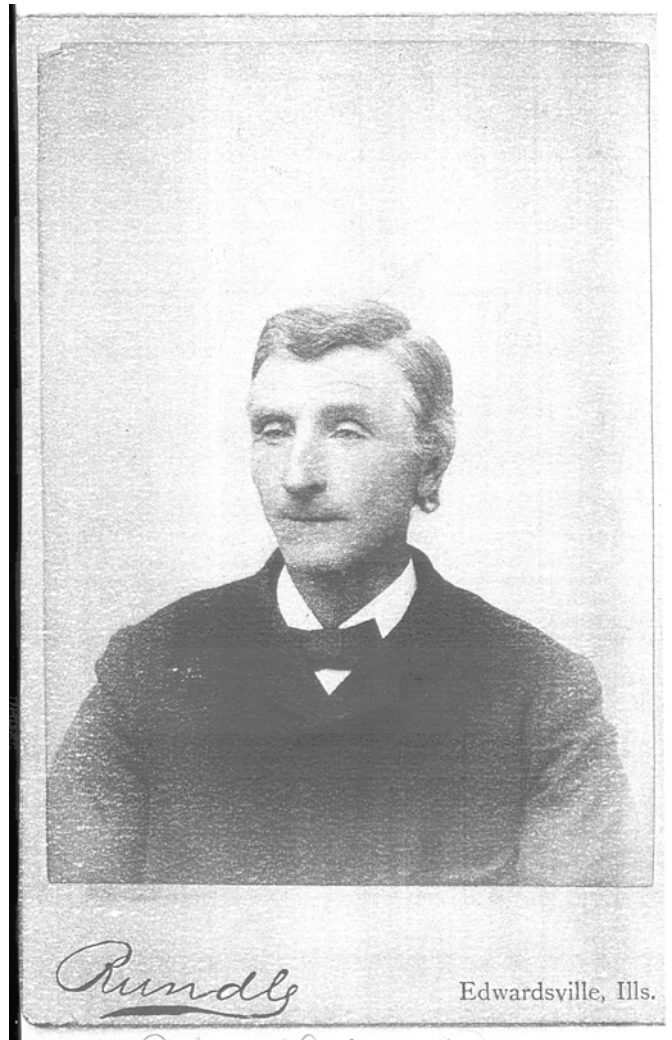


Mrs. Mary A. Jane Livingston



Mr. John Livingston

Memories in and about the Livingston Homestead

These memories of visiting the Livingston home are vivid from so long ago; they are some of the clearest memories of my childhood. Most are from at least a couple of three or four-day visits as a preteen with my four great aunts, whom we called “aunties”; Aunt Beckie, Aunt Maggie, Aunt Jessie and Aunt Mae. The memories also include short visits when my family stopped to see them for an hour or so. These visits were made when we were en route to our home in New Douglas from someplace else – Edwardsville, for example. The route between our house and St. Louis or Springfield was through Livingston and passed the Livingston auntie’s home. If there was extra time before we needed to be home for a meal or some scheduled activity, it was not unusual to stop and see them. Often the whole family and my Grandmother Livingston, widow of the auntie’s brother, were on the trip. On my extended visits in the 1930s, I was dropped off or picked up on the occasion of someone’s trip through Livingston. In those days it was unheard of to make a special trip from New Douglas through Binney Station to Livingston just to bring me to Livingston. This was even true after a shorter trip (by two miles) could be made on the new “hard road” from New Douglas to Livingston.

On arriving at the home, if the drive back to the south side of the house was thawing or muddy after a rain, we stopped on the street east of the house. Since a child’s remembrance of distance and size is usually longer and bigger than they actually were, I hesitate to say how far it was from the street to the house, but I am sure it would be safe to say it was longer than 180 feet.

Around the yard was a white, square picket fence, and from the street to the house ran a cement walk with either roses or dahlias along the south side. Regardless of whether we approached the house from the south or the east, we always arrived at the front door. The house was a typical, large, two-story, frame home with a porch across the front. Earlier photos (tintype) show the house with a square front porch that didn't go across the full front of the house.



Livingston Family Home located on Livingston Avenue.

As you entered the house there was a central hall with a stairway going to the second floor. The room on the right was the parlor. It was a large room with overstuffed furniture. I remember one of the sofas had tassels on the front of the arms. The room also contained two or three large paintings. The two I remember were between five and six feet tall and about four feet wide. One was of a young lady under a wisteria vine and the other was of a seated nude woman with her back toward the artist. These had been done by an artist who, as a soldier in the World War I, had received a pair of knitted wool socks with money in them from either Aunt Jessie or Aunt Mae. After the war he did the paintings for them.

The parlor had a west door that opened onto a porch on the north side of the west wing of the house. If the outside temperature was moderate to hot, we sat in the parlor. If it was cold and heat was needed, we went into the sitting room on the left side of the hall. It had an iron-front fireplace built into the wall, but often there was a heating stove. Above the fireplace was a clock, which is in my home today. Furnishings also included a table/desk, books, and comfortable chairs, of which at least some were rockers. Although the sitting room was smaller than the parlor, I am sure it was the most used room in the house.

Leaving the sitting room by another door (to the west) you entered what I will call the formal dining room. It at least contained a fancy table and six matching chairs. Around the walls of the room was a plate rack on which there were dozens of hand-painted plates. A door from this room opened into the everyday dining room. It also had doors that opened onto the north and south porches.

The everyday dining room may have been as large as the parlor, which was either the largest or the second-largest room in the house. In the southeast corner of the room was a dining table that seated twelve to fourteen. Along the north side were three china cupboards. One of them contained an extensive collection of salt and pepper shakers. On one of my visits they gave me a small, brown, ceramic set with a carrier, which I still have. I understand that the contents of the china cabinet were but one of the reasons the auction of the belongings in the house took three days. On the west side of the room was a cook stove, where food for the meals was kept warm.

The dining table in this everyday dining room was a special point of interest. It was always full of fine food prepared by Aunt Mae and her helper. I think the helper might have been referred to as "the hired

girl,” but she always called her by her first name; I wish I could remember it. Everyone else was referred to by their first names except that “Miss” preceded my great-aunt’s first names. It was at this table I always answered questions about my wish for more food by saying, “Yes, ma’am” and “No, ma’am” and always responded with “thank you, ma’am” when offered something I wanted. Also, everyone sat down and left the table at the same time, which is somewhat unusual in homes today.

After the meals, several may have “readied” the table for the next meal. A clean tablecloth may have been put on the table; beautiful containers of condiments were refilled if needed; and plates, glasses and silverware were replaced. Then a wire frame (I’m not sure how it opened or closed when it wasn’t on the table) was placed on the table and a linen cloth was placed over all. At the next meal the tablecloth and wire frame were removed, water glasses were filled, and bowls and platters of food were placed on the table.

Before the food was placed on the cook stove in the everyday dining room, it had been prepared from scratch in a work kitchen to the west of the everyday dining room. There the food was stored, prepared and taken to the dining room. Beyond the work kitchen was another room that contained storage, a coal bin and toilet. Besides these rooms, there were three bedrooms on the second floor: two across the front of the house and one over the west wing.

On my visits, I was with Aunt Beckie and Aunt Maggie most of the time. They were retired teachers and most closely related to me. I enjoyed going to the barn with Aunt Maggie when she went to milk the cows. Aunt Mae, the housekeeper, was always busy and didn’t spend much time with me, but I certainly enjoyed her food. Several times while I was there, I would walk a couple of blocks to go to the lumberyard office, where Aunt Jessie spent her day. I also went a couple of blocks south to visit the print shop and home of another great-aunt, Pearl Olive Camp.

I was permitted to be outside alone. I always wanted to ride the pony the aunties had, but he didn’t have regular riders and his hoofs needed trimming, so I just admired him. There was a turkey flock just northwest of the house and I would watch them, especially at feeding time. In the pasture west of the house was a small stream, but I was told not to play in it – not because I would get dirty, but because water came from the mines and it contained “something” I shouldn’t come in contact with. It was a small stream and I really wanted to build a dam in it, but I was always obedient.



James W. Prange, the author of this reminiscence, pictured at left along with a clock from the Livingston Family Home.