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## The Early History of McKeesport

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“As we intended to take horses here, and it required some time to find them, I went up about three miles to the mouth of the Youghiogeny to visit Queen Alliquippa, who had expressed great concern that we passed her in going to the fort. I made her a present of a match-coat and a bottle of rum, which latter was thought much the best present of the two,” wrote George Washington in his journal on December 31st, 1753 and, incidentally he thereby made the first definite authentic record of a visit of a white man to the present site of the City of McKeesport. Washington, of course, was accompanied by Christopher Gist on this occasion and Gist also made a record of the visit in his journal.

Many another traveler on his way to the Forks of the Ohio over Nemacolin's Path or Trail had visited the home of the trader Frazier at the mouth of Turtle Creek, but, as Nemacolin's Path gave the mouth of the Youghiogeny a wide berth, and as the incentive that prompted Washington to leave the beaten path was a stranger to the mind of the average traveler, it is not surprising that the section now known as McKeesport was little visited.

As Queen Alliquippa was the first permanent resident at the mouth of the Youghiogeny,—if the residence of an Indian may be termed permanent—it may be fitting to consider for a moment this regal personage.

Queen Alliquippa was what might be called an anomaly among Indian rulers, in that she was one of the very few women who became the leader of a band of Indians; in fact this, no doubt, accounts for her prominence in history.

In the year 1701, she, with her husband and infant son visited William Penn at Newcastle, Delaware; <sup>1</sup> in 1706 Thomas Chalkley found her ruling her tribe in Chester County, Pa.; <sup>2</sup> in 1748 Conrad Weiser dined with her at her town on the Allegheny River, near the mouth of the Monongahela River; <sup>3</sup> in 1749 Celeron found her at Shannopin's Town on the Allegheny River, although he did not see her, for she fled to the hills at the approach of the French and did not return until after they had departed; <sup>4</sup> in 1752 Messrs. Patten, Fry and Lomax, commissioners of Virginia, presented her with gifts at her town on the Ohio River below the mouth of Chartiers Creek; and finally Washington found her at the mouth of the Youghiogheny in 1753. When the French drove the English from the Forks of the Ohio, Queen Alliquippa fled from the mouth of the Youghiogheny and joined Washington's camp at Fort Necessity in 1754, <sup>5</sup> and upon the surrender of that fort, she was sent to Aughwick, Pa., where a few months later she died. "Alequeapy, ye old quine, is dead, and left several children" tersely reported George Croghan, in charge of Indian Affairs at Aughwick, to the Colonial authorities under date of December 23rd, 1754. <sup>6</sup>

Local historians delight to surround Queen Alliquippa with a halo of glory, but she was just a wrinkled old Indian squaw, possibly 75 years of age when she lived at McKeesport. She was a Seneca, and her one virtue seems to have been that she ever remained the firm friend of the English.

Subsequent to the visit of Washington there is no definite record of the presence of any white man at or near the mouth of the Youghiogheny until Braddock and his army passed that place on July 9th, 1755. Entering the present limits of the City of McKeesport, Braddock's army passed down the valley now known as Hartman Street, and forded the Monongahela at the present site of the new McKeesport-Duquesne Bridge.

The history of McKeesport during the period from 1755 to 1768 is shadowed in doubt and there is no authentic record of the events occurring during that interim. However, notwithstanding the want of information on the subject, practically every history of Allegheny County and of McKeesport relates that David McKee settled at the mouth of the Youghiogheny in 1755 "under the protection" of

Queen Alliquippa. <sup>7</sup> As that dusky sovereign was chasing the deer in the "Happy Hunting Ground" during that particular year, and as it is definitely known that all the English had been driven from the Monongahela by the French prior to 1755, little credence need be placed in these assertions. David McKee may have made a visit to the mouth of the Youghiogheny as early as 1755, but even that is extremely doubtful, and if the story is not purely a myth, it at least lacks historical confirmation.

It will be remembered that on February 3rd, 1768, the Assembly of Pennsylvania solemnly passed that most terrifying law declaring that all settlers occupying lands not yet purchased from the Indians should remove from the same at once or "suffer death without benefit of clergy", and that a commission was appointed to visit the various settlements and explain the law to the settlers. In the report of that commission dated April 2nd, 1768, is a list of the settlements visited and the names of the settlers, but the name of McKee does not appear therein. <sup>8</sup> While that report does not pretend to give the name of every settler, yet the absence of the name of McKee therefrom is at least significant.

If David McKee was not in southwestern Pennsylvania at the time of that report, there is positive assurance that he was there on December 25th, of the same year. In a volume of the early Supreme Court Reports, officially designated as "1 Yates", at page 288 is reported a case known as Richard Smith vs George Crawford, et al., and from that report the following is a quotation.

"It was proved by several witnesses, that the said James McKee first seated himself on the land and began to build a cabin about Christmas 1768, which was finished in 1769, after the office opened, and originally held it by what he falsely called an improvement, which he had continued by himself or his tenants up to the present period, and that at the time of commencing the ejectment he had a good house, barn, stables, some meadow ground and about sixty acres of land cleared on the farm, that his father had sent to Philadelphia applications for several tracts of land for his sons, and amongst others one for the tract in question, to be entered in the office, which had miscarried, but which under an impression that the locations had been sent by

mistake to a wrong surveyor, the survey had been actually made for the said James McKee, his son, and John McKee his brother had paid 5L for the surveying fees."

This case, decided in 1793, was an action of ejectment for "300 acres at Braddock's upper crossing on the west side of the Monongahela about 14 miles from Fort Pitt," the present site of the City of Duquesne. It recites that James McKee claimed the land under a permission granted to Alexander Ross by Captain Charles Edmonstone, commanding officer at Fort Pitt, under date of September 29th, 1768. Upon the attainder of Ross for high treason, the estate was declared forfeited and sold at public sale to James McKee for 35L.

Therefore, in lieu of any authentic information on the subject other than the report before mentioned and the Supreme Court record, David McKee and his family must have arrived at the mouth of the Youghioghenny sometime between April 2nd, 1768, and December 25th, of the same year. With David McKee came his wife, Margaret, his five sons, Robert, James, Thomas, David and John, and his two daughters, Mary and Margaret.

When the Proprietors' Land Office was opened on April 3rd, 1769, to receive applications for land in the "New Purchase," which included southwestern Pennsylvania, David McKee was present on the opening day and filed his application for 306 acres of land at the junction of the Monongahela and Youghioghenny Rivers. Two days later his two sons, Thomas and Robert, filed their applications, the former for 253 acres adjoining David McKee's land on the south, and the latter for 285 acres adjoining David McKee's land on the east.

The prompt action of David McKee and his two sons in taking up all the level land between the two rivers, and some not so level, at least gives us a hint as to the purpose they had in view when they journeyed westward to the frontier of Pennsylvania.

The McKees were not the only pioneers interested in procuring lands at the mouth of the Youghioghenny. Samuel Sinclair, Jacob Zeinnett and Peter Keyser followed the McKees, and the first named made application for the land across the Youghioghenny from the David McKee property, later known as the "Forks of the Youghioghenny." Jacob

Zeinnett procured the land along the Monongahela east of the Robert McKee tract beginning at Braddock's Upper Crossing, while Peter Keyser made application for the same land for which the application of Thomas McKee had already been filed. However, upon ascertaining his error, Keyser later purchased the Zeinnett property. A year elapsed and then young Hugh Goben arrived in the community and took up the land south of the Zeinnett tract and east of the David and Thomas McKee properties.

Thus it will be seen that practically all the property now included within the present city limits of the City of McKeesport was originally owned by six men, David McKee, Thomas McKee, Robert McKee, Peter Keyser, Hugh Goben and Samuel Sinclair. They were all primarily farmers and at once began to clear the land and to till the soil.

Very early two of these men were taken from the field of activity by death. Thomas McKee was a victim of disease, but Peter Keyser met a violent end. As Keyser's passing was extremely tragic, the details have a historic interest.

The home of Peter Keyser was located on the Monongahela River very near the spot where Braddock's army crossed that stream. One day in the year 1777 or 1778, while Keyser and his two sons, aged 18 and 20 years respectively, were in the fields sowing wheat, a band of Indians suddenly appeared at the cabin and sank their tomahawks into the skulls of Mrs. Keyser and her four small children. Then after setting fire to the house they went to the field in search of Keyser and the two elder sons. Keyser was killed but the two boys fled to the river, where the younger was shot just as he was plunging into the water. The elder son, Jacob by name, swam the river and escaped—the only survivor in the family of eight. \*

The next record of Jacob Keyser is found in a power of attorney executed in Lexington, Kentucky, under date of February 13th, 1798, authorizing John Walker to enter suit for all property claimed by him in the State of Pennsylvania, and reciting that a similar power of attorney had been given to Ephraim Blain in the year 1788 but Blain had neglected to act thereunder.<sup>10</sup>

The place of Thomas McKee in the community was soon taken by James Peebles. However, instead of mak-

ing an application for a new tract of land, Peebles promptly married David McKee's daughter, Mary, and together they took possession of the Thomas McKee tract of land. Later, in 1779 Peebles purchased the interests of his wife's brothers and sister in the property and procured a patent for the land. The deed to Thomas McKee will be found among the records in Westmoreland County.<sup>11</sup>

While the early settlers were clearing their land and tilling their fields, David McKee decided that a ferry across the Youghioghenny and Monongahela Rivers would be profitable, and two ferries were promptly placed in operation. Early histories relate that the right to operate these ferries were given to McKee by the Colonial authorities, but the Colonial Records are silent in this regard. However, it is certain that such ferries existed, for the minutes of the Virginia Court for Augusta County under date of February 21st, 1775, record the appointment of viewers for a proposed road "from the mouth of the Youghioghenny River at McKee's Ferry."<sup>12</sup>

It may be that these ferries were operated without any express legal authority from the Colony of Pennsylvania, and it is certain that he did not have such authority from Virginia, which claimed jurisdiction at that time, and the lack of such permission from Virginia caused the temporary suspension of the operation of McKee's ferries during the year 1775. Samuel Sinclair, who resided across the Youghioghenny, taking advantage of McKee's omission in this regard, on the 24th day of February 1775, made application to the Virginia Court for Augusta County sitting at Fort Dunmore for permission to operate ferries across both rivers. The minutes of the court on that date provide as follows:

"On motion of Samuel Sinclair, who lives at the forks of the rivers Monongahale and Youghagano leave is granted him to keep a ferry over each of the rvierns, and that he keep boats."<sup>13</sup>

A few months later, David McKee, realizing his error in not having procured such permission from the Virginia Courts, appealed to that body, but with less success. The minutes of the court on May 16th, 1775 are as follows:

"On the motion of David McKee for leave to keep a ferry over the Monongahale and Youghagano, which motion being opposed, on hearing the parties it is considered that the ferry is un-

necessary; it is therefore ordered that the said motion be rejected." <sup>14</sup>

Thus it will be seen that Certificates of Public Convenience as granted by the present Public Service Commission of Pennsylvania are not particularly new, the old Virginia Courts having exercised the same jurisdiction in a somewhat limited form.

It is not known just how long David McKee's ferry remained inactive, but on February 5th, 1784, the Assembly of Pennsylvania, passed an Act granting to John McKee, son of David McKee, the right to operate a ferry over the aforesaid rivers. <sup>15</sup> In the preamble of the Act it is recited that the said ferry had been operated by John McKee for many years past and that the purpose of the Act was to establish by law his right to operate the same.

Before introducing the principle character of the early history of McKeesport, John McKee, his brothers and sisters will be disposed of briefly.

As has before been stated, Mary McKee married James Peebles and settled on the Thomas McKee tract after Thomas had died, and James McKee built his cabin at the present site of the City of Duquesne. Robert McKee erected a large stone mansion on his tract of land at a point now known as Fifth Avenue, McKeesport, which in the memory of some of our older residents has ever been spoken of as the "Haunted House". His daughter, Elizabeth McKee, married Samuel Sinclair, Jr., son of Samuel Sinclair from across the Youghiogheny, and their descendants appear prominently in the history of McKeesport. David McKee, Jr., settled across the Monongahela in Mifflin Township, and one of his daughters, Sarah, married Thomas Whigham. To this David McKee, the present mayor of McKeesport and many other more or less prominent citizens trace their lineage. Margaret McKee married a man by the same name, Robert McKee, but little is known of their children, if any.

John McKee, the founder of McKeesport, was born in 1746 in northern Ireland of Scotch ancestry and was therefore about 22 years of age when the family arrived at the present site of McKeesport. At first he does not seem to have been interested in taking up land, and, while his father and brothers made applications for large tracts, the name of John McKee does not appear in the land records for many

years thereafter. The father and brothers, however, secured their land for the permanent use and occupation of themselves and their families, while John McKee, when his interest in land was awakened, became a trader in real estate for profit. He bought and sold land in Pittsburgh, in Beaver County, along the Allegheny and in Versailles Township, and through his real estate operations and other business transactions became one of the wealthiest men in western Pennsylvania. With the coming of wealth came also the desire to live in a home suitable to his station in life. The old log cabin was abandoned and a large stone mansion erected near Second Street, and east of Walnut Street. John purchased fine horses and blooded cattle, and the work about the plantation was done by negro slaves.

In the records of Allegheny County there are numerous references made to John McKee's slaves, but the most interesting among these references are two papers recorded in the Recorder's Office which read as follows:

"Be it know to all men that I, John McKee of Allegheny County and State of Pennsylvania, do by these presents let free my negro man known by the name of Peter Casco for the consideration of the sum of 100 lbs., which he, the said Peter has paid me by sundrey obligations in writing for the same. And he the said Peter has always behaved himself as an honest, trusty servant.  
In witness whereof, I have set my hand this 3rd, day of July 1790.

John McKee (Seal)" 16

"THIS INDENTURE made the 24th, day of September in the year of Our Lord 17..."

WITNESSETH Negro Suck who is not free by her Master James Tarrans of Allegheny County and State of Pennsylvania forenamed Suck doth of her own free will bind her daughter, Kut, unto John McKee of the City and State aforesaid, during the full and complete term of 12 years and 6 months which term she the said Kut, her Master shall faithfully serve, his lawful commands cheerfully obey; she shall not contract matrimony, nor do anything detrimental to her said Master's interests; she shall not commit fornication nor frequent taverns, cards, dice nor any unlawful games. And her master for his part, his heirs and assigns are bound to provide for said Kut sufficient meal, drink, washing and lodging during said term, and to learn her to read the holy scriptures and to give her when free two suits of clothes, one of which is to be new.

In Witness whereof both parties have set their hands and seals the day and year above written.

Witnesses



		her	
Negro	Suck	(-)	(Seal)
		mark	
John	McKee		(Seal)" 17

Thomas Ochiltree  
John Lawrence

McKee was a shrewd business man and was not adverse to going to court to enforce a just claim or to defend against an unjust one. On one occasion his enthusiasm for his cause got him into serious difficulty and an attachment was issued against him for contempt of court "for endeavoring to influence and corrupt a jury by handing certain papers to them during their deliberation and before giving in their verdict in a certain cause wherein James McPherson was plaintiff and John McKee was defendant." 18

John McKee was twice married, his first wife being Sarah Goben, a sister of Hugh Goben, and his second, Sarah Redick, popularly known as "Sally." By reason of the fact that both wives bore the same first name, historians seem to have overlooked the first wife entirely and no mention of her has been made in any published history.

In Deed Book Vol. 2, at page 311 is recorded a deed signed by John and Sarah McKee, and dated May 20, 1789. In the acknowledgement of this deed under date of June 23, 1790 it is set forth that the acknowledgment of the deed is made by John McKee alone, his wife having died since signing the deed. There is also a case reported in Vol. 1 Addison's Reports at page 272, wherein it is recited that Hugh Goben and John McKee were brothers-in-law.

At least two children were born to John McKee and his first wife, one of whom, answering to the name of Margery, grew into woman's estate and married young William Thompson, "lately arrived from Kentucky." McKee then purchased the Hugh Goben farm, which had been the home of his wife, and turned it over to his son-in-law, William Thompson. The Thompsons lived on the farm for many years, and reared two daughters.

John McKee's first wife died sometime between May 20th, 1788 and June 23rd, 1790, but he did not long remain single. One July day in the year 1791 a man on horseback and leading a second horse on which was a lady's side-saddle, stopped at the home of John McKee. The rider was the handsome Hugh McCoy of Fort Pitt. He was quickly join-

ed by John McKee, also on horseback and leading a second horse on which was a lady's side saddle, and together they rode away. They followed Braddock's Road into the Cumberland Valley, and finally stopped at the home of John Redick, a wealthy and aristocratic land owner. That evening, July 21, 1791, a double wedding took place, and the next morning when the riders started homeward, the beautiful Sally Redick rode by the side of John McKee, and her sister, Rachel Redick, rode by the side of Hugh McCoy.<sup>19</sup> The comely Sally was duly installed as mistress of the McKee plantation, and the blue blood of the Redick family joined the wealth of the McKees, and the first aristocracy of McKeesport was formed.

Although this wedding was a May and December affair, Sally being 25 years of age, and John 20 years her senior, the union was a happy one. The vivacious Sally attracted to her home the society of the surrounding country, for Sally was a born aristocrat, and the prominence of her brothers, John Redick of Beaver County, and David Redick of Washington County, extended her social reign into both of those counties. John Redick was an associate judge of Beaver County<sup>20</sup> and David Redick was one of the most prominent men in western Pennsylvania. He was a member of the Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and served a term as vice-president of that body. He was also a member of the first Constitutional Convention, and for a time was its president.<sup>21</sup>

Four children were born to John McKee by his second wife, David, who died in infancy, and John, Sally and Redick all of whom lived to maturity.<sup>22</sup>

However the affairs of John and Sally McKee did not always run smoothly. Then as now, when a man or woman, by social position, education or financial circumstances, rose above his or her neighbors, he or she soon became the target for the gossips of the community.

It will be remembered that in the year 1794 and prior thereto, the good citizens of western Pennsylvania engaged in a slight altercation with the Government relative to the taxation of stills and the product of the same, and that by reason of the activities of a certain "Tom the Tinker" and his followers the popularity of a settler was not increased, nor was his personal safety assured by his being in any

manner associated with those whose duty it was to enforce the law.

With this condition in mind, John McKee cannot be blamed for becoming highly incensed and righteously indignant when certain gossips in the neighborhood began to circulate the report that he and his wife were giving information to the government officials regarding the stills in the vicinity. This gossip became so insistent that it became necessary for John McKee to make a public denial of these accusations and under date of August 12th, 1794, the following advertisement appeared in the Pittsburgh Gazette.

"Whereas some evil minded and ill disposed persons, with a view, no doubt, to injure me, both in my character and property, have circulated two false reports against me and my family. One is, that when I was last in Philadelphia, I informed upon the distillers on this side of the mountain, who had not entered their stills with the excise man, and had received three hundred pounds for the same, and that I came up with the Federal Sheriff to Fayette County. The other is, that Mrs. McKee should have said, that, if Tom the Tinker burnt all we had, the state would make it good.

Now I do hereby solemnly declare the above reports to be false and groundless; that I do not know Clymer or Miller, the excise men, nor Lennox the Federal Sheriff, nor ever spoke a word to one of them in my life, and of this I am ready to make oath if called upon. And I do hereby call upon the malicious and false propagators to come forward and substantiate the charges, and do hereby put the world of mankind to defiance to prove or support the same.

Mouth of Yough. August 12th, 1794".

Shortly prior to this occurrence, the financial affairs of the McKees had taken a decided turn for the worse. Judge John Redick of Beaver County had entered into a contract with the United States Government to furnish supplies for the army of General Anthony Wayne for his expedition against the Indians, and John McKee had become surety on the bond of the Judge.

Some historians declare that Judge Redick's undertaking was to furnish supplies for the army brought into this section to quell the Whiskey Insurrection, but a casual glance at the respective dates of the two events should definitely decide the controversy against the latter contention. Gen. Anthony Wayne's army was encamped in or near Pittsburgh from the spring of 1792 until the spring of 1793, \* while the army to oppose the Whiskey Insurrection did not arrive in this vicinity until early in November, 1794. \* As

the case against McKee was tried in 1794, the cause of action must have accrued sometime prior to that year, and most probably in 1792 or 1793, the period when General Wayne's army was encamped at Pittsburgh.

Redick failed in his undertaking and McKee was called upon to pay the amount of the bond. Payment was offered in Continental money, of which McKee had a large supply, but the Government demanded gold, and in this contention the Government was sustained by the District Court at Philadelphia,<sup>25</sup>

The payment of this judgment not only depleted his purse, but compelled him to borrow from friends and acquaintances, and the repayment of this borrowed money caused him extreme financial embarrassment. And it was in the agony of this financial embarrassment that the idea of laying out a town on the home plantation was born in the mind of John McKee.

At this time David McKee had reached the advanced age of 84 years and John was the only son remaining at home. For many years John had managed the plantation as his own, in fact as early as 1781 his father had executed an informal deed for the tract in his favor,<sup>26</sup> but it had not been signed by his mother and no patent had ever been secured from the State.

On February 5th, 1795 the first public announcement regarding the new town was made and it took the form of an advertisement appearing in the Pittsburgh Gazette, reading as follows:—

"A NEW TOWN is laid out by the subscriber on the spot known for many years past by the name of McKee's Ferry. The ground intended for the Town is delightfully situated on a fine level point at the junction of the Monongahela and Youghiogheny River about 16 miles from Pittsburgh by water and 12 only by land; the plan on which the town is to be improved consists of upwards to 200 lots of 60 ft. front and 120 feet deep, each lot having the advantage of a street and an alley 20 feet wide, for the convenience of stables, etc. The principal streets are 80 feet in width,

the others 60. Near the center of the town is a large Area or Square intended for a Public Market House; 48 of the lots front the 2 rivers, Monongahela and Youghioghenny. Four lots will be given by the subscriber for the use of a place of worship, and a Seminary of Learning. The situation of the place is so well known in the western country that it needs no encomium that can be given it, but for the information of those persons below the mountain who may wish to become purchasers, it may be necessary to premise that its situation is one of the best in the western country for trade and commerce, having the advantage of the 2 rivers, Monongahela and Youghioghenny flowing under its banks, being near several grist and saw mills close to what is known as the Forks of the Yough settlement, which is indisputably the richest we have; it is at least 12 miles nearer Philadelphia than Pittsburgh is; it has public roads laid out from it in different directions; the price of each lot is \$20.00 and \$1.00 ground rent to be paid annually. To avoid disputes the lot each purchaser is to possess is to be decided by a lottery, which will be held on the spot on the first day of April next. Each purchaser at the time of receiving his ticket is to pay \$10.00 and the residue when he draws his number and gets his deed. The majority of persons present at the drawing are to choose the persons who shall draw the tickets, which persons shall point out the four lots to be appropriated to public uses prior to the drawing. Tickets may be had of John Hannah, merchant, Pittsburgh; Andrew Swearingen, Washington; John Taylor, Esq., Greensburgh; James Wallace, Esq., Carlisle; Peter Whiteside, merchant, Mercersburg, and of the subscriber on the premises.

John McKee

N. B. In front of those lots which are laid next the two rivers is a considerable portion of ground extending to the water edge, which as it will be of great use

to the settlers for a variety of purposes, the proprietor intends as public property for the accomodation of all the inhabitants, reserving only to himself the sole right of keeping ferries and so much ground at each ferry as a ferry house may stand on; should the present buildings of the proprietor interfere with any of the lots, these lots will not be included in the lottery. A plan of the town with proposals annexed may be seen at any of the above places."

On March 26th, 1795, announcement was made that 187 tickets for the drawing of lots had been sold, and that any person desiring a clear deed for any lot drawn, free and discharged from the ground rent of \$1.00 a year, could secure the same by paying an additional sum of \$10.00, thereby making the purchase price of each lot \$30.00. <sup>27</sup>

The drawing for the lots took place as advertised on April 1st, 1795, and two days later the following notice appeared in the Pittsburgh Gazette:—

"Those who have become purchasers in the NEW TOWN at McKee's Ferry are hereby informed that their deeds will be made with every possible dispatch, and when prepared further notice will be given of the time when and place where they may apply to make good their second payment and take up their deed.

John McKee."

Apr. 3rd, 1795.

While the selling of the lots in the new town took the form of a lottery, yet there were no blanks, and uncertainty existed only in the location of the lots. Lotteries were common at that time and no opprobrium was attached to such affairs, even churches financing building operations in this manner.

Following the sale of the lots in the new town, John McKee obtained from his father and mother a deed for all their interest in the location and at once prepared to patent the land. As part consideration for this conveyance, John McKee entered into an agreement with his parents wherein he covenanted "to give them one half the profits of the east side of the Youghiogheny Ferry and one half of the south side of the Monongahela Ferry; the said David and Margaret McKee to be at equal expense of keeping crafts and

ferry-men", and further to give them a house, barn and five acres of land with the privilege of taking water from the well, to lay in fire wood for them, to give them one third of the grain and fodder raised on the orchard fields, one third of all fruit and one fourth of all cider produced.<sup>28</sup>

As there was some delay in procuring the patent for the land, a report became current in the community that McKee had been unable to obtain a clear title for the tract and that a fraud had been perpetrated upon the public. However, on November 4th, 1795, the patent was officially issued and McKee again resorted to an advertisement in the Pittsburgh Gazette to inform the public of the fact, at the same time taking the opportunity to say a kindly word to those who had circulated the false report concerning his title. The advertisement read as follows:—

**"TO ALL CONCERNED**

There has been much said by those who are enemies to my interest and the progress of the town laid out at the junction of the rivers Monongahela and Youghiogheny called McKee's Port, but I have the pleasure to inform the public that I now possess a patent for the land on which the town is laid out and will wait on those who are entitled to conveyances for lots to make them their respective deeds from the 21st, day of December next until the 30th, of the same month. And as all persons who have demands against me (a few only excepted) are straining every nerve to compel payment, I shall expect the purchasers of lots in the aforesaid town to prepare themselves to pay off the remainder of the purchase money at the time above mentioned, under the penalty of forfeiting their claims.

John McKee.

McKee's Port Nov. 26th, 1795".

It will be noted that the name of the town is changed in the advertisement from McKee's Ferry to McKee's Port. This no doubt became necessary from the fact that a small settlement near the present site of McKee's Rocks had meanwhile assumed the name of McKee's Ferry,<sup>29</sup> and the change was decided upon to avoid confusion in the names of the two places.

During the time limit set in the advertisement for the delivery of the deeds for lots in the new town, only 41 persons responded, but in the following three months 60 additional lots were paid for and before the end of the year 1796 a total of 133 deeds had been delivered. As the consideration mentioned in all of these deeds is \$30.00, it appears that the populace did not take kindly to the English idea of

a ground rent, and chose rather to pay the full purchase price and receive a clear title to their lots. The records of Allegheny County disclose that during the year 1796, several persons who had not participated in the drawing, purchased choice lots which had not been drawn, and paid as much as \$100.00 each for them. The total amount realized from the venture, including the sum received from the sale of the tickets, was approximately \$4500.00.

This amount does not seem to have been sufficient to satisfy the demands of the creditors, who, according to the advertisement, were "straining every nerve to compel payment," and it became necessary to sell parts of the plantation not included in the original plan of the town and called "Outlots".

It is difficult to scan the deeds conveying these outlots without being conscious of the supreme, but futile, efforts made by the Founder of McKeesport to save his home from the wreckage of his blighted hopes and blasted fortunes. Piece by piece the old farm passed into the hands of strangers; first, parts of the land at the extreme south end of the tract were sold; then, the hilly section to the east; then, on April 7th, 1798, he gave up the mansion house and 26 acres of land, but he did so with one grand gesture—the demanding and receiving of the sum of almost \$7000.00 as the price of his final capitulation to the inevitable.<sup>30</sup>

In view of the relatively small amounts received from the sale of other parts of the plantation, it would seem that the improvements on these 26 acres must have been quite pretentious to justify so great a price for the property.

Before arriving at the decision to sell the homestead, John McKee left no stone unturned in his search for funds to satisfy his relentless creditors. He even made a trip to distant parts, where he had friends and acquaintances, in the hope of getting money. On January 17th, 1798, before making this journey, he executed a power of attorney to his wife and his son-in-law, William Thompson, reciting therein that he had "business of importance to transact abroad which demands my immediate attention, and whereas there are sundry judgments against me which are unsatisfied, and other debts due which ought to be paid and which must be attended to during my absence."<sup>31</sup> However, he did not leave McKeesport until the latter part of January, 1798 and



returned two months later, his quest for money having been in vain.

Even after losing the old home, John McKee was not spared the agony of hearing the cry of the Sheriff as his household "lares and penates" were offered to the highest and best bidder, for on May 9th, 1789, the following advertisement appeared in the Pittsburgh Gazette:—

"By virtue of a writ of Fieri Facias to me directed, there will be exposed at public sale at Pittsburgh on Tuesday, the 16th, day of next June, horse, cows, sheep, stills, negroes, and household furniture. Taken in execution as the property of John McKee and to be sold by William Perry, Sheriff."

John McKee died January 11th, 1807, aged 61 years, a disappointed and brokenhearted man, the victim of his own generosity.

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7. Warner, *History of Allegheny County*, p. 723; Evert, *History of Allegheny County*, p. 162; Abbott and Harrison, *The First One Hundred Years of McKeesport*, p. 9.
8. Veech, *The Monongahela of Old*, pp. 89-93.
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11. Westmoreland County, *Deed Book*, Vol. "B", p. 16.
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19. An unpublished manuscript prepared by R. F. Ramsey, Esq., of Pittsburgh, Pa.
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22. Family Bible of John McKee.
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24. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
25. Warner, *History of Allegheny County*, p. 725.
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27. Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 725.
28. Allegheny County, *Deed Book*, VIII, 292.
29. Allegheny County Court of Quarter Sessions, No. 4, September, 1795.
30. Allegheny County, *Deed Book*, VIII, 86.
31. *Ibid.*, VII, 471.