

## Flowers in McCoy Park

It would take a courtship of over 12 years to convince Eleanor Waddle to become the wife of William McCoy. They were eventually married in 1850 back in their hometown of Chillicothe, Ohio. William purchased a 14-acre site plot of land on the corner of Spring & Farmer Streets from the estate of Samuel and Fanny Owens, who both died relatively young. There was already a large 2-story brick structure and numerous outbuildings on the property. William would build for Eleanor a large south addition in the Greek Revival style home, buy furniture and artwork from the east, and provide gardens that she enjoyed back home in Ohio. Letters that have survived between William, Eleanor, and family members provide clues of life here in Independence and living on this hillside. Letters discuss news on family member's health, news in town, and, of course the weather. For Eleanor, she would also write about her gardens. In a time when many could only afford to put out a small vegetable and animal feed garden, Eleanor would have a herb, kitchen, vegetable garden, orchard, and, her pride and joy, 2-acre flower garden. The list of flowers that she would grow is quite lengthy, with many of the names of flowers presented in Latin, showing her knowledge and education in horticulture. William and Eleanor's love of flowers, especially roses, extended into their home with their decorations, artwork, and floral carvings on their mahogany furniture. John McCoy, William's brother (Harry & Bess's Sunday School superintendent) would state in his journal entries about bringing plants back with him from the different Santa Fe, California trails. One entry notes his frustration of not being able to grow Buffalo grass here. We imagine many of John's experiments of trying to grow native plants from Western Territories and prairies ended in Eleanor's garden. We presently have a large Yucca plants cluster in our yard which seem to have the ability to live for many years. A dear friend gave us a wedding photo of her parents taken in our side yard that showed those same plants over 60 years ago. The McCoy Estate was also enjoyed by the community who would walk around the grounds while in town or after church services or other social gatherings. It must have been a treat on a hot day decked out in your Sunday best and all the layers of clothing to stroll through the gardens and down to the spring (that Heritage House sits on) and enjoy a cool breeze coming out of the McCoy Park valley. To enjoy the beauty of their garden year-round, the McCoy's commissioned an artist to paint a border of roses and vines on the ceiling of the front parlor and a trellis pattern of yellow roses covering the entire ceiling in the front side hallway (see [owensmccoyhouse.com](http://owensmccoyhouse.com)). There is indication that Eleanor had a greenhouse on the grounds, possibly to start seedling plants and house plants. In letter correspondence with her brother and sister back in Chillicothe, Ohio, Eleanor mentioned of sending someone to Ohio to pick up nursery stock. Trips such as these likely included an exchange of plants. Because this part of Ohio was also a part of the Underground Railroad, one could speculate that the plant exchange was not just about horticulture.

Forest and Martha Ingram saved the Owens-McCoy House from demolition using their own personal finances and their own labor while working against one of the most well-funded government-backed redevelopment programs and the world headquarters of the RLDS Church. Martha shared with me that she put ribbons on numerous century old trees in the McCoy Park area to at least save many of these trees. This was not successful either. We believe we need to put high standards when it comes to redevelopment of these historic areas. These standards go back to the presence of Mayor William McCoy who wanted to lead Independence to be a prosperous community and cultural center on the far western edge of a new and growing nation. He led as its first Mayor, founder of local educational institutions, and leader in his church, and a prominent figure in holding the community together during the Civil War when most of the border communities were looted and burned to the ground. We owe it

to those who came before us and future generations of the Independence citizens to use the highest preservation standards, beautiful landscaping for public improvement, and have the resources and water lines, underground sprinkler systems, and hydrants to maintain that landscaping.