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## Interview with David Greer

David Greer

Jen DiLisi

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**Interview with David Greer**  
**November 13, 1998**  
**Jen DiLisi and Alice McCunn**  
**Irish American**

(David began talking before we asked a question and tape starts a few seconds in)

DG: They can trace back to the 17th century. Dad's mother was French descent. Both of mom's ancestors I think were primarily British. So I think we covered all the British Isles except for Wales. About as WASP as you can get. And Martha being WASC (White Anglo Saxon Catholic), in fact her message it said, 'They haven't found many people to talk to and you're the only one I can think of that's the Orange type. Don't take it personally, you can't help it.' But we've been doing this since we were, you know, 45 years. Ever since we were old enough to know the difference., She taught me the difference I guess. Is this a socy course?

AM: Yeah. Professor Sacks. He's directing this. It's called the Rural Life Center.

DG: Yeah, I saw that they had that. Cause, you know, I cooperated every year with the Family Farm Project. Helped them with their, provided materials they used on their web page, and I promote it every chance I get. They've come to speak twice, the first year and third year at this community program we have. We're one of only two townships in the state that still has a community farmer's institute. Which was a rural education thing way before they had mass media, including television. Well, it's good to know you're continuing on. He took a year off and chased his sheep around. Was out there this summer and saw his wetland.

JD: So, can you tell us a little about your family? Who came here....

DG: As far as the Greer part, cause that's the part I know most about, cause most of them are buried 200 yards from where I live. My three great-grandmother was Mary Greer and she was a widow. Not quite sure of the particulars of my great-grandfather's death. I mean, it was a natural I think. There were, I believe, six or seven children, that came with here. She was born in 1785. And they came here in 1826. Her late husband's brother had a plantation in Port Tobacco, Maryland. That's Charles County, just southeast of Washington D.C. And Professor Sacks has visited there because of some connections I'll tell you about in a minute. My mother passed away. OF course she's not of that descent but she collected everything. I can see why I do it now. And it's kind of like a funnel: all the stuff from her family and Dad's family kind of collected in our house. And she passed away a year ago and we finally started cleaning out this summer. But, we uncovered a lot of documents. We uncovered my grandfather's journals from around 1900 till he passed away in 1947. Although I wasn't aware of the more recent ones. The ones around the 19 oughts, 1907, 1908, etc. And through the teens when Dad was born. In fact, they didn't give him a name for several months. So we found many of those things. And we found some correspondence. We gave them to Professor Sacks, he has them now and he just drooled when he saw them. I have a first cousin whose about 10 years older and she's the family genealogist and I call myself the family press agent. This proves it right here. Among other things, she discovered a letter that her brother- in- law who owned the plantation wrote to her. They lived in

Londonderry, County Antrim. Things were all ready, and they could come, and they would help them get ready to move to Ohio. I think they knew already that's's what they were going to do. Discovered another letter which we think was from a potential suitor of hers. And it said 'I cannot but refrain to shed a tear.' Something like that. It was really funny. I don't know what year that would be. To think she was leaving. He probably thought he was going to get her money. If she had any, I don't know. So, they came here in 1826 and stayed there a year. Then they came onto Ohio. They probably came up over the Muskingum River. I have a deed signed by John Quincy Adams. More likely by his clerk, dated 1827 for 80 acres including where my house sits. We think it was built about 1840. Part of that still stands, we tore a younger part we think dated about 1870 off. But they came here, 3 brothers, another great-grandfather and 2 brothers and then maybe some other who weren't mentioned. Maybe they weren't significant or maybe they moved away. It's kind of like the Amish. Only so many people can stick around, you know? There's not enough farms and they have to go somewhere else. A couple of the sisters married and a couple stayed here and the others moved away. To the southeast. I'm talking about North Carolina, the Smokey Mountains area, not the mountains per se. But the Carolina area. One of those brothers was Robert Greer and he laid out the village of Greer in 1836. A lot of this has been shown not just by primary sources but spurred on by the centennial of 1876. That stimulated a lot of local history. The Knox County one wasn't written until 1881. There just weren't enough people to....Kenyon wasn't turning out enough liberal arts majors back then. Some of those people were still living. If they weren't their biographies were easily recalled by their descendants. So that's where some of this information came from also. My great-grandfather then, was Thomas, and he was born around 1840. He had an older brother who was in the early days of the Civil War, survived the battle of Shiloh, and died a couple of months later of disease. So, we have a letter from the commanding officer, informing his mother that her son had died. We also have a letter that came from my great-grandmother who had been a sweetheart of the man who died and then, once that happened she married my great-grandfather. Probably a common thing, there weren't that many to go around, eligible men. Um....I don't really recall much consciousness of our being Scottish or Irish since we had so many of the various British countries represented. I think of myself Scottish more than Irish, cause basically we were Scots who were bussed to Ireland to make sure the Catholics were not a majority.

JD: Did you say that your family changed the name?

DG: No we didn't. The name Greer is what they called a sept. That's S-E-P-T. Which is a substitute name for MacGregor. And there were twenty such names. I think, I'm not sure which it was, we won a battle but lost the war. And the person that won the war the English Lord in retribution said that there would never be the name MacGregor again. As I understand it was reinstated in the very late 1800s. We weren't allowed to say the name, wear the, I should have worn my MacGregor tartan, it's green and orange. Orange, of course, I made a point to wear that St. Patrick's Day, especially if I was going to be around Martha!

<Laughter>

DG: But, the name was outlawed. My guess is that all happened around the time of the so-called Jacobite rebellion. When they were trying to restore the descendants of King James to the throne.

King James of Scotland. And all of this, Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth killing her and all that sort of stuff. That stuck in the throats of Scotsmen for a long time. We have a lot of unresolved grievances with the English. We're with the Irish in that. The matter of being Protestant has been of diminishing concern over the years. I remember Mom quoting, I can't remember if it was Dad's dad, not even sure it was an ancestor of Dad's, but there was somebody who was such an ardent Protestant who said he wouldn't be happy until he could ride his horse knee deep in the blood of Catholics.

AM: Whoa.

DG: I know, it's repulsive to all of us here at least. When Dad was on the school board around 1960. There were either 2 or 3 Catholics on the school board and 2 or 3 Protestants, and if a Catholic decided he wasn't going to be on the school board, then another Catholic would surely run. You know, and vice versa. To some extent there was some block voting. And, course, your parents would never tell you about birth control. That being a factor in large Catholic families. It was, that they'd take over the world. But I guess the Amish are going to take over the world too, their family size. There was a woman in Danville who had 4 children there and two elsewhere. And those four children accounted for about 43 grandchildren she had. So large families were the norm around here. That averages out to 10. And there was one man who had 13. Turns out one of his sons married my mom's first cousin, a Protestant you know, and that sort of thing was unheard of. In fact, probably, being told you couldn't date a Catholic girl was all the more reason to do it. Right? And a couple years ago, we were talking something about how there doesn't seem to be the Catholic/Protestant schism there used to be. I said "You know come to think of it, I don't think there's a Catholic on the school board anymore, and I don't think anyone's been keeping track for a while." Which is good to know. When I moved back in 1985, we had ADAM, Association for Danville Area Ministers. And we had Good Friday service, Thanksgiving, you'd see two of those a calendar year, and these would rotate among the churches. Like at St. Lukes....etc., and although the Protestant minister might deliver the message in the Catholic church, he won't stand up on the altar of course, he'll be off to the side at the lectern. But to think we'd ever have services in one another's churches. 30-40 years ago would have been unforeseen. I never knew much of that rivalry to be of ethnic origin though. Although, I guess most of the Catholics around Danville were Irish. There were probably some that were French, most were Irish. Martha's family, one side was Blubaugh (German) and the other side Finan (Irish). And the Germans, you know, in Germany, they would serve beer at the county fair. Here, though, you wouldn't dare have beer even upwind of the fairgrounds. Although, I think the beer-drinking is evenly divided among the faiths here in Knox County as far as that goes. In Danville the community center, St. Luke's, it's called the St. Luke's community center, not the St. Luke's church center. The school's right across the street. We have testing over there, dances there. Most of the time they don't charge us money. If they do they give it right back to the school. I'm just extremely pleased with the way that people get along anymore. Like I said before, we thought it was more of a Catholic/Protestant thing than an ethnic thing. There weren't many people that were clearly Italian I guess. I think most of those people had a common agrarian background as far as that goes. Most of them had come to America in the early half of the 19th century. So it wasn't like they were late arrivals. All in all, I'd have to say that there was not much ethnic awareness, I don't think, other than what Martha and I would just banter about. In good fun. She

did it the other night, you see. 'Nothing personal, you can't help it.' I'm very conscious of ancestry, and proud of it. The farm's been in our name for 161 years, and there's time when I think 'Heck with this all, I'm going to move to Wyoming!' And then I think no, no, my ancestors are buried right down there, and I'd like to be buried there myself if the law allows it.

JD: Were there traditions that you practice over the years.

DG: Not any that I thought were Irish. Or Scottish, either one. I guess the quintessential Scotsman is Presbyterian and we were close. We were Methodist, closer than anything else I guess.

JD: So, would it be safe to say that your heritage has been kind of assimilated?

DG: Yeah, I think it would be safe to say that. That's a good way to put it. Cause I remember asking a long time ago, and I don't know why I asked, 'Mom, what are we?' It wasn't like we were German or English, and she'd say 'You have one grandpa that's German, another that's French, some that are Irish.' And isn't that funny, cause the English hated all three of them! My blood ought to be boiling in my veins. I remember saying that when I was 10 or 12. I was old enough to know then, to know the English didn't like all those people and the feeling was mutual. But, you know, it wasn't like there were any organizations around. I guess, you know, when you're a farm community it's all of you against nature. You don't have any time to fight with each other! We had a lot of neighbors who were Schwartz. Mom would talk about them, the Dutch, up around Loudonville. Whether they were Dutch or Deutsch (German). The Strangs, Heffelfingers. They were probably German. A lot of them came from around Germany, about the same time the Irish came. Before the Civil War. The main ethnic thing we're aware of is the Amish. An awful lot of neighbors, acquaintances and so on. But when you hear about clubs and organizations in the city dedicated to preserving folk ways and so forth. I hear the Celtic shows on PBS or NPR on Saturday and Sunday night, but that was nothing we were aware of earlier. We just knew we had ancestors from many of those countries, but it never seemed to matter much.

AM: So you would say, did you grow up in this area?

DG: Mm-hmm.

AM: You would say that the ethnic diversity would be just more religious, Protestant/Catholic than anything else?

DG: Mm-hmm. Yes. I don't know, most of those Catholics, Martha, her mother, as mine, was a teacher as was mine. I think she was more aware of educational stuff than most of them, but it wasn't pervasive, I don't think.

AM: How important was your church growing up?

DG: Oh, very important then. It's not as important to me now. I'm not a believer of the same type

that I was then. But, between the church, put it this way. Our social life revolved around church and rural organization. For some people that meant the grange and we were never in the grange. Some people it might mean the Farm Bureau. Dad was involved in Soil Conservation, which started after WWII and various things that Ohio State Extension sponsored. I'm now on the same board he was, in the same position. We would meet, the men would work in the kitchen on their soil maps, the women would visit and the children would go out and play. We had a dairy farm, so there was always work, you didn't just run off for three day vacations. We just kept this whole place together: get the work done and go someplace else for meetings. And, that and church things, cause our church had Sunday and Wednesday night service, and Mom would go to Wednesday night. When most of us got to be teenagers we had an active youth group one other night a week. So I could have gone to church three nights a week if all the other things: band, homework, drama, allowed. It didn't. By the time I was 16 I was glad all those things were there cause it gave me an excuse not to go. But still most of the people we knew were from church or people that we farmed with. We'd go help the neighbors and they would come help us if any of us needed it. That was our social life. I can count even fewer times how many times we went out to eat. There wasn't time for that I guess. You had to finish the milking really early to go someplace to eat. Mother's Day was about it. Likewise in the Catholic church they had their social organization.

\*\*Tape ends, continues on other side a minute or so later\*\*

JD: Would you say that ethnic groups tend to settle more in cities than in rural areas?

DG: I guess that's what I've been saying now, I wasn't aware of it then. But from what I understand that was often the case, especially when you looked at certain big cities. Now, in southern Ohio, western Marietta, there were some Welsh there, because of the then Iron industry. Civil War post-dated it 25 years. It wasn't one big steel mill like down in the flats that came to Cleveland. But, what they were just trying to be, was like masonry. I guess the big thing here, a lot of people here, this is not from direct experience, this is just what I've learned, is the digging of the canals, brought both the Irish and the Germans. And that was in 1830, that was the onset of that. But then, I guess after that job was over, then those people would go look for a farm. Cause that was their dream. I think they made \$30 a month. A dollar a day. They probably worked seven days a week. Maybe not Sunday. I suppose that if they came from a rural area they would try to buy a farm. They had no idea what to do with the farm, they were still planning on getting some of the best farm land around. I would guess there were a number of reasons for that. First, you would find people of your own kind, your own language and of your own religion.

AM: So, you think it was pretty easy to lose your ethnic identity living here because people were so spread out?

DG: And the similarity was we were all farming, and that wasn't easy. It just didn't become that important after a while. Of course, all of us were English, the people I'm talking about were Scottish, Welsh, English. The English would say we Americans, we don't speak proper, what's that line in My Fair Lady?

AM: We don't speak proper English.

DG: Right. Some places that's true. I think it's because everyone brought different versions of English over here, and everyone was trying to make a living, and it's basically a cooperative venture. Your neighbor doesn't get any less because you get more, you know. You're all such a small part of the market that you take whatever they're offering for meat. And it's still not enough.

AM: What's your view of Knox County today? I know you're involved in preserving farmland and there are lots of people moving in and Columbus is moving north. How do you feel about that?

DG: I'm not at all opposed to people moving in. Provided they become a part of the community. And, I think that 6 or 8 or 10 best supporters for schools are people who have moved in the last 10 years. And they've had kids in the system and are willing to help out. Good example of Scott Siddall. One of the reasons we've got such a good computer system is because he made sure we had all the right things.

JD: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us? Anything we haven't covered?

DG: How many families have you interviewed so far?

AM: I think, four, so far...

DG: Are you the only ones doing the Irish?

AM: Yeah.

DG: Are the other having better or worse luck? I would think that the Native Americans would be hard to find. Cause a lot of people won't confess.

AM: They've had a few interviews. Three or four. We've had very limited time cause we started three weeks ago and he said we needed to have all of our interview done today. It's just incredible, because we're coming up on the end of the semester and we have to get these things written up.

JD: But we're fortunate that we found Martha....

DG: Yeah. She used to work at Kenyon. That would be a good find as far as I can tell.

AM: Do you have any family pictures possibly on your land or something?

DG: Yeah, I have some. I haven't seen a bunch of them since January. We put them in a box and they're somewhere. Professor Sacks might have some with my cousin. She left all her stuff with him before she left for Arizona. But I don't know, if I could find anything this weekend. I did find a picture of the house. I'm not sure what you could do with that. There's some of the old

folks, I don't know about those. But I'll look for those.

AM: Great. Eventually we have someone who is taking care of all the photographs and taking them to the Mt. Vernon News and they're going to scan them then, so they won't be holding on to those.

DG: I'm not worried about that part. I know Scott Siddall, and I could have him wipe out your computer account....

AM: Oh no! And I'm a senior!

DG: No, but I'll give you girls a call if I find anything, and if you don't hear from me in a week give me a call.

AM: Great. We really appreciate you coming out to talk to us. Thank you so much.

JD: Yes, it was really nice to meet you.

DG: You're welcome, thanks for asking me.