

**GENEALOGY OF THE MCKINSTRY
FAMILY: WITH A PRELIMINARY
ESSAY ON THE SCOTCH-IRISH
IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649317295

Genealogy of the McKinstry family: with a preliminary essay on the Scotch-Irish immigration to America by William Willis

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM WILLIS

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GENEALOGY
OF THE
McKINSTRY FAMILY,

WITH
A PRELIMINARY ESSAY

OF THE
Scotch-Irish Immigrations to America.

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OF PORTLAND, ME.

BOSTON:
HENRY W. DUTTON & SON, PRINTERS,
TRANSCRIPT BUILDING.
1858.

218. a. 50.



THE MCKINSTRY FAMILY.

The MCKINSTREYS originated in Scotland. The first of the name who emigrated to Ireland was Rodger, who had lived in the neighborhood of Edinburgh, and emigrated thence to the north of Ireland about the year 1669. I propose, as a preliminary to the history of this family, to give a brief account of the Scotch emigration to Ireland, and from that country to America previous to our Revolution.

During the Irish rebellions in the reign of Elizabeth, the Province of Ulster, embracing the northern counties of Ireland, was greatly depopulated, and it became a favorite project with her successor, James I., to repeople those counties with a protestant population, the better to preserve order, and introduce a higher state of cultivation in that portion of his dominions. To promote this object, liberal offers of land were made, and other inducements held out in England and Scotland, for persons to occupy this wide and vacant territory. The project was eagerly embraced; companies and colonies were formed, and individuals without organization were tempted to partake of the advantageous offers of government. A London company, among the first to enter upon this new acquisition, established itself at Derry, and gave such a character to the place as to cause it to be afterwards and forever known as the renowned city of Londonderry.

The first emigration from Scotland was chiefly from the Highlands, where agricultural resources were scanty and often wholly cut off, and where the fruits of labor were gathered from a stern soil. Sir Hugh Montgomery, the sixth Laird of Braidstone, a friend and follower of King James, was among the earliest to obtain possession of forfeited land in the county of Down, and laid his rough hand upon many broad acres. The coast of Scotland is within twenty miles of the county of Antrim in Ireland, and across this frith or strait flowed from the northeast a population distinguished for thrift, industry and endurance, which has given a peculiar and elevated character to that portion of the emerald island. It is said that the clan McDonald contributed largely to this emigration, and was among the first of the Scottish nation to plant upon its shores. They scattered chiefly in the counties of Down, Londonderry and Antrim, and

greatly assisted to build up Newry, Bangor, Derry and Belfast, the principal cities of those counties.

This was the first protestant population that was introduced into Ireland, the Presbyterians of Scotland furnishing the largest element; and they have maintained their ascendancy to the present day, against the persevering efforts of the Episcopalians on the one hand, and of the Romanists, bigoted and numerous, by whom they were surrounded, on the other. The first Presbyterian church established in Ireland was in Ballycarry, in the county of Antrim, in 1613.

The Clan Alpine, otherwise called the McGregors, in the latter part of the 17th century, had made themselves very obnoxious to government and the neighboring clans by a wild and reckless course of life. Argyle, the chief of the Campbells, their inveterate enemy, who was high in court favor, procured a decree of extermination against them, extending even to the obliteration of their name and place of residence. Heavy penalties were proclaimed against all who bore the badge of the clan. To avoid this withering persecution, many sought refuge in the neighboring islands; many changed their names and fled to remote parts of their own country or to other countries. Descendants from this clan are now found in the United States and elsewhere, under the names of Grier, Greer, Gregor, Gregory, &c., the Mac being dropped. Thus we shall probably find that a distinguished Judge of the Supreme Court of the U. States, residing in Pennsylvania, Judge Grier, derives his origin from the same wild tribe, which, under the guidance of Robroy McGregor, was the terror of the high and low lands of his native soil. Nor was the change of name confined to that clan; for we are assured that the Mackinnons, from the isle of Skye, are now McKenna, McKean, McCannon; that McNish has become McNiece, Meness, Munniss, and Moniss; and Graham is Graeme, Grimes, Groom, &c.

Although the rebellions of 1715 and 1745, against the House of Hanover, made large additions to the Scotch population in the north of Ireland, yet by far the largest accessions to this colonization were occasioned by religious persecutions in the time of the latter Stuarts. That fated race, blind to the dictates of justice and humanity, and devoted with sullen bigotry to their peculiar notions in religion and politics, pursued a system of measures best calculated to wean from their support subjects the most devoted to their cause. The Scottish race was bound to the Stuarts by a national prejudice and a sincere affection. But they were imbued with a religious enthusiasm, inspired by Knox their great apostle, which ruled their consciences, and rendered the sanctions of a higher law superior to their patriotism, or their attachment to their native sovereigns. Rather, they believed that true patriotism consisted in maintaining the religion transmitted by their fathers.

When, therefore, the Charleses and James II. endeavored to introduce

prelacy among them, and to force it upon their consciences by arbitrary laws and the iron hoofs of the dragoons of Claverhouse, very many of these hardy, persistent and enduring Presbyterians, having suffered to the bitter end of cruelty and oppression, abandoned the land of their birth, the home of their fondest affections, and sought an asylum among their countrymen in the secure retreats of Ulster, or fled across the ocean. They carried their household gods with them; and their religious peculiarities became more dear in their land of exile, for the dangers and sorrows through which they had borne them.

Presbyterianism was transported from Geneva to Scotland by John Knox, who composed his first Book of Discipline, containing the substance of his intended policy, in 1561. In 1566, a general assembly approved the Discipline; and all church affairs, after that time, were managed by Presbyteries and General Assemblies. They did not at first formally deprive the bishops, who had ecclesiastical jurisdiction, of their power, but they went on gradually and steadily doing it, as they acquired confidence and strength. In 1574, they voted bishops to be only pastors of one parish; in 1577, they decreed that bishops should be called by their own names without title; and the next year they declared the name of bishop to be a nuisance. In 1580, they pronounced with one voice, in the General Assembly, that diocesan episcopacy was unscriptural and unlawful. The same year, King James and his family, with the whole Scotch nation, subscribed a confession of faith, embracing the "solemn league and covenant," obliging them to maintain the protestant doctrine and presbyterian government. Thus, in the space of twenty years, grew up this formal, extensive and powerful institution, twining itself over the Scottish mind with stern and inflexible bands, which death only could sunder; and for which, home, country, life—all things beside—were freely given up.

James had hardly become secure and easy on his English throne when he began his attack upon the religious system of his early life, and of his native country, and his successors followed it up with a pertinacity worthy of a better cause. The attempts to establish the church of England over Scotland, and destroy the religious system so universally established and so dearly cherished by that devoted people, was pursued by the Charleses and James the 2d, by persecutions as mean, as cruel, and savage, as any which have disgraced the annals of religious bigotry and crime. And they did not cease until they had greatly depopulated Scotland, and were stripped of their power by the happy revolution under William and Mary, which restored repose to a distracted and long suffering people.

Scotland, a country no larger than Maine, with a population at the close of the seventeenth century of a million, and in 1800 not so much as the present population of Massachusetts and Maine; with agricultural and other resources by no means equal to ours—of which a writer in a recent number of the *Edinburgh Review*, on the Highlands, says, "at the end of

the 17th century the chief social feature of the Highlands was famine, and another was emigration." Yet this country has contributed largely, by emigration, to furnish numerous and prominent settlers for many other lands; to the nation with which she is connected, profound statesmen, brilliant writers, and men the most renowned in every department of scientific and philosophical research.

This is the race, composed of various tribes flowing from different parts of Scotland, which furnished the materials of the Scotch-Irish immigration to this country. By their industry, frugality and skill, they had made the deserted region into which they had moved a comparatively rich and flourishing country. They had improved agriculture and introduced manufactures, and by the excellence and high reputation of their productions had attracted trade and commerce to their markets, so as to excite the jealousy of government in the reigns of Anne and the first George, notwithstanding that by their efforts and example the prosperity of the whole island had been promoted. The patronizing government began to recognize them, in the shape of taxes and embarrassing regulations upon their industry and trade. The same jealousy controlled that government afterwards, in regard to the American Colonies, by which the commerce and enterprise of their subjects on this side of the ocean, were, in like manner, hampered and restricted, so that they were hardly permitted to manufacture articles of the most common necessity, but were driven to import them from the mother country, as glass, nails, hats, cloths, &c.

These restrictions occasioned general distress, not only in the north of Ireland, but throughout the whole island. To this, Douglass (p. 368) says, "was added an extravagant advance in rents by landlords, whose long leases were now expired." The energetic and self-willed population of the north of Ireland, animated by the same spirit which subsequently moved the American mind, determined no longer to endure these oppressive measures; and they sought by another change to find a freer verge for the exercise of their industry and skill, and for the enjoyment of their religion.

One of their spiritual leaders, the Rev. Mr. McGregor, in a sermon which he preached on the eve of the departure from Ireland, assigned the following reasons for their removal to America: 1, to avoid oppressive and cruel bondage; 2, to shun persecution; 3, to withdraw from the communion of idolaters; 4, to have an opportunity of worshipping God according to the dictates of conscience and his inspired word. He looked at it chiefly from a religious point of view; others, from a material and commercial stand point. It was undoubtedly suggested and promoted by a variety of motives gradually operating upon the mass of the population, which brought them to the determination, solemn and painful, to sunder the ties which had bound them firmly to their adopted country, and impelled them to seek new and doubtful homes in a wild, unexplored, and far-distant land.

The first immigration of these people to this country was to the Middle and Southern Colonies. As early as 1684 a settlement was formed in New Jersey, and in 1690 small groups were found in the Carolinas, Maryland and Pennsylvania. But it was not until the reigns of Anne and George I. that large numbers, driven by oppressive measures of government and disastrous seasons, were induced to seek, even in the wilderness, a better home than their old settled region could give them. Gordon says, "Scarcity of corn, generally prevalent from the discouragement of industry, amounted in 1728 and the following year almost to a famine, especially in Ulster. Emigrations to America, which have since increased, drew above 3000 people annually from Ulster alone." Dr. Boulter, afterwards Archbishop of Armagh, who labored strenuously in 1728 to divert the horrors of famine in Ireland, wrote to the English ministry, March 7, 1728, that there were seven ships then lying at Belfast that "are carrying off about 1000 passengers; most of them can neither get victuals nor work at home." He also says, "3100 men, women and children went from Ireland to America in 1727, and 4200 in three years, all protestants." The principal seats of these emigrations were Pennsylvania and the Middle States. New England was found not so favorable to their farming and other interests. Douglass, who wrote at Boston in 1750, says, "at first they chose New England, but being brought up to husbandry, &c., New England did not answer so well as the Colonies southward; at present they generally resort to Pennsylvania." By Proud's history of Pennsylvania, we find that in 1729 near 6000 arrived in that Colony; and before the middle of the century nearly 12,000 arrived annually for several years. These were protestants and generally Presbyterians; few or no Catholics came, until some time after the Revolution.

In the summer of 1718, the first organized company of this class of immigrants, of which we have any knowledge, left the shores of Ireland in five vessels, containing 120 families, for the new world, and arrived safely in Boston, August 4, 1718. Here all was new, the wilderness and the world before them. Imagine this little colony, strangers in a strange land, seeking new homes and not knowing whither to turn. There they lie at the little wharf at the foot of State Street in the town of Boston, which then contained about 12,000 inhabitants, taking counsel where to go, and how to dispose of themselves and their little ones, to begin the world anew. With their wonted energy, they were soon astir. One brigantine, with a company of twenty families, sought their fortunes at the eastward, among whom were Armstrong, Means, McKean, Gregg;—they spent a hard and long winter in Portland harbor, and then fled westward, most of them, to join their companions in founding their new Londonderry. Another portion went to Andover and its neighborhood, led on by their pastor McGregor; another to Pelham, Mass., under the lead of the Rev. Mr. Abercrombie; another remained in Boston, under their