

1887

John McMechan

A. C. McMechan

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Nebraska. Grace Virginia, Elizabeth Budington, and Allan Read are the names of their three children.

Jean Marion Allan and W. R. Johnson were married in Omaha, June 11, 1879. Her present residence is Omaha. Her three children are Robert, Erwin, and Donald Allan Johnson.

JOHN McMECHAN.*

Died, November 3, 1883, at "Headwood," the family residence, in Otoe county, near Nebraska City, Nebraska, of the infirmities incident to old age, John McMechan, aged 83 years and 23 days. The McMechan family is of Scotch origin, and lived in Ayreshire, but being active and leading members of the "Solemn League and Covenant," was forced, by religious persecution, to leave Scotland in 1650, and settled in the county Antrim, in Ireland, near "White Abbey," five miles from the city of Belfast.

John McMechan, the father of the subject of our sketch, was a wealthy land-owner, and the family estate in Ayreshire and Antrim county numbered several thousand acres of grazing and tillable lands. His wife was a Miss Mary Ballentine, daughter of David Ballentine, of Ayreshire, and grand niece of Lord John Ballentine, a cousin of Mary Queen of Scots. John McMechan was born on October 10, 1800, at the family homestead "Carmonia," near the "White Abbey," five miles from Belfast. He had four brothers and five sisters. He survived all of his brothers and two of his sisters. In 1810 the family came to America and settled in Belmont county, Ohio, eight miles from Wheeling, Virginia, and his father in the same year purchased the "Indian Springs" farm, so called from the springs at which the Indians camped previous to attacking Wheeling.

His parents being Covenanters, were remarkably reverent in their observances of the teachings of divine truth, and he being early impressed with them, grew up with an abiding sense of duty and right, and a strong hostility to false pretenses. He received a good and thorough common school education, the best to be had in those days in that new and sparsely settled country. He also learned the lessons

*The biographies of John and Matilda McMechan were prepared by their son, A. C. McMechan.

of a high moral culture and of industrial habits, constituting the basis of integrity and fidelity to duty which marked his career. At the age of seventeen he engaged in mercantile pursuits, for which he was by nature admirably fitted. When twenty-one years of age he moved to Mount Pleasant, Ohio, and engaged in merchandising, where he remained until 1826, when he went to Zanesville, in the same state, and on the 24th of April, 1827, he married Miss Matilda Ballentine, the second daughter of David Ballentine of that town.

This happy union was blessed with a family of six sons and four daughters, of whom one son and one daughter died in infancy. During his residence in Zanesville he engaged in the flouring mill and mercantile business. In 1842 he removed from Zanesville to Glasgow, Mo., where he continued merchandising, and at this place he built and conducted the first packing house on the Missouri river. In 1846 he removed his family to St. Louis, Mo., where he embarked in the wholesale grocery business and continued until the summer of 1853, when he closed out his business in St. Louis.

In September, 1853, he removed to Council Bluffs, Iowa, then the principal outfitting and starting point for Utah and California emigrants, and there he engaged in the wholesale grocery and outfitting business, and in freighting across the plains to Salt Lake City, Utah. His was the first exclusively wholesale grocery store in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

When Nebraska was opened for settlement in 1854, he was offered a portion of the town site of Omaha, but not liking the social element then predominating, he declined, but purchased several lots on the original town site, and for him was built one of the first business houses erected in Omaha.

He closed out his business and sold his real estate at Omaha and Council Bluffs in the autumn of 1854, came to Nebraska, and became one of the original proprietors and one of the founders of Kearney City, which is now a part of Nebraska City, in Otoe county, Nebraska. He surveyed and laid out the town site, and when the land was subject to entry entered the same in the land office at Omaha. In the autumn of 1854 he purchased of Hall, Platt & Co. the steam saw mill at Civil Bend, Iowa, and in the spring of 1855 moved the same to the new town in Nebraska, it being the first steam saw mill erected in that place. On April 5, 1855,

the family removed to Kearney City, where the subject of this sketch built the first frame dwelling-house erected in that town. In 1857 he purchased of Ephraim White a farm two miles south of Nebraska City, in Otoe county, where the family has resided since 1863, and which when purchased was named "Headwood." Soon after buying this farm Mr. McMechan set out a fine orchard, which was one of the first planted in that part of the territory.

Mr. McMechan was a man of indomitable energy, and for him were built the "Planter's House," the first and only hotel in Kearney, —now a part of Nebraska City, Nebraska—the business houses of T. H. & L. C. Winn & Co., Kalkman & Wessells, and the hardware store of D. B. McMechan, the first hardware store in Kearney or Nebraska City, and a large number of dwellings. In 1820 he united with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian (now United Presbyterian) church, in St. Clairsville, Ohio, presided over by Rev. Samuel Findley, D.D.; and was a trustee and ruling elder for seven years in the United Presbyterian church in St. Louis, Mo., during his residence in that city. He was an earnest, energetic, zealous, consistent, and generous Christian; exemplary in all the duties of religion, and putting in practice his religious beliefs, always encouraging churches, religious and charitable societies; and one of his first acts after settling in Nebraska was to establish a Sabbath-school under the auspices of the church of which he was a working member; this was the first denominational Sabbath-school established in the territory. At the same time Rev. R. H. Allen, of Mount Pleasant, Iowa, came to Nebraska by invitation of Mr. McMechan and held divine service in Kearney—now one of the wards of Nebraska City—and preached the first sermon delivered in the new town.

The subject of this sketch possessed a truly modest, retiring, cheerful, quiet, contented, charitable, and unassuming disposition; his mind was clear and his judgment had much weight, and these qualities, together with his Christian life, won for him the highest esteem of all who knew him. He possessed that stability of character which is the distinguishing mark of his countrymen. In business he was active, prompt, and punctual. He gave often and lavishly to the poor and needy, and no appeal in behalf of suffering humanity ever passed him unheeded, and although a Presbyterian in his beliefs and views, he gave liberally to all denominations wherever he lived. The

poor of this section never knew a better friend. Socially he was agreeable, entertaining, and hospitable to a fault. His peculiarly happy temperament continued to the last. His perseverance in active well-doing was not ostentatious, but fruitful and unceasing. As a citizen and town proprietor he was solid and substantial, just, obliging, and honorable, courteous and accommodating; heartily engaging in every movement which seemed calculated to benefit the community or society at large. He gave liberally of his property and means to everything which tended to the advancement of religious or public good, to the encouragement of men struggling in business, and to those starting in life, or to the unfortunate and deserving. In friendship his attachments were sincere, strong, and confiding. He lived to see a large, prosperous, and enterprising town grow, aided by his own work, where had been dense woods and a wilderness; fruitful fields and prosperous villages where naught but the bare prairies were to be seen when he came to the then infant territory. In his old age he could not boast of worldly success, but enjoyed a moderate competence, and he gathered around his Thanksgiving table near a score of children and grandchildren who looked up to him with reverence and affection. Of his life and its successes let it be written: "Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." When his evening came the clouds in his sky were golden. The setting sun of life lighted them up with a radiance that heralded a blessed immortality.

MATILDA McMECHAN.

Died, February 5, 1886, of the effects of a fall consequent to paralysis, at "Headwood," the family residence in Otoe county, near Nebraska City, Nebraska, Mrs. Matilda McMechan, relict of John McMechan, aged 78 years 10 months and 23 days.

Matilda McMechan, the eldest daughter of David Ballentine, and a direct descendant of Lord John Ballentine, was born March 12, 1807, at "Headwood," the family estate near Belfast, Ireland.

In 1814 the family came to the United States and settled in Ogdensburgh, New York, where she and her only sister, Agnes ("Nancy"),

and her four brothers, William, John, Henry, and David, the latter twins, were educated. When she was 17 years of age the family removed to Zanesville, Ohio, and there, when 18 years old, she united with the United Presbyterian church. She was united in marriage with John McMechan, April 24, 1827, at Zanesville, Ohio. The family moved to the West in 1842, living at Glasgow, Mo., until 1846, then removed to St. Louis, living there until 1853, and in the autumn of that year moved to Council Bluffs, Iowa, and in October, 1854, they came to Nebraska territory, settling in Kearney City, Otoe county, which Mr. McMechan laid out, and which to-day is part of Nebraska City.

Mrs. McMechan had ten children—six sons and four daughters. Of these, two walked before her through the valley of the shadow of death. John and Rachel died in infancy. The eight living are: Mary Jane (Mrs. Alex. E. McConnell, in New Orleans, La.); Annie Clarke, residing at "Headwood," the family residence in Otoe county, Neb.; David Ballentine, in Kansas City, Mo.; John Henry, living at "Headwood," the family residence in Otoe county, Nebraska; Andrew Charles, Lieut. U. S. Navy; Matilda (Mrs. S. H. Calhoun, in Nebraska City, Neb.); William Ballentine, and Edwin Eldridge, in Kansas City, Mo. Two of her brothers survive her: William Ballentine, of Kansas City, Mo., and Henry Ballentine, of Mariposa county, Cal. Her faithful and christian husband answered the call of the death angel November 3, 1883, aged 83 years and 23 days.

She was possessed of an amiable, loving, retiring, and charitable disposition; gentle in manners, kind and sympathetic, refined and intelligent to the highest degree, and endowed with excellent judgment, active and efficient in every good work. As a christian woman, a christian wife, and a christian mother she was a model, and truly worthy of imitation. While she "rests from her labors," by her life we may hear her saying to us in words of inspiration, "Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace without spot and blameless." When she went to Council Bluffs, Iowa, there was no bible class in the Presbyterian Sabbath-school there, but she soon organized one, and taught it during her residence in that place.

When the family removed to Nebraska, she, with her husband and family, organized in Kearney City the first denominational (United Presbyterian) Sabbath-school in the then infant territory, and she

taught the first bible class. In 1877 she and her husband united with the Presbyterian church at Nebraska City, there being no U. P. church there.

For three years before her death she was unable, because of physical weakness and failing sight, to attend church.

While rising from her seat in her sitting room, on the afternoon of January 19, 1886, to receive some visitors, she fell, fracturing the right thigh bone, the fall being caused by a paralytic stroke of the lower limbs. She lingered until the afternoon of February 5, bearing her suffering with great fortitude and with full possession of all her reasoning faculties, and conscious until a few hours of her death, which she, like a good and true christian, calmly awaited, sleeping quietly and sweetly away without pain or struggle.

HENRY MARTYN ATKINSON

Was born in Wheeling, Virginia, September 9, 1838. His parents moved to Licking county, Ohio, when Henry was five years old. He was educated in Connecticut, at Denison University. He came to Brownville, Nebraska, in the spring of 1857. His first work in Nebraska was at the carpenter business. He then taught school, and afterwards read law in the office of E. W. Thomas, and was admitted to the bar in 1861. In 1862 he entered the military service of the United States, as adjutant of the 2d Nebraska Cavalry. Afterwards he was assistant provost marshal of the district of Nebraska. Was mustered out of service at Omaha, in 1864, resuming the practice of law. In 1867 he was appointed register of the U. S. Nemaha land office at Brownville. From 1871 to 1873 he was engaged in railroad construction from Brownville west. In 1873 President Grant appointed him a member of the Mexican border commission, and afterwards U. S. commissioner of pensions. In 1879 he resigned that position, and was appointed U. S. surveyor general at Santa Fe, New Mexico, serving in that position for two terms, after which he engaged in the practice of law, until his death, October 17, 1886.

In 1865 he was married to Miss Kate, daughter of Ex-Senator T.