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It began with a desire to identify the parents of Thomas Lawrence McNelley, who married Sarah Amelia Lamb on March 30, 1881 in Canton, Ohio. The couple moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1883, where they settled and raised their family. Thomas' marriage and death records do not name his parents; a birth record for Thomas Lawrence has yet to surface. Finding out about his parents and siblings proved to be quite a challenge!

There were a couple of family letters that provided some vital clues. In a letter dated October 28, 1958, Lulu McNelley (Thomas Lawrence's daughter, known in the family as Aunt Lou) wrote to Theodore Thomas McNelley (Thomas Lawrence's grandson), "I do know that your great-grandmother McNelley was a Pennsylvania Dutch (German) woman and a great, great Uncle McNelley a Captain of a ship on Lake

Erie." In another letter written in 1971, she mentions a cousin "Dorothy Rice in Cleveland, daughter of Bertha Rice." There was also a brief biographical sketch of

Thomas Lawrence McNelley in the Eagle Flyer, stating that he had been born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1856. (Source: Eagle Lodge Publication in the possession of Terry McNelley; date of publication unknown. Presumably, this Eagle Lodge was located in Chicago, as the bio sketch states that Thomas McNelley came to Chicago in 1883 and was initiated into the lodge in 1900.)

The next piece of information to come to light was in the U.S. census of 1860 for the Fifth Ward (Cleveland) of Cuyahoga County, Ohio. Listed are Thomas "McNally" (40) and Sarah (33), along with their children Mary E (7), Thomas L (5) and Isabella (2). It gives Thomas' place of birth as Canada. The place of birth for Sarah is given as Pennsylvania. Thomas' occupation is listed as "laborer" in this census.

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From the U.S. Census of 1860 for the Fifth Ward (Cleveland) of Cuyahoga County, Ohio

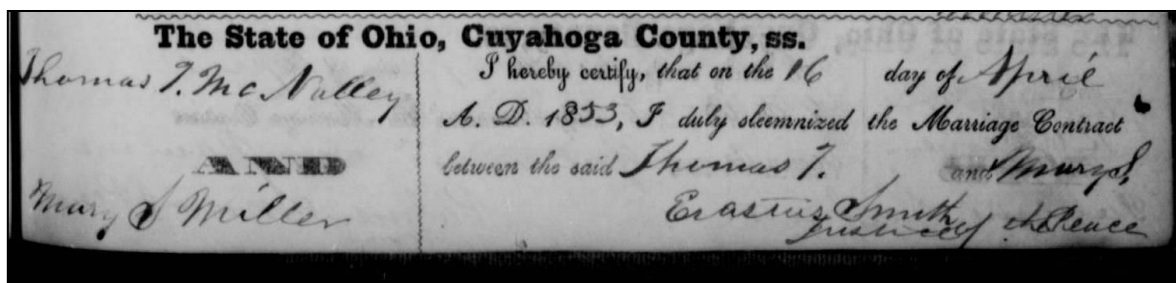
Letters of inquiry were sent out to current residents of Chicago with the surname of McNelley. Sharon McNelley Angelo, great-granddaughter of Thomas Lawrence McNelley, and a great, great-granddaughter of Thomas T McNelley, was eventually located. In 2010, she was living in the Chicago suburbs and had a large family bible in her basement. "Mary McNelly" is printed in gold letters on the red cover of this large, old bible. The bible listed the deaths of Thomas T. McNelley on January 3, 1869 and Sarah D. (?) McNelley in September, 1866. Documents discovered later indicate that the wife of Thomas T. McNelley was known as both Mary and Sarah. At some point the bible came into the hands of their son, Thomas Lawrence McNelley, and his wife, Sarah Amelia Lamb. Their births and marriage, as well as the births of their six children and the death of three of their daughters are recorded in the book. The marriage of Thomas Lawrence's sister Sarah to Byron Rice is recorded in the bible as well, along with the birth of their child Maud. There is also a notation of the death of a Charley McNelley on January 24, 1878.

Thomas T. McNelley and Mary Sarah Miller

It is only in piecing together small pieces of information from a variety of sources that we are able to develop any picture at all of this family. Family letters and the family Bible guided our search for public documents. From the records noted above and in the paragraphs that follow, it appears that Thomas T. McNelley was born in Canada about 1820 and moved to Cleveland sometime before 1845. Mary Sarah Miller was born in Pennsylvania about 1827. The couple married in Cleveland, Ohio in 1853 where their three children, Mary Eleanor, Thomas Lawrence, and Sarah Isabella, were born. Both parents died at an early age. Mary Sarah (Miller) McNelley was forty when she died of consumption in September of 1866. Thomas T. died a little over two years later, in January of 1869. He was 49 years old. Their children were left orphans at the ages of 16, 14, and 11, respectively. Mary Eleanor and Sarah Isabella grew up, married, had children, and died in Ohio, not far from Cleveland. Thomas T. and Mary Sarah's son, Thomas Lawrence, moved to Chicago with his wife, also named Sarah (Sarah Amelia Lamb), and their infant son Oscar in 1883.

Thomas T. McNelley appears in the records of Cleveland, Ohio from 1845 to 1870. In the records of Thomas, the surname is spelled variously as McNelley, McNally, McNelly or McNalley. His brother William's surname is usually spelled McNelley. Adding to the confusion is the fact that there was more than one Thomas McNelley in Cleveland in the mid-nineteenth century. Also, Mary Sarah Miller, wife of Thomas T., sometimes used the name Mary; at other times she used her middle name of Sarah.

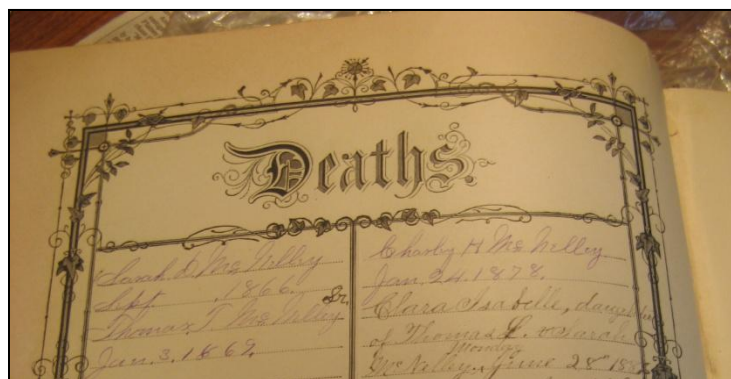
In the U.S. Census of 1850, both a Thomas McNelly (27) and a Wm McNally (21) are listed as living in a boarding house. The birthplace for Thomas, a "bar keeper," is given as Germany. William is listed as a sailor. His birthplace is listed as Canada. These men are probably "our" Thomas and William. The landlord no doubt provided the information to the census taker and was not too concerned about its accuracy.



Marriage record for Thomas T. McNalley and Mary S. Miller; Cuyahoga County, Ohio

The Cuyahoga County archives list a marriage between Thomas T. McNalley and Mary S. Miller on April 16, 1853. Note that the name is spelled "McNalley" in this record. Other than the name of the officiant, no other information is provided on the marriage record. The record was available online at FamilySearch.org under Ohio Marriages 1800-1958 in July 2011.

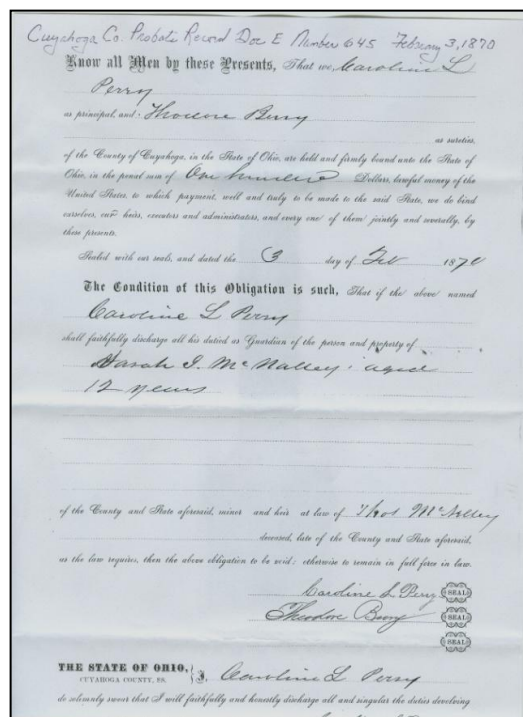
It is stated that Thomas was born in Canada and his wife in Pennsylvania in the U. S. Census record of 1860. In the U.S. census records of 1910 and 1920 for Chicago, IL, son Thomas Lawrence also gave his father's place of birth as Canada and his mother's place of birth as Pennsylvania. However, in the U.S. Census of 1900 for Chicago, Thomas Lawrence's parents are listed as born in Ohio; perhaps his wife was the one answering the questions for the census taker.



A portion of the death record from the "Mary McNelly Bible" showing the deaths of Sarah (Mary Sarah) and Thomas T. McNalley

Thomas T. McNalley had various jobs in the course of his life. In the U.S. Census of 1850, he is listed as a bar keeper. On the census ten years later, he is listed simply as a "laborer." Apparently, he was also a clerk and a "measurer of hay." Clues are found in notices which appeared in 1857 and 1858 in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, a newspaper published in Cleveland Ohio. On July 1, 1857, there was an article reporting the

proceedings of the City Council meeting on Tuesday evening, June 30. Petitions presented included "Of Thomas T. McNally, asking that provision be made for the repairing of the city hay scales and the office occupied by him. Referred to Committee on Markets." In a notice dated February 17, 1858, concerning the proceedings of the City Council, a T. McNally is listed as from the "office of weigher of hay." Later in the year, on June 23, 1858, also in the proceedings of the City Council, is the comment, "Also requesting the mayor to employ counsel to propose answers and make a defense to the suits of Thos. McNally against the city." (Newspaper articles found online at GenealogyBank.com in July, 2012.) There is also a "Thomas T. McNelley" listed in the City Directory of 1865 for Cleveland, OH. He is identified as a clerk, living at 50 Cross Street. (Source: Cleveland City Directory of 1865 found on Ancestry.com and was downloaded on 2/12/2012.)



Guardianship papers for Sarah I. McNalley, dated February 3, 1870

The only record of Thomas' death on January 3, 1869 is the bible notation and the guardianship papers for his youngest child Sarah Isabella. The latter is a Cuyahoga County Probate Record, dated February 3, 1870, providing a guardian for Sarah I McNelley, a 12 year old minor. She is listed as a child of "Thomas McNelley, deceased, late of Cleveland" (Source Cuyahoga Probate Court). The place of burial and cause of death for Thomas are unknown.

Mary's death is also noted in the family bible and was later found on the Register of Internments for Woodlawn Cemetery in Cleveland, OH. (Prepared by the City of Cleveland, OH; Department of Parks and Public Property, Division of Cemeteries). On the latter record, she is listed as "Sarah McNelly," age 40. Date of death: September 15, 1866. The cause of death was listed as consumption. Sarah is buried in Section 29, Lot # 17, Grave #2. Nothing is known of Mary Sarah's parents.

Thomas T. and Mary Sarah are mentioned as the parents on the death records of their daughters Mary E and Sarah Isabella. On Mary's record, her parents are listed as Thos. McNelly and Sarah Miller. Place of birth is listed as "unknown." On Sarah's record, her parents are listed as Thos McNelley and Mary Miller, both from Scotland. (It is believed that Scotland was the place of origin of the immigrant ancestor, rather than the place of birth for Thomas T.) On their son Thomas Lawrence's death record, the names and place of birth for his parents are listed as "unknown."

Thomas T. and Sarah (Miller) McNelley were both deceased by the U.S. Census of 1870. Thomas and Sarah's son, Thomas Lawrence, does appear in that census, which was enumerated in June of 1870. In the census for Ashtabula, Ashtabula County, Ohio, is a listing for a Thom L. McNelly, age 14, living in the household of John Peru (Perew). Ashtabula is some 60 miles east of Cleveland, and is a shipping port on Lake Erie. Thomas' occupation is listed as farm laborer. The occupation of John Peru, head of the household, is listed as a lake engineer. Thomas T.'s brother William H. McNelley, ship captain, worked for Frank Perew, wealthy owner of a Great Lakes shipping company, the People's Line of Cleveland, Ohio. William married a woman named Mary E. Perew. It appears that young Thomas Lawrence, son of Thomas T. McNelley, was living with the family of his aunt Mary (Perew) McNelley in 1870.

More on the Children of Thomas T. and Mary Sarah McNelley

Thomas T. and Mary Sarah had three children:

(1) **Mary E. (Eleanor)** was born on August 17, 1853 and died on August 25, 1937 in Berlin Heights, Erie County, OH. She married Madison Karr and the couple had four children: Charles H. (November 22, 1882); Alice Eleanor (February 26, 1888); Irma (December 30, 1894) and Dortha (About 1898).

(2) **Thomas Lawrence** was born on July 13, 1855 and died on March 14, 1936 in Chicago, IL. He married Sarah Amelia Lamb on March 31, 1881 in Cuyahoga County, OH. The couple had six children: Oscar James (April 12, 1882); Clara Isabelle (January 20, 1885); Emma Laura (September 11, 1889); Lulu May (January 31, 1893); Mary Ellen (July 10, 1894); and Thomas Lawrence (December 8, 1897).

(3) **Sarah Isabella** was born on December 22, 1858 and died on November 25, 1922 in Rocky River, Cuyahoga County, OH. She married Byron Rice on May 20, 1879. The couple had four children: Maud (May 15, 1880); Thomas Oliver (August, 1886); Hamilton Oscar (September 15, 1890) and William Frederick (April 1898). Cousin Dorothy Rice, mentioned in Aunt Lou's letter of 1971, is the daughter of Thomas O. and Bertha Rice and granddaughter of Byron and Sarah Rice.

Origins of Thomas T. McNelley remain a Mystery

Although the documentation is thin, it appears that Thomas T. McNelley was born in Canada. We know nothing about his parents. Apparently, at some point they crossed the border into the United States. Sidelines, that is records of siblings, can often yield valuable information. In this case, they add to the confusion. There are a number of records which provide information on Thomas T.'s brother, William H. McNelley, who as noted earlier, was a ship captain. William appears in the U.S. Census records for Cleveland, OH for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1900, as well as in a number of Cleveland, Ohio city directories. His career as a sailor and lake captain is well documented in census records, city directories, and in his obituary, among other records.

Unfortunately, the place of birth for William cannot be determined with any certainty. It is listed as Massachusetts, New York and Canada on the various census records and on the death records of William's children. (There is a place on the certificate asking for the birthplace of the deceased person's parents.) As a ship captain, William was probably away from home much of the time and his wife and his children were likely unsure where he was born. In the U.S. census of 1860, William's birthplace is listed as Massachusetts. In the 1870 census, William's birthplace is listed as Canada. In the 1880 census, his birthplace is again listed as Massachusetts. (Place of birth for William's father is listed as Scotland; his mother's as Ireland.) In the 1900 census, William's birthplace is listed as New York. On William's death record, place of birth is listed as Scotland. In the U.S. Census of 1900, under William's son George McNelley (spelled Geo McNalley), the place of birth for George's father is listed as Scotland. I suspect that this information applies to the immigrant ancestor, rather than to George's father. William's birthplace is listed as Ohio on George's death certificate. On his daughter Ellen's death certificate, William's place of birth is listed as Boston, Massachusetts. At the very least, family members were unclear about the birthplace of William!

Putting it all together and placing more weight on earlier records which tend to be more accurate, it is most likely that Thomas T. was born in Canada, while his younger brother William H. was born in Massachusetts. Records suggests that their father was Scottish, their mother Irish, and they immigrated to Canada prior to 1820. That would also make the McNelley name Scottish.

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It is more certain that “our” Thomas and William (and perhaps other family members) were living in Cleveland, Ohio by 1845. In that year, a Thomas McNelley (laborer) is listed as living at 53 Parkman Street in Cleveland. A William McNelley and a Peter McNelley are living at 16 Dock North in 1846. Peter's occupation is listed as grocer; William's occupation is "n.a." If this is "our" William, he would have been 15 or 16 in 1845 and might not have been working. (Source: Peet's General Business Directory of the City of Cleveland, 1845 and 1846)

Cleveland Leader City Directory of 1865, in which Thomas T. McNelley is listed as a clerk. A number of other McNally/McNelly/McNelleys are listed as well.

On the tax lists of 1865 for Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Peter McNelley is listed as having a house on Kinsman; Thomas “McNally” is listed as having property on Parkman. A

Peter McNalley, age 51, appears in the U.S. Census of 1870 for Cleveland. His occupation is given as bar keeper. Place of birth is listed as Ireland.

There is a record of a death of a Thomas McNalley on May 2, 1878 in the Cuyahoga County, Ohio Archives. He is listed as age 68, born in Canada. This man died in the 5th Ward of Cleveland; the cause of death is recorded as "consumption" (tuberculosis). No other information is provided. This man was not our Thomas T. McNelley and he would have been too young to be his father. It appears that there were at least three Thomas McNelleys living in Cleveland at mid-nineteenth century: one who died before 1859, our Thomas T. who died in 1869, and one who died in 1878.

Background Information on the Scots-Irish who settled in Cleveland, Ohio

In the fall of 2013, Margaret Lynch, Executive Director of the Irish American Archives Society, compiled a report titled "Cleveland and the Ohio and Erie Canal" (A PDF report downloaded from the web on May 14, 2015). She notes that work on the Ohio and Erie Canal began in 1825. "The first notable influx of Irish immigrants was prompted by the need for laborers to dig the canal." According to Lynch, early settlers with last names like McMurphy and McIntost, indicate that these settlers might well have been Scots-Irish, that is Scottish Presbyterians sent to Northern Ireland by the English in the early 17th Century. Many of these Scots-Irish immigrated to the United States a few generations later. Lynch observes that "Toiling for \$5 a month under wretched conditions, most left little, if any, trace in public records. . . . Look for a sampling of [Irish] names in Cuyahoga County in the 1830 United States census, or in the first Cleveland City Directory in 1837, and the search is fruitless."

There is a plaque posted by the State of New York in 1969 along the St. Lawrence River in the Chippewa Bay Area which reads in part: "This area was settled early in the 1800s by immigrants from Scotland. They were encouraged to come here by agents of George Parish, a large landholder in the North Country. These conscientious farmers and tradesmen came up the St. Lawrence River from Montreal with true pioneer determination." Might members of this group of people have also traveled to Cleveland a few years later?

Nothing more is known about the origins of Thomas T. and his brother William H. McNelley who settled in Cleveland, Ohio in the mid-nineteenth century. Maybe someday, someone, somewhere will have a key piece of information that can link these McNelleys to others by that name who settled not only in Cleveland, Ohio but also Canada, Maine, Massachusetts, and Tennessee in the early nineteenth century.

Sources:

U. S. Census Records of 1840, 1850, 1860, and 1870 for Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, OH
Ohio birth, marriage, and death records, available at FamilySearch.org
City Directories for Cleveland, OH, available through Ancestry.com and at other online websites
Cemetery Internment Records for Cleveland, OH, available through FamilySearch.org
Tax Lists for Cleveland, OH, available online
Family letters from Great-Aunt Lou, Biographical sketch of Thomas Lawrence McNelley, and the McNelley family bible, as referenced in the above article.

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