

William John McElroy

Arms Manufacturer

By Cecil W. Anderson

GAR



William John McElroy and wife, Esther Freency of Macon.



Major McElroy and son, Henry, born 1860.

(Courtesy of Dr. & Mrs. H. L. Batts, heirs at law)

William John McElroy was born October 22, 1824. "He was the son of Jonathan McElroy (who was himself born in Green County, N.Y.) and a "Miss Fisher", who is unidentified. Jonathan was living in Coeymans, N.Y., when a son was born to him there in June 1819 and we assume that William J. was also born there." The 1845 City Census of Savannah (For the State of Georgia) lists William J. as 20 years old and a tinner. McElroy left because there was constant competition from immigrating artisans and Macon (1824) demanded useful, talented people. He married Esther Freency, of Macon, on December 27, 1849, and, through her influence and guidance, became a community leader, active in fraternal organizations, the Methodist Church, and supported the Democratic Party, though not aspiring to public office. It is interesting to note that while he is listed as a merchant in the U.S. 1850 Census, he helped organize Macon's first trade (Labor) union. The Middle Georgia Historical Society has revived interest in Macon's past and their reprint "Historical Record of Macon and Central Georgia", used with their booklet "A Guide to Macon's Architectural and Historical Heritage", provides additional

information not contained in this limited space. William A. Albaugh's works give an excellent description of the physical characteristics of McElroy's products and related use and my additional data will be given later.

The most valuable source of information is the files of the Macon Telegraph (newspaper). The issue of Jan. 11, 1862, announces the name of William J. McElroy as a candidate for the office of Major of the 50th Regiment, Georgia Militia, which position he won and, later, rose to Lieutenant Colonel. The picture shows Major McElroy and his son, Henry, born in 1860. The issue of Feb. 11, 1862, gives detailed information of the editor's

visit to McE.'s factory, giving location, naming items made there (e.g., lasso bowie knife), etc. The issue of July 11, 1862, announces the removal of the factory and a commercial notice on Sept. 21, 1862, of McE. and his partners inviting business at his new location.

After declining to run for the office of Lt. Col. in Feb. 1864, McE. was dropped from the rolls of the 50th Georgia Militia. He then joined a local company (Co. B. Macon Guards) and, as he was a Government Contractor, was not interfered with by the Enrolling Officer, until in the month of May 1864 when he was enrolled and an application for his detail was forwarded by the Macon Arsenal to the Georgia and Confederate Authorities, as a public necessity. Georgia denied this request and McE. served in the defense of Macon twice, in addition to serving the needs of the Community and Arsenal. The demands of war caused his various partners to either use their talents separately or enlist.

McElroy stamped his first products in 1860, with hardware store dies, a sword being marked "W. J. McELROY, GA." and his bowie "W. J. McElroy, Macon, Ga." and finally a sword, and pike, "W. J. McELROY, MACON, GEORGIA". He and James Thompson, his partner, sold these individually and it is interesting to note that he also sold a Philadelphia-type Derringer marked simply "W. J. McELROY." The maker will have a hard time duplicating the size and style of these dies as this is the only examples of stamping. James Thompson returned to his native New York when war became imminent. Late in 1860, McElroy formed two partnerships that aided his arms

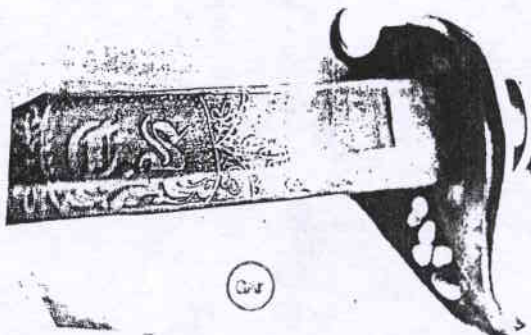


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manufacturing. The first was with Alexander S. Reynolds, a 33 year old Pennsylvanian-a pattern maker, moulder, and brass founder, and Cornelius D. Wall, a 22 year old South Carolinian, who was fore-man and master machinist, in 1860, for the South Western Railroad, simply entitled "Wm. J. McElroy & Co., Macon, Ga." (also W. J. McElroy, Macon, Georgia). The second was with John R. Hunt, a 40 year old North Carolinian, a moulder in 1860 for S.W.R.R., and was entitled "McElroy and Hunt, Macon, Ga.", firm name cast rather than stamped into brass frame buckles.

The etchers for his swords were J. E. Wells, Jr., Colton Ave. corner Cherry St., Macon, and S. E. Thues, Mulberry St. near 2nd, Macon; not B. P. Freeman, firm of Greer and Freeman, grocers, Cherry St. near 2nd., or Florian Herzog, firm of Bolshaw & Herzog, 11 Colton Ave., Manufacturers of crockery. Although publicity is given for making one home-made sword, in the Macon Telegraph, Freeman had no active participation in the McElroy ventures.

The above partnerships were dissolved as Reynolds, later 2nd Lt., 5th Ga. Militia, still later Cpl., 2nd Ba. Ga. Inf., became a moulder for the Macon Armory. C. D. Wall, later Capt., Co. G, 14th Bn. Ga. Inf., also worked for the Armory but spent most of his time patrolling and protecting the railroad (his command gaining the name of "S.W.R.R. Infantry"). The last partnership was W. J. McElroy, Herrington & Co. (1863) and while the Hiram Herbert Herrington family was large and active in arms manufacturing, this was A. G. Herrington and not a misspelling as one might imagine. All of McElroy's manufacturing was on a limited basis and, I believe, has a higher survival rate, tending to create the idea of huge quantities being manufactured.



This article from the Macon Telegraph adequately describes the operation of W. J. McElroy, & Co. I quote, "We inspected the large manufacturing establishment of Major McElroy, & Co., Yesterday, and

were much pleased at the activity and energy displayed by the firm. Besides manufacturing all varieties of Tin and Copper vessels, and articles for ordinary use, they manufacture everything for army purposes that can be made out of tin

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