

Carroll Yesteryears

13 March 2022

An Irish Immigrant Took on Mighty B&O and Won

By Mary Ann Ashcraft

St. Patrick's Day 2022 is right around the corner, so today's column shares an inspiring story of a courageous, illiterate, immigrant named Hannah Dougherty who likely fled Ireland to escape the Potato Famine of the 1840s and early 1850s and ended her life in Carroll County.

Several articles in the Baltimore *Sun* during 1869 and 1870 mention Hannah's lawsuit against the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad for the 1868 death of her husband, James, a railroad worker killed "near Sykesville." It took two trials before the 38-year-old widow left with six children under the age of 14 was awarded significant compensation. Who would have believed someone with no education could have taken on the mighty B&O and won. She must have had a strong case against it.

There are some gaps in tracing Hannah's story, but she and her husband first appear in the 1860 US census with three young sons living in Baltimore's 14<sup>th</sup> Ward, an area known as Irishtown near the B&O's Mt. Clare Station on Pratt Street. The boys were born in Maryland, but Hannah and James were born in Ireland, likely indicating they had met and married once they reached the United States. Baltimore was the final destination for many ships bringing Irish immigrants, and the B&O, like most railroads in the U.S., hired Irishmen for some of the most grueling work on their routes.

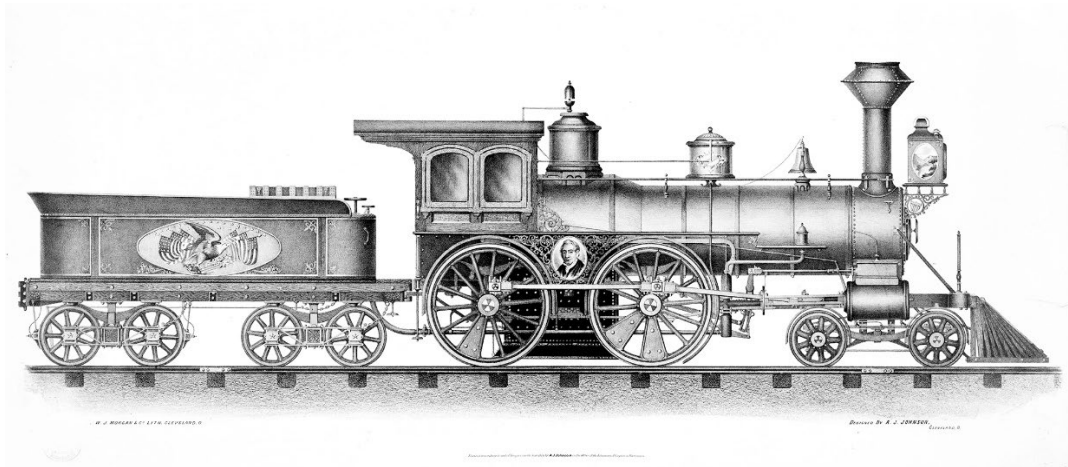
Exactly how James died must be preserved in court records, but it did not appear in newspaper articles. Sometime between 1870 and 1874, the railroad awarded Hannah and her dependent children roughly \$4,000 to settle her lawsuit. She used her portion and those of her children to purchase approximately 185 acres in the Eldersburg area near present-day White Rock Road and she shows up in the 1870 census with four of her six children. Two of the boys, ages 10 and 11, lived elsewhere, working for families near Libertytown in Frederick County. Andrew, the oldest at age 14, and the three younger girls lived with their mother. Apparently the lawsuit was not settled by 1870, so it is understandable why farming out the two boys was an economic necessity.

The 1880 agricultural census showed Hannah's farm was worth about the same amount as her settlement with the B&O - \$4,000. In 1879 it yielded \$950 worth of goods, probably from the sale of 450 pounds of butter, 600 dozen eggs plus other products. There were five horses, two mules, 18 cows (including six milch cows), seven pigs, 50 chickens and an orchard of apple and peach trees. Everyone in the family must have been working hard during the 1870-1880 decade to run a farm like that. In 1898 she disposed of it in a series of transactions.

By 1900 Hannah's oldest son and youngest daughter were dead; two other sons had moved away; and she was living with her 36-year-old twin daughters, Sarah and Hannah C., plus a young fellow listed as a servant. When she died in February 1901 at age 70, she had \$813.24 on deposit in the Farmers and Mechanics National Bank of Westminster and \$210 in cash. Once her estate was settled, her executor divided almost \$600 among the four living children and another

person – not a small feat for someone who, like so many other immigrants, built American into what it is today through hard work and perseverance.

*Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.*



*Image 1: Courtesy of Library of Congress; caption: The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad probably used locomotives very similar to this on its mainline track running between Baltimore and Sykesville when James Dougherty was killed in 1868.*



*Image 1: Courtesy of Mary Ann Ashcraft; caption: A monument to James and Hannah Dougherty stands in the cemetery of old St. Joseph Catholic Church overlooking downtown Sykesville. There are a few errors on it. James died in 1868 and Hannah in 1901, not 1902.*