Rev. Richard McAllister of Fort Hunter
by Anna Hulme Price, 1817

editor’s note: Colonel Richard McAllister (1725-1795) was the founder of Hanover, York County. Prior to 1750 he settled within the tract known as "Digges Choice," then considered in the jurisdiction of Maryland. There in 1763 he founded Hanover Town, which the 1767 survey of Mason and Dixon found to be within the colony of Pennsylvania. Subsequently eminent in York County, he became lieutenant of the county during the War for Independence and later served as a member of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania State Archives includes an extensive collection of McAllister family papers.

Richard’s son Captain Archibald McAllister (1756-1831) was an officer in the 8th Pennsylvania regiment and farmer-storekeeper in Hanover, in Londonderry township of Lancaster (later Dauphin) County, and in Fort Hunter. In 1814, Archibald erected the current Fort Hunter Mansion on the site of the original frontier fort that gave the area that name. Six miles above Harrisburg on an elevated protrusion at the mouth of Fishing Creek, and where the southernmost portion of Blue Mountain crosses the Susquehanna, this strategic site commanded an extensive view up and down the river and guarded the gateway from the fertile lower Susquehanna Valley into the more rugged Juniata and upper Susquehanna valleys.

Tours of the Fort Hunter Mansion include a brief mention of Archibald’s son Rev. Richard McAllister (1792-1822) of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Unfortunately, little relevant primary source material survives and visitors are told only that the socially prominent and relatively non-religious McAllister family was not very pleased with Richard’s conversion and his decision to enter the ministry. Much later, in 1886, the Heckton Methodist Episcopal Church was erected across Fishing Creek from the mansion. When that congregation ceased to exist in 2003, the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist deeded the property to the Fort Hunter Association.

A recently acquired document that sheds some light on the McAllister family and confirms the anecdotal information shared by the tour guides at the Fort Hunter Mansion. The document is a letter written in 1817, just four years after Archibald McAllister erected the mansion and immediately after Richard McAllister left the family estate to join the Methodist itinerancy. It was written in 1817 by a recent bride, who boarded in the mansion with the McAllister family while her husband rode Methodism’s Dauphin circuit.

Kept in the Heckton Church file at the archives, the letter also gives valuable information about the circuit and prevailing Methodist ideals. Explanatory notes follow the transcription of the letter.
My Dear Brother,

I have been anxiously waiting to receive an answer to my letter which I wrote to Betty Craft (dated September 2nd), intending when I heard from her to write to you. But I have waited until I can wait no longer. I feel very desirous to hear from you, and hope you will now immediately write.

I am at present at Mr. McAllister’s, six miles above Harrisburg, but expect next Monday or Tuesday to go with Mr. Price to the lower end of the circuit and shall not return before the 5th or 6th of next month. Therefore if you do not get this letter in time for an answer to reach Harrisburg by next Monday, you will please direct it to Jonestown Post Office, Dauphin County, near which Mr. Price will preach.

I have been over the mountain to Millersburg, where I expected to have made my home, but by the desire of Mr. and Mrs. McAllister I returned here the 1st of this month. This place is about the center of the circuit, and I shall have more of Mr. Price’s company than I could possibly have had at Millersburg, which is at the upper end of the appointments.

The family where I am are rich and abound in all the good things of life. All they lack to make them happy is religion. Mr. McAllister has been a very wicked man, and a great enemy to the Methodists. But since his son has become a preacher among them and his daughter married to a preacher, he has become outwardly reformed and is very friendly to all the society. His wife is a very agreeable woman and is seeking to experience that change of heart which she is deeply convinced as necessary to prepare her for death. She is very kind to me, much more than I could have expected. And so are all the people I have been among. They do not feel strange, nor do they act like strangers, but are as kind as if they had known me all my life.

Mr. Price is very much respected, which affords me great satisfaction. He is indeed worthy of it. I feel as if I never could be sufficiently thankful to the Lord for giving me such a companion and friend. Our affection for each other daily increases, and so does our desire to be useful to our fellow creatures. The greatest cross we have to bear is that of being separated, though where I am to spend the winter he need not be at any time longer from me than ten days at one time – and that only once in 4 weeks. And one week in the month he can be with me from Monday night until the next Saturday morning, so that I have no reason to complain. If he is only blessed with health and preserved from sudden death, I hope I shall feel very thankful.

This family has been visited with an alarming call to prepare for death. Last Friday night a brother of Mrs. McAllister, a Mr. John Carson, was suddenly deprived of life. He complained in the evening of a pain in his side and stomach, had something applied to it, and went to bed. After being in bed some time, he got up, as was supposed, to sit by the fire thinking he would feel better. How long he sat was not known. His wife was wakened by a noise, and missing him from the bed ran down to the parlor where she found him fallen into the fire. He had fallen with his stomach on the andiron and was dead. He was a man near seventy years of age, much respected by his neighbors, but is to
be feared was too careless of his soul’s concern. His poor wife is almost distracted with the idea that he was not prepared for his sudden awful change. My soul feels for them and prays that this loud call be attended to by every one of the family. For my own part I feel that this is not my rest, that I am a pilgrim and a sojourner here. I am sensible I have not lived as near to the Lord as I might have done, nor have I been as useful as I might have been. O may my future life be spent more to the honor and glory of God.

My dear brother, it is impossible for me to express how near and dear you are to my heart, and how earnestly I long for your eternal welfare. Oftener than the morning and evening do I bear you and sister Martha and the dear children on my heart before the Lord. He has been very good to you, my dear brother. He has prospered your undertakings, placed you in a situation to provide comfortably for your family, and favored you with better health than you formerly had. O let a sense of his goodness and mercy lead you to repentance. O give your whole heart to the Lord. We are all children of wrath by nature and must experience a change of heart. We must be born again or we can never see the Kingdom of God. O may you and your dear companion feel the necessity of laying up treasure in heaven and train up the dear children in the way they should go. Our dear mother thus instructed us, and we have been enabled in some degree to profit by her example. O may we follow her footsteps through life, die like her in peace with God and all mankind, and spend an eternity of happiness with her in heaven.

I have written you plainly, my dear brother. I am at present in good health, but I may never see you again in this life. You or I may be called from time to eternity before the ensuing spring. I wish therefore to clear my conscience in the sight of God and earnestly beg you to give your whole heart to the Lord. This I am resolved by grace to do. Thus if we never meet again on earth, we shall meet in a better world.

Write me what you know respecting our Hulme relations and all my friends in Burlington. Tell Betty Craft to write soon. Give my love to Martha, Lydia and Peggy – and to all the dear children. Kiss them all for me, and don’t let Jeannette forget to say Aunt Nancy every day that she may have some idea of me if I am spared to return to Burlington in the spring.

Write me whether you have sold the house or are likely to do it. Try to get the rent quarterly and keep it till you see me. There is a person coming to the city soon by whom I intend writing to Peggy and to Sarah. I shall enclose these to Libby, who will forward them to you. Mr. Price desired me to give his love to you all. He is at present over the mountain.

Farewell from your affectionate sister,
Ann Price

Remember me to George Painter’s family, and to Mr. and Mrs. Aikens, to Mrs. Craft and Betty.
Appendix I: Notes on persons (listed alphabetically) appearing in the letter.

Mr. and Mrs. Aikens – unknown.

John Carson (1758-1817) – brother of Mrs. McAllister. A respected member of the community, he was an officer in the Revolutionary War. In 1785, when Dauphin County was separated from Lancaster County, John Carson and Archibald McAllister were both members of the county’s first Grand Jury. From 1786 to 1791 he was a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly, and he was an associate county judge from 1791 until his death on Friday, October 10, three days before the letter was written.

Sarah Carson (1760-1823) – wife of John Carson. She was the former Sarah Dickey.

Betty Craft – a sister of Mrs. John Hulme.

Sarah Craft [Mrs. Craft] – the mother of Martha and Betty. Her husband’s name was James, but nothing more is known about this family.

John Hulme (1782-1845) – the recipient. The son of George Hulme (1750-1808) and his second wife Jennet Neale Hulme (1751-1814), he married Martha Craft in Trenton NJ in October 1804. While he was living in Burlington NJ in 1817, he died in Montgomery County PA. The immigrant Hulme ancestor was John’s great-grandfather George (1683-1729) who was born in England and settled in Bucks County PA.

Martha Craft Hulme (1780-1845) – wife of the recipient and subject of “Give my love to Martha…”

Jeannette Hulme – daughter of the recipient, named for her paternal grandmother. Jeannette appears to be the youngest of the children, and the Lydia and Peggy mentioned in the letter are assumed to be her older sisters.

Samuel Hunter [Fort Hunter] – site of the McAllister mansion. Fort Hunter was originally settled in 1725 by Benjamin Chambers, who later founded Chambersburg. Chambers left the property, which included grist and saw mills, to his brother-in-law, Samuel Hunter. The property became known as Hunter’s Mill. Samuel was taken prisoner in Franklin County by Indians in April 1758 and killed as they crossed Tuscarora mountain. Fort Hunter, actually a modification of his mill, was one of a series of small forts established along the Susquehanna River by the British due to the mounting threat of the French and Indian War. After the defeat of the Indian nations in 1763, the Fort was left to decay. In 1787, Archibald McAllister bought the abandoned fort, Hunter’s Mill and farm. He grew the property into a village with grist and saw mills, country store, blacksmith shop, school, artisan’s shops, tavern and a distillery.

In 1870, Daniel Dick Boas bought the property and later willed it to his daughter and her husband, Helen and John W. Reily. For more than 50 years, the
Reily dairy farm was a fixture in Harrisburg. The childless Reilys left the property to their nine nieces and nephews. Reily niece, Margaret Wister Meigs, recognizing the historical significance of the site, bought the remaining shares of the property and founded the Fort Hunter Museum. In 1956, Meigs established the Fort Hunter Foundation and the Friends of Fort Hunter in order to restore the estate and offer educational programs. In 1980, Dauphin County and the Board of Trustees for Fort Hunter took over operation of the property.

Archibald McAllister (1756-1831) [Mr. McAllister] – master of Fort Hunter. This family was large and well-connected in the Harrisburg area. According to the Ickes article referenced in connection with this volume’s account of the Pennsylvania Female College, two of Mr. McAllister’s great-granddaughters were enrolled in the preparatory department during the first year of the College. They were Matilda Willis Cox (granddaughter of Archibald’s daughter Matilda Willis McAlister) and Mary O. McAlister (granddaughter of Archibald’s son John Carson McAlister, who had married a granddaughter of Harrisburg’s founder John Harris.)

Elizabeth McAllister (1764-1822) [Mrs. McAllister] – second wife of Archibald McAllister. She was the former Elizabeth Carson, sister of John Carson. They married in 1780 and had six children.

Richard McAllister (1792-1822) – the son of Mr. and Mrs. McAllister who became a Methodist Episcopal preacher.

George Painter – unknown.

Ann Hulme Price (1784-1856) – the writer. Letters she wrote from 1824 to 1839 to her brother and other relatives in Burlington NJ are in the Women’s Resources manuscript collection of the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus. The description accompanying the manuscripts describes her as “wife, later widow, of pork-packer and local Methodist preacher John Price” and notes that the letters are written “with much expression of religious sentiment.” Apparently the family moved to Lebanon OH and then to Cincinnati OH. One Hamilton County OH publication refers to her as “a Quaker woman teaching sewing in Cincinnati between 1824 and 1836.” She died in Philadelphia in 1856.

John Price (1784-1832) [Mr. Price] – assistant on the Dauphin Circuit in 1817 and husband of the writer. While the official minutes of the Philadelphia Conference list Phineas Price and John Rice as the pastors of record for the Dauphin Circuit of 1817, this is an error – the name should be PRICE and not RICE. The original circuit book lists simultaneous payments during the year to both a “Phineas Price” and a “John Price.” John and Ann were married in Philadelphia on September 12, 1816. He appears to have been an unofficial assistant on the circuit and may have been related to Phineas Price – although they
apparently were not brothers. After his move to Ohio he continued to function as a local Methodist Episcopal pastor while working in the meat industry. He died in Cincinnati in 1832.

**Phineas Price** (1789-1867) – a pastor of record for the Dauphin Circuit in 1817, but not the husband of Ann Hulme Price or the “Mr. Price” of the letter. It is unknown whether the “Mr. Price” of the letter was a relative or there was just a coincidence in surnames. Rev. Price was a native of Essex County NJ, and his wife Susanna Evans was born in Lancaster County PA. He was assigned as a deacon in 1817 with elder John Rice to Dauphin Circuit in the Schuylkill District of the Philadelphia Conference. He was ordained an elder the following year. He left the itinerant ministry in 1823 and eventually became a medical doctor – although he continued to function as a local pastor/missionary/evangelist. Apparently an outspoken individual, he was involved in several controversies involving legal and religious disputes. A tombstone in the Grove Methodist Episcopal Cemetery in Chester County reads “Susanna Price wife Rev. Phineas Price died May 7, 1825, 27 years, 6 months, 25 days.” Nothing more is known about Phineas Price, except that he and Susanna are believed to have had a daughter Susan who married a Thomas Talley Beeson.

**credentials** [Philadelphia Conference]

- 1813 admitted on trial
- 1815 received into full connection
- 1816 ordained deacon
- 1818 ordained elder
- 1823 located

**appointments** [Philadelphia Conference]

- 1813 Hamburg NJ
- 1814 Bergen NJ
- 1815 Lancaster
- 1816 Bristol and Northampton
- 1817 Dauphin
- 1818 Lancaster
- 1819 Chester
- 1820 Bristol
- 1821 Bristol
- 1822 Somerset
Appendix II. Notes on Rev. Richard McAllister.

credentials
1815 admitted on trial [Philadelphia Conference]
1816 received into full connection [Baltimore Conference]
1822 superannuated (retired) [Baltimore Conference]

appointments [Baltimore Conference]
1817 Harrison
1818 Stafford
1819 Fell’s Point
1820 Fairfax
1821 Fairfax

a. This is problematic for two reasons and may be an error, an appointment that never materialized, or a reference to another “R. McAllister.” First, the Baltimore Conference (3/12/1817) would not have assigned Richard McAllister before he was admitted to the Philadelphia Conference (4/1/1817). Secondly, this appointment in the Monongahela district disagrees drastically with the sequence of events given for 1817 in the obituary.

b. This does not contradict the obituary. Dumfries is the leading town in Stafford County VA, and both names were used to describe the circuit.

obituary – from the Baltimore Conference minutes for 1824.

Richard McAllister. He was born September 20, 1792, near Harrisburg, in the state of Pennsylvania. In the twenty-fifth year of his age he was awakened to a sense of his lost estate as a sinner against God. And after groaning under the power of sin for some time, evincing his sincerity and earnestness to be delivered by seeking salvation in all the means of grace, he at length found peace with God in 1817.

He very soon evinced that ardent desire for the salvation of others which usually accompanies those to whom a “dispensation of the gospel is committed.” The same year he was received on trial in the Philadelphia Conference, and labored for a short time in the city of Philadelphia; but he was soon removed to Severn circuit, in the bounds of the Baltimore Conference.

In 1818 he was stationed at Dumfries; in 1819 at Fell’s Point; in 1820 and 1821 on Fairfax Circuit. Soon after he entered upon the labours of this circuit he declined in health, and became unable to preach. Through the advice of his physician and friends, with a view to the recovery of his health, he made a voyage to the south, and spent the remainder of his days in the state of Georgia.

Here he became acquainted with the Rev. S.K. Hodges, presiding elder of the Athens district, with whom he traveled occasionally during the summer of 1822. With him he conversed freely on the subject of his approaching dissolution, with the most perfect composure of mind. At one time, when extremely ill, he observed that he “waited patiently for his release.” And though he suffered at times exquisitely, he complained not, but calmly acquiesced in the will of God.

After making these excursions, as his strength would permit him, being unable to endure the fatigue of traveling any longer, he returned to his brother’s, in the lower part of the state, where, on the 8th of November, 1822, he died in peace, expressing a hope of immortality, in the thirty-first year of his age.