

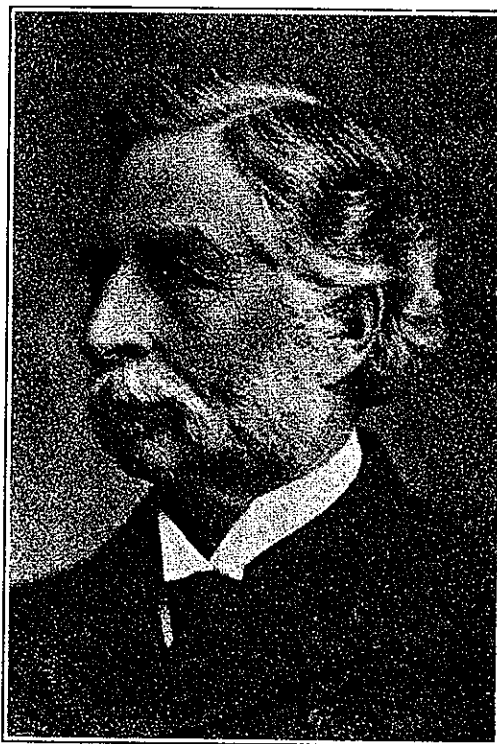
J. J. McGEE

By his son, T. D'Arcy McGee

John Joseph McGee was born in the Town of Wexford, Ireland, on the 6th of August, 1845. His father was James McGee of the Coast Guard Service, and his mother's name was Margaret O'Dea. He was a half-brother of the late the Honorable Thomas D'Arcy McGee, and the youngest of a family of seven, the other members being Lawrence, James, Rose, Anne and Dorcas, all of whom had predeceased Mr. McGee, and he was for a great many years the only surviving member of the family.

He was educated at St. Peter's College, Wexford. His brother, D'Arcy, who was the eldest child of the first marriage, came to Canada in 1857, and at his instance the younger brother also followed a few years later, arriving at Montreal on the 11th of February, 1863. Shortly afterwards, he left for the town of Peterborough, where he was articled to the late J. W. Fitzgerald, O.L.S., with whom he worked for three years. During that period he was engaged on many important surveys in the Districts of Algoma, Lake Superior, Georgian Bay and Muskoka. Mr. McGee successfully passed his final examination as a Provincial Land Surveyor in Upper Canada and received his certificate dated the 10th of April, 1866.

A few months later he was employed by the Dominion Government on a special survey in the District of Lake Superior, and in the early part of June, 1866, he left Peterborough for the head of the lake, and during that summer he was stationed at Michipicoten, Sault Ste. Marie and Fort William.



After completing this survey, he attended McGill University, Montreal. Shortly afterwards he was employed on the survey of the Intercolonial Railway during the Government construction of that road under the late Sir Sanford Fleming with the late Samuel Hazelwood, John Brophy, Harry J. Cambie, Fenning Taylor and other well known Civil Engineers. In 1873 he entered the Department of Interior at Ottawa and about that time gave up the practice of his profession.

In 1879 he was appointed to the Dominion Lands Survey Branch of the Department of the Interior, and shortly afterwards was made Assistant Surveyor-General of Canada. He remained in that Department until the 20th of May, 1882, when he received the appointment from the late Sir John A. Macdonald, of Clerk of the Privy Council, which position he held for twenty-five years, retiring in 1907 after thirty-five years of faithful service in the Government of Canada. On the 26th of February, 1893, he was appointed Deputy Governor-General by the then Governor-General of Canada, Lord Aberdeen.

In religion Mr. McGee was a Roman Catholic and was at all times a devout member of that Church. He had the same love of his native land, which inspired his illustrious brother, and was always concerned with the affairs of Ireland and followed with interest the political fortunes of that country.

Mr. McGee was married in Montreal on the 31st of January, 1871, to Elizabeth Crotty. There were nine children born of this union, namely: Mary E., a member of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, residing at Montreal; T. D'Arcy, Barrister, etc., Ottawa; John J. Jr., Mines Department, Ottawa; Charles E., who served in the Boer War in South Africa, was killed in action at Festubert, 26th of May, 1915; James A., of the Geological Survey, accidentally killed May 16th, 1904; Frank C., a noted hockey player, killed in action at Courcellette, September 16th, 1916; E. Lillian Robertson, Ottawa; Kathleen G., died an infant 19th July, 1883, and Walter R., Bond Broker, Ottawa.

After his retirement from the Civil Service in 1907, Mr. McGee, accompanied by Mrs. McGee, took a trip to his native Country, Ireland, and on his return he commenced the writing of a phase of Canadian History, between the years 1857 and 1867, interwoven with which were his Reminiscences of his late brother, D'Arcy McGee, who during that period played no small part in welding together the scattered provinces of

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this country into one united and contented people which culminated in their union into a Confederation: The Dominion of Canada.

His son, T. D'Arcy McGee, Barrister in Ottawa, furnished the materials for this Sketch but the photograph was donated by Mr. J. J. McGee in 1919.

Mr. and Mrs. John Joseph McGee celebrated the fifty-sixth anniversary of their wedding on January 31st, 1927. Three sons, Thomas D'Arcy, John, and Capt. Walter, and one daughter, E. Lillian (Mrs. Donald E. Robertson) were present.

Thomas D'Arcy McGee, his half-brother, was born in Ireland in 1825, and there were also two brothers, one Lawrence, a sea captain who served in the American Civil War, and was later a lawyer and man of letters in New York, and James, who also served as an officer in the American Civil War.

It was Thomas D'Arcy who induced John Joseph to come to Canada. He wrote him on December 13th, 1862, as follows: "I have made arrangements with Jas. W. Fitzgerald of Peterboro, West Canada, one of the Provincial Land Surveyors, who is willing to take you into his office as soon as you can reach Canada, the sooner the better." Directions were also given respecting transportation. Fare from Derry to Portland £15 to £16, Portland to Montreal £2.

The news of the assassination of Thomas D'Arcy McGee in Ottawa on April 7th, 1868, reached John J. at Metis when employed on the Intercolonial. He drove with horse and buggy from that point to Riviere du Loup where he took train to Montreal.

John Joseph McGee took an intense interest in public affairs and kept scrap books for reference, which chronicle events in Canada and Ireland.

The following extracts are from a letter written by Mr. J. J. McGee in 1919.

"I was articled to Mr. Fitzgerald of Peterboro, in April, 1863, and passed my final examination in April, 1866. It is all as of yesterday. Mr. Charles Unwin was Secty. to the Examiners. For him I am immensely grateful. He did me a great service, being but a boy, so to speak, my age was questioned, just 21 years of age. His kindness is always floating on the placid surface of my brain, and the ostrich feather which daily skims off the rubbish has never been able to skim off Mr. Chas. Unwin's kindness in my behalf then."

"Messrs. Hawkins and Passmore were my examiners. I had no fear of Mr. Hawkins' reputation as a stickler in mathematics. I never met anyone who could down me. The Irish, from the days of Virgilius in A.D. 783 down to John J. McGee (in 1919 so say I) were noted mathematicians. Of Mr. Passmore I had a holy dread. If St. Peter lets me into Heaven I'll renew my acquaintance with these two remarkable men in my view of the human race. Mr. Hawkins' question to me was to remonstrate the infinite divisibility and indivisibility of matter, but the 16th Prop. of the 3rd Book of Euclid was at my fingers' end. Mr. Passmore's question was, how would I plant posts on a double fronted concession as the surveys ran in Upper Canada. I was non-plussed as I only had experience in new lines for the Government surveys. The line from Spanish River to Parry Sound for example."

"Prof. Chapman of the University was my examiner in Geology. I surprised him. I believe then, and so believe now, I knew more about Trilobites than he did, and I got marks 'exceedingly good.' I had for my instructors Dr. Sterry Hant and Mr. Billings, two of the greatest scientists of their day. Dr. Sterry Hant had a terrible temper but Mr. Billings was placidity itself. I have yet to learn the name of any man who was a greater palæontologist than Billings. The present Billings Bridges outside (Ottawa) now in the City, was called after him. He was unmarried, but relatives of the family still reside in the neighborhood of this Bridge."

He took an interest in the Veterans' meetings, and nearly every year wrote an interesting letter regretting his inability to attend the Luncheon, but expressing the hope that he would have an opportunity of meeting again some of his contemporary Surveyors.

In 1926, he stated that "when a very small boy, he took a great delight in following the Surveyor of the Geodetic Survey of Ireland, a model of perfection; there is not a well, nor a fence, nor a road, not shown on the Survey maps."

"When I came to Canada in 1863, my great ambition was to climb to the position of Surveyor-General, but the political fates were against me. I spent, however, many profitable days with Col. Dennis, Chas. Unwin, Fitzgerald of Peterboro and Wilson of Mount Forest, and spent many happy days on surveys between Fort William and Ottawa. The names of Gossage, Hawkins, Passmore, Drennan never pass out of my memory."

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He was also employed with Hugh Wilson, P.L.S. of Mount Forest. John McAree, P.L.S., served his apprenticeship with Mr. Wilson in 1863-1867 at about this period.

After Mr. McGee's retirement from the Civil Service in 1907, he commenced his Reminiscences of the Hon. Thomas D'Arcy McGee, M.P., which he practically completed in 1918 or 1919. He proposed to publish it in two volumes.

Mr. J. J. McGee died at Ottawa on Sunday, April 10th, 1927.

A survey of the Township of Ryan was made for the C. L. Department by Mr. McGee in 1866.

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