

The McKensie Family

Information taken from History of Port Henry, New York and received from Mrs. C. P. Morrison, 318 Pleasant Ave., Oneida, N. Y. and other sources as summarized by R. E. McKensie, Tazewell, Ill., in the year 1937 and 1938.

Sir Alexander McKensie, father of William, our direct ancestor, and of Sir Alexander McKensie the discoverer, served in the English Army under General Asher at Crown Point. He received a grant of 200 acres of land around Port Henry from the English King for services in the French war all of which land later came into possession of William. After William had moved his family to McKensie Landing, later known as Lewis Mills, Herish and finally Port Henry, Sir Alexander returned to Scotland. Two brothers, names unknown at this time, served with Alexander with Gen. Asher at

William McKensie, known as "Old Squire" McKensie, was born at Inverness, Scotland, near a city of 80,000 and located about 100 miles north of Glasgow, in 1759 and died at Port Henry April 18, 1815. He emigrated to Canada and married Deborah Toomer (1766-1848) at St. Johns, Quebec. With their daughter Ann, sometimes called Nancy, they sailed up Lake Champlain to McKensie Landing in May, 1784. (Ann married George Andrew). They built a log cabin and soon after a frame house which still stands (now occupied by Mr. Goff who married Melina grand-daughter of Wm. The nearest settlers to them was at Sakers Point 10 miles north on their side of the lake and across the lake three miles at Chimney Point. Deborah was an expert with her birch bark canoe and frequently paddled to Chimney Point with it for supplies. On one such trip a bad storm came up and she was detained by friends until dark. Urged to stay all night, she refused saying that Wm would worry and that she must go, started out with her two children in the canoe and the night was so dark that she could see the end of the canoe only when the lightning flashed but she made the landing without mishap. They were surrounded by wild animals and Indians, principally Iroquois and were often disturbed by them. There is some question as to just when they had their first neighbors but in a year or more Mr. Porter and Mr. Ross came to the vicinity, lived the first season in a cloth tent and in 1786, saw and grist mills were built for Mr. Porter and in 1789, Porter gave them to Robert Lewis who operated them and the town became known as Lewis Mills. People patronized the mills from many miles around and more settlers came to locate there. William was the father of 10 children, Ann, Alexander (first white child born in Port Henry) Ithiel, Thomas, William, Jr., Hiram, Creable, Robert, John, (my great grandfather) and Sarah (who married either George or Palmer Havens).

In the early days, Wm operated his home as a hotel to accommodate early travelers. In 1785, he established the first ferry to Vermont. He helped build the first roads in 1793. The first election was held at William's home on April 26, 1803. It took three days and 67 ballots were cast.

William was elected Justice of the Peace. He was the first Supervisor of Port Henry elected in 1808. His son Alexander was elected constable and collector in 1809. In 1818, \$5.00 was collected in the community and Alexander was appointed to build public stocks but for some reason, they were never built. In 1822, the first license to sell liquor was granted to Phineas Woodruff, the license being \$2.50. In 1829, his son Alexander served as Supervisor and in 1839, his brother Hiram held that office. In the war of 1812, Capt Alexander McKenzie (1785-1873) the first child born at Port Henry, organized a company at Port Henry which included Sargeant Wm. Jr., Corporal Robert and Privat John. At the battle of Plattsburg, they occupied an advanced position near Chazy where they captured several men and horses. Lt. Wm. Jr was later so appointed by DeWitte Clinton, Governor Of N. Y. and was later a major. William's grandson, Milton was later identified with the extensive iron ore mining industry of that region. Alexander, Jr. was elected senlor warden, A. F. A. M. in August, 1848. Hiram, Lyman and Jeddiah are mentioned as interested in docks and shipping in early days of Port Henry.

William's brother, Sir Alexander McKenzie, Jr. was the celebrated traveler and discoverer. In 1789 with 12 men and 4 bark canoes, he left Fort Chipewyan and traveled north for six weeks following the tortuous course of a large river which they discovered and named the Mackenzie and finally reached the Arctic Ocean in latitude 69 degrees. For this achievement, he was knighted. Not satisfied with this achievement, Sir Alexander organized a small party of men to cross Canada in a westerly direction "across the bleak and inhospitable mountain backbone of the North American continent". They finally paddled their birch bark canoes out of the Bellaocola River into the Pacific Ocean just north of Vancouver Island and painted on a huge rock these words "Sir Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada by land the 22nd of July 1793". Records of the length of time taken for this trip and the many hardships endured are not available but only a born explorer with courage could have made it. Sir Alexander was born of Scotch parents at Inverness, Scotland in 1760 and died in 1830.

The name McKenzie is of Scotch origin and was originally McKenneth meaning "son of Kenneth". It was taken by a descendant of the FitzGerald clan of Scotland at an early date. It is found on ancient records as McKenneth, McKenacee, McKenzie, Mackenay, Mackenzie, etc. Its descent is traced from Sir Henry FitzOthore, a Norman knight of the Geraldine family of the ancient Dukes of Tuscany who went into England with William the Conqueror in 1066 and was father of Walter FitzOther, Castellan of Windsor Castle, who had Gerald Fitzwalter whose oldest son Maurice Fitzgerald, Baron of Offaly, was father of Gerald who had Maurice, who was father of Thomas whose youngest son Gerald became first baron of Kintail who was the progenitor of the McKenzies.

Gerald, First Baron of Kintail, was granted this Baronry in the year 1266, also his coat of arms, by King Alexander of Scotland because of his bravery in saving the King's life when that Monarch was attacked during a hunt by a stag. Gerald married Margaret Stewart, daughter of Lord High Steward of Scotland and had Kenneth FitzGerald second Baron of Kintail who married Morba McDougall, daughter of the Lord of Lorn who had Kenneth McKenneth or MacKenzie, third Baron of Kintail who was the first to use the present name. Kenneth MacKenzie married Lady Margaret De Strathbolgie, daughter of the Earl of Athol and was succeeded by his son Kenneth in the year 1328.

The lineage is traced for many generations until the 10th Baron of Kintail.

One Captain McKenzie was married in 1720 to a daughter of Lord Ross and was engaged in trade with the American colonies, invested in land on the Delaware River but never lived here because of his estates in Scotland. His son Andrew moved to Ireland and then to America in about 1760. He settled in New Jersey but later had a grant of land in North Carolina and made his home there. Other branches of the family are known to have settled in Pennsylvania and New York and various parts of the south. Among the McKenzies who fought as officers in the Revolutionary war were Lt. Robert of Penn. Surgeon Samuel also of Penna and Cap't William of South Carolina. Alexander Slidell MacKenzie of N. Y. Naval officer, 1803-1848 Randall Slidell MacKenzie of N. Y. Military officer 1840-1889

In my records are description of the ancient coat of arms with motto, etc.

In my records is a transfer of "Lot 11 on Legge Patent and bounded and described by Mr. George Webster Survey of the same" same being deeded to John McKenzie by Deborah Towne McKenzie and dated the "twelf" day of March, 1822. Same is signed by Beborak McKenzie Mark X and witnessed by Hiram and Thomas McKenzie.

Another story of Deborah Towner is as follows; A group of indians who were known to the McKenzies, paddled their canoes into McKenzie landing one morning, landed, passed the time of day and put their canoes over the top rail of the fence and proceeded to go into the woods behind the McKenzie cabin. A little later a larger group of Indians of another tribe and unknown to the McKenzies, landed there also and went into the woods also. Some time later, the second group returned and started to leave and take the canoes which the first group had left but Deborah would not let them take the canoes, saying that they belonged to her friends and drove them off. The first bunch never did return for their canoes and it was assumed that they were killed in the woods by the larger band of Indians. At least they were never heard from again.