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IMPROVEMENT LEAGUE TRANSFORMS THINGS AT M'KOWNVILLE

BODY ORGANIZED 4 YEARS AGO AND WINS PROGRESS

Obtains Gas for Community of 200 Homes Out Western Avenue

HELPS TRANSPORTATION

Boasts Own Fire Department With 60 Members and Pumper

AIDS PAVING PLAN

Association Seeks to Restrict Settlement to Home Owners

By William W. Tyler

Occupying a unique place in the history of Albany, although never actually a part of the city, McKownville, that small community of 200 homes on either side of Western avenue beyond the city line, within the last fifteen years has progressed from a farm country to its present active state. Enjoying every convenience which they could possibly find within the city, the residents of McKownville have preferred that it retain its identity and because of this we find an active, bustling little community linked with Albany in spirit, but determined to manage its own affairs – and doing it wisely and well.

The history of McKownville, were one but to pass a few hours in conversation with some of the “old-timers”, would present a colorful story; one worthy of the telling because of the link which it forms between the Albany of today and that of the past.

Days Before Canal.

That history recalls the days before the first rail was laid through the Hudson or Mohawk valleys and when the Erie canal was yet the dream of a few men, and they accused of visionary tendencies. McKownville then was but one huge farming space, the homestead of the McKown family.

McKown's hotel, a part of the big estate, was known from Buffalo to Boston and equally far in other directions. It was a rendezvous for farmers and traders from all parts of New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut and, especially in summer, was seldom without a full quota of guests.

Because of its fame as a meeting and trading point, McKownville became a stopping off place for the cattle and poultry droves, which in those days were herded on foot from Buffalo over the Great Western turnpike to McKownville. Here they were bivouacked until sold or traded and then driven down the Hudson valley to New York or east over the Boston turnpike to the Massachusetts slaughter houses.

It was years after these activities were discontinued that the section assumed its present name of McKownville. Until then it was known as West Brighton and took that name from its business connection with the city of East Brighton, Mass. The latter was then one of the foremost cattle trading and meat packing centers of the east.

Over Big Trail.

Most of the cattle and poultry sold or traded at what is now McKownville went over the “big trail” to East Brighton. Hence the name, at first Little Brighton and later West Brighton.

Then there was the famous plank road running through the section and laid primarily for the use of

teams loaded with merchandise coming to market in Albany. The planks covered only one side of the road and were designed for the loaded wagons city bound; the other half of the road was sand and was to be used for by outgoing teams which were supposed to be returning empty. Many and humorous are the stories of the developments when a strong willed farmer, outbound with a loaded wagon and using the planks, met an equally strong willed farmer inbound with a load and fully conscious of his right to the way. There was not room to pass and it was often a donkey-donkey proposition.

A vestige of the old plank road remains, but the other scenes which then portrayed the life of the section have long since passed. The disappeared with the last of the cattle driven over the Great Western turnpike.

Today, McKownville boasts 200 homes, lights, gas, well laid streets, fire protection and all other modern conveniences. To these are added the natural advantages of wide spaces, pure air, good water and fine views.

Welfare Body Formed.

In the securing of the man-made conveniences, no one factor or a group of factors has wielded more influence than the organization four years ago of the McKownville Improvement Association. To this body must go much of the credit for the present conditions in McKownville.

The association was organized, or rather reorganized, from the Great Western Turnpike Association by a group of such men as Louis C. West, Alfred Garrison, H.C. Kimmey, J.M. Russum, Walter Martin, Allyn Smith and Thomas Gordon.

The first effort of the association was the securing of gas, which up to that time was an unknown luxury in McKownville. Petitions were broadcast and the result showed an overwhelming desire on the part of the residents to have the gas. As a result, pipe lines were laid and McKownville had this commodity before many sections within the city limits.

Similar efforts in behalf of lights by the association gave the community an up to date lighting system along Western avenue, its main thoroughfare. No other streets of the section have lights at present as they are very short and can be sufficiently lighted from the avenue.

The next step in the improvements program which the association had outlined for itself was the installation of a transportation service.

Has Fire Department.

Again the residents were canvassed by petition bearers and the results were placed before the Capitol District Transportation company. That firm, with the consent of the public service commission, immediately included the community in its bus routes and residents of the section now enjoy a fifteen minute transportation schedule.

McKownville boasts its own fire department, which with sixty members and a motor pumper, adequately protects the community against fire. Continued effort by the association in behalf of quarters for the fire department has resulted in plans for a community building.

This building will contain a large auditorium for community gatherings, quarters for the fire apparatus, and will contain bowling alleys and other facilities for diversion. Plans are now being drawn and it is expected actual construction of the building will be started soon.

The association has now turned its attention to the improvement of streets and the laying of sidewalks. As the community is within the town of Guilderland, negotiations for the paving is being carried on with town authorities and, it is expected, will be satisfactorily culminated. Paving of some of the streets will probably be started this summer.

McKownville extends for a mile and a half along Western Avenue from the city line west to the school house road. One of its main restrictions, that only one family houses be constructed, is designed to assure the community remaining a home xxxxxx(?).