

ORIGIN OF THE NAME McELROY

The name McElroy has been in use for many centuries. In O'Hart's Irish Pedigrees it can be traced back a thousand years, or probably even to the times of St. Patrick. One of the proofs that it is a very old name is found in the fact that it belongs to both Ireland and Scotland and is common to both Catholics and Protestants. The Irish people are Celts, and also probably one-half of the Scotch, specially those of Western Scotland. The Irish language and the Gaelic of the Scotch Highlands are substantially the same. The Emerald Isle was called, in the times of the Picts and Scots, Scotia, or the land of the Scots. In the ninth century these Scots from south of the Irish Sea, moved in vast hordes upon the North land overcoming the Southern Picts and contending with the Northern Picts for supremacy with the ultimate result that the country became Scott-land, with a race of Scottish kings on the throne. With this division of the original Scots there seems to have been a division of the McElroys. A part of them were doubtless among these invaders of Scotland. They remained there for centuries and in the Reformation times became Protestants, and at length persecuted exiles, coming back and settling in North Ireland.

Others of the McElroys remained in Ireland and their descendants are the Catholic McElroys of South Ireland of to-day. Of late many Catholic McElroys are found in America. In Philadelphia and Pittsburgh there are more Catholic McElroys than Protestants.

The Form and Significance of the Name McElroy.

Its most ancient form, given in O'Hart's Pedigrees, is Gillereagh. In a late Scottish work of some research by Frank Adam, Edinburgh, 1896, it is claimed that McElroy is derived from, or was originally McGillivray.

Scotch-Irish McElroys

The impression has prevailed pretty extensively among those bearing the name that McElroy means Son-of-a-king. However flattering to our pride we think this definition cannot be sustained. Roy, the only part of the name that suggests kingship, is not Latin, nor is it French. The whole name is Gaelic or Celtic, and Roy in the Celtic language does not mean king.

Mac or]\Ic means son. A thorough investigation will show that El or II preceded by Mac is but an abbreviated form of I^IacGill. The word Gill or Gilli means servant, disciple, out-door attendant. Its least favorable equivalent is Gilly, as used by Sir Walter Scott and others. It was often used in a religious sense: Gilchrist, servant of Christ; Gilpatrick, servant of St. Patrick; Gillibrede, servant of St. Bridget.

The syllable or syllables following Gill or Gilli describe the kind of servant, or set forth something in his personal appearance or character.

According to O'Hart reagh means gray-haired, and McGillereagh means "son of the gray-haired servant." The name changed in form as generations passed, becoming McGilre, Mcctllroy, McKilroy, Mclloy, McCulroy, ISiC Hilroy and McElroy. It will be noticed that all these differing forms when pronounced rapidly, with the accent on the last syllable, are the same to the ear.

The form Mclloy is widely used at the present time among those who bear the name in Ireland and Scotland.

There are those who claim that "roy" in our name means red and that Mac-Elroy means son of the red servant.

If the Scottish derivation from McGillivray be accepted, what would the name mean? I took the liberty of referring the question to Professor Robinson of Harvard University, one of the few scholars in our country who are versed in the Celtic language and literature.

In reply he says: 'T think it unlikely that the name (McElroy) should be the same as McGillivray * * * *. This name in Gaelic is McGillcbhrath, and means "Son of the servant of judgment."

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We seem to have three definitions to choose from : "Son of the gray-haired servant," "Son of the red servant" and "Son of the servant of judgment." The first of these seems to the writer to have the strongest support.

It seems plain that the McElroys must give up their kingly claims. We are servants. But the honor or dishonor in the case depends altogether on who is our master.

Their Location in Scotland.

The locality in Scotland from which the McElroys came to North Ireland is not certainly known. Dr. W. T. Knott is of the opinion that they lived in the counties of Argyle and Lanark. There are traditions, referred to elsewhere, that they came from the region of Glasgow, which is in the County of Lanark.

The McElroys were not Highlanders in the strict sense of the term. They were of Celtic origin, and their ancestors had no doubt been identified with the Gaelic Highlanders. They never constituted a distinct clan, but were connected with the McGilvrays, if not identical with them, and even the McGilvrays were not a clan, but only a sept or dependency of the Clan McGillivray, and entitled to wear their Tartan.

There was, as generations and centuries passed, a considerable intermingling of Gaels with the Lowlanders. Glasgow was not remote from the border and so it came to pass that our forefathers had become in the times of John Knox dwellers in the Lowlands and subject to those religious influences which transformed them into Bible Christians and Covenanters.

The Highlanders in the mountains had scarcely felt the influence of Presbyterianism, or of the Reformation, and knew almost nothing of the Bible. They were illiterate and fierce and brave Six thousand of them responded to the call of the authorities and descended upon the Lowlands to assist in exterminating the Covenanters. The persecutions ceased with the Revolution of 1688.

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Untold miseries in one form or another had come upon the people of Scotland. Violent death, imprisonment, banishment, not to speak of impoverishment, had

been the lot of many thousands. It was estimated that nine thousand persons had fled the country – a majority of them to North Ireland.

There had been more or less of migration to Ireland in earlier times. The Scottish regiments sent south at the time of the Irish Rebellion in 1641 probably contained some McElroy soldiers. And in the Plantation of Ulster under Cromwell at least one of that name is enrolled among the new settlers. O'Hart refers to a McElroy among Cromwell's colonists who settled in County Down and there acquired considerable wealth.

This brings us to the traditionary accounts in the following pages of our forefathers coming from Scotland "time o' the persecutions" and settling in different parts of Ulster, specially in County Derry and County Down.

The Emigration from Ulster to America.

Less than forty years after the Revolution of 1688, when the persecutions in Scotland ceased, the Scotch dwellers in North Ireland began to migrate to America. There were reasons for the movement. The Scotch colonists and refugees had been a great blessing to Ulster. They had brought with them industry and thrift which resulted in material prosperity. Land increased in productiveness and value, and better dwellings were erected. Landlordism greedily appropriated the gain and raised rents to the highest notch, and the people became grievously discontented.

Another cause for the large migration from Ireland was the repressive measures adopted by the English government toward commerce and agriculture. At first these industries were fostered, and the encouragement given, particularly to the culture of flax, so increased the linen trade that there was danger of Ireland controlling the market. Then there was a change of policy, and by indirect yet effectual means Ireland's trade was hindered and repressed and that of England promoted. A similar course ill regard to agriculture placed Ireland's products under embargo, that English farmers might not suffer by the competition.

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A third cause and a potent one was religious intolerance. These Scotch people in Ireland were attached earnestly and perhaps obstinately to the doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church. They were treated however by the government and by the authorities of the established church as dissenters and dangerous to the state. Marriages solemnized by their ministers were declared invalid and the legitimacy of the children of such marriages was called in question. And all Presbyterians were excluded from civil and military offices of every kind.

It is not strange that our Scotch forefathers, almost en masse, rose up and set their faces toward America. The historian Froude tells us that "during the first half of the eighteenth century, Down, Antrim, Tyrone, Armagh and Derry were emptied of Protestant inhabitants who were of more value to Ireland than California gold-mines." These emigrants entered our country mainly at the ports of Boston, Philadelphia and Charleston.

Dr. Robert Baird in his "History of Religion in America" states that "from 1729 to 1750 about twelve thousand annually came from Ulster to America."

Chamles Cooper McElroy

THE BUCKS COUNTY (PA.) McELROYS

William, of Nokamixon Township

The earliest migration of McElroys from North Ireland to America occurred, according to our information, about the year A. D. 1717. A large family came in that year to Philadelphia and settled a few miles north of that city on the Delaware in Bucks County. We do not know the Christian name of the head of the family, nor precisely where in North Ireland they had lived. It is probable that they came from the southern part of County Down. They were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, but in later years a number of them became identified with the Episcopal Church.

From "Pennsylvania Archives," Vol. II, third series, p. "j^, we learn that William McElroy obtained warrant for certain lands in Nokamixon Township, Bucks County, on the ninth day of August, 1749.

The will of William McElroy, on record at Doylestown, was probated October 31, 1765. His wife was Jean. His three daughters, all married, were Agnes Scott, Sarah Jones and Jean Jones. He had two sons, Alexander and George, who were only eight to ten years old when their father died. At the opening of the Revolutionary war these two young men were connected with a military company in Nokamixon Township, but being under age, were registered as "associators."

Agnes Scott became the mother of seven children, the first of these, William, named for her father, was born September 8, 1747, Her sixth child. Alexander, was bom in 1761, and one younger probably in 1763. From these records I infer that Agnes was married in 1746, and that her birth was about 1720, and that her father, William McElroy, was born in Ireland prior to 1700, and that he may have been 25 to 30 years of age when his father came to Bucks County in 1717.

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Col. Archibald, of Bristol.

From "Pennsylvania Archives," V'ol. XIV, p. 204, we learn that Archibald McElroy was Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fourth Battalion, Bucks County militia, commissioned May 10, 1780. His will, on record at Doylestown, was probated IN March 31, 1806, his death having occurred February 14, 1806. His wife was Sarah. His children were John, Sarah, Archibald, Schuyler, and a daughter Ann, who married Little. His residence, Bristol Borough. Archibald and Schuyler are supposed to have migrated northward, settling at or near Rome, N. Y., but of their history or descendants we have no knowledge. The daughter, Sarah, a beautiful and popular young woman, was the occasion of a fatal duel - in 1798 - between two army officers. In the burial ground of St. James' Church, Bristol, a stone marks the grave of Capt. John Sharp, of the Tenth United States Infantry, the challenger, and near by is the grave of Sarah, who died unmarried.

The oldest son, John, married a Miss Goodman of Philadelphia. His second marriage occurred January 11, 1798, to Ann Cooper, a wealthy Virginia widow,

a half sister of Commodore Richard Dale, of the United States navy. They lived for some years on the old homestead three miles below Bristol, the present site of "The Mary Drexel Home," in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia. The descendants of John McElroy are numerous and widely scattered. Some of them are in business in Philadelphia, but the major part of them reside in the town of Beverly, N. J., just across the Delaware from Bristol. The wife of Col. Archibald McElroy, according to tradition, was Sarah McClelland, and her cousin is said to have been the wife of General Heister Clymer. The maiden name of the Colonel's mother in Ireland is said to have been Susanna Young.

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What relationship existed between William of Nokamixon Township and Archibald of Bristol borough — both of Bucks County? Were they brothers? Probably not. Possibly the latter was a nephew of the former. There was also a David McElroy who, according to the register of Christ Church, Philadelphia, was married March 20, 1801, to Eliza Anderson. An examination of deeds and court records at Doylestown would probably throw light upon the above questions and also give us the Christian name of the original head of the Bucks County McElroys.

John McElroy and his wife Ann Cooper were the parents of eighteen children, including three sets of twins. Only nine of them reached adult age and all of them have passed away. Two or more grandsons bearing the McElroy name are in Beverly, N. J., two or more are in business in Philadelphia, and one, John McElroy, resides at Black Hills. S. D.

Agnes Scott.

A granddaughter, Mrs. Alice McElroy Wright, of California, a sister to John, of South Dakota, has brought me under obligations by her intelligent and full letters relating to family history and traditions. She and husband and entire family of Bucks County McElroys are highly connected, and have a just pride in their family history from Colonial times. They are connected by blood or marriage with the Coopers of the south and with Fenimore Cooper, the novelist ; with the Cutlers of New England, and with the Penns of Pennsylvania. She was born at Beverly, N. J., but has resided for ten years past in California, is a great-granddaughter of Col. Archibald McElroy. Her grandfather, John McElroy, who married a sister of Commodore Richard Dale, was a man of wealth and influence and a member of the State Legislature, residing on his estate in what is now known as Eddington-on-the-Delaware. Her father, Charles Cooper McElroy, was educated for the Episcopal ministry, but was hindered by failure of health from taking orders. At the time of her marriage to Mr. Wright, she was the widow of the distinguished civil engineer Andrew Ellison. Jr.

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Gustavus W. T. Wright was the eldest son of the late Robert Clinton Wright of Baltimore, and grandson of Governor and United States Senator Robert M. Wright of Maryland. Born in Rio Janeiro, Brazil, and brought up in Baltimore,

he returned, in his early manhood, to the former city, where, as coffee merchant and banker, he spent twenty-three years. In 1880 he returned to the United States, residing of late years in California.

Hon. Warren Scott Dungan traces his ancestry back to Rev. Thomas Dungan, a native of England, who settled in Bucks County, A. D. 1682, and who was the first Baptist minister in Pennsylvania ; to Robert Scott of Edinburgh, a member of the Scottish Parliament, whose son John came to Bucks County about 1720, and to William I McElroy, whose daughter Agnes married John Scott, Jr., in Bucks County.

W. S. Dungan, ^ Isabella McFarren* (Dungan), Mary Scott'' (McFarren), Agnes McElroy- (Scott),

WiLLiaM McElroy^.

Mr. Dungan was born in Beaver County, Pa., in 1822. Attended the academy at Frankford Springs. Was a teacher in Pennsylvania, Virginia and the remote south. Became a lawyer. Settled in Iowa, at Chariton, 1856, where he continues to reside. Was five times elected to the Iowa Legislature - three times as senator and twice as member of the house, and in 1893 was chosen Lieutenant-Governor. Was a soldier in the Thirty-fourth Iowa Infantry ; enlisting as a private, elected captain, and returning after three years' service as lieutenant-colonel of his regiment.

Governor Dungan married, in 1859, Aliss Abby Kingman Procter, of A'lassachusetts, who died in 1882. Five daughters are living; a son and a daughter are deceased. A member and ruling elder in the Chariton Presbyterian Church, and a com- missioner, three times, in the General Assembly from Des Moines Presbytery. He is now President of the Scotch-Irish Society of Iowa.

Agnes McElroy Scott.

Mrs. Alice McElroy- Wright

Of the family of William McElroy the only one whose history or descendants are known to us is Agnes, who married John Scott. The father of John Scott came from Edinburgh about 1725 and settled on the Neshaminy, becoming a member of the Bucks County (Pa.) M c Elroys 19 Neshaminy Presbyterian Church, of which Rev. William Tennant was pastor. His three sons, Moses, Matthew and John, were officers in General Washington's army, the first a surgeon, the second captain and the third commissary. Captain Matthew Scott is honored as the ancestor of Mrs. Lucy Webb Hayes, wife of ex-President R. B. Hayes.

John Scott and his wife, Agnes, resided in Northampton County, Pa., some miles north of Easton, and just across the Delaware from Belvidere, N. J. They had seven children, the first born in 1747, and the last in 1763. Their fourth child, Mary or Polly, married (1784) William McFarren. The late Rev. Samuel McFarren, D. D., of Congruity, Pa., was their grandson. Another grandson, Hon. Warren Scott Dungan, of Chariton, is widely and well known as a lawyer, Presbyterian elder and late Lieutenant-Governor of Iowa. The fifth child of John and Agnes Scott was Rev. George McElroy Scott, a pioneer Presbyterian minister, who lived and labored many years in Western Pennsylvania and who also did missionary work in Ohio. Governor Dungan has vivid recollections of this venerable uncle and relates some interesting reminiscences. One of these is worthy to be put upon record. During one of his trips through the Ohio wilderness he spent a night at a settler's cabin,

where he noticed a fine mastiff. He paid little attention to him, did not fondle or try to make friends with him, for he was not an admirer of dogs. Resuming his lone horseback journey next morning he noticed the dog following him. He tried to drive the animal back, but without success. After some hours' travel, when passing through the dense woods, a highwayman sprang to his bridle-bit and, seizing it, demanded his money. Then the dog appeared on the scene and took right hold, biting and shaking the villain until he was glad to get away with his wounds and his life. Soon after this the dog turned homeward and could not be coaxed to go further. This the minister regarded as a "Special Providence."

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John W. Scott, D. D., son of the foregoing, was born in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, in 1800, and died in Washington, D. C., in 1892. He graduated at Washington College in 1823, and from Yale College a year later, and then for fifty years was among the most prominent and successful educators in the country. He was ordained by the Presbytery of Oxford in 1830. His wife was Mary P., daughter of John Neal. He held a professorship in Washington College, Pennsylvania, four years; in Miami University seventeen years, and in Farmer's College, Ohio, four years. He was president of Oxford Female College ten years, and was also on duty for a time in Hanover College, Indiana, and in Monongahela College.

Dr. Scott's daughter, Carrie, married Benjamin Harrison, who became President of the United States. Her venerable father had his home with her during his declining years. There, amid those unique surroundings where Death has seldom made his appearance, father and daughter both met the last summons and passed from earth.

Hon. Warren Scott Dung a