

Biography of Francis Coulter (1771-1846)

Coulter was a major name in the Town of Bovina since the early 1800s. The road on which the founding Coulter ancestor lived still is known as Coulter Brook. Though there are no Coulters currently in Bovina, there are many Coulter descendants there, and those with the Coulter name still live in Delaware County and throughout the United States. This makes it all the more ironic that Francis Coulter, ancestor of many of Bovina's older families, was not born a Coulter. When Francis was christened 3 September 1771 in Robertson, Scotland¹, he was christened Francis Coltherd. Born on 25 August 1771 in Kelso, Scotland², he was the son of Walter Coltherd and Elizabeth Rae. His parents were married in 1762³. If Francis had any siblings, no record has turned up of them.

Francis married Agnes or Nancy Glendenning, daughter of James Glendenning and Isabel Hendry.⁴ She was born in Scotland and was christened 10 November 1772 in Ashkirk, Roxburgh, Scotland.⁵ The names Agnes and Nancy tend to be used interchangeably in Scotland, but any records that do show up in the US show that the name Nancy is used.

Francis and his wife probably came to the United States around 1800, though this is not definite. It appears that only one of their children, Isabel, was born in Scotland, in 1798,⁶ indicating that they came to the US after 1798. Francis's naturalization record confuses this however, stating he had been in the United States between the 18th of June 1798 and 14 April 1802.⁷ It is possible that Francis came first and his wife followed later with their daughter. It also is possible that the naturalization record is in error – there are two statements as to when Francis had been in the United States, and the first one says he was in the US between June and April of 1798, an obvious mistake.

Francis and Nancy were in Albany a year, then headed to Stamford for a couple of more before settling in Bovina.⁸ At the time he settled in Bovina, it was still part of the town of Delhi. He settled on lot 56 of Great Lot 40 of the Hardenburg Patent in 1805. It was 156 acres. He never owned it, but rented it from Louisa Livingston. This was in the days when few farms were owned by the farmers. His rent was 28 3/4 bushels of grain.⁹ The farm eventually came to be owned by his son David in 1858.¹⁰

When the name change took place is not clear. His 1810 naturalization record is signed Coltert. The tax rolls use Coltert until 1824, when it shows up as Coulter. In later years, though, Coltert shows up again. In Bovina United Presbyterian Church records from about 1833, it is consistently Coulter.

Why the name change took place is not clear, either, but there is a 1919 letter concerning the upcoming first ever Coulter family reunion that has one explanation. There was another Coulter family in Bovina. Francis liked the name and decided to change from Coltherd/Coltert to Coulter. He traveled to Albany to petition the State Legislature for the name change.¹¹ No record can be found in State Legislative records to back this story up, but it is true that there was another Coulter family in Bovina.

Francis's name shows up a couple of times in records of the Bovina United Presbyterian Church,

and it was not under the best of circumstances. Twice he was cited by the session of the church for intoxication. The first time was in April of 1833. Francis “confessed his fault, expressed his sorrow for what he had done, and promised to be more upon his guard for the time to come.” He was rebuked by the moderator and “it was agreed [that] if Francis Coulter gave evidence of his better conduct in future by revoking the course which he has followed for some time past, then he shall be full restored to church privileges.” In October of 1833, the suspension was taken off as evidence of “repentance and reformation.”

Unfortunately, it happened again in April of the following year. He was again suspended from “church privileges until he should show evidence of repentance and reformation.” Francis Coulter, at the same meeting which suspended him from church privileges, “brought in a charge against John Ormiston his Son in law for unfriendly conduct towards him in passing him without speaking ... Francis Coulter was requested to take the scriptural rule with him.”¹² No other references to Francis show up in the session minutes. And these references should not be taken to mean that Francis necessarily had a drinking problem. The Presbyterians condemned any use of intoxicating liquor.

The Coulters had nine children:

Isabella Coulter, the only child of Francis and Nancy, as far as can be determined, born in Scotland, married John Armstrong, son of Archibald Armstrong and Allison Purvis in 1818 in Bovina. They had 10 children: Nancy (1821-1868), Ellison (1825-1912), Mary (1827-1902), Margaret (1829-1911), Elizabeth (1832-1862), John Graham (1834-1904), Frank Coulter (1838-1925), Isabella Jane (1840-1876), Ellen (1842-1915) and Archibald (1846-1853). All of their children died in Delaware County except John, who died in Salinas, California and Ellen, who died in San Francisco. Isabel’s husband died in 1864 and Isabella died 1879¹³. They are both buried in the Bovina Cemetery.

Elizabeth Coulter was born August 1800. She died 20 June 1847 and was buried in Old UP Cemetery, Bovina, near her parents.¹⁴

Agnes Coulter was born 16 October 1802. She married James Miller (1802-1878), son of James Miller and Isabella Armstrong. They had the following children: Nancy (1832-1901), Isabella J. (1835-1903), Ellen (1837-1917), James, and Frank. She died 7 January 1869 and was buried in the old Reformed Presbyterian churchyard, Bovina, NY.¹⁵

Walter Coulter was born 11 July 1804. Walter was married twice. His first wife was Margaret Storie, daughter of William Storie and Mary McCune, on 22 December 1823. They had the following children: Mary Ann (1827-1847), Jane (1828-1829), Nancy (November-December 1829), Francis (1831-1909), William (1832-1883), James A (1833-1882), John (1836-1842), Nancy Jane (1839-1906), Samuel (1841-1842), Walter James (1843-1919), Margaret Lillis (1845-1920), and Mary Ann (1848-1877). The fact that Walter and Margaret had two daughters named Mary Ann has caused some confusion for genealogists. It was not unusual to name a children after a deceased sibling. All of Walter’s and Margaret’s children resided in Delaware County except his son William, who settled in California. Margaret Coulter died in 1864. The next year, on

24 October 1865, he married his late wife's cousin, Margaret McCune, daughter of James McCune and Phoebe Ann Nichols, in Bovina. He died 9 December 1876 in Bovina, NY and was buried in Bovina Cemetery.¹⁶ His second wife survived him by 40 years, dying in 1916.

Mary Coulter was born 16 May 1806. She married William Graham son of Adam Graham and Jane Thomlin, in Bovina. They had two children, a daughter Nancy, who died in her early 20s and a son Francis, who died when he was 4. She was widowed in 1837 and later married Andrew McGibbon. Mary was widowed again in 1883 and died 21 March 1889 and was buried in the Bovina Center Cemetery, next to her second husband. Her first husband and two children are buried in the old United Presbyterian church cemetery.

James Coulter was born 8 August 1808 in Bovina. He married Nancy D. Thomson, daughter of Andrew Thomson and Elizabeth Rutherford. They would have the most children of all of Francis's children, thirteen, but not all of them made it to adulthood. Their first three children, Elizabeth, Nancy and Andrew, died in a two day period in September 1836. They were 4, 2 and 1 respectively. Two other children also died before reaching adulthood. Thomas M. died in 1858 when he was 11. W. Leiper died in 1855 when he was a year old. James and Nancy's son Solomon died in the Civil War in 1864 in South Carolina. He was 20. Their other children who reached adulthood were: James William (1837-1917), Andrew T. (1838-1867), Frank R. (1840- 1902), John A.(1842-1919), David Martin (1845-1914), Dixon Eliot (1848-1914), and Edward L (1852-1932),. They all settled in Delaware County except John, who moved to Boulder, Colorado and became a lawyer and a judge. James's wife predeceased him in 1891. James died 14 November 1898 in Bovina, and was buried in the Bovina Cemetery next to his wife.

Ellen Coulter was born 22 November 1810. Ellen married John Ormiston (born 1806), son of William Ormiston and Jane Graham in 1829. They had the following children: William (1829-1900), Nancy (b 1832), Fanny, Mary, James, and Anna. Ellen died in 1883 in Horseheads, NY.

David Coulter was born 2 February 1813. He married Margaret Hamilton, daughter of Thomas Hamilton and Elizabeth Arneil. They had the following children: Elizabeth (1839-1907), Francis J (1842-1907), Thomas H. (b.1844), and Nancy (b. 1847). Thomas served in the Civil War, then moved to Montana. Nancy moved with her husband Robert Scott to Iowa. David was widowed in 1850. He later married Fanny Taylor (died 1897), daughter of Hezekiel Taylor and Phoebe Beers. They had the following children: David (b 1855), Fanny P (1857-1927), and Maggie (born 1858). David, Sr. died 8 May 1877 and was buried in Bovina Cemetery.¹⁷ His second wife Fanny survived him by 20 years, dying in 1897.

William Coulter was born 19 June 1817. He married his cousin Isabella Glendenning, daughter of James Glendenning and Jannet Hyslop, on 23 September 1847 in Bovina. Within a year William and Isabella left Delaware County and settled in Rock County

Wisconsin. They had four children: James (1848-1904), Frank (1850-1916), Isabella (born 1853), and Nancy Ellen (1855-1866). William died 28 November 1895 in Harmony Township, Wisconsin and was buried in the Wheeler/South Porter Cemetery near Janesville, Wisconsin.¹⁸ His wife Isabella died a few years later in 1903 and is buried with him.

Francis's wife Nancy predeceased him on 6 March 1843. Francis died on 6 June 1846 in Bovina, Delaware Co, NY. Francis and Nancy are both buried in the old United Presbyterian churchyard in Bovina.¹⁹ They are buried near their daughter Elizabeth and three of their grand children, children of their son James.

Acknowledgments

Many sources, human and documentary, were used to develop this small biography. When I started tracing the Coulter family in 1997, I used the voluminous notes created by the late Fletcher Davidson to collect information on those who married into the Coulter family. I was surprised to note that Mr. Davidson's notes did not include a lot of information about the Coulters, part of the reason I started this work. Cemetery records were crucial and, again, the work of Fletcher Davidson and his sons made this easier. Will and other estate files at the Delaware County Surrogates Court were indispensable. The will of Mary Coulter Graham McGibbon was particularly useful because she died leaving no children.²⁰ All her nieces and nephews are listed, effectively providing for me a list of Francis and Nancy Coulter's surviving grandchildren.

I've had e-mail or personal contact with a number of people who also are researching the Coulters. Henry Schrier and Carolyn Schrier are a brother and sister genealogy team working to gather information on the Coulters - their mother was Mildred Agnes Coulter. I also had contact with:

Jean Coulter Braddick of Delhi,
Esther Coulter Cash of Delhi,
The Late Ruth Coulter Parsons and with her sister Cecelia Coulter of Walton

My thanks to all who were so helpful.

SOURCES

- 1.Church of Scotland, Parish Church of Roberton, Parish registers, 1679-1856, (LDS Film 1067926/27, frame 115).
- 2.Coulter, James, letter, 1928 (citing entry in Walter Coltherd Bible)

3.Church of Scotland, Robertson Parish registers (“Given in by Walter Coltherd before proclaim in order to marriage with Betty Rae both in this Parish”).

4.Adee, Lawrence Edwin and Underhill, Lee, editors, “Diary of Jannett Glendinning Adee”, page 250, 1996.

5.Church of Scotland, Parish Church of Ashkirk , Parish registers, 1630-1854 (LDS Microfilm, C117812, file 106793).

6.Church of Scotland, Ashkirk Parish registers (LDS Microfilm, p. 1067931 - "Francis Coltherd & Agnes Glendinning his wife had a Daughter born at Headshaw October thirteenth seventeen hundred & ninety eight and was baptized in the Church November twenty fifth seventeen hundred and ninety eight named Isabel.").

7.Delaware County Clerk's Office, Petition of Naturalization, DCA 1985-7.27.

8.Biographical Review of Delaware County, 1895, p 556 (Biography of James Coulter).

9.Delaware County Historical Society, “Cora L. Barton Rent Book,” page 48 and 237.

10.Delaware County Clerk's Office, Record of Deeds, Liber 56, p 41 ("East half of lot 73 of Great Lot 40, 43 3/4 acres, 'as the same was leased on the 21st of November 1833 by Edward Livingston to Francis Coulter ... for and during the lives of him ... and his sons David and William at an annual rent of 5 bushels and 30 pounds of goods.").

11.Mr and Mrs. D.H. Murray (son of Ellen Coulter, great grandson of Francis Coulter) and Mrs. Nancy R. Scott (nee Nancy Coulter, granddaughter of Francis), Letter, 18 August 1919, written by relative about the first Coulter reunion (copy on file at the Delaware County Historical Association).

12.Bovina United Presbyterian Church, Session Minutes, transcript by Ray LaFever (unpublished).

13.Delaware Gazette (Newspaper), Births, Marriages and Deaths, Delaware County Clerk's Office, Delhi, NY 13753.

14.Houck, Shirley (trans), List of Deaths, Town of Bovina, 1847.

15.Davidson, Ed, “Burial Sites in the Town of Bovina, Delaware County, New York,” August 2000 (From data collected by David Fletcher Hoy)

16.Davidson, Bovina Center Cemetery database.

17.Davidson, Bovina Center Cemetery database.

18.Janesville (WS) Gazette, 29 November 1895, Page 5, Col 3.

19. Bovina Old U.P. Cemetery, Reinertsen Hill Road. "Tombstone says: "There the wicked cease from trembling and there the weary be at rest"."

20. Delaware County Surrogates Court, Probate Records, Will, box 76.