

MIDWEST COMPUTER GENEALOGISTS

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MUSIC AND OTHER WINTER HEARTH PASTIMES ON THE VERMONT FRONTIER

Julia Morse

A distant Morse cousin, Mrs. Bathsheba H. Crane, recorded her childhood reminiscences growing up in a small community in the woodlands of Vermont in the early 1800's--the same place and time where Albert's and my ancestor, Ephraim Morse, lived as a very little boy. Here are some excerpts of her account which give insight into the winter pastimes of the young people and their families:

"We loved our icicled home, clad in the snows of winter, and time or distance can never efface its hallowed scenes from memory. During the long evenings, when the storm raged without, the fire blazed upon the hearth. . . . Father and mother were there, and never a shadow had darkened our days. We felt a sense of pleasure in a respite from labor, — of ease, security, and freedom in the presence of love and providence, which made home the happiest place on earth. . . ."

"At such times, the large kitchen was converted into a workshop, or whittling-room. My brothers worked upon their hand-sleds, or articles of curious mechanism, and miniature musical instruments, or at their hard sums in arithmetic.

"Their first specimen of a musical instrument was a violin as large as a man's hand, neatly strung with horse-hair, and called by them "Little Kit." It had a dainty little bow, and, when well fingered, made a concord of sweet sounds. Next came one larger; then another; and at last, a bass-viol and a beautiful violin were finished, which filled the house with music, beguiling the hours and giving us the most ecstatic pleasure. We have often wished there were just such

kitchens nowadays for boys. . . ."

"The Morses were great lovers of music, and for generations had been sweet singers in Israel. Uncle [Captain Jacob Morse] and his wife [Sarah Hawes Morse], with their family of eight sons and two daughters, were all, at different times, members of the choir. Their children seemed born to sing like the birds, and never tire of music. N. C., one of the younger sons, played on the violin, sang ballads, and united with the choir in boyhood; later he was professor of music, and is now among white-haired men of affluence in Kentucky. [See Note 1.]

"Singing was their recreation. After the business of the day was over, with the assistance of the "big bass" and other musical instruments, which took the place of the modern piano, they rehearsed selections from the late composers, or sung the old church melodies, the music of which was never considered perfect without the aid of the mother's rich, mellow, alto voice, which gave a sweetness and freshness to the fugues absolutely charming. . . ."

". . . Nothing so endears a family to each other, and binds them to their early home with tender memories, as joining in the harmonies of evening music at the fireside, when heart throbs to heart in gentle and lofty sympathies, with a freedom from care that will never come again. Other scenes will fade, and voices be forgotten, but the inspiration of those sacred hours will go with us through life, like an 'old hymn, laid up in the heart.' . . ."

-- Bathsheba H. Crane (1880). Life, letters, and wayside gleanings: For the folks at home. Boston: James H. Earle, Publisher, p. 91; 68-69. <https://archive.org/details/lifeletterswaysi00cran>

Mrs. Crane, at the encouragement of her cousin N.C. Morse, recorded and published her reminiscences in

1880. They are now archived and available for us and future generations through the Genealogy Collection of Allen County Public Library at Internet Archive.

MCG is now beginning to publish our own collections at Internet Archive. Your stories could be there, too!

[Note 1]

N. C. Morse left an interesting heritage, worthy of further mention. He made music his early profession, selling pianos, other instruments, and sheet music in Cincinnati and Louisville, Kentucky. His Cincinnati piano works hired Old-World master artisans to obtain the best quality in sound. The Cincinnati piano works were eventually sold to the company that became Baldwin pianos. N. C. published songs (sheet music) of his own composition, one which was recorded well over a century later by the Grateful Dead. He eventually found other businesses and investments (such as tobacco processing for export, mining land speculation, and suspension bridge building) to be more lucrative, but continued providing music to his church and friends as a life-long hobby.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Al Morse

My 7th great grandfather on my mother's side was Thomas Farnsworth. He came to America in 1677 from England. He was a Quaker and had been arrested for attending Quaker meetings. His wife, Susanna, two children, and two servants came to America in 1678. She was a Quaker minister. The two servants were probably indentured servants. They would not have been able to pay to come to America, so they agreed to work for someone who would pay their way for a set number of years. They would then be allowed to be free. The Farnsworth family settled in New Jersey. Five more children were born to Thomas and Susanna, and the youngest, Henry, was my 6th great grandfather.

Henry had a son, Thomas, who left New Jersey and owned a lot of land on Staten Island, New York. He later moved to Virginia. He had a son, Daniel, and Daniel had a son, Isaac, who became my 3rd great grandfather. He married Louisa Tracey around 1830. They had 7 children and their oldest child, a daughter, was Rachel Elizabeth, who was born in 1831. She married Joseph Mooney on October 21, 1847.

Joseph Mooney had visited two of his brothers in Clay County, Missouri. So, Joseph and Rachel Mooney, with 3 children and Rachel's parents, Isaac and Louisa Farnsworth, and their 6 children, moved to Clay County, Missouri in 1854. They traveled by boat, bringing some furniture with them. They traveled down the Ohio River, up the Mississippi River, and up the Missouri River to Liberty Landing, Clay County, Missouri. Unfortunately, Isaac Farnsworth died of cholera and was buried at night on the banks of the Missouri River.

Joseph and Rachel Mooney farmed in Clay County. They had 5 more children born there. The youngest was Laura Jessie, born April 21, 1871. She became my grandmother. Louisa Farnsworth settled in Liberty, Missouri and raised her children. She later moved to Kansas City, Missouri.

An interesting story passed down by my mother, Mildred Catherine (Janssens) Morse, was that Joseph Mooney was a miller of grain. As border problems existed, times could be challenging. Joseph was grinding some grain for someone when some Jayhawkers came by. They were not pleased that he was doing that for that person and prepared to hang him. But a neighbor boy, the son of Zarilda Samuel, Jessie James, came by and convinced the Jayhawkers that Joseph was an honest person and ground grain for everybody regardless of their beliefs. This saved Joseph Mooney's life.

The Mooney family kept moving and renting other properties. About 1880, their oldest son, Dr. Joseph Henry Mooney, bought a boarding house in Harlem, Missouri across the Missouri River from Kansas City, Missouri. Joseph and Rachel and their family moved in and helped run the boarding house. In 1886, the Mooney's youngest daughter, Laura, was helping by

serving as a waitress. David Janssens came by to eat often. He fell in love with Laura and asked her father if he could marry her. Laura was 15 years old, and Joseph told David that she could not be married until she was 18. Laura turned 18 on April 21, 1889.

David Janssens was born March 8, 1854 in Zandvliet, Belgium. He came to America in 1880. He traveled from New York to Pennsylvania, to Chicago, and to Harlem, Missouri. He was 35 years old and Laura was 18 when they got married on April 23, 1889. They eventually had 14 children. Child number 12 was Mildred Catherine Janssens, born October 21, 1910 in Parkville, Missouri. She became my mother.

The family kept moving to many different locations. They moved to Kansas City, Missouri and lived there from 1892 to 1909. They lived in different houses, but stayed the longest at 1406 McGee. David owned a business that handled poultry, eggs, butter, game, and hides at 122 E. Missouri Ave. A picture taken in 1907 shows David and 2 of his employees and a wagon loaded with crates of live chickens on it. The wagon was pulled by a horse. Also, the oldest sons, Walter and Lester, were on the wagon as well. They would have been teenagers.

The family eventually moved to Bates County, Missouri in 1917. They rented different properties, but they bought a farm in January, 1920. David died on December 2, 1920. The family sold the farm and rented other farms in the Foster, Bates County, Missouri area. Mildred graduated from the 10th grade in Foster in 1927. Another student in that class was Albert Frank Morse. The Janssens family then moved to properties in the Rich Hill, Bates County, Missouri area. Mildred graduated from Rich Hill High School in 1929.

The family moved to a farm on the east edge of Rich Hill in 1930. Laura had a stroke, and the family told Mildred to return to the farm and help with her mother and her brothers, who all lived there. The brothers had a dairy business. Laura died May 23, 1939. There were 4 children that were there at that time, and they all went different directions. On November 6, 1940, Mildred and Albert Morse were married in Rich Hill. On January 3, 1942, I was born.

Much of the information in this article was obtained from a book titled *Farnsworth Memorial II*, pages 759-774. And a Janssens Notebook, including pictures, stories, and genealogy tables, compiled by my cousin, Laura Frances (Seals) Scott. Her mother was child number 4, Amy Henrietta (Janssens) Seals.

SEARCHING FOR ADOPTION RECORDS

Marjorie Slavens

Recently, I read two books that discussed adoption and challenges faced by those who want to search for adoption records. The first, *Before We Were Yours*, by Lisa Wingate, published in 2017, presents the Historical case of the Tennessee Children's Home Society, which functioned from 1924 to 1950. Georgia Tan, the Director of this agency, had babies and small children kidnapped and sold to prospective parents, who paid Tan large sums to adopt those children. Two children of Joan Crawford were among the approximately 5,000 children for whom this organization arranged adoptions.

Before We Were Yours was the story of 5 children, who were left alone on a boat in the Mississippi River and kidnapped while their parents were gone. Their baby sister was united with one of her sisters many years later. The children were not cared for properly while they were waiting to be adopted, and many of them died under the supervision of this illegal organization run by Tan, who became extremely wealthy.

The second book, *Before and After*, discusses the efforts of some of the adopted children to find their birth families. They proposed to Lisa Wingate that she help them search for their families and assist them in holding a reunion of adoptive families who were illegally separated from their birth families by their Tennessee agency. The reunion was held in Memphis in 2019. Wingate and her friend, Judy Pace Christie, interviewed family members and described some of the searches to reunite the families.

“During the first half of the twentieth century, the Tennessee Children's Home Society operated a black-market baby business that offered up stolen

children for adoption. The author recounts the stories of some of those children and their later lives, including their efforts to find their birth families.”

In November, 2018, Beth Foulk presented at our MCG meeting her search for her older brother, who had been adopted before she was born. She was able to find his birth mother and to tell her about her brother, but he decided that he did not want to meet his birth mother. He was pleased to have learned about her through Beth’s research.

In the November, 2018 MCG Newsletter, I discussed the adoption of my niece and nephew, who were legally adopted as babies. In both Beth’s family and in ours, a natural child was born after the adoption of the older children, but both families were loved and completely integrated within the families without distinction.

In Before and After, the adopted children, who were victims of the illegal action of the Tennessee Children’s Homes Society, wanted to meet their birth families. In some cases, they were illegally kidnapped and deprived of the relationship with parents and brothers and sisters. Although there was some resistance to this reunion in some cases, the final reunion was successful. The adopted children had no siblings in their new adoptive families, and they were able to know some of their siblings from their original families. In some cases, the family relationship was established from DNA testing through Ancestry.com.

Some interest in tracing adoption records is for medical reasons. There are some situations in which the medical history of the family is extremely important in determining when certain medical situations are hereditary. In some cases, medical treatment for a condition can be done only with members of the birth families.

It would seem that there are both advantages and disadvantages to such research. It can be very helpful in such medical cases, and, if both the adoptive and birth families are interested and willing to know each other and to meet. However, those who are involved in the research of their adoptions, both as parents and children, should be able to make their own decisions about their family identity and contact.

PRESERVING STORIES OF FAMILY MUSIC AND OTHER PASTTIMES

Julia Morse

In a past newsletter, Albert Morse recorded some of the musical background of his family. This is an example of an aspect of family life that often is unrecorded and lost over time.

Albert's grandfather, Clark Frank Morse, played the banjo, which he may have acquired as a teen. My mother remembers him reminiscing late his his life about good times with music in his home and among neighbors, when he was growing up in Bates County, Missouri. He talked about going to musical parties and dances. We think these were neighbor's parties, a time when neighbors would invite neighbors to come for an evening of music and probably dancing and food.

He seemed to indicate that there was less music in the days after he was married and had a family of his own. We can only today speculate why this was so. His wife, Dona Miller Morse, daughter of pastor William Barton Miller, might have brought a slightly different culture to the household, but certainly she married her husband knowing his interests. It may have been largely because he was so busy with his farm and family responsibilities that he had less time and energy for outside activities.

Clark Frank’s grandson, Richard (my father), who played banjo himself, once wisely noted that it was the people who found time to sit on their porch and play that got good at playing the banjo! I’m pretty sure he attributed that wisdom as coming from his grandfather.

While researching the diary of Clark Frank Morse's mother, Nancy Ward, I learned that when she was a schoolteacher boarding in Richmond, Illinois, she often spent evenings with friends in the town, where-- I conclude, but cannot prove--music and singing was almost surely a part of their gatherings. Nancy was close friends with the wife of Dr. Robert F. Bennett and her sisters, and so she frequently visited and stayed for supper at the Dr. Bennett home.

Dr. Robert Bennett was an older brother of Samuel Filmore Bennett, who wrote the hymn "In the Sweet By and By." Prior to the Civil War, S. F. Bennett had been principal of the town school and an active proponent of teacher education in the county. Nancy may have attended one of his teaching seminars or even worked with him, though he was residing in Wisconsin at the time of Nancy's diary. There is record of the circumstances in which the famous hymn came about, which suggests that it was normal in the small town communities (or at least among the Bennett family) for friends to pick up a fiddle and share or write a song or hymn. Nancy's 1867 winter evenings with the Robert Bennett family likely included similar sharing of music. Perhaps the Bennett family sang their brother's hymn in this year prior to its publication. Sadly, Nancy's 1867 diary seldom recorded specific details of her visits.

Nancy did mention her occasional attendance at "singing school"--a common winter pastime in many frontier towns of the time--but she did not attend consistently. Whatever love of singing she may have shared with her later husband and children in Bates County is left unrecorded, with the exception of the comment from her son of fond memories of "much music in the home."

While Clark Frank may have found music less prevalent by comparison in his later life, it was not totally missing. Two of his grandsons, Richard (my father) and his brother, Jack, usually lived and worked with him on the farm during the summers. Both of the boys somehow learned to play harmonica well enough to play at a local fair or competition, and were even once hired by a local storekeeper to perform for a promotional event. Later their younger brother, Bob, also learned banjo and guitar.

Richard also recalled music from the radio. In order to enjoy better radio reception of The Grand Ole Opry, some of them would drive a vehicle to some spot known for better reception. Though Clark Frank's farm was not electrified, he had a small wind generator device, specifically designed to power a radio. As families more frequently became listeners rather than participants, perhaps it was the old days of live, home-grown music and dancing that Grandpa Frank missed?

Do you have fond memories of music or other pastimes in your home when you were a child? Or perhaps you remember comments from your parents and grandparents of what they did. Do write them down, or use your computer to record an audio or video recording telling these stories. We at MCG may be able to help you find a venue to archive them for the benefit of future generations.

MUSIC IN THE FAMILY

Marjorie Slavens

Music has always been very important in my family. The articles written by Al Morse about music in the Newcomb family of his wife Dorothy, and Julia Morse's article this month about music in her family have inspired me to think about music in my own family.

My father, Ralph Westmeier Slavens (1907-1983), was born in Seymour, Indiana. The grandparents of his mother, Edna Marie Westmeier, came to Indiana from Germany in 1841. His father, William Howard Slavens, was born in Henry County, Missouri and moved with his mother first to Kentucky and then to Seymour. His father bought a farm near Wicks, Arkansas in 1908, but it was not a very successful venture. They moved to Pittsburg, Kansas, and my father grew up there.

In high school, my father took 4 years of Latin, 4 of English and one of Journalism, two of Spanish, and 4 years of band, not the much needed advanced Math courses he would need for his future employment. He first studied the violin for 5 years but began cello lessons in the 8th grade and loved the instrument. He played the cello in his high school orchestra when these activities were more recognized and supported than they are now. His favorite piece was the "Poet and Peasant Overture", in which he played a solo. He could not continue with these activities after that time because his father thought a high school education was enough for anyone. It was more important to get a full-time job. My father became an electrician and later Maintenance Supervisor for the National Lead Company, but he never forgot about his music.

He often talked about Joseph John "Johnny"

Richards, his band teacher. Richards took his bands to high school contests with Joplin, Springfield, Missouri, Columbus, Kansas, etc., all excellent high school bands. He encouraged his students to use their music talent in many ways. My father played in a small group at the Christian Church in Pittsburg, and Richards recruited him for the Pittsburg State College marching band as a drummer when no college students were available. My father admired Richards and told me these stories in May, 1983 in an audio interview I recorded with him just three months before he died.

“Joseph John Richards (August 27, 1878 – March 16, 1956) was a composer, conductor, and music educator best known for writing over 300 compositions for circus and school bands. His most successful works were marches, including Crusade for Freedom, Emblem of Unity, and Shield of Liberty.

Richards was born in Cwmafan, Wales, but spent most of his childhood in Pittsburg, Kansas, United States. He began playing alto horn and cornet at the age of ten and became director of the Norton-Jones Circus Band at the age of nineteen. He would later play for and conduct several other circus bands, including the Barnum and Bailey Circus Band and the Ringling Brothers Band before they combined. When not playing for a circus, Richards studied music at Kansas State Teachers College and the American Conservatory of Music.

He began teaching music during World War I, first to Army bands and later to public schoolchildren. He conducted several municipal bands in Florida and Kansas until 1945 when he was selected to succeed Herbert L. Clarke as conductor of the Long Beach, California Municipal Band. He became a member of the American Bandmasters Association in 1936 and was elected president in 1949.

Richards died in Long Beach, California in 1956. He was inducted into the Windjammers' Hall of Fame in 1981. (www.wikipedia.com)

My father always loved music and appreciated listening to music my mother, Mildred Marie Welty Slavens (1910-2008) played on the piano and organ. Mother played the piano and had many years of

lessons. She also learned to play the organ and did so when her small church needed someone to play for services. She had a Hammond organ at home, but she was more comfortable with the piano.

My parents inspired us to listen to and love good music. None of us studied music, but it has been very important in all of our lives. When we were young, they always took us to a Muny Opera performance each year in St. Louis. My brother Everett, loved listening to Opera when we were younger, which bored me at the time, but I later became an addict for the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts on Saturday afternoon. He had season tickets for a number of years for the Houston Grand Opera. My sister, Beverly, and her family still go to Muny Opera performances and to shows at the Fox Theater in St. Louis. She and her husband, Don, attended a steel guitar convention in St. Louis for a number of years, and they love country music, as did our father. My sister, Carol, and I love Broadway musicals and television concerts. I have had season tickets for the Kansas City Symphony for 20 years.

My parents' grandchildren played in their school bands. My sister, Beverly's children, Linda and David played clarinets in high school, and David played clarinet and saxophone. My parents always enjoyed attending their concerts. My younger sister, Carol's daughters, Robin and Christine played the flute, and Christine's children, Jon and Jessica, played the trumpet and cello. My father would have been very pleased to know that Jessica was a good cello player.

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