

Colonial *and* Revolutionary Families *of* Pennsylvania

Genealogical and Personal Memoirs

EDITOR

JOHN W. JORDAN, LL.D.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Ex-General Registrar of Sons of the Revolution
and Registrar of Pennsylvania Society

*

VOLUME II

*

NEW YORK

CHICAGO

THE LEWIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

1911

This is another line of Revolutionary descent leading to the Denny family--that of Elizabeth T. (O'Hara) Denny. The O'Haras are an ancient family of Ireland. They are mentioned in Irish history as far back as 1348 in County Mayo, in the west of Ireland. In 1396, Bishop O'Hara is named, in 1409, Bishop Bryan O'Hara, in 1485, Archbishop O'Hara has mentioned. General Sir Charles O'Hara was created a Baron in 1706. He was of county Mayo, as was his son, General James O'Hara, who served and received a title from Queen Ann. General James O'Hara had hanging on the walls of his Pittsburgh home the coat-of-arms of the barony of Tyrawley, in recognition of his descent from the Baron O'Hara, of county Mayo--Vert on the pale radiant or, a lion rampant, sable. James O'Hara (afterward quartermaster-general in the American army) came to America in 1772. He landed in Philadelphia, but soon found his way to Western Pennsylvania, where he was an Indian trader for a firm in Philadelphia. He left them and for a time till March, 1774, was employed by Pittsburgh men as their Indian trader in (now) St. Lawrence county. His accounts were kept with the Indian in buck, doe and fawn skins. Here are a few of his entries: "Captain Pipe's account, pea, meat, chease, lives on the creek." "Captain Pipe promises to pay these accounts if the other would not". "Deer skins received of his wife, 10 shillings; 1 Buck skin", "paid Joseph

Hamaltius, 6 shillings, 1 pence", "remainder of raccoon and foxes skins got at camp". "Account with White woman who lives in the smith's shop". "Dr. Pipe's brother-in-law". "Dr. the little Muncy man who bot gun at thr Muncy-town, 1 pint powder". From March, 1774, till the breaking out of the war, he was government agent among the Indians. As O'Hara had served three years in the British army and had ranked as ensign, he was thought capable of being captain. He raised and equipped a volunteer company, the equipment being a hunting shirt, buckskin breeches and the ever ready rifle. The company was first sent to Fort Canhawa (now Kanawha) which had been erected by the State of Virginia. Here Captain O'Hara and his men remained until 1779. The company having been reduced to twenty-nine men through losses from the Indian fighting, the fort was abandoned, the cattle and horses sent to Pittsburgh, while the few men surviving were attached to the North Virginia regulars under General Broadhead, December 13, 1779. O'Hara, who spoke French, the Indian dialects, and understood their sign writing, was of great benefit to Major Clark, whom he accompanied on his arduous march through the Wabash country. He was sent east with letters to General Washington, and remained at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, until 1780, when he was appointed commissary for the General Hospital and stationed at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In 1781 he was made assistant quartermaster. The winter of 1779-80 was one of unusual severity. The means of transportation were closed and supplies could not be furnished the army in a great quantity, nor with regularity. The depreciation of the Continental currency also caused most serious difficulty. The distress consequent was responsible for the revolt of the Pennsylvania Line in 1781. Captain O'Hara, as assistant quartermaster, used every endeavor to provide for the southern campaign of 1781 under General Greene. Of the history of his efforts for this purpose there remains but one small memorandum book. In that can be traced his journey with the army and a record of provisions, procured by himself and his assistant, Mr. Elliot. Names of places are given that correspond with the most noted places and battles of the southern campaign. South Carolina was in the hands of Cornwallis, and he was preparing to invade North Carolina. Morgan defeated the British Colonel Tarleton at "The Cowpens," January 17, 1781. There were various pursuits and retreats until March 15, when the battle of Guilford Court House was fought. This was one of the hottest fights of the war. The Americans were repulsed, but the British were too badly shattered to pursue. At Camden, General Greene had a hard battle with the British under Lord Rawdon, and was defeated. Again at Eutaw Springs the armies grappled and both claimed the victory. These and other places are mentioned in the book, showing that Captain O'Hara was giving active personal attention to the duties of his department (the commissary). He remained with the army until July, 1783, when having seen the last of the Pennsylvania troops on board the transport, he traveled north to Philadelphia in company with General Wayne.

After settling the affairs of his office he returned to Pittsburgh, accompanied by his newly wedded wife, in a wagon, the only means of travel. She was Mary, daughter of William Carson, a Scotch gentleman of means. The house to which Captain O'Hara brought his bride was built of logs. She however had brought with her all the luxuries of home life that could be transported. The

carpets astonished the western country people, and they expressed their surprise, that Mrs. O'Hara should spread coverlets on the floor to walk on. The house stood near the Allegheny river, above Fort Pitt, in what was called the "Officers' Orchard". During his residence in Pittsburgh, General O'Hara was noted for his hospitality. To his home all were welcome, from the countryman who came for rest or refreshment, to his guests of honor, Louis Phillipe, General Moreau, and his friends the French officers. Letters from officers high in rank in the army, prove their esteem and confidence in him. April 19, 1792, he was appointed quartermaster-general of the regular United States army, and served until May, 1796, being succeeded by General John Wilkins father of Nancy, the wife of Major Ebenezer Denny (See Denny). After the war ended, General O'Hara took a contract to furnish provisions for the western army under General Harmar, and did this satisfactorily, and was appointed quartermaster and treasurer for the payment of the soldiers. His accounts were kept with the most scrupulous exactness, as his reports to the Treasury Department show, and the following confirms:

Treasury Department,
Registers Office, Mar. 6, 1792.

These are to certify that James O'Hara, late contractor for supplying the army with provisions, and who occasionally acted as Quartermaster of the troops and agent for the supply of Indian goods, is not charged with any moneys on the treasury books. That he has from time to time settled his accounts in a regular manner at the Treasury, and has given general satisfaction to the Treasury officers with whom he has settled said accounts.

(Signed) Joseph Nourse,
Register.

April 19, 1792, Captain James O'Hara was appointed quartermaster-general in the United States army, and served until May, 1796.

War Department, April 19, 1792.

Sir:—The President of the United States by and with the advice and consent of the Senate has appointed you Quarter-Master General in the army of the United States. You will please immediately to signify your acceptance or non-acceptance of this appointment. In order that you may judge of the pay, rations and emoluments of the commissioned and non-commissioned officers and privates in the service of the United States, I enclose you the act of Congress relating to the military establishment. I am, dear sir,

Your humble servant,
H. Knox,
Secretary of War.

(James O'Hara).

In the spring of that year (1796) he built a saw mill in Allegheny City, and planned with Major Isaac Craig the erection of glass works. They spent thirty thousand dollars (a fortune in those days) before a single bottle was blown, but later it was a paying business. The glass industry of Pittsburgh owes its inception and infant life to those two men, O'Hara and Craig. The glass works of O'Hara and Craig made a common green grade of window glass, bottles and other hollow goods. They used an eight pot furnace and turned out three boxes of window glass daily, about three hundred square feet. A memorandum from General O'Hara's book, found after his death reads: "To-day we made the first bottle, at a cost of \$30,000." He was a builder of ships at Pittsburgh. They were built at his ship yard, loaded, then floated down the rivers to New Orleans, where they were rigged and sent on their voyages.

He built the "General Butler," which made several voyages across the ocean, but was captured by the Spanish, October 3, 1807. In 1811 he was a partner with John Henry Hopkins (after Bishop of Vermont) in the iron works at Ligonier, Westmoreland county, that failed. He made large purchases of land in Allegheny and other counties of western Pennsylvania. In 1804 he was appointed a director of the Pittsburgh Branch of the Bank of Pennsylvania. He ran for Congress in 1802 and in 1804, but failed of an election. He was a Presidential elector in 1789 when George Washington was chosen. He was an able assistant to General Wilkinson in raising the money to build the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, and donated a handsome chandelier which hung in the church for many years. He died in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, December 21, 1819, aged sixty-seven years. His wife, Mary Carson O'Hara, died April 8, 1834, aged seventy-three years.