



# KNOW YOUR ROOTS

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## MARY ELIZABETH ELSON

Rebecca Free was our grandmother in the February newsletter and this issue will be devoted to her mother, another grandmother back one generation, Mary Elizabeth Elson. Obviously when you see the name of Harry Elson Durland you can connect it to Mary Elizabeth, his grandmother that he never knew. Fortunately anyone can now read the past issues of Know Your Roots when I refer to them, as all nine years have been

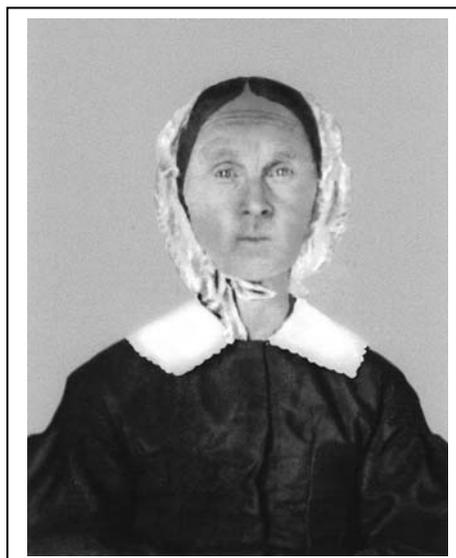
published on this same website. I will try to present new information with each new newsletter, but for what has been written in the past about Mary Elizabeth and the Elsons, I urge you to pull up the past Free/Elson issues.



I paid to have this photo of Mary Elizabeth below restored from an ambrotype (left) which is rapidly disintegrating as you can see. An ambrotype is a photo on glass and is highly perishable. Ambrotypes were made between 1850 and 1856. This is the original which I picked up from the Free/Elson issue Volume VI, Issue 3 (June 2001) because I didn't

want to scan the original again and add to its deterioration. The ambrotype, depending on what year we estimate it was taken, is almost 150 years old and is a real treasure.

One day while looking at it, the eagle eye of Mitzi Jr. could see that Mary Elizabeth had ties on her neck which we concluded were from a bonnet, and the restored picture shows the bonnet more clearly. I regret that her hands in the original ambrotype were not included in the restoration because one can see in the original they are large and strong. After marrying William Free in her teens, Mary Elizabeth had nine children, four sons and five daughters of which our Rebecca was the youngest. This Elson grandmother gave birth to Rebecca well



into her early forties. In one of my future newsletters I'll make a timeline to show how many times William, who was a farmer, moved the family from one state to another so it must have been very hard for her to pick up and change locations so many times.

The Elsons have a long history in our line. We can trace the first Elson, John William, to his marriage in Maryland in 1727 to Joanna Bradcutt, the midwife. You have been re-introduced to their son, our Elson Revolutionary soldier, Richard Elson, and it was only when Richard fought in the Revolutionary War that the continuation of our Elson family was in Virginia.

Mary Elizabeth's father William, the youngest of Richard's family, was born in Virginia and Mary Elizabeth's mother was Hannah Stewart. According to the handwritten list I have, Hannah Stewart was Scotch-Irish! Does this mean we have an Irish strain in our background? Not one bit, but we do have a Scottish strain. In the past I've written a little about the Scotch-Irish, but genetically Hannah is very important to me. Do you remember in my story of Rebecca, the daughter of Mary Elizabeth, I said Rebecca had red hair? Do you remember the pictures of Harry Durland having strawberry blonde curls? Well, I can prove I have some of Mary Elizabeth's genes because to my consternation I am loaded with freckles, a red hair component! And all because of Hannah, our Scotch-Irish grandmother. There are references to our Scotch-Irish heritage in the past newsletters which are on file through the archives in the Family Index under Free/Elson. By the way, the fan chart for Becky (Rebecca) will help you locate these grandparents I am referring to.

When you are searching the index, look up another Elson, a famous one not too distantly related - Mary Elizabeth's nephew, William Harris Elson. Historically, he is one of the greats in our educational system. A whole book can be written about his contributions. Any encyclopedia will give you his biography in depth, but succinctly I will just note that he is considered the father of technical instruction. After his success in that field he entered the field of child education by authoring the Elson Readers, then creating "Fun with Dick and Jane" which became a whole series of Dick and Jane books used universally throughout the United States. He was the forerunner for all the teachers through the generations that followed.

I want to digress one moment. I know that previously I have written a lot about the Durland side, but Rebecca's family, the Frees and the Elsons are equally important to the development of our country. If the Frees in Pennsylvania, namely Abraham Free, can be proven to be a son of Heinrich Frey, then our Free family had land before William Penn called it Pennsylvania! Then there is Anne Bevan, the ex-Quaker wife of Abraham, whose family is also quite prominent. Another story to be told in the future.

So now we have the Elsons who began in Maryland and Virginia. Rebecca Free has given us much, culturally and historically, through these Elsons and there is still more to be discovered. Mary Elizabeth Elson has brought us down another road to be proud of. Count all the states that we have early ancestors in and it will blow your mind.