

# KK's Kin Chronicles

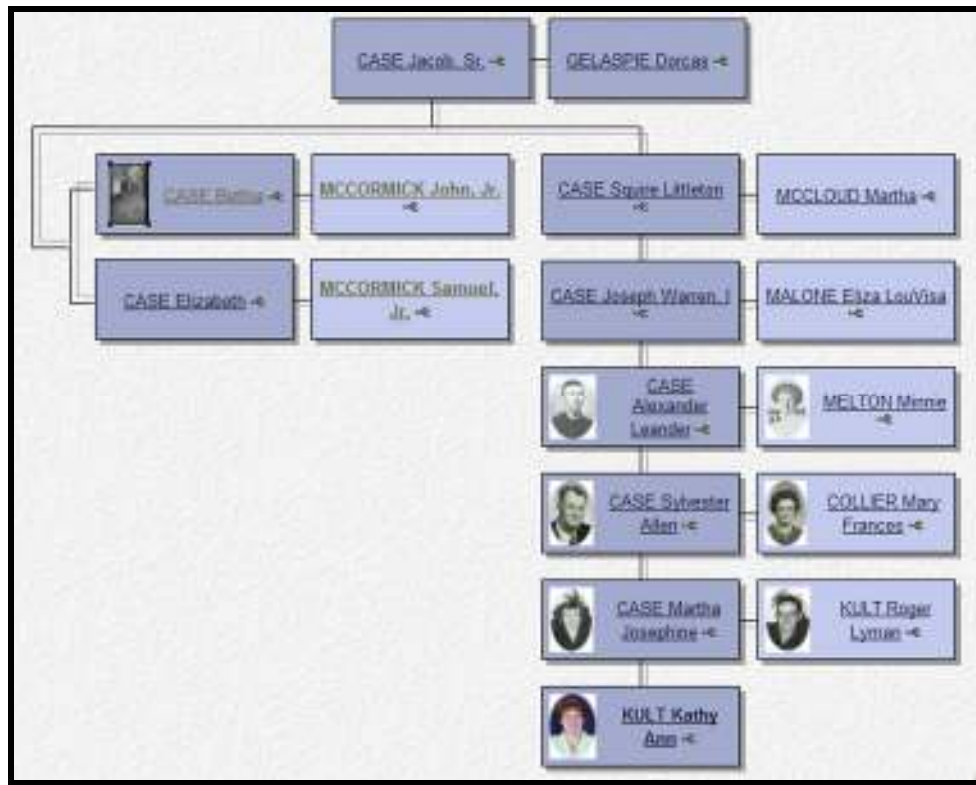


By Kathy Kult

## Hoosier\* Kin...?

### *Family Members Who Were the First Pioneers in Indianapolis*

The Case side of our family goes back to the Colonial era when America was just beginning. Our forefathers fought for our country and our freedom by participating in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and many skirmishes with the Native Indians. Some of them were even in more than one war.



### ■ Jacob Case, Sr.

My 4<sup>th</sup> great-grandfather, **Jacob Case, Sr.**, was one of those forefathers who fought for our freedom. He was born in Bedford County, Pennsylvania in 1747, and when he was 29 years old, he enlisted as a soldier in the Revolutionary War in Virginia in 1776. He married and had two children before he married my 4<sup>th</sup> great-grandmother, **Dorcas Gelaspie**, on July 24, 1787 in Jefferson County, Kentucky. Dorcas was 27 and Jacob was 40 when they married.

Jacob and Dorcas had 12 children during their lifetime. They moved from Kentucky to Butler County, Ohio in the early 1800s, and then later moved to Indiana sometime before 1816.

Their last child, my 3<sup>rd</sup> great-grandfather, ***Squire Littleton Case***, was born on January 3, 1816. Mind you, Jacob was 69 years of age and Dorcas was 56 when they had Squire!! Amazing! And with 11 older siblings, could you imagine what the hand-me-downs looked like by the time little Squire got them?

But this story isn't about Squire. It's about two of his older sisters, Bethia and Elizabeth Case. They married two Scottish brothers, John and Samuel McCormick, and together they helped to pioneer the wild frontier of America. These two families (along with another brother, James McCormick, and his family) lived quite the life... they were true pioneers, in every sense of the word. They traveled by covered wagon, they dealt with the Indians, and most predominantly, they were instrumental in founding the state capital of Indiana.

## ■ John Jr. and Bethia (Case) McCormick

John McCormick Jr. was the fourth child of John and Catherine McCormick, and was born in Pennsylvania on Sept. 15, 1791. He later came to Ohio with his parents and married Bethia Case of Hamilton, Ohio, on July 21, 1810.<sup>6</sup> A short time after their marriage the second war with Great Britain was declared in 1812, and like his father who enlisted three separate times for the Revolutionary War before him, John Jr. took up arms in defense of his country.

### ***Indian Warfare***

John Jr. had to leave his young wife, Bethia, in Hamilton, Ohio when he enlisted in the War of 1812. After peace was declared, John and Bethia left Ohio and moved to a fort in Connersville, Indiana, which was near his father's homestead. John McCormick was the first man to leave the fort at Connersville, and build a house for a residence, about the year 1813. They remained there until the Treaty of St. Mary's was signed with the Indians in 1818 under a big sycamore tree in Greenville, Ohio. This treaty provided a strip of land through central Ohio and Indiana to the Government, which was called the "New Purchase".

### ***Westward Ho!***

On February 16, 1820, the McCormick families decided to strike out for a new site Westward, so John, Bethia, and their seven children (Jacob, Katherine, John Wesley, Lavina and Tabitha (4-year old twins), William Henry Harrison (20 months), and Mary Ann (4 months)) all piled into the wagon. John's two brothers, Samuel (who married Bethia's sister, Elizabeth Case) and James, and nine to twelve other employed men, went along with them on the journey.

They cut through the virgin forest, traveling by a Conestoga wagon (see photo) drawn by oxen. They started their journey in February, so they



*A Conestoga wagon used by pioneers in the 1700-1800s. Notice there is no buckboard in front of the wagon for the driver to sit – he either sat on a horse, walked along side, or used the “lazy board” located where the man is sitting on the side of the wagon.*

placed the wagon on sled runners for winter travel. Though the distance was only about sixty miles, the journey took them eight days because they had to blaze the trail.

They arrived on the banks of the White River near Fall Creek, on February 26, 1820. White River was very high at this time, so John decided not to attempt fording it, but to stop and make camp on the east bank, near where the old National Bridge was afterward erected. Since there was plenty of fish and game for food, they decided to permanently settle at this spot.

Immediately after they arrived, the McCormicks along with the hired men set to work felling trees, which were to be used in building the McCormick's double cabin. They erected the cabin quickly; for by the first nightfall, they had everything done except for the roof. The wagons were used for shelter and protection until the cabin was completed and ready to be occupied.

Huge campfires were kept burning to make it as comfortable as possible for Bethia and the seven children. On the second day of their arrival, John and Bethia's twin daughters, Tabitha and Lavina, celebrated their fourth birthday.

The new cabin had two square rooms, each of them eighteen square feet. They were separated by a passage eight to ten feet wide. The outside of the cabin was often decorated with coon, bear and frequently deer skins stretched to dry for making into breeches for the menfolk.

After the cabin was completed, the two brothers of John McCormick and the nine hired men returned to Connersville, leaving John and his family with no other neighbors except the Indians, and they frequently made the statement in later years that they did not see the face of a single white person until the return of James McCormick and the rest of his family.

### *Indian Neighbors*

James quickly returned with his family and supplies on March 7, 1820. James and his wife, Patsy, and their small baby girl lived in one side of the double cabin while John and Bethia and their seven children lived on the other side of the cabin. Indians were very much in the neighborhood, and the nearest white settlement was on the bluffs of the river near what is now Waverly.

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***'He eat,' said the Indian.  
'You put those victuals right  
back,' said Patsy. She looked  
at him so fierce the Indian  
put them back.***

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An Indian chief by the name of "Johnny Quake" would come by canoe on the White River and stop to visit the camp. Other bold Indians would walk into the McCormick cabin without knocking, and would inspect and handle everything in the place. They were friendly as a rule, but all too curious. One once opened a chest in

which they kept the family linens, including piles of handkerchiefs. He took out every article and looking at the pile of handkerchiefs, grunted 'Heap bunch.' One opened their food cupboard, took out the cooked victuals (as they called food) and placed them on the table. 'He eat,' said the Indian. 'You put those victuals right back,' said Patsy, James' wife. She looked at him so fierce the Indian put them back.<sup>2</sup>

### *Another Indian Causes Trouble for the McCormick Women*

The McCormick cabin was a lonely spot for a time until the Harding and Pogue families came and built their cabin nearby, after which the men of all families interchanged work and gave more security from the Indians, who were a source of alarm to the unprotected women. On one occasion, while the McCormick women were alone, a brave appearing Indian invaded the McCormick cabin, but fortunately one of the robust Harding men

was working on their place nearby and heard the women's cries. He gave the intruder an unexpected reception, shaking him almost insensible and later watched him slouching down toward the river bottom. On the following day, out in the clearing, the Indian's dead body was found by the men, who naturally concluded that the drubbing had caused his death, and fearing Indian revenge, for the three nights afterward the families slept in fear of revenge by the Indians. No attack came however, and some time afterward on meeting a peaceable Indian, John McCormick asked him if he knew there was a dead Indian down in the clearing and received the reply "bad Indian fight and got killed."

### ***The Stare-Down***

On one occasion, an Indian came into the cabin and stood and stared at James McCormick without saying a word. James looked him straight in the eye, but did not dare move. He knew that if he made a motion the Indian would kill him. After what seemed like an age, the Indian turned and walked out of the house and paddled off in the canoe. 'Him bad Indian.' said the chief to whom James told the incident; 'you move, he kill you.' Later this bad Indian was killed and ceased to bother the white settlers.

### ***The Many Duties of a Pioneer***

John was very expert with a gig, and could fill a canoe with the most choice of fish in a few hours. He frequently giggered the inferior kinds to feed to his hogs.

Patsy and Bethia had a soap kettle and made soap right on what was to become Washington Street. They also sometimes ferried people across the White River by canoe.



***Bethia (Case) McCormick,  
wife of John McCormick, Jr.***

### ***Bethia: The Story Teller***

Bethia McCormick is also remembered well by the younger members of the family as the champion story teller of the McCormicks. She used to sit by the hour and tell of the hardships of the early pioneers and their struggles in making homes, also the many troubles the white settlers had with the Indians. There are many people who have heard from her own lips the story of the removal to the "New Purchase" as she told it, and she always placed particular emphasis upon the fact that she was the first white woman to tread its soil.

Here's a story told by Bethia that's been handed down through generations:

"At first we had to paddle down the river to Spencer Town to buy salt, wheat, and cornmeal. Travelers passed through and some stayed. The Indians called the river the musical name... "Wa-Ma-Ca-Me-Ca" name meaning, pure clean water. I had a hired girl to help me with the meals and general housework. John hunted and fished and managed the business.

There were a few bad Indians, but having experiences in Ohio and Fort Connersville we were determined not to make any trouble with them, nor give them excuses to molest us. The woods were full of them. Their chief was called Johnny Quake and he could speak some English. He was a nice old Indian and never favored the bad ones and told us "Don't be afraid to drive the bad ones away", and we did except a couple of times."

“One time, young William Henry Harrison was nearly killed by a bad Indian. He was asleep in his cradle, the men folk had gone to the field, and we were alone in the cabin. In the event the Indians bothered us, all I had to do was to blow a horn and the men would come running back. I was ironing when suddenly I looked up and there was a drunken Indian standing in the doorway. I went to get the horn but it was not there where we kept it. He was yelling ‘Wisk-Wisk’, in those days everybody kept the red juice [whiskey], and I told him ‘no!’ because he was already drunk and could hardly stand up. Seeing the baby, he staggered over to the cradle and held up his tomahawk and said ‘chop-chop’ if I didn't give him some of that fire water. Frightened, I gave him some, but before he got away the men came home and what a wolluping that Indian got! He was knocked out and when he came to, he was told to skin out and never come back. We never saw him again.”

### ***Big Bottle***

This next story, as recounted by John H.B. Nowland in his *Early History of the New Purchase*, tells how Bethia was nearly killed by an Indian named “Big Bottle”, though if Bethia ever referred to it, it was in a very modest manner.

"One bright, sunny Sunday morning, about the middle of March 1821," says John H.B. Nowland, "my father and I took a walk to the river. We were within about fifty yards of the house of John McCormick, when we suddenly heard cries of ‘Help, Murder!’ coming from the house. We ran to the cabin, and by the time we got there several men had arrived. A well-known Indian from the Delaware tribe known as Big Bottle [from the fact that he generally carried very large bottle which was hung from his belt], had come to the opposite bank of the river, and demanded to be brought over by canoe. Mr. McCormick not being at home, Bethia refused to take the canoe over for him, knowing that he wanted whiskey, and when drinking was a very dangerous man. He set his gun down against a tree, and plunged into the river and swam over. When my father and I reached the house, Big Bottle was ascending the bank, tomahawk in hand, preparing to hack his way through the door to the cabin, which Bethia had barricaded. When Big Bottle caught sight of the several men who were running to see what the trouble was about, he desisted from his intention, and told the men that he only wished to ‘scare white squaw.’ He was escorted back to the other side of the river in the canoe, and admonished that if he attempted to scare the white squaw again, Bethia’s husband would kill him. This rather irritated him and he flourished his scalping-knife towards Bethia’s direction and gestured signs from her head toward his belt that he would take her scalp, but he never did -- as she carried it until her death.”<sup>2, 7</sup>

### ***The Birth of a Capital***

John McCormick also kept the first tavern in the place, and in May 1820, entertained the state commissioners a part of the time when they were there for the purpose of selecting a site for the seat of government. Bethia and Patsy McCormick made dinners for them, primarily of venison.

These men stayed at the McCormick cabin until Jun 7, 1820, when the State Capital was formed. An engineer who laid out the plans for the design of the capital stayed with the McCormicks to do his work. The capital was platted "mile square".

When it came time to name the capital, John's wife Bethia helped to muster courage at the special session of Indiana General Assembly. She got up on the platform and said..."We and the Pogues were the first settlers in this part of the state. I know you must think I'm a little bragger indeed to be standing here in front of you, I didn't want to, but I want you very much to consider the name ‘Indianapolis’ as the Government Seat." It was at that moment that Indianapolis was established as the State Capital of Indiana.

## *Building the City*

The McCormick men helped to clear the ground where the Statehouse now stands. They were paid \$1 per day for their work.

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### *The Indians called Indianapolis “Chan-tun-oon-gi”, meaning “Make A Noise Place”<sup>8</sup>*

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John and James McCormick and their families lived on the banks of White River for two years, and then moved about four miles up the river, on the south edge of Washington township. They bought government land, and built on the east bank, almost directly west of the present site of the Country Club. There John McCormack built the first saw mill in the county, and some of the timbers of the old dam can yet be seen at low watermark. John had also become one of the first three county commissioners of Marion County, and he and Bethia were members of the Baptist Church. The brothers continued to live together and operate the mill until James moved to Rush County in 1824, after which John ran it until his death on August 25, 1825. John was buried in Greenlawn Cemetery, Indianapolis.



*McCormick's Rock  
White River State Park, Indianapolis, Indiana*



### *Life Goes On...*

Bethia was also a member of the Baptist church in her earlier years, but later united with the Christian Church. After her husband's death, Bethia McCormick married John King, by whom she had four children, and he pre-deceased her. She continued to live near the bluffs until after the close of the Civil war, when she moved to Arcadia, Indiana, to live with her twin daughters until her death on January 28, 1847. She is buried in Brethren Cemetery in Arcadia in Hamilton County, Indiana.

There are relatives of the McCormicks in Indiana still today. McCormick's Rock commemorates the site of John McCormick's first cabin as the first settler of Indianapolis on the east bank of the White River in Indianapolis.

## ■ Samuel and Elizabeth (Case) McCormick

Samuel, an older brother of John McCormick, was born in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. He moved with his parents when he was about 6 years old to Butler County, Ohio, Then moved to Preble County, Ohio where he married Elizabeth Case and in 1812 they moved to Connorsville, Fayette County, Indiana. Then Indian trouble started and they moved back to Ohio for one year, after that they went back to Connorsville where Samuel built a Fort. In the fall of 1820, Samuel cleared 15 acres of the public square in Indianapolis, Indiana. In 1827, he built the first brick home in Indianapolis on the bank of the White River near the Emrickville bridge. Now known as 16th Street and White River. In 1836 he moved to Hendricks County, Indiana. He moved to Cartersburg, Indiana in 1864. He returned to the family farm in 1866 where he died in June, 1867.



*The First Brick Home in Indianapolis  
Built by Samuel McCormick*

The McCormick burying ground is on a part of the family's old farm about a mile and a quarter from Cartersburg Springs. Here Samuel, James and the most of the McCormicks are buried, except for John & Bethia McCormick.



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\* A "**Hoosier**" is a native of the state of Indiana. In colonial America, the terms "cracker" and "hoosier" were widely used to refer to white farmers who did not own slaves or large plantations. However, the term "Hoosier" is commonly accepted and employed at all levels of discourse by people from Indiana themselves, and is considered neither derogatory nor informal when used to describe people from Indiana. Deriving from common usage, "Hoosiers" is the nickname for Indiana University athletic teams, and the title of an award-winning 1986 movie starring Gene Hackman, about an Indiana high school basketball team.

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