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KNOW YOUR ROOTS

A Family That Doesn't Know Its Past Doesn't Understand Itself

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FREE/ELSON

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The picture at the left is an ambrotype (photo on glass) of Mary Elizabeth Elson Free. The ambrotype is probably 150 years old and is deteriorating rapidly. I am trying to save it for the future by keeping it out of the light.

The picture on the right is a doctored version of the one above. I tried to bring out the bonnet. Mary Elizabeth is wearing in the original but I'm not very good at photo restoration..



THE ELSON IN Harry ELSON Durland

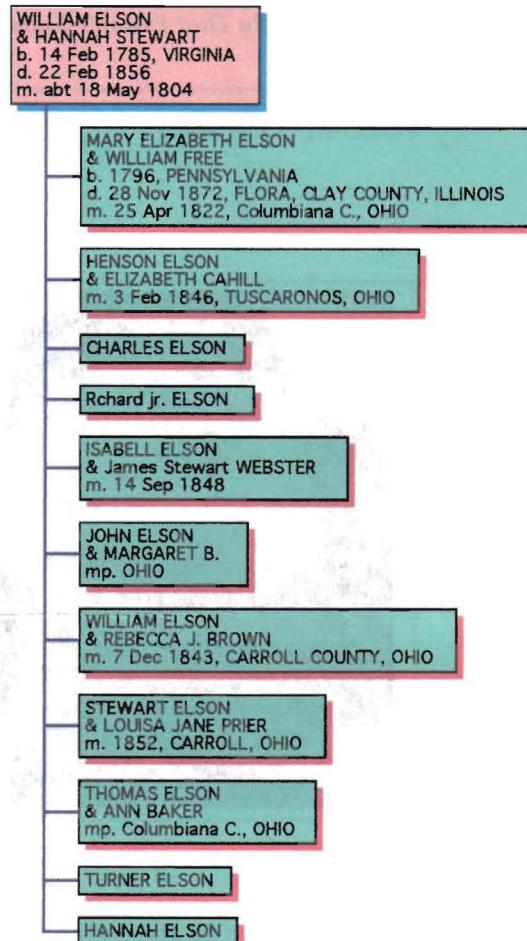
The picture on the cover is Mary Elizabeth Elson, mother of Rebecca Free and grandmother of Harry Elson Durland. Very little is known about her but so far it is known that she was born in 1806 in Virginia and died in 1866. The death date and place has not been definitely determined.

It is certain that Harry did not know his maternal grandmother for he was born in 1888 but his mother Rebecca Free evidently wanted to preserve the name for Elson posterity. I thank her for that, for I found other family names through the Elson siblings. Mary Elizabeth was the eldest but the names that follow give hints to the other ancestors.

For example, Henson is certainly a family name but I have yet to make the connection. I'm still searching but I do know it is on the Elson side, for there was a Henson in another Elson family.

William obviously is named after his father. Stewart is for William's wife, Hannah Stewart, and Turner is for the wife of Richard Elson, father of the elder William. One researcher does have a Richard Jr. born 1811 but I have not found him.

Heretofore it was thought that the Elsons were Scotch Irish due to the handwritten note found in the Dorland book. However, recent research has proven that to be incorrect. The Scotch Irish must have been from Mary Elizabeth's mother, Hannah Stewart, not from her father, William Elson.



To understand Mary Elizabeth we have to take a look at her siblings. She was the eldest of the eleven children. Her story appeared in the Free/Elson issue of 2000 but her marriage to William Free at age 16 gives us cause to wonder. In 1822, the date of her marriage, there were already 8 children in the family. We can speculate on whether she married to get away from the family or because William was an ardent suitor. We will never know the answer to that question but it is an interesting one to consider.

THE ELSON CONTROVERSY & THE STEWART LINK

In the Free/Elson issue of the year 2000 there was a bit of the past history of the Elson family.

As I continue to research the family, I find that that the Elsons probably came from England to Maryland in the very early days. This means that our roots go back on the Elson side also into the 1600s.

However there is much controversy as to the place overseas the original Elson to Maryland started from. Some say it was Wales, others say it was Kent.

These messages have come through the Internet and when I queried about their sources, I didn't get an answer.

One Elson says there are still Elsons living near Wrexham in Wales so anyone who travels there can try and unravel this mystery.

Another tidbit is that there are two Rebecca Elsons and one was hanged as a witch January 20, 1662/63. Wouldn't this be fun to tie her to our family?

Another researcher reports there is a town in England called Elson. She visited there in May and says there are only a few houses and no real town or church. There is a cottage with a sign that says 'Elson Cottage.' The town is now a suburb of Ellesmere, Shropshire. I hope by the 2002 Free/Elson issue I can find proof of the first Elson on these shores but suffice it to say, our original Elson was English.

Therefore, the Scotch-Irish reference in the handwritten note must have referred only to Hannah Stewart, who was the wife of William Elson.

Hannah Stewart had eleven children and being Scotch Irish must have come from Ulster, Ireland where the Scots had been banished because they were Protestants. But before I can trace that heritage, I must find her parents here in this country.

Tracing the name Stewart is not easy because it is a very common name sometimes spelled Stuart. We know that Hannah spelled it Stewart but did her parents?

I have found that she was born in 1785 in Virginia. She was married to William Elson in about 1804 because Mary Elizabeth was born 1806 in Virginia. William Elson was born in Augusta County, Virginia, and I have no proof that it was Augusta County where Hannah was born.

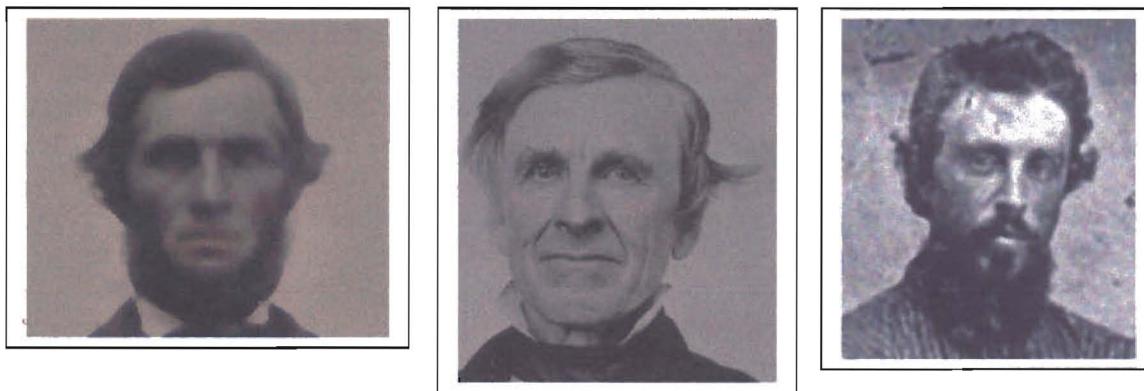
However I found lots of Stuarts on the year 1800 Tax list of Augusta. Also I have found that there is a John Stuart who had lived and had land adjacent to the Oldstone (August Stone) church which was the church for the Scots Irish community in Augusta County.

With this information I am going to begin looking for Hannah as a child of a Stuart. This might be a wild goose chase but then I've been on many of those lately.

This is just a little bit of history on Hannah Stewart/Stuart of Virginia. Females are particularly difficult to trace because not only were they not mentioned in wills, but when they married they took on their married name. We were just fortunate that Grandma Elson was identified as Miss Hannah Stewart in William Free's handwritten note.

A CONTINUING DILEMMA

Is the man on the left the same as the man in the middle? Note the hairdo, the nose, the mouth, the sunken eyes. I asked these same questions in the 1998 Free issue, page 2. Does the man on the left look younger than the man in the middle? Is the man on the far right the same as the man on the far left? I still have not solved the identity of the younger and older. However, I do know for sure who the man on the right is. It is Milton Free, son of William who I believe is the man in the middle.



The picture on the left is the head of a tintype. The picture in the middle is from an ambrotype. The picture on the right is a bad copy sent to me from a Free cousin. I assume it is a tintype.

An ambrotype is older than a tintype. The ambrotype is on glass and fades when it is exposed to light. Ambrotype as a photo process was invented by a Frenchman in Paris, patented in 1853, and discontinued in 1865. So the picture in the middle has to have been made before 1865.

The head on the left, a tintype, is an example of a process that began in 1856 and continued to 1900. The same would apply to the tintype of the man on the right.

This is my dilemma. Certainly the man on the left is younger than the man in the middle. If they are the same man then the tintype had to be made in 1856 or later and the ambrotype was discontinued in 1865.

I believe the man in the middle to be William Free, father of Milton. In the ambrotype, he would have had to be about age 68. Also, his wife, Mary Elizabeth's picture on the cover is an ambrotype before 1865. It seems reasonable that they would have had their pictures taken together.

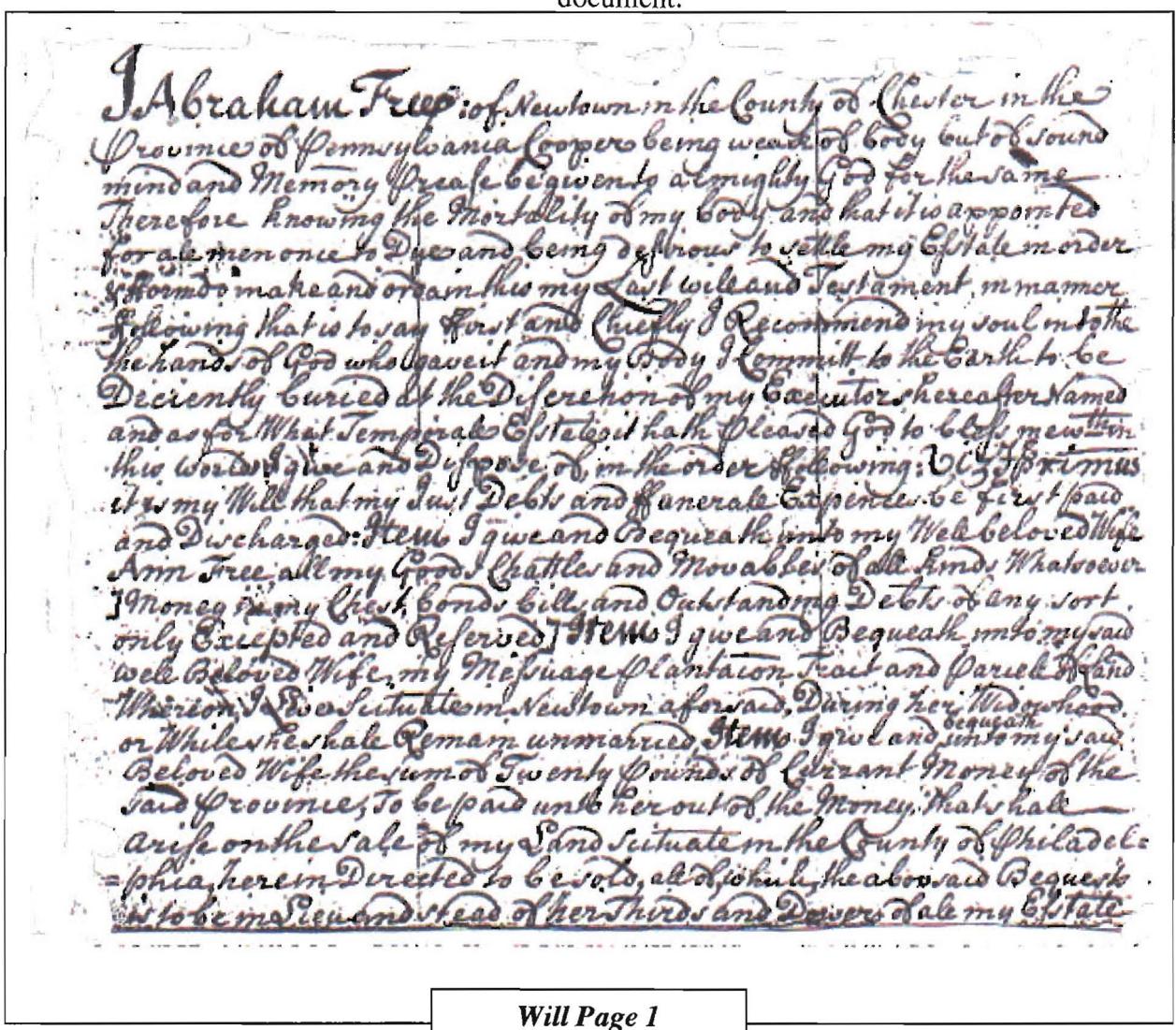
If the left photo and the right photo are not the same, and the left photo and the middle photo are not the same. Then, who is the man on the left? I have only one conclusion to draw. It could be son John who was born in 1826 and certainly an adult in the tintype era, or son William, born in 1829 or Elson, born in 1830. The likeness to the middle photo is uncanny.

As I said on the title page, I am in the process of trying to date and identify the eighteen daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes I have in order to preserve them for the future.

WHERE ARE WE IN SOLVING THE FREE MYSTIQUE?

What do we know? We know that Rebecca Free was married to James Youngs Durland. We know that her father was William Free and her mother was Mary Elizabeth Elson. We also know that William Free's father was John Free because William was traced in the deeds of the property that John owned. We are sure our William is the right one because the handwritten list we have of his siblings mentions them in the deed of the land.

I am getting closer to solving the parentage of John Free. As of today, I know that our John Free could be the son of Abraham Free. In the 1996 issue of *Know Your Roots* there was a story about the possibility of our William Free being an ancestor of Abraham. In that same issue I presented Abraham's will. It was rather hard to read so in this issue I am giving you a larger version. It is still difficult to read but it is very interesting as a family historical document.



Will Page 1

Notice in Page 1 Abraham bequeaths to his wife Ann [Ann Bevan] everything as long as she remains unmarried.

This includes his land in Newtown, Pennsylvania and Philadelphia County. I have not found the land in Philadelphia County.

All Real and Personal Estate I Devise order and Direct that my Executors or the Survivor of them do sell alien and convey all that my said Tract and parcel of Land Situate in the said County of Philadelphia with the Appurtenances, containing by Estimation Two Hundred and Fifty acres, be the same more or less, I term I give and Devise unto my Executors all that my said Mesnage Plantation Tract and parcel of Land Situate in Newtown as aforesaid with the Appurtenances, and to the heirs of the Survivor of them, for to be sold aliened and conveyed by my Executors, or the Survivor of them and in and for default of such alienation by my Executor or the Survivor of them, Then in that case that the said Mesnage Plantation Tract and parcel of Land with the appurtenances be sold & conveyed by the heir or heirs of such surviving Executor but all my Executing Reserving unto my said Wife the aforesaid privileged during her widowhood, in the said Mesnage and Plantation. Item I give and Bequeath all the money arising on the sales of my said Two Tracts and parcels of Land herein directed to be sold, and the rest and residue of my personal Estate [not herein before bequeathed] after the said Twenty Dollars given unto my wife Debts Incumbrances and Demands on the said lands being paid and Discharged unto my dear and Beloved Children to wit John, William, Abraham, Mary and Martha Free, to be Devised; only that the Share or Dividene of my said Sons be made Ten pounds apiece more then the Share

Will Page 2

In Page 2 of the will, Ann receives 10 pounds and his children. John, [presumably the eldest], William, Abraham, Mary and Martha were to receive ten pounds apiece.

Ann Bevan Free, widow, [see 1999 Free issue for her history] married Samuel Caley after Abraham died. All of her children were minors at that time. In that era she must have been considered a wealthy widow.

This last page of Abraham's will should give you some idea of the practice of the time before the Revolution in 1776. The land was still under English rule.

The Inventory to this will was given to you in the 2000 issue of the Free/Elson *KNOW YOUR ROOTS*.

Share or portion of Each of my said Daughters, and it is my Will that if it shall happen that one or more of them before his her or their age of Twenty one Years or Marriage shall then be her or their Grandparents be Equally Distributed amongst the Survivors of them. Item I nominate and appoint my well beloved wife Anna Free and my true & full Friends Mordecai Lewis of New Town aforesaid & women to be Executors of this my last Will and Testament giving and granting unto them and to the Survivors of them full Power to act thereon according to the true intent and meaning hereof. Item I nominate this Recd of New Town above named George and David Lewis of Radnor in the said County of Chester Friends as Trustees Desiring them to be Assistant to my Executors and such that this my Will be faithfully and judiciously observed and performed And Lastly I declare to be my last Will and Testament and to my Executors and such that this my Will be faithfully and judiciously observed and performed And Lastly I declare to be my last Will and Testament by me made in word or Writing I declare this only to be my last Will and Testament. No Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this the fourth day of the month of September anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and thirty eight

Signed sealed and published by the said
Abraham Free to be his last Will and
Testament after he had signed
and the words foregoing theron were
Interlined, in the presence of us whom
he desired to be Witnesses

Abraham Free

Lewis Lewis

Reed Howard
Gabriel Lewis Probate Commissioner

Chas Oct 2 1738 Then personally appeared Lewis Lewis & John Lewis of this witness to the within written Will who on their solemn affirmations do declare that they were present and saw the Testator that man named Abraham Free Publish his Will and Declare the same to be his last Will and Testament and that he did so in the dying time of his life of sound mind and memory to the best of their understanding

Affirmed before me this 2d day of October 1738

MARY'S MESSAGES



I have just learned about a very important service being provided by David Griffith to the elementary schools in Austin, Texas. This announcement which appeared on the Web was titled "Austin, PARTNERS IN EDUCATION." I quote verbatim. "This week's featured Partner in Education is 4 U Technologies. 4U Technologies is this week's Partner in Education! For five years now, 4U Technologies has been providing Austin (TX) schools with recycled computers at cost or cheaper. Odom Elementary has been one of the lucky schools the company has chosen to donate to.



David Griffith, COO of 4U Technologies says that the happiness that the computers bring to the children is the big pay-off for his work. 'When you see a kid walk up to you and say,

'This is great!, you just want to do more,' he said. 'This is the most effective program that I've ever been associated with because David has a real commitment to kids,' Ron Bolck, Principal of Odom Elementary, explained."

Congratulations, David, and many kudos. I know everyone in the family is very proud of your contribution to Austin Partners in Education.

On another note, here is a little historical tidbit if you have wondered how our families landed in Illinois. It was the promise of new lands in frontier America. The general paths of migration were either to the South, westward, or down the Ohio River. Our families seem to have followed the river. Water was used as a means of travel and lands were opened by lottery, treaty, and grants. I need to look at how the Frees and the Elsons went from Pennsylvania and Virginia to Ohio.

From Ohio they went to Indiana, on to Illinois near St. Louis, and finally to Flora, Illinois. This migration started immediately after the Revolution when the East had been ravaged by war. In subsequent issues, I'll trace their land purchases as they moved westward.

Remember that Mary Elizabeth Elson and William Free married in Ohio. Mary Elizabeth was born in Virginia and William in Pennsylvania, so Ohio is where the families converged.

Not even his mother or grandmother recognized last issue's mystery photo of Patrick Smith! Try this one out and see how well you do. (These are photos I had and I'm running out. Can anyone send some more?)

WHO IS THIS?

