

**THE TREE FROM THE STONE:
A GENEALOGICAL PUZZLE SOLVED**

by Brian E. Michaels

Perhaps no one had noticed it for many years--until that spring day in 1976. There was no particular reason to notice it; at first glance it was not remarkably different from the hundreds of others nearby.

It was just an ordinary slab of moss-encrusted stone in stately old St. Monica's Catholic Cemetery on an old brick street in the old section of Palatka, Florida.

True, it did seem more than usually difficult for the eye to trace this particular inscription, and few who saw it would have made the effort. Those who did may have marveled briefly at the strange characters chiseled deep into the stone face, but it was not an urgent mystery.

When the gravestones of St. Monica's were surveyed in 1976 as part of a county-wide Bicentennial cemetery project, the strange inscription was carefully recorded, briefly considered, and properly filed. Then, in the summer of 1983, Janice Smith Mahaffey of the Putnam County Archives brought it out again. It wanted to be read, and I became determined to read it.

The stone proved to be two feet wide, nearly three inches thick, and some forty-five inches high. It bore a strange five-line inscription and two carved panels--one at each upper corner of the face. The inscription was made up of characters which had been variously guessed to be Greek, or Turkish, or any of a variety of Slavic tongues. It certainly was not any form of English, though some of the characters did closely resemble some of the letters used in English.

Dr. Albert C. Malone, a retired Army Intelligence colonel and an expert in Russian and the other Slavic languages, agreed to view the stone. He was baffled; some of the letters resembled some of the characters of the 32-character Cyrillic alphabet employed in Russian, but most of them did not. Dr. Malone was absolutely certain of one thing: "I'll stake my reputation on the fact that it is no form of Slavic," he concluded.

We knew, then, what language it was not. But what language was it?

After staring at the inscription for some time I began to wonder whether the six large letters near the top of the stone--which resembled "AMATAR"--could be some form of "mother." But in what language? There were a couple of other possible clues: the first nine characters of the fourth line seemed to go together. If transliterated as LUIMINACH, they seemed to suggest, with the following "Co," the possibility that it could be the ancient name of an Irish county. Could the inscription be Gaelic? That possibility seemed strengthened by the presence in the same plot of two concrete Celtic crosses--a small one on a child's grave, bearing only the brief legend "Lizzie," and a much larger one with no markings of any kind.

On a hunch, THE LONDON TIMES ATLAS OF THE WORLD was consulted to see whether LUIMINACH could be found as a place name. It couldn't. LUIMNEACH could, along with an intriguing cross-reference: see Limerick County, Ireland. But on the other hand, if LUIMINACH CO really meant "County Limerick," what could the last line be? By no means did that letter-group resemble "Ireland."

Meanwhile, hidden by the grass at the base of the monument, the dates 1836 and 1892 were discovered, flanked by carvings of a rising sun on the left and a crescent moon on the right.

AMATAR
euphonia or colla
Creg haun
luiminach.co
Innirfall.

Once we were armed with a supposed death year, St. Monica's Church, which is still an active and vital congregation, was approached in the hope that either Father Thomas Walsh, a native of Ireland, or the church records, might shed some light on their long-dead parishioner. But Father Walsh was in Ireland at the moment, and a search of the church records yielded nothing, despite the willing assistance of the church secretary, Mrs. Evelyn Long.

Almost as an afterthought, a despairing request was made for any old plats or drawings of the layout of St. Monica's Cemetery, since no old deeds exist. Mrs. Long pulled one from a file drawer, and there on one sheet a sketch of the plot in question bore the single surname O'Driscoll. A similar old plat consulted later at a local funeral home provided the same information, but no more. Nonetheless, the Irish connection was getting stronger.

From there to the Putnam County Courthouse. No land records for any O'Driscolls prior to the twentieth century, and the first entry of any kind, a naturalization for one Daniel O'Driscoll, had not been recorded until 1896, four years after the death in question.

On to the Putnam County Archives to check naturalizations, which had recently been published in THE PUTNAM COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY JOURNAL. Nothing close, neither in the published list nor the original files--a puzzling state of affairs. Then years of experience with misfiled records came to the rescue, prompting a look under "D" rather than "O'D." There was an entry for "Duscalla, Daniel O.," for 1883. Although it was thirteen years earlier than the courthouse entry and the surname bore only faint resemblance to the one being sought, there had to be a connection.

Back to the original files at the archives. Sure enough, "Daniel O. Duscalla" turned out to be Daniel O'Driscolla, who had sworn in circuit court in 1896 that he had resided in Putnam County since 1 January 1882. On 3 April 1883 he had declared his intent to become a citizen of the United States, renouncing allegiance to Queen Victoria "of Great Britain and Ireland." He was finally naturalized on 16 April 1896, thirteen years and thirteen days after declaring his intention. Now we had an individual named O'Driscolla fixed in Putnam County in the 1880's and 1890's; if the stone really did say "Mother," it might be, we thought, this Daniel's mother.

When asked for someone who might know Gaelic, Mrs. Long at St. Monica's had provided the name of Father Noel Cox, Irish-born rector of St. Ambrose Church at "Moccasin Branch" in nearby St. Johns County. A fortunate choice, for Father Cox was able to translate the stone by telephone--after some highly interesting attempts on my part to describe the Old Irish letters to him.

Father Cox explained that the Gaelic alphabet not only has different ways of forming some of our common letters, but contains a total of only eighteen letters (it lacks our j, k, q, v, w, x, y, and z). The decedent's first name had to be rendered as "Elisa," he said, though it probably was Eliza. The top line on the stone, as it turned out, was indeed "mother." Translated, the inscription read:

O MOTHER
ELIZA O'DRISCOLLA
CREGHAUN
LIMERICK COUNTY
"ISLE OF DESTINY"

So at last we knew who lay under the mysterious stone--or, at least, we had a name. But every genealogist knows that names are not enough, so now the search began in earnest.

Since the O'Driscolls had arrived in Putnam County in 1882, it was not surprising that they were not to be found in the archives' cardfile index to the 1880 census. And since the subject of our search had died two years after the ill-fated census of

1890, the federal census records could be of no help in this case.

Fortunately, Florida was one of five states which had accepted the invitation (and the money) of the federal government for a state census in 1885 which was modeled on the U.S. census of 1880. Unfortunately, the nearest microfilm copies are 125 miles away. It would take several days to bring in a reel on interlibrary loan from the state library in Tallahassee, and my vacation was almost gone.

The local newspaper's microfilm files seemed the next best bet for information on the elusive Mrs. O'Driscolla. It was depressing to find that there was but one surviving issue from January through June of 1892. Six months of obituaries were lost, and there was as yet no information on when the subject of our search had died. The odds of locating her obituary--even if there had been one--had to be less than one in two. And as the December issues of THE PALATKA WEEKLY TIMES rolled through the old Kodagraph reader, a wave of despair rolled with them--she just wasn't there. After reading so many uninformative headings of "Died," "Obituary," and the like, my tired eyes almost missed, on page one of the edition of Friday, 16 December 1892, a short piece headed "Death of Mrs. O'Driscoll." Everyone within a block must have heard the shout of joy!

The obituary confirmed that Eliza O'Driscolla was indeed the mother of Daniel O'Driscoll. Her birthdate was given, and her deathdate could be calculated from the date of the newspaper, so the story could end at that point--or could it?

DEATH OF MRS. O'DRISCOLL

Died, at her residence at Palatka Heights, last Sunday evening, Mrs. Eliza O'Driscoll. The deceased was born in the County of Limerick, Ireland, March 25th, 1836. She came to America about ten years ago. Mr. Daniel O'Driscoll and Miss Mary O'Driscoll, well and favorably known to a large circle of friends in this city, are the son and daughter of the deceased, they having lived here for several years. Mrs. O'Driscoll was a quiet and conscientious Christian woman, and though her residence among us was of short duration, yet she had greatly endeared herself to a large circle of acquaintances, who mourn her death. She was buried from St. Monica Church, in this city, Tuesday morning, with the usual impressive ceremonies of that church.

Now we had laid Mrs. O'Driscoll to rest, but what had happened to Daniel? What had become of his now-discovered sister, Mary? Might there be descendants of Eliza O'Driscoll still in the area? Might there be a photograph of her?

To the 1900 U.S. census for Daniel and Mary. Daniel, it turned out, was residing in Palatka Heights as the single head of a one-person household--no Mary O'Driscoll to be seen. According to the census, Daniel was a forty-one-year-old white male brick mason born in Ireland in June of 1858. Both parents were born in Ireland; he had immigrated to the United States in 1882 and had lived in this country for eighteen years. He was naturalized, and he owned his house.

But where was sister Mary? Back to St. Monica's--perhaps she had married. She had indeed. On 28 April 1897, Mary O'Driscoll had wed Alphonso C. Lancaster (who was, according to census, probate, and vital records located later, a carpenter born in Georgia on 18 February 1862 to David and Martha Morse Lancaster. He died in Palatka on 27 August 1926, leaving his widow as sole heir).

The odds were now pretty good that the child's grave marked "Lizzie" and lying immediately adjacent to Eliza O'Driscoll was a namesake granddaughter. St. Monica's records and the 1900 census confirmed this assumption. Elizabeth Margaret Lancaster was born 23 June 1898, baptized on July 24 of that year, and died of "spasms" (convulsions) at the age of two on 3 October, 1900.

Had there been surviving children at Mary O'Driscoll Lancaster's death of Bright's Disease (at the actual age of 76) on 7 February 1932? That question was answered by THE PALATKA DAILY NEWS of Monday, 8 February 1932:

rites today for Mrs. Lancaster

Funeral services for Mrs. Mary Lancaster, 72, who died last night at her home on the Peniel Road following a lingering illness, which assumed serious proportions about two weeks ago, will be held today at 4 p.m. from St. Monica's Church. Interment will take place in St. Monica's Cemetery with the Rev. Fr. W.C. Becker officiating. Mrs. Lancaster, whose husband predeceased her several years ago, resided here for about forty years. Her brother, Dan O'Driscoll of this city, survives.

So much for descendants. Dan O'Driscoll had never married; he was still listed as "single" at his death.

Through city directories and land, census, vital, and probate records we can track this stalwart Irish brick and stone mason for more than sixty years as he moved across the panorama of Putnam County. In his later years he lived in a small house near the edge of the present-day golf course, casting concrete flower pots and low walls, growing oranges and his own wine grapes. In 1936, at the age of seventy-seven, he was "taking care of Camp Pauline," then a respectable forerunner of the modern motel (though it was later to become "a notorious juke"--and worse--during the war years).

In 1940, when he was past eighty, he was still installing low concrete plot walls in St. Monica's Cemetery. One longtime resident whose grandparents' graves O'Driscoll fenced that year remembers that one of his trademarks was the use of decorative bits of colored glass set into concrete and mortar. That recollection is borne out by the presence of a tiny blue-glass cross within the small cross on Lizzie's grave. Chips of glass also are still to be seen in the fence uprights around the O'Driscoll plot.

Only one person has been found who remembers Dan O'Driscoll. She says, "I used to see him around town, a little short, grayhaired fellow. He must have been highly regarded; he was always busy."

The saga of Eliza O'Driscolla and her family came full circle with the location by Mrs. Ruth Richter of the Putnam County Health Department of the death certificates of both of her children, a fortunate feat for Florida vital records of that vintage. According to Daniel's death certificate (on which he himself is listed as the informant), Eliza O'Driscolla was born Elizabeth O'Horan in County Limerick. She married Jeremiah O'Driscolla of Timoleague, County Cork (probably between 1852 and 1855, since Mary was born on 1 May 1856, when Eliza was barely twenty).

Though some late deed records had indicated that Daniel O'Driscoll's middle initial was "J," it remained for his death on Friday, the 13th of November, 1942, at the age of 83 years, 5 months, and 8 days, to reveal that he was born Daniel Jeremiah O'Driscoll. And there are sad ironies to conclude his story: his death certificate was erroneously recorded as "David Jeremiah O'Driscoll"; and this man who spent much of his life providing monuments and embellishments for the graves of others lies in an unmarked grave in St. Monica's Cemetery.

Daniel Jeremiah O'Driscoll was the last of his line. There are no descendants to read or care about the results of this inquiry. He has neither stone nor obituary. But if this account of how a family tree can sprout from an unreadable stone helps some researcher somewhere better understand how to proceed with his or her own research, then perhaps this story will serve as Dan O'Driscoll's monument.