



Diaspora Stories

Ancestor's Name: Mary Dempsey Child of Thomas Dempsey and Ellen Regan
 Place of birth (if known): Derryclough, Drinagh, Cork
 Your Name: Susanna Kane
 Contact (optional): smc1961@gmail.com

My grandfather Harry Daniel Kane (b.1897) grew up in Elmira, New York, USA. When I was a young girl he told me stories of where his ancestors came from. He always said "Skibbereen". To my young ears it was a melodic name and because of that I never forgot. In 2007, I travelled to Ireland and visited the Skibbereen Heritage Center. I did not have much information on Mary Dempsey, only her birth date. The ladies at the information center were extremely helpful and promised to forward the information to the priest of the parish so he could retrieve any pertinent records. Six months later I received an email from the center with the name of her parents and siblings. I was thrilled. In July of 2017, I again visited the Skibbereen Heritage Center and met with Margaret Murphy, the genealogist on staff. She was extremely knowledgeable and ever so welcoming. She found the exact location of the family farms, of which there were two possible locations. She met me the next day in Drinagh and took my husband and me to the land. She arranged for me to meet a distant cousin, James Dempsey, and then explained in detail the features of the land, the famine, and the struggles against the unfair taxation by the British. I can't begin to tell you how Margaret's gift of time changed my life. I felt a strong connection with Mary, as I gazed upon the land. I picked up a small stone to remember the land on which Thomas Dempsey farmed and Mary walked upon each day. I can't help but think that Mary was smiling down on me from heaven.

Mary Dempsey emigrated from Liverpool and arrived in New York City on 30 May 1830. She was only twenty years old. The ship was called the Isaac Webb. Also on the ship was Cornelius Kane, her future husband. They immediately settled in Elmira and had my great-grandfather Dennis Kane. Mary's sister Johanna (Joan) arrived in Elmira a short time later. She married a man with the last name of Connelly. Mary's parents Thomas Dempsey and Ellen Regan Dempsey disappear from records. There was a Thomas Dempsey who left for USA; however, he is listed as having died onboard. There are also a few Thomas Dempseys who emigrated to Australia under a conviction for non-payment of taxes. I can't be sure if these are valid trails to follow. Ellen disappeared from the parish records and I suspect the poor thing perished. Joan and Mary named many of their children after their brothers and parents, which is such a wonderful Irish tradition. I don't have any stories about their experiences upon arrival to the USA, I think life was difficult as laborers and maids, however, they gave the gift of life to me ...and I'm thankful.

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I agree to submit this story for publication by Skibbereen Heritage Centre.

Signed: Susanna M. Kane
 Date: 1/31/2017

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