesse Burleson b.1751 and enlisted for the war in 1776 while living on Rocky River in Anson County North Carolina. His father has not been proven but he is one of the Rocky River Burlesons. Also on Rocky River lived two more Burleson men David and Isaac Burlison that served in the War. Rufus does not recognize any Rocky River Burlisons except Jesse.

There was a Thomas Burleson but he is named in his father's Will, Aaron Burleson b. abt 1725 of the Washington County NC Will 1782. Thomas settled Burke/Buncombe County and remained in NC. He has Revolutionary War Vouchers from the Washington District NC.

Rufus claims that Aaron of the Washington Co Will was a surviving son of Aaron of Wales. Oddly enough this Aaron was killed in the Revolutionary War in 1782. Rufus wrote that this Aaron, his own great grandfather, "was a devoted friend of Daniel Boone, and desired to join him in his beautiful Kentucky land. He set out soon after the close of the war, in 1784, but was murdered by Indians in crossing Clinch River in Tennessee." Rufus listed the names of four sons and three daughters of his great grandfather.

No history book except A Brief History has the names of Aaron Burleson and Daniel Boone together in the same paragraph, together on the same page or entire book.

Apparently Rufus did not know his own great grandfather Aaron had a Will that was probated in Washington County NC 1782 , naming all of his 6 sons and 7 daughters.

I can not say Rufus did not have a reference or source for his information that he published in A Brief History, I can say that he did not mention a source in his presentation at the reunion nor did he reveal or published a source in his Brief History nor did he ever offer a hint or publish a source in his many writings until his death in 1901. The troubling thing to me, and it should trouble any thinking Burleson today, is the fact no one has ever found a reference to the existence of an Aaron Burleson of Wales, using today's world of communications and the availability of primary sources. No Documentation has been found yet for the existence of an Aaron Burleson of Wales.

Since Dr. Rufus Burleson did not offer any source of his information and none has been found to this day, I assume that most of it was verbally passed down to him. As each generation moved west they were separated into smaller family groups and more distance from their other cousins.

This is the path that Burleson history was passed down from father to son. Not just from father to son but also from father to daughter. Dr. Rufus Burleson had a sister Mrs. Mary Maxwell Staten, she had a different recollection of Aaron of Wales. Her version that she wrote in a letter was printed on page 278 of the Burleson Family Association Bulletin and she stated that a "David Burleson was the first in America and he brought a son named Aaron". There is no documentation for the existence for that David either.

Could there have been two founders of the Southern Branch, one with documentation and one that can not be documented?

No, documentation is history. An undocumented history is only family traditions.

The Brief History does not mention any Burlesons in the state of Virginia. From 1746 thru 1755 there were at least three, Jonathan, John and Aaron. Jonathan is documented to have been born in Suffield in 1704 which was 12 years before Rufus said the first Burleson arrived in America, and 22 years before he said there was a Burleson in the South. John was born before 1730 to have been old enough to be listed in the 1749 Tithe List of Lunenburg Co. VA. Aaron purchased land in Lunenburg in 1749 requiring his birth to have been before 1728. Jonathan is documented in two states, he was born in Suffield and he is documented in Lunenburg VA.

There is evidence that Aaron married a Jones lady a daughter of Thomas Jones of Slate River VA, a few years before his land purchase. This Aaron moved to North Carolina and died in 1782 leaving a Will in Washington County North Carolina naming all thirteen of his children. John also moved to North Carolina and is documented there. There are no more records for Jonathan after November 1755.

Slide----- New England Burleson Families

Rufus's history does not mention Jonathan, John or Aaron in Virginia. At this time the only documented Burlesons in America are in New England or Virginia. In 1755 there is

still no record for an Aaron of Wales but here are documented Burleson families in the South.

From Lunenburg County VA the Southern Branch of the Burleson moves to North Carolina. We do have a record for the Aaron Burleson owning land on the Savannah River in Georgia in 1757. To my knowledge no one knows where he came from. There are several theories but there is no documentation to inform us of his origins. This Aaron did leave descendants. He can not be Dr. Rufus Burleson's Aaron of Wales because his sons are not the forefather of all of the Southern Branch.

The next record of the Burleson family in the South was Aaron Burleson entering land in Cumberland County North Carolina in 1761. He sold his property by 1763 and is found next on Rocky River of Anson County 30 miles to the west as a witness to a deed. In 1766 Aaron entered land in Mecklenburg County NC 70 miles to the west on Sandy Run Creek. This Aaron on Sandy Run Creek is positively proven to be the Aaron Burleson of the Washington County Will 1782. Because of his travels I believe he is also the same Aaron Burleson that purchased land in Lunenburg Co. VA 1749, Cumberland Co. NC in 1761 and was a witness on Rocky River, Anson County NC in 1763.

Henry Clark and Aaron Burleson were both born in New Jersey, They were neighbors in Lunenburg Co VA, both families moved to NC about the same time and both lived on Rocky River, two of the Clark brothers served in the Clear Creek Militia of Mecklenburg Co. The Henry Clark family and Aaron Burleson's family moved to the Sandy Run Creek area, Aaron and the Clarks served on the same Tryon County Jury together. Aaron's final move to the Watauga settlements was the same time as Clarks move. In 1781 Aaron Burleson asked his friend (possible kinsman) Henry Clark to witness his Will. I feel safe in saying that Aaron Burleson of the Washington County Will 1782 can be documented from New Jersey, Lunenburg Co. VA, Cumberland Co. NC, Rocky River NC, Sandy Run Creek NC and finally to his death in Sullivan Co. NC of the Watauga settlements.

Aaron's son Joseph, named in his father's Will, is quoted by Anne Newport Royals and published in 1819 that "his father was a native of New Jersey" All of this tells me that Jonathan as a young man left Suffield, was in New Jersey, and had at least two sons John and Aaron by the time he settled in Lunenburg. John and Aaron are later documented together on Rocky River in North Carolina.

The best documentation that indicates this Aaron of the Washington Co. Will is the same as the Aaron in Lunenburg is in the 1823 letter written by Hilikiah Burlison the son of David and Ursula Weatherford Burlison of Rutherford Co. TN. The letter is printed on page 115 of the BFA Bulletin. Hilikiah Burleson, named in his fathers Will, wrote a letter in 1823 to his parents David and Ursula Burlison from Rocky River but living at the time in Rutherford Co. TN. He explained to his father that "he (Hilkiah) had rented land from **Cousin** Joseph Burleson in Alabama." Joseph was the son of Aaron and named in his father's Washington Co Will. I believe that because of the 20 years difference in their ages and of the distance from where they grew up, they had never met before and Hilikiah was saying Joseph was a first cousin of his father David. Both Aaron and John

were together in Lunenburg Co. VA. and they were together in Anson Co. NC on Rocky River. If Joseph the son of Aaron and David the son of an un-proven Burleson (probably John), were first cousins then they had a common grandfather; I believe to be Jonathan Burleson of Suffield/Lunenburg. John is listed on the 1752 Tithe list of Lunenburg in Jonathan's household at a time when Aaron owned his own land. Since Aaron and John were together in Lunenburg along with Jonathan that birth is documented in Suffield Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1704, we can conclude that Aaron and John were the sons of Jonathan. We do not have a document that states that, but I repeat that in 1752 the New England Burlesons and the three Lunenburg Burlesons in the South, were the only documented Burlesons in America at that time.

Aaron's six sons migrated in a different pattern than did the Rocky River Burleson's and if they crossed paths it was a note worthy occasion like the chance meeting of kinsmen Hilikiah and Joseph forty years after the war. During the war the families of Aaron lived in the Watauga settlement and the Rocky River Burleson lived 200 miles to the east. There are no family traditions from the Rocky River Burlesons of four or any Burleson brothers being killed in the war. I do not see how Rufus knew 100 years later what happened to the separated families. Of the Rocky River Burlesons Jesse, David and Isaac have documented service in the Revolutionary War.

According to Rufus; the Aaron of Wales family are supposed to be all the Burlesons in the South, at least three Burleson's from Rocky River were fighting for Independence. There was three other Burleson Men on Rocky River but we have only one record for each of them. Rufus denies that the Rocky River Burlesons existed; they are not in his Brief History or his Family Tree of the Southern Branch. For Dr. Rufus C. Burleson's history to be correct then the Rocky River Burleson's could not have been real. I can document my Rocky River Burleson's and Dr. Rufus C. Burleson or no one living today can document an Aaron Burleson of Wales.

Isaac Burlison was a private in the Clear Creek Militia in April 1776, the same Militia that on May the 20th 1775 Clear Creek Militia commander Col. Adam Alexander and Col. Thomas Polk called a Convention of Representatives of all the Mecklenburg County N C Militia Companies. On that day the convention wrote, signed and presented the first ever Declaration of Independence in the British Colonies.

In February 1776 the Clear Creek Militia, with Isaac Burlison's name on that roster, was sent to Wilmington on the coast to remove the Royal Governor and to repel the British soldiers. Isaac served and was paid for twenty one days service. Isaac was back on Rocky River when on 16th April 1776 he enlisted in the 5th South Carolina Continental Regiment.

Isaac's brother David Burlison has his service documented by several pay vouchers of 20 lb 5 shillings for the Anson County NC Militia plus a discharge from Major James Fair of the Anson County Militia. Anson Co. was a hot bed of Tories that lasted from 1775 until late in 1783 when Anson finally converted, or killed or forced the reminding Tories into South Carolina.

Jesse Burleson enlisted in the 4th North Carolina Continental Regiment in 1776. He fought in the northern army of George Washington and is documented at Valley Forge. Jesse also has pay vouchers of 20 lb 5 shillings for Militia service in Anson County.

Today membership in the Daughters of the Revolution (DAR) and the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) is open to the Southern Branch of the Burleson Family to the descendants of Aaron Burleson of the Washington County NC Will and his two sons Thomas and Aaron Jr. plus the descendants of the Rocky River Burleson's; David Burlison of Rutherford Co. TN, Isaac Burlison of Montgomery Co. NC and Jesse Burleson of Georgia. The DAR and the SAR does not accept family tradition, only documented facts.

I hope I have caused you to take a Second Look at the Brief History. Hopefully you will take a second look at your family line then make a list of what can be documented and a list of what that can not be documented.

Thank you John Hoyle Burleson