

# The Turnpike Record

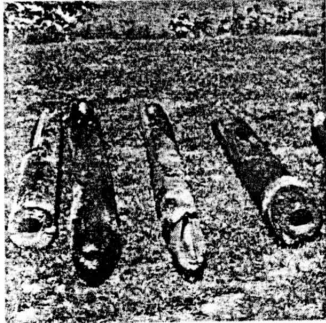
☆ "Guilderland's Community Newspaper" ☆

Vol. XIII, No. 33

ALBANY, NEW YORK, Thursday, August 14, 1969

## McKownville Water System Relics Are On Display At Altamont Fair

By FRED ABELE



One of the items of historical interest which has been added to the Farm Museum at the Altamont Fair this year should be of particular interest to residents of McKownville.

Turned over to the Fair recently for exhibit were seven sections of old hollow log water pipe which are approximately 150 years old. About six to eight inches in diameter and six feet long with an approximately 2 inch hole bored through, they are pointed on one end and the hole is tapered at the other so they fit together.

These are part of an old water distribution system installed by William McKown to supply water to his hotel (later Witbecks Tavern), which stood where Kings Shell Station now stands, and the cattle pens and other buildings on the north side of the Great Western Turnpike. Some have been found as far away as Elmwood Street. The seven sections were unearthed along side the filtration plant of the McKownville Water District when a new intake was being installed.

They were wisely preserved by Superintendent Jacobson. They are in good state of preservation.

William McKown first leased a tavern on the old Schenectady Path in 1786 and when he found that the Great Western Turnpike was to be constructed bought a large tract of land in 1793 and leased a right of way to the Turnpike Company. His hotel and tavern at Western Turnpike and Fuller Road was completed before the Turnpike was opened about 1800. Since he died in 1843 the water conduits would have been constructed during this period, probably before 1820.

A recent visit to Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts (circa 1790-1830) revealed at their wood-working shop a rig for boring such water pipe, which seem to have been fairly common for that period. The log was held rigid in a frame and a long auger turned by hand and held in place by guides drilled a straight hole. The logs were usually made of pine which when cured becomes very hard. Since there was much pine in this area it must have been used.

A series of dams, at least four, were constructed along the Kromme Kill (now Krum Kill) one of which was at the site of the present McKownville dam which itself dates back to 1890 or before.

William McKown and the other McKown family remains now repose in the Prospect Hill Cemetery in Guilderland where they were moved when the private family burial plot in McKownville was removed.

excerpts from article by Fred Abele  
in Turnpike Record, 8 May 1969

The Hamlet of McKownville is probably the second oldest in the Town of Guilderland. A map of the Town in 1865 shows a cluster of population density stretching from just west of Russell Road to approximately the present Johnson Road, on and near the Great Western Turnpike or Great Western Plank Road by that time.

What was probably the first building within the confines of what is now McKownville was a tavern which stood along the old stage coach road to Schenectady on a site near where the fourth tower is being constructed for State University. Built in the early 1700's it was leased to William McKown in 1786 for a period of 22 years. The old stage road is long obliterated here and the old tavern site can no longer be found. The tavern was called the Five Mile House.

A second tavern was built in 1793 on the site of the present King's Shell Station. This one, operated in its early days by William "Billy" McKown later became Witbecks Hotel and stood until 1917 when it burned. It was a well known overnight stop for travelers on the Great Western Turnpike completed through here in 1804.

The earliest water supply for the hamlet was a system of hollow log conduits laid from the branch of the Krum Kill which now serves as a water source, to the old hotel, the stock pens nearby and to several residences. There were several dams, one behind the church, the one at the filter plant, one behind the hotel and one at the grove. A larger and more modern water supply was built by the Witbecks in 1932 using the present reservoir dam. The present McKownville water system was placed in service in 1949.