Fort McMichael

Our cousins William "Bill" Vogel and Carol Jones De Paul were keenly interested in Fort McMichael, a blockhouse built by James McMichael on his land as protection from marauding Indians. They collected a few references to this fort, but never organized them in any fashion. Here I attempt to put their and other references I found together. (Note: Bill and Carol contributed most of the information used in John A. DeMay's 1997 book **The Settlers' Forts of Western Pennsylvania**.)

Living on the western frontier in the Pittsburgh area during the Revolutionary War was quite dangerous. There were numerous Indian raids, supported by the British from Fort Detroit. There the British would pay the Indians for scalps. Sometimes, the Indians took prisoners and they usually ended up in Detroit too, as was the case for some of my Walker ancestors on my Mother's side. In response, the newly arrived settlers formed militias and built block houses as places of refuge. The names of those that mustering into those militias are recorded in the Pennsylvania Archives and includes John and Isaac McMichael, the sons of James McMichael our earliest McMichael ancestor in Western Pennsylvania. The forts, though, have largely receded from memory and even history. Some of their locations are not well known, and there is almost no accounts of the events that occurred in and around them. This leaves us with only short fragments of documentation attesting to their former existence.

Location:

Fort McMichael was located In Robinson Township, Allegheny County Pa. It was on a trail that has become McMichael Road near where it intersects with present day Ridge Road. Its location on top of a hill was selected because it gave a clear view of the traffic on the trail. The McMichael trail was an off shoot of the main east-west trail in the area that is now traced by the Steubenville Pike (Pa. Route 60).

Known references to Fort McMichael:

1. From a sketch of Abagail Young published in an 1860 issue of the Pittsburgh Dispatch newspaper. (We suspect that Abagail was a daughter of James McMichael, but this is in question.)

    'Died on the 1st of last April at her residence in Robinson Township, Allegheny County, Pa., Mrs. **Abagail Young, Sr**., in the eighty-fifth year of her age. The deceased was born in Robinson Township, Allegheny County, Pa., in 1775, and passed through many trying scenes in her early life. Her father's family, with a few others, erected a fort on the McMichael farm, about nine miles from Fort Pitt and one mile from the present Steubenville Pike. While occupying this fort one of her brothers was killed by Indians[i]. She was married at age of eighteen, raised a family of thirteen children, lived to see her youngest child reach the age of forty.' She had at the time of her death, besides her own children, sixty-two grandchildren and thirty-eight great grand children, in all one hundred and thirteen descendants. This grandmother will be represented at this Centennial celebration by grandchildren in the fifth generation."

2. April 1, 1779. Revolutionary War Pension application of John Kinkaid notes that he was drafted by Captain Zadock and marched to "McMichael's fort."

3. 1779. Revolutionary War Pension application of Henry Shaffer noted that he served a total of seven months militia duty in Captain Zadock Wright's Co., at "McMichael Station."

4. Early 1782. Revolutionary War Pension application of Robert White noted that he volunteered into the Company of Captain Cisney at "McMickle's station" about four miles from Fort Pitt for the summer season. He remained with that company for a month before volunteering into a Company under Colonel Crawford's command[ii]. They rendezvoused at Mingo Bottom on the Ohio side of the river above Wheeling.

5. 1875. Flora McMichael used Fort McMichael as her return address in her letters to her cousin Theodore Boice. Whether it was a real postal address in unknown because only the letter was saved without its envelop.

Genealogy: James McMichael, was the father of John McMichael, who was the father of John McMichael, Jr., who was the father of John Calhoun McMichael, who had the following sons: John Clive McMichael, Robert Neale McMichael, James Maxwell McMichael, and my father Paul L. McMichael.

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[i] There is a possible variation on the story of the boy killed by Indians. My father, Paul L. McMichael, told me that his father and his Aunt Flora told him that two Indians had camped at a trading post at Bridgeville and were passing though the McMichael settlement on the McMichael trail where they scalped an orphan boy taken in by the McMichael family. They tracked the Indians to Queen Aliquippa's camp, and she turned them over and they were hung. The Indians were reported to have had too much to drink. My father said that his father had shown him where the boy was buried, but could not recall where when I asked him. (There is big a problem with this account since it was unlikely that Queen Aliquippa was still alive at the time in question.)

[ii] The Crawford expedition turned into a disaster. It set out with intention of eliminating the Indian threat on the western frontier. When the British and their Indian allies learned of it, they gathered their forces and defeated the Americans near what is Sandusky, Ohio. Most of the troops made it back to Pennsylvania, but Col. Crawford was captured. The Indians tortured and burned him at the stake in retribution for the brutal massacre of the Christianized Indians at Gnadenhutten by an earlier American expedition.