

Notes on John McChesney
and Elizabeth née Elliot

(Great-grandparents of John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major)

John McChesney born: c1817, Dailly, Ayrshire, Scotland.

Elizabeth Elliot born: 15 August 1820, Dailly.

Married: 19 October 1838, Dailly.

Children: Susan, born 1839, Dailly.

Mary, born 1840, Dailly; died 1841, Dailly.

*Thomas, born 31 August 1843, Dailly.

James, born 1847, Dailly.

Mary, born 1849, Dailly.

Margaret, born 1851, Dailly.

John, born 1854, Dailly?

Francis, born 1857, Girvan, Ayrshire, Scotland.

Hugh, born 1859, Girvan.

Elizabeth, born 1861, Girvan.

*Grandfather of John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major

Arrived in NZ: 4 September 1864, Bluff, in 'Sevilla'.

Elizabeth McChesney, née Elliot, died: 6 December 1889, Gladstone, Invercargill.

John McChesney died: 23 April 1906, Nokomai, Southland.

John McChesney's birth and forebears

[Much of the information in this section was provided by Jock McChesney, Invercargill, from research in British Army records.]

John McChesney was born about 1817 in the small coal-mining village of Dailly, Ayrshire, Scotland, about 6 miles inland from Girvan, the son of James McChesney II and Elizabeth née McTaggart.

James II, John's father, had been born about 1791 in Ireland, his parents being James McChesney I, wheelwright, and Jane née Fergusson. James II was their first child, followed by Hugh (c1794), Thomas (c1796) and a sister Susan. The McChesneys were a Scots-Irish family – part of the 16th and 17th century Protestant 'plantation' of Ireland intended to keep in check (or eliminate) the rebellious 'papist' native Irish. They had settled in County Down near the cathedral city of Downpatrick.

At the age of 19 James II (John's father) had joined the British Army. He is described in the records as being 6ft 2ins tall, and a labourer by trade. James II fought in the Peninsular Wars, was injured and repatriated to Chelsea Hospital, London, where he was declared 'unfit for further Service' and discharged from the army on 10 April 1815 with a pension. At this time his trade is given as wheelwright

(like his father). *[For fuller information on James McChesney's military service, researched by Richard Major, see endnote 1.]*

On discharge James II did not return to his family in Ireland but settled in Dailly, Scotland, as a tenant of the Fergusson family, working on their Ballantrae estate. Here he met and married Elizabeth McTaggart. Their first child, John, was born about 1817, followed by James III born on 3 September 1819, Susanna (1821) and Janet (1823).

James McChesney II died on 13 June 1857 in Dailly from 'a fever of a few days', and is buried in New Dailly churchyard. His son John was the informant, signing the death register with a X.

John McChesney's marriage and working life

The first official record relating to John McChesney is found in the Dailly parish register for 1838: 'John McChesnie and Elisabeth Elliot both of this Parish gave in their names in order to marriage Octr 6th were duly proclaimed & married on the 19th.

Elizabeth Elliot had been born in Dailly on 15 August 1820 and christened there on 24 June 1821. The parish register officiously informs us that she was the 'daughter natural' (i.e. illegitimate) of Francis Elliot and Mary McGarroch. Further perusal of church records seems to indicate that her parents never married.

The June 1841 UK census lists John McChesney, aged 25-29 (in this census adults' ages were rounded down to the nearest multiple of five), and Elizabeth, 20-24, as living in Dailly village with two children: Susan aged 2 and Mary, 9 mths; Mary died later that year. The 1851 census has them still in Dailly with four children at home.

At the time of the 1841 and 1851 censuses John was a coalminer, but in 1861 he, Elizabeth and a number of their children are described as cotton weavers, now residing at Whitehill, a few miles out of Girvan. Thomas, aged 17, is not living at home by this time, and was probably already in the police force.

Children

Elizabeth McChesney bore 10 children in all; they were:

- **Susan, born** c1839, Dailly, Ayrshire, Scotland; **illegitimate child:** George Elliot, born 11 September 1862, Newton-Kennedy, Girvan, Ayrshire. Susan **married** Thomas Muirhead, gold-miner, 11 May 1865, Nokomai, Otago; **children:** Thomas Stuart (birth registered 1877), William (1879), Robert (1881), Susan (1884); **died** 13 September 1915, Garston (near Nokomai).
- **Mary, born** 1840, Dailly; **died** 1841, Dailly.
- **Thomas, born** 31 August 1843, Dailly; **married (1)** Catherine Paterson née Ewing, 10 April 1868, Invercargill **(2)** Sarah Jane Stevenson, 27 May 1915, Invercargill; **children** by Sarah: Eliza Euphemia (1913), Thomas (1915); **died** 11 January 1920, Invercargill. *[See separate essay.]*
- **James, born** c1847, Dailly; **married** Christina McGregor Clark, 1872; **children:** Christine McG (birth registered 1874), John Francis (1878), Margaret Ann (1881), Mary (1883), Ann (1885), Susan (1888), May Alexandra (1892), James Alexander George (1895); **worked** as railway bridge inspector; **died** 1 April 1905, Ashburton, South Canterbury; buried in the Eastern Cemetery, Invercargill, Block 19, Plot 145.

- **Mary, born** c1849, Dailly; **married** James Catherall, 1872; **died** 1928, Invercargill.
- **Margaret, born** c1851, Dailly; **married** John Nicolson, 1 January 1884; **died** 12 July 1912, West Plains, Southland.
- **John, born** c1854, Dailly?; **married** Kathleen Hogan, 1885; **child:** Elizabeth Elliott (birth registered 1890); **established** plant nursery in Scott Street, Invercargill; **died** 8 June 1944, buried in the Eastern Cemetery, Invercargill, Block 7 (Roman Catholic), Plot 80.
- **Francis (Elliot), born** 1857, Girvan; **married** Annie Smith, 3 July 1884, Longbush, Southland; **children:** Hugh (birth registered 1886), Violet Margaret Elizabeth (1887), Hazel Israil (1892); **had shop** in Spey Street selling painting and paper-hanging supplies; **died** 14 January 1935, Dunedin.
- **Hugh, born** c1859, Girvan; **didn't marry**; **died** 28 March 1884, Gladstone, Invercargill.
- **Elizabeth, born** 11 December 1861, Newton-Kennedy, Girvan, Ayrshire; **didn't marry**; **died** 8 June 1884, Gore.

Also living with John and Elizabeth was the illegitimate son of their first child, Susan:

- **George Elliot, born** 11 September 1862, Newton-Kennedy, Girvan, Ayrshire; **married** Margaret Jacobson, 6 December 1886, Nth Invercargill; **child:** Catherine (birth registered 1893); **worked** as gardener on stations owned by Hazlett family; **died** 12 November 1942, Christchurch.

Migration

Because of the steady mechanization of the cotton trade, the employment situation of hand-loom weavers, including John and Elizabeth McChesney, had become precarious by the 1860s. This is illustrated as far as Ayrshire is concerned by a petition sent to the New Zealand government in 1863 by the Girvan Hand Loom Weavers' Emigration Society, which reads in part:

....your Petitioners are hand-loom weavers in the Town of Girvan, Ayrshire, Scotland, and owing to the depression of trade, and the low rate of wages (being on an average four shillings and sixpence per week), and only partially employed for the last three years past, makes our position very deplorable, and on account of the circumstances we are forced to apply to you for assistance to emigrate to your Colony.

.... Your Petitioners consider that they would be useful to your Colony in a general way by endeavouring to advance it in prosperity and wealth, and, at the same time, raising themselves in the social scale, and becoming useful members of society.

Under the above-mentioned circumstances, we humbly beg that you will take our case into your favourable consideration, and grant us free passages, or in any other way to you seeming most fit and convenient, further the object we have in view....

Apparently, only the recently-created province of Southland responded to this plea. The ship 'Sevilla' was chartered, at a cost to the provincial council of £1,113, delivering 249 immigrants (including 83 children) – the 47-year-old John McChesney with Elizabeth and 11 children amongst them – to Bluff on 4 September 1864.

The 104-day voyage had been stormy, frightening and generally unpleasant. The ship's log records that on 13 July a fierce gale was encountered accompanied by a

heavy sea which washed away 'one boat off the skids, stove in the gig, unshipped the boat's davits, and washed away the closets'. However, the log continues, 'during the gale the ship behaved very well, and proved herself a fine sea boat'. The *Southland Times* of 6 September 1864 describes the 'Sevilla' as

a fine ship of 800 tons...fitted with all the appliances for securing the comfort and good accommodation to so large a number of passengers. The ventilation of the ship is thoroughly complete, and she possesses a condensing engine for the regular production and supply of fresh water on the voyage. Great credit is due to Captain Kerr and his officers for the cleanliness and good order in which the ship has come into port.

Life in a new land

John and Elizabeth established their home on the corner of Dee and Lewis streets, Gladstone, Invercargill. As there were no public schools in Invercargill at this time the younger McChesney children attended private establishments, while the older ones would have immediately looked for jobs.

John himself could find employment only as a labourer working on the roads, but he was fortunate to have found work of any sort, as the editorial in the *Southland Times* of 8 September 1864 makes clear.

The addition of two hundred and fifty souls to a small population like that of Southland would, at any time, be a matter of considerable importance, but, unfortunately, the immigrants by the Sevilla have just set their feet on the shores of New Zealand in a season of unusual depression, which is not confined to Southland, but is participated in, more or less, by the whole of the Colony.... [W]e fear there will be great difficulty in getting the whole of the immigrants by the Sevilla remunerative employment.

As if this were not discouraging enough, the editorial then proceeds to pick out for special mention the Girvan weavers.

Amongst the immigrants by the Sevilla are some of a class which has not before been represented in Southland, and it is very questionable whether they are the best qualified to succeed in colonial life. We allude to the Girvan weavers.

The editorialist's fears were not unfounded, as an item in the issue of 13 September reports:

We are glad to learn that all the immigrants per the Sevilla, with the exception of those hailing from Girvan, are already absorbed by our population in town and in the country districts. The number now on hand, therefore, will amount to about one hundred.

What work the McChesney boys did initially get is not known, but it must have been at least adequate as eight of the 10 children spent the rest of their lives in Southland, where the McChesney name became well-known and respected.

Deaths

Elizabeth McChesney née Elliot died in Gladstone, Invercargill, on 6 December 1889, aged 70. John outlived his wife by 17 years, dying on 23 April 1906, at the age of 91, in the tiny settlement of Nokomai, western Southland, where he had been living with his eldest daughter Susan and her husband Thomas Muirhead. John is buried with Elizabeth in St John's cemetery, Waikiwi, Invercargill, Block 7, Plot 24.

Endnote 1: James McChesney's service in the British Army

by Dr Richard Major

At half past five on the afternoon of Wednesday, 22nd July, 1812, on the brown hills outside Salamanca in central Spain, James McChesney, Greta Major's great-grandfather, overthrew Napoleon.

I admit he had a little help from his friends, the other 5500 men of the Sixth Division. And from the Duke of Wellington, who was running the show. But who knows what would have happened to the Sixth Division if that one tall conspicuous fellow had turned tail?

As it was James and the rest of the Division kept on marching up the hillock called Arapil Grande until the final French counterattack was broken apart. James was shot through the right arm, which is sad, but nonetheless that one charge ended the Battle of Salamanca, and the Battle of Salamanca was the turning point of the Peninsular War. Madrid was liberated from the beastly French a few weeks later, and the Napoleonic Empire never recovered from that defeat.

James McChesney was 23 at the time of Salamanca, an Ulster wheelwright, brown-haired, grey-eyed, pale-complexioned, and, very unusually, 6 foot 2 – it's presumably his genes that keep us tall now.

He was a private in the 2nd (or Queen's Royal) Regiment of Foot, and since the 2nd Foot happens to be the senior English line infantry regiment, it has enthusiastic reenactors. This is what the 2nd Foot looked like at the time of the Napoleonic wars: <http://2ndfoot.org.uk/Gallery/2008/puttenham%2008/Picture-057.jpg>.

Here they are as extras in the Bollywood film of 'Vanity Fair', charging the French: <http://www.2ndfoot.org.uk/Gallery/images/vanfair3.jpg>; we may imagine great-great-great- (or great-great-, or great-great-great-great-) grandfather James as one of the fellows going down. And this is the spot on Arapil Grande where he was knocked over, marked in red: <http://www.richardmajor.com/Salamanca/sign.jpg>

James was invalided out of the army after Salamanca, and awarded the excitingly-named Military General Service Medal (<http://www.dnw.co.uk/medals/resources/medalrolls/militarygeneralservice/recipient.lasso?id=15116>).

He couldn't be a wheelwright without a right arm, so he took his pension off to the Scottish Lowlands, worked as a sawyer, married a local girl, begot children, and died. His tall oldest son John was a handloom-weaver until mechanisation ruined that industry; John then emigrated to Invercargill, where his own oldest son, Thomas, begat Greta, our excellent grandmother.