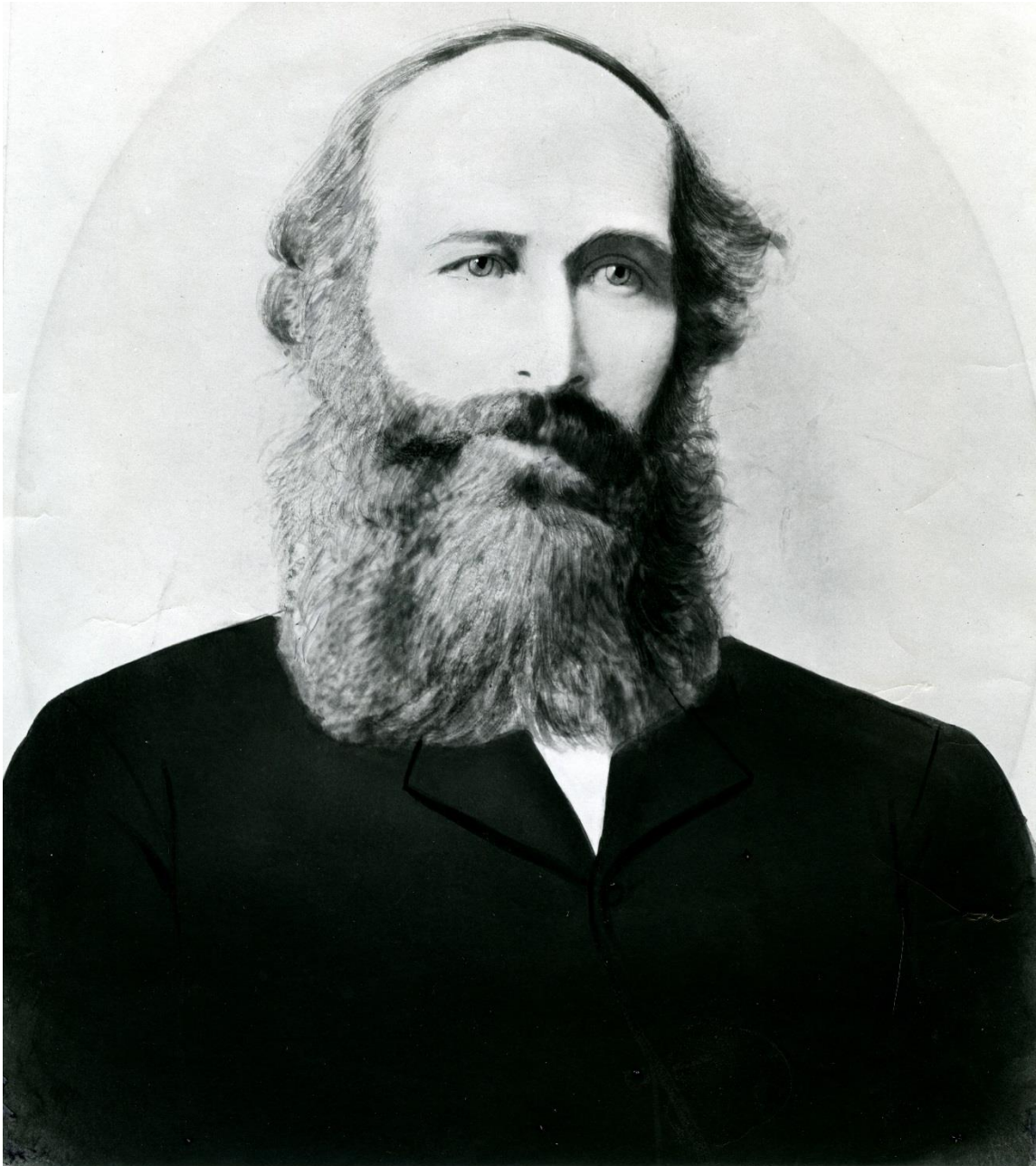


Luke McRedmond



The first Kitsap territorial clerk, Luke McRedmond, reached the ripe old age of 80! He began the first term in 1858, the

same year the Iron Horse began operation with the Northwest Railroad.

McRedmond, who was born in Ireland, followed the droves of immigrants sailing into the west coast in search of wealth and happiness. He first took root in San Francisco during the Gold Rush era and then sailed north towards Seattle in 1852. Versatility was McRedmond's main ingredient for success as he was a Sea Captain, a carpenter and, like most citizens of Kitsap, worked the lumber mills before eventually became a politician. Along with serving as the county clerk he also held office as the Auditor, Assessor and as County Commissioner for four years.



Picture courtesy of Bainbridge Island Historical Society

After turning 50 years old, McRedmond uprooted and relocated to Seattle where he ran for King County Sheriff and was one of the initial discoverers of the Black Diamond Coal mines. He was also the first postmaster of Redmond, the city that still bears his name. Pushing paper as a Kitsap County clerk may appear to be a dull position to most, but McRedmond and the next clerk, John Webster had character that stood out well beyond the average citizen of those times.

Luke McRedmond

A colorful Irishman once called Bainbridge home

By JOE CLASEMAN

The founding fathers of Bainbridge Island, recorded in history books, can move over now and make room for one more of their number, an Irish man by the name of Luke McRedmond.

The legacy left by this man has been lost for 114 years, but recent research has rediscovered this broad and public-spirited man who helped establish the settlement of Bainbridge Island and shape the early directions of county government here.

Although he was to become famous later as the founder of the town of Redmond, his contributions to Kitsap County and Bainbridge Island are significant as well. His story is one of a man of diverse talents whose life was marked by his sense of civic responsibility; it is a story that involves the telling of an old Bainbridge legend, and finally, it is the story of the man's love for the beauty of the land.

Luke McRedmond came to Bainbridge Island in 1853 or 1854. He was born in Knock's Hill, King's County (now County Offaly), Ireland in 1818 and emigrated to Tennessee in the late

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1840s as the potato famine in Ireland worsened. He was both a sea captain and a carpenter who worked at the shipyards near Memphis until gold was discovered in California. He then sailed around the Horn to San Francisco, where he lived and worked until 1851 when he moved to Port Townsend, a city many thought would become one of the major ports of the West Coast. In 1852 one of the Barbary Coast gangs burned down San Francisco for the fifth time. With the town's diminishing lumber supply, a few people began thinking of where to go to get more wood to replenish it. Among them was George Meigs, a Maine lumberman who had also come to San Francisco for the gold rush.

It is conceivable that Meigs and McRedmond traveled together to Bainbridge Island. At least they arrived here at the same time. Perhaps they had met earlier in San Francisco or later when Meigs came through Port Townsend as he searched for a place to start a lumber mill. Meigs had the capital and McRedmond had skills that would certainly be useful in operating a mill and in transporting lumber by ship

back to San Francisco. When Meigs established his mill and the town of Port Madison in 1854, McRedmond was working beside him.

Slaughter County politician

McRedmond worked in the Meigs mill for 14 years, but his life here was chiefly characterized by his very active involvement in local government. In 1857 he not only ran for legislative representative from Slaughter County (Kitsap's earlier name), but was also a member of the convention that elected General Isaac Stevens to be the first representative of the Territory of Washington to the U.S. Congress. In 1858 he was appointed County Auditor and Clerk of Courts for Kitsap County. In 1859 he became County Assessor. From 1864 to 1867 he served as County Commissioner. In 1867 he was Supervisor for Road District #2, and at various times during his years on Bainbridge, he also held the jobs of Road Viewer, Clerk of Elections for Port Madison and Grand Juror.

Bainbridge Island was the cradle of government for Kitsap County, and during those early years Port Madison was the county seat. In 1865 a

controversy arose over its siting there. A businessman named Collins from Teekalet (the early name of Port Gamble), who also happened to be one of the County Commissioners, wanted the county seat moved to his town. McRedmond and Kemple, the other two commissioners, could not agree that that was legally valid. McRedmond was called on to make a fair statement of both sides of the argument to submit to Chief Justice C.C. Hewitt and to Acting Governor Elwood Evans. It is a tribute to his ability to state the facts in a clear and unbiased way that the document he drew up was signed by all three commissioners. A decision favoring the McRedmond and Kemple view was rendered, and although the controversy surfaced again several times, the county seat remained at Port Madison until the 1890s.

The years that McRedmond lived on Bainbridge Island seemed to be a time of settling in and taking root. He worked at the Meigs Lumber Mill and Shipbuilding Company as a carpenter and lumberman, and occasionally he would captain loads of lumber to San

McRedmond

Francisco. Perhaps he also piloted some of the new ships Meigs was building. His residence was in the southern part of Port Madison at the end of High Street (now Washington Avenue) in one of the houses built by Meigs for the men who worked for him. In 1859 his friend Captain Richard Morse died, and in 1860 he married his widow, Kate Barrie Morse. One child had been born of the Morse marriage and Luke and Kate were to have three more children during the time they lived in Port Madison. A further indication of their desire to continue settling on Bainbridge was the homestead that McRedmond bought in the center of the island in 1865.

Curious move

The curious thing then is why the McRedmond family should leave Bainbridge in 1868 to live in Seattle before eventually moving on to a homestead on the Sammamish River. It would seem unlikely that a man of 50 with four children of 10 years of age and under, a steady job and the involvement in the community that McRedmond had shown should decide to move without substantial motivation.

Any number of reasons for the move could be speculated upon, but none can be verified. For example, it seems plausible that since some of the McRedmond children were to die at an early age, bouts with ill health could have caused the family to move to Seattle to be closer to medical care. Whatever the true reason for their leaving the island, there is one explanation which although colorful, rings a bit false. It involves an old Bainbridge legend about a whiskey farm.

The story is recorded in our history books that George Meigs allowed only beer to be served in his town and delivered an immediate penalty of dismissal to the person who came to work drunk. It is said that in violation of this code, a "MacRedmond" set up a whiskey farm which lured the lumbermen to overindulgence. This whiskey farm was located on the 40 acres north of Torvanger Road on Sunrise Drive. Meigs is supposed to have remedied the situation by buying out MacRedmond and shutting down the farm's operation.

There are some tantalizing connections to fact in the story. First there is the similarity of the names. Also, an old photograph shows a log cabin on the whiskey farm which bears some resemblance to log cabins that still exist on what is left of McRedmond's homestead on the island. And it is true that Meigs bought McRedmond's homestead at the end of 1867.

The evidence that "proves" the truth of the legend, however, is balanced by other facts which tend to "disprove" it. To begin with, the land where the whiskey farm was located was never owned by McRedmond, and in fact, was not in private ownership at all until four years after McRedmond left the island. Also, his descendants say that both he and his brothers were teetotalers from the time they lived in Ireland.

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Perhaps the strongest argument against McRedmond's involvement in such a venture was his interest and position in the community. If the whiskey farm was somehow in operation while McRedmond lived here, it would have been most likely during the time when he was County Commissioner. It would certainly seem untenable for him to be exacting fees for liquor licenses from saloon keepers while operating a covert still less than half a mile from town. It would be difficult, to say the least, for the secret to be kept for very long. Also, all other evidence about his life shows him to be a civic-minded individual, not one bent on breaking society's laws.

In the years after leaving Bainbridge, McRedmond continued to pursue his diverse interests in community affairs. He ran for sheriff of King County; he was credited with being one of the discoverers of the Black Diamond Coal Mines; from his homestead on the Sammamish River, he dedicated land for the first school in the area and helped construct it. He became the first postmaster of Redmond and platted the town in 1886. He also dedicated land for the development of the Seattle and International Railroad in that area. His concern for the plight of the common man in the difficult economic times of the last part of the 19th century caused him to help form the People's Party, a new political party designed to give more power to the farmer and laborer. In 1886 he chaired a "Grand Rally" of over 1000 people who supported the candidates of that party in the Northwest. Finally, he achieved a reputation for clear thinking and broad-mindedness through various writings he submitted to area newspapers.

In the way of legends, it seems likely that some of the facts about the whiskey farm have been confused in the telling and retelling before being written down. The story is intriguing, but it is certainly out of character with everything we know about McRedmond both before and after he left Bainbridge. However, it is also in the way of legends that regardless of whether it is true or not, it will probably continue to be told.

In spite of the variety of things he had done in his life, the phrase that McRedmond once used to describe himself was, "an humble farmer from the woods." It is the description of a man whose identity is with the land and his connection to it. A Seattle Post-Intelligencer account of his homestead on the Sammamish River says as much about the man as it does about the place: "... a cozy farm on the outskirts of Redmond. It was not an elaborate or pretentious place, but its quiet homelikeness, its air of restful comfort and rustic beauty, set in the shade of a typical old time country orchard held for the eyes of the passerby a charm that never failed to entrance."

McRedmond's attachment to his land is also recorded in a story of his death, which is still told by his descendants. In 1898, at the age of 80, McRedmond was taken to Providence Hospital in Seattle

with a complication of diseases. One day his daughter Emma went to visit him. At that time it was a rather difficult journey into Seattle. From the farm there was the stagecoach to Lake Washington, followed by a ferry boat ride and finally a horse-drawn trolley to the destination on the other side. It was a glorious day in May and that helped to make the journey a bit more pleasant for Emma. When she got to the hospital, she found her father's room empty. No one seemed to know what had happened to him. Emma made the steps of the return journey with growing consternation for what fate may have fallen to the ill old man.

She entered the farm yard as dusk began settling on the trees and there she saw her father sitting on a stump. He was watching the approach of evening. Apparently he, too, had been affected by the stirrings of the spring day. She went to him, and he told her only that he had come back to see the place for the last time. A couple of days

later he died.

McRedmond's passing was greatly felt in the community he left behind. His house was filled with mourners, among them neighbors, statesmen and many members of the Salish Indian tribe who considered him their good friend. A newspaper account of his death described him as one of the most prominent pioneers of Puget Sound and one "widely and favorably known for his sterling qualities, firm principles and broad ideas."

What emerges about Luke McRedmond is the character of a common man who was uncommon in his sense of involvement in the community and in his willingness to help his fellow men to shape it. If anything is the legacy of Luke McRedmond it is that. It is a legacy that has been lost to us on Bainbridge for over 100 years, and now that it has been found it deserves its place not only in our history books but in our consciousness.



Kate Morris McRedmond

Special thanks to the [Bainbridge Island Historical Museum](http://bainbridgehistory.org/) for providing the pictures of Luke and the bio materials! We believe Luke McRedmond was the first Clerk of the County for the Washington Territory after the county was established in July of 1857.

Please visit the museum at:

<http://bainbridgehistory.org/>