

**Today in Columbus history, September 14, 1837**, an advertisement appeared in the *Columbus Enquirer* in which William P. McKeen announced that he had bought the Oglethorpe House and, in so many words, was open for business again. A little later that year, an *Enquirer* editorial (Oct. 26, 1837) noted that the success of the Oglethorpe House, “kept by Wm. P. McKeen, is crowded every night with travelers in search of lands and fortunes,” probably reflected reality as well as the *Enquirer*’s attempts at boosterism in order to revive the city’s economy after the worldwide financial troubles of the Panic of 1837, which had begun the previous May.



1 *Columbus Enquirer*, September 14, 1837

From the *Enquirer* of October 26th :

“Our city seems to be reviving. Some activity and life has been exhibited in business circles this week. The health of the place is almost unparalleled in its history, nothing like bilious or malignant fever being known among our citizens. We are in hopes that times are getting better and money matters growing easier. This hope is strengthened by the fact that we daily see large numbers of strangers going West to purchase land and find new homes. The Oglethorpe

House, kept by Wm. P. McKeen, is crowded every night with travelers in search of lands and fortunes. The City Hall, too, under the

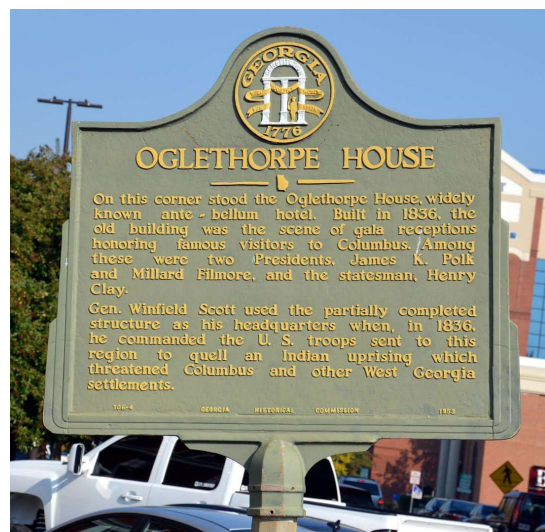
2 Martin quoting the *Columbus Enquirer*, Oct. 26, 1837 (pp. 81-82)

troubles of many businessmen in Columbus in the late '30s and early '40s. Several of McKeen’s properties in downtown Columbus were listed in the “Muscogee Sheriff Sales,” including “the large tavern known as the Oglethorpe House, now kept by McKeen & Bedell,” to “satisfy sundry fi fas issued from the Superior Court of Muscogee county” in favor of a long list of plaintiffs. (*Columbus Sentinel and Herald*, April 4, 1840)

Still, by 1842, William McKeen had regained ownership of the popular gathering and lodging place from William B. Phillips. But he was not to stay in Columbus. In 1843, William McKeen remarried and by 1850, he and his family had moved to Mobile, Ala. and lived there through the 1870 census.

Thomas and William Pace McKeen were the sons of Robert McKeen and Sarah Leonard and grandsons of Thomas McKean [sic], an early American politician and civil servant and signer of the Declaration of

**In 1839 William P. McKeen** and G.W.E. Bedell announced that they were in partnership as hotel owners. They continued into early 1840, but by April of 1840, William McKeen’s financial troubles were showing up in the newspapers, as were the

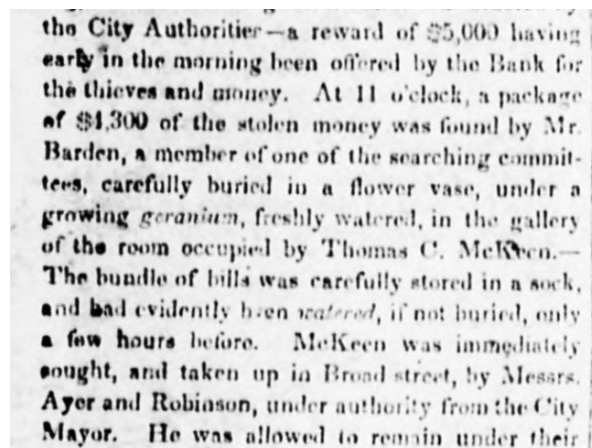
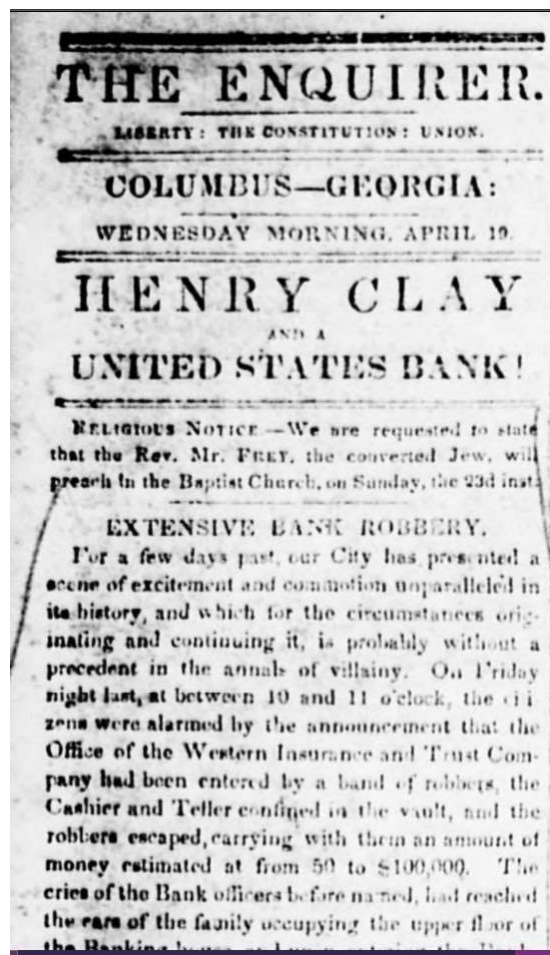


3 *Oglethorpe House historic marker image (GALILEO)*

Independence. Thomas C. McKeen, a lawyer in Columbus in 1834, practiced with Walter T. Colquitt and Josephus Echols (*Columbus Enquirer*, December 06, 1834). The McKeen brothers appear on tax lists and other documents transcribed in *Galer* between 1836 and 1841. Thomas and William both did business with James S. Calhoun and Charles S. Bass and they engaged in some financial dealings together which went south in the early '40s after the Panic of 1837.

Financial problems brought on by the Panic may have been a contributing factor in what happened next. In April 1843, Thomas C. McKeen was caught and accused of robbing the Western Insurance and Trust Company, owned by industrialist Mark Anthony Cooper, the total stolen was “estimated at from 50 to \$100,000.” McKeen buried \$4,300 of the money “in a flower vase, under a growing geranium [that] had evidently been watered, if not buried, only a few hours before,” (“Extensive Bank Robbery,” *Columbus Enquirer*, [April 19, 1843, 2](#)). (Martin calls it a “japonica jar” (136), although I don’t find that word used in the existing newspapers.) “McKeen's guilt was fully established...failing to give the bail, he was committed to jail.” I’ve searched through subsequent newspapers but found no follow-up information about Thomas McKeen and what became of him.

Read more about the events around and famous visitors to the Oglethorpe House in Martin and Worsley.



*Columbus Enquirer, April 19, 1843, page 2.*  
[Read the whole article at Georgia Historic Newspapers.](#)

*Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.*

## **SOURCES:**

Sarah Cantey Whitaker Allen, *Our Children's Ancestry*, [Milledgeville, Ga.]: S. C. W. Allen, 1935 (Hathitrust).

Mary Jane Galer, *Columbus, Ga., Lists of People, 1828-1852 and Sexton's Reports to 1866* ([Columbus, Ga.]: Iberian Publ., 2000).

Clippings from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

“*Columbus, Georgia, From its Selection as a ‘Trading Town’ in 1827, to its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raid, in 1865, Part 1 - 1827 to 1846,*” John H. Martin, compiler (Columbus, Ga.: Thos. Gilbert, 1874) (Internet Archive).

Nancy Telfair, *A History of Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1928* (Columbus: Historical Publishing, 1929).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_McKean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_McKean).

Etta Blanchard Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee* (Columbus: Columbus Office Supply, 1951).

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