



In the Frankton Cemetery, opposite the Queenstown Sporting Complex, is the grave of John McBride, born in Cross, Northern Ireland in 1830. John McBride was the eldest of a group of seven McBride brothers who came from County Antrim to the Otago gold rushes in the 1860s and founded a dynasty of McBrides. There are many living collateral descendants of John McBride.

Several of the McBride brothers arrived earlier than John. They had been involved in gold mining on the Victorian goldfields in Australia and followed the dream to New Zealand. Their lives in the goldfields were hard, and one suspects often unrewarding, so they turned their hands to a variety of tasks and occupations. McBrides were involved in commerce in Queenstown, in sawmilling at the head of the lake and in a variety of occupations. McBrides Hotel in Queenstown dates from this time.

Other ventures included the making of bridges and water races in Central Otago.

McBrides also were involved with a brother-in-law, Captain Robertson in building the "Antrim" the first steamer on Lake Wakatipu.

Tragically, two of the original seven brothers, Hugh and James were drowned in the lake.

In transit to New Zealand John disembarked at New York and was immediately inducted into the Union Army (North) to fight against the Confederates (South) in the American Civil War. He served in the 1st Company of the 38th New York Regiment, a group which took heavy casualties in both Battles of Bull Run and in other engagements. John was promoted to corporal. Eventually he was discharged and travelled to Queenstown New Zealand with his gratuity from his war service, where he regained contact with his six McBride brothers.

John never married but prospered in the sawmilling industry, and he also owned some land around the head of the lake. Among his other attributes John was renowned as a distiller of illicit whisky. The courage, application and dedication of these early settlers is amazing. They worked with primitive implements by today's standards, but many of their works are still standing today, a testament to their courage, energy and initiative.

When family members recently realised that John was entitled, as an ex-serviceman from the American Civil War, to a memorial plaque and a grave refurbishment courtesy of the Defence Department of the United States, Tony Hanning, John McBride's great-grand-nephew contacted the American Embassy in Wellington and set off a chain of events which culminated in a memorial service for John at the graveside at Frankton in May 2008, prior to which the grave had been renovated and a special commemorative plaque emplaced.

The service was conducted by Father Tony Harrison and the occasion was graced by the presence of the United States of America Ambassador to New Zealand, William McCormack. An unexpected 'bonus' at the ceremony was the appearance of the Choir of Notre Dame University from the United States who happened to be touring New Zealand at the time, who sang, "The Star Spangled Banner" and "America the Beautiful", adding much to the moving and solemn occasion.

At a get-together after the service in the hall, about eighty extended family McBride members afterwards Ambassador McCormick spoke movingly about the sacrifices made and the horrors of the Civil War.

In this terrible war of secession, the Union Army comprising 2,100,000 men lost 110,000 men killed in action; 360,000 total dead, and 275,000 wounded. The Confederate army of 1,064,000 men lost, 93,000 men killed in action, 260,000 dead and 137,000 wounded. This was war on an unparalleled scale until the First World War, fifty years later. The Confederate Army had a surprising number of victories when one considers that their numerical strength was just over half of the Union Army. Poor food, substandard sanitation and living conditions also accounted for many deaths by a variety of illnesses on both sides although the Union Army was generally better provisioned.

William McCormick spoke about the bugle call "Taps" which was played at the graveside and how often there were close relatives on either in this series of bloody engagements. The death toll and horrors of the Civil War were immense and the effect on families was heart-breaking. The Confederate generals paid emigrant ships' captains to divert ships full of young men who were following the gold to California, Australia, and New Zealand, to the port of Savannah, where these young men were pressed into service in the Confederate Army. This resulted in many cases of brother fighting brother on opposite sides.

The damage to homes, businesses and property was devastating, especially in the southern states. Whole cities were razed to the ground in the terrible war.

John McBride for his efforts in this war was fittingly remembered on a special day dedicated to his memory.

John McBride died at Queenstown in 27 December 1897.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) by McBride relative Donn Livingstone of Mosgiel.