



Extended History of Collection M-017 – Burr, Aaron

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1.0 Aaron Burr, Jr. (1756-1836) - was an American aristocrat, military officer, brilliant civil lawyer, legislator, attorney general and the third Vice President of the United States under President Thomas Jefferson. After serving as a Army officer in the Revolutionary War Burr became a successful lawyer and politician. He was elected to the New York Assembly (1784/85, 1798/99), was appointed NY Attorney General (1789-1791), a US Senator from NY (1791-1797), and Vice President of the United States (1801-1805). In 1804, Burr killed his political rival **Alexander Hamilton** in a duel. He was never tried for the illegal duel, with all charges eventually dropped. Hamilton's death ended Burr's political career and he never held office again. Burr went west seeking new economic and political opportunities. He was eventually arrested on charges of treason in 1807 but subsequently acquitted. His western schemes left him with large debts and many influential enemies. In a final quest for big opportunities, he left the US for Europe in 1808, remaining overseas until 1812. He returned to the US to practice law in NY City. There he spent the remainder of his long life (1812 -1836).

During the time this letter was written to **Samuel Miles Hopkins**, Burr was a renowned civil lawyer known for taking “hopeless” cases and turning them into major legal victories. It is assumed that in 1819 Burr, was trying to retrieve legal records from from past cases in which he may have had an interest, including those associated with the NY Court of Chancery, The years covered by the request were 1798 to 1803. He must have assumed that Mr. Hopkins, as an involved attorney and a reporter of the court, might be of assistance and allow Burr to review Hopkin's personal legal registers.

2.0 Samuel Miles Hopkins (1772-1837) was a US Representative from New York. Born in Salem, CN, he graduated from Yale in 1791, studied law, was admitted to the bar and commenced practice in Genesee County in 1793. He moved to NY City in 1794. Hopkins was elected as a Federalist to the Thirteenth Congress (1813-1815). He would become a member of the New York State Assembly in 1820-21, and of the NY State Senate in 1822. From 1813 to 1826, he was **Reporter of the New York Court of Chancery**. He was a judge of the State circuit court 1832 to 1836. He died in 1837.

3.0 The New York Court of Chancery (often called the Court of Equity) was established in 1701 and had jurisdiction on cases of equity in the state until 1847. The Chancellor of New York, was the highest judicial officer in the state.

No specific record of the Mr. Rogers, or Colonel Henry mentioned in the letter have been uncovered.



4.0 Augustine James Frederick Prevost (aka A.J. Frederick Prevost) (1766?-Oct 2, 1842) - The **A.J.F. Prevost** mentioned in the Burr letter, was the youngest of the two sons of **Colonel James Mark Provost** (1736-1781) and **Theodosia Stillwell Bartow**. He was known as Frederick by his family.

For a short time, during the Revolution, the two boys, A.J. Frederick and his older brother **John Bartow Prevost** (Mar 6, 1766-1825), aged eleven and twelve, served under their father, as ensigns in the 60th Regiment in Georgia. However, they were soon returned to their mother in New Jersey so as to avoid their exposure to the dangerous southern climate.

In 1781 A.J. Frederick Prevost's father died while on duty in Jamaica. Aaron Burr married his mother Theodosia in 1782. He and his brother John, became Burr's well loved step-sons. Burr adopted them, helped raise them and provided legal training and services to both over the years. Both brothers served in Burr's law office.

A.J. Frederick. married twice, first to **Euphemia Hunt** (c 1770-Feb 7, 1808) and second to **Prudence Lockwood** (1795-1855). He had six daughters from his first marriage, and three daughters and a son from his second.

He moved to Pelham, Westchester County, NY on a property called "*Shrubbery*" in 1790 after just receiving it from Aaron Burr. He married his first wife Euphemia about 1790 and she died there in 1808. He married his second wife, Prudence, in October 30, 1813. The Prevost family lived in Pelham until 1817 when Frederick sold that home and moved to Cooperstown, NY. His four children with Prudence were born there. About 1825 the family bought a sheep farm in Westford, NY and in 1834 they moved west to Morgan County, IL, near Jacksonville. They lived in a log cabin just south of present-day Concord, IL, on a 250 acre farm. A.J. Frederick Prevost died in 1842 and Prudence Prevost in 1855.

5.0 Colonel James Mark Prevost (1736-1781) - As already mentioned James Mark Prevost was the first husband of Theodosia Stillwell Bartow. He was born in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1756 he was recruited as an officer (along with his two brothers) by the British Army, into a new regiment, the Royal American, 60th Regiment of Foot being formed from Swiss and German settlers in the colonies at the start of the French and Indian War (1756-1763). He was wounded during the failed British attack on Fort Ticonderoga in 1758. After his marriage to Theodosia in 1763, he lived with her and their growing family as a country gentleman on half pay in Paramus NJ. At the outbreak of the American Revolution Prevost returned to active duty in the British Army. He ended up fighting the rebels in Florida and Georgia during the British southern campaign.



During the campaign James Mark served under his older brother **Major General Augustine Prevost** (1723-1786). Augustine Prevost was then the British governor of East Florida and led the successful British defense of Savannah in 1779 against the besieging American and French forces under French Admiral Comte d'Estaing.

In 1778, during the British occupation of Georgia Prevost served as governor of the state. James Mark's most outstanding military exploit was his brilliant victory over American forces at the **Battle of Briar Creek**, GA, March 3, 1779. He was later transferred to Jamaica and died there in 1781. His death allowed Theodosia and Aaron Burr to marry the next year.

6.0 Theodosia Stillwell Bartow Prevost-Burr (Oct/Nov, 1746-May 18, 1794) –

Theodosia was the daughter of **Ann Sands Stillwell** and **Theodosius Bartow**, an attorney. Her father died several weeks before she was born. She was raised for five years by her mother who then married her step father **Captain Philip de Visme**. Theodosia was well tutored. She learnt fluent French, and translating French political treatises.

At seventeen, Theodosia married Lt Col. James Mark Prevost a British officer of Swiss heritage. They had five children: three daughters and two sons – John Bartow and Augustine James Frederick Prevost (A.J.F). Despite her husband being an officer in the British Army, Theodosia was a patriot.

Theodosia and her home, the **Hermitage**, became a gathering-place for American officers. When Washington was in the area after the Battle of Monmouth, she invited him to stay there. He accepted and in July 1778 briefly utilized the **Hermitage** as his headquarters. Other visitors included General Charles Lee, James Monroe, Lafayette and Aaron Burr. This was while the rebel military was operating around Paramus, NJ.

Theodosia first met Burr in August 1778. They became friends and Burr began regularly visiting her. By November 1778 his constant visits to the Hermitage provoked gossip. They gradually fell in love, and by 1780 were openly lovers. Theodosia learned in December, 1781 that her husband had died in Jamaica. She and Burr were married on July 2, 1782 at the Hermitage.

Theodosia was ten years older than the 25 year old Burr, not very good looking, but was extremely intelligent, well read and a women of the world. She captivated Burr. They had an *"intellectual partnership"* and wrote letters to each other notable for their candor.



Theodosia often disagreed with her husband's views, "*never shy to point out his flaws*", and Burr treated her as he would any other intelligent person, giving her political books and newspapers that he thought she would enjoy. Theodosia's keen sense of observation and adeptness at "*judging Burr's peers on the national scene*" made her a crucial ally in his political career.

They both had a "*passionate commitment to education*" and Theodosia educated their daughter, the famous **Theodosia Bartow Burr- Alston** (1783-1813), as any wealthy male child would have been educated. **(See Mercantile Library Special Collection Letter M-18)**. Burr handled more and more of this as his wife's health deteriorated. By 1792 she was in regular pain. She died on May 28, 1794. Burr later wrote that she was "*the best woman and finest lady he had ever known*". It has been conjectured that she was a very positive influence on Burr and if she had lived he might have avoided some of his later difficulties. They did have a happy marriage.

7.0 Summary – The story behind this simple 1819 letter concerning Aaron Burr's inquiry about past legal records, while in his sixty third year, reminds us of Burr's amazing eighty year life and his incredible and controversial career. A casual reference to a case involving his stepson Augustine James Frederick Prevost also opens the door to his first wife, his daughter, the larger Prevost British military family and ultimately their significant impact on Burr's life and the history of the United States and Canada.

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