

# McKownville: News And Comment

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## Origins of McKownville

In my previous column I established the location of the first building in the McKownville area. The origin of the hamlet of McKownville and its name, its first settlers and its founding father are an interesting story.

The McKown family in America as well as McKownville has been traced back to origins in Londonderry, Ireland where they had previously migrated from Scotland. It is assumed that the family stemmed from the Scottish Clan Colquhoun of County Dunbarton near Glasgow.

On May 23, 1721 John McKown

was born in Londonderry. He died on June 15, 1809 at the McKown Tavern in McKownville at age 88. He was married in Londonderry and had a large family. In 1766-67 John and his family migrated to America. His wife, whose name is unknown, died at sea and only five children survived to reach this country. They were James, Mary (Molly), Robert, William and Barnard W. Their port of entry has not been established but they found their way to Cherry Valley, where it is known they were living in 1778. By 1780 they had apparently migrated to this area and taken residence at the old Five Mile House on the King's Highway. When George Washington visited Albany and Schenectady in 1782, one account says that his party stopped to rest at McKown's and were met by a party from Schenectady.

William (Billy) McKown, after whom McKownville is named, was born in 1763 at Londonderry, being four years old when the survivors of the family arrived in America. In 1778 he survived a not-so-friendly encounter with the Indian, Joseph Brant, in Cherry Valley and settled with his father at the Five Mile House about 1780. In 1786 when the lease for the Five Mile

House came up for renewal, it was leased to William McKown, said lease to run until 1808. He was also given permission to erect a barn and fence the property.

He purchased a large tract of land within the VanBaal patent, discussed some time back, and extending to the Norman's Kill.

Being a tavern keeper and meeting many travelers and being politically minded, William heard, early in the process, of the proposal to build a new road to the west. The road would become the Great Western Turnpike, now Western Ave. (Route 20).

During 1793 he cleared a road from the Five Mile House to a point where King's Service Station now stands and cleared land and erected the second building in this area, a large two and one half story hotel. When the first company of the Great Western Turnpike was formed to build to Cherry Valley, William sold them a right of way through his land, directly in front of his new tavern.

William McKown married Catherine Sprung and they had seven children, four of whom reached adulthood. Three died in one week in 1796 in what must have been a heartbreaking experience. The four surviving children were John A., Absalom, Catherine, and Abraham H. \*note

William became very well known as a tavern keeper and the Four Mile House of Billy McKown on the Great Western Turnpike became a stopping place for all using the turnpike. He built cattle sheds, an ice house and various other buildings. He dammed the Krum Kill in six or seven places and piped water to the hotel and the cattle sheds through conduits of hollow log pipes.

In 1813 he ran for supervisor of the Town of Guilderland and held this post through 1824, Guilderland's seventh supervisor.

William died on Aug. 1, 1843 and

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was buried in the family plot which was situated in the area behind King's Service Station where the Quadrini development was built during the 1950s. At that time the cemetery occupants were relocated to Prospect Hill Cemetery, where modern gravestones were erected. The original stones were later found in the basement of a former caretaker of the Prospect Hill Cemetery.

The children of William McKown carried on the family name in the Town of Guilderland and surrounding area for many years but in the mid-1950s the family name died out in this area.

\*note - this is the only record to be found of Abraham H as a child of William McKown. Possibly this is an old mistake. There was an adult Abram H McKown, but he was a child of John A McKown, so a grandson of William. There was an Abraham H McKown, but also a grandson of William, and who died in 1819, just over one year old.

old gravestone gives age  
87 years 25 days - so  
born 1722 May 21

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