

# Maj. Nicholas "BigBee" PERKINS, III

**Maj. Nicholas (III) "BigBee" PERKINS** was born 14 Mar 1779. He died 6 Jan 1848 in TN.

Maj. Nicholas Perkins once lived in "Meeting of the Waters", the home where Ridley Wills, II now lives in Franklin County, TN.

"History of Belle Meade" by Ridley Wills, II. William Giles Harding had many important visitors to Belle Meade. In 1843, Gen. Edmund Pendleton Gaines, US Mary, and Gen. Robert Patterson of Philadelphia, spent a day there. "Gaines may have told General Harding the story of the roles he and Harding's kinsman, Nicholas ("BigBee") Perkins, of Williamson County, played in the capture of Aaron Burr in the Mississippi Territory in 1807. Although that took place the year before Harding was born, he had grown up hearing the story."

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Nicholas arrested Vice President Aaron Burr:

The story following Vice President Aaron Burr's killing of Alexander Hamilton in a duel is very interesting. Burr had journeyed to Nashville, TN, and to Mississippi. While in MS, a judge wanted to hold Burr for questioning. There were rumors that he was to be charged with treason for fermenting a war with Mexico. "Fearing that he would not receive fair treatment, Burr fled to the Mississippi wilderness with his friend Chester Ashley. His only hope was to find a port with a ship that would take him to Europe. While seeking food and drink the exhausted fugitive was spotted by an army patrol. He was arrested and detained at Fort Stoddard."

"Nicholas Perkins, who had first identified Burr, volunteered to take him to Washington D. C. where his was to stand trial for treason. Perkins' was given \$3,300.00 in reward money and hoped to receive more after his party of eight guards and one prisoner finished their thousand-mile trek."

A COMPLETE ACCOUNT of Nicholas Perkins' arrest of Aaron Burr:

Albert James Pickett: HISTORY OF ALABAMA.

(Kindly contributed by William C. Bell)

CHAPTER XXXIII. THE ARREST OF AARON BURR IN ALABAMA.

During a cold night in February, two young men--Nicholas PERKINS, a lawyer, and Thomas Malone, clerk of the court--were sitting in their cabin, in the village of Wakefield, Washington county, Alabama. Before them was a backgammon board, and they were absorbed in the playing of that game. The hour was ten o'clock. The distant tramp of horses arrested their attention. Two travellers presently rode up to the door, one of whom inquired for the tavern. It was pointed out to him, and then he asked the road to Colonel Hinson's. Perkins informed him that the route lay over difficult paths, the place was seven miles distant, and a dangerous creek intervened. The fire, being replenished with pine, now threw a light in the face of the traveller who pronounced these questions. His countenance appeared to PERKINS exceedingly interesting. His eyes sparkled like diamonds, while he sat upon his splendid horse, caparisoned with a fine saddle and new hilters. His dress was that of a plain farmer, but beneath his coarse pantaloons protruded a pair of exquisitely shaped boots. His striking features, with the strange mixture of his apparel, aroused the suspicions of PERKINS, and, no sooner had the two travelers ridden from the door, then he said to Malone, with the most earnest gesticulation, "That is Aaron Burr. I have read a description of him in the proclamation. I cannot be mistaken. Let us follow him to Hinson's, and take measures for his arrest." Malone declined to accompany him, remonstrating, at the same time, upon the folly of pursuing a traveler, at such a late hour of the night, and, upon the basis of the merest conjecture. Perkins now rushed to the cabin of Theodore Brightwell, the sheriff, and awoke him. Feb 18 1807: Presently these men were seen riding off with a rapid pace. The night was bitten cold, and the pine trees of the forest sadly moaned.

The travelers strangely made their way to the residence of Hinson, where they arrived about half past eleven o'clock. The moon had just risen, and enabled the lady of the house, whose husband was absent, to see that they were travelers, by their saddle-bags and tin cups, as she timidly peered through a small window. She made no answer to their "halloo," but quietly closed the window. The strangers alighted and went into the kitchen, where a cheerful fire was yet burning. PERKINS and the sheriff soon came in sight of the house. The former, recollecting that he had already been seen at Wakefield, thought it polite to remain in the woods, until Brightwell could go in the house, make the necessary discoveries, and return to him. Mrs. Hinson was a relative of the sheriff, and, recognizing his voice, felt relieved by his appearance from the fears she had felt in consequence of the strangers having come at such a late hour of the night. Brightwell repaired to the kitchen and discovered one of these men sitting by the fire,

with his head down, while a handkerchief partially concealed his face. His companion had gone to the stable to assist a negro in taking care of the horses. It was not long before they went into the main building, where the hostess had hastily prepared supper. While the elder traveler was eating, he engaged her in a sprightly conversation, in which he often thanked her for her kindness. At the same time he cast the keenest glances at the sheriff, who stood before the fire, evidently with the endeavor to read his thoughts and intentions. After he had finished his supper he arose from the table, bowed to the lady, walked back to the kitchen and took his seat by the fire. Mrs. Hinson then turned to his companion, and said, "Have I not, sir, the honor of entertaining Colonel Burr, the gentleman who has just walked out?" He gave her no answer, but rose from the table, much embarrassed, and also repaired to the kitchen. Her question had been prompted by Brightwell. Feb 19 1807: In the morning, after breakfast, the elder traveler sought an interview with the lady, took occasion again to thank her for the hospitable attentions, regretted the absence of her husband, inquired the route to Pensacola, and rode off with his companion.

PERKINS remained at his post in the woods, shivering with cold, and wondering why Brightwell did not return to him. His patience at length became exhausted, and, believing the person he was pursuing to be really Burr, he mounted his horse, and rode rapidly to the house of Joseph Bates, Sr., at Nannahubba Bluff. Procuring from that gentleman a negro and a canoe, he paddled down the river, and arrived at Fort Stoddart at the breaking of day. Rushing into the fort, and acquainting Captain Edward P. Gaines with his suspicions, the latter made instant preparations to take the road. After a hasty breakfast, about the rising of the sun, Gaines, placing himself at the head of a file of mounted soldiers, rode off with Perkins. About nine o'clock that morning they met the two mysterious travelers, on the descent of a hill, near a wolf pen, at the distance of two miles from the residence of Hinson. The following conversation immediately ensued:

Gaines--I presume, sir, I have the honor of addressing Colonel Burr.

Stranger--I am a traveler in the country, and do not recognize your right to ask such a question.

Gaines--I arrest you at the instance of the Federal Government.

Stranger--By what authority do you arrest a traveler upon the highway, on his own private business?

Gaines--I am an officer of the army. I hold in my hands the proclamations of the President and the Governor, directing your arrest.

Stranger--You are a young man, and may not be aware of the responsibilities which result from arresting travelers.

Gaines--I am aware of the responsibilities, but I know my duty.

The stranger now became exceedingly animated, and with much eloquence and force denounced these proclamations as documents which had emanated in malevolent feeling, without any just foundation, and endeavored again to frighten the young officer from discharging his duty, by ingeniously animadverting upon the great liabilities which he was about to assume. But Gaines sternly replied, "My mind is made up. You must accompany me to Fort Stoddart, where you shall be treated with all the respect due the ex-Vice-President of the United States, so long as you make no attempt to escape from me." The stranger for a moment gazed at him with earnestness, apparently surprised at the unusual firmness which the young officer exhibited. He then assented, by a gentle motion of his head, wheeled his horse around, and took the road to the fort, riding by the side of the captain. His traveling companion rode back toward Wakefield with Brightwell, the sheriff, who was in company with the two travelers when they were met by Gaines.\*

\* It remains a mystery to this day why Brightwell did not keep his promise with PERKINS, and I can only account for it by supposing that he became fascinated with Colonel Burr, was sorry that he had sought to arrest him, and was now conducting him to Mrs. Carson's ferry, upon the Tombigby, on the route to Pensacola. Burr had seen Colonel Hinson at Natchez, who had invited him to his house should he ever pass that way. When he escaped from Natchez he was secreted, from time to time, at the houses of his friends, and he was hastening to Hinson's with whom he had intended to pass a week. But when he found him absent, and himself discovered by Brightwell, who probably informed him of the intentions of Perkins, he determined to fly to Pensacola, and there take a ship for Europe. He intended to enlist wealthy and influential persons, both in England and France, in the scheme of making the conquest of the North American Spanish possessions, now that he had so signally failed to accomplish it in the United States.

The party reached the fort in the evening, and Colonel Burr, being conducted to his room, took his dinner alone.

Late in the night, he heard a groan in an adjoining room. He arose from a table, at which he was reading, opened the door, entered the room, and approached the bedside of Geo. S. Gaines, the brother of the commandant, who was sick. He was kind to the sufferer, felt of his pulse, said he had traveled much and knew something of medicine, and offered his services. They now entered into an agreeable conversation. Burr asked the Choctaw factor many questions about the Indians and their commerce. The next day he appeared at the dinner table, and was introduced to the wife of the commandant, who was the daughter of Judge Harry Toulmin. In the evening, he played chess with that accomplished lady, and, during his confinement at the fort, was often her competitor in that intricate game. Every night he sought the company of the invalid, who became exceedingly attached to him, and who felt deep regret on account of the downfall of so interesting and so distinguished a character. Often and often did the good heart of George S. Gaines grieve over the adversities and trials of this remarkable man, as they discoursed together. In all their conversations, maintained every night, the impenetrable Burr never once alluded to the designs which he had failed to carry out, to his present arrest, or to his future plans.

About the period of March 6 1807: Arriving at the Boat Yard, Burr disembarked and was delivered to the guard which was so long to be with him in dangers and fatigues. It consisted of Colonel Nicholas Perkins, of Tennessee, who had, as we have seen, been the cause of his arrest, Thomas Malone, formerly a clerk About the in the land office at Raleigh, North Carolina, but who, period of at this period, was a clerk of the court of Washington county, Alabama, Henry B. Slade, of North Carolina, John Mills, a native of Alabama, John Henry, of Tennessee, two brothers, named McCormack, of Kentucky, and two federal soldiers. With the exception of the two soldiers, Perkins had chosen these men on account of the confidence which he reposed in their honor, energy and fidelity. He had been placed over them by Captain Gaines, who entertained a high opinion of his bravery and capacity. Perkins took his men aside and obtained from them the most solemn pledge that they would not suffer the prisoner to influence them in any manner in his behalf; to avoid which, they promised to converse as little as possible with him upon the whole route to Washington. The character of Burr for making strong impressions in his favor upon the human mind was well known to Perkins.

When the prisoner fled from the Natchez settlements he assumed a disguised dress. He was still attired in it. It consisted of coarse pantaloons, made of homespun of a copperas dye, and a roundabout of inferior drab cloth, while his hat was a flapping, wide-brimmed beaver, which had in times past been white, but now presented a variety of dingy colors. When the guard was ready to depart he mounted the same elegant horse which he rode when arrested. He bestrode him most gracefully flashed his large dark eyes upon the many bystanders, audibly bade them farewell, and departed.\* Perkins and his men were well provided with large pistols, which they carried in holsters, while the two soldiers had muskets. They left the Boat Yard, a quarter of a mile from which the terrible massacre of Fort Mims afterwards occurred, and, pursuing the Indian path, encamped the first night in the lower part of the present county of Monroe. The only tent taken along was pitched for Burr, and under it he lay the first night by large fires, which threw a glare over the dismal woods. All night his ears were saluted with the fierce and disagreeable howling of wolves. In the wilds of Alabama, in a small tent, reposed this remarkable man, surrounded by a guard, and without a solitary friend or congenial spirit. He was a prisoner of the United States, for whose liberties he had fought; and an exile from New York, whose statutes and institutions bore the impress of his mind. Death had deprived him of his accomplished wife, his only child was on the distant coast of Carolina, his professional pursuits were abandoned, his fortune swept from him, the magnificent scheme of the conquest of Mexico defeated, and he was harassed from one end of the Union to the other. All these things were sufficient to weigh down an ordinary being and hurry him to the grave. Burr, however, was no common man. In the morning he rose with a cheerful face, and fell into traveling order, along with the taciturn and watchful persons who had charge of him.

\* Many persons who saw Burr in Alabama have told me that his eyes were peculiarly brilliant, and, to use the comparison of Malone, "they looked like stars."

1807: Although guarded with vigilance, he was treated with respect and kindness, and his few wants were gratified. The trail, like all Indian highways, was narrow, which required the guard to march in single file, with Burr in the middle of the line. The route lay about eight miles south of the present city of Montgomery, then an Indian town called Econchate.\* Passing by the residence of "Old Milly," who, as we have seen, lived upon the creek in Montgomery county, which still bears her name, Perkins employed her husband, a mulatto named Evans, to conduct the guard across Line Creek, Cubahatchee and Calabee, all of which they were forced to swim. It was a perilous and fatiguing march, and for days the rain descended in chilling torrents upon these unsheltered horsemen, collecting in deep and rapid rivulets at every point. Hundreds of Indians, too, thronged the trail, and the party might have been killed in one moment. But the fearless Perkins bore on his distinguished prisoner, amid angry elements and human foes. In the journey through Alabama the guard always slept in the woods, near swamps of reed, upon which the belled and hobbled horses fed during the night. After breakfast, it was their custom again to mount their horses and march on, with a silence which was sometimes broken by a remark about the weather, the creeks or the Indians. Burr

sat firmly in the saddle, was always on the alert, and was a most excellent rider. Although drenched for hours with cold and clammy rain, and at night extended upon a thin pallet, on the bare ground, after having accomplished a ride of forty miles each day, yet, in the whole distance to Richmond, this remarkable man was never heard to complain that he was sick, or even fatigued. At the Chattahoochie was a crossing place, owned by an Indian named Marshall, where the effects of the expedition were carried over the river in canoes, by the sides of which the horses swam. In this manner they passed the Flint and Ockmulgee. Arriving at Fort Wilkinson, on the Oconee, Perkins entered the first ferry-boat which he had seen upon the whole route, and, a few miles beyond the river, was sheltered by the first roof--a house of entertainment, kept by one Bevin.

\* Econchate means Red Ground.

March 1807: While breakfast was in a state of preparation, and the guard were quietly sitting before a large fire, the publican began a series of questions; and learning that the party were from the "Bigby settlement," he immediately fell upon the fruitful theme of "Aaron Burr, the traitor." He asked if he had not been arrested--if he was not a very bad man--and if every one was not afraid of him. Perkins and the rest of the guard, much annoyed and embarrassed, hung down their heads, and made no reply. Burr, who was sitting in a corner near the fire, majestically raised his head, and flashing his fiery eye upon Bevin, said:

"I am Aaron Burr; what is it you want with me?"

Struck with the keenness of his look, the solemnity of his voice, and the dignity of his manner, Bevin stood aghast, and trembled like a leaf. He asked not another question of the guard, but quietly moved about the house, offering the most obsequious attentions.

When Perkins reached the confines of South Carolina, he watched the prisoner more closely than ever, for in this State lived Colonel Joseph Alston--a man of talents and influence, afterwards governor--who had married the only daughter, and, indeed, the only child of Burr. Afraid that the prisoner would be rescued at some point in this State, he exhorted his men to renewed vigilance. Before entering the town, in which is situated the Court House of Chester District, South Carolina, he made a halt, and placed two men in front of Burr, two behind, and two on either side of him. In this manner they passed near a tavern, at the Court House, where many persons were standing in front of the portico, while music and dancing were heard in the house. Seeing the collection of men so near him, Burr threw himself from his horse, and exclaimed in a loud voice, "I am Aaron Burr, under military arrest, and claim the protection of the civil authorities." Perkins, with several of the guard, immediately dismounted, and the former ordered the prisoner to remount. Burr, in a most defiant manner, said, "I will not!" Being unwilling to shoot him, Perkins threw down his pistols, both of which he held in his hands, and seizing Burr around the waist with the grasp of a tiger, threw him into his saddle. Thomas Malone caught the reins of the prison's horse, slipped them over his head, and led the animal rapidly on, while others whipped him up from behind. The astonished citizens saw a party enter their village with a prisoner, heard him appeal to them for protection in the most audible and imploring manner, saw armed men immediately surround him and thrust him again into his saddle, and then the whole party vanish from their presence, before they could recover from their confusion. The least timidity or hesitation on the part of Perkins would have lost him his prisoner, for the latter was still popular in South Carolina.

Mar. 30 1807: Far in the outskirts of the town the party halted. Burr was in a high state of excitement, and burst into a flood of tears. The kind-hearted Malone also wept, at seeing the low condition to which this conspicuous man was now reduced. The bold attempt to escape, and the irresolution of the people to whom he appealed, suddenly unmanned him. Perkins held a short consultation with some of his men, and sending Burr on the route in charge of the guard, with Malone in command, he went back to the village, and purchasing a gig overtook the party before night. Burr was placed in this vehicle and driven by Malone, escorted by the guard. Without further incident they arrived at Fredericksburg, where dispatches from Jefferson caused them to take Burr to Richmond. The ladies of the latter place vied with each other in contributing to the comforts of the distinguished ex-Vice-President, sending him fruit, wine, and a variety of fine apparel. Perkins and his men repaired to Washington, reported to the President, and returned to Alabama by the distant route of Tennessee.

Aaron Burr was arraigned for treason, and was tried and acquitted. He was then arraigned for misdemeanor, and was tried and acquitted. Thus ended the most expensive and extraordinary trial known to the country. A part of the time that he was in Richmond the Federal Government caused him to be confined in the upper story of the penitentiary, where he was permitted to enjoy the company of his daughter.

Sailing to Europe, Burr was at first treated with great distinction in England. The winter of 1809 found him in Edinburgh. Residing some time in Sweden and Germany, he at length arrived in France, where Bonaparte,

influenced by letters from America, conceived a prejudice against him so immovable that he refused him passports to leave the country. At length the Duke de Bassano procured him the necessary documents, when he sailed for America, and arrived at New York on the 8th of June, 1812. Here he engaged again in the lucrative practice of the law, living in dignified obscurity, if such a position could be assigned to a man of his notoriety. He died at Staten Island, on the 11th of September, 1836, at the advanced age of eighty. His body, attended by his relations and friends, was taken to Princeton, New Jersey, and interred among the graves of his ancestors."

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(Page 48)

Major NICHOLAS PERKINS died January 6, 1848, "one of our most distinguished citizens." [In William K. Wall's DESCENDANTS OF NICHOLAS PERKINS OF VIRGINIA, Ann Arbor, 1957, pages 126-127, it is noted that Major Perkins was born in Pittsylvania Co., Va., March 14, 1779; died Jan. 6, 1848; married Mary Harden Perkins (1794-1840), Jan. 28, 1808; father of eleven children. It was he who arrested Aaron Burr for treason in 1807. He was a first cousin of Colonel Nicholas Tate Perkins, also of Williamson County.]

Nicholas married **Mary Hardin PERKINS**, daughter of Lt. Thomas Hardin PERKINS and Mary Magdalena O'NEAL. Mary was born 1794. She died<sup>1</sup> 23 Apr 1840 in Williamson Co., Tn.

"Mary Harden PERKINS; died April 23, 1840; wife of Nicholas Perkins, Esq; member of Presbyterian Church; W.W.R." (Early Obituaries of Williamson County, TN)

They had the following children:

- 2 F i. **Mary Elizabeth PERKINS.**
- 3 F ii. **Sara Agatha PERKINS.**
- 4 F iii. **Margaret Ann PERKINS.**
- 5 M iv. **Nicholas Edwin (son of Nicholas & Mary) PERKINS.**
- 6 v. **(total of 11 children) PERKINS.**