

Killings defy pat answers

BY PATRICK MALONEY
Free Press reporter

Why were the Donnellys executed with such savage brutality by their neighbours?

There are almost as many theories as there were members of the expansive Irish-Catholic Donnelly clan. Among the explanations:

- ▶ The Donnellys were scapegoated as troublemakers who upset their neighbours.
- ▶ They were successful, making their fellow Irish immigrants jealous.
- ▶ They terrorized the area.

Area turmoil "turned a Canadian township into a seething cauldron of hatred and claimed a score of lives."

Orlo Miller, historian

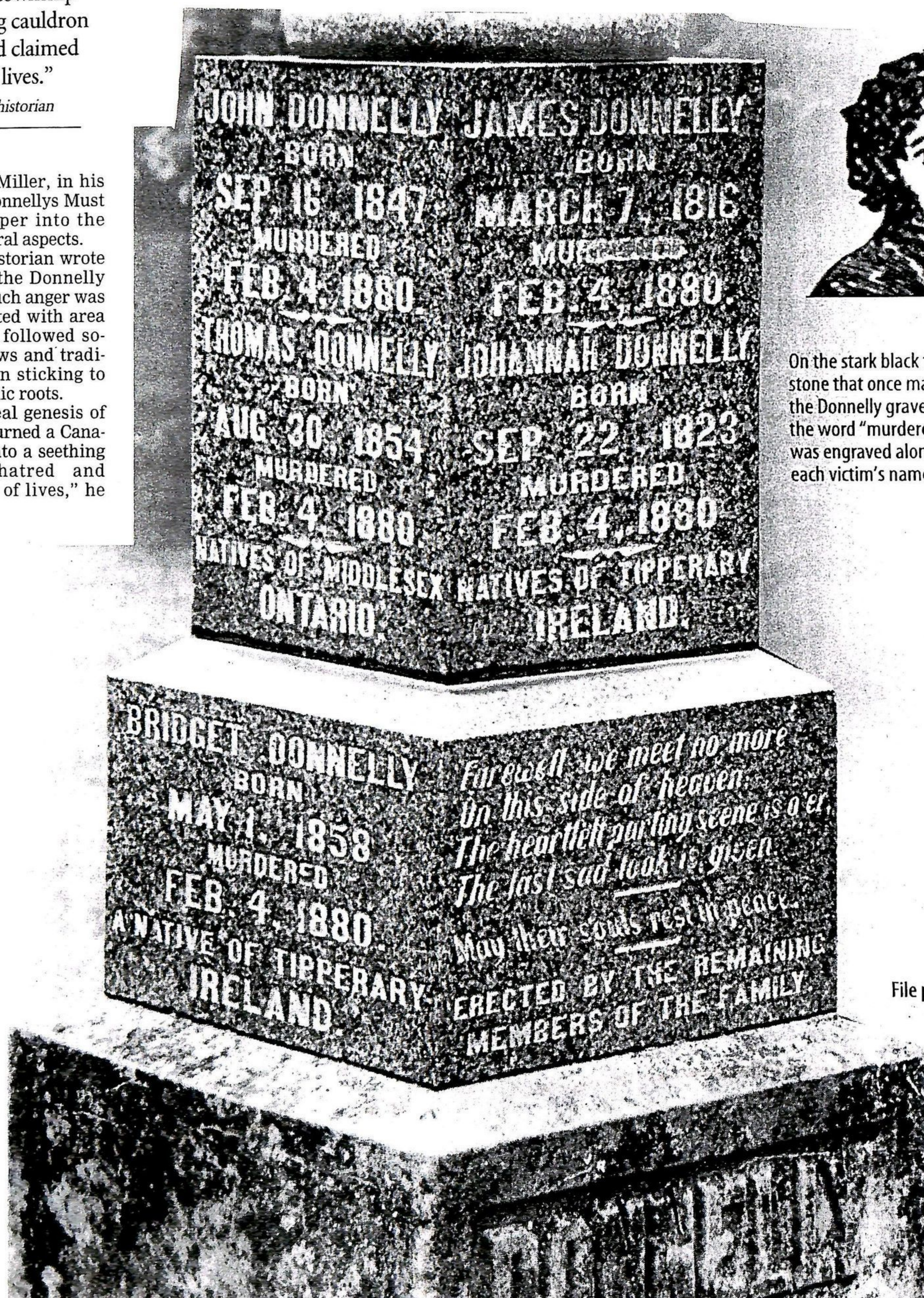
The late Orlo Miller, in his 1962 book *The Donnellys Must Die*, delved deeper into the fiery feud's cultural aspects.

The London historian wrote the real reason the Donnelly clan stoked so much anger was that they consorted with area Protestants and followed so-called British laws and traditions, rather than sticking to their Irish Catholic roots.

"This is the real genesis of the events that turned a Canadian township into a seething cauldron of hatred and claimed a score of lives," he wrote.



Photos taken in 2012



THE SURVIVOR

Johnny O'Connor, 11

A bootlegger's son, staying with the Donnellys the night of the massacre, he survived by hiding under a bed.

On the stark black tombstone that once marked the Donnelly grave, the word "murdered" was engraved along with each victim's name.

ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

Commemorative events planned for the 125th anniversary of the Donnelly massacre:

On stage

▶ A new play by Londoner Chris Doty, *The Donnelly Trial*, focusing on the botched trials of the accused, debuts in its first public reading Thursday, Feb. 3, at 7 p.m., at London's Central Library's Wolf Performance Hall.

▶ Admission is \$15.

▶ The play will be performed June 30 to July 11 at the historic Middlesex County courthouse in London, where the two trials were held in the year after the killings.

▶ "I'm not making up the dialogue here. Everything's based in fact," Doty said. "This really is as close as you can get to the Donnellys."

In Lucan

▶ A Lucan bus tour on Thursday retraces the vigilante mob's route the night of the killings.

▶ It departs Lucan Community Centre every half-hour, starting at 8 p.m.

▶ Admission is \$10 a person or \$25 for up to five family members.

▶ Proceeds go to the Donnelly Museum's fundraising efforts.

On TV

▶ A new documentary on the Donnellys airs on History Television this fall, a spokesperson for the channel said. A film crew for the project was in the Lucan area late last year.

File photo