

MOSES and ELIZABETH McELROY

(July, 1982 update)

Moses McElroy (5.3), b. 12/15/1839, and his wife, Elizabeth Glover McElroy ("Big Mama", #5.4) b. 2/20/1842, were born in Northern Ireland, or "Ulster" as it is often known. In later years, Big Mama told of having played as a child on the Giant's Causeway, a natural rock formation on the northern coast of Co. Antrim near the town of Bushmills. Tradition had it that the family (which family, McElroy or Glover, or both, is not known) were ship-building people and were of some means, i.e. at least not desperately poor as many Irish immigrants were in that period.

In spite of considerable digging, I have not as yet been able to find out which town they came from, nor any record of their having come. My own father, William McElroy Land (#3.1) recalled the name of their town as Tunbridge, pronounced "Tunebridge". Careful examination of a map of Ulster fails to show any Tunbridge. However, it does show "Toome Bridge", a town where the Lough Neagh empties into the River Bann at the Co. Londonderry border. For many years I assumed Toome Bridge must have been the McElroys' original home. However, on a trip to Ulster and to Toome Bridge in May, 1980, Jane and I were not able to find any trace or record of our particular McElroy family anywhere in Ulster, Toome Bridge included.\*

Since that visit, I have tried to locate people who knew of Moses or Elizabeth McElroy via the Ulster Historical Society, also without any success. I now have no particular reason to believe Toome Bridge was correct. And since Toome Bridge is in fact some 40 miles from the Giants' Causeway, Big Mama's playing there while living in Toome Bridge does not seem especially logical after all.

Another of my father's hazy recollections which came to me later had to do with connections with town of Glen Arm. That place is on the sea coast and thus seems to coincide more with the shipbuilding idea. That will be for another investigation, however.

I do not know when the McElroys emigrated to the U.S., nor whether they were married on the other side or in this country after arriving. They apparently landed in New York and travelled toward the west, an area just then opening up for settling. Family tradition said they journeyed west through the Mohawk Valley in New York. This makes sense because it was by far the easiest route. Perhaps they took the Erie Canal, although actually the railroad existed by then. The McElroys' first child, George, died at the age of 1 year 4 months on April 1, 1864, and I have been told he was buried in upstate New York, possibly Gloversville. \*\* I now doubt George was buried in Gloversville, although if I ever get the chance, I would like to check records in that city to see if any information on

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\* The search was not made easier by the fact that Toome Bridge was said to be a Republican stronghold in the civil war then in progress. Tensions were obviously high, the police station fortified with machine guns, etc. People were nervous, and it did not seem a good location to linger in.

\*\*Gloversville was named for the glove-making industry once prominent there.

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George McElroy or his parents can be found.

The fact that George McElroy died on April 1, 1864 says that the McElroys were married no later than March 1, 1862. (There may be marriage records in Gloversville if that does happen to be the correct town.) In March 1862 Moses was 23 years old and Big Mama was 20.

They journeyed on west, and the next three children to be born were Lizzie, my grandmother, Emma George (George perhaps in memory of the dead infant George?), and Mary. The Fort Scott, Kansas city directory of 1888 says Lizzie and Mary were "from Illinois". If this is true -- and city directories were not noted for accuracy-- George died just after Lizzie was born in Illinois and therefore was not buried in New York State. My grandmother was known to have been born in Quincy, Illinois, another town whose records I would like to check for births and deaths of McElroys in the early to mid 1860's.

I would like to know whether the McElroys originally had their mind set on Fort Scott, Kansas as a settling place. It seems more likely to me that they settled for a bit in New York state, then for at least 3 years in Quincy where Lizzie, Emma, and Mary were born and George died, and maybe then decided to move on to Ft. Scott. According to one account, they went by train to Kansas City and thence south by covered wagon to Ft. Scott. Since the railroad down from Kansas City reached Ft. Scott in 1869 (same year the trans-continental railroad was completed), and my grandmother Emma was born in Illinois in 1865, their trip must have been made in this interval -- and probably after 1867 when the next younger child, Mary, was born, supposedly in Illinois.

Fort Scott was a town of importance in that area since well before the Civil War. (See extensive notes on Fort Scott elsewhere in this series.) Moses McElroy opened a grocery store there and was listed in the city directory of 1871 - 72 as a "grocer" with a residence on Walker between Locust and Birch. I do not know where any of these streets are today and have an idea some or all may have permanently disappeared when a highway bypass was built north and south through the town in the 1950's or 1960's. The McElroys added often to their family for 12 children were born in a space of 18 years from 1862 to 1880. Seven of these lived to maturity, and 5 of the 7 married. The grocery store seems to have been successful enough, with credit extended here and there to townspeople and farmers as was often the custom.

Somewhere along the line a family tragedy occurred, although I know few details about it. Since the McElroys were doing well in their adopted country, they arranged for their family in Ireland to join them. Shortly thereafter, according to family stories, the entire remainder of the McElroy (and/or Glover) clan were lost in a shipwreck off Ireland. This could have been in the Ft. Scott days, or the Illinois days, or even in the New York days. This accident greatly affected Big Mama; she seldom talked about it, but she would never again get on a boat if she could possibly help it. (In Ft. Scott it would seem there should be little need to.) The dislike of water extended at least to her daughter, Emma, and even her grandson, my father was unenthusiastic about boats and cruises.

As she grew older at least, Big Mama lived up to her family nick-

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name amply. The pictures that remain of her show her as a mature lady, short, and very broad of beam -- five-by-five, as it were. Her expression was pleasant, but with a no-nonsense air. I understand she was an admirer of her approximate contemporary, Great Britain's Queen Victoria, and occasionally imitated her style of dress. Great grandfather Moses wore a full beard, which I recall having heard was bright red. The one picture I have of him displays him in this beard, which makes it difficult to get an idea of his facial features.

The McElroys came to own property in Ft. Scott. A substantial brick building housing several stores on Market Square was the "McElroy Block." Although it was still there in 1947, it had by then passed from the estate. This cannot have been the original McElroy store, and that may have been on or near the site of the "Old Post Office" on Scott Avenue. The last McElroy family home was at 102 State St., and this bungalow still stood in the late 1930's. It was still in the estate at that time and was always referred to as "the old home place." I recall as a child being greatly unimpressed by it. It was badly in need of a coat of paint, and flush toilets were just then being installed. Later, the family owned a home at 515 S. Crawford St., which is still there in 1982.

Somewhere on a street corner in downtown Ft. Scott -- possibly on Scott Avenue -- was the McElroy well, equipped with pump and drinking cup. I remember reading of it in a Ft. Scott Tribune news item in the 1940's. Apparently the well was a landmark which stood there for many years, although it had disappeared long before my time.

Moses McElroy died at age 42, in the prime of his life, on August 19, 1881, just 5 years to the day before his grandson, my father, was born. He was said to have had "inflammation of the bowels," a sudden, severe illness. The reported symptoms -- high fever, abdominal pain -- point to appendicitis. Unfortunately, medical knowledge was limited in those days, and nothing could be done for him except 'pack him in ice until he died'. He is interred in the McElroy family plot in Evergreen Cemetery, south of town, where a substantial sandstone monument is erected.

This left Big Mama with the family business to carry on, but many children of various ages to care for, including young ones. This could have accounted for her no-nonsense expression, one supposes. Of course, the older children were called upon to help a great deal. Apparently the business remained in the family for some time, and Big Mama survived until 1914, keeping house with her unmarried daughter, Lizzie. My grandmother, Emma, married at the age of 20 and was a lifelong resident of Ft. Scott. Because of this, my grandfather, S.M. (or "Sam") Land, seems on family occasions to have been a sort of father figure in the fatherless McElroy family, as the younger children were growing up. He definitely married into the McElroy family, not the other way around. When his time came, he was interred with my grandmother, also in the McElroy family plot.

My father, as a child, spent a great deal of time at the old home place with Big Mama and the others, and he enjoyed the associations with his aunts and uncles, especially since his own father was often away on extended business trips.

--WML, jr.  
July, 1982