

Treasure Chest Thursday: The John Roberts and Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts Family in 1900



The John Roberts Family, 1900 or 1904. (Click to enlarge.)

Eight years after their 1892 family portrait (see [Treasure Chest Thursday: The John Roberts and Elizabeth Ann Murrell Family in 1892](#)), the John S. Roberts family had another family portrait taken, this time at another 'homeplace' in Prairie City, Jasper County, Iowa.

Years ago I used the techniques discussed in the previous post to identify the persons in this photograph. I started with the known persons and then incorporated knowledge from other photos, censuses, etc. The date of the photo was estimated to be 1902-1903 due to the age of Edith Roberts, but since one of the babies was born in 1904, that definitely set the date later.

Here is the identification:

From left-

Mary Jane Roberts' family: Mary Jane (Mollie J) standing holding her daughter Bernice Blount; son Samuel Harvey with hat and tie standing next to his father, Samuel H. Blount. Seated on ground in front are, from left, Florence, Helen J, and Harold M. Blount. Oldest son Harry R. is standing next to his father in a dark suit.

George A. Roberts' family: Standing next to Harry R. Blount is Ella V. Daniels Roberts and in the (short) white dress is daughter Ethel Gay Roberts. Seated at her feet is Edith Mae Roberts. Their father George A. Roberts stands next to Ethel, with son George A. Roberts, standing next to him.

Jason Lee Roberts' family: Oca Roberts, in a long white dress, stands next to George Roberts Jr. Her brother Guy L. Roberts stands in front of her and their father, Jason Lee Roberts. His wife Julia French Roberts stands next to him holding their baby Ralph Roberts. Sitting on the ground in front of them are, from left, Wiley Roberts, Willard Roberts, and Charley Roberts in white. The very short woman in front of Julia French is Orpha B. Roberts.

Elizabeth Ann Murrell and her husband John Roberts stand next to Julia French.

William Edward (W.E., or Ed) Roberts' family: W.E. Roberts stands next to his father, John Roberts. His son Orville stands beside him, with the woman on the right probably Orville's mother, Mary M. Main Roberts; his sister Edna is not seen in the picture. Seated on the ground in front of them are Maude & Clara, with Maude possibly having the lighter hair as seen in the 1892 photo.

In the last few years, we found an advertising page,

“Courtesy of

ROBERTS BROTHERS
Groceries, Bottled Gas Ranges,
Plumbing, Heating
Pumps & Windmills"

It contained the above picture and two others, with everyone identified plus information about John and Elizabeth Roberts' lives. Sadly, the women and children were not truly identified, but it did verify that we had the families correct:

Left to right- Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Blount and family, Mr. and Mrs. George Roberts and family, Mr. and Mrs. Jason Roberts and family, Mr. and Mrs. John Roberts, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Roberts and family. This picture was taken of Mr. and Mrs. John Roberts, their children and grandchildren at their home in Prairie City in 1900 (now the Vande Kieft home). The fifth boy sitting down from the left is the Mayor of Prairie City.

The moral of the story is:

- 1) Use ALL your resources in a collaborative way.
- 2) Revisit your families- new information comes online and available every day.

Notes, Sources, and References:

- 1) Family photograph, and page from a magazine or flyer.
- 2) Updated 12/2/16 with corrected identification of Oca and Orpha Roberts.
- 3) Some sources (like the Roberts family advertisement) state the 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.

01/11/2017 UPDATE: However, if the baby being held by Julia French Roberts is their son Ralph Roberts, the date of the photo would be 1904, since he was born 11 July 1903. The baby could instead be one who died very young, as there is an almost 3 year gap between Ralph and his older brother Charley. We will have to leave this mystery to the Jason Lee Roberts and Julia (French) Roberts descendants to sort out.

Please contact us if you would like a higher resolution image.

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We would love to read your thoughts and comments about this post, and thank you for your time! All comments are moderated, however, due to the high intelligence and persistence of spammers/hackers who really should be putting their smarts to use for the public good instead of spamming our little blog.

[Sentimental Sunday- Murrell Family Bible, Part 1](#)



Edith Roberts
Luck, c1970

I was never close to my grandmother when a child- she adored my sister and brother, but thought that my youngest brother and I were spoiled and she did fuss at us quite a lot. She loved talking about her family history, though, so even as a young girl, I realized that was one way to have good experiences with her. (I really was interested, too; thankfully we became close in her later years.) I can remember climbing the steep steps to the hot attic- the door is seen just to the left in this photo- with its old smell and intriguing items from the past. The house was a small 1920s bungalow, by then 40 years old, with beautiful Arts & Crafts wide woodwork and a breakfast nook. We always visited in August- there was no air conditioning until later years, and Iowa does have hot summers! (Very cold winters too- a wonder all that paper survived so well.) But Grandma's house will always be a special place in my heart.

The Murrell Bible was stored in a big trunk, along with many pictures, newspapers, and other family treasures. I still get sentimental, and 'shed a briny tear' (something she said she always did as we drove away), thinking about being with Grandma as she opened the trunk. She would become a young girl again, off within her memories, talking about her days growing up on the farm and the family she loved so much. She had a

wonderful childhood, rich with the mundane things of life, but all were cherished, every day.

Grandma would tell us, "You come from strong pioneer stock-you can do anything you set your mind to." Her words still drive me when I can no longer keep going, and I know she is helping me to take that next step.

The smells, the movements, the look on my grandmother's face as she relived her younger years and loved her family anew, and the time with her as she shared our family history come back to me in such a powerful way. Every time I open an old family bible, turn the pages of an old newspaper, and hold the old photos that were a part of her legacy, she is with me. Thank you, dearest Grandma Edie, for sharing our heritage, and loving family so much. And thank you for making such sweet memories while you were sharing them.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) Murrell Family Bible, possibly c1845.

Please contact us if you would like a higher resolution image.

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Mystery Monday- Roberts Family- School Picture



Class photo found in with George Roberts' and Ella V. Daniel's photos and papers.

This photo was found in with pictures and papers of the George Anthony Roberts and Ella Viola Daniel family who lived in Prairie City, Jasper County, Iowa. We don't know who any of the people are in the photo, but the boy who is the third from left in the front row may possibly be their son, George Anthony Roberts, (Jr.) born 1889 in Iowa. That child also looks similar to George Sr., who was born in 1861 in Illinois. Would be very interested in learning more about this photograph and the people in it.

Please contact us if you would like a higher resolution image.

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Stories - A Family Legacy, Part 2

DECLAMATORY CONTEST

In the declamatory contest last night Miss Edith Roberts won first over all.

Carroll Wooddell took first (and second) in the Oratorical.

In the Dramatic Edith Roberts took first and Velma Walker second.

Humorous, Enos Fouts first, Charlie Rovaart second.

The judges were Miss Gaston and Miss Harsh, of Mitchellville, and Miss Alice J. White, principal of the Douglass School, Des Moines.

The musical numbers were: Violin solo by Miss Mertha Baillagh; Miss Shearer, accompanist. Piano duet, Miss Rosalind Jenks and Miss Faye Schalk. Vocal solo, Miss Keister; Miss Meek and Miss Jenks, accompanists.

Edith Roberts -
Declamatory
Contest. *Prairie
City News*, Prairie
City, Jasper Co.,
Iowa, shortly after
2 Feb 1917. (From a
clipping without
date)

Telling the family stories is a wonderful legacy to pass on to your children.

But I can't find ANYTHING about my ancestor ANYWHERE...

Don't know much about the actual stories of the lives of your ancestors? There are many resources available, both online and at specific places that can help you piece together a life and/or a family. If you are not lucky enough to have many

family stories, you *can* learn more about your ancestors to help put their lives in context.

Newspapers

Newspapers are a great resource for learning the stories of ancestors, or the places and times in which they lived. Newspapers of 50+ years ago included who was visiting where, long or one-line obituaries, detailed political and voter information, etc. The obituary of Jefferson Springsteen (1820-1909) tells of him running away to join the circus as a boy- how could he then be upset when his son Abram Springsteen ran away to join the Union Army as a drummer boy at age 12? There is a story there... A short note about Miss Edith Roberts (1899-1982) taking first place in the Declamatory Contest as well as "the Dramatic" is on the same page as the notice of the "Death of Grandma Roberts" (her paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Ann Murrell Roberts, 1835-1917). What mixed emotions Edith must have felt that day! Such information from newspapers allows us to realize and then understand the challenges and triumphs of those who have gone before, and help us tell the stories of our ancestor's lives.



"Death of Grandma Roberts"-
Elizabeth Ann Murrell
Roberts. *Prairie City News*,
Prairie City, Jasper Co.,
Iowa. Undated newspaper
clipping but Elizabeth died
02 Feb 1917.

Genealogy Bank is my favorite newspaper website for ease of use and breadth of papers held, though it is a for-pay

website. Ancestry.com also has newspapers, as do a few other for-pay websites. Some favorite free websites are chroniclingamerica.loc.gov, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc> for California newspapers, and <http://fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html> for New York state and other newspapers, postcards, etc.

If you can't find articles about your own family, read through the headlines, ads, and social columns of the newspaper from where they lived and during that time period- it will help to put your ancestors into the context of their times.

Books

There are many books that can be found in the history section of the bookstore or library that can help you to piece together more information about your ancestor's probable daily life. (*Jane Austen's England* by Roy Adkins is on my list to read- it tells about everyday life in the late 18th and early 19th century England.) Used or out-of-print books may be found at abebooks.com, alibris.com, or a local used bookseller can do a search for you. Many other family or social history sources can be found on Google Books (books.google.com), such as county histories. Although your ancestor may not have had the money or inclination to buy a writeup in a county history (AKA "Mug Books" since they sometimes required a payment to be included), just reading about the area in the first part of the history can give an idea of the topography, religion, economics, goods and services provided, social groups, etc. Google Books may give you a snippet of information from a book so that you can determine if you would like to buy it, or it may provide an ebook for free to download. The Internet Archive (<https://archive.org>) has millions of pages of books, videos, etc. available for free. (Sadly, some of them are OCR'd images and may be hard to read, but may still be useful.) They also offer "The Way Back Machine" to help you find old web pages from now-defunct websites. Another good free online book source is hathitrust.org.

WorldCat (<http://www.worldcat.org>) is a great place to find a book, and then your library may be able to get it on interlibrary loan for you if it can't be found locally. College libraries that include manuscript or special collections and dissertations may provide wonderful information. Some may be dry and/or scholarly, but you may be able to find information that can help you enhance the date and place information you already know about your family.

Here are some social history questions to ask, and research, about your ancestor's time, place, and life:

What events were going on locally, nationally?

What was the economy like? Boom time or bust, or just a long struggle like in the 1890s?

What were prevailing religious views?

What were political leanings and issues of those in the area where your ancestor lived?

What provided income to your ancestor, and how common was that occupation?

Some of the answers can help provide family stories. We inherited some strange tools- they were very old and it was hard to tell what they were used for. They belonged to descendants of George Lee (1821-aft 1880) who lived in Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire, England, which was a large shoe-making center. George and his sons all came to America, and at least one son, Josiah, was a shoemaker. With the knowledge that shoemaking was important in their hometown in England, and then the US Federal Census that listed shoemaking as an occupation for Josiah, some online research for shoemaking tools helped us identify the purpose of the artifacts. The tools we have were probably Josiah's, and now we can add shoemakers to the family stories.

When telling your family stories, whether in print, electronic form, or oral stories, it is important to ALWAYS differentiate general facts from those known specifically about your family. Also, document sources with proper citations, so that you or others may revisit those sources to verify or disprove ideas and 'facts.'

Adding social history to your research can give a deeper understanding of the lives of our ancestors, and enrich the family stories we leave as a legacy to our descendants.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) Newspaper clippings are from the Prairie City News, around 02 feb 1917.

2) I have no affiliation with any of the websites listed, and do not receive any benefits from them financially or in product. (FTC Disclosure.)

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[Time Travel Tuesday: The Murrell Family Farm in 1880](#)



Tipton, Cedar Co. Farm-
Engraving (relatively near
to Jasper Co. and the
Murrell Farm.)

It is seldom that we can travel to a time and place long ago, and almost hear the sounds, smell the odors, touch the items in the scene, and have it seem so very real. Unless we have a diary, journal, or detailed written account such as in a county history, it is hard to imagine exactly what life was like for our ancestors.

The Agricultural Schedules of the U. S. Federal Censuses are just the vehicle to take us to a place unknown except to our ancestors. While there are still ag censuses being taken, the ones most interesting to today's genealogists will be those taken during the 1850-1880 U. S. Federal Censuses, and for any states that also took a census in 1885. Very few of these images have been digitized, and there are also Manufacturing Schedules, Social Statistics Schedules, and even a Business schedule completed in 1935. Not all farms or businesses will be found listed, however, as the criteria for inclusion changed throughout the years, for example, in 1850, small farms producing less than \$100 of products annually were excluded; in 1870, to be excluded a farm had to have less than 3 acres or produce less than \$500 worth of products.

The following is a simple narrative transcription of the raw

data found in the 1880 Agricultural Schedule for Wiley A. Murrell's farm, using the column headings of the Schedule and including the data for WA's farm. This information could easily be woven into the story of WA's life, and that of his family, with richer language to make it a bit less dry. Also, looking at the data for other farmers on the same page will help give a sense of relative income and possessions owned by your ancestor. The Agricultural census may even help to distinguish one person from another with the same name.

JASPER COUNTY IOWA

1880 AGRICULTURAL CENSUS

MOUND PRAIRIE TOWNSHIP

Page No. 8 (D.), Supervisor's District: No. 3, Enumeration Dist: No. 96, Line No. 6. Enumerated 08 June 1880.

W.A. MURRELL rented for shares of production 240 acres of improved land [Tilled, including fallow and grass in rotation, (whether pasture or meadow.)] and 0 acres unimproved land. The value of the farm included land, fences, and buildings worth \$6,000; the value of farming implements and machinery was \$300; and value of livestock was \$2,200. The cost of building and repairing fences in 1879 was \$50, and there was no cost for fertilizers purchased in 1879 listed.

The amount paid for wages for farm labor during 1879, including value of board was \$150, with no value listed for the weeks hired labor in 1879 upon farm (and dairy) excluding housework.

The estimated value of all farm productions (sold, consumed, or on hand) for 1879 was \$1600. [*equivalent to about \$36,000 in 2010.*]

Of the farm grasslands, in 1879 30 acres were mown, 10 acres were not mown. Hay production was 40 tons, with no clover or grass seed harvested in 1879.

There were 7 horses of all ages on hand June 1, 1880 and no mules and asses.

Neat cattle and their products:

On hand June 1, 1880 were 22 working oxen, 3 milch [*milk*]

cows, and 23 other cattle. 6 calves were dropped. [born] None were purchased, 20 cattle sold living, none listed as slaughtered, and 2 died, strayed, [or] stolen and not recovered. No milk was sold or sent to butter and cheese factories in 1879. 300 lbs. of butter were made on the farm in 1879, but no cheese.

No sheep were on the farm but it included 100 swine and 50 poultry (not barnyard) on hand June 1, 1880. 100 dozen eggs were produced on the farm in 1879.

There was no barley or buckwheat grown in 1879. The farm had 85 acres in Indian Corn, producing 4,000 bushels; 6 acres of oats which produced 225 bushels; 4 acres of rye that produced 100 bushels, and 37 acres of wheat produced 540 bushels of crop. There were no crops of pulse [legumes- soybeans], flax, or hemp. No sorghum or maple sugar was produced, nor broom corn. No hops, potatoes (Irish or sweet), tobacco, or orchard trees (apple, peach) were grown. There was no acreage in nurseries, vineyards, market gardens, or forest products (wood cut and sold or consumed) in 1879. No honey or wax was produced by bees kept on the farm in 1879.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1) To determine the non-population schedules of the US. Federal Census that are available, and where they may be found,

see <http://www.archives.gov/research/census/nonpopulation/>

2) The FamilySearch Wiki has an article on the Agricultural Census: http://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Census_Agricultural_Schedules

3) Source citation: Census Year: 1880; Census Place: Mound Prairie, Jasper, Iowa; Archive Collection Number: T1156; Roll: 25; Page: 9; Line: 6; Schedule Type: Agriculture.

Accessed online 22 May 2011:

http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=1276&iid=31643_218858-00386&fn=John+M&ln=Mench&st=r&ssrc=pt_t4049043_p-1651968883_kpidz0q3d-1651968883z0q26pgz0q3d32768z_0q26pgPLz0q3dpid&pid=577872

4) Even soil fertility and differences with modern agricultural practices may be compared with these schedules. In 1880 the farm produced 4,000 bu. of Indian corn on 85 acres, for a yield of 47 bu./ac. Today's yields, with modern planting equipment, herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizer, provide yields up to 225 bu./ac for various corn varieties.