

NEWPORT PARK SITE HALLOWED BY HERO'S GRAVE

By John H. Breiel

Somewhere on the site of the old Newport Barracks lie the remains of a once gallant soldier.

The grave is lost. The barracks are gone. But the little plot of ground at the junction of the Ohio and Licking Rivers is forever hallowed as the final resting place of a great Kentuckian, Capt. Victor McCracken.

Decoration Day seems a fitting time to recall this veteran, who trooped the wilderness with Gen. George Rogers Clark, and whose last earthly wish was "only to be buried in the soil of Kentucky."

While discussing the history of Newport Barracks, now the site of the Newport City Park, Col. Arthur J. Daly, former Newport city solicitor, who has made an exhaustive study of pioneer days in northern Kentucky, pointed out the interesting story of Capt. McCracken's "vision."

In 1781, according to manuscripts

quoted by Col. Daly, Gen. Clark and a detachment of 1500 men paused at the city park site before campaigning against the Shawnee Indian villages in Ohio, then uninhabited by white men.

The site, said always to have been a favorite meeting place for both Indians and whites, was where Gen. Clark met his pioneer guides, headed by Simon Kenton. Capt. McCracken was a member of Clark's command.

Leaving the encampment in Kentucky, Clark's army pushed north-eastward thru Ohio to the heart of the Shawnee country. Many successful forays against the hostile Indian towns, then friendly to the British, were conducted. It was during one of these forays that Capt. McCracken was mortally wounded.

During the long trek back, Capt. McCracken was borne on a litter. "His stout heart," Simon Kenton told one of his later biographers,

"held out for one hope—a burial in Kentucky."

Kenton related how Clark's little command, weary from the rigorous campaign, halted one evening on the hills opposite Kentucky where Cincinnati now stands.

It was toward sunset, Kenton said, and McCracken, knowing he was about to die, called several of his comrades to him and related his "vision."

Pointing across the Ohio River to Kentucky, McCracken said he saw there what would be a great state 50 years hence. Sketching the strategic points in the location where they had camped before starting on their campaign—McCracken's last—he told them that a half century would see that point of great military importance to the nation which then was fighting for its independence. He predicted cities would be built around that spot, traders would come there to settle in great numbers and the ground where he had lived to be buried would be the focal point of many trails

After sundown he died and the next morning his corpse was taken across the river and laid to rest in the place where it now remains—in Kentucky.

Kenton said Clarke's entire command was drawn up in a hollow square around the place of burial. After the body was laid away each man made a solemn pact to return to the same spot 50 years later to see what of Capt. McCracken's vision had come true.

Kenton was speaking with Judge John H. James at his home near Urbana, O., just a few days before the reunion of Clark's men was to have taken place around the grave, almost forgotten even then, of Capt. McCracken. He told Judge James he had been in communication with as many of the survivors of Clark's army as he could find. Only 100 were to be located, he said, and of that number only 15 were able to make plans to revisit the spot. Judge James does not say whether or not the reunion was held.

Newport, Covington and Cincinnati today will attest the truth of the soldier's "vision."

His only error was in time, for it was just exactly 25 years after his death that the United States established the Newport Barracks, which at one time was military headquarters for the entire southern district.

Headquarters were established at the barracks due to a clause in the Constitution which stated they must be located on ground which belonged, in title and in fact, to the government. Newport Barracks was the only post owned exclusively by the United States south of the Ohio River.

The barracks were retained by the government from 1806 until the construction of Ft. Thomas, just before the Spanish-American War. They were not general headquarters all that time, but always were an important link in Uncle Sam's military organization.

Robert E. Lee visited the post during their army careers. Lee came on a famous court-martial case while he still was serving in the U. S. army.

The occasion of his visit was the occasion of the classical remark about Newport hospitality when he said "We all went to the colonel's home and had a good drink of Bourbon."

The ground for the barracks was given the government by Gen. James Taylor out of the land grant he received as a bounty for his services during the Revolutionary War. Approximately 5½ acres were in the original plot. Smaller plots were added later thru purchase.

Altho the government has given the ground to the city of Newport to be used forever as a park, they have retained, according to war records, the right to reclaim it at any time for military purposes. Perhaps they, too, are not unmindful of the