



George McLean was born on 10 September 1834 in Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland, the son of James McLean and Jane [Proctor]. After education at Elgin Grammar School and St. Andrews University, he emigrated to Melbourne, where he was employed in the Colonial, and later the Oriental Bank. From 1862 to 1865 he was manager of the Dunedin branch of the Bank of New Zealand. He left banking in 1865 to become a partner in the mercantile firm of J. & E. B. Cargill.

In 1871-72 and 1875-81 he represented Waikouaiti in Parliament, holding the portfolios of Customs, Postmaster-General and Telegraphs in the Vogel and Atkinson administrations. Due to ill-health he retired from the House of representatives and was appointed to the legislative Council in 1881.

George McLean was the first chairman of directors of the Union Steamship Company 1875-1906, and, for many years, whenever James Mills was absent, he acted as managing director. For 18 years he was chairman of the Colonial Bank. After its collapse in 1895, although he negotiated its sale to the Bank of New Zealand, he became an increasing embarrassment to the Union Company. His uncompromising attitudes were also increasingly unpopular in a liberal age. By the early 1900s, his fellow directors were describing him as 'detrimental' to the company, and he resigned in 1906.

He was president of the Dunedin Jockey Club for 32 years, owned many successful racehorses, and advised the Club to purchase Wingatui and move their activities there. He was knighted in 1909.

His wife Isabella McLean, daughter of Mathew Holmes, was described as 'a small but commanding leader in the social activities of this city'. She was a founding committee member of the Dunedin

Public Art Gallery, and a lasting contribution was her work for the campaign to build a new art gallery, which was eventually rewarded with opening of a purpose-built gallery in the Queens gardens, much of which is now part of the Otago Settlers Museum. She married George McLean in 1867 and they had one son and five daughters. Sir George died 17 February 1917, and Lady McLean on 19 June 1923. They are both buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery.

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