

from the website: The Donnell Family

submitted by Virginia Freeman Taylor

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~tnwcogs/famhist/donnel01.html>

Life and Labor of Rev. Robert Donnell by T. C. Anderson

Virgil Prichard in researching the life of Robert Donnell located the above book is in the library of Cumberland University in Lebanon. The author's first name is probably Thomas and the book was written in 1858.

The following letter of Mr. John F. Doak, of Wilson county, Tenn., was written at my request, and contains information respecting the early history of Mr. Donnell, that no other Pen could have furnished:

Dear Sir:

I received your letter some two moths since, requesting information relative to the early life of the late Rev. Robert Donnell.

I regret exceedingly that so few items pertaining to the early history of that good and great man are at my command; and there is no other person now living in this neighborhood that knew him in the days of his youth, except my sister, and her memory has become so impaired that she has no recollection of dates.

Mr. Donnell's family moved to this country the year before my father. Both families lived for a time on the north side of Cumberland River. My father, Grandfather Foster, Alexander Foster, and Mr. Donnell's father all bought land previous to their leaving North Carolina, on Spring Creek, which was then a part of Sumner County. The tract purchased contained twelve hundred and eighty acres. None of the parties had seen the land; and to prevent difficulty in assigning to each one his portion, after personal

examination, it was mutually agreed that the decision should be made before the families reached Tennessee. On seeing the land, each member of the company took possession of his own without a murmur, though the poorest part of the tract fell to the share of William Donnell.

I have been acquainted with Robert Donnell from my earliest recollection. He was quite a favorite with my father and mother, and was often in the family. His suavity of manner in his social intercourse, and industrious habits, early attracted the attention and admiration of the neighborhood generally. His expertness in the use of tools, was great service to the community. Much inconvenience had been felt in the country for the want of a mill, and when the erection of one was commenced, Mr. Donnell, though but sixteen years old, and had never studied the trade, was the only person that could be found in the country to superintend the work. Indeed, he did most of the labor with his own hands. The mill proved to be a very good one, and lasted many years. The logs of the building were cedar, and some of them are still to be seen on the ground. I showed the place where the mill stood, not long ago, to Mr. Donnell's son.

The physical powers of Mr. Donnell were extraordinary. I knew him to split one thousand rails in a single day. The timber was cedar, it is true; but I am not aware that the number was ever equaled before or since. In the chase after the bear or deer, he was always foremost, and I never knew his superior in shooting at a mark.

His profession of religion and determination to preach produced considerable excitement among his relatives and friends. In the common acceptation of the term, he was "uneducated;" and it was regarded as presumption in that day, in the Presbyterian Church, to think of preaching without an education. Rev. Samuel Donnell, cousin of his father, was then teaching school in the neighborhood, and offered to educate him gratis. But Robert declined; took his Bible and went to work, saying it was too long to spend five or six years learning to preach, when there was such a pressing call for laborers in the vineyard of the Lord.

I recollect hearing my mother ask him, about the time he began to preach, if they-referring to himself and friends of the revival-had found a better and nearer way to heaven? He replied, that he had great respect for the Presbyterian church, and venerated the religion of the fathers; but that there were some things in the Westminster Confession of Faith that he could not believe. He then playfully asked her if, when she moved to Tennessee, they did not in crossing Spencer's hill, tie a tree to the hind part of the wagon, to hold it back and keep it steady? She said they did. Well, said he, I have no doubt the time will come when wagons will cross the hill without locking; so we must advance as light increases, and not merely hold to sentiments and usages because the fathers entertained them. In this good-humored way, he generally met opposition, so that everybody loved him, though differing with him in sentiments.

I regarded Mr. Donnell as one of the best men I ever knew, and his preaching and example have been of incalculable benefit to me.

John F. Doak.