

Minnesota Towey Descendant to Canada

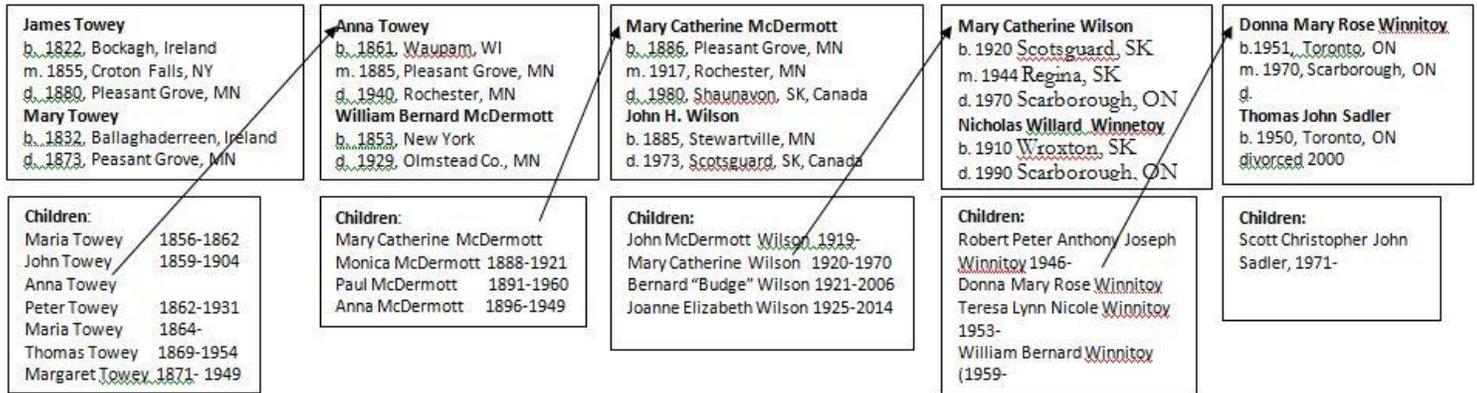
INTERVIEW WITH TOWEY DESCENDANT MARY "CATHERINE" MCDERMOTT WILSON

Prelude: Mary "Catherine" McDermott Wilson was interviewed and tape recorded by her son John McDermott Wilson, CSB, on 20 May 1974 in Shaunavon, SK, Canada, when 89 years old (she passed away at 94 in 1980). Mary "Catherine" McDermott Wilson was commonly called "Catherine" and is a descendant of James and Mary Towey whose families emigrated from Ballaghaderreen, Ireland, married in Croton Falls, New York then relocated to Pleasant Grove, Minnesota. They owned farms there from 1866 to 1880 and were well known in the community.



Pictured are gravestones for James and Mary Towey in St Bridget's Cemetery, Simpson, MN as visited during Towey Clan Gathering in August 2012.

Genealogical Chart:



Following is the tape interview by John McDermott Wilson, CSB, with his mother Mary "Catherine" McDermott (upper right in photo) and provided by Granddaughter Donna Mary Rose Winnitoy Sadler.

John: It's Victoria Day, 1974. It's an extremely wet day here in Shaunavon. I'm with mother, and we're going to record a few things for posterity. We're all set to go again here, and I'd like to talk to mother a little bit about the family.

Catherine: My father, William Bernard McDermott (far left), and mother, Anna Towey (lower right), were married in 1885. I'll tell you about my Mother's people (Anne Towey). My Grandfather and Grandmother were both Toweys, but they were no relation. My Grandfather and Grandmother McDermott were from Roscommon- that's in Central Ireland, but the Toweys were from Western Ireland, Co. Mayo. Yes, those were the Toweys, a very poor part of Ireland, but they were all great money makers and they all made money. I don't know how, but they were really good workers too.

Going back to the McDermott's, my father was eight when he came out here and he then was married in 1885, and there were four children, I was the oldest born in 1886, and my sister Monica was next 1888, then Paul, my brother, my only brother, was born in 1891 and my sister Anne was born in 1896 and all of my people, every one of my people are gone now. I am the only one left.

I got my education in and around Rochester, Minnesota at various places and finally we did move to Rochester and that's where we lived, my folks all lived there as long as they lived and that's where I lived before I was married.



John: What about Auntie Evans. The Evans family.

Catherine: They are all dead too. Auntie Evans was my mother's youngest sister, a Towey, Margaret (Towey) Evans (1872-1949). The Evans. She was my mother's youngest sister, and her husband died and the children still lived at home. She moved to Minneapolis. She was a bookkeeper and stenographer for a big milling company and supported her children that way. She put them through school and then moved to Minneapolis and worked in a.. I can't remember what she did in Minneapolis, but she did have a good job and she had three children. Marion, her oldest had a very brilliant

Recorded Interview with Towey Descendant, Mary "Catherine" McDermott

mind and she was a bookkeeper and stenographer. That's the training she took and she had a chance to go with Columbia Broadcasting, and she had a very fine position with them. Harry was with a big milling company and Lou was a sort of invalid all his life, so he didn't really do anything. None of them are alive. None of any of my mother's people or my father's people either that I know of are alive. I am the only holdout.

John: What about Father Jim?

Catherine: Father Jim has been dead for years and years and his brother and sister are dead. He was a first cousin of my mother's and Paul. (Father Jim was the son of Peter Towey- James Towey's brother. Peter moved to California) was with Old St Mary's (MN), but he died in Los Angeles. He was retired and dropped dead in an event somewhere. They had a very severe heart condition in the family. He was maybe in his sixties, I would think, probably in his sixties and his father was the youngest one of my Grandfather's (Towey) family. (Actually he died 1 Feb 1953 and was 70 years old.)

When people came out from the old country, they, of course, worked at anything, probably \$40.00 a month was the top of what they got, but they were used to being deprived of everything and they saved their money and brought out everyone -came out. It was just the tradition to save your money, too. The first one out saved money and brought out the next one in the family and then that one brought out the next one and so on. My Grandfather brought out Uncle Peter Towey (1837-1924), and Uncle Peter went to- it was the time of the gold rush in California, and he went to California and mining gold, and he did strike gold and he was the man with the money in the family, but of course Uncle Peter has been dead for many years anyway.

John: Was that the Peter that was in the San Francisco fire?

Catherine: No, that was another Uncle Peter, my mother's brother. Uncle Peter (Towey 1862-1931), he had made money. He had a furniture store in San Francisco, but he lost everything in a fire in the San Francisco fires (after the great earthquake 18 Apr 1906). He was a younger man and the gold was all over long before that. Not only did they lose everything, they jumped out of the window, they were upstairs, they lived up over the furniture store and jumped out the window and as they jumped, the window was right on the ground level. It was pouring down and just as soon as they got out, it went down. It just disappeared in the ground and they never had one thing. They got out okay and Aunt Agnes had a set of sterling and she grabbed that as she jumped out the window, and that was all she had. They didn't have any insurance, he didn't have anything and I don't think he ever recovered from it. It was 1906.

I can remember Uncle Peter, but not very well. I think I remember all of my mother's brothers and sisters, but they are all dead and my mother was the only one left and she died. Then she had an adopted sister and of course they did their own adopting in those days- one of Grandpa's nieces was Mary Grady (1868-1940). Her parents were John Grady (1838-1873) and Margaret Towey (1840-1872). She and her husband both died, so of course, she had three children and they were divided up among the different sisters, uncles and aunts, and this sister was my mother's adopted sister, so there were two Mary's in mother's family. They had a Mary and then this adopted child was Mary (Grady). They brought this Mary up if she had been their own sister. (Mary Grady's sister Anne Grady went to live with her Aunt Catherine Grady (1832-1922) and her Uncle Thomas Towey (1831-1922)).

John: Your mother was kind of on the short side. The Toweyes were shorter?

Catherine: The Toweyes were- some of them were very short.

John: What about the Towey that was a funeral director?

Catherine: Oh, John? He's dead.

John: What relative was he of yours?

Catherine: He was my mother's great cousin. (John Henry Towey-son of Catherine (Towey) Grady and Thomas Towey). Thomas was a brother to James Towey. Also Catherine (Towey) Grady was a daughter of James and Thomas Towey's sister- Mary Catherine (Towey) Grady- married to Michael Grady. So that means that Thomas Towey married Catherine Grady (his niece)). They were very blond people and my father's people were very, very dark. Black Irish they were called but my mother's people were blond. The Toweyes, some of them were just as blond as could be.

Catherine: My father, didn't have a very paying job, nothing was a very paying in those days. We had a hard time getting to school, but so was everybody else. There wasn't much money in the world, not like now.

Recorded Interview with Towey Descendant, Mary "Catherine" McDermott

John: Maybe you can tell us something Mother about your teaching experiences and then next thing perhaps how you met Dad and so on. Kind of interesting for your grand-children, you know. I've heard all this before, but you know, but you kind of forget.

Catherine: Well, I was sent to teach when I was 18 and I taught 1 year for the sisters in Maquiketa? (south of Rochester MN in Ohio- is this correct?) and I certainly wasn't much of a teacher. Then I was in a little country or a village school that had 7 teachers the year before. There were some big boys going to school and they promptly threw out the teachers. In the early days if they didn't like the teacher, they threw her out. There was a man that had been there, and they threw him out.

So I took the school and taught there for 3 years and got along fine and they weren't nearly as tough as they thought they were.

John: You must have been pretty tough.

Catherine: I was the toughest, yes (laughing) at 19 years old. I could look tough anyway and from there I went..uh..(pause), I can't think where I went next. I went at the eighth grade in Pine Island (north of Rochester) for three years and then I went to the western side of the state in Fairmont and taught for two years and I always taught the seventh, eighth or ninth grade. In Fairmont I taught the ninth grade and in Pine Island, I taught the seventh and eighth grade.

John: You were going to say something about the junior high?

Catherine: Oh yes. The years that I was in Pine Island, the state had come out with this plan that they would have a junior high, combining the eighth and ninth grade. And I was on the head to test it out. It was very successful. The poor ones who were left over in the eighth grade, combined with the smart ones that came up from the seventh grade, and made the ninth grade. And of course some of the poorer ones that could have achieved something, decided they'd do better as long as the kids were with them and some of the rest of them, that was as far as they went in school.

Then I came back and taught at a country school. I decided then it was time to get married and I taught a country school and used to drive back and forth from home, and that had all the grades and that was a tough school, but it was alright. We got along fine. Then I was married.

John: Mother, can you tell us the story about the Superintendent who was asked to send his best teacher out to Montana?

Catherine: Oh, well, that sounds kind of funny. When I was in Pine Island, an old fellow, a banker, had been in Pine Island, a little city in Montana- and they sent word back

John: Polson?

Catherine: Polson, yes -word back to his friend that took his place in the bank, to send his best teacher out for a month in school and so I got the chance to go. And it was the most enjoyable summer I ever put in and the place that I stayed was ½ mile from the school. The school was up on the side of a mountain. You couldn't drive up there but the kids all rode a horse to school, and so did I ride a horse to school. I had a lovely big grey horse. It was a ranch country.

John: Was it near Lewiston? Do you remember the name of the place?

Catherine: Moore. Moore, Montana. It was 17 miles from Lewiston. I was there just one summer. It was just almost straight up and down the side of the mountain. Course they always said, "Oh Pooh- That's just foothills." So one day we decided we'd go up on the top of the mountain and get some huckleberries. So, I decided we would have a two hour noon hour, things were pretty relaxed in those days, and we took our lunch and went up to the top of the mountain and when we got to the patch of huckleberries, a bear raised up that was just laying down in the huckleberries all filled up. So we decided that wasn't the day to pick huckleberries. We went back and took our lunch to school. There were lots of bears there, lots of antelope and deer and all sorts of wild animals.

John: Interesting, things were kind of relaxed and we're getting back to those kind of, where things are not as rigid as they last were.

Recorded Interview with Towey Descendant, Mary "Catherine" McDermott

Catherine: Well, I s'pose that's right. Well that's a good thing too. Those kids learned just as much I think, as if they sat in school 5 ½ hours.

John: Mother, when did you first meet Dad?

Catherine: Oh, I think I was about ten, in Stewartville, on a neighboring farm. My mother was awfully against match-making, but Grandma Wilson was a great match-maker. She had a big family and she said to my mother. "Aren't they just the cutest little pair?" and grandma didn't like that a bit. I sounded too much like match-making for my mother.

John: Mother you said your mother wanted to follow Irish tradition about the oldest girl. Can you explain that please?

Catherine: Well, there was a sort of a tradition, among the Irish families that the oldest girl didn't marry. She stayed home and took care of the old folks. Somebody had to take care of them, and I think I was sort of elected to stay home and she didn't like it a bit when I decided to marry, but my father wasn't against it. But of course, my mother, once we had some children, my mother was all convinced that that was my vocation. I had some really wonderful children.

John: Were you interested in Dad, or were you going together for a long time? How did this all of a sudden take place you know because you had been teaching quite a while and Dad was out west here?

Catherine: Oh, I don't know. It was just one of those things. I knew him and we'd go together a few times and then I would go with somebody else and I suppose he would too. But then when we grew up, we decided it certainly wasn't a mistake.

John: You weren't married until you were about thirty. Is that right?

Catherine: I was thirty, yes, and Dad was thirty-one.

John: Dad had been homesteading out here for some time I guess by that time. How many years I wonder?

Catherine: 1907-1911- five years or six years.

John: Well, that is a very interesting tape and I'm sure that there's lots of good things on it. Homesteading we've got those on another tape. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Catherine: No, I guess not.

John: You are looking pretty well today. It's like we said, it's Victoria Day, May 20th, 1974 Well, you're in your own house here and kind of enjoying the flowers, the lawn and stuff. The place looks very nice.



Marriage of John H. Wilson and Mary "Catherine" McDermott in Rochester, MN on 17 Feb 1917



John Henry Wilson married **Mary "Catherine" McDermott** (a Towey descendant) on 17 Feb 1917 and settled on John's farm in 1918 in Saskatchewan

John Henry Wilson sitting at wheel of Emerson tractor.

Mary "Catherine" McDermott Wilson sitting in wheel. She was granddaughter of James and Mary Towey of Pleasant Grove, MN

Wilson's cousin **Michael Martin McElgunn** standing on tractor.



First home built by John Wilson in Saskatchewan, Canada to obtain farmland. It was built in 1912 using a kit sold in that area.

