

BLACK IN BLUE BURLESON'S

Jonathan Burleson (1789-1866) spent the last fifty years of his life in Morgan County Alabama. He and his young family settled there in 1816. The land they settled was located less than one mile east of Flint Creek and less than six miles south of the Tennessee River. His first home, a log cabin, was built two years before Cotaco County (named changed to Morgan County in 1821) was established and three years before Alabama became a State. The first official land sales for Cotaco County were held in July 1818, at which time Jonathan purchased 160 acres. The young frontiersman and Creek War veteran thus became a farmer. As his landholdings increased, he became a planter and by the time the War Between the States started in 1861, he owned several thousand acres of land. His land holdings included tracts scattered over Morgan County and land in north Mississippi. The bulk of his land was located adjacent to and included his original home, and his later home built in 1841. The 1850 Federal Census reports 4,650 contiguous acres he operated and managed around his home. Jonathan maintained his own cotton gin and cotton press. His farm had its own blacksmith shop, shoe shop, tailor's shop, tannery, equipment sheds, farm office, corn cribs, smoke houses, stables, barns, hog pens and other out-buildings necessary to the successful operation of his farming enterprises.

Living and working on the Burleson plantation were several black slave families. Census records report Jonathan owning 20 slaves in 1830, 43 slaves in 1840, 64 slaves in 1850 and 49 slaves in 1860. The 1820 Census for Morgan County was lost. Scattered on the farm were at least a dozen slave dwellings. Most were simple log structures similar to Jonathan's first home. Some were frame houses built with sawn lumber. One such dwelling, built with a combination of logs and sawn lumber was still standing in the 1960's. The majority of the slave houses were located on a rocky knoll in what was called the "Hickory Grove" located along the north side of Red Bank Lane which extended east and west through the plantation. The grove was located just west of the site where the cotton gin and press were located and about one quarter mile northwest of the family cemetery.

Located north of and adjacent to the Burleson plantation was the 400-acre farm of Jonathan's son, William Byrd Burleson (1818-1865). The farm had been given to William by his father soon after William's marriage to Minerva A. Stephenson (1822-1907) in January 1840. According to the 1850 Federal census William owned 11 slaves. The 1860 census reports William owning 15 slaves. Some of the slaves had formally worked on the plantation of Minerva's father, Arthur Stephenson (circa 1792-1858). The bulk of the Stephenson farm was located about six miles northwest of the Burleson farm. The Stephenson-Burleson cemetery is located on a portion of the land.

The above information lays the groundwork for the purpose of this article, which is to discuss the five black Burleson's who in the later stages of the Civil War left their homes and joined the Union army. Yankee forces had occupied the Tennessee Valley area of North Alabama on and off since shortly after the battle of Shiloh in April 1862. The town of Decatur and its important railroad junction served as headquarters for the Union forces in Morgan County. At various times thousands of Union soldiers were quartered in Decatur. Union officers spent considerable time recruiting white and black men for the army. Numerous black men in Morgan and adjacent counties ran away from their plantations and made their way to Decatur to volunteer for service. However, some of the Yankee recruitment efforts included forcing slaves from their homes and pressing (forcing) them into the Union army. Another tactic recorded in Madison County (adjoining Morgan

County to the north and east across the Tennessee River) involved Union troops surrounding churches on Sunday and taking away black men at the point of a bayonet so they could “volunteer” for the army. Four black Burleson’s from Jonathan’s plantation wound up in Union blue along with one slave from William’s farm. Just how the four men from Jonathan’s plantation were recruited is unknown. Information for this report has been pieced together from military records, census records, family descendant genealogy records, government depositions and affidavits from the soldiers themselves and from friends and family members, newspaper articles, Freedman Bureau records, deed records, estate files and one diary. The following are the stories of five brave soldiers who fought for their freedom and for a better way of life.

Nelson Burleson and William Burleson were brothers. Their parents were possibly Phillip Burleson-Fennoy and Julia Burleson. Nelson and William had four known siblings, all born on the Burleson plantation. Based on depositions given by Nelson in 1915, he was born April 12, 1831 (census records indicate birth year to be 1835 or 1836). He stated he was married to Maria Johnson in 1853 and that they were married in a church and William Byrd Burleson performed the ceremony. He stated the church was in the area where the village of Flint would later be established. Possibly they were married in Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church. Jonathan Burleson and his family attended church at Mt. Pisgah. Church records list approximately 150 white members and about 50 black members in the years leading up to the start of the Civil War.

Military records show Nelson Burleson (spelled Burleston in service records) enlisted March 1, 1864 at Decatur. He was officially mustered into service a few weeks later near Pulaski, Tennessee. He served as a private in Company “T”, 111th Regiment of the United States Colored Infantry. Within two months of enlistment, Nelson’s company was sent to the fort guarding the Sulphur Branch trestle, an important railroad bridge located a few miles north of Athens in Limestone County. The trestle and fort were located about a mile south of the village of Elkmont near the Tennessee-Alabama state line. The trestle was part of the Tennessee and Alabama Central Railroad which had been chartered in 1853 by the State of Alabama with the purpose of building a railroad line from Montgomery, Alabama northward to the Tennessee state line where it would tie into an existing rail line which along with another line, further north, extended all the way to Nashville, Tennessee. The only part of the rail line finished before the Civil War was the 27-mile stretch between Decatur and the Tennessee state line. It was finished in the spring of 1861 just before the war started. At Decatur Junction, the T&AC railroad joined the Memphis & Charleston Railroad which extended west to east through north Alabama. Both railroads were important for the transport of men and supplies for the Confederate army at the start of the war and later in the war for the Union army. The Sulphur Branch trestle was built of wood, was 72 feet tall and about 300 feet long. To protect it from Confederate forces, the Union army had constructed a formidable fort on a hill on the east side of the trestle at the south end of the bridge. The fort had two block houses, earthen and wooden breastworks and living quarters for the approximately 1,200 troops stationed there. In the fall of 1864, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest moved south from Tennessee into Alabama. On September 24th his troops captured Fort Henderson in Athens with over 1,300 prisoners taken. On September 25th Forrest and his men attacked the Sulphur Branch fort. After a few hours of bombardment by Forrest’s artillery, the fort surrendered. According to Confederate reports, 200 of the enemy had been killed and 973 men taken prisoner. Included in the captured men was Nelson Burleson. Most of the captured black Union soldiers from Fort Henderson and Sulphur Trestle were marched in columns to Cherokee, Alabama. There some of them were carried by train to Mobile to work on Confederate fortifications. Some of the prisoners were marched to Mobile; the journey on foot took 12 days. In a deposition given by Nelson Burleson years after the war, he stated: “After we were captured the Rebel soldiers burnt the trestle bridge. It was not torn

down but burnt down. From there we marched clear down to Mobile, Alabama, crossing the Tennessee River near Tuscumbia, Alabama. The river was so low that we forded it. We stayed in Tuscumbia one night and then marched to Cherokee, Alabama. I am sure we prisoners marched the whole way to Mobile. We got on the train once at some little station, name not now known. But then the cars ran off of the track and then we did not get on again.” In his efforts to obtain a military pension after the war Nelson Burleson gave the following statement June 29, 1889: “I was put to work on breast works and the guard struck me with his gun across my back, and disables me for work, about three weeks. Was sent to the Rebel hospital during that time and they gave me such medical treatment as was common at such places, I suppose. When I was exchanged and got back to my regiment, I did not have much hard duty to do and my back did not give me much serious trouble until I was discharged and returned home and commenced work on the farm, then I found out that my back would not admit me to do hard labor and was compelled to call on a physician for advice and medicine. My first physician was Dr. Wesley Price, his P.O. address was Priceville, Morgan County, Alabama but he is dead, has been dead about five years. Since that time I have called on Dr. Scott Rountree for medicine for my back a few times but none of their treatment seems to do but little good, if any. His P.O. address is at this time, Hartselle, Morgan County, Alabama. I have not been at any time so that I could not go about but could not attend to the hard part of work that was necessary for a farmer to do at many times all the way down from the close of the war to the present time.”

Nelson Burleson was a prisoner of war until April 30, 1865. On May 4, 1865, he and numerous other former prisoners were turned over to Union General Canby by Confederate General Richard Taylor when he surrendered his army. Nelson and other members of his company were sent to Memphis, Tennessee where they rejoined their regiment, May 27, 1865. It appears Company “I” of the 111th Regiment was mustered out of service April 30, 1866, in Nashville, Tennessee. After the war Nelson returned home to the Jonathan Burleson farm. He and his wife Maria are shown living on the farm next door to Maria’s mother Mary Johnson, in the 1866 Alabama State Census. Nelson and Maria eventually had six children: Samuel, Alexander, Mary Lou, Callie, Johnnie and Mattie. Samuel, the oldest was born in about 1868 and Mattie, the youngest was born in 1886. Nelson Burleson changed his surname from “Burleson” to “Fennoy” sometime between the 1866 census and when he registered to vote in 1867. He stated he and the other former Burleson slaves were encouraged to change their surnames and he chose “Fennoy” since it was his father’s name. It is not known who requested the former slaves to change their names; some say it was Jonathan Burleson. This is unlikely as Jonathan was suffering from dementia by the end of the war and until he died September 24, 1866, would not have been capable of making the request. Several former slave families did change their surnames, however, several Burleson families did not.

Nelson’s wife Maria died July 28, 1897, and was buried in the Minor Hill Cemetery near Flint. On March 20, 1898, Nelson remarried. His bride was Jennie Minor, the widow of Sam Minor. Reverend W. A. Wilhite preformed the wedding ceremony which was probably held at the Minor Hill Baptist Church in Flint.

Jennie had been born on the Pryor plantation located in south Limestone County a few miles north of Decatur. According to her mother, Fannie Pryor, in a deposition given in 1920, Jennie had been born during the Civil War which would make her about 30 years younger than Nelson. In 1885, Jennie had married James Peebles, however, after about six months of marriage, it was discovered James still had a living wife when he married Jennie. Peebles ran off and was not heard from again. (Deposition could be in error. It appears Jennie was married to Peebles for at least six years and had three sons.) Jennie then married Sam Minor and went to Morgan County to live. After Sam died,

she then married Nelson Fennoy. Jennie and Nelson had no children together. By the time of his second marriage Nelson owned a home and other real estate in the village of Flint. In 1907, in efforts to get his military pension increased he asked the two surviving children of Jonathan Burleson, Dabney Adair Burleson (1835-1912) and Mattie Burleson Orr (1837-1923) to provide testimony to assist him in the pension claim. Dabney's affidavit stated Nelson had been born on his father's farm and that "we were boys together." Mattie's affidavit stated she knew Nelson was a few years older than herself and that she would be 70 years old next month. Nelson Fennoy died September 6, 1919, in his home in Flint. He was buried the next day in the Minor Hill Cemetery near his beloved first wife, Maria. Nelson's grave is unmarked. The cemetery is located about two miles west of where Nelson was born and reared. Today descendants of Nelson and Maria are scattered across the United States.

William Burleson was a younger brother to Nelson. He was born about 1840 and like his brother, Nelson grew up on the Burleson farm and was living there when the Civil War started. In an affidavit given in 1890, Jake Burleson, who had also lived on the Jonathan Burleson plantation, declared William Burleson had married Delilah Burleson-Jaggers (sometimes spelled 'Jaggars') on or about the 2nd day of October 1860 and they were married by John Tapscott, a Justice of the Peace. Tapscott lived about 3 miles northwest of the Burleson farm where the village of Flint would later be established. Delilah's parents were Burrell Burleson-Jaggers and Elizabeth 'Betsie' Burleson-Pate who lived on the Burleson farm. Based on census data, it appears Burrell was born in South Carolina and Elizabeth was born in Virginia, both born in about 1820. In an affidavit given in 1916, Delilah stated she had been born in 1841. Her death record states she was born in 1839.

Affidavits given years after the war contain erroneous information about William's enlistment date in the Union Army. Based on information contained in the military files of other Union soldiers, it appears William enlisted in Decatur, Alabama around the first of March 1864 and he was officially mustered into service at Pulaski, Tennessee around the middle of April 1864. He served as a private in Company "B", 2nd Regiment Iowa Infantry. Little is known about William's personal experiences while in the army. Later in this report the exploits of the 2nd Iowa will be discussed. William was honorably discharged in the Summer of 1865. He returned home to Delilah, where they are shown living on the Burleson farm in the 1866 Alabama State Census. Three children, two boys and one girl, all under the age of ten years, are shown living in their household. In the 1870 Federal Census, William and Delilah Burleson are shown living adjacent to Ann Burleson (circa 1806 -1878) the widow and second wife of Jonathan Burleson. Between the 1870 census and the 1880 census, William's family changed their surname to "Fennoy" just as his older brother Nelson had done in the late 1860's. During the same time period Delilah's parents changed their surname to "Jaggers." It is not known why the name "Jaggers" was chosen. William and Delilah had at least six children: Dennis, Hence, Mary Eliza, Harriet, William Thomas and Robert Lee. William Burleson died on or about the 12th day of February 1883 and was buried in Hartselle, Alabama possibly in the Hartselle Missionary Baptist Church Cemetery. In the 1890's Delilah applied for a widow's pension based on her late husband's service in the Union Army. On July 15, 1895, Dabney Burleson (1835-1912) gave a lengthy deposition to the Military Pension Office. He stated he had known William and Delilah "all their lives" and that "they were both raised up in our family." He stated that "William and Delilah were married a short time before the war and that they were young and neither of them had been married before." When asked to give a description of William around the time he enlisted, Dabney replied, "he was just about full grown probably 22 or 23 years old, about five feet and five or six inches tall and of a dark brown color." When asked how William spelled his name, Dabney replied, "B-U-R-L-E-S-O-N. If he was enrolled any other way, it was incorrect. He was

raised in our family and his name was the same as mine.” Dabney went on to say that “Delilah has always been a hard-working woman and has had no children or lived with any man as his wife since her husband died.” Delilah was approved for a widow’s pension and drew it until she died. By 1900, Delilah owned a 128-acre farm located about three miles north of Hartselle adjoining the L & N Rail line. She eventually moved to Birmingham, Alabama and was living with one of her children when she died January 16, 1919. She was buried in Hartselle, Alabama. The name “Fennoy” was common in Morgan County for many years after the war. One of William and Delilah’s grandsons, Leslie Fennoy, a son of Hence Fennoy, became a prominent citizen in Hartselle. He owned several pieces of real estate and owned and operated a store on the corner of Georgia Street and Bethel Street in northeast Hartselle. He was born in 1895 and lived well into his 90’s. He loved raising and training hunting dogs and could often be found at First Monday Trade Day in Scottsboro, Alabama where he would buy, sell and trade dogs.

Living on the Burleson plantation by the 1840’s were Anthony “Tony” Burleson and his wife Dorcas Burleson. They were the parents of Joseph and Jacob Burleson. In Freedman Bureau records from June 1869, Joseph stated he had four living brothers: Lawson, Rufus, Aaron and Jacob. He stated he had three deceased brothers however they were not named. He also stated he had four sisters: Lucy and Nelly, who were living with him, and Edna and Ann, one of whom was living in Memphis and the other living in Mississippi. It appears Joseph Burleson, born sometime between 1839 and 1841, was one of the older children. His younger brother, Jacob, was born in about 1842. Both Joseph and Jacob joined the Union Army in 1864.

Joseph Burleson (spelled Burlison in military records) served with Nelson Burleson in Co “I”, 111th Regiment of the United States Colored Infantry. He, like Nelson, enlisted in Decatur on March 1, 1864. His military records show he originally enlisted as a private in Co. “I” of the 3rd Regiment Alabama Infantry African Descent. This regiment had its designation changed in June 1864 to the 111th Regiment. Joseph was captured along with Nelson Burleson at Sulphur Trestle on September 25, 1864, and was also sent to Mobile where he worked on Confederate fortifications. Joseph and Nelson were turned over to Federal authorities in May 1865 and sent to Memphis to rejoin their regiment. In an application for a military invalid pension in 1890, Joseph stated that while stationed in Murfreesboro, Tennessee during the summer of 1865, “I was seized with paralysis of my right side, and it has followed me to this day. I am drawn down to the ground with it and unconscious for hours at a time.” Joseph was honorably discharged from the army in Nashville, Tennessee April 30, 1866. He returned to his home on the Jonathan Burleson farm and is shown living there in the 1870 Federal census with his wife, Amanda and five sons: Samuel, Silas, Terry, William and Aaron. By 1870 Joseph had changed his surname from “Burleson” to “Barker”. The source of the name “Barker” is unknown. When Joseph opened an account with the Freedman’s Bureau in June 1869, he was still using the surname “Burleson.” Based on their children’s ages, it appears Joseph and Amanda had married sometime prior to the start of the war. By 1873, Joseph and Amanda finally had a daughter; they named her Virginia. In the late 1870’s Amanda died. Joseph remarried in August 1879. His bride was Sarah Johnson, the widow of Burrell Johnson. Sarah’s maiden name was Stephenson. She had been a slave on the Arthur Stephenson (circa 1792-1858) farm. Her name was included on an 1858 inventory of slaves owned by Stephenson. In the 1880 Federal census, Joseph and Sarah Barker are shown living on the Burleson farm next door to Nelson Fennoy and his family.

In 1890, using the surname Burleson, Joseph applied for a military invalid pension based on the paralysis he suffered along with a partial loss of eyesight. On April 23, 1892, two friends of Joseph,

John Jagers and Samuel McCulloch gave the following account in a general affidavit. They stated "We are both personally acquainted with Joseph Burleson having known him ever since the war. That one morning in the Fall of the year 1884 we were coming to Decatur and on the side of the road some two miles from his home, we saw Joseph Burleson stagger and fall to the ground. We came to him and found him in a hard fit. We put him in our wagon and brought him to his home. The fit was very bad and severe and lasted him for several hours. We have not seen him have any other fits, but it is understood in the neighborhood that he frequently has them. He is a poor man and is not able to do but little if any manual labor."

Joseph was eventually approved for a \$6.00 per month pension, which he was drawing when he died February 22, 1902. He is possibly buried in one of the many unmarked graves in the Minor Hill Cemetery.

According to his death certificate, Jacob "Jake" Burleson was born April 11, 1842. He was reared on the Burleson plantation along with his brothers and sisters. Before the Civil War started, Jake married Jane Bean, probably from the Benjamin Bean plantation which was located a few miles northeast of the Burleson farm. Jake stated they were married with "consent of mistress." Jake enlisted in the Union Army April 1, 1864, in Decatur and was sent to Pulaski, Tennessee where he was formally mustered in April 19, 1864. His service records have his name spelled as "Bullerson" for the most part but occasionally it was spelled "Bullison." His name is spelled "Burlison" in his pension record. He served in Company "C", 2nd Regiment Iowa Infantry. He served as an "under cook." There was one exception to his duty as an under cook. In June and July 1864, he served as a Division Teamster. In his pension application in 1890, Jake stated that "while in Company "C" and in the line of duty at Snake Creek Gap, in the State of Georgia in the middle of May 1864, I was wounded in the upper front part of my head or forehead, by shot from the enemy." He was conveyed by ambulance to a hospital in Rome, Georgia where he was treated for his wounds. Military records show Jake was honorably discharged from the army at Louisville, Kentucky July 12, 1865. He returned to his home on the Burleson farm and was living there with Jane when the 1870 Federal census was taken. Sometime before the 1870 census, Jake, like his brother Joseph, changed his surname to "Barker." He used the surnames "Barker" and "Burleson" interchangeably for the rest of his life. In affidavits made in the 1890's Jake stated his first wife, Jane died in February 1873. Morgan County marriages records show Jacob Burleson marrying Easter Orr November 29, 1877. They are shown living in Hartselle, Alabama when the 1880 Federal census was taken. His occupation was listed as farm labor and railroading. Easter died in Hartselle sometime in the 1890's. Jake eventually married a third time. Morgan County marriage records show Jake Barker marrying Caroline Rodgers, March 28, 1906. The ceremony was performed by Rev. John P.M. Woodall. Caroline "Callie" Rodgers was the widow of Frank Rodgers who died in October 1904 or 1905. Callie's maiden name was McDonald. According to Jake, he never had children with any of his three wives.

In May 1890 Jake Burleson started the process to obtain a military invalid pension. In his July 1890 pension application he stated he was disabled in the following manner, to wit: "From gunshot to head causing severe attacks of Neuralgia lasting from the 1st of December to about the 1st of March each year." Jake was approved for a pension. In 1920, Jake filed paperwork to increase his pension. In an affidavit given in 1921, Callie Burleson stated that she had attended to Jake constantly for the past three years due to his head pain. Jake Burleson died January 31, 1931, when he was 88 years old and was buried in the Hartselle Missionary Baptist Church cemetery. A military gravestone showing his service in Company "C", 2nd Iowa Infantry marks his grave.

Benjamin "Ben" Burleson was reared on the Arthur Stephenson plantation just southwest of Decatur, Alabama. Ben is listed as under 21 years of age on the slave inventory prepared after Stephenson's death in 1858. Some records indicate he was born March 4, 1839. By 1860 he was living on the farm of William Byrd Burleson who in 1840 had married Minerva Stephenson, a daughter of Arthur Stephenson. It is not known how many of the Stephenson slaves moved to the Burleson farm. In a newspaper interview given by Ben in 1910, he stated he was living on the Burleson farm when the war started in 1861. His job was to look after the farm mules. Sometime in late 1863, he simply walked away from the farm and made his way to Decatur and joined the Union Army. Records indicate he enlisted November 22, 1863. The army shows his name as "Benjamin Bullison." Ben, like William Burleson, became part of Company "B", 2nd Regiment Iowa Infantry where he served as an "under cook." Company "B" was in northwest Georgia by May 1864 where they were present at the skirmish at Snake Creek Gap and a few days later were involved in the Battle of Resaca which is considered the first battle of the Atlanta Campaign. Later in May they fought at the engagement at Dallas, Georgia and later at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain. Late in August 1864 the 2nd Iowa fought in the Battle of Jonesborough which is considered the last battle of the Atlanta Campaign. From there they went with General Sherman as he burned and fought his way through Georgia. The 2nd Iowa fought at Savannah and later at the skirmish at Lynch Creek in South Carolina. Their last action was at the Battle of Bentonville, North Carolina in late March 1865. The war ended in April and the 2nd Iowa was sent to Washington D C where they took part in the Union victory parade along Pennsylvania Avenue. Benjamin Burleson was present at all the engagements mentioned above including the final victory parade. He was mustered out of the army in July 1865.

After the war Benjamin changed his surname to "Butler." He knew of Union General Benjamin F. Butler and liked the sound of the name. Ben moved to Memphis, Tennessee after the war and in 1887 he married Mary Elizabeth Wellings who was about 28 years younger than him. The first three of their five children were born in Memphis. Ben was evidently married before he wed Mary. Contained in his 1919 obituary is a statement mentioning a daughter named Minnie from a previous marriage. Racial unrest in Memphis in 1892 resulted in the lynching of three black businessmen. Because of this and continuing racial discrimination Ben moved his family to the Oklahoma Territory in 1894. They were living in Kingfisher, Oklahoma when their youngest son, Solomon Butler was born March 5, 1895. Still faced with racial discrimination, Ben moved his family to Wichita, Kansas in 1904. His final move was to Hutchinson, Kansas sometime prior to the 1910 census being taken. In Hutchinson, Ben opened a shoeshine and drink stand at the corner of Avenue B and Main Street across from the courthouse. Ben became a well-known and respected citizen. Part of his local fame was from his amazing "strawberry finish" drink, a summertime Hutchinson favorite. Ben died on either the first or second day of April 1919, and was buried in the Eastside Cemetery in Hutchinson. His grave is marked by a military gravestone which is inscribed: Benj. Butler, Co B, 2nd Ia. Inf.

In any discussion of Ben Butler, mention should be made of his youngest son, Solomon "Sol" Butler. By the time Solomon graduated from high school in 1915, some sports writers across the United States were calling him, "the greatest high school athlete in the world." Solomon began his high school career in 1911. After some race related resistance, he was allowed to attend Hutchinson High School. While there he became a world class athlete. He starred on the basketball court and the football field however his greatest achievements were in track and field. By 1912 he was gaining regional fame. In a district track meet held at Sterling High School he won four individual events plus received the gold medal for highest number of individual points. In 1913 it was reported he

had won 37 first place medals in track and field events held in Kansas. One school in Manhattan, Kansas where he had competed, refused to send him his first-place medals because he was black. In 1914 at a district track meet held in Pratt, Kansas, Sol won six individual events including the 50-yard dash, the 100-yard dash, the 220-yard dash, the running broad jump, the shot put and the 220-yard low hurdles. At this meet, Sol broke the interscholastic record in the 50-yard dash and tied the record in the 100-yard dash. In June 1914 after his Junior year, Sol took part in the Stagg meet, a major track and field event held in Chicago. Over 400 high school athletes from all over the United States participated. Sol won individual honors at the meet having won several events. Solomon transferred to Rock Island High School for his senior year. Rock Island is located in Illinois just across the Mississippi River from Davenport, Iowa. While there he continued to gain national prominence. In 1915, he earned the largest individual point total in the mid-west in track and field events and won several events at the national interscholastic track and field meet held in Chicago. After graduating in 1915, Sol attended Dubuque College (now University) in Dubuque, Iowa. While there he was quarterback of the football team and is given credit as the first black athlete to quarterback a college team for four successive years. During his college years he became one of the first black athletes to gain international fame. Only Jack Johnson, the heavy weight boxing champion from 1908-1915 received more press than Sol Butler. In 1919 he traveled to Paris, France where he participated in the Inter Allied Athletic Games. Sol won the running broad jump and came within half an inch of breaking the world record. During the U S Olympic trials held in Boston, Massachusetts in July 1920, Solomon broke the United States record for the running broad jump with a leap of 24 feet and 6 inches. He easily made the Olympic team but was injured in a practice meet just before the 1920 Olympic games and was not able to compete. After college, Solomon went on to become one of the first black players in the National Football League. He was so popular his old High School in Rock Island wrote a song about him. Solomon Butler died in Chicago December 1, 1954, and was buried in Wichita, Kansas.

Evidence suggests a sixth Burleson from Morgan County joined the Union Army. The 106th United States Colored Troops had been organized in Decatur and originally named the 4th Regiment Alabama Infantry African Descent but had been consolidated into the 106th USCT in May 1864. Andrew Jackson Burlison from Morgan County enlisted on July 1, 1864, and held the rank of "private." He and most of his comrades were captured when Fort Henderson in Athens surrendered to General Forrest, September 24, 1864. Records show Burlison escaped and was later reported a deserter as of April 15, 1865. The only other record found is a pension application filing by a Jackson Burleson from Alabama on October 8, 1890. The filing shows him as a member of Company "B", 106th U S Colored Infantry during the war. No evidence has been found to connect him to the Jonathan Burleson plantation. He does not show up after the war in any family records or census records. More research will be necessary to document his background.

As previously noted, some black Burleson families changed their surnames after the war. In addition to the names already mentioned, other surnames used were: Hamilton, Powell, Dickson, Strothers (or Strawthers) and Francis. Several of these families are shown living on the Burleson farm for several years after the war ended. Roby Adair Burleson (1845-1870) kept a diary for the year 1866. He was the only child of Jonathan Burleson and his second wife, Ann. Roby managed the Burleson farm after the war. In his diary he wrote of having written contracts with the "freed people" as black labor shifted from enslaved labor to a wage system. Many of the farm workers he writes about are the soldiers and their families included in this report.

It is unfortunate so little information is available to document the lives of the many black families who lived and worked on the Burleson farm in the years before, during and after the War Between the States. As time moves forward and more black families become interested in their history, maybe documentation and family stories will surface which can add to the rich history of their ancestors' struggle and sacrifice to make a better world for all Americans.

David A. Burleson
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Various articles in newspapers from Kansas, Illinois and Iowa relating to the history of Benjamin Butler and his son, Solomon Butler. Accessed through Newspapers.com

SPECIAL THANKS

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