The Jamiesons

A Family Story (continued)

William became the farm manager of property owned by W. J. Christy. It is believed Jamieson and Christy knew each other in Scotland and Jamieson's knowledge of botany made him suitable for the position with his friend and employer.

While supervising the digging of a well on the Christy farm, Jamieson recognized the earth as "fire clay." Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was a major center of American pottery manufacturing so Jamieson and Christy sent samples to contacts there for analysis. The samples were deemed excellent for firing and this was thought to have been the beginning of Christy Fire Brick Company, one of many clay mine and brick-making operations scattered throughout St. Louis.

William had brothers still living in Scotland. His brother James was an engineer and made his first trip to St. Louis in 1861 to explore possible business ventures with William. He returned to Scotland and came back to St. Louis permanently in 1863 with his wife Margaret Herriot Swanston Jamieson and their young son. William and James acquired land together and co-founded their own clay mine and firing operation, Jamieson Fire Clay Company. They had four mining operations and in 1879 William expanded his interests and became a director of a newly incorporated Grand View Christy Fire Clay Company.

William supported his communities through contributions of the soul. He studied the Bible and was instrumental in the founding of several churches. One of them, Holy Innocents Episcopal Church, was organized for the coal mining families of the South St. Louis area. He helped found a Sunday school which later became a Methodist church and still exists today.

The grounds of the Jamieson home, built in 1868 and still standing, included a grove of fruit trees, formal gardens of manicured flower beds with rockscapes and a large Victorian greenhouse filled with exotic plants. There was a pond on the property where a pet alligator lived for a while. It was said the ice man had been chased more than once by the alligator and he was a prime suspect when the alligator met an early demise.

William and Anne had seven children with three daughters who lived to adulthood – Jane (Thompson), Violet (Fleming) and Ellen (Knox).

Anne Payne Jamieson died on January 1, 1892. William continued to live in the family home and in doing so it was his good fortune to get better acquainted with the housekeeper next door. Betsy "Bessie" Fyffe, of Arbroath, Scotland, and William were married on January 19, 1895. William and Bessie had three children - Charles, Frank and Grace (Wilfley).

William died in 1924 at the age of 93 and Bessie lived another 36 years, until 1960. William was my great-great-grandfather and his daughter Ellen, my great-grandmother.

Gary Carr

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