



McKOWN'S TAVERN

From McKown's Tavern To Burger King

By ALICE P. BEGLEY

History has a way of repeating itself and coming round full circle.

Almost 200 years ago, hungry travelers on the Great Western Turnpike sought repast at "Billy" McKown's hotel and tavern located on the land where Western Ave. meets Fuller Road in the Town of Guiderland. Today, Burger King, located on that same acre of land, dispenses food to hungry Western Turnpike travelers.

In the interim, between the old tavern and the new fast-food chain, there have been a few changes.

The big, white McKown Hotel was built in 1796. It was owned and operated by William McKown, for whom the tiny hamlet of McKownville was named. McKown later became a supervisor of the Town of Guiderland.

In 1786 William McKown, a native of Scotland, petitioned for a lease of what was then known as the Five-Mile House. It was granted by the Common Council of Albany. The establishment stood, as the crow flies, five miles west of the Hudson River on the old Albany road. Having the foresight to know that this road would open up the land to the western part of the state, shrewd Mr. McKown built a new structure to serve as a tavern and a residence. He built it in a cleared wooded area, a short distance from the Five-Mile House.

In 1799, the New York State Legislature granted the Great Western Turnpike Co. permission to construct a road from Lexington Avenue in Albany west to the Cherry Valley. This was financed by private investors.

William McKown, in turn, granted the Western Turnpike Co. the right-of-way over some of his 600-acre holding near his tavern. The road would go right past the McKown Tavern's front door and

would be the beginning of a larger, bustling intersection in a thriving suburban town 200 years later.

Early 1800 travelers on the new thoroughfare were livestock, stage coaches, westward-bound pioneer families and a few wandering Indians, according to the writings of the late Arthur B. Gregg, Guiderland Town Historian. He also noted that the famous author Henry Rowe Schoolcraft was known to have frequented McKown's Tavern as a "halfway" stop on his travels from the City of Albany to Hamilton (Guiderland hamlet).

The McKown Tavern prospered, and its owner became a member of the New York State Legislature in 1822. McKown became town supervisor in 1825 and kept that position until 1830.

The tavern continued to be a favorite stopping off place. State militia and military companies encamped on the tavern grounds on their way to the Anti-Rent wars in the Helderbergs in 1839.

In 1884 William H. Witbeck, a former employee of Billy McKown, leased the tavern from his old employer. With his sons, Benjamin and Arthur, he finally bought the hotel and tavern. It was renamed Witbeck's, and so it stood until 1917 when it was destroyed by fire.

During many of these years, the inn served as a post office for the small hamlet of McKownville.

The Esso Oil Co. bought the property in the 1920s and built a gas station with a Ma & Pa butter and egg store attached. It remained so until Chester ("Chet") King of McKownville purchased the land in 1953 and with his sons, operated King's Shell Service Station.

The busy business location was taken over by Burger King in 1982 and a modern eating establishment

was erected on the site of Billy McKown's old tavern. Another "halfway" stop for the comfort and feeding of the still hungry residents who travel up and down the Great Western Turnpike.

NOTE: Some of the facts included in this article were drawn from a 1957 Turnpike Record feature by the late Arthur B. Gregg, Guiderland town historian. — Editor.

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Florence Barcomb Dies; Led Elks Auxiliary

Florence Barcomb of Loudonville, charter member and original president of the Guiderland Elks Lodge 2480 auxiliary, died Sunday, Nov. 10 at Memorial Hospital, Albany, after a brief illness. Her age was not disclosed by the family.

Born Florence Hauser in Albany, Mrs. Barcomb was an independent consultant for Mary Kay Cosmetics. She also was once employed as a waitress at the Empress Restaurant, Albany.

She was also a member of St. Francis de Sales New Church, Loudonville, and the Christian Brothers Academy Mothers' Association.

Survivors include her husband, Albert P. Barcomb, Sr.; a daughter, Patricia A. McCumber of Las Vegas; three sons, Albert P.

Barcomb, Jr., and David P. Barcomb, both of Guiderland, and Jamey J. Barcomb of Loudonville; her father, Arthur J. Hauser, Sr.; two sisters, Dorothy Palmer and Bernice Bergeron, both of Guiderland; three brothers, Arthur J. Hauser, Jr., of Guiderland, Charles Hauser of Los Angeles and Victor Hauser of Schenectady; and eight grandchildren.

Funeral services were held Wednesday, Nov. 13 from Hans Funeral Home, Albany, and St. Francis de Sales New Church. Burial was in St. Agnes Cemetery, Menands.

Contributions in Mrs. Barcomb's memory may be made to Major Projects for Cerebral Palsy, c/o Guiderland Elks Lodge 2480, 3887 Carman Road, Schenectady, N.Y. 12303.

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