

Madness Monday: Mary Jane (Roberts) [French] Blount and Family, 1900



The family of Mary Jane (Roberts) Blount, 1900. Standing, from left, Mary Jane (Mollie J) (Roberts) Blount, baby Bernice Blount, Samuel Harvey Blount with hat and tie, his father Samuel H. Blount, and Harry R. Blount. Seated on ground from left: Florence Blount, Helen J. Blount, Harold M. Blount. Cropped from a larger family photo.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Back in the mid- to late-1960s, kids did not generally have

much of an understanding about divorce. D-I-V-O-R-C-E (remember that country song?) was something whispered about, and only amongst grown-ups. So it seemed madness trying to document this family back then as a young teen. Just WHAT was Mary Jane's last name?? It was Blount, right? Her husband had that surname, and so did her kids. But what was this about her name being French (whisper, whisper)? And didn't her brother Jason Lee Roberts marry Julia French- was she related or was I just mixed up? It did not make sense to a young teen.

Sadly, today divorce makes too much sense to our kids, as so many have experienced it firsthand and it has become commonplace. But can you imagine the scandal in small town Iowa in the 1880s when a divorce took place?

Let's start at the beginning, though...

Mary Jane Roberts was born 7 November 1863 in Warren County, Illinois, to John Roberts (1832-1922) and Elizabeth Ann (Murrell) Roberts (1835-1917). Another kind of madness was going on around the family- the nation was in the midst of the Civil War. In fact, President Abraham Lincoln would dedicate a cemetery just 12 days after her birth- that speech is now known as "The Gettysburg Address." Thankfully the family was in a northern state, but times were hard for most during the war.

Mary Jane was only about 5 when she rode and walked alongside the family's covered wagon as they migrated from Warren County, Illinois, to Jasper County, Iowa in 1868.

Mary's life on her father's farm would have been similar in Iowa to what it had been in Illinois. She would have helped her mother with the cooking, cleaning, laundry, and probably the "women's work" on the farm which usually included a vegetable garden, some fruit trees, raising chickens for eggs and meat, and milking the family's cows and producing butter, which was often sold in town.

Life changed for Mary on 4 July 1878- she married Reuben H. French (1856-1937) on that date, per family records. Yes, it would be four more months before she turned 15 years old, for you numbers people. Two years later, "Mollie J." French was listed as the wife of Reuben French, a farmer like her father, in the 1880 US Federal Census for Mound Prairie Township in Jasper County, Iowa. Mollie's brother William E. Roberts was living with them, and listed as a farmer, too. Reuben was 23, and Mollie 16. It was also noted that the couple was married during the census year, so the date from family records may be inaccurate, and Mary/Mollie may have been about 16 when she married. (A marriage record has not been found.)

It does turn out that Reuben actually was the brother of Julia French (1863-1917), who married Mollie's brother Jason Lee Roberts (1859-1940) in 1881.

We don't know details about the years in between for Mollie, but the family story includes D-I-V-O-R-C-E. The next document we have is from 18 April 1889- a marriage record for a "M. J. French" whose maiden name was M.J. Roberts, and her parents were listed so we know the record is for the right M.J. The details of the record also state that the groom's name was "Daniel Blount"- more madness, since all the other records we have state Mollie's second husband was *Samuel Henshaw* Blount (1864-1935).

Sam and Mollie were next found in the 1900 US Federal Census in Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa. Sam was working as a coal operator, a skill he likely learned in England since he was a "colliery clerk" in Derbyshire when he was 17. (A colliery is a coal mine, and Iowa had a number of coal mines throughout the state.) They already had four children who were listed on the census: Harry R. Blount (1890-), Samuel H. Blount (1893-1966), Harold M. Blount (1896-), and Helen I. Blount (1898- ; married Joseph L. Cannon). By the 1910 census, two more children were born: Florence M. Blount (1900-1959) and Bernice M. Blount (1903-1994). In 1920, a Warren Blount was

listed as a son of Samuel E. Blount, and 15 years old; he has not been found on any other census with this family.

Sam was moving up in his profession- by 1910, when he was 47, he was listed as a partner in the coal mine. Son Harry was working as a miner that year.

The state of Iowa took a census in 1915, and recorded that Mollie had 8 years of grammar school plus 1 year of high school. Her church affiliation was Christian and the family was living at 2101 Clark St., in Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1920, a Warren Blount was listed as a son of Samuel E. Blount, and 15 years old; he has not been found on any other census with this family. Daughters Helen and Bernice were also living in the household.

Mary J. and Sam continued to live in Des Moines as they got older. Sam died on 29 June 1935, and Mary Jane on 20 December 1947. They are both buried in the Masonic Cemetery in Des Moines.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Image cropped from original large descendant photo. See "Treasure Chest Thursday: The John Roberts and Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts Family in 1900" at <http://heritageramblings.net/2014/02/13/treasure-chest-thursday-the-john-roberts-and-elizabeth-ann-murrell-roberts-family-in-1900/>
2. See also "Mystery Monday: The Children of Mary Jane (Roberts) [French] Blount" <http://heritageramblings.net/2016/05/16/mystery-monday-the-children-of-mary-jane-roberts-french-blount/>
3. Family interviews and records, circa 1960s-1970s.

Click to enlarge any image. Please contact us if you would like an image in higher resolution.

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[Sibling Saturday: Mary Jane \(Roberts\) Blount and Family, 1892](#)



Mary Jane (Roberts) Blount and her husband Samuel H. Blount, holding baby Harry R. Blount.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Image taken at "The Homeplace" of John Roberts and his wife Elizabeth Ann (Murrell) Roberts, Mary Jane's parents.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Cropped from larger image- see [Treasure Chest Thursday: The John Roberts and Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts Family](http://heritageramblings.net/2014/02/06/the-john-roberts-and-elizabeth-ann-murrell-roberts-family-in-1892/) in 1892 at <http://heritageramblings.net/2014/02/06/the-john-roberts-and-elizabeth-ann-murrell-roberts-family-in-1892/>

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Wordless Wednesday: George Anthony Roberts and Family, 1892



Family of George Anthony Roberts and Ella Viola (Daniel) Roberts, 1892, Jasper County, Iowa. Son George A. Roberts, Jr., is in stroller, and Ethel Gay Roberts is held by her mother. Their third child, Edith Mae Roberts, was not yet born.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Family treasure chest of photos, cropped from the original larger picture of all the descendants of John S. Roberts and Elizabeth Ann (Murrell) Roberts.
2. For original, large image please see also [Treasure Chest Thursday: The John Roberts and Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts Family in 1892](http://heritageramblings.net/2014/02/06/the-john-roberts-and-elizabeth-ann-murrell-roberts-family-in-1892/) at <http://heritageramblings.net/2014/02/06/the-john-roberts-and-elizabeth-ann-murrell-roberts-family-in-1892/>.

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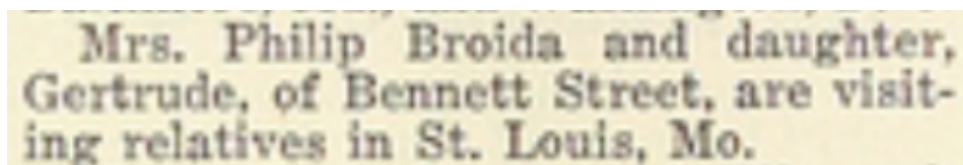
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Travel Tuesday: Gertrude Broida and Mother Visiting St. Louis in 1919



Mrs. Philip Broida and daughter, Gertrude, of Bennett Street, are visiting relatives in St. Louis, Mo.

Gertrude Broida (later Cooper) visiting St. Louis, Missouri with her mother, Bess Dorothy (Green) Broida, 25 July 1919. From the *Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion* of that date, with kind permission to publish.

[Broida Family](#) (Click for Family Tree)

Gertrude Belle Broida was not quite eight years old when her mother, Bess Dorothy (Green) Broida, took her to St. Louis, Missouri, on a visit from their home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They most likely took the train to St. Louis, and arrived at beautiful Union Station. We can imagine that Gertrude and her mother would have stepped down from the train and walked from the dozens of tracks inside the station toward the Grand Hall. Family may have met them at the train- back then, one could actually go all the way to the train even if not a passenger- or waited patiently in the Grand Hall for them to arrive. All were probably dressed beautifully- back then, one dressed up to travel, and since both families worked mostly in the clothing industry, their clothes were likely the latest fashion and impeccably tailored.

Bess and Gertrude might have been met by their Broida family. Bess' husband and Gertrude's father, Phillip E. Broida, had quite a few family members in St. Louis. His father, John "Zelig" Broida was 62 in 1919, but had been listed in the St. Louis City Directory in 1917. We don't know if he was still in St. Louis or had already immigrated to Israel, but perhaps Bessie and Gertrude visited to see him before he left. There were quite a few Broida cousins in St. Louis, too.

Bessie's Green family may have met them at the station as well. Bessie's father, Abraham Green, and her mother, Rose (Brave) Green, made St. Louis their home. Additionally, Bessie's sisters lived in St. Louis, and two of the three had families of their own, as did her brother Herman Green.

We can only imagine the joy Bessie would have felt as she hugged her sisters, Estelle (Green) Ledwidge, Ann (Green) Stampfer (or had she married Charles White by that date?), and Mary Green. They all would have commented how big each of the children had grown since their last visit.

Gertrude would have been thrilled to see her older cousin (Sarah) Jane Ledwidge, who would have been 12 in 1909.

Jane's little sister Helen D. Ledwidge, lovingly known as "Sis" her whole life, was only about three months older than Gertrude. Esther S. Stampfer would have been 11. The four cousins would probably have linked arms and marched down the walkway to the Grand Hall, probably giggling and skipping all the way. The family was always very close.

Union Station was, at one time, the busiest and largest train station in the *world*, and once they all reached the Grand Hall, it would have been quite impressive to a little girl. (It was impressive even into the 1960s and 1970s.)



1909 Postcard of the Grand Hall of Union Station in St. Louis, Missouri.

As the group exited the station, they would have waited for a streetcar if one of the St. Louis families did not have their own car. Looking back, Union Station was as beautiful from the outside as the inside:



Postcard of exterior of Union Station in St. Louis, Missouri.

Herman L. Green was the lone brother in the family, and he had a son, Preston M. Green, who would have been just 4 that year. (His son Harold Green would be born in 1921.) Abraham and Rose Green, Bessie's parents, would most probably thoroughly enjoyed having all their children and grandchildren around them. The families likely had a wonderful visit. Parting when Bessie and Gertrude were scheduled to return to Pittsburgh must have been painful for all.

Of course, we do not know if all the details described above are totally true. But this little snippet in the Society section of the *Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion* allows us to imagine what life was like for Bess (Green) Broida and Gertrude Broida as they travelled to St. Louis for a treasured visit.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. *Jewish Criterion*, 25 July 1919, Society Section, Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, Vol. 51, No. 22, Page 16. The

Pittsburgh Jewish Newspaper Project, posted with kind permission. http://doi.library.cmu.edu/10.1184/pmc/CRI/CR1_1919_051_022_07251919.

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[Sibling Saturday: The Jason Lee Roberts Family, 1900](#)



Jason Lee Roberts Family, 1900. Standing, in white dress is Orpha B. Roberts, her brother Guy L. Roberts, Jason Lee Roberts, his wife Julia (French) Roberts holding baby Ralph Roberts. Seated children, from left: Wiley Roberts, Willard Roberts, and Charley Roberts. (Jason's brother George A. Roberts is the man standing on the left, with his son George Jr.)

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

The Roberts family have a legacy of feeding their own families as well as the nation by their work with the soil and food crops, as well as with livestock. Jason Lee Roberts followed in the footsteps of his father, John S. Roberts, and other ancestors, as he farmed the land for all of his working life. In fact, J.L. is listed along with his two brothers, George A. Roberts and W. E. Roberts, in the "Directory of Leading Farmers in Jasper County, Iowa" in 1901.

Jason Lee or "J.L." was the second child of five children (one died in infancy) of John Roberts and his wife Elizabeth Ann

(Murrell) Roberts. J. L. was born in Warren County, Illinois, as were 3 of his siblings; his birth was on 8 December 1859. (He was possibly born in Roseville- records vary.) J.L. would have worked on the farm as a young boy, learning the same skills his father had learned from his own father. In 1868, when J.L. was about 9 or 10, the family migrated via covered wagon to Jasper County, Iowa. The family settled on a farm there, where J.L. and his siblings grew to adulthood.

Jason acquired his own farm "after reaching manhood," as his obituary stated. The homestead was near Prairie City, and his son Charles farmed it after he retired.

Jason married Julia French on 22 December 1881 in Mound Prairie Township, Jasper County, Iowa. Julia had also been born in Illinois, but on 5 December 1863, to John Candor French and Susan F. Peckenpaugh. Julia's parents had lived in Indiana, as had Jason's, and then moved to Illinois- it was a common migration pattern. The known residences of the families were about 70 miles apart in Indiana, but only 45 miles apart in Illinois- perhaps the families knew one another? Both families were enumerated in Jasper County in 1870, so there is the possibility that they migrated together in 1868, as it was a good-sized group. We have been unable to find the French family in the 1860 US Federal Census, so finding where they were that year might give us more clues about whether or not the two families knew each other prior to removing to Iowa.

The two families were close, even if it was only once they took up residence in Iowa: Julia's brother, Reuben H. French, married Jason's sister, Mary Jane Roberts. (More of that story in another post.)

J.L. and Julia had seven children together: Orpha B. Roberts (1883-1948), who married Samuel Blount; Oca S. Roberts (1888-1973), who married Walter Wilkinson; Guy L. Roberts (1890-1962); Wiley A. Roberts (1895-1967); Willard Francis Roberts (1897-1943); Charles Wilder Roberts (1900-1989); and

Ralph H. Roberts (1903-1977).

Little Wiley Roberts, seen in the above picture, was most likely named after his maternal grandfather, Wiley Anderson Murrell. The younger Wiley later became the Mayor of Prairie City in the 1950s. See the Facebook page [Prairie City Historical Society](#) for a photo of him as an adult.

The family can be found in Mound Prairie Township, Jasper County, from 1870 to 1910, per US Federal Censuses, and they were included in the 1905 Iowa State Census.

Julia passed away on 28 November 1917 in Prairie City at the young age of 53, and was buried in Westview Cemetery in that city. Their youngest son, Ralph, was just 14 when his mother died.

Jason married May Riley (1872-1961) on 25 October 1919. May, of Newton, Iowa, was the daughter of John and Kate (Gray) Riley.

In 1940 Jason (and presumably his wife May) were spending the winter in Long Beach, California- many farmers, even those retired, spend their winters in warmer climates than frigid Iowa, even now. In April Jason had a heart attack, and after being stabilized, he returned to Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa. Sadly he spent six weeks in the hospital there, but succumbed on 26 May 1940, at age 80. He was buried in Westview Cemetery with his first wife Julia.

May was a schoolteacher, and later that year she moved to Rolla, Phelps County, Missouri, to live with her sister and brother-in-law, Rey and Alfred Mulkey. She taught 8th grade that year. May survived her husband by 21 years, and passed away on 2 November 1961. She was buried next to her sister Elizabeth (Riley) Harlan in Lone Tree Cemetery, Sioux Rapids, Buena Vista County, Iowa. She was 89 at her death.

We know there are other Roberts descendants out there, and

would love to share information. Please also let us know about anything that you think is incorrect in this series of family posts, and if you have some stories to add.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Image cropped from original large descendant photo. See "Treasure Chest Thursday: The John Roberts and Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts Family in 1900" at <http://heritageramblings.net/2014/02/13/treasure-chest-thursday-the-john-roberts-and-elizabeth-ann-murrell-roberts-family-in-1900/>
2. Family interviews with Edith (Roberts) [McMurray] Luck, her sister and brother, and some of her cousins during the 1960s.
3. "Directory of Leading Farmers in Jasper County, Iowa," in the *Standard Historical Atlas of Jasper County, Iowa*. The Huebenger Survey and Map Publishing Co., Davenport, Iowa, 1901.
4. Iowa Marriage Records, 1880-1937 on Ancestry.com
5. Census records on Ancestry.com.
6. Jason Lee Roberts obituary: *The Jasper County Mirror*, Thursday, May 30, 1940 – Page 2, Col. 5. <http://iagenweb.org/boards/jasper/obituaries/index.cgi?review=252697>
7. See Find A Grave Memorials for images of headstones for Jason and Julia.
8. Jason Lee Roberts- Find A Grave Memorial #76815012 at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=76815012>
9. Julia (French) Roberts- Find A Grave Memorial #76815050 at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=76815050>
10. May (Riley) Roberts- Find A Grave Memorial #169716084 at <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=169716084&ref=acom>

11. Some sources state picture was taken in 1900, some state 1904. I tend to agree with the 1900 date, as Edith Roberts was born 10 October 1899, so would have been 1-1/2 or 2 when this image was taken. That seems more consistent with her size, as if the photo was from 1904, she would have been 5 years old.

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