

## Nuggets from the Past

By Norman McLeod

### The Michael McDonough Story

People give me things to read. The following is an interesting account of an Irish immigrant, apparently written by his daughter, Nora McDonough Selvester, who died in 1980. Unfortunately, Nora offered but few dates in her biography. With her written permission, I've done some editing. Her story:

Michael McDonough was determined he would sail for America on the next boat from County Mayo, Ireland. There was little or no opportunity for a young lad in that impoverished land. To obtain passage, his neighbors each contributed a small amount of money. He traveled steerage aboard ship. His departure was a day of sorrow for his parents. They worried they would never see him again.

His ship arrived in New York City, and his first job was on railroad construction at Long Branch, N.J., where his sister lived. This was the era of the Irish immigrant.

A cousin, Annie Clark, had accompanied Michael to America, and now she wanted him to travel with her to Inyo County in California. Her brother-in-law managed a hotel there. She paid his fare. Michael became a general helper in the hotel.

The hotel was located in a mountain town, and Michael's duties were primarily of the outdoor variety, i.e. cutting the winter wood. This led to his next job as a logger for a local lumber man in the town of Markleville, Alpine County. It was there that he became a naturalized citizen and voted for the first time. By this time, his natural good nature and Irish wit increased his popularity. He became known in town as "Mac."

Nora's mother also emigrated to America from County Mayo, one of 11 children. Her name was Honoria Kate Halligan. She and Michael were married in 1875 in the Catholic Church in Carson City. She worked as a maid in the Hill Hotel in Bodie. The story goes that Michael was very particular about meeting "Onnie" in the hotel. She was very young, and very much in love, and he was protective of her reputation. They were married when she was 19. A year later their first child was born - William John.

Shortly after this, the family moved to Forest Hill in Placer County, where Michael worked the mines. Their home became the gathering place for relatives coming from Ireland.

Eight children were born of the marriage of Michael and Honoria, but only five survived. The three who died at a very young age lie buried in the Forest Hill Cemetery.

The family home was adjacent to the three-room schoolhouse situated in the wooded section of town. It had four small bedrooms, a large kitchen, a "parlor" and a narrow porch completely around the house. The story goes that when Nora was small, she liked to sit on the back steps of the schoolroom until the nice teacher invited her in.

The lot next door to their house was owned by "Uncle" Jim Creighton who owned a saloon in town. He made good money, and once made a pleasure cruise to Ireland. He remained a bachelor and was wonderful to the McDonough children. Nora wasn't permitted inside his saloon, but if she walked slowly by - and the room was empty - he would call her inside and make her a pink lemonade.

Nora thought this was wonderful. Many years later, she could still visualize the swinging doors and the round, green card table of that saloon.

One vivid memory Nora retained was of the little Catholic Church in Forest Hill. At first, there was a resident priest who rang a bell for evening devotions. Usually, the children would be playing among the trees. Nora's sister, Ethel, possessed a sweet voice, and she grew up playing the organ and led the choir at mass.

Nora's father was crushed in a cave-in in the Paragon Mine at Bath when she was about three. His legs were badly broken and he lay in bed for months with bags of

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bran between his legs. "Mother took entire care of him," she wrote, "besides caring for five children. This later made her more susceptible to illness when it hit."

In later years in San Francisco, Michael's doctor stated that his recovery no doubt was due to "Onnie's" good nursing and the energizing mountain air.

Most McDonough relatives moved to Grass Valley during the mining boom there, and during her summer vacations, Nora spent much of her time in that town. "I took the four-horse stage to Colfax," she wrote, "then the narrow gauge railroad to Grass Valley. I always liked the bustling, little city."

Nora's mother died of consumption when she was six. She made numerous trips with her mother to doctors in Grass Valley. When the end came, her Aunt Celia and Uncle Pat - who had no children - wanted to adopt her, but her father wouldn't hear of it. When her sister Ethel finished the ninth grade, she became the housekeeper. Michael worked at prospecting at Cranage's - a mine near the Mayflower.

Later, Michael owned a cigar stand in town. Evidently, he had managed to save some money as Nora never felt she was poor. When her brother Will grew into adulthood, he helped the family by working in the mines.

Owing to his disability, Michael was never able to hold a salaried position again. He left Foresthill in either 1904 or '05 for San Francisco, in time for the disastrous earthquake in 1906. There he lived with son James, who became president of a large biscuit company - that later merged with Nabisco.

Michael McDonough died on Jan. 5, 1934, and is buried with his wife, Honoria, in Foresthill's Catholic Cemetery.