

March 1953

Mr. Frank Miller, 9 Elmwood Street, McKownville, who loaned me the photograph of the second McKown tavern (1793) for copying, was the last employee of the Witbeck family.

The picture had hung in the Witbeck Filling Station (formerly Oake's Grill) until the place closed in the spring of '53. (This filling station occupied approximately the same site as the old tavern on the south side of The Great Western Turnpike, or U. S. Route 20, just opposite the entrance to Fuller Road.)

As a youth, Mr. Miller said, he had often been to the McKown (or Witbeck's) tavern to collect the mail for his parents when his family was living in the Krumkill Road.

In the 30's, Mr. Miller went on, he started to build his present home in Elmwood Street. Work was in progress to excavate the cellar of the house and this was being accomplished by a team of horses pulling an earth scoop. Digging to clear for the north-east corner of the cellar a very heavy length of wood was struck. At the time it was thought the object was a tree root or old log and it was decided to chop it away. Miller started to cut away the wood with an axe and after several blows had been struck he was surprised to find the root was hollow and that it gave forth a tremendous quantity of clear, ice-cold water.

This water from the hollow log began to fill the excavation and the team had to be withdrawn. Mr. Miller then had to put on hip-boots and enter the partly filled cellar-hole to saw the end of the log evenly. Once this was done a pine plug wrapped with burlap was driven into the opening and the flow of water was stemmed. (The hollow log is still in position and plugged, just as he left it, outside the basement wall.)

Shortly after this one of the Witbeck boys, when told of the incident, informed Mr. Miller that what he had supposed to be a tree root was, in reality, a section of the network of hollow-log water mains placed by the first William McKown to supply the tavern and its' cattle yards with an almost inexhaustible supply of water.

The point of origin of the old main, or its' source of supply, was not known to the Witbeck's nor to Miller and he was not certain where it should be searched for.