



Clan MacEwen

The Galloway MacEwens

According to tradition, this branch of the clan made its appearance in Galloway at an early period--in the middle of the fifteenth century,--about the time of the dispersion from Otter. A descendant [Mr. John McEwen, Girvan, Ayrshire.] of the family of High Mark, Wigtonshire, furnishes the following interesting account of the sept:-- "The late Sir Andrew Agnew, in his history of The Agnews in Galloway, states that about the middle of the fifteenth century the Laird of Lochnaw was besieged in his castle, which was then situated on the island in the middle of the loch, by the retainers of the Black Douglas, with whom the Agnews had a feud regarding the Sheriffdom of Galloway. When the besieged were on the point of capitulation they were surprised to see, one day, that their enemies had been attacked in the rear by another armed force, and they sallied out, and with the aid of their new allies routed the forces of the Douglas. To recompense these allies--who were the remnant of a broken Highland clan called McEwen--the Laird of Lochnaw gave them the tenantry of four of his farms--Knock, Maize, Achnoterach, and High Mark--and their descendants are in occupation of the two latter to the present day.

"In a private letter to Mr. Robert McEwen, R.N., in 1840, Sir Andrew Agnew, while recommending him to the Lords of the Admiralty for a commission, states that he could recommend him not only because he knew him personally, but also from the fact that 'his family had been tenants on his estates from time immemorial.' "One of the family (a Covenanter) was shot by command of Claverhouse at the village of Baor, in Ayrshire, and was buried, and a headstone was erected to his memory in the churchyard there. Another of the family at this time was ruling elder of the Parish Church of Leswaet, and through him the old church Bible which Richard Cameron (the Cameronian leader) had used and preached from, came into the possession of the family, and is now in that of the writer. "Early in the eighteenth century another of the family, Andrew McKewan, was killed by command of the Earl of Cassils, for although McKewan was too independent to give up his farm to a follower of Kennedy at the latter's request, and met his death as the result. When tried for the crime, Kennedy was ordered to pay the widow of McKewan a large quantity of cattle to recompense her for the death of her husband. So much for the law and justice, and the value set on men's lives in those days. "At the time of the rebellion of the '45 Sir Andrew Agnew took the field for King George, accompanied by two dhuin vassals, John and Thomas McEwen from High Mark; while two other brothers, Robert and Gideon, took the Jacobite side and followed the fortunes of Prince Charles. The story goes that when Sir Andrew Agnew was besieged in Blair Castle, going the rounds one day he passed John McEwen, and in looking out at the rebel forces he also saw the brother Robert, the Jacobite. Turning to John he said, 'Jock, do you see Rab?' and on being answered in the affirmative, he ordered him to 'Shoot the beggar,' a command which, it is needless to say, was not carried out, for after all 'blood is thicker than water.' This John McEwen afterwards went to the Continent with Sir Andrew Agnew, and was present at the Battle of Dettingen, where Sir Andrew commanded the North British Fusiliers.

"The grandson of John McEwen, born in 1766, and also John by name, ran away to sea when in his teens, and during his first voyage was pressed into the Royal Navy, and for seven years was in active service. When he received his discharge he sailed as first officer of the privateer 'Mary,' of Liverpool, under Captain Thompson, who was mortally wounded in the first engagement. Before his death he handed the command of the vessel over to McEwen, writing on the back of the Letter of Marque, 'From James Thompson, commander, to John McEwen.' This document, signed by the Lords of the Admiralty in 1793, is now in possession of the writer. After making some prize money in command of the privateer, McEwen bought the hull of a Government transport, and after fitting her out sailed with a cargo to the West Indies; but on his return with a cargo of sugar he was wrecked on the north-west coast of Africa, losing all he had on board except his quadrant, now in the possession of his great-grandson. "Captain McEwen left a son, Robert, who became a marine engineer and was the first to erect a steam engine in Russia, and was presented by the Czar Nicholas with a cup for his services. He was awarded the Isis Gold Medal of the Royal Society of Arts on two occasions: 1st, for his safe mercurial steam gauge; and, 2nd, for his machine for hot pressing lace goods. The cup and medals are also in the possession of the writer. He received a commission in the Royal Navy, and died at Monte Video in 1860 on board H.M.S.'Curacoa.'

"In the old family Bibles, and in the buryingplace in Leswaet Churchyard, near Stranraer, the name is spelt in various ways, as McKewan, McKeown, McEwine, McEwing, McEwan, and in later times McEwen, the form now generally adopted. "On the farm of High Mark, Leswaet, the names of the fields are evidently of Gaelic origin; and there is also a cove on the shore called 'Otter Cove,' probably so named after the original home of the race. In the days of the 'Free Traders' it was no doubt a convenient shelter and landing place. A member of the family who got into trouble over his 'trading' is said to have escaped to the Isle of Man, where he was joined by his wife and family, and became the ancestor of a family of the name in that island."

There is an old seal in the family showing an oak tree springing into leaf again, with the motto "Reviresco" over it. It was used by Robert McEwen in his lifetime, but is of much older date.* [See post on the subject of these family seals]

There are, besides the writer, other descendants of these Galloway families."

