

Sandscrest: A Sense of Place, A Sense of Past

by Nora Edinger

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The McColloch & Fair View Farm Era: AD 1770-1920

Part 3 in a Series

In 1770, the McColloch family – immigrants from Scotland and Ireland only 50 years into their American experience – laid claim to thousands of acres between what is now North Wheeling and West Liberty. The collective family 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.

This claim was made possible by the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, which opened the Ohio Valley -- east of the river -- to settlement. To truly own the land, it took another 30 years of violent conflict with Native American tribes already living in the greater region – and the brutal death of Samuel, the family’s most celebrated member.

But, own it the McCollochs did. The Ohio Valley – blood stained as it was by frontier violence -- was poised for a new era.

The change was both legal and practical. By the end of the 1700s, the conquest of the land was largely over. American Patriots had defeated indigenous warriors at the Battle of Fallen Timbers and, in 1795, the Treaty of Greenville paved the way for settlers of European descent to cross the Ohio River into what is now most of the state of Ohio. In the early 1800s, regional Native American tribes were forcibly relocated to the West via the Trail of Tears ordered by President Andrew Jackson.

The McCollochs and other early settlers such as the Zanes (founders of Wheeling) had lived their first decades in the Ohio Valley at the point of a gun barrel. Now, they 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 just when the 300 acres or so that are today’s Sandscrest were cleared for farming and an initial log cabin built. There is some evidence this could have happened as early as the

late 1780s or the beginning of the 1790s – long preceding the 1847 date at which public record indicates 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 large, extended family had -- Fair View Farm.

A Long Road Home

Sheriff John McColloch (1726-1778) -- father of Major Samuel of McColloch's leap fame – was the first American-born family member of this particular lineage, the lineage that created what is now Sandscrest. Sheriff John, the first Ohio County resident to hold such a title, started his life in colonial New Jersey before moving to colonial Virginia and, ultimately, to the Ohio Valley.

Sheriff John's father (Samuel McColloch, 1705-1748) was born in Ireland and died in New Jersey. Sheriff John's grandfather (another John McColloch, 1682-?) was born in Scotland, which was the family's ancestral home. This Scottish John moved his family to New Jersey in 1720, which makes him the family's original immigrant to the American colonies.

Sheriff John married Sarah Inskeep (1728-?, sometimes written Innskeep or Inskep), who was of English descent, in 1748 or 1749. Their children included sons Major Samuel (1752-1782), John (1754-1821), Abram (1760-1839, sometimes written as Abraham) and George (1763-1836) and daughters Elizabeth McColloch Zane (1749-1814) and Sarah McColloch Coleman (1765-?).

By the 1750s or 1760s, the historic record shows the extended McColloch family had relocated from New Jersey to colonial Virginia, settling near the south branch of the Potomac River. Their farmland was south of the Trough – a valley between two straight mountain ridges near present-day Moorefield, WV.

While some histories have suggested the McCollochs were tenant farmers in that latter location, talks by regional historian Margaret Brennan have noted there is public record of the family selling some 400 acres of Virginia property. There are also McColloch family records which indicate there had been previous land ownership in New Jersey. So, the family may have been struggling given that the greater Trough area 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 Metres, the Inkeeps and the Wetzel families, according to Brennan.) The

Zane patriarch, Ebenezer, was additionally related to the McCollochs through his wife, Elizabeth. She was the sister of Major Samuel and their multiple other siblings.

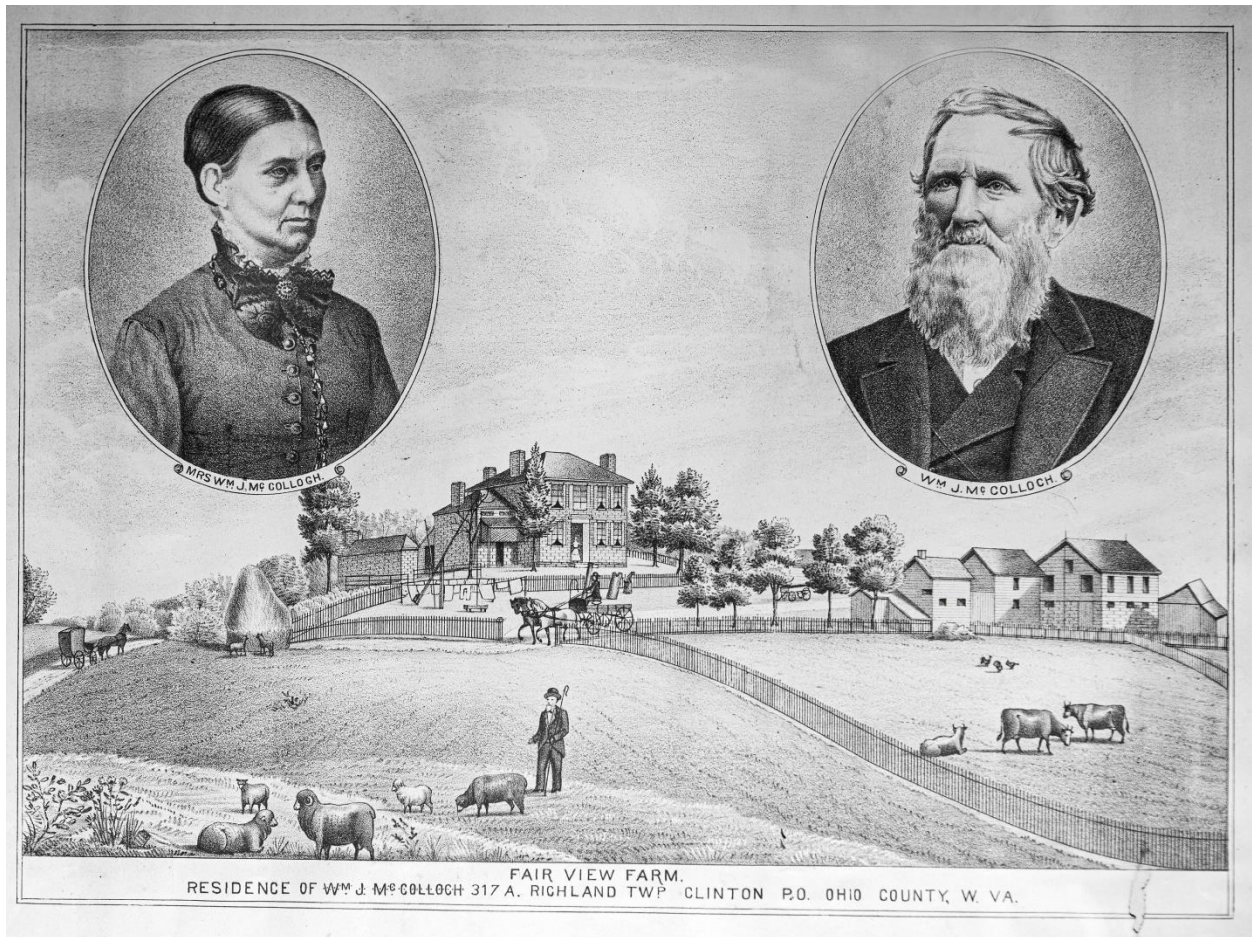
Upon arriving in what is now Ohio County in 1770 -- with their adolescent and adult offspring -- the McCollochs secured multiple land grants for the males of the family from Gov. Patrick Henry of colonial Virginia. They marked the perimeter of the land, which collectively included thousands of acres, with tomahawk slashes to trees. The overall parcel extended from North Wheeling at its southern border to West Liberty at its north. From west to east, it ran much of the core of what is now the Northern Panhandle.

The McCollochs and other incoming colonists began their Ohio Valley life by farming around Fort Van Metre – a place of safety settlers constructed along what is now Boone and 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 after its origin.

(Some records suggest the presence of a second Fort Van Metre in West Liberty, but the one on Boone and Hedges Road is believed to be the one at which most of the action recorded in this chapter was based.)

Even as late as 1800, the fort was a critical place of retreat as Native American tribes were intent in 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. Settler's cabins were occasionally raided and burned during this time. Individuals, including Major Samuel McColloch – who was both a highly celebrated fort commander and a frontier scout -- were killed.

These new Americans eventually prevailed, however. By 1800 at the latest, settlers 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 Sandscree.



Neighbors and Brothers

According to regional historian Alan Fitzpatrick, Fair View Farm's distance from Fort Van Metre (two miles by road) suggests this land would have been a dangerous place for settlers of European ancestry to live or farm prior to 1800. There is some documentation, however, that indicates Major Samuel's youngest brother, George, may have built a cabin at what is now Sandscrest and was farming the site as early as the late 1780s or early 1790s.

(A detailed aside: George purchased the 300-acre property that is now Sandscrest from his brother John in the late 1780s. At some point, he began and farming it and lived on it in a cabin until his death in 1836. John and Major Samuel's widow, Mary Mitchell McCulloch Woods (early 1750s-1826), had inherited the property after Major Samuel's death in 1782. Mary sold her one-third portion to John prior to the sale to George. Following this line of transfer reveals that what is now Sandscrest was part of the original land grant specifically deeded to Major Samuel in 1770.)

Fair View Farm's house was built in approximately 1847 by William McCulloch (1809-1888) and Rebecca McGee (sometimes written Magee) McCulloch (1828-1917). This couple and an

illustration of the farm generated from photos were featured in an 1879 history of the Northern Panhandle.

(Another detailed aside: The McCollochs extensively reused names across sibling lines and generations, a practice that has led to confusion in some historical accounts. This particular William was a son of Abram McColloch. Abram was another brother to Major Samuel, John and George. This William and two of his brothers – who later deeded their interests to William -- purchased what is now Sandscrest from George's son, Andrew McColloch, and George's daughter, Elizabeth McColloch Dunlevy. Andrew and Elizabeth had jointly inherited the property at the time of their father, George's, death in 1836.)



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 George's log cabin. That cabin could date as far back as the late 1780s.

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 on the site.



Smith additionally said the sole remaining barn on the property also suggests an origin before 1840. There are both hand-hewn oak beams and others that were manufactured by a pit saw – both early techniques for the Ohio Valley. This means the structure may be the farm's original barn or close to it and was likely constructed by George rather than William.

(An interesting architectural aside: The siding of this barn is unusual in that it fits together in groove-and-groove fashion rather than tongue-and-groove. Sandscrest Director Cheryl



Harshman is pictured at left holding examples of the interlocking pieces. All current siding is redone – from poplar – in this original style.)

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 William's brother, James McColloch, and his wife, Tibitha (sometimes written as Tabitha) McGee (sometimes Magee) McColloch. Tibitha was both sister and sister-in-law to William's wife, Rebecca. A handwritten note in Harry Sand's papers dates 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/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 or a long one, but certainly was possible. 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 was buried in sight of the farms, near Table Rock, as the area was part of his original land grant. Major Samuel 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. Major Samuel -- who died before frontier violence ended -- did not live long enough to build a house of his own.

Major Samuel’s younger brother John, in comparison, began construction of a house on his original land parcel 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 descendents.

John McColloch is buried in an unknown grave somewhere on his farm. His factory town included a grist mill, saw mill and a linsey-woolsey mill – all powered by water.

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



(A side note on Major Samuel widow: Various early histories suggest it was quite the social coup when Mary Mitchell managed to marry Samuel – who was described by a contemporary as “middle size, straight, fair complexion.” 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 silver 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 Ohio County Public Library now stands.)



By the time William and Rebecca built Fair View Farm in 1847, construction had moved far beyond log-cabin quality. Their home included the current Sandscrest dining room (pictured above in its current state), entry hall and living room and the interior rooms of three bedroom suites on a second floor. What is now known as the farmer's office was also part of this original construction, although this side wing was only one story during the McColloch era.

Photos from the time and the illustration that appears earlier in this chapter 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 the presence of enslaved workers at Fair View Farm. But it is documented that at least one McColloch – Elizabeth McColloch Zane – 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 below) is dated, according to Sandscrest archives at 1884. 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 William died. Rebecca lived nearly another 30 years and remained in the home until her death in 1917. William and Rebecca had no children. The property went into ownership of the extended McColloch family after her death.



Fair View Farm took on the name Sandscrest about 1920, after it was purchased from a McColloch descendant by Harry and Helen Sands. Interestingly, Sky Farm was purchased later in the 1920s by A. Singleton Paull and Mary Virginia Sands Paull. Mary Virginia was the daughter of Lawrence Sands, Harry Sand's brother. The Paulls renamed Sky Farm as Lawrencefield, likely in honor of Virginia's recently deceased father. Both properties still stand. But, multiple additions at both locations and the painting of Sandscrest's brickwork makes their original similarity difficult to see.

Sandscrest of today and a 2000 newspaper clipping documenting the celebrated nature of Sky Farm/Lawrencefield are pictured on the following page. The clipping is part of a Sandscrest archive that includes many such newspaper accounts collected by Harry Sands in a scrapbook.



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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 Daughters of the American Revolution talk by Ethel Mozena 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
- McCulloch Family of Ohio County, W.Va., 1999, a book-length record compiled by Sam McCulloch, a then-living descendant of the extended family

- *an unidentified August 2000 news clipping about Lawrencefield Farm, formerly Sky Farm*
- *an on-site interview with John Smith, a restoration specialist from Belmont Technical College*
- *The Heroic Age: Tales of Wheeling's Frontier Era, William Hintzen and Joseph Roxby, 2000*

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- *historic photos are restored by Bruce Edinger from images in the Sandcrest Foundation, Inc. archive*