

Recollections of the Billius and Ruthanna Kirtland Family and Their Home

By Ruthanna Anderson-Clark (1978)

Compiled by Ted Hine – February 2015

The following was provided to me in 2010 by Joanna Clark-Moore, my 3rd cousin. Joanna and I are both descendents of Billius and Ruthanna Kirtland, she from their daughter Lucy Kirtland-Mays and me from daughter Emma Kirtland-Hine. Ruthanna Anderson-Clark (1899-1985) was Joanna's mother.

Below I've first included Joanna's cover letter to me, the second paragraph providing the introduction to the material from her mother. The original document isn't included but rather a typed summary by Joanna (including remarks) of her mother's original 1978 text.

The information provided by Ruthanna Anderson-Clarke about the Billius Kirtland Family is somewhat second hand as she was born shortly after Billius and his wife Ruthanna had died. Apparently she visited Poland, OH as a young child and stayed in her great-grandparents home as a guest of the then current owners.

Dear Ted,

I'm showing my vulnerability. I don't know how to transfer a file from *Family Tree Maker*. I only know how to transfer from Word. I don't mind; I hope you don't.

I'm enclosing a file starting with Billious Kirtland, and what showed up was the Hine family. That will show many empty spots, which you can fill for me. I noticed that my grandmother, Ruth Emma Mays (Anderson), and your grandfather, Homer Henry Hine, are very close in age (1873 and 1874). Ruth had a daughter (my mother) who was named Ruthanna, and 12 years later your aunt named Ruthemma was born. The Mays family and the Hine family must have been close. I think the Hine-Mays families gravitated to Poland when on vacation, and my grandmother spent a lot of time in Poland because she lived in Pittsburgh. I knew she was a great friend of Cousin Nellie, but I hadn't thought about her contacts with the rest of the family. Where did your grandfather live? Poland must have been full of Kirtlands and their descendents for many years. Turhand and Polly arrived in 1803, and Cousin Nellie died in 1955. I think there must have been Kirtlands etc. in Poland, OH, over 150 years. I think the last Kirtland descendent to die in Poland was George Bishop, great-grandson of Henry Turhand Kirtland. He lived in the large brick house built by his great-grandfather when he lucked out in the gold rush in 1849. George was very solitary.

I'm also sending 3 pages of letters my mother wrote to Rebecca Rogers. Mother was not very clear in her old age, but I still thought this information provided a useful picture of earlier days. Generally she probably remembered her early years quite accurately, but then she adds family lore which may or may not be faithful. Still, it's interesting. You may not be interested in the Billious Kirtland house, but Rebecca Rogers was very interested because she is an historical architect, and she lives in the Jared Potter Kirtland house, carefully rejuvenated, which was nearly a copy of the Billious Kirtland house. She has considerable information about the Kirtland family. If you ever return to Poland, I think you'd like to meet her; perhaps you've already met her. She took me to the Kirtland/Hine house two years ago, and Becky Rogenski was very generous in showing me the house and spending time there.

Best regards, Jo

A VISIT TO POLAND, OHIO

Founded by Turhand Kirtland in 1798.

LETTERS FROM RUTHANNA ANDERSON CLARK

Her memories of Poland and the Billius Kirtland house in 1905 or 1906

Ruthanna wrote (in 1978) that she spent the summer of 1905 or 1906 with her grandmother Lucy Kirtland Mays in Poland, Ohio, at the Billius Kirtland farm. Grandfather Dallas Valentine Mays had died in 1903, and Grandmother Lucy had moved back to Poland, Ohio, living in the old farm with the Olsen family. "I realize my mother had brought our family out of Pittsburgh for our summer vacation to help my grandmother to right herself after the death of her husband. It was to try and see if the life at Poland would be pleasant for her and son Paul, then about 18, among the old friends and close relatives, her sister Emma Hine and their brother Alfred. [Ruthanna would have been 5 in 1905, or 6 in 1906.]

"The first memory comes from the delight experienced by me in my bare feet over the cold wet and large stone slabs under and around the pump area. When water was running into a shallow and slanted trough it splashed off onto the paving stones and drained off to some unseen area. This is where we children rinsed off our bare feet before coming into the house. Of course we flicked water at each other. This pump was at the northeast corner of the narrow porch that ran beside the dining room, past the kitchen to the tool sheds. One of these large back rooms (like sheds) had been equipped with a tower and telescope where Dr. Jared Potter Kirtland and his brother Billius had studied the heavens. At one time it had a glass dome.

"The house was set back several hundred feet from the road [from Poland to Boardman Corners] and the long front lawn was a pleasant part of the whole place. Around the house a lawn was kept cut. The boundary of the lawn on the west was outlined with an ancient and very tall mock orange hedge, and in the middle of this high hedge was maintained an arch tall enough for a fully-loaded hay wagon to drive through. Here a large farm gate was kept closed, so there must have been animals pastured beyond. In this west yard was an open fireplace outlined by three or four layers of brick, and set on the fireplace was a large iron kettle where apple butter and all sorts of things that needed slow and long cooking were boiled. They would heat up the house too much if stirred in the kitchen.

"This kitchen had a large open fireplace where a whole side of beef or pork could be roasted. This hearth had various kinds of iron equipment that made our daily cooking quite complicated. At the left of this open hearth was a deep bricked-in oven in which my grandmother built a fire, and when the oven was hot enough she would shovel the small fire and its ashes out of the main fire box, then by means of a long-handled wooden shovel or paddle she would lift in her loaves of bread to be. This kitchen was fairly large. On one side a door opened into the back sheds, another on the opposite side was where a water pump and trough were, and another to the dining room.

"The dining room was not quite as large as the kitchen. It had an open fireplace with a high mantelpiece with a lot of white woodwork. To the west of the dining room was a [unintelligible]. In these old farm houses the master bedroom was within sight and hearing of the barns and premises so the farmer could tune an ear to any untoward noises at night on the premises. To one side of the front hall and sort of under the circular staircase was a smallish room leading out of the dining room and a stairway leading to a basement. This room was called the [unintelligible] because it led down to the cool basement where vegetables, etc., might have been kept. I never went down there; it was scary.

"The front hall was gracious with its circular stairway and a kerosene lamp that hung down from the 2nd story high above. It was the sort that pulls down and up with a glass and partly-frosted chimney that is lifted to light it. Then the parlor was the other side of the hall with its high white mantel and fireplace.

On a table facing into the room between the two windows was the large family Bible from which Billius [had been accustomed to] read every morning to the whole assembled family and farm hands.

"Of course children were not allowed to play in the parlor. Once, Alfred Kirtland and his pal William McKinley, in a naughty mood, snuck in there and were jumping over the chairs, I guess to prove their bravery. Well, Bill didn't succeed in one of his jumps and knocked a rocking chair over and broke off the end of the rocker. This chair we have always kept, and I am sitting in it now in my living room.

"Also the floor of the parlor in my time was carpeted with Aubuson carpet sent from Cousin Lucy Boardman's house in New Haven. I have a pair of candle sticks with gilded ironwork surrounded by glass prisms from this mantel, and to the left of the fireplace was a white marble statue of Diana on a pedestal almost waist high. On each side of the fireplace mantel were two tall white woodwork arches without doors in the wall, and portraits were hung in these spaces.

"Billius must have had a prankster's sense of humor, for he was expelled from Yale for severely frightening a fellow student near a cemetery. In spite of his aborted college history he must have absorbed enough education to have taught and conversed with his younger son in Latin. This little fellow died of scarlet fever when I think only 10 years old. Billius had nine children; only three survived the scourge of scarlet fever that swept the country for two generations or more.

"These contagious diseases made a large difference in the life of the Indian natives. Turhand and his descendants [respected] the local Indians. He also brought from New England a black man whom he freed and gave him land from his grant. When I was in Poland the black family of Alfred Arnold was still in Poland. He was chief of police then. The family moved to Youngstown because the young people in the family could find no black mates. Also on the B. Kirtland farm, in the very next house east, lived an elderly Indian woman and her brother Adam Mockerman. An elderly man, he roamed the woods at the back of the Kirtland farm looking for berries and materials out of which he could make antique-type brooms. These things he peddled door to door, and my mother and grandmother always bought what he had.

"Speaking of the woods which were a part of the pasture, there wandered a lively but quiet stream. Let's return to the arch in the large mock orange hedge through which were drawn these loads of hay to the two large [hay racks?]. These were at right angles to each other, and sheltered the fenced barnyard, in the middle of which was a large, high stack, around which the cows had nibbled, making an [indentation?] around it that made the stack look like a giant [mushroom?]. Hay was stored in the lofts of the two large barns. The third side of the barnyard was lined up with chicken coops and could be entered through the orchard, which was to the [?] of this square. I had the job of gathering the eggs daily and also learning to be careful of the setting hens. The yard was fenced so the chickens stayed in the orchard close to the flower and vegetable garden. I think I want to say that the barns were north of the house with the big barn backing to the west and through the middle of it a large break or arch was closed off by a large gate or door which was opened when the cattle came up the lane from the fields to be milked. I was a little frightened by these gates and doors. They were probably two or three times as tall as me, and horses and cows would come through them at will. I was afraid of these animals. The horses hung around a lot asking for morsels of green grass and attention.

"I think the first division of the west barn housed the horses and wagons. My grandmother Lucy K. Mays was the main horse woman. I think my mother was timid about horses. I used to ride with my grandmother to take milk and cream to the [?] or to the market or go calling on friends. This was in a small buggy, but sometimes a few of us would pile into the surrey with the fringe on top. Lucy was always the driver, even when her brother Alfred was along.

"There were quite a few of us there one summer. I don't know how we were all housed so comfortable because somewhere, in addition to our family, there were the Olsens, the farmer and his wife and children. Our group was made up of Lucy, called Gammy, us children and her son Paul, our father and mother, Uncle Alf Kirtland, Lucy's brother, and Alf's daughter Ruth, a young lady. This was a brave and mighty effort of my grandmother to install herself at the old homestead after the death of her husband. Uncle Alf

was a part of the family because he had lost his wife and son. He worked hard in the garden, and my mother and grandmother did also. My father was city bred and did not know what to do. I remember there was much talk about planting Potter's favorites. These were Dr. Jared Potter Kirtland's trees and plants. He had died, but all remembered him."

The paragraphs are taken from a pile of first drafts of a letter Mother was getting ready to send to Rebecca Rogers in Poland, Ohio. Rebecca is a historical architect, wonderfully well-informed about Poland history, and she lives in the Jared Potter Kirtland house. She had it moved to a new location and began a project of restoration. She sent Mother a long letter with lots of information about the Kirtlands, and she asked if Mother could tell her about the Billious Kirtland house, which is sort of a twin of hers. It was 1978, and Mother and Dad were living in their apartment in Newark, DE. The request stimulated a lot of writing. K Unfortunately Mother jumped from one subject to another and repeated herself often, but I found all this really interesting material. I left out lots and lots of paragraphs, mostly repetitions. I'm glad she saved all her first drafts. So far as I know, it's the only narrative she ever wrote about her ancestors. She spent a lot of time in research, but she didn't write her memories of the people who surrounded her in her childhood. That's a lesson to all of us: write our memoirs before it's too late! I wonder if she ever sent these letters to Rebecca. I have destroyed the originals of these letters.

Other comments written to Rebecca Rogers in 1978: "I once had in my hand a large chart on brown grocery paper, of an outline of the Kirtlands in America, kept by someone in Connecticut, and discovered in a wall of the Whittlesey house when someone cut through the wall to make an arch. On it I learned that in the first generation of Kirtlands, Nathanied Kirtland came from Kirsche Lind, Germany, to England, then to America in 1635. As you know, the Duke of Buckingham gave those who were fleeing Europe refuge. One of his daughters married a man from Silesia, (Central Austria), by the name of Dr. DeBilleyus. This is the derivation of the outlandish name Billious and has been in almost each previous generation of American Kirtlands. These people were seeking refuge in England from the Thirty Years War."

Mother was convinced of this information in her old age, and I'm skeptical about it. Nevertheless, it's possible. (I have Mother's copy of that chart. She returned the original, and I find no mention of Kirsch Lind or DeBilleyus in the chart on which she copied the original and added some names. She returned the original chart to Dr. Nathan T. Pratt, who had sent it to her. He expressed surprise when she returned it.)

"Cousin Lucy Boardman's house on Hillhouse Ave. in New Haven, CT, has been a rendezvous for the college cousins, the Hine boys at various schools, Ruth Mays at Smith, and her sister Katharine Mays at St. Margaret's. They were maintained at these educational institutions by Cousin Lucy Boardman. Her sister, Cousin Mary Wade, lived with Lucy Boardman for a while, and while she was there she removed the carpeting from the house, the famous Aubuson carpeting from France. She sent it to be used at the Billious Kirtland home and at my home in Pittsburgh. It was used in our playroom. This handsome old home at New Haven was across the street from the house of the President of Yale." (The house is still there and belongs to Yale.)

(In reference to Billius being kicked out of Yale) "When he hitchhiked over several days and arrived in Ohio in the middle of the night, to waken his parents he threw pebbles at their window, and Turhand said, 'There's Billius,' as though he had never expected him to last."

"My mother used to like to tell that when McKinley was President of the U.S. he was going in a parade past our house on 5th Avenue in Pittsburgh. Uncle Alf Kirtland was watching it from our steps when Mr. McKinley happened to see him and stood right up in his carriage, waving his hat, and called out 'Alf, hi Alf!' He had to be pulled down so he wouldn't fall out of the carriage. Alf Kirtland was superintendent of the West Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad. He had been to Troy [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute] and was a classmate and good friend of Roebling, Jr., who built the Brooklyn Bridge, having to take over the job of superintendent after the death of his father, Roebling, Sr., who started it." [Alfred is the brother of Emma and Lucy Kirtland].