
Chapter 3

Edward Higginson and Mary Donaldson

Irish Immigrants

I have always enjoyed the stories Grandma Myrtie told me about her Irish Grandparents (my Great Great Grandparents), Edward and Mary Donaldson Higginson. Grandma never met her grandpa Higginson, and she knew Mary as Grandma Shattuck.

I have combined several family stories about Edward Higginson and Mary Donaldson.

—Louise Smith

Edward Higginson, Myrtie's other Grandfather, was born in Down County, Ireland, in the early 1830s. Edward, five foot 10 inches tall with brown hair and brown eyes, sailed from Ireland. Edward arrived in Buffalo, New York, in 1854, according to his Declaration of Intent to become a US citizen. That's all the information I have on his entry into the US. He may have worked on the Welland Canal in Ontario, Canada, about 30 miles from Buffalo, New York, and 14 miles from Chippawa where he and Mary Donaldson were married.

Mary Donaldson

Myrtie's blue-eyed grandmother, Mary Donaldson, was born in Belfast, Ireland, the sixth of ten children. Mary's father, John Donaldson, died around 1844, when Mary was 11 years old. Mary Johnson Donaldson, Mary's mother, died two years later.

Contae An Dúin



Contae An Dúin or County Down where Edward Higginson was born is one of six counties that form Northern Ireland, sometimes called Ulster Province. The city of Belfast, where Mary Donaldson (possibly spelled Donnilson) was born, is in both County Antrim and County Down.

Northern Ireland has had quite a turbulent history unfortunately. Photos of the area show it to be very picturesque. County Down, has over 200 miles of coastline as well as loughs, forests, and parks that are inland. The Mourne mountains are in the south of the county.

Jane Eyre, a very favorite novel of mine, was written by Charlotte Bronte. It was interesting to me that the countryside around Down County's River Bann is known locally as Bronte Country. It was the homeland of Charlotte's father, Patrick Bronte, and numerous uncles and aunts. It is said that Patrick inspired his three famous novelist daughters with tales of his youth in the Bann Valley.—Louise Smith ❀

The family story says the Donaldson sisters embroidered small and large-sized dresses to make money during the week.

Mary and three or four of her sisters also learned to make lace. They were able to get the thread they needed from a supply place. So once a week, every Thursday, in addition to working during the day, the girls would sit up all night and make lace.

“The girls worked by candlelight. Candles was the only light they had, as lamps was unheard of then.”—*Emily Higginson Crabtree, daughter.*

Then the girls would take the lace they had made and get paid.

Grandma Myrtie told me (Louise) that the embroidery



Mary Donaldson Higginson.

work Mary and her sisters did all night each Thursday, was for the queen or royalty. I seem to be the only one that heard this story.

After her parents died, Mary wanted to travel to Canada to stay with her brother, David, said one family story. Around 1851, a wealthy family traveling by ship to Canada, hired Mary as a nursemaid for their baby.

The mother hired a young girl to tend each child on the six week trip. Mary, said that she hardly had much to do because the mother cared for the baby herself.

They arrived in Niagara, Canada, one story says, and Mary at some point saw Niagara Falls.

The family had an estate in Niagara and employed a large staff of servants, caretakers, and stablehands. These seven girls worked by getting meals ready and other chores. After the family had dinner, the girls would clear the dishes. Then the girls and the other servants could all take their meal.

The family was kind and generous. Unfortunately, the baby died of pneumonia, leaving Mary without a job. But Mary did not go back to Ireland.

Edward and Mary Meet and Marry

Mary worked as a servant, possibly in the Niagara Falls area, on the Canadian side. Edward may have worked on the Welland Canal in Canada, about 15 miles from Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.

A family story says that Mary and the other servants socialized after their work was done. This is possibly where Mary and Edward met.

Edward Higginson married Mary Donaldson at Chippawa, County Welland, Ontario, Canada, in May of 1854. ❀

Irish Lace and the Donaldsons

There are several types of lace that were made in Ireland in the late 1840s: Youghel or needle lace; embroidered lace: limerick and crickamacross (both involve embroidery on net); and Irish crocheted lace.

Lace makers would need to read and write so they could read the pattern. And Mary Donaldson Higginson could read and write.

Sometimes a broker would take a specific pattern to the girls to make. He would pick the lace up in a month and pay them in thread and/or needles and pins, depending on the amount of lace they had made.

Some lace was made for the church, but other lace was made for the wealthy aristocrats and royalty. The lace makers could not wear the lace they had made as there was a law against it.

This is information I (Louise) learned from two ladies who are very skilled lace makers, and are quite knowledgeable about the history of lace.

When I asked them about the probability of Donaldson sisters making lace for royalty or the queen, the answer was, “It is very probable that they did.”—*Louise Smith, great great granddaughter*

The Donaldsons

There have been many Irish Donaldsons in Ontario and Buffalo, New York, over the years, but I am unable to positively identify any one of Mary’s brothers so far. There is a David in Welland County, Ontario, in 1851, and he was gone by 1861. —*Cal Bivens, great great grandson* ❀

Edward Higginson, Irish Immigrant

The Higginson Name

What was Edward's surname? Census reports, documents, and family stories use Higgins, Higginson or Hickerson for Edward and Mary, and son Jim's last name. At least one family story tells how the name was switched from Higgins to Higginson.—Louise Smith, great, great granddaughter

I (Cal) have reached a conclusion that the name is Higginson. There is ample evidence that the name was misspelled on a regular basis for some reason. They seem to be prone to being misspelled, much like we Bivens folk.

Edward's name is given as Hickerson in the 1860 census. Higginson was either misunderstood or misspelled or both. His wife and children are listed with their birthplaces and ages; this is them, I have no doubts whatever. The census taker's penmanship makes it possible that the name was actually spelled "Hickenson" which is easily mutated into "Higginson."

Hickerson, Hickenson, and Higginson are all given as derivative names of the original Hick, which goes back to the 14th century.

In the passenger list indexes is a reference to Edward's naturalization papers. The source referred to was the book: *Kane County, Illinois, Naturalization Records, 1857–1906, Geneva, Illinois, Kane County Genealogical Society, published in 1988.*

In the Kane County Naturalization Records book mentioned, Edward is listed as Edward Higginson, as opposed to

Higgins which is on the original Declaration of Intention. The book alludes to the fact that some final papers are on file as well as the Declarations of Intention. This makes me think that his name appeared as Higginson on his final papers. The 1870 census says that he was a citizen, which means he had to have been naturalized.

Immigrants into Buffalo, New York, US

Buffalo is the city where Edward arrived from Ireland according to his Declaration of Intention to be Naturalized. While Buffalo was at the time the biggest inland port in the US, it was never a port of entry from overseas, because of Niagara Falls. Immigrants into Buffalo came in from New York City or elsewhere, or came over from Canada (many of those walking across the border).

Unfortunately Canada didn't require passenger ships to keep registries of passengers and so the odds of finding a ship's list with them on it are not good.

Edward's Arrival in the US

The Declaration of Intention document does say that Edward left Ireland in 1854. I have difficulty with the compression of time. Sailing the Atlantic in those days was still only done from spring to late summer. It would seem to make Edward and Mary's courtship very, very brief.

They married in May 1854, and crossed into New York and went from there to Illinois where John was born in June 1855. It's not impossible but seems to me to have some problems.—*Cal Bivens, great great grandson* ❀



This map shows the locations of Buffalo, New York, Niagara Falls, New York, US; Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, and Chippawa, Ontario, Canada. The Welland Canal where Edward may have worked is shown on the left.

Chippawa, Willoughby Township, Welland County, Ontario, Canada

Chippawa, where Edward and Mary were married, is a village located within the City of Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. The town was named, but incorrectly spelled, after the Chippewa Indian band. Chippawa is the correct spelling for the town and the surrounding area.

—*Louise Smith, great, great granddaughter* ❀