

Margaret Small McMunn — From Scotland to the Williamsport west end

Williamsport Women

by MARY SIEMINSKI



My great-grandparents, Margaret Small and Edward McMunn, came to live in Williamsport during the height of the lumber era. Edward was not a lumber baron; he was a lath sawyer in the mills. Margaret, before their marriage, was a domestic and then a pastry cook at the American Hotel. Margaret and Edward did not own a house on Millionaires' Row, but they did come to own a home on the corner of Cemetery and Scott Streets.

The lumber industry in Williamsport gave both

Edward and Margaret what they needed most — jobs. Their labor helped guarantee the success of those who actually made the millions and their lives tell us something about the lives of other Williamsport "workers" of the era.

I have reconstructed what I could of Margaret's story from what public records I could find: mostly census records and city directories and her obituary. There are few family stories about Margaret.

The opportunity for employment is what drew Margaret Small to Williamsport from her

uncles' farm in Kellysburg, Cascade Township — in the northeast corner of Lycoming County. She was in her 20s then. Born in Scotland, she had come to America from Ireland in 1849 when she was 9. She came with her grandmother, also named Margaret, and her uncles James and Daniel Small and John McClain. Presumably both Margaret's parents and her grandfather had died before their voyage.

Early years

The family lived for a few years in Bloomsburg, where the uncles were "furnace men" in the foundry there and young Margaret went to school. In the 1860 census for Cascade, the same extended family — Margaret (now 19), Margaret Sr. (now 70), John McClain, James Small and Daniel Small — were listed as farmers. Pomeroy's Atlas of Lycoming County for 1873 pinpoints the location of their farms.

Norman Wengert lives on that plot of land now, as did the late Marguerite Bierman, and they preserved the foundation work and the spring from the original homestead.

I try to imagine my great-grandmother's early life. What was it like to lose your parents and then head out on a ship with your grandmother and uncles to a new country? And then go to school in Bloomsburg and move to a farm miles from the nearest city, without even brothers and sisters?

Only 10 to 15 families lived in Cascade at that time — almost all Catholic and almost all Irish. Did Margaret take care of her aging grandmother? Did she work on the farm, doing the cooking and cleaning? Some family members have said that she was a teacher at the nearby Kellysburg School.

By 1870, Margaret was in Williamsport. "Maggie" Small is listed in census records as a pastry cook at the American

Hotel at the corner of West Fourth and William Streets. For two years before that, Maggie was living at 92 Edwin St., a domestic in the household of Frank L. Herdic, lumberman. Frank was a cousin of Peter Herdic and had moved to Williamsport from New York to take advantage of the money to be made in lumber.

Edward McMunn

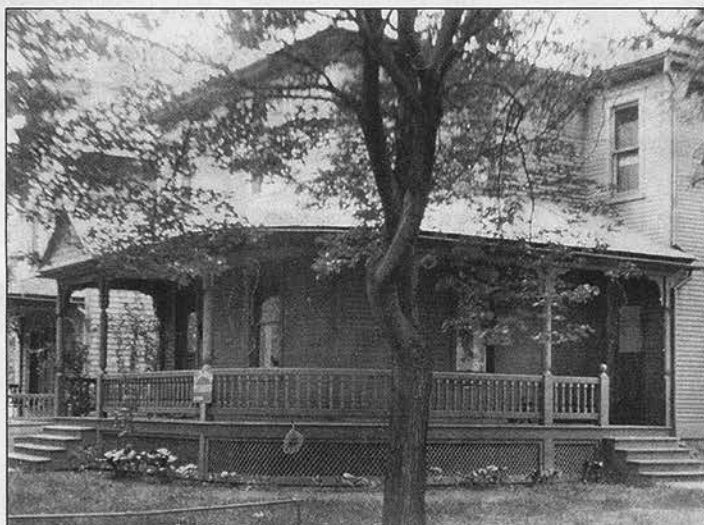
While living in Williamsport, Margaret met my great-grandfather Edward McMunn.

The lumber business drew Edward McMunn from Calais, Maine. His father, also named Edward, had immigrated to Maine from Beltra, outside of Sligo, Ireland, about 1840. Great-grandfather McMunn was born in Calais and attended school there. When he was a young man, he set off to find work in the woods of Pennsylvania, where the lum-

(See MARGARET, Page E-3)

Lifestyle

Williamsport Sun-Gazette, Sunday, November 10, 2013 E-3



Margaret Small McMunn — From Scotland to the Williamsport west end

(From Page E-1)

ber industry was flourishing. According to family lore, he set off — by foot — with another young man from Calais: J. Henry Cochran, who did become one of those millionaires.

The sawyer and the pastry cook at the hotel, both Irish, both Catholic, both new in Williamsport, were married on June 23, 1872, at the Church of the Annunciation, then a small brick church on Edwin Street.

But there is more to the story, and this part continues to intrigue me. When Margaret left the farm for Williamsport, she left behind in Cascade a young daughter, Elizabeth. The child is listed in the 1870 census as being 9 years old and living with Margaret's uncle James and her grandmother. The girl's name on the census record is Elizabeth Hesley; she would have been born in 1861, when Margaret was 20. The identity of Elizabeth's

father always has been shrouded in mystery. Speculation among my mother and her sisters about the true parentage of their Aunt Elizabeth ran from "the needle and pin man" (that is, a travelling salesman) to a soldier who went off to the war and never returned.

After Edward and Margaret married, Edward formally adopted the 12-year-old Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's father

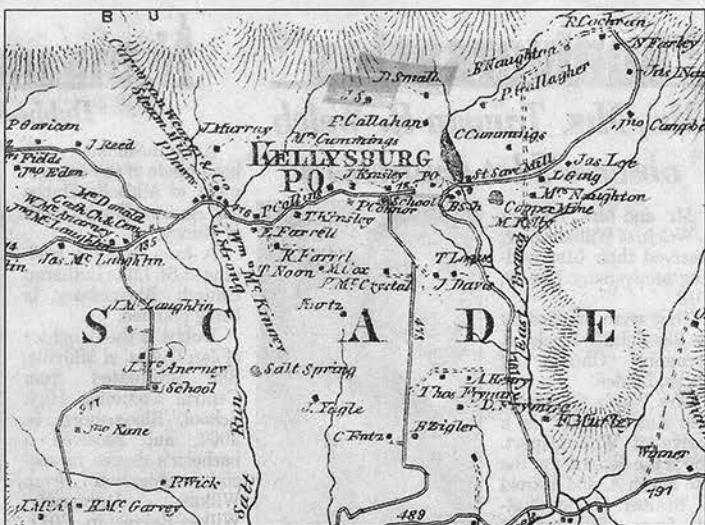
One hundred and fifty years later, we are still not positive who Elizabeth's father was, but we do have some clues. As Elizabeth grew up and was asked for her father's name on various forms, such as her marriage license application, she was not consistent in her responses. Sometimes she wrote that her father was Fred Small; sometimes she named her adopted father, Edward McMunn.

Internet searching produced one likely candidate. His name is Fred — Frederick Augustus

Heisley. Heisley was from Williamsport; his brother Michael had a logging operation in Cascade. Had the couple met and fallen in love and had a child? In June 1863, Heisley enlisted in the Civil War. Serving in the 191st Pennsylvania Infantry, he was wounded and taken prisoner, and in October 1864, he died in the Salisbury prison in North Carolina. Perhaps they had married, but there is no proof of that — or actually any proof that Heisley is Elizabeth's father. But when Maggie came to Williamsport, she came as a single mother.

Five children

After their marriage, Margaret and Edward McMunn had five children. The oldest was my grandfather, also named Edward. In 1886, great-grandfather McMunn left the sawmill; he was appointed by Postmaster Logan to be a letter carrier — the "Democratic" letter carrier, a position he held until he died.



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Shown, clockwise from top left, is 427 Cemetery St., from the photo collection of D. Vincent Smith, courtesy of the Lycoming County Historical Society; Small Farm in Kellysburg, Cascade Township, from Pomeroy's Atlas of Lycoming County, 1870; Margaret Small McMunn with her infant granddaughter, Louise McMunn Morin, 1916; and Edward McMunn in about 1900.

Margaret was proud of her Scottish ancestry. She bragged that her family was descended directly from the famous Scottish poet Robert Burns. Burns did have several children out of wedlock, but there is no proof that our family descended is from one of those lines.

Margaret also was a devoted Catholic. One family story passed down is that the parish priest from Annunciation,

Father Garvey, was out on his bicycle on a very hot day trying to raise money to build the Annunciation Church we know today.

He was so discouraged that Margaret offered him not only lemonade, but also \$100 that she had saved to pay the mortgage.

Margaret and Edward lived in the same home until they died — Edward in 1908, Margaret in

1924. Her obituary reads, in part, "She has resided at the southwest corner of Cemetery and Scott Streets 50 years and was one of the best known and most widely respected citizen of the West End."