Emma Donovan McCabe (1842 - 1932)
By Jo Ellen Heil

Emma's world revolved around her family, their Irish roots and a life-long marriage filled with both heartache and joy.

The first of three children, Emma Donovan was born in July 1842 just outside Albany, New York to Michael Donovan, an Irish immigrant, and Emma Williams, a native New Yorker. Michael worked as a harness maker.

During the 1860 Census, 18-year-old Emma lived with her parents, newborn sister Mary and their boarder, 30-year-old store clerk John McCabe, in their Albany home. John's parents were also Irish immigrants.

When the Civil War broke out, Michael Donovan helped muster the 18th New York Infantry in May 1861 and signed up for a two-year enlistment as the Captain of Co. F.

22-year-old Emma Donovan married John McCabe on November 23, 1864 in Albany. They had four children: Hattie, Mary, Edith and Georgie. Only Edith survived to adulthood. In 1870 their daughter Mary died aged six months. In 1877, seven-year-old Hattie died of an "inflammation of the brain." In 1882, infant son Georgie died of cholera.

Family became vital for John and Emma's economic and spiritual health. For their first forty years together, the couple lived in her parents' Albany home with a rotating host of relatives, in-laws and schoolteachers. One of the staples of the household was Julia Donovan, a native New Yorker with Irish roots who remained single in order to serve the family from 1860 to 1900.

Through the years John McCabe worked as a store clerk and self-employed furrier. In 1879, was on the payroll in the Department of the Treasury as a Watchman in the Architect's Office. His salary was $2.

Emma's father Michael Donovan died in August 1899. Emma's mother followed him just two weeks later. Her burial card listed "Acute Melancholia" as cause of death.

John and Emma McCabe's life in Albany shifted with her parents' deaths. They finally owned their own home and their daughter, Edith, had begun her life-long career as a dance instructor. By 1910 the family had begun wintering in Santa Barbara, California and became year-round residents in 1912, moving between 335 E. Valerio and 1904 San Pascual.

In November 1914, the Santa Barbara Daily News covered John and Emma's Golden Wedding Anniversary and home reception. Taking advantage of the publicity, Edith quickly put an ad in the paper the next month:

"Dancing Classes under the direction of Miss Edith McCabe at Woman's Club, 1419 Anacapa Street. Morning: For women Aesthetic exercises and New ballroom dances. Afternoon: For

children and Young Girls and Boys. Evening: Men and Women New Social Dances. Home Telephone Red 2439." (December 2, 1914)

Emma, John and Edith were active, fluid voters. Throughout the 1920s, all three registered as either Republicans, Democrats or "undesignated," often switching party affiliations between elections. Dinner discussions were lively.

Santa Barbara City Directories from the 1920s list John and Edith as retired. Still single, Edith supported the family as a dance instructor; Shaw Kuroda, a 36-year-old servant, lived with them. Kuroda was not a white woman, as was typical, but a Japanese man. He had immigrated to America in 1913, spoke both Japanese and English and was listed as a "Houseman" under his own name in the 1920 Santa Barbara City Directory.

The McCabes moved to their final home on Bath Street in 1927. John, Emma's husband of 65 years, died at home on November 2, 1929, and was buried in the Santa Barbara Cemetery. The Santa Maria Times printed his obituary:

"John J. McCabe, for 16 years a resident and picturesque character in Santa Barbara, passed away late Saturday night. McCabe was a man of letters. Interested in poetry and all branches of the arts and sciences, he had for some years been engaged in writing an opera which will go unfinished. Funeral services will be held in his home, 10 o'clock tomorrow morning."

Emma Donovan McCabe outlived her husband by two years, then died at home on January 30, 1932. Daughter Edith arranged a small funeral at the house, followed by cremation and a private committal at the Santa Barbara Cemetery.

Emma's obituary in the Santa Barbara Morning Press provided no further details save a short bold headline which screamed "Death Claims Aged Resident".

May she rest in peace.