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## Reminiscence of John Muir by Brown, Grace (Blackley)

Grace (Blackley) Brown

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*Letter of David Muir, dated  
May 24, 1867 tells of  
Aunt Blackley's death -*

*Mary Muir, May 21, 1867 74 yrs of age*

REMINISCENCES OF JOHN MUIR BY HIS COUSIN

GRACE BROWN (NEE GRACE BLACKLEY), TOLD  
TO A.R. JENKINS, HER SON-IN-LAW, JULY 29,  
1915, AT HER RESIDENCE, FILLMORE AVENUE,  
BUFFALO, N.Y.

My name was Grace Blackley. I am a full cousin of John Muir, and the only one left on my mother's side. My father was a shepherd in his younger days and he finished his days as a farmer in Crawford John, Lanarkshire, Scotland.

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland. His father was born in Manchester, England. John Muir's ~~fa~~ grandmother on his father's side died when he was born, and his grandfather got his discharge from the Army and went back to Scotland with his two children. My mother, Mary Muir, was ten years old, living in Crawford John, Scotland, and Dan Muir was only a baby when the children were sent back to his mother's place in Crawford John.

*7-1995* John Muir's grandmother on his father's side was named Sarah Haig, an English woman. My mother's mother was named Sarah Haig. John Muir's father was a recruiting sergeant in the British Army at Dunbar, Scotland, where he met his first wife who died, then he married his second in Dunbar. John Muir's father was my mother's brother. There were two children by the first wife, but they died; of the second wife there were eight children, as follows: John, Margaret, David, Sarah, Daniel (a doctor), Mary, Annie and Johanna. His first wife bought him out of the Army, as she had money, had a store. People had run in on her, and he took hold of the place and shut it up, gathered in all the money he could and then opened up with a cash-no-credit store, and he made money hand over fist, and then he took his family to America and went straight to Wisconsin and settled on a full section of land which he bought.

David is a drygoods merchant somewhere; Margaret is a farmer's wife; Sarah has an independent fortune; Mary is married to a lawyer; Annie is a high-school teacher in Portage, Wis. I lost track of them, did not correspond with them.

John Muir lived on his father's farm at Fontelak, 14 miles from Portage, Wis. Last time I saw him was when he got back from college, he and another fellow were going around looking for a simple little flower all through the weeds.

Johanna Muir, his youngest sister, was the only American; she married a Southerner in Hamilton, Canada, and went back to the Southern States to live.

John Muir's mother's name was Annie Gilroy, a Scotch woman from Dunbar, Scotland, where John Muir was born; his father was born in England, in Manchester.

John Muir was about 20 years old after we came out. His father sent for me and mother and my sister and husband and family and brother, and he was going to lay out money, free of interest, and make us a home, when we landed--but the home we got was to clear out a lumber room and make beds on the floor. Then he wanted to take us farther west, amongst the Indians, and we would not go; so my brother-in-law, John Watson, my sister's husband, went back to Portage and bought a farm at Poinette, Wis.--his son is there now, James Watson, on the same farm; there were just the two boys, James and Hamilton.



We went there during harvest time, working in the harvest field. My uncle wanted me to learn to make bands to lift the grain with, and I looked at him, and he went back to my brother and said "That sister of yours wont be learned, she knows more than me, knows as much in one day as I do in a year." He did not know anything about "lifting" grain, and I knew all about it. John and David and myself took all the grain off the field into the barnyard. David pitched until he was that played out he couldn't pitch any longer, and I made him build the load and I pitched. I left in the fall. Our clothes never were taken out of the boxes in the barn. Margaret came to me and said "Don't you dare go, you can never walk to Portage." I said "There are lots of places by the way." Uncle was going in in the morning; he just gave me time to get on my clothes, no time for breakfast, and I went to my sister's place in Portage.

I was six or seven years older than he was.

I met John Muir and talked to him. When he was hunting for those flowers in the woods, he and the other student, that was all he ever talked to me about. After I was married to William Brown he came to Portage and visited me once, and he was talking about that little yellow flower, which was a very good thing for medicine, for bowel complaint, and he was still hunting for it; the flower was called "Tarmentel", I think it was.

John Muir was about 20 years old after we came out. My brother and his brother were digging a well on a new farm of about 80 acres, about 7 or 8 miles from his old place, and the well was deep, and they let John Muir down into the well, and they heard a moan, and they just managed to pull him up in time to save his life from the gas. After that, while he was still suffering from the effects of the gas, he whittled out of hardwood with his pocket knife a clock, which was exhibited in a watchmaker's shop in Portage, corner Dewitt and Main streets, by the name of Steeber. Everybody thought it was a wonderful clock, and it kept good time. He would play with snakes and toads and such things, always going around gathering flowers.

He studied for a doctor. He was going to once burn all his papers from the college when his wife grabbed them and pulled them out of the fire. He married, in California, a Spanish woman.

I was told there was a furniture manufacturer in Portage wanted to engage him at a big salary to merely show his skill, not to work, but he said no, that his ingenuity was to be shown on human beings, not on furniture, and he refused the man's offer.

They said that he invented a bedstead that you could wind up and set it for whatever time you wanted to get up in the morning and it would land you on your feet at that time. I couldn't say what became of that bedstead.

I never heard much more about him, except that he was a great man for going around seeing sights and gathering flowers and studying them. This was his habit. He worked with his father until his father broke up the farm about the time of the outbreak of the Civil War. John Muir and Dan Muir were both in Canada at the time of the Civil War, and when they came back I lost track of them. In Canada they made plow handles and farm implements to raise money while there, and after the War they went to Edinboro, Scotland, to study to be doctors.

I am 83 years old.

John Muir, instead of becoming a doctor, became a writer.