

# Johann Christian Borges

*This chapter is updated from what is found in Windows – A Mormon Family (first edition). A recently discovered article by M. A. Schwalm has been included and the first part of the story from the first edition has been edited to include this sketch.*

A curious entry in the records for Norton, Bristol, Massachusetts lists an attempt by John Watters or Watterman to marry Hannah Newland. This John Watterman was most likely a Hessian mercenary. How he was recruited is not known, but he defected early upon arriving in the new world. The first German troupes arrived mid-1776 and we find him trying to get married to Hannah Newland as early as February in 1777.

Hannah Newland was expecting and she was not married. John Watterman was most likely the father. The Select men, or councilmen, of the city forbid this marriage after it was announced by the town cryer. It is not clear why. Whether it is because of Hannah's condition or the questionable status of John Watterman we do not know. We do know that Hannah Newland gave birth six months later. Hannah Newland gave birth to an illegitimate son at Norton, Bristol, Massachusetts on August 14, 1777. This son was named Benjamin Newland. The question arises whether she tried to marry John Watterman six months earlier because she was expecting and John Watterman was the father. In those days the honorable thing to do was to marry, or try to marry, a woman that was expecting the child of the father.

Hannah Newland was christened on May 10, 1758 at Norton, Bristol, Massachusetts the daughter of Antony and Patience Woodward Newland. The christening record can be found in the vital records of Norton. She later married John Christian Burgess, the subject of this chapter.

From a sketch by M. A. Schwalm,<sup>1</sup> Johann Christian Borges, was born March 6, and christened on March 7, 1754 in the village of Fischbach, part of Bad Schwalbach, then a part of Hessen-Cassel. His father was Johannes Borges, a resident of Fischbach and his mother was Catharina Magdalena Prebers Borges, formerly from the neighboring village of Ramschied. The sponsor was Johan Christian Knirch from Schwalbach. His paternal grandfather was Johan Heinrich Borges of Fischbach and his maternal grandfather was Johan Philip Prebers of Ranschied.

It is not known whether he enlisted or whether he was drafted, but he was shown as having been “on leave” from Company 3 of the Landgraf Regiment on the 1775 Muster. At that time he would have been 21 years old, and his military quarters were in the vicinity of Rheinfels/St. Goar. Fischbach is located about 25 kilometers from St. Goar.<sup>2</sup> The Landgraf Regiment, sometimes called Wutgenau was part of the Second Hessian Division, under the command of Lt. General von Knyphausen. The Regiment was ordered to Ritzebuettel, north of Bremen, where it was mustered on June 6, 1776. The troops then boarded ship and set sail for Portsmouth, England, arriving there on June 20, 1776. On June 28 the fleet once again set sail, arriving at Plymouth, England, on July 2, 1776. There the fleet, which was to make the trans-Atlantic crossing,

assembled. It was not until July 20, 1776 that the ocean crossing was finally begun.

Long Island came into view on October 16, and on the 20<sup>th</sup> the ships anchored in New York Harbor. Two days later, the troops were disembarked. Eventually they boarded small boats and were landed at New Rochelle, New York. By October 28, the several regiments, including Landgraf, had arrived in the vicinity of West Chester, New York. Preparations were begun to capture Fort Washington. The battle took place on November 16, 1776. It is not known what part Johann Christian played in that action.

Following the capture of Fort Washington, then renamed Fort Mifflin, most of the Hessian troops returned to New York City. On November 20, 1776 the Landgraf Regiment, together with five other Hessian Regiments and an equal number of British and Tory soldiers, embarked and set sail for Newport, Rhode Island. Four of the Hessian Regiments which included the Landgraf and Johann Christian Borge, together with some of the British troops, went ashore at Newport. There was only little opposition from the Colonists, many of whom had withdrawn earlier.

The 18 months which followed were generally spent in building and maintaining defenses and participating in various drills and maneuvers. The Colonists did, on several occasions, make attacks, but they were neither successful nor decisive. Food supplies for the Hessians during this time were generally adequate. Forays were conducted to the outer parts of Newport Island and to the mainland to secure firewood and seize cattle and horses. Relationships with the natives on the island, most of

whom were loyal to the King, were generally good. Nothing specific is known about Johann Christian during this time-frame. It is likely that he did participate in some of the forays, and it must be assumed that he was intrigued by what he observed about the countryside, and perhaps the Colonial women. Most likely he also secretly made friends among Colonial sympathizers.

The French, having joined the Colonists by treaty, launched a naval attack on the Newport shore batteries in early August 1778. In the meanwhile, the Colonial land forces occupied the northern part of the island. This was followed by a sea battle with a British naval force outside of the harbor on August 11, 1778. However, a bad storm caused the British Navy to break off action and sail away. The French fleet returned to the Newport area on August 20<sup>th</sup> for a short period of time, causing grave concern to the British and Hessian land forces occupying the area.

It was on the night of August 21, 1778 that three soldiers from the Landgraf Regiment deserted: two from Company 4: Peter Sippel<sup>3</sup> and Nickolaus Fait; and Johann Christian Borges from Company 3.

There is no indication that they traveled together. All three must have had a friend or friends who provided shelter as they moved across the island. There was also the matter of transportation across the sound to the mainland. Sippel settled in Providence and Borges in North Providence.

Nothing is known about Johann Christian's life over the next three years. It was during this period that the phonetic spelling of his name changed from Borges to Burgess. Subsequent Colonial military records indicate that he earned his living during that period as a weaver.

Supposedly the Rhode Island Regiment in which Johann Christian Burgess enlisted, was stationed in the vicinity of Fort Ticonderoga for several months. From this point, little about the life of Johann Christian and his family has been documented in the traditional manner. Rather, most of the data is based on bits and pieces of oral histories by various descendants which, in more recent years, have been put into writing. There are contradictions in these oral histories.<sup>4</sup>

One recorder of oral history of the Burgess Clan claims that Jabez Newland, a brother of Hannah Newland, served in the same Rhode Island Regiment in which Johann Christian Burgess served. This Jabez Newland is reported to also live in North Providence, Rhode Island,<sup>5</sup> and it was he who introduced Johann Christian to Hannah. Johann Christian and Hannah supposedly married there in 1786. A check of the Rhode Island Archives indicates that Jabez did indeed serve earlier for a term of one year and that he also had military service in Massachusetts. However, he does not appear on the 1782 muster of the Rhode Island Regiment.

Following the marriage of Johann Christian and Hannah they settled in the area that was then northern Washington County, New York, now the town of Bolton, Warren County, New York. One wonders if Christian was attracted to the area as a result of having done military service at Fort Ticonderoga.

Hannah Newland apparently brought into the marriage her illegitimate son, Benjamin Newland, and whom she called her brother. As far as is known, her children, along with Johann Christian Burgess, referred to Benjamin as “Uncle Benjamin” rather than as a stepbrother.

The 1799 Assessment Roll for the Town of Bolton lists Christian Burgess as owning a house and farm. The value of his real estate was shown as \$67 and the value of his personal property as \$30. The amount of his tax due was 9 cents.

The following children were most likely born in or near the village of Bolton on the northwestern shore of Lake George: Hannah; John Christian, Jr.; Frederick; William; Phillip; Lemira; Sarah Ann; and Martin.

Hannah Burgess, the first child, was born about 1786. John Christian Burgess, Jr., the second child, was born January 11, 1789. Frederick Burgess, the third child, was born about 1792/1793. William Burgess, the fourth child, was born May 21, 1794. Phillip Burgess, the fifth child, was born about 1796. Lemira Burgess, the sixth child, was born about 1798 (one source states her place of birth as Putnam, New York, on the west side of Lake Ticonderoga near its southern end. The fact that Johann Christian Burgess appears on the 1799 Bolton Tax Assessment list would confirm that Putnam was not her place of birth – rather she too was likely born in Bolton). Sarah Ann Burgess, the seventh child, was born about 1800. Martin Burgess, the eighth child, was born in September of 1802.

One story which has circulated is that Johan Christian Burgess was killed by a falling tree in 1806. If this is factual, (he does not appear on any subsequent census), then his widow Hannah would have been left with a sizeable family to support: six children ranging in age from 4 to about 14 – assuming that the two older children, Hannah and John Christian, Jr., would have been out on their own. Oral history says that son William, as a young man, worked for his stepfather, Geduthan Dickson. This

would indicate that Hannah had remarried.

It is most perplexing and discouraging that no further data has surfaced in the records of Washington/Warren Counties of New York which would reflect on the immediate family of Johann Christian and Hannah Burgess after 1800. A look at the records for Geduthan Dickson may indicate what happened to the family. Further, it is sad that the passing of Johann Christian Burgess and his wife Hannah have not been documented, nor have their graves been located.

Johann Christian Burgess was the progenitor of a great number of descendants in this new nation – many of whom became early pioneers west of the Mississippi, and extending well into the Rocky Mountains and Northwest. Several of his descendants have left impressive footprints on the sands of time.

William Burgess, born May 21, 1794, together with his sons: Harrison, Horace, and William, Jr., joined the Mormon movement in 1833. They took their entire families to the Mormon Settlement in Kirtland, Ohio. William Burgess, Sr., and William Burgess, Jr., arrived in Utah with the Brigham Young Company number 22 in September of 1848. Harrison moved to Iowa where for some years he operated a service to help later Mormon pioneers on their trek to Utah. Horace died of cholera in 1849 at Winter Quarters, Nebraska.

Another descendant of the Hessian and later Colonial soldier who has gained significant posture in early Americana was Andrew Burgess. He was the eleventh and last child of John Christian Burgess, Jr., having been born January 16, 1837 in Hulett (likely at nearby Dresden or Dresden Landing), then Warren County, New York. It is

presumed that early on in his life he met another young man, Matthew Brady, born circa 1829, also in Warren County, New York, who became the famous photographer of many Civil War battle scenes and was originally credited with several well known portraits of Lincoln.

Andrew Burgess became the Sunday shooting partner of Brady and eventually the owner of the Brady Gallery in Washington. There is evidence that Andrew actually took the famous portrait of Lincoln and his son Tad, as well as the portrait of Lincoln which is found on the five-dollar bill and on the three-cent postage stamp issued in 1923.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, the State Department requested that Brady send Andrew to Texas and Mexico City, supposedly to photograph any evidence of the presence of French troops in Mexico. It may account for the Maximilian Plate in the Brady Collection. Data in the Library of Congress reveals that Andrew Burgess was assigned to cover the December 22, 1870 Eclipse (Syracuse, Sicily) along with Professors Simon Newcomb, Asaph Hall and J. R. Eastman of the U. S. Naval Observatory. After photographing the eclipse, Andrew came down with "Roman Fever" while touring Prussia, and did not return home until April 10, 1871.

On October 25, 1871 he married Eudora Tiffany in the First Presbyterian Church at Owego, New York. Her parents, Mr. And Mrs. Austin F. Tiffany, witnessed the wedding. Eudora was the granddaughter of Charles Lewis Tiffany, founder of the famous Tiffany jewelry firm of New York City.

During some of the intervening years Andrew actually owned the Brady Gallery as Brady "fell on hard times." In 1875 Burgess is listed in the Washington DC business

directory as “Successor to Brady.” However, at that time Andrew was occupying most of his efforts inventing and patenting numerous improvements in the firing mechanisms of various guns and rifles, including the Marlin, Colt, Burgess and Kennedy. By 1893 he had established the Burgess Gun Company at Buffalo.

A reoccurrence of the “Roman Fever” left Andrew with ailing health, and in 1899 he sold the Burgess Gun Company to Winchester and retired to his winter floating workshop at St. Augustine, Florida. He died December 18, 1908 at St. Augustine, Florida and was buried at Owego, New York. He was survived by his wife; two brothers, Hiram from Los Angeles and Lewis of St. Augustine; a sister, Mrs. Shear of Goodland, Indiana, and another sister, Mrs. Hulett of St. Augustine.

1. This story is based on a paper compiled by M. A. Schwalm who states that the inspiration to do it originated with an inquiry from Elmer H. Burgess (since deceased) dated April 16, 1986; and from Barbara Williams, both of whom supplied much information over the past ten years. Elmer was a direct descendant of John Christian Burgess, Jr., and Barbara is a direct descendant of William Burgess, the fourth child of the Hessian. Elfriede and Henry Retzer supplied valuable translation services of German church records and German geography.
2. *Hessische Truppen im Amerikanischen Unabhaengigkeitskrieg*, Inge Auerbach and Otto Froehlich, Marburg 1976. This lists the surname as Johann Christian Borries. Most likely a transcription error in copying his surname from the longhand

military roster to the computer files.

3. *Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association, Inc.*, Vol. 2. No. 3, 1983, page 12.
4. To indicate the degree of conflict in the oral histories of the descendants, there appeared on the internet a statement that the Burgess family was of Scotch-Irish-English descent, and while not arriving on the Mayflower, it settled in New England very early. Another that Grandpa's father or grandfather was a drummer boy for George Washington.
5. North Bristol, Massachusetts is about 20 mile northeast of North Providence, Rhode Island.