

The Keen/Keene Family of Wayne County, PA

The first Keen to come to Wayne County was Matthias around February, 1815. His journey probably started in Wallkill, Orange County, NY, then to Milford, Pike County, and ending in Wayne County. To get to his new home he had to drive over lumber roads and part of the way through an unbroken wilderness. Their new home was a rude log cabin, situated in what was then called Elk Forest, but he at once commenced to improve the desolate surroundings. The History of Wayne, Pike and Monroe Counties (HWPMC), p. 556, describes their arrival thus: "In the fall of 1814 he had, with the help of a hired man, built on his land a log house or cabin of the most simple structure possible. It had a bark roof, and its doors were only blankets. To get to it he drove through lumber roads and, part of the way, through an unbroken wilderness. Their household goods and the family were drawn in a sleigh, and while it was being unloaded Mrs. Keen sat in the sleigh and cried, so dreary and wild appeared what was to be her future home."

Some records state that he was born in Wallkill, Orange, NY, and others say he was born in Virginia, a descendant of Joran Kyn from Sweden. HWPMC, p. 556, is one such; Commemorative Biographical Records of Northeastern PA (CBRNEPA), p. 975 is another and appears to have been copied from HWPMC. This question needs to be researched and answered from reliable sources.

He was known as Captain Keen, because he had commanded a uniformed company of soldiers in Orange County, NY, called the "Republican Blues." The records for Keen's Cemetery, Canaan, PA, list him as a Revolutionary War veteran. CBRNEPA states p. 975: "He was proficient in military drill, and on reaching Wayne took an active interest in military affairs and was appointed by Gov. Snyder captain in the 103rd Regiment of Pennsylvania militia." Considering these glowing reports, it is strange that The History of Orange County, NY, published in 1908, and edited by Russel Headley makes no mention of Capt. Keen or his Republican Blues militia company. There is no mention of any Keen except one mention of Elihu Keen in a roster of an infantry regiment.

Capt. Keen was born August 9, 1774, so that would make him about 40 when he made the move to Wayne County, bringing his second wife, Anna Reeve Keen, and probably 9 or 10 of his children. He saw the potential of Canoe Pond as an energy source to power first a grist mill until 1830, and then a sawmill which replaced it. To that end, he dammed the pond the outlet of the pond and thus raised the water ten feet. Since that time, it has been known as Keen's Pond. HWPMC, p. 335 reports the elevation of Keen's Pond to be 1320 feet; it has bass, pickerel and perch, the bass running in from Elk Pond.

Both businesses were successful. Deacon Rufus Grenell was the mill-wright of the grist mill. The stone for the mill were obtained in the mountains and shaped by Mr. Keen's own labor. Huntington Collins built the sawmill. Capt. Keen also installed a carding machine with wool picker attached. This allowed wool to be processed mechanically, a task previously labor intensive for women. This technology caused Capt. Keen to become known as a public benefactor.

He was a strong Jacksonian Democrat, and held many township and county offices thereby inspiring several of his progeny to similar civic activity.

Capt. Keen was shot in the hip, giving him an injury that troubled him the rest of his life. One account in Goodrich's History of Wayne County, p. 181, says "in drawing a gun towards him in a canoe, it went off and the ball was lodged in his hip. After he had suffered much, Dr. Mahony extracted the ball, but he was left a cripple for life." When Capt. Keen's son was 85 he told of the accident in these words: "When my father had a ball enter his hip by the accidental discharge of a gun, one of his medical colleagues was called, who dressed the wound; but after a week or two, finding it very offensive and in a sloughing condition, the patient was carried to Bethany and was examined by Dr. Mahony, who removed from the wound the wadding of the gun, and with his finger reached the lodging place of the ball, and by the aid of a razor in enlarging the opening secured the bullet with his finger, after which recovery was rapid." CBRNEPA reports two versions of the event. On page 975 it states, "The accidental discharge of his gun, while hunting, gave him a painful wound which he carried through life." Then later, on page

1414 it says, "He was accidentally shot while hunting, and died from the effects of his wounds." Yes, he did die, some 20 years after, but it is a stretch to suggest this was due to "the effect of his wounds." HWPMC, p. 543, describes it in these words: "By an accidental discharge of a gun he was wounded in the hip. The ball, after several surgical operations, was removed, but he suffered from the effects of the wound through life." Then on p. 556 it says, "Soon after his arrival he was badly wounded by the accidental discharge of a rifle, while hunting."

Capt. Keen was married twice in Middletown, Orange County, NY. He fathered a total of 13 or 14 children. His first wife was Mary Jane (Jenny) Murray b. 1774, d. Oct. 3, 1793. Both were 17 when they were married June 10, 1791. Six months later she bore her first child, Jane, and in 1793 she bore George Murray Keen. Less than three weeks later she died, perhaps from complications of a difficult childbirth. Their children:

- (1) Jane, b. Dec. 2, 1791; d. 1866.
- (2) George Murray, b. Sep. 16, 1793; d. June 26, 1871.

A year later, Oct. 3, 1794, Capt. Keen (age 20) married again, Anna Reeve (age 19), b. 1775, d. June 27, 1861. Records disagree about the number of children she had and their names. Many list Elihu, but he was Capt. Keen's son-in-law, married to daughter Julia. Elihu was the son of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Julia was the daughter of Capt. Matthias (Joseph's brother) the son of Jacob. Julia and Elihu were grandchildren of Jacob. Some records erroneously name Elihu as the son of Capt. Matthias. Goodrich's History of Wayne County is one such error; HWPMC is another. Note that Elihu's middle name is Clark which he inherited from his mother, Mary Clark (Mrs. Joseph Keen). This relationship is spelled out clearly in CBRNEPA, page 1413. Some records specify only 13 children. Mostly they agree about those who were prominent in the community. CBRNEPA gives a list which agrees remarkably well with the names and order presented below, with the exception of Sarah. It is possible that Sarah died shortly after birth, a fairly common event, and thus is not named. Here is a possible list including Sarah containing 14:

- (3) Julia C., b. July 10, 1796; d. Sep., 1872; m. her first cousin Elihu Clark Keen.
- (4) James Reeve, b. May 19, 1799; d. 1887.
- (5) Matthias, Jr., b. June 15/25, 1802/1804; d. July 18, 1866.
- (6) Jacob Louis, b. 1803; d. 1900.
- (7) Elvira, b. May 14, 1805; d. July 20, 1886.
- (8) Mary C., b. May 3, 1807; d. at a young age
- (9) Sarah, b. June 15, 1811.
- (10) Catherine C., b. 1814; d. 1900.
- (11) Rosetta Reeve, b. 1817; d. 1900.
- (12) Dorothea Louisa, b. 1820.
- (13) Elizabeth, b. 1823; d. 1868.
- (14) Ann, d. 1900.

A newspaper article held by the Wayne County Historical Society, dated Jan. 12, 1952, states: "He was an expert stone mason and superintended the erection of the lock at Easton on the Lehigh Canal and also built locks on the Pennsylvania Canal and the Delaware and Hudson. In addition to taking care of his Grist Mill and Saw Mill, he took an active part in the Military, Civic and Political life of the county, his name appearing in all the important events of the early days. He was well known in Masonic circles and had an enviable record. The Masonic Grand Lodge records show that he was Master of a Lodge in Milford in 1815 and appeared before the Grand Lodge in Milford in 1815 and received the warrant for Freedom Lodge in Bethany. He was appointed first Master and was again Master in 1821. He had thirteen children all of whom followed his example of integrity and service to his fellow men. He was buried in the family cemetery in Canaan township, where in 1921 his descendants erected a beautiful monument to him and his wife, Anna Reeve Keen, as a memorial to their perseverance, industry and pioneer spirit, using for this purpose the original millstones which Captain Keen had brought from the nearby Moosic mountains

and shaped with his own hands." <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13980212/matthias-keen> has photos of the headstone and memorial.

As mentioned, Capt. Keen was active in civic life. One of the offices he served was county coroner. HWPMC p. 493 reports this incident: "The second hanging in Wayne County was that of Cornelius Jones. On the 6th day of February, 1817, Elizabeth Roswell, who lived on the road leading from Seelyville to the old glass factory, on what is now the farm of John Robertson, appeared before Squire Spangenberg, and swore away the life of her only son, who, she said, had poisoned his step-father. Cornelius Jones was arrested the day following, and that afternoon Coroner Matthias Keen held an inquest, and the jury brought in a verdict that Roswell was murdered by Cornelius Jones. On the 27th of the following August, Foreman of the Grand Jury Oliver B. Bush signed a 'true bill' against Cornelius for administering 'white arsenick mixed with cider.' The trial came the next day, and one of the witnesses testified that she heard the prisoner say that he killed his father because he hated him, A verdict of guilty was returned, and the execution took place on November 15, 1817. The scaffold was erected about forty rods east of the old court-house, in Bethany, in a lot now used as a cornfield by Isaiah Scudder. Bungling work was made of the execution, and the rope broke after only half strangling the doomed man. Before it could be readjusted, he recovered his powers of articulation, and begged them most pitiously not to haul him up again. The sentence of the law had to be complied with, and he was dragged a few inches off the ground, where he ended his life in horrible agony, while the crowd turned away appalled at the sickening scene.

"Some days after the execution it was discovered that the murderer's grave had been robbed and his body was found in an old log hut, on the hill west of Bethany, where it was being cut up preparatory to boiling for the skeleton. An alarm was given, and the dismembered remains were taken over to the court-house and placed on the table, where they were identified as those of Jones. They were then reinterred just outside of the Presbyterian graveyard. The grave robbery created much excitement, and Dr. Seely and several others were arrested, but the affair never came to anything."

HWPMC reports some of Capt. Keen's life before coming to Wayne. "After his marriage (to Annie Reeve) the captain moved to New York city and engaged in the draying business. This must have been about the year 1801. He remained in the city a couple of years, then returned to Orange County, N. Y., and in Middleton engaged in the mercantile business, and afterwards in the hotel business. In 1808 he sold out and went to Mechanicsville and bought a farm; but, owing to endorsing for others, his farm was sold on a mortgage, and he then moved to Milford, in Pike County, Pennsylvania, and for two or three years worked at the mason trade." It could have been during this time that he worked on the canal locks mentioned in the newspaper article cited above.

Capt. Matthias Keen and Masonry in HWPMC, p. 498: "It was in this old hotel that the Bethany Masonic Lodge was instituted about August, 1816. It was known to the craft as 'Freedom Lodge, No. 147.' Its membership was large and persons came from places as remote as Milford to attend the meetings. These were held on Tuesday evening, 'from five till nine o'clock from September ye 25th to March ye 25th; and from six o'clock to ten o'clock from March ye 25th till September ye 25th.' The initiation fee was sixteen dollars, and from a receipt for dues dated October 16, 1826, it seems that at that time Abisha Woodward was treasurer. In 1819 (Anno Lucis 5819) a Masonic work gives some of the officers as follows: Benjamin Raymond, W. M.; George Spangenberg, S. W.; Jacob S. Davis, Secretary; Robert Beardslee, Treasurer. The members mentioned were Thomas Spangenberg, Eliphalet Kellogg, Matthias Keen, William R. Walker, Abisha Woodward, Charles Stanton, Benjamin King and Jeremiah Bennett. After Honesdale had grown up and the courts been established there, the membership of this lodge, like that of St. Tammany's, became so reduced that it was given up, and the records and jewels were removed to the new lodge at the county-seat, where they were destroyed in the great fire."

I have attached a biography for Capt. Matthias Keen which I have written based on records I have found on the internet. I am his direct descendant: Capt. Matthias Keen; Matthias Keen Jr.; Marquis DL Keene; Israel T. Keene; Rae Bertrand Keene; Thaddeus Bertrand Keene; Raymond T. Keene (me).

Submitted by Ray Keene 2021