

An Unfinished Biography of Captain John McClurg

John McClurg is my first cousin three times removed. John was born in 1858 in Colerain Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. John's father, Samuel Jackson McClurg, was born in 1824 in West Nottingham, Chester County, Pennsylvania and died in 1861 at age 37 in Oxford, Chester County, Pennsylvania. John's mother, Rachel Collins was born in 1833 and died in 1870 also at age 37. Both events most likely were in Pennsylvania. So, you can see that John was an orphan when he was 12 years old. Until 1873, John lived with Thomas Coates, a wealthy farmer and, I believe, a relative. In 1873, John went to live with Joseph W Shellender, his guardian and my great great grandfather. His wife was Rebecca Jane McClurg, and they were married in 1853, thus the tie between the McClurg's and Shellender's.

John had dreamed of sailing the seven seas and captaining his own vessel. He grew tired of the discipline of farm work and left Joseph Shellender in 1874 to become a captain. He walked away and declared "I'll never come home again until I'm captain of a ship."

Nothing was heard of John for many years, and he was presumed dead. His sister, Margaret (Maggie) Louisa McClurg Whiteside, had administered the estate of their parents, Samuel and Rachel. She had asked for her share of the estate which Joseph W. Shellender had been holding for John. Her attorney recommended she go to court to have John declared dead, legally.

Orphans' Court of Lancaster County records show the process which involved testimony from Thomas Coates as well as Mary Ramsey who appears in the 1880 census along with Maggie McClurg Whiteside as living with Thomas Coates as head of household. I assume Mary was a friend of Maggie's and knew John. She testified she last heard from John when he was in the West Indies. The court needed their testimony and after 12 weeks (about 3 months) had then passed for John or anyone else to appear before the Orphans' Court of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania to come forward and testify that he was alive. John was declared dead on August 17, 1887, and Maggie, as sole heir, was able to obtain John's half of the estate, \$140.40. Today that would be \$4,114.29 in 2023. Not an insignificant amount.

Now, fast forward to 1891, when John is 33 years old and has not been heard from in 18 years and legally is dead. He appeared in Philadelphia, delivering a load of mahogany for Peter Wright & Sons of Philadelphia in a vessel they owned. They had notified Maggie of his return, and she gave him his inheritance 21 years after his mother's death.

John remained true to his words: "I'll never come home again until I'm captain of a ship."

Jay Matlock

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This is entitled "Unfinished" for good reason:

- I have not yet found record of John in any census record other than 1860 when he was 2 years old. Not surprising since he was probably at sea when the enumerator came around.
- I do not know if John married and/or had children.
- I have no direct evidence of the relationship of John to Truman Coates or Mary Ramsey.
- I have no information as to when John died.
- I am seeking information as to his seamanship career.