

20TH CENTURY HISTORY
OF THE CITY OF
Washington and Washington County
Pennsylvania

AND

Representative Citizens

BY

JOSEPH F. McFARLAND

"HISTORY IS PHILOSOPHY TEACHING BY EXAMPLES"

PUBLISHED BY
RICHMOND-ARNOLD PUBLISHING CO.
F. J. RICHMOND, PRES.; C. R. ARNOLD, SEC'Y AND TREAS.
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1910

JOSEPH PARKINSON.

The Founder of Parkinson's Ferry, Later William's Port, and Now Monongahela City.

BY WILLIAM PARKINSON WARNE,
Member of Washington County (Pa.) Bar.

The family name Parkinson is derived from Perkins or Parkins, a patronymic from Perkin, a diminutive of Peter. The surname of Simon Barjona, given him by Jesus Christ Himself, went everywhere with the spread of Christianity. Petros in Greek, Petrus in Latin ("the stone" from *petra* "rock") became Pietro in Italy, Pedro in Spain, Pierre in France, Pieter in Dutch, etc. From Peter we derive the "pet" name of Perkin, or Parkin, from which we get Perkin, Perkins, Parkinson, Parkin, Parkins, Parkinson, etc.

There are no Perkins or Parkins on the Hundred Rolls, and these names begin to appear first in Yorkshire and in the eastern counties of England about the year 1300.

From a consultation of the works on heraldry it is ascertained: First, a Parkinson coat of arms without any special reference otherwise. Second, a coat as borne by Richard Parkinson, Esq., of Kinnersley Castle, County Hereford. Third, a coat as borne by Mary Parkinson, of East Ravendale, County Lincoln, widow. Fourth, a coat as granted to the Rev. John Posthumus Parkinson, M. A. Fellow of Magdalene College, Oxford, on his marriage with the heiress of the late Rev. Dr. Parkinson, of East Ravendale, and assumption of her name. Fifth, a coat as borne by Parkinsons of Cadale Forest, Fairsnape and Blandhurst, County Lancaster and Wordgate. All these have also crests.

That the name Parkison or Parkinson is English and that the family is English there can be no doubt from the derivation of the name and the evidence from the records on heraldry. It is further proven that the Parkinsons were of Yorkshire English, and persons of prominence, refinement and education.

As to the correct spelling of the name to be given this family from which the subject of this sketch was descended it can only be decided from the evidence before us. An examination of the records of Washington County, Pennsylvania, shows a varied spelling of the name. It is spelled Parkison, Parkinson, Perkerson, Perkeson, and in one instance Parkins. The earlier

spelling was more frequently Parkison than otherwise, but at later dates and now it is nearly always spelled Parkinson. The name is found in all parts of the United States and in England and always spelled Parkin-son. All that is positively certain, however, is that the original name was Perkin, or Parkin, and the various families have come to spell the name in the different ways.

The earliest authentic date that it is known that the family of Parkinson was found in what is now Washington County, Pa., was in the years 1769 or 1770. It is family tradition that Joseph Parkinson first came to Fort Pitt as an Indian trader, and was at Fort Pitt in 1769, when the lands along the Monongahela River in the vicinity of where Monongahela City stands were first begun to be taken up by the early settlers of that region, among the first of whom were the Parkinsons.

William Parkinson, the earliest common ancestor of which we have any record, was a resident of Cumberland County, which was erected out of Chester County (one of the three original counties of Pennsylvania) in the year 1749, and included what is now Franklin, Adams, and in fact all the western territory claimed by the Penn's, and which now includes Washington County, etc., in Western Pennsylvania. William Parkinson had a large family of children, among whom were Joseph, William, Benjamin, Thomas and James, who removed from their home in Cumberland County, near Carlisle, about 1769 or 1770, to the mouth of Pigeon Creek, on the west bank of the Monongahela River, where Monongahela City is now located. The five brothers took up some 5,000 acres of lands among them in Washington County along the waters of Pigeon and Mingo Creeks from 1769 to 1791. For their day and time they were men of education and refinement and among the sturdy and brave pioneers who dared to settle in the then territory of the red man, where Indian outrages, the French and Indian wars, the Revolutionary War, the many bitter boundary contests between the adherents of Virginia and the Penns, and lastly the Whiskey Insurrection of 1794, required men of stout hearts to face the then trying times of this region.

It is tradition as well as a well authenticated fact that the Parkinsons came from the old Conococheague Settlement, a very early one, composed of the English, Scotch and German emigrants who first located there supposing their settlement lay wholly within the domains of Lord Baltimore. However, by a subsequent arrangement between them, the proprietors of the two provinces, the territory in which the Parkinsons found themselves, was within the boundaries belonging to the Penns. The Conococheague Settlement was a very early one, and as early as 1738 was an active old Presbyterian settlement, for in that year the numbers were

so large that it became necessary to divide the congregation into the East and West Conococheague Churches. The Conococheague Settlement was included in what is now Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and Washington County, Maryland.

As to the four brothers of Joseph Parkinson who were more or less identified with the settlement of the portion of Washington County, in and around the mouths of Pigeon and Mingo Creeks, we will speak briefly:

Benjamin Parkinson was a prominent farmer and owner of mills, and made himself famous as a leader of the Whiskey Boys during the insurrection in Western Pennsylvania in 1794, took up several tracts of land, finally settling on a farm on the Galdes Road between Dunningsville and Kammerer, on the old Washington and Williamsport Turnpike. He was captured and taken a prisoner during the Whiskey Insurrection and taken to Philadelphia among others who were tried and found guilty of high treason, but afterwards pardoned by President Washington. Benjamin was one of the first justices of Washington County, Pa., elected in 1781, and was one of the twelve justices that composed the first court of Washington County, one of whose number was elected President Judge.

Thomas Parkinson was a large owner of mills. He sold out and removed to near Ligionier, in what was later Westmoreland County, in 1791, and about the year 1804, sold his farms and mills in that place and moved his family to Brooke County, Virginia, (now West Virginia). About the year 1783 he married Margaret Latimer. The Latimers were English and came from Philadelphia. Mr. Latimer and his wife and their infant child (afterwards Mrs. Parkinson) were taken captives by the Indians, and subjected to a five days' march across the Ohio River into the wilderness. From this story and capture is based the story of Meg Latimer in Dr. McCooks tale of the Whiskey Insurrection, "The Latimers."

James Parkinson was a carpenter by trade and one of the most skilled millwrights of his day. He built a mill on Pigeon Creek which became known afterwards as the McFarland Mill, which he sold to his brother, Thomas Parkinson, who later sold to James McFarland. He also built the first brick house ever erected in that region in the year 1785, which still stands and is now known as the VanVoorhis Homestead. The workmanship of his own hands can be seen to this day in a good state of preservation, and the old colonial house is a model of good architecture that is worth copying yet. James Parkinson left Pennsylvania some time prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century and located in Virginia.

William Parkinson and his descendants were large

owners of lands and mills and took a prominent part in the navigation of the rivers and as owners of steam-boats in later years. His son, Benjamin Parkinson, known as "Little Ben" to distinguish him from his uncle, Benjamin Parkinson, of the Whiskey Insurrection fame, on the 17th of March, 1801, bought from David Acheson a tract of land on the Monongahela River, including the mouth and both sides of Mingo Creek, upon which at an earlier date Paul Froman had erected the old Mingo Mill.

A deed is of record as follows which would indicate that the Parkinsons once owned slaves: Alexander Pool and Hagar, his wife, people of color, sold to Joseph Parkinson (probably a son of Thomas) all their right, title and interest left to them by will of "Mingo Dana, a man of color," beginning at lands of Charles Wells, now David Harveys, on the Virginia line. From the name "Mingo Dana" it could be inferred that the person so designated may have been a slave of the Parkinsons at the mouth of Mingo.

As an evidence of the prosperity of the Parkinsons the contents of the deed of Thomas Parkinson to James McFarland, dated October 21, 1791, whereby he conveys: All that his mills and plantation whereon the said Thomas resides, situate on Pigeon Creek, James Parkinson, Benjamin Parkinson et al, containing not less than 300 acres and as much more as it will measure according to the settled lines with the neighbors aforesaid. Together with the buildings, improvements. . . "as also the screen and wind-mill to go with the premises—James McFarland covenants to pay the £1,010 at or before January '1, next—part now and security—£10 to be paid in Linen Cloth or Whiskey," etc.

From the standpoint of what might have been and knowing what we now know, if the five Parkinson brothers and their heirs had held on to the 5,000 acres of lands taken by them in the years from 1769 to 1791, until now the same would be worth several millions of dollars, so valuable have the same lands become owing to the rich coal veins underlying them. The Parkinsons seemed to have been men with a talent for selecting real estate as the lands taken up by them in every instance were the best as to soils, location and mineral deposits. Joseph seems to have had an eye for a town location, as he took the mouth of Pigeon Creek at its confluence with the Monongahela River and whose waters drained a great valley extended for miles into the rich territory along its banks. All the brothers selected their lands along streams of water where water power was accessible to run their mills. They showed much intelligence in those early days such as is useful in the selection of locations even at this day and date.

The first white man to erect a habitation at the mouth of Pigeon Creek on the west bank of the Monongahela

River was Joseph Parkinson. The only other known persons to erect a cabin in this locality were the Deckers along about 1758 at the point up Pigeon Creek about a mile from its mouth where James and Thomas Parkinson afterwards built their mills and lived until 1791, when they sold out to James McFarland. Joseph had come from Fort Pitt in 1769 or 1770 and taken up a tract of land at the mouth of Pigeon Creek and proceeded to build his cabin on the river bank within fifty yards east of the entrance to the new river bridge which was dedicated December 6, 1909, and continued to live therein until his death in 1834, or a period of 64 years, when he died in his 95th year.

From the early history of Western Pennsylvania we learn that immediately after the treaty of November 5, 1768, when the Indian title to lands comprising the southwestern counties of Pennsylvania, was extinguished, the proprietors, or heirs of William Penn began the sale of lands, and among those who then or very soon after obtained warrants for lands in this vicinity, were the Deckers, Fromans and Devors. From the Survey Books we take the following: "In pursuance of an order No. 3783, dated 26th August, 1769, the above is a draught of a survey of a tract of land called "Southwark," containing 70.5 acres, with the usual allowances of 6 per cent for roads, highways, etc., situated on the west side of the Monongahela River. Surveyed for Abraham Decker 26th October, 1769."

During 1770, Joseph Parkinson settled on the tract above mentioned, and ultimately laid claim to it and other lands adjoining to the amount of over 300 acres.

To pass over what is a long story, Joseph Parkinson became interested at a very early day, the exact date of which is not known, in a ferry across the Monongahela River near the mouth of Pigeon Creek, on the lands included in the survey called "Southwark."

Very likely the first person to conduct a ferry was James Devore, a pioneer, who must have settled on the east side of the Monongahela River, opposite the mouth of Pigeon Creek, at about the same date and engaged in conducting a store at that side of the river, and as the need required it commenced to conduct a ferry which is called "Deboirs Ferry" in Washington's diary at the time he crossed the same in 1771. Parkinson located on the west side and owned the land and the settlements were first made on that side of the river. A demand soon arose for a ferry and no doubt Parkinson, very soon after Devore commenced to operate a ferry from his side of the river, joined in the enterprise on his side. In some way or other the ferry was carried on from 1771 to 1785 by these two men. At a very early date the ferry became known as "Parkinson's Ferry" (as early at least as 1781) and was the first name of the place. It was the name of the first postoffice established

there, is well known in the annals of the Whiskey Insurrection where the Congress of the Whiskey Boys met. It was the name of the first postoffice established there, is well known in the annals of the Whiskey Insurrection where the Congress of the Whiskey Boys met.

Afterwards, in 1792, Joseph Parkinson laid out on his lands a plan of lots and advertised them for sale; but did not carry out his design until 1796, when he sold a large number of lots in his new town which he called "William's Port," after the name of his son, William. It continued to be known as William's Port until 1833, when the place was duly incorporated under the name it now bears, Monongahela City. The name Williamsport being the name of another town in Pennsylvania, on the Susquehanna River, and to avoid two postoffices of the same name the first name of the place was dropped and the present name adopted. It ought to have been called Parkinson.

Joseph Parkinson was born in 1739 and died in 1834, aged 95. He was one of the first justices of the peace, elected in 1781. Was the first postmaster at Parkinson's Ferry. Besides the above, he was a trader on the rivers from Parkinson's Ferry to New Orleans, taking flat boats loaded with whiskey and other products of the region to New Orleans. He was employed under Col. George Morgan as a supply agent for the government at Fort Pitt from the time it was abandoned by the British until it ceased to be a fort at the end of the Revolutionary War.

On one of the trips he with eight others were captured by Indians led by Simon Girty and taken prisoner on Blennerhasset's Island in the Ohio River, and were all compelled to run the gauntlet, Parkinson being the only one to escape with his life, who was allowed to make his way back to the settlements on the Monongahela, deprived of his boats and their cargo of whiskey and flour. The above narrative is vouched for by Margaret A. E. McClure, a granddaughter of Joseph Parkinson, who died in 1902, at the age of 91 and was therefore 23 years old at the death of her grandfather, and had often heard him relate his daring experience with the savage red men at Blennerhasset's Island.

That Joseph Parkinson was employed as a supply agent at Fort Pitt during the trying times in Western Pennsylvania through the Revolutionary War is to his credit as a patriot. The question of supplies at Fort Pitt about the years 1778 and 1779 was one of extreme importance and it required men of diplomacy as well as bravery.

Joseph Parkinson was distinguished along with his wife, who was before her marriage to her husband in Carlisle prior to coming to the Monongahela Valley, Margaret Weaver, a descendant of the pure Dutch stock of that region, as the owner and keeper of Parkinson's

Tavern which was famed for its hospitality from Philadelphia to the most western settlements of the time; it being located on a main thoroughfare from the east to the west. Mrs. Parkinson was noted as one of the best cooks in all the country and her dinners were a thing of art in the culinary science of those days.

In connection with the Parkinson Tavern at Parkinson's Ferry was the garden managed and superintended by Mrs. Parkinson, the wife of the landlord. It was admitted to be one of the finest flower gardens west of Philadelphia, in the days of Parkinson's Ferry. It was laid out in walks traversing it in various ways. The beds were laid off in squares for the vegetable portion of the garden, from which Mrs. Parkinson gathered the products for the table for the entertainment of travelers who stopped with her husband. The flower beds were of nearly every form such as circles, anchors, half-moons, crosses, squares and triangles. A wide walk ran all the way around the garden, and one main walk extended from the hall door of the tavern down through the garden to the well, thence to the lower boundary of the same near the ferry, passing through a summer house, which was a perfect bower of beauty covered with flowering vines of many varieties. Another walk led from a summer house, which stood near the tavern, in a direction parallel with the main walk. In the garden were to be found all kinds of tulips, pinks, flags, lilies, hyacinths, blue bells, king's crown, many varieties of roses and all the flowers then cultivated in gardens. Besides the flowers, the garden was planted with all kinds of fruit and ornamental trees and shrubbery.

The first thing a traveler did on arriving at this old tavern was to stroll through the garden that was talked about by everyone who ever came to Parkinson's Ferry.

As has been said, Mrs. Parkinson was a complete mistress of cookery and domestic sciences. She managed the care of her garden herself, and it was her particular pride to attend to its cultivation during her whole life as the hostess of the famous old tavern. It always gave her her greatest delight to walk out in the mornings and evenings with her guests to display the beauties of her garden and receive the deserved compliments of the eastern merchants and others then traveling from the more cultured and refined east.

It must not be supposed from the fact that Joseph Parkinson and his wife managed and conducted a tavern and ferry that they were the simple landlords of a small hostelry and the conductors of a ferry, and that Joseph Parkinson was a man who sat on the river bank looking for the occasional traveler. As a matter of fact, Joseph Parkinson was a very energetic and busy man from his early manhood to the time when age called him away from the activities of life. He engaged in trading for many years on the rivers as far

as New Orleans, taking flat boats with their cargoes to that distant city and returning oftentimes afoot to his home on the Monongahela, and risking his life among the then savages of the territory. He was for some years in the employ of his government as a supply agent at Fort Pitt, rendering his country a substantial service. His foresight and business acumen was evidenced further in laying out the first plan of lots which became Monongahela City. As to the many stories of the Whiskey Insurrection it may be said that Joseph Parkinson and none of his brothers, excepting Benjamin, were ever friendly to that movement against the government. While the public meetings connected with the adjustment of that difficulty were held on his lands at Parkinson's Ferry, yet it is a fact that General Lee made his headquarters at Joseph Parkinson's tavern. So that it is to be seen that he as a tavern keeper provided entertainment and accommodations for both the government's military officers as well as the citizens for and against the levy and collection of the much despised excise tax. It is a family tradition that neither Joseph, William, Thomas or James Parkinson ever engaged in any way in the manufacture of whiskey, or in any manner supported the insurrectionists.

The Parkinson families who lived at the several points on the Monongahela River and on Mingo and Pigeon Creeks were persons of considerable wealth, in fact rich for their day and time, and they lived in accordance. Many pieces of furniture and silver plate are still extant which show they lived in some luxury. The old mahogany sideboard used in the Parkinson tavern when General Lee and his officers were guests at the then hostelry in 1794 can be seen at the residence of a great granddaughter, Ella V. Warne, in Monongahela City, besides many other pieces of plate and furniture.

One instance of the many big dinners served at the old tavern is given in an old Washington County newspaper:

“Parkinson's Ferry, July 4, 1811.

“The Williamsport rangers, commanded by Captain James Warne, assembled at 10 o'clock a. m. After performing various military tactics, they dismissed until 3 o'clock p. m., when all met at the house of Mr. Joseph Parkinson and partook of an elegant dinner. General John Hamilton and Joseph Beckett, Esq., occupied seats at the head of the table, and thirteen toasts were given.”

Joseph Parkinson was acquainted with all the early pioneers and knew them personally. He knew and had business with such men as Col. George Morgan, at Fort Pitt. He knew the Indian chiefs mentioned in the history of the early days. He was well acquainted to his sorrow with Simon Girty, the outlaw. He associated with the Deckers, Fromans, Devores, Wickerhams, Van Voorhises, Andrew and James McFarland, Daniel Depue,

Samuel Black, Van Swearingin, Paul Froman, the Bradys, and hundreds of others whose names made up the population of the territory around Fort Pitt in the days preceding and immediately following the Revolutionary war.

From the records of the Supreme Executive Council for August 24, 1781 (XIII. Col. Records, 38), is found the information that among the justices of the peace of Washington County, returned as elected is the name of Joseph Parkinson, as one of the justices from Nuttingame Township.

A petition was signed by many citizens of Washington County, in 1781, and forwarded to President Reed at Philadelphia, protesting strongly against the commissioning of some of the twelve men returned as elected as justices who should form the first Court of Washington County, and containing the names of certain citizens as more fit to serve in said capacity, among whom were, James Edgar, Judge, Danl. Leet, John Reid, Jos. Parkinson, John Armstrong, Abner Howell, and James Brice, all of whom were certified “to be more able to serve.”

Thus we can realize that Joseph Parkinson was a man of many parts and exerted an influence in various ways and was prominent socially as well as in a business capacity.

As to his church relations the writer has no data; but it is to his credit that he donated to the Presbyterian Church its first location for a church and a small piece of land for a graveyard. And from the further fact that his family came originally from the old Presbyterian Settlement of the Conococheague Church, his leanings at least were Presbyterian, if not actually affiliated as a member.

On the death of Joseph Parkinson, the Monongahela Patriot of April 29, 1834, published in Williamsport, states:

“Died.—In this borough, on Monday night, April 28, 1834, at the advanced age of 94 years, Mr. Joseph Parkinson. Mr. Parkinson was well known to many as the original proprietor of this place, from whom it received the name of Parkinson's Ferry. Although his death was long looked for, it has cast a gloom over our citizens. The following testimony of respect from our town authorities, to the memory of the deceased, was handed in a few minutes before our paper went to press:

Tribute of Respect.

“Whereas, We have learned with deep regret of the death of our aged and esteemed fellow-citizen, Joseph Parkinson, the original proprietor of this town; therefore, be it

“Resolved, That as testimony of respect to the memory of the deceased, we will attend his funeral this afternoon, at 4 o'clock, and that it be recommended to our citizens generally to attend said occasion.

“By order of the council of the borough of Williamsport.

“JOHN BAUSMAN, Sec. AARON KERR, Pres.”

In early life Parkinson was a tall, bony, muscular man dressed rather fashionably in the costume of his day, with knee buckles and shoe buckles. In his older days he wore side-whiskers, and the well known queue of the times.

The founder of Monongahela City was buried in the old grave-yard at the head of Church Alley near the old Presbyterian Church within the lines of a small tract of land which he himself donated to the church for a burying ground. The exact spot where lies the remains of all that is mortal of Joseph Parkinson and his wife Margaret is not known, as no tombstone was ever erected to mark the last resting place of the two persons whose lives were given to open up this country and establish the town in the wilderness, now a thriving and progressive little city. After all, is'nt it just as well. The grandeur of monuments and the massive walls of cryps will not keep a man's name green after him. But the name of Parkison will live as long as the foot of man shall tread the soil of the great Monongahela Valley. Some time we hope the people who will live to enjoy the things made possible by the old pioneer who built his cabin and dwelt among the scenes of nature as he

found them in 1770, in order that his part in the great scheme of God's plan might be carried out, will have enough local pride to erect a fitting marker to call the attention of the coming generations to the one who first cleared the way for the white man to set up the standard of Christianity and civilization on the banks of the Monongahela, where the 5,000 acres of lands once taken up by him and his brothers now pour their millions through its gates into the great water way that will soon lead to all parts of the world.

The only living descendants of Joseph and Margaret Weaver Parkinson residing in Washington County, Pennsylvania, at this time are the following: Miss Ella V. Warne, Matthew S. Warne and his children, and Mary E. Warne Stathers and her children, of Monongahela City; and A. Clark Warne, Boyd E. Warne, Esq., Howard R. Warne, Flore R. Warne and Mae Warne, and William Parkinson Warne, Esq., and the following named children: James Kemp Warne, Mary Elizabeth Warne, Thomas Parkinson Warne(William Dumm Warne, Richard Mastin Warne and Harry Millar Warne, all of Washington, Pa.