

Thomas Peter and Margaret Kearney

The year of birth of Thomas Peter Kearney, son of Bernard and Catherine Fitzsimmons Kearney, is hard to pin down; his gravestone and death certificate say he was born in 1858, but when he was married in July 1890, he gave his age as 28, which would make him born in 1861. His birthday was recorded as August 12. He was about six feet tall, with dark hair, and on the heavy side, though very healthy most of his life. He was recalled as a brusque man who enjoyed a drink, and was not a churchgoer.

Thomas was born in Shercock, County Cavan; as a young man, he drove a horse cart in Dublin. He left Ireland on February 2, 1882, when he was in his early 20s. He may have lived for a time in England; according to his naturalization papers, he arrived in Philadelphia on April 8, 1887 (a month before his mother's death). He settled in Morrell, a small town near Connelsville in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. But he seems to have moved around a lot; he went to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, in 1889, after the famous flood, and also lived in Calumet, Buffington and New Salem, also in Fayette County. He worked as a leveler at the coke works.

(Coke and coal played major parts in the economy of the Kearney family, and also of the related Murtha family. Coke, an ingredient in steel, is created by baking coal in huge ovens. Leveling the coal in these ovens was considered one of the most demanding, dangerous jobs. Most of the coke operations in Fayette and Westmoreland counties were owned by Henry Clay Frick, a business associate of Andrew Carnegie; these operations ended up being owned by U.S. Steel.)

In 1890, Thomas married Margaret McCluskey--joining the Kearney family with another Shercock family, the McCluskeys.

Margaret, Owen and Anne McCluskey's only daughter, was born December 9, 1862. Margaret was about 5'7", had blue eyes and spoke very softly. When she first arrived, she came to Philadelphia, where she worked as a maid in the city's Germantown section.

She had known Thomas Kearney in Ireland, and Thomas' family thought she "followed him to America to marry him." Edward McCluskey, however, believed that Margaret came over first. In any case, they were married in 1890, and settled in Calumet, Pennsylvania.

Thomas Peter Kearney had many fruit trees and "a nice bank account." He never learned to drive. He was known for his frugality: The saying most often attributed to him was, "Money in your pocket's better than carpet on your floor." He did, however, go back to visit Ireland once or twice, the only person on either side of the family to do so before his son Chris went there with his wife Adeline on their honeymoon. He became a U.S. citizen on Dec. 7, 1895, getting a good-character reference from one Thomas McDermott.

Both Thomas and Margaret grew to be a little on the heavy side; their hair went gray but not white. Like her husband, Margaret "drank a little too much."

Thomas and Margaret Kearney had five children: Bernard Walter, known as Barney, born in 1891; Margaret, known as Peggy, apparently born in late 1891 or early 1892; Christopher James, born November 8, 1892; Catherine, born 1895; and Thomas John, born 1897.

The eldest son was named Bernard for his paternal grandfather, following the old Irish tradition. Barney worked in the coal mines, and was in the Army during World War I. He was killed around

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1923, at the age of came down on him. He left behind two children, Edward and Robert, known as Bud.

Peggy was remembered for her auburn curls. She died of poisoning at the age of five, after eating something poisonous: rat bait, or medicine that a boarder had left behind. According to her sister Catherine, all the children had eaten and gotten sick from this.

Catherine spoke very softly, like her mother, but is remembered as being somewhat difficult to get along with. She taught in public schools, then became a nun at Seton Hill, taking the name Sister Agnes Catherine. The other sisters are said to have put off letting her take permanent vows because of her bad temper. She left the convent to become a nurse, and to take care of her sick mother. After Margaret's death, Catherine returned to the convent.

Thomas John Kearney, the youngest child, married Catherine Barnett and lived in New Salem, Pennsylvania. They had one child, an adopted baby named Robert. Adele Kearney remembers Tom as drinking tea out of a saucer and eating peas with a knife. Patrick Kearney remembers his uncle fondly, who died when Pat was very young. Tom's son Robert settled in Gary, Indiana, and had five or six children.

Margaret Kearney died in 1930. At about that time, the house of Thomas and Margaret Kearney in Calumet burned to the ground. "Because Chris didn't seem surprised when he heard about the fire, Adeline suspected Thomas started it himself to collect the insurance," Thomas' granddaughter Adele Kearney reports. (In Thomas' defense, Adeline was something of a hostile witness.) He moved into a boarding house on Main Street in Mount Pleasant.

Around this time, in 1930 or 1931, Thomas remarked casually remarked to his daughter-in-law Adeline that Chris had saved up a lot of money, and ought to retire early, as he had. This suggestion flabbergasted Adeline. "He can't retire with all these young children to educate," she told him.

Not long after, in 1931, Thomas announced that he was going to check himself in to the hospital, and he died there a few days later. He was probably about 70, though he may have been as old as 73.