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**THE McCLEAN FAMILY AND THE MASON-DIXON LINE**

By ROBERT M. TORRENCE

Many articles concerning the early border disputes between Pennsylvania and Maryland explain why the Penns and the Calverts employed the English surveyors, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, to survey what is known as the Mason-Dixon Line. Some are more detailed than one recently published popular article [\[i\]](#) which describes the survey and displays excellent photographs of the carved stone markers but which gives the impression that Mason and Dixon accomplished this memorable work aided only by wagons and tents, servants, axmen and laborers." It merely mentions that Colonel Alexander McClean, of Pennsylvania, and Joseph Neville, of Virginia, surveyed that part of the Line between Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Earlier histories give space to these two men and more particularly to McClean's brother, Archibald McClean, who had preceded the English mathematicians on the survey and without whose assistance the project might have been delayed many years. Archibald McClean, an experienced Provincial surveyor, was engaged by Mason and Dixon soon after they arrived in Philadelphia on November 15, 1763, for he had been employed for three years by the Proprietaries on the southern boundary survey. In fact, Mason and Dixon were called in chiefly because of the slowness with which McClean and his colleagues worked and the two Englishmen repeatedly testified to the accuracy of the work of their predecessors. [\[ii\]](#)

Archibald McClean, on July 4, 1760, was commissioned to make surveys for Thomas Penn, William Penn and Frederick, Lord Baltimore. [\[iii\]](#) His surveying skills caused him to remove from his residence in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia County, where, on July 18, 1761 he received the commission of the Penn heirs to survey and adjust the peninsular and circular boundaries between the three lower counties and Maryland. [\[iv\]](#) In company with John Lukens who also represented Pennsylvania, and Thomas Garnett, Jonathan Hall and John Frederick Augustus Priggs, representing Maryland, he established the Middle Point," between Cape Henlopen and the Chesapeake, and located, in November and

December, 1761, the well known Arc of the Circle around New Castle, Delaware and also the "Tangent Line through the Peninsula."<sup>[v]</sup> He is also said to have joined David Rittenhouse, of Pennsylvania, and Captain John Montresor, of the Royal Engineers, in the 1774 survey of the line between New York and Pennsylvania and to have entered the employ of Charles Carroll of Carrollton in order to establish the lines of his holding, "Carroll's Delight," then thought to lie in Maryland.<sup>[vi]</sup>

As the leading surveyor working out of Philadelphia, Archibald McClean was the chief associate of Mason and Dixon. His brother Moses secured appointment as Commissary to the expedition and entertained Mason and Dixon overnight in his Montgomery County home,<sup>[vii]</sup> but the association with the McClean family went further. As a York County historian records, "Six [?] of his brothers were also employed in assisting to establish the line from 1763 to June 4, 1766, when the party arrived as far west as the summit of Little Alleghany ' and were there stopped by troublesome Indians. On June 8, 1767, Mason, Dixon and Archibald McClean began to continue the survey from the top of the Little Alleghany,' accompanied by a delegation of friendly Indians as an escort, against the savages. On the 14th of June, they reached the top of the Great Alleghany,' where fourteen more friendly Indians joined them as interpreters. At this time, there were *thirty* assistant surveyors, fifteen ax-men and a number of Indians. They continued westward 240 miles from Delaware to Dunker Creek,' as marked on their map. This was thirty-six miles east of the western limit of the present Mason and Dixon line. The balance was run in 1782 and 1784."<sup>[viii]</sup>

On November 27, 1764, while working with Mason and Dixon, Archibald McClean was commissioned Deputy Surveyor for Western York County, and removed his residence from Byberry, Philadelphia County, to York, Pennsylvania, in June 1765.<sup>[ix]</sup> Since none of the histories of the Mason-Dixon survey include biographical information concerning the surveying brothers who engaged in the work, this seems to be an appropriate place to do so.

Archibald McClean was the second of nine children of William McClean who was born in 1702 on the Isle of Mull, Scotland, emigrated to Ireland and from thence to Montgomery County (now in Adams County), Pennsylvania, where he died June 13, 1785,<sup>[x]</sup> having married at Londonderry, Ireland, February 20, 1733, Elizabeth Rule, daughter of a Presbyterian minister. The son, Archibald, was baptised at Abington Presbyterian Church, Montgomery County, June 27, 1736,<sup>[xi]</sup> and died April 30, 1786,<sup>[xii]</sup> being buried in the Old Marsh Creek Cemetery, now a part of the Gettysburg battlefield.

He followed his profession throughout his life. On February 21, 1781 he was appointed by the General Assembly of Pennsylvania a Co-Commissioner, with John Lukens, to run and mark "a meridian line to the Ohio river," in connection with establishing the Pennsylvania and Virginia boundary. The work, for which McClean was paid only £2.4.9 specie, was done between September 1781 and July 1782 and a detachment of Westmoreland militia gave protection to the surveyors

who were doing their survey in wartime. Lukens and McClean had the assistance of the latter's brother, Samuel; his brother Alexander was designated Alternate Commissioner.<sup>[xiii]</sup> Archibald McClean, in addition to his surveying accomplishments, became a member of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania. He served as Chairman of the first Committee of Safety for York County during the Revolution; he was Prothonotary, Register of Wills and Recorder of Deeds for the County from 1777-1786. His first official act was to record the Declaration of Independence, under his own signature, in the county records. While the Constitutional Congress held sessions in York, his residence was used as the Treasury Department.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

Colonel Alexander McClean, surveyor and younger brother of Archibald, was born at Abington, presumably on November 10, 1746, and died at Union town, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, December 7, 1834. After his work on the Mason-Dixon survey, he removed to Fayette County where, in 1772, he was made Deputy Surveyor for that county. In 1781 he was appointed by the Supreme Executive Council, as Chief Surveyor for the State of Pennsylvania; in 1782 he served as a member of the first Assembly and in 1783 was the Recorder and Presiding Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and Orphans Court.<sup>[xv]</sup> When David Ritzenhouse and Andrew Porter were appointed Commissioners to run the western boundary of Pennsylvania, Porter, on May 10, 1786, asked that Alexander McClean be his assistant. The appointment was made the same day and between June and October 1786, McClean signed the official reports of progress with Porter. Their work was finished at Lake Erie.<sup>[xvi]</sup>

List of Children of William and Elizabeth (Rule) McClean:<sup>[xvii]</sup>

i. William McClean, born December 26, 1733; died September 3, 1807, in Hamilton Ban Township, Adams County, Pa. He married December 6, 1757, Jane Witherow, born December 30, 1732; died July 23, 1785, and had issue: *a.* John McClean, *b.* Elizabeth McClean (married James Johnson), *c.* Margaret McClean (married Abraham Sc6tt), *d.* William McClean, *e.* Rebecca McClean (married-Meredith), *f.* Mary McClean (married John Cox), *g.* Ann McClean (married Andrew Finley), *h.* Samuel McClean, *i.* Sarah McClean (married John Witherow), *j.* James McClean (married Margaret Reed), *k.* Jane McClean (married John Foster).

ii. Archibald McClean, mentioned above, married first, March 29, 1759, Ann (Annetje) Trump, by whom he had issue: *a.* Elizabeth McClean (married Thomas Clingan), *b.* Mary McClean (married Ensign Jacob Barnitz and was the mother of the Honorable Charles A. Barnitz), *c.* Levi McClean, *d.* Alexander McClean (married Margaret Lawrence), Archibald McClean married, second, March 11, 1777, Mary Leach Treat, of Abington, and had further issue: *e.* Esther Rule McClean (married Jacob Scudder), *f.* Rebecca Irwin McClean.

- iii. (Major) Moses McClean, born January 10 and baptised March 26, 1738; surveyor and Commissary; married April 14, 1763, Sarah Charlesworth, and later resided in Chillicothe, Ohio. Issue: a. Archibald McClean.
- iv. John McClean, born May 11 and baptised June 8, 1740; surveyor; removed to Washington County, Pa.
- v. James McClean, born July 27 and baptised November 3, 1742; died September 14, 1825. He married April 6, 1773, Janet Hart, born in 1751; died January 6, 1815.
- vi. Samuel McClean, born September 30, 1742; surveyor; married Margaret Porter and removed to Washington County, Pa.
- vii. (Colonel) Alexander McClean, mentioned above, married October 26, 1775, at Uniontown, Pa., Sarah Holmes, born April 4, 1750; died March 26, 1832. Ten children.
- viii. Elizabeth McClean, no information.
- ix. Joseph McClean, born 1752; died 1776.

## FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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[\[i\]](#) William Stump, 'Mason-Dixon Line,' illustrated with photographs by A. A. Bodine and A. L. Trussell and published in the magazine section, *The Baltimore Sun*, Sunday, December 2, 1956.

[\[ii\]](#) Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth Of Pennsylvania, Containing Reports of the Surveys and

Resurveys of the Boundary Lines of the Commonwealth (Harrisburg: I 557), p. xiii.

[iii] John Gibson, ed., *History of York County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: 1556).

[iv] *Report of the Resurvey of the Maryland-Pennsylvania Boundary, Part of the Mason and Dixon Line* (Harrisburg: 1909), No. 335.

[v] The work of McClean and associates is described in scholarly detail in Thomas D. Cops, 'When the Stars Interrupted the Running of a Meridian Line Northward Up the Delmarva Peninsula,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 100, No. 6 (December, 1956)~ pp. 557-566. The same author has studied the Mason-Dixon survey (with no mention of the McLean's) in "Degrees Along the West Line, The Parallel Between Maryland and Pennsylvania," *Ibid.*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (May, 1949), pp. 127-133, and in numerous other articles.

[vi] William Dunlap, *History of the New Netherlands, Province of New York, and State of New York, to the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (New York: 1539-40), II, cxcix, mentions Ritten-house only. In the British Museum is a plan, "A map of the province of New York, with part of Pennsylvania and New England, from an actual survey made by Captain Montresor, engineer, four sheets, 1775." *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXXVIII, 329.

[vii] On February 13, 1765, Charles Mason recorded in his Journal, "Cross'd the River Schuylkill near the Swedes-ford and Lodg'd at Mr. McLane's Commissary for the Lines." The original Journal is in the National Archives; a Photostat is at The American --Philosophical Society.

[viii] Gibson, pp. 395-396. See also *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereinafter *PMHB*), XXXII, 495.

[ix] Deposition of Archibald McClean dated December 5, 1759, in the suit of Digges Heirs vs. George Stevenson, No.67, July Term, York County, Pa., C.P. 1710, filed as Blair MSS No. 22 at York County Historical Society. Gibson erroneously states that Archibald McClean located 'in the Marsh Creek district of York County ' in 1735 (*op. cit.*, p. 395)~ when he would have been two years old. He was living in Byberry on February 15, 1765. *PMHB*, LVIII, 207.

[x] William Henry Egle, M.D., ed., *Notes and Queries, Historical, Biographical and Genealogical, Relating Chiefly to Interior Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: 1595), Annual Volume 1597, p. 223.

[xi] *Records of Abington, Pa. Presbyterian Church, 1714-1864* (transcript at GSP), p. 25.

[xii] *York County Deed Book* 00, p. 16. His will, dated October S, 1755, was proved May 15, 1756. *York County Will Book* G, p. 105.

[\[xiii\]](#)

*Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs*, pp. 295-312. McClean's letters provide an interest-ing documentary account of the expedition.

[\[xiv\]](#)

Gibson, pp. 123, 396.

[\[xv\]](#)

Franklin Ellis, ed., *History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: 1512), p. 362.

[\[xvi\]](#)

*Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs*, pp. 375, 431.

[\[xvii\]](#)

The dates of baptism here cited are from *Records of Abington, Pa. Presbyterian Church, 1714- 1864*. The dates of birth, marriage and death are from Bible records in the possession of Helen H. Torrence, Baltimore, Md., great-great-great-great granddaughter of Archibald McClean.