

Donovan Family Diaspora Story – told April 2026 in County Cork

This story begins with my fourth great-grandfather, James Donovan, born in 1798 in County Cork, and his wife, Elizabeth Houlahan (also recorded as Holland), born in 1800 near Bantry. They were married on May 21, 1832, in the parish of St. Mary's (built in 1827) in Schull East, near Bantry..

My great-great-grandfather, Patrick Donovan, their eldest son, was born around January 1833 near Bantry, County Cork. We have his baptismal record (April 11, 1833) from St. Finbarr's Church (built in 1825). The children of James and Elizabeth included Patrick, Mary baptized March 25, 1835, Bridget baptized April 12, 1840 and Ellen Baptized March 22, 1837.

At age 21, in 1854 during the Great Famine, Patrick emigrated to the United States. He first settled in New York and later married Bridget Purcell in Ottawa, Illinois, in 1857. Bridget had emigrated that same year from County Tipperary. They had eight children:

- James Edward (born in Knox county) June 25,1858–1908) married Elizabeth O'Neil at St Patrick Cemetery in Chatworth
- Catherine ("Kate") Scheible (1859–1939)
- Elizabeth /Etta (1859–1890)
- Mary (Martha) 1862
- Timothy 1866-1911
- John Donovan (December 3, 1867 – April 14, 1925)
- Thomas Fanning Donovan (December 17, 1871 – November 17, 1946), who later became Lieutenant Governor of Illinois and lived in Joliet
- Ellen/Nellie (Deaney) (1873–1947)

John Donovan, my great-great-grandfather, married Annie O'Connor (1868–1925) in 1892. They had six children: Elizabeth (b. 1894), Daniel (b. 1896), James (b. 1898), Sister Margaret Mary Annice, CSC (b. 1901), and Thomas Charles (b. 1902). John died at age 57 on April 14, 1925, and is buried at St. Patrick's Cemetery in Chatsworth, Illinois. They may have relocated from Charleston Il to Chatsworth. In 1880 they were in Charlotte.

Annie O'Connor was born in Illinois. Her parents were Daniel O'Connor (d. 1892) and Hanora ("Nora") Larkin (d. 1902). Annie lived to the age of 82.

Their son, Thomas Charles Donovan, my grandfather, was born on October 12, 1902, in Chatsworth, Illinois, where the family lived on a farm near town. Both Thomas and his sister Annice showed early academic promise. Recognizing their talents, local priests helped send them to school in South Bend, Indiana. Annice went on to become an accomplished scholar and teacher, earning a PhD, and is buried at Saint Mary's College.