

McGinnis Family Ancestry

James Martin Isaacs is believed to have married Mary Holdsclaw about 1872 in North Carolina. The family resided in Watauga County, but marriage records of that county before 1873 have been accidentally destroyed. This session of research focused on finding Mary with her family in the censuses before 1872, to learn the names of her parents. As the title of this report suggests, a surprising twist was discovered. This report will explain the findings, and the supporting documents accompany the report. Some of these documents are surely familiar as duplicates from the Isaacs research sessions.

Mary is believed to have died in 1932, but she could not be identified in the 1930 federal census. The 1920 census shows 'Marton' and Mary Isaacs in Watauga County, where Mary reported that she and her parents were born in North Carolina. The 1900 federal census gives Mary's birth month and year as September 1851. James' father and mother, 'Elija' and Sarah, resided in the home. Elijah's birth occurred in December 1821, and he showed an age of seventy-eight. Sarah was age eighty-five, born in May of

1815. Also in the home was a William Holdsclaw, born in December 1831, listed as a brother to the head of household.¹

Locality		1900, Watauga Township, Watauga, NC						
ED, Sheet, Line		E. D. 132, Sheet 14B, Lines 51-59						
Enumeration Date		27 Jun 1900						
Location		Name	Birth Date	Relationship	Occupation	Birth Place		
House	Family					Self	Fath	Moth
256	256	Isaacs, James M.	Oct 1851	Head	Farming	NC	NC	NC
		“ Mary	Sep 1851	Wife		“	“	“
		“ Esther L.	May 1882	Daughter		“	“	“
		“ Dovie C.	Nov 1884	“		“	“	“
		“ Lucie D.	Jul 1887	“		“	“	“
		“ David E.	Apr 1890	Son		“	“	“
		“ Elija	Dec 1821	Father		“	“	“
		“ Sarah	May 1815	Mother		“	“	“
		Holdsclaw, William	Dec 1831	Brother		“	“	“

It may have been assumed in previous research that William was the brother-in-law to James, and therefore the brother of Mary. Perhaps that is how the Holdsclaw name became attached to the pedigree for James' wife.

Running on the theory that Mary's maiden name was indeed Holdsclaw, that name was also searched in each of the censuses before 1900. In 1880, Martin and Mary Isaacs resided in Watauga Township, Watauga County, with their four oldest children, Lizzie, Noah, Wilson and Diana.² A William 'Holsclaw' lived in Boone Township of Watauga County, age fifty, with a wife named Rachel and three children.³ Another William Holsclaw, age forty-seven, lived in Cove Creek Township of Watauga County,

¹ Document 1: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1900, Watauga Township, Watauga, NC, E. D. 132, Sheet 14B, Lines 51-59.

² Document 2: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1880, Watauga Township, Watauga, NC, E. D. 203, Sheet 14B, Lines 31-36.

³ Document 3: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1880, Boone Township, Watauga, NC, E. D. 192, Sheet 6B, Lines 45-49.

with his wife Mary and daughter Lucinda.⁴ Both men are close in age, and either one could be the same man who resided with James and Mary Isaacs in 1900.

The 1870 census shows ‘Martin’ and Mary Isaacs as newlyweds in Watauga Township. Martin’s age is listed as twenty, while Mary’s is shown as twenty-one, slightly older than indicated on the later censuses.⁵ It appears that their estimated marriage year should be moved up from 1872 to 1869 or 1870, shortly before the 1870 census enumeration.

In 1860, Mary should be found in her parents’ home as a nine, ten or eleven year-old girl. No matches were found in Watauga County. In nearby Caldwell County, a seven year-old Mary Holsclaw is shown as one of the many children of Joseph and Arminta Holsclaw.⁶ William and Rachel Holsclaw resided in Valley Cruces Township in Watauga County in 1860.⁷ The other William Holsclaw lived alone, next door to Wiley Holsclaw and his family in Boone District, Watauga County. Wiley appears to be an older brother to William.⁸

If Mary was really twenty-one years old in 1870, then she may have shown up in the 1850 census as an infant. But no Mary Holsclaw or Holdsclaw near that age could be found in North Carolina. The censuses did not reveal the names of her parents as anticipated.

Mary’s longevity served her well in many ways. Her death in 1932 is plenty late for a death certificate to be available. The index to North Carolina death records is available online, and the microfilmed death certificates are available at the Family

⁴ Document 4: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1880, Cove Creek Township, Watauga, NC, E. D. 197, Sheet 9A, Lines 39-41.

⁵ Document 5: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1870, Watauga Township, Watauga, NC, p. 851.

⁶ Document 6: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1860, Patterson District, Caldwell, NC, p. 164.

⁷ Document 7: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1860, Valley Cruces Township, Watauga, NC, p. 357.

⁸ Document 8: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1860, Boone District, Watauga, NC, p. 364.

History Library. Mary's death certificate was located, and the names of her parents were surprising. Her father's name is given as John Mcguiness, born in 'Wilks' County, and her mother was 'Prisilla' Walker, also born in 'Wilks' County. Mary died on January 4, 1932, at the age of eighty-two years, three months and twenty-one days. Her husband's name was recorded as J. M. Isaacs, so the evidence is indisputable that this death certificate is for the ancestor. Her age at death calculates to a birth date of September 13 or 14, 1849.⁹ It was not unusual for a woman to shave a year or two off her true age, particularly if she was older than their husband.

The identity of William Holsclaw in the Isaacs home in 1900 can probably be explained by looking at the earlier generation. In previous research it became clear that Sarah Hartley, wife of Elijah Isaacs, had been married previously to a Holsclaw or Holdsclaw. William must have been a product of that marriage, and would therefore be the half-brother of James. The 1850 home of Elijah and Sarah Isaacs did not show this William Holsclaw, nor could he be found in the area. He would have been about eighteen or nineteen years old then. But this explanation makes sense, and clears the way for the McGinnis surname on the pedigree.

Returning to the 1860 census, the family of John and Priscilla McGinnis was easily located in Valley Cruces Township of Watauga County, on the page previous to the family of William Holdsclaw shown in Document 7. The McGinnises had several children, including an eleven year-old daughter named Mary. The family consisted of these persons:¹⁰

⁹ Document 9: Death Certificates, State of North Carolina, Volume 1543, Certificate #282, 4 Jan 1932.

¹⁰ Document 10: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1860, Valley Cruces Township, Watauga, NC, p. 356.

Locality		1860, Valley Cruces, Watauga, NC							
Enumeration Date		16 Jun 1860							
Page	House/ Family	Name	Description		Occupation	Value of Estate		Birth Place	Remarks
			Age	Sex		Real	Pers.		
356	43/36	John McGinnis	50	M	Farmer		75	NC	
		Priscilla “	48	F				“	
		Martha “	24	“				“	
		Elizabeth “	19	“				“	
		Thursa “	17	“				“	
		George “	15	M				“	
		Mary “	11	F				“	
		Isaac “	9	M				“	
		Sarah “	6	F				“	
		James “	1/12	M				“	

Unfortunately, the family could not be located in 1850. The age gaps between some of the children may be due to the untimely death of a child or two, that might be picked up in the 1850 census, if the family had not been missed.

The age of John and Priscilla’s oldest daughter indicates that they were married before 1840, and should show up in that census. A John McGinnis lived in Wilkes County in 1840, a man in his thirties. On the same page is listed an older James McGinnis, perhaps the father of John.¹¹

Locality			1840, Capt. Kilby’s District on Warner Creek, Wilkes, NC											
Pg. Ln.	Head of Family		0	5	10	15	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	Slaves
			to 5	to 10	to 15	to 20	to 30	to 40	to 50	to 60	to 70	to 80	+	
8	John McGinnis	M	1					1						
		F	2				1							

¹¹ Document 11: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1840, Capt. Kilby’s District on Warner Creek, Wilkes, NC, p. 8.

Locality			1840, Capt. Kilby's District on Warner Creek, Wilkes, NC											
Pg. Ln.	Head of Family		0 to 5	5 to 10	10 to 15	15 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	60 to 70	70 to 80	80 +	Slaves
"	James McGinnis	M F			1		1			1 1				

James and his wife were in their fifties, so they were probably born sometime in the 1780's. They were indeed old enough to be James' parents, since he was born about 1810.

Internet sources were searched for more information on these McGinnises. Nothing helpful could be found in Ancestry.com's World Tree Project. The International Genealogical Index (IGI) contains a marriage entry for John McGinnis and Priscilla Walker, married on December 14, 1835 in Wilkes County.¹²

Marriage records of Wilkes County confirm this marriage date and place. Robert Williams served as the bondsman for their marriage. Other McGinnis marriages were noted, as shown below:

Ephraim McGinnis to Susannah Swanson 21 Nov 1859
Hugh McGinnis to Frances L. Holte 13 Feb 1850¹³

These may have been younger brothers to James. Several Walker marriages were copied and included for future reference. One of these early Walker marriages may be for the parents of Priscilla.

The McGinnises do not seem to be landowners in Wilkes County, as the index to deeds does not mention their name. A printed volume of will abstracts does not mention them either, but several Walker wills were noted. None of them mention Priscilla, but

¹² Document 12: Familysearch.org, International Genealogical Index, Version 5.0.

¹³ Document 13: Brent H. Holcomb, *Marriage Records of Wilkes County, North Carolina, 1778-1868* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1983).

they were copied for future reference. They may be useful in a “process of elimination” tactic for identifying Priscilla’s parents.¹⁴

County histories of Wilkes County were searched, and one proved helpful. Biographical information on the Swanson family mentioned the McGinnis family and gave some valuable data. Susanna Swanson married Ephraim McGinnis, her first cousin. Ephraim was born about 1818, the son of James McGinnis and Nancy Swanson. Nancy was born on September 2, 1786, and her parents were John Swanson and Elizabeth Clifton. The other children of James McGinnis and Nancy Swanson are not mentioned in this biographical sketch.¹⁵ But if the link between John and James can be strengthened, then another generation has been added to the McGinnis line.

Continuing with the census searches, the 1830 census of Wilkes County shows James McGinnis there with five sons. His oldest son is represented by a mark in the column for males between fifteen and twenty. John would be about twenty years old, according to his age of fifty in the 1860 census, and was most likely that male in the home. The 1830 household of James McGinnis appears in the census as follows:¹⁶

Locality			1830, Wilkes NC											
Pg. Ln.	Head of Family		0 to 5	5 to 10	10 to 15	15 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	60 to 70	70 to 80	80 +	Slaves
370	James McGinnis	M F	3	1 1	1	1	1							

The younger sons could include Ephraim and Hugh, who married in the 1850’s. It is important to note that no other McGinnis households appeared in Wilkes County, which

¹⁴ Document 14: Grace Turner, *Wilkes County, North Carolina Will Abstracts, 1777-1910* (Wilson, NC: privately published, 1988).

¹⁵ Document 15: *The Heritage of Wilkes County, North Carolina, Volumew II, 1990* (Wilkes Genealogical Society, 1990).

¹⁶ Document 16: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1830, Wilkes NC, p. 370.

strengthens the likelihood that John and James were indeed father and son. Their proximity to one another in the 1840 census adds more evidence in that direction.

In 1820, James McGinnis resided in Wilkes County. James was between twenty-six and forty-five years old, with a wife in the same age range. He had five sons under the age of ten, one of whom was surely John.¹⁷

Locality	1820, Wilkes NC													
Page	Head-of-Family	Free White Males						Free White Females					All Others	Slaves
		0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 18	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +	0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +		
522	James McGinnis	5			1	1								

There were no other McGinnis households in Wilkes County, that could be the parents of John.

John and Priscilla McGinnis were followed forward in the censuses, to learn more about them. In 1870, the couple lived in Boone Township, Watauga County. Coincidentally they lived right next door to William Holdsclaw and his wife Rachel.¹⁸

Locality	1870, Boone Township, Watauga, NC									
Enumeration Date	9 Aug 1870									
Page	House/ Family	Name	Description		Occupation	Value of Estate		Birth Place	Remarks	
			Age	Sex		Real	Pers.			
795	34/ 34	Maginnis, John	60	M	Farmer		100	NC		
		“ Pressilla	58	F	Keeping Hse			NC		

John and Priscilla were still alive in 1880, residing in Watauga Township, next door to their son George.¹⁹

¹⁷ Document 17: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1820, Lincoln NC, p. 522.

¹⁸ Document 18: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1870, Boone Township, Watauga, NC, p. 795.

¹⁹ Document 19: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1880, Watauga Township, Watauga, NC, E. D. 203, Sheet 11C, Lines 41-42.

Locality		1880, Boone Township, Watauga, NC							
ED, Sheet, Line		E. D. 203, Sheet 11C, Lines 41-42							
Enumeration Date		13 Jun 1880							
Location		Name	Description		Relationship	Occupation	Birth Place		
House	Family		Sex	Age			Self	Fath	Moth
110	111	McGinnis, John	M	70	Head	Work on Farm	NC	NC	NC
		“ Priscilla	F	68	Wife	Keeping House	“	“	“

It is helpful to know the birthplaces of John and Priscilla's parents, all born in North Carolina. The McGinnis family would be found in the records of North Carolina well into the 1700's.

Continuing back in the censuses, the 1810 census shows 'James McGinness' in Lincoln County, which borders Wilkes County to the south. In fact there were two James McGinnesses, one designated 'Jr.' The other James was over forty-five years old in 1810, and most likely the father of James, Jr. The two households appeared in the original census as abstracted below:²⁰

Locality	1810, Capt. Andrew's District, Lincoln, NC													
Page	Head of Family	Free White Males					Free White Females					All Others	Slaves	
		0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +	0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +			
365	Jas. McGinness		3	2		1						1		
	Jas. McGinness Jr.	1			1				1					

This most likely represents the next earlier generation on the McGinnis line. Research into the records of Lincoln County may confirm this.

The 1820 census shows James McGinniss still in Lincoln County, with some younger McGinniss men nearby, including John, William and Ambrose, all three between

²⁰ Document 20: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1810, Capt. Andrew's District, Lincoln, NC, p. 365.

twenty-six and forty-five. This appears to be some of the young sons in the older James' home in 1810 that came of age by 1820.²¹

Locality	1820, East of the South Fork of the Catawba River, Lincoln, NC														
Page	Head-of-Family	Free White Males						Free White Females					All Others	Slaves	
		0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 18	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +	0 to 10	10 to 16	16 to 26	26 to 45	45 +			
354	Jas. McGinniss						1						1		
	Jno. McGinniss					1		3	1			1			
	William McGiniss	1				1		2				1			
	Ambrose McGiniss	2				1		1		1					

Internet sources were searched to see what other researchers had discovered about these McGinnises. Ancestry.com's World Tree Project does not contain anything helpful about them, even with the added information of earlier generations. In Genealogy.com's McGinnis Family Genealogy Forum, a couple of interesting queries were found. A researcher asked for any information about James McGinnis, born about 1778, possibly in Virginia, who died June 20, 1880 in Wilkes County, North Carolina. He married Nancy Swanson on October 12, 1809 in Lincoln County. Their children are listed, the oldest being John, born about 1810, who married Priscilla Walker. Others included Elizabeth, Ephraim, Willis, Nancy, James and Hugo.²² Another posting gives some helpful information on the Swanson family of Lincoln and Wilkes Counties.²³ This researcher apparently has information that links James and John as father and son.

Acting on the clue that James McGinnis lived until 1880, the census for that year was searched to verify. He did in fact survive to that year, and resided in the home of Ephraim McGinnis. James shows an age of one hundred and two years! He reported that

²¹ Document 21: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1820, East of the South Fork of the Catawba River, Lincoln, NC, p. 354.

²² Document 22: Genealogy.com, McGinnis Family Genealogy Forum, Entry #892, 19 Jan 2001.

²³ Document 23: Ibid., Entry #1152, 2 Sep 2001.

his birth occurred in Virginia, and that both of his parents were natives of Virginia as well. This is a very valuable clue for future research.²⁴

These new names have been added to the pedigree and family group sheets. Mary McGinnis and 'Martin' Isaacs were found in the IGI Ordinance Index as having been sealed in 2006, and Mary's temple ordinances completed.²⁵ This suggests that another descendant of hers has traveled this same research path and submitted her name for temple work. Her parents, John McGinnis and Priscilla Walker, were sealed in 1981, most likely through the records extraction program.²⁶ Neither John nor Priscilla have had their temple ordinance work done. John's parents, James McGinnis and Nancy Swanson, have not yet been sealed together. These names have been submitted and cards printed for their ordinance work to be done.

With the allotted time for research coming to a close, suggestions for future research would be to explore the records of Lincoln County, as well as North Carolina statewide sources. Once these have been satisfactorily exhausted, research can move into the records of Virginia for further extension of the McGinnis line. The Walker line could be the subject of a separate research project. Another surname new to the collection awaiting exploration is that of Swanson. As new branches of the family tree are discovered and new surnames added, then research can follow those new avenues. We look forward to continuing to study these families and extending each of the lines.

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²⁴ Document 24: Ancestry.com, U. S. Federal Census 1880, Beaver Creek Township, Wilkes, NC, E. D. 213, Sheet 17A, Lines 43-49.

²⁵ Document 25: Familysearch.org, International Genealogical Index, Version 5.0, Ordinance Index.

²⁶ Document 26: Ibid.