

Chapter 31

Our Burr Family History

Oakley Cousins – Happy 4th of July! Recently, I have been doing additional research on our distant relatives in the Burr family, which as you know resided in Fairfield, Connecticut. They were a prominent family in Fairfield for many generations, from the mid-1600's until well after 1800. In looking at a map of Fairfield, I see that there is a Burr Street and even a Burr Elementary School. See:

<http://fairfieldschools.org/schools/burr/>

It turns out that one of our Burr relatives played a part in the Revolutionary War, so hopefully my narrative about this individual is fitting for the 4th of July.

To learn more about the Burr family in Fairfield, I have been reading through “History and Genealogy of the Families of Old Fairfield”, compiled and edited by Donald Lines Jacobus, for the **Eunice Dennie Burr Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution**, Fairfield, Connecticut. This three-volume set was published between 1930 and 1932, and it is available on the genealogy website operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at:

<https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/43068?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Of course, I was intrigued by the fact that there was a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Fairfield that is named after “Eunice Dennie Burr” – I thought that she had to be one of our Burr ancestors from Fairfield. And indeed she was! It turns out that she was married to Thaddeus Burr Jr., who was a second-cousin of Sarah Burr. Recall that Sarah Burr married Jeremiah Oakley in 1753.

So in this e-mail, I'll be writing about Thaddeus Burr Jr. and his wife Eunice Dennie Burr, who were incredibly fascinating individuals around the time of the American Revolution. Thaddeus Burr Jr. is (was?) my second-cousin, six times removed; that is, he was the second-cousin of my g-g-g-g grandmother, Sarah Burr. In other words, my g-g-g-g-g-g grandfather, Jehu Burr Jr., was the great-grandfather of Thaddeus Burr Jr. Got that, everyone?

Here is how we are related. Jehu Burr Jr. had several sons, including Lt. Daniel Burr (our ancestor, who was the grandfather of Vice President Aaron Burr Jr.) and Maj. Peter Burr. Peter Burr was born in March 1668 and he died on 25 December 1724 at the age of 56. Peter Burr graduated from Harvard in 1690. In 1708, he was a Major in the Militia of Fairfield County, Connecticut. He was a judge in the Fairfield County Court (1708-1724), a judge in the Superior Court, and eventually he was the Chief Justice in 1723-24. One document states that he also was the Chief Justice of the Connecticut Colony Supreme Court. So in various documents, he is referred to as The Honorable Peter Burr, Peter Burr Esq., Maj. Peter Burr, and Judge Peter Burr. He and his first wife, Abigail, had two sons and three daughters. The oldest child was Thaddeus Burr (Sr.), who was baptized on 8 September 1700 (presumably he was born a few days before that date).

Thaddeus Burr Sr. married Abigail Sturges (8 September 1704 – 26 June 1753) on 26 November 1725. Thaddeus Sr. died on 28 March 1755. Thaddeus Sr. and Abigail had a number of children, including Thaddeus Burr Jr., who was born on 22 August 1735. And the rest of this narrative will focus on Thaddeus Jr. (and his wife Eunice Dennie Burr).

Thaddeus Burr Jr. graduated from Yale University in 1755. Like numerous ancestors before him, he served in various offices in Fairfield County, Connecticut: Deputy of the General Court for several sessions, Justice of the Peace for several years, and High Sheriff of the County. He also served as a delegate to the state's convention to ratify the Constitution.

Thaddeus Burr Jr. married Eunice Dennie on 22 March 1759. It appears that they did not have any children. Attached are portraits of Thaddeus Burr Jr. and Eunice Dennie Burr. These portraits were painted by John Singleton Copley around 1763, and they are owned by the St. Louis Art Museum. John Singleton Copley is famous for his portrait paintings of important figures in colonial New England.

Thaddeus Burr Jr. and his wife Eunice Dennie Burr were the “first couple” of Fairfield, Connecticut, in pre-revolutionary times. The Burrs lived in a stately home in the center of Fairfield, along what is now Old Post Road. With inherited wealth and social position, they were known far and wide for their amiability and hospitality.

Thaddeus Burr Jr. early espoused the cause of the Colonies against the King of England, and in 1775, he was a member of the Town Committee on War. He regularly associated with and entertained prominent scholars, statesmen and clergymen, including George Washington, Marquis de Lafayette, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, the artists John Trumbull and John Singleton Copley,

James “Taxation without representation is tyranny” Otis, Dr. Timothy Dwight (who was a President of Yale University), and family members of both the Quincy and Adams families.

In fact, he was a good friend of Massachusetts Governor John Hancock – such good friends that Gov. Hancock was married to Dorothy “Dolly” Quincy of Boston on 1 August 1775 in Thaddeus Burr Jr.’s house in Fairfield, Connecticut.

Thaddeus Burr Jr. was a second-cousin to Aaron Burr Jr. (who became the third Vice President of the United States). Thaddeus Jr. was born in 1735, and Aaron Jr. was born twenty-one years later in 1756; Aaron Jr. spent many of his youthful days at Thaddeus Burr’s house in Fairfield and considered him to be somewhat of a surrogate father (recall that both Aaron Burr Jr.’s parents died by the time that he was two years old).

Actually, the house that Thaddeus Burr Jr. owned in Fairfield was built around 1700 by his grandfather, the Honorable Peter Burr. The house was then passed down to his father and to him. Actually, a house at that site was originally built by Peter Burr’s father, Jehu Burr Jr., in the 1650’s.

The Burr’s home was burned in 1779 by departing British troops from General Tryon’s command. The British troops set Fairfield afire as punishment for the town’s part in the war. General Tryon’s men even stole Eunice Burr’s silver buckles from her shoes and the gold sleeve buttons from her wrist. They left the house to burn with Eunice hiding in the marshes behind her home. After the fire, John Hancock visited his friend Thaddeus Burr Jr. Together they surveyed the ruins. After their walk, Hancock urged his friend to rebuild, offering to supply the needed timber and glass “provided he would build a house precisely like his own in Boston.” Burr, a wealthy landowner, accepted the offer and rebuilt an exact copy of Hancock’s home. The reconstruction stands to today as a prized historic site in Fairfield, Connecticut. It contains the Fairfield Museum and History Center, and the fifteen-room mansion and its graceful gardens can be rented for weddings and receptions.

Thaddeus Burr Jr. was a member of George Washington’s Culper Spy Ring, which is given much credit for supplying the intelligence that led to victory in strategic battles near the end of the Revolutionary War.

<http://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/culper-spy-ring>

The way that this spy ring worked was that some folks from Long Island would go to New York city, where the British were in full control. They would observe

naval maneuvers in the harbor there. Dispatches would then be given to another spy on Long Island, who would carry them across Long Island Sound to Fairfield, Connecticut, where Thaddeus Burr Jr. and others would then pass them on , eventually reaching General Washington. How cool is it to see this Burr connection to the Revolutionary War!

Finally, Thaddeus Burr Jr. was actively involved in the patriot cause in Fairfield, Connecticut, at the same time his cousin Aaron Burr Jr. was serving in the war and cousin Peter Burr (our ancestor) was likewise furnishing supplies to the Continental Army in the Colony of Virginia.

Thaddeus Burr died on 19 February 1801. He was buried in The Old Burying Ground in Fairfield, Connecticut – his gravestone can be viewed at:

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=9018522>

After Thaddeus' death in 1801, Eunice helped establish a private school, the Fairfield Academy, which was built in 1804. She was instrumental in ensuring that girls be educated there as well as boys.

Although Thaddeus Burr Jr. and his wife Eunice Dennie Burr didn't have any children, Thaddeus became the guardian of the orphaned son of his younger brother, Gershom Burr, in 1760. [According to the Bible, Gershom was the firstborn son of Moses and Zipporah.] Gershom Burr's son or grandson, Gen. Gershom Burr, inherited the mansion from Thaddeus Burr Jr., after his death in 1801.

As described in the 1915 book "An Historic Mansion, Being an Account of the Thaddeus Burr Homestead, Fairfield, Connecticut, 1654-1915", by Frank S. Child, the house was altered in the 1840's; the alterations included "taking out the dormer windows and lifting the roof, taking away the porch and building the broad veranda with its lofty massive fluted columns." This short book is available online at:

<https://archive.org/details/historicmansionb00chil>

and it is an incredibly interesting read – especially on the 4th of July!

Also attached to this e-mail note are several photos of the Burr House in Fairfield, Connecticut.

All the best,

Cousin Burks