

CAPTAIN WILLIAM MCKERACHAN

An Unintentional Patriot

in 1774, William McKerachan settled in the village of Nanticoke. It is unclear why he traveled from Belfast, Ireland to make his home in America. But at the time, the bitter conflict between the British and French began to threaten the shores of his homeland. His peaceful existence as a schoolteacher and shop owner in America would soon change as he would find himself thrust into a war that positioned sworn adversaries' the Yankees and Pennamites to fight side by side against a common enemy Great Britain.

A Connecticut Yankee

In the 1600s, King Charles II gave land in North-Central Pennsylvania to both Pennsylvania (Pennamites) and Connecticut (Yankees) allowing both groups legal rights to the same lands. The first war between the factions lasted from 1763 to 1771 with no clear winner. McKerachan came to America at the beginning of the second Yankee Pennamite war. In 1774, skirmishes got more intense as each side attempted to push the other out of the Wyoming Valley. on Christmas Eve of 1775, in what is known as the Battle of Rampart Rocks, (Nanticoke Falls in the area of Honey Pot and West Nanticoke). Four hundred Yankees, under the command of Zebulon Butler, were surprised by the advancing column of Colonel William Plunkett's Pennamite army. Captain Lazarus Stewart and his Paxton Boys ambushed Plunkett's column at Harvey's Creek (near the intersection of Route 11 and Route 29). The Pennamites were defeated. Connecticut then claimed the Wyoming Valley and named it Westmoreland County. It was at this time that the Yankees gave McKerachan the role of heading one of the six companies formed to defend Nanticoke along with- Lieut. Lazarus Stewart, Ensign Silas Gore. McKerachan settled into his role as teacher and shopkeeper, whether he had a family is unknown, but in 1778, He was called upon to fulfil an even greater challenge.

Called to Fight

Skirmishes between the Yankees and the Pennamites continued until April 15, 1776, when the Continental Congress appealed to both sides to cease their hostilities and join in the fight against a new and common adversary, Great Britain. The newly annexed County of Westmoreland, (Wyoming Valley), assembled a militia of two companies, forming the Connecticut Line of the Continental Army. In 1778, McKerachan and his company of men answered the call to service when British troops led by Colonel John Butler, and fragmented renegade Native American tribes systematically destroyed settlements and started moving east toward Westmoreland.

A Fateful Decision

The garrison at Pittston Fort had fallen to the British and a compliment of Continental Army Troops from the southern end of the valley had not yet arrived at Forty Fort. On the morning of July 3, British Colonel John Butler sent a message to Colonel Nathan Denison of the Continental