

James A. Donohoe ((1857-1946)

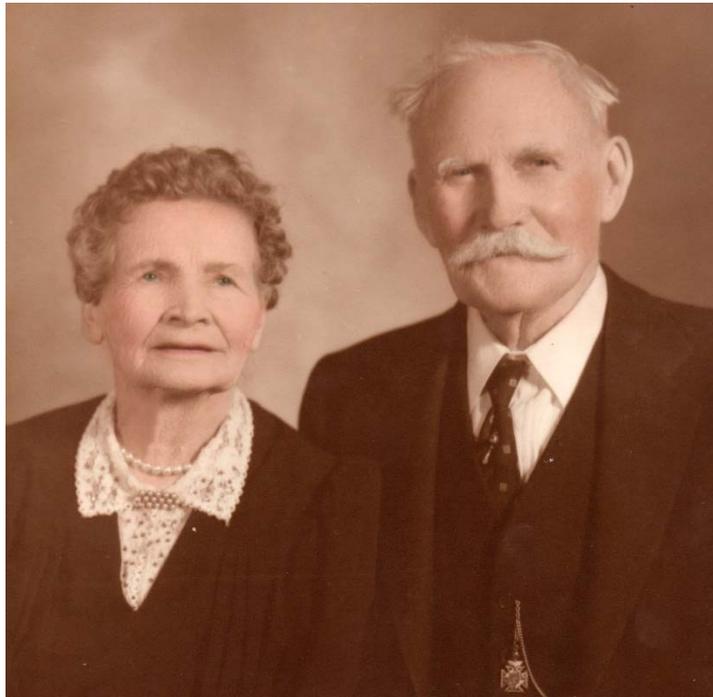
**A remembrance on occasion of 100th anniversary
of Marty Council of the Knights of Columbus
Sacred Heart Parish, Yankton, South Dakota by Robert F. Lyons**

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WHEN MY GRANDFATHER, James A. Donohoe (1857-1996) decided to move his family from Iowa to South Dakota in 1910, he had three requirements: good farmland, a location near a Catholic Church and a Knights of Columbus Council. His timing was perfect for Father Lawrence Link in Yankton was just forming a Knights of Columbus Council at the recently completed Sacred Heart Church. On December 22, 1910, the men of the parish gathered in the basement of the new church and formally established Marty Council of the Knights of Columbus. A formal initiation ceremony was later held at the Odd Fellows Hall (the old courthouse) on the following January 8th, 1911. The records of Marty Council state that James A. Donohoe and his two sons, John W. and Will S. transferred membership on February 24, 1913. Grandfather Donohoe became a member and embraced the Knights' mission: *"to seek strength in solidarity, and security through unity of purpose and devotion to a holy cause: members vowed to be defenders of their country, their families and their faith"* for this was part of his vision of building a new community. He proudly wore his K of C watch fob on his vest (visible in photo) with its TFMM motto: **Tempus Fugit Memento Mori** (Time Flies, Remember Death).

At age 55 Mr. Donohoe moved from a prosperous Irish farming community in Johnson County,

Iowa to Yankton with his wife, Mary and 6 adult children. He bought a 640 acre farm north of the cemetery on Douglas Avenue (now the Wintz & Ray Funeral Home) where he built a replica of the large farm house he had left in Iowa. Mr. Donohoe was a progressive state-of-the-art farmer who rapidly determined that Yankton did not have an adequate milk supply. He installed automatic milking machines in a new milk processing building which was such a novelty that the townspeople drove out on Sunday afternoons to witness this progressive apparatus in action. He developed a dairy business with a herd of 50 Holstein cows and door-to-door horse and wagon delivery. It was called the Sanitary Dairy Co. and eventually merged into the Keating



Grandparents Mary & James Donohoe c. 1945

Creamery Company which had been established in 1913 by two other leaders in the Yankton business and Catholic community, brothers Frank J. and John L. Keating.

Mr. Donohoe subscribed to the views of Thomas Jefferson that, *"if we're going to have a successful democratic society, we have to have a well educated and healthy citizenry"*. He sent his three sons and three daughters on to academies and colleges of higher education. His youngest daughter, Mary (my mother, Mrs. William F. Lyons) graduated from Yankton College and became a public school teacher. In his library, he read into the night from the Catholic Encyclopedia. He was well known and respected in the business community as his obituary notes *"Another of Yankton's respected old citizens passed from the scene today....Mr. Donohoe, besides maintaining an active interest in his home surroundings, also made regular trips downtown and was often seen visiting with old friends in the business district"* (Yankton P&D, August 21, 1946). Frank Yaggee, lifelong businessman, community person, artist, and citizen of Yankton told me some years ago: *"your grandfather Donohoe was known as Mr. Catholic because of his strong involvement and interest in the church and community."* For him, active participation in the Catholic Church and in the Knights of Columbus was an exercise in the civic and religious virtues he cherished to build a community of believers and good citizens, and the institutions to support them.

In politics, Mr. Donohoe was a democrat. He was interested in all that would promote the progress and prosperity of Yankton. He bought \$5,000 of bonds in 1919 to assist in the one and one-half million dollar bond drive to build the Meridian Bridge across the Missouri River from Yankton to Nebraska.

The Sacred Heart parish census for 1908 reports a congregation of 750 people, 620 born in the United States, 50 in Ireland, 50 in Germany, 12 in Bohemia, 10 in Austria, 4 in Canada and 2 each in England and Poland. The early decades of the 20th century in South Dakota experienced waves of immigrants who responded to the call of land and opportunity in the West.



James A. Donohoe Farm - Yankton c. 1920

To the West, to the West, to the land of the free,
Where the mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea,
Where a man is a man if he's willing to toil,
And the humblest may gather the fruits of the soil.

Where the people are true to the vows that they frame,
And their pride is the honor that's shown to their name;
Away! Far away! Let us hope for the best,
And build up a home in the land of the west. (Chas. Mackay 1814-1889)

A snapshot of Yankton County from the Federal census of 1910 shows a population of 13,135 which included people from Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, and from Norway, 2000 persons, a clear majority. There were 225 people, whose parents had been born in Ireland, as were the parents of James and Mary Donohoe. In response to anti-Catholic prejudice in the first decades of the 20th century

in South Dakota, a collective sense of Catholicity eventually superseded any separate, immigrant identity. Churchgoers tended to bond together to combat a common foe. South Dakota Catholics identified more with their religion and their fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Columbus than with their nationalities.

The legacy of James Donohoe's agricultural innovation, civic service, support for education and music, and the promotion of progress in the Yankton community was passed along to his grandchildren. Pat Lyons was among the first to initiate the use of center pivot irrigation systems on his 600 acre farm east of Yankton. He transformed intensive pig farming for which he was recognized as one of the five commercial Master Pork Producers for 1972. The award is sponsored by S.D. Livestock Expansion Foundation, S.D. Extension Service, and the S.D. Association of Vocational Instructors. He also has been a supervisor of the Yankton County Conservation District and chairman of the Yankton County South Dakota Pork Council.

Jack Lyons, Choir Director of St. Benedict's Church, and his wife Margaret, both retired music teachers, were recognized as Yankton's Citizens of the Year 2009 for their 45 years of promoting music, theater, education and preservation of historic sites. Under the auspices of the Donohoe brothers, Jim, George and Jerry, hundreds of housing units have been built over the last decades on the original Donohoe farmland to meet the expanding housing requirements for citizens in Yankton. The principal street defining this development is named "Donohoe Boulevard". The secondary streets are named for several James and Mary Donohoe children, William Cr, Ella Lane, Francis, Anna and Mary Streets.

The Marty Council of the Knights of Columbus as it celebrates its 100th anniversary reaffirms its commitment of service to the Catholic Church, community service and fellowship. The legacy of James Donohoe and others of that founding membership continues to live through the hundreds of hours each year when Marty Council assists in the needs of the Church and community of Yankton. I am proud that my grandfather, James Donohoe and my beautiful grandma, Mary Donohoe, who lived to be 100 years of age, were a part of its origins in the town and county of my birth.

*Robert F. Lyons, grandson of James and Mary Donohoe and son of William and Mary Donohoe Lyons lives in New England where he teaches Irish Short Stories, Irish Film Classics, Irish Readers Theatre in lifelong learning programs at the University of Southern Maine, Portland, Tufts University in Boston, Dartmouth College, and while living in Ireland, at University College Cork.

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