

THE WILLS ANCESTORS

This account was written by Elizabeth (Wood) Dodds,
granddaughter of Patrick and Margaret (Orme) Wills.

My mother's parents (Mr. and Mrs. Patrick-Wills) came to live in Canada in the year 1844.

My grandmother was formerly Margaret (Peggy) Orme, daughter of Major Orme. Both Patrick and Margaret were born and raised in Ireland, not far from the north west coast in Sligo County.

At the time of coming to Canada, they already had two small children—a daughter Bessie and a son (a baby) Patrick.

A great many Irish young couples were coming to Canada at that time. Several of these had already settled in the beautiful County of Leeds. Some were from the same vicinity in Sligo from nearby places like Ballina, Killala, Bailycastle, Crossmolina or from the neighbouring County of Mayo. Evidently several of this group had already settled in the vicinity of the village of Portland on the Rideau, others in the Brockville area.

Patrick and Margaret made their new home a few miles from Portland. They were also not far from Otter Lake.

After the long, tiresome crossing of the Atlantic, they arrived at Montreal. In those days, the roads were in very poor condition due to mud sometimes up to the hubs of the wheels also some stones. Sometimes, the men would take the stages to Brockville, others would go by boat to Brockville and sign the papers necessary for -possession of what was to be their particular property.

The women and children would remain in Montreal while these arrangements were being made. Then the women would follow by boat or stage to Brockville. This was the arrangement agreed upon by the Wills family. However, on the appointed day, Patrick went to Brockville to meet his wife and children only to be told that they had been re-routed by boat to Ottawa and thence by the Rideau to Portland. In those days, there would be no phone nor wireless to notify of a sudden change in plan. Meanwhile, his small family had already arrived in Portland and were taken in and welcomed by friends from home. One can imagine the relief after such a tiresome ordeal!

With help of neighbours, Grandfather had put up a shanty on the farm where he had located. This was soon replaced by a comfortable log house. These log houses played an important part in pioneer days. They consisted of one large room and two small bedrooms. The large room served as kitchen, dining area, and sitting room. The upstairs was partitioned off into bedrooms. At the back of the house, was a lean-to which served as a summer kitchen and to an extent, later on in winter, as a refrigerator for perishable foods.

At one outside corner of this lean-to would be a rain barrel, which held soft water for family washing. The Wills family had a small lake on their farm, which provided them for immediate use. Pumps came later.

There were seven children in their family. Bessie and Patrick (born in Ireland) and Peter, Ann, Maria, Margaret, and William (born in Canada).

All seemed to be going well when tragedy struck. The oldest of the family, Bessie, was a general favourite—a happy healthy girl, attractive in every way. She married young Mr. Wills (no relation). With him she had moved to his home on Hamilton Bay. Before the age of twenty, she died in childbirth. For her parents, it was the type of grief one carries to the grave.

In those days, unless a doctor was nearby, the average birth was attended by a midwife. This was all very well if everything went normally. If not, a doctor with horse and buggy would not get there in time to save mother and child.

In that period of Canada's history, many young women died in childbirth, sometimes leaving small children. The husband would remarry and the second wife would raise the children already there and the ones of her own marriage.

Patrick Wills married Mary Ann Wood. They had six children - Annie, William, Edward, Sarah, John, Albert.

Ann Wills married James Wood. Their children were: William Henry, Ann Jane, Margaret Elizabeth, Sarah, George, Maria Priscilla, Jessie and Mary Isobel.

Maria Wills married John Wood. Their children: Mary Ann, James, Elizabeth, Margaret, Wm. George, Robert, Phoebe, and Effie.

Peter Wills married Sarah Burns. They had 2 sons, Herbert and Earnest.

William married Isabel Burns. Their children: Robert, Herman, Oscar, LauraBell.

Margaret married Hiram Tweedy. Their children: Jessie, James, Charles, Albert, Ethel and Bertha.

Peter Wills, my uncle, lived to 93 years of age and my mother Ann Wills Wood to the advanced age of 101 years.

My grandfather Patrick Wills died, I believe in 1888, his wife Margaret having pre-deceased him about 15 years earlier. Both are buried, along with several close relatives in the Union Cemetery, Lombardy, Leeds County.