

## 2. The Arbuckles

By

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The Scots link of our family is through my great-grandmother, Florence L. Arbuckle (Mammy Dennis). A few decades ago, I was contacted by Floy Arbuckle Gruen, a distant relative who lived in Missouri. For many years, Floy had organized reunions of the Arbuckle clan, and she invited us to join the next one in Missouri. Aunt Seabay went with us, and it was there that she was reunited with Freddie Arbuckle, her first cousin, whom she hadn't seen in quite a while. Fred Bracken Arbuckle was the son of Zibe William Arbuckle, the youngest of three brothers of Florence Arbuckle, Seabay's mother. I had never met Freddie, and my first glimpse of him was when he opened the motel room door and threw his cap all the way across the room to land perfectly on a coat rack in the corner. He reminded me very much of Seabay's brother, Uncle Zibe Dennis, Susie Winters' father. We attended two more of these reunions, one in Hartford, Kentucky and another near Louisville.



Fred Bracken Arbuckle and his cousin Juanita Seabay (Dennis) Jackson

In the early 1900s, Floy Arbuckle's father, Leslie Logan Arbuckle, and an older relative, Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle (1829-1915), compiled a history of the Arbuckle family that Floy and her brother, Willis, annotated up to 1976. (1) The authors said that Arbuckle or Arbuckel was a place in Lanark County in the lowlands of Scotland, one county to the southwest of Edinburgh. Apparently, it no longer exists by that name.

The Arbuckle surname has been the subject of conjecture over the years. An explanation of the Arbuckle name appeared in a 1934 newspaper article:

King Malcolm the Grim, hero of North Britain, gave the name Ar-Buckle to his son, James the Grim in recognition of his knightly accomplishments. It was said, "James the Grim could cut a

swath with his battleaxe, as a plowman could with his mower.” Because he could buckle up his armor quicker than any of the king’s knights, Buckle, with the Pictish prefix of nobility, Ar, gives us Arbuckle. . .” (2)

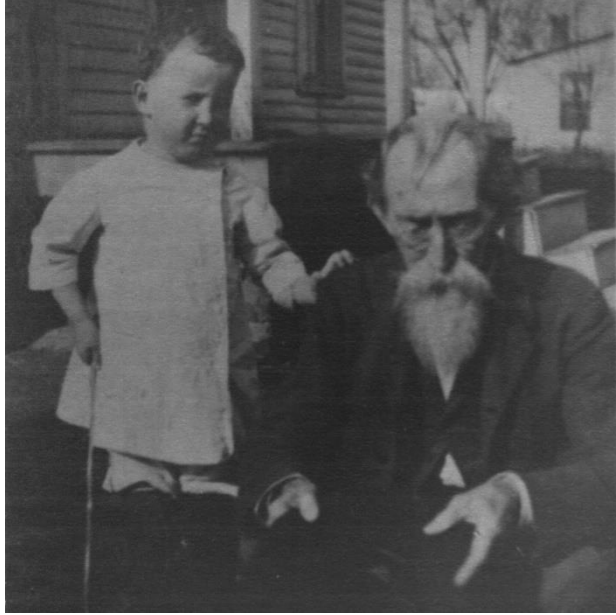
Early appearances of the name were noted:

The surname Arbuckle was first found in Lanarkshire, a former county in the central Strathclyde region of Scotland, now divided into the Council Areas of North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, and the City of Glasgow. John Arbuckle was recorded as a witness in Irvine in 1499, and later John Arbuckle purchased a lot of land in the city of Glasgow in the year 1511. (3)

HouseofNames.com notes that some of the Arbuckle family moved to Ireland, the place to which many lowland Scots immigrants went first before coming to America. However, that was apparently not the case with our original ancestor. Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle, writing in the early 1900s, believed that our line descends from David Arbuckle, who emigrated around 1755 directly from Scotland to Prince Edward County, Virginia. His son, Samuel, moved to Crab Orchard, Kentucky in 1785, and it was he who married Tabitha Drinkard. (4) Florence Arbuckle Dennis (Mammy Dennis) was Samuel’s great-granddaughter.

The Arbuckle family history has a story about another of Samuel Arbuckle’s sons, Francis, that I will summarize. Francis Arbuckle moved to Indiana, and both he and his wife died of cholera in 1833, leaving four children. Tabitha was by then a very poor widow who still had two of her own children living with her. She sent her son, Logan, on horseback to make the 200-mile trip to retrieve the children. Upon their arrival, Tabitha’s son, Drinkard, took in one of Francis’s children, William Drinkard Arbuckle, and the other three lived with their grandmother. The oldest son, John Wesley Arbuckle, was a soldier in the Mexican War. John Wesley Arbuckle was Floy Arbuckle’s grandfather. Francis’s second son, William Drinkard Arbuckle, went first to Kirksville, Missouri, then to Clay County, Missouri where he married. He moved again to Atchison, Kansas before settling back in Kentucky in Cromwell, Ohio County, KY.

Drinkard Arbuckle, third son of Samuel and Tabita Stanley Drinkard, was Florence L. Arbuckle’s (Mammy’s) grandfather. Florence’s father, James Drinkard Arbuckle (or “Pa” Arbuckle as he was known in our family) lost his first wife, Sarah Mehitable Ranney, when Mammy Dennis was only four years old. His second wife, Virginia Miller died just before Mammy’s 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, and Florence had to assume the role of mother to four step-siblings, ages 6 months to 6 years. My mother told me that this was a real challenge for Mammy, who did not know much about cooking at first, and even less about caring for so many small children. Mom heard Mammy tell the story of how she baked her first pie, then proceeded to eat most of it before anyone else had a piece. Pa Arbuckle never re-married, and Florence somehow managed to cope with her new responsibilities throughout her teens until she met and married George Washington Dennis in 1899.



James Drinkard "Pa" Arbuckle with Grandson Roscoe Peters

The Arbuckle history chapter by Leslie Logan and Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle has this story about Drinkard Arbuckle:

Many a fine buck did he bring down with his old flintlock rifle. I remember that he shot left-handed. That made the lock come next to his left cheek and eye. I well remember the day that he came home with his left eye full of powder that blew out at the touch hole of his gun. He carried the mark to his grave in 1863, 27 years after it was done. Drinkard Arbuckle was one of Butler County's best men, loved and respected by all that knew him. His life was such that no reproach was attached to his name, but on the contrary, he was ever striving to make himself of some use to the community as a neighbor and citizen by favoring law and order and by setting an example of industry and faithful discharge of all duties through his own conduct. Drinkard Arbuckle was conceded to be one of the [most] upright and valuable citizens of Butler County, Kentucky. He was a Republican politically and was a member of the Old Green River Baptist Church. (5)

There is evidence that some of grandfather Drinkard Arbuckle's civic mindedness was passed on to Mammy's brother, Elmore Vechel Arbuckle, before he left Kentucky, as reported in an 1896 Hartford newspaper item: "Mr. Elmore Arbuckle of Prentis was in town last Monday and qualified as Deputy Clerk in and for Ohio County." (6) Mammy had two other brothers, Zibe William Arbuckle and Seth B. Arbuckle. There is a note on page 16 of the Arbuckle history about two of the brothers:

Elmore Vechel and Seth Arbuckle were both traveling photographers, and they married the Johnigan sisters [actually, *Jarnagin*--GW]. They both disappeared and their wives or anyone that knew them know not where they went or what happened to them. (7)

Both of their wives were either pregnant or had recently given birth when they disappeared, so many believed that the brothers had been robbed and killed on one of their working trips as photographers, and their bodies and wagon thrown into Green River. However, it is now certain that the Arbuckle brothers abandoned their Kentucky families and started new lives in other states around 1898 under

assumed names, Elmore as John Daniel Duffy (signed on his Illinois marriage register and license in 1901 as Elmo Duffee) and Seth as Samuel Oscar Bradley of Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Why they might have run away is hinted at in footnote 18 of an article I published in 2013. It was possibly due to Seth's involvement with a married woman. (8)

In the 2013 article I conjectured that the Arbuckle brothers probably disappeared at the end of 1897 or beginning of 1898. A more recent discovery of an appeal on page 10 in the March 6, 1904 Louisville *Courier-Journal* implies that it would have been 1899 when they went missing. The entry reads:

Select, Ky. Please ask your subscribers if any of them know the whereabouts of Elmore and Seth Arbuckle; last heard from were at Calhoon, Ky., about five years ago. Ages thirty-six and thirty-four years. Information will be thankfully received by their father, JAMES D. ARBUCKLE, Select, Ohio County, Ky.

Seth's son Adriel Arbuckle was born on January 18, 1897, and Elmore's daughter Reba Arbuckle was born December (or November) 30, 1897, so my original contention that the brothers left Kentucky near the beginning of 1898 is probably accurate. Elmore (b. September 19, 1872) would have been 31 and Seth (b. March 12, 1874) would have been 29 (almost 30) on March 6, 1904, so James D. "Pa" Arbuckle was somewhat confused when he wrote the appeal for information in March 1904.

The brothers kept their true birthdays, and that proved to be the link that allowed us to solve the mystery of the disappearance of the Arbuckle brothers. One of Elmore's Illinois descendants, Lucinda (Cindy) Duffy, lives in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, where my wife, Mia (Stanislavka Radoicic) and I met and married in the early 1970s. Long after we moved to Bloomington, Indiana in late 1975, Cindy Duffy noticed the picture of Pa Arbuckle that I posted on ancestry.com and contacted me in 2012.



Lucinda Duffy, granddaughter of Elmore Arbuckle

It was Cindy's and her father's curiosity about their roots that ultimately led to the conclusion that her grandfather, John Daniel Duffy, had another name. On his marriage license, he entered Ohio County, Kentucky as his birthplace, but on his Social Security form he listed Owensboro, Davies County, Kentucky

as his place of birth. He wrote his name as Elmo Duffee on his wedding license, and Cindy was always told that he changed his given names from Patrick Elmo to John Daniel.

Fortunately, Cindy's father, Harry Dean Duffy, quizzed his dad about his origins and wrote down the information. Although John Daniel Duffy (Elmore) fabricated some of the answers, some were close enough to the truth that Cindy was able to discover his true name. The notes from Harry Duffy list a brother Zibe Duffy, father James Drinkard Duffy, and mother Sara Mahetebal O'Ranney. The actual names were, of course, Zibe *Arbuckle*, James Drinkard *Arbuckle*, and Sarah Mehitabel *Ranney*. This was information that Seabay Jackson told me several decades before Cindy and I became acquainted. Cindy also remembered hearing about a sister and another brother, and she learned the very important fact that the brother who left Kentucky assumed the name Sam Bradley.

On ancestry.com you can find hundreds of people named Sam Bradley who were born in the 1870s in Kentucky, and there is no search feature at this time that allows you to join in one search an exact full birthday to a name. Thus, I began the task of scrolling through all the Samuel Bradleys on ancestry.com. Imagine my surprise when I spotted Seth Arbuckle's birth date attached to the death record of a Samuel O. Bradley born in Kentucky whose father was named James. I thought we had our man, Samuel Oscar Bradley, but how to prove it?

This is where luck came in. I began to search the internet for possible surviving relatives of Mr. Bradley. The Find-A-Grave record for Samuel Oscar Bradley eventually led me in 2013 to his then 87-year-old son, James Edward Bradley. I found a telephone number for a James Bradley in Roswell, New Mexico and gave him a call. James initially doubted that his father was the same as Seth Arbuckle, but other Bradley relatives turned up through correspondence and phone calls. They bought into the idea that Seth Arbuckle and Samuel Bradley were one and the same. Eventually, they convinced James Bradley to participate in a DNA match. Charles H. Arbuckle, a grandson of Zibe Arbuckle living in Ohio, was also willing to participate, as were Cindy Duffy and I. When the DNA results came back, they were conclusive. We were all closely related cousins!

#### NOTES

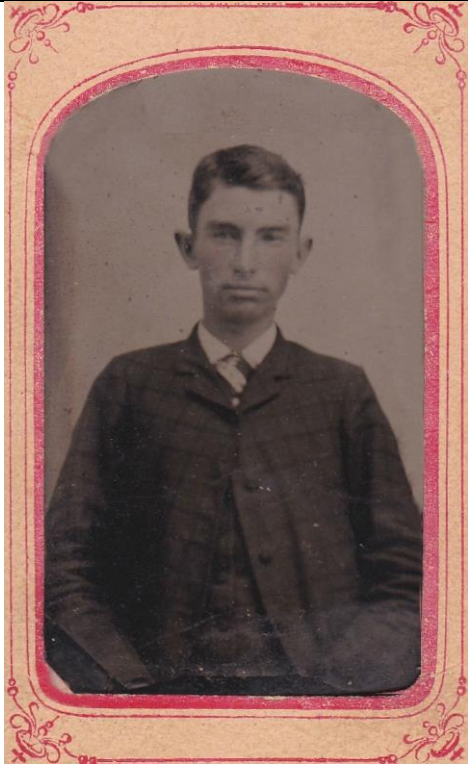
1. At least part of the Arbuckle book was published as: Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle. *Just us: Descendants of Samuel Arbuckle and Tobitha (sic) Drinkard*. Filmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1987.
2. "The Arbuckle Family; History and Genealogy of Pioneers." *The Charleston Daily Mail*. (Charleston, WV), July 15, 1934.
3. House of Names. <https://www.houseofnames.com/arbuckle-family-crest> (accessed 9 June 2018).
4. "Drinkard" is an odd surname that shows up several times as given names in later generations. One old deed document from 1818 has it spelled "Drinkhard".
5. Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle. *op.cit.*
6. *The Hartford Republican*. (Hartford, KY), February 28, 1896.
7. Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle. *op.cit.*, p. 16.
8. Gary Dorman Wiggins. "[The Mystery of the Arbuckle Brothers' Disappearance Solved!](#)" *Kentucky Family Records* v. 37 (Winter 2013), pp. 108-113.
9. The old Drinkard Arbuckle farm was in the forks of the Indian Camp Creek about one mile from Green River. The place was known at the time of the writing of the Arbuckle Family history as

the Jolly Austin Farm. Mary Jane Arbuckle was the fourth daughter and eighth child of Drinkard and Lucretia Maxey (Arbuckle), and she was born on this farm. She married Carroll Bradley on July 5, 1850, thus providing at least a clue as to why Seth Arbuckle chose Bradley as his new family name when he left Kentucky. Carroll Bradley served in the 12<sup>th</sup> Kentucky Cavalry Company and participated in the fight at Owensboro, the Bare Wallow Fight, and in other engagements, and was eventually wounded. Nathaniel Francis Arbuckle wrote of him in 1903: “. . . he still fights the rebels, as the Democrat Party is called, and Uncle Sam is feeding and clothing him and upholding him in his present fight better than he did in the first fight.”

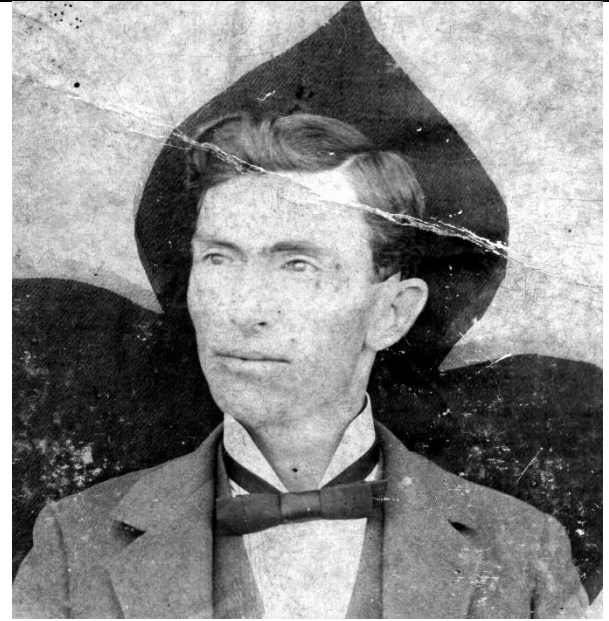
10. At the Arbuckle reunions we attended, there were two topics of conversation that always came up: Arbuckle coffee and the actor Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle. For those interested, there is a biography of Roscoe Arbuckle published in 1994 by Stuart Olderman, and you can still buy Arbuckles’ coffee online. Whether there is any connection whatsoever in our family to these Arbuckles I do not know.
11. With heartfelt thanks to Cindy Duffy, without whose help, the mystery of the disappearance of the Arbuckle brothers might never have been solved.

The most recent version of this chapter (3/28/2021) is available on the web at:

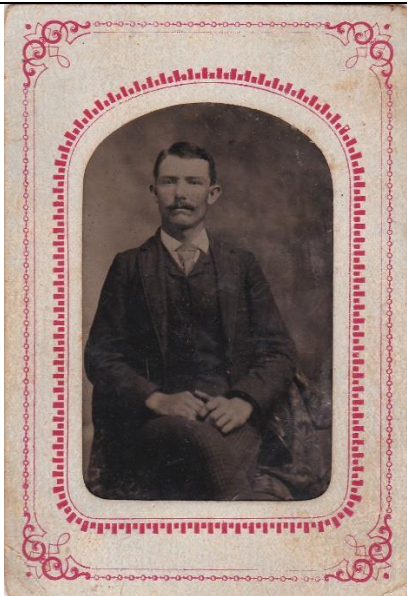
<https://www.hoosierpewter.com/WBS/WBS-0002.pdf>



Elmore Vechel Arbuckle



Elmore Vechel Arbuckle



Elmore Vechel Arbuckle  
(aka, John Daniel Duffy)



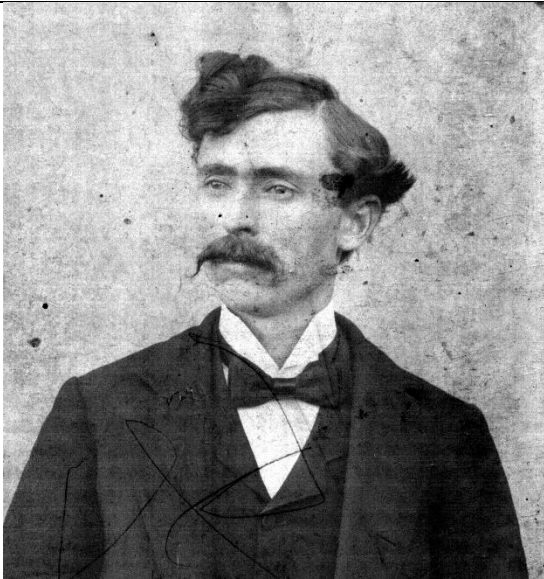
John Daniel Duffy  
(aka, Elmore Arbuckle)



John Daniel Duffy  
(aka, Elmore Arbuckle)



Elmore Arbuckle (?)  
(aka, Elmo Duffee,  
aka, John Daniel Duffy)



Seth B. Arbuckle  
(aka, Samuel Oscar Bradley)



Samuel Oscar Bradley  
(aka, Seth B. Arbuckle)





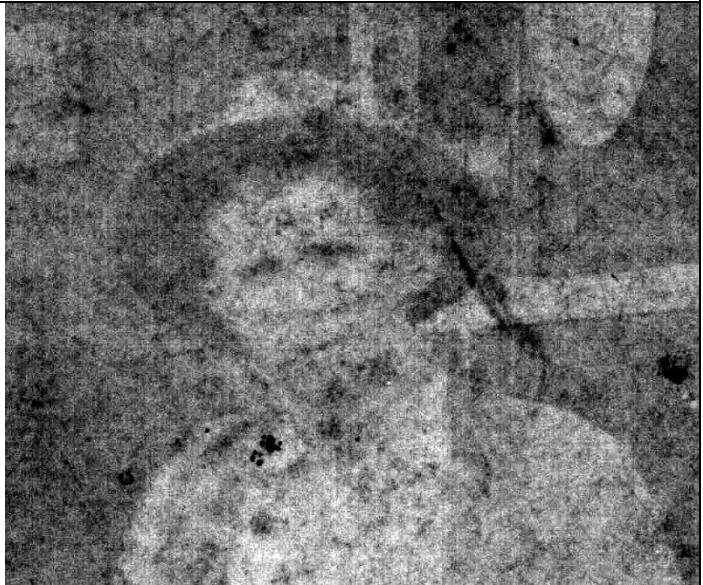
Adiel Arbuckle  
(Son of Seth Arbuckle)



Samuel O. Bradley with Grandsons



Samuel O. Bradley



Zibe Arbuckle

Other Arbuckle Pictures



Edith Arbuckle Shown  
(g. granddaughter of Drinkard Arbuckle)



Edith Arbuckle



Idella Atchison Arbuckle  
(wife of Volney James Arbuckle,  
son of Drinkard Arbuckle)



Samuel Oscar Bradley Family



Fred Bracken Arbuckle,  
son of Zibe Arbuckle (w daughter Cherry)



Florence Arbuckle Dennis,  
sister of Elmore, Seth and Zibe Arbuckle



Florence Arbuckle Dennis



Florence Arbuckle Dennis