

Chapter 4

THE McCLELLANS OF MADISON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

Unlike the Smiths, the McClellan families remained in Madison County. The McClellans would find the four decades following the establishment of the county in 1822 to be prosperous ones, although more prosperous for some than others. Settlement and the marks of civilization came quickly to Madison County. The significance of education was noted with the establishment of the Jackson Academy in 1824. This was the year before Abram Smith went on the Santa Fe Expedition. Despite a “disastrous drought” in 1827, the demand for cotton caused the citizens to press forward with plans for improvement. That hope was reinforced when Andrew Jackson was elected President of the United States in 1818. The citizens of the western states now felt that their interests would be represented. By the year that Rhoda Ingles Smith died (1829), there was a stagecoach running three times a week between Memphis and Jackson, the county seat of Madison. Two years later the Memphis Railroad was chartered.

In 1830, eight years after its creation, there were three McClellan families living in the county, the family of John D. McClellan and two of his sons, William B. and Samuel. His eldest daughter, Martha, and her husband, Benjamin Hayley, also lived in the county. Within a few years, two more of John’s sons, James D. and Albert G.,[\[223\]](#) married, and soon there was a large network of families and their children.

It appears that, before her death, Rhoda Ingles Smith had dispersed her Madison land among her children, since in 1826, three years before she died, her daughter, Juliet, and her husband, William B. McClellan, had sold 34 1/6 acres of land to Sugar McLemore. The land was described as a “parcel of land being the one twelfth of an undivided warrant of land it being a part of five hundred acres Granted

to Bird Smith by No. 17204. Situated lying and being in the aforesaid County (Madison) and State in the Sixth (?) Surveyor's District." [224]

In 1828 John D. McClellan deeded 156 1/8 acres of land near Turkey Creek in north central Madison County to his son William B. McClellan in "natural love and affection." [225] By this time the young family had three children. True to Scotch-Irish naming patterns, John J., as eldest son, was named for his paternal grandfather. The second child, Rhoda Jane, the eldest daughter, was named for

her maternal grandmother living in the same county. The third child was second daughter, Martha or Mattie.

In 1837 there was a financial panic when New York banks stopped making payments in specie, followed by banks in Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston. Some 618 banks failed in 1837. The panic was most felt in the Southern and Western states due to substantial unemployment, [226] but what effect, if any on the Madison County McClellans is unknown.

Around 1840 the patriarch, John D. McClellan, who was about 60, died, apparently without a will. The inventory and sale of the estate were reported to the court in Madison County on October 9, 1840. [227] Included in the estate were 10 slaves ranging in age from 51 to five and including Philip [228] and Sally, both in their fifties. Items sold consisted of household goods, such as a bureau, 21 chairs, three bedsteads, a folding table, a clock, a cherry table, [229] two chests and a press (probably a linen press where linens were stored). Other estate items were farming tools, as well as a "square and compass," probably surveying equipment. William B. McClellan bought a sorrel horse from the estate, one of the seven horses offered for sale. Other livestock included sheep, a herd of 21 cattle and some 23 swine. Some 400 pounds of bacon and 40 bushels of wheat [230] were also put up for sale. Miscellaneous items like a man's saddle, a woman's sidesaddle and three "rife guns" were also sold. Various family members, as well as others, bought the items. Land owned by the deceased was not sold at these estate sales, but divided among the heirs when the estate was settled.

On December 21, 1842, an Administrator's Settlement was filed with the Madison County court. [231] It noted that there had been \$530 "cash on hand" and from the sale of the estate it appears that

\$6,134.35 was realized. In the ensuing couple of months the administrator of the estate had collected \$8,297.41 1/2, which was from money that John D. McClellan had lent out, some to sons and other family members. This would have made the total value of the estate to be almost \$15,000. The estate had paid out \$2,786.57.

In all likelihood the widow, Catherine McClellan, had taken out her widow's share before the sale of the estate. This should have included most of the household goods and other items necessary for her maintenance, which might have included a horse and food items. In situations like this, upon the

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death of the male head, the household was broken up and the widow, taking her portion of the estate, went to live with one of her children. It appears that Catherine went to live with her son, Albert G. McClellan, since she was living in his household in 1850.[\[232\]](#) If there had been a will, it is possible that a widow might live on the estate or a portion thereof until her death when the land would be divided among the heirs. In that case, a son might have use of the land and, in return, give a portion of the profits to his mother. This would have provided a more independent lifestyle for the widow.

In March of the following year, 1843, the widow Catherine McClellan and John's five oldest children, William B., Albert G., Samuel, James D. and Martha McClellan Hayley appeared in court to state that the deceased John D. McClellan had given several tracts of land, from 112 acres to 231 acres, and averaging in value about \$350 to his younger children, namely John Q. A., Elizabeth McClellan Withers and Bennett T., but no deeds had been given before John D. McClellan died. The widow and older children obligated themselves to be sure that land was given to the other children.[\[233\]](#) The youngest child, Robert McClellan, was not mentioned, probably because he was only 10 or 11 years old at the time.

It is obvious from the legal documents that, as was usual in those days, John D. McClellan had given land and personal property (perhaps slaves) to each of his nine children. If he gave each of the nine approximately 200 acres that would have meant that John D. McClellan had at some point owned 1,800 acres of land, a substantial amount. John D. McClellan, without a doubt, would have been considered wealthy by his peers.

As a means of comparison, 13 years later, in 1853, a Madison County man "made forty-three

bales of cotton with nine hands, showing a profit at the end of the year of \$421.35.” [\[234\]](#) To raise a family of nine children, to educate them, to endow them with land and personal property, and still have a final estate of several thousand dollars would be a fine achievement at any time.

John McClellan could eventually be counted as grandfather to about 52 children. Considering this, it is not difficult to understand how quickly population grew at this time.

The two decades (1840–1860) following the death of John D. McClellan were prosperous years for Madison County. It was the height of the ante-bellum era and Madison County was well suited to profit from “King Cotton.” Not only was the soil of Madison County excellent for growing cotton, but the proximity of the county to the Memphis and the Mississippi River facilitated the transportation of cotton to market. Steamboats, which began their commercial success in 1807, were

used to transport cotton and passengers on the various rivers, especially the Mississippi. By the outbreak of the Civil War, Memphis was a center for railway transportation.[\[235\]](#)

During early decades of the century as the North began to build up its industry, increased opposition to slavery was seen. The more agrarian South had resisted laws such as tariffs that aided industrialization, sometimes to the detriment of the South. Meanwhile, the invention of the cotton gin in the fading years of the eighteenth century had ingrained the institution of slavery. With the decline of tobacco it seemed that slavery could, at the very least, be gradually phased out of existence. Paradoxically, the increase in industrialization in England and the northern United States and subsequent increased demand for cotton to fuel the new textile mills had, in essence, sealed the future of slavery.

Growing cotton, like tobacco, required manpower and, at that time, that meant slaves. The result was a large number of slaves in Madison County. While Madison County had a high proportion of slaves due to cotton raising, non-slave owning farmers still outnumbered those owning slaves and those who owned a few slaves still outnumbered those having a large number of slaves.[\[236\]](#) Slave ownership is an indication, nevertheless, of the owner’s wealth since slaves were extremely expensive as they were in high demand with farmers and planters wanting to grow cotton.

In the ensuing years the McClellan families had multiplied, and some of them grew more prosperous. In 1830 the William B. McClellan household included the parents, three girls, one boy and no slaves. The household was the only McClellan household that did not have slaves. This could have been due to a lack of prosperity or because William was spending most of his time as a merchant, his later occupation. Whatever the situation, William's household on the 1830 census listed two people (probably William and his only son) as involved in agriculture.

William B. McClellan's brother-in-law, Benjamin Hayley, husband of Martha, owned seven slaves, with seven people involved in agriculture, a total that probably included himself and a son or two, since there were only three male slaves of an age for agriculture work.

Of William B. McClellan's half-brothers, James D. McClellan, owned nine slaves, including three males who could work the fields. Albert McClellan owned the most slaves, 11, but only one person in the household was involved in agriculture. John Q. A. McClellan had three slaves, including one male with two household members in agriculture. This meant that John Q. A. presumably worked in agriculture as well. Bennett McClellan had two slaves, including one male who, with Bennett, made up the two involved in agriculture. William's stepmother, Catherine, owned nine slaves and had the most in agriculture, nine.

During their lifetimes the children of John D. McClellan continued their father's legacy, with two of them establishing significant estates, far over shadowing their father. William B. McClellan's sister, Martha, and her husband continued to live in Madison County until Martha's death about 1851 in her late forties. By 1860 Benjamin Hayley had moved to Prairie County, which is located in central Arkansas. Martha and Benjamin had eight children, six boys and two girls. The two oldest boys

boys remained in Madison County. While one was a farmer the other boy became a grocery merchant and later a cotton buyer. The eldest daughter's husband was also a merchant. The third boy, named for his McClellan grandfather, was a young married father when he was killed in the Civil War. The younger members of the Hayley family seemed to all be in Arkansas where one was a dry goods merchant and another was sheriff of the county, later becoming a merchant. Two of the older brothers married sisters from the Tomlin family of Madison County, not an uncommon occurrence. Another McClellan grandchild also married into this family.

James D. McClellan, the oldest son of John D. McClellan's second marriage, was an attorney and a member of the Methodist Church. He lived in the town of Jackson since he served as county registrar from 1836 to 1840 and as county clerk from 1840 to 1848,[\[237\]](#) three years before his death in 1852 at the age of 46. James' law partner was John L. H. Tomlin, a member of the family into which two of James' half-nephews and one niece married. James and his wife Isabella[\[238\]](#) were childless and in James' will he gave the entire estate to his wife, except for several small bequests, and one of \$1,000 to his mother, Catherine McClellan. "The will was made with the express understanding and agreement with his wife that at her death she bequeath half of the whole estate to the brother and sisters of the testator." [\[239\]](#) Since his estate was large and valued at more than \$76,000, the last was to be an important point when Isabella died in 1857, leaving the majority of the estate to members of her family. The issue, not surprisingly, landed in court and the McClellan heirs prevailed with each McClellan heir receiving \$5,056.94.[\[240\]](#)

The second son of the second marriage, Albert, was an exceptionally successful planter in Madison County. In 1833 he married Harriet Eliza Randolph of Pitt County, North Carolina. They eventually had two children, a boy and a girl. In 1850 Albert had \$6500 in personal property [\[241\]](#) that probably reflects the 26 slaves he owned. That is an unusually large number of slaves, and it is likely that he had land on which to work the slaves and produce cotton, the crop bringing so much wealth to Madison County. In any event, 10 years later, in 1860, he was shown as having \$62,000 in real estate and \$81,000 in personal property.[\[242\]](#) Again, the personal property should have indicated the slaves that

Albert had; in this case by 1860 he owned 97 slaves. Only the tiniest number of slave holders fell in this category in any part of the slave holding states. Logically, considering the number of slaves, he now had an overseer, William E. Rowlette.

Despite his financial success, tragedy was only a few years away. In February 1864, during the Civil War, Albert's and Eliza's only son, James, 28 and a Confederate prisoner of war, died in the Union prison at Rock Island, Illinois. Less than two years later, Albert died at age 57. He left his estate to his wife Eliza and his only remaining child, Mary E. "Polly" McClellan Merrill. Who Polly's husband was is unknown, although a John M. Merrill served in Company G, 6th Confederate Regiment with other McClellan relations, John M. Withers, R. Hicks and J. N. McClellan(d).[\[243\]](#) Apparently Polly's husband died, as she later married Willis Williford Williams some 15 years her senior. Unfortunately, less than three years after her father's death, Polly was dead at the age of 29, with no known children. In less than 10 years, the family of five, which had included three generations, counting grandmother Catherine McClellan who lived with the family, had lost four of its members, leaving Eliza McClellan, widow of Albert, the sole survivor. There are no known descendants of Albert's family.

After the Civil War Eliza McClellan was still wealthy since she had \$20,000 in real estate and \$3,000 in personal property.[\[244\]](#) When she died some 15 years later, part of her estate was left to some of the McClellan grandchildren in Madison County, namely the Samuel McClellan farm of 355 acres in northwest Madison County.[\[245\]](#)

The third son of the second marriage, Samuel C. McClellan, was also a farmer/planter. He married a woman with an unusual name, Balzora Vann[\[246\]](#) in 1829, the year his father, John D., died. Samuel and Balzora had five daughters, one of whom died at age eight in 1843. The next year Samuel died at age 34 leaving a widow and four young children. Balzora later married George C. Wade.[\[247\]](#) The two oldest daughters married Hicks brothers, the sons of George Hicks.

George B. Hicks, husband of Samuel McClellan's second daughter, Eliza, had taught school in Madison County. Later he moved his family to Trenton in Gibson County just north of Madison. He built and operated the Hicks House hotel in Trenton, served as mayor of Trenton and as a representative in the State Legislature in 1883. He was considered "quite wealthy" and had "accumulated a very handsome competency for his declining years." [\[248\]](#)

The fourth son of the second marriage was John Q. A. McClellan.[\[249\]](#) John and his wife, Charlotte Louise,[\[250\]](#) had one of the larger families of this generation, at least eight children. The couple, however, suffered the death of at least three of their children, two in infancy and a daughter who died at age 19 from scarlet fever.[\[251\]](#)

By 1860 John Q. A. McClellan, who was in his forties, had real estate worth of \$75,000 and \$12,000 in personal property.[\[252\]](#) This marks John as a financial success. The lower figure for personal property is because John owned only four slaves. The effect of the Civil War on John's finances is readily apparent in the 1870 census record figures of \$5,000 in real estate and only \$1,000 in personal property.[\[253\]](#)

John Q. A. McClellan was engaged in farming for his entire life. He died only eight years short of the next century. Robert W. McClellan, one of John's two surviving sons, took over farming from his father. His other son, John, who appears to have been a participant in the Civil War, may have been a minister.

The only daughter of John D. McClellan's second marriage to Catherine Todd was Elizabeth Susan McClellan, who married Radford Withers in Madison County. The Withers had the largest family of her generation, thirteen children, most of them daughters. The oldest child, Lydia C. Withers, married Ransom Hicks, another member of the Hicks family that intermarried with several McClellans in Madison County.

In 1860, nine years before his death and one year before the outbreak of the Civil War, Radford Withers had \$6,400 in real estate and \$22,500 in personal property,[\[254\]](#) a reflection of the 21 slaves that

he owned. In 1862 Radford “was appointed by the presiding justice of Madison County in accordance with the Tennessee Legislature act of March 18, 1862 to take and make an enrolment (sic) of the able bodied male citizens and inhabitants...between 18 and 45 years” for District 9 of the county.[\[255\]](#)

Radford Withers, 59, died in 1869, four years after the close of the Civil War. His wife, Susan McClellan Withers, died the following year at age 50, leaving several of their younger children orphans. The children appear to have gone to live with their oldest surviving brother, John McClellan Withers.

The youngest son of John D. McClellan’s second marriage was Robert Newton McClellan. Robert was 21 when he married Elizabeth Ann Williams in Madison County. As best can be determined, the couple only had one child, E. Robert McClellan. Just before the outbreak of the Civil War, Robert had five slaves, as indicated in the \$3,500 personal property on the 1860 census. He had \$2,500 in real estate.[\[256\]](#) In that same year in Madison County Robert married his second wife Henrietta Briggance,[\[257\]](#) who was about twenty years his junior. Robert and Henrietta do not appear to have had any children.

Following the war, Robert and Henrietta relocated to the neighboring county of Haywood where Robert was the town constable. In 1870 he had only \$500 in real estate[\[258\]](#) and \$500 in personal property. Later they lived in Crockett County, which had been formed out of part of Haywood County.[\[259\]](#)

Of John McClellan’s nine children, five left descendants who continued to live in the Madison County area. By the middle of the century, however, two of the McClellan families of Madison County had left the county and the state of Tennessee. One was William Beavers McClellan, his wife, Juliet,

and their nine children. The other family was that of Bennett T. McClellan, the fifth child of the second marriage, who, with his wife, Nancy, [\[260\]](#) and their two daughters, followed his older half brother to Washington County, Texas.

[223] Probably named for Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the United States Treasury in 1808. He proposed national roads, canals and water transportation. These were of great importance to the people of Tennessee and other western states.

[224] Madison County, Tennessee Land Deeds, Book 1, p. 648.

[225] Madison County, Tennessee Land Deeds, Book 2, p. 311.

[226] *The Almanac of American History*, p. 235.

[227] Madison County, Tennessee, Will Book, v. 3, p. 273–274.

[228] On May 1, 1829 John McClellan had bought Philip who had been about 45 at the time.

Among those executing the deed was Bird B. Smith. Madison Co., TN Deed Book 2, p. 522 (registered May 2, 1841).

[229] These first items are considered signs of gentility or things owned by the gentry.

[230] Note the wheat, a change from the earlier days of settlement with nothing but corn. While corn should have remained an important crop for the maintenance of the household, wheat introduced flour and the items made from the flour: bread, rolls, cakes, pies and the like.

[231] Madison County, Tennessee, County Clerk, Will Book, v. 3, p. 642.

[232] On the 1840 census Catherine McClellan still maintained a separate household living with her youngest son, Robert.

[233] Catherine McClellan was not able to sign her name, marking an “X”, Martha McClellan Hayley's husband, Benjamin, signed for her.

[234] Williams, Emma Inman, *Historic Madison*, p. 201.

[235] This fact was unfortunate for Memphis and West Tennessee in the Civil War, since Federal troops moved into the area early on and held the region to interrupt transportation in the Confederacy.

[236] *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee (City of Jackson and the County of Madison)*, p. 175.

[237] *Ibid.*, p. 805.

[238] James D. McClellan and Isabella McLean were married in Jackson, Madison Co. on May 23, 1833 (*Marriages from early Tennessee newspapers*, edited by Silas E. Lucas, Easley, SC: Southern Historical Press, 1978, p. 297). The only McLean on the 1830 Madison County census was a Charles McLean in his fifties.

[239] Fischer, Marjorie Hood. *Tennessee tidbits, 1778–1914*. Volume II. Vista, CA: Ram Press, c1986, p. 197.

[240] Madison County, Tennessee Chancery Court Minutes, Feb. 24, 1859, p. 271.

[241] 1850 Federal Census, Madison County, Tennessee, p. 288a, Family no. 11/11, 30 Oct 1850.

[242] 1860 Federal Census, Madison County, Tennessee, Ma-152-137, Family no. 1088/1119, 1 Aug 1860, written page 158, line 15.

[243] A “John M. Morrill,” 24 year old male, lawyer, born in Maine was listed as living in Jackson on the 1850 Federal Census for Madison Co., TN, in the household of another lawyer, G. Adamson, Dist. 15, 27th family listed. A “Jno. Murrell,” 36 year old male, merchant, born in Ireland, is listed on the 1860 Federal Census for Madison Co., TN, with apparent brother, Lindsey, 33, clerk, Lindsey’s wife, Margaret, and son, Alex, living in Jackson, page 173, 23rd family listed.

[244] 1870 Federal Census, Madison County, Tennessee, Family no. 235/235, line 6, 14 July 1870.

[245] Madison County, Tennessee Probate Minutes, Book 16, p. 454.

[246] Daughter of Valentine Vann (see will of Samuel McClellan, Madison Co., TN Chancery Court Minutes, p. 85).

[247] Madison County had two marriage records for Balzora Vann McClellan: (1) “Wade, George to McClaland, Basora, issd. Nov. 15, 1854; Witnesses: Wade, George (Gibson Co.) and Harris, Adolphaus. Sol. Nov. 18, 1854 by Y.A. McLemore (G.P.M.).” (2) “Wade, Osias to Vann, Bolsora, issd. July 30, 1855; witnesses: Wade, Oasis (Gibson Co.) and Hicks, George B. Sol. July 32, 1855 by John Moss (M.G.).”

[248] *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee (Gibson, Obion, Dyer, Weakley and Lake Counties)*, 1978, p. 888.

[249] In 1815, the year that John Q. A. McClellan was born, John Quincy Adams was the head of the delegation to England that negotiated the Treaty of Ghent which ended the War of 1812.

[250] Maiden name unknown.

[251] *Family Findings*, v. 4, no. 1, January, 1972, p. 35: "Elizabeth McClellan on 1860 Mortality Schedule, Madison Co., p. 363, District #8, #9, 19 years, b. TN, Mo. of Death: June, Scarlet Fever."

[252] 1860 Federal Census, Madison County, Tennessee, Dist. 9, p. 137b, 1044/1079.

[253] 1870 Federal Census Madison Co., Tennessee, p, 229b, line 14, 23/23.

[254] 1860 Federal Census, Madison Co., Tennessee, p. 288b, 25/25.

[255] *Family Findings*, 1989, p. 52 (from West Tennessee Whig).

[256] 1860 Federal Census, Madison Co., Tennessee, Dist. 9, 1071/1102.

[257] Daughter of W.B. and Lavina Briggance.

[258] 1870 Federal Census, Haywood Co., Tennessee, printed page 465.

[259] 1880 Federal Census, Crockett Co., Tennessee, v. 5, ED 4, Sheet 15, line 33.

[260] Maiden name unknown.