

This [very] old house

By Katie Lehrian

Meadville (Pennsylvania) Tribune Intern

Submitted by Scott McGill

SAEGERTOWN, PA

One of the oldest log houses in Crawford County is getting a face lift.

Extensive renovation of the Patrick McGill House in Saegertown will bring it back to its original 1802 shape.

The current owner, Mary Beth Hagamen, decided she wanted the house to become an educational center to teach children about the early settlers of western Pennsylvania, said Paul Koehler, overseer of what's become Hagamen's Patrick McGill Project.

Hagamen is a direct descendent of Arthur McGill, Patrick's brother. Both McGills traveled from Ireland to America around 1770 to start a new life.

"I hope to use this project and house as an icon for the town's heritage," said Hagamen, who lived in Saegertown as a child.

"The learning center would focus on teaching children how a log house was constructed and what people back then had to contend with, as far as living space," Koehler said.

The preliminary steps of the McGill house project—including removing current siding, additions and other changes made to the original house—have been under way for [some time]. The house will be wrapped in plastic to protect it from weather, and then further decisions will be made.

Hagamen is deciding if the house will stay at its present site or be moved to an undetermined place, somewhere along French Creek. If the house is left at the original site, an additional "period piece" structure might be built to accent the house and be used for additional educational experiences.

"We are looking at other sites," she said. "There

are a bunch of variables that are unknown, but we will probably be able to decide as soon as we get the info about the house and see what has to be done."

The house was occupied continually from 1802 to 2000. The ancestors of Patrick McGill were of Celtic Origin living in Scotland. Following a Scottish-Irish custom, Patrick was selected as one of the brightest of the children to be set apart and educated for a professional career.

During this era, the Anglicans were gaining control and many professions were closed to young Presbyterians. McGill wouldn't renounce his faith to obtain a profession and decided to pursue a career in America. He determined the perfect place would be with the Quakers in Pennsylvania, and his family insisted he bring Arthur, his older brother, so he wouldn't be alone in the new world.

With the signing of the Treaty of 1784, the land including the north and west of the Allegheny River was no longer claimed by the Six Nations Tribe.

It was surveyed, broken up into 400-acre tracts and offered for sale to settlers. In 1792, Patrick and Arthur began traveling west to the much-talked-about French Creek country.

They claimed their land and build rudimentary shacks, then traveled back to pick up their wives and families.

Patrick's original house probably was built in 1796 but burned down in 1802 and another, the one still standing, was built immediately.

The square logs in the McGill house are about 12 inches thick and chinked with clay mortar. The logs are dovetailed at the corners. The house was erected on a creek-stone foundation with a center chimney of stone.

McGill House a Landmark in Saegertown

By: Anne Stewart

Meadville Tribune Staff Writer

Submitted by Scott McGill

"The most ancient dwelling in the historic valley of French Creek" still is standing on Main Street, Saegertown, the Patrick McGill house built in 1802.

The fireplace opening into each room large enough to take in four-foot wood. A kitchen and bath have been added on the first floor and a bedroom to the half story. Originally there were three rooms down and one upstairs.

Patrick McGill and his brother Arthur were among the Scottish-Irish emigrants from northern Ireland to this country in the late 18th century. According to "The McGills," written by Capt. Augustus McGill, Patrick's grandson, in 1910, the brothers were with Washington at Brandywine and Valley Forge.

Hearing favorable accounts of the French Creek country, they paddle and pled their way up the Allegheny River and then north on French Creek in the fall of 1792. Arthur claimed land and built his shack between Woodcock Creek and French Creek at a site three miles north of David Mead's settlement.

Patrick took claim to a tract north of his brother's and hired someone to clear a half-acre of it and to build a cabin ready for the return of Patrick with his family, left behind in Northumberland County (PA). Patrick and his wife, the former Anna Maria Baird, also Scotch-Irish, and infant son John arrived on the banks of French Creek in 1796 and moved into their first log cabin, shingled with clapboards.

This cabin burned down in 1802 but [was re-built immediately]. Further description from Capt. McGill: "Great stone hearths were laid even with the floors, and iron cranes, secured in the masonry, swung back and forth laden with hooks, kettles and pots . . . The floors were laid with wide matched pine flooring . . . Containing many sound pine knots.

"To the north side a cellar was built, over which was a lien one story high and wide enough to fur-

nish a kitchen and bedroom. On the front, facing south, was a porch extending the whole length of the building . . . A spring bubbled up strong and pure from the bank of the creek . . . When this ceased to be effective, a well was dug in front of the porch.

"When an excavation was made (in later years), for a sidewalk, the ashes and burned stone foundations of the original cabin built in 1796 were unearthed, fixing the exact location which was directly in front of the present building.

"It was the home of hospitality . . . Nor was the door ever closed to the wayfarer, be he white, black or red . . . Men and women have been born, lived their allotted time and died, but the old house remains a monument to the crude handicraft of a dead century."

The McGills, according to Capt. McGill, secured their rights to title of their land before [others] got their clutches on most of the property in the area. Patrick McGill established the first school at Alden's Mills, where Saegertown now stands. The academy was "purely a beneficence on the part of Maj. Roger Alden and Patrick McGill for the benefit of those who were otherwise deprived of all chances of schooling"

