

**A Brief History  
of  
John Taylor Leckie, Sr. and Sophia Simpson Irvine**



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Compiled and written by Franklin P. Mason II in 2020

John Taylor Leckie, Sr. and Sophia Simpson Irvine were each born in Scotland in about 1880. They each came from good, fairly well-to-do, middle class families with lots of children and lots of love.

## John Taylor Leckie, Sr.

John Taylor Leckie, Sr. was born on 18 September 1879 at 12:00 midnight at 45 Johnstone Street in Alva, Stirlingshire, Scotland. His parents were William Leckie, Woolen Mill Owner [born about 1840 in Menstrie, Clackmannanshire, Scotland, son of William Leckie and Margaret (Liddell) Leckie] and Janet Thomson [born 1847 in Stirling, Stirlingshire, Scotland, daughter of Charles and Isobella (Taylor) Thomson]. His parents were married on 10 August 1865 in Stirling, Stirlingshire, Scotland.

William and Janet had 13 children, all of whom were born in Alva:

William Leckie, b. 1867

Alexander Leckie, b. 1869 (fraternal twin)

Margaret Leckie, b. 1869 (fraternal twin)

James Leckie, b. 1871

Isabella Leckie, b. 1874

Archibald Leckie, b. 1878

John Taylor Leckie, b. 1879 (fraternal twin)

Thomas Liddell Leckie, b. 1879 (fraternal twin)

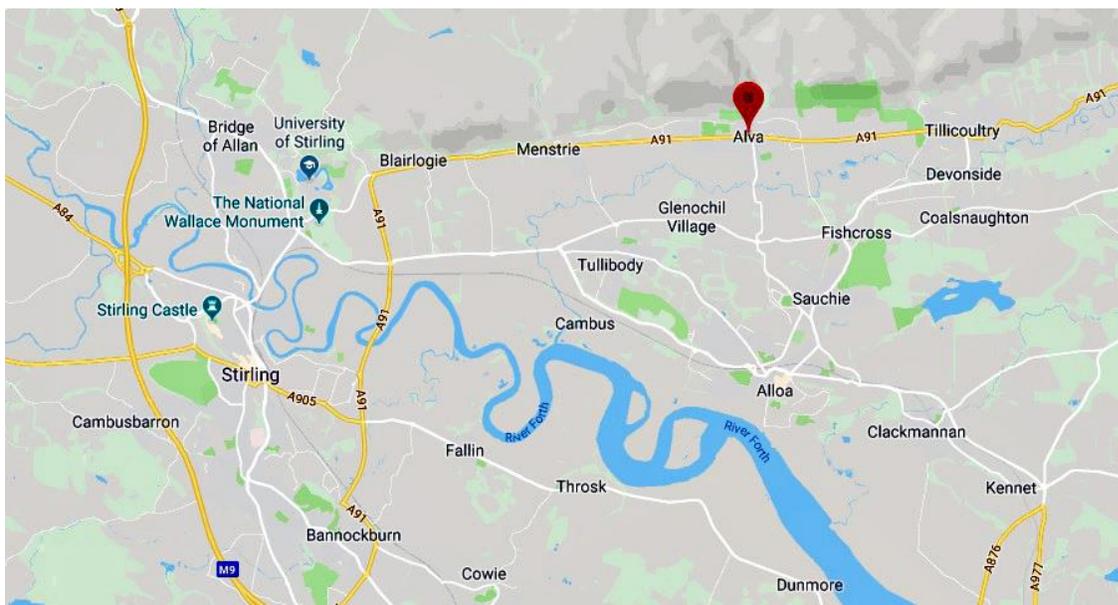
Robert Leckie, b. 1882

Peter Taylor Leckie, b. 1884

Alfred Leckie, b. 1886

Edward Leckie, b. 1888

The town where John was born, Alva, is a small town in Clackmannanshire, set in the Central Lowlands of Scotland, immediately to the south of the Ochil Hills. Alva was historically in an exclave of Stirlingshire, but it was transferred to Clackmannanshire in 1891.



Alva, Clackmannanshire, Scotland

During the Industrial Revolution (circa 1760 to 1830), Alva developed as a textile manufacturing center. The woolen mills were originally water-powered, powered by the water of Alva Burn. The mills produced textile products including tweed, woolen novelty fabrics, and mohair and woolen rugs. And in fact, John's father, William Leckie, owned and operated a woolen mill in Alva. The mill produced tartan scarves and so on for the American market until the advent of powered looms caused closure of the mill.



Alva Burn

John Taylor Leckie had blond hair and blue eyes. He wasn't very tall (about 5 ft. 7 in.), but he had a stocky build, and he was very strong.

The standard education at that time in Scotland was from 5 to 13 years of age (8 years total, equivalent to elementary school and middle school in the USA today). After that, most people entered a trade as an apprentice. John's daughter, Agnes, recalled that her father first apprenticed as a baker. However, by 1901, at age 21, John was listed as a "stone mason" in the Scottish Census.

### **Sophia Simpson Irvine**

Sophia Simpson Irvine was born on 26 December 1882 in Dalmuir, Old Kilpatrick, Dumbartonshire, Scotland. Her parents were William Irvine, Journeyman Blacksmith in Marine Engineering [born 1841 in Renfrew, Renfrewshire, Scotland, son of John and Agnes (Armstrong) Irvine] and Elizabeth Gibson Alexander [born about 1844 in Liberton, Midlothian, Scotland, daughter of James and Mary (Gibson) Alexander]. Her parents were married on January 2, 1867 in Morton, Parish of Liberton, Midlothian, near Edinburgh, Scotland.

William and Elizabeth had 9 children, all of whom were all born in Dalmuir:

John Irvine, b. 1868

Mary Gibson Irvine, b. 1869

Agnes Armstrong Irvine, b. 1870

James Irvine, b. 1872

William Irvine, b. 1874

Christina Irvine, b. 1878

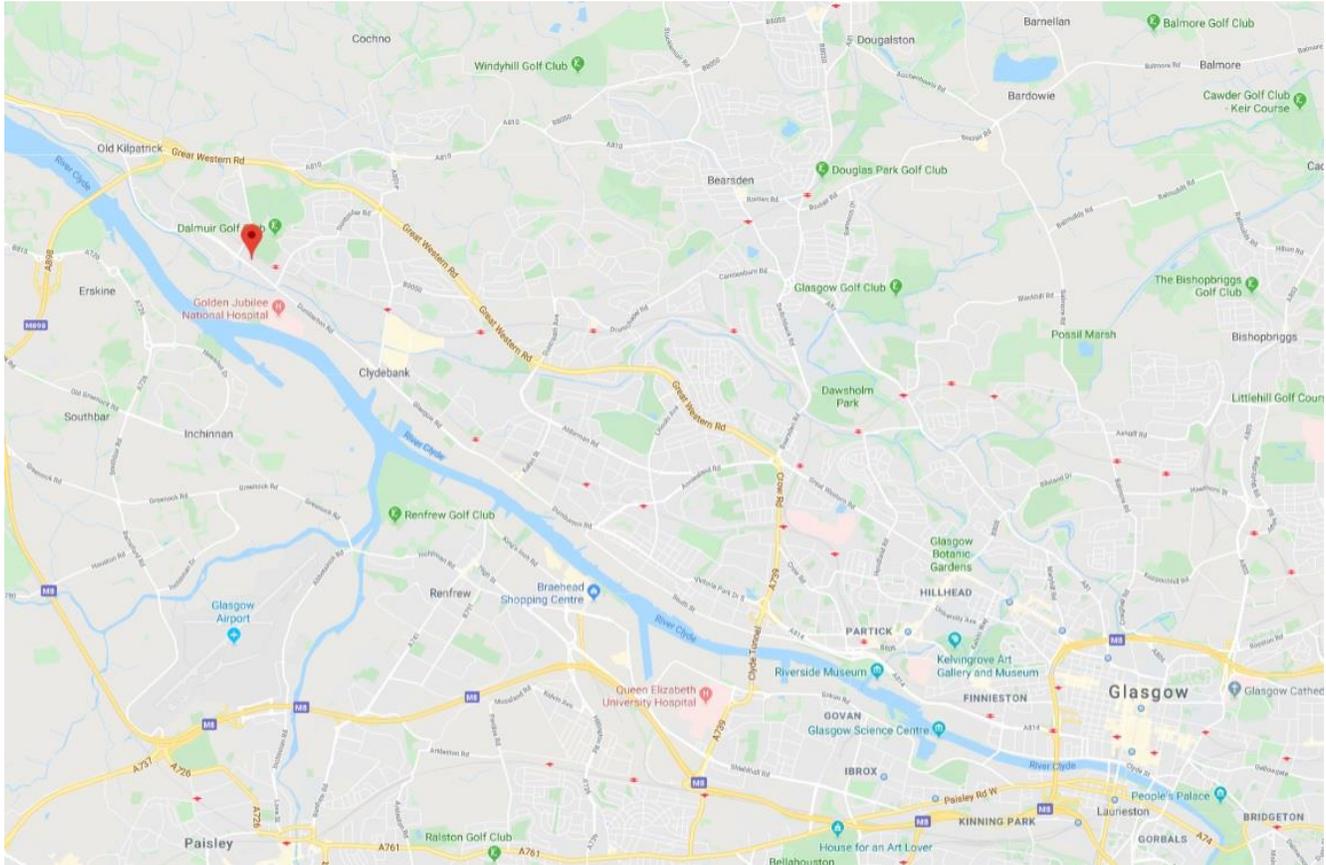
Janet Irvine, b. 1881

Sophia Simpson Irvine, b. 26 December 1882

Elizabeth Alexander Irvine, b. 1885

The town where Sophia was born, Dalmuir, is nine miles north-west of Glasgow. It is situated on the alluvial plains of the River Clyde, south of the formerly volcanic Kilpatrick Hills. The area was at the most northerly-west part of the Roman Empire with Antonine Wall forts to the west at Old Kilpatrick and

north at Duntocher from AD 142 until it was abandoned in AD 162. In the 18th century the area was mostly arable land, undivided moor capable of grazing 266 sheep, with a small mansion, near the Duntocher Burn, called "Dallmuir House". To the west was Dalmuir Farm and the two Buchanran farms to the east. The first industrialization was the paper mill opened in 1747 by Edward Collins. Powered by the Duntocher Burn at Dalmuir Glen, the water was diverted through the Mill Lade to the High Dam to provide power to the mill's Upper Works. Thatched whitewashed stone cottages for workers grew around the mills along Dumbarton Road, creating the village of Dalmuir. By the 1790s the statistical account records the paper mill as the fourth or fifth largest in Scotland. Also in 1790 the Forth and Clyde Canal opened.



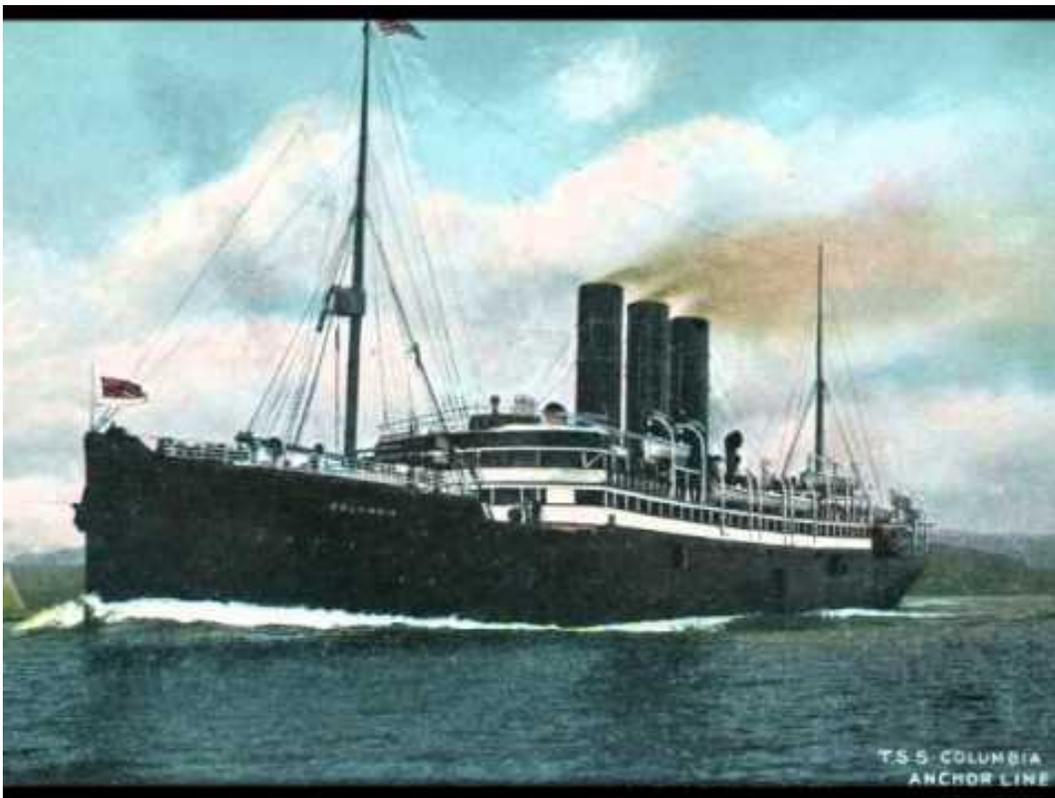
Dalmuir, Old Kilpatrick, Dumbartonshire

## Our Grandparents Time Together 1905 - 1934

As stated before, John grew up in Alva and Sophia was raised in Dalmuir. Those two towns are about 40 miles apart. Today, 40 miles is nothing, but in 1900, when people tended to stay where they were brought up, that was quite a distance. However, John's daughter, Agnes, recalled hearing that, in 1902, her father moved from Alva to Dalmuir.<sup>1</sup> And in fact, she recalled that he moved into the home right next door to where Sophia lived.<sup>2</sup> (Why John moved is unknown.) In 1902, John was about 23 years of age and Sophia was about 20.

The new neighbors must have hit it off well, because by 1903, it seems, the two were engaged. After they were engaged, the plan must have been for John to go America to become established and then return to Scotland to be married, because that is what happened.

In 1903, John Taylor Leckie emigrated to the United States of America.<sup>3</sup> The ship *Columbia* departed from Glasgow on 21 March 1903. The Master's name was Baxter. John was in "steerage" class<sup>4</sup>, which was, by far, the least expensive way to travel by ship.



The ship T.S.S. *Columbia* in about 1903

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<sup>1</sup> The 1901 Scottish Census shows John, age 21, living with his parents at 28, Queen St Park Villa in Alva; occupation stone mason.

<sup>2</sup> Agnes also recalled that the two homes were not merely next to each other, they were two halves of a "double house", or a duplex as we would say today.

<sup>3</sup> John's fraternal twin, Thomas Liddell Leckie, emigrated from Scotland to Canada in 1907.

<sup>4</sup> "The steerage area of the ship was once used to accommodate passengers, often placing hundreds together in a single large hold. Beds were routinely long rows of large shared bunks with straw mattresses and no bedding."



In America, John settled in Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio. (The reason for the choice of Cleveland is unknown.)

While John was still in Scotland, as was mentioned, he had become a stone mason. So that is the occupation he pursued in America. By 1905, he had become well enough established in his adopted country that he could return to Scotland to get married and take his bride back to his new home.

John (age 25) and Sophia (age 22) were married on 24 March 1905 at 13 Clyde Trust Buildings, Dalmuir in the Parish of Old Kilpatrick, Dumbartonshire, Scotland, her childhood home.

Very soon after the wedding, they took passage from Glasgow to New York City on the ship *Astoria*. This time John, with his new bride, traveled in a second-class cabin, a vast improvement over the steerage class of his first trans-Atlantic voyage in 1903. They landed in New York on 11 April 1905.

According the passenger list, John then lived at 200 Malden Road in Cleveland, to which they now both removed.



The ship S.S. *Astoria* in about 1905





John and Sophia Leckie with two of their children in about 1910

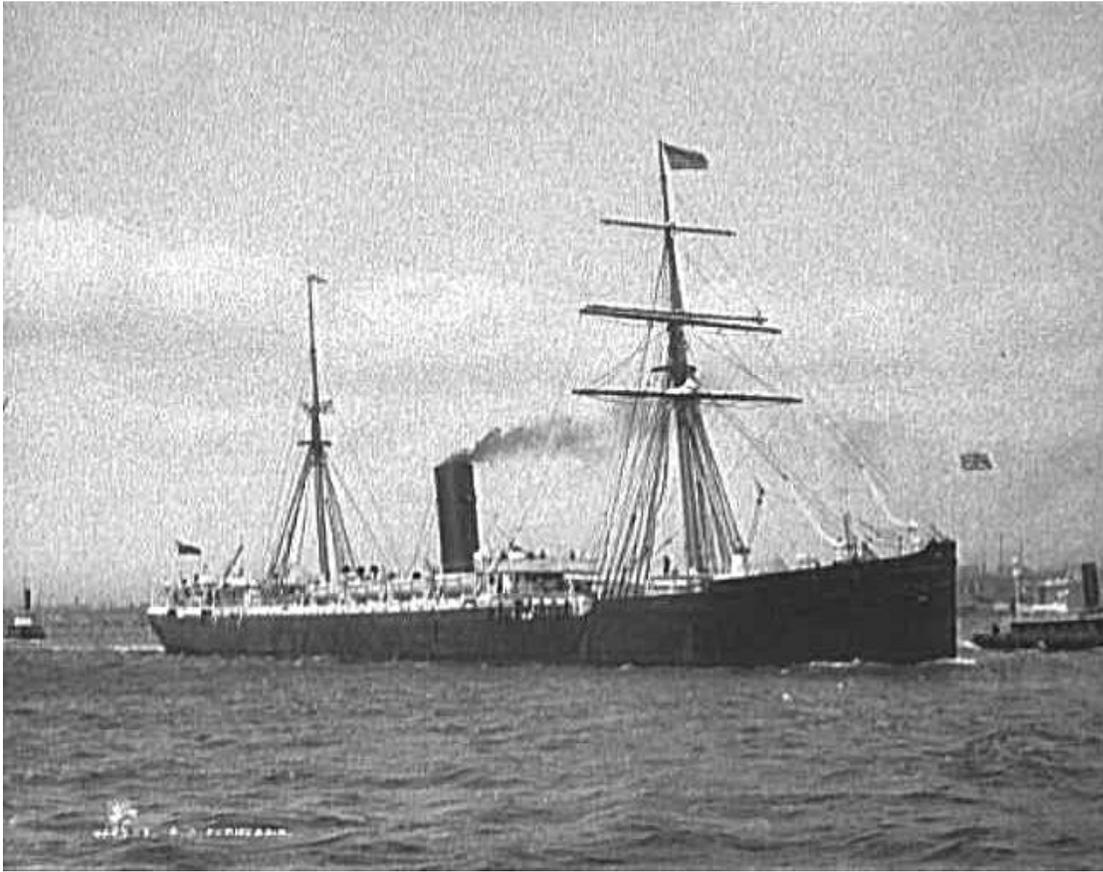
William Irvine visited his daughter and her family in America quite often in the early years of her marriage. The last time was in 1913 (which was the year he died). And Sophia returned to Scotland several times to visit as well. However, unfortunately, World War I put an end to these visits.

One of William Irvine's visits to the Leckie family was in about June of 1911, when the Leckie's third child, William, was about nine months of age.

William Irvine loved cowboy pictures [even in 1911]. It was about three miles to the nearest movie theater. One day he took "Baby Bill" with him on his shoulder to the theater but came rushing home because Bill (at only nine months) had said, "Lookada osses."—translated by a loving Grandfather—"Look at the horses".

The Leckie family returned to Scotland at least once (but likely more often). In 1911, John, Sophia, Bessie (age 5), Jennie (age 3), and Bill (age 1) visited their Leckie and Irvine relatives in Scotland. They returned on the ship *Furnessia* on 08 March 1911. At that time, John's mother (Janet Thomson Leckie) still lived in the family home at 11 Johnstone Street in Alva. (John's father, William, had died in 1904.)

Whenever Sophia was on board a ship, she became violently seasick. Nonetheless, she willingly traveled from America to Scotland by sea several times.



The ship *Furnessia* in about 1911

John and Sophia had a good life,<sup>5</sup> which got better with each passing year. As has already been mentioned, John was a stonecutter. After he had established his name in the trade, he started his own company as a cut stone contractor. In those days, cement was not used at the sides of roadways. Curb stones were used instead. John had the contract with the City of Cleveland to place those curb stones. He had other business as well, but that contract, which was very lucrative for him, was a significant portion of his business. When he first went into business, John used horse-drawn wagons to move the stone. But when they became available, he switched to trucks. For many years, he did very well and was quite prosperous.

Each night, when John came home from work, he bathed and dressed in a suit and tie for a formal dinner.

Sophia was a homemaker with six children to care for. That was more than a full time job, especially in those days before the advent of labor-saving devices such as automatic washing machines. Nonetheless, Sophia found time for a social life. She was especially fond of the game Mahjong, which was all the craze at that time. And she would get together with friends to play at least once a week.

John and Sophia owned their own home. In about 1907 to 1910, they lived at 1116 East 75<sup>th</sup> Street, N.E. They then moved to 10702 Earl Avenue, where they had a stable behind the house. In about 1913, they moved just down the street to 10710 Earl Avenue. They moved again in about 1918 to 10707 Tacoma Avenue, where they stayed until the early 1930s. All the children were born at home. For example, Agnes was born in the home at 10710 Earl Avenue.

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<sup>5</sup> John became an American Citizen on 19 November 1912.



10702 Earl Avenue



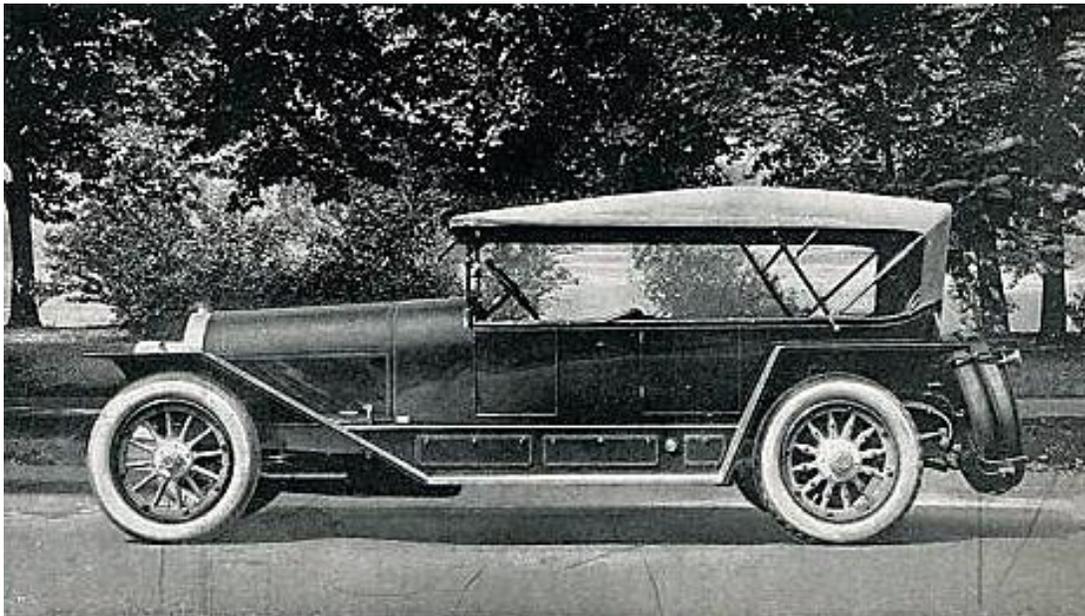
10710 Earl Avenue



10707 Tacoma Avenue

As their affluence grew, John and Sophia were able to purchase a Locomobile Touring Car.<sup>6</sup> The Locomobile was a seven-passenger car, which was one of the largest cars available at the time. Thus, if the youngest child sat on someone's lap, all eight members of the family could fit. The Locomobile was also a very expensive car for the time, costing many times a Model T Ford. The family used the car for excursions on Sunday afternoons. But more than that, Sophia would take the children for longer trips. For example, they went to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, which is a 250-mile drive from Cleveland on 1920s' bumpy roads! During that trip, the family got caught out after dark. Bill had to walk in front of the car with a lantern so that they didn't end up in a ditch.

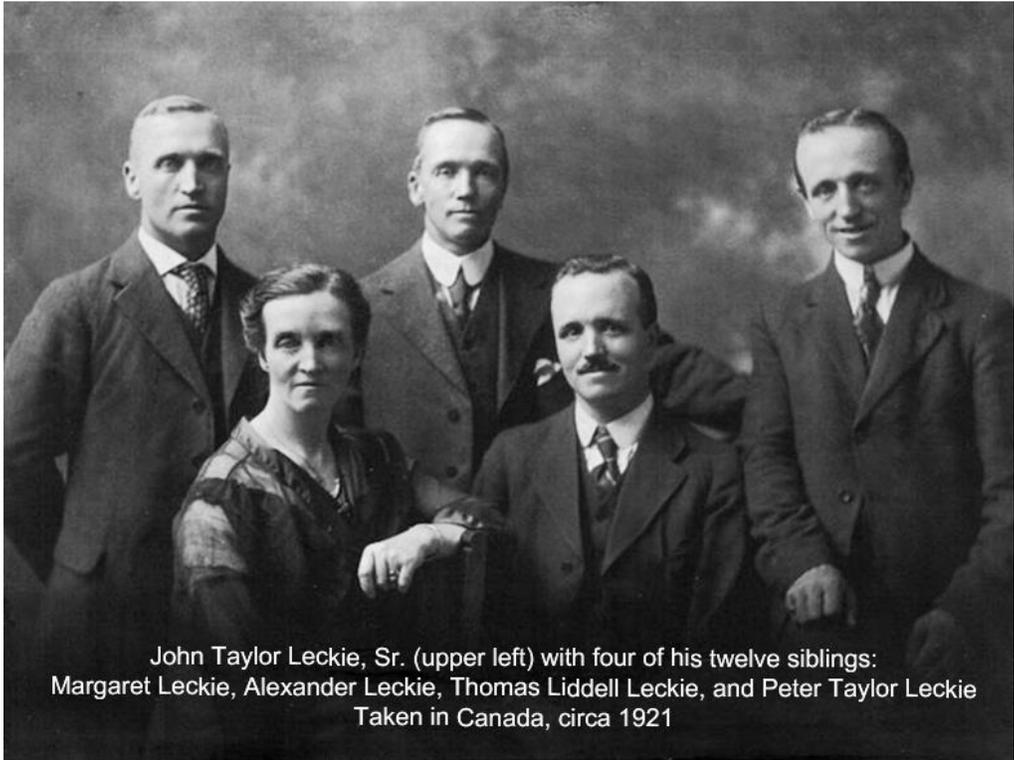
At least once (perhaps in 1921), the entire family went to Ottawa, Canada to visit the Canadian Leckie cousins.



1920 Locomobile

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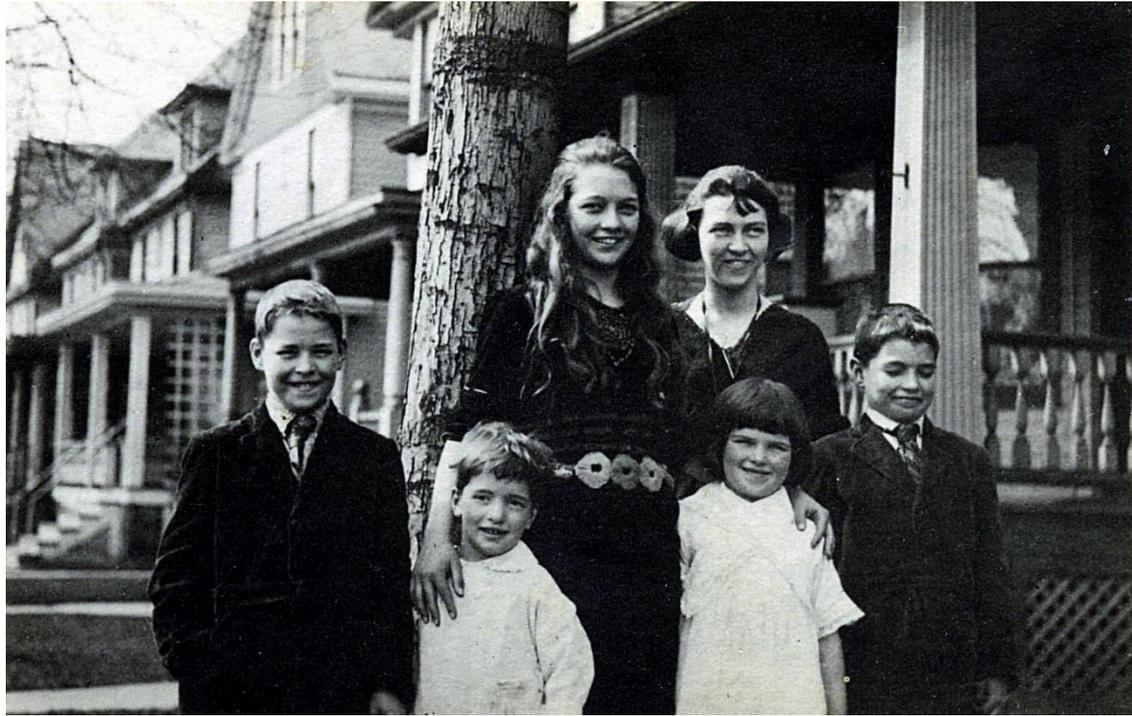
<sup>6</sup> In those days, automobiles were used for touring, not for getting around town.



John Taylor Leckie, Sr. (upper left) with four of his twelve siblings:  
Margaret Leckie, Alexander Leckie, Thomas Liddell Leckie, and Peter Taylor Leckie  
Taken in Canada, circa 1921



John Taylor Leckie in about 1923 and Sophia Simpson Irvine Leckie in an about 1924



The Leckie children in about 1920

The Leckie children all got along well together. In particular, Jennie and Bill were very good friends both as children and as adults. And Agnes and Jimmy were inseparable, especially as children.

The Leckie children were all very bright. According to one recollection, all the Leckie children were college graduates, and four of them were members of the Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society. That was not only an achievement for the children; it was a tribute to the parents.

In 1984 (when she was 70 years old), Aggie recalled the following about her father:

I can remember feeling very free to climb on my father's lap, [even] when I was as old as six or seven. He was a very quiet man, very serious. He was proud to be a good husband and father. It gave him pleasure to be able to provide for us adequately. He smoked cigars and so all his clothes smelled like cigars. To this day (though I dislike cigarette smoke), I enjoy the smoke of a cigar.

During the '20's, he loved to go to auctions. He would bring home something for each of us. I particularly remember when he brought us each a wrist watch.

I remember also that, in the summer, he would take us to work with him. Jimmy and I usually went together. Flat cars filled with huge pieces of stone would be pushed by an engine to the yard near the sheds. These sheds had three sides and a roof—no front. He had his own business as a cut stone contractor. Other men also had sheds there. Jimmy and I would climb up on the huge blocks of stone and walk along the top. It was a great adventure. Bill actually worked with him some. When cranking the truck one time, the crank flew back and broke Bill's arm.

My father was 5' 7". He was stocky and very strong. The first trade he learned [in Scotland] was to be a baker. [By age 21 years, also in Scotland, he had become a stone mason.] When he came to American, he [continued his trade as] a stone cutter. Each apprenticeship took seven years. Then you were a "Master."

He had platinum blond hair and the bluest eyes I ever saw. He was handsome in a rugged way.

When he arrived in America, he bought the Encyclopedia Britannica and a piano. And he got a high school diploma. He loved to sing and had a beautiful voice (whereas Granny, his wife Sophia, who was always singing, couldn't carry a tune).

And in a letter to Bill, Agnes asked:

“Do you remember when we visited our Canadian cousins in the Locomobile? We all squeezed in or hung on the running board. What a ride!”

In 1928, at age 49, John formed a corporation, Leckie-O'Brian, Inc., with Thomas O'Brian in the cut stone business, located at 10504 Quincy Avenue in Cleveland.

U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995 for John T Leckie	
Ohio > Cleveland > 1929 > Cleveland, Ohio, City Directory, 1929	
	Leckiejewski Albert (Jessie) contr 0405 Fleet av h do
	" Frank (Rose) h3671 E 61st
	" John (Sophia) lah h6205 Kenyon av
	" Martha fldr r6205 Kenyon av
	" Stanley (Anna) toolmkr h367 0E 61st
	Lecker Chas (Esther) checker r10810 Hampden av
	" John S slsmn h9401 Hough av
av	Leckie Anna (wid Robt) r8001 Elsa ct
(C	<b>LECKIE FREDERICK L (Holding, Duncan &amp; Leckie), Law Offices 1970 Union Trust Bldg, Tel Main 1117, h8001 Elsa ct. Tel Evergreen 1168-W</b>
02d	" Herbert V (Gertrude) chf eng Steel & Tubes Inc h17410 East Park dr
1 av	" Janet T slsmn Halle Bros Co r10707 Tacoma av
005	" John tmkr C O Bartlett & Snow Co r3950 E 54th
	" <b>John T (Sophia) pres-treas Leckie-O'Brian Co h10707 Tacoma av</b>
	" <b>-O'Brian Co The (inc 1928; cap \$10,000)</b> John T Leckie pres-treas Thos O'Brian v-pres Chas N Fiscus sec cut stone 10504 Quincy av
908	" Wm student r10707 Tacoma av
av	Leckleider Josephine (wid Wm) h1731 Wy-more apt 6 (EC)
av	Leckler Harry H (Dorothea) supt h17417 Norton av (L)
	" Ida M (wid Jos) h17417 Norton av (L)

1929 Cleveland City Directory, showing the Leckie-O'Brian Corporation and showing that John's place of business was 10504 Quincy Avenue and his place of residence was 10707 Tacoma Avenue

In 1928, John and Sophia took a vacation in Havana, Cuba. Havana must have been the place to go in 1928, as is indicated by the “Havana Number” of *Life* Magazine published in January of that year.

Florida, Passenger Lists, 1898-1963 for John T Leckie  
A3618 - Arriving at Key West, Florida, 1907 - 1949 > 19

NO 19  
**LIST OF UNITED STATES CITIZENS**  
(FOR THE IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES)

S. S. NORTHLAND Sailing from HA HAVANA CUBA FEB 10 1928, 1928, Arriving at Port of KEY WEST FEB 10 1928, 1928

No. on List	NAME IN FULL		AGE	Sex	Married	IF NATIVE OF UNITED STATES INSULAR POSSESSION OR IF NATIVE OF OTHER STATES, GIVE DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH (CITY OR TOWN AND STATE).	IF NATURALIZED, GIVE NAME AND LOCATION OF COURT WHICH ISSUED NATURALIZATION PAPERS, AND DATE OF PAPERS.	ADDRESS IN UNITED STATES
	FAMILY NAME	GIVEN NAME	Yrs. Mos.					
1	LAUGHLIN	JOSEPH	55	M	N	SURIN CO NY NOV 1 1872		BINGHAMTON
2	LAUGHLIN	REBA	48	F	M	INDIENY NY OCT 8 1879		BINGHAMTON
3								
4	BARTON	JAMES	47	M	N	ARIZONA WASH MAR 23 1881		SEATTLE WASH
5	BARTON	VIVIAN	38	F	M	SEATTLE WA FEB 19 1890		SEATTLE WASH
6	ZACHARIAS	BILLO	49	M	S	VERONA PA FEB 29 1878		PITTSBURG PA
7	SHEEHAN	RAYMOND	32	M	S	PLUM CITY O OCT 8 1895		PITTSBURG PA
8	MC CORMICK	VERONICA	28	F	S	CHIC ILL AUG 21 1879		BLOOMINGTON ILL
9	FRANKSON	JOHN	59	M	N	GRANDVILLE ILL APRIL 23 1879		BLOOMINGTON ILL
10	FRANKSON	BERTHA	60	F	M	BLOOMINGTON ILL OCT 9 1868		BLOOMINGTON ILL
11	FARLEY	MARY	25	F	S	BINGHAMTON NY JUNE 4 1896		ALBANY
12	AUSTIN	JOSEPH MAY	46	M	N	BUFFALO NY MAR 1 1881		BUFFALO NY
13	BOHLERER	JULIA	45	F	M	BUFFALO NY JAN 7 1882		BUFFALO NY
14	GIEGG	JENNIE	64	F	M	BUFFALO NY APRIL 6 1862		BUFFALO NY
15	HENCK	ISABEL	47	F	M	BUFFALO NY SEPT 12 1880		BUFFALO NY
16	BATTERSON	JOHN G	70	M	N	DETROIT MICH NOV 15 1878		DETROIT MICH
17	PATTERSON	MARIE A	65	F	M	DETROIT MICH SEPT 28 1858		DETROIT MICH
18	LECKIE	JOHN T	48	M	N	Scotland	COURTY COURT CLEVELAND OH HUSB AND WIFE 1924 Nov 1911	CLVE O
19	LECKIE	SOPHIA	45	F	M	Scotland	NAT - CLEVELAND OH OH OH DECE 5 1908-1910 MARRIED 1908	CLVE O

Passenger List, showing John and Sophia returning from Havana, Cuba on 10 February 1928 on the ship *Northland*

**HAVANA, CUBA**  
SUNSHINE AND SEA BREEZES.  
*Winter in the Most Glorious  
Climate in the World.*

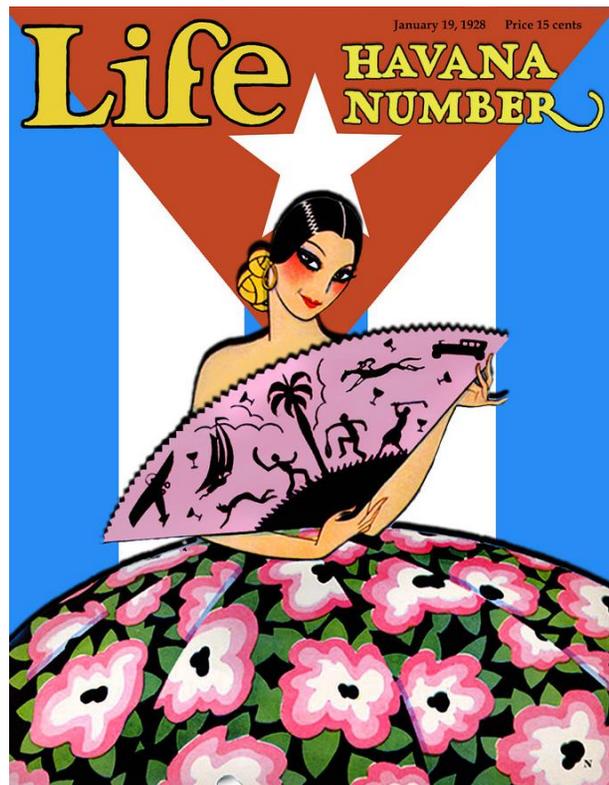


CASINO NACIONAL.

Cuba is becoming the World's winter playground—  
Motoring through the Island, Golfing, Bathing and Fishing  
everywhere. Horse Racing at Oriental Park, Havana,  
middle December until the end of March. The Casino  
National—Chemin de Fer, Baccarat, Roulette, etc.—  
opens December 31.

SURF BOATING. YACHTING.  
Old Havana, full of Spanish Treasures.

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London Agents:  
**BOWMAN BILTMORE TRAVEL BUREAU**  
DEWAR HOUSE, HAYMARKET, S.W.1



Havana, Cuba 1928: Advertisement and *Life* Magazine Cover

Thus, it appears that the late 1920's a very successful and happy time for the Leckie family!

According to the 1930 US Census, in 1930, the entire family was living at 10707 Tacoma Avenue in Cleveland. John was about 51 years of age; Sophia was 48, Bessie was 24<sup>7</sup>; Jennie was 22; Bill was 20; Johnny was 18; Agnes was 16; and Jimmy was 13.

## **The Breakup**

Very unfortunately, all this happy and loving time for John and Sophia and the children ended suddenly in 1934. In 1929, the Great Depression struck America. But 1929 was just the beginning. The worst years of the Depression were to follow, and the Depression was to continue throughout the 1930s.

According to the Cleveland City Directory, in 1931 the family was still living at 1070 Tacoma Avenue, and John was still a contractor. In 1932, their address had not changed, however, John was now listed as a salesman for the Memorial Tablet Company. As the situation worsened, finally, the family was forced to move into an apartment (at 2482 Derbyshire Road).

Thus, in the early '30s, John watched as everything he had built over 30 years crumble before his eyes. Due to no fault of his own, he lost his business; he lost his house; he lost his car; he lost everything.

By 1934, all the children, except for Jimmy (who was 17 years of age), were gone from home, either married or in college. As Agnes said, John took great pride in being able to support his family and to support them well. Now, all that was gone.

At that time, Agnes was attending Barnard College in New York on a full scholarship, so her room and board were covered by the college. The situation was so desperate at home, however, that Agnes sent home the money that she earned from babysitting (10 cents per hour) so that the family back in Cleveland could have some money, at least, for food.

The result of the devastating loss was, perhaps, inevitable. In early 1934, John and Sophia had a terrible argument of some kind. The argument was so profound that it broke up the family. That was the final tragic blow to a family that had been strong and loving and prosperous.

In May 1934, after the big blowup, John went to Canada to visit his (twin) brother, Thomas Liddell Leckie, in Ottawa.<sup>8</sup>

After he returned from Canada, John went back to Cleveland. Bill remained with his father for a year or two. In early 1936, Bill was living with his father at 1181 East 114<sup>th</sup> Street in Cleveland. But by mid-1936, Bill had moved to New York to be with Jennie and the rest of the family. (Bill and remained in contact with him later, after he moved to New York).

However, the argument affected Jimmy so deeply that he never spoke to his father again, and, in fact, it is said that when Jimmy saw his father approaching walking down the street, Jimmy crossed to the other side so that he could avoid the possible contact.

In June 1934, after school was over for the year, Sophia and Jimmy went to New York City where they moved in with Jennie. Sophia remained in New York with Jennie for the rest of her life.

In 1934, John was 55 years of age and Sophia was 52.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Detroit, Michigan marriage records, Bessie (Betty) was married to Kenneth O. Peck on 5 Jun 1925. This is in direct contradiction to the 1930 US Census record for Cleveland, which states that she was "single" in 1930.

<sup>8</sup> John Taylor Leckie, Sr. had several siblings who emigrated to Canada at about the same time that he came to the USA. They were Alexander Leckie, Thomas Liddell Leckie (John's twin), and Peter Taylor Leckie.

## John After the Separation

For a while, immediately following the breakup, as was mentioned, Bill remained with his father in Cleveland. Apparently, John was not employed in the mid-1930s, but Bill was, so that is probably how they both survived. Shortly thereafter, during the Roosevelt years, John found work with the Works Project Administration (WPA)<sup>9</sup> building bridges over newly constructed highways. Almost certainly John helped to build the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut (which was built entirely during the Depression with WPA funds). And possibly he helped in the later stages of the Hutchinson River Parkway in New York (which was finished during the Depression with WPA funds). The bridges on those parkways, especially those on the Hutchinson River Parkway, are beautiful structures, which are as graceful today as the day they were built. They are a living monument to a man who spent his life building such beautiful structures as these.



The Hutchinson River Parkway, showing one of the beautiful stone bridges

John and Sophia were divorced in about 1937. John remarried on 04 July 1939 to a widow, Mrs. Florence G. Flood (maiden name Goehler) in Cleveland. At the time of his second marriage, John was listed as a Foreman. John and Florence lived at 1662 Crawford Road in Cleveland. In 1942, John was employed by the Bricklayers and Masons Union #5.

In about 1948, John went to New York and Connecticut to visit his family so that he could see them for one last time.<sup>10</sup>

John died at age 69 years at 1:05 pm on Monday, 14 March 1949 in Cleveland. He died in his car at the rear of the Bricklayers and Masons Union #5 Building, 2105 East 21<sup>st</sup> Street. He died of acute cardiac failure.

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<sup>9</sup> “The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was an ambitious employment and infrastructure program created by President Roosevelt in 1935, during the bleakest years of the Great Depression. Over its eight years of existence, the WPA put roughly 8.5 million Americans to work.”

<sup>10</sup> FPM: It was during this visit that I met maternal grandfather. As I recall it was a brief visit. Sadly, it was the only time that I ever met him. I was about 6 years old. I remember the encounter only very vaguely.

## **Sophia After the Separation**

At least at first, Sophia's history after her separation from John was the story of her migration, and that of the children, from Cleveland to New York City.

The exact timing of the move (various moves) is not clear now, with the passage of time. The breakup occurred in about May 1934. And apparently, Jennie, who was first to live in New York,<sup>11</sup> moved there in early 1935.

In 1935, Jennie lived at 521 West 111<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan. Thus, one might suppose that Sophia moved in with Jennie upon her first arrival in New York.

The first record of Sophia as the head of the household is in 1938, when she was living at 62-30 Saunders Street in Rego Park (Queens). It appears that in 1938, Jennie, Bill, and Johnny were living with their mother in Queens. (As was mentioned, in 1936 Bill was living with his father in Cleveland. But apparently by 1938, he had moved to Queens to live with the rest of the family.)

Where were the other children? Bessie had married Kenneth Peck in 1925. In the mid-1930s, she was living with her husband in Ohio. However, by about 1937, Bessie and her husband had moved to New York (in Huntington, on Long Island). Thus, by about 1937, all of the Leckies, except John Taylor Leckie, Sr., were then living in New York.

Agnes was married in May 1938. Thus, she was living with her husband in New York (on Long Island).

Jimmy was away at college (Duke University) from the fall of 1935 to the spring of 1939. After he graduated from college, Jimmy also joined the family in Queens.

Therefore, in 1939, Jennie, Bill, Johnny, and Jimmy were all living with Sophia in Queens.

Their next place of residence was 14 Sutton Place South, which is quite a fashionable place in mid-town Manhattan, very close to the East River.<sup>12</sup> They must have moved between March and June of 1939, because a Passenger List shows Jennie and Bill living in Queens in March of 1939, and a Baptism Certificate for Willard Leckie Mason (Agnes' oldest son), dated June 1939, lists Sophia's address as 14 Sutton Place.

In addition, the U.S. Census for 1940 shows that Sophia and four of her children—Jennie, Bill, Johnnie, and Jimmy—were all living together at 14 Sutton Place South. The rent on their apartment in 1940 was \$200 per month,<sup>13</sup> which, in 1940, was a lot of money.

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<sup>11</sup> Agnes had lived in New York beginning in the fall of 1932. However, as was mentioned, she was living in a dormitory at Barnard College. Thus, it would not have been possible for her mother to move in with her.

<sup>12</sup> In 1940, the rent on their apartment was \$200 per month. However, in 2018, a 1200 square foot condo in that area is selling for about \$1,500,000 and is renting for about \$7500 per month.

<sup>13</sup> \$200 in 1940 is equivalent to about \$3500 in 2018. However, rents have increased at a greater rate than the overall cost of living. Therefore, the rent for that apartment is probably more than \$3500 today.



In 1936, Henry Sell was asked to look into promoting “something that had been named ‘vitamines’.”<sup>16</sup> Knowing little about them, Sell had told the client some research would be necessary before giving an answer and proceeded to hire a small group of college graduates to visit universities where work on vitamins was going on.”<sup>17</sup>

Heading up the research team were Jennie and her brother Bill.<sup>18</sup> By the time the beginning research was complete, Mr. Sell, Jennie, and Bill were so enthusiastic about the potential of vitamins in human health, and as a business opportunity, they decided to start a vitamin company of their own.

Beginning in 1936, for the next four years, the team of three—Mr. Sell, Jennie, and Bill—lived for vitamins.

After a year of intensive work, they had created a company, produced a product, and named it *Vitamins Plus*. It was the first vitamin-mineral product to be sold directly to the public. (That fact bears repetition: *It was the first vitamin-mineral product to be sold directly to the public.*)

The first sales of *Vitamins Plus* were in October of 1937.

Mr. Sell was the founder and inspiration and genius promoter of the company, but Jennie and Bill were its hands and heart. The following is one example of how important Bill was to the company:<sup>19</sup>

My brother Bill, especially, did Trojan work on the project. When Henry Sell decided the salesgirls should receive regular correspondence from the office, Bill set up a system of keeping in touch with all six hundred of them. Or maybe it was a quick checkup trip to the West Coast—Bill was always willing and ready to go. And when Henry Sell sold more product than we had, Bill's gentle ways could always be counted on to pacify the impatient buyers who had customers in their departments clamoring for the product that was ordered but not yet delivered.

The 1940 US Census showed that, by that year, Johnny and Jimmy had joined the company. Jennie was listed as “Executive, Vitamins”, Bill was “Manager, Vitamins”, Johnny was “Sales Manager, Vitamins”, and Jimmy was “Salesman, Vitamins”.

As was mentioned, Bessie (Betty) Peck had moved to New York by about 1937. Now, it was time for her to join her siblings in promoting *Vitamins Plus*. Her contribution was described as follows:<sup>20</sup>

At Gimbels in New York, where the sales were phenomenal, Henry Sell asked his friends Bernard Gimbel and Kenneth Collins—who was at that time vice-president in charge of advertising and promotion—to do him a special favor. He wanted to try out a booth, of the kind that had been so successful for Elizabeth Arden in the twenties, when use of cosmetics was still in its infancy. Amused at the show their diverting friend was putting on, Gimbel and Collins gave their consent. A display company was hired to build an interesting freestanding booth that was placed at the intersection of two busy aisles in the cosmetics department. Here, Henry Sell felt, where anyone could come up and ask whatever questions they had about vitamins, he could gain invaluable

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<sup>16</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitamin>: The term *vitamin* is derived from the word *vitamine*, coined in 1912 by Polish biochemist Casimir Funk, who isolated a complex of micronutrients essential to life, all of which he presumed to be amines. When this presumption was later determined not to be true, the “e” was dropped from the name. [Many of the] vitamins were discovered (identified) between 1913 and 1948.

<sup>17</sup> *A Talent for Living, The Story of Henry Sell, An American Original*, Janet Leckie, 1970, Hawthorne Books, Inc., p. 183.

<sup>18</sup> William Leckie was no less intelligent and hard-working than his sister. Bill never missed a single day of school from the first day of Kindergarten to the last day of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade! He was given a special award to recognize this accomplishment, which had never been achieved before in the Cleveland public school system. In addition, he had graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Northwestern University in 1932.

<sup>19</sup> *A Talent for Living, The Story of Henry Sell, An American Original*, Janet Leckie, 1970, Hawthorne Books, Inc., pp. 192-193.

<sup>20</sup> *A Talent for Living, The Story of Henry Sell, An American Original*, Janet Leckie, 1970, Hawthorne Books, Inc., p. 192.

information to guide him in later advertising and promotion. The problem was that, once the booth was installed, no one wanted to man it. The salesgirls were intimidated at being so visible. There was nothing to do but press another member of the family into service. My sister Betty Peck, an enthusiastic believer in Vitamins *Plus*, agreed to take the spotlight. For months she answered the questions of both the public and the salesgirls and developed the information that Henry Sell felt he needed for future campaigns.

Thus, all of the Leckie children, except for Agnes, were very much involved in this exciting new enterprise.

But shortly thereafter, the world entered a period of extreme turmoil. Germany was making war in Europe, and Italy was mobilizing for her declaration of war.

When the USA passed the National Mobilization Act in 1940, it was felt that Bill would be taken into the armed services. It was decided that the company could not remain in business without him.

At about this time, three major companies had made propositions to buy Vitamins *Plus*: Lever Brothers, American Home Products, and the Vick Chemical Company. The third of these was chosen, and thus, Vitamins *Plus* was sold to the Vick Chemical Company in late 1940.

From that time on, these four Leckies never lacked for money. Jennie continued to work for Henry Sell until just before her death in 1971. And Bill, Johnny, and Jimmy enlisted in the Armed Forces during World War II, after which they had successful careers.<sup>21</sup>

As a final note to the digression, to indicate how well the Leckies were doing in the late 1930s into 1940, pretty much everyone who was involved in Vitamins *Plus* took vacations in Bermuda and/or Cuba during this time.

Embarkation Date	Person	From	To	Ship/Airplane	Home Address
1935-08-17	Jennie	Hamilton, Bermuda	NYC	<i>Queen of Bermuda</i>	521 West 111 St., NYC
1937-07-17	Johnny	Hamilton, Bermuda	NYC	<i>Queen of Bermuda</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1937-07-21	Jennie	Hamilton, Bermuda	NYC	<i>Monarch of Bermuda</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1938-08-28	Johnny	Darrell's Island, Bermuda	Port Washington, NY	Pan American Airways <i>Bermuda Clipper</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1938-10-02	Sophia	Darrell's Island, Bermuda	Port Washington, NY	Pan American Airways <i>Bermuda Clipper</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1938-10-02	Jennie	Darrell's Island, Bermuda	Port Washington, NY	Pan American Airways <i>Bermuda Clipper</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1939-03-08	Bill	Havana, Cuba	Miami, FL	<i>Evangeline</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1939-03-08	Jennie	Havana, Cuba	Miami, FL	<i>Evangeline</i>	62-30 Saunders Street, Rego Park (Queens)
1940-08-04	Bill	Darrell's Island, Bermuda	LaGuardia, Queens, NY	Pan American Airways <i>Bermuda Clipper</i>	14 Sutton Place, South, NYC
1940-08-05	Jimmy	Hamilton, Bermuda	NYC	<i>President Roosevelt</i>	14 Sutton Place, South, NYC

<sup>21</sup> Very unfortunately, Johnny died in 1963 at age 51, and thus he did not live out his life to its full potential. Unlike his brothers, Johnny witnessed the worst aspects of war: the killing and maiming of his fellow soldiers on the front lines in Europe. Therefore, he suffered from what we now call PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), which many believe caused him to take his own life.



The ship *Monarch of Bermuda* and the aircraft *Bermuda Clipper*<sup>22</sup>

Jennie's visit to Bermuda in August of 1935 was, no doubt, for business only. She was very likely there as a "beautiful person" with The Arthur Murray Dance Studio. In fact, it is possible that Jennie met Mr. Sell on this first trip to Bermuda. (Vitamins *Plus*, which was their first big venture together, did not begin until 1936.)

In July of 1937, Jennie and Johnny were together in Bermuda. Even though they left at different times, they were clearly in Bermuda at the same time. (It is possible that Jennie had business there, whereas Johnny probably did not.)

Johnny returned in August of 1938, apparently on his own.

Then, Jennie visited with her mother in October of 1938. This seems to be the only time that Sophia was in Bermuda.

For a change of pace, Jennie and Bill visited Havana (not Bermuda) in March of 1939. Jennie and Bill were the two key players in Vitamins *Plus*. Maybe this was a much-needed break from the intense activity of that company.

With World War II looming, it looks like Bill and Jimmy took a final get-away before they enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces (Navy for Bill and Marines for Jimmy).

When they were visiting Bermuda, the Leckies very likely stayed for free in the (ultra-deluxe) Castle Harbor Hotel. Mr. Sell was the advertising agent for the hotel, which had opened in 1932. And as friends of Mr. Sell, it is almost certain that the Leckies would be honored guests at the hotel.

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With some of the money that they earned from Vitamins *Plus*, Jennie and Bill were able to buy a small farm in Ossining, New York, which is on the Hudson River, 35 miles north of New York City.

For Thanksgiving in 1944, during the height of World War II, all three Leckie men were on leave at the same time. That was very unusual and truly fortunate. It allowed all the Leckie siblings to gather at the farm for Thanksgiving Day that year.

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<sup>22</sup> Information paraphrased from: <https://bernews.com/2011/02/golden-age-of-bermuda-clippers/> and [https://pan-american-clippers.fandom.com/wiki/Clipper\\_Bermuda](https://pan-american-clippers.fandom.com/wiki/Clipper_Bermuda)

The Pan American's S-42B aircraft *Bermuda Clipper* had an interesting history. It was a boat that could fly. Thus, it did not require a land-based airstrip. The *Bermuda Clipper* inaugurated regular service between Bermuda and Port Washington, New York on June 18, 1937. Later that year the airline changed the terminal for their Bermuda flights from New York to Baltimore because of better weather conditions. The *Bermuda Clipper* was an opulently appointed flying boat providing comfort and style which rivalled that of any of the luxury ocean liners of the day. In 1940, it was renamed the *Alaska Clipper* for service in Alaska. Then, in 1941, it was renamed again to the *Hong Kong Clipper II* to be used for the Manila / Hong Kong route. Finally, it was sunk by the Japanese in Hong Kong Harbor on December 8, 1941.



The Leckie siblings, Thanksgiving 1944  
Bessie, Jennie, Bill, Johnny, Agnes, and Jimmy

Jennie and Sophia spent as much time as possible at the farm in Ossining, to get away from the city. In addition, another of Sophia's daughters, Agnes, lived in Ossining at the time, with her husband and three children. Thus, being in Ossining gave Sophia an opportunity to be with her grandchildren.

Every afternoon in good weather, Sophia would have tea in the garden. Immediately adjacent to the farm was Maryknoll Seminary, a Catholic seminary. A stone wall marked the boundary between the two properties. And Sophia could see the wall from where she sat to have tea.

Now, Sophia was very much a Scot. As such, she had an antipathy for Catholics. It is no longer known how it first happened, but the seminarians, who were just young men in their early 20s, and who were, no doubt homesick, began looking over the wall. Seeing a grandmotherly figure next door, they, perhaps waved and then climbed over the wall to say "hello". Well one thing must have led to another, and finally, the young men were having tea with Sophia on a regular basis. All of this was, of course, strictly against seminary rules. And Sophia welcomed these young visitors, Catholic or not.

In 1942, while Sophia was still spending time in Ossining, a grandson (Agnes' son Franklin) was born in the local hospital. He was born at 4:02 P.M. Well, there was a superstition that any child born after 4:00 P.M. must have something wrong with him. So, to make sure that the superstition was not true in this case, Sophia marched into the hospital, past the nurses, into the nursery, where the child was asleep. Sophia, without any permission what-so-ever, undressed the baby and inspected him head to foot. When she was satisfied that everything was in order—ten fingers, ten toes—she redressed the baby and departed. All this was highly irregular. But that was the way she was.

Sophia never went out of the house without hat and gloves, not even on a quick trip to the grocery store (or sometimes, even to rake the yard).



Sophia Irvine Leckie in about 1944

Sophia would often take the train from New York to Connecticut to visit her daughter, Agnes, and the grandchildren. Sophia would putter around the house humming, cleaning, and organizing. Frequently, one of the members of the household would have misplaced something. And when that happened, he or she would ask Granny, as she was called by her grandchildren, to find it. Sophia would just do her usual puttering, and always, by the end of the visit, she would have found the lost item.

In the mid-1940s, Jennie sold the farm in Ossining and bought six acres in Fairfield, Connecticut (on Old Academy Road, near the Greenfield Hill Congregational Church). That property had a barn and an adjoining cottage on it. Jennie converted the barn into a home<sup>23</sup> and left the cottage pretty much as it had been. After the barn conversion was complete, Jennie lived in the barn and Sophia lived in the cottage.

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<sup>23</sup> Jennie was way ahead of her time in many ways. She was one of the first people to convert a barn into a home. And, in fact, she won an architectural prize for the way she did the conversion.



Jennie's home in Fairfield, showing top: converted barn; middle: breezeway between the barn and the cottage; bottom: cottage (Photos taken 04 June 2013)

Sophia was very calm person (when she wasn't checking out a new-born baby for the requisite number of toes). She never raised her voice. One of her favorite words was "connie",<sup>24</sup> which means "gentle". But more than that, it means everything good about one's behavior. Sophia was the epitome of "connie". Wherever she lived, Sophia made that dwelling into a place of comfort and peace for herself and for all who visited her. She was a kind and loving person who gave joy to all those with whom she came into contact. It is said that bluebirds will make their nests only in places of peace. There was always a bluebird's nest near the cottage in Fairfield, at least as long as Sophia lived there.

When Jennie and Sophia stayed in Fairfield, Sophia drove a 1949 Chevrolet sedan, which was dark maroon in color.

Sophia never remarried. She had a very good life living with Jennie, and she was in close proximity to several of her other children, who she visited often. (The exceptions were Bessie, who moved to Florida in the late 1940s, after her husband died and Jimmy, who moved to Florida in about 1947 and then to California in about 1952.)

Sophia died at age 73 years on October 24, 1956 in New York City. She died of cancer.

### **An Afterword**

Even though circumstances beyond their control destroyed them as a couple, John and Sophia, nonetheless, left a rich, mutual legacy of six children, fourteen grandchildren, many great grandchildren, and many, many great, great grandchildren.

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<sup>24</sup> The use of the word "connie" as Sophia used it is found widely in Scotland. It appears in the *Dictionaries of the Scots Language*. It is related to the word "canny". As well as meaning gentle, connie can also mean pleasant; good, kind, and comfortable. "The adverbial use of this word [gently, carefully, quietly] is very common in the West of Scotland, and its applications are exceedingly varied," as they are in the adjectival form. The word is also used with imperative force. Refer to: <https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/canny>