



Peter Curtis – Ireland to Illinois

By George Curtis



Peter Curtis was born in Tipperary, Ireland on July 3, 1835, son of John and Ellen Curtis. He died October 23, 1916 in the town where he and his family settled - Belvidere, Boone Co, Illinois - and was buried in St. James Cemetery in Belvidere, according to his Illinois death record. His marriage record lists his year of birth as 1843. I found Peter on the passenger list of the American packet ship *Harvest Queen* arriving in New York City on November 5, 1858. Peter brought no trade but was a day laborer most of his life.

Sometime between late 1860 and 1864, Peter met Catherine Maher, born in Johnstown, County Kilkenny, Ireland on March 19, 1843, daughter of Martin Maher, according to her Illinois death record or Edward Maher, according to the NJ Marriage Record. Catherine and Peter married in Trenton, NJ on either July 17, 1864 or 1865 as two records are in conflict. Catherine died in Chicago, IL on July 20, 1927 and was buried on July 23, 1927, joining her husband Peter in St. James Cemetery. Catherine was on the passenger list of the *Autumn Queen* docking in New York on Nov 30, 1860 from Liverpool. Catherine was listed as a servant for the family of John and Bridget Maher.

Peter and Catherine had eight children of which only the first, Ellen was born in Trenton, Mercer Co, NJ, on May 1, 1865. U.S. Census information shows the other seven children were all born in Illinois - Sarah, b. Sep 1868; John, b. abt. 1870, d. 1889; Catherine, b. Feb 1870; Edward, b. June 1873; James, b. abt. 1875; Margaret, b. abt. 1877, d. 1894; Mary, b. Oct-Nov 1879.

I lost track of all three surviving girls – Sarah, Catherine and Mary after the 1880 U.S. Census along with their brother Edward after the 1900 census. But James was another story.

James Curtis, son of Peter and Catherine, married Pauline Klass in Belvidere about 1899. Pauline was born about 1879 in Illinois. The 1910 U.S. Census listed five children for James and Pauline, all born in Illinois - Elmer E., b. 1900; Harold J., b. abt. 1903-4; Clarence J., b. abt. 1905; Margaret M., b. abt. 1907 and John A., b. abt. 1909. Ten years later in the 1920 census, James was living with son Clarence in Belvidere. His wife, Pauline, along with children Elmer, Harold, Margaret and John, were living in Milwaukee. Pauline was listed as a “widow”. The 1919, 1921 and 1923 Milwaukee City directories contain a listing for Pauline Curtis as “widow” in 1921 and “widow of Jas. P.” in 1923. Sons Elmer, Harold J., and Clarence J. are also listed at the same address. Pauline remarried William Monday, a widower, in the middle 1930’s and was living in Mequon, Ozaukee Co, WI in the 1940 census. She died in the early 1950’s. In the 1930 census, Elmer was an electrician at a theater and Harold was an elevator/lift operator. These occupations factored in later discoveries.

Elmer Edward Curtis, son of James and Pauline, was born August 24, 1900. His 1918 World War I draft registration gives his birth as August 28, 1898. He married Alice Prouix (a Native American) on December 27, 1924 in Sault St. Marie, Michigan. Elmer was found in both the 1930 (married) and 1940 census (divorced) at the Milwaukee County House of Corrections in Granville, Wisconsin as an inmate, prison job - electrician. Alice Prouix Curtis was found back home in the Chippewa Co, MI 1930 census living with her parents with two daughters born in Wisconsin, Margaret, age 3, and Madeline, age 1. The Wisconsin Death Index and the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) both lists the death of an Elmer E. Curtis on June 11, 1977 in Milwaukee. His Social Security Death Index (SSDI) birth date is given as Aug 24, 1900.

Harold J. Curtis, son of James and Pauline, married Dorothy (last name not known) in 1928 and they were found in the 1930 Milwaukee census. Harold was discovered in the 1940 census as an inmate (divorced) at the Milwaukee County House of Corrections in Granville, occupation lift operator. Harold died between 1940 and 1950. There exists a short abstract of an obituary - "*Curtis, Harold J., son of James Curtis and Pauline Monday*" under Obituary 1940's on Wisconsin Ancestors.com.

Clarence J. Curtis, son of James and Pauline, was listed in the 1930 Milwaukee census and was living with his mother Pauline and brother Harold and his wife. Clarence probably got involved in the same trouble Harold did because he was also in the Milwaukee County House of Corrections in the 1940 census. Clarence and Harold's inmate numbers were one digit apart so they were probably incarcerated at the same time. Clarence J. Curtis died in Milwaukee on October 3, 1975 at age 70. His obituary in the October 6, 1975 issue of the Milwaukee Journal stated he had two daughters, Joan Sciano and Alice Biksadski, 15 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.

John Curtis, youngest child of James and Pauline, was born Nov-Dec 1909. He seemed to have learned from his older brothers' misfortunes. In the 1940 census John was a lodger at a rooming house in Milwaukee and his occupation was listed as that of a concrete finisher for a construction company. According to that census, he was in the same location in 1935. Interestingly, there was a James Curtis, age 65, born IL, living in the same building as John. Was this John's father and Pauline's first husband? The birth year is about the same - 1875.

There is a John A. Curtis in the 1942 WWII enlistments, born 1909 IL. This John enlisted in the Army in Louisville, KY on Dec 17, 1942 as a private. His civilian occupation was given as "concrete finisher" and he was separated from a wife with no dependents. No further information was found on John.

I was not able to find what happened to Elmer's daughters Margaret and Madeline. And I do not know if Harold had children or what happened to him after prison. We know from his obituary that Clarence remarried and had daughters and grandkids. That only Elmer was listed in the obit may indicate he was the only sibling living in 1975.

(Footnote: I received an e-mail from a family member that Clarence lived out his life as a caring father who greatly enjoyed his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.)

Additional Sources

"New Jersey, Marriages, 1678-1985," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FZG3-DLN> : accessed 17 Apr 2013), Peter Curtis and Catharine Maher, 17 Jul 1865.

"Boone County, Illinois Birth Records 1856-1900"

Naturalization index card for Peter Curtis

C - 632	
Family name Curtis	Given name or names Peter
Address -0-	
Certificate no. (or vol. and page) V-B P-28	Title and location of court Illinois Boone Co. Cir. Belvidere
Country of birth or allegiance Grt. Britain	When born (or age) -0-
Date and port of arrival in U. S. -0-	Date of naturalization Feb. 17, 1876
Names and addresses of witnesses S. L. Covey Boone Co. George DeMunn " "	
U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Form No. 1-IP.	