

Locating Aaron Burleson's Virginia Land Grant

by Sarah Burleson Gower

Have you ever wanted to walk in your ancestor's footsteps? For me, it's fun to try to imagine what it would have been like to see their corner of the world through their eyes, in their time. To be where they were can help explain what challenges they faced and what their motivations were, in a way get to know them, centuries after they've passed. This Spring, I had the chance to help the BFRG do just that when I was asked to help locate the land granted by the King of England, to Aaron Burleson in what was then Lunenburg County, Colonial Virginia in 1749. The team and I used the following resources to piece together my hypothesis:

- 1) Plat Plotter <http://platplotter.appspot.com/> (converts deed "metes-and-bounds" into a Plat of Survey that can be viewed in Google Maps or imported into a mapping program)
- 2) John Hoyle Burleson's book "A Study of the Early Burleson History"
- 3) The original 1749 land grant to Aaron which included date recorded, landmarks of the parcel, as well as the metes and bounds of the parcel. (image a)
- 4) The original 1749 land grant to John Phelps which listed Aaron Burleson as a boundary description. (image b)
- 5) Record of the sale of the land to John Echols in 1755.
- 6) Historical Map showing Bedford County from Roanoke Historical Society - revealed that what is known today as the "South Fork of Little Otter River" was not known as such in the 1700s. (image c)
- 7) Other land grants that were also described as involving "the south fork of The Little Otter River", as found in the "Cavaliers and Pioneers" books.
- 8) "Early Bedford Land Patents and Grants", the lifelong-work of James Robert Tinsley
- 9) Deed Mapper Software and Bedford County Map set (image d and e)
- 10) Google Maps of modern Bedford Co. VA (image f)

At the beginning of my research, I tried using Plat Plotter to place the polygon shape of the grant along what is modernly referred to as the South Fork of the Little Otter River, which is just north west of/enters the actual town of Bedford.

'as give grant and confirm unto Aaron Burleson one certain Tract or Parcel of Land containing one hundred and forty seven Acres lying and being in the County of Lunenburg including both Sides of the South Fork of Little Otter River and bounded as followeth to wit, BEGINNING at a white Oak on the North Side, Thence North seventy Degrees fifty six Poles crossing the River to a red Oak Thence North twelve Degrees West one hundred and twenty six Poles to a Hickory Thence North thirty Degrees East fifty seven Poles to a white Oak Thence North twenty four Degrees West fifty four Poles to a red Oak Thence North eighty seven Degrees West thirty six Poles crossing the River to a Hickory Thence South forty four and an Half Degrees West ninety nine Poles crossing a large Branch to a white Oak Thence South three Degrees East one hundred and forty two Poles to a white Oak and Thence South sixty two Degrees East seventy four Poles to the Beginning With all Woods Underwoods

Image a) The piece of Aaron's grant showing how it is described

and confirm unto John Phelps one certain Tract or Parcel of Land containing four hundred and forty four Acres lying and being in the County of Sunenburg including some of the Branches of the South Fork of Little Otter River and bounded as followeth, to wit, BEGINNING at a white Oak just above Aaron Bourlesons Survey Thence North thirty two Degree West three hundred and twenty Poles crossing two large Branches to a red Oak Thence South thirty five Degree West two hundred and thirty two Poles crossing a Branch to a white Oak Thence South thirty Degree East three hundred and twenty Poles crossing two large Branches to a Hickory and thence North thirty two

Image b) the piece of John Phelps's grant mentioning Aaron's land

No matter which way I turned the parcel on the map, I could not make it and John Phelps's pieces fit their descriptions anywhere in that area. After consulting John Hoyle's chapter on the subject and looking over the historic map of Bedford County (image c), we decided to look more south east of the town of Bedford.

Further strengthening this hypothesis were several other grants, described similarly as being along the south fork of Little Otter that were easier to find using landmarks/names that remained the same to this day such as Falling Creek and Orrix Creek. I was able to add to this hypothesis using maps from James Tinsley's books of hand drawn maps including some of these descriptors and their chains of title.

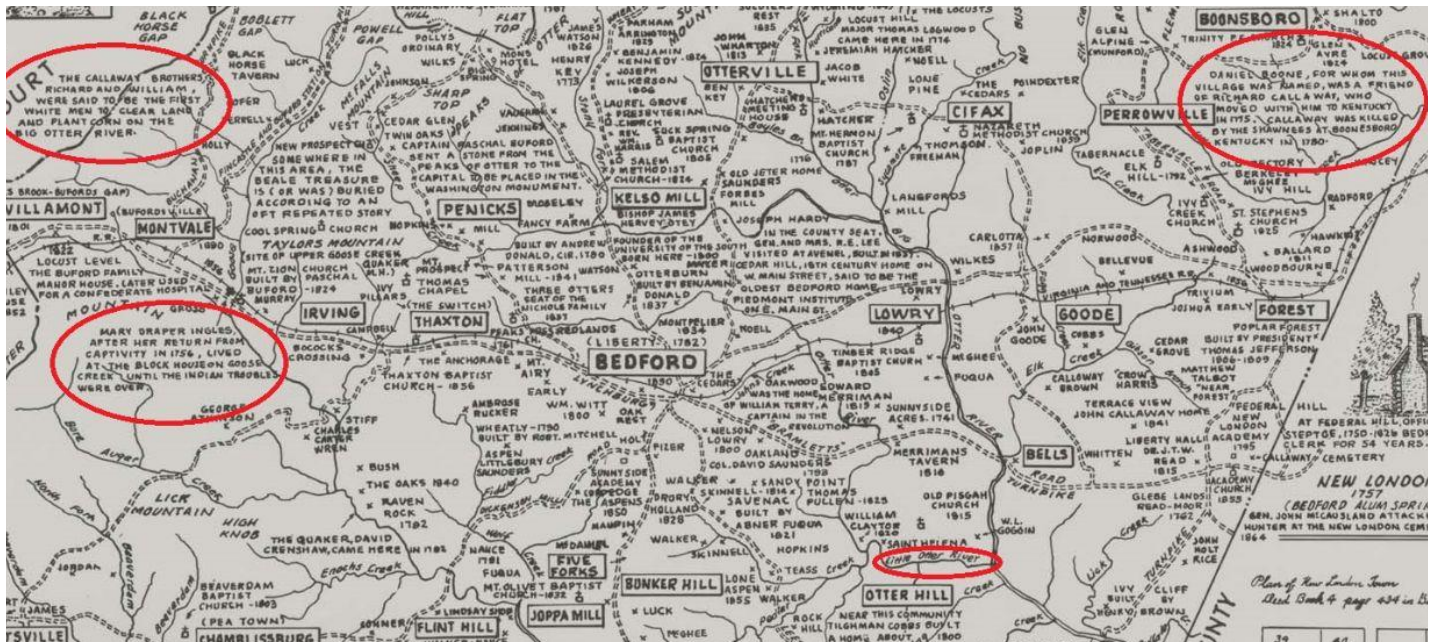


image c) map of Bedford Co depicting locations and names from the beginning of the county, through the antebellum period.

Aside from contributing to our initial goal of locating Aaron's land grant, the Historic Bedford map (image c) also added many bits of adjacent information that have helped the team form a better idea of Aaron's life and motivations during this time period and spurred further

research. Several are circled in red above. Tradition holds that Aaron was a colleague and friend of Daniel Boone, and details on this map of the naming of the town of Boonsboro in the NW corner of Bedford, support that theory in proving that they were both among the first settlers in the same area, at the same time period, in the same circles. Another piece of this map that fits into Aaron's puzzle: a few miles West of his proposed homestead, we see the location at which Mary Draper Ingles settled when returned from captivity in 1756, after escaping death as a hostage during the Draper's Meadow Massacre that occurred in 1755 at an outpost of the frontier approximately 50 miles West of Bedford in what is now Blacksburg, VA. This massacre of colonial settlers by Shawnee warriors was one event that was known to prompt many southwest VA settlers to uproot and move south to resettle in North Carolina. 1755 also happens to be the year that Aaron sold his land and moved his family down the Great Wagon Road into western NC. It is possible that the Draper's Meadow Massacre also contributed to Aaron's list of motivators to pick up stakes and move south.

Despite all we were able to glean from the historic Bedford map, I was still unable to narrow it down any further and had hit many dead ends in attempts to track the sale of the land to modern day, from John Echols through chains of titles using the Bedford Co Register of Deeds Office. Our next breakthrough was reached when JD met a man in his travels who told him about Deed Mapper and did a quick search of the existing records that had been submitted to the software for Bedford Co, VA. His search returned that Aaron's land had been included but, as the company warned me, with some errors due to pieces of surrounding deeds being damaged/missing in the archives. So I used the suggested location with errors in the existing submitted research as a starting point to begin gathering clues from neighboring properties.

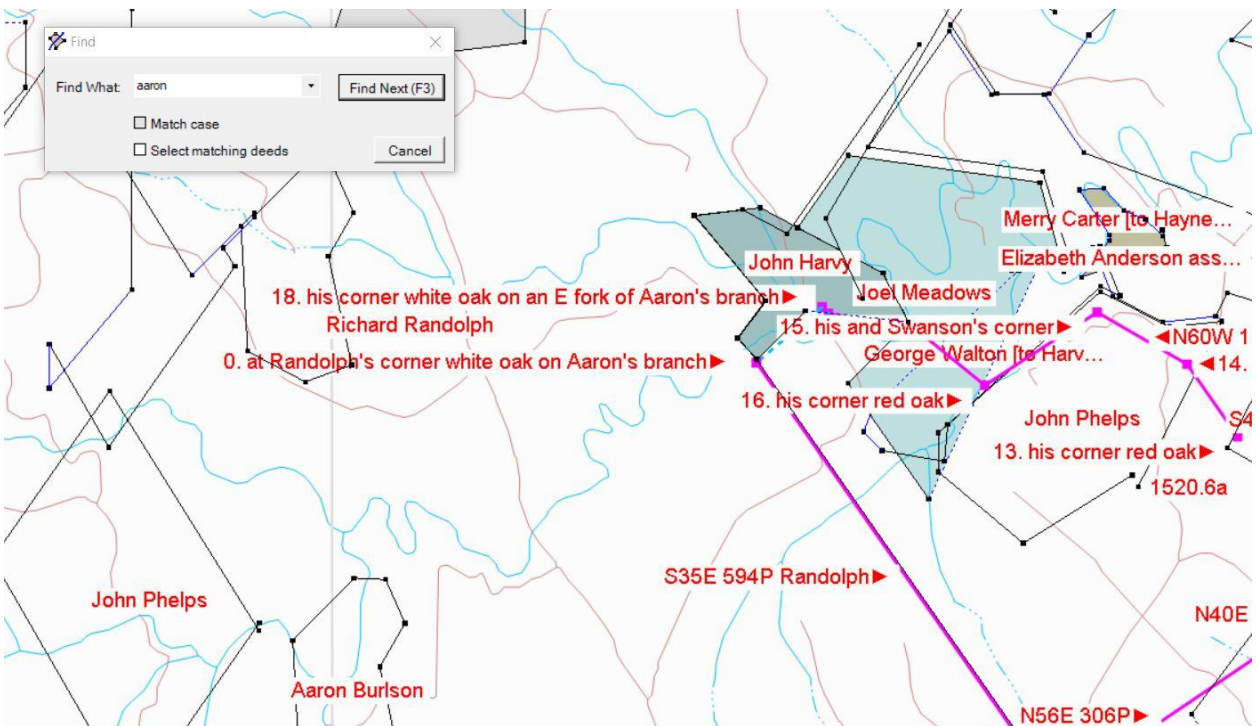


Image d) a screenshot of the Bedford Co maps in Deed Mapper, showing the search function as well as the descriptors of neighboring properties that refer to a branch of Little Otter as "Aaron's branch"

For a bit of background: Deed Mapper software allows the user to enter the metes and bounds detailed in the grant or deed and uses them to create a to-scale polygon in the shape of the parcel. The user can then move the polygon around on the map of the area to fit with known neighbors/landmarks listed in the details, etc. Deed Mapper also allows the user to submit their own maps to the County's existing maps so that other researchers can find them when they purchase the County map set and use them for reference. The text search function lets the user search all entered deed descriptions and has a feature that can be selected to display descriptions from the document on the map itself. This feature is what ultimately led me to my conclusion about the land's location because it revealed that several nearby parcels included "Aaron's branch" as a description of the portion of the Little Otter River on which they were located. Given that Aaron Burleson was the only Aaron recorded on a grant/deed in the years prior to those mentioning the name, and given the proximity of these nearby parcels to other known anchor points in the map, I concluded that Aaron's land must have been the Aaron they were referring to. Placing his parcel on that branch also made it fit perfectly to the grant's description. This location also fits perfectly with the description of John Phelps's land in relation to Aaron's and the various branches of the river.

We also discovered that Jonathan Burleson's (Aaron's father) land was listed as a boundary line in a grant recorded to Nathaniel Williams in 1773, and the suggested location in the Deed Mapper Bedford Co Map Set seemed accurate based on surrounding grants and other

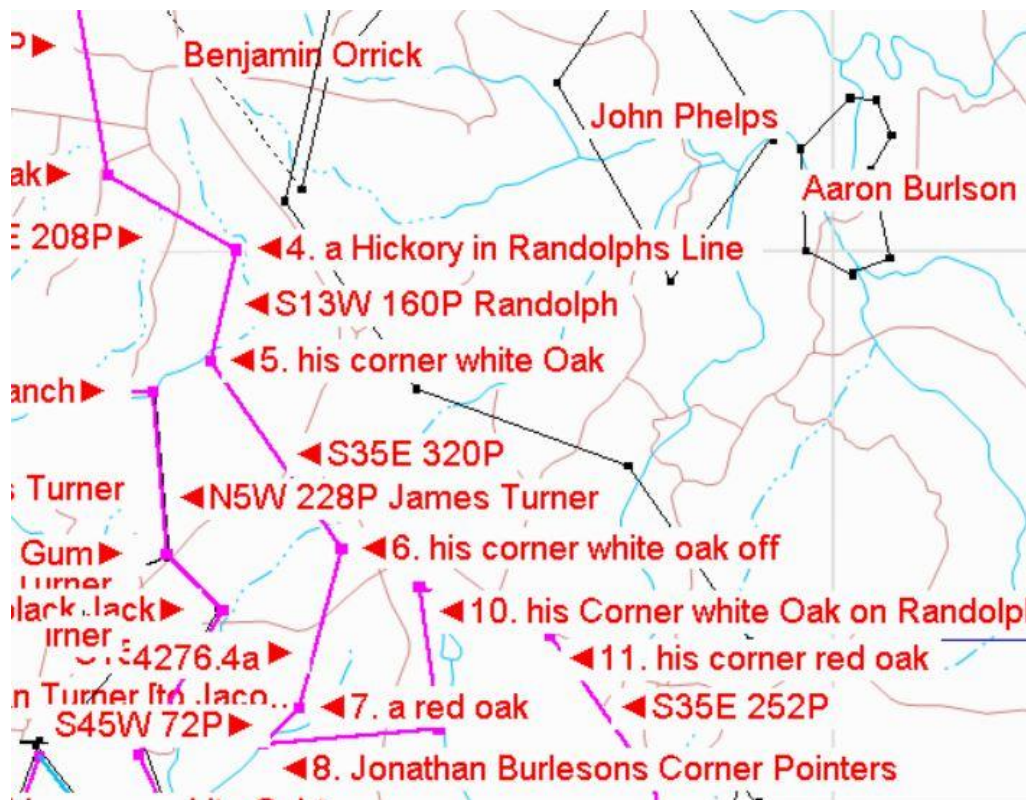


Image e) a screenshot from Deed Mapper showing the 1773 reference to Jonathan Burleson's property as a descriptor in Nathaniel Williams's boundary lines just to the southwest of Aaron's property

known locations. Future work that I would like to do to help prove my hypotheses on these two men's land locations is to try to work backwards from modern owners back to Jonathan and Aaron through chains of titles when I am able to return to the Bedford Co Registrar of Deeds in the coming months.

Deed Mapper has proven to be a valuable resource and I look forward to using it to further my other genealogical research endeavors in the future, so that I can see the world from the path those before me pioneered. If you are interested in using any of these resources in your own research and have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at sarah.a.burleson@gmail.com or on the Cousining Facebook page.

Other related images: image f) a to-scale map I created, showing where I believe the lands were located, overlaid on modern Google map of the area

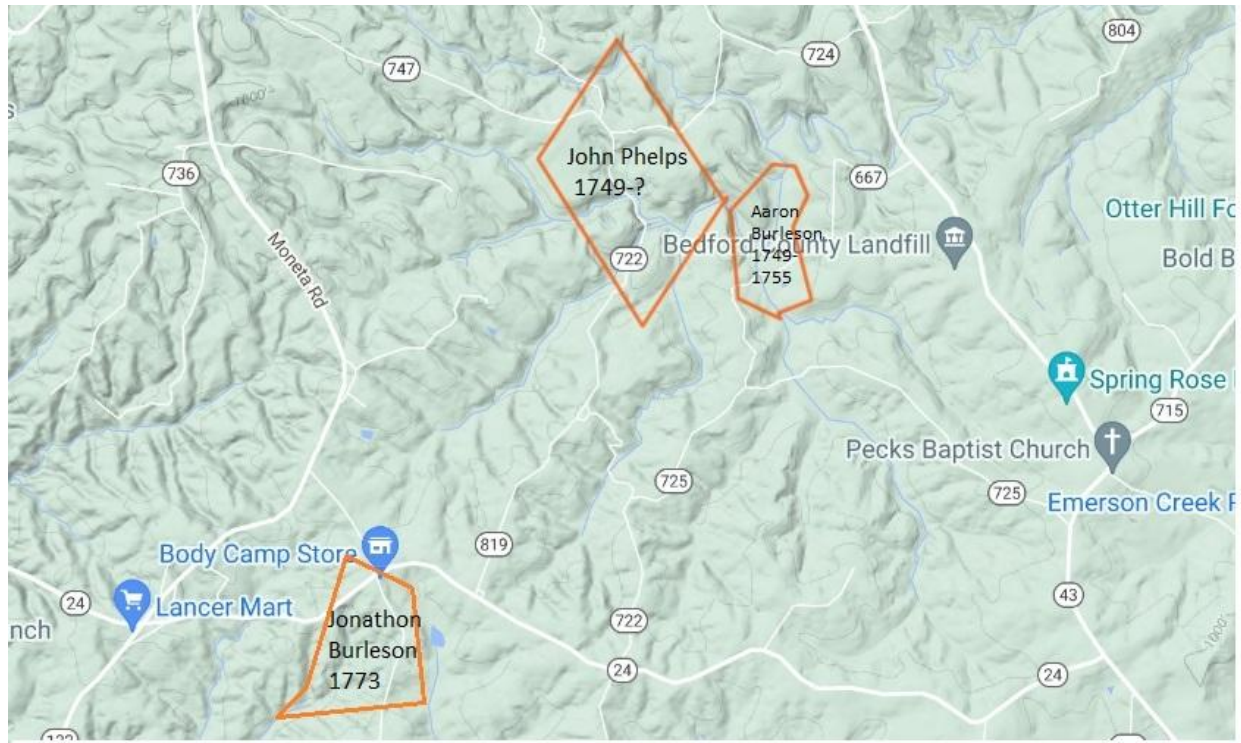


Image g) Photo of descendants of Aaron Burleson visiting the proposed location of the land that he settled in his early adult years.



About Me:

My family and I live in Orange Co, VA, on the farm on which I was raised. The Gower family includes my husband Matt, step-daughter Sarah Elizabeth(11), daughter Melanie(6) and son James(3). Growing up, I was very interested in finding out about our family history. Interest in genealogy partly inspired my pursuit of a BS and MS in Plant Breeding and Genetics at Virginia Tech. For 6 years I worked in a career in Crop Improvement through Soybean Breeding in North Carolina, which is where I met my husband. In 2017, we moved back to VA to be close to my family after my dad suffered a debilitating stroke. Now I am a homemaker, homeschool my children and enjoy hobbies including sewing, crafting, baking and genealogy.

My dad's was the first generation of my Burleson branch to permanently settle away from the "Big Ivy" area. Through Linda Burleson and Y-DNA testing of my dad, I have learned that we descend from Edward Burlison (born ~1780s) of Big Ivy, NC who, interestingly, was biologically a Sisco and therefore only a Burleson in name.

