WILLIAM CROGHAN, JR.,  
AND THREE OF HIS LETTERS  
MARGARET PEARSON BOTHWELL  

Croghan! The name brings to mind two of the early heroes of America, and both were named George Croghan.  

William Croghan, Jr., of Pennsylvania and Kentucky, who wrote the letters* that appear herein, was of the Croghan clan that produced those two men named George Croghan.  

There were chieftains, centuries ago, in the Croghan clan in Ireland, so it is small wonder that America’s first George Croghan was a leader of men, and that his kinsman, George Croghan, won a lasting place in military annals for bravery and leadership.  

America’s first George Croghan, the canny, daring, brilliant Irishman who probably drew his first breath in County Roscommon, Ireland, was one of the most amazing of amazing men. His activities in behalf of the land that became the United States of America were phenomenal. His services to it extended from the year of his arrival on its shores in 1741 to the day he drew his last breath in Pennsylvania. He was one of the very first men to travel uninhabited lands in Pennsylvania. In his initial missions he did not even have shelter for his person. His accomplishments took place in an atmosphere of constant danger.  

The next Croghan to leave his mark on various areas in the United States, including Pennsylvania, Virginia and Kentucky, was William, the first William Croghan — as far as is known — to come to America. George Croghan had arranged for him to come from Ireland to America, and he arrived in Philadelphia in 1768 when he was about eighteen years old. Some persons believe that George Croghan was his father, while others say that the relationship was that of uncle and nephew. Some others say that Nicholas Croghan of Dublin

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Mrs. Bothwell, in the above article, is continuing her careful research on the pioneer families of her native city.—Ed.  

*These and some other letters were given this year to The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania by its president, the Honorable Harmar Denny. One of his ancestors, Harmar Denny, married, in 1817, Elizabeth O’Hara, whose sister, Mary Carson O’Hara, became the wife of William Croghan, Jr., six years later. It was to that Harmar Denny, his brother-in-law, that William addressed the letters which appear in this issue.
was his father, and he may well have been, but whether William was a
nephew or a son of George Croghan, or a son of Nicholas Croghan,
his own activities earned him a place in history. (See explanatory
note regarding Nicholas Croghan, page 269.)

William was courageous and was not a stranger to danger. He
had encountered it often after his arrival in Philadelphia from
Ireland. He was an officer in the Revolutionary War, but long before
that he had certainly gone on some perilous jaunts with George
Croghan. He knew Pennsylvania well and, in 1776, when he acquired
more than six thousand acres of land in it from George Croghan, both
were described in the deed as being of Pittsburgh.

The region which is now Kentucky called to him some years
later and he heeded its call. It can be conjectured — and with sound
basis for the conjecture — that George Croghan had acquainted
William with the land now known as Kentucky long before other men
had paid heed to it, for George and his half-brother, Edward Ward,
were very well acquainted with it.

As William Croghan travelled life's road he met and married
Lucy Clark, sister of the celebrated George Rogers Clark. Sometime
after their marriage in 1789, he built Locust Grove, the house that was
home for him and his beloved Lucy and their children for many
years. The house was well constructed by his workmen, and is still
standing in Blankenbaker Lane, a little over three miles east of
Louisville, Kentucky, and fortunately the restoration of it is well
under way. Deplorably, though, William Croghan's fine old home is
being publicized as the "Home of General George Rogers Clark." That
description of it implies that the General owned Locust Grove,
which he did not.

A man whose efforts cause a house to be built to conform to his
means and his dreams for his family and himself is surely entitled
to have his house known by his name even after mortal affairs are
beyond his ken. It does not seem proper to give the name, even the
name of a hero of the stature of George Rogers Clark, to another
man's house.

Locust Grove had housed another great hero — a man who earned
lasting fame at Sandusky, in August, 1813, in the War of 1812 —
when he was actually only twenty-one years of age, and that hero
was George Croghan, one of the sons of William Croghan, Sr. There
must have been quite a celebration at Locust Grove when news of his
heroism reached it.
Locust Grove was a refuge for General George Rogers Clark when he was sorely in need of one. He had suffered a stroke and the amputation of a leg at fifty-seven years of age. His sister Lucy and her husband, William Croghan, Sr., had him brought to Locust Grove. They provided him with loving care from the time he became a wheel-chair guest in their home in 1809 until death took him to his eternal home in 1818. The pleasant routine of the lives of William and Lucy and the lives of their children was undoubtedly changed by the presence of the enfeebled General in their home.

The magnificent hero, George Rogers Clark, if he could make his voice heard from eternity, would probably decry the bestowal of his name to the senior William Croghan's lovely house, Locust Grove.

Locust Grove and its restoration was the subject of an informative article by Grady Clay in *The Courier-Journal Magazine*, Louisville, Kentucky, of Sunday, November 3, 1963. In that article, which he entitled "Going Back to 1809-1818," Mr. Clay stated in part:

Architecturally, the house is a rarity in Jefferson County; an original, substantial manor house showing Pennsylvania, English and Virginia influences.

The house and 55 acres around it was bought for $250,000 jointly by the Jefferson County Fiscal Court and the Commonwealth of Kentucky in 1962 as a historic shrine. Fiscal Court has entered into a caretakers' agreement with the Locust Grove division of Historic Homes Foundation . . .

For the past few months, contractor Fred J. Lichtefeld's workmen have been busy restoring Locust Grove with the help of James Thomas, "clerk of the works," and his brother Sam. Both live in a substantial caretaker's log house, donated by Ben and Mrs. Charles Blakeley, recently moved to Locust Grove and rebuilt. James is on-the-job representative of Macomber [Walter Macomber, architect, Washington, D.C.] and Louisville architect Frederick Morgan . . . .

The two Thomas brothers mentioned in the quoted portion are energetic, resourceful and capable young men.

A picture of present-day Locust Grove was on the cover page of the issue of the magazine mentioned above, and at the top of the page on which Mr. Clay's article began there was another picture of Locust Grove, and a portion of the description opposite it was as follows:

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BEFORE
Locust Grove, the home of
George Rogers Clark on
Blankenbaker Lane, looked
like this before restoration
of it began . . . .
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There was another interesting article in the same issue of *The Courier-Journal Magazine*, and it was written by Margaret Bridwell.
The title of her article was: "Clark Had Three Homes Here." She identified one of the homes as "Locust Grove, now being restored by Historic Homes Foundation, Inc." She stated that "The journals and papers of William Croghan contain many items entered between the years 1809 and 1818 concerning General Clark," and she later quoted the following entry after mentioning that General Clark had died on February 13, 1818:

General Clark died at my house and was buried the 15th — to cash paid for his coffin $50.00.

The words "died at my house" in that entry by William Croghan in his journal are significant. He was justifiably proud of Locust Grove, and so was his wife who succeeded him as owner. It is regrettable, as stated before, that Locust Grove, as restored, bears another man's name.

The senior William Croghan died in 1822. One of the provisions of his will was:

It is my will and desire that the farm I now live on including four hundred acres with the house, furniture and all the articles belonging to the house and farm should on the death of my wife Lucy devolve and belong to my son William.

William, Jr., was a widower with an eleven-year-old daughter when his mother died in April 1838, and the property became his in accordance with the terms of his father's will. One cannot know of a certainty why his father bequeathed Locust Grove to him, but perhaps he fell heir to it because farming interested him and it would seem that he had made a study of it.

William Croghan, Jr., was a very intelligent man, as well as a handsome and chivalrous one. He had been a member of the Bar of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, for three years when he became the owner of Locust Grove. He had married, in January, 1823, when he was in his late twenties, attractive Mary Carson O'Hara, youngest daughter of Irish-born, highly respected James O'Hara of Pittsburgh, whose deeds will always be a part of Pittsburgh's history. James O'Hara had not lived to see Mary marry William.

William and Mary found great happiness in sharing life together. Their first-born was a son, William Croghan III, and their next child, their last one, was a girl, Mary Elizabeth Croghan. William knew then the greatest happiness that he was ever to know in life, but death was waiting for his beloved Mary and it claimed her on October 15, 1827, in Kentucky in the twenty-fourth year of her life. William was
inconsolable and he found life almost unbearable without her. He never remarried.

His letter, printed herein, which bears the date line “Locust Grove 2nd, Nov. 1827,” was written just a few weeks after death had taken his wife from him. Anguish filled every moment that he did not fill with work. He set about in a feverish, exhausting burst of energy to have construction work done on his property in Louisville and in Pittsburgh in an effort to put out of his mind the misery that beset it. His grief at Mary’s loss was not to be allayed in that or any other way. His sorrow made him flounder in a sea of uncertainty at times as to what he wanted most to do. He still had his two children when he wrote that letter of November 2, 1827. The letter is of special interest as regards the age of his daughter, Mary Elizabeth, who, years later, married Captain Edward W. H. Schenley, for you will note, as you read it, that he wrote what he would do in the spring had his “little daughter passed her second summer,” which certainly is proof that she had lived only one summer when he wrote that letter in November, 1827. There has been a difference of opinion as to her age.

Before returning to the subject of his letters, it seems proper to state regarding Mary Elizabeth’s marriage to Captain Schenley early in 1842, that the Pennsylvania legislature enacted Act No. 48 on March sixteenth of that year, and stated correctly therein that she was under fifteen years of age when she married Captain Schenley. However, she passed her fifteenth birthday within a month and a few days after the passage of said act. Her cousin, James O’Hara, testified years after her marriage, in litigation of record in Pennsylvania, that she was married “In February, 1842.” This testimony was given during the lifetime of Mrs. Schenley.

William Croghan’s letter dated “Locust Grove March 27 — 1829,” which appears herein, reveals the financial and other difficulties he encountered in his efforts to have buildings constructed in Louisville and in Pittsburgh. This letter has to be read carefully to get its full import, for if one reads it hastily the conclusion is likely to be reached that both his children were still living, which was not the case for death had robbed him of his son about eleven months before that letter was written.

The boy, his namesake, was just four years old when he was stricken with measles and whooping cough. The physician who attended him was Dr. W. H. Denny, a relative, but there must have been complications involving the child’s eyesight, for Dr. Denny called in
Dr. James Speer, an ophthalmologist, to do what he could for the child. The little fellow could not be saved. He died on April 25, 1828, and his father, already overburdened with grief, became a thoroughly distraught and distressed man. He had hoped that young William would survive him and perpetuate the Croghan name. In that hour of tragedy he must have hugged his little daughter closer to him for she was all that was left to him of his life with his adored wife.

Another one of his letters which has been chosen to appear in this issue of the magazine bears the date “Louisville April 18 1838.” It was written in the month and the year in which his mother died. Her death added to his weight of sadness, but the letter makes no reference to her death. Locust Grove, which then came into his possession, was filled with memories of many kinds for him.

Despite his misfortunes and miseries, he had to bear up under them because of his daughter, Mary Elizabeth. She had brought much happiness to him and some sorrow. The sorrow came when her marriage to Captain Schenley of England took place. She had been attending a boarding school in New York when he courted her. As stated earlier, she had not quite reached her fifteenth birthday when the Captain, who is said to have been some years older than her father, persuaded her to elope with him and to leave promptly with him for England. She was his third wife.

Indignation, rage and resentment lodged in William Croghan’s heart when he learned of the marriage, but those emotions were dislodged and gave way to resignation and contentment when he realized that Mary Elizabeth had found happiness in her marriage and that she was truly in love with her husband. She and her children were ever dear to his heart, and she and they, as well as Captain Schenley himself, gave him the only happiness that he knew as his life drew to a close.

He died in September, 1850, after a few days’ illness at his palatial home near Pittsburgh, in Collins township, after having lived a half century and six years. He might well have mused as his life came to an end about the heartache and loneliness that he had known throughout much of his life, and he may have welcomed the journey into eternity.

He left a sizeable estate according to records in the Register of Wills office in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the county in which Pittsburgh is located.
A sketch of his pretentious residence, Pic-Nic,* the house which he had labored long and arduously to have built to delight his daughter Mary Elizabeth, was described on McGowin’s map of 1852, just two years after his death, as “Capt. E. W. H. Schenley’s residence,” yet Captain Schenley had no more to do with the building of Pic-Nic than George Rogers Clark had to do with the building of Locust Grove in Kentucky.

There was, for years, a Croghansville close to Pittsburgh and the section later actually became a part of Pittsburgh. Croghan property was certainly responsible for the name “Croghansville,” and at one time there had been a Croghan Street in downtown Pittsburgh. Within a few years after the death of William Croghan, Croghansville ceased to exist.

The name of Croghan, even though it has vanished as the name of a section of Allegheny County and as the name of a street in Pittsburgh, appears in several places on current maps of Ireland.

The name of Croghan is associated, heroically and historically, with various sections of our vast country. It was with Pennsylvania, though, that the name was first prominently associated, and that was due to George Croghan — the first of his name in the place. He served it valiantly and his remains repose in it.

Pennsylvania also kindled affection in the hearts of the senior and the junior William Croghan. George and the two Williams also had a fondness for various other places in our country, and some of those places were Kentucky, Ohio and Virginia.

The name CROGHAN deserves to be gratefully remembered and to be honored forever by our country!

THREE OF WILLIAM CROGHAN’S LETTERS

Locust Grove 2nd, Nov. 1827

My dear Harmar

I have lingered out one week of miserable existence since my dreadful calamity; from my friends I have received the kindest sympathies & generous attentions, I ought to feel consoled but yet my

*An article, “Remains of Old Pittsburg Mansion,” which was published in the issue of December 21, 1895, of The Bulletin, gave this description of Pic-Nic: “The house stands in a domain of over one hundred acres lying directly east of the Allegheny Cemetery. It is beautifully situated, commanding a prospect of the Allegheny River.” Pic-Nic was later razed.
feelings have not begun to react — Under any circumstances I would feel almost disconsolate, but under existing circumstances my case is truly aggravated — I have nothing in anticipation upon which I can rivit my attention & excite to action; here I have dispossessed myself (I rejoice at it) & everything in a quiescent state awaiting Mr. Hancock's arrival (which may not be until spring & although I have within a day or so written to him urging him to hurry on) For months past all my efforts were directed towards my settlement in Pittsburgh, from that resource I am now cut off If I could only determine some course for the future it would I am sure greatly relieve me — Presuming my attention would not be required much in Pitts — until summer towards rebuilding the Brewery, I had determined myself on spending a part of the summer in Louisville, in attending to the erection of a couple of buildings I have under contract — if you would say it would be advisable for me to be at Pitts: during the erection of the new house, I would see my undertaker here & get him to defer his job in Louisville for another season, for really on leaving here, I do not want to see the place again soon Moreover I would like to be near my dear little children next summer & I must observe the last request of my poor dear Mary of taking them to Pitts; Had my little daughter passed her second summer I think I would commence housekeeping this spring, as it is, I can not entirely get my approbation, although the servants I could take with me would relieve me of a great deal of trouble & anxiety — I must hear what you have to say to these various suggestions

William is as hearty & sprightly a boy as need be, he has lately suffered with the sore eyes, but they are now nearly well — Our little daughter, improves, she begins to feel astonishingly well & receives the undivided attention of her Grandma — we yesterday discovered she had cut her first tooth — she is to me a source of the greatest possible solicitude — I am permitted to say as yet she does well —

I beg you to write to me often & excuse me for troubling you so frequently, it is to me a source of so much pleasure once more to commune with my Dear friends My Love to Mrs O'Hara, Denny & the children Believe me I am Yrs Affectionately

W. Croghan
Dear Harmar

Eighteen months since I contracted with three individuals in this neighborhood, to erect me a couple of buildings in Louisville, which they were to have commenced a year since, but thinking my presence, necessary in Pittsburgh during the erection of the Brew House & added to that my great anxiety to be with my dear little children, I prevailed on them to postpone the job until this spring — I have hitherto made considerable advances to them to enable them to procure the materials, I was advised by them only a few months since that everything was, or would be ready by 1' April, I have this morning returned from a visit to them, the one in whom I principally relied, is in the last stage of the consumption, & I find that the means I advanced to enable to lay in the materials, was used in paying their debts, & they contracted for it on credit, & not an article can I get without paying for it or assuming it — they are in my debt near $3000, which I must get in the best way I can, in the interim they admit they can't proceed with my buildings — Situated as I am, I had resolved forthwith to return to Pitts: but to pass another summer in idleness & listlessness would be insupportable — what I wish to say is this, from the means now in my possession, together with the fifteen hundred dollars I advanced to Shiras, provided I can secure it within a year or thereabouts, I can employ other mechanics & complete the job I do not ask it positively, but do you think it probable, you could from the receipts on account of the Estate spare me that sum within that time — I assure you, I make this uninteresting statement of my affairs as well as the above proposition, with great hesitation & diffidence My affairs have suffered here by my absence most materially — Not the least important consideration in my present undertaking, is occupation, if I succeed I am induced to believe as rents now rate, I will realize 12 pr cent — I dislike selling any of my property in this place, & could I succeed elsewhere, the most I could get would be the promise of payment a year hence — I remain on my oars until I hear from you —

I have procured a few articles for Mrs O'Hara, which will go with the boat that takes this & by way of doing a little in the smuggling line, in the keg containing rice, she will find a letter & c — As you are a farmer, read Lewis Sanders letter in the last Farms, on the subject of grass, — He is one of the individuals that made the importations of English cattle to Lex — many years hence & from whom I got
Long Horns — Did I own your Deer Creek farm I would put all your bottom land in meadow — I think you would find it most profitable & least troublesome —

My love to Mrs Denny & the children

Yrs & c  W Croghan

Louisville  April 18 1838

Dear Harmar

As you [are] aware I gave Dr. Denny two drafts on Scully of $1000 each payable at 30 & 60 days after date (Ap' 2) — Could Scully meet with any success in collecting for me, there would be no necessity of appealing to you; under the circumstances will you excuse me for requesting you to see Mr. S & ascertain what aid, if any he will require to enable him to meet my first draft, & if he be deficient in the means you will help him out.

Since my arrival hereabouts, I have done but little more than mope about — Before my arrival, the greater part of the foundation of my houses were dug & the materials nearly all ready, otherwise I dare say I would have put off the job to some more propitious time; strange as it may seem everything here in that way, still remains at war prices. Owing to the location the public will not allow anything short of an elegant edifice — I suppose the buildings, will cost me about $18,000 rather an onerous sum for me to assume the payment of — the rent of them will amount to 2000$, they are already applied for — the plan is my own & I am vain enough to think you will approve of it — the first story, will embrace eight offices, which will be sought after by the members of the bar, being so near (immediately opposite) the Court House — one of the buildings (upper part) as a private dwelling the other a boarding house &c

Elizabeth [and] Mary are quite well — the former I never saw look better, both appear very happy — they exercise a great deal, strolling about the premises & frequently extending their walks to the river &c. We have concluded it will be time to depart for Pitt, about 1 May

Speaking of English Cattle, a gentleman of Ohio an extensive grazier & withal an importer of some Durhams, remarked yesterday in my hearing — “Ohio must yield the palm to Ken, you have the finest cattle, the merit is not in you, it is your climate, the same amount of kind treatment in Ohio to our cattle, will not profit us as much as it
would you & c.” I am told the average sale from Cunninghams farm is 25,500$ a year, he resides near Lexington & has enclosed 3000 acres, the greater part known as woods pasture, a mode of improving or rather appropriating lands peculiar to Ken

The Whigs here regret the publication of Mr Biddles last letter to Mr. Adams — they too apprehend as a consequence, if the Banks of N. York resume specie payments, the Govt., will aid them for effect; those not coming into the measure, will be invidiously remarked upon particularly the U. S. B & a recoil may be apprehended, especially in New York —

Remember me affectionately to Mrs Denny & the children

Yrs Sincerely
W Croghan

EXPLANATORY NOTE

An intensive and extensive search in the public records of Ireland, by a very capable Dublin lawyer, has failed to reveal the name of Nicholas Croghan. When the Dublin lawyer just mentioned, due to his heavy work load, could not pursue the matter further, the author of this article, believing that Nicholas Croghan might have left a will, addressed a letter to the proper authorities in Dublin, and a reply, dated Dublin 7. 18th June 1964 from the Public Record Office of Ireland stated, in part, “that the Indexes to the Prerogative Wills of Ireland for the period 1536 to 1858 contained no entry relating to the proving of the Will of Nicholas Croghan.” It will be noted therefrom that the search was extended far beyond the date when Nicholas Croghan, about whom information was sought, could have died. The light of the truth of the matter may some day shine as brightly as the noonday sun, but at present the truth is unknown.