

## Chapter Five

### .THE BRACKEN FAMILY

#### William Bracken and Thomas Bracken

These chapters on the Bracken Family have been made possible in their present form by the fact that more than seventy years ago Dr. Wm. C. Bracken, M.D. commenced the work of gathering data for a history of the family. His illness and death prevented completion of the work, and it was not resumed until twenty-five years later, when his son H. M. Bracken, M.D. of Minneapolis, Minn. made a vigorous attempt to complete it. In 1901 a 79 page book was issued giving information then available.

This material is splendidly presented and gives evidence of absolute accuracy. The story of the earlier generations as here given is derived from this source, but the data has been checked by examination of wills and of county records for all generations back to the first, and substantial additions have been made to the story of Henry Bracken and his descendants by reason of the fact that the writer has had access of memoirs of Rev. Alex Donaldson, Rev. Thomas A. Bracken and Rev. John Culbertson Thom. The information as to the allied families has been secured principally from official records of wills and deeds. These pioneer farmers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century did not leave much of a record except locally and the lack of files of newspapers compels dependence on officials records and on such notes as local Historical Societies have gathered.

No information is available as to the history of the Bracken family in England. Tradition says that William Bracken, first generation came from England. One of the early settlers of West Jersey was a Francis Bracken who emigrated from Scarsborough, Yorkshire, in August, 1683. It is therefore strongly probable that a search of Yorkshire records would throw some light on the English forebears of the American families of the name.

#### WILLIAM BRACKEN - FIRST GENERATION IN AMERICA

Just when he landed in America or whence he came has not been found. The first record of him is his purchase of one hundred acres of land in Delaware. This first deed, made in 1702, stated that William Bracken of Newcastle County, Delaware, requested a grant of 100 acres near Red Clay Brook for which he agreed to pay 12 10s per 100 acres.

William Bracken purchased additional land at various times during the next twenty-five years. On Dec. 14, 1727, he requested the grant of a parcel of land on Fishing Creek near Susquehannah and desired a warrant as soon as possible.

One James Robinson entered the following protest regarding this grant: "That about seven years since he (Robinson) made some beginning on a tract of land lying on the west side of Fishing Creek in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but soon after William Bracken procured a survey to be made by Elisha Getchell, which included the above improvement, under the pretense of settling his children, but instead thereof, he has without regular warrant sold two quantities for about 90 pounds besides what he has given to his son in law and daughters, and of that

part still left unsold by William Bracken J. Robinson desires the grant of 200 acres for which he is ready to pay. (Penna. Archives, 3rd series, Vol. 1 pp. 67-69).

It is evident that William Bracken made his home in Newcastle County, Delaware, but that he acquired much land in Pennsylvania and that he believed that Lancaster County was a desirable place for his children to settle. The fact that Newcastle County, Delaware, and Chester County, Pennsylvania, adjoining it on the North, and Lancaster County, next west, were the early gathering places of the Scotch Irish, leads to the query as to whether he did not have a fairly close connection, possibly by his marriage, to the Scotch Irish.

We find nothing to indicate his church connection. His son Thomas, and possibly others of his children, belonged to the Episcopal Church. His grandson, Thomas Bracken Jr. and his descendants were prominent in the Presbyterian Church and dwelt in a predominantly Scotch Irish settlement in Washington County. The fact that his oldest son Thomas was a member and vestryman of the Episcopal Church would seem to indicate that the father was a member, and would tend to prove that the family was English.

Nothing has been found which gives the date of birth or marriage of William Bracken in England or the name of his wife. He was undoubtedly married in England some years before emigrating as he came to America with his wife and one or two small children.

His children, in the order in which they are listed in the will (probably not in the order of their birth) were

1. \*Thomas, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. to Martha Green
2. John, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m.
3. Henry, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m.
4. Hannah, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. Feb. 2, 1722 James Jordan
5. Margaret, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. Alexander Moore
6. Martha, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. John Ball Jr. who died before 1749
7. Susan, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. before April m. John Gillihan 1749

William Bracken's will was drawn April 8, 1749. It was proved December 28th 1749 and is recorded in Will Book G. page 459 of New Castle County records at Wilmington, Delaware.

The will is unusual in that he leaves to each of his sons and surviving daughters, and to each of his sons-in-law the sum of only one shilling as their "full portion and share of my real and personal estate."

This indicates that he had given each of them, on their marriage gifts of land and property, just as he did to his son Thomas, and would seem to prove that all of them were prosperous and well to do for the times in which he made the will.

The last part of his will, after the above bequests of one shilling to the children, disposes of his entire estate to his grandchildren, and reads as follows:

"Item, I do leave unto John Gillihan who was married to my Daughter Susanah Deceased one shilling Sterling Curr.<sup>t</sup> money which shall be in full of his

portion and share of my real and personal Estate.

"Item. I do leave unto my Grandson William Gillihan son of the said John Gillihan thirty pounds curr.<sup>t</sup> money of Pennsylvania to be put out to Interest for him by my Executors until he arrived to of age of twenty one years and then to pay him the Principal and Interest.

"Item. I do give unto my grand daughter Elizabeth Gillihan Daughter of the sd. John Gillihan the house and shop where John Lapsly lately lived it lying on the main Road leading to white Clay Creek landing and four Acres of land joyning to it and all the appurtenances thereunto belonging to her and heirs for ever and fire wood Sufficient & Convenient for twenty one years shee or her heirs cutting and halling the same. But if it should happen that shee should depart this life without lawful Issue then it is my will & I do give & bequeath the above sd. house & shop & four Acres of Land and priviledges afores.<sup>d</sup> to my sd. Grand son William Gillihan & his heirs for ever. -----

"Item. I do leave unto my Grand Daughter, Martha Jordan daughter of my said Daughter Hannah Jordan ten pounds Curr.<sup>t</sup> money of Pennsylvania to be put out to Interest for her in good hands & paid her at sd. age of Eighteen years or day of Marriage by my sd. Executors both principal & interest. -----

"Item. It is my Will & I do give & Bequeath unto my Grand son William Bracken Son of my said Son Henry Bracken all my real & personal Estate he paying all my just debts & funeral charges and Legacies left by me to the within & above mentiond persons, to him & his heirs for ever. But if it should happen that my sd. Grandson should be taken away by death without lawful Issue then it is my Will & I do give the sd. Real & Personal Estate to my sd. son Henry Bracken to him & his heirs for ever. And it is my will that all the legacies left by me be put to Interest in good hands within Six Months after my Decease & paid as above & within sd. -----

"AND LASTLY, I do Constitute make & ordain my Loving Son Henry Brackon and my sd. loveing Grandson William Brackon son of my sd. Son, Henry Bracken my sole Executor of this my last Will & Testament, And I do hereby utterly disalow Revoke & disanul all & every other former Testaments Wills & Legacies Bequests & Executors by me in any ways before this time named Willed and Bequeathed Ratifying confirming this & no other to be my last Will & Testament, IN WITNESS whereof I have hereunto set my hand & seale the day & Year above written.

William Brackon (Seal)

SIGNED SEALED PUBLISHED :  
 Pronounced & declared by the :  
 sd. William Brackon as his last :  
 Will & Testament in the presence of :  
 us the Subscribers .....:

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Simon Hadley   | Evan Rice & Nedabiah Olney two of the subscribing     |
| Evan Rice      | Evidences to the above Testament on their Oathes      |
| Nedabiah Olney | do say that they were present & saw sd. Testator,     |
|                | William Brackon Sign & Execute the above & declare it |
|                | to be his last will and Testament he being then of    |
|                | perfect sound mind & Memory.                          |

Decb.<sup>r</sup> 28th 1749 Jeho Curtis Register -"

THOMAS BRACKEN - SECOND GENERATION was born probably in England, near the turn of the century, as his father was in America in 1702, possibly somewhat earlier. He was undoubtedly the oldest son, probably the oldest child of a family of seven who lived to maturity.

The first record of him is on February 23, 1726 when his father deeded him 200 acres of land on condition that he make no further claim on his father's estate. (Deed Book H, page 249, Wilmington, Dec.) On Nov. 27, 1749, nearly eight months after his father's will was drawn, another deed was made to him for 200 acres of land located on the North side of White Clay Creek, the consideration being "love, good will and twenty pounds." (Book of Deeds, page 237).

In consequence of the first deed above referred to, which was probably made about the time of his marriage, he was left only one shilling to his father's will. It is a fair assumption that the second deed was made to give him a more adequate share of the estate.

He evidently lived in Delaware for the first thirty years or more of his married life, but sometime previous to 1759 he moved to York, now Adams County, Pennsylvania, for on Sept. 10, 1759, John Bohonin of Mill Creek Hundred sold to Thomas Bracken "of Huntington Township, York County, Pennsylvania" One (?) acre of land in Mill Creek Hundred. (Book U, p. 527 Wilmington).

He was one of the Vestrymen of Christ Church, Huntington Twp. York County, in 1760 and 1761. In the latter year he was assessed two pounds for work on the Glebe House belonging to Christ Church. In his will he left thirty pounds to the poor fund of Christ Church.

Doctor Bracken in his book says: "The early settlers of York Co., Pa. were from England and this probably had some influence upon Thomas Bracken when he chose his new home away from the Delaware settlement. He and his family were members of the Episcopal Church as shown by their relationship to Christ Church. Among those assessed for the Glebe House of the Church were his son John and his sons-in-law Archibald and William McGrew."

The last record of a real estate transaction of his was the sale on June 19th 1769 to Philip Ziegler of 150 acres of land for 350 pounds.

Thomas Bracken was married, probably about 1725 or 1726 to Martha Green, daughter of Edward Green, whose will drawn 1735 mentions his daughter, Martha Bracken. Edward Green's will speaks of "my daughter Martha Bracken, my son Thomas Bracken and my daughter Margaret Reed" and makes Thomas Bracken sole executor. This will is one of those recorded in one of the books destroyed by the British during the Revolution and only the abstract in the Index books remains. In April, 1722, Edward Green Junior, possibly a brother of Martha, applied for 100 acres of land next to William Bracken's property. The very scant record of the will of Edward Green in the index volume only mentions the two daughters, Martha and Margaret.

Martha Bracken was living in 1779 when her husband's will was drawn, but there is no further record of her and the date of her death is unknown.

Tradition has it that George Washington was friendly with the Bracken family and that he had stopped at their home.

Of the four sons of the Bracken family, William the oldest was living in Westmoreland (then Indiana) County during the revolution. He had no war record so far as known. John died early in 1777. Thomas was a widower with four small

children at the outset of the war and has no war record. James is said to have been an officer during the early years of the war.

Thomas and Martha Bracken had nine children who grew to maturity and married as shown by the will of Thomas Bracken. The order in which they are named in the will probably is not the order of birth, but undoubtedly named boys first in the order of their birth, and girls in the same way. If dates of marriage of the daughters were available it might be possible to place the family in approximately correct order. As named in the will they were:

1. William, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. to Ruth Gregg 1756
2. John, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. 1759 to Elizabeth \_\_\_\_\_
- 3\*. Thomas, b. about 1740 d. Feb. 1803 m. 1st 1764 \_\_\_\_\_ Kilmary  
2nd 1777 to Ann Shannon
4. James, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. \_\_\_\_\_ to Mary \_\_\_\_\_
5. Hannah, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. \_\_\_\_\_ to Nicholas Bishop
6. Mary, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. \_\_\_\_\_ to James Guttory
7. Martha, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. \_\_\_\_\_ to Archibald McGrew
8. Margaret, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. \_\_\_\_\_ to William McGrew
9. Jean, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. \_\_\_\_\_ Martha Dill

The will of Thomas Bracken was drawn April 6, 1779 and probated Nov. 14th 1780. It is recorded in Book E of Wills on page 130 of York County records. The exact date of his death is not known but it was probably in October or early November of 1780.

In this will he left "to my beloved wife Martha one horse one cow one feather bead and bedcloath one spinning wheel and all my sheep together with her mentainance out of the rent of my place." He provided that the place was to be rented during Martha's lifetime, and after her death William, John, Thomas, James and Martha or their heirs were each to receive thirty pounds and Hannah, Mary, Margaret and Jean each twenty pounds. Any remaining money after these payments and the church bequest was to be divided equally between the children.

The grant to Christ Church was as follows:

"Item I give devise and Bequeth intrust unto John Collance and William Godfrey Church wardens for the time being, and their sucksesor forever the Sum of Thirty pounds lawful money which shall be put to Interest And the money arising from sd. sum shall be laid out for the use of the poor belonging to Christ Church in Huntington township and County of York at the discreation of the Vestry of sd Church for the time being and their sucksesors forever, To be paid to them after the sale of my Real Estate."

## Chapter Six

### THOMAS BRACKEN JUNIOR - THIRD GENERATION and THE SHANNON FAMILY

Thomas Bracken was probably born in New Castle County, Delaware, about 1740 and was a boy in his teens when his father moved to York, now Adams County, Pennsylvania.

As is the case with all of the members of those early generations, nothing at all is to be found as to the boyhood, youth, education or sports of the times. There is no definite record of him prior to 1777 when he married his second wife, Ann Shannon, and in November, 1778, when he removed from York County to Washington County, then part of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. With him, at the time of removal, were his second wife, Ann, and her infant son then six weeks old, and four children by his first wife, whose first name we do not know. She was a Miss Kilmory of New Castle County, Delaware.

Many of the early settlers of Washington County were from Chester, Lancaster and York Counties, and some of his sisters, and probably some of his wife's family were already living there, so this removal was not one which took him among strangers.

He took up two tracts of land, one known as "Three Shares" situated on Chartiers Creek near Canonsburg, the other known as "Logan Water" on Raccoon Creek.

Part of the Chartiers property, on which he resided, was much later, acquired by the state as the site of the Morganza Reform School.

Thomas Bracken prospered and became one of the leading citizens of that part of Washington County. Reverend John McMillan, a noted Presbyterian minister of Western Pennsylvania began preaching to the Chartiers people in 1776, shortly before Thomas Bracken settled there. The Chartiers Presbyterian Church was organized and Thomas Bracken was one of its early ruling elders.

Rev. John McMillan started a Latin School about 1779. About the same time Canonsburg Academy was founded and in 1791 the Academy and Dr. McMillan's School were merged, and, in 1802 the school was reorganized as Jefferson College, the first college west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Thomas Bracken was one of the trustees of Canonsburg Academy during a large part of its existence and is said to have been active in the founding of Jefferson College, which grew out of it and which received its charter shortly before his death.

A footnote in Doctor Bracken's family history quotes Nevins Presbyterian Encyclopedia as follows:

"The Presbyterian Church had decided that it needed schools for the purpose of educating young men for the ministry and it determined to locate one school in Canonsburg and the other in Virginia.

"The latter school was the outgrowth of Liberty Hall in Lexington, Virginia, organized by the Rev. William Graham. After its reorganization it was known as Washington College (now Washington and Lee.)"

Thomas Bracken's oldest son by his second marriage, Reverend Reid Bracken, married Mary Graham, daughter of Rev. William Graham, Principal of Liberty Hall, Lexington, Virginia.

This intimate connection of Thomas Bracken with the very early establishment of higher education, and especially the marriage of his son in 1806 to the daughter of Rev. William Graham of Lexington, Virginia, directs attention to the fact that on page 126 of "Our Pioneer Ancestors" Vol. 1, is the following statement:

"The early beginnings of Washington and Lee University, formerly Washington College, are found in a small school built near Timber Ridge Church, and actively supported by Robert Houston.<sup>1</sup> It was given the name of Libery Hall. In response to a demand that it be moved closer to Lexington a site was secured on Mulberry Hill, about a mile northeast of Lexington. Liberty Hall was incorporated in October 1782. The first list of trustees included the names of William McKee\* and Samuel Lyle." William McKee was trustee from 1782 to 1796 when Liberty Hall became Washington College, and is rated as one of the founders of Washington and Lee University."

Thomas Bracken was, in exactly the same way, active in the management of the School at Canonsburg, which later became Jefferson College<sup>2</sup> and still later was merged with Washington College and is now Washington & Jefferson.

Thomas Bracken was described as tall, well proportioned and fine looking, and it was said that his family was one of the most respected families in Western Pennsylvania.

He was married first in York County in about 1861 to \_\_\_\_\_ Kilmory, who was the mother of four children.

1. William, b. about 1763; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. 1st Jean Thompson  
2nd Sarah King
2. Martha, b. May 10, 1765; d. before 1803; m. \_\_\_\_\_ Samuel Shannon
3. Ann, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. before 1803; m. \_\_\_\_\_ to David Andrews
4. Samuel, b. \_\_\_\_\_ d. before 1803. Never married.

Thomas Bracken was married in 1777 a second time to Ann Shannon, daughter of John Shannon and grand daughter of Thomas Shannon of Lancaster County. These children were:

5. Reid, b. Nov. 24, 1778; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. May 1, 1806 Mary Graham
6. Thomas, b. Feb. 12, 1780; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. 1st Elizabeth Morrow  
2nd Ann Davidson
7. Sarah, b. Feb. 21, 1782; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. 1811 to John Thompson
8. Agnes, b. Nov. 24, 1783; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. Rev. John Matthews
9. Hannah, b. Oct. 20, 1785; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. Mar. 28, 1809 Joseph Thompson

1. Robert Houston was g.g. grandfather of Emma Hynes Riggs on her mother's side and William McKee was her g.g.g. grandfather on her father's side.

2. The intimate connection of Jefferson College with the forebears of descendants of William Bouton Thom is evidenced by the fact that among the alumni are found the names of Rev. Cyrus Riggs, class of 1803, Rev. Stephen Return Riggs, 1834; Rev. Cyrus C. Riggs, 1836; Rev. John Culbertson Thom, 1853; Henry W. Bracken, 1853; Judge Samuel A. Riggs, 1863; Rev. Alexander B. Riggs, 1863; and Doctor Elliott S. Riggs, M.D. 1863."

10. John, b. Aug. 17, 1787; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. to Sarah Howe
11. Jane, b. May 1, 1790; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. to Richard Miller
12. Mary, b. Oct. 23, 1792; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. Feb. 1819 to William Van Eman
13. \*Henry, b. June 29, 1794; d. \_\_\_\_\_ m. June 10, 1816 to Martha Davis  
Simcox
14. Moses, b. Nov. 25, 1796; d. after 1803
15. James, b. June 30, 1799; d. in infancy

Thomas Bracken died in February or March, 1803, and was buried on his own farm, on the part that afterward passed to his son Thomas. It is said that his remains were later removed to the Hill Church burying ground, but if so there is no stone marking his grave.

His will was drawn February 8th 1803 and was probated March 22, 1803. This will mentions all of his children except Martha, Ann, Samuel and James. It makes a bequest of five pounds to his son-in-law Samuel Shannon, thereby indicating that Martha had died prior to Feb. 8, 1803. It leaves a full share to two children of Ann and provides that her husband shall occupy the land until the oldest comes of age.

One clause in the will indicates that his wife was much younger than he was. It reads as follows: "And in case my said wife should marry before the youngest of said children should come of age, then she shall get the one third of my personal estate forever but nothing more." When he died he was in his middle sixties. He was evidently a large land owner but it is not possible to determine from the will the acreage of his holdings.

After the death of Thomas Bracken his widow, Ann, lived at the old homestead with her youngest living son Henry until the death of her son-in-law William Van Eman, after which she made her home with her daughter Mary Van Eman until her death in 1839. She died at a good old age, as she must have been born in the late 1750's and was respected highly by all who knew her. She is buried in the graveyard of the Chartiers (Hill Church) Presbyterian Church.

Her brother, William Shannon, in his will drawn in September, 1793, left to his sister Ann Shannon Bracken two hundred acres of land at the headwaters of Drinnings Lick Creek in what is now Henry County, Kentucky.

#### THE SHANNON CONNECTION

We have been unable to trace the Shannon line further back than Ann's grandfather THOMAS SHANNON "Farmer," who lived in Sudbury Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. His wife's name was Agnes ("Eigness"). His will was drawn April 4th 1737 and is recorded in Book 1 of Wills of Lancaster County on page 26, thus indicating that he was one of the very early pioneer settlers in the County.

The certified copy of the will is all that we have found relative to Thomas Shannon. From it we get the name of his wife and children living in April 1737 and from it we can also draw our own conclusions that these pioneers of more than two hundred years ago had but little education and that God had blessed them with but few "Worldly Goods." The will in full is as follows:

"April the Fourth. In the Name of God Amin Anno Domin One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty Seven