

## Mackey and his Turtle

Michael Mackey was born in Ireland in 1817 and migrated to America, eventually settling in Lawrenceville, which would later be renamed Parker Ford.

He was well-known huckster. It would be a usual occurrence to find him supplying food and drink at area farm and estate auctions. He was also known for his own “brand” of ice cream, which was sold at his small cigar and confectionary store in the village.

In the late spring of 1869, as he was walking around his property, he happened to notice a box turtle. He watched its steady but slow movement across the landscape. Mackey set out some tidbits of food for the turtle, who continued to stick around for the summer, until one day was nowhere to be seen. Prior to the departure, Mackey decided to identify the turtle by marking the year and his initials on the breastplate of its shell.

Each year thereafter, the turtle would make an appearance at the Mackey home. This usually occurred during June and it would stay the summer. The turtle developed a bond with Mackey, as it was the turtle’s practice to come to the door when it heard the Mackey dinner bell. The turtle shared in the Mackey table menu, with a growing fondness for the ice cream for dessert.

Over time, many of Mackey’s neighbors had grown to expect these visits as well. During each visit, it had become a yearly ritual for Mackey to place the turtle in a basket and then cart it to the office of the Pottstown Ledger newspaper. In this way, he could document the turtle’s identity and make note of the seasonal visits.

The age of the turtle was not known, but with the identifiable markings on the shell, everyone in the area knew who the turtle’s benefactor was, which undoubtedly saved the turtle from becoming the main ingredient in someone’s soup. Each fall, the turtle departed for its winter quarters, which was believed to be located near Favinger’s dam on Pigeon Creek.

This yearly visitation by the terrapin had been ongoing for 25 years, with the arrival date always noted by Mackey. However, in 1894, there was an unusual nervousness in the Mackey home. It was mid-July and the turtle was a no show. Mackey believed that his summer visitor must have met its demise. and was fearful that he would never see his “friend” again.

He and his wife made a trip to Pottstown to share with the newspaper what he believed to be the end of his pet’s visitation. Afterwards upon their arrival home, the turtle was waiting at the door. Although five weeks late, it brought a big smile for Mackey and a great deal of joy was to be had at the Mackey home. A large mound of ice cream was in store for newly arrived summer visitor.

After suffering a stroke, Mackey died at home in Parker Ford, on August 3, 1895. In his obituary, the newspaper recounted the yearly trek of the turtle’s visit over a 26-year period. His property was sold the following year with the fate of the turtle never known.