

"William A. McKellip, Consul to Magdeburg"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Among the many notable Carroll Countians who lie buried in the Westminster Cemetery, few had careers as interesting as William A. McKellip. Former editor of The Times J. Leland Jordan wrote an interesting sketch of McKellip's life in his December 4, 1942 Time Flies column.

The Consul to Magdeburg—passing through the Westminster Cemetery recently, I paused at the grave of Col. William A. McKellip. It came to mind that at one time he carried the title—the Consul to Magdeburg. I remembered too, that he was a soldier of some prominence; a friend of Presidents Lincoln, Grant, McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. I knew too that he was one of Carroll's most distinguished sons.

McKellip was a native of Taneytown. He came to Westminster at the age of 30, and was for a number of years deputy clerk in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court. In 1862 he recruited and was directly responsible for the formation of Company A, Sixth Regiment Infantry, Maryland Volunteers, in this city, and assisted with the organization of companies C and F of the same regiment. He was commissioned a lieutenant and advanced rapidly to captain, major and finally to Lieutenant Colonel of the Sixth.

Col. McKellip served with his regiment through the Virginia campaign and was wounded as a result of an exploding magazine at Maryland Heights. This disablement rendered him unfit for service and he was retired. At the county election then in progress he was elected to the office of Clerk of the Court. He served in this office until 1867.

Having been admitted to the bar he formed a law partnership with Judge John E. Smith. In 1882 when Smith was returned to the bench McKellip became the senior partner of the law firm of McKellip and Clabaugh.

During the administration of President Grant, he was appointed as one of the U.S. Commissioners to the Vienna Exposition. He traveled extensively in Europe on several occasions. In 1902 President Roosevelt named him to the consulate at Magdeburg, Germany. He died at his post in April 1904. The body was returned to the United States and was received at the port of Baltimore. Funeral services were conducted in Centenary Methodist church, this city. This funeral was the largest ever held in the county, it is said. Representatives of the State Department at Washington, government and state officials, the Grand Army of the Republic, state military and political leaders as well as representatives of the several military orders were in attendance. The funeral procession was led by the First Regiment Band and Company H.

Let's go back to 1862. The regiment of which he was temporarily commanding was in need of arms, so direct appeal was made to President Lincoln. He and Governor Hicks went to Washington and obtained an interview with the president. The result was the following note written on the back of the President's personal card:

"Secretary of War:

Please give bearer, Major McKellip, of the 6th Maryland Regiment, the best arms possible, and oblige.

A. LINCOLN."

Twenty years later when he and his daughter were in Washington, he requested admittance to the office of the Secretary of War. He was advised that the secretary was engaged and could not receive visitors. The Colonel then presented the worn but valued card which he had carried so many years. It was taken to the secretary who immediately came to the door and received the Colonel and his daughter personally. McKellip stated that he had no particular business to transact, but wanted to know if a card from President Lincoln would be received by his son, who twenty years after had become the Secretary of War.

Although the Historical Society owns several photographs of Col. McKellip and other items related to his military service, it is not known if the Lincoln card survives. It may also be interesting to note that Consul McKellip's former post became the target of American bombers shortly after Jordan wrote the above story. Elements of the 8th Air Force attacked industrial targets in and around Magdeburg on several occasions.

Photo caption: Col. William A. McKellip sat for his portrait by Bachrach & Bro. of Baltimore shortly before being named Consul to Magdeburg, Germany by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902. He died at his post in April 1904. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Rev. Paul Reese, 1941.