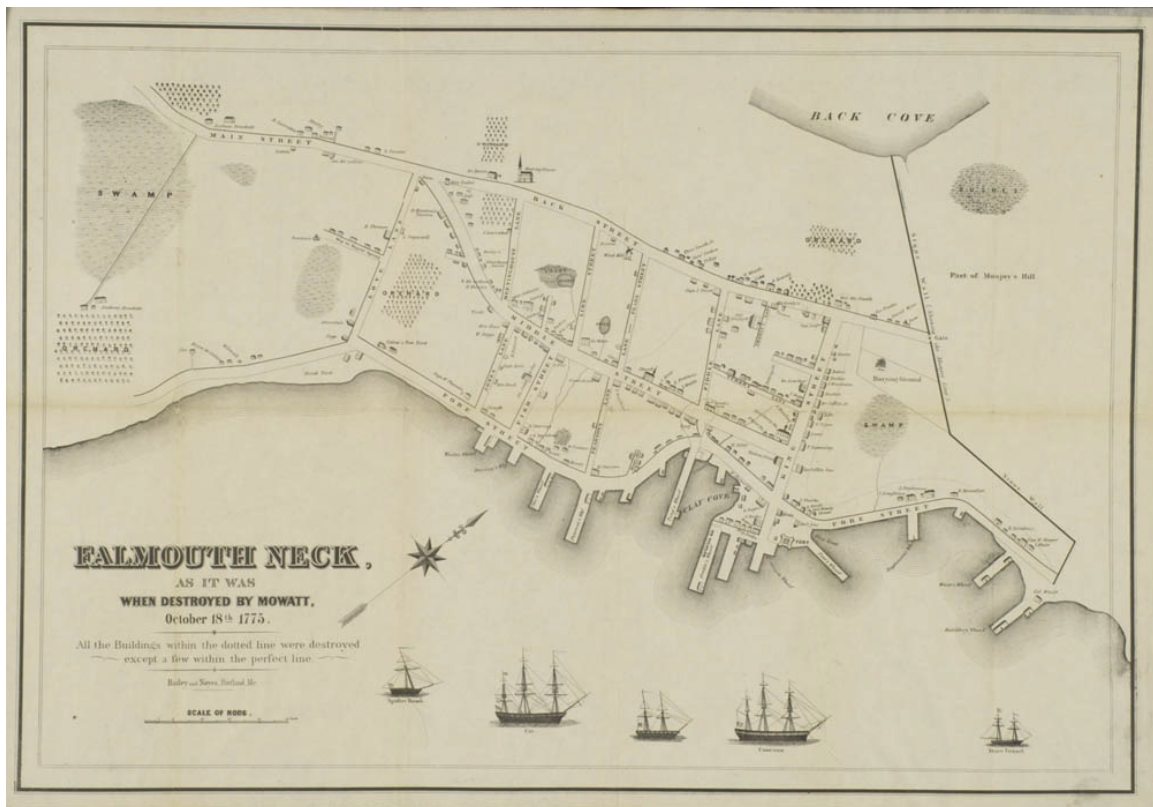


## The Rise and Fall of The McLellan Family of Ballymoney and Maine

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1720, Bryce McLellan, a weaver from Ulster presented his credentials from the Presbyterian sessions in Ballymoney Co. Antrim to the Congregational Church at Wells, Maine, where the proprietors of the town granted him 10 acres of meadowland. The tough pioneer settlement of Wells had survived the ravages of the ongoing so-called Indian Wars and had just begun to prosper at this time. Since 1652, Maine had been under the political and religious domination of nearby Puritan Massachusetts. As the Puritan Congregational Church was virtually the only available public worship in Wells at the time Bryce joined the congregation of the patrician Rev. Samuel Moody, who was a close friend of the renowned revivalist Jonathan Edwards. However, Moody is chiefly remembered for having led the attack on the French for of Louisbourg armed with a hatchet which he referred to somewhat confusingly as 'the sword of the Lord and of Gideon'.

However Wells was not the place where Bryce McLellan would make his fortune. His children had become sick there and all had perished save only his eldest son Alexander who had been born in Ballymoney. In 1728 Bryce 'upped sticks' and moved to Casco Bay where he spent a couple of years in what was then Cape Elizabeth and is today the suburb of South Portland. He moved on again within a couple of years and settled Falmouth Neck - nowadays the city of Portland, and took up residence close to present day York street and High street. The town was then a major 'masting post' for the Royal Navy largely because of its excellent harbour facilities and the ready availability of ample supply of timber most suitable for the manufacture of ships' masts. However it was not yet the centre of fabulous wealth that it was later to become as a very significant port engaged in world trade. Notwithstanding this there were already signs of individual merchants striving to acquire finery and elegance.



Initially Bryce McLellan was a poor but useful and hardworking member of the community. His Portland home was a small cabin which sat in 2-3 acres of 'enclosed and fenced' land. Immediately behind his house Bryce laid claim to the tidal flats that stretched as far as the channel of the river. He didn't allow anyone to remove seaweed from or to dig for clams in this area which he enclosed and on which he then built a 50

foot wharf. Although he had worked in Ulster almost solely as a weaver Bryce McLellan now offered a variety of 'handyman' skills to the people of Falmouth - largely within the area of farming and labouring. Records show that between 1738 and 1773 he held a number of minor town offices to supplement his pay with other small amounts of income. So it is stated that he worked as, 'a constable, a surveyor, a culler of fish, a tything man, and a fence viewer.' In 1773 he was awarded 13.04 pounds (sterling) for, 'officiating in the smallpox'. So nothing if not versatile he was a 'jack of all trades', and his son Alexander was growing up to operate in the same way.

It was in this Falmouth house that Bryce had a new family - Susannah (1713-1812), Captain Joseph (1732-1820), Deacon James (1734-1792), Captain William (1736-1815), and possibly also Margaret, Mary, and Rachel. Of these Joseph was the most talented and ambitious. Bryce's wife Jane died in the late 1730's and in 1741 he married Elizabeth Miller (1692-1770). At this time there was some tension between Rev. Thomas Smith of the First Parish Church in Falmouth and the McLellans who were members of the Congregational Church but nonetheless seemed to be clinging to their Presbyterian ways.



*Captain William McLellan*

Thirteen years after Bryce's arrival in Maine and in 1733 his cousin Hugh and wife Elizabeth left Co. Antrim and emigrated to York, Maine. The McLellans - Bryce and also Hugh and Elizabeth were individually descended from Sir Hugh McLellan of Scotland who had been knighted in 1515. The family were originally lowland Scots with their main Castle being situated in Kircudbright.



*Kirkcudbright*

The family had settled in Ulster at the time of The Plantation. When Hugh and Elizabeth married in 1729, however, there was opposition to the match in that Elizabeth's family had developed as the wealthier branch of the clan. Elizabeth was actually disowned by her uncle and this may have been a key factor which prompted the couple's emigration. After staying for a while with his brother James in Saco, Maine, Hugh stayed briefly with Bryce in Falmouth. He pushed on to settle in the frontier township of Narrangansett No. 7 - which later became known as Gorham, Maine. There he purchased 200 acres of land for the princely sum \$15.00 which even then appeared like a remarkable deal until it is realized that these 200 acres on the frontier were hostile wilderness where virtually no one else wanted to live. There were no roads, no shops, no governmental services and a constant and frighteningly real threat of Indian attack. In 1746 the McLellans' nearest neighbour was killed and as a result the family took refuge in the fort at the top of the hill near their cabin. They actually stayed there for 7 years until peace was eventually secured. The family was then able to return to their log cabin. It was at this time that Hugh and Elizabeth began to prosper - farming for sustenance and cutting timber for sale to a growing number of settlers in the area. They coupled this energy with a frugality for which they were to become renowned. They were to have a large family and about 20 years after they moved back to their log cabin Hugh McLellan spoke about the need to build a home with more space. His actual words are worth noting here as a statement of the ambition and striving will of the Scots-Irish settlers on this frontier. --

*'Your mother has always said when we talked about it that as we both belong to a race that has had lands and lived in stone houses, and as they turned her out of doors having married a poor man, and we now have more land than any of them, if your mother is to have a new house it should be a brick one'.*



Thus the family moved from a one room house to a house with 15 rooms which was a great talking point in the local vicinity. Elder Hugh, as he was known, was now the wealthiest man in Gorham and owned 1500 acres of land, as well as many cattle and slaves. He had achieved all of this because he was prepared from the start to 'literally tame the wilderness'.



*McLellan-Swett House*



Portland Harbour

Meantime, Bryce's sons - Joseph, William, and George, all received their maritime training aboard local vessels engaged in the West Indies trade. All of the McLellan sons became master mariners - Joseph purchased his first 'cumpas' (sic) in 1756. The two branches of the family came together with the marriage of Elder Hugh's daughter Abigail to Deacon James McLellan and that of her sister Mary to Captain Joseph. Thus the maritime McLellans of Falmouth married into the agricultural McLellans of Gorham. As a result of this we see how the McLellan clan came together as described by their son-in-law Rev. Elijah Kellogg.

*'Joseph carried lumber to the West Indies and they (the Gorham McLellans) built his vessel, and loaded her from their own forests. They bought timber lands, and on small streams that they could dam with little expense, sawed out their own timber, hauled it with their own teams, and raised their own hay and cattle'.*



*Elijah Kellogg Church, Harpswell, Maine*

By 1766, Captain Joseph owned a 54 ton vessel and a quarter share in an 18 ton vessel. Though he continued to call himself a mariner now he was also licensed to sell 'tea, coffee and china ware'.

At this time, Falmouth was viewed by the British as a 'nest of rebels', and by December 1774 Joseph was appointed as one of a three man team who were given the task of securing cannon for the defence of the city. At this time the colonial merchants became loosely organized as 'The American Association'. In April 1775 Joseph was appointed by a local committee to obtain gunpowder from Boston and in the following month he was sent to Andover on a similar mission. This kind of venture took time and money to complete but meant that Joseph was well in with the local rebel Popular Party. On October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1775, a British flotilla entered Casco Bay and fired on the town and set fire to a vast area. Joseph McLellan had run his vessel down to the safety of Harpswell at the far end of Casco Bay whilst Mary had sent the children to Gorham to take refuge at Elder Hugh's house.



*Portland on fire 1775*

After the Revolution the McLellans survived the upheaval and began to assume real prominence in the town of Portland. Bryce the immigrant from Ballymoney died in March 1776 and thereafter Joseph started to style himself as a 'merchant' rather than a 'mariner'. In 1780 he was commanding officer at Falmouth and when the official end to the war came with The Peace of Paris in 1783, the McLellans were poised financially and socially to rise even further. In 1793 the French Republic declared war on Great Britain and America's mercantile trade including that of the McLellans benefited from selling to both sides. When politics started to replace 'the power of the pulpit', the McLellan family prospered even more. At this time Falmouth experienced an influx of craftsmen, itinerant painters and mechanics and the development of 'banks, insurance companies, lottery offices, libraries, academies, militia units, independent fire companies, stores, wharfs, churches, newspapers and elegant residences'. Slavery was abolished in Massachusetts and in what was then the District of Maine in 1783. Indentured servants now made up most of the workforce and so it was with the McLellans. In this new town (now called Portland) the shipping firm of Joseph McLellan and Son was quite simply, 'the largest ship owner in Maine', before 1807. The firm was said to be as well known for its trade in Liverpool, England, as it was in America. The McLellan shop which was situated on Main (now Congress) street had by now developed into a large General Store which operated using barter as well as conventional buying and selling. The firm also extensively used a system of IOU's to its detriment in the long run. The firm also hired vessels at this stage to sell Georgia cotton and moved cargoes between Boston, Charleston, South Carolina, and Liverpool.

They had developed to the zenith of their social and economic power by the time of Jefferson's Embargo Act of 1807. Under its terms no American ship was permitted to sail to foreign ports and no foreign vessel was allowed to unload its cargo at American ports. Until now the McLellans had reached a point whereby they lived in great mansions and were key to the economic life of the town. The third and fourth generation were in the practice of arranging marriages with the other great families in the town. However, the effect of the embargo on trade and the toppling of the 'paper economy' led to consequent bankruptcy and set relative against relative within this once tightly knit 'Scots-Irish' clan. This is shown by the fact that Rev. Elijah Kellogg actually sued his own father-in-law Joseph McLellan senior. Symbolically, all was lost on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1810, when Stephen McLellan sold the magnificent McLellan mansion in Portland for \$2000.00 and persuaded the new owner to retain his services as manager of this newly created 'Boarding House'. In the years that followed occasionally individual members of the McLellan family achieved prominence as State Senator or Judge but by and large it was over. The family of Bryce McLellan, weaver from Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, had enjoyed fabulous wealth but this had been reversed when the tide was almost literally turned against them by Thomas Jefferson's embargo policy.

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Reference - Unpublished manuscript by William David Barry and John Wolverson  
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