

# The Story Of McKownsville

By FRED B. ABELE

It is interesting to note the boundary lines established for the new McKownville Sewer District, as they more nearly coincide with the rather nebulous boundaries which the Hamlet of McKownville had in early days. Today's McKownville is usually associated with the lines of the Fire and Water District boundaries.

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.

John McKown built a farmhouse on McKown Road about 1800. It still stands. The McKown family holdings extended from the Albany City Line to the banks of the Norman's Kill.

Around this nucleus grew the Hamlet called McKownsville, later McKownville. A post office was established in 1862 and continued until 1905. James F. McKown was the first postmaster. It was located in the old McKown Hotel at Fuller and Western. When the City of Albany boundaries were altered in 1870 some of the east end of the Town of Guilderland and likewise McKownville became part of Albany. The census of 1905 indicates a population of approximately 150.

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# **McKownsville Story —**

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The Hamlet eventually boasted of a Tavern-Hotel, a wagon and blacksmith shop, a saw mill, an ice house, a church, a post office, a school. Most of the residents were farmers or worked for one of the local establishments.

The McKownville Methodist Church began in 1866 with the present building erected in 1898. Common School District No. 11 provided education for local children.

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.

Squire William McKown opened McKowns Grove in 1896 and the Hamlet became a Mecca for picnics, outings, clambakes and swimming.

Mr. Witbeck, an employee of McKowns acquired the old Tavern and much of the property of the Hamlet, subdividing it and building homes. Other developers followed.

The McKownville Fire District was established in 1918 as was the McKownville Fire Dept., Inc., to serve it. McKownville Improvement Association was established in 1924.

In its 170 odd years of existence McKownville has grown from a Turnpike Hamlet to a bustling suburban community and now a college town as well. Few of its present people are aware of its long history. Many of its residents have served in prominent places in the Town of Guilderland, from William McKown who was Town Supervisor from 1813 thru 1824 to John Feldmann and John E. King who served as Town Supervisors during the past twenty year period.

In a town of primarily Dutch heritage, McKownville was unique in that its namesake and founder, the McKown family came from Scotland. However, it is now a cosmopolitan community made even more so by the location here of many State University professors.

Throughout its years of existence McKownville has managed to weather many storms and preserve its dignity and a healthy controlled growth. Let us hope that the planners will see fit to continue to keep its nature of a pleasant residential community for many years to come and let us hope that there will continue to be the same civic mindedness among its residents as has been enjoyed in the past.

Being good citizens in our own community and keeping our house in order is a first requisite to being good neighbors with the other communities in the Town of Guilderland of which we are proudly a part.

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