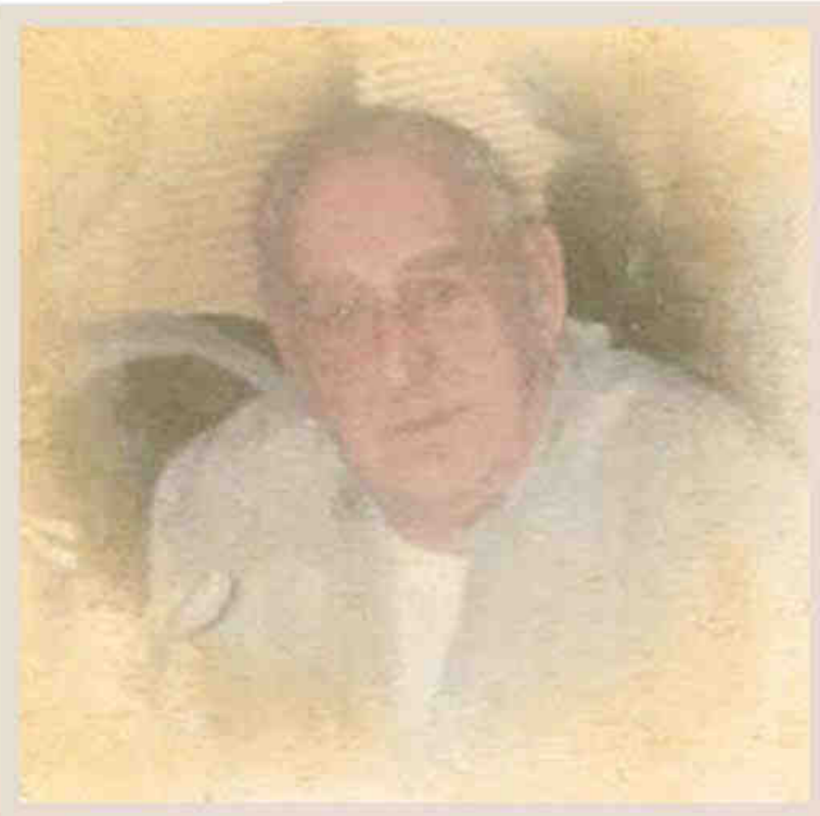




## Charles "Jim" McKee

February 5, 1926 - December 5, 2009  
Paw Paw, MI

### LIFE STORY / OBITUARY



Charles "Jim" McKee knew what it meant to put in a hard day's work, although he knew how to enjoy life too. He was a bit of a "stubborn Irishman" who liked being social - especially at the local watering holes. Jim found some of his greatest joys during the moments he spent with his grandsons as they were a great source of pride. Although his life was not without its challenges, Jim made the most of the days he was given while creating treasured moments that his family and friends will forever cherish.

For the most part the 1920s were a time of plenty in America as business was booming and innovation was blossoming around every corner. The year 1926 was a year in which President Calvin Coolidge occupied the White House, the unemployment rate was under two percent, and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was organized as the first nationwide radio broadcasting network. This was a significant year in the home of Charles and Francis (Webb) McKee as it was the year in which they welcomed the birth of their son, Charles, on February 5th. Charles, who was most often called Jim, was born in Dowagiac, Michigan as the oldest of six children in his family. His parents were farmers which was an industry that was especially hard hit during the Great Depression of the thirties. Jim moved from Dowagiac to Paw Paw while he was still quite young and attended the old one-room schoolhouse in the Wildey Farms area of Paw Paw. He continued his formal education at Paw Paw High School from which he later graduated.

On December 7, 1941 our nation was attacked at our naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by the Japanese which left President Franklin D. Roosevelt to declare a state of war the very next day. It was during this unprecedented time that Jim enlisted in the Army and served in Okinawa, Japan for a few years. Once he was discharged Jim returned home and found work at Wildey Farms as a hired hand.

A pleasant turn of events occurred when Jim met the woman with whom he would create a family. Her name was Opal Conklin and they met through family. A romance ensued and it wasn't long before their relationship blossomed into true love. They were later united in marriage in December of 1950. They settled in Paw Paw and soon started their family. Jim and Opal were blessed with the birth of their daughter Deb and then five years later, their son Chuck.

Jim's career path led him to a variety of places throughout his life. From the Wildey Farms he became the manager at the Teapot Dome, a local greasy spoon and coffee shop located on Red Arrow Highway. Jim then secured employment at Hartford Farm Supplies where he was in charge of keeping everything running. Finally, Jim worked at Knass Foods where he was a yard foreman for over 20 years before he retired. His hard work enabled Opal to stay home to care for their children and household needs for the most part, although she did work as a beautician for a time.

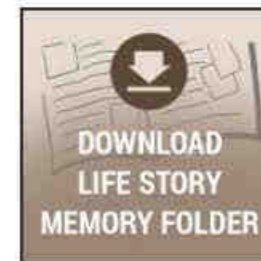
Even though working certainly kept Jim busy, there were a variety of other interests he enjoyed throughout his life as well. He and Opal enjoyed dancing together as often as time allowed. Jim was a member of the American Legion, McGowen Johnson Post #68 in Paw Paw where he enjoyed the camaraderie of his fellow servicemen for 50 years. He loved snowmobiling and spent a lot of time with his grandsons, Ron and D.J. Some of their favorite times together were spent around a crackling bonfire. Jim also liked to fish and tended to a large vegetable garden for many years. He was able to do a lot of canning from his yield too, most notably pickles.

Life drastically changed for Jim when his beloved Opal died in 1986. Although he was deeply saddened during this time, he continued on with his life and still enjoyed many of his interests. Jim remained social and enjoyed visiting the local bars where he savored his favorite beer, Pabst Blue Ribbon. His grandsons even took him to his favorite watering holes when he was no longer able to drive on his own. When he was in the comfort of his own home Jim liked watching many old programs or keeping up with the many chefs on the Food Network.

Eventually the years took their toll on Jim and he moved into a local nursing home. Although he rarely visited the doctor, he was able to receive the more hands-on care his health required while a resident at the nursing home.

With a diverse palette of interests, Charles "Jim" McKee enjoyed a fulfilling life that spanned many decades. He saw times of war and times of peace, times of plenty and times of want which together impacted the man he one day became. Jim worked hard in order to support his family and when his legacy grew to include grandchildren he couldn't have been happier. He valiantly served his country during a time of need and enjoyed being social with his friends. Jim will be dearly missed by all those he leaves behind.

Charles "Jim" McKee of Paw Paw died December 5, 2009 in Lawton. Jim's family includes 2 children: Deb Richmond and Chuck McKee; 2 grandsons: Ron Richmond and D.J. (Cris) Richmond; 2 great-grandchildren: Stephanie and Cody Richmond; 4 siblings: Marilyn (Arnold) Harvey; Dianne (Norm) Miller; Ed (Pat) McKee and JoAnn Longcore and by many nieces and nephews. Jim was preceded in death by his wife, Opal McKee and by a brother, Bob McKee. Service will be held Thursday at 11:00 a.m. at the Betzler Life Story Funeral Homes - Paw Paw, MI; 60900 M-40, 657-3870 with burial at Wildey Cemetery. Please visit [www.lifestorynet.com](http://www.lifestorynet.com), where you can archive a memory or photo, sign his memory book, or make a memorial contribution to the West Michigan Cancer Center.



#### SERVICE

Thursday, December 10, 2009  
11:00 AM EST  
Betzler Life Story Funeral Homes  
Paw Paw Location  
60900 Michigan 40  
Paw Paw, MI 49079  
[\(269\) 657-3870](tel:269-657-3870)  
[Driving Directions](#)

#### CONTRIBUTIONS

At the family's request memorial contributions are to be made to those listed below. Please forward payment directly to the memorial of your choice.

West Michigan Cancer Center  
200 North Park Street  
Kalamazoo, MI 49007  
[\(269\) 382-2500](tel:269-382-2500)  
[Driving Directions](#)  
[Web Site](#)