

OUR FAMILY STORY

Winter, 2002-03

Happy New Year to Everyone;

This is your cousin or nephew Rick Siler. Welcome to our **second** family newsletter. I do hope that you enjoyed the first letter I sent you in October. To reiterate from my previous correspondence, as the descendants of **Jerre' Moreland** and **Pearl Scruggs** we all share a common heritage. It is my aim to pass along to you and your families some of the chronicles that I am collecting on our ancestors. I hope that you will share it with your children so that they can also understand how firmly rooted we are into the history of our country. In this issue I will introduce you to our great-grandmother Sarah Rebecca Douglass and her Scotch-Irish forefathers.

SARAH REBECCA DOUGLASS A "PIONEER WOMAN"

Sarah Rebecca Douglass and her husband William Calvin Rhodes arrived in California around 1859 and were among some of the earliest settlers to put down roots in the western part of that state. They were the great-grandparents to our grandmother Pearl Scruggs Moreland. By the mid nineteenth century; California had come from obscurity to statehood because of the Gold Rush which started in earnest in 1849. Even though California was made the 31st state in 1850, coming to California was no small feat. If settlers on wagon trains made it over the Rockies safely, they were often stopped by the hostile Sierra Nevadas where winter comes early and savagely. Thus many settlers lost their lives like the Donner party. The story of Sarah Rebecca and her travels demonstrate our ancestor's participation in this perilous journey across the continent.

Sarah Rebecca Douglass was born in Tennessee in 1828. Her father John Douglass was born in Virginia, and her mother Nancy Dickson Bishop was born in South Carolina. She married William Rhodes in McMinn County, Tennessee on 27 April 1848. Soon after Sarah was married she and William left Tennessee and migrated by wagon to Rusk County, Texas. Her first five children Thomas, John, Harriet, Julia and Ann were born between 1850 and 1856 while the family was living in east Texas.

In about 1857 or 58, Sarah along with her 5 children joined a wagon train traveling from Texas to California. It is unclear as to whether William made this trip with his family. According to grandmother Pearl Scruggs's uncle Samuel Roy Scruggs, Sarah Rebecca came to California by herself with her children. They were members of a wagon train party that narrowly missed being massacred by Indians. Their train was just three days behind a train of California-bound settlers that were massacred at Mountain Meadow, Utah. In order to escape a like fate the members of the train in which the Rhodes family was traveling, took a circuitous route over very dangerous and mountainous country. So steep was the country that the wagons had to be let down over the mountains by ropes. The oxen were able to get down by themselves, but could never have done so while hitched to a wagon. It took the party several months to cross the plains and mountains to arrive safely in California.

Sarah son William was the first of her children born in California. This event occurred in 1859 and it is said that William may have been the first "white" baby that was not of Spanish or Indian descent born in the area of San Bernardino County, California. Sarah had 12 children during her lifetime, (5 sons and 7 daughters).

One can readily understand that Sarah was definitely a "tough old woman" who exemplified the pioneer spirit that made the great westward expansion possible during the 19th century. A photograph of Sarah Rebecca (Douglass) Rhodes exists within the archives of our family history and is attached this correspondence. Sarah lived to the ripe old age of 85 years when she passed away in 1913. She is buried in Porterville Cemetery, Tulare Co., California.



OUR SCOTCH-IRISH ANCESTRY

Sarah Rebecca Douglass and her Douglass grandfathers are excellent examples of our Scotch-Irish ancestry. So often I've heard the term Scotch-Irish used to refer to our ancestors. I've wondered as to what the term actually meant, and which grandparents, if any, fit the definition.

So who are the Scotch-Irish, and what does the term mean? Apparently the term "Scotch-Irish" is an Americanism, generally unknown in Scotland and Ireland, and rarely used by British historians. In American usage, it refers to people of Scottish descent who, having lived for a time in the north of Ireland, migrated in considerable numbers to the American colonies in the eighteenth century.

The "plantation" of Ulster, in Northern Ireland, with Scottish immigrants, took place from roughly 1606 through 1700. The "Great Migration" of Scotch-Irish to America took place from 1717 through 1776. An estimated 200-250,000 Scotch-Irish migrated to America during this period. The period of the "Great Migration" of Scotch-Irish took place at approximately the same time as the German Palatine migration. It is believed that, at the time of the Revolution, they comprised 10-15% of the population of the United States. Their negative feelings toward England played no small part in the emotion of the "stew" that led to the American Revolution.

My recent research into the Douglass family line has uncovered roots that take us back 10 generations to a grandfather named John Douglass who was born in Scotland and migrated to County Antrim in Northern Ireland prior to 1700. His son Robert was the progenitor of the Douglass family line in America having migrated from Ireland sometime prior to 1758. Robert was most likely typical of the Scotch-Irish pioneers who settled in America during the 18th century in that they brought along their devout Presbyterian animosity toward Papists and Anglicans alike thus a political activism of the querulous and boat-rocking variety. These folk were tough, stubborn, touchy, combative, and full of energy. After coming to America, Robert Douglass and his wife, Mary,

moved to the back country and settled in Augusta County, Virginia, where their son. Robert Douglass, Jr., was born in 1758. In 1787, Robert, Jr. and his young family moved from Augusta County, Virginia to the upper part of East Tennessee. This event occurred before the state of Tennessee was even formed. They eventually settled in McMinn County, Tennessee in 1822. The Douglasses had come from the Virginia frontier, moving down mountain valleys into this new region as the Indians moved out - - perhaps at times before. They doubtless knew what they were about, and thought only of making their homes and a livelihood in such a land, with all the fearlessness and steadfastness of purpose that characterized these Scotch-Irish frontiersmen. Robert Douglass Jr., grandfather to Sarah Rebecca Douglass, was a soldier in the American Revolution and was present at the siege of the British Army at Yorktown, Virginia.

A QUOTE TO NOTE

"To communicate, put your words in order; give them a purpose; use them to persuade, to instruct, to discover, to seduce."

William Safire

Always open for suggestions as to what you might want to look for in future issues of "Our Family Story".

Best Wishes to all!!

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