

William Skinner alias McGregor

transcribed by: Charlou Dolan

From: Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy and Adjoining Country
(William A. Whitehead, 1856, New York, D. Appleton & Company) pages 99-121.

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[Charlou Dolan: The numbers have been added by me, to facilitate keeping track of the various Skinners. William is 1, his first child is 11, the second 12, etc. The first child of William's first child is 111, etc. Please note, also, the date on this book--it is equivalent to our writing today about a family from about 1890 to the present, in other words, this is not the result of research done at a much later date.]

Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy and Adjoining Country (William A. Whitehead, 1856, New York, D. Appleton & Company) pages 99-121:

THE SKINNER FAMILY

Among the most influential families of the ancient capital, were the Skinners, descendants of the Reverend [1] William Skinner, the first rector of St. Peter's Church. This gentleman was a MacGregor, and among those of that clan proscribed* after the rebellion of 1715, having taken an active part in the restoratory struggles of the Stuart family. He had received a superior education at one of the first literary institutions in England (thought to have been Oxford University), and possessed mental endowments of a sterling character. Obligated to leave Scotland after the battle of Preston Pans, in which he was wounded, and prevented from bearing the name of his clan, he assumed that of a friend in Edinburgh, from whom he received favor and protection.

[*After the Scottish Rebellion of 1715 the MacGregors (as well as certain other Scottish clans) were forbidden to use the surname MacGregor; they all had to change their surname to something else. William MacGregor changed his name, therefore, to William Skinner. This is why he is also known as "William Skinner alias MacGregor." Note that he did not arrive in New Jersey until 1723. He is not, therefore, related in any way to the Richard Skinner and Susannah Poulain family.]

As William Skinner, he left England for Holland, in company with Lord Belmerino, and subsequently, by way of Barbados, or Antigua, came to Philadelphia, where he had, or made, a friend in a Mr. Logan,--one of the family of so much notoriety in the annals of Pennsylvania,--with whom he found a home; probably in the capacity of tutor, as it is understood the sons of that gentleman received from him instruction in the languages, which he was well qualified to impart.

Mr. Skinner probably pursued theological studies while residing in Philadelphia; for after a few years he returned to England, and received ordination from Robinson, Bishop of London. While there (in 1721) he was appointed missionary to Perth Amboy, from the "Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts," and entered into his labors in September, 1723. The following year he was called to the rectorship of St. Peter's Church, and for thirty-five years continued to discharge his duties faithfully and acceptably, occasionally officiating in the neighboring towns; death putting an end to his earthly career in 1758, in the 71st year of his age. His remains were deposited in the rear of the Church, but the precise spot not having been marked by any monument, is now unknown.

Mr. Skinner is said to have been exceedingly kind-hearted, generous and hospitable; and--almost a necessary consequence from the possession of these virtues--very regardless of money; living unostentatiously himself, in order that his resources might be greater for his charities; fully complying with the directions to all their missionaries by the society, in whose service were his first ministerial labors;

"that as they be frugal in opposition to luxury, so they avoid all appearance of covetousness, and recommend themselves according to their abilities by the prudent exercise of liberality and charity."

He was twice married. His first wife was a [the youngest] daughter of Christopher Billop, of Staten Island, and the widow of the Rev. Mr. Brook, one of the society's missionaries, whose indefatigable labors in New Jersey are elsewhere alluded to. His second wife was Elizabeth, youngest daughter of Stephanus Van Cortlandt of New York. His children, all by this lady, were--**one daughter, [11] Gertrude, who became the wife of James Parker**, and was the mother of the present elders of that family;--and four sons, 1 Cortland, 2 Stephen, 3 William, and 4 John--who will be noted in succession.

12. Cortlandt, the eldest son of the Rev. William Skinner

[12] Cortlandt, the eldest son of the Rev. William Skinner, was educated for the bar, studying the profession in the office of David Ogden, an old and distinguished practitioner at Newark, at which place he also, for some time, was established after his admission to practice.

In 1752 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Philip Kearny of Amboy, and shortly after, if not before, took up his residence permanently in the place of his birth. Although not of studious habits, he became eminent in his profession, his natural abilities being good, and his oratorical powers considerably above mediocrity. He was soon appointed the King's Attorney-General for the province, and continued to hold that office until the Revolution put an end to the authority whence it was derived. In 1761 he was elected to the Provincial Assembly from his native city, in the place of Andrew Smyth, deceased, and continued thereafter to be a prominent member of that body while it existed: in 1765 (Nov. 28th) receiving a convincing proof of the esteem and confidence of his associates in their choice of him to be Speaker.

During the early stages of the struggle for independence, Mr. Skinner, like many others who in the end became royalists, was strongly opposed to the encroachments of the British Ministry upon the liberties of the colonies... [there follows copies of letters he wrote to unnamed correspondents]...

Such continued to be his position until the first blood was shed at Lexington, and the more decided measures of the colonists prompted thereby caused a marked distinction to be drawn between the friends and the, so-considered, enemies of the country. [there follows more about his political activities]...

In December a letter of his was intercepted, addressed to his brother, Lieut. Col. William Skinner, in England [copy of letter]

This letter was sufficient to condemn him. On the 9th January, 1776, it was laid before Congress... [they ordered his arrest, but he was forewarned, and took refuge on board the "Asia" man-of-war, then lying in the waters of New York.]

He was, of course, received as an efficient and active auxiliary, and General Howe evinced his regard and consideration by appointing him, soon after, a Brigadier-General, with authority to raise five battalions from among the disaffected in New Jersey... [more about his service in the Revolution]...

After the Revolution General Skinner went to England with his family, and received from the government compensation for his forfeited estate, and the half-pay of a Brigadier-General during his life. He died March 15th, 1799, aged 71... His wife survived him, after a union of 47 years, and continued to reside among her children, in England and Ireland, until her death...

Cortland Skinner had several children:

[121] William was placed in the English navy, and died young.

[122] Philip Kearny entered the Army, and died in London in 1827 or 1828, unmarried. He was taken prisoner on one occasion by the French, and detained for some time at Lisle. On his release and return to England, in 1799, he found he had been promoted to an Adjutant-generalship, and before his death was Lieutenant-General, commanding at Bombay.

[123] John was a Lieutenant in the young company called the "Governor's Guards," elsewhere mentioned. Soon after a memorable review day he was required to doff his cap, with its motto "Liberty or Death," and was sent on board the Phenix frigate, at Sandy Hook, and entered as a midshipman. Soon after this, the Phenix on passing up the North River came within range of the guns at Fort Washington, and young Skinner had the misfortune to have his right hand shot off by a ball, which did no other injury on board. He had previously, while playing in the market Square, at Amboy, lost the sight of one eye from

a cork-dart; and thus mutilated he passed through life, a bachelor, ever active and cheerful, benevolent to a fault, an affectionate son and valued citizen. As a post-captain, he for many years commanded the Holyhead packet, and while in the discharge of his duty was accidentally drowned in 1830; being swept overboard in a sudden squall. A monument, erected by public subscription, attests the estimation in which he was held.

[124] Cortlandt was left by his father for several years in this country, with his brother-in-law, Mr. Terrill, but afterward went to England, and eventually established himself in Ireland, and died in Belfast. He held different offices, and for several years was Comptroller of the Customs, being highly respected and esteemed. After the death of his father, his house became the residence of the widow, who described his premises in her letters to her friends in this country, as being highly improved, and pleasantly situated. He subsequently resided at Dungannon Park, the property of Lord Dungannon, who was his personal friend. He was twice married. His first wife was Miss Kingsmill, the second Miss Isabella McCarty, and he left several children.

[125] Downs, named probably by Mrs. Governor Franklin, as that was her maiden name, went from England to the Island of Jamaica, whither his brother-in-law, Sir George Nugent, was sent soon after as Governor, and married there. He returned to England for his health in 1801, but finally died in Jamaica, previous to 1803. He left but one daughter, named after his mother, [1251] Elizabeth Kearny, who married a Rev. Mr. Simpson of England, and has two children, [12511] William and [12512] Adelaide, twins, born on the day Queen Adelaide was crowned. [8 Sep 1831]

General [Cortlandt]Skinner had seven daughters:

[126] Susan married Major Jasper Farmar of the British Army, and after his death his brother, Thomas Farmar, who are elsewhere noticed, and descendants bearing the name of Murphy are living in Nova Scotia.

[for more see page 97 of 'Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy...']

[127] Elizabeth married William Terrill, of New York, and had four daughters, who never married, and one son, [1271] John, who is yet living in England and has children, -- one of his daughters married Henry Meigs, of the Metropolitan Bank, New York, and left one daughter.

[128] Euphemia became the wife of Oliver Barberie, who studied law with her father, and is noticed on another page. [see page 125]

[129] Catharine married Sir William Henry Robinson, son of Col. Beverly Robinson, of New York. She died at Marlow, England, in 1843, aged 75, and left several children.

[12a] Maria married, in 1797, Captain (afterward General) Sir George Nugent, G.C.B.D.C.L., and accompanied her husband both to India and Jamaica, whither he was sent by his government to discharge important trusts; and a diary kept by her has been printed for private distribution since her death, which took place in 1834. At one period they resided in great splendor in Dublin. Sir George Nugent died March 11th, 1849, aged 92, leaving four children. At the time of his death he was the oldest general officer in the English Army, his first commission, as Ensign, bearing date, July 5th, 1773. He served in America, from 1777 to 1783, was in the expedition that proceeded up the North River for the relief of Burgoyne's army, and was at the taking of Forts Montgomery and Clinton. He subsequently served with credit on the continent, and in 1811, was Commander in Chief of the troops in India, and he held high civil trusts, both in Ireland and Jamaica. He attained to a colonelcy in 1794, and was promoted to the rank of General in 1813. His acquaintance with Miss Skinner commenced in America. His heir is [12a1] Sir George Edmond Nugent, born in 1802, who in 1830 married the daughter of Lord Colburn. He is a captain in the Grenadier Guards. There is another [12a2] son and two daughters--[12a3] Lady Freemantle and [12a4] Lady Clinton.

[12b] Isabel married a Doctor Frazer, while the family were on Long Island. He subsequently went to England, and she followed, with her father, at the close of the war. They had several children. One son ([12b1] Thomas) became a physician; another is, or was, [12b2] a captain in the British Army, and a third [12b3] a clergyman.

[12c] Gertrude married (June, 1780, at Jamaica, L.I.) Captain Meredith, of the 70th regiment of foot, who died previous to 1800, leaving her with four children, one of whom ([12c1] Richard) is a captain in the British Navy.

13. Stephen, the second son of the Reverend William Skinner

[13] Stephen, the second son of the Reverend William Skinner, was for many years previous to the Revolution engaged in mercantile pursuits, in 1758-9 making a trading voyage of several months' duration among the West Indian islands, and up to August, 1767, keeping at Amboy what was then called "a general store," which he then sold out. His residence was on the bank, on the north side of Smith street, where during the present year (1855) some buildings have been erected, adjoining the Bruen stores.

After relinquishing his mercantile pursuits, Mr. Skinner, as treasurer of the province for East Jersey, was for several years a very prominent character. On the 22nd July, 1768, the public money-chest in his possession was robbed of between six and seven thousand pounds, and the circumstances of the case were such as to lead to much angry discussion between the Executive and Legislative departments of the province. The Governor and his Council threw the odium of the robbery upon one Samuel Ford, a notorious rogue and counterfeiter, while the Assembly attributed it to the negligence of the treasurer, at least, if they did not directly impugn his integrity, and desired to hold him accountable for the loss. The matter agitated the province greatly, but cannot in this place be more fully noticed. Mr. Skinner finally (Feb'y 23d, 1774) resigned his office, and his successor was authorized to institute a suit for the recovery of the money. This, however, was never brought to a legal termination; the political events which soon after occurred, sending the ex-treasurer into banishment, and putting an end to the provincial government. After his resignation, Governor Franklin, very unwisely for his own popularity, appointed Mr. Skinner one of his Council.

Although chosen by the good people of his native town to represent them in the Provincial Congress, in April, 1775, in conjunction with James Parker and Jonathan Deare, there is nothing known of his sentiments, rendering it probable that he was favorably inclined to the colonial cause. Certain it is that soon after the commencement of hostilities he removed his family to New York, and thence to England, the property left behind him in New Jersey being confiscated to the use of the State. His house was accidentally set on fire on 28th December, 1776, and entirely consumed; the New York papers of the time stating that, by fire, and "the depredations of the rebels," Mr. Skinner had suffered within the month a loss of full 3,000 pounds.

He married Catharine, daughter of Andrew Johnston, by whom he had nine or ten children, but they all died without issue, either in England, or Nova Scotia, to which province the family eventually removed, having received a grant of land there, as compensation for his losses in New Jersey.

14. William, the third son of the Rev. Mr. Skinner

[14] William, the third son of the Rev. Mr. Skinner, entered early in life the provincial service, and served as a captain against the French in Colonel Schuyler's regiment, participating in all the trials and dangers of the campaigns of 1755 and 1756.

[more letters]

Captain Skinner was at Oswego, in August, 1756, when the fortress was surrendered to the French under General Montcalm, and as a prisoner of war was sent to France, where he remained until the following May (1757), when he was permitted to pass over to England on his parole to await an exchange, which was effected in the course of a few months through his intimacy with the family of Sir Peter Warren, whose widow was his first cousin. (Lady Warren was a daughter of Stephen De Lancey of New York, who married Anne Van Cortlandt, sister of Elizabeth, wife of Rev. Wm. Skinner.) Major

[more letters]

Lieutenant Skinner's promotion was rapid; he was gazetted Captain, August 4th, 1759, and, as Major of Royal Volunteers was in the Expedition to Belle Isle, in 1761.

[more letters]

The following year he accompanied the Army, under Lord Loudon, to Portugal, and Lord Viscount Pulkney, his superior, having been placed temporarily in command of another corps, Major Skinner held

the rank of Lieutenant-colonel; and the following April (1763) received the promotion regularly, in consequence of the death of that nobleman. Shortly after this, he returned to England. In a letter written at this time he expresses an opinion that his regiment would be broken, and he hoped in a few months to see his American friends; but this wish was never gratified. Previous to the Revolution he had risen to the rank of Colonel. He died in England about 1778.

Colonel Skinner married a daughter of Lady Warren, and his only child, [141] Meauna Maria, married Henry, 3d Viscount Gage, and her son, [1411] Henry Hall Gage, is now the possessor of the titles and estate of the family.

15. John, the fourth son of the Rev. Mr. Skinner

[15] John, the fourth son of the Rev. Mr. Skinner, entered the Provincial service at the same time with his brother William, as Lieutenant in his company; was taken prisoner with him at Oswego, in 1756, and was his companion during his sojourn in France and on his transfer to England.

While waiting the result of an application for a commission in the regular army, he volunteered his services in a secret expedition then fitting out, and during the cruise (in the Mediterranean) performed duty in the Grenadier Company attached to Lord Loudon's Regiment. The fleet returned to England in October, 1757, and so well pleased were his superiors with Mr. Skinner's conduct, that they petitioned the Secretary of War in his behalf, and he received a regular commission as Ensign in that regiment.

In 1759, he had risen to a Lieutenancy in the regiment of Colonel Grey... The regiment to which he was attached being ordered to America, he had the pleasure of again meeting his family and friends. He was promoted to a Captaincy, June 10th, 1768, and in September of that year he attended Governor Franklin to Fort Stanwix, to assist at the Council held there with the Indians. He rose to be a Major in the 70th Regiment, and returned with it to England, in 1770, and continued there during the revolution. He subsequently sold his commission, returned to America, and took up his residence again in Perth Amboy, entering into mercantile business. He married (Feb'y 16th, 1774) Sarah, daughter of Philip Kearny, and died in December, 1797, leaving one son, [151] James, who died at Amboy in 1827, leaving a wife and daughter--that daughter, previous to her marriage to Mr. Laforge, was the last of the descendants of the Rev. Wm. Skinner, in this country, bearing his name.