

John Calvin McCoy

City Founder
1811-1889

by Susan Jezak Ford

John Calvin McCoy single-handedly had the greatest effect on the development of early Kansas City. He was the founder of Westport in 1833 and in 1838 a member of the original Town Company of Kansas. He lived to see the area's wilderness transformed to accommodate busy thoroughfares, trains, tall buildings, and crowds of people.

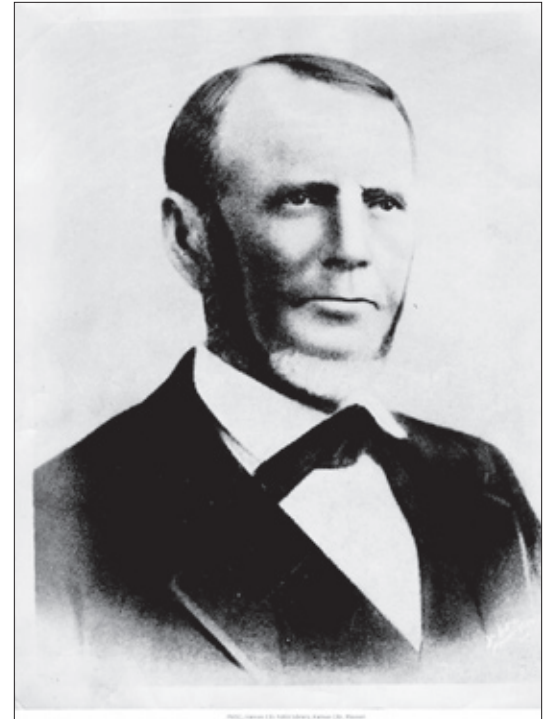
Calvin McCoy, born in Indiana, came to the area in 1830 with his missionary parents, Rev. Isaac and Christiana McCoy. Educated as a surveyor at Transylvania University, McCoy soon acquired land along the public road that connected Indian Territory with Independence. He opened an outfitting store at what is now the northeast corner of Westport Road and Pennsylvania Street. He platted the land around it, named the town "West Port," and announced that lots were for sale. Business was slow, so he often gave away land to anyone willing to move to the town and establish a business there.

It was McCoy's idea to use a rock ledge on the Missouri River as a dock for the riverboat owned by him and his father. The result was Westport Landing and the road, built by McCoy and his slave Tom, that transported merchandise four miles south to McCoy's store. The landing grew, as did the town of Westport.

When a group of merchants and traders purchased property for the Town of Kansas, McCoy was one the "historic 14" members of the company. He invested heavily in the land and in 1846, drew the town's first plat map dividing the property into 318 lots for sale. In 1850, the Town of Kansas became an official municipality.

McCoy's first wife, Virginia Chick, died in 1849 of cholera. He married Elizabeth Woodson in 1850. He continued his business of investing in local land, even when he was ordered to leave Kansas City during the Civil War's Order Number Eleven due to his southern sympathies.

Near the end of his life, McCoy lived in the center of the city he



helped create, a very different place from the wilderness that he helped tame.

Sources

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