OAK GROVE CEMETERY PROFILE
ROBBINS TOMB

In this tomb lies (sic) the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of
Maj. Moses Robbins & Abigail Cook, his wife,
Of Vollingtown (sic), Conn.
This tomb was built in May 1865.

So reads the inscription on the obelisk at the site of the Robbins' vault/tomb in Oak Grove Cemetery in St. Charles, Missouri. An accurate history of this site and those named is difficult to compile. One reason--"Moses Robbins" is the name of three men in three successive generations of this family:

- Moses (1717--04 Nov 1814), who was born and died in New London, Connecticut.
- his son, Moses (26 Jan 1767--23 Sep 1818) who was born in Voluntown, Connecticut and died in St. Charles, Missouri Territory.
- his son, Moses Brintnal (26 Jan 1797--27 Feb 1840) who was born in Voluntown Connecticut and died in St. Charles, Missouri.

A second reason for this difficulty is that this tomb was erected in 1865, apparently because Frederick Minor Robbins, in a codicil to his will, dated 16 April 1859, appropriated one thousand dollars "to the building of a Tomb to enclose my remains and those of my Father Mother Brothers and Sisters."[1] Frederick's father had been dead approximately forty years and his mother for thirty years by the time of Frederick's directive. Is the tomb/vault located in Oak Grove Cemetery the tomb Frederick intended? Did Frederick mean for the bodies of his parents to be removed from their original burying sites to this tomb? If so, were Frederick's wishes carried out, or were Moses' and Abigail's remains left in a family burying ground later known as the Black Walnut Cemetery?[2] On October 21, 1874, Zeuriah Robbins Boyer installed an obelisk in Black Walnut with inscriptions for Abigail Cook Robbins, Thaddeus C. Robbins, and Samuel H. Robbins. All died before the quit claim of 1826 transfer in which Moses B. and Mary Robbins deeded one acre of their land for a burial ground. Is Abigail buried in Black Walnut or in Oak Grove? Where is Moses, her husband, buried since his name is not inscribed on the obelisk? Zeuriah Robbins Boyer had a second obelisk installed on August 21, 1875, inscribed with Moses B. Robbins and Mary Robbins. Clearly, this inscription refers to Zeuriah's brother and his wife, not to Zueriah's mother and father referenced on the obelisk at the Robbins' vault. The mix-up of these two Moses in these cemeteries is an example of how information for a father and son, both named Moses, can be conflated. Does information on the two Black Walnut obelisks signal burial sites or are they simply memorials? To further the mystery, the information on the three obelisks at these two cemeteries conflict with each other, and all three conflict with the instructions in Frederick's will.

A third reason for this difficulty is found in Albert G. McKnight's 1903 will.[3] Albert identified a Moses Robbins who was a Major, who was a soldier in the revolutionary war, and who was born 12 November 1756 in Voluntown, Connecticut. No evidence of such a person

with such birth date can be found in the Connecticut records. Here is another example of confusion of identities. Moses Robbins (26 Jan 1767--23 Sep 1818) had an older brother, Brintnal (22 Mar 1756-25 Jul 1836) who was born in Voluntown, Connecticut and died in Greensburg, Westmoreland, PA. The information in the McKnight will could have been conflated with the information about Brintnal Robbins since Brintnal's birth year is identical to the year cited by McKnight. Or, the McKnight will could have conflated information with a Moses Robbins who served as a private in Capt. Oliver Shattuck's Company in Lt. Col. Barnabas Sears' regiment in Massachusetts in the American Revolution. Of the three Moses Robbins associated with the Missouri Robbins, only one, Moses (1717-04 Nov 1814), father of Moses Robbins (26 Jan 1767-23 Sep 1818), served in the American Revolution; he was not a Major. This Moses served in Capt. Joseph Palmer Company, enlisting 2 Sep 1776 for five days. Then he served in Col. Durkee's Company from July 15, 1779, to November 15, 1780. This Moses has been certified as DAR ancestor #A096748. This Moses' four eldest sons—Lorin (1760-1849), Brintnal (1756-1836), Samuel (1749-1839), and Minor (1747-1778)—served in the American Revolution in Connecticut regiments. McKnights' misinformation in his will makes him an unreliable source for the details of the Robbins' family history. McKnight was the grandson of Moses and Abigail Cook Robbins through their daughter, Abigail. Both grandparents died before his birth. His uncle, Moses B., died in 1840 when McKnight was eighteen months old. His aunt, Mary Best, died five years later. He and his mother lived with Welcome in St. Louis in 1850.[4] For how long cannot be determined. Albert was twelve years old at the time. Albert G. McKnight had no direct access to the Robbins' history other than through his mother, his uncle, Welcome A., or their living siblings.

Additional details about the Robbins' vault/tomb surfaced in McKnight's will. First, McKnight allocated money to repair and fix up the vault (McKnight's word) at a cost not to exceed $1200.00. The vault was then 38 years old and, apparently from the text in the will, the vault had fallen into disrepair. Between 1865 and 1903, all children of Moses and Abigail Cook Robbins had died. McKnight was part of the next generation—a grandchild who assumed responsibility for the vault. McKnight did stipulate, however, that if the majority of relatives and members of the Robbins' family did not consent to the repairs, then the work was not to be done. Looking back to1903, the identity of these relatives and members of the Robbins' family is obscure. The will is silent on how to solicit these folks' opinions, or even who these folks were or their places of residence. McKnight also stipulated that if the relatives wanted to repair and fix the vault on their own, then his Trustee was to be relieved of that responsibility.

Second, McKnight directed his Trustee to build said monument on my said family cemetery lot and to pay for the same. Exactly what *monument* was referenced here? Obviously, this *monument* was not the one and the same as the *vault*. At the site in Oak Grove Cemetery today, both a vault and obelisk stand. The vault was erected in 1865; the obelisk was erected, as directed in this will, apparently after Albert McKnight's death in 1905. McKnight directed the wording of the inscriptions:

> *The vault was erected in 1865 to the memory of Major Moses Robbins and his wife Abigail Cook, by their sons Welcome A. and Frederick Robbins.*

Major Moses Robbins, a revolutionary soldier, was born in Voluntown, Connecticut, Nov 12th, 1756. His son Welcome A. Robbins was born Feby (sic) 3, 1791. His son Frederick Robbins was born Aug 21st, 1799.

The inscription on the obelisk reads:

In this tomb lies (sic) the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of Maj. Moses Robbins & Abigail Cook, his wife, Of Vollingtown (sic), Conn. This tomb was built in May 1865.

The unnamed sculptor used portions of the sample inscriptions from McKnight's will for the obelisk; the sculptor also used wording from Frederick Robbins' will. Furthermore, McKnight's directions were to inscribe "on the face of said vault', a direction the sculptor also did not follow.

Third, McKnight's will stipulated that once the Trustee had built the monument on the family's said cemetery lot and paid for the construction, then the Trustee was to turn over all trust property in his charge to McKnight's nephews—Ben, Dod, and Dan Halford—and render them an accounting of the expenses of the monuments.

These three nephews were sons of Eleanor McKnight, Albert's sister, and James H, Halford, a miner, who eventually settled his family in Helena, Montana. "Ellen" was Albert's only sibling to have children; Albert and Susan Aker had no children either. Consequently, these nephews were Albert's 'next generation'. To what degree these nephews faithfully administered the McKnight estate is unknown. However, a St. Charles news article, dated September 25, 1923, about 18 years after McKnight's death, described the vault as 'deteriorating fast". The iron door was rusted and bent back with some of the large stones forming the entrance falling to the ground. The padlock had rusted away. On the other hand, the article reported, the inside of the vault was in good condition. The article also referred to an incident several years prior in which the cemetery keeper talked with a lady at the vault from Montana. She mentioned that at that time a fund of $1600 was set aside for the upkeep of this vault.[5] This information supports the McKnight's will directive to the nephews living in Montana. The condition of the vault suggested that the upkeep had not been continued. The author of the article goes on to report that a stone fallen to the ground, but which had one time stood upright on top of the vault, was inscribed thusly:

In this tomb lies the sons, daughter (sic), and grandchildren of Maj. Moses Robbins and Abagail (sic) Cook, Vollington County, Pa (sic). This tomb was built in May 1865.[6]

Even with the reporting errors, this 'stone' is obviously the obelisk that Albert McKnight had authorized built. This cemetery plot apparently had received little care in the 18 years since Albert's death.

So, what exactly was inside this vault? Whose remains are contained therein? This news article gave a general account--"It is large and well cemented, contains no cracks and is

apparently watertight" Also described: "The vault contains five iron caskets bearing date marks from 1820 forward. The glass of one of the caskets has been broken. One can see the shrunken remains of the head of the body entombed in it."[7]

Excerpts from a newspaper account in 1969 suggested additional deterioration of the tomb since 1923. The iron door was described as "battered" and "rusted"; the entire edifice was described as "unmaintained." The obelisk remained fallen. This article also revealed the inscription inside the tomb:

Erected to the memory of Maj. Moses Robbins and his wife, Abigail Cook, by their sons Welcome A. and Frederick Robbins.

Revealed in this article was a description of the interior of the tomb:

Upon entering the vault, one steps down about one foot onto an earth floor. The size of the room in which one then finds himself is eight feet wide, eight feet high at the top of its vaulted ceiling, and twelve feet long. The vaulted or canopied ceiling, as well as the walls, are constructed of plastered covered stone. Through this vaulted ceiling is a cylindrical shaft to the earth above.

The crypt contains five large, iron caskets. Four of the five rest on thick, marble shelves, The fifth rests on the dry earth. The bodies float in caskets which have been filled to the top with alcohol. These caskets resemble the caskets of today. They differ in that the iron caskets have thick, glass faceplates and are much narrower along the entire casket length. Thus, the faces of the dead could be easily viewed, and the structure of the casket served to minimize the volume of alcohol and hence the weight.

The fifth casket is unique. It is constructed from copper with an iron top cover and an iron framed and cross supported oval viewing window. It is the casket that contained the remains of the beautiful granddaughter of Moses Robbins, Abigail Mallerson (1827-1845). Two of the iron caskets contain the bodies of her brothers, Walter Mallerson (1834-1849) and Elias Mallerson (1820-1844). The remaining two contain the remains of Abigail's cousins, Wm. Clinton Mittalbarger (1847-1850) and Elizabeth Shue (1849-1850).[8]

Another document in the Robbins file at the St. Charles County Historical Society described the interior in this manner:

Marble shelves—top shelf-1 large copper casket. 2nd shelf childs (sic) metalic (sic) casket. West side a hand made casket. East side—metalic (sic) casket. Marble name plates on floor. Three of the caskets are 6' long, shoulders are 18-20 ". 1' wide at end. Glass plates 6 or 8" square.

In 1977, the City of St. Charles allocated $4500 to restore the damaged Robbins Tomb. The sealed door, evident today, inscribed with five names, was installed at this time. Three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren of Moses and Abigail Cook Robbins are buried supposedly in the Robbins' tomb. All five died before Oak Grove opened. All five are children/grandchildren of Merinda Robbins Mallerson, Frederick's and Welcome's sister. These children are:

Abigail K. Mallerson (daughter)
6 Mar 1827-30 Aug 1845

Walter P. Mallerson (son)
6 April 1834-10 Sep 1849

Elias W. Mallerson (son)
20 Sep 1821-10 Dec 1844

Elizabeth Shue (granddaughter)
17 Apr-1849-12 Jun 1850

William Clinton Mittleberger (grandson)
1 Oct 1847-13 Aug 1850

Neither Moses (1767-1818) nor Moses Brintnell (1797-1840) were alive in 1865 when the vault was built. The door at the entrance of the tomb is now inscribed:

ROBBINS TOMB
Erected by their sons
Welcome A. and Frederick Robbins

We have many unanswered questions regarding this tomb's construction, content, and history. Our research continues.

Susanne Paradis
svparadis@yahoo.com

Philip L. Rhea Ed.D.
rheajp@sbcglobal.net

ADDENDUM

Two pieces of information relevant to our investigation:

1. Robbins—Major Moses. Came from Vollvintown (sic) Conn. Buried in old neglected Black Walnut Cemetery near Black Walnut. Served in Virginia in Rev. Also served in war (sic) 1812. Tombstone thrown in ditch by vandals in 1965.[9] This entry by Edna McElhiney Olson, in her historical series for the *St. Charles Journal*, is incorrect information.

2. Regarding the use of "Major" for Moses Robbins. Examples exist in England where 'major' and 'minor' are used to distinguish father and son of the same name, such as is done with 'senior' and 'junior' in the United States. Two Moses Robbins of this family lived in St. Charles County. The sculptor may have tried to distinguish the two, perhaps at the suggestion of family members who had to approve of this 'fix up'. The most convincing argument, though, is this--the term 'Major' on the obelisk was used because Albert McKnight used it in his will, even though he unknowingly used it incorrectly. The term was not used in any documents in St. Charles before Albert McKnight used it in his 1903 will.

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[1] *Will-Frederick Minor Robbins*. Missouri, Wills and Probate Records, 1766-1988. Ancestry.com

[2] Deed Book "Y", 1826, p. 297. St. Charles County, Missouri. Moses B. and Mary Robbins deeded one acre of their land through a quit claim to Frederick M. Robbins or to the church wardens of the township of Portage des Sioux for the use of a graveyard and a house of worship. This one acre eventually became known as the Black Walnut Cemetery.

[3] *Will—Albert G. McKnight,* June 27, 1903. St. Charles County Will Book 7, p.344.

[4] 1850 U.S. Census. William (Welcome) A Robbins, Age 50, Farmer. St. Louis, District 82, Missouri. Acestry.com.

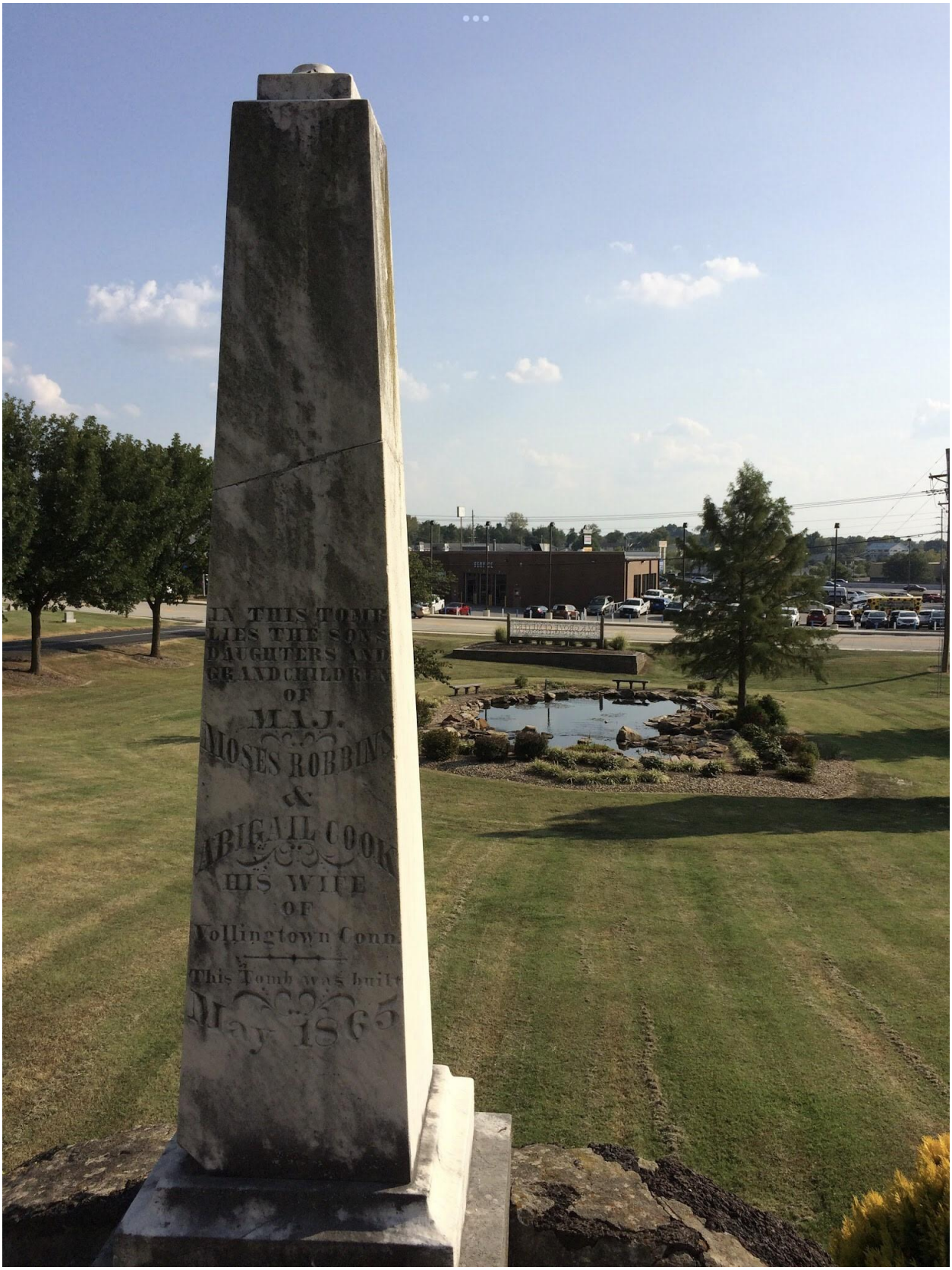
[5] "Old Vault in Oak Grove Cemetery". September 25, 1923. *A History of St. Charles, Missouri During the First Two Hundred Years of American Independence.* Linnemann Branch, St. Charles City-Co Library, St. Charles, Missouri.

[6] "Old Vault in Oak Grove Cemetery," September 25, 1923. *A History of St. Charles, Missouri During the First Two Hundred Years of American Independence.* Linnemann Branch, St. Charles City-Co Library, St. Charles, Missouri.

[7] "Old Vault in Oak Grove Cemetery," September 25, 1923. St. *A History of St. Charles, Missouri During the First Two Hundred Years of American Independence.* Linnemann Branch, St. Charles City-Co Library, St. Charles, Missouri.

[8] John A. Smith. "Historical Series—"The Robbins Tomb". *St. Charles Journal*, February 20, 1969. St. Charles County Historical Society.

[9] Edna McElhiney Olson. Historical Series—"Revolutionary Soldiers," St. Charles Journal, December 21, 1967. St. Charles County Historical Society.


IN THIS TOMB
LIES THE SON
DAUGHTERS AND
GRANDCHILDREN
OF
M.A.J.
MOSES ROBBINS
&
ABIGAIL COOK
HIS WIFE
OF
Vollingtown Conn
This Tomb was built
May 1865


ROBBINS TOMB
ERECTED BY THEIR SONS
ABIGAIL MALLERSON
WALTER MALLERSON
ELIAS MALLERSON
WILLIAM C. MATTALBARGER
ELIZABETH SHUE


ROBBINS TOMB
ERECTED BY THEIR SONS.
WELCOME A. AND FREDRICK ROBBINS.
ABIGAIL MALLERSON
1827 — 1845
WALTER MALLERSON
1834 — 1849
ELIAS MALLERSON
1820 — 1844
WILLIAM C. MATTALBARGER
1847 — 1850
ELIZABETH SHUE
1849 — 1850