

WILLIAM and SELINA HAMILTON

William Hamilton (#5.7) and Selina Beattie Hamilton (#5.8) emigrated to the U.S. about 1867 from the small village of Fivemiletown, in County Fermanagh, No. Ireland. I have no facts concerning their life over there; it seems safe to assume, however, that they were in very modest circumstances. Three of their five children were born over there, George A., Susan Maria, and my grandmother, Ella Jane (#4.4).

In this country, they settled in Corona, Long Island, now part of Queens. Little information has reached me about the senior Hamiltons. William was apparently a real dour Scot, sullen and uncommunicative. He made a living as a carpenter but went off by himself a great deal and had hermit-like tendencies. He drank too, apparently. He lost his life suddenly when he was run down by a Long Island Rail Road train, while walking on its track. This must have been about 1876, when the youngest child, daughter Selina, was about a year old. No pictures seem to remain of him.

This left his wife, Selina, with 5 children to support. Their family's standard of living, which cannot have been very high anyhow, must have fallen even lower thereafter. I do have one picture of her, copied long ago from a tintype, which shows her to have had fine and attractive features. I recall from my own childhood in the early 1930's that my grandmother (Ella) Ware had a framed picture she was very fond of. It showed a poor little girl, barefooted, with a ragged, patched dress. She said it reminded her of her own childhood.

In about 1882, by an almost unbelievable circumstance, Selina Beattie Hamilton was also killed by a Long Island Rail Road train, again while walking along the track. I do not know how old either great grandparent was at the time of their death.

The five children were orphaned but managed to stay together as a family, George, the eldest at 23, acting as a sort of father figure and earning the chief living, while Susan ("Aunt Susie") at 19 was the homemaker. The other youngsters were my grandmother, Ella, then about 17, William, 12, and young Selina, 7. Years afterwards, my (great) Aunt Selina recalled that Susie fed them prunes as an economical staple in their diet; she had to eat prunes so many times as a child that she never could stand them thereafter.

Young William ("Uncle Will") immediately pitched in to help the family group as best he could. He went to work for the Long Island R.R. as a telegrapher. My grandmother, Ella, did too. So, eventually, did Aunt Selina. Aunt Selina, famous for a caustic tongue, in later years was heard to remark that Susie never learned telegraphy "because she was too dumb -- and Ella wasn't much better."

Shortly before his death in 1952, Uncle Will told me he had been paid \$45/month on his first job. He contributed \$20 of it at home, and another \$20 went for his start in Long Island real estate, while he got to "squander" -- his word -- the other \$5 on clothing, transportation, and incidentals he himself wanted. From these humble beginnings, he went on to amass a substantial fortune.

--Will, jr.
March, '68

Long Island