

Chapter 2

THE McCLELLAN FAMILY

Scotch-Irish immigrants have long had fame in American history for being the ones at the forefront of settlement, always reaching beyond the limits of civilization, challenging all whom stood in their way. As a group they are considered impulsive and quick to anger; firm in their Calvinistic beliefs of the rights of the individual, and fearful of government control. By 1800, however, the Scotch-Irish immigrants, like other groups before and after them, intermarried with other immigrant groups to the extent that as an ethnic group they ceased to exist. The most famous example of this group remains Andrew Jackson of North Carolina and Tennessee fame.

As best can be determined the McClellans were Lowland Scots, from the border areas between Scotland and England. Many of the Scotch-Irish's most noted characteristics, many believe, can be traced to the volatile environment of the border country homeland, where war was a constant given, where it was take or be taken and where a man took care of his own or he and his died.

In the early part of the seventeenth century, England decided to push the resident Catholic Irish out of the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland and plant new Protestant settlers, mostly from Scotland, but some from England and even other countries. Why the McClellans left Scotland for Ulster is unknown, whether banished for crime or rebellion, whether forced off their land or whether they migrated willingly for better opportunities. All this is unknown. Throughout the early 1600s, as American colonies were struggling to plant themselves, the Scots were establishing themselves in Northern Ireland. In the end, however, Ulster became less a place of potential and more a place of oppression. Presbyterians, the Scots were disdained by their Anglican English rulers. The land laws made it harder and harder to make a living, and the weather contributed with black frosts and droughts.

The Scotch-Irish fled to the Americas in distinct waves, an immigration that waxed and then waned. One of the largest immigration waves was in 1718 and established a significant number of Scotch-Irish in the New Jersey Colony. In about 1740 William McClellan I joined his fellow countrymen in New Jersey.[\[175\]](#) It would appear that he brought a family with him since, when his first wife died, he returned to Ireland to find a new wife, Sarah Wilson.

The very fact that he was able to return to Ireland to bring back a new wife indicates a level of prosperity unknown to most of his fellow Scotch-Irish immigrants. By his first wife William I had at least three children, William II, born about 1748, Martha and Mary. By his second wife he had a son, Robert, born in New Jersey.[\[176\]](#)

The McClellans did not remain in New Jersey, moving instead to Loudoun County in northern Virginia. Since most young males of the time married in their early twenties, William II probably married his wife, Hannah Beavers, somewhere around 1770, maybe in Loudoun County. Hannah Beavers was the daughter of William and Abigail Beavers.[\[177\]](#) William II's sister, Mary, also married into the Beavers family. Later, his half brother, Robert, would marry Hannah's sister, Mary. In 1775 William McClellan I died in Loudoun County.

The Revolutionary War broke out in 1776, the year after the death of William I. During the war William II served as a captain of cavalry with the Loudoun County Volunteers. A year after the Revolutionary War ended in 1781 and before 1787, William II, who was in his thirties by then, moved his family to Rockingham County, North Carolina. His young half-brother, Robert, came with them.

Rockingham County is located on the Virginia-North Carolina border and shares part of its north boundary with Pittsylvania County, Virginia, home of John Smith, Jr. and the Pocket Plantation. During their move southward, the McClellans presumably traveled the Fall Line Road from Loudoun County, Virginia to Rockingham County, North Carolina.

Here William II lived out his life. He died, as it is noted in the 1762 family Bible, on December 9, 1800. Almost three years later, on October 12, 1803, Hannah joined her husband in death. William II and Hannah had at least five children, William III, George, John D., Abigail, and Mary "Molly."

William III, the oldest, married Caroline Matilda Joyce in 1805, most likely in Loudoun

County, Virginia. It was not of unheard for either bride or groom to go back to a previous home county to marry. This is perhaps what William III did.[\[178\]](#) Later William McClellan III and his brothers, George and John D. McClellan migrated to Tennessee. Nothing is known of the two daughters.

The early adulthood of the third son, John D. McClellan, is obscure. It is known that he first married about 1802 when he was about 22 years old. By his first wife, whose name is unknown, he had two children, William Beavers McClellan, born September 8, 1804, and Martha F. McClellan, born about 1805.[\[179\]](#) Descendants of William Beavers McClellan say that he was born in Rockingham County, North Carolina, so it can be said that in the early years of the nineteenth century John and his young family were probably living in the Rockingham County area. Shortly after the birth of her second child, John's wife died and he remarried in Rockingham County, January 15, 1806, to Catherine Todd,

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by whom he eventually had seven children.[\[180\]](#) It appears that the young McClellan family moved to Tennessee by 1807 when Albert, the first child of John's second marriage, was born.

There is a record of a John McClellan who was surveyor of the Fourth Survey District of Tennessee in 1808, which covered the counties of Anderson, Bledsoe, Campbell, Knox, Overton, Rhea, and Roane. Some of these are east Tennessee counties, like Knox, while others, like Overton, are middle Tennessee counties that are close to White County. There is no way to determine if this is the correct John McClellan, since there is some evidence to indicate that there was more than one John McClellan in the area.

Since most Tennessee census records for 1800 and 1810 are missing, tax records and land records are the best way to trace an individual's movement in early Tennessee. In these records, there is good evidence that in 1808 John D. McClellan was in the central Tennessee county of Williamson, which was formed in 1799 from Nashville's Davidson County. Williamson County, in 1799, encompassed present day Williamson, Maury, and Giles counties. On January 18, 1808, in Williamson County, Samuel McKnight and John McClellan paid \$306 for a tract of land on Arrington's Creek on the waters of the Harpeth River.[\[181\]](#) This land record, in and of itself, would not be proof that this John was John D. McClellan. Another land record, however, also in Williamson County, but some four years earlier, notes that an indenture was made on December 19, 1803 by Samuel Buchanan and Robert

McClellan, “latter of Davidson County, Tennessee,” to pay \$550 for a tract of land also on Arrington’s Creek on the waters of Harpeth River. The documents were recorded on June 6, 1804.[\[182\]](#) Robert McClellan was John D. McClellan’s half uncle, and that fact combined with the land records showing that the two McClellans lived near one another, is good evidence of John D. McClellan’s location in 1808. It is likely, therefore, that Robert McClellan settled for a while in the Nashville area in Davidson County, and later in 1804 moved to Williamson County. In 1808, his nephew John D. McClellan joined him in Williamson County.

During the War of 1812, there were three John McClellans who served from Tennessee, [\[183\]](#) but none of the three appears to be John D. McClellan as the three served from east Tennessee units. Since John D. McClellan would have been about thirty-three at the outbreak of war, it is entirely conceivable that he did not serve in the military during the War of 1812. In 1816 there is a John McClellan shown on the tax records for Maury County. This is probably John D. McClellan since Maury County

was formed out of Williamson County in 1807. John may have lived in Maury County then or simply owned land there.

While records are sketchy, there seems adequate evidence that John D. McClellan was definitely in the Williamson and Maury counties area from 1808 to 1816. In 1820 John McClellan was on the federal census for Williamson County, Tennessee. John was listed with his large family, consisting of eight males, ranging in age from under 10 to himself, and three females, two girls and his second wife, Catherine. John had eight slaves, two adult men, one young man, age fourteen to twenty-six, one boy, two girls and an adult woman. Four members of the household were engaged in agriculture. Also located in the county in 1820 were John’s half uncle, Robert McClellan, and John’s older brother, George McClellan.

Young William B. McClellan, eldest child of John D. McClellan, thus came to Tennessee as a young child of about four and grew up in middle Tennessee with his siblings, probably in Williamson County. How William met his future wife, Juliet Lewis Smith is unknown, although Giles County, where Rhoda and her youngest children were living in 1820 is just to the south of Williamson and Maury counties, having been formed out of Maury County in 1809.

One possible clue to how William and Juliet met may lie in the 1820 census of Williamson County. A Guy Smith aged 45 or above was listed with his two sons and his wife several pages before John McClellan and his family. This may be Bird Bowker Smith's younger brother who was born in about 1769. If this is the case, it is likely that Rhoda and her children visited the Guy Smith family, and on one such visit William McClellan might have met Juliet Smith. In any event, and by whatever means, the young couple met and were married in the early 1820s. The couple may have married in Giles County, but perhaps since the courthouse there was burned during the Civil War, no marriage record has been found.

[175] William McClellan I may have migrated from Antrim County in Northern Ireland. The McClellan families seem to have all originated from Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, which was about seventy-five miles across the Irish Sea. Letter from Thomas R. McClellan of Alexandria, VA to Hollis McClellan of Liberty, TX dated April 10, 1985.

[176] Robert McClellan is shown on the 1850 Tennessee census as being born in New Jersey.

[177] *American Genealogist*, v. 47, p. 209, "Found listed William Beavers and Thomas Beavers (d. 1770 in Loudoun Co., VA; William died in Hampshire Co., VA (?).)"

[178] All information on the ancestors of John D. McClellan is from Thomas R. McClellan of Alexandria, Virginia (1994).

[179] It is possible that William and his sister Martha were twins as on later census records they are the same age, but since there is no family tradition about twins, it is more probable that the two were simply very close in age.

[180] The slight blurring of the marriage record caused some to think that the record said "1803" or some other earlier date, but the author personally examined the record as well as had a search done by the North Carolina Archives and Records Section and both agree that the date is "1806."

[181] Murray, Joyce Martin. *Williamson County, Tennessee Deed Abstracts, 1799–1811, Abstracts of Deed Books, Volume A, No. I, Volume A-2 and Volume B*. Dallas: Henington Publishing Co., 1991, p. 113.

[182] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[183] M-602 (Roll 136) *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers*. Federal Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.