

John Smith McKay: Chestermere Ditchrider (1934-1937)

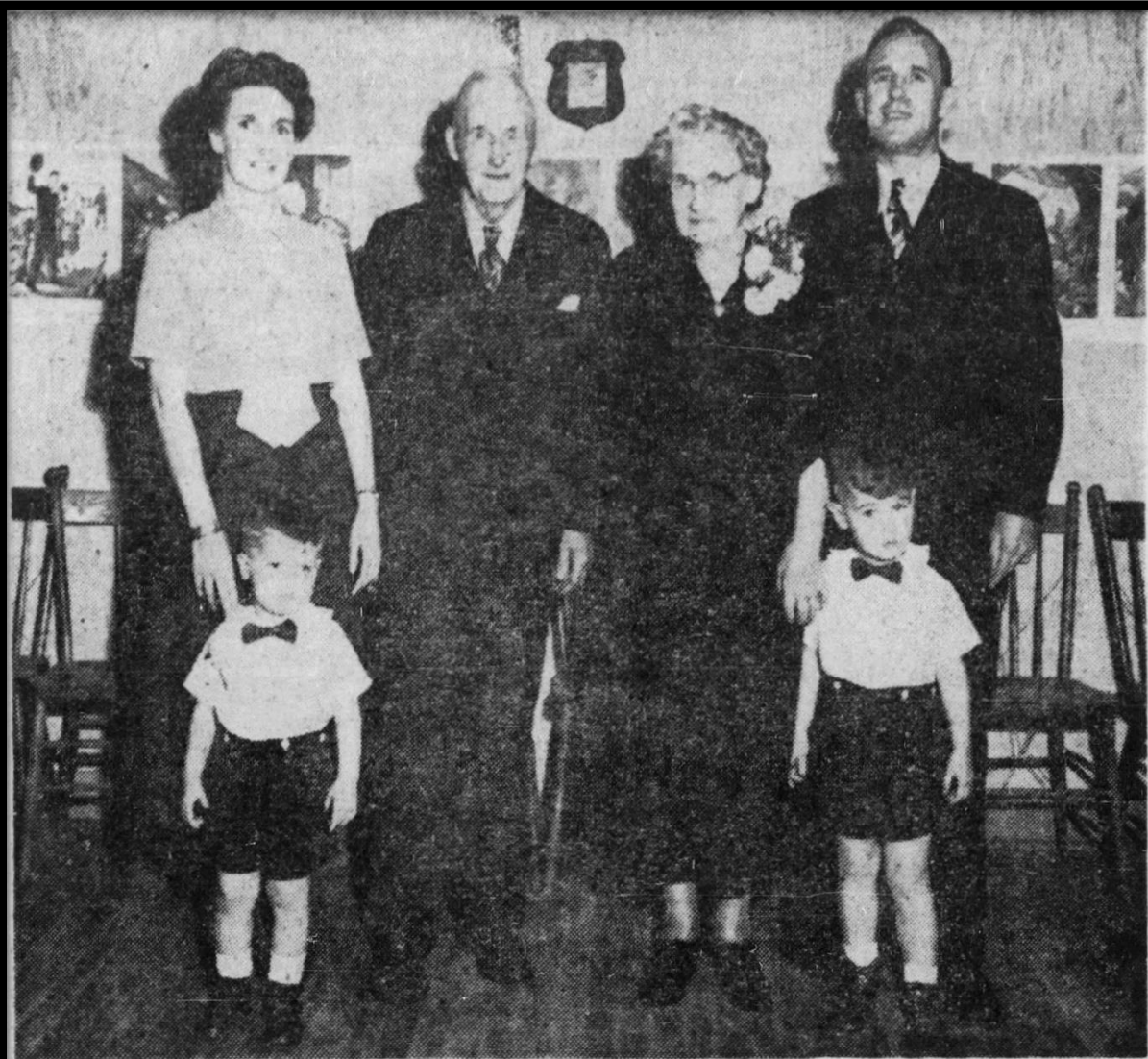
John McKay was born in Saint John, New Brunswick on 17 March 1873, the son of a Presbyterian clergyman.^{1 2} The family lived in Prince Edward Island for a time before returning to New Brunswick.^{3 4} According to the 1891 census, John was a railway employee in Chatham, New Brunswick.⁵ On 28 November 1900, John married Alice Elizabeth Walls at Chatham.⁶ Alice was born into a large farming family at Blackville, New Brunswick in 1878.⁷ Shortly after their marriage, the McKays moved west to Calgary where their first child, Harold Neil, was born in 1901. Sadly, he died as an infant and was buried in Union Cemetery.^{8 9} Five more sons followed: Frederick Alexander in 1902, John Douglas in 1904, Charles Stanley in 1907, Donald Peter in 1908, and William Alexander in 1912.^{10 11}

John worked for the Dominion Express Company (owned by CPR) for a number of years in Calgary before becoming their agent in Fort Macleod.^{12 13} He left this position in late 1911 or early 1912 and subsequently served as Macleod's postmaster from 31 January 1912 until 2 June 1913.¹⁴ In mid-June the local newspaper reported that, "J.S. McKay, late postmaster here left on Monday for the Pacific coast. He will visit a number of places on Vancouver Island, with a view of locating there."¹⁵ A suitable situation must not have been found, as the paper noted in early August that John had moved back to Calgary to work again for the Dominion Express Company.¹⁶ In 1914, the McKays decided to go farming and took up land 2½ miles north of Strathmore.^{17 18} Unfortunately, the first crop was completely destroyed by hail and that put an end to farming.¹⁹ It appears that John may also have engaged in an auction business as the *Strathmore and Bow Valley Standard* carried numerous advertisements for sales conducted by a John S. McKay throughout 1915 and early 1916.²⁰

By the time irrigation season rolled around in 1916, John had obtained employment as a ditchrider with the Canadian Pacific Irrigation Department (C.P.I.D.) at the Cheadle headquarters located on Section 6, Township 25, Range 25 W4M near Hervey School.²¹ The McKay family was completed in 1919 with the birth of a daughter, Ruth Elizabeth.²² John would likely have continued at Cheadle until his retirement but for the untimely death of Chestermere ditchrider Ed Staves in August 1933. Given the drought conditions in the mid-'30s the vacancy needed to be filled by an experienced man, so the McKays were transferred to the Chestermere headquarters on 1 March 1934.²³ Before their departure, the community surprised them with a farewell party consisting of musical and dramatic entertainment, lunch and a presentation of gifts. The newspaper item describing this event concluded with a bit of verse:

Oh my! Oh my! we hate to see them go
Oh my! Oh my! for we will miss them so.
It will be with kindest memories
We think of them so dear
While they are bathing in Chestermere.²⁴

John retired after the completion of the 1937 irrigation season and subsequently went to live in Calgary. In 1944 the McKays moved to Strathmore as John had been appointed an assistant in guarding war prisoners.²⁵ John died in Strathmore on 18 December 1952 and was laid to rest in Queen's Park Cemetery, Calgary.²⁶ Alice died in Calgary on 24 November 1971 and was buried in Queen's Park.²⁷ Fred, Stan and Bill McKay all served during World War II. Fred, Douglas, and Bill were employed in various capacities by the CPR, Stan became a teacher and Don worked in the oilfield equipment business. All the McKay children married except for Ruth who had been an invalid since birth.²⁸



FOUR GENERATIONS of the family of Mr. and Mrs. John S. McKay, long-time residents of Strathmore, who recently celebrated their golden wedding, are pictured here. Mr. and Mrs. McKay were married at Chatham, N.B., on Nov. 28, 1900, and came to Calgary in the same year. Included in the group are their son, Mr. C. S. McKay, their granddaughter, Mrs. N. W. Haraldson, and their great-grandsons, Graham and Gerald Haraldson all of Calgary.

Calgary Herald 15 December 1950 p6

FAREWELL PARTY

FAREWELL PARTY FOR
MR AND MRS J MCKAY

On Wednesday February 21st Mr and Mrs John McKay were agreeably surprised by a large number of friends who gathered at their home to bid them farewell before they leave for Chestermere Lake on March 1st.

Mr McKay has been a well known resident of Strathmore District for the past 20 years.

Mrs McKay has been an active worker in the United Church and other ladies organizations.

Mr Phil Sorson, a very capable master of ceremonies called on each guest in turn and a splendid entertainment of instrumental, vocal and dramatic numbers was greatly enjoyed by all.

After lunch was served Mr Sorson and Mrs Nelson made the presentations on behalf of the guests. Mrs McKay was given a carving set and Mr McKay received an arm chair.

Their many friends regret that Mr and Mrs McKay cannot remain among them but rejoice in Mr McKay's promotion and wish them continued happiness and prosperity in their new home at Chestermere Lake.

Oh my! Oh my! we hate to see them go

Oh my! Oh my! for we will miss them so.

It will be with kindest memories
We think of them so dear
While they are bathing in Chestermere.

Strathmore Standard 28 February 1934 p1

John S. McKay

John Smith McKay, 79, an old timer of the Strathmore district and a former resident of Calgary, died Thursday in his home at Strathmore after a brief illness.

Born in St. John, New Brunswick, Mr. McKay came to Calgary in 1901. He moved to Strathmore in 1914, where he lived until retiring to Calgary in 1938. He returned to Strathmore in 1943. Before his retirement, Mr. McKay was employed by the irrigation department of the C.P.R.

He is survived by his wife, Alice; a daughter, Ruth of Strathmore; five sons, Frederick and Stanley of Calgary, Douglas and William of Vancouver, and Donald of Edmonton; nine grandchildren; and three great grandchildren.

Rev. Blake Pritchard will conduct the funeral service Monday at 1:30 p.m. in Strathmore United Church. Burial, under the direction of McInnis and Holloway funeral home, will be in Queen's Park Cemetery.

Calgary Herald 20 December 1952 p26

¹ John Smith McKay (1873-1952), Find a Grave Memorial 153258540, added October 4, 2015.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/153258540>

² 1881 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll C-13162, Prince Edward Island, district 1, subdistrict Q, page 72, family 320, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?app=Census1881&op=&img&id=e008112778>

³ Ibid.

⁴ 1891 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll T-6302, New Brunswick, district 17, subdistrict D, division 3, pages 201-21, family 98, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?app=Census1891&op=img&id=30953_148104-00088

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Smith - Walls marriage, 28 November 1900, New Brunswick Provincial Returns of Marriages, 1887-1919; <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GBDK-V71?cc=2001064&wc=M6VH-XMH%3A284545701%2C284549001>

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- ⁷ 1881 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll C-13185, New Brunswick, district 35, subdistrict G, division 2, page 13, family 40, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1881&op=&img&id=e008135118>
- ⁸ Harold N. McKay death registration index entry, 1901, #22. Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta. <https://provincialarchives.alberta.ca/sites/default/files/2018-11/deaths-mca-1877-1918.pdf>
- ⁹ H. Neil McKay (n.d. - 1901), Find a Grave Memorial 127275386, added April 1, 2014. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/127275386>
- ¹⁰ 1911 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada, RG31, Roll T-20328, Alberta, district 3, subdistrict 30, page 20, family 237, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1911&op=&img&id=e001928695>
- ¹¹ 1916 Census of the Prairie Provinces, Statistics Canada, R233-47-9-E, Roll T-21948, Alberta, district 34, subdistrict 11, page 11, family 121, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1916&op=&img&id=31228_4363977-01005
- ¹² C.S. McKay, "The John McKay Family" in *Along the Fireguard Trail*, Lyalta, Ardenode, Dalroy Historical Society, 1979, 164.
- ¹³ "Around Town," *The Macleod Advertiser*, September 8, 1910, 8. <https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/sanews/id/12851>
- ¹⁴ Macleod Post Office, item 22648, Post Offices and Postmasters database, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/postal-heritage-philately/post-offices-postmasters/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=22648&>
- ¹⁵ "Brevities," *The Macleod Spectator*, June 17, 1913, 8. <https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/sanews/id/13955>
- ¹⁶ "Brevities," *The Macleod Spectator*, August 7, 1913, 8. <https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/sanews/id/13987>
- ¹⁷ "John S. McKay" obituary, *Calgary Herald*, December 20, 1952, 26. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/481389344/>
- ¹⁸ C.S. McKay, "The John McKay Family" in *Along the Fireguard Trail*, Lyalta, Ardenode, Dalroy Historical Society, 1979, 164.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Auction advertisements, *Strathmore and Bow Valley Standard*, various issues 1915-1916. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/SMS/>
- ²¹ 1916 Census of the Prairie Provinces, Statistics Canada, R233-47-9-E, Roll T-21948, Alberta, district 34, subdistrict 11, page 11, family 121, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?app=Census1916&op=&img&id=31228_4363977-01005
- ²² C.S. McKay, "The John McKay Family" in *Along the Fireguard Trail*, Lyalta, Ardenode, Dalroy Historical Society, 1979, 164.
- ²³ "Farewell Party," *Strathmore Standard*, February 28, 1934, 1. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/SMS/1934/02/28/1/>
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ "Local News Items," *Strathmore Standard*, August 10, 1944, 8. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/SMS/1934/02/28/1/>
- ²⁶ John S. McKay obituary, *Calgary Herald*, December 20, 1952, 26. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/481389344/>
- ²⁷ Alice Elizabeth McKay obituary, *Calgary Herald*, November 26, 1971, 63. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/482270911/>
- ²⁸ C.S. McKay, "The John McKay Family" in *Along the Fireguard Trail*, Lyalta, Ardenode, Dalroy Historical Society, 1979, 164.