

Frank McKearn

Farmer, Countryman, Civic Servant



Left to right: Richard, Catherine, Frank, Gene, Bessie and Dorothy in 1932

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Farmer, Countryman, Civic Servant

Frank McKearn was born on January 29th, 1885 in Durand, IL (Laona Township). He was the son of Michael and Mary Dolan McKearn. Frank was the second oldest of Mike and Mary's ten children. The oldest was Alford(b. 1883) whom Frank would work side by side with his entire life. Following Frank was Margaret(b.1886) Rose(b. 1888), Elizabeth(b.1890), Thomas(b. 1892), William(b.1893), Joseph(b.1895) Emma(b. 1898) and Louisa who died as an infant. Mike and Mary farmed on land in Laona Township near her parent's farm. They lived in a house at Baker and Wheeler Roads. Throughout their time in Laona Township Mike and Mary bought and sold several parcels of land which was a prelude to Mike's later Beloit dealings as an investor and speculator.

The year 1904 proves to be a difficult year for Mike, Mary and all the Dolan Clan as on February 1st, her 35-year-old Brother John Dolan dies of spinal meningitis. Later that year on November 10th they lose Mary's father John at age 75. These events lead Mike and Mary to move their family to the bustling Beloit area which has growing industry and a city population now exceeding more than 10,000 people. Mike and Mary buy 120 acres out on the River Road in the Town of Beloit. The farm sits atop a hill along the River Road with scenic views of the Rock River and access to a stopping station for the new Rockford and Interurban Railway that runs between the Rock River and the River Road

Mike finds the perfect house for his family, but it was 4 miles south of the farm in the City of Beloit at the northeast corner of Prospect and Public Streets. This location would later become the home for the Presbyterian Church. The stately home belonged to John Pierron, a native of France and a well-known, respected builder in the Greater Beloit area. Mike was getting his start in the house moving business and by nightfall on October 16, 1905 he had moved the huge 16 room 3 story home north and east to the corner of Bushnell and Church street, right where the First Congregational Church sits today. He quit for the day because the phone company's wires

were blocking the way but at 10:30 that evening the phone company served an injunction on him to halt any further moving. The house sat in the street for 10 more days until court convened and a judgement was handed down. Mike had to remove the tower on the house and pay the phone company \$25.00 for raising the lines. The house was then moved to a site very near the current home of Tim and Deb McKearn at 2815 Riverside Drive. At the time it was finally placed on its new foundation the home would be the 6th house from the City of Beloit. Mike and Mary lived in their new home for about five years at which time Mike and Mary and their six youngest children moved to a large home at 822 Fourth street in the city of Beloit. Frank and his older brother Alford remained in the old home and farmed the land. By that time, Alford had married Anna Clark and their baby son John had been born.



The Pierron house was located at the northeast corner of Public and Prospect Streets. It was bought by Mike McKearn in 1905 and moved to what is 2815 Riverside. The home was purchased by Frank McKearn and burned down in 1914.

Fire on The Road



On February 25, 1913 the Beloit Daily News carried a front-page story, “Fire Destroys Fine River Road Home in Morning.” The article announces, “The old Pierron house, occupied by Frank McKearn, burns to ground. Firemen can do nothing. Fire originating in the attic in the south wing of the fine 16 room home of Frank McKearn on the River Road, leveled the beautiful home to the ground at an early hour this morning. The house was occupied by John McKearn and family, and the owner of the house, Frank McKearn, made his home with his brother and family.”

The Rockford and Interurban railway operated from 1902 till 1929. The rail line had a history of financial instability and operated through many reorganizations and sales. The tracks for the Interurban ran alongside the River Road in Beloit Township crossing the Rock River in the city of Beloit. The Interurban had a stop near the McKearn home on the River Road. The Beloit Daily News article tells us that on the morning of the fire at the McKearn home, the conductor of the early morning run of the Interurban noticed smoke billowing out of the top of the third floor of the home. He also noticed that there didn’t appear to be anyone present in the yard. Fearing that the family was unaware of the fire, the conductor stopped the train, ran up the hill to the house and upon entering the back door of the home found the family gathered in the kitchen eating breakfast, unaware that the third floor was ablaze. Efforts were made to fight the fire including a heroic effort by Frank who entered the smoke-filled attic with buckets of water but the fire prevailed. The only thing left standing were the two fireplaces.

The Family Grows

Frank married his wife Bridget Fitzpatrick (Bessie) in St. Thomas Catholic Church on June 4th, 1913. Father Ward, a well-known local temperance leader presided over the ceremony. A nice write-up that appeared in the Beloit Daily News mentioned that “The bride’s aunt and uncle gave them \$100.00 in gold and the groom’s parents gave them \$50.00 in gold.” After a brief honeymoon that included a stay at Milwaukee’s Pfister Hotel and travels to Northern Wisconsin, Frank and Bessie settled into their new farmhouse at 2815 Riverside. Years later Bessie would say “And wouldn’t you know, the varnish wasn’t even dry, the house was that new.” The new house sat on a hill overlooking the River Road with an expansive view of the Rock River. The scenic vantage point only 82 years earlier would have provided a front row view of the Blackhawk War as it played out along the banks of the Rock River.

The home consisted of three bedrooms and a sewing room on the second floor. The first floor offered a kitchen, formal dining room and a living room. The living room featured oak pillars and was separated from the dining room by large sliding pocket doors. Like many homes built at this time, there was no plumbing and thus no indoor bathrooms or running water.

Bessie, came to the US from the Gort district of County Galway, in Ireland at the age of 16. She traveled alone by ship in steerage and arrived in New York. Bessie was sponsored by an aunt and uncle and owed them a debt to cover her travel expenses. This resulted in her working for the aunt and uncle essentially as an “indentured servant”. Her brother John and sister Catherine both lived out their lives in the Chicago area and were part of a large Fitzpatrick clan in that city. Bessie was a very proper woman and ruled her home with an iron fist. Farm life required no less. She was fond of telling her grandchildren, “I never repeat myself” implying it would be a good idea to pay attention to her the first time she said something. She worked for many years at Chesters Department Store in downtown Beloit. Bessie was a staunch Catholic who made prayer a part of her daily life.

It's now 1919 and Frank and Bessie have been married for 5 years. With no children yet running around on the River Road it doesn't look like children are in their future. A tragedy in the extended McKearn family will change their family structure in ways Frank and Bessie could not have possibly imagined.

Frank's father Mike has an older brother named Richard; he is Mike's senior by two years. Richard marries Maria Cunningham later in life and they have a large family. Richard is 26 years older than Maria and their youngest of 8 children, Richard junior is born in 1918. Maria, 38 years old, passes away early in 1919 due to complications from childbirth. Maria's passing ushers in a challenging chapter in family history. Richard known as "Daddy Rich" is now 64 years old and charged with raising the 8 children on his own, a task that he early on realizes is unsustainable. Richard and his children live in Minnesota. He packs up the children in a covered wagon and heads back to Beloit. The children would be put up for adoption, most being raised in separate homes, some who would not meet each other again until much later in life.

Frank and Bessie, who have been living in their new farm house on the River Road since 1914 are in their late 30's and it looks like they will not be blessed with children so they agree to take in two of Daddy Rich's children, young Richard and his older sister Dorothy who is 3 years his senior. Exact dates of their adoption are not known but by all accounts, they settle in and begin to adjust to life as a family. It's said that God works in mysterious ways and the McKearns are doubly blessed when Frank and Bessie give birth to Catherine Mary in 1927 and Francis Eugene II in 1930. Francis II would be known as Gene. 1919 begins with a tragedy and the roaring 20's ends with the once childless couple completing their family with the birth of Gene.

The Great War Hits Close to Home

On April 6, 1917 The United States joins Great Britain and France by declaring war on Germany. Frank's brothers Joe, Tom, known as "Big" and Bill join the war effort in person. Joe joined Company L of the National Guard. Within a year brothers, Bill and "Big" were also in the army and on their way to France. "Big" joined the 33rd Illinois National Guard Division and Bill was assigned to the 7th Regular Army Division. US entry into the war swings the momentum and within a short time it becomes apparent that Germany will not prevail. The land war becomes a race to secure land before a settlement is reached. The fighting is brutal and intense with both sides employing trench warfare tactics. Big and Bill both saw frontline action, were severely gassed and each were awarded the Purple Heart. Youngest brother Joe was killed on August 4th, 1918 by German machine gun fire during a battle to retake the French town of Fismes. Joe, a carpenter by trade was 23 when he died. The day that Joe dies is an especially tough day for Beloit families as 8 soldiers from Beloit die. The story of Joe McKearn is illustrative of what happened during the Great War. A paper, written in the summer of 2018 by Mark and Tim McKearn to honor the 100th anniversary of the passing of Joe McKearn, is based on research done by their uncle Tom McKearn and provides a snapshot in time. An excerpt is shared here:

On July 7, 1917, young Joe McKearn and many other men from Beloit and Rhinelander, joined Company L, 127th Infantry Regiment of the National Guard's 32nd Division (Red Arrow Division). The Division, made up of men from Wisconsin and Michigan, trained in Wisconsin and Texas before shipping off for France on January 31, 1918 from Hoboken, NJ.

After arrival, and to the angry objection of the American Expeditionary Force commander, General John "Blackjack" Pershing, the 32nd Division was initially used as a replacement and labor division. The situation proved to be temporary.

On May 18, 2018 the 32nd was ordered to the front lines to relieve French troops positioned along an elaborate defensive trench network less than

20 miles from the French/Swiss border. In the six weeks that followed, the 32nd suffered 28 killed in action (KIA) and 296 wounded. Compared to other unit casualties, that area of the war was considered a “quiet sector”.

On May 27, 1918, the Germans launched the 30 Division Aisne/Marne Offensive, aimed at reaching Paris and forcing an armistice before the American troops could tip the balance in the Allies favor. The attack advanced within 30 miles of Paris. The outlook appeared grim for the Allies.

By June, the American 2nd and 3rd Divisions joined the fight and helped turn back the German advance at the battle of Belleau Woods and later, between July 15th and 22nd, with the help of seven American divisions, vicinity Chateau-Thierry, France the German offensive was halted.

The Supreme Allied Commander, General Foch began planning for a counter offensive and Pershing pledged eight American Divisions, which included the 32nd. On July 19, 1918 the 32nd Division was on trains headed towards Paris and then the front lines at Chateau Thierry. The Germans, sensing the vulnerability of their inferior positioned and weakened forces, began a systematic withdrawal on July 21, 1918.

On July 29, 1918, the 32nd Division, took over a 2-mile-wide sector. The Germans were fighting a determined rearguard action to cover the withdrawal towards Fismes and the Vesle River. Over the next six days of fierce fighting, the 32nd would advance sixteen miles and retake the town of Fismes, but at a tremendous cost of 578 men killed in action.

Company L, along with Company I (Marinette and Superior, Wisconsin), lead the 127th Infantry Regiment assault on the rainy, muddy Sunday afternoon of August 4th. As the troops moved slowly forward, light danced briefly off the muzzle of a German machine gun. Corporal Joe McKearn peered through the haze trying to see what was on his left and right. Suddenly, enemy fire poured down on him and his squad, from their front

and from both flanking ridges. They were caught in a terrible crossfire near the Chezelles farm. The field was littered with dead and wounded. It was August 4, 1918...the last day of Joe McKearn's life...He was 23 years old.

All told, eight men from Beloit lost their lives that day, including the L Company Commander, First Lieutenant Ray Dickop. Dickop was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) for his leadership and heroism on the battlefield. Two other Beloit men, Private James Hix and Private Wilford Lloyd lived to receive their DSCs. The men of the 32nd were named Les Terribles by a French General for their courageous actions during those six days.

Joe's mother, Mary McKearn, stood on the bridge over Turtle Creek and watched as the automobile convoy of Soldiers arrived from Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois. It was May 19, 1919 and most of Beloit's 21,000 turned out to welcome the return of the boys of Company L. Mary and the other Gold Star mothers began handing red roses to the returning veterans. A parade formed and the men marched up Grand Avenue to the city park as bands played and flower girls scattered blossoms in the path of the returning heroes. Mary had sent three sons to war but only two came back. Beloit lost a total of sixty-four in the Great War.

Five days before Christmas in 1920, Mary McKearn died of pneumonia following surgery. She was laid to rest in Beloit's Calvary Cemetery.

On June 11, 1921, Corporal Joseph Andrew McKearn's body rested in a flag draped casket in Saint Thomas Church where a requiem high Mass was celebrated. The night before the Mass, Joe's father Michael had his sons take the military escorts out for a few drinks so he could open the casket and examine Joe's remains and dental work – his closure was complete. Former Company L comrades attended as pall bearers and later walked behind the hearse followed by an escort of Company L men and Great War veterans. Father Lonergan of Durand, Illinois, a former Army Chaplain, said the final prayers over Joe as he was laid to rest beside his mother Mary.

Life on the Farm

The McKearn farm on the River Road was a modest operation. Life on a small farm was often harsh and austere with few luxuries. Everyone wasn't cut out for farming, but Frank and Bess make a good team and carved out a good life. They weren't alone in their love of farm life as the number of active farms in the United States peaks at about 7 million in 1935. With the ongoing depression, times are tough, but living on a farm meant there was always something to eat. The McKearns were frequently visited by those looking for a little help and these visitors never left empty handed.

Debt was eschewed by farmers, but the depression placed pressure on the economics of small farms. Frank and Bess borrow \$1,000 on a mortgage using the farm as collateral on November 18, 1931. The mortgage is satisfied on August 14th, 1934.

The farm had a barn measuring 24 x 36 with a hay loft and 10 stanchions for milking cows. There was a shed for storage attached to the side of the barn and a concrete silo measuring 14 feet across and standing 30 feet high. The well-manicured lawns of today were a luxury that few living on farms would have time for. A couple of times a year a team of horses would be hooked up to run across the yard and keep the grass trimmed down.

With Frank's passing in 1946, Bess continues to operate the farm until 1949 at which time the difficult decision was made to get out of the business of farming. An auction was scheduled for February 18, 1949. Wieland Sales and Auction Services is contracted to conduct the auction. An ad appearing in the Beloit Daily News offers the following information about the farm assets that will be made available for purchase:

- 18 Head of High-Grade Quality Brown Swiss Cattle and a team of horses.
- 65 tons of ear corn, 750 bushels of oats, 1,450 bales of alfalfa and timothy hay, 500 bales of second cutting alfalfa, 500 bales of oat straw, 29 tons of loose alfalfa and timothy hay in the barn, 10 ft. of silage in the silo.

- Various pieces of farm equipment including a McCormick Deering Farmall f 80 tractor, acorn planter with fertilizer and soybean attachment, a McCormick 7ft tractor disc and many other implements.

The auction netted \$6,814 in equipment sales and \$3,835 in sales of hay, corn and oats. The fee for auction services was \$419. With the bang of the gavel closing the auction the River Road McKearns were out of the farming business.



Bessie McKearn in front of oak tree at the homestead on the River Road. Behind her is the Rock River. You can also see the gravel River Road and the tracks of the Rockford and Interurban rail line that ran from about 1902 to 1930.

A Legacy of Public Service

In a Beloit Daily News editorial dated June 11th, 1946 it was said that “Frank McKearn was a countryman, who combined tillage with public service and thereby made a double contribution to his community”. There would be other tributes from those who knew him well.

Frank McKearn was first elected to the Beloit Town Board in the spring of 1925. One year later he was elected Town Chairman, a position he would hold until his death in 1946. His tenure on the Town Board encompassed the Depression and WW II.

In 1927, Frank was appointed to the Rock County board of supervisors. He remained on the county board until his death, serving a term as Rock County chairman from 1934-1936. While on the county board he served on many of its committees including but not limited to the Sheriff's committee, Equalization Committee, Banking committee, Highway committee, Park and Conservation Committee, and the Agriculture committee.

In addition to his elected positions on the Beloit Town Board and Rock County Board of Supervisors, he showed his interest in education by serving more than 20 years as Chairman of the Powers School District. His public service extended beyond elected office as demonstrated by his time as an active member of the Veterans Service committee of Rock County and the Rationing Board of the Office of Price Administration (OPA). The OPA was created by the federal government in 1941 to ease the switching to a war-time economy. While a member of St. Thomas Church he was a member of the Knights of Columbus and the Holy Name Society.

After his death, the Beloit Daily News said of Frank McKearn, “As an official of his township, as the country member of many city boards and committees, and in many other ways, Mr. McKearn made himself and his influence felt in Rock County”. Being influential is not what distinguishes Frank as a public servant but rather it is how he used his influence that elevates him.

The year 1932 provides an excellent case study of how Frank used his influence to help others. Rudy Vallee had a hit song in 1932 entitled “Brother Can You Spare a Dime” which captured the mood of Americans with the stock market bottoming out and whispers of a “New Deal” sweeping the country. Also, in the summer of 1932, a political bloc on the Rock County Board voted to abandon the county system of relief administration and instead moved towards what was then called unit rule. Unit rule would have abandoned the county system of relief administration and instead would have forced the 28 separate taxing units within the county to be responsible for their own relief programs.

Unit Rule would be beneficial to the smaller political units that had far fewer families on public relief. For bigger political units like the cities of Beloit and Janesville and towns like Beloit, unit rule represented a financial responsibility that would be very difficult if not impossible to meet. In 1932, Beloit Township had 250 families on public relief. The annual cost of providing public relief to those 250 families would be in the neighborhood of \$125,000 to \$150,000, a sum of money it simply could not raise. If unit rule were imposed, the larger political units within the county, the town of Beloit in particular, would be faced with confiscation of assets and repudiation. The question of relief administration in Rock County had created a sectional split that would be difficult to bridge.

By the fall of the year the unit rule faction had gained momentum. In an effort to end the debate, the McKearn resolution was introduced to the county board on September 27th, 1932. The text of the resolution read as follows:

“Resolved that from and after January 1st, 1933 all distinctions between county and town, village and city poor be abolished and all expenses of maintaining all the poor therein shall remain a county charge”.

The intent of the resolution was to overturn the decision of the county board from earlier that summer and re-establish the county system. Along with the 250 families in Beloit Township on relief, the City of Janesville had 700 families on relief and the City of Beloit had 1,000 families on relief. The immediate future of these nearly 2000 families and many others would be hinged on the passage of the McKearn resolution. The outcome of the vote was 25 for, 25 against with 3 members being absent. The McKearn resolution had failed. Unit rule had prevailed.

The county board was called back into session on September 29th. Through a parliamentary maneuver, Frank McKearn was able to reintroduce his resolution, this time in the presence of all 53 members. During the debate on the resolution, county board chairman D.A. McCarthy, who was opposed to the resolution surrendered his gavel to enter into the heated discussion and speak on behalf of the opposition. When the smoke had cleared, the vote on the McKearn resolution was 27 for, 26 against. The county system had prevailed after several months of intense lobbying and debate.

With passage of the McKearn resolution, the needy of the county would be adequately taken care of, the cities of Beloit and Janesville were saved from financial despair and Beloit Township was saved from confiscation and repudiation.

It's War Again

War was once again raging across the European continent as well as in the Far East. The United States manages to stay out of the war until on December 7th, 1941 the Japanese launch an attack on US positions in Hawaii. Frank's oldest son Richard is on guard duty that fateful morning at Hickham Field and in an interview shared the following memory, "The planes came in right out of the sun, over the Diamond Head area. At first, I didn't see them because I was looking right into the sun, but it didn't take long for they were coming down the runway making screaming dives and were strafing the field. We later learned they hit Wheeler Field first."

Before World War II was over, 9 McKearn cousins from the Beloit area would serve with honor and distinction. Bill McKearn, Frank's nephew would fly 26 missions in his B-17 Bomber over Germany. Later Frank's youngest son Frank "Gene" McKearn would serve with honor in Korea. While in Korea Gene would be injured in two separate incidents, one in which he was hit by shrapnel in the head from North Korean mortar fire. His life was spared as he was wearing his helmet. The helmet suffered a large dent from the golf ball sized piece of shrapnel. He was later injured in an accident in which a jeep he was riding in flipped, leaving him with a back injury that followed him the rest of his life.

Service Beyond Public Office

With many McKearns serving overseas, Frank is tapped to serve on the local rationing board. With the nation's economy shifting to a war-time footing, rationing of different products occurs in many areas. Local rationing boards oversaw these rationing efforts. Serving on the rationing board was not a popular job as most Americans were forced to live without high demand necessities. The work of issuing ration books and exchanging used stamps for certificates was handled by some 5,500 local ration boards of mostly volunteer workers selected by local officials. Many levels of rationing went into effect. Some items, such as sugar, were distributed evenly based on the number of people in a household. Other items, like gasoline or fuel oil, were rationed only to those who could justify a need. Restaurant owners and other merchants were accorded more availability but had to collect ration stamps to restock their supplies. In exchange for used ration stamps, ration boards delivered certificates to restaurants and merchants to authorize procurement of more products.

Each ration stamp had a generic drawing of an airplane, gun, tank, aircraft carrier, ear of wheat, fruit, etc. and a serial number. Some stamps also had alphabetic lettering. The kind and amount of rationed commodities were not specified on most of the stamps and were not defined until later when local newspapers published, for example, that beginning on a specified date, one airplane stamp was required (in addition to cash) to buy one pair of shoes and one stamp number 30 from ration book four was required to buy 5 pounds of sugar. The commodity amounts changed from time to time depending on availability. Red stamps were used to ration meat and butter, and blue stamps were used to ration processed foods.

To enable making change for ration stamps, the government issued "red point" tokens to be given in change for red stamps, and "blue point" tokens in change for blue stamps. The red and blue tokens were about the size of dimes and were made of thin compressed wood fiber material, because metals were in short supply.

There was a black market in stamps. To prevent this, the OPA ordered vendors not to accept stamps that they themselves did not tear out of books. Buyers, however, circumvented this by saying (sometimes accurately, as the books were not well-made) that the stamps had "fallen out." In actuality, they may have acquired stamps from other family members or friends, or the black market.

Most rationing restrictions ended in August 1945 except for sugar rationing, which lasted until 1947.

Frank McKearn is Dead

The morning of Saturday June 8th, 1946 dawned like any other day and there was work to do on the farm. Alford, Franks oldest brother was there like he always was and was the first to notice something unusual. Frank had hooked up the team of horses and was working land not far from the house in the early afternoon. Alford could see out back and noticed that the horses had come to a halt which was unusual. He rushed to see what was going on and found Frank, who had suffered from a heart ailment for a number of years, on the ground. It was 2:30 in the afternoon, Frank had suffered a heart attack and was gone.

The funeral was held at Frank's parish of St. Thomas in Beloit. The entire county board would attend the service as a body. The visitation or wake as the Irish referred to it, was held at the McKearn home on the River Road. To accommodate the casket, the big picture window in the living room that looked out over the River Road and the Rock River would be removed and the casket lifted through the opening so that Frank could lay in the living room to be viewed by mourners.

One tradition of the Irish wake was the presence of a wailer or keener as they were known in Ireland and Frank would have a keener. In the old country, the keener would sit near the casket and openly mourn the loss of the deceased. Keening was a social practice and artform steeped in the depth and beauty of the Gaelic musical tradition. Keens are said to have contained raw unearthly emotion, spontaneous word, repeated motifs, crying and elements of song. Structure was provided by banging on the coffin and the ground, and the repetition of familiar refrains and vocables. Vocables are repeated sounds and utterances that are not words in themselves but allow a structure, pause and feeling to flow. The keen often shared feelings about the deceased or shared concern for the difficulty being experienced by the family and other loved ones.

Tributes to Frank

Tributes to Frank came from many places. State Senator Robert “Robbie” Robinson for whom Robinson School in the city of Beloit is named after, hand wrote the following in a letter to Bessie:

“Your great loss is shared by the entire county. We will all remember him for his fine example of good citizenship. His public activities were many and always unselfish and he always did an excellent job in anything he undertook.”

An editorial that appeared in the Beloit Daily News, written by Oscar Nelson said the following about Frank:

“Frank McKearn is dead. For 26 years Frank McKearn served as chairman of the Beloit Township board and as such represented his township as a county board supervisor. He served on many committees and a term as county board chairman.”

Friendly, neighborly, faithful, he was the kind of friend one craves to win and dislikes to lose. Frank McKearn was the type of legislator who gave no thought to his political future when the chips were down, which won him more friends than enemies. He could be persuasive – he could be tough – he always had what an occasion demanded.

It was Frank McKearn’s tenacity that saved Beloit Township from financial ruin in 1932 when a county board bloc attempted to impose unit rule when a high percentage of McKearn’s constituents were receiving relief. The original vote taken in February favored unit relief – 47 to 6 – when the matter was reconsidered in September the vote was 27-26 against.

And no individual deserves greater credit for obtaining the fine 3-lane highway between Beloit and Janesville than Frank McKearn. Beloit township may be fortunate enough to secure as good a representative, but never one better.

Tributes paid Frank McKearn upon his funeral day provided eloquent and convincing proof that he who works conscientiously and unselfishly for the good of those about him has not labored in vain.”



Picture of Frank McKearn unveiled by two of his grandsons, Richard "Dick" McKearn and Tim McKearn.

Bessie would continue to live on the farm until the late 50's when her son Gene would purchase the homestead from her after his marriage to Donna Reynolds. Gene and Donna would raise their 5 children on the farm and Gene would live there until he passed away in 1987 on October 3rd. A date of death he would share with his sister Cathy. Gene would start State Electric Supply with two partners, Harold Cole and Ellen Ramberg in 1955, selling his stake in 1969. He would work the rest of his life for various electrical wholesalers and electrical contractors.

Dorothy would marry at a young age and eventually moved to the New York City area, where she would divorce and remarry. Her relationship with Bessie would remain strained. Dorothy would return to Wisconsin only a few times the rest of her life.

Richard would marry Anne Fitzpatrick and they would raise 5 children on Riverside Drive (the old River Road). Richard would have a career as a highly regarded blacksmith at General Motors in Janesville, WI. He would serve on the Town of Beloit volunteer fire department, a lifelong passion, and was considered a master weaver of fanciful stories.

Upon the sale of the homestead to Gene, Bessie would live with her daughter Cathy until the early 1980's when she would move to Caravilla, a retirement home a few miles north of her old River road home. She would live to be 102, outliving all her children except for Richard. Cathy would work professionally for the "phone company" and eventually built a career as a successful real estate agent in the Beloit area. She would remain single until her passing on October 3, 1983.

On May 24, 1963, Bessie would sell 5 acres of the southeast corner of the farm along Park Avenue to the Town of Beloit for the sum of \$1 for the purposes of the establishment of park space. In 1989, the Beloit Town board at the request of the McKearn family would rename the Park Avenue Park, Frank McKearn Park.



Pictured outside their home on the River Road are Mike McKearn, Bessie McKearn, Francis "Gene" McKearn, Frank McKearn.

Thanks go to Pat McKearn, Clarence Furset, and Shirley Geffers for reading through this essay and providing feedback.

My friend, Denise Peters, laid out the brochure and provided her usual keen eye and helpful suggestions.

Mark McKearn provided the detailed information regarding World War I.

I am forever indebted to my uncle, Tom McKearn, who spent countless hours researching our family and helped instill in me an appreciation of this big Irish clan.

It would have been hard to provide some of these details without the reporting of the Beloit Daily News all those years ago.

There are many interesting stories to be told in this family and it is my hope that others will follow the story of Frank McKearn.

-Tim McKearn

Frank
McKearn

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