

THE FIRST
 One Hundred Years
 —OF—
 McKEESPORT.



AN HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL DESCRIPTION
 OF THE CITY FROM ITS INCEPTION
 UNTIL ITS CENTENNIAL IN 1894.



COMPILED AND PREPARED

—BY—

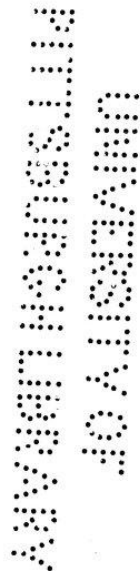
Walter S. Abbott and William E. Harrison,

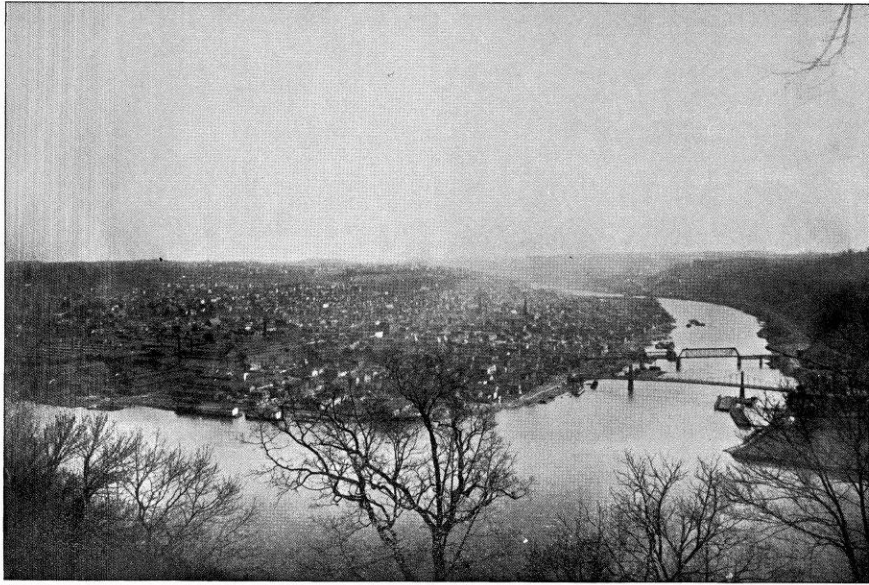
— UNDER DIRECTION OF —

Centennial Historical Committee.



McKEESPORT, PA.
 PRESS OF McKEESPORT TIMES
 1894.





A General View of McKeesport Showing Confluence of the Two Rivers.

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NOTE.

This history was prepared and issued by authority of the Historical Committee of the Centennial Celebration of McKeesport, celebrated on September 13th and 14th, 1894. The Committee was appointed by the General Committee of the McKeesport Board of Trade, controlling the celebration, and consisted of the following gentlemen:

- W. E. HARRISON, Chairman,
- JAMES EVANS,
- HENRY STEWART,
- ISAAC EDMUNDSON,
- W. S. ABBOTT.

CARD OF THANKS.

THE authors return sincere thanks to James Evans, Henry Stewart, Isaac Edmundson, M. Wilson Stewart and W. E. Buehler, for special assistance in this work, and to many other friends here and abroad, for valuable services rendered. Without their aid, much of the data secured could not have been obtained, because many dates could not be procured except from private records. The assistance of these friends aided the authors very materially.

PREFACE.

IN undertaking the task of preparing a history of McKeesport the authors were aware of having assumed something not easy of accomplishment. Much data necessary to a complete history is not procurable, because it does not exist. Other information sought was unobtainable. But the compilers have made an honest endeavor to gather and arrange the following history in its proper chronological order in as complete a form as it is possible at this time to prepare such a work. The history is the result of a laborious gathering of facts from every conceivable source of information, both at home and abroad. Data has been tested and subjected to proof wherever it has been possible and the work is offered to the public, though incomplete, and perhaps imperfect as to some of the facts presented, as the most comprehensive history of the "Metropolis of the Monongahela" that has yet been published. Whatever its imperfections may be, the authors have no apology to offer. As a souvenir of the first century of McKeesport it seeks recognition, and wonderful as the record of the past may seem, the century just dawning will far surpass it. The next century of McKeesport's existence will be far greater, grander and nobler, and the history of the second cycle of one hundred years will record a still greater development.

THE AUTHORS.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS.*

We come, with clang of bells, with songs of praise,
 With waving banners, with electric blaze,
 With radiant hopes, and with inspiring cheers,
 To crown the memories of a hundred years.

* * * * *

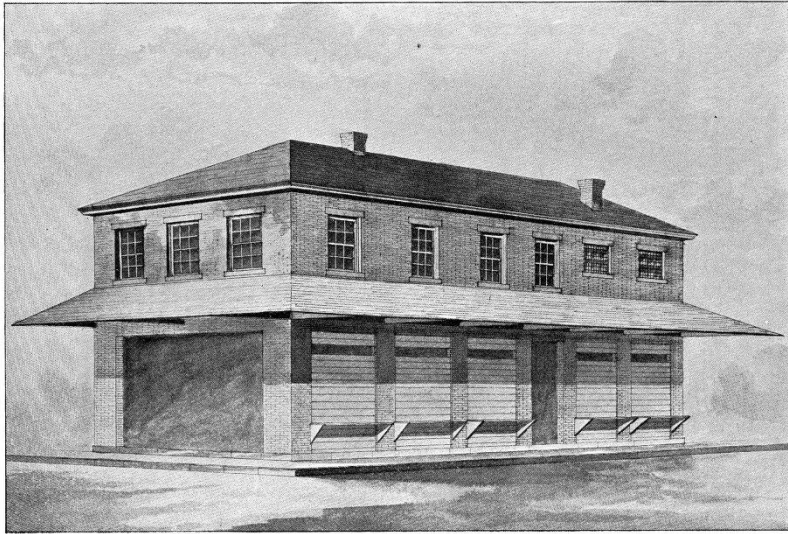
Could we roll back a hundred cycling years,
 And photograph the early pioneers,
 How we should see in each bronzed, rugged face
 The native stamp of that ancestral race
 Who came to act as conscience should dictate,
 Far from the partnerships of Church and State.

* * * * *

A hundred years! How long, or short, it seems,
 Depends on fruitful deeds, not idle dreams.
 To sanguine vision, with its rainbow light,
 Days shrink to hours in their rapid flight;
 While lagging weeks or lingering months may be
 To wrong and suffering an eternity.
 Sunshine and shadow, innocence and crime,
 With different standards weigh and measure time.
 Full twenty centuries the Pantheon's dome
 Has watched the ebbs and flows of life in Rome.
 Through forty centuries, survey the links
 Of past and present in the silent Sphynx,
 And in the stately Pyramids that rise
 Until their summits pierce Egyptian skies.

Brief space compared with all this length of years,
 McKeesport's single century appears;
 And sharply drawn, the contrasts brought to view
 Between the records of the old and new.
 Scan transatlantic archives, and you find
 Their every page with blood-marks interlined.
 Traverse each foot of Europe's wide domain,
 The scars of battle are on every plain.
 Where'er you turn, amid the busy hive,
 "The dust you tread upon was once alive."

**Adapted from Centennial Poem by Dr. Bombaugh, Harrisburg, Pa.*



Original Market House, Council Chamber and Jail.

McKeesport.

THE first known permanent resident at the mouth of the Youghiogheny river was Queen Alliquippa, the queen of the friendly Delaware tribe of Indians, who selected the spot now known as McKeesport for her seat of government. She was a good queen, celebrated in history and tradition for many good qualities, and in its day her tribe ranked as one of importance among the red men who controlled this part of the country prior to, and after, 1750. A legend has it that when the doughty General Braddock marched through here in 1756 to the scene of his defeat, three miles below McKeesport, near the mouth of Turtle Creek, that Queen Alliquippa occupied a prominent position among a number of her braves on the hilltop above Riverton and gazed upon the British Army, as it passed down Crooked Run Hollow to the Monongahela river and forded that stream. She is supposed to have been struck with wonder when the red and gold uniforms and glistening accoutrements of the English soldiers flashed in the sunlight beneath her gaze; but she was a proud queen, and notwithstanding the fact that George Washington, afterwards the "Father of his Country," accompanied the soldiers, she insisted that because due homage had not been shown her by that august body, she had been slighted. The angry queen, through messengers, is said to have informed the army that it had given her offense; but the story goes that George Washington afterwards succeeded in smoothing and softening the ruffled feelings of the dusky queen by presenting her in person with a bottle of rum.

Exactly where Queen Alliquippa's lodge was located is not known. Probably it was on one of the hilltops, as the level ground about the rivers at that time was swampy. One of the hills mentioned as the site of her headquarters is that now covered by what is known as South Park.



The McKees of McKeesport.

ABOUT the beginning of the eighteenth century David McKee, with his family, moved from Scotland to the Protestant settlement in the north of Ireland, settling near Londonderry. But persecution followed the Presbyterians and about the middle of the century he was forced to seek a new home. He came to America in company with several brothers and found in the Province of Pennsylvania what he said he long had sought: "a church without a bishop; a state without a king."

He settled near Philadelphia, but in the year 1755 he crossed the Allegheny mountains and under the protection of the once celebrated Queen of the Delawares (Alliquippa), he settled permanently in the wilderness he found at the confluence of the Monongahela and Youghiogheny rivers. There he built himself a log cabin and became the first white resident of the locality.

The territory now covered by a teeming, throbbing, pulsing city was at that time an extensive marsh or swamp, clogged with heavy forest and a dense undergrowth—not a home site that would to-day be selected by seekers after health and longevity. The time, too, seemed not aptly chosen, for it was contemporaneous with the disastrous defeat of General Braddock at Braddock's Field. The country round about was quaking with the shock of warfare and the only recognized law was that of might. The strong ruled the weak. Notwithstanding the unfavorable surroundings David McKee built and occupied his log house and established a home in spite of all difficulties. The seed thus planted, over a century ago, was the nucleus of what afterwards became McKeesport, to-day a prosperous city whose railroads, manufactories, schools, churches, intelligence, refine-

ment and thrift, form a halo through which the past appears as a misty dream, the outlines being dim and exceedingly hard to discern. It is difficult to believe that the present modern city was erected where the first white settler found nothing but a swamp along the shores of two big rivers, the future value of which he had no conception whatever. He was simply an adventurous white man determined to carve a home out of the wilderness and to force the earth to render him and his family a living, free from the restraints he found in the, to him, obnoxious land of his birth. He cleared out enough of the dense tangle of swampy forest to enable him to operate a farm, but did not confine himself strictly to farming for an indefinite period. He had the Scotch-Irish ideas of thrift about him and he soon established a skiff ferry connecting his place with the opposite sides of the Monongahela and Youghiogheny rivers and in 1769 he obtained a charter for it. That charter is still in force to-day and a steam-ferry service is maintained under it.

David McKee died on October 11, 1795, aged eighty-five years and his property passed to his three sons, John, David and Robert. David left the settlement, removing across the river and occupying a tract of land in what is now Mifflin township. He was drowned some years afterward while fording the Monongahela river on horseback, at Braddock's upper riffle, opposite the mouth of Crooked Run, where Braddock's army crossed in 1756. Robert located on a tract of land in the neighborhood of Braddock's Field, which was at that time a respectable settlement. John retained the old homestead which had been deeded to him by his father some years before.



John McKee.

AS has been stated, John McKee succeeded his father as the possessor of the McKee land at the confluence of the Monongahela and Youghioghenny rivers some time previous to his father's death. John McKee was the owner of McKee's Ferry and the founder of McKee's Port—afterwards the Borough and now the City of McKeesport. The McKee homestead was located outside of what became the town of McKeesport, viz: On the East side of Walnut street near the spot now occupied by the new portion of the iron works of the W. Dewees Wood Company. W. E. Harrison and probably one or two others of our oldest citizens, remember playing about the old log pile, the remains of the McKee home, which marked its location in their boyhood days. All traces of it disappeared many years ago.

John McKee was born in Ireland in 1746 and at the death of his father was forty-nine years of age. He was a man of fine presence, much energy and of infinite resources of mind and body. He had been very prosperous in his undertakings up to the date of the whiskey insurrection, ranking as one of the wealthiest men in Western Pennsylvania. Subsequent to the whiskey war his affairs became somewhat tangled and he suffered losses in large sums prior to the year 1795.

During that year he laid out the plan of McKee's Port on the site formerly known as McKee's Ferry. McKee's Port as he laid it out was bounded by the Monongahela and Youghioghenny rivers, Ninth street and Walnut street. The plan consisted of upwards of two hundred lots, sixty feet front and one hundred and

forty feet deep, each fronting a street and running back to an alley. The two principal streets, Market and Fourth, were eighty feet wide, all the others being sixty feet wide. All the lines ran at right angles and the plan is to-day pronounced perfect, regret being expressed that the original lines were not continued in subsequent additions to the work so well begun by John McKee. Near the center of the new town Mr. McKee left a large area intended for market house purposes, which for many years has been known as the Diamond. Two lots each for church and school purposes were set aside and the remainder of the lots were offered for sale.

Mr. McKee adopted a novel plan to dispose of his town lots. He put the price of the lots at twenty dollars each, and by way of satisfying purchasers as to the selection of lots, he arranged a lottery scheme. The purchaser paid him ten dollars for which he received a numbered ticket and when the lottery drawing occurred, each man was assigned the lot his ticket drew, when, if he paid ten dollars additional, he received a deed for the property. There seems to have been no blanks in John McKee's lottery but if a ticket holder did not like the location of the lot he drew, he forfeited the ten dollars he paid for the ticket. Even in that early day the value of advertising was recognized and appreciated and John McKee accordingly made his lottery and land booming scheme known to the world through the columns of the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. W. E. Harrison has the advertisement clipped from that paper dated February 5, 1795, a valuable relic, a copy of which is herewith reproduced:

A NEW TOWN

IS laid out by the subscriber on the spot known for many years past by the name of McKees ferry. The ground intended for the Town is delightfully situated on a fine level point, at the junction of the Monongahela &

Youghiogeny rivers about sixteen miles above Pittsburgh by water, and twelve only by land. The plan on which the Town is to be improved consists of upwards of 200 lots of 60 feet front ; each lot having the advantage of a street and an alley 20 feet wide, for the convenience of stables etc. The principal streets are eighty feet wide the others sixty. Near the center of the Town is a large area or square intended for a market house. Forty eight of the lots front the two rivers Monongahela and Youghiogeny, Four lots will be given by the subscriber, for the use of a place of worship and a seminary of learning.

The situation of this place is so well known in the Western Country that it needs no encomium that can be given it but for the information of those persons below the mountain who may wish to become purchasers it may be necessary to premise, that its situation is one of the best in the western country for trade and commerce, having the advantage of the two rivers Monongahela and Youghiogeny flowing under its banks, being near several grist and saw mills, close to what is called the Forks of Yough settlement which is indisputably the richest that we have it is at least 12 miles nearer to Philadelphia than Pittsburgh is, it has public roads laid out from it in different directions.

The price of each lot is to be 20 dollars, and one dollar ground rent

to be paid annually. To avoid disputes the lot every purchaser, is to possess is to be decided by a Lottery, which will be held on the spot on the 1st day of April next. Each purchaser at the time of receiving his ticket is to pay ten dollars, and the residue when he draws his number and gets his deed. The majority of purchasers present at the drawing are to choose the persons who shall draw the tickets, which persons shall point out the four lots to be appropriated to public uses, prior to the drawing.

Tickets to be had of John Hannah merchant. Pittsburgh ; Andrew Swearingen Esqr. Washington ; John Taylor Esqr. Greensburgh, James Wallace Esqr. Carlisle, Peter Whitefide merchant. Mercersburgh and of the subscriber on the premises.

IOHN M·KEE.

N. B. A plan of the town with proposals annexed, may be seen at any of the above places.

February 5, 1795.

[The advertisement as it appears above was clipped from the *Gazette* by the late Judge Veech of Pittsburgh, formerly of Uniontown. About thirty-five years ago he gave the clipping to C. C. Taylor, Esq., then an attorney-at-law here, who presented it to W. E. Harrison, who has it preserved in a glass-covered frame].

The new town had not been formally christened and it was not until sometime in November 1795 that the name of McKeesport was finally determined upon. The lottery disposed of many of the lots, but we know little of the particulars of what modern land speculators would call a "boom," natural to follow the birth of a new town, claimed to possess many advantages

over the village of Pittsburgh because it was "twelve miles nearer Philadelphia;" but we do know that many of the original purchasers abandoned their lots and refused to pay the taxes assessed against them. The omnipresent tax-gatherer kept charging up the taxes until the limits of patience had been exhausted and in the year 1834 a general clearing up of the tax muddle was inaugurated and about one half of the "lottery lots" were sold under the hammer for the delinquent taxes against them, at an average of less than ten dollars a lot.

Nevertheless, these apparent reverses did not prevent McKeesport from being something of a town. For instance it had, as a necessity, a graveyard outside the limits, just East of Walnut street and adjoining that portion of Ninth street which was afterwards laid out East of Walnut. This old graveyard was located by David McKee, father of John, and was not finally abandoned until the year 1872, when all the bodies, or what could be found of them, were removed to Versailles Cemetery.

As early as 1800, McKeesport attracted general attention. Among its possessions was a race track running nearly around the town as platted, and, judging from the number of races on this course, the people were by no means devoid of a love for outdoor sports. The track ran along Water to Eighth street, then around to near Market street and thence to Second street. That the races were patronized by people from the surrounding country is shown by the following notice which is a copy of one appearing in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, dated August 27th, 1800:

MCKEESPORT RACES.

McKeesport races will be sported for on the turf at McKeesport on the first Wednesday in October next. A purse of \$40 for mile heats; free for all; any horse, mare or gelding. On Thursday a purse of \$20, one and one-half mile heats, free as above. And on Friday a sweepstake, one mile heats, free as aforesaid, the winning horse of each day excepted. No respect paid to the weight of the rider.

PITTSBURGH, AUG. 27, 1800.

John McKee died on January 11th, 1807, aged sixty-one years. His remains were placed by the side of his father in the old graveyard, previously described, where they rested quietly until the demands of later years made it necessary to abandon the old burying ground. Accordingly in 1872 the remains were removed by one of his relatives, the late William Whigham, to Versailles Cemetery where they are to-day, the location being marked by the original headstone erected by his family in the old graveyard. But a handsome granite monument to him as the "Founder of McKeesport" was erected over his remains (and those of his wife and his father), in 1887 by David R. McKee, as executor of the will of Redick McKee (son of John McKee, and born in McKeesport, December 7, 1800), who occasionally visited the old Borough and had many friends among its residents.

John McKee married Sally Redick, sister of Judge David Redick, of Washington County, Pa., whose pedigree is traceable back through the Hoges or "Hoags," Humes, Stewarts, "Reddachs," and Douglasses to the dawn of Scottish history, about the year 1100. Two of her grandnieces, Mrs. Jacob Burket and Mrs. John Merrington are still living and were recently residents of this city. A grandnephew, R. F. Ramsey, Esq., is living in Pittsburgh.

Redick McKee, after a long life of great activity and usefulness (largely passed in Wheeling, Va., where in its early days he was prominent alike in establishing manufactories and other business enterprises and in founding religious and educational institutions), died at the home of his son, David R. McKee, in Washington City, September 13th, 1886.

The latter is now the only survivor of Redick McKee's family; and his sons are the last-born lineal descendants of the first settler of McKeesport.





REDICK McKEE,
Son of John McKee, the Founder of McKeesport.