

# Captain Michael McGuire Memorial Park Dedicated in Loretto, PA

## Blanche McGuire

On August 21, 2015, St. Francis University and the Borough of Loretto dedicated a newly created public park in honor of Captain Michael McGuire, first settler in the region and religious benefactor.

More than two centuries ago, Captain Michael McGuire, a Catholic Revolutionary War veteran from Maryland, led a small band of family and friends to McGuire's Settlement located in what is today Cambria County. Before his death in 1793, McGuire set aside land for the benefit of resident clergy. Bishop John Carroll later gave a young Prince Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin permission to "take possession of the land donated by Captain McGuire," a decision that set the stage for a strong and vibrant Catholic settlement in Loretto. Today Loretto is home to St. Francis University, the Franciscan Friars of the Third Order Regular, a Carmelite Monastery, and the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel.

More than 260 guests attended the park dedication, many of them McGuire descendants (some shown below) who came from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland and Virginia to honor Captain McGuire and his family. The crowd also included many people descended from other early pioneers in McGuire's Settlement.

One McGuire descendant, Michael McGuire of Cresson, composed an original rollicking ballad about Captain Michael McGuire, his great-great-great-grandfather. McGuire and his son, Aaron, sang the ballad during the dedication ceremony. In this song and in earlier remarks, McGuire paid tribute to Captain Mike, his "saintly wife, Rachel" and to the faith that sustained his ancestors. He emphasized how much this heritage is needed in today's climate of relativism and indifference to religion. Said McGuire "We need to think for the future as well as the past. The Park is a symbol of good values, morals and hard work."

McGuire's sister, Sister Margie McGuire of the Carmelite Community of the Word, echoed these sentiments. "I grew up knowing and cherishing the McGuire family history. The pioneers cherished their faith and family and wanted their children to grow up in an environment that fostered these values."

The dedication ceremonies began with remarks by Mayor David Eckenrode of Loretto. Rev. Joseph Lehman, T.O.R., Vice President for Mission Integration at St. Francis University, gave the opening

prayer in which he too paid tribute to the early pioneers who were "bold in their dreams and blessed us their descendants with a great legacy." Rev. Malachi Van Tassel, T.O.R., President of St. Francis University, delivered the welcoming address. Rev. Malachi paid tribute to the close ties between the University and Loretto that resulted in a "natural, sustainable and inviting outdoor space...that will provide residents, students and visitors recreational and learning opportunities."

McGuire Memorial Park is the result of a partnership that began in 2011 between St. Francis University and Loretto Borough. Funding for the park was provided by a grant from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Community Conservation Partnerships Program as well as donations from community partners and others including members of the McGuire family.

The first community park in Loretto, McGuire Memorial Park, was designed to promote health and fitness and to celebrate Loretto's history and cultural heritage. It is an environmentally friendly space that provides recreation and education for area residents, visitors, and students. It includes a walking path, many plants native to Pennsylvania such as red maples and tulip trees, a playground, an outdoor classroom, picnic facilities, grills, bike racks, a bird blind, and boardwalks that lead into the natural wetlands located on the grounds.

The park features several historical signs providing background on Captain McGuire, Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin (Servant of God), the Franciscan Friars who founded Saint Francis Academy, and Loretto resident and steel magnate, Charles Schwab. Other signs provide lyrics for the Ballad of Captain Michael McGuire and depictions of pioneer life from American artist, Nat Youngblood.

The park's logo, designed by Shane Adams, depicts the hunting cabin that Captain McGuire built in this region in the late 1760s.

Ceremony attendees enjoyed a splendid ox roast supper, courtesy of the Borough of Loretto. "We'll do this every year, folks!" promised Mayor Eckenrode. Clearly the Park's legacy is just beginning.

Blanche McGuire is also a descendant of Captain Michael McGuire. In 1975-1976 she researched and documented the life of Captain McGuire for the Loretto, PA Bicentennial Committee.



**McGuire descendants with St. Francis University President, Rev. Malachi Van Tassel**

Source: St. Francis University