

A CENTURY AND A HALF
OF
PITTSBURG AND
HER PEOPLE

GENEALOGICAL MEMOIRS OF THE LEADING FAMILIES
OF PITTSBURG AND VICINITY, COMPILED
UNDER THE EDITORIAL SUPER-
VISION OF

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DAVID McKEE. A pioneer settler of Westmoreland county. Written by his youngest living grandchild, David F. McKee, of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

The records being very meager, the date of his birth is not certainly known. It must have been about 1732 or 1733, thus making him a contemporary of George Washington, with whom he came in contact later. Neither is his nativity certain from the records at hand, although the strong probability is that he was Scotch. However, he may have been Irish. Certainly he was one or the other. He entered Glasgow University and took a four years' academical course, a four years' collegiate course, a four years' theological course and graduated in 1766. His diploma is in my possession. How long he preached, or where is not known, but he abandoned the ministry on account of throat trouble which rendered it difficult for him to speak. He emigrated to America, date not known. His calling is supposed to have been teaching, and his residence in Philadelphia or that neighborhood. Late in life he married Sarah Free, a native of Haverford, Delaware county, Pennsylvania. Subsequently he located in Bedford, Pennsylvania, where several of his first five children were born, and where his calling was that of a teacher. While a resident there in 1794 he was appointed by General Washington a captain in the army for the suppression of the Whiskey Insurrection. As he was more than sixty years old at that time only two reasons can be surmised for the bestowal of such a rank on him—either previous military experience which he might have gained by service in the Revolutionary war, but of which we have no record; or because of his college training, of which we have a record. Enough to know that it brought him west of the mountains, where he decided to settle, and where, about 1795, he located and took up from the commonwealth a large tract of land, including a "mill site" situated on Pine Run, in what was then Washington township but now Allegheny township, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania. The records of this land transaction are to be found in the recorder's office of the county. Here in the spring and summer of 1796 he made a "clearing" in the triangle formed by the junction of a small stream with the main creek, a short distance above the "mill site," built himself a cabin, raised some corn and flax, gathered his crops at maturity, stored them in the cabin, and then

went back to Bedford to spend the winter with his family. The next spring, 1797, he embarked his household goods with his wife and five children, in wagons, being the first "flitting" to attempt the trip in that way over the old "Forbes military road." Others had been coming by the pack-horse way. On their arrival at the new home instead of finding a roof to protect them they were greeted by a pile of ashes. Some marauding Indians had first looted and then burned it to the ground. No retreat, but another location was made farther down the creek on the same side and near the mill site. There a cabin of round logs was hastily constructed, roofed with clap boards held down by poles and the usual stone and wooden chimney. Without waiting to chink and daub the cracks they moved into it August 31, 1797, and that night their sixth child and third son was born. This child afterwards became the father of the writer. Two other children, girls, were subsequently born, one in 1800 and one in 1802. Another house was afterwards built about a mile further up the creek, in which the family lived for a number of years. Other settlers soon followed—Sober locating in the valley of the branch about a mile above, in 1798, and he was soon followed by his brother-in-law, Artman, who located between the McKee and Sober tracts. The McGary settlement in the valley immediately above the Sober tract was also a very early one, but the date I do not know. The chief sentimental interest of the writer in it is that upon it is located the public school from which he graduated under tutorship of Robert J. McQuilkin, a teacher of teachers, and one of the salt of the earth, and who afterwards became a captain in an Iowa regiment in the Civil war, and remained until his death a prominent citizen of that state. Pardon this digression, but it seems to fit in here.

The plans of the grandsire were no doubt well laid for becoming a large landholder and the building up of a business community about him, but his age was against him. He died December 31, 1803, aged seventy years, leaving his widow, a comparatively young woman, with eight children in the backwoods. His remains lie in Poke Run church graveyard, and his monument is a great sycamore tree growing directly from his grave, having sprung up there after his burial. In the settlement of his estate a large tract of the land, including the "mill site," was purchased by George Crawford, who erected a dam across the creek, established a saw-mill and a grist-mill. A carding-mill, a fulling-mill, a store and postoffice, and other buildings necessary for the comfort and convenience of such a community, were added by his son, who succeeded him. It was then known as Crawford's Mills, and was quite a business center for many years, but first canals and then railroads diverted the channel in which business flowed, and then decay did the rest. The dam is gone, and a few scattered foundation stones are the only indication that the place was once a busy hamlet. The water rolls over its rocky bed, around the bend and through the gorge on its way to the sea just as it did more than a century ago. The power that it once furnished passes by unvexed and unhindered by any artifice of man. The span of life allotted to the first white child born on this tract saw its redemption from the wilderness inhabited by wild beasts and wilder men and its advance to a busy community, practicing the arts and enjoying the comforts of a high-grade of civilization as well as its retrogression back to a state of nature save alone the restoration of the forest. Being the point at which evergreens begin to

line the bank of the stream it is quite a romantic place, and is now much in favor with summer campers.

This George Crawford was the grandfather of Colonel R. P. Crawford, of Thomas boulevard and Lindon avenue, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and the great-grandfather of State Senator John W. Crawford, of Duquesne, Pennsylvania. He was succeeded by his son, George T. Crawford, and he by his heirs, and it remained in the Crawford name until 1906, when it changed hands. For some reason the first "clearing" was allowed to be reclaimed by the forest, and remained so for many years. I remember distinctly of seeing the marks of the corn rows among the trees, as well as the ditch that had been dug around the first cabin for drainage purposes, and pieces of broken dishes and cooking utensils could be found round about the place. It has again been cleared and is now a cultivated field. I have also seen the ruins of the next two cabins, one of which might be called a house, as I think I recall seeing some hewed logs in it. A part of this tract is still owned and occupied by the oldest living grandchild, William Young, and his family. All of his eight children grew to maturity, and all of them married except one, and all of the married ones except one left children. Several others of his family also came to America, but whether with him or at some other time I have no means of knowing. His brother Robert owned and occupied a tract of land in what is now the eastern part of Greensburg, where he raised a family, but so far as I know that family has become extinct, most of them if not all having lived and died unmarried. An old letter written by himself mentions his sisters Mary and Nelly. Mary married James Paul and became the mother of the Paul family once so prominent in Bell township, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania. I have never heard of Nelly except seeing her name in the old letter, same dated Blockley, June 14, 1797, speaks of paying for surveying his brother Samuel's place. Nothing more is known of him or his descendants if any there were. One letter mentions his sister, Eleanor Chapman. This was evidently Nelly, who had married a man named Chapman, but where she lived or whether she left children who may be living among some of her descendants is not known. One of these old letters mentions his friend, John McKee, "Mouth of Yough." This was the founder of McKeesport. Whether they were related I am not sure, but they visited and corresponded and had business transactions with each other.

I write this data largely for the benefit of my own children, who are so far behind the generation to which they properly belong, as well as for any others who might be interested in the family or the history involved in the sketch. To my knowledge his descendants run down at least as far as great-great-great-grandchildren. It comes to me direct from my father who got it from his mother. I will run the data down to the grandchildren, leaving it to each branch of the family to follow it out to the end so far as it concerns themselves. The teaching proclivities of the grandsire seem to have descended to the grandchildren, as many of them were teachers, and one a preacher as well. The military instinct seems also to have come down the same way, as at least five of the grandsons wore the blue and saw service in the Civil war. They were William Young, James N. McLeod, James F. McKee, Robert W. McKee and David F. McKee. Two of these were severely wounded—James N. McLeod in the battle of Stone River, and Robert W. McKee in the battle of the Wilderness. All of them except James N. Mc-

lead are alive at this date (November 5, 1907). He died many years ago, while serving as county treasurer of Armstrong county, Pennsylvania. Their first postoffice was Greensburg, postage 25 cents. Next, the letters came in care of Daniel McKeown, storekeeper, who was a prominent farmer and merchant, at what was afterwards called Oakland X Roads, and is now known as Mamont. Some of his descendants still reside there. Postage 17 cents and 12½ cents. Then they began to come to Crawford's Mills. This shows the growth of the postoffice department within one generation. The church they attended was Poke Run Presbyterian church, eight miles distant. I have heard my father say that he has walked there barefooted, sat on a log for a pew, heard the preacher deliver excellent discourses standing on some logs built up for a pulpit, and the sky for a roof. Truly, "The groves were God's first temples." This was at a time when all the men, including the preacher, carried their guns with them to church. Other incidents in the history of this family might be mentioned, but the purpose is to shorten this sketch as much as possible.

Sarah Free, wife of David McKee, was a native of Haverford, Delaware county, Pennsylvania, of Welsh antecedents, and if not a Quaker, of Quaker descent. The date of her birth is not known, but according to the age given in the record of her death in the possession of the Young family the year must have been 1758, made historic by the capture of Fort Duquesne by the British army under General Forbes. She was a young girl in her teens when the battle of Brandywine was fought around her home in 1777. She must have been an only daughter, as in all the correspondence no sister is mentioned. Neither is her mother mentioned, and it is to be inferred that she was left motherless while yet young. Her father is mentioned as having broken up his home by a "vendue" on account of his "poor state of health," and living with an aunt, and his death is recorded as occurring August 2, 1797. That she had at least five brothers is certain, because there are letters from each of them. They are Abraham, John, James, Samuel, and David, quite an array of good scriptural names. I think Abraham and John were farmers. James learned the saddler trade with "George Luken's brother Joel." Samuel was a cabinetmaker, and a good one, because I have a sample of his workmanship. He was also a prolific writer. David was first lieutenant in "Captain Muhlenberg's Company in the War of 1812." Much anxiety in regard to his safety is expressed in some of the letters, but later ones state that he is safe and on his way home. Some of the letters speak of legacies due her, one of \$320, which had been in the bank for several months. One letter dated April 28, 1815, states they have the news there that Bonaparte is again "Emperor of France." That was after his escape from Elbe, and fifty days before the battle of Waterloo, which put an end to the public career of that wonderful man. This sister of five brothers, a pioneer and the mother of pioneers, lived a widow for more than thirty years after the death of her husband in the backwoods where they had made their home. Her death occurred in 1834 in her seventy-seventh year. Her remains repose beside those of her husband in Poke Run church graveyard. (Of the five brothers and their descendants I know naught save what has been written.)

The children of David and Sarah (Free) McKee: 1. Samuel, date of birth not know. He learned the trade of tanner in Philadelphia. He married Jane Crawford, daughter of George Crawford, and lived near the present

site of Apollo, Pennsylvania. He was accidentally drowned in the Kiskiminetas river near his home while yet a young man, leaving a widow and three children. The widow afterwards married Alexander McKinstry, and with him settled near Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, where descendants of both husbands still live.

2. Eleanor, born in 1790. She grew to womanhood and married John W. Young, who was, I think, a native of Maryland. They owned land and occupied a part of the old home tract, where they raised nine children. This is still owned and occupied by their only living child, William, and his family. Their descendants are citizens of this and other states. Both died at an advanced age.

3. William, was born at Fair Hill, Pennsylvania, in 1792. This place is thought to be now included in Fairmont Park, Philadelphia. He owned and occupied a part of the old tract, where he followed the occupation of a farmer. He married Hannah Postlewaite, of French Huguenot descent, and they were the parents of seven children, three boys and four girls. Two of these are living at this date (November 5, 1907). Their descendants are citizens of this and other states. His death was caused by an accidental fall at the age of about seventy-three. The death of his wife preceded his own many years.

4. Nancy, date and place of birth not known, probably Bedford, Pennsylvania. Married John Porterfield; died childless.

5. Margaret, became an invalid, and died unmarried in middle life.

6. Abraham F., born August 31, 1797, at what is since known as Crawford's Mills, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania. His birth occurred on the night of the first day in which they occupied their new cabin built to succeed the one destroyed by the Indians. He was crippled at the age of thirteen by a tree falling on him. He had a famous schoolmaster who was a noted penman, and who taught him to read, write and cipher as far as the "double rule of three." That was the graduating point in those days. He also presented him with a specimen of his handiwork in the form of a "Birth Certificate" drawn in colored inks with a quill pen. This is in my possession. He lived with and cared for his mother until her death, and six years later (in 1840) married Polly Watson, daughter of Robert Watson, a native of Franklin county, Pennsylvania, and Sarah McLeod, a daughter of William McLeod, of near Inverness, Scotland, and Rosanna Moorehead, a native of Ireland. This William McLeod had served in the British army during the famous siege of Gibraltar, where he had been for several years, but on the raising of the siege received his discharge and came to America on a sight-seeing expedition. There he met his fate in the Irish girl, married her, and settled on a farm in Washington township, Westmoreland county, near the headwaters of little Puckety Creek, where they raised their family and lived out their lives. Abraham F. and his wife were the parents of six children, only two of whom reached maturity—Robert W. McKee and the writer hereof. Drawing his first breath as a pioneer, he lived out his long life within fifty miles of the place of his birth, dying in 1881, in his eighty-fourth year, the last survivor of his family by many years. His remains lie in Bear Creek cemetery, Butler county, Pennsylvania. His wife died in 1896, and lies in Homewood cemetery, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Although born in a "log cabin," he never became great, but such does not always prove the case, for twelve years later another boy was born in a "log cabin" in another state, and when he was twenty-one

he had learned to read, write and cipher as far as the "double rule of three." Still, a few years later another boy was born in a log house in another state, and when he began to think he was old enough to go to work his father, much against his will, procured his appointment as a cadet in West Point Military Academy. There were times in these lives that looked like failures, but history records the careers of Lincoln the statesman, and Grant the warrior, and refuses to mark them failures. Their living children are: Robert W., born March 17, 1841. He was a farm boy. He finished the first of his more than thirty terms of public school teaching before being seventeen years old and snatched a fair education at intervals from school and self-study. He served in Company C, One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pennsylvania Volunteers, during the Civil war, and was severely wounded in the battle of the Wilderness, May 5, 1864. He married, June 18, 1873, Isora (Zoe) C. Beighel, of Pleasant Unity, Pennsylvania, who died March 1, 1906. One son was born June 29, 1874, Edward H. W., a photographer, is living. Two children, a girl and a boy, are dead. He had been a resident of Pittsburg for twenty-five years, and his life had been varied in occupation, as teacher and principal clerk, bank teller and bank cashier eleven years, traveling salesman, bookkeeper and office manager for many different firms of the city, and superintendent of indexing for the Guarantee Title and Trust Company. He was never an active party politician, never holding public office except school director nine years, voting for what he thought the greatest good to the greatest number, and therefore always opposed to the spread of the liquor traffic. He was one of the enumerators of the census of 1900 in the city. He had lived for twenty-one years at 7021 Susquehanna street. His death occurred December 17, 1907.

The other son, David F., commenced at eighteen as a country school teacher, served a short term in the Civil war in Company A, First Battalion, Stewart's Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, enlisted for a second term, but was never mustered in. He worked in the oil regions, being at Pit Hole City when it was at its best, continued to teach, and was a merchant and postmaster at Olivet, Pennsylvania. He married Nancy J., daughter of William McQuilkin, of North Washington, Pennsylvania, in 1868. Her death occurred in 1869, leaving one son, who died in 1895 without issue. In 1871 he spent a year in Kansas. In 1872 married Frances T., daughter of Samuel Miller, of Beatty, Pennsylvania. In 1873 he removed to Butler county, Pennsylvania, where he served as school principal, notary public, a term as county superintendent, then removed to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, where he has been a traveling salesman, principal of a ward school for six years, and latterly has been pursuing a commercial life. The last marriage has issue of five children, three boys and two girls. Only three are living—two boys, Wayne and David Oliver, and one girl, Mary Martha. That is the history to date (November 5, 1907). What the future has in store only time can reveal.

7. Sarah, born 1800, married when young, about 1820, David McLeod, who was the only son of the William and Margaret McLeod spoken of in the narrative of A. F. McKee, and his wife. They were the parents of ten children, four boys and six girls. They lived in Armstrong county, Pennsylvania, near Kittanning. The James N. McLeod spoken of in the military history of the family was their son. Only one of these children survives at

this date, Mrs. Margaret Cochran, of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The mother of these children was my father's sister, and their father was my mother's uncle, thus making them doubly related without mixing the blood. The name of this particular McLeod family has become extinct by reason of the death of all the male members without leaving male issue to perpetuate it, but the blood still exists in the descendants of the daughters.

8. Mary, born 1802, married David Skillen, and was the mother of six children, two boys and four girls. They lived and died on a farm at North Washington, Pennsylvania. Their surviving descendants are residents of Iowa so far as known to me.