

BOOK REVIEW

One Immigrant's Legacy: the Overmyer Family in America, 1751-2009

A Revolutionary American Family: the McDonalds of Somerset County, New Jersey

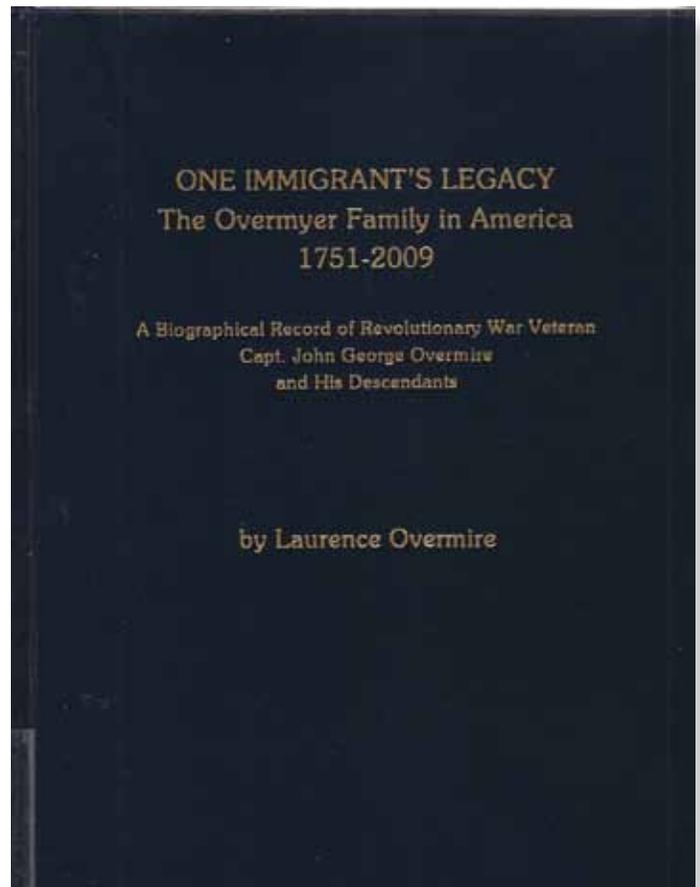
Reviewed by Steve Turner

Author: Laurence Overmire
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Author Laurence Overmire recently donated two family histories to the GFO that I felt deserved my admiring reviews.

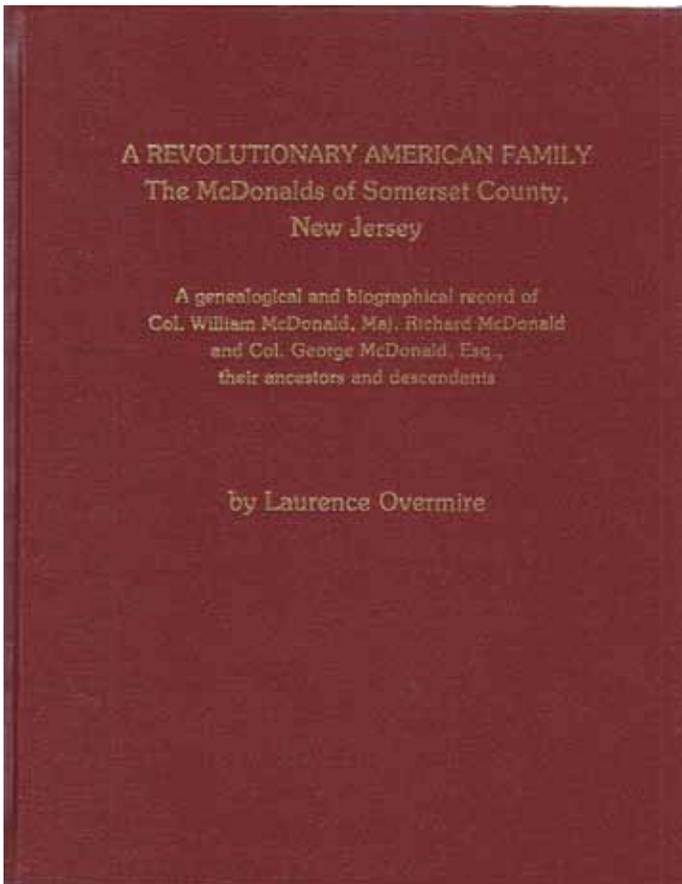
One Immigrant's Legacy is an exemplary family history by an inspired genealogist who is also a poet, actor, director, and educator. Overmire's thoughtful vision of family history and genealogy—as a way to discover and deepen our bonds with the entire human family—shines through every page of this well-researched and beautifully presented genealogy. The rather inventive organization is effective, and the layout is attractive, with numerous well-placed and clearly printed portraits, photos, maps, and other illustrations.

Chapter 1 presents what is known of the German origins of Johann "Hans" Georg (I) Obermyer, 1681-1743, father of Captain John George (II) Overmire, the immigrant ancestor of the title. The author often uses sidebars to present related material, such as "What does DNA tell us about our ancient history?" in this chapter. Facing the beginning of each chapter is a page listing the chapter's



focus ancestor, along with the spouses and children for each of that ancestor's marriages.

Chapter 2 proceeds to the immigrant Capt. John (II) and his two wives, and includes a section on "The Captain's Children Whose Fates Are Unknown," which presents what is known, speculated, and not known about these loose ends. The succeeding chapters treat each of the "known" children in turn, with subparts for each of the grandchildren, and subsections of each subpart following selected descendants down each respective line. Each chapter, subpart, and subsection treats an individual and his or her downline, giving often extensive genealogical and biographical information. Each chapter also concludes with up to three additional sections, the first a more comprehensive listing of "The Military Honor Roll," descendants of the chapter's ancestor who served in the military, with their line of descent and military service data. The second concluding section for each chapter is for other "Notable Descendants" of the chapter's ancestor, listing selected individuals alphabetically, with their descendancy, usually brief biographical information, and often a portrait photo. The third concluding section for each chapter is for "Family Researchers Descended from . . .," a useful



feature for those interested in pursuing genealogical material not included in the chapter.

Following the various chapters is a multi-page “Poet’s Corner,” featuring poems by the author and other Overmyer descendants; a page of “Family Mysteries” presenting unsolved genealogical questions; “In Memoriam,” listing those descendants who died in military service; a beautifully written afterword; 28 pages of endnotes; a page of additional sources; a complete full-name index; and a page “About the Author.”

A Revolutionary American Family is a more ambitious undertaking, devoted to the genealogically challenging ancestral family of the author’s wife, Nancy McDonald. Book I, *The Known World*, treats the known American portion of the story and is organized similarly to *One Immigrant’s Legacy*, with chapters on each of the three related McDonald progenitors of the subtitle and nine additional chapters following major lines of descent. Some of these nine chapters are subdivided into “Branches,” and again, selected individuals are treated with often extensive biographical and genealogical material. (The three concluding chapter sections of *One Immigrant’s Legacy* are not included in this work.)

Overmire, though not a descendant of the featured progenitors, gives himself a couple of pages, following three for his wife Nancy McDonald. He outlines his experience as a genealogist and his descent from the progenitor of Clan Donald in Scotland as well as from many other Scottish lines. His biography is relevant to the content, as Book II, *The Unknown World*, is an extensive examination of various claims regarding the Scottish origins of the McDonalds of Somerset County, New Jersey. Weighing the evidence in light of a detailed look at relevant circumstances of New Jersey and Scottish history, Overmire effectively, though not unkindly, debunks some of the claims of earlier researchers and builds a case—strong but not claimed to be proven—for the probable humble origins of the three immigrant ancestors to New Jersey.

I found Book II a most fascinating read, an especially fine example of genealogical research guided by insight from thorough analysis of the relevant historical background. Book II ends with chapters “Solving the Mystery” and “Summary and Speculation,” which thoughtfully weigh what can be concluded from the evidence marshaled and what remains so far unknown. A solid base for further research is the result. End matter includes a fine epilogue; six appendices providing related material (the last on the possibly related MacDaniels of Woodbridge, New Jersey, disambiguating two different William M(a)c Daniels); a list of images; acknowledgements; 78 pages of endnotes; a complete full name index; and another final page “About the Author.”

I like the quote he offers on that final page: “History remembers only the celebrated; genealogy remembers them all.” Although those about whom the most is known get the most press (even in these two family histories), the author’s egalitarian philosophy honoring all our ancestors and fellow humans great and humble is evident in many ways in both works, as well as in his latest effort, an introduction to genealogy entitled *Digging for Ancestral Gold*. I found both these family histories to be admirable examples of genealogical research, presentation, and writing, inspired by a real love for our shared heritage as humans. Along with those qualities, Overmire’s carefully balanced and well-qualified treatment of material—from the thoroughly documented through the probable and possible to the quite speculative—makes these books especially commendable examples of genealogy as an art.