

“AUNT MARY”

REMEMBRANCES OF MARY PURDY MCCUNE

by Mary W. McCune

INTRODUCTION

Certain people come into our lives and really make a difference. “Aunt” Mary Purdy McCune came into my life when I married Duncan McCune in 1947. Not all relatives we inherit are exceptional, but Aunt Mary was. Single women living quiet lives are often forgotten, and their memory fades in the light of the more flamboyant members of the family. She was too remarkable to let her story fade away. In her quiet but firm way Aunt Mary was a huge influence on many and I want to leave a memoir that testifies to those quiet gifts she shared. To her credit, I never met anyone who did not like her.

When I married into the McCune family I immediately became a part of a large community of Mary McCunes. It is a name that goes back many generations to grandmothers, great great grandmothers, etc. Because there were so many they were distinguished by their middle names. Duncan’s sister was Mary Lucie McCune and I was Mary Ann McCune. Mary Purdy McCune had a cousin Mary Purdy. Aunt Mary’s two grandmothers were both named Mary Jane. There was a very wealthy Mary McCune that lived in Pittsburgh but we could not claim her. As the years went by I realized how privileged I was to have carried the same name as Aunt Mary.

HER FAMILY

To understand her you have to know something about her family because her heritage was very important to her. She had deep roots in the Ohio River Valley, and even though she went out into the world, she came back to those roots later in her life.

Mary Purdy McCune’s father, Samuel James McCune (born March 10, 1863), was the seventh of ten children born to Joseph McCune and Mary Jane Medill McCune. All the children were born in the old McCune homestead in Warren Township, Jefferson County, Ohio. Joseph McCune had been quite successful in land speculation but in the panic of the 1870’s he lost everything. Shortly after that he died leaving his widow, Mary Jane Medill McCune with ten children, the youngest not yet born. This family of ten healthy siblings who lived long lives and their progeny began a McCune family connection that had strong ties. There were four boys and six girls. The story is told that when the last child was born the children were invited to help name her. Each one put a suggested name in the hat and the one picked was the winner. The oldest son Tom put in the winning name, Theresa Maxima, and it was Maxie from then on. However, she was not alone in strange names for an older sister was named Keren Happuch, which claims to be the biblical name of one of Lot’s wives. She was fondly called Aunt Kernen. It is reported in a favorite story about her that she would walk across the railroad bridge over the Ohio River to get to school each day. If a train happened to come along, she had to climb down below and let it pass. Aunt Mary told many stories about them and she had a little poem using their first names to help her keep them in order. I wish I had written down more of those stories. (See pictures 1, 2, & 3: page i & ii.)

After the father's death, the family moved to Half Moon Farm on the Virginia side of the Ohio River and the story is told of thirteen year old Samuel plowing the fields although he could hardly reach the plow handles. Because of this situation, Samuel had no formal higher education as some of his older siblings did. Samuel worked in a store for a while and in 1887 he joined with his older brother Joseph Addison McCune and established a general merchandise store, McCune Brothers, in Brilliant, Ohio. "*They started in a small room about twenty feet square. Two years later they erected their present building on Main Street where they conduct a very extensive business, carrying a full line of dry goods, notions, boots, shoes, hardware, farm implements, wagons, buggies, engines, etc.*" (20th Century History of Steubenville & Jefferson County, Ohio by Joseph B. Doyle.) The partnership lasted 55 years. (See pictures 4,5 & 6 pages iii, iv)

Because Aunt Mary's father was such an influence on her some extra words of description seem necessary. Two of his grandsons have memories. Samuel Knox McCune,(son of Joseph Condit McCune), growing up in Pittsburgh remembers spending Sundays with his family visiting the grandparents and in his taped reminiscences includes those memories. Duncan McCune ,(son of James Edwin McCune), spent vacation time visiting his grandparents and remembers his grandfather well. So a few stories.

Grandfather Samuel McCune obviously had a winning way about him. He was outgoing and full of talk and stories. He is described as well read and informed on local and national events. His McCune relatives had lived in the Ohio Valley for considerably more than 100 years and he knew all about them and their stories. Samuel Knox McCune remembers going to the Smithfield County Fair with his grandfather and being introduced to relatives as far removed as fifth cousins. He remembers eating in a "Boarding House" and going to see the harness races. As the storekeeper in Brilliant Samuel knew everyone and was recognized by all. Besides the store he started a bank in Brilliant that withstood the 1933 closings, much to his satisfaction. He was head of the Water Board, Mayor of Brilliant, and became a contractor building a row of houses in Brilliant. He said that with the profit he was able to pay the college bills for his children. But most of all he was a politician. He was Chairman of the Jefferson County Democratic party for many years. He ran for the State Legislature in 1914 on the Democratic party. However, his brother and partner Joseph Addison McCune was nominated by the Republican party and won the election, serving several terms. Sam tried to keep him on the right track. He was a member of the Ohio State Board of Education, The Northwest Territory Centennial Celebration,(See page x & xi.), President of the Jefferson County Children's Home and a trustee and elder at the Brilliant Presbyterian Church for more than fifty years. As an Elder he would go up to Western Seminary in Pittsburgh when a new preacher was needed, picking out one who showed much promise. He did it often because these young men would leave after a year or two and many attained prominence. Sam seemed able to pick the winners.

His son James Edwin McCune described him as follows: "*Samuel had very little formal education but he was very well versed in business, law, banking, mechanics and most*

anything he was inclined to lay his hand to." Because of all this, the McCune family held an important place in the community and Aunt Mary always felt responsible to keep that reputation intact. She herself inherited the cheerful personality and charm of her father.

On September 20, 1888 Samuel married Elizabeth Anne Purdy (called Bessie) in the Presbyterian Church at Holidays Cove, Virginia. They had met at an evening social at a friend's house where the young people enjoyed music and socializing. She was always described as quiet and less outgoing than her husband, more in keeping with her Scotch-Irish background. Her parents, James Purdy and Mary Jane Knox Purdy lived on a farm at Holidays Cove, Virginia (now Wierton, West Virginia). Aunt Mary had many fond memories of spending summers on the farm. (See pictures 7 & 8: page v.)

Samuel and Bessie McCune had three children: Joseph Condit McCune born January 9, 1890; Mary Purdy McCune born May 24, 1892 and James Edwin McCune born December 3, 1894, all in Brilliant Ohio. (See picture 9: page vi)

BRILLIANT, OHIO

Samuel and Bessie McCune lived in Brilliant, Ohio all their married life building a comfortable home on the hill above the town but in sight of the McCune Brothers store. This is the house where the McCune children were raised and where Aunt Mary returned after her father's death. She lived in the house until she moved to Beaver in 1967. (Since then there have been two owners. We communicated with the current owner and were delighted to find that he and his family love the house and are happy there.)

Because Brilliant is so central to our story I want to share some of the stories that two grandsons remember so that we can try to see it as it was in the early days. According to the history of Brilliant that appeared in the 1953 Celebration of the State Sesquicentennial it was founded in 1819 but called Phillipsburg, then LaGrange, until the post office insisted there were too many towns with that same name and they should change it. In the early 1880's it was renamed "Brilliant" after the Brilliant Glass Works located there at the time. It was a pretty wild frontier town in its early days. There were once 13 taverns in town until after many years it was voted dry. There is a story that this is where Johnny Appleseed originated.

Brilliant is a river town built on a long narrow strip of land along the Ohio river. Immediately behind it are steep hills. The part of town where grandfather's store, the bank, the railroad station and other commercial enterprises were centered was the original town settled on that narrow plateau. Houses around these enterprises and a few built up the hillside made up the town. As the population grew more houses were built farther south along the river. There was a small ferry that took cars and people across the river which both grandchildren remember. To arrive at the opposite point in the river, the ferry would head upstream first and then be carried down to the landing spot on the other side. It was steam powered. Duncan remembers his grandfather giving him a nickel to go ride the ferry. If he didn't get off on the other side he could keep riding back and forth. They even let him shovel coal into the furnace. The ferry ran for 130 years until bridges and roads spelled its demise.

During that time there were still stern-wheeler steam packet boats taking passengers up and down the river. Duncan remembers a trip on one of these to Marietta, Ohio with his grandfather. From the porch of grandfather's home on the hill, the boats could be seen and their calliope heard. Beside being in the store the boys were allowed to rummage around in the big storage barn next to the store, finding all kinds of interesting things. Duncan rode the train to Pittsburgh with his grandfather and saw his first baseball game at Forbes Field. Grandfather obviously knew what boys liked to do.

Being on the banks of the Ohio river had its problems in the form of floods which, before the dams were built, came often. A memorable one was in 1936. (See picture 4: page iii) Joseph Condit McCune, Samuel's oldest son, on hearing of the approaching flood drove from Pittsburgh to Brilliant to help his father and uncle move the supplies in the store to the second floor in a race against time. When the water crested two inches below the first floor ceiling they knew they were lucky. Joseph Addison McCune, the co-owner of the store, lived with his two sisters in a house on the riverbank across from the store. In the house they had devised a system of hooks and pulleys so that the heavy furniture could be lifted to the ceiling when a flood came. Uncle Add had an excellent library housed in barrister bookcases. They took the bookcases up to the second floor, but instead of carrying the books up they put them on the seats of the couch and chairs which they lifted to the ceiling. The only trouble was the water this time got to the first floor ceiling and the library was lost. The aunts and uncle had to be rescued through a second floor window by boat. There were also stories about all the canned goods in grandmother's pantry whose labels had been washed off in the flood. It was always a surprise when they were opened. The '36 flood was talked about for a long time.

All of these families, the McCunes, Knoxes, Purdys and Medills had lived on both sides of the Ohio river for several generations. The McCunes and Knoxes came to the U.S. in the early 1700's and included a number of Revolutionary War soldiers. There were lots of family still there to be visited and whom they considered important in their lives. The towns of Steubenville, Brilliant and Mt. Pleasant on the Ohio side of the river were mirrored by Holidays Cove (now Wierton, West Virginia) Wellsburg, and further south, Wheeling on the Virginia side. There was much coming and going among the relatives.

HER EDUCATION

Mary Purdy McCune was the middle child between two brothers in a family that stressed the value of learning and education. Samuel encouraged his children to pursue their interest in learning and sacrificed to see that they went to excellent colleges.

Mary went to the Brilliant schools for the lower grades. The high school at that time was located in Steubenville so she would take the inter-urban train back and forth. On June 10, 1910 she graduated. The announcement lists the speaker as F.B. Pearson, from Ohio State University. The class play was "Joan of Arc". Aunt Mary was a good student and she liked school. (See picture 10: page vii)

From there Mary entered Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Wilson College was a small women's college under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church. Surely this experience was one of the defining moments in her life. Not many women from a small Ohio River town had this opportunity. Late in life she still delighted telling about her college days, keeping up with her classmates and meeting Wilson college graduates along the way. From her Wilson College transcript for the first two years there we confirm she was a good student. With a grade average of 3.325 she got A's and B's (except for Bible I and Bible III) and excelled in physical education. What is impressive is the classical course work she took. (See transcript) She made lasting friendships there that continued all of her life. Mary graduated in the class of 1914 and it would seem she was sorry to see it all end. (Pictures 11, 12, 13, & 14: page viii & ix)

In her things I found a series of "round-robin" letters that she wrote to her classmates between 1915 - 1922. (A group of friends would circulate letters among themselves, each one adding what they were doing and then sending them on to the next one.) They are most revealing about what she is doing and what the others are doing in these years right out of college. Many are getting married and having families and she laments to some extent her prosaic life of teaching. In 1916 she writes "*How I wish I had some exciting news to tell you - that I'd eloped with a chauffeur, or become a Red Cross nurse - but my life has been most prosaic; I'm not even engaged.*" The war is taking its toll and in 1918 she writes: "*I often feel like a useless encumberer of the earth although I struggle along with all the usual industries - school, church, civic and war, and cherish the fond belief that I can knit a sock or make a T-bandage with the best of you. This last week mother and father and I drove out in our machine to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis to say good-bye to my older brother(Joseph) who is a First Lieutenant in the Engineers and who expects to leave any day now for France. My other brother(James Edwin) is also with the Engineers. This is indeed a sad and sorry time to live. A great many seem to believe that one more year is all we'll have to stand.*" She once confided that she had had a love interest, but he had been killed in the war. (See pictures 15, 16, & 17 page xii)

Because of her loyalty to the college and her college friends she was an obvious choice to be the chairman of their 50th Reunion in 1964. Her first letter about it to her classmates goes like this.

"Greetings to all who ever belonged to the class of 1914 at Wilson:

Haven't the last fifty years gone by quickly – actually fifty- four since we sewed or pinned all those little bells on the points of our green jester costumes! It seems impossible but the plain

fact is that we are face to face with our fiftieth reunion. Let's make it a good one.-----

-----Do be faithful in taking your vitamins and aspirin and never forget your digitalis and guard against falling and get your hearing aids checked and your glasses adjusted and polish up your cane and most of all, REMEMBER THE BIG DATE - June 5-7."

*Loyally yours, Mary P. McCune
Reunion Chairman*

In her follow up letter describing the Reunion she said 24 of the original 30 graduates attended and had a wonderful time.

SHE GOES TO WORK.

After college Mary got a job teaching at Stephenson Seminary in Charles Town, West Virginia where she stayed for two years. She writes: “*I think most of you know that I am teaching English and Latin in a “female seminary” in Charles Town which is a little town only three miles from the Virginia border and essentially southern. The town has progressed just about two steps since the Civil War. The inhabitants point out the tree whereon John Brown was hanged, and think, without exception, that Robert E. Lee made the moon and put it up, while Lincoln was a mild species of villain. As for the academics, I can say that I like teaching English better than I ever thought possible and that I like Latin very, very much. I can also say that I am a much wiser woman than I was this time last year. I can talk to you almost intelligently about Emerson’s essays, the “Iliad”, the Conspiracy of Cataline, the London of Shakespeare’s time, Milton’s conception of Hell or several other kindred subjects.*” The seminary closed at the end of the 1916 school year and she went back home to Brilliant, Ohio where her parents were glad to have her.

She started teaching at her alma mater, the Steubenville High School in 1917. She writes in her round robin letters to her friends: “*At last I’m teaching my beloved Geometry: and I do hereby declare that no one who has not taught geometry for five periods a day for a year can realize how stupid some children are. Bertie and Nellie may remember how Miss Voss called me lazy and cast all sorts of aspersions at my industry. Well, I just wish she could see me trying to explain the Theorem of Limits to a wild mixture of Russian jews, Italians, Austrians, Africans and assorted Americans. I don’t believe she ever worked any harder.[than I am.] However, I like it very much*”

In the spring of 1921 she was offered employment at Wilson College as the Alumnae Secretary where she served three years. Her primary job was to raise money for an endowment that was vital to the continuation of the college. New standards by the Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools of the Middle States required the college to have an endowment of \$500,000.00 in order for the college to be considered a member. Wilson met all the requirements but the endowment and not to be included in the list of standard colleges would be a disaster. A large part of her job was writing letters and encouraging alumnae to contribute. Everything was suggested from rummage sales to selling personal items, to persuading your wealthy friends. Aunt Mary had to do the hard sell and it is fun to read her letters with her humorous but serious encouragement to her classmates to give. I do not know if they succeeded, but the college did continue.

Following that she went to New York working for one of the Boards of the Presbyterian Church and attending Columbia University. In September, 1926 she was looking for a job in Pittsburgh and cousin Chalmers McConahey was helping her. But luck must have come and she landed a job at the Journal of Commerce newspaper in New York. She worked there for

fifteen years becoming the Assistant to the Editor, an important position for a woman of that time. She lived at 200 W. 16th Street, Apt. 15I, at least part of the time. Duncan remembers visiting her there when he was a teenager. In New York City she enjoyed all the cultural things offered, including the symphony and opera and theater. It always surprised me that in later years she seldom talked about that period of her life. (See pictures 18: page xiii)

RETURN TO BRILLIANT

On April 3, 1942 her father Samuel McCune died suddenly and without warning of a heart attack. He was waiting on a customer in the store when the attack hit him and he died half an hour later. He was 79 years old. Because of who he was, his funeral was a community event. His wife Bessie was left alone in Brilliant and so it was Mary who left New York and came back to care for her mother. I often commented to her that it must have been a difficult thing to do, but she assured me that it was not. She was 50 years old. Of course she needed a job and teaching was obviously what it would be. Luckily, her teaching certificate from years earlier was still good so she went to work at the Brilliant High School teaching mathematics. She picked up the fabric of her life as a member of an important family in Brilliant with church, clubs, and gardening. Her mother died two years later, 1944, but Mary was settled in and had made her place in the community and decided to stay. When she retired from teaching in 1957 she became the librarian at the Brilliant Branch Library at the foot of the hill where she lived. For someone who had always loved books and reading it was a happy experience. In 1965 she retired for good and enjoyed some traveling and a slower pace of life. When asked in a newspaper interview what was her philosophy of life she said: "*Make the best of whatever you have and do the best you can.*"

By the time she was 75 it was obvious the old house on the hillside and the inconveniences were getting to be too much for her. It was time to stop driving too. We asked her if she would like to come to Beaver where we would find her an apartment and she would be a part of our family. It must have been a really hard move to leave her hillside and, in a way, her life story. But we helped her clean out the old house and move into a new apartment in Beaver. There was never a word of complaint and we felt blessed to have her close. Although we had visited often during the years, it was those five years in Beaver when we really got to know her and learned so much from her. After a series of small strokes and declining health she died of a heart attack in February, 1975. At the funeral service in the First Presbyterian Church in Beaver, Pennsylvania. on Feb. 4, 1975 the pastor, Rev. Warren Martin said the following.

"There are some people in life who could be called by no other name than the one given them; for me Aunt Mary was such a person. The name fit her. I think of her by a small collection of words: - she was gentle, she was a gentlewoman. In a world that seems to have so little gentility her gentle nature whether native to her or created by her was felt in her presence. She was cultured, the fruitage of what humanity's genius could bring forth and share with others left its mark on her. Not the highbrow esoteric culture of sophistication but the culture that refines and enriches and deepens the

human qualities in the personality - like the innocence of a homely honesty and forthrightness.

She could make friends and was one; enjoying her circle of new-found companions at a late age in life suggests she could do what many who are lonely and maybe a little bitter cannot do; she could enjoy the company of others.

I am sure she had many loyalties, but one among the many was her relentless loyalty to her home church in Brilliant.

But as much as anything else she was contemporary, she was current, she was a person of the present tense and today we share her death with God in Christ who said, "I am the alpha and the omega, I am the beginning and the end." The last of her family, Aunt Mary has come to her end, but may her kind and her tribe increase. Amen."

She is buried in the family plot in lovely old Union Cemetery (in Steubenville, Ohio) next to her mother and father. Surrounding in the plot are other McCunes (80 McCunes are buried there) and Purdys and Knoxes, so the family is together again. Union Cemetery was founded in 1854 and is located on a hilly area above the town. It is full of history, and it is a beautiful spot - an arboretum and bird and flower sanctuary. Aunt Mary loved it.

GLIMPSES OF HER LIFE

The first time I met Aunt Mary was in 1948 when Duncan and I were at The College of Wooster (Ohio) where he was finishing up after the war. His sister Mary Lucie McCune was also there and with her boyfriend we all drove down to Brilliant in the ancient old car that we had. This was virgin territory for me, since I had always lived in the flat lands of the city of Chicago. As we drove into Jefferson County the roads begin to wind up and down very steep hills until we finally came to the Ohio River. By the time we had worked our way down the river from Steubenville to Brilliant my fear of heights had been realized. We drove up the little road on the hill to the old family home and there on the porch was Aunt Mary to greet us. Duncan and Mary Lucie had always spoken fondly of Aunt Mary who had a way with people of all ages. Their instincts were true for she welcomed us with laughter and fun and put us all at ease. That weekend we learned lots of family history and stories and saw some of the treasures. That was when we learned what a game player she was as she beat us all, but with a smile. My first impression of Brilliant was to ask "How did it get its name?" For in truth it was shabby and grey and the big power plants and steel mills down the river spewed out their dirt. I learned its name came from a glass company that was once located there. Aunt Mary was the only brilliant part left. (See picture 19: page xiv)

Four years later Duncan and I moved to Beaver, Pennsylvania which is located on the Ohio River about 50 miles north of Brilliant. We went there because it was Duncan's first job and it was only serendipity that we landed back in the country of his ancestors that was still peopled with aunts, uncles, cousins and more. I came from a big family but I knew that this experience was going to be different and I was apprehensive about it. Little did I know that we were going to be welcomed by all of them and that it became an enriching part of our life there.

McCune descendants of Aunt Mary's fathers nine siblings were still in the area . There were also the descendants of the Purdys and Knoxes. They had complicated family trees and some of them were related from both sides. Aunt Mary became my guide to the family and she was a wonderful teacher. The relatives were a fascinating assortment of knowledgeable, strong minded, often strait laced, religious and proper characters who were full of life and considered the family links sacred. After meeting them Aunt Mary would give me a background sketch of each member of the family and where they fit into the picture. But she also with a twinkle in her eye would give me the inside story of their lives from the family perspective. Each one was a story in itself.

Besides Brilliant there were close ties to relatives in Mt. Pleasant, Ohio the old Quaker town where the early pioneer families had settled as they moved west. The first event I attended at Mt. Pleasant, shortly after we had arrived in Beaver, was the funeral of one of the aging siblings of Aunt Mary's father. Arriving there is an experience since you climb up almost a mile to the little town of old brick houses and the Quaker Meeting House on the crest of a hill. This was the holy ground of the early settlers and their descendants . The funeral service was in the old family farmhouse they called "The Little Village Farm". It sits at the end of the street - a white clapboard house in a lovely setting of trees and grass. (See picture 20: page xiv) The house had been literally divided in two halves since three maiden aunts lived on one side and a brother and his family lived on the other. Out in back were sheep, a big garden, and close by the Old Seceder Cemetery where lots of the family rest. When we entered the parlor it was wall to wall with people and here began my education. For me it was a revelation, and I thought I had entered a time capsule of an earlier era. But with Aunt Mary as my guide it was the beginning of a wonderful entrance into a new family experience where I was welcomed and accepted as were all the other characters there. There were the old maiden aunts who were so delicate that the family was called to their death beds many times before they died in their late 80's. There were long conversations about family history and so many local spots where family history had taken place that it took me years to sort it all out. Always there were spirited conversations with humor to ease the tight spots. There were stories about everyone, the love stories, the sad stories, the black sheep stories and the sterling character stories. It could have been a movie.

The most outstanding relative there was Samuel Chalmers McConahey, a cousin of Aunt Mary's. (His mother, Nancy Jane McCune, was a sibling of Samuel McCune).(See picture 21: page xiv) A successful self- made man, he retired back to his roots in Mt. Pleasant and pursued seriously the art of genealogy. He had a quick and accurate mind combined with charm and personal interest in everyone. He welcomed me as if I was selected to enhance the family line. He communicated with everyone with his typed carbon-copy letters that over the years told the family history through the everyday events of life. He kept a file of his letters and those that he had received from family members in his black boxes. Today they are a source of information about the family's lives. He was a gifted archivist, and a delightful person.

The other center of relatives was in Pittsburgh. Aunt Mary's older brother Joseph Condit McCune and his wife Lucie Brown McCune lived there. Joe and Lucie were close to Aunt Mary and when their children Samuel Knox and Thompson Brown were born Aunt Mary enjoyed their growing up years. Joe & Lucie's lovely home in Edgewood was often the scene of celebrations and family events. There were other cousins and aunts and uncles from the surrounding area that joined in these events. After Sam Knox McCune married Barbara Campbell they lived close by the parents in Edgewood and when their children Helen and Lucie were born there was a close relationship. Christmas and Thanksgiving continued to be celebrated there when we first came to Beaver. The first Thanksgiving we were there we arrived the day before. Everything was set out for the dinner, with little notes under each dish to say what would go in it. Aunt Lucie came from Richmond, Virginia and she carried on the gracious customs in which she was raised. Her Thanksgiving dinner was a masterpiece of elegance but her graciousness and inclusiveness were what I remembered. (See picture 22: page xv)

AUNT MARY'S SPECIAL QUALITIES

CHILDREN: Aunt Mary especially liked children. With her nephews and nieces she never missed a birthday or Christmas. She loved to buy them presents for special occasions. She would start months ahead reading the catalogs and thinking about each child and their interests. She wanted to please them with a gift they would enjoy. Duncan says that was true when he was growing up and it was true for our own children. She had a soft spot, especially for boys. She could sit down and talk with them and especially listen to them and they bonded well. When our son Tom was going through adolescence he would walk over to her apartment for a talk, and always came home feeling better. She was an adult who always had time to play a game with the children and enjoyed their company.

She said one of her big disappointments in life was not having children of her own. We reminded her that she might not have been so good with all the other children she had influenced if she had her own. However, when Thompson and Jane McCune named their second little girl Mary Purdy McCune and brought her to Brilliant to be baptized her happiness knew no bounds. When she found her namesake was a reader and a student she was doubly happy.

COMMUNITY: In Brilliant, Aunt Mary held a very important place in her community. As the last member of one of the first families of Brilliant she was considered an elder states- woman and was respected and loved. But how did she keep alive her curiosity and interest as well as find friends in this little town? Besides teaching she joined many groups and enjoyed an active life in the community. She had many good friends and enjoyed the conviviality of being with them. However, she did prefer friends who had a sense of humor, because to her a good laugh was great therapy. People that took themselves too seriously were not at the head of her list.

THE CHURCH: The Presbyterian Church of Brilliant in which she grew up and in which her father was a lifetime elder was the recipient of her labors. She taught the Women's Sunday School Class for years, and probably held every office at one time or another. The thriving church of her parents' days changed over the years as Brilliant did, but she was always loyal and an example for everyone.

GARDENING One of her interests was gardening and she relished her rock garden on the hill behind her house where she spent many hours. (See picture: page xvii) She was an active member of the Brilliant Garden Club and was very knowledgeable about her subject. She was often asked to give talks about gardening to her club and to others. The following excerpt is from a talk entitled "Horticulture" which she gave to the Wintersville Garden Club on January 8, 1962. By reading her words you will appreciate her knowledge and her charm.

"January is a fine month for gardeners. Oh, of course April or even February may offer us the thrill of the first bulbs bursting into bloom and June gives us the miracle of the roses, but January brings the new catalogues and the great pleasure of planning our garden for next summer and dreaming of the glorious flowers we are going to have."

Catalogues hold the center of the stage in January. You can't garden long without discovering the simple fact that catalogues are the route to better and more rewarding gardening with emphasis on rewarding. It is true that you can go to the nearest nursery or even the five and ten and pick up flats of zinnias and marigolds and petunias and many others, and raise ribbon-winning specimens and have beautiful borders. Local nurseries and garden centers are invaluable because they carry stocks of standard subjects known to do well in our general area. But you will have missed half the fun!-the adventure of trying the new, the novel, the little known things that excite visitors to exclaim "Say, what's that? Where did you get it?" The intriguing names of some of the hundreds of varieties give me pleasure as I thumb through the catalogs. Wouldn't you too like to know what the saxifrage "Tumbling Waters" is like: or "Happy Thought"? That's a geranium. A friend told me the other day that she always tries at least one new thing in her garden each year. This year she wants to grow Love Apples, you know those vivid red or orange balls you can buy at the florist in the fall?

The chief new thing I am trying this year is wallflowers. The first thing that greeted our eyes when we landed at an airport in Scotland last spring was a big bed of some orangish flowers that I thought must be snapdragons although I didn't see how they could be blooming the middle of May. We became well acquainted with these wallflowers because they were everywhere in Scotland and England. I brought some packets of the seeds home but friends who had done the same discouraged me-saying that they couldn't get them to grow here. Anyhow, I'm going to have a try at it."

She completes the talk giving them practical hints for planting and recommending what they should be ordering from the catalogs.

LITERARY LIFE

Because she had an excellent classical education for a woman of her time and came from a family that valued education she was always a learner which included being up to date on what was happening near and far. Reading was always her passion. Her home library in Brilliant was a combination of the classics of English literature and poetry, interspersed with modern novels, especially about history and biography. There were many books on mathematics and especially games. There were gardening books and travel books, especially about England and Scotland. There were books about the church and the social issues facing the day. But there were also many old books which she had inherited from her relatives. Some were well worn school books and my favorite, "Noble Deeds of American Women", that details all those courageous women who actively supported the Revolution - an early feminist work. There were also shelves of old Bibles that had belonged to her relatives. (See picture: page xviii)

She was active in several literary clubs and was often asked to do book reviews. Even when she moved to Beaver late in life she joined a Literary Club and continued to be active. As the librarian of the Brilliant Branch of the Steubenville Library she was often asked to speak to groups about reading and books.

The following excerpt is from a speech presented to the New Alexandria Junior Women's Club on October 21, 1960..

"The Library"

"It is so pleasant to be with you this evening. Seeing so many familiar faces carries me back to school days and I might just branch off at any moment and start teaching arithmetic again!

The other day at a meeting at the back of the church literature table was a large poster with these words arranged in three lines.

*If you yearn
To learn
Read!*

I have taken this for my text this evening. Now of course I learned to my sorrow in teaching school that many people don't yearn to learn. They are satisfied just to exist as they are, but I believe that most of you do yearn to learn or you wouldn't be members of this club. There is a word - not very popular today I'm afraid - that is the objective of this desire for self improvement and that word is culture. What is our cultural life? Well, the dictionary says that cultural refers to refinement of good taste, manners, emotion and thought through study or training.

Refinement of taste: It has never seemed fair to me that some women just naturally have good taste; they don't need to work at it. No one needs to tell them what colors go well together, they just know. But as we think a little further, we realize that while one of us may excel in choosing clothes, another may have equally good taste in furnishing her home or in combining foods or, much more important, in her personal relationships with people. She may know just when to be sympathetic and when to be a bit critical, when to talk and when to listen, when to argue and when to stop arguing! But no doubt about it, all of us need to cultivate good taste in one direction or another. One of the ways to do this is to read. Magazines are full of helpful articles and there are excellent books on every phase of this subject.

Then there is the question of manners. Good manners are based on thoughtfulness, so we are told. That is true, and yet thoughtfulness will not tell us what fork to use when! We need a little training or study for our development here, and again we may turn to our reading to help us.

Culture includes refinement of emotions. There again some women are blessed. They seem to have a natural rein on their emotions, and are always calm, serene, and gentle. But we never know about another person. Maybe the calm ones among us had to work hard to develop that serenity, and certainly most of us can stand a little refinement or development in this direction. Finally, our definition says that culture means the refinement of thought. This is a wide open field. How is your supply of thoughts? Did you ever wonder how you would get along if you should suddenly become blind and deaf? It could happen, of course, although God forbid that it should ever happen to one of us. Would there be enough in my mind to make me a fit companion for myself in a world of darkness and silence. Norman Cousins says that the mind is a curious instrument. It is like a muscle that grows soft and flabby without exercise. And the longer it is allowed to remain idle, the more difficult it is to get it back in thinking trim. Oliver Wendell Holmes said long ago that the human mind is like a checking account. So long as you keep putting enough money in the bank, your checkbook is the most magic book in the world. All you have to do is dip your pen in the ink, make a few flourishes, and your check becomes the open sesame to your heart's desires. But just stop making deposits, and the magic evaporates with a curt message from the bank, "No funds." Many persons, Dr. Holmes said, have a corresponding mental experience. They keep drawing on their intellectual reserves long after the time they have put anything in to draw against. Unfortunately, however, there is no bank to serve notice that they are out of mental funds. So they continue, in their conversation, in their letters, in their everyday activities, to do their mental business even though they are intellectually bankrupt. Although reading is by no means the only way to add to our mental assets, it is probably the easiest method of acquiring new knowledge, new interests, new ideas. Perhaps you will agree with this inscription in a Massachusetts library:

*Books are keys to wisdom's treasure;
Books are gates to lands of pleasure;
Books are paths that upward lead;
Books are friends. Come, let us read."*

She follows this introduction with a history of Ohio libraries and of course lots about the Brilliant Branch of the Steubenville Library where she worked as librarian.

GAMES AND PUZZLES

These were her other passion and you did not need to be around her long before you were involved in one of them. In teaching mathematics she used lots of them with her students as well as setting up a chess club for the boys. But alone at home her delight was the crossword puzzles, especially those of the New York Times. Beside her chair she had a little stand supplied with her needs: dictionaries, thesaurus, poetry and literature collections, atlases, etc. Just as often she was deep into a jigsaw puzzle. She said that when she had to spend a holiday alone, she always had a new puzzle as a treat to enjoy that day. I often found her watching baseball games on TV.

When she moved to Beaver she bought a new color TV. That was the period when Public Television was big into British dramas. We discovered "Upstairs-Downstairs" on Sunday nights and being an Anglophile she could hardly wait for the next installment, and we would have long discussions afterwards speculating on the story line.

Her other consuming interest was politics. She was a loyal Democrat carrying on the tradition of the families of her father and mother. She was never too partisan about her politics.

She had a wide and educated view of the world so her response was reasoned and responsible. When Watergate broke upon the scene she devoured each new development like a continued story. She did believe that each person had a responsibility to live their lives in the interest of the greater good.

On October 9, 1944 when World War II was still a reality she gave a talk to the Women's Club of Brilliant. It is an illustration of her sense of responsibility for not only her own life, but for her beloved community of Brilliant. With humor she describes what must have been the bad habits of many of the members of the community, and yet is able to make her point.

WHY WORRY?

"Why worry? Why? So we'll accomplish something worthwhile in the world. Worry makes the wheels go round - constructive worry, that is. No one upholds the chronic worrier, the

fretful fussy complainer, the oh-I-never-get-a-break, the Yes-it's a nice day but I'm worried that it'll rain tomorrow kind.

But constructive worry –worry that leads to action and thus to improvement—that is what we want to consider. Worry seems to have very few friends. There are many poems celebrating the carefree spirit but none in praise of worrying. Although Lloyd George did say, when asked how he stood the burdens of the last war, “ Well, to me a change of worries is as good as a vacation.”

We all know the song that Robert Browning gave to little Pippa to sing as she went along

:

*The lark's on the wing
The snail's on the thorn
God's in his heaven
All's right with the world.*

Pippa has come to stand for the typical optimist, and that's all very well. But what is your picture of little Pippa meeting the emergencies of everyday living? Suppose instead of the snail on the thorn, Pippa saw a worm on the cabbage. Would she say Oh! what a velvety smooth worm, what a lovely clear green, and go tripping off singing

*The worm's crunching the cabbage
All's right with the world.*

That is where the worrier of the family would have to step in and do a little constructive spraying. It has been said that a pessimist is someone who has to live with an optimist. Someone in every family must do some worrying.

And in the same way, some one in every town must do some constructive worrying. Here again we have the chronic complainer-Nothing is ever done right here; Why doesn't somebody (somebody else of course!) do something; No, I never vote, what's the use, all the politicians are crooked. And we have the Pippas who think that everything is perfect in this best of all possible towns. But, thank goodness, we also have some constructive worriers who see that some things are wrong and then do their best to put them right.

As in the town, so in the nation, for the United States is just Brilliant multiplied by several thousand. What tremendous power would be generated if the citizens of every town in this country would do some constructive worrying about the appearance of their village, about their schools, their churches, their local and county government. We must remember that democracy in this country does not come to us from Washington. We send it there.

At present we are all worried about the international situation—the death, suffering and destruction caused by the war. But how much is constructive worrying? If we are really concerned, deep in our hearts, we will not neglect any tiny little thing that we can do to help win the war and guard the peace. We will not cash in our war bonds, try to get more than our share of scarce supplies, use black market gasoline, or refuse help to the Red Cross, and after the war we will not forget to work for peace. We can have a better world if enough of us worry about it and work for it.

*So—Let's worry as we wander o'er the earth
Let's worry a little each day
For worry's the spur that urges us on
To make the world better some way."*

CONCLUSION

I have tried for a long time to isolate what it was about Aunt Mary that was such an influence on me. I think it was because she made me appreciate that she had found serenity and peace just by being herself, a person of integrity and compassion , secure in her identity and with no pretense. That allowed her to be open to others, a listener who was not judgmental and lightened the spirits of others with her own sense of joy and humor. She did not try to "fix" the problems of others, but by listening helped them figure it out for themselves. She must have been a wonderful influence on her students - truly a mentor in today's language.

Aunt Mary also was an example of how to grow old truly with grace. In the last five years she lived in Beaver she never seemed to grow old. When she found it hard to get out of her chair, she would say "I don't know why I can't do this because it is the same old me inside." Like all of her life, she accepted what came graciously and dealt with it with calm and acceptance. The spark of her inner self never burned out. Now that I am far along to that same period of life, I keep remembering all she taught me, hoping I can follow in the tradition of dear Aunt Mary.

(See pictures: page xvi)

CREDITS

The author has made every effort to verify the dates, names and events as presented. However, there can be errors and corrections would be appreciated.

Special thanks to Duncan McCune for setting up the story, scanning all the pictures printing and binding all the copies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Mary Ann Wilhelms was born and raised in Chicago in a family of five girls. She married Duncan Chalmers McCune on August 23, 1947 in Chicago. They lived in a small town, Beaver, Pennsylvania, on the Ohio River twenty five miles north of Pittsburgh for fifty years. These were the years when all the memories were realities. They moved to Freedom Village, a Retirement Community in Holland, Michigan, in 2002. It is near their summer cottage at "Oakenwald" in Grand Haven, MI and the extended family in Chicago. They have two children. Thomas Duncan McCune who with his wife Leora Hatchwell and daughter Callie Anne live in Buffalo Grove, Illinois. Anne McCune and her husband, Ed Klinenberg, live in Oakland, California.