

SANDSCREST

A Sense of Place, A Sense of Past

by Nora Edinger

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Chapter 3

The Fair View Farm Era: AD 1770-1920

The McColloch family – Scotch-Irish immigrants only 50 years into their American experience – laid claim to more than 3,000 acres between what is now North Wheeling and West Liberty in 1770. The land grant from Patrick Henry, then governor of colonial Virginia, was marked by tomahawk slashes to the trees on the borders of the vast claim – which includes what is now Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center. To truly own the land, it took another 30 years of violent conflict with Native American tribes already living in the region – and the brutal death of Major Samuel of McColloch’s Leap fame, the family’s most celebrated member.

But, own it the McCollochs did. By 1800, regional Native American tribes were conquered and would soon be relocated to the West via the Trail of Tears ordered by President Andrew Jackson. The Ohio Valley – stained as it was by frontier violence -- was poised for a new era.

The McCollochs and other early settlers such as the Zanes (founders of Wheeling) now had indisputable claim to a vast swath that remained mostly as untouched forest. It was safely theirs to settle, farm, develop into a “factory town,” to divide among numerous family members or even to sell off in parcels to would-be neighbors. They did all of these things.

It is unclear exactly when the 300 acres or so that are today’s Sandscrest were cleared for farming and the building of an initial log cabin. Tantalizing evidence in the property’s sole remaining barn suggests it was before the 1840s -- preceding the 1847 date at which some public records indicate the core of the current house was completed.

What is certain is that the extended McColloch family would claim ownership of what is now Sandscrest for a staggering 150 years – from 1770 until it was sold to Harry and Helen Sands around 1920.

The McCollochs called this homeplace – one of many the extended family had -- Fair View Farm.

A Long Road Home

John and Mary McColloch (future parents of Major Samuel McColloch and his siblings) immigrated to colonial New Jersey from their ancestral homelands in Scotland and Ireland in 1720, according to Margaret Brennan, regional historian.

By the mid 1700s, Brennan said the McCollochs had relocated to colonial Virginia, settling near the south branch of the Potomac River. They lived near present-day Moorefield, WV. While some histories have suggested the McCollochs were tenant farmers in that latter location, Brennan noted there is public record of the family selling some 400 acres of Virginia property. So, the family may have been struggling given that land was prone to flooding, but there was already property in their legal possession.

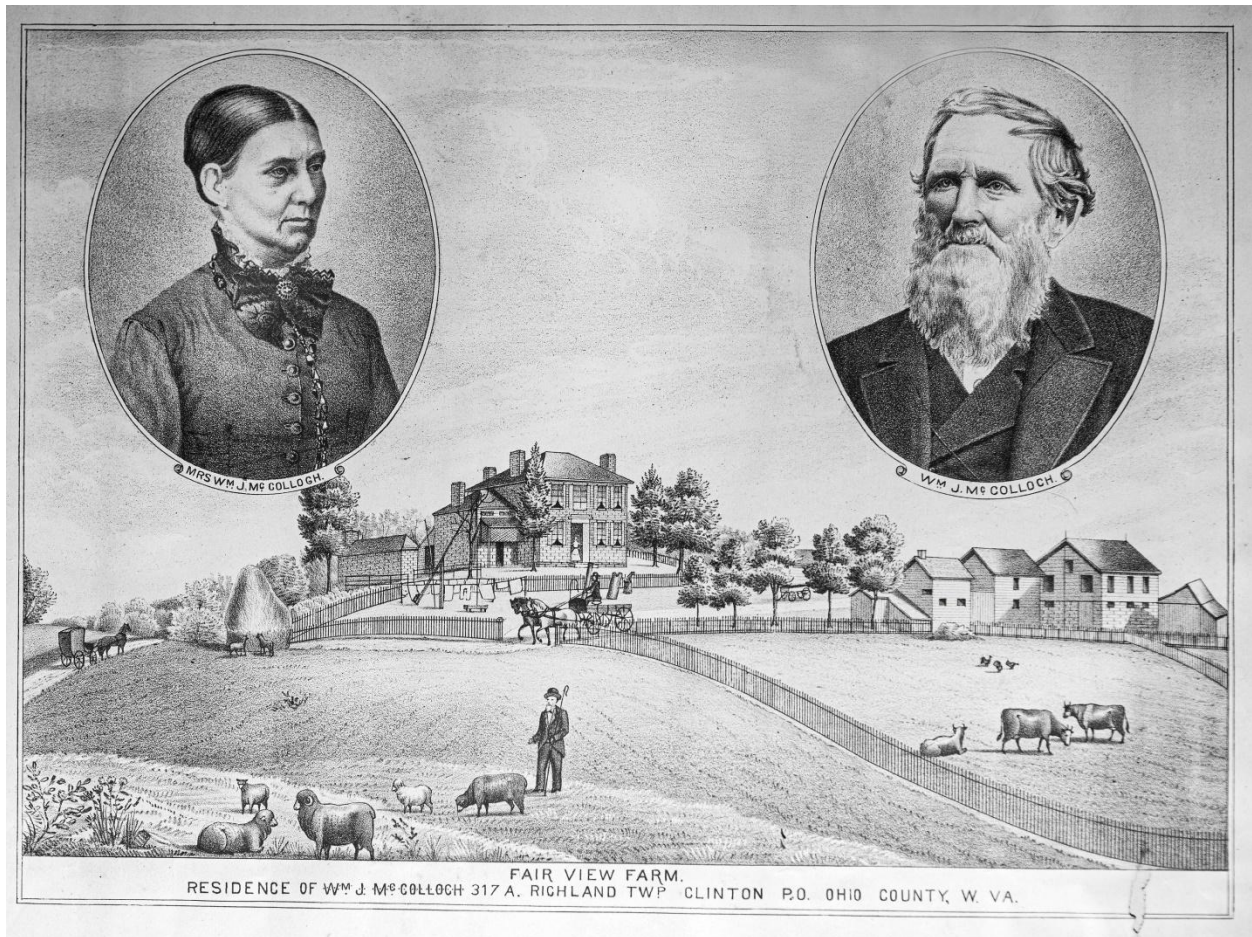
The Zanes, who founded Wheeling itself, were the McColloch's neighbors in the Moorefield area. (So were the Van Metre, Innkeep and Wetzel families, Brennan said.) Ebenezer Zane was additionally related to the McCollochs through his wife, Elizabeth. She was the sister of Major Samuel McColloch and their multiple other siblings.

Upon arriving in what is now Ohio County in 1770 with their young adult offspring, the McCollochs secured a multi-thousand-acre land grant from Gov. Patrick Henry of colonial Virginia. They marked the perimeter of the land with tomahawk slashes to trees. It extended from North Wheeling at its southern border to West Liberty at its north. It ran from the Ohio River at its west and stretched to a point near the present Pennsylvania border at its eastern edge.

The McCollochs and other incoming colonists began their Ohio Valley life by farming around Fort Van Metre – a place of safety they had constructed along what is now Boone & Hedges Road. This site is west of the intersection of GC&P Road and Bethany Pike/Rt. 88 and is marked with a monument. Interestingly, an archaeological dig in the 1970s found evidence of a post and a fire pit at this site nearly 200 years later.

Until 1800, the fort was a critical place of retreat as Native American tribes were intent on pushing European settlers off land that had been in indigenous control for millennia. While the fort provided a measure of safety from raids, it was not complete. Settlers' cabins were burned during this time. Individuals, including Major Samuel McColloch – who was both fort commander and a frontier scout -- were killed.

These new Americans eventually prevailed, however. By 1800 at the latest they were able to farm in peace anywhere on the McColloch land claim and beyond. The former included the 300 or so acres that is now Sandcrest -- a parcel called Fair View Farm by the McColloch family.



Neighbors and Brothers

According to regional historian Alan Fitzpatrick, Fair View Farm's distance from Fort Van Metre (about two miles by road) suggests this land would have been a questionable place for settlers of European ancestry to live or farm prior to 1800. There is some documentation, however, that indicates a cabin and some farming might have been on site as early as 1789.

What is known is that Fair View Farm's house was built – completed by 1847, according to several accounts – by William (1809-1888) and Rebecca McGee McCulloch (1828-1917). This couple and a drawing of the farm that is compatible with photos from the Fair View Farm era are pictured above in a newspaper clipping of unknown origin and date.

While the McCulloch's use of similar names across sibling lines and generations confuses the issue, it is likely that this William was a descendant of Abram McCulloch, who was a brother to Major Samuel and frontier scout John. Abram (sometimes recorded as Abraham) is reported in

a 1973 *Wheeling News-Register* account of then-living McCollochs as having produced six sons and five daughters.

It is possible that the core of the present-day Sandscrest house – which was greatly enlarged by Harry and Helen Sands during the 1920s – was built around the log cabin that would have preceded it.

John Smith -- a restoration specialist from Belmont Technical College who has worked on structures at nearby Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village -- has noted foundational clues in the eastern-most part of the house's basement that suggest an earlier structure.

Smith additionally said hand-hewn beams in the sole remaining barn on the property also suggest a construction date prior to 1840. This means the structure could be the farm's original barn or close to it. And, that it is likely the McCulloch's launched Fair View Farm no later than the 1830s.

Back to what is known, it is interesting to note that a twin property to Fair View Farm was built alongside Table Rock Lane by Williams' brother James McCulloch and his wife, Tibitha (sometimes written as Tabitha) McGee



McColloch, who was Rebecca's sister as well as sister in law. A handwritten note in Harry Sand's papers dates this Sky Farm to 1845 but some accounts date it to the mid 1850s.)

Alike in their rosy-red brick and a multitude of chimneys, Fair View Farm and Sky Farm were also similar in production, according to various newspaper accounts. Both featured orchards, crops, sheep and thoroughbred cattle. An unidentified newspaper clipping in the Sandscrest archives notes that Sky Farm also had a barn with hand-hewn beams.

The original surface of the McColloch's home at Fair View Farm (now Sandscrest) was recently revealed because of water damage in the current sunroom, which was added to the north side of the house by the Sands. It is pictured below, as is a dinner bell that once hung outside the barn. The bell may date back to the McCollochs, as well.



Sandscrest folklore suggests the two sisters would walk between the neighboring farms in order to visit. The path would have been either a steep one as the crow flies or a long one along farm roads, but not impossible. Even with a tree line that now separates the properties, the farm houses remain in sight of each other in winter months.

More folklore that made its way into newspaper accounts of the early and mid 1900s suggested that Major Samuel, of McColloch's leap fame, was buried in sight of the farms, near Table Rock. This Samuel McColloch was, in fact, buried inside the walls of Fort Van Metre after his sudden

death at the hands of Wyandot warriors in 1782. But, it is possible that some other early Samuel McColloch – Samuel, John and Elizabeth being particularly common names across generations and sibling lines of the family – is indeed buried near this geological feature.

On a similar note, the McColloch family was so large that there are many houses in what is now Ohio County, WV which were “McColloch homes.” Some are incorrectly attributed to Major Samuel McColloch. That Samuel -- who inherited parts of the McColloch holding by 1780 in addition to securing acreage under his own name -- did not live long enough to build a house of his own. He was killed by the Wyandot in 1782.

Major Samuel’s younger brother John – who either inherited Samuel’s property or shared partial ownership of it with Samuel’s young widow Mary Mitchell McColloch Woods – began construction of a house near Short Creek in 1816. This upgrade from a log cabin John had already constructed was finished by a John Snodgrass in the 1820s. Snodgrass appears to have purchased the property and a nearby mill constructed by John McColloch as part of a “factory town” from one of John’s descendants.

John McColloch (1754-1821) is buried in an unknown grave somewhere on his farm. His factory town included a grist mill, saw mill and a linsey-woolsey mill.

The John McColloch house, pictured at right, is among the earliest structures in Ohio County that is still standing. It is located south of Short Creek and the factory town and west of Waddles Run Road.



(A side note on Major Samuel McColloch's widow: Various early histories suggest it was quite the social coup when Mary Mitchell managed to marry Samuel. This most-eligible-bachelor-turned-husband lived only six months after their wedding, however. It appears to have been a love match on both sides. On the day of his death, Samuel returned to Fort Van Metre in order to leave his watch and a note for his bride in the keeping of his brother John's wife. Mary, it seems, was visiting family at the time.)

The young couple had no children. Mary later married Andrew Woods, brother of Wheeling political leader Archibald Woods. Mary and Andrew named one of their sons Samuel and kept the horse Samuel was riding when he made his famous leap until it died at the astonishing age of 34. The horse was buried at what may have been John McColloch's farm. Mary, who died in 1826, is now buried at a cemetery on Wheeling's Peninsula. Her original gravesite was in downtown Wheeling, where the Fort Henry Club now stands.)

By the time William and Rebecca built Fair View Farm in 1847, construction was more grand. Their home included the current house's dining room, entry hall and living room and the interior rooms of what are now the front four suites on the second floor. What is now known as the farmer's office was also part of this original construction, although this side wing was considerably smaller at the time.

Photos from the era and the drawing that appeared in a local newspaper suggest a kitchen was in a free-standing building to the south of the main house for fire-safety reasons. There is no known record of slave housing or presence at Fair View Farm. But it is documented that at least one McColloch – Elizabeth McColloch Zane, a Methodist – claimed ownership of enslaved individuals. These individuals were freed, in stages, by a provision in her will.

The photo of the Fair View Farm house (pictured on the following page) is dated to 1884, according to Sandscrest archives. Individuals in the photo include, left to right: Ellen Ridgley, Mrs. Gene Ridgley and daughter, Rebecca "Beckie" McColloch, William McColloch, Mrs. Mitchell, Miss Biggs, Billie Hensrauth and Miss Mattie Biggs. The photo was taken about four years before home-builder William died. Rebecca (Beckie) lived nearly another 30 years and remained in the home until her death in 1917.



Fair View Farm took on the name Sandscrest about 1920, after it was purchased from a McColloch descendant by Harry and Helen Sands. Sister property Sky Farm was purchased later in the 1920s by Mary Virginia Sands Paull (the daughter of Harry Sands' brother Lawrence), and her husband, A. Singleton Paull. The Paulls renamed that property Lawrencefield, likely in honor of Virginia's recently deceased father. Both properties still stand, although multiple additions and the painting of Sandscrest's brickwork makes the similar appearance the two homes once had difficult to see.

Sandscrest of today and a 2000 newspaper clipping featuring Sky Farm/Lawrencefield are pictured on the following page.



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Sources:

- a variety of undated, unidentified newspaper clippings and handwritten or typed notes found in a scrapbook assembled by Harry Sands, located in the Sandscrest archive
- a 1936 "Potpourri" column written by Blanche Steenrod for the Wheeling News Register
- an undated history of Sandscrest written by Karen Grisell of Wheeling
- a 2024 phone interview with Joe Roxby, Ohio Country magistrate and regional historian
- a history of the McCulloch family compiled by Narcissa Doddridge from first-person and second-person accounts from the frontier era.
- a history of Major Samuel McCulloch written by Richard S. Klein and Alan H. Cooper for the Wheeling Intelligencer in 1977, from the Ohio County Public Library Archives
- various talks and files presented or assembled by Margaret Brennan, regional historian
- materials presented at a 2017 Fort Henry commemoration at West Virginia Independence Hall; sponsored by Wheeling Heritage and co-hosted by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Fort Henry chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution
- a June 14, 1976 Wheeling Intelligencer article detailing an archaeological dig at Fort Van Metre that began in 1975
- notes from a talk by Ethel Mayena (spelling uncertain) in May 1998 at Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center
- the last wills and testaments of both Ebenezer Zane and Elizabeth McCulloch Zane, from the First Presbyterian Church of Wheeling archives
- an unidentified August 2000 news clipping about Lawrencefield Farm, formerly Sky Farm

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