

APPENDIX A  
UNCLE "BIG" MAKE McNEILL

A few months ago, my Cousin Catherine MacKay Hutchinson gave <sup>me</sup> a copy a memorial to my late Great Uncle Malcolm Drake McNeill written by Miss Cornelia Spencer MacMillan of Red Springs. This Memorial brings back many pleasant memories and stories of and by Uncle Make and his family. I have taken the liberty of copying the Memorial which was written by Miss Cornelia in long hand, apparently a very short time after Uncle Make's passing, (December 12, 1936) I also have added foot notes where my memories vary from hers and in some cases amplify the episode mentioned.

"Sketch of Life of Late Malcolm Drake MacNeill"  
By Cornelia S. MacMillan of Red Springs, N.C.

"With the passing of Malcolm Drake MacNeill the last Confederate Veteran in this part of Robeson County, I would like to give a brief sketch of his life as he told it to me a year or more ago. For he said at the time, "I won't live much longer so write it down"

He was born at Moss Neck-Robeson County, July 3rd, 1847. His parents were William C. & Pamela Ann Drake MacNeill. On both sides he was descended from, God fearing sturdy Scotch who came over & settled in this part of the county & taken an active part in the life of this section

His boyhood days were passed on the farm, Schools in those days rarely lasted longer than three or four months, so there was plenty of time for many experiences, making trips to Lumberton & Shoe Heel (Maxton), to Elizabethtown on the Cape Fear, sometimes they camped for the night which was very thrilling for a small boy.

It is especially interesting to note that one character, Steve Lowry, who was afterwards to be well known, worked on the farm & accompanied him on more than one trip.

Mr. MacNeill's good disposition & humane treatment of this Indian boy was afterwards to be remembered, and makes a thrilling story.

The first school Malcolm (Make) as he was known attended was at Red Springs, taught by William Stewart in a one-room school house near the Hotel on North Main Street. He felt very much at home in Red Springs for his Great Grandfather (Sailor Hector MacNeill) had received from GEORGE III a grant of land on which the town is built. Here he met many of his kith & kin. From Red Springs he went to Morven, Anson Co., N.C. to a school taught by Rev. Neil Ray, a Methodist minister

In the late Summer of <sup>1864</sup> he came home, volunteered for service at the age of 17 in Co. D 1st Batt of Heavy Artillery & was sent to Fort Fisher, where ~~remained~~ <sup>he</sup> remained until it fell. He was wounded severely through the hip & lay on frozen ground a day and a night before his wounds were dressed. (1) The suffering of that terrible time crawling for water, along with the moans of the dying is even too distressing at this late date to recall. Sellers MacNeill, his cousin, just a lad, died at his side. Mr. MacNeill said these dying soldiers were sending messages by him to their mothers and loved ones at home.

These wounded boy soldiers were taken on board ship & carried to

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prison at Point Lookout, Md., where for long weary months they barely existed on a little soup & bread. One day walking around in the prison yard he saw through the fence his Uncle-in-Law, Dougald MacCormick. Imagine the joy of seeing some one he knew. Uncle Dougald gave him a fish, salt mackerel-raw of course----such a time as he had getting that fish cooked over the coals.(2)

At last prison days were over & he came by boat to Wilmington, up the Cape Fear to Elizabethtown, across to Bladenboro where he boarded the Seaboard train for Moss Neck.

Home at last, the war over but an invading army has swept the country and he a boy of 18 was to start life anew, with little to start with, an old Sherman horse and an ox was to do the ploughing and cultivate the farm, but he cheerfully went to work. The South as a whole was hard hit but Robeson County's trouble had just begun. Henry Berry Lowry & his gang were to deal with. The Carpetbaggers were another evil to contend with and life was anything but pleasant. Time went on and one day Mr. MacNeill was taken prisoner by the Lowry gang. In recounting this experience I asked him "well how did you feel/". "Well he said "I thought my time had come. I was securely tied. I couldn't sleep & during the night I could hear them talking; over the camp fire & I heard Steve Lowry begging for me & the next morning Steve let me go" (3).

Gratitude is commendable in everyone & it is pleasant to think that this outlaw, who was considered the meanest of the gang, remembered his childhood friend & did one kind deed. Mr. MacNeill went back to his home & not so long afterwards, he & his brother-in-law John Taylor were walking from the house to the railroad station (across the Mill Dam), when Mr. Taylor was shot down.(4)

The situation grew worse, for the Carpetbagger ruler in Lumberton, hearing of the death of a negro, **maliciously** accused Mr. MacNeill of the crime-- a perfect falsehood but Mr. MacNeill knew he would have to leave the country, so he left.(5)

In company with some men from the Eastern part of the State he started West & finally landed in Indian Territory where he lived for some time. I asked him what in the world he went there among Indians for & he laughing remarked, "Why there were all kinds of folks there and he got along pretty well. One day he said he was sitting talking to an Indian. Trees were scarce & some remark was made about a tree near by & the Indian said "Hang a White man on that tree last year." Mr. MacNeill exclaimed "Why". The Indian said "He hang Indian year before". Mr. MacNeill said " I was real nice to that Indian and moved on". After a stay in Indian Territory he went on a trip to Texas & then back home. After a brief visit to his home & friends, he left for Georgia. where he settled at Oliver. He went in naval stores & was very successful. He married Miss Minnie Zitrauer, a **descendant** of the Salzenbergers, who settled near Savannah in 1734. To this union was born one child, Louise, (Mrs. C.M. Rakestraw). His wife died many years ago & when he retired from business, he came back to the Carolinas with his daughter & for the last eight years has made his home in Red Springs.

The subject of this sketch was a typical Southern Gentleman & had a wonderful personality, everybody loved him & he always loved to have his friends around. He was a colorful figure in the community & will be greatly missed.

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At his last public appearance at "Lee-Jackson" Celebration he was to overcome to respond as he was the last Veteran. He passed away true to the last to those principles for which the South fought.

In his Gray Uniform he was laid <sup>ones</sup> to rest near the home of his childhood, where with his loved ones he sleeps after a long life, well spent for his God & his Country.

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Footnotes:

- (1) I remember his story of his experiences at Fort Fisher. The only reason he survived was that was so cold that the blood from his wounds froze and thus prevented him from bleeding to death.
- (2) My recollection of Uncle Dougald MacCormick bringing him the fish, is that was at Fort Fisher. (I could be wrong about this) The wounded prisoners were kept in a separate stockade from the unwounded.
- (3) One of the best coverages of "The Lowery War", is that written by Mrs. Mary C. Norment of Elrod, N.C and later republished by the Lumbee Publishing Company in 1909. It is not a well written book, but apparently is very factual. It is titled "The Lowrie History" Uncle Make's story of being captured and held prisoner over night by the Lowries is documented by Mrs. Norment. The incident was associated with the Lowrie effort to capture a R.R. Detective by the name of Sanders. They succeeded, **tortured and murdered him. His body was later recovered, and he was given a decent burial.**
- (4) Uncle Make told me that he and Uncle John Taylor (Aunt Dove's Husband) were walking across the Mill Dam to the Moss Neck Station, where Uncle John was going to catch the train. He said that he (Uncle Make) stepped back to avoid a mud puddle when the Lowrie Shotguns went off, blowing off Uncle John's head and scattering his brains on the mill pond. Uncle Make said that he looked down at those shot-gun barrels and that they looked as big as "Flour" barrels to him. He took off as fast as his legs could carry him back to his home.
- (5) His story about the negro being killed: He and eleven other men were indicted (He never did indicate that it was a KKK hanging, although I suspect that it was). Uncle Make told me that he, along with several other men were escorting a prisoner to the jail in Lumberton, when a friend came riding out and warned him that there was a warrant out for his arrest. Uncle Make said that he turned his horse around and swam him across the river. He said that the water was as cold as ice, and took off for Moss Neck. He hid out in the woods for several days until a plan was worked out for his escape. It was for him to ride by horseback to Bladenboro and to be waiting in the woods at the Railway Station, for a certain train for Wilmington. A friend was to get off the train. If this friend pulled out a Red Handkerchief, Uncle Make was to head back into the woods; if the friend pulled out a White one, it mean't that there was no one on the train who would recognize him, and that he could safely board it. The friend pulled out a White handkerchief.

Wilmington was too close to Moss Neck, so Uncle Make went on to Baltimore. His family boxed up his trunk and shipped it to him. Later he went on out West to Oklahoma and Texas, as far as the Rail Roads went, then he took a Stage Coach and after that he got out and walked. He stayed in Texas a while and twice came as close back to home as Goldsboro bringing droves of Mules. Later one of the other eleven men had to come back to Robeson County. He stood trial and was acquitted. This acquittal mean't that

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the other indicted men were the free to return. Uncle Make came back to N.C., but didn't stay long. He took off for Georgia, where he went into the turpentine business. He first stayed in Oliver. There he met and married Aunt Minnie and Cousin Nonie soon arrived. Later they moved to Southwest Georgia. My mother, then a 17 year old girl visited them when they were living in Sumner, which is a few miles East of Tifton. We have, what today would be called an autograph book, that contains a number of good wish entries, made in Sumner, addressed to Miss Ann (as my Mother was apparently called at that time). Uncle Make was very successful in the turpentine business, but after Cousin Nonie married Dr. Chauncey M. Rakestraw, he and Aunt Minnie moved to Savannah, Ga. There Uncle Make went into partnership with another man and as Uncle Make put it "He supplied the money and the other man supplied the experience. When it was over Uncle Make had the experience and the other man had the money".

Uncle Make and Aunt Minnie made their home with the Rakestraws. Dr. Rakestraw was a very fine man and apparently an Excellent Surgeon, in fact my mother went to Savannah in 1914, for a kidney operation by him. For some reason, Dr. Rakestraw seemed to be constantly on the move. I never knew him very well. They moved from Savannah to Asheville, where Aunt Minnie died in 1917. Uncle Make for a time held a job as a night security man for the Langren Hotel. Then the Rakestraws moved to Rock Hill, S.C., then to Chester, then to Abbeyville, Anderson, Newberry and at least one other place in South Carolina. Dr. Rakestraw was well thought of in Newberry. He composed a number of fine readings. One of his best was entitled "Before the Tomb" and was read on Easter Sunday in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer before a large audience and was also read that afternoon before the congregation of St. Luke's Church. That reading was reproduced in full in a Newberry paper on 13 April 1926.

Later they moved to East Rainelle, West Virginia. There Dr. Rakestraw had a severe stroke, about 1927 or 28. Uncle John T. arranged for them to move to Red Springs, where they spent the remaining years of their lives.

Uncle Make was my favorite and only Grand Uncle that I knew well. Aunt Minnie was a favorite too, even though she wore an asifedita bag around her neck. Since I only remember seeing her a few times, my memories are not as complete, as those of Uncle Make. My most vivid one of her was probably on the occasion of her last visit when she gave me a WHOLE SILVER DOLLAR, the first one that I ever had, and a dollar was a lot of money for a ten year old in those days.

Uncle Make and Aunt Minnie used to visit us practically every Summer, and I looked forward with great pleasure to their visits. After Aunt Minnie died, Uncle Make continued his visits in the Summer, (and at Xmas, if I could influence him enough). He usually came to Red Springs, (Aunt Dove was living at that time) and then he would go on down to Bladen, to visit Aunt Tудie. That involved getting him over to St. Paul's where he took the train to "Elizabeth". He also developed (or had) an acquaintance with a fellow Veteran, who owned and ran a soft drink stand at White Lake, whom he helped out in the Summer. That arrangement lasted until his friend died.

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I used to make a special effort to get him to spend Xmas with us. Once I wrote him a letter in the form of a legal summons, to which Cousin Nonie responded and he appeared as summoned. Cousin Nonie saved that letter and Louise Watson, returned it to me when Cousin Nonie became so feeble that she had to enter a nursing home.

About 1917 or 1918 it was customary for some of the Mill Pond owners to drain their ponds in the Fall of the year and sell tickets for people to go fishing in the low water (usually with a net). Uncle Make and I and others went to one at the Moss Neck Pond. We didn't do any fishing but it was a pleasant outing and it was the first time I saw a YELLOW Watermelon. That I have never forgotten and in fact I don't remember seeing Yellow Watermelon again until last year when one of the Supermarkets in Falls Church had some for sale. (Note: Moss Neck Pond today is drained and completely overgrown with brush and small trees. You can drive across the dam without realizing that you are passing over a historic Robeson County Spot). It is on State Route SR1003, South of the SCL RR Crossing.

Cousin Nonie and Louise also used to come to Red Springs for visits in the Summer. They would usually stay at our house for a couple of weeks or more and then go across town and visit Cousin Bessie (McCormick)Coxe. Cousin Bessie had a brother, John, who when he decided to quit farming the McCormick Home Place, near Moss Neck, came to live with her. He was still quite active and did the gardening for Cousin Bessie's large family. One of the plots that he tended was on Church Street, not far from our house. When Cousin (or Uncle) John decided to spend a day at that garden, he would load his implements in the wagon plus a bunch of the local children (he was very popular) and come across town. If Cousin Nonie was visiting the Coxes, Louise went right along with all the rest of the children. They followed John's plow up and down the rows, and had a great time. Louise stayed right along with the other children, while Cousin Nonie was under the impression that, she had only ridden along to visit at our house. I don't know how long Louise got away with that little subterfuge.

In September of 1925 Cousin Nonie brought along an additional guest, whose mother was seriously ill. She was a spirited, long legged young girl of about 12 or 13, whose name was Louise Quantock. Today: Looking Back, who would have dreamed that, this young girl, would develop into a lovely and talented lady, who has raised three fine sons and who would look out and care for Cousin Nonie in her declining years. That young girl's name today is Mrs. James E. Watson Sr.

Incidentally Cousin John and his father Great Uncle Dougald McCormick are buried at the site of Hebron Methodist Church, North of US 74, just West of Harper's Ferry Crossing of the Lumber River.

Uncle Make is buried near his parents and other Uncles and Aunts in the McNeill (Buie) Cemetery just to the South of Bear Swamp at Four Mile Curve, South of NC 711 at Moss Neck.

*James M. Roberts*  
James McNeill Roberts

June 6, 1980.  
Falls Church, Va.