



### **MATILDA TONE (1769 – 1849)**

Matilda Tone was the wife of Theobald Wolfe Tone, famous Irish patriot and republican involved in the 1798 Rebellion. Although overshadowed by her husband she was herself a remarkable woman and given little credit and recognition in the historical annals of the Wolfe Tone story.

Born Martha Witherington in Dublin, she married Wolfe Tone in 1785 at the tender age of 16. Their relationship was a loving one and although they lived most of their lives in constant danger of being arrested and imprisoned she proved a pivotal figure in supporting Wolfe Tone through all his trials and tribulations and in holding the family together. They had three children and the burden of looking after them fell heavily on Matilda as Tone was very much involved in political activity at home and abroad. This meant long periods alone with the family in Ireland, America and France and the constant worry about Tones safety. She accepted this as their destiny and her support for him never wavered. Unlike most, if not all, men of that time he confided in her and valued her counsel. She was a very loving, understanding and compassionate person. A woman of remarkably strong character when you consider the many trials, tribulations and heartaches she experienced in her life and all of which she endured.

There was the ever changing antipathy of her own family towards Tone, the times she had to endure often alone with the children, the constant worry for Tone's safety, the eventual loss of her husband and the children one by one. She did marry again to an old confidant of her husband, Thomas Wilson a Scotsman in 1817.

While in France she had great influence and rubbed shoulders with high ranking figures in the French government, including Napoleon Bonaparte himself. After Tone's death she had to petition the French government for support for the family which she achieved and managed to get her son William through the prestigious French Military Academy as a lieutenant in the 8<sup>th</sup> Chasseurs.

In 1817 Matilda, her son William and Wilson left France and went to live in America in Washington. She suffered another blow when Wilson died suddenly in 1824.

Wolf Tone's extensive writings had been left in 1794 with a friend in Washington for safe keeping but as a result of his aging senility they were lost. It took years for Matilda and William to recover what they could of Tone's records. Between them they

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

were responsible for publishing his biography without which his legacy may never have survived. The final blow came when William died in 1828 leaving her all alone. She had survived everyone when she died in 1849. She lies buried in Green Wood cemetery, Brooklyn, New York. A much forgotten but truly remarkable woman.

**Larry Breen**