

(This cover letter shares the family history research completed by John Edgar McElrath as it was shared by his daughter Marion McElrath. It was retyped from the original copy in the family's private collection. McElrath Family private collection.)

Berkeley, California
November 22, 1963

Dear Family:

Here is your genealogy. My father, John Edgar McElrath, was an ardent Genealogist. It was his hobby. He compiled the data.

Too voluminous, to be sure, but I have recorded it as it was given to me. It is embellished with the account of Grandmother McElrath's account of her visit to President Lincoln and the "Ode" my father composed for a Harvard Class Reunion.

All is now submitted for your interest and information.

Affectionately,
Marion McElrath



I am a 1/32 degree Cherokee, and my ancestry is as follows:

Oc-on-os-tota, my great, great, great grandfather, Chief of the Cherokees, who was in Revolutionary times allied to the British, and fought against General John Sevier, or as he was known among the Indians, "Nolachuck-y Jack," first Governor of Tennessee, and my great, great, great grandfather, was the father of a daughter named Oo-lu-tsa, who was a full blood Cherokee. Oo-lu-tsa's daughter Nancy married George Lowery, a Scot Presbyterian, who was second Chief of the Cherokees for forty-two years, and was honored by them by the erection of a monument to his memory at Tahlequah. Of this union there were born six children one of whom my great, great grandmother, Elizabeth Lowery, married, first, Joseph Sevier, a son of John Sevier, and at the death of Joseph Sevier, she married Jack Walker, Chief of the Cherokees. Of the first marriage there was born Margaret Sevier, my great grandmother, who married Gideon Morgan of Sartoga Springs, new York, who was the uncle of General John H. Morgan, "The Raider," and United States Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama. Gideon Morgan, my great grandfather, was a Major in the United States Army in the War of 1812, and led a regiment of Cherokees. Of the union of Gideon Morgan and Elizabeth Lowery, there was born my grandmother, Elizabeth Morgan, who married Hugh McDowell McElrath, whose father was David McElrath of North Carolina, who was a Captain in the Revolutionary War; and on the McDowell side he descended from Captain Joseph McDowell, of the Revolution, who had three sons in the Battle of Kings Mountain, Charles, Hugh, and Joseph, the first of whom was a General. And in the same battle were John and Joseph Sevier. I also trace my descent in direct line to Margaret O'Neill of Castle Shane, Ennis Killen, County Fermanagh, Ireland — Lord Hugh O'Neill present owner. Margaret O'Neill married Joseph McDowell and came to North Carolina in an early day, in about 1730, and moved to North Carolina, where she died in 1773.

My father, John Edgar McElrath born at Citico, Tennessee, January 2, 1844 married Elsie Ann Alden at North Temescal, California September 23, 1875. They had 11 children.

This will give you a general outline.

Yours truly,

Elsie Alden McElrath

daughter of John Edgar and Elsie Ann Alden McElrath

at time of application for membership in Daughters of American Revolution

applies to all children of John Edgar and Elsie McElrath

A REBEL WOMAN'S VISIT TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN

By Elizabeth Morgan McElrath

On the 14th of July 1864, I was arrested at my home in Tennessee for my “rebellious walk and conversation” and after various trying episodes, found myself on the morning of September 15th at Willard's in Washington.

With a heart torn with conflicting hopes and fears I had left Nashville under a parole and gone to Washington to implore the clemency of the President. Arriving at night, the next morning I ordered a carriage and was whirled up to the White House where I soon found an usher to take up my card, having previously written on the back a beseeching prayer for an immediate audience. It was returned with the information that the President was engaged with five senators and four governors and could not see me. I did not know just what to do, but hearing two ladies from Baltimore venting their disgust at having made four trips from that city to see the President, and failed each time, I with a willpower born of the circumstances that environed me, determined to wait, if it should be for a week, right in the ante-room. This was crowded with a mixed multitude exhibiting various degrees of impatience and all, like myself, waiting for an audience. For four mortal hours, I, poor lonely rebel, the solitary representative of a desperate cause, sat and watched the seething, moving crowd and rather enjoyed their ejaculations of impatience and disgust. One tall, seedy looking individual, having the appearance of a used up politician or a chronic office seeker, stalked through the room muttering his thunder and asserting in rather unmeasured terms – “that it was as much and more to the President's interests to give him an audience than it was his to see him.” Another to whom I was particularly attracted was a young “greenhorn” in a spick and span new suit of citizen's clothes with a stiff pair of yellow gloves on his enormous hands – hands that the poor fellow in his new “court dress” found superfluous appendages and could not dispose of to his satisfaction. Sometimes they spraddled their capacious grasp over each knee, then up they would go in a vain attempt to hide in his pockets, then settle hopelessly on his knees again. One poor old woman with a thin striped shawl upon her shoulders, addressed me several times, saying, “Don't it take a long time for him to git ready” and “Haint you tired of waiting?” Tired! I was worn out, but just as I had reached the very limits of endurance we heard the glad “Open Sesame” proclaimed by the usher

and what a rush then for the audience chamber! From sheer weariness some of the crowd had dispersed but there were quite a number of us left.

I knew nothing about the modus operandi of approaching potentates and powers, and so followed in the wake of those whom I supposed had made the “grand entree” before. I suppose the room was the library. It was very large and the walls were covered with maps and charts and several well-filled bookcases. The men all ranged themselves on one side of the room and the women fell into line on the other, just like a spelling match at a country school.

The President sat behind a long table covered with green baize and had a worn and weary expression on his face that was not dissipated when the seedy individual advanced with a profound bow and presented his scrap of paper. I did not hear the colloquy but a very few moments ended his dream of glory and he backed out of the Presence. When the poor greenhorn’s turn came he looked as if he would shake to pieces before he arrived at the “port of delivery” across the table. The President hastily scanned his credentials and with a voice hurled with all the force of scorn against his new coat and yellow gloves, said “You go back to your regiment sir!” The poor fellow withered beneath that sirocco and got out as fast as he could. One after another handed in their petitions and retired, some looking glad and some disappointed. When the old woman in the shawl went up, the President handed her paper back saying, “Why my good woman your business is with a Justice of the Peace, not me.” As the ranks of petitioners were thinning I thought I had better pluck up heart of grace and go forward. But I had no written petition! I did not know that it was necessary, but as I sat in the ante-room I had found in my pocket an old letter that I had written to the President six weeks before but never mailed, so in default of something better, I concluded to present that as a something to inaugurate my talk. I was a prisoner on parole but neither felt nor affected the humiliation that such a state imposes. Had I been a man I should have trembled, but being a woman I fearlessly took the inside track and approached the President on his own side of the table, and as he reached out his hand for my petition, I grasped it and gave it quite a fraternal shake saying, “I have no written petition but here is a letter written sometime since that will perhaps elucidate my object.” As he opened it I said, “With your permission I will take a seat” for – to tell the truth – I began to feel slightly nervous.

After reading down the first page he turned to me and said, “I understand you, – you are living on the lines and entertaining guerillas all the time.”

“I’m doing no such thing sir” said I.

“I’ll bet you have someone fighting against me now” said he.

“I have but one son and he is doing his best, and that reminds me sir, that your son and mine were classmates at Harvard in ’61, and interchanged occasional courtesies such as boys are wont to do who do not receive regular remittances, and you should have some regard for the mother of your son’s friend.”

But the incorruptible patriot relied, “I don’t care a thing for that.”

I asked, “Do you know General Carter now at Knoxville?”

“Yes, and he is no better friend of mine than you are. By what General’s orders were you arrested?”

“Gen. Steadman’s, and he said by General Sherman’s verbal order. I did not know your military officials did business that way,” said I.

“Well Madam, the most that I can do will be to telegraph General Steadman and if he will let you go home I don’t care.”

Thereupon he wrote a telegram and shuffled wearily across the room to the bell and sent it off. As he took his seat I asked, “How long before you will get an answer to that?”

“I don’t know, perhaps in two or three days.”

“Well sir, in the present state of my finances I cannot remain in Washington so long. Can you let me hear from you at Nashville?”

After a moment’s deliberation – “Well yes, if I should be reminded of it,” and thereupon he turned squarely from me and extended his hand to the next suitor.

I withdrew to my old place in the line feeling that I was neither a wiser nor a better woman. I stood there for a half-hour with the tension of my nerve and willpower considerably relaxed despair glowering down upon me from every corner of the room. The crowd was growing beautifully less, so with a recklessness born of desperation, I once more approached the President on the near side again saying as I did so, "It is but seldom that a lady has an opportunity of pleading her own cause before such a magnate as the President of the United States and my business is not in the shape I want it.”

His lips relaxed into a gentle but weary smile and he said, “Now I want you to tell me just exactly what you want, for I want to get rid of you.”

I told him what I wanted and he wrote to Governor Johnson. Handing the card to me to read he said, "Will that do?"

I thanked him and told him it was perfectly satisfactory, adding that if his officers and soldiers had treated me with half his consideration I might not have been such an uncompromising rebel.

"Well," said he as he took me kindly by the hand and raised his other as if in blessing, saying, "Go and sin no more."

So ended my first and last interview with the lamented President Lincoln.

The card from President Lincoln to Governor Johnson is in my possession and is worded as follows:

*"Governor Johnson is hereby authorized
if he sees fit to send Mrs. McElrath to
her home or her friends further south.
September 15 1864."
(Signed) Abraham Lincoln*

The foregoing card was written and signed entirely by President Lincoln.

ODE

Air – “Fair Harvard

Oh! Far from the walls of Fair Harvard, we meet
 On this distant and glorious shore,
Once more to recall the fond memories sweet
 That clustered around us of yore;
To muse o’er the past, that forever has gone,
 With the hopes that we cherished so dear,
When roseate hues gilded life’s early morn,
 As the rainbow gilds hills far and near.

As soft as the snowflake that falls on the river
 As sweet as the perfume of flowers,
Is the mem’ry still bright and still green as ‘twas ever
 Of the music that breathed thro’ thy bowers.
And tho’ Atropos dread over ready may stand
 To cut in twain life’s brittle thread,
Till then we will think of old Harvard so grand,
 And the fame that around her is spread.

J. E. MC ELRATH