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A SEARCH
FOR COMMUNITY
IN McCRACKENVILLE

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After the American Revolutionary War, lands in central and western New York state became available for settlement. These were lands that Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham acquired from Massachusetts, lands in the Holland Purchase, and other tracts of land. One early settlement, McCrackenville, was attempted early in the nineteenth century at the west side of the Lower Falls of the Genesee river, north of the burgeoning village of Rochesterville. Rochesterville, a village in 1817, incorporated as the city of Rochester in 1834 and absorbed McCrackenville into its own boundary. Eventually the familiar name of the area beside the Lower Falls slipped from usage, and few current residents of that area, or of greater Rochester itself, are aware of McCrackenville's one-time existence.

A search for the pioneer settlers of McCrackenville, and for the reason or reasons why its familiar name did not continue in popular use beyond the 1850s, leads also to records of land purchases further west in New York state. Several brothers McCracken, Dr. David, William J., and Gardiner, may have listened to the advice of Oliver Phelps about the desirability of western New York State lands, or, more likely to Phelps's fellow townsmen from Suffield, the Kings, Grangers, and Rows who bought land near the western bank of the Genesee river before the close of the eighteenth century (Slocum, 1948, 3; Turner 1851, 420-21). David and William McCracken first bought land in the Holland Purchase in or around Batavia, then these McCracken brothers came east to the area around the Lower Falls of the Genesee river and began to make plans for a settlement

which could benefit from the water power available from the falls, and plans for the potential mill sites which could be sold there. William became a tavern keeper further south along the road toward Rochesterville, in the area later known as Frankfort.

One may discern a web of interpersonal relationships between early settlers as they migrated, bought and sold lands, in their efforts to make a living on a new and raw frontier. In these relationships one might search for the events which could explain the "community" name which was used for the area and possibly uncover the elements of "community" which an anthropologist would recognize.

A modern writer, novelist and screenwriter John Gregory Dunne, in a program shown on Rochester's public television channel on November 10, 1990, 8:00 p. m. made the statement "Community is built on shared experiences." This varies considerably from the criteria anthropologists may argue over, but this researcher will seek the kinship ties and common origins upon which these early settlers may have acted in their emigrations and business transactions.

Method of Research

Because this researcher is unaware of living descendants of the three McCracken brothers, it has been necessary to search for other means to learn about their lives and deeds: to search out existing writings and records about the McCracken pioneers.

Constraints of time and distance have caused this research to be limited to material available in the City of Rochester, New York, county of Monroe. I have examined some materials held in libraries including the following:

- Drake Memorial Library, State University of New York at Brockport; Charles Cowling, archivist for western Monroe County records

- Library at the Rochester Museum and Science Center, Leatrice Kemp, librarian

- Rochester Historical Society Library, Elizabeth Holihan, president; Megan Lodge, administrative assistant

- Rundel Library, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York, Wayne Arnold, librarian, Local History Division

- Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester, Karl Kabelac, archivist, Rare Books Division

The Offices of the County and City Historians may also be consulted about early records of some localities, but since the earliest transactions for McCracken land were before Monroe County was established in 1821, and before Rochester became a city in 1834, a search of earliest Monroe County records is not always productive of useful material. Earlier records may exist in Ontario and Genesee counties.

I have also consulted with the following personnel of public agencies:

- Tim O'Connell, Engineering Records, City Engineer's Office, City Hall, Rochester, New York

- Paul Wheeler, Records Management, Monroe County Clerk's Office, Monroe County Office Building, Rochester, New York

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Comments

Archivists and librarians can direct a researcher to books which hold lists of early maps and their locations, and also to indices of collections of writings such as the Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series (RHSPFS), and to the booklet, Rochester History, published by the Office of the City Historian. There are also other compilations of titles about early regional history, indices of early newspaper articles relative to an area of research, and obituary files in Rundel Library's Local History division.

The City Engineer's Office is an excellent source for early and current maps, pictures of the Lower Falls area, and also has a copy of the Cultural Resources Inventory for the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program City of Rochester, Monroe County, New York, prepared by the Cultural Resource Survey Program Division of the Rochester Museum & Science Center for the City of Rochester. Mr. O'Connell is knowledgeable about the area in which this researcher is interested.

Records of many sales and exchanges of real estate by the McCrackens may be found at the County Clerk's Office, and are openly available to the public. Reading these records is very tedious because of the legal terminology and the

description of land sales in specific terms used by surveyors. Also, it has happened that mention was made in writings by some pioneers to transactions made which have not as yet been found in the county records.

The Rochester Historical Society has records from the registry of the early days of the Episcopal Church² of Rochester, as well as early City Directories, and its own Publication Fund Series. This series is also available at the Rundel Library, and the Library at the Rochester Museum and Science Center.

Problems encountered

Librarians usually require specific request for material. They do not routinely make suggestions. They might do so if the department is not crowded or extremely busy with many patrons. A department may also have a directive which requires it to limit service to any one patron to ten minutes, for example. Machines for reading the reels of microfilm in the Rundel Local History department may be out of service at times, or may be in constant use by other researchers. However, the machines in another department can be used. Material over a certain age may not be photocopied. No material circulates.

The earliest city directories do not have consistent spelling of surnames, and do not contain reliable house numbers for dwellings. Also, early street names do not coordinate with

present day street names. As an example of the difficulties of consulting one early city directory (1827), its listing of residents' names is by wards, in rough alphabetical order, and locates "boarders" only as "boards with _____," the name of the householder, and does not include any area outside the city. No material circulates and some may not be photocopied.

The requests for certain information in some departments are sometimes answered by "unavailable" or "cannot be located." Best cooperation is received by courteously requesting an appointment with persons who have many demands upon their time.

Care must be taken when working with the old standard historical reference books, Pioneer History of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase by Orsamus Turner and Sketches of Rochester by Henry O'Reilly, because the inclusion of supplements or appendices results in duplication of numbered pages, and confusion, until one gets used to the page arrangements in the books.

Drake Memorial Libray at SUNY Brockport holds only historical records for the western part of Monroe County.

The Rare Books Division of the Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester has somewhat limited hours of availability, and inquiry should be made before making a visit. Researchers are provided with a locker for most personal belongs, since only pencils, notebooks, and necessary research materials may be taken into the department. The department

closes completely between noon and one p.m. for a lunch break.
No material circulates.

McCrackenville, some of its inhabitants, and other pioneers

What can be known about the McCracken brothers of McCrackenville from the writings of historians, other early writers, and the Rochester newspapers of earlier days? Many of these were located and searched in an attempt to discover what was going on in McCrackenville in the early nineteenth century.

Dr. David McCracken, the oldest of the three brothers, was the third person to purchase land in Batavia Village in 1801, the year the Holland Purchase was first opened for settlement (Turner, 1850, 454). Before this time, a David McCracken appears in the New York Census Index of 1800, p.153, as residing in Cayuga County. Without further research in census and genealogical records, one can only assume that this might have been the same person; he might also have been a collateral relative.

The census record of 1810 does show that David McCracken resided in Genesee county, and that his household consisted of two males over ten years of age but under twenty-six years of age, and two males twenty-six years of age but under forty-five years of age. Brothers William and Gardiner probably were the males under twenty-six years of age, since their ages (given in

*McCracken
see*

obituaries which will be cited below) fit that description.

David, who was seventy-four when he died in 1842; (Rochester Daily Democrat, July 18, 1842, 3-2) would have been one of the males under forty-five years of age.

Orsamus Turner, (1850, 465) says David was a physician, "the first upon the purchase" and that he had "for a long period an extended practice." David was also the "first Under Sheriff and jailer of Genesee County" (Turner, 1850, 525).

Orsamus Turner (1851, 620) writes that the McCracken brothers "removed to Rochester soon after the war." That was the War of 1812, when many who lived in the western regions of the state moved east, away from the continued presence of the British in the Niagara frontier. Many were also afraid to live too near the mouth of the Genesee because of the raids made by British ships. Turner also said, in the same reference, that David purchased a tract of land near Deep Hollow, on the River "which is now embraced in the city" and that he died "at an advanced age . . . childless." Deep Hollow, also known earlier as Gulph Stream, appears on early maps as emptying into the river just south of the Lower Falls.

Henry O'Reilly, editor of Rochester's first daily newspaper, the Rochester Daily Advertiser, and author of a book written about Rochester, Sketches of Rochester with Incidental Notices of Western New York, 1838, says that David was not practicing as a physician in Rochester (ibid. 324). He lived, before 1820, in a large house in a grove at what is now

the southwest corner of Lake Avenue and McCracken Street (now Driving Park Avenue) (Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series VI, 133, 344-345, hereafter referred to as RHSPFS).

In 1829 David McCracken was Anti-Masonic candidate for assessor of Gates (Anti-Masonic Enquirer, April 7, 1829, 2-2). In 1831, he was appointed culler of staves and heading of Orleans County (Rochester Daily Advertiser, March 23, 1831, 2-2). In 1832 a partnership he was involved in with two other persons was dissolved (Rochester Daily Advertiser, April 30, 1832, 2-5).

Henry O'Reilly (1838, 372*) gives no year for the following account in his book

Paper-making.--Gilman and Sibley established a paper-mill in 1819, which passed into the hands of Everard Peck, and was burned several years ago. The business was discontinued; but a new start has been made in it by P. Foley & Co., who have leased and altered for the purpose the flouring-mill of Dr. M'Cracken, on the east side of the Lower Falls, in the second ward [emphasis added].

Emphasis is added above because "on the east side" no doubt referred to the east side of the McCracken tract, since the second ward was on the west side of the Genesee River.

In 1835 Alderman Lathrop presented to city authorities an account in the amount of \$8,300 for D. McCracken, for building a road and bridge at the west end of Carthage bridge, and an additional amount of \$51.71 for materials, services etc. for Carthage bridge (Rochester Daily Democrat, October 9, 1835,

2-3). This was probably for construction of McCracken Street from near the river gorge to the road called State Street which ran from Rochester toward Hanford's Landing. According to the County Clerk's record there was an exchange of land for this purpose recorded in 1836 (Liber 33, 450).

In a later year the Common Council recorded the following:

Resolved, that David McCracken, one of the city assessors, be substituted for P. P. Peck, excused on the grounds of interest for serving as assessor for Clarissa st. bridge provided he is not interested in the premises or kin to persons so interested . . . (Rochester Daily Democrat, August 29, 1839, 2-6).

The Episcopal Church records which the Rochester Historical Society holds in its library, (Episcopal Church Records, 1820 - 1851, Part I Rochester Genealogical Society, 1982) contains an entry that a funeral was held for Anna, wife of David McCracken on 14 October, 1837. After a mourning period of seven months, Dr. David apparently married again, to ~~Maria A. Dannels~~. There appeared in an Index of newspaper items a reference to this marriage (Rochester Republican, May 29, 1838, 3-4). This researcher was unable to verify the item because of the deteriorated condition of the newspaper which was copied onto the microfilm.

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Dr. David McCracken died in 1842; his obituary follows

In this city on Saturday the 6th last very suddenly of affliction of the heart aged 74 years. In the morning the deceased was up in the city, in apparent health, moved with a firm step, and was afterwards engaged in his corn field till near one o'clock when he returned to his home, complained of pain in his breast and at 3, two short hours after, he was a corpse. How impressive the language 'in the midst of life, we are in death' (Rochester Daily Democrat, July 18, 1842, 3-2).

Found later:

* Married, in this City, on Monday, 21st inst., by Geo. Andrews, Esq. Doct. David McCracken to Mrs. Maria A. Dannels, late widow of Capt. Sarah Dannels, and daughter of Lucien Swigart of Ohio (R.R., May 29, 1838, 3-4).

These account of the events so far discovered in Dr. David McCracken's life seem to indicate that he led the life of an educated, civic minded citizen involved with the life of a frontier, a developing area of New York state. In a later section of this paper, which will deal with the many real estate transaction of all three brothers, it may become apparent that he was also entrepreneurial in his buying and selling of parts of the McCracken Tract in his efforts to stimulate the further settlement of his area.

Next in age to Dr. David was William J., according to his obituary to be cited later, which can be interpreted to show that he was about twelve years younger than David, or, about twenty-two years old in 1806 when he purchased land in Township 12, Range 2, of the Holland Purchase (Turner, 1850, 462). Near neighbors (for those times) in Township 11, Range 1 were Lyman D. and Harvey Prindle, who bought their land in 1803 and 1805 respectively (Turner, 1850, 455, 459). One may make another assumption that the Eleanor Prindle McCracken, wife of William J. McCracken, whose obituary appears here, might well have been a sister of his neighbors.

In this city on the 2nd inst, of congestion of the brain, Eleanor, wife of W. J. McCracken aged 56 years. Funeral at St. Luke's this (Saturday) afternoon at half past 2 o'clock (Rochester Daily Democrat, March 4, 1843, 2-7, and additional notice, Rochester Republican, March 7, 1843, 3-5).

It was a real estate transaction of July 28, 1847 (Liber 75,

172, County Clerk's Office) between Sarah Prindle, wife of Lyman D. Prindle, and Caroline, wife of Harvey Prindle, who returned to William J. McCracken land he had originally deeded to the Prindle brothers in 1827--and the discovery that William McCracken's wife was a Prindle--which suggested an in-law family relationship between William and the Prindle brothers. The discovery of Eleanor's maiden name came from the obituary of Lavira McCracken Blanchard, daughter of William J. and Eleanor (Prindle) McCracken (Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser, Monday March 27-/93, and, Barton's 2nd Obituary Book, 66).

Lavira (Mrs. Hiram Blanchard) related her "Reminiscences of McCrackenville" to Charles Hastings Wiltsie, who read the account before the Rochester Historical Society in 1891 (RHSPFS VI, 129-134). In this interview Lavira said her father built the North American Hotel, and owned it for many years, working as landlord and manager until 1837. This was the later name of the "Tavern, by William M'Cracken" that O'Reilly listed among the hotels of Rochester (O'Reilly, 1838, 376*).

Further information about this hotel (also sometimes referred to as the "McCrackenville Tavern") including its location, can be found in RHSPFS VI, 343-346. A picture of it can be found in Rochester History, vol. L, No. 3, July 1988.

Lavira, eldest daughter of William J. McCracken, who was born in Batavia in 1812, (RHSPFS VI, 129) married Hiram Blanchard, a merchant (Rochester Gem and Ladies Amulet, October 7, 1837, 159-3). Blanchard's store was directly across

the street from her father's hotel (Varney, RHSPFS VIII, 220). Another daughter of the William McCrackens, Marietta, born in Batavia in 1815, (RHSPFS VI, 134) married Andrew Jackson Langworthy in 1837 (Rochester Gem and Ladies Amulet, September 23, 1837, 151-3).

A note of sadness: the Episcopal Church Records 1820-1851 contains a poignant combination of entries:

McCracken, Albert, son of Wm. J. and (~~----~~^{Mary}) McCracken, L
baptized 19 July, 1821

^{Albert}
McCracken, (----) a child of W. J. McCracken

Funeral for 27 July, 1821

McCracken, (----) Son of Wm. J. McCracken

funeral for 12 June, 1823.

The church record does not seem to place much importance in naming infants when they had a funeral, and did not name the wife of William McCracken when she had a funeral. Only the name of the male relative is noted.

*Underlines
deleted*

In 1828 William offered himself as a candidate for Monroe County sheriff (Rochester Daily Telegraph, October 9, 1828, 2-5). He was robbed of a valuable gold watch in 1853 (Rochester Daily Union, September 12, 1853, 2-4). His house and lot on Brown Street were sold for \$2500 in 1854 (Rochester Daily Democrat, February 16, 1854, 2-5).

In 1841 the following item appeared in a daily paper; it could be seen to illustrate William's good heart and willingness