
SARAH DOHERTY CUNNINGHAM
1859 Born in Co. Donegal, Ireland
1883 Married C. Cunningham in Pendleton
1885 Died in childbirth
2016 Fence placed in Sarah's honor by
descendants of her brother, James G. Doherty.
Sarah paved the way for the Blackhorse Dohertys.
Fence built by Packy and Kelly Doherty.

EPILOGUE

The Vinson gravesite is a place to be revered for all that it represents. For many years, perhaps from the time of her death, the grave was enclosed with a wooden picket fence, built with square nails. The fence withstood the forces of nature well, but has now had to be replaced. In Sarah's honor, the Blackhorse Dohertys dedicated a new steel fence on July 3, 2016. It is capped with shamrocks. The fence was built and placed by relatives Patrick "Packy" Doherty and his son Kelly, both of Pilot Rock. On the fence is a bronze plaque commemorating Sarah's memory, her story, and her importance to us.

"She paved the way for all of us."

She Paved The Way For All of Us

The Story of Sarah Doherty Cunningham



Dennis Doherty
July 2016

If only “keeping track” were that simple. Not so. Because to really keep track, we would have to trace two additional lineages. First, the lives and descendants of daughter Sarah Cunningham (who married Matt Mooney). Second, the lives and descendants of the 11 brothers and sisters of Catherine Doherty Doherty. Seven of them also came over from Ireland and stayed (Philip, Anne, John “Dutchy”, Eugene, Nora, Rose and Margaret). Fortunately, Rose’s granddaughter, Eva Gremmert, has laid down a lot of that history in her 2011 book, *A Cottage in Donegal* – well done, very readable, and excellent backgrounding.

Saving The Blackhorse Farm

Ironically, James G. saved the Blackhorse farm by dying unexpectedly, per oral history. It was the Great Depression. The family was struggling to keep the farm intact, but a mortgage foreclosure seemed imminent. On February 11, 1933, as James G. was waiting for a ride into town to meet with the banker, he died of a heart attack. The heart attack that took him triggered the insurance policy that saved the farm. His wife Catherine Doherty Doherty stayed on the farm and with the help of the children kept the Blackhorse farm going.

Sarah’s Resting Place

On February 27, 1885, Sarah Doherty Cunningham was laid to rest in the tiny cemetery at Vinson, Oregon (population 2), on Highway 74 which connects Heppner and Pilot Rock. This cemetery lies between the Catherine Doherty Nelson and Charles Cunningham places. Sarah has rested there for 131 years now. God bless Sarah Doherty Cunningham! May she rest in peace forever!

She Paved The Way for All of Us

Sarah Doherty Cunningham was pivotal in our family history. Her story, however sparse the historical documentation, is the lead-up to each of our stories. And our history is her legacy. The same can be said about all three Catherines - Catherine Doherty Nelson; Catherine Grant Doherty; and Catherine Doherty Doherty.

Today Dennis and Anne have a Catherine - our granddaughter, Catherine Susan Doherty, daughter of our son, Ben, and his wife, Melissa Hobson Doherty. This Catherine was born May 6, 2008, and she is known as “Cate.”

**Research by the descendants of
Sarah Doherty Cunningham**

still there in 1891 when she and her two sons settled in Blackhorse Canyon, near Lexington and Heppner, in Morrow County.

Descendants In Blackhorse Canyon

In Blackhorse Canyon, Catherine Grant Doherty and sons established what has come to be known as “The Blackhorse Doherty” family line. Catherine came to be known as “Blackhorse Kate.” She was nobody’s “passing reference”; she was the matriarch! No doubt about that. Blackhorse Kate died in 1913 and is buried in the Heppner Cemetery. Relevant materials about Catherine Grant Doherty appear in *The History of Morrow County*, published in 1983.

In the meantime Sarah’s sister, Mary, became a matriarch in her own right. By virtue of her marriage to Michael Kenny on December 16, 1884, the “Kenny” line of descendants was started. It later came to include the “Healy” line. A fine accounting of Mary’s legacy is available in *A Bit of Irish Stem*, published in 1984.

Sarah’s brother, Bernard F., never married. The oral history is that he and James G. had agreed that the Blackhorse Canyon farm could support only one family. As it turned out, that was James G. So, James Grant Doherty eventually became the sole owner.

Three Lineages

I have already written about Catherine Doherty Nelson and Catherine Grant Doherty. On July 6, 1893, James G. married the “next Catherine” - meaning Catherine Doherty, who was born March 7, 1872, also in County Donegal, and who had emigrated at age 16. James Grant Doherty and Catherine Doherty then proceeded to populate Blackhorse Canyon, not stopping until they had 13 children to expand the Blackhorse Doherty family line (Mary, Sarah, Nora, Ann, Margaret, Tina, Francis, Eugene, Bernard, Gertrude, Helen, Paul, and Betty). The 11 who married then had children of their own—plus or minus, 44 of them. From there, you’re on your own to keep track.

His first marriage was celebrated in Pendleton, when Miss Sarah Dougherty (sic) became his wife. To this union were born two children, one, Sarah, living at the present time (1903) and one son dying in infancy. ... (Italics added for emphasis)

Thus from the Irish lad landing in New York a stranger, whose only capital was plenty of pluck and two good hands, and who at once offered his blood for the honor of the flag under which he had come to dwell, we have passed briefly to the leading stockman of the northwest, a noted financier and commendable and loyal citizen....”

Sarah's Children

Again, only a brief passing reference to Mr. Cunningham's first wife (our Sarah Doherty). The marriage was not a long one. There was the son who died at birth, March 27, 1884; and the daughter, also named Sarah. Sadly, mother Sarah died giving birth to daughter Sarah, February 27, 1885.

Sarah's Legacy

I am pretty certain that Mr. Cunningham had not achieved fame or fortune during the time of his marriage to our Sarah. Sarah's story, though, isn't about that or what might have been. It is about what she did in her short life; and, for the Blackhorse Dohertys, about her legacy. Just as Catherine Doherty Nelson had been the magnet that drew Sarah, Sarah was the magnet that drew her mother, sister and brothers to Big Butter Creek. After Sarah's father, Francis died, her mother, Catherine Grant Doherty, immigrated also, bringing Sarah's sister (Mary) and two brothers (Bernard F. and James G.) with her.

They too, reached their destination, arriving in New York, October 8, 1883, and at Big Butter Creek sometime thereafter. Following Sarah's death, Catherine Grant Doherty was there to help care for Sarah's namesake daughter; was there while her own two sons worked for a period of time for Mr. Cunningham; was

Coming to America

Sarah Doherty was the oldest of four children born to Francis and Catherine Grant Doherty in Inishowen, County Donegal, Ireland. When she came of age, Sarah left her family behind and immigrated to Oregon. Her destination? Big Butter Creek in south Umatilla County, near the edge of the Blue Mountains - rugged country - even today an area of big ranches, few people, and a far piece to Pilot Rock, the nearest town.

Leaving Ireland

Why was this young Irish woman departing a homeland to come so far to this place, which would be considered a lonely place by many people, and probably a desolate place to some? The answer lies in the remarkable story of a relative who preceded Sarah. We need to start there, with Catherine Doherty Nelson. Unfortunately, I have very little source material available to tell the full story of Catherine Doherty Nelson; or for that matter, the full story of Sarah herself. In both cases, the basic story emerges by inference from source material available about others, plus “oral history.”

Catherine Doherty was a relative of Sarah's parents. She left Ireland, chaperoned by an uncle, as early as 1849, and traveled to the California gold fields. The uncle died in a mining accident. Following that, Catherine married a Swedish immigrant named Ebner B. Nelson.

Reliable source material about Mr. Nelson is found in an undated 579-page book, *History of Umatilla and Morrow Counties*. Inside the cover of the book there is a handwritten inscription dated 1903. So, the book was published then or earlier. Mr. Nelson was orphaned at a young age; went “to sea” at age 14; served what sounds like “hard time” as a merchant marine and on a warship; came in 1849 to the California gold fields (Eagle Gulch, Nelson

Hill, Yreka...); moved on in 1863 to Grant County, Oregon (Canyonville and Granite Creek, where there had been a lesser gold strike); settled near Vinson on Big Butter Creek in 1869; raised cattle; and was killed by hostiles on July 6, 1878, during the Bannock-Paiute Indian uprising.

As disappointing as it is, this source acknowledges, but does not name Mr. Nelson's wife. It simply states that she is "still living with the son, who owns the old place."

There is also a short biography of the son James Nelson: born in 1860 in Yreka. He came to Grant County six years later and Butter Creek in 1869. So, the benchmarks for Catherine Doherty Nelson seem pretty well connected. Clearly, though, women of that time often did not receive the recognitions and attributions that were accorded to the male "heads of family."

Settling on Big Butter Creek

Catherine Doherty Nelson and that "old place" on Big Butter Creek served as a magnet for family still in Ireland, and Sarah Doherty was the first that I know of to answer the call. Sarah then, became the magnet for other Dohertys.

Sarah's Marriage

Like Catherine Doherty Nelson, Sarah's story emerges indirectly, for the most part -- meaning, by inference from what we know of others. Obviously, Sarah reached her destination. Ebner Nelson was deceased, but his wife and son were still on the "old place." Sarah endured. What costs and what hardships - we don't know. She logs into the historical record by virtue of the fact that she married Charles Cunningham in Pendleton on May 20, 1883. Mr. Cunningham's name is renowned in Umatilla County to this day. He too was Irish, orphaned, came to America penniless, eventually settled on Big Butter Creek in 1876, and built a sheep

and wool-based business. Here's some of what the same undated source book says about Mr. Cunningham:

"Here he commenced operations, devoting his whole attention to the raising of sheep, and bringing to bear all his native ability and wisdom and his acquired knowledge through experience. This soon began to tell and it became evident that Umatilla had acquired no ordinary stockman in the person of Mr. Cunningham. He has constantly increased until now he is the proprietor of a princely domain of eighteen thousand acres of land on Butter and Birch Creeks, while he owns twenty-one thousand head of sheep, giving him an annual wool clip of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds, while his annual income from this immense establishment is over seventy thousand dollars....



Sarah Cunningham (Mooney), daughter of Sarah and Charlie Cunningham, with her father.