

Margaret Montgomery: A life in Paradise

Williamsport Women



By MARY L. SIEMINSKI
Sun-Gazette Correspondent

Margaret Montgomery is one of the hundreds of Montgomerys who have lived in the Montgomery area since the late 18th century. Margaret Montgomery married her first cousin Robert T. Montgomery in 1831, so she is a Montgomery twice.

Margaret lived from 1806 to 1888. Although I found little about her personal life, her story provides a glimpse into what life was like in this part of Pennsylvania. Margaret lived in a time of contradictions: Her father, David Montgomery, owned slaves, but her sons, David and Robert, fought in the Civil War.

In 1774, Margaret's grandparents John Montgomery, a captain in the Pennsylvania Regiment, and Christiana Foster Montgomery acquired 636 acres of land in Turbot Township, Northumberland County. Because the land was so beautiful, they named the settlement "Paradise."

Their home was four miles from Fort Freeland, which was attacked by British and Indian troops in 1779. The family moved to Harrisburg for safety,

(See MARGARET, Page E-2)



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Margaret and Robert Montgomery and their children are buried at this site in Muncy Cemetery.

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(From Page E-1)

returning to Paradise in 1783 when the Revolutionary War ended.

FORT RICE

The original Montgomery homestead had burned during the 1779 attack, so the family moved into Fort Rice, which had been constructed by a German Regiment on the Montgomerys' property. John Montgomery built additions onto the fort, and generations of Montgomerys lived there. The fort itself still stands on Fort Rice Road, about three miles south of Turbotville.

Margaret's mother was Agnes Shaw Montgomery. Agnes's parents, William and Esther Shaw, had settled in the area when Agnes was a child, fleeing Ireland after William was involved in the unsuccessful Irish Rebellion of 1803, led by Robert Emmet.

Margaret was one of seven children. Unfortunately, despite an extensive search, I found little about her childhood. Her brothers might have gone to one of the many private schools in the area; she may have been tutored at home.

We do know that not only did David Montgomery own slaves but so did his father, several of his brothers, and his brother-in-law Rev. John Bryson. There is a record of David's purchase of a slave named Bob, bought as an infant in 1800, and a row of slave shacks stood on the Paradise property.

MARRIED LIFE

Margaret was married on Dec. 15, 1831, when she was 25 and Robert was 33. Although I cannot be positive, most likely the cousins were married by Rev. John Bryson at the Warrior Run Presbyterian Church.

Robert Montgomery (1798-1871) had inherited land from his father and was a very prosperous farmer. He was born in the Paradise area and spent most of his life there. His considerable holdings in the area included land in what is now the borough of Montgomery. He donated the land for the Montgomery railroad station and, as a result, the station and the borough bear his name. According to Rev. Adam P.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Above, Margaret Montgomery built this ornate home at 118 S. Main St., Muncy, in 1874, after the death of her husband. She lived here until her death. Right, also called Fort Montgomery, Fort Rice was built in 1779 for the defense of the West Branch Valley during the American Revolution. It is the only fort in the area still standing. The Montgomery family expanded it and made it their home after the Revolution.

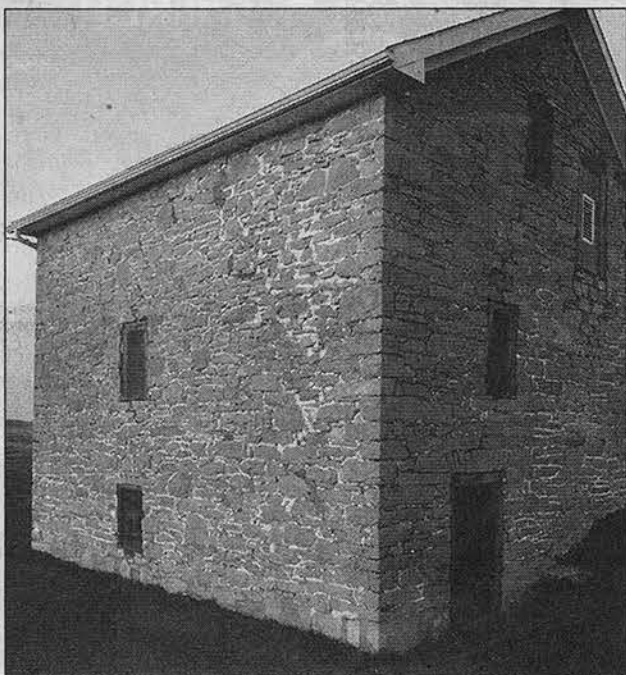
Bingaman in "How Did Montgomery Get Its Name?" (1967), his land extended to "the hotel at the beginning of the toll road which leads over the mountain" (now Route 15).

Robert was a leading citizen. He was elected a member of the school board, and one of the school teachers lodged in his and Margaret's home.

Margaret and Robert had seven children: John (1834), David (1836), Henrietta (1837), Robert (1839), Anna (1842), Caroline (1844) and Edward (1848). One died before reaching maturity: John drowned when he was 14.

DAVID MONTGOMERY THE SON

David had graduated from Princeton and was practicing law in Williamsport when he enlisted in the Woodward Guards. After transferring to the regular army, he was wounded at Richmond and at Gettysburg and was held for a time in Libby Prison



near Richmond.

On Dec. 7, 1864, David married Emily Condell of Springfield, Illinois. His mother was not well enough to travel to the wedding and he did not have enough leave to take his bride to see her. According to a story in the Montgomery Mirror (May 18, 1839), David's father, Robert, went all the way to Washington to take his son's plea for leave to President Lincoln, who knew the Cordell family from Springfield and had "dangled [Emily] on [his] knee and kissed her many a time." President Lincoln granted the leave, and David later stood guard at Lincoln's bier in Springfield.

David himself died of an accidental gunshot wound in 1868 on an Army base in Texas.

LATER YEARS

Robert died in 1871. After his death, Margaret built a beautiful home at 118 S. Main St., Muncy. A note in "Now and Then" (v. 4, no. 10, Oct. 1874) called her home "a speci-

men of modern architecture that, merely to look at, affords every one pleasure." The house, still standing, boasts round towers, a cupola and other gingerbread decorations. Living with Margaret were her unmarried daughters, Henrietta and Anna; Emily, her son David's widow; and Emily and David's daughter, Margaret.

When Margaret died in 1888, her property was divided among her surviving children and her granddaughter. Margaret and Robert are buried in Muncy Cemetery, along with their children.

Sieminski is a retired librarian and manager of the Lycoming County Women's History Collection. Hurlbert is a Professor Emeritus of Library Services at Lycoming College. Their column is published the second Sunday of each month and the author can be reached at lcwhcmanager@gmail.com.