McGREGOR SCHOOL Named for a Champion

BY FRED FOLGER

In September of 1963, McGregor Elementary School opened its doors to students in the Washington Local School District in Lucas County. McGregor School, serving students from kindergarten to the sixth grade, is the twelfth elementary building to open in the school system. McGregor School has an unusual distinction among the schools of our state. It is a school named for a champion - - but not any ordinary champion. Robert McGregor was a horse! When names were being considered for the proposed school, McGregor was suggested because the building would face McGregor Lane. At that time the fact that the street had been named for a famous horse was relatively unknown. Thus the name was officially designated for the new school. After construction was under way it became known that the street had originally been named for a great trotter.

Older residents of the area recalled that the school grounds and the surrounding area had once been the Ketcham horse farm which had had an international reputation for excellence at the turn of the century. George H. Ketcham was a prosperous Toledo businessman. He had made a fortune as a real estate and investment broker. These were only a few of his varied activities however. He also designed and built the old Valentine Theatre in Toledo. This theatre had the reputation of being one of the finest in the Midwest. Incidentally Mr. Ketcham named his theater for his father, Valentine Ketcham, Toledo's first millionaire. George Ketcham also had an active interest in sports. He was well known among yachting and horse racing circles. He chose a location for his summer home and horse farm near Trilby, a small suburban community northwest of Toledo. Here he developed his famous farm of approximately one thousand acres. The farm was stocked with the best-blooded horses from Kentucky.

The farm gained recognition by the successes of horses such as Robert McGregor and Cresceus. The farm was even illustrated in newspapers as far away as Vienna, Austria. The farm consisted of a complex of buildings, the summer home and a race track for use in training horses. This enterprise required thirty-five men to maintain the buildings and care for the horses. Robert McGregor was one of the first horses to establish the fine reputation of the farm. McGregor, a trotting stallion, had been an outstanding figure in harness races during the early 1880's. His superb finishes earned him the title of "Monarch of the Homestretch". McGregor established a record of trotting a mile in two minutes, seventeen and one-fourth seconds. When McGregor was retired from racing he was allowed to spend the remainder of his life grazing on the broad expanses of the Ketcham farm.

Mr. Ketcham decided that an appropriate marker was required to mark the grave of this distinguished trotter. Ketcham selected a large red granite stone from an abandoned building project at the St. Francis de Sales Church in Toledo. The pastor made a gift to Ketcham of any stone which he would choose to mark the grave of Robert McGregor. The monument was properly engraved with this inscription: ROBERT MC GREGOR - MONARCH OF THE HOMESTRETCH, 1871 - 1898. It was then placed over the grave where it remained as a well-known landmark in the locality for many years. However sometime during the 1920's it disappeared and no one really seemed to know what had happened to it. It was the discovery of this tombstone that brought to light the fact that the new school had been named for a famous horse.

Mr. George C. Draves, a Trilby resident, interested in local history, had heard that such a tombstone had once existed. He began to make inquiries and in time he actually discovered the missing marker - - and of all places, in a cemetery! Mr. Draves had been directed to the Toledo Memorial Park Cemetery at Sylvania, Ohio. There he discovered the old slab abandoned near the maintenance buildings. Cemetery officials had no idea how the stone had been placed there and were willing to allow Mr. Draves to have the old marker. Mr. Draves then approached the Washington Local School

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McGregor's son, Cresceus, breaking the world's record at Columbus, Ohio

MCGREGOR SCHOOL

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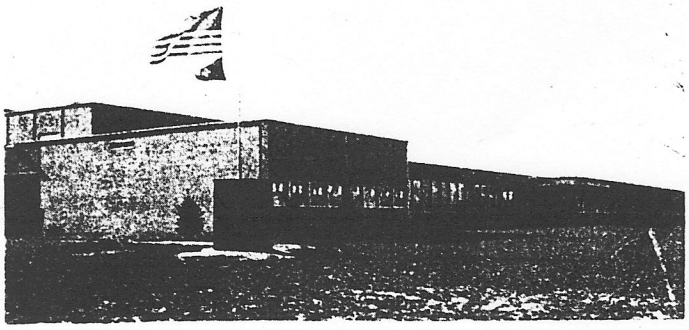
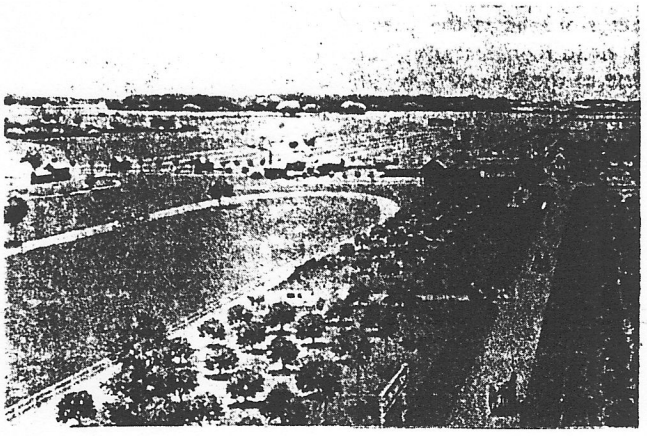


McGregor School with its tombstone for a Horse (The flags are at halfmast for ex-President Hoover - not for the Horse)



View of the Ketcham Stock Farm

Board with the proposition of returning the stone to its original ground and placing it in the yard of the new McGregor school building.

School officials were somewhat wary about receiving the tombstone of the horse and having it placed upon the school grounds. They were concerned with public reaction to the direct association of the horse with the new school. During this period of decision The Toledo Blade published an article entitled, "Monumental Decisions Nagging at School Board". This article served to make known Mr. Draves' discovery and proposition. The school officials decided that it would be the best policy to allow the public to make the decision themselves. The proposition was brought before the Parent-Teacher Association and the Mother's Club of the school. Both organizations voted favorably for the return of the McGregor stone to the site of the old Ketcham farm.

However it was the offspring of Robert McGregor and a mare named Mabel who broke McGregor's record and brought more fame to the farm and its owner. This horse, Cresceus, had set records at seventeen different tracks by the end of his third year. He was originally named Crescens, but a typographical error on a racing program at his first appearance caused him to become known as Cresceus.

When Cresceus was only nine months old he developed a severe case of epizootic and was ordered to be destroyed. However Tim Murnen, superintendent of the farm, noticed signs of recovery and thus reintroduced the colt to George Ketcham after Cresceus made a complete recovery. Murnen predicted that Cresceus would become a great trotter. Cresceus earned $102,851.50 in prize money for Ketcham. After one particularly successful tour of New England race tracks which won Ketcham $30,000, Cresceus was welcomed home to Toledo with a parade through the downtown area. Culminating the event was the presentation of a large cut-glass punch bowl to Cresceus by the Libbey Glass Company. Cresceus became a national hero after setting the world's record at Columbus, Ohio in 1900. He trotted the mile in 2:02-1/4. The sulky which he drew in that race is now on display at the Henry Ford Museum at Dearborn. George Ketcham always drove Cresceus personally in all races.

Cresceus was retired to the Trilby farm in 1903. In 1905 he was sold at auction for $21,000 to a Minneapolis purchaser. He was later resold to a buyer in Russia. He died in 1915. Many leading American and Russian trotters of today can trace their pedigree to Cresceus and Robert McGregor.

During the early years of this century George Ketcham began to sell portions of his large farm. Gingseng, a Chinese medical plant, was raised on the remainder of the farm for a while, but the farm was subsequently subdivided and platted for residential purposes. Today the Robert McGregor tombstone stands by the school's flagpole and faces the corner intersection of McGregor Lane and Rambo Lane. The red granite marker, which is seven feet high and weighs two tons, has been returned to its original ground after a disappearance of some thirty years. The students of McGregor Elementary School may proudly speak of the champion for whom their school was named and be inspired by the excellent reputation earned and maintained by Robert McGregor: Monarch of the Homestretch.

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