

The McCormick Family, First Settlers of Indianapolis

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John, James and Samuel McCormick built the first house in what is now the capital of Indiana, settling here in 1820.

The McCormicks are of Scottish extraction; the ancestors of this branch moved from Scotland to the north of Ireland, whence the early ancestors in America emigrated. They crossed the ocean about 1700 and settled first in Pennsylvania, then moved to near Winchester, Virginia. When the trouble which culminated in the Revolution began they sympathized with the colonial cause and John, Sr., enlisted three times—two times from Virginia and once from Pennsylvania, being in service from 1775 to 1783.

John, Sr., was born August 13, 1754, in Virginia, and on March 24, 1785, married Catharine Drennan, who was born January 25, 1769. They had eight sons and six daughters. The family moved from Virginia to Butler County, Ohio, and in 1808 settled near the present site of Connersville, Indiana, where they built the first cabin in the settlement. The Indian fort was still there and occupied.

John McCormick, Sr., was a man of fine character, highly regarded for his ability and intelligence, and took an active part in the organization of Fayette County. The first grand jury met in his house. He died April 18, 1837; his wife survived him many years, having reached the age of ninety-three when she died February 22, 1862. She received a pension as a widow of a Revolutionary soldier until her death.

James, son of John and Catharine, was born in 1797 in Hamilton, Butler County, Ohio, and was only a boy when his parents came to Indiana. While still young he learned the trade of millwright, which he followed all his life; many of the old-fashioned water mills in central Indiana were of his construction.

His brother John, born September 25, 1791, moved with his family to the paternal home near Connersville after the War of 1812, in which he served. There he remained until after the treaty of St. Mary's in 1818, when he decided to remove to the "New Purchase," the tract of land in central Indiana secured by that treaty. Samuel, James, and John and his family started for the new location February 18, 1820, accompanied by twelve employees, who helped to cut the road. Even though the distance was but sixty miles, the journey by sleds took eight days, the party reaching the banks of White River February 26, 1820. They camped on a spot near where the old National Road bridge was afterward erected, and the double log cabin which was to become historic as the first white man's dwelling in what is now the capital of Indiana was commenced at once. It was located on White River, on the narrow wedge-shaped piece of ground lying between what is now West Washington Street and the National Road, and stood between the two bridges which later were built across the river at the base of the wedge, being just north of the east end of Washington Street bridge.

The log house was typical of the times. It contained two rooms, each eighteen feet square and separated by a passage eight or ten feet wide. The outside was often decorated with coon, bear and frequently deer skins stretched out to dry. John McCormick located on the east bank because the stream could not be forded. The abundance of fish was an advantage not to be overlooked in the days when an immediate food supply was a question of greater importance than it is now.

James and Samuel helped John to erect the cabin, after which they returned to Connersville. Part of James' family had made the journey and he came back with his wife and the rest of his household in March. Samuel removed here in the fall.

The Indians were still in the neighborhood at that time and the nearest white settlers were on the bluffs of the river near what is now Waverly. On June 7, 1820, Indianapolis was chosen for the seat of government and the members of the delegation were entertained at the McCormick cabin.

James and John lived here for two years and then moved

about four miles up the river on the southern edge of Washington township. They bought government land, built on the east bank, almost directly west of the Woodstock Country Club. There John built the first sawmill in the county.

The brothers continued to live together and to operate the mill until James moved to Rush County in 1824, after which John ran it until his death in 1825. He had married in Hamilton, Ohio, in 1811, Bethiah Case, and they had a family of eight children, their twin daughters Sabitha and Lavina celebrating their fourth birthday the day after the family arrived at Indianapolis. After her husband's death Bethiah married a Mr. King, by whom she had four children. She survived him and continued to live near the Bluffs until the close of the Civil War, when she moved to Arcadia to live with her twin daughters until her death in 1879. The twin daughters married twin brothers.

At Connersville James married Patsy Martha Perkins, a native of South Carolina and daughter of John Perkins, who was also born in that state. John Perkins and his wife were both of German descent. They were pioneers in Rush County, where Mr. Perkins engaged in farming, kept a dry goods and grocery store and also bought stock. He and his wife died in that county.

Eight sons and six daughters were born to James and Patsy McCormick. The mother died in Frankfort in 1880 at the age of 77. She was a Methodist, while James was a Baptist. He was one of the first three commissioners of Marion County.

One history gives Patsy Perkins as being the daughter of Jacob Perkins and his wife, Elizabeth Sailors. They had twenty-one children and eighteen lived beyond infancy. Jacob Perkins died in 1837.

James McCormick went back to Rush County in 1824; in 1826 he moved to Marion, Shelby County, then returned to Indianapolis in 1832. His home was on the ground now included in Crown Hill Cemetery, which he had bought the previous year. There he built a house in which he lived for three years when he moved to Millersville to build a mill for Noah Leveston, on the site of the present mill at that point.

He stayed there one season and in the spring of 1836 moved to a farm which is now a part of Riverside park and traversed by the Big Four railway. In 1838 he bought the old mill site where his brother John had built a mill, putting up one which he conducted for several years. In 1853 he moved to Hendricks County, near Cartersburg, where he bought land and built the mill which he was operating at the time of his death, October 6, 1858.