

'POP' ABERNETHY - An Ulster Scot in America

By Brian McConnell *

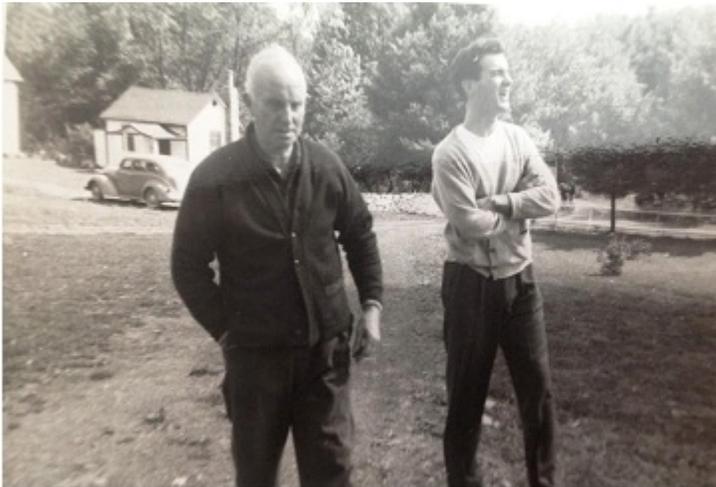
After Thomas Creighton Abernethy was buried at Mount Hope Cemetery in New York City in April, 1952 the members of his Lodge met at his grave for a time of Remembrance.(1)



Thomas Creighton Abernethy, known as "Pop" by his family and friends was born on June 12, 1888 at Stewartstown, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.(2) He was the oldest of three sons born to Thomas Edward Abernethy and wife Annie Abernethy. His father farmed lands he owned and lived on at Unicks, near Stewartstown. The family's ancestors came from Scotland. They were Ulster Scots.

Pop chose not to farm and on January 20, 1912 left Londonderry by ship and arrived eleven days later at Portland, Maine on the vessel "Scotian".(3) It was the beginning of a new adventure in the United States of America. Thirty years later after working as a carpenter, motorman, and building superintendent he started a ventilation and air conditioning business which was extremely successful. He owned an entire block in New York City and a summer home in the Catskill Mountains of New York called Pine Valley.

Top photo above shows entrance to Pine Valley, Pop's summer home, and below is photo of him



at left there with my father in September 1950. Pine Valley was very secluded and it was said to have once been the hideout of notorious American gangster Al Capone.

When Pop first arrived in America he found work in West Virginia as a carpenter. (6) However, he decided to take a job as a motorman where the pay was more consistent and he was able to support his family. In 1920 he was living with his wife Minnie and two young sons George, age 3 ½ and Robert, just 1 ½ in Manhattan, New York in a modest home. However, by 1930, after the birth of his daughter Anna in 1921, he owned a large building and had 10 tenants.(7)

Picture below was taken after wedding of Pop's daughter Anna to Tommy McConnell in May, 1941. He can be seen standing in rear. When Anna and Tommy had a son, he was named William and called "Billy" as in King William of Orange or King Billy. It was then a very common name in Ulster Scots families, many of whom belonged to Orange Lodges and could trace ancestors back to supporters of King William of Orange.

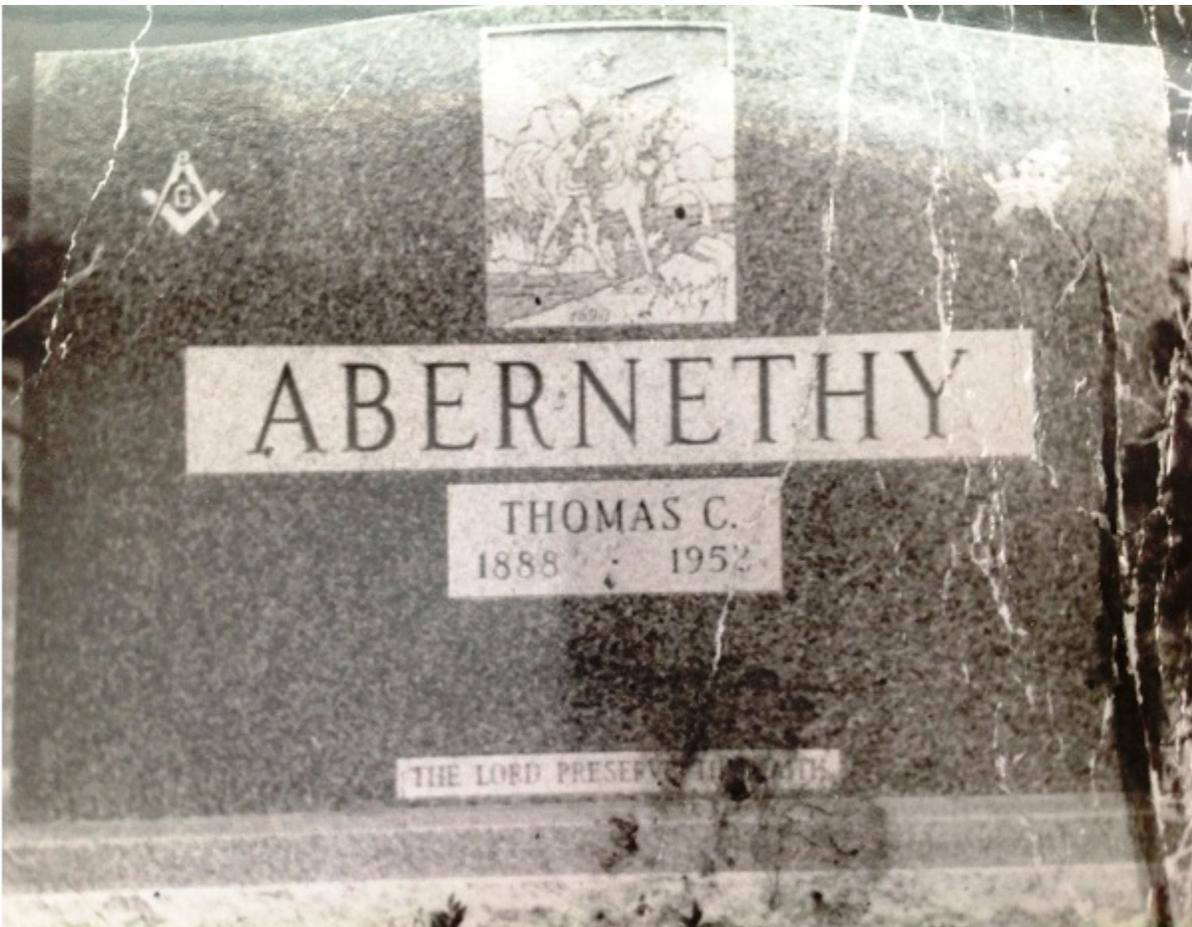


At his summer home, Pine Valley, Pop had horses and a pony for his grandson Billy. Pictured below is Billy on his pony with his Aunt Margaret who was visiting from Canada. Also, in the other photo underneath is a gathering of family and friends at Pine Valley. In the middle is Pop's daughter Anna and husband Tommy McConnell on left and Pop on right with son Billy in front. My father is second from the right.



Although Pop lived in New York, he made many trips in the summer to Toronto, Canada to visit relatives and spent the Twelfth of July with them. The Orange parades in Toronto, which had been called the “Belfast of Canada”, were among the largest in the world. At one time during the early 1900s there were more Lodges in the city than in any other including in Northern Ireland or Scotland. Many members of the city council were Orangemen including the Mayor. (8)

Knowing Pop’s commitment to his heritage it was not surprising then that, as the picture shows below, on his gravestone, between the symbols of the Masons and the Royal Black Knights, other groups of which he was a member, was a large engraving of King William of Orange.



NOTES:

* ‘Pop’ Abernethy was the father-in-law of my great uncle Tommy McConnell. My parents spent their honeymoon at his summer home, Pine Valley, in the Catskill Mountains of New York in 1950. For more information email brian.mcconnell@yahoo.ca

(1) New York Times, Obituaries, March 31, 1952

(2) Civil Registration of Birth Index, Ireland, 1888

(3) Petition for Naturalization of Thomas Creighton Abernethy, 1925

(4) Census of Ireland, 1901, 1911

(5) Ulster Covenant, 1912. See:

http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/ulster_covenant.htm

(6) In 1918 Pop was living in West Virginia as appears from WWI Civilian War Draft Registration, 1917 - 18

(7) Sources: New York State Census, 1915, United States Federal Census, 1920, United States Federal Census 1930, New York City Directories.

(8) See “Canada’s Ulster Scots” at <http://www.brianmcconnell.info/us/>