

THE COX - NICHOLSON SAGA by LUDELLE COX POWELL

The first ancestor in the Cox family, of whom we have any record, was Archer Cox, born in Wales, who came to America as a young man and settled in Mecklenburg County, Virginia, near Boydton, about 1800. In 1802 he married Miss Ayers, born in Scotland, then living in Mecklenburg County in the southern part of the state. They were the parents of seven children: (1.) James L. Cox b. 2 Jul 1803 (2.) Wilson Cox b. 27 Feb 1805, d. 19 Mar 1841 (3.) Archer Cox b. 27 May 1907 (4.) Mary Thurman Cox b. 11 Jun 1809 (5.) Abnor Cox b. 7 May 1812 (6.) Armpstead Cox b. 5 Feb 1814 (7.) Alexander ("Zandy") b. 5 Feb 1814.

Our line descends from their second son, Wilson, who in Jan 1824 married Martha Mallett, born in Scotland 12 Jan 1804. She had recently come to America to visit relatives in Mecklenburg County. The Malletts were wealthy influential citizens in Scotland, and raised their children in luxury. The family had been ranked among the aristocracy of the country for over five generations. Soon after Martha's marriage two uncles came from Scotland to visit her but she, having married a man of modest means, never returned to Scotland, being happily contented with her lot.

It is almost assured that her brothers and sisters were named William, Thomas, Nancy, Polly, and Jane. Martha had an uncle in Danville, Kentucky, Dr. Ayers, a pioneer Physician. It is possible that he was related to Miss Ayers who married Archer, in which case she would have been related to Martha also, and could have been the relative Martha had come here to visit at the time she met and married Wilson.

Wilson and Martha were the parents of seven children: (1.) William Henry Cox b. 24 Oct 1825, d. 7 Feb 1907 (2.) Thomas Cox b. 1827, d. at 13 yrs of infantile paralysis, in 1840 (3.) Richard Cox b. 18 Jan 1829, d. suicide 1883 (4.) James Clayton Cox (Jim) b. 12 Apr 1830, d. 5 Jul 1903 (5.) Wilson Taylor Cox (called Taylor) b. 18 Jan 1832 (6.) Mary Cox b. 1833 (7.) Jane Cox b. 1835.

In 1833 Wilson and his family, together with his brothers Zandy, Abner and Armpstead moved to Boyle County, Kentucky where Wilson bought land and raised tobacco and other produce. Jane, their youngest child, was born there. After the death of Archer's wife in 1837, he too went to Kentucky and afterward married a widow named Kitty Bennett.

On 3 Apr 1841 Wilson died, leaving Martha with six children and very little income. She soon found that she could not take care of them all, and the two oldest sons found homes in nearby families and made their own way. James went to live with a friendly Quaker family in Bardstown, Kentucky, not far distant. Martha kept the three youngest with her. She felt desolate and lonely, and while there were many relatives all of whom were kind and attentive and she saw them often, she nevertheless, much of the time preferred living independently to herself. She felt the need of money, and while she knew there was wealth in Scotland, she was much too proud to let her needs be known there.

In the early days of her marriage, when her uncles had come from Scotland to visit her, they had returned, reporting to her family of her happy life with her fine young husband, a man of much promise, and they were comforted. Communication with the New World was difficult in those early days, and Martha herself was negligent about writing. She had so much to learn about being a wife and mother and housekeeper that her whole time and attention was given to this new way of living. When the family left Mecklenburg County her whereabouts became unknown. No doubt efforts were made to reach her with word of inheritance later on, but she could not be found, and she did nothing to further it.

When James (Jim) was a lad in his teens, relatives influenced him to come to Dicksville, Kentucky to make his home. On doing this he at once found work and was able to make his own way.

A nephew of Martha's who had just returned to America after being at sea for fourteen years, came to Kentucky at this time. He married a widow named Ann Coleman, who had a son named Tignal, called "Tig," who was about Jim's age and they soon became fast friends. When they were twenty years old they rode horseback to Texas where they stayed for two years. On their return to Dansville, Jim became acquainted with Mary Ann Nicholson, a beautiful young girl whose parents had moved to his home town during his absence in Texas. He was now twenty-two years old and wanted to get married. While Mary was six years younger than he, nevertheless, he had become very infatuated with her and felt convinced she was the girl he wanted for his wife. However, she and John May, one of his best friends, seemed very much attracted to each other and he must bide his time, being unwilling to make any effort to "cut out" his good old friend, John. (The author returns to Jim and Mary later in her narrative. - GTK)

The first Nicholson ancestor, of whom we have any record, was John Nicholson, born in England. He married Jane MacIntosh, born in Scotland. They came to America and located in Charleston, South

Carolina. Our line descends from their son, John Macintosh Nicholson, born in Charleston 19 Aug 1800 and named for both parents. When he was a small boy his father died and his mother remarried.

It is assumed that John was not happy with a stepfather, for at an early age friendly neighbors assisted him in going to Chatham County, North Carolina, near Bonlee, where he lived with friends and went to school. He became acquainted with Mary Ann Brooks (called Polly) a little schoolmate, and they became very good friends.

The Brooks family were wealthy land owners, and Polly lived in the finest house in the county. It was originally built by her great-grandfather in 1755. His name was John Brooks Sr. Esq., born in England in 1690, and in 1735 he brought his wife and six sons to America. He was a man of wealth and influence, his forbears having been prominent in England before the first member came to America in 1609. He deeded farms of vast acreage to each of his children. The above named showplace had come down through three generations to Polly's father, Terrell Brooks in 1792. This house was said to be the first two-story house built in the state of North Carolina. It was frame, weather boarded, ceiled, and had paneled doors and glass windows, luxuries seldom seen in those days.

The ground on which this house was built was originally deeded to John Brooks Sr. Esq. by King George. At the time of this writing, 1967, this property has continued to be owned by the Brooks family, and every August descendants gather on the grounds for family reunions. (The house stood until 1940.)

John Nicholson loved to visit at this house, being fascinated by its many special and unusual features. At the age of fourteen he was offered an apprenticeship in watch and clock making in what is thought to be Hartford, Connecticut, it taking five years to complete the course. This he gratefully accepted and left soon after. He and Polly wrote to each other during the years, growing more and more fond of each other.

At the end of four years he was given a month of vacation and returned to Chatham County for a visit. He and Polly soon realized they were very much in love and wanted to get married. After much persuasion, Polly's parents reluctantly agreed, with the promise from the young couple that Polly would remain at home while John went back to finish his apprenticeship, at the end of which time he would receive one hundred dollars, a new suit of clothes, and a full set of instruments. Though it seemed a long, lonesome waiting, they were married and John returned to his work soon after, and Polly began filling her time with learning more about her interesting ancestors.

As a child, she had heard her father tell many tales of former, exciting adventures. She knew that her grandfather, Isaac Brooks, had succeeded to the home place in 1761, and that he had served in the war of the revolution. She learned that, during that time Tories had come to the house to arrest him, and he had quickly bolted the door and fled to the upper story. The soldiers had used the butts of their guns to hammer out the door panels, but on gaining entrance, found that Isaac had jumped from a second floor window and made his escape. She had seen this battered door in a rear lean-to. (At the time of this writing, 1967, this door with its broken panels is still in the possession of descendants in Greensboro, North Carolina.)

At another time, later on, General Green, with his army, marched through Chatham County in pursuit of Lord Cornwallis. They camped near the Isaac Brooks home, and Colonel William Washington, one of the group who was a marital relative of the Brooks family, slept in their house that night. Isaac's grist mill ground all through the long hours while his wife and servants baked bread for the soldiers.

Later on, near the end of the war, a group of soldiers brought a young captive to a tree in front of the Brooks house and prepared to hang him. Seeing the captive was little more than a boy, Isaac persuaded them to release him, promising he, himself, would be responsible for the boy.

While Polly enjoyed hearing these interesting events in the past, she would also have been pleased could she have looked into the future to see her young brother, William Tell Brooks, then nine years old, as a member of the first class to graduate at Wake Forest College. Also to know of his master's and doctor's degrees, and of his service on the faculty of the college as long as he lived. He wrote many of the text books used in the school and later became a trustee. (A large oil portrait of Dr. William Tell Brooks hangs in the corridor of Wake Forest College in recognition of his renown and in appreciation of his loyal service to the institution.)

As the days went by Polly realized she was pregnant, and from then on her whole time and attention was given to preparing for the expected baby. In due course of time she gave birth to a fine boy whom she named Frank.

Upon John's return after finishing his course, it was his desire to leave at once with his wife and baby for Lexington, Kentucky to make their home. Polly's father, being a slave owner, gave them two young slaves (a man and his wife) a team of horses, and a covered wagon. They arrived in Lexington in due time and located on Main Street near the McCord Presbyterian Church, which Polly joined soon after. John was not a church-going man, but he paid his share and said religion was a good thing.

The slaves worked part time on surrounding farms, while John worked at his trade, traveling much of the time to sell his wares. He received one hundred dollars each for the wall-sweeping clocks, many of which had works hand-carved from wood. It has been said that on one of John's early trips he bought land on what became Third Street in St. Louis, Missouri, feeling there was promise of the town becoming a large city. Later on, discouraged with his investment, he deeded the land to a tailor in exchange for a black satin vest, a garment much in vogue at the time.

In the years 1822, 1824 and 1826 respectively, Susan Nicholson, Lydia Nicholson, and Alpha Nicholson were born, after whom three others were born who died in infancy. In 1833, after a severe epidemic of cholera, John moved his family to Garrard County, a few miles farther South, on the fork of the Dix river, where he bought a farm. He continued traveling, while the slaves worked on the farm raising stock and produce, mostly tobacco. Frank, who was then nearing fifteen, did not favor living on a farm, and left on horseback for the west to seek his fortune. It was presumed he was killed by Indians, as nothing more was ever heard from him. In 1834 their son, Marion, was born. The following year Lydia and Alpha had cholera and John decided to leave Kentucky. He sold the farm and the slaves and moved his family to St. Albany, Indiana, where he bought a store. By this time he was making harps and jewelry.

On 18 Feb 1836 Mary Ann Nicholson was born, named for her mother. Things were going along well until 1838 when Polly was stricken with cholera and died at the age of thirty-six. The following year Alpha also died of cholera and was buried beside her mother in the yard of the First Presbyterian Church, of which Polly was a member. John then sold the store, after finding suitable places for his children to board, went back to Kentucky to continue his trade, traveling much of the time.

Mary Ann, from whom our line descends, was two years old when her mother died. She was placed to board with a Mrs. Lewis who knew very little about the ways of children. One day while she was busy with her chores, Mary stuffed her nose full of navy beans. Mrs. Lewis was panic stricken and sent for old Doctor Cooper, of whom Mary was very fond. Later on, when he was again called after Mary had filled her ears with green currants, Doctor Cooper said to her, "Do you know what I would do if you were my little girl?" He had always been so kind Mary was expecting to hear something very nice. "I'd take a little peach tree switch to you." Mary was horrified and greatly insulted. She never liked him afterward.

It became rumored around that Mary was not getting the proper care. When Mrs. Wyckoff and her spinster daughter, Ann, heard of this they sent a letter to Mary's father asking permission to take his little girl to live with them. John knew the Wyckoffs, who had been good friends of Polly's and heartily agreed. When Ann went to the Lewis home to bring Mary back with her, she found the child very reluctant to leave with the "strange lady." Ann was kind and persuasive, and when she told Mary of fifteen fluffy baby chickens she could have for her own, she was completely won over and anxious to go. Furthermore, it was a treat merely to be dressed up and then taken outside, a thing that seldom happened.

The Wyckoffs were Quakers, originally from Philadelphia and while they were always good and kind to Mary, they were nevertheless strict in accordance with their faith. Mary had longed for a Mother's love, and young as she was, she realized something very sweet was missing in her life. She wanted to say, "I'll tell Mother" when things went wrong or her feelings were hurt, just as she heard other children say.

Ann tried to be a good mother to her and she loved Ann dearly, but there was one deep sorrow. She hated being dressed like a little Quaker. She loved pretty clothes, and wanted white shoes, fluffy dresses, and lace on her underwear, all of which she was told was very wicked. Neither did they favor children playing together very often. She was never allowed to go out front on summer evenings where other children were playing. Denied this, she begged to sit up and watch Ann sew on hats, which she sold in her millinery store, but always she was sent to bed early, and alone. Many times she would sneak to the window in her nightgown to watch the others at play. During the day it was necessary for her to imagine her playmates. She would be her own mother, her little girl, run away from herself, bring herself back, and then give herself a good spanking.

On one of the rare days when she was allowed to visit a little friend, the mother lost a treasured thimble, and the two children hunted diligently, but the thimble was not found. Later on, when she was again

allowed to go out and play, she spied the thimble under some bushes beneath the window where the lady had been sewing. When she ran inside with it, the lady was so pleased she wanted to reward Mary, and gave her a beautiful pair of lace trimmed panties she had just finished making for her own little girl. Mary ran home in high glee, for she felt surely now she would be allowed to wear the long-wished-for garment. But, much to her heartsick disappointment, she never saw the panties afterward.

Otherwise Mary was well cared for and contented. Being of a happy disposition she tried to accept discipline she could not control. One day, when she was six, Ann sent her to the spring a few yards away to get a pail of water. On turning from the spring she saw a tall, handsome man smiling down at her. "Let me carry your pail, little girl," he said, "I'm going your way." And she gave it to him. He took her by the hand as they started off and asked her name. "It's Mary Nicholson," she replied. "I live in that house," and she pointed it out. When Ann saw them coming she rushed to the door. "Why it's Mr. Nicholson!" she exclaimed, ushering them in. Mary then knew the strange man was her father.

That afternoon he took her to a store to make her own selection of material for a new dress. She chose a dark red merino. They then went to a dressmaker to see about having it made. "And how would you like it to be, Mary?" the dressmaker smiled.

"I want it a long skirt with low neck and short sleeves," Mary piped up confidently. At this the others laughed heartily and she felt highly embarrassed. "That's the way they are in the Lady's Godey Book," she said defensively. Ann sold these books in the millinery store and Mary loved to browse through them, seeing the beautiful dresses that were pictured there.

After a short visit with Marion and his three daughters John returned to Kentucky and shortly after bought a farm in Mercer County on Follis Run which is a wide creek. In 1842 he married Lavinia Salmon, a thirty-five year old spinster, plain but kindly, and he felt she would be a good mother to his children. She was also strong and well adapted to farm work. He sent for Marion to come from St. Albany to help the hired men on the farm, and to continue his schooling. There were no public schools in those days. Parents contributed in accordance with the number of children they had in attendance.

Sue and Lydia refused to go to the farm or to live with the stepmother. They felt very bitter toward their father for having remarried. Not long after, Sue married George G. Baggerly, a young Baptist minister in St. Albany. They left at once for Yazoo, Mississippi where he had accepted a call. The following year, at their insistence, Lydia went to live with them. She too, married a Baptist minister, but her happiness was of short duration. James Wiberforce Smith lived but two years afterward.

Mary felt very lonely after her brother and sisters were gone. The sisters especially were attentive and affectionate and she greatly missed her frequent visits with them. When she was eight years old her father came and took her back to Kentucky to live on the farm with her stepmother. Mary was grief-stricken and heartsick to be leaving her beloved Wyckoffs and her pleasant home in St. Albany. She knew nothing of life in the country and while she found the farm a comfortable place to live, she was most unhappy. Her stepmother welcomed her warmly and taught her all she knew about life on a farm. In those days women worked very hard, milking, churning, spinning, weaving, and cooking. Sewing and knitting were done evenings while resting. To merely sit and read was thought to be lazy. The farm was a neat, white frame, built after southern architecture. It was nestled on a hillside completely surrounded by giant oaks, white ash and many sugar maple trees.

John was gone from home long periods of time. His homecoming was a time of festive celebration. Mary adored him. He was a man of fine intellect, well read and posted on topics of the day. He was highly esteemed throughout the countryside, being called upon for counsel, both legal and financial. Also medical, for having so successfully treated his own family's illnesses, he was frequently called upon to bleed the sick. He advised against going to law if it could possibly be averted, saying, "If you want real vexation, and a long procrastination, you are in that situation when you take a case to law."

He was very versatile, in fact could do almost anything. On the farm he kept a lathe and a full set of tools, and had a blacksmith shop of sorts, in order to do the necessary repairs. Town shops were far away and much time was consumed both going and coming.

One day as he and Mary sat looking across Follis Run at the long ridge of high hills covered with magnificent forest trees, John told her of the abundance of ginseng to be found in the sandy loam beneath the trees. In the summer "sand diggers" as they were called, came in large numbers to grub out the roots for which they have ready sale. Mary was at once alerted. She had wanted to earn some money to take back to St. Albany, and this seemed the ideal way. She thought it couldn't be far, for she had

heard her father tell of walking the distance when Alpha was stricken with cholera. He was off on one of his trips and, on getting the word of Alpha's illness, had started home immediately. After a few miles the stage had broken down and he had been forced to go the rest of the way on foot. Mary did not know that he had walked a distance of seventy-five miles.

When she told her father of her eager desire to join the "sand diggers" he smiled amusedly. "But I couldn't let you do that," he told her. "They are a ragged, nondescript lot. You wouldn't want to be with them." And later on, when she saw them, she knew he was right, and her cherished dream of returning to her former beloved home was never realized.

Soon she entered the country school, walking a mile each way over rough roads, in all kinds of weather. The school building was one large room, built of crude logs, one log being cut from the wall to give light. The benches were split logs, and at one end of the room was a ten-foot fireplace. The boys kept up the fire, and pupils were allowed, one at a time, to stand by the heat to keep warm. A gourd hung beside the door, and if anyone wanted water, the gourd was taken to the spring a few yards away. If the gourd was missing, others knew someone was out, and waited their turn.

The teacher was a scrawny, crotchety old man named Edmunds. All of the pupils disliked him intensely. They were expected to bow to him politely on entering and leaving the school each day, but those bows were merely quick nods. For infraction of the rules, a large hickory stick was kept beside the teacher's desk. Pupils eyed both as monsters.

It was the teacher's prerogative to make all the quill pens used in the school. One day, after one of Mary's admirers had made her a pen, she was called to the desk and given a whack across the knuckles for having accepted it. This came near to being the last act of the teacher's life, for when Mary's father heard of it he went gunning for the teacher, who then apologized.

The school studies were arithmetic, called ciphering, and elementary spelling. The spelling books contained definitions of words sounding alike but spelled differently, such as "air" a fluid, and "are" the plural of "am." None of them knew what "plural" meant, never having studied grammar.

Spelling was taught by taking each vowel and adding it to succeeding consonants, such as a, b, ab, e, b, eb, i, b, ib, o, b, ob, u, b, ub. All studied in vocal unison, and as they learned they ran the syllables together, till for miles around their voices could be heard shouting in unison, the first "a" always long drawn out, followed in rapid succession by the following ones, such as "A---bab, e, beb, ibib, o, bob, u, bub. A---pap. e, pep, i, pip, o, pop, u, pup. A---tat, e,, tet, i, tit, o, tot, u, tut, and on and on until all the consonants were added. Strange to say, the noisy outburst never seemed to annoy the old teacher. It was merely a phase of the day's lessons. Every Friday afternoon was given to a spelling bee, what they called "choose up and spell down." Recreation outside the school consisted of singing groups, swinging on grape vines, and occasionally, much on the QT, kissing games.

When Mary was fourteen, her father exchanged the farm on Follis Run for property in Dicksville, Boyle County, Kentucky, not far from Danville. At this time, much to Mary's delight, she was placed in a boarding school in Perryville. This town being near Dicksville, she was able to spend many weekends at home. She was a very pretty and attractive girl and the town boys were most attentive, one of which, John May, she was seen with most often.

About this time, James Clayton Cox, called Jim, who had been away in Texas for two years, returned to his home in Dicksville. On meeting Mary, whose parents had moved to his home town during his absence, he was completely bowled over by this beautiful girl and wanted to become better acquainted. When John May, who was one of Jim's long time friends, heard of his exciting adventures in Texas, he became much enthused, and very soon, with no warning whatsoever, he mounted his horse and headed west. This cleared the way for Jim to pay his court to Mary.

In the spring of 1852, soon after Mary was sixteen, she and Jim were out for a walk and he asked her to marry him. She was bashful, and shy and didn't know how to answer him, though she knew it would be "yes." They were passing by an arbor-vitae hedge and she broke off a sprig and handed it to him coyly. Both knew, in the language of flowers, this meant "over thine" At once they began making plans to get married. Mary had never liked living in Kentucky, and asked Jim if he would be willing to take her away after they were married, preferably to Indiana. He, having been gone from home for two years, was not averse to leaving, and readily promised they would go as soon as he was financially able to do so.

When Mary's father was told of their plans, he vigorously opposed the marriage. While he esteemed Jim as an excellent young man, he felt Mary was much too young for marriage. "She is just sixteen years old,

a school girl," he told Jim, and of course they knew he was right. Mary had never willfully gone against her father's wishes nor displeased him in any way. Hard as it was to face the long delay, they agreed to postpone their wedding for at least a year, at the end of which time she would have finished school.

A few months later, on 6 Oct 1852, Jim heard of a house, soon to be available, that was in every way the ideal place for them to have a home. Quickly getting in touch with Mary, they excitably confided in Jim's good friend, "Tig" Coleman, and impulsively, without further thought, the three of them mounted horses, and eloped to Danville, where Mary and Jim were married by the Reverend Dr. Polk. Tig stood up with them during the ceremony. Mary knew she should look at the minister during the rites, but being shy and bashful she looked over his shoulder at a picture on the wall called "The Carrier Dove." (This picture remained in the family for several years.)

Mary knew how to do housework and had no difficulty in managing her home. She had not, however, learned to master the art of baking light biscuits. Knowing Jim to be especially fond of hot bread, she tried repeatedly, but only to meet with failure. Being naturally frugal, she felt it would be wicked to throw them away, so she began secreting them in an old chest that was seldom used. One day later on, Jim was looking around for a place to hide some money he had saved, and came upon the old chest. "The ideal place," he thought. Upon raising the lid, he was dumbfounded to see dozens of dried up biscuits filling the space. Mary, thus caught in the subterfuge, tearfully confessed. To Jim the episode was a source of hilarious amusement, but to Mary it remained a tragedy. (Needless to say, long before her ninth and last child was born she had long since learned to bake fluffy biscuits.)

[The rest of the story (thanks to David Quay) is continued below the following comment.]

COMMENT

I received the Saga in the mail yesterday, and thank you for sending it to me. Reading it over again several times, it sounds to me like it was Mary Ann (Nicholson) Cox's own reminiscences written down or transcribed by her daughter years later. Reads as a first person narrative, but obviously written by Ludelle in 1967. It seems to stop abruptly at p18 and I feel that there might have originally been more pages, but no way to know.

I see a "story behind the story" when I read it. Appears that John M. Nicholson wasn't home much and his family had to pretty much fend for themselves. When his wife died, the children were farmed out here and there. It reads like everything was just hunky dory from Mary Ann's words, but if you look at the situation, and read what it REALLY says, it must have been a difficult childhood for all his children. The adoptive or foster families in Indiana might have been really wonderful, but I doubt that. In a lot of cases, orphaned or boarded children were treated much like slaves. Looking at the whole narrative with a 21st century eye, I sense a lot of disruption, trauma at the loss of their mother and estrangement from their father in those children's lives. When John M. remarried, it might not have been a good situation either...maybe yes, maybe no. I have a feeling that by that time, all the children were probably pretty much dysfunctional with a capital "D"! I suspect that Francis Marion's dysfunctional childhood made for a dysfunctional adult. His children all thrived and prospered, so I guess somewhere along the line, the pattern was broken.

In 1981, I received a letter from an elderly gentleman from KY who was a descendant of John M. Nicholson. His grandmother was Margaret (Nicholson) Gabhart, who was the only child of John M. Nicholson and his second wife Lavinia (Salmon) Crutchfield. In his letter, he wrote: "John McIntosh Nicholson was born in Scotland and was shipped to this country on the ship Olander when about 14 years old, with a boat load of BAD BOYS! (his emphasis) This was revealed to me by G. M. Maggie who was not at all proud of his beginnings. John worked his way to Conn. where he had education and served several years as apprentice to a clock maker. He learned his trade and spent the rest of his life making and repairing clocks. He traveled by horse & buggy on his regular clock rounds and was noted for his fondness for strong drink. Lavinia (second wife) was a staunch Christian and once upon a time his faithful horse pulled the buggy home without benefit of John's hands on the reins. That woman was so infuriated that she threw a bucket of scalding water on old John and needless to say, although she didn't break him of the habit." (his phrasing).

This letter and the "Saga" say to me that John M. was a man who drank and who was an absentee husband/father (if the story is true). I suspect his wife (wives) & children didn't have an easy time of it. Court records that I got many years ago show a pattern of moving a lot between Mercer, Washington, Garrard & Boyle Counties. Lots of mortgages and suits against him for non-payment of debts and land being sold on the courthouse steps, etc. One item from Mercer Co., Mortgage Bk. 2, p175, May 11, 1848

has John M. mortgaging land, livestock, farm utensils, blacksmith tools, furniture etc. etc. (sounds like everything he owned) as security for him on a bond executed to the Commonwealth of KY...for his appearance at the next term of Boyle Circuit Court to answer a charge of having passed a counterfeit gold coin.. Acknowledged in Boyle and recorded in Mercer, same day. The Saga mentions that at some point in time he was making harps and jewelry in addition to clocks. Sounds like he might have ALSO been making gold coins!! Note the mention in the Saga that John M. advised against getting involved in matters of law.

When I received this letter in 1981, I spent years trying to verify this info about his immigration, etc. etc. but was never able to. I always wondered whether it wasn't John M.'s father that was the immigrant on the ship Olander full of "bad boys". Nothing ever was found to verify anything; I never found a ship by that name, no passenger list...nothing. John M. always consistently said on the census that his birthplace was NY, but all the genealogies all say he was born SC or Charleston, SC. Between the letter and the Saga, the info doesn't gel. If John M.'s birth date was 1800, as all the genealogies say, then it would have been the year 1814 when he came to America. He m. Mary Ann Brooks in ca. 1817 per the "Brooks and Kindred Families" book, so nothing fits, anywhere, anyplace, anytime. Between the various accounts and the census data added in, there are 3 places: NY, SC, CT, KY & IN. A mystery man on the move.

I think we all assume when we start doing genealogy that all our ancestors must have been upstanding, solid citizens...patriots, ministers, magistrates and all around respectable people. A librarian told me the very first day I went to a library to "trace my roots"...she said, "If you don't like skeletons, don't open closet doors". I didn't understand that then, but over the years did find most were of sterling character, but I also found a skeleton here and there. I always found the skeletons, the black sheep, the single most INTERESTING ones to work on! John M. Nicholson has been one of those interesting ones and I wonder if all his mysteries will ever be solved.

- Anon

[Continuation of THE COX-NICHOLSON SAGA:]

When Jim first returned from Texas, he went to work on the plantation of Hon. Al G. Talbot. He was a fine man to deal with and most of Jim's duties were satisfactory. However a part of his work was overseeing slaves, and he had always been vigorously opposed to slavery, and given to expressing his views openly. One time at a town meeting his remarks so enraged the southern sympathizers, that a group of them came to his house in the night, soon after, and completely burned him out.

After this outrage he and Mary decided to leave Kentucky at once. Within a week they, together with his brothers Richard and Taylor, and their families, his two single young sisters and his mother, Martha, left by covered wagons for Shelby County, Indiana near Flat River. Here on February 17, 1854 Mary's and Jim's first child was born, a boy whom they named Tignal Franklin, Tignal for their friend Tignal Coleman, and Franklin for Mary's brother Frank. Tignal Franklin was born the day before his mother's eighteenth birthday. Richard and family soon became homesick and returned to Kentucky, and within a few months, Taylor moved his family to Crawfordville, Indiana where they made their home. Jim's sister Mary married an Indiana man named Alec McCalip. They had two children, William and Ona. Mary died when the children were very young and their father took them to live in Kansas. When Jane was eighteen she married Joseph Lee Campbell and died ten months later in childbirth, the infant born dead. In June 1856 Jim's mother died at the age of fifty-six. Mary and Jim were now the only ones left, out of the two family group that originally came to Indiana.

Times were hard and Jim decided to move farther west. Soon after their daughter Fanny Alice (called Allie) was born on October 23rd, 1856. They left for Fayetteville County, Missouri, where Jim bought a farm near Wollington. In 1860 an infant son was born dead. On the following March 7, 1861 Clark Alonza was born. One month later war was declared between the North and South, and Jim thought it best to leave Missouri. After selling the farm he moved his family to Virden, Illinois, where he went into partnership with George W. Cox (no relation) in a general merchandise store. Business was good and they were saving money, but Jim grew more and more restless as the war progressed and was eager to join the Union Army.

Mary was grievously distressed to see her husband's wild excitement on hearing the drums calling the men to town meetings. Many times he would stop short in the midst of a meal, and grabbing his hat, dash out the door headed for the gatherings. It was useless for Mary to undertake to dissuade him, for his mind was made up. He was most determined. In August 1862 he enlisted under Captain Cowen and General

John T. Renicker in Company G. 122rd Illinois Volunteer Regulars, stationed at Carbondale, Illinois. This town being nearby, Mary was able to visit him often.

Jim liked good coffee and found it hard to the watery brown fluid served as such in the mass hall. Almost at once he began supervising the coffee making and was soon being called "Coffee Cox", a name endured throughout the war period.

One Sunday morning when Jim was at home on a week-end furlough, he and Mary went to church next door to their house. Clark, then two years old, had been taken with them and knew where they usually sat. On waking and hearing they were at church, he slipped out the door before his mother's helper could dress him, stopped in the street outside and took off his nightgown, then walked stark naked through the aisle to where Jim and Mary were sitting. Horrified, Jim quickly covered him with his coat and they hurried from the church, much to the amusement of the minister and congregation.

Soon after Jim's return to Carbondale, his company was sent farther South and Mary was left desolate, along with her three small children. On November 8th, 1863 Ona Etta was born, named for Jim's niece Ona McCalip. Neighbors and friends were more than kind throughout the weary times that followed.

By this time Jim was deep in the throes of war. At the battle of Kenesaw Mountain he was shot through the chin, leaving a hole so large he was forced to wear a beard ever after. Later, while on a burning ship in Mobile Bay, he was compelled to slide down a rope in order to save his life. This so severely burned the inner parts of his hands he was never able to open them part way. At another time he was confined in Libby Prison, suffering illnesses from which he never fully recovered. These were his battle scars.

When the war was over he returned to his home in Virden and resumed his work in the store. He found Clark was still a mischievous little boy, often running away and having to be hunted for, usually by neighborhood children to whom Jim gave candy at the store. It was nothing uncommon for these youngsters to come to the store and say, "Mr. Cox, we want some candy and we promise to hunt for Clark the next time he gets lost."

One day a circuit riding minister, who always stayed with Jim and Mary when he was in Virden, jokingly said to Clark as he said goodbye, "Now you must come to my house and return my visit." Clark perked up his ears, and that afternoon when no one was around, he packed some clothes in a pillow case, put his pet kitten in also, and started off. After a long search, he was at last found sitting on the stuffed pillow case atop the cowcatcher of an idle engine in the train yards. The poor kitten was dead.

The following April 3, 1866 Artella Eva was born. Things were going along happily, when a group of travelers from the west came through Virden, telling of vast wealth to be made by raising stock in southwest Missouri. Jim kept thinking of this for days after they were gone, becoming more and more convinced he could become rich in the promising country. He soon decided to sell out completely in Virden and move his family to the new field. Mary was greatly opposed to such a plan. She pointed out they were all happy in Virden, had a fine business, owned their home and were saving money. She was bitterly against making any kind of change whatsoever. She loved Virden and wanted to stay there the rest of her life. But notwithstanding her initial pleadings, Jim was adamant. He loved Mary and wanted to do even better things for her and was definitely convinced that this would be the outcome of their move.

On reaching Jasper County, Missouri, near Carthage, Jim bought land and stocked it with cattle. Everything verified all that he had been told of this wonderful country, and he was wildly exuberant over the venture. The following year was spent getting it all suitably organized. Suddenly, with no warning whatsoever, an epidemic of killing disease among cattle struck that part of the state and every head of his stock lay dead.

Mary and Jim now felt they were all but completely wiped out. Heartsick, discouraged and woefully despondent, Jim sold the land and took his family to Carthage where he went to work in a store until he could decide what was best to be done.

That year word came that a new railroad was to be built through that section of the state, and after making inquiries, Jim and one of his friends went to Dallas County and bought land on the right of way. There they laid out a town they named Georgia City, and sent for their families. Jim again took up farming, biding his time until the railroad came through and Georgia City would be a thriving town on the main line.

On January 27th, 1869 Eugene was born. The farm was prosperous, the receipts far outreaching the disbursements. One day after Jim had received a large sum of money, he started to the nearby town of Buffalo to deposit it in the bank. It being a few miles, and the horses needed on the farm, Jim decided to

walk to the town. When only a short distance on his way he suddenly began feeling a strong urge to return home. This puzzled him, but thinking it absurd, he continued on his way. The urge, however, became so compelling he quickly turned and hurried back home.

There he found Clark had attempted to ride an unbroken pony, much against his father's instructions. The pony had thrown him off and kicked him in the head. The piece of scalp the exact size of the pony's hoof was hanging over the boy's eye. Mary, there alone with her children and no near neighbors, was panic-stricken and helpless. Jim knew then that had been given a divine premonition, bringing him back home. Quickly he brought the country doctor, who, after cleaning away the sand and gravel in the bleeding tissue, sewed the torn piece of scalp back in place, it taking twenty-two stitches to close the wound,

When Frank was fifteen it became evident he was in no way adapted to farm work. He was a tall, slight frame, and had a strong talent for art, seeing beauty in everything about him. Instead of doing the work expected of him out in the field, he would be found sitting under a tree making pencil sketches of the beautiful surrounding country. This grossly vexed his father, who knew nothing about such a talent, and therefore thought his son was lazy and didn't want to work. He was at his wit's end to know what to do with the boy.

Frank soon wanted to leave the farm and try making his own way, Doing the things he liked to do and felt fitted for. After talking it over with his parents, they reluctantly agreed and he left for the nearby town of Buffalo. There he found an opening for a sign painter, and after trying his hand at it, and finding he could give satisfaction, he soon had all he could do. From this beginning he was able to work his way farther on, earning enough in one town to take him to the next. At the end of a few months he had visited several states both north and south.

On December 15, 1871 Mary had another son whom they named Jesse Claude. In the spring following, a band of Indians came through the town giving shows. Clark and his friend Bob were fascinated, and attended every performance, talking to the Indians and becoming acquainted. Secretly they decided to slip away with the tribe when they left town, taking part in the shows and seeing the country. At the edge of town Bob backed down and returned home, but Clark stayed on, telling the Indians his name was Tom Clark. By evening, when Clark did not come home, his parents began looking for him. Bob felt frightened and was reluctant to tell what he knew, but upon questioning, broke down and told of their plan to join the Indians. By this time the tribe was far on their way, and no one knew what direction they had gone. Jim and Mary tried every way they could to get word of him, but in those days such news was hard to come by, and they were compelled to wait, and hope that Clark would soon tire of the venture and in some way manage to get back home.

But two years had passed with no word and they had almost despaired of ever hearing what had happened to their boy. About this time a missionary traveling through the Indian Territory happened to see a white boy among the tribes and began to question him. Clark, by then, was very homesick and told the missionary the whole story. On getting the name and address of Clark's parents, the missionary wrote to them and Jim immediately sent word for his boy to come home.

It was a time for great rejoicing and especially so for Mary, who had felt herself being largely the cause of Clark's being so entranced with the Indians. She well remembered the time when she was carrying Clark, that a tribe of Indians had come through that part of Missouri and how unnaturally possessed she had been with the tribe. In those days it was thought that pregnant mothers could mark thier unborn children through undue emotions.

Frank continued with his traveling, and being adept at cartooning, conceived the idea of giving evening entertainments at a modest admission fee. These he called "Chalk Talks", talking amusingly while making caricatures, usually of well-known people. This fascinated the audiences and people came in large numbers each night. He later began calling himself "The Tramp Painter" making pictures in oil during his talks. Finding that he was able to make as many as fifty such pictures of an evening, he later began to advertise his entertainment as "The Lightning Artist." He worked his way to Colorado, where he became entranced by the gorgeous scenery, making oil paintings of local scenes, during his lectures. Sometimes he would pretend to be very displeased at the way some of those pictures would be turning out, green skies and blue grass, red splotches and gray spots. Then suddenly he would turn the canvas upside down, and there the audience would see a beautiful picture of some familiar place, blue skies and green grass. One of these was a picture of the Garden of the Gods with the red rocks, the gray spot turning out to be Pike's Peak in the distance. The audience, always delighted with his unusual work, sang his praises far and wide.

In the summer of 1873 word came to Buffalo that the railroad had changed the original right of way which would leave Georgia City several miles off the main line. Georgia City would now become a ghost town. Jim was frantic with despair, all his hopes and plans were now completely shattered. Everything he had undertaken since leaving Virden had met with disaster. He and Mary decided to leave the state and return to Indiana. He would buy another farm.

Claude was just recovering from whooping cough which had resulted in an infected ear which was still draining. They consulted a doctor about the advisability of leaving with the baby, to take such a long trip. The doctor assured them it was perfectly safe and gave them a new medicine to help the healing process.

As they left the state, Mary looked across acres of bright yellow golden rod. The times of her greatest sorrows and disappointments were tied in with fields of buttercups or sunflowers or golden rod. Never again could she abide the sight of any kind of yellow flower.

As they approached Terre Haute, Indiana, Claude became violently ill and died within a few hours. The infected ear had been allowed to heal too quickly and the poison reached his brain. After burying him in Terre Haute, Jim and Mary went on to Morgantown, Indiana, grief-stricken and almost prostrate from the many cares they were called upon to endure.

Jim eventually bought a farm and Mary opened a millinery store. Allie was old enough to be much help in keeping up the home during Mary's hours in the store. Allie was a beautiful girl and had many admirers. The superintendent of the school, William Turner Cathcart, fell in love with her, and though he was twelve years older than she, they were married in September 1875. Because of the difference in their ages, Allie always felt rather in awe of her new husband. While she knew much about cooking, she felt something very special should be served to this very fine and dignified man. She studied all the fancy cookbooks and magazine recipes and gave him only the most exotic foods, until at the end of three weeks he was almost helpless with diarrhea. Weakly, he said, "Allie, can't we just have some plain meat and potatoes for a while?"

In July 1876 Allie had her first baby, a boy whom they named Ernest Alonzo. Soon after, a much better paying position was available in Bastrap, Louisiana and they left for their new home.

Frank by then had worked himself into the scene painting business, furnishing all the stage scenery and advertising drop curtains for theaters. He too was married in 1876 to Miss Clara Atkins of Streater, Illinois. As the business grew he took Clark, who was near sixteen, to assist him. Very soon he found that Clark also had a natural talent for art and began to teach him to paint scenery. He also felt the need of an advance agent to travel ahead and secure contacts as well as sell the advertising spaces on the drop curtains to be installed. He felt his father well qualified for this position and persuaded him to sell the farm and enter into business with him and Clark. Mary then sold the millinery store and took the children back to Buffalo, Missouri, where they would have better schooling, and she would be among friends. In March 1878, Mary got word of the death of her father in Kentucky, at the age of seventy-eight. A day or so after she received word of the birth of Frank and Clara's first child, a little girl they named Myrtle. About this time Mary moved to Springfield, Missouri, and on May 14, 1878 she had a baby girl whom they named Lulu Delle. It was the intention to call her Lulu, but her father began affectionately referring to her as baby "Dell e" and she went by that name ever after. Having a sister named Telle, the family found the similarity in names very confusing, then later on when there was a Nell and a Zella in the family, they said, "We give up."

When Delle was six weeks old her mother and her sister Telle started to the gallery to have her picture taken. Telle was wheeling the baby carriage, when suddenly it overturned and Delle was thrown out. Panic-stricken, Telle caught the baby up in her arms feeling surely she had been killed, but they soon found that no harm was done. Aside from a frightened little whimper the baby kept sleeping soundly. When they reached the gallery no amount of dawdling could waken her. Finally the photographer said, laughing, "All right, we'll just have to take her picture asleep in the buggy," and this was done.

"Seems we just didn't choose the right day," Mary said smiling, thinking of the mishaps.

The following spring in 1879, Allie and Will moved to Springfield, Missouri from Louisiana, where they had been living, and in 1882 their baby girl May Alice was born.

Telle and Ona, who were in their early teens, adored their baby sister Delle and as soon as she was old enough, began teaching her to recite little rhymes. By the time she was three they had taught her some songs and how to play chords on the parlor organ for her accompaniment. Since her feet could not reach

the pedals, one of them would sit beside her to pump the organ. Delle was quick to learn and always eager to perform. One day at a church picnic a girl mounted the rostrum and sang a song. As she came down to resume her place, Delle piped up, "You didn't sing that right." Astonished, the girl said, "Do you know how to sing it better?" Delle said she did, whereupon she climbed up and began the song. The whole assembled crowded in to see and hear such a little child, and Mary was frantic for fear her baby girl would be smothered, but undaunted, Delle sang on to the end, followed by loud applause.

One day when Ona was giving Delle a bath, a favorite middle-aged bachelor came to call. Delle spied him through a crack in the bedroom door and cried out frantically, "Don't come in Uncle Dave. I've got no panties on." Ona smilingly wondered if this staid old bachelor would have swooned completely away had he inadvertently come upon this little miss in her first-born nudity.

When Delle was four, a slovenly, dissolute family moved into the house on the alley at the rear of their property. She saw they had a little girl about her age and she immediately wanted to get acquainted with her. "No, no," Delle's mother said, "You stay away from there." Delle was crestfallen, "But why can't I play with her?" she asked. After some hesitation Mary said, "Well -- her head might not be clean."

Delle knew nothing about lice, and to her this meant plain dirt. So that afternoon while her mother was entertaining callers, Delle called the little girl to come over. After taking off her clothes she sat her under the pump and splashed on the water, giving her head an especial scrubbing. She then picked up the scissors and cut off practically all of the little girl's hair, then proceeded to dress her from the skin out in some of her own clothes. Taking her by the hand proudly, she went in to her mother. "Now, Mama, will she do? Can I play with her now?" Mary was horrified! "My word" she exclaimed to her friends, "Those people will sue us." Heartsick, humiliated, and not a little frightened, Mary took the child home, apologizing for what had been done. When the slatternly woman was told the little girl could keep the clothes she had on, the woman was highly pleased and nothing more was ever heard about the incident, which to Mary had been a dilemma.

The next day Mary saw Delle come staggering up the path from an apple tree and finally falling senseless. On quickly getting a doctor he saw the rotten spot on the apple which Delle had bitten into, and gave her an emetic. Soon she disgorged a very poisonous spider which would easily have caused her death.

When summer vacation time came, Gene went to visit his Aunt Sue in Texas, and Mary took Delle, who was then six years old, back to Kentucky where she and Jim had been married, Tell and Ona remained at home with a middle-aged woman who did the housework, while Allie, who lived close by, helped to supervise.

Jim was away on one of his trips, later going to Alton, Illinois on business. He loved this hilly old town on the Mississippi river, always having been an admirer of rolling country. He remembered well having been there before, during the war when helping to guard the Federal Penitentiary near the river front.

At the end of Mary's visit in Kentucky, he sent for her and Delle to meet him in Alton, where he had business for a few days. On their arrival he took them to what was then called Upper Alton, saying he had found a cool, homelike place to board. It being August, the weather was very warm. When they reached the house they went into the darkened living room where Delle immediately spied the cabinet organ and climbed up on the stool. "This looks like our organ," she said, then looking closer, "This IS our organ," and with that, Tell and Ona burst into the room, grabbing and hugging them while shouting excitedly, Yes, it is our organ. Everything is ours. We have moved from Springfield, and this is where we are going to live. It was all in perfect order. We have done everything."

Mary was completely stunned. It was unbelievable. Never in her life had she known such a complete surprise, but it was all beautiful and she was highly pleased. That was their homecoming to Alton, Illinois where they lived the rest of their lives and were at last buried there.

In September Gene returned from Texas and entered High School. The following April Ona was married, and Tell went to Kimmswick, Mo. to live with Allie who had developed a kidney disorder. She was never well, and now having three children she needed help. Tell was old enough to assist her in many ways and was glad to be back in Kimmswick among her many friends. In early spring Delle had been placed in a private kindergarten and her school mates chose her as "Queen of the May". She felt highly distinguished in her fluffy white tarlatan dress and crown of daisies. By the time for the fall semester, Gene who had never been much of a student, begged to quit school and join Frank and Clark in the theatrical scenery business. He, too, had a natural talent for art, and his parents thought it wise to agree.

The business grew and in a short time they were advertising as the "Cox Brothers, Scenic Artists" and were one of the leading firms in the country. An excerpt from a newspaper later on stated, "The new drop curtain at the Opera House was painted by Eugene Cox, the youngest scenic artist in the United States, being seventeen years of age."

When Jim became sixty-three he retired from the traveling position and went into the drug business with Tell's husband, who was a registered pharmacist. Jim, knowing nothing about drugs, was a silent partner and spent very little time in the store. He bought two acres of ground on one of his beloved hills and built a modern house. He raised chickens, kept a cow, had a fine vegetable garden and many fruit trees. His yard was a bower of beautiful plants which he loved to cultivate. Delle loved cats and kittens and many times passers-by would stand at the fence and watch them tumbling at play on the beautiful lawn. While these were busy days for Jim, they were also carefree and serene; profitable too, in an entirely new field of endeavor.

Delle graduated from High School with high honors, and later graduated from the Shurtloff College School of Music. She taught piano lessons until she was married in October, 1899. Years later she wrote her memoirs which are available in a book she entitled "Garna Graham".

Soon after Delle was married, Jim and Mary went back to Kentucky to visit Jim's oldest brother and many other relatives, as well as the old haunts of their youth. They found the picture of "The Carrier Dove" still hanging in its original place where Mary had looked at it during their wedding ceremony. They also found the old hand-carved spinning wheel, dated 1844, on which she learned to spin as a child. Both of these items were given to her to take home and still are being preserved by her descendants. It was a joyous and memorial trip, one they loved to talk about all through their remaining years.

In October 6th, 1902, Mary and Jim celebrated their Golden Wedding. Thirty-five relatives were in attendance, including their children, grad-children, and their first great-grandson. It was a time they had looked forward to and hoped for throughout many long years and they were happy and comforted at its consummation.

The following winter Jim's health began to fail due to illnesses sustained during the war. On July 5, 1903 he passed peacefully away, and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Upper Alton.

At this time, Mary too was beginning to age and it was thought unwise for her to live alone, The house and its furnishings were sold and she spent the following years visiting among her children, staying a few months in each home. One time, when she was at Allie's house, she became interested in an art course one of her grand-daughters was studying. Being confined to her room while convalescing from an attack of influenza, she picked up a newspaper and casually tried her hand at copying a picture shown there. Thinking nothing more about it, she threw it aside. When Allie came into the room later she saw the sketch and was amazed to find her mother had made the drawing. A few days later Frank stopped to see them while passing through the town, and Allie showed him the sketch. He immediately realized she had talent and bought her a full set of water color paints, brushes and paper, and showed her how to go about using them, encouraging her to keep trying to make pictures. From this beginning, at the age of seventy years, she made over one hundred and fifty pictures for which she had ready sale, as well as many others made as gifts for relatives and friends. She conceived the idea of making free hand copies of "The Carrier Dove", one for each of her seven children. These are all being preserved by posterity. Many Newspaper articles depicting her unusual discovery of this latent talent were preserved in an old scrapbook which is now in the possession of her grand-daughter Virginia, Mrs. C. K. Boyle. It was now definitely understood from whom the natural talent of the famed Cox Brothers had derived.

On January 19, 1911 Mary passed away and was buried beside Jim, her husband, in Oakwood Cemetery. All of their cares and failures and disappointments, as well as their times of greatest happiness, now lay beneath the sod and the flowers.

Gone but not forgotten.

Ludelle Cox Powell

June 9th, 1976.