

Pennsylvania Catholic Pioneer To Be Honored with Memorial Park

Blanche McGuire

Capt. Michael McGuire, a Revolutionary War veteran and the first settler in Northern Cambria County near Loretto, PA, donated a sizable tract of land to the Catholic Church in the early 1790s. Today, St. Francis University in Loretto, is returning the favor by creating a community memorial park on university land in honor of McGuire.

Father Gabriel Zeis, T.O.R., president of Saint Francis University, put the park into perspective when he said, "The park is named in honor of the founding father of Loretto, Capt. Michael McGuire. Our park will be dedicated to his memory and to the challenge for all of us to be leaders: spiritually, civically, environmentally and physically."

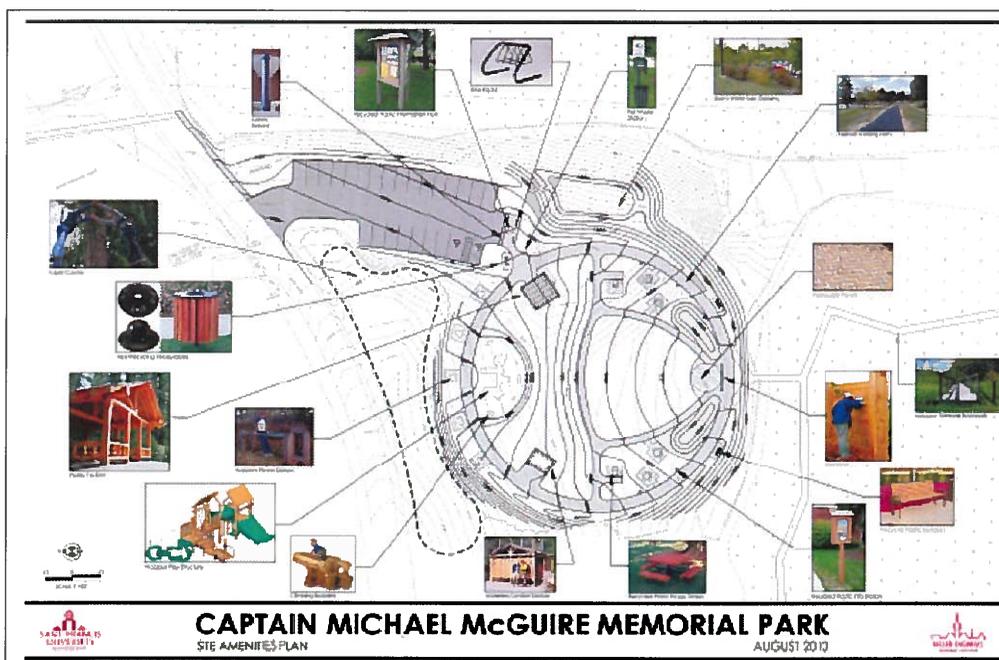
McGuire's connection to the Church was long established. His father settled on the Maryland/Pennsylvania border before 1740, an area popular with Catholics who fled to the frontier to escape anti-Catholic laws in Maryland. Jesuit missionaries from Conewago, Pa. administered the sacraments to these

settlers and kept the faith alive in the wilderness. During these troubled times, McGuire's family publicly avowed their Catholic faith. Legal documents in 1758 refer to his father as a "Papist" liable for higher taxes.

For colonial Catholics like the McGuires, the Revolution promised freedom from British anti-Catholic laws. During the Revolution, McGuire captained a company of Frederick County, Md. militia that served under Gen. George Washington in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and was reportedly present at Yorktown.

After the war, Captain McGuire fulfilled a long time goal and moved his family, relatives and friends to the vicinity of Loretto, Pa. in 1788.

A noted hunter who loved the wilderness, Capt. McGuire had hunted in the area since the 1760s. En route to the Alleghenies, the McGuires stopped to worship at the recently built Basilica of the Sacred



**“The Captain Michael McGuire Park is a
tribute to McGuire and all the early
Catholics who held true to their faith [...]”**

Heart in Conewago. The Catholic residents of the newly formed McGuire’s Settlement yearned for the services of the Church.

To that end, McGuire set aside land for a graveyard, church and support of a resident priest. Bishop John Carroll, the first U.S. Catholic bishop, described the gift as follows, “Capn Michael Maguire, living on the deck (slope) of Alligany, [...] where there are a good many Catholicks, offers 200 acres of very good land and a good horse to a priest, & will himself, subscribe (funds per year).” *

Father Felix Brosius, a visiting priest, later consecrated the donated land. When Captain McGuire died in 1793, he was the first person interred in the cemetery. McGuire’s gift to the Church was one of a series of events that established Loretto as an early center of Catholicity in Western Pennsylvania. In 1795, Prince Demetrius Gallitzin, a Russian prince and newly ordained priest, came to McGuire’s Settlement on a sick call and was shown the donated land. By 1799, Bishop John Carroll approved Prince Demetrius Gallitzin’s request to take possession of McGuire’s gift and reside as pastor.

Gallitzin renamed McGuire’s Settlement ‘Loretto,’ supervised the construction of St. Michael’s Church (reportedly named in honor of Captain McGuire) and spent his life ministering

to his beloved flock of pioneer Catholics. Captain McGuire’s sons, Luke and Richard, served as Church wardens and his widow Rachel’s will called Gallitzin her ‘dearly beloved friend.’ Known as the ‘Apostle of the Alleghenies,’ Gallitzin is now a candidate for beatification.

The Captain Michael McGuire Memorial Park is a tribute to McGuire and all the early Catholics who held true to their faith in times of difficulty and is a reminder that Catholics today must meet similar challenges.

McGuire Park will provide recreation and education for area residents, visitors, and students. It will include a playground, an amphitheater, picnic facilities, a low-ropes course, several workout stations, a bird blind, and boardwalks that lead into the natural wetlands located on the grounds. Saint Francis University is presently raising funds for the Park’s construction. Members interested in supporting this initiative can send a donation to the Capt. Michael McGuire Memorial Park Fund at St. Francis University.

**Hanley, Thomas O’Brien, S.J. The John Carroll Papers, Volume 2. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press., 1976.*

Special Note: Blanche McGuire is a descendant of Capt. Michael McGuire.