THE EARLY IRISH IN KINGSTON

Cahalane

Before characterizing the early Irish in Kingston, it might be well to introduce some facts relating to the background and customs of the Irish race. In this way we may better understand and appreciate the pathos and the struggle of a strange race in a stranger land, who came to labor and be free.

These people were persecuted and unhappy in their native land for many years, before the emigration to America took place.

In looking over early records, some Irish names appear, telling us that as early as the first census in Kingston, between the years of 1786 and 1796, in the home of Wm. Sever, Esq., merchant and yeoman, the name of Jane Sullivan, aged 68 appears; apparently a nursemaid in that household.

According to a graph made by Maj. Geo. J. Sever, of the life lines of the children of Wm. Sever, this conclusion was made: In lot C-17 in the Old Burying Ground, is a tombstone bearing the inscription:- "Here are deposited the remains of Jane Sullivan, a native of Ireland, who died Feb. 1st, 1806 aged 67 years, more than 44 years of which time she lived in the family of Wm. Sever." According to these figures, she must have been here during the trouble-some days before the Revolutionary War. The name of Sever was held in high esteem by many of the early Irish families, because of the respect and appreciation shown to this early Irish girl who served them as nursemaid and servant. This headstone serves as the only link with the early history of Irish who came to Kingston.

Another early Irish name appears in the records of "Burial Hill-Plymouth-its monuments and gravestones", by Benjamin Drew- #222-"Andrew Farnell, of respectable connections in Ireland, aged 38 years, owner and commander of the ship Hibernia, sailed from Boston, Jan. 26 and was wrecked on Plymouth Beach Jan. 28, 1805. His remains, with five of seven seamen who perished with him, are here interred."

No doubt, other Irish immigrants came here in the early days; but it is generally recorded that most of them remained in the cities, the Irish being a very social race of people, liking gaiety and excitement.

Quoting from "Ireland and Her Story", by Justin McCarthy, a member of Parliament for over 20 years - "The success of the U.S. in their struggle for independence, had opened up to the Irish, the prospect of a new haven of refuge from religious penalties and from the miseries caused by an intolerable system of land tenure. The flood of emigration from Ireland to the U.S. had already begun, although it had not reached anything like the vast volume it attained in more recent days". The main cause of emigration then, was the system of land tenure existing in Ireland.

In looking over early records in Sandwich, Mass., I found that many of the Irish were engaged in the manufacture of glass in the early days. The first Catholic Church in this area, was established in Sandwich, and the Kingston Irish went there to be married and be baptised - a day's journey from here by horse and buggy.

Some legendary lore forms the introductions to the authentic history of every people which has risen to civilization; and from that legendary lore we may be guided to an understanding of each peoples characteristics. All the ballads and stories popular in Ireland, seem to tell of a land where the supernatural and the magical make part of every-day life. The fairies, or little people, are still a reality in Irish imaginings. The soil is peopled by goblins and wizards and fantastic creatures of all kinds who have nothing to do with the common laws of existence. Every stream,

well and cavern; every indentation of the seashore; every valley and mountain peak has its own stories and memories, of beings who do not belong to this earth.

In my mother's family, a large candle was inserted in a turnip, surrounded by holly, and was placed in an east window of their cottage on Christmas Eve. The children were told that at night, when all the house was still, the fairies came and perched on the thorns of the holly and awaited the dawn of Christmas Day. My mother used to believe it; and so did we, when we were children. In such a way were legends transmitted from generation to generation.

The legend of the Blarney Stone, for instance, dates back to the middle of the 15th century. Cormac MacCarthy-the-Strong, a descendant of the ancient Kings of Munster, and builder of Blarney Castle, chanced one day to save an old woman from drowning. In her gratitude, the old woman offered MacCarthy a golden tongue; which would have the power to influence men and women, friends and foes, as he willed. She told him to kiss a certain stone in the wall, five feet below the gallery running around the top of the castle. He followed her directions, and sure enough--obtained the gift of persuasiveness she had promised. The tale of this accomplishment spread, and the Blarney Stone has been drawing pilgrims to itself ever since. Tradition also declares that all the McCarthys are more or less descended from Cormac-theStrong; and that the treasures of the McCarthy family are sunk under the waters of the Lake of Blarney, about a quarter of a mile from the castle.

The secret hiding place is supposed to be known to only three McCarthys in each generation; and the treasures will be recovered the day that one of the family enters into possession of the ancestral estate.

The wail of the Banshee, supposed to resemble somewhat the baying of a hound dog, was a warning of approaching death. It followed certain old Irish families. The Banshee was reported to be a little girl, with long yellow hair; who floated thru the air calling her chosen one home, and wailing about the house of the sick one.

We used to listen to these hair-raising stories of the supernatural, when Irish-born men and women got together. They liked to gather around and tell tales of people and places in Ireland, where these almost unbelievable incidents took place. I was always very much impressed, and once when I was coming home at dusk, after doing an errand down town, I cut thru the cemetery beside the Town Hall. I hadn't gone but a few yards, when I began to regret my action in taking this short cut. About that time, I thought I heard a rustle in back of me, and started to run for dear life. I imagined all the ghosts in the cemetery were after me. When I came out by the Unitarian Church, they were still going strong. It wasn't until I reached the tack factory at the river, that I realized the ghosts were the hair ribbons on my pigtails, which rustled as I ran.

So prominent a part have these stories and wierd tales played in the literature of a country, that at Harvard University, there was established in 1940 a Dept. of Celtic Languages: plus Literatures of Old, Middle and Modern Irish; also Medieval and Modern Welsh. A great deal of research work was done previous to this date, in order to present literary material for such a course.

At the time of this writing - Walt Disney is reported to be in Ireland, gathering material for another of his fantasies. He is being well received in Dublin; and royally entertained with stories of the fairies and leprechans, that only the Irishman knows how to tell.

The art of "keening" was long a custom at wakes in Ireland, and was carried on here in Kingston. Rose Griffin, who lived in the Rocky Nook section, was accustomed to do the keening at wakes here. Keening was somewhat like a chant; consisting of a long lamentation, that in part mourned

the death, and in part exalted the virtues of the departed. At frequent intervals, the keener broke out with a wail, repeated three times, in which everyone present joined. Some old women became experts in the art of keening, and were called to be chief mourners at all wakes throughout their home region.

Julia Tobin, when a little girl of twelve, went one day with her mother to visit her uncle in Plymouth who was quite ill. She had listened to the keeners at wakes, and could imitate them. While she was left in a room to amuse herself, she started keening to beat the band. Up rushed the people who lived downstairs, inquiring excitedly- "Did your Uncle Bill die?" "No!" answered Julia, quite surprised at all the commotion she had caused - "I was only keening for the fun of it."

The shillalah, was the combat weapon of the Irishman. It derived its name from a famous wood in County Wicklow, where the best oaks and black thorns grew. T he old time Irishman was very careful in selecting a weapon and also in its preparation after it was cut from hedge or woodland. The usual treatment was to rub it over repeatedly with butter and place it up the chimney, where it was left for several months. Shapes varied; but the favorite style was that of a cane, three or four feet long. Occasionally a man would arm himself with a shillalah, having a length of 8 or 10 feet, or with a "wattle" or with a "kippeen" which is a short club that has a burly knob on the end. This last was the deadliest of the three; but could not be carried with the innocent appearance of a staff, as could the other two.

When the people got together at fairs or market, there was sometimes trouble. They only needed to drink a bit, and they wanted to try their strength on each other. If a row did not occur naturally; some man would take off his coat, trail it in the dust, and dare any man to step on the tail of it. This provocation never failed of its purpose; and you could hear the sudden startling yells ringing out - the town calling together the partisans, and then there would be a wild whirl of shillalahs and God knows what. As in the Kentucky mountains, feuds were handed down from generation to generation. Yet fights seldom occurred without the participants first having their valor strengthened by whiskey. Many shillalahs were brought over here by the early Irishmen; but I have gleaned no stories as to how they were used. I think they were treasured only as souvenirs, and not used in the manly art of self-defense.

Last March, on the eve of St. Patrick's Day, a burnished shillalah, decked with green ribbon, was presented to the aircraft carrier, Shamrock Bay - by the Ancient Order of Hibernians, at the So. Boston Navy Yard Annex. It was received by Capt. James E. Sleeper, U,S.N. of Arkansas, who, thru his mother, claimed kinship with the Irish clans.

My husband once showed me a Black Thorn Hedge in No. Walpole, N.H. which had been imported from Ireland. It was tangled and thorny, with a very sturdy growth of the main plant. It was about five feet high.

Father Matthew's Total Abstinence Society was an organization which had branches not only throughout Ireland, but in all parts of the world to which the Irish had emigrated. Its founder, born in 1790 was a priest in the city of Cork. Previous to Father Matthew's time, drunkeness lacked a little of being a positive virtue in Ireland. Among the higher classes, the host who suffered one of his guests to leave his table sober, would have been considered mean and inhospitable.

In Victoria's time, the inns and public drinking places were frequented by English recruiting officers, hoping to catch an unwary Irishman "in his cups" and clap him into the Army or Navy. His method was to slip a shilling into the palm of the Irishman; and the latter, having accepted the Queen's shilling, was considered a member of the fighting forces of England. Many were the Irishmen who saw the world unwillingly, by accepting the Queen's shilling.

Potatoes have been the main crop of Ireland, for more than 200 years. They were first made known to Ireland by Sir Walter Raleigh, who owned an estate on the south coast. Ireland led all European countries in the adoption of the potato for many years; but had a most distressing experience with this staple in the famine years of 1846 and 1847.

A graphic description of this period in Irish history, one of the darkest thru which the island has passed in centuries, is contained in the pages of "Realities of Irish Life" by W. Stewart Trench. Mr. Trench resided at Cardtown in Queens County, and had become much interested in reclaiming an exclusive tract of mountain land, chiefly of rough pasture covered with heather. He kept 200 laborers constantly employed in this enterprise, at good wages. The upland grew where his mountain property was located, with a clear trout brook flowing thru it, to enhance its attraction; thus it became known as "The Happy Valley."

He accomplished the reclaiming, mostly by means of the potato; the only crop which would flourish in such ground. His efforts were rewarded by a harvest that well repaid all labor and expense. The expense of reclamation was practically defrayed by the sale of the first year's crop alone. Encouraged by this success, Mr. Trench in 1846 planted to potatoes, more than 150 acres. Everything went well during the early summer, and in July, the extent and luxuriance of his upland potato fields were the wonder of everyone who saw them.

But on August 1st, he was startled by the report that all the potatoes of the district were blighted. He immediately hurried up to Happy Valley, and was relieved to find his crop as flourishing as ever, in full blossom, the stalks rich and thick, and promising a splendid increase. In the lowlands, the blight had taken over, and much alarm prevailed in the country. Those, who like Mr. Trench, had staked a large amount of capital on the crop, became extremely un-easy; while the peasants looked on, helplessly dismayed at the total disappearance of the crop of all crops, on which they depended for food.

Mr. Trench's mountain farm advanced steadily towards a healthy and abundant crop until August 6th. On that day, as he rode up the valley, he was met by the stench of the blighted potatoes; and as he kept on, he could hardly bear the fearful smell. The fields looked as promising as ever, but he recognized that their doom was sealed. He attempted to save himself from total loss by converting into starch, as many of the potatoes as could be rescued from the decay; but the expense was more than the sum realized.

—Desolation, misery and starvation now rapidly affected the poorer classes throughout Ireland. Many succumbed to impure and insufficient diet; while fever, dysentery, and the crowding of the work houses, carried off thousands. Public relief works were soon set up by the government. Soup kitchens were established. Indian meal poured into the country and money was supplied without limit. Yet still the people died! The trouble seemed to be that the sufferers had neither the strength nor energy to seek the aid offered, even when it was near at hand. Not far from 200,000 perished in all, and as a result of the distress, vast numbers emigrated.

The work houses were jammed to over-flowing, and impossible conditions existed on account of this. Mr. Trench, who tried vainly to remedy conditions in the work houses, saw plainly that things could not go on as they were; and so, with the approval and financial support of Lord Lansdown, one of the great proprietors of County Kerry, he put into practice another scheme.

He offered free emigration to every man, woman and child, now in the poor-house, who was chargeable to his lordship's estate. It was argued that it was cheaper to pay their passage abroad, than to continue to

support them at home. They were allowed to select what port in America they pleased, whether Boston, New York, New Orleans or Quebec. The announcement was at first scarsely credited. T o the dwellers of the work house, it was considered too good to be true. But when it began to be believed and appreciated, there was an instant rush to get away. A selection was made, and 200 each week were conducted to Cork, under close guard, to keep them from scattering; and were soon safely on board the emigrant ship. They made a motley company; but notwithstanding the distress of their circumstances, they were in the most uproarous spirits. There was no crying or lamentation. All was delight at having escaped the deadly work house.

The majority of them spoke only the Irish language; and these wild batches of Irishmen direct from the stricken boglands of the old country, must have presented a strange spectacle when they landed on the shores of America. Yet, Mr. Trench says that nearly all-even to the widows and children-found employment immediately after arriving; and adds, "that they have acquitted themselves in their adopted land most creditably."

It was many months before the desire for free emigration was satisfied. The poor house filled, as fast as it was emptied. In all, 4800 persons were assisted across the sea from this single estate.

It is generally conceded that the greater number of Irish who came to Kingston and remained here, arrived around 1847, during the years of the potato crop failure and the famine which resulted therefrom.

Corn was carried to Ireland from Kingston, at the time of the famine, by Capt. Ed. Holmes, in one of his own vessels built at his own shipyard at Jones River. He landed at Queenstown, and having disposed of his cargo, he went ashore and found the taverns and streets full of emigrants waiting for a chance to embark for America. Some paid their passage; but many could not, and bargained with the Captain for passage, agreeing to work on the farms-shipyards and in the kitchens, to pay for their transportation. They worked under skilled people on the Holmes estates, and those men who showed skill, were assigned to the Grist Mill and the shipyard. The girls often went to the Holmes' brides, after being trained.

In interviewing the descendents of those early Irish families, the following names appear to be most prominent and best remembered:

In the Rocky Nook Section:

PATRICK DIVINE
DENNIS HART
JOHN DONNELLY
MATTHEW CLINCH
TOM NOLAN
JOHN TOBIN--The Tobin Home where Dr. & Mrs. Holmes now reside, at the top of Thomas Hill.
THE HAZZARDS--whose children moved to Boston--Margaret Hazzard engaged in ladies costuming business--first with Broadley and in later years, had her own establishment in that city.
JOHN and ROSE GRIFFIN--Rose being a keener at the wakes.

Crossing the Jones River:

MICHAEL McMANUS--in the present McManus homestead.
JOHN MAHONEY--also lived there.
DENNIS HARNEY--in the house now owned by Mrs. Helen Williams.
ROBERT EAGER--in the house now owned by Wm. Ormond, later in the telephone exchange.
FELIX SWEENEY--who worked at Jonah Willis soap factory. He was unmarried and made his home with Michael McGrath and used to sing songs in Irish to the McGrath children.

In the Landing Road area:

JOHN MURRAY
THE McGUIRE family who lived at the Bradford House.
ROBERT McGRATH, whose son, tender of crossing after retiring from railroad, was custodian of the Town Hall until recently. He contributed much valuable information toward the writing of this record. He came over here when he was 2 years old, and I think is the last of the original Irish settlers.
THE DORSEYS--who lived in what is now "The Landing".
THE McGUIRES--who lived in the house now occupied by Miss Thorpe.

At Stony Brook:

EDWARD PRENDERGAST

Toward the west end of town or Triphammer:

JOHN A'HEARN
JOSEPH and ANN O'BRIEN
PATRICK MALONE--who worked at the Anchor Forge for 31 years.

At Crossings Pond:

ANDREW and ELLEN NORTON

Near the Plympton line:
JOHN SCOLLARD--who fought in the Civil War, and whose grandson Wm. Malone of Prospect Hill gave 7 sons to World War II, an enviable record for loyalty and service to this country.
JAMES FLYNN--whose son Tom gained renown as an old time fiddler.

Brook Street: (then called Dublin or Dublin Road derived its title from the fact that all who dwelled there were Irish.)

In the locality of Second Brook lived:
KATIE O'BRIEN and her daughter.
DENNIS CAREY--whose daughter, Mary, wrote the first record of the early Irish in Kingston.
TOM SHEEHAN and his wife ELLEN--Tom worked at the Slop Works at Fullers Hall, Corner of Maple Ave., now Mitchell Toabe's, making pants. They were a very comical couple, talked Irish most of the time and referred to each other as "she-Tom and He-Ellen." Tom always wore a tall hat on Sundays. The young men used to congregate at the Sheehan home-playing cards and telling stories during the long winter evenings. The house is gone now, but 3 beautiful Elms still remain there, and old lilac bushes cling to the site of the little house once known as Tom Sheehans.
BARTHOLOMEW O'BRIEN--who had 4 sons, PATRICK, WM., JAMES and JOHN. Wm. and James gave their lives for their country. Patrick was wounded in the hand having had 2 fingers shot off. A very distinguished service record for the O'Brien family. Patrick served as constable here for a great many years, and his son Wm. O'Brien served this town as Selectman and Postmaster. He also had 2 sons who served in World War II.
JOHN CROSSING
THOS. CALLAHAN--who brought the art of stone masonary with him from Ireland, as may be observed from the little picture in our exhibit, of his ancestral home. The Stone Barn, on the Alexander

Holmes estate, recently torn down, was a good example of his early craftmanship. His son James Callahan did the stone work at the Mellon estate, now the Russell House; and his son Michael was engaged in the construction of Harris Hall at the Cordage, when he died.

THE McCRATES--also stone masons, worked on these buildings with the Callahans.

PATRICK O'ROUKE--a Civil War veteran.

On the corner of Brook and Elm:

MICHAEL McGRATH

Lane Leading off Elm Street:

PATRICK and NANCY SMITH--Patrick also fought in the Civil War and was considered a hero on his return home, wounded in the foot. A story told to me by the late Edward Carr of No. Plymouth runs something like this:

Patrick was assigned to duty as a Sharpshooter on the Union side, and located himself in a tree overlooking enemy lines. As he watched, he spotted 3 Confederate soldiers approaching stealthily, with their guns cocked, ready for action. Thinking themselves safe, they proceeded to a nearby brook to get a drink of water. One stood guard, while the other two quenched their thirst at the stream. With perfect timing from the lookout position in the nearby tree, rang out these words in a rich Irish brogue:

"Halt! If one of ye moves, you're a dead nagger!"

One did move, swinging his gun in the direction of the tree; but he was a split second too late, and truly did become "a dead nagger." The other two, Private Patrick Smith marched into camp as prisoners. The Captain asked how the feat was accomplished, and Private Patrick, overcome with confusion replied, "I surrounded 'em sor."

Copy of a notice appearing in a paper, at that time, and a citation is here exhibited. He was promoted to the rank of Color Corporal.

His family said that he never mentioned the affair himself and it was only thru his comrades in battle, that this story in detail was made known.

Elm Street:

JOHN SMITH--who worked at the Grist Mill where the Pumping Station now stands. He purchased the house on Elm Street in 1861. His son, JOHN T. SMITH, attorney at law, now resides on the crest of the hill opposite the ancestral home. He is one of our distinguished citizens, serving as Selectman here for many years.

WM. HAGGERTY--who resided in his home at the top of Elm St. hill. For many years employed by the Cordage Co. He walked the entire distance to and from his work.

CHARLES McCARTHY--who lived on both Brook and Elm St. at different times.

MARTIN FARRINGTON--who lived at the foot of the hill near the Pumping Station.

In the Center of Town:

JOHN RYAN--In a small house in the rear of Keith's Store-now

Kingston Hardware Co. The house was built for him by Henry Keith, who employed John first at Duxbury in a store at Crooked Lane, and later in Kingston. MARGARET RYAN, his daughter, said to be the first Irish girl to graduate from the High School, was considered very efficient in figures. Business men in town had her do their bookkeeping for them. She married Michael Ormond, who came here from Ireland. He served as our Supt. of Water Works for many years.

The First Births Recorded in the Early Town Records Were:
Mary Ryan--March 5, 1849.
Cornelius Callahan--Oct. 23, 1849.
Later, after Kingston was annexed to the parish of Plymouth, the first birth and baptism recorded in Kingston, was that of:
Wm. McGuire--born Jan. 21, 1873.
baptised Jan. 26, 1875.
by Rev. J.C.Murphy

The First Marriage:
Jan. 30, 1873 Wm. Potter
Jane Murray
by Rev. J.C.Murphy
The Potters lived in the house now occupied by Mrs. Helen Williams. Inherited from the Haneys.

Employment was furnished to the Irish people who came here; on the farms, and in the households of the descendants of the early English families - the Holmes and Sever families perhaps employing the greatest number. There, the boys learned how to operate a good farm; and the girls learned to cook and run a good household.

I remember a recipe for chocolate cake which I copied from an old worn note book, belonging to the Callahan family. "The rule" as it was called, came from the Holmes household originally, and certainly was an excellent one. It was known as the "Kingston Chocolate Cake Recipe." Many of my friends in Springfield copied it and, I suppose, Kingston Chocolate Cake has been made famous in that locality.

It is interesting to note that just as soon as the Irish people got enough money together, they bought homes. Plenty of all kinds of fruit trees were planted because fruit definitely was a luxury in Ireland. I remember that the home of my grandfather had all kinds of fruit trees around it. It was an old wheelright shop when he purchased it, and he made it over into a home. The kitchen had a brick floor - fine for dancing. People have told me that they had many a good dance on that old brick floor.

Dancing was one of the most popular forms of recreation in those days, and Fuller's Hall was the location where most of the dances were held. In our exhibit here, in a little scrapbook, are samples of the dresses the girls wore at a Calico Ball.

In concluding this story--it so happened that, the famine in Ireland closely approximated our great expansion in America. The Irish came at a time when our country was making her most glorious strides--the opening of the west, and the building of the railroads. Romance and adventure beckoned, and we find this nationality scattered across the country. Perhaps for this reason, we find very few of the descendents of those early Irish families, remaining here in Kingston.

The different waves of nationalities which have hit our shores, have made the Americana of to-day; and so, the Irish have taken their place in the overall picture. Parke Curtis--adopted son of George Washington expressed it all so well when he said:

"Let the shamrock be entwined with the laurel of Americanism, and with truth and justice guiding the pen, inscribe on the tablet of American memory, eternal gratitude to Irish men."