

Residential life in mercantile McKownville

By FRANCES INGRAHAM

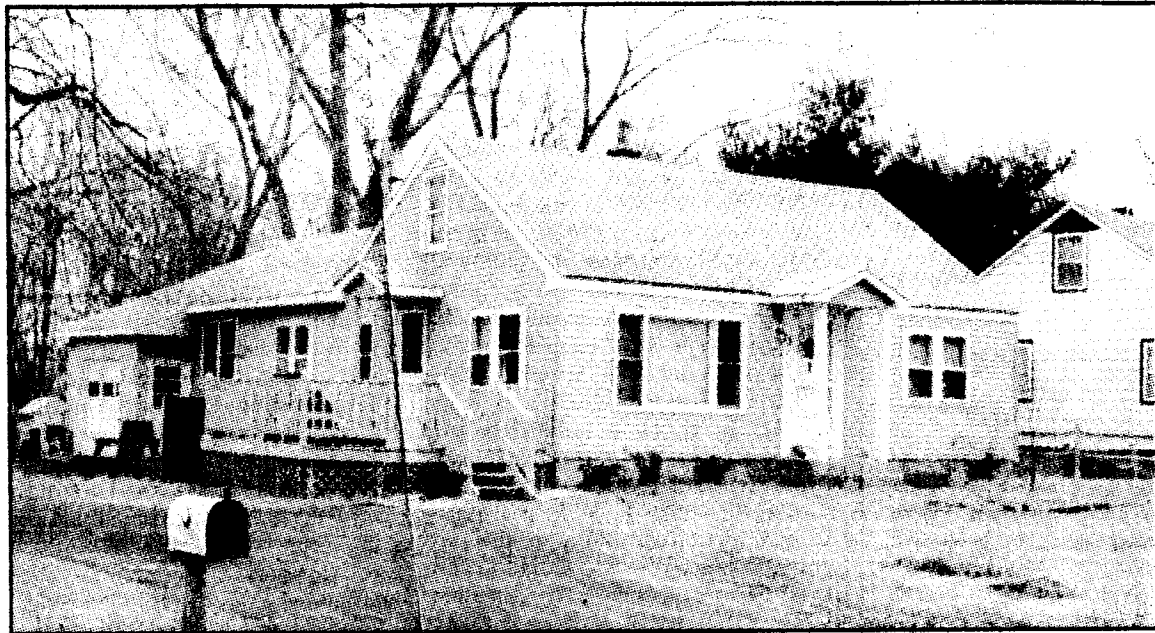
Staff writer

McKOWNVILLE — This Guilderland hamlet, known originally as McKownsville, derives its name from the McKown family who settled in the area during the late 1700s.

Located on the western edge of the city of Albany, McKownville has come a long way from when the area was used for farming and Western Avenue was a toll road linking Albany to Buffalo.

Because the hamlet is not incorporated, its boundaries are not strictly defined, but rather have been sculpted over the years by residential and commercial construction and major highways. Generally, though, the neighborhood extends west to east from the Northway to the Albany city

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MCKOWNVILLE

line, and north to south from the State University at Albany (half of the campus is located in McKownville and half in Albany) down to the Thruway.

McKownville is home to many businesses, professional offices and several shopping malls along Western Avenue and Fuller Road. When it comes to their neighborhood, some residents are defensive about new commercial development. The McKownville Improvement Association was formed in 1924 to establish sidewalks and a water district and to serve as a watchdog to preserve the residential fabric of this community. Members of the association strongly opposed construction of the \$85 million Crossgates Mall for fear of traffic congestion, noise and a lowering of nearby property values.

But, say others, it's these stores and businesses that make McKownville a prime residential location.

"I bought my home in 1965," said Don Reeb, professor of economics at the State University at Albany and former president of the McKownville Improvement Association. "That was when the university was located downtown. I have to say that when this campus was completed it's been an ongoing luxury to be able to walk to work.

"McKownville is very much a village-like setting — the houses are close together, Stuyvesant Plaza is in the center, you're on a bus line, and the university is like a big central park."

"I've lived here since the 1950s," said Ruth Abele, whose late husband, Fred Abele, served as the

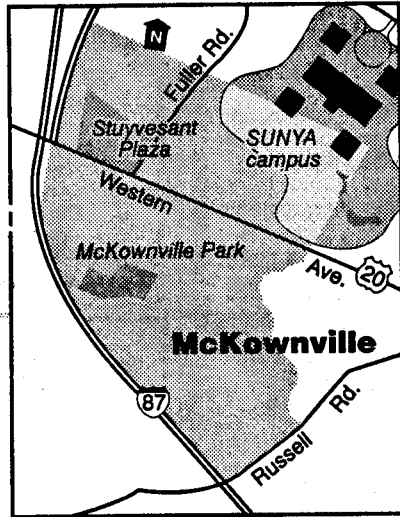
assistant town historian. "I like it here because we're suburban and yet close enough to everything that we don't feel isolated. I can walk to Stuyvesant (Plaza) from my house. This is a great place to live, especially if you're a senior citizen like I am."

The hamlet's seven-acre Fred B. Abele McKownville Park off of Schoolhouse Road is named in her husband's memory. There, residents can partake in basketball, softball and picnicking. Paths were created from all of the streets around the park to provide children with a safe passage to and from the playground.

The oldest residential part of the hamlet is divided by a one-mile strip on Western Avenue, which is lined by residences on the north side (some have been converted into professional offices) and an ever-changing scene of commercial ventures on the south side.

In the mid-18th century, John McKown of Scotland leased the Five-Mile House tavern near what is now the Indian Quadrangle on the SUNYA campus. His son William, who would become the Guilderland town supervisor in 1813, built another tavern in 1796, which became the hamlet's nucleus. That tavern was located near the present Burger King on Western Avenue.

Along the way, the McKown family purchased vast tracts of land, spanning from the present Albany city line to a point in what is now Westmere, and from the State Office Campus (originally part of the Kings Highway) to the Norman's Kill, according to historical records compiled by Fred Abele. By 1896 farms



Times Union map

and housing had developed around the site now occupied by the university.

POPULATION: Approximately 2,756 with 1,137 housing units.

POLITICS: The Guilderland Town Board is Republican.

TAXES: For 1993 residents pay \$6.78 per \$1,000 of the assessed value for town and county, \$15.32 per \$1,000 for school and a flat annual fee of \$237 for sewer.

SCHOOLS: Children attend Westmere Elementary School for grades K-5; Farnsworth Middle School for grades 6-8; and Guilderland High School for grades 9-12.

HOUSING: Approximately \$80,000 to \$170,000.

TRANSPORTATION: CDTA runs along Western Avenue, in addition to making a loop to Stuyvesant Plaza, Crossgates Mall, Northway Mall and Colonie Center.

POLICE, FIRE, HOSPITALS: Town police, volunteer fire company and Albany hospitals.

AMENITIES: In addition to being centrally located to four shopping centers, McKownville is served by businesses and retail stores along Western Avenue, including banks, pharmacies, supermarket, gas station, restaurants, fast-food eateries, motels, beauty salons and churches.