From the Society Archives: “Daugherty’s Cemetery: An Interesting Historical Sketch of a Region in Beaver County”

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The following selection is taken from the Archives of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pa. Complied by Beaver County attorney Frank T. Covert, this selection provides a short history of the first Catholic cemetery in Beaver County, Daugherty’s Cemetery near Beaver, Pa. For the complete account, please see Folder 21, Box 13, Series 12 of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania Collection at the University Archives at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa.¹

The graveyard, more familiarly known as Daugherty’s Cemetery, located at the junction of the Three Degree and Harmony roads in Daugherty township two miles from New Brighton and about the same distance from Rochester, Beaver Co., Pa., was one of the earliest grounds laid out in this part of the state.

It was the first Catholic graveyard within the limits of Beaver County, and probably the earliest to be located in Pennsylvania, west of the Ohio and Allegheny Rivers.

For a period of over sixty years it was the only place of internment for Catholics in the county, with the exception of the small burial plot or churchyard adjoining the lately burned church at Beaver where in but few were interred. These bodies have since been removed. The Beaver church yard was not used for a burial ground until long after the dedication of the Beaver Church in June 29, 1837.

Daugherty’s Cemetery is kept in good condition and is still used as a burial place by the congregations of St. Cecilia, of Rochester, and Ss. Peter and Paul, of Beaver; or as the latter is commonly and reverently termed “the Beaver Church.”
When Edward Daugherty, who was the grandfather of Mrs. P.H. Coyle of New Brighton and the late Edward B. Daugherty, Esq., of Beaver, crossed the mountains and came to this then sparsely settled region, he located upon a large farm or tract as it was then called, lying southwest of the present New Brighton which he later purchased, part of which is still in possession of his descendants and the present Daugherty’s Cemetery constituted another portion. He immediately erected his log cabin home upon the farm now belonging to the aforesaid Mrs. Coyle upon the Rochester and Harmony road. This was in the year 1800 or 1801 and his was the fourth Catholic family to settle in Beaver County. James McGuire, a grandfather of Hugh McGuire, of Oak Hill, and the late James McGuire, of Daugherty township, who fled from Ireland during the turbulent period at the close of the eighteenth century, had previously in 1795, settled upon a 4000 acre tract lying immediately north of New Brighton, the greater portion of which is yet owned and resided upon by his descendants. He was the first Catholic in this region, stood near where now stands the old brick Schofield house, on the New Castle road, below New Brighton reservoir.

The second was John Daugherty, a brother of Edward, who, a couple of years ago or so after Mr. McGuire’s arrival, settled upon a tract on Bennett’s Run, and builded his house just within the angle formed by the meeting of the present two roads at what is known as the forks of the run. About this time also, Daniel McGuire, the third Catholic settler, located his home at Vicary, now a part of Freedom, but some years afterward settled upon the Big Sewickley creek near what is now Well Rose post office, where several of his descendants still reside. He was a cousin of the former James, and was the grandfather of Michael McGuire of Economy township.

Shortly after Mr. Daugherty was comfortably settled he was joined by his brother, Manasseh and family, who resided with him. About the same time came John Black, a Protestant, whose family, or part of them afterwards became Catholics. He settled upon a neighboring tract to Mr. Daugherty and at once builded thereupon his log cabin, the site of which was lately and for many years occupied by the family of the late Patrick H. Coyle.
When his house was completed Mr. Black made arrangements for erecting a log barn a short distance north of his home. At their barn raisings, as in later times, it was customary for all the neighboring settlers to collect and give assistance in lifting the heavy logs in position, or as the walls of the building grew higher, in sliding them up from their resemblance to the horns of a bull, which forked ends were placed at the ends of the log to be lifted. Each of these bull heads was pushed by a different set of men and good natured “races” were often run to see which set could first slide its end up the skids. This was a dangerous and sometimes fatal practice; the men were frequently badly injured or maimed by the falling of the log when a bull head slipped off by reason frontend being pushed up too rapidly. This happened the construction of Mr. Black’s barn. The building was nearing completion when a “race” began in lifting a heavy roof piece called a weight pole. A bull head slipped off an end, and before Manasseh Daugherty, who was helping could get away from beneath the big, heavy timber it fell upon him, crushing his body so badly that he died two days later. This was the first death of a Catholic resident, and there being no Catholic graveyard, his brother Edward had him interred in a plot of about half an acre of his (Edward’s) farm, which he thereupon set aside and donated to the Catholics forever as a burying ground, and which as ever since been demonstrated in honor of the donator, Daugherty’s Cemetery. These events happened about the year 1801, and this half acre is the eastern part of the present cemetery, which now comprises between two and three acres.

Manasseh Daugherty who was the grandfather of Manasseh Yoho, of Mt. Washington, Beaver Falls, was therefore the first burial therein. The second was that of his wife, who a few years later followed him to the grave.

Up to the 1845 therein there was but few burials, as few Catholics were in the community. The few internments made were principally members of the families of McGuires, Daughertys and Backs.

Some of the more prominent persons in local affairs of the time, who were buried therein during this period, were the aforesaid James McGuire, who died about 1830 and his two sons, Hugh, who died in 1842, in his sixtieth year, and James, who died in 1848, aged sixty-three years, and John Daugherty, who lived to be 108 years of age. Edward Daugherty lived until July 31, 1830, and died aged eight-four years. His wife, Alice survived him 15 years. Their graves are now marked appropriately. However, but a few tombstones graced the cemetery prior to 1865, and until about 1845 no fence surrounded it.
In most cases during the 4 years the plot lay open, when an internment was made a kind of rude fence or simple enclosure of short rails or small tree boughs was built up around the new grave, which served the dual purpose of a mark and a protection, for several years after the plot had been fenced and the enclosures about the graves removed, simple boards were generally used as markers.

In 1844, a deed was made and entered of record by the heirs of Edward Daugherty, of the half acre to Michael O’Connor, Bishop of Pittsburgh, there having been hitherto no formal conveyance, and Daniel Daugherty, a son, is whose portion of his father’s estate the cemetery plot lay, Catholic church in the county up to about 1855, that he would donate much more land as the congregation could afford to build a fence. A subscription was taken up and about the year 1845 some of the Catholics went out and with the assistance and under the direction of James Black, a son of the former, built the first stout fence about the cemetery, but such was the state of their finances that they were unable to enclose but little more, if any, than the original half acre. From this time monuments and gravestones were generally placed on the graves or on such graves that could be definitely located after the lapse of so many years, for during the long time it had been used prior to 1845 and for several years thereafter the cemetery was more or less neglected. A definite plan of graves in the original half acre does not appear to have existed. Different graves were dug up by different sextons and other persons, who trusted solely to memory the determine a location, the result therefore being similar to the conditions existing in most other old graveyards, that is, that while in general most graves can be and are located definitely, there are many others whose position it is impossible to determine. About 1884 or 1885 this old half-acre had been pretty well filled up and realizing this, some members of the Rochester and Beaver congregations started a movement to desert this cemetery and purchase a new graveyard much nearer Rochester. This set with vigorous opposition from EB. Daugherty, Esq., who in order to induce the retention of the old place donated from his land adjoining, he having acquired the same from his deceased father, Daniel, the western portion now known as the new part of the cemetery. This was adopted by the two congregations. A deed was delivered for it, and the whole, including the new part, was in 1885 enclosed by another substantial fence. It was Mr. Daugherty’s intention to include in his donation the presence unfenced small wood lying next the Harmony road, but the congregations mistakenly believed that without enclosing this small wooded tract they had taken in enough land suffice for all internments for scores of years.
This new part is laid out with regularity and an accurate record of internments kept. In fact, for several years past the entire cemetery has been fairly well cared for. It is a beautiful situated spot. The whole plot fronts the Three Degree road and gently drops back an easy slope toward a sluggish run. Hidden from the beaten tracts of travel by a small wood it is else far enough removed from town to be protected from vandals and flower thieves, and realizing this many of the older Catholic families still continue to bury their dead therein, notwithstanding the other Catholic cemeteries now in use. This graveyard is the last resting place of two priests, Father James Reid, the first resident priest in the county, and for twenty-two years pastor of Beaver, died February 14, 1865, and was first interred in the Beaver Churchyard, but after the burning of the Beaver church, in April 1898, his remains were removed to Daugherty's.

The other was Father F.A. Steffen, a young priest who died of small pox at Rochester, December 30, 1881, as pastor of St. Cecilia's, which was his first charge after being ordained to the priesthood. Both these graves are marked by fences enclosing them.

At one time Father Reid wished to desert Daugherty's, which had not been consecrated and have deceased Catholics buried in the small Beaver churchyard, which idea was strongly opposed by James Black and other s of the older families, but it ended with the consecration of the original half-acre by Father Reid upon the orders of the bishop. The new part was dedicated about 1885 by Father Joseph Fleckinger, then pastor at Beaver and Rochester, who also erected the large rec cross therein.

So far as known no soldiers of the Revolution are buried in this cemetery, but the following are the names of some of those who served their country in the war of 1812-1814, who rest there:

James McGuire and William Vankirk, respectively a son and son-in-law of the first James McGuire, and Daniel Daugherty, son of the above named Edward Daugherty.
The early funerals were conducted with great inconvenience. The bodies of the deceased for many years were carried long distances upon the shoulders of pall bearers and other men, who relieved one another in turn, whilst the mourners and friends walked behind over the primitive, and during many months of the impassable roads. Later the corpses were hauled in a light, rude vehicle, with wooden springs culled from a dearborn wagon, though rough farm wagons were frequently used. Such of the friends and relatives as could do so rode on horseback or in conveyances.

When horses and carriages had come into use, it remained customary for many years for the pall bearers to ride on horses.

As there was no resident priest in the county until the advent of Father Reid in 1846, priests came from Pittsburgh on horseback to attend the dying or to hold funeral services for years before this date, but in still earlier years the services of a priest could not be had at all.

T. Frank Covert  
Beaver Falls, Pa.  
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1 Covert's transcript of Daugherty's Cemetery is prefaced as follows: "Extracts from "the History was a series of newspaper articles which I had clipped and pasted in a scrap book" and the following are extracts from a newspaper article which had been formerly received by Matt. L Blake at New Brighton, Pa., and which is referred to in Mr. Covert's letter of February 15, 1959."