

Part II
WILSON MURPHEY
(1800 - 1878)

Byron F. Murphey

(Editor's Note: The following article was submitted by AGS member Byron F. Murphey. We appreciate Mr. Murphey sharing his family story, which comes from many years of research. Some errors in spelling in this article were left in as not to change misspellings from previously printed sources, i.e., newspapers, probate records, etc... This article is being printed with "First Serial Publication Rights Only" and is being continued from the Spring/Summer 2000 issue.)

The 1850s were good times in Butler County. My oldest son, Julius, purchased in 1855 more government land just four miles southeast of Butler Springs. Amanda, who was a daughter of Anderson Seale, and Julius by 1860 were raising four daughters and three sons with a fifth daughter arriving in 1861. J. B. Murphy at age 38 appears on the December, 1863, muster roll of Capt. Goldsmith's Indpt. Co., Alabama Volunteers (Home Guard) with the notation "Has a substitute in CSA". A common practice both in the North and in the South during the first half of the Civil War was to pay some other person to take their place in the Army. Subsequently when more men were drawn into the fateful struggle, Julius became engaged in active service and lost his life. Julius departed this world at a Richmond, Virginia hospital in April of 1865.²¹

At the time that Amanda E. Murphey became administratrix of the Estate of J. B. Murphey deceased, her eight children (five girls and three boys) ranged in age from twenty to five. The oldest son was twelve. Assisting Amanda in posting bond were her father, Anderson Seale and one of Julius' brothers, A. Murphey (Augustus).²² In the year 1870 all Amanda's children are still at home. Her sixteen year old son is shown as a farm laborer.

John Murphey married Celia A. Gafford in 1854 and by 1860 they were blessed with two daughters and two sons. The next arrival was a daughter in 1866. In the December, 1863, muster roll of the Home Guard, thirty-five year old John appears as a 3rd Corporal with the note "has substitute in C.S.A." John was a farmer who was able in 1858 and 1860 to purchase government land about a mile southeast of Butler Springs.

My oldest daughter, Sarah, married Augustus Watts who died in 1858. Sarah and her two sons appear in the 1860 census as the next family after Wilson Murphy, Sr. Augustus apparently in 1858 died before the birth of his second son. In 1868 Sarah remarried to a William J. Watts. At the time of the probate of my (Wilson Sr.) property in 1879, Sallie Watts, wife of William J. Watts, and William J. Watts lived in Wilcox County according to the Probate Record. However, at the time of the 1880 census they were living near Old Texas in Monroe County, about 8 miles west of Butler Springs.

Just one month before Augustus C. Watts married Sarah Murphey on March 2, 1855, his sister Amanda F. Watts married Augustus Murphey. In 1860 Augustus was overseer of the plantation in Wilcox County. Wilson Murphy appears as owner of the plantation on the next line of the census record -- thereby having been enumerated both in Wilcox County and Butler County!

In the December 1863 muster roll when Augustus was 26, he appears as a private in Capt. Goldsmiths Indpt. Co. of the Alabama Volunteers with a substitute in C.S.A. In late November at Chattanooga, Grant's Army had defeated the Confederate forces under Braxton Bragg. And by July 4 of 1863, the Confederates had been defeated at Gettysburg. Nonetheless, the Confederate leadership under Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee regrouped and enlisted more brave men in their futile endeavor. Augustus was caught up in the war to the north, but he survived to be found farming again in Butler County in 1870 with Amanda and five children.

James Murphey married Prudence Watts at the home of Mrs. Mary M. Watts on 21 October 1858. Something happened to James, because Mrs. Prudence Murphey married William Thigpen at the residence of Mrs. Mary Watts on the 8th of November 1859. In the 1860 census we find Wm. Thigpen age 34 with wife P. Thigpen age 18 and no children.

In the year 1860, Anna and I had at home with us, in addition to Sallie and her two children, two sons and two daughters. In May of the next year, 1861, the Mobile and Montgomery railroad was completed; thus Greenville was then provided with much more efficient transportation for its farm products of cotton, corn, stock, timber and leather.

Whenever I get to this part of the story about my family, I find my attention diverted to the War of the Rebellion -- the Civil War. Wilson Jr. was 21 when he enlisted on March 10, 1862 for a term of three years as 2nd Lieut. in Co. D of the 33 Reg't Alabama Infantry (Confederate). His Colonel placed him on detached service with Co. A on May 8. Wilson Jr. married Julia Harris in Russell County on the 14th May and was dropped from the rolls by order of General Hardee on June 21. On March 19, 1863 he was reinstated by Adjutant & Inspector General Office Special Order 67.

At the time of the Battle at Gettysburg, the 33 Reg't Alabama was bivouacked near Chattanooga in Tennessee. The battle of Chickamauga, which is near Chattanooga, took place on Sept. 19-20, 1863. The Alabama 33rd was part of the Confederate Army under General Patrick Cleburne which was particularly successful in repulsing the attack of the Northern Army. Wilson Jr. was slightly wounded at this affair which turned out to be the last significant "victory" in this region for the South. The southern forces failed to follow up on their opportunity and the North regrouped and defeated the South at the battle of Chattanooga on Nov. 23 - 25 1863. Meanwhile, Wilson Jr. was promoted to Captain.

The subsequent retreat was not without temporary victories, as indicated by the following Joint Resolution of the Confederate Congress:

"Resolved, that the thanks of Congress are due, and are hereby tendered, to Maj. Gen. Patrick R. Cleburne, and the officers and men under his command, for the victory obtained by them over superior forces of the enemy at Ringgold Gap, in the State of Georgia, on the 27th day of November, 1863, by which the advance of the enemy was impeded, our wagon train and most of our artillery saved, and a large number of the enemy killed and wounded. "Resolved, that the President be requested to communicate the foregoing resolution to Major General Cleburne and his command."

By the end of December, 1863²³, the slowly retreating Confederate forces were located at Tunnel Hill, Georgia about 20 miles southeast of Chattanooga. A little-publicized remarkable, confidential, proposal was read by General Patrick Cleburne to a group of high-ranking Officers on January 2, 1864 for the eyes of their Commanding General, J. E. Johnston, of the Army of Tennessee. The six-page eloquent text may be summarized as proposing emancipation of the Slaves in order to enlist their support "to save our country" from the enemies who are using slavery as a "pretense to establish sectional superiority and a more centralized form of government, and to deprive us of our rights and liberties". The idea did come to the attention of President Jefferson. The notion was hushed. Officers continued to serve under their General as fervently as ever.

During the retreat toward Atlanta the South established a very strong entrenchment at Kennesaw Mt. The defenders, which included Cleburne's troops, repulsed a determined Union attack on June 27. The next day, Sherman decided he could bypass Kennesaw. On June 29, 1864, Wilson Jr. was sent south to the wagon train "in arrest" and his military record ceases in September. The Union reported seeing 100 wagons moving from Marietta toward Atlanta on June 30.²⁴ Atlanta was lost on September 2.

The Butler County census of 1866, though lacking in details, does show Wils Murphy married with two small children. The very next line shows P Harris. Peterson Harris, a brother of Julia Harris (wife of Wilson Jr.), had just married Wilson's sister, Florence Murphey.

A lien was co-signed by Wilson Murphey, Jnr and Peterson Harris on 22nd May of 1866 to be paid by one five hundred pound Bale of Cotton of the Class known as Middlings. In the margin of the Deed record is written "satisfied", signed by the outfit which had advanced the Provisions and Supplies to enable them to make a crop.²⁵

A year later, two liens were signed by Wilson Murphey Jr. for necessary provisions, each of which provided for payment in the form of two bales of lint cotton. One lien was cosigned with his brother, A. Murphey. The other was cosigned with his wife, Julia A. Murphey, and filed for record on the 26th of June, 1867. I guess in the light of subsequent events, I should investigate whether Peterson Harris had borrowed for provisions that June.

Reconstruction! After the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, a Democrat by the name of Andrew Johnson became President of the United States. From Tennessee, he had become Lincoln's running mate in order to obtain Democratic support in the 1864 presidential election. He proclaimed amnesty in May to all Confederates (except a few leaders) if they would ratify the 13th amendment abolishing slavery. Some States in doing so attached conditions limiting the rights of Negroes. Congress promptly responded by restoring military control over the South.

Thus, while the industrialized North prospered, the agricultural South struggled to regain productivity under the new circumstances of a different kind of labor force. Politically, a dozen years passed before the county electorate was once again able to establish local Democratic control. During this time many tensions existed because of the various behaviors of the citizenry as they strove to deal with their impoverished condition.

A terrible confrontation took place involving my son, Wilson Jr. I quote from the *Greenville Advocate* of Thursday, July 11, 1867:

"Homicide--Mr. Peter C. Harris, who underwent a preliminary examination before Judge Bolling yesterday and the day before for the homicide of Mr. W. Murphy, by shooting him with a pistol was required to give bond in the sum of two thousand dollars for his appearance before the Circuit Court. They were brothers in law; and the unfortunate difficulty which resulted so fatally grew out of a misunderstanding about an account sued on before a Justice of the Peace."

Two paragraphs below is an account from Lowndes County (adjacent to the north) in which two partners had a fatal falling-out as a result of a disagreement between their wives concerning chickens! Three Sheriffs Sales are advertised.

Remember Wilson Jr.'s brother, Augustus, was married to Amanda F. Watts who was the youngest sister of "Gov. Watts". Thomas Hill Watts was elected Governor of Alabama in 1863, but "was driven from his post in 1865, when the Federal army overran Alabama and assumed control of its affairs".²⁶ Resuming his law practice, "Gov. Watts" is reported in **The History of Butler County** published in 1885 to have "defended over one hundred persons charged with murder, and never had one of his clients hanged."²⁷

The *Greenville Tri-Weekly Advocate* carried the following astonishing story on Saturday, April 4, 1868: **"Important Trial** The Circuit Court for this county has been in session now for nearly two weeks, and several cases of considerable importance, both civil and criminal, have been tried; but that which excited the greatest interest was that of "The State vs. Peterson Harris, charged with the murder of Wilson Murphy". The defendant was represented by Messrs. Crenshaw & Minnis, of this place; Ex.-Gov. Thos. H. Watts of Montgomery; and Hon.

David Clopton of Tuskegee. The State was represented by Messrs. Land & Gamble of Greenville, and the State Solicitor, Col. W. B. H. Howard of Camden. The argument was opened on the part of the State by Mr. Gamble in a forcible and ingenious argument. Hon. David Clopton followed in an argument powerful, for strength and logical conclusions, beauty of rhetorical diction, originality of conception, and fertility of figurative illustration. We have seen eloquence rise higher and become more captivating for the moment: but never have we seen it flow with a more constant and uninterrupted current of intellectual strength. There are those whose eloquence rises up and dazzles from momentary inspiration, and then descends below the ordinary average of oratory. Between such and Mr. Clopton, there exists about the same parallel, as there is between the poems of Pope and Drydan; whereas the latter rises higher and soars further heavenward, the former remains longer upon the wing, and whose object seems to fly well rather than high. Gov. Watts concluded the argument for the defense in an able, eloquent and convincing speech. His eloquence consists altogether in the reason of facts, and the felicitous manner, with which he presents them to the best advantage; his is the eloquence of logic. Col. Howard closed for the State in a speech peculiarly his own — at times eloquent, and at times otherwise; but always very impressive. His is peculiarly the eloquence of action and gestures. Taken altogether the four present a remarkable contrast in the art of oratory. After a lucid and characteristic charge of the court, the jury retired, and in half an hour returned with a verdict of “not guilty”.

Who knows the details of the argument between Wilson Jr. and Peterson? Many years later for two hours I looked for the Circuit Court Minutes in the basement of Butler County Courthouse; but the records are in such a jumble that I could not locate any 1868 records.

Wilson Jr.'s wife Julia was left alone with a four year old son named William Harris Murphey and an infant daughter named Iola. In July 1869, a year after her brother had been acquitted of the murder of her husband, Mrs. Julia A. Murphey married Sanford Thornton who was 12 years her senior and also had come to Butler County from Russell County where the families were probably acquainted. Sanford was a farmer too.

My youngest daughter, Nancy, married Peter H. Cheatham in March 1868 at W'sn. Murphey's.

Thomas H. Watts in December of 1870 as Executor of his father's estate reaffirmed a deed which had been lost or mislaid. 480 acres of land in the western part of Butler County was sold at auction in December of 1859 to Wilson Murphy at about four and a half dollars an acre “and the said Murphy has been in possession of said lands ever since.”²⁸

In March of 1877 I sold the Murphey Mill tract to John A. Smith.²⁹ On the same date on the next page of the mortgage records “I give and will and bequeath to Perlina Murphey” 80 acres in the southeast corner of Section Twenty one in Township Ten of range Twelve. What is interesting about this transaction is that Perlina Murphy appears in the 1870 census among the families of Blacks which are enumerated immediately following Wilson Murphy. As mentioned previously, the first person in this list of nine Blacks is Ceiza. The next person is Polina; at age 35 she is shown along with two men as keeping house. In the 1860 census of Slaves, Wilson Murphy (Senior) is shown as a Slave Owner of fifty-three Slaves, half of whom are males.

The above two deeds are the last of my court records prior to my demise in late July of 1878, with the exception of two John A. Smith promises to pay in October and November that are recorded in March of 1878. In the early part of the 1870s I was able to make loans to farmers in need of the wherewithall to plant crops (as previously described). In several instances prudence required that the loan be secured. The last such loan was in November of 1874 to be paid off in November of 1875.

Sketch of the author

Byron F. Murphey was born August 12, 1918 to Benjamin Harris Murphey and Gladys Freeze Murphey. Byron's Grandfather was William Harris Murphey (the son of Wilson Murphey, Jr.) who married Eustacia Thompson in Butler Co., Alabama on Nov. 28, 1888. Living in Greenville, Butler Co., Alabama, their children were Gherald, Gladys, Ben, George and Wilson. William died in Greenville in 1920. Ben died in Missoula, Montana in 1935, having moved to Montana about 1914. All the information that Byron has obtained concerning the Murphey forebears of William Harris Murphey has come from court records, census records, newspaper articles and the 1885 History of Butler County Alabama by John B. Little.

Sources

1. **Butler County Alabama Obituaries** compiled by Marilyn Davis Barefield 1985, p. 70 and **The Greenville Advocate, Vol. XIII**, Number 39 Greenville, Butler County, Alabama, Thursday. August 8, 1878. *'Died at his home in Butler county, on the 28th of July last, Mr. Wilson Murphy, in his 78th year. Mr. Murphy was a native of Georgia, but emigrated with his father to this State and county when but 14 years of age, when Butler county was still in the hands of the Indians. He was near the spot when Col. Butler (the hero for whom this county was named,) was killed by the Indians, and he it was who pointed out the grave fortyfour years afterwards when the citizens determined to give his bones more decent burial, by bringing them to Greenville. "Mr. Murphy was a member of no church; he lived and died in the belief of final holiness. He leaves five children, all having families of their own, to mourn his loss."*
2. **History of Butler County, Alabama 1815 to 1885** by John Buckner Little 1885, pp. 23. 136-139
3. **Deed Book D, Butler County, Alabama** page 54.
4. **The History of Butler County, Alabama**, page 82
5. **Deed Book N** Butler County, Alabama, page 300.
6. **The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation and Alabama, 1806-1836.** by Henry DeLeon Southerland, Jr. and Jerry Elijah Brown, The University of Alabama Press, 1989. page 20
7. **Tract Book, Butler County, Alabama 1817 - 1860** compiled by Barbara Perdue Middleton in 1995 from the original in the Butler County Court House at Greenville, Alabama
8. **Land & Property Research in the United States** by E. Wade Home, Ancestry Press, 1997. Page 129
9. **Butler County, Alabama, Wills 1** 1853 - 1864, pp. 173-5
10. **Seale and Allied Families** by Ida Carrie Seale, R.N., who was a granddaughter of Ransom Seale
11. **AS GRAIN ONCE SCATTERED** The History of Christ Church, Savannah, Georgia 1733-1983. Text by Roger K. Warlick 1987
12. *ibid* page 11 (endnote 11 is page 35)
13. **HANCOCK CO., GEORGIA, SUPERIOR COURT MINUTES 1794 - 1809** page 290 in Judge Mitchell's Charge to the Jury 8th September 1798
14. **A HISTORY OF THE GEORGIA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, 1784-1984** by Robert G. Gardner et al 1988 pages 258-263

15. **BUTLER CO., ALABAMA, DEED RECORD VOL. J** dated 3 May 1861 and filed for record 29 Dec. 1862. Ransom Seale was a witness and the signature is Wilson Murphey. S.I Bolling was Judge of Probate.
16. **BUTLER CO., ALABAMA, DEED RECORD VOLUME M** page 522 Seaborn Moore Sr. and Jr. were the trustees of the Ebenezer Church.
17. **HISTORY OF BUTLER COUNTY ALABAMA** Little, Chapter XXXII on Forest Home.
18. **Irish and Scotch-Irish Ancestral Research** by Margaret Dickson Fahley 1962 Two volumes. Republished by Genealogical Publishing Co. page 12
19. **History of Butler County Alabama**, page 167
20. **BUTLER COUNTY, AL MINUTE RECORD-PROBATE VOL. 5** page 641, dated Feby. 8th, 1861 also **MINUTE RECORD-PROBATE VOL. 1** 1854
21. National Archives Compiled Service Records for **Confederate** soldiers -- J. B. Murphey, Co. E. 12 Alabama Infantry
22. **BUTLER COUNTY ALABAMA RECORD OF ESTATES VOL. 8** page 239 and **VOL. 10** page 61
23. **The Civil War CD-ROM**, The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Guild Press of Indiana, Inc. The original publication by the U.S. Govt. consists of some 127 volumes.
24. The **War of the Rebellion**, Volume 75 page 645, as found on **The Civil War CD-ROM**.
25. **Bulter Co., AL Deeds etc. Volume K**, page 431. Loan by JR. and H.S Abrams recorded on June 20 1866, but dated 22nd May 1866.
26. **Memorial Record of Alabama**, Brant and Fuller 1893 pages 776 - 770
27. **The History of Butler County**, J. B. Little 1885. page 52
28. **Butler County, Alabama Deed Record Volume S**. page 114
29. **Butler County, Alabama Mortgage Record Vol. KK**. page 522
30. **Butler County, Alabama Deed Book CC**. pages 376. 377; Mortgage to Wilson Murphy dated 17 November 1874

*This article was published in the Alabama Genealogical Society Inc. Magazine, Fall/Winter 2000 issue.
Transcribed by Woody F. Murphy, Oct 15, 2002.*

Note added by Wilda Murphy 5 August 2005: in reference to footnote #10 above, Ida Carrie Seale was actually granddaughter of Anderson Seale, who was brother of Ransom, according to page 19 of Seale and Allied Families.