

Town of Guilderland Cellar Paved With Gravestones

By Fred B. Abele

As bulldozers and graders rumbled and crashed outside a little white farmhouse with green shutters, standing on the south side of Western avenue in the shadow of the Prospect Hill cemetery, yielded historic treasure in its final moments. Indicated on the Beers map of 1866, no owner's name was given, but it had been used by various caretakers for Prospect Hill cemetery. One, John Newman, was a veteran of the Civil War and had lost an arm. It has not been occupied as a residence for nearly 10 years and is slated for demolition in the wake of an apartment house and shopping center construction.

Members of the Guilderland Historical society, pursuing a rumor, explored the house and found the rumor true. The cellar floor was paved with old gravestones. No one has yet ascertained how or when they were placed.

Lying face down as a cellar floor were the original stones from the old McKown family plot. Turning over the first stone, society members Russell C. Case and Fred Abele found it recorded "William McKown, died August 1, 1843" at the age of 80 years plus. Born in 1763, Mr. McKown was the early settler who leased the "Five Mile House" on the old Schenectady Road, now site of the latest SUNY dorm. In 1793, this gentleman, aware of the pending construction of the Great Western Turnpike, erected a tavern on a site now on Western avenue opposite Fuller Road, the same site now occupied by King's Shell Station. This tavern and its owner were described in the writings of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, a famous Guilderland son. William McKown was well thought of in the community, and served as the seventh Guilderland town supervisor from 1813 to 1824. The tavern lasted until it burned in 1917, and for many years served as the post office for McKownville.

The second stone overturned was that of John McKown, died June 15, 1809, at the age of 87. Born in 1722, he was undoubtedly the McKown who brought the family name to America from Scotland.

Other stones yielded information on Catherine McKown, wife of William (or Billy) as he was mostly called. She died in 1841 at age 84. There were the infant children of John and Catherine McKown and three young children of William and Catherine McKown who died in the same week in 1796. Both wives' names were coincidentally Catherine.

One stone was Abram H. McKown, M.D., who died at age 32 in 1853, and another for Peter Hilton, who died in 1845 at age 62.

Some of the stones are being removed for preservation by a work party for the Historical society. The house itself cannot be saved; another landmark disappears from Guilderland.

McKownville little remembers its founding family, such names as Stuyvesant (Plaza), Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn with no association with the area having overshadowed it.

Stones Removed from the Cellar Floor

WILLIAM McKOWN -- Died August 1, 1843 -- age 80 years, 4 months, 15 days. This was a large stone with top ornamentation, and the inscription "At length it's finished. Yes, the conflict's o'er, and pain and sorrow shall molest no more. Oh, blissful state when joys that never end rewarded this father, dearest friend; self-love be silent, dare not to complain. Compare your loss with his eternal gain."

At the bottom was the legend, "R. A. Cole, Hudson."

Sacred to the memory of Catherine, wife of William McKown, who departed this life 3rd of July 1841, age 84 years, 11 months, 8 days.

ABRAM H. McKOWN, died on Feb. 15, 1853, age 32 years, six months, 15 days.

"Our son is departed before us, affliction no more he shall know; his spirit is landed in glory; his labours are finished below."

JOHN McKOWN, who departed this life June 15, 1809, aged 87 years and 25 days. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." (A large but plain stone).

PETER HILTON, died May 15, 1845, aged 62 years, 10 months.

Stones Which Remain

Sacred to the memory of **PETER W. HILTON**, who departed this life, January 26, 1836, aged 90 years, 11 months, 11 days.

Inscription -- "Friends and physicians could not save this mortal body from the grave nor could the grave confine me here. When Christ commands I must appear."

Sacred to the memory of **ELIZABETH**, wife of Peter W. Hilton, who departed this life 31st March, 1838, aged 89 years, nine months, 19 days.

Inscription -- "Kind angels watch this sleeping dust, till Jesus comes to raise the just; then may she waken in sweet surprise, and in her Saviour's image rise."

ABRAHAM H., son of John & Catherine McKown, died Aug. 16, 1819, age 1 year, 1 month, 26 days.

ELIZABETH H., daughter of John & Catherine McKown, died Apr. 27, 1822, age 2 years, three months, 27 days.

In memory of William and Catherine McKown's three sons -- **James McKown**, died March 20th, 1796, age 5 years, 1 month, 21 days. **William McKown**, died March 28, 1796, aged 3 year, one month, 25 days. **Barnard McKown**, died March 25, 1796, age 0 years, 11 months, 9 days.

There were other assorted small stones and lot markers all fitted into a neatly laid cellar floor.