

The Thomas McDonough Family

by Eldon Bryant Tucker, Jr. -

(descendant of James McDonough [1790-1824])

[courtesy of Ruth Terrill, who had been given this text]

11-27-1970

For years, our family had the information that Thomas and Catherine McDonough were our immigrant ancestors of the McDonough family, and we had the dates of their deaths but didn't know where they were buried or where they actually lived in Greene County, PA. Also, no one seemed to know or to have the least idea. No one seemed to have even done any searching for information. Many of my dates come from a bankbook of the Merchants and Farmers National Bank of Greenburg, PA into which my grandmother, Mrs. W.A. Tucker had copied dates from an old bible which Mrs. Sarah M. Griffin had had. Unfortunately, I never either met Mrs. Griffin or saw the Bible, so I don't know to whom the Bible belonged originally. It was probably James and Elizabeth (Lewis-Whittaker) McDonough's Bible, for although it did have dates for his parents, it had no data of his brothers and sisters. It did have data of Elizabeth's first marriage and listed her children of that marriage.

Thomas was born in Ireland in the parish of Magheracross in County Fermanagh. According to Margaret Falley's "Irish and Scotch-Irish Ancestral Research", Magheracross Parish is in Clogher Diocese. The Parish records for Magheracross begin in 1800, so we miss the record of Thomas' birth there in 1750, which would have given his parents' names. I have written there anyway for records of McDonoughs of the early 1800's, but never received any response. The book mentioned above also does not mention any McDonough data in the various repositories of genealogical and historical collections, so it is doubtful if we will be able to discover his parentage or any further data about him or of his wife Catherine, whose maiden name we also don't know.

The early McDonoughs of our family were Catholics. Mrs. O.L. McClure said they were good kindly people. Also, that twins ran in the family. The date of their coming over is uncertain, but Mrs. McClure said that Thomas, Jr. was four years of age when they made the ocean trip and that he was so sick that the captain of the ship said he might have to be buried at sea. His mother was so distraught that she said she would just as soon be thrown into the sea with him if he went. The date may have been around 1805-1810, inasmuch as Thomas, Jr.'s first child, Mary, was born in 1825. Mrs. McClure said that the family settled in or near Pittsburgh, coming to Greene County later. This is logical because some of the children made their homes in the Pittsburgh area. Ella (Keenan) Borroughs, dec'd, of Somerton, Belmont Co., Ohio, a genealogist of her family, stated in her records that Thomas, Sr.'s daughter, Sarah, married Hugh Keenan in New York. Mayme Black of Uniontown wrote me that Hugh Keenan, Jr. was born in 1814 as the ship docked at NYC coming from Ireland. The family may have stayed a while in New York. Catherine Keenan Trippett was born in New York about 1808.

Jan. 24th 1817, Thomas McDonough purchased 200 acres of land in Greene Township on Meadow Run for \$2,000.00 from James and wife Mary Long, which they had purchased 13 April, 1795, from Thomas and Ann Alley. Their neighbors were Richard Pain, and Walter Dickinson. 13 Aug. Thomas purchased an additional 9 acres from James Long, which bordered on Isaac Johnston's land and cornered on Benjamin William's land, for a price of \$60.00.

Robert Whitehill served as Thomas' attorney, and Thomas apparently paid \$500.00 down and agreed to pay \$500.00 with interest from 24 Jan., on 24 Jan 1820, 24 Jan. 1823, and 24 Jan. 1826. However, he died three months after the first payment date, April 28, 1820.

Wed March 11, 1953, after visiting in the court house at Waynesburg, PA, I took a trip along Meadow Run in Greene County, looking for graves, descendants, cabins, or whatnot of the McDonough family.

I finally arrived at Davistown, a small old village in a valley between hills through which Meadow Run, a branch of Dunkard Creek, runs. At the country store people said that they never heard of any McDonoughs, Keenans, or Whittakers living there, but that if anyone knew anything for certain about the history, it would be old man Clark F. Litman, who lived on his farm, on a hill above town.

At the home, two women came to the door, and the younger one asked me to come in and took my hat and coat very graciously and bid me wait in the living room for her 76-year-old father to come from where he was resting after his evening meal. He soon came in, an elderly but active and wiry man, of average height, and who was very interested in my inquiry. He told me about and quickly took me to see the tombstone of Thomas McDonough, up the hill and to the left and over grazing meadow to near fence on other side. I was tickled to death. The stone had recently been broken off at the base accidentally by one of the hired help who came too close to it with his grass cutting machine (mower). The stone was in the shape as given below, two feet wide, three feet above the ground, and about three inches thick. The inscription was in perfect condition:

IHS
To the memory of
Thomas McDonough
A native of Ireland
County Fermanagh
Parish of Magheracross
who departed this life
April 28, 1820
Aged 70 years
Lord have mercy
on his soul

Jim Debolt
James Litman
C.F. Litman

In 1961, when we visited in the East, we found the tombstone turned over face down, so I propped it up. In 1965, when we visited again, we found the stone lying down again, face up, and the weather had worn away about a third of the inscription. This year, 1970, the stone was found to be propped up, leaning against another stone, 18 inches wide and 2 ft above ground, which was forced to lean backwards by its proximity to a tree on the other side. This stone had no legible inscription. In 1965, Uncle Wyland was with us and he took back to Aunt Mary Tucker's basement the footstone with the TM on it.

Returning to the initial visit in 1953, Mr. Litman said that he had inherited the farm from his father, James, who had purchased it from James Debolt. This makes me wonder why their three names appeared on the tombstone. Was the Thos. McD. tombstone put up by grandchildren years after he died and did they pay these three men to do it? Originally, there were about six graves, acc. to Mr. Litman, with only two tombstones and the rest ordinary stones. He had placed a smaller (tomb?)stone near the fence so it would not get damaged by the mowing machine. It had no legible inscription-- may have been the footstone to the other one without an inscription.

In 1970, we saw another smaller tombstone, prob. a footstone, without any inscription except a cross at the top, and which was broken into two pieces, and were leaning against Thomas' tombstone.

Mr. Litman's father told him that Thomas had actually been buried on a round knoll at top of the hill. A crowd and a priest had walked down the hill praying and they suddenly stopped precisely where Thomas' tombstone was placed and said this was where he lay and they set up the tombstone there. Clark was dubious about all this. Opal, Clark's dau., told us this year (1970, Aug 1) that of Thomas (Cath. too?), his (or their) soul(s) were prayed and prayed down the hill from where buried at the top. She said that there may have been as many as 20 graves, and that many stones may have been plowed under. People came and looked at them years ago and may have copied the inscriptions. This doesn't jive with what Mr. Litman told me. He said that I was the first one to ever come to see the tombstone in his lifetime.

In 1952, he told me that for years there was nothing but a wilderness up on the hill, but when as a young boy his family moved to the farm there also had been a log cabin up the hill, which has been gone for many years. An apple tree which had stood by the cabin lasted until about 1959. The cabin was only of one floor, and it probably had 4 rooms, and a stone chimney. Opal (1970) told us that there are four piles of stones on the other side of the top of the knoll, which may have been from chimneys of several cabins. Her mother thought there may have been a spring over there which was reason for picking the location. Clark said (1953) that an old mill (sawmill) had stood by the run below and to left when facing it but it was long ago gone. It was powered by the stream and maneuvered a vertical blade.

Regarding our visit this year, Ethel Courtney, Bobby, and Charles went along. Opal Litman said her father had died 2 years ago at age 91. Her mother was living and aged 92 and had a good memory, but had fractured a hip 2 years ago and had been in the Sundale Rest Home for 15 months and had received very good care there; now she is at home with Opal. Opal still teaches school and belongs to the D.A.R. Clark told us in 1953 that he had another daughter married to a Korean War veteran and they were living in California. Also, he told us that he was born in the home Opal lives in-- so my notes had a little confusion. It had been my impression that he had been born there.

Thomas wrote, or rather had his will written for him, February 28, 1820, at which time he was "weak in body but of sound mind and memory." He recommended his "soul to God who gave it and my body to the earth in a Christian-like manner." He gave his "plantation" where he lived to his three sons, Thomas, James, and Richard, along with his debts, and gave his "beloved wife, their mother, her room in the mansion house, her bed and bedding and her choice of a cow in the yard." They were to take care of her, and she was to have the choice of which one(s) lived in the house with her. He hoped that none of the sons would sell their share in the property without the consent of the others. Also, as soon as they paid his debts, they were to pay his other two sons, John and Hugh, fifty dollars each. His daughters, he mentioned, had been given their "full portions" at the times of their marriages; Alvy, the wife of John Kenon (Keenan); Sarah, the wife of Hugh Kenon (Keenan); Catherein, the wife of Arthur Wiggins; and Ezabally, the wife of James McCaffery. Last dau. may have been Isabella. Henry Burge, Daniel Cowell, and Peter Myers witnessed the will. It was probated May 3rd, 1820, a few days after his death, April 28th.

Regarding what happened to Thomas McDonough's property, a year after his death, his widow and three sons, Thomas, James, and Richard, and their wives sold back the 200 acres on which he had been making installment payments to the original seller, James Long, who was then residing in Ohio, for \$1500, apparently at a loss of \$500.00.

30 March 1846, Elizabeth, widow of James McDonough, and her two heirs James and Nancy of Greene County, sold their part of the nine acre lot Thomas had purchased on Meadow Run to Jacob Debolt for \$25.00. It was near Nicholas Debolt's mill, and adjacent to lands of Nicholas Debolt, John Steel, and others. Elizabeth signed her mark to the deed, but the children signed

their names. This is probably the same land the Litman farm is on and where Thomas had lived. On 1 April, 1846, Thomas, Jr. and his wife Sarah and Richard's widow, Ann, and her children deeded their share of the nine acres to Jacob Debolt for \$80.00. Their share was 2/3. Ann's son, John, was probably the attorney John McDonough who handled the deed. Richard's widow and his married daughters and their husbands weren't able to sign their names. The deed was recorded in Pittsburgh 8 April, 1846.

James McDonough, son of Thomas, married first Nancy Lynch June 25, 1810, who died Nov. 21, 1810. We don't know where they lived or where she was buried. They possibly lived in the old cabin at Pierceville (now Ceylon, Greene County, PA, but I could locate no deed indicating purchase or sale of the cabin. James married second Elizabeth Lewis-Whittaker Feb. 1, 1817. She was born Dec. 15, 1769, at Columbia, Lancaster PA, a town just across the Susquehanna River from York Co., PA and on the road connecting York to Lancaster. We don't know who her parents were. James died Aug. 23, 1824, just 4 years after his father, and may have been buried on his father's farm at Pierceville. We could never find his grave. There are no deeds recorded in James' name, or in Elizabeth's name, other than the one mentioned above when she and her children by James sold their share of the old farm in 1846 for \$25.00. Nothing much is known about James. Presumably he was a farmer. I could find no record of his having served in the War of 1812. His birth date is unknown. He could have been as old as 54 at his death if born when his father was 20, but I doubt if this was so. Their children were:

Nancy McDonough born April 15, 1818
 married Dec. 14, 1847 John Hill Courtney
 died Nov. 3, 1876

James Lynch McDonough (his middle name was taken from maiden name
 of Nancy Lynch, his father's first wife
 married July 1, 1847 Lucinda Dowler
 died September 28, 1899
 he was a coverlet weaver; we have a coverlet of
 his with his initials and 1848 in 2 corners

Catherine McDonough born August 18, 1819
 died August 27, 1819