



John Muir's Birthplace Fact Sheet

Number 2.01 – John Muir's Siblings

Daniel Muir and Ann Gilrye had a large family: there were eight children. John Muir was the third and the eldest son. In adulthood he kept up contact with his brothers and sisters whenever he could, although his lifestyle meant that this was by letter more often than not. During family crises John seems to have been the centre around which the others rallied. They were:

Margaret Muir, the eldest in the family, was born in Dunbar on 30 September 1834. She married John Reid on 18 December 1860 and had 6 children. In later life Margaret suffered from poor health, perhaps a lingering effect of harsh conditions during the family's early years on their Wisconsin farms. Margaret and John moved to Martinez in 1891 after their Nebraskan ranch was hit by drought. John Reid became foreman on the Muir-Strentzel orchards. Margaret died on 22 June 1910.

Next came **Sarah Muir**, who remained close to John all her life. She shared an interest in the natural world. Sarah was born on 19 February 1836. In 1856, she was the first of the siblings to escape their father's harsh control when she married David Galloway, a neighbouring farmer. The couple had four children. Sarah remained in Wisconsin before moving to be near John in Martinez after 1896 and lived until 11 April 1932.

John Muir came next. He lived 21 April 1838 – 24 December 1914.

David Gilrye Muir (b. 11 July 1840) was close in age to John, who seems from an early age to have defended his little brother from youthful scrapes. However, this did not prevent John leading David into danger during his adventurous scootches (or dares). David married firstly Catherine Cairns and had 4 children, then afterwards Juliaette Treadway. He flourished in business in Portage, Wisconsin until his partner's embezzlement led to bankruptcy. In 1892 he moved to Martinez to assist on John's ranch. David died on 20 October 1916.

The older group of children seem to have carried the burden of the day-to-day work on the Wisconsin farms as they settled into their new country. John's recollections were of rising on winter mornings and struggling into frozen boots prior to the numbing routine of farm life and field making. The youngsters had little time for further schooling and little help from their father after the early

years. If the heavier tasks belonged to the boys – John was once set to digging an 80 foot deep well-shaft – the girls had their own share of the essential tasks. It was, of course, easier to use family labour than employ a paid hand.

Daniel Muir II was born on 29 June 1843. Like his brothers, he had little interest in continuing to work the family farms and instead became a doctor and settled in Lincoln, Nebraska. He also married twice, having a daughter from each union – Mabel and Alice.

Annie Muir, twin to Mary, was born on 5 October 1846. The three youngest children seem to have avoided the worst of their domineering and exacting father, perhaps because the elder group shielded them, perhaps because religion was taking Daniel further from home during their youth. Anna remained unmarried, living with her mother until 1896 and she died on 15 January 1903.

Mary Muir, born 5 October 1846, married Willis Hand in 1878 and had three children. She died at Corvallis, Oregon on 18 April 1928 after a long illness. She was a gifted artist and had studied at the University of Wisconsin.

Joanna Muir was the last-born and the only one to be born in Wisconsin – in 1850, the year after the family's arrival there. In 1881 she married Walter Brown and by 1885 she was living in Kansas City. She looked after her ailing father in the last years of his life and when John had a premonition of the old man's death he gathered seven of his siblings at her home (only Sarah did not attend). This seems to have been the last major family gathering as Margaret, Sarah and David were not able to leave California in 1896 when their mother died. John (of course) had been forewarned by another premonition and arrived at the onset of her final decline.

More Information

Further reading

Bade, WF, *the Life and Letters of John Muir*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1924
Wolfe, LM, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*, AA Knopf, New York, 1946
Stanley, M, *The Heart of John Muir's World: Wisconsin, Family, and Wilderness Discovery*, Prairie Oak Press, 1995

Websites

John Muir's Birthplace	www.jmbt.org.uk
Friends of John Muir's Birthplace	www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk
John Muir Exhibit	www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/intro.html
Muir genealogy @ Martinez	www.nps.gov/archive/jomu/muir.htm
Wisconsin links	www.johnmuir.org/wisconsin/