



Janet Cathcart, Pauper?

In late 1783, Dailly Parish Church records started regularly identifying people as paupers. This included one of our direct ancestors, Janet Cathcart, who died in 1784. It turns out that there was a reason for this that did not have anything to do with her financial status.

In 1728, Janet (Jannet) Cathcart married the earliest known John Watson among our direct ancestors. When I found the Dailly Parish Church record for her February 13, 1784 death, I was surprised to see that she was identified as a pauper. I assumed she had been living with one of her children after her husband died, and thus was not destitute, and I hadn't come across anyone identified as a pauper before.

I then noticed that a lot of people on the page were identified as paupers, starting in late 1783.

Year	Record
1784	Margaret, near old Dailly, a pauper, died Dec 8 th
M'Garrah	Margaret, wife of Willm McCorral Knight at Barginy died Jan 5 th D.P.
M'Koffi	Jacobina, a child, buried at Gowan, died Jan 12 th
Haxton	Janet, in Dailly, died privately Jan 24 th age 70. D.P.
M'Martin	Margaret, in Dailly, died Feb 1 st pauper, age 60
Stewart	Janet, widow of the deceased David Ramsay, died Feb 5 th pauper
Murchie	Andrew, at Cockroston Mill, died Feb 7 th longidicote, pauper,
Cathcart	Janet, widow of the deceased John Watson died Feb 13 th pauper,
M'Sun	Margaret, at High Landing, died Feb 15 th age 60, pauper
M'Gaudie	Margaret, wife of John Stewart, Dundland, died Feb 26 th D.P.
Gowdie	Agnes Gowdie, widow of — M'Gubbin died March 13 th pauper
Dawidson	William, Knight at Barginy, died April 17 th Age 80. Duty Paid.
M'Sun	Bryce, son of David's at old Dailly died April 17 th D.P.
Bair	John, near Bilsparmy died May 11 th an old man, pauper.
M'Sun	Margaret, wife of John McCellan died May 28 th pauper.

Several paupers died in Dailly in early 1784, including our direct ancestor, Janet Cathcart.

Others were tagged with “D.P.” or “Duty Paid”. This got me curious. It turns out that this had to do with the American Revolutionary War.

Wars cost money. That included the American Revolution. The British House of Commons passed the Stamp Duties Act of 1783 in order to help pay for the war. Under the provisions of Stamp Duties Act, all baptism, marriage and burial entries in each parish register were subject to a tax of 3d (old pence). Church ministers were given the power to collect this tax, and they were allowed to keep 10% of what they collected as compensation for their work. People who refused to pay could be fined five pounds, a lot of money in those days.

Paupers were exempt from this tax, so you can probably see where this is going.

The tax was deeply unpopular, and many clergymen were sympathetic to the plight of their parishioners. If you were on good terms with your minister, he could help you avoid the tax by labeling you a pauper in the parish register entries.

Another way people got around paying the tax was by simply not participating in these life events. After the Stamp Duties Act was repealed in 1794, there were a number of adult “late” baptisms during the following years as people finally got around to doing what they had been putting off.

Thus, it is highly unlikely that Janet Cathcart was actually a pauper. Rather, she and her family were probably on very good terms with Rev. Thomas Thomson, the minister of Dailly Parish Church when she died.

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