

Some time ago my curiosity was aroused by a paragraph in a Philadelphia dispatch to The New York Times reporting an accounting filed in Orphans Court in the estate of a Col. John McKee, described as a wealthy Negro Civil War veteran who died in 1902. He left his fortune, now amounting to \$1,320,615, to establish a "little Annapolis" for both white and Negro boys. It stated that Colonel McKee directed in his will "that an equestrian statue of himself should be erected on the campus, clad in the uniform of commander of the 13th Regiment, Pennsylvania National Guard." Reference to the Scranton area military unit, now the 109th Regiment, sent me on a quest for further information about Colonel McKee's possible connection with it. I found, as The Times said, that Colonel McKee's military history is vague. "In fact," The Times reported, "no official record of it has ever been discovered." His civilian history, likewise, is vague, except that it is known that he built his fortune in the operation of a real estate business and an oyster house in Philadelphia. Prof. John J. Gallen of Villanova University is executive secretary of a committee, "interracial in character," formed to supervise scholarship awards to be financed by some of the funds in the estate after court found the total insufficient to found the decedent's proposed naval academy. Professor Gallen informed me that "so far as I know there are no Scranton connections with Colonel McKee. None of his contemporaries are alive, of course, and there is apparently little information available. It is known that he had various real estate holdings in Philadelphia and Bristol, Pa., McKee City, N.J. (obviously named in his honor) and other land in West Virginia, Kentucky and Alabama, I believe." His Philadelphia holdings were the most valuable part of the estate.

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Colonel McKee, who was originally a Presbyterian, named as trustees of his estate Archbishop Ryan and his lawyer, both now deceased. The succeeding trustee is the Catholic archbishop of Philadelphia, now John Cardinal O'Hara, who administers the estate. At Professor Gallen's suggestion I contacted Eustace Gay, editor of The Philadelphia Tribune, that city's 75-year-old newspaper for Negroes. Editor Gay told me that shortly before Colonel McKee's death he became a Catholic. His will directed that his estate be used to build the academy after the death of his last lineal descendant. Colonel McKee's last grandson, Dr. Harry McKee Minton, died in 1946. By that time, because of today's building costs, it was not possible to carry out the wishes of the testator. Instead four scholarships of \$1,000 each are given yearly to orphan boys regardless of race. According to Editor Gay the McKee will was patterned after that of Stephen Girard "except that he wanted all races to benefit while Girard restricted his gifts to white boys only. I have gone through the files to discover why the Colonel wore the uniform of the commander of the 13th Regiment and have found nothing that really answers your question," Mr. Gay wrote. "Some years ago in discussing this matter with people who knew him they said he had been a member of the PNG. He was born in Alexandria, Va., and came to Philadelphia, where he joined the Presbyterian Church." Philadelphia's historic First Regiment, dating back to the Revolutionary War, became in World War I the 109th Infantry Regiment—the present-day designation of Scranton's former 13th Regiment. Of course, that still does not explain the interest in the 13th Regiment held by Colonel McKee, who died at least 15 years before the United States' entrance into the first world conflict. Perhaps some day the answer will be forthcoming, but I must admit it eludes me at this time.