

25-Year Mystery Solved

By Vinniedee Hippensteel

[This story about painstaking research recounts the discovery of the location of the final child of John and Susannah McNeil McHenry. The children are:

Daniel – born 1755, stayed in the Stillwater-Benton area. His descendants started the distillery.

James – born 1758, died young

John – born 1760, twin of Thomas. Was the last one needed to complete the series of books.

Thomas – born 1760, twin of John. Stayed in the Orangeville area. This is Vinnie's lineage.

Henry – born 1762, married Priscilla McClure and moved to McHenry Valley, NY.

Martha – born 1764, went to NY with her brothers

Mary – born 1766

Edward – born 1768. Drowned in Lake Erie shortly after he moved further west from his brothers.

Matthew – born 1771. Died as a young man, but moved to Karr Valley, NY not far from his brother Henry. ~ Editor]

About 25 years ago I completed the paperwork for my two aunts, my sister and myself to become members of the Fort McClure Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution through our lineage to Thomas McHenry (born 1760). Thomas had a twin brother John. I was working full time, but my interest in the siblings of Thomas became a new goal for my sister and me. There was not much information available except to travel and search in courthouses, historical societies and walk around cemeteries. Daniel had stayed in the Stillwater and Benton areas. Our Thomas is buried in McHenry Cemetery near Orangeville, Columbia County.

We traveled to New York where we located Edward, Henry and Matthew's families. James had died young. Thomas's two sisters had traveled further north in NY to Lavonia. Twin John, according to his pension papers, had settled in Southport, New York. Knowing where they all settled, as information became available I would put it in a binder and if anyone out of the area needed the information I would quickly pass it on to them. I have traveled back to McHenry Valley, NY many times by myself and only the descendants of Matthew stayed in the area. The idea of a vacation to most people would not be the sparse area of NY, but that is my favorite place. I would usually get lost and bypass Southport, having only gone there one time on a trip when my husband was with me and he was not very patient sitting around hours in a motel while I did research, but insisted I should not be on the road by myself.

One day about 25 years ago I got a call from Charles McHenry who lived in Texas. He said he was a descendant of John, twin of my Thomas. He went on to say he had visited the cemetery and log cabin that our John built in Adams County, Ohio. He said the log house was moved to the Fair grounds and eventually ended up in a pile of logs. Did our John build this two story log cabin? Charles had also visited the McHenry Cemetery where the McHenry family members were buried and John's name was firmed up as buried there. Impossible, as John lived in Southport, NY and Adams Co., Ohio was in the south eastern tip of Ohio. So I checked other records thinking that John was the son of Barnabas who lived in Virginia plus other McHenry lineages that were in America in the 1700s. I could not find a record that John was buried in Southport. But, in early times, tombstones fell to the wayside. Charles also mentioned the

reddish color hair that he and his family had and wondered about the hair color of the other members of the clan.

I usually travel to the DAR Library in Washington, DC twice a year and would pull out books from NY and Ohio still searching for this other John born 1760, as all records show that Charles's John was indeed grounded in Adams County. Over the years Charles and I would communicate, and the file with his info was always in my current file. When I moved, I had it on the front seat of my van and carried it into my new house. Names of the McHenry children are used over and over, but I noticed that the John in Ohio and the John in NY had children named Lucas and Ruhannah and Jackson. The name Alexander popped up also. Not the usual McHenry names of John, Daniel and Thomas.

My message to Charles always was I am still searching, and he remained sure that his John and my Thomas were the twin brothers.

I decided I needed to solve this mystery. I am not eager to go to cities, but in the fall of 2017, I packed my bag and headed for Southport, NY which is across the bridge from the County seat of Elmira. And I was staying until I searched every record available.

There was not a lot of info on McHenry, but John had been in Southport. Again I checked and John was not listed in any of the cemeteries in the area and he did not own land.

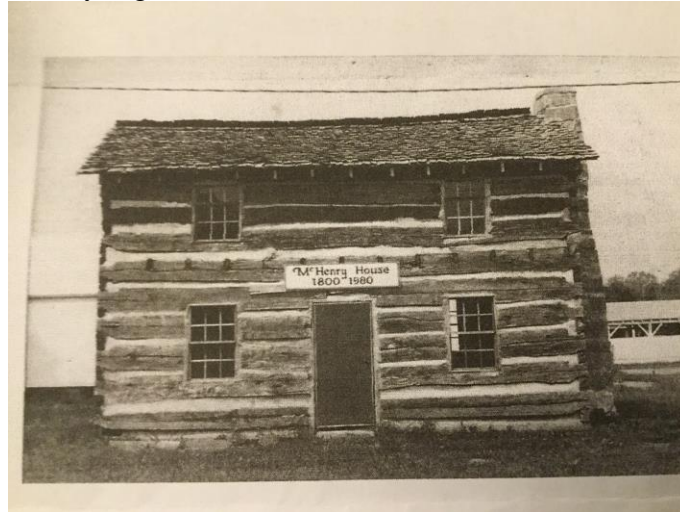
People were friendly and invited me to join them for lunch, but I was there on a mission, so I ate my crackers and drank my coke while waiting for the Historical Society to open and sorted through the papers I had already copied.

I asked myself, since John lived here, why aren't there records, not just a mention of a name? Records are available for many generations down his line, but they could not provide any facts or proof that would be useful, just stories.

We knew John had married Anna Miller, and I thought she was from the local Miller family and she moved with him to Southport. But I thought it was worthwhile to mention Miller. Immediately the folders were piled high in front of me as they were a well-known military family in the area and had gone back and forth to Adams Co., Ohio. Even nowadays, that would be a long trip, but they went back and forth. OK, I guess I had to believe it since records show that they did. Finally one obituary for a female named Martha M'Henry Johnson caught my eye and I read and reread it as it said she was born in Southport, N.Y, the daughter of John and Anna Miller McHenry and that she was the youngest of 14 children. The puzzle was finally coming together after all these years. Of course I left Elmira with a pile of copies.

I brought the paperwork I had gathered home and Bill & Sandy Schamberger and I sorted and sorted. Apparently John married in PA and had a daughter and son. Records say the son Alexander was born in Rohrsburg, PA and the daughter was named Elizabeth. Both children were born before his marriage to Anna Miller. The name Alexander is not a usual McHenry family name. Then he married Anna Miller from Elmira area, NY. The next child of Anna and John was born 8 years after Elizabeth. They had 12 children. The marriage date for Anna Miller of the well-known military family and John is firm.

Adams County Historical Society did return a call to me about the log cabin and where it is at this time. It was taken down as someone decided it was no longer safe and some of the logs are being used as needed to repair their building and the attached museum. Charles will say loud and clear that if the logs had not been in a pile for 10 years they would not have rotted. But, the Historical Society, like many organizations, lacks volunteers.



Log cabin of John & Susannah McHenry

I had gathered reams of paper with info over the years on McHenry and Bill and Sandy Schamberger were making trips to my home and taking binders and loose papers home for Bill to organize and put into the computer. Our goal was to put the information of the children of John and Susannah (McNeal) McHenry into books. I had printed obituaries and taken pictures of tombstones, houses and people. Bill sorted and sorted and completed a series of 10 books and all we needed to complete the series was the book #11 on John, twin of Thomas.

We are never done with research, so I will keep trying to find the name of John's first wife. History said the twins were like two peas in a pod and they did serve together during the Revolutionary war and were boatmen traveling the Susquehanna River to provide supplies from fort to fort in our area after the War. Why John left this beautiful area, might be that his wife had died. Well, we can invent many stories or thoughts about each move the siblings made, but we will never know for sure. John's Revolutionary War Pension application did prove that he and his twin brother Thomas served together, but Thomas was unable to travel to NY to help testify for his brother to get his pension.

Although John was the father of 14 children, no one has become a member of DAR using him as their Patriot.

Bill still was not 100% sure of the connection and said maybe we should do two books and list children 6 and 5 with each John, one who lived in Southport and one who lived in Adams County, Ohio. Bill's wife Sandy and I are the Thomas McHenry descendants and we are positive of the connection. But, if anyone in their research has doubts, please contact me as when doing research one is never done digging.

We welcome any descendants and families of John and Susannah at our annual McHenry Reunion held each year on the last Sunday in July in the Benton, Columbia County, PA area.

I am always willing to provide information on the McHenry family. Contacting me is easy as I volunteer at the Columbia County Historical and Genealogical Society and I am a past 3-term Regent of Fort McClure Chapter DAR. I am presently serving as co-chair of our chapter home, McClure House, located at 561 Fort McClure Blvd., Bloomsburg, PA

The twins' brother Henry married Priscilla, daughter of James McClure, so I know at some time Henry was on the 297 acres of the original McClure property. Priscilla is buried on the family farm in McHenry Valley, NY.

McHenry books available at CCHGS

Clan McHenry by Mae McHenry, 1952

McHenry Connections by Vinniedee Hippensteel, 2004

NEW SERIES:

Children of Daniel & Mary (Stevens) McHenry recently donated (Daniel born 1755).

- #1 John & Benjamin McHenry
- #2 Daniel Butterfield McHenry
- #3 "Hunter" John McHenry
- #4 Jane, Uriah & Martha McHenry
- #5 Moses, Elias, Mary, Susannah & Sarah McHenry

Two books will be donated the next time the Society orders hard bound: Children of Thomas McHenry and Mary Reed. (Thomas, twin of John, born 1760)

- #1 Absalom McHenry descendants
- #2 Other children of Thomas

Books on the other children of John & Susannah (McNeil/Neal) McHenry have been completed, but they moved out of the area so I just donated the one for Daniel and Thomas who remained in Columbia County