

## **Elias William Burgess – A Brief Sketch**

**Written by Steve Smith**

**Elias William Burgess** was born between 1826 and 1829, probably in Georgia. The identity of his parents is uncertain. Possibly, they were Joseph B. and Sarah Burgess who were born in North Carolina and South Carolina respectively, and who migrated to Georgia and Alabama (Sarah's maiden name is not known). This would definitely tie Elias W. Burgess and his descendants to one of the most numerous Burgess families of early Virginia, and in all likelihood to the immigrant, Colonel William Burgess, a founder of Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

Elias W. Burgess may have moved to Alabama in childhood or adolescence in the company of his parents. He (and his parents?) settled in the eastern part of the state, on lands that at the time of his birth still belonged to the Creek Indians. It is possible, on the other hand, that he did not move to Alabama until after his return from the Mexican War.

The U.S. and Mexican governments went to war in 1846. In August of the following year, Elias enlisted in the U.S. Army as an infantry private. He apparently was present at the capture of Mexico City in September, 1847, which effectively ended the war. A treaty was not signed, though, until February, 1848. Elias was discharged from the Army on July 24, 1848, at Camp Carrollton, Louisiana.

Elias W. Burgess married Jane Jones on September 7, 1848, in Randolph County, Alabama. Jane was born in Carroll County, Georgia, possibly a year or two before her husband. The identity of her parents is also unknown, but they, too, seem to have settled ultimately in Alabama.

The couple appear on the 1850 census in Talladega County, Alabama, where they farmed. Sometime between 1850 and 1860 they moved to Tallapoosa County, Alabama, in the Goldville-New Site area. Here they established a homestead (that may have approached 200 acres in size) which they and their children farmed for a number of years.

The Civil War broke out in 1861 and Elias traveled to Montgomery in September of that year to enlist in the Confederate cause. He joined the "Wilson Grays", a group of Alabama volunteers making up Company C of the 50<sup>th</sup> Tennessee infantry regiment. The company was among several thousand Confederates captured following the Union victory at Fort Donelson, Tennessee, in February, 1862. Elias and his compatriots were sent to a prison camp in Chicago, Illinois. He spent nearly seven months there and finally was released during a prisoner exchange at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Elias returned to his family and farm. A year-and-a-half later he re-enlisted, despite lingering illness which he contracted during his previous service. This time he was sent to Virginia. It is not known what, if any, combat he saw there, but in March of 1865 he ended up in a Confederate hospital as a result of his illness.

Upon the Confederate surrender Elias was discharged from the Army and he returned home. A few months later – in January, 1866 – he died. He was 40, at the oldest.

Elias' widow Jane continued farming with help from the children. It was difficult, though, and she seems to have lost ownership of the family's land at some point. She applied for and received a small widow's pension from the U.S. government (based on Elias' service in the Mexican War) and one from the State of Alabama (because of Elias' Confederate service). It appears she eventually moved to Sylacauga in Talladega County. She died in either 1894 or 1895.

### **Children of Elias W. Burgess**

Elias W. and Jane Jones Burgess had six children: James Benjamin "Ben" Burgess born 1849, Louis Martin "Mark" Burgess born 1852, William A. Burgess born 1854, Thomas Jefferson "Tom" Burgess born 1857, John C. Burgess born 1860, and Jane Jacqueline Burgess born 1864.

**James Benjamin "Ben" Burgess** attended at least some school in Tallapoosa County, Alabama, while helping out with the family farm. At age 20 (in December, 1869, almost four years after the death of his father), he married Mary Frances Pepper and they established their own household adjacent to his mother's farm.

Between 1870 and 1879, Ben moved to Jefferson County, Alabama. There he tried farming with his brother William A. Burgess, buying 80 acres of land near what is today the Birmingham suburb of Irondale, but the venture apparently did not succeed. In the 1880's or early 1890's he moved to Talladega County and began farming near Sylacauga, where by all accounts he was more successful.

He pulled up stakes again just before the turn of the century, moving to northwestern Alabama and the Lawrence County City of Moulton by 1900. This was the beginning of a major Burgess presence in Moulton and nearby communities. He bought a number of tracts of land, giving some of them to his sons as they reached adulthood. One tract of land he bought was the Shoemaker Farm in April 1898 for \$2000.00, according to records published in "The Moulton Advertiser". He became well known in Moulton as a farmer and businessman.

Mary died in 1931 and Ben followed her two years later. They are buried in Moulton Memory Gardens in an old portion of the cemetery known as Shoemaker Cemetery, along with a number of children, sons and daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. Many of their descendants still live in the area.

Ben and Mary Burgess had six children who lived to adulthood. Some stayed in Moulton while others went to Missouri, South Alabama, and possibly (in the case of son John Henry) to Georgia. A full listing of their descendants to the present (1992) has yet to be completed.

**Louis Martin Burgess** married Aneliza C. Davis in 1875. Five years later he is in the census as farming land adjacent to his mother's in Tallapoosa County. Sometime between 1880 and 1900

he established a farm in Talladega County, but by 1910 he and his family were in Whistler in Mobile County, Alabama. Here he worked for the railroad while (at least for a time) his wife ran a boardinghouse. A nephew, T. A. "Jake" Burgess (son of Ben Burgess), also moved to Whistler and found work with the railroad. Jake Burgess has descendants who live in the Mobile area and it is likely that Martin (who had several daughters who lived to adulthood) does also.

What happened to Louis Martin Burgess? Much more needs to be known about him, his wife Aneliza Davis Burgess, their children, and other descendants.

**William A. Burgess** married Nancy Isaac Herring in 1879 in Jefferson County, Alabama. He farmed and in Jefferson County with his brother James Benjamin in the late 1870s and perhaps early 1880s (see above). In 1885, at the age of 31, he died. His wife soon remarried to a man who raised William's children. William's children and grandchildren remained in Jefferson County, for the most part. Descendants can be found there today as well as in the Atlanta, Georgia, area. Perhaps the main question about William A. Burgess is, what caused his death at such an early age?

**Thomas Jefferson "Tom" Burgess** lived on his mother's farm in Tallapoosa County, Alabama until at least the age of 21. He married Sarah "Lou" Snider and by 1900 they were in Moulton, Lawrence County, as was his brother James Benjamin (see above). Sarah died in 1924 and Tom died in 1932. They are buried in a Moulton cemetery with a number of other members of the Burgess family.

Tom and Sarah had a son and a daughter who lived until the 1960s. There are probably some descendants from this family group who have not yet been identified. This is Mary Lou Williams Kelly's grandparents.

**John C. Burgess** was a year-and-a-half old when his father marched off to the Civil War the first time. He was not quite six when his father died. He lived on his mother's farm into the 1880s, and then, in 1884, he married Nancy J. Bradley. John may have remained in Eastern Alabama, unlike older siblings who migrated to the northwestern and southern parts of the state. He and Nancy had at least five children whose names have been identified. Other than that, nothing much seems to be known about him. Where did he and Nancy live? What was his occupation? When and where did he die? Who are his descendants, and where did (do) they live?

**Jane Jacqueline Burgess**, the youngest child of Elias W. Burgess, and his only daughter, was around two years old when her father died. She married in 1884 (the same year as her brother John) in Tallapoosa County, to William A. Collins. She is known to have been living in Jacksonville, Calhoun County, Alabama, in 1933. Other than that, nothing is known about her, her children, or other descendants.