

McCLARY PLACE

Famous in the Stirring Times of Long Ago
When American Independence Was Sought
Story of the People Who Made Its Proud History
Last Meeting of Society of Cincinnati
Was Held There

Home of Michael McCleary Steele

Willows Set by a Bride

Through the forest of Nottingham, and up the wooded hills of Epsom, following the slender bridlepaths, just wide enough for a horse to pass, there came in 1746 a bridal party. Tradition is silent concerning its appointments; if there was a splendor it was not because the participants might not in all propriety have worn the adornments of pride and station. John McClary and his bride were worthy of all that belongs to the rank of nobility.

At all events, the mansion to which they came was, in those fine days almost palatial in size and style. It stood upon the brow of a hill surrounded by lands as rich, and encircled by forests as noble as any ancestral home ever boasted.



The great house was destined to be the birthplace of men who were to help make the history of the nation, and to be the resort of some of the most distinguished patriots, lawmakers and statesmen. And after they had all passed away, to remain so lightly touched by the hand of time as to now appear strong and substantial enough to comfortably shelter another generation. A century and a half has passed and gone since the day John McClary's bride alighted from her horse at the foot of the hill where the lane turns from the road, and planted the willow switch he had used for a riding whip on her wedding

journey from Nottingham, in the earth by the side of the path. The tree that sprung from the twig has grown and kept the family company from generation to generation and know stands in melancholy companionship with the old house.

But it was some twenty years previous to this event that old Andrew McClary, the very first man of the name to come to this country, arrived in New Hampshire and settled in Nottingham. he was of Scottish origin, but his ancestors settled in Londonderry, Ireland from whence they emigrated to this country about the year 1726. At that time his son John was but six years old. The original settlement was made in Nottingham. In 1739 the family removed to Epsom and settled on McClary Hill. At this time the whole country was unbroken wilderness, a log cabin was built in which they lived until the two sons, Andrew and John built large houses but a short distance apart on the brow of the hill. The house erected by Andrew was long ago destroyed by fire. The place where it stood may be seen from the roadside marked by an embankment and a few rocks. There is a depression in the ground, just below the site of the old house, which is said by traditioin to be the spot where the log cabin stood.

In 1746 John McClary married Elizabeth Harvey, who came to this country in the same ship when they were three years old. They had twelve children. Though unassited by great advantages of education, he was honored with a very large share of public confidence, and that, too, in trying times. Besides sustaining, with much acceptance, several important offices in the town, he was called by his townspeople in that period of danger and anxiety, when the provincial congress was formed, to hold a seat in the council and senate of the state. He was a most exemplary citizen and was deeply interested in the church, and all matters of religious welfare to the community.

In connection with his brother, Andrew, he cleared large tracts of land; they together owning more than 1,000 acres. They built sawmills, cut roads and otherwise energetically puched forward the work of civilization. The Hon. John McClary died in 1801, aged 83, and was buried in Epsom. A plain slab erected in his memory may be seen in the graveyard on the hill in Epsom



Hon. John McClary had a son named John, who was killed in the battle of Saratoga in 1777. He also had a son Michael born in 1753. Michael entered the army at the age of 23, and was appointed ensign to Capt. Dearborn's company in John Stark's regiment, and fought at the battle of Bunker Hill. He was in the army 4 years and saw service in some of the severest engagements. After leaving the army he aided in forming the government of the state and held office of Adjutant General for 21 years. It was largely through his influence that the New Hampshire branch of the Society of Cincinnati was formed, of which he was treasurer for 25 years. These Revolutionary officers met on the 4th of July, and three times at his house, with affable and engaging manners, his wit and varied knowledge rendered him a most enetertaining host and constant friend. In 1779 Michael McClary married Sally Dearborn of North Hampton.



Maj. Andrew McClary, son of Andrew the first settler and brother of Hon. John McClary, although equally respected and esteemed by his fellow townspeople, was a man of different cast of mind. His intensely patriotic nature and military disposition let him to sympathize with and take an active part with the patriots; he was fond of military tactics and shared largely in the war-like spirit of the time.

John McClary was accustomed to entertaining travelers, so that his house became known as McClary's Tavern. Here the prominent military characters of the town about were accustomed to assemble and discuss the all-absorbing subject which was agitating the country. They were anticipating the war and were ready for it. The echoes of the first gun fired at Lexington had hardly died away when signal fires were lit on a thousand hilltops and messengers on fleet horses rode through every town, calling to arms. News of the battle soon reached Exeter and from whence one of those fleet messengers started for Nottingham, across Deerfield Parade and on to Epsom. Here again the part of Cincinnatus was enacted; young McClary was plowing in the field, the messenger had scarcely finished his words of warning, when he left the plow in the furrow, and joined by other daring patriots hurried to Deerfield. There they were joined by others, making a company of some eighty who left the same day and reached Medford the next morning. Many of these men became distinguished in the revolution at once. This company of brave men from the hills of New Hampshire held the post of honor at the battle of Bunker Hill.

Andrew McClary, whose military ingenuity had always made him a conspicuous character, at once began to exert his influence in organizing troops.

At Medford two regiments were organized, composed of New Hampshire boys, of one of these, John Stark, was chosen as colonel, and Andrew McClary major. In the Nottingham company Michael McClary was ensign. Of the little over 1500 troops stationed around Boston on the 17th of June, 1500 were actually engaged in the fight of Bunker Hill, and of these the larger number were from New Hampshire, connected with the regiments under Colonel Stark and Reed. Stark's regiment formed a line behind a rail fence and fought heroically, doing fearful execution to the enemy, and were the last to retreat. A commander of one of the companies was Henry Dearborn of Nottingham, who survived the perils of war and afterwards wrote a graphic account of the battle of Bunker Hill. In a lengthy review of the battle he frequently speaks in terms of praise, not only of the military sagacity, but of the constant bravery of Major McClary. His courage and enthusiasm were a constant inspiration to the men. He, as well as General Stark, was always foremost where duty directed him. The misfortune of that memorable battle can in no way be attributed to either of these men; but on the contrary much of the heroism and valor of that hardly fought, but lost battle was due to the skill and cool courage of John Stark and Andrew McClary.



And it is almost sufficient praise to say that as regiments of other states, one after another were forced to fall back, these brave New Hampshire men in the midst of the terrible carnage, that none but Spartans could withstand, covered their retreat.



FIREPLACE IN THE RETRIEVAL ROOM

After the battle Maj. McClary observed that the British troops on Bunker Hill appeared in motion and started to reconnoiter them. After having satisfied himself that they did not intend to leave their strong posts on the heights, he was returning when a random shot from one of the frigates, lying near Craig's Bridge passed directly through his body. He leaped two or three feet from the ground, pitched forward and fell dead on his face. He was carried to Medford and buried with all the respect and honor that could be shown a great and good man.

During the battle the patriots were intent on cutting down every officer they could distinguish in the British line. When Maj. McClary discovered one he would instantly exclaim, "There, See that officer. Let's shoot at him!" Two or three would fire at the same moment and all being excellent marksmen were sure of their object. Col. Dearborn in his account of the battle says of Maj. McClary, "He was among the first officers of the army,

possessing sound judgement, undaunted bravery, enterprising and ardent both as a patriot and as a soldier. His loss was severely felt by his compatriots in arms, while his country is deprived of the service of one of her most promising and distinguished champions of liberty." In taking leave of brave Maj. McClary, it must be said to the shame of the present generation that while the exact spot where the body of that hero was buried is unknown, no monument has been erected to his memory.

The homestead built by Hon. John McClary, and occupied by several generations of that illustrious family, remains very nearly the same as it was originally built; no room has been altered or partition removed; old age has not weakened its joints, and its walks stand as firm as in the days of yore. The visitor can leave the cars at either Short Falls or Epsom station and reach the farm by a delightful drive of about three miles on the road leading to Epsom Center. The high ascends a series of short hills until it reaches the mansion on the height of land overlooking panorama of diversified and beautiful scenery. The wide foreground of the landscape is enriched by cultivated fields and comfortable farmhouses. In the middle distance lies the quiet and fertile valley of the Suncook, while away beyond the encircling range of foothills rises the blue summit of Kearsarge.

The old house stands upon the very top of the hill, and is nearly hidden from view by the lombardy poplars and willows that grow by the side of the lane leading up to it. Just at the turn of the road, on the left, is the ancient willow that grew out from the little twig used for a riding whip by the bride of John McClary.

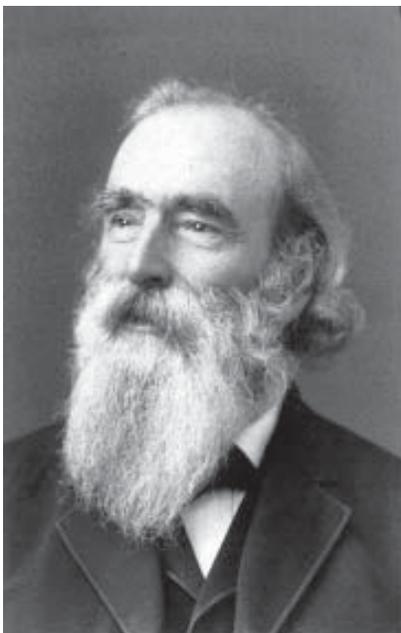
The venerable mansion has a history more genuinely interesting than often attached to buildings of even legendary fame. In it great men have been born and



lived; in its dining hall famous men have sat at the board; in its chambers distinguished statesmen, jurors and heroes have slept; before the wide fireplace in the reception room have gathered the wit and beauty of a time when men were strong and women fair and wine was red. No wonder that the echoes of long lost and forgotten music are said to return at night when darkness and silence reign. Alone in the great guest chamber one might fancy he had for companions the shades of Daniel Webster, Josiah Mason, General Sullivan and other distinguished men, who have in other days slept within its walls.

When the Hon. John McClary built this house in 1740, he built as though he anticipated the momentous events that were to follow; spacious rooms and well appointed apartments that might accommodate meeting patriots or Freemasons and at the same time have all the comforts and even luxuries of a gentleman's home.

It was in this house that the Committee of Safety met, at the most important period of the nation's history. In the reception room, deliberations that held the welfare of the state in their grasp, have been often held. Some idea of the importance of the actions of that body of wise and strong men may be formed, when it is remembered that their meeting in the McClary house extended over a long series of years, from 1750-1776. Michael McClary, through whose influence the New Hampshire branch of the Society of Cincinnati was formed, and who was its treasurer for 25 years, was born in this house in 1753. He married Sally Dearborn, daughter of Dr. Dearborn of North Hampton in 1779 and they reared 5 children. General Michael McClary died in the old mansion in 1824 and was buried in the little churchyard at Epsom by the side of the Hon. John McClary. One of Gen. Michael's daughters, Elizabeth, married Jonathan Steele, a lawyer, and resided at the homestead.



On a fine summer morning the traveler seeking the healthful air of Epsom's beautiful pastoral landscape, will, if he pursues his journey over the height toward Deerfield, notice the shady lane branching off from the highway, and on the right; if he should, tempted by the prospect of a fine view from the higher land, turn into the byway and walk up to the old fashioned house, he will meet a gentleman somewhat past middle life engaged in some pleasant occupation about the grounds. The cordial greeting which will be received will give assurance that a man of more than ordinary attainments has been met.

This well-bred gentleman is Michael McClary Steele, son of Elizabeth McClary Steele, and lineal descendant of Hon. John McClary. Here he lives alone in the retirement he prizes on account of the ancestral memories that cluster around the old homestead. Michael Steele, whose portrait by Langley accompanies this article, was born in 1824 and at the age of 69 is still a handsome man; his polished conversation, always

reminiscent, is most entertaining.

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