

THE McKEANS OR McKEENS

IN 1902 Cornelius McKean of Perry, Iowa wrote and published a 213-page volume tracing several branches of the McKeens and McKeens to James, John, and William McKean, sons of James McKean of Londonderry, Ireland, and grandsons of William McKean of Argyleshire, Scotland.

John McKean died at Ballimoney in County Antrim before the family departed for America, but his widow Janet came to Nutfield in New Hampshire in 1718 with their three sons John, Robert, and Samuel. John became the progenitor of the McKeens of Nova Scotia ; Robert of the McKeens of Cecil, Maryland, Huntingdon, and Bradford counties, Pennsylvania ; Samuel was the ancestor of the McKeens of Acworth, N.H., and Belfast, Maine.

James McKean made the crossing to America on the same ship with John's widow Janet and her boys. His descendants settled first in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and at Fryeburg and Stoneham, Maine.

Mary McKean, daughter of John McKean who died at Ballimoney, married her cousin John McKeen, and from whom was Joseph McKeen, first president of Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, Judge Levi McKeen, and others.

William McKean, the youngest of the sons of James McKean of Londonderry, Ireland, came to America in 1727 and settled in Chester county, Pennsylvania. Prominent among his grandsons was Thomas McKean, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The ancestor of the McKeens who settled in Baltimore, Maryland, prior to the Revolution, as well as of the McKeens of Strong, Maine, was Thomas McKean, second son of William McKean the emigrant, who as indicated above settled in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

The McKeens of Lebanon, Ohio, and of Terre Haute, Indiana, are descended from William McKeen, brother of Governor Thomas McKean of Pennsylvania and grandson of William McKean the emigrant.

The author, Cornelius McKean, says that James McKean of Londonderry was at the siege of Derry, which, it will be recalled, was relieved by troops despatched by the Prince of Orange a short while before he and his army landed at Carrickfergus to defeat the forces of Catholic James II. He adds that the grandfather of John, Robert, and Hugh McKean, who came to America soon after the close of the Revolutionary War, was also present at the siege of Derry, according to information he received from Charles B. McKean of Hopkinton, Iowa ; he conjectures that this man may also have been a son of William McKean of Argyleshire, Scotland, because of a similarity in personal names given their children by descendants. He states that he believes Robert McKean of County Tyrone, Ireland, the McKeens of Camden, New Jersey, and William McKean of Allentown, New Jersey, are all descended from the same common ancestor.

Cornelius McKean believed that the McKeens were a sept of clan MacDonald. He stated it thus :

“ The family and clan name is MacDonald, which takes its name from Donald, King of the Isles and Argyle. Donald was a son of Reginald and grandson of Somerled King of the

Isles. All descendants of Donald are called MacDonald, or sons of Donald. The progenitor of the MacDonalds of Glencoe was John Fraoch, son of Angus Og MacDonald, Lord of the Isles of Scotland, who fought with Bruce at Bannockburn. The MacDonalds of Glencoe were locally or patronymically known as Mac Ians or MacIains, equivalent to McKean in English. In the Gaelic dialect, *Mac* signifies *son* and *Ian* is *John*. They were therefore called Mac Ians, or sons of John.

John *Sprangach*, the youngest son of Angus Mor MacDonald, Lord of the Isles, and brother of Angus Og, Lord of the Isles, was the ancestor of the Mac Donalds of Ardnamurchan, who are patronymically Mac Ians, same as Glencoe. (*Sprangach* signifies the *bold*). The claymores of the McKeanes gleamed in all of the important battles of Scotland in their day except Culloden. They were in the battle of Inverlochy, 1431, known as the 'first battle of Inverlochy' where Mac Ian of Ardnamurchan and John Dubh MacLean commanded the front of Donald Balloch's army, and the whole being under the command of Ranald Ban. They defeated the royal army commanded by the Earl of Mar and Caithness 'with the loss of but twenty-seven men, against nine hundred and ninety of the enemy'. The McKeanes of Glencoe were with the Marquis of Montrose and took an active part in all of his brilliant victories, including the second battle of Inverlochy, 1646. They were with Dundee at Killiecrankie, and took part in that splendid charge that almost totally destroyed the royal army, under the brave Mackay, one of the ablest generals of that time. Glencoe was also with Prince Charles Edward Stewart and was at the head of the right wing of the Prince's army (the Post of Honor) at the battle of Prentonpans, and defeated the army of General Cope, 'by a night attack and totally routed him in about six minutes'. So says R. R. Mac Ian in his *Costumes of the Clans of Scotland*. Angus Og, Lord of the Isles, was a friend of King Robert Bruce and was with him at the battle of Bannockburn and led the Highlanders and men of the Isles in that famous charge that decided the day in favour of Scotland. 'For this service the MacDonalds received from Bruce, the honor of taking position on the right of the army. Holding this position in the Scottish armies, they have performed prodigies of valour'."

An old manuscript written by Judge Levi McKeen of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., more than two centuries ago contains some family anecdotes that are both curious and important, as they supply historical background for the earlier forebears of the McKeanes :

"The first knowledge we have of the McKeen family is after the murder of Archbishop Sharp, when the Covenanters were brought before the military tribunals and questioned as to their loyalty. The shibboleth upon which life and death depended was, 'Was the killing of Archbishop Sharp murder?' If the examinant was ambitious of a crown of martyrdom he would answer, 'No', when immediate execution was done upon him. At this time William McKeen, who appears to have been an agriculturalist, was brought before ¹Claverhouse, and upon the question being put answered, he 'was nae laayer and cood na tell', but that he understood 'it was un lafoo' deed. This was a new answer and for the present he was dismissed, when he fled to Ireland, where with many others, he founded a Scotch colony in the county of Ulster (*recté* Province of Ulster). At this time the family of David Cargill the martyr emigrated thither. The son (James McKeen) of the foregoing William McKeen was an actor in the defense of Londonderry. He was sent out with a party to forage during the siege, but falling into an ambuscade was overcome, plundered, thrown into a ditch and left for dead, but after some time he recovered and found himself stripped and nothing left but an old hat which the plunderer had thrown away.

This one called ²William ye soldier, had first James, born 1665, great-grandfather to the writer, called *the Justice* ; second John, father to Levi's grandmother ; third Gennette or Annis,

¹ An article on Viscount Dundee, who was John Graham of Claverhouse, is included in the present *Book of McKee*.

² Cornelius McKean corrects this from William to James.

who married Rev. James McGregor, and one or two other sons, named either Robert, Joseph, or William. James ye justice, by his first wife had sixteen children. * * * * It is known that James and John, sons of William ye soldier, left in Ireland one or two brothers—the better opinion is but one, and that was the grandfather of Governor McKeen, and his name was Robert, ¹William, or Joseph. The McKeens originally removed to Ireland under the assurances of the ²London company that they would enjoy their religion freed from taxes and tithes. In this they were deceived. They therefore determined to send delegates to make inquiries into the condition of this country, and try, if possible, to find a place where they could settle as a colony all together in one place. They sent the Rev. James McGregor and another clergyman named Holmes, who came to this country in 1716 or 1717, and as McGregor was a very eloquent preacher and as there was no material difference between this doctrine and those of the Congregationalists of New England, he was most flatteringly received, and wrote back letters encouraging his friends to remove. When James and John closed concerns, from their wealth and influence they became ye leaders of an expedition that sailed September 1718, in five ships, for Boston, where they had a flattering reception from ye Governor and public authorities ”.

THOMAS McKEAN

Thomas McKean was one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence. He was the son of William McKean and Letitia Finney, and of Scot-Irish ancestry, being the grandson of William McKean who emigrated from Ireland to the colonies in 1727. He was born in New London township, Chester County, Pennsylvania, March 19, 1734.

He entered the law offices of a relative David Finney as a law student while yet in his teens, and by industry and brilliant scholarship so applied himself that before he was twenty-one he was admitted as an attorney at law in the Court of Common Pleas for the counties of Newcastle, Kent, and Sussex, as well as in the Supreme Court. Later he was admitted to practice before several other courts, probably on mere application, and after a tour of study in England he was there admitted to Middle Temple, May 9, 1758.

In 1757 he was elected clerk in the House of Assembly, and in 1762 was selected with Caesar Rodney to revise and print the laws sequent to 1752. In October, 1762, he was elected a member of the Assembly from the county of Newcastle, and was annually returned for the next seventeen years. On July 21, 1763, he married Mary Borden, eldest daughter of Col. Joseph Borden of Bordenstown, New Jersey.

Following the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, he was elected a member of the congress that met to consult together concerning it, and then in a loyal and dutiful manner to draw up the necessary petition to represent the serious effects of this piece of oppressive legislation to George III. On June 13, 1812, he wrote to John Adams and mentioned that he was then the last surviving member of the Stamp Act Congress.

On September 5, 1774, he took his seat as Delaware's leading delegate in another general congress of the colonies at Philadelphia, and was in those which followed. He voted in favour of the now famous resolution adopted on July 2, 1776 'that these United Colonies are, and of right, ought to be, free and independent states'. His colleague from Delaware, Read, voted against it, which nullified Delaware's vote. Later, Delaware's third delegate, Rodney, hastened to Philadelphia and voted on July 4th in favour of the resolution, thus securing Delaware's vote.

¹ William is correct.

² This would be in the Plantation in Ulster.—R.W.M.

On July 28, 1777, Thomas McKean was appointed by the Supreme Executive Council as Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, in which office he remained for twenty-two years. The accolades concerning his conduct in this high office are very considerable. On July 10, 1781, he was elected President of Congress, and in that capacity received for Congress the news that Cornwallis had surrendered. The glad tidings reached him near midnight October 23, 1781, and the old German night watchman continued his rounds gleefully calling, "Basht dree o'clock and Cornwallis isht daken!"

In October, 1799, Thomas McKean was elected governor of Pennsylvania on the ticket of the recently born Republican party. He was re-elected in 1802, with an immense majority, and again in 1805. At the end of this third term he retired, and on June 24, 1817, joined his ancestors. His children were :

By his first wife, Mary Borden :

Joseph Borden McKean, 7.28.1764.

Robert McKean, 3.9.1766.

Elizabeth McKean, 8.18.1767 (m. Andrew Pettit).

Letitia McKean, 1.6.1769 (m. George Buchanan).

Mary McKean, 2.18.1771 : 12.27.1781.

Anne McKean, 2.25.1773 (m. Andrew Buchanan).

By his second wife, Sarah Armitage :

Sarah McKean, 7.8.1777 (m. Marquis de Casa Yrujo).

Thomas McKean, 11.20.1779.

Sophia Dorothea McKean, 4.14.1783 : 12.27.1819.

Maria Louisa McKean, 11.28.1785 : 10.21.1788.

The volume from which the foregoing brief excerpts were taken gives the lineage of hundreds of McKeans and McKeens, many of whom adorned the pulpits and benches of the nation they and their forebears helped to found. It contains dozens of photographs of members of the family, some of whom wear the insignia of Sons of the American Revolution with obvious pride.