



Diaspora Stories

Ancestor's Name: DANIEL, MARY, DENNIS & SEPHANIA DOWDAN
 Place of birth (if known): RATHHALL, COEK
 Your Name: DANIEL & MAUDEEN DOWDAN
 Contact (optional): AMHERST NY, USA 609.222.3070 COMCAST.NET

SEE ATTACHED

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

Signed: *[Signature]*

Date: 27 SEPT, 2019

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The Donovan Family of
Union Hall, Cork, and
Concord, New Hampshire, USA

From a brief biography of one of their sons, I knew that Daniel and Mary Donovan, hailed from some place in County Cork and emigrated in 1847, eventually arriving in the U.S. and settling in Concord, New Hampshire. When I retired, I set out to find what I could about them and hoped to locate the place from which they had come.

I eventually discovered that Daniel (1816 - 1864) and Mary (1819 – 1909) left with their son John (1845 – 1865) at the height of the famine from Union Hall, a small farming and fishing village a few miles from Skibbereen, an area generally regarded as the epicenter of the famine. Most likely the three left without other family members, sailing from the pier at Union Hall to a larger ship at Kinsale, eventually landing at St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. Thereafter they went to Boston, where Daniel was recruited to work as a laborer in Lawrence, Massachusetts. By 1850 they had arrived in Concord, NH.

Mary was one of five children of Dennis (1785 – 1879) Donovan (her maiden name was Donovan) and Johanna Casey (1796 – 1882). Apparently, the others left in two groups consisting of Mary's parents, siblings, spouses and children. They left probably between 1847 and late 1848. It is not known from whence they sailed or where they landed in North America. (Montreal is most likely.) Evidently, they were recruited by employment agents on the docks, because all of them resided for a year or two in Cincinnati, Ohio. Except for one of Mary's brothers, the entire family was illiterate but apparently kept in touch with Daniel and Mary by mail (most likely through parish priests) because, remarkably, by 1850 the entire family was in Concord, NH.

Concord was economically vibrant, with railroads being built and mills being developed, but it was not an ideal place to be an Irish immigrant. It had been founded and long controlled by people of English Protestant stock and the influx of the Irish was not met with enthusiasm. They were uneducated, illiterate, many spoke little English, they drank and partied, they were unwashed. And worst of all, they were Catholic. But they also worked hard at dangerous jobs nobody else wanted,

Nonetheless, before long the Irish in Concord were much too numerous to ignore.

The first generation worked in the usual immigrant occupation: laborers and hod carriers for the men, domestics for the women. The one brother who learned to read became a machinist in a locomotive factory. Most of the family lived in the same neighborhood and many of them eventually owned a house – all close together in Concord, NH.

Daniel died at the age of 48 in 1864, leaving Mary with seven children ranging in age from 18 to 2. Somehow, she got by, presumably with the help from the kids and relatives.

John enlisted in the Union Army (fraudulently) at the age of 15 or 16; some of the other started work at 12 or so. Patrick, my great-grandfather, was a locomotive fireman at the age of 16 and a full-fledged engineer by the age of 21.

Most notable of all Daniel and Mary's children was Patrick's younger brother, Daniel B. Donovan. He graduated from Concord High School at the age of 18 and at the age of 21 became the first Irish lawyer in the state. His career was legendary, earning him an honorary degree from Dartmouth. (He never attended either college or law school.) He died at age 43 in 1898 and the bar association's obit noted that Attorney Donovan demonstrated to members of "his race" that it was safe for them to enter the learned professions.

The next generation found employment in diverse fields, demonstrating both hard work and acceptance by the community. There were a few lawyers, a couple of physicians, more than a few teachers, numerous railroad workers and a variety of skilled tradesmen.

Except for John, who vanished during the Civil War, and Mary's unknown sister, all the Union Hall Donovans, their spouses and most of their children, are buried near each other in Concord, New Hampshire. Their graves are now always decorated with Irish flags.

A small stone has been removed from under the grave of Dennis and Johanna and has been tossed into Glandore Harbor from the pier from which all the family is believed to have left, symbolizing their return.

The Skibbereen Heritage Center did considerable research on the Union Hall Donovans and the results were commendable. They located two probable ancestral homes and toured them as well as Myross Graveyard with my wife and me. This is an ancient site where there are a number of Donovans and Hegerty graves, some of whom were most likely ancestors. Great thanks are due to the staff at the SHC, but especially to Margaret and Deirdre, who gave us a tour on their own time and even managed to have us visit the family patriarch, a delightful man of 90 years who could easily pass for much younger.

Skibbereen Heritage Centre is an invaluable resource deserving the support of everyone who comes to use its resources.

Daniel E. Donovan III

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