

## CLIFTS, MCREES WERE EARLY LANDOWNERS HERE

By John Wilson

In Hamilton County's early years, much of the land at the northwest end was under the control of the brothers-in-law, Robert Clark McRee and William Clift. They held 10,000 acres together, and each also had major land dealings in conjunction with other partners. In the mid-1820s, they built stately frame homes near a spring at Soddy that came to be known as the Clift-McRee Spring.

A Scotch-Irish family, the McRees came over from County Down, Ireland, to Pennsylvania. They were staunch Presbyterians, who in the early years in America still “talked often about the reformation from Popery, the bloody Queen Mary, and the battle of, the Boyne.” William McRee, one of the emigrants, made his way to North Carolina. His son, William McRee and, his wife, Dinah, lived at Mecklenburg County, NC This



William McRee lived from 1714 to 1789. His son, Dr. James McRee, was a prominent Presbyterian minister in North Carolina. Another son, William McRee, was born in 1766. He married Jane Craighead, whose birth was in 1774. Their son, the Robert Clark McRee who came to Hamilton County, was born in 1799. The McRees moved to Knoxville about that time.

William and Jane Craighead McRee joined their son at Soddy in their latter years. William McRee lived until 1845, and his wife until 1848.

William Clift and RC. McRee married daughters of Moses Brooks, who lived in Knox County. Clift married Nancy Brooks, and McRee married Jane Brooks. The Clift marriage occurred in 1823 and the McRee marriage in 1818. Moses Brooks, who was originally from Augusta Co., Va., was in the battles of King's Mountain and Guilford Courthouse in the Revolution. His wife was Agnes Gamble.

Both the Clifts and McRees migrated to Hamilton County when it was just opening up and land prices were low. From their days in the Tennessee militia, McRee was known as “Major” McRee and Clift as “Colonel” Clift.

At Soddy, they worshiped together at the Presbyterian church they helped found. This “Mount Bethel Church” was formed in 1828, with Abel Pearson as pastor. The

congregation met in homes until a church building was erected on land donated by Clift and McRee in 1832.

One of the 5,000-acre purchases of Clift and McRee was at Opossum Creek stretching to the foot of Walden's Ridge. McRee joined with the land speculator B.B. Cannon in another 5,000-acre venture. With John Brown, he obtained a 2,000-acre grant. One of McRee's first grants in 1828 was 200 acres on Walden's Ridge.

When there was a court judgement against John C. Penny, R.C. McRee used the occasion in 1847 to bid \$18.92 for 100 acres on the Tennessee River above Opossum Creek. He also was active in the speculation centering around the town of Dallas, which was briefly the county seat.

Major McRee was also a skilled surgeon, and he treated many of his neighbors. He and Col. Clift were leaders in the mining operations at Soddy. Major McRee also had a sawmill and gristmill operation.

As settlers began streaming into the rich valley near the Clift and McRee estates, they began to dole out their land. They sold to the families' of Gann, Layman, Roberts, Selcer, Vandergriff, Sawyer, Copeland, Rogers and others.

Jane Brooks McRee died in 1856, while Major McRee lived until 1876. During the Civil War, his brother-in-law Clift was an ardent Unionist and waged the "Clift War" at Soddy. However, Major McRee cast his lot with the South. The McRees, like the Clifts, were divided on the war issue. One son of Major McRee, Robert Clark McRee Jr., fought for the Confederacy. His younger brother, Moses Brooks McRee, was on the Union side. A sister of R.C. McRee Jr., Nancy Isabella McRee Anderson, and her husband, William Eagleton Anderson, were in the Sequatchie Valley during the war. A battle was fought near their home, and the wounded were afterwards treated in their residence. During guerrilla warfare, her husband was carried off with three other prisoners, two of whom were shot down.

Major McRee, beginning in the 1840s, had distributed some of his property to his children. He had a large family, though some of the children died at a young age.

Margaret Hannah died at the age of nine in 1828. Cynthia Ann died in 1840 at the age of 18 just after her marriage to the Rev. James Landrum Reed. Elizabeth Jane lived from 1824 to 1852 and was the second Wife of James Landrum Reed. Mary Agnes, who lived from 1826 to 1848, was the wife of James Hair. William Richard died in 1833 when he was 19. Sarah Eda Rebecca died when she was nine in 1847.

The other children included Almeda who married Philip M Roberts as well as Nancy Isabella Anderson. Moses Brooks McRee married Nancy Roberts.

Robert Clark McRee Jr., who was born in 1837, married Mary Anderson, sister of William E. Anderson. The Andersons were children of Col. Josiah McNair Anderson of

Sequatchie Valley. He was speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, then speaker of the state Senate before being elected to Congress in 1849. A strong Confederate supporter, he was shot by a fanatic while making a speech near Whitwell in November of 1861. He died three days later.

R.C. McRee was a law student residing in Chattanooga with the attorney John L. Hopkins when the Civil War broke out. During his service with a Confederate cavalry unit, he escaped without serious injury. However, his brother-in-law, James Madison Anderson, was killed in 1865.

R.C. McRee lived at Soddy and was active in the Presbyterian Church there. In 1876, he was elected county judge for Hamilton County. It was during his administration that a new county courthouse was erected on the dock between Walnut Street and Georgia Avenue. He served until 1886.

Judge McRee and Mary Anderson celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at Soddy. A short time later, on Dec. 4, 1921, Mrs. McRee passed away. Judge McRee died a year later "almost at the same hour." He was then 85 and was living with his daughter, Mrs. J.W. Clift.

Several of the sons of Judge McRee became physicians. His children included Dr. William Richard McRee, Dr. Josiah Anderson McRee and Dr. Hugh McRee. Dr. William Richard McRee died in 1917 at Soddy. Another son, Dugald Monroe McRee, moved to New Mexico. Another son was Wallace Park McRee. The daughters included Elizabeth McRee Carmichael, Almeda Brooks McRee Sangster, Ann McRee Davis and Iris who married Dr. J.W. Clift.

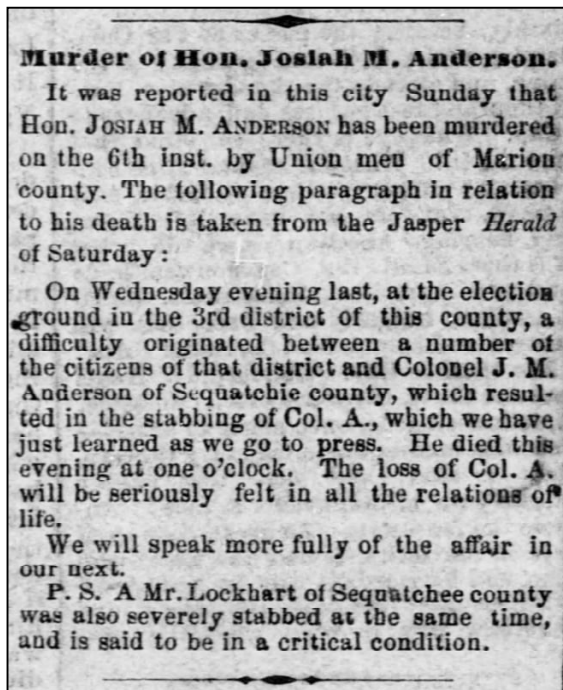
Moses Brooks McRee lived in the old home of Major McRee at Soddy. The sons of Moses Brooks McRee included Douglas, Arthur Brooks, Fred, Claudius Monroe and Joseph Richard, who was a minister. A daughter, Blanche, married Horace Bowling. Marshall McRee, a son of Claudius Monroe McRee, lives in Hixson. Lee McRee, son of Fred McRee, resides in Lupton City. Sons of Arthur Brooks McRee include Maynard McRee, of Soddy, and Arthur Brooks McRee Jr., who is in a nursing home in Rhea County. Arthur Brooks McRee III lives at Soddy.

Almeda McRee Frazier, daughter of Douglas McRee, lives in the old Major McRee home that dates to about 1825. It is at 11313 Hixson Pike. The frame home, built with wooden pegs, still has many of its original features, including the old chimneys. A back bedroom and bath have been added and the entrance altered. Nearby is a cistern that held water from the Clift-McRee Spring. The old home of Col. William Clift was also nearby. That home burned and was replaced by another old Clift dwelling that was torn down in recent years by a new owner. The Bowling house where Blanche McRee Bowling lived with her husband is also nearby. It is now occupied by the Leland Ganns. Almeda McRee married Earl Lee Frazier.

At the McRee Cemetery near Soddy are the graves of pioneers of the family, including William and Jane Craighead McRee. and Major R.C. and Jane Brooks McRee.

Larry McRee, of Madison, Ala., has written a book on the McRees. He is a grandson of Claudius Monroe McRee and great-grandson of Moses Brooks McRee.

**Col. Josiah McNair Anderson**, b. 29 November 1807, Pikeville, Bledsoe Co., TN – d. 8 November 1861, Marion Co., TN, md 1828 to **Nancy (Lamb) Anderson**, b. 28 September 1807, Bledsoe Co., TN – d. 29 March 1860, Sequatchie Co., TN, d/o Alexander Lamb & Elizabeth Carmack:



Col. Josiah McNair Anderson U.S. Congressman. He studied law, was admitted to the bar and commenced to practice law in Jasper, Tennessee. He was a member of the Tennessee State House of Representatives, (1833-37) and a member of the Tennessee State Senate, (1843-45). In 1849, he was elected as a Whig to the Thirty-first Congress, serving until 1851. An unsuccessful candidate for reelection, he resumed the practice of law. In an effort to prevent the impending Civil War, he was a delegate from Tennessee at the peace convention held in Washington, D.C., in 1861. He was a Colonel in the Tennessee State Militia, when he was killed at age 53 after having made a secession speech at Looneys Creek, Tennessee.

Bio by: John "J-Cat" Griffith

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