

The Journal of the American-Irish Historical Society (Vol. II)

By: Thomas Hamilton Murray

THE IRISH PIONEERS AND FOUNDERS OF PETERBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE.

BY JAMES F. BRENNAN, OF PETERBOROUGH.

Mr. Toastmaster, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

My memory leads me back over a comparatively brief part of the time covered by the recollections of the gray-haired women who are here present. I was born in this beautiful village; my first hallowed recollections cluster here; its territory is familiar to me; I know its people and something of its history, and wherever I go my mind reverts with pride to this good old town.

It is with great pleasure that I accept the honor of responding to this toast, and in what I have to say shall not refer to the comparatively modern generation of Irishmen—Murphy, Brennan, Hamill, Noone, and scores of others—and their descendants, who have helped to build up this town, and whose history should be left for a résumé of fifty years hence, but to those early settlers who came across the ocean, and their descendants; men who risked all, even life itself, to make this spot a fit place for the abode of man.

They were composed in a very small part of Scotchmen, Englishmen, and other nationalities, but the essential part of the pioneers of our town, in fact nearly all of them, were Irishmen, for I assume that where men were born in Ireland, as they were, where many of their fathers, perhaps, also, some of their grandfathers were born, they were men who can unqualifiedly be called Irishmen. Adopt any other standard and a large part of the inhabitants of Ireland at the time they emigrated would not be considered Irishmen, and probably few persons in this town today would be considered Americans.

The Scotchmen who came to Ireland, and from whom some of the pioneers of this town trace their ancestry, landed on that Emerald Isle, as our town history records it, in 1610, more than a century and a quarter before their descendants came to this country in 1736. These immigrant descendants were indeed Irishmen to the manor born, with all the traits, impulses, and characteristics of that people, having, as the Rev. Dr. Morison said in his centennial address, the “comic humor and pathos of the Irish,” and to their severe character and habits “another comforter came in, of Irish parentage; the long

countenance became short, the broad Irish humor began to rise," etc. Need I ask the indulgence of my hearers if I occupy a part of the time allotted me in naming some of these men who were the founders of this town and the inaugurators of civilization in this section?

Samuel Gordon and his wife, (Eleanor Mitchell) were born in the County of Tyrone, Ireland, as were also his father and mother; they are all buried in the old cemetery on the hill. By marriage, the blood intermixed with Holden, Kimball, Barnes, Pierce, Cochran, Dickey, White, Brooks, and Hurd.

William Allen was born in Ireland in 1723 and was one of the early settlers. The blood is mixed by marriage with Swan, Metcalf, Worcester, Way, and Whitten.

John McKean was born in Ballymony, Ireland, in 1714, and was the ancestor of all the McMCKean'sn this section. His son James lived and died on the David Blanchard place.

John Ferguson was born in Ireland in 1704 and came to this country with the Smiths, Wilsons, and Littles. The blood infused into Morison, Stuart, Duncan, Miller, Moore, Evans, and Whiting.

George Duncan was born in Ireland and was the ancestor of all of those names in this section. Shortly after immigrating, he married Mary Bell of BaBallymoney and their progeny married into the Taggart, Todd, Black, McClellan, Moore, Wallace, Wells, and Cummings families.

John Swan came from Ireland, and the family mixed by marriage with Parker, Stuart, Gilcrest, Morse, Caldwell, Allen Sawyer, Graham, Chamberlain, Nay, Hoyt, Steele, Hannaford, Moore, Mitchell, Cutter, and White.

Joseph Turner and his wife immigrated from Ireland with their sons Thomas, Joseph, and William, who were all born there. The blood by marriage went into Wellman, Sanders, Shedd, Converse, Nichols, Goodhue, Nutting, Taggart, Davis, and Preston.

John Moore immigrated from Ireland in 1718 and is the ancestor of all of the same name here. The blood was mixed by marriage with Jewett, Priest, Taggart, Woodward, Smith, Gregg, Dinsmore, Wood, Steele, Turner, Holmes, Burnham, Jordan, and Phelps.

147Andrew Todd was born in Ireland in 1697 and married the daughter of John Moore. Their progeny married Morison, Miller, Taggart, and Brown.

John Smiley, after his marriage, immigrated from Ireland. The blood by marriage went

into Miller, Hovey, Parker, McCoy, Wilson, and Leonard.

Abial Sawyer was born in Ireland in 1721, where also his wife was born in 1726. From them all of the names about here trace their origin, intermixing by marriage with Gregg, Bailey, Scott, Farnsworth, Howard, and Nichols.

Matthew and James Templeton came from Ireland, and their blood was intermixed by marriage with Holmes, Miller, Robbe, Wilder, and McCoy.

William Robbe, both of his wives, and seven children were all born in Ireland, three generations of the family having lived there. From them, all of the names in town trace their origin. They mixed by marriage with Taggart, Whittemore, Farnsworth, Mussey, White, Redding, Chapman, Gowing, Livingston, Morrison, Moore, Follansbee, and Swallow.

Thomas Steele was born in Ireland in 1694 and came here in 1718. The blood is mixed by marriage with Gregg, Mitchell, Wilson, Smith, Ramsey, Swan, Senter, Willey, and Rice. Another branch of the Steeles that emigrated from Ireland was the father of the late John H. Steele, governor of our state in 1844-'45.

William Wilson immigrated from County Tyrone, Ireland, in 1737, with his wife, daughter, and son, Robert, who was born in that county, and commanded a party of men organized to go to Lexington, armed, as our town history says, with guns, pitchforks, and shillelahs. The blood by marriage went into Swan, Steele, Johnson, Hunter, Lee, Gibbon, Scott, Jackson, Sherwood, Fisk, and Taintor.

Thomas Davidson immigrated from Ireland with his brother John Davidson and Matthew Wright. By marriage, the blood went into Patrick, Hoar, Dodge, Clark, Cutter, and Nichols.

Thomas Cunningham was a native of Ireland. The blood was mixed by marriage with Robbe, McKean, Treadwell, Hale, Goodhue, Jackson, Caldwell, Porter, and Bishop.

John Wallace came to Londonderry from County Antrim, Ireland, and in 1719, and was the ancestor of the name here. The blood is mixed with Mitchell, Noone and Spline.

James Gregg emigrated from Ireland to Londonderry in 1718, 148and was the ancestor of all of the names in this section. The family intermixed with Steele, Gibbs, Hutchins, Nelson, Macy, and Wright.

William McNee, born in Ireland in 1711, was one of the settlers of the town. Before he

came to this country he married Mary E. Brownley, by whom he had all his children. His descendants have now reached the eighth generation, but unfortunately, the name is entirely lost. The first and second generations retained the name, but the third changed it to Nay. They intermixed with Cunningham, Taggart, Millikin, Swan, Upton, Weston, Davidson, Turner, Miller, Gilbert, Frost, Buss, Wood, Felt, Cross, Porter, Jaquith, Vose, Adams, Young, Balch, Perkins, and Hapgood.

Nathaniel Holmes (the ancestor of our able orator here today and of all of the names in this section) was born in Coleraine, Ireland, as was also his father. Thus we have three generations of this family which lived in Ireland. He was an early settler and by marriage the blood mixed with Whittemore, Adams, Clement, Swasey, Leach, Kimball, Dickey, Hall, Griffin, Gregg, Miller, Aiken, Bruce, Sewall, Smith, Newton, and Livingston.

There were two distinct families of Millers in town, remotely related; the ancestors of both, however, came from Ireland. Back to these people our president of this day and all of the names hereabouts trace their ancestry. They intermarried with Patterson, Burns, Campbell, Vickery, Johnson, Mead, Shipman, Templeton, McFarland, White, Duncan, Davis, Ropes, Wilkins, Phelps, McCoy, Thompson, Cunningham, Taggart, Gowing, Clark, Gregg, Holt, Sanderson, Wilder and Scott.

All the Whites in town, including the marshal of this day, are descendants of Patrick White, who was born in Ireland in 1710. By marriage, they intermixed with Stuart, Shearer, Gregg, Upton, Cram, Stearns, Carley, Parker, Grant, Dennis, Goodwin, Farmer, Perry, Swan, Pierce, Fisk, Washburn, Whittemore, Shattuck, Leighton, Burns, Allen Grimes, Loring, Holmes, Mitchell, Scott, Cunningham, Lakin, Spafford, Longley, Kyes, and Tenney.

Samuel Morison and his wife emigrated from Ireland, leaving their parents, but taking with them eight children, who were all born there. From them descended all that family in this section who spell their name with one r, including our poet of today, and the venerable gentleman whom we are proud to have with us here, who delivered the oration at our centennial fifty years ago. By marriage, their blood went into the following named families: Steele, Mack, Knight, Johnson, Bassett, Williams, Mitchell, Smith, Moore, Todd, Wallace, Hale, Graham, Felt, Wilcox, Holmes, Buxton, and Wells.

James Smith, the progenitor of all the Smiths in this section, was from Ireland. His son Robert was born in Moneymore, Ireland, and with his four children, John, Sarah, Mary, and William, all born near Lough Neagh, came to this country in 1736. Thus we find that three generations of this family were from Ireland. Dr. Smith, the historian of our town,

was a descendant of this family. By marriage, the blood went into Bell, McNee, Morison, White, Annan, Dunshee, Fletcher, Smiley, Burns, McCrillis, Emery, Findley, Pierce, Russell, Barker, Fifield, Cavender, Walker, Gordon, Fox, Foster, Reynolds, Kilbourne, Jones, Leonard, Blanchard, Lewis, Cheney and Dearborn.

William Scott immigrated in 1736 from Coleraine, Ireland, where all his children were born, among them William, who settled here the same year. This man and his father were Irish, as was also Alexander Scott, progenitor of another branch that settled here and immigrated at the same time. From these families sprang every person of the name in town, among them our efficient toastmaster,[12] and by marriage, the blood has mingled with Cochran, Robbe, Wills, Maxfield, Cummings, Ramsey, Whitney, Lincoln, Loomis, Gray, Bullard, Jewett, Fuller, Bowers, Orr, Allyn, Blanchard, Clark and Ramsdell.

This is only a partial list of the Irishmen who were the founders and builders of Peterborough—which may be completed at some future time. It could be extended considerably, but sufficient names are here given to show the nationality of the men to whom this town owes its existence. All the brief facts here given are taken from the history of this town and that of Londonderry, N. H.

Thus we see that there are comparatively few persons in town today, with the exception of recent comers, who have not coursing in their veins the blood of those sturdy Irishmen who made this town what it is, whose bodies have long since returned to clay in the old cemetery on the hill, and whose history is the history of the town itself. Long may their memory be cherished! Long may the pride which exists in such ancestry be retained! They were brave, honest, manly men, who broke down the barriers that civilization might enter. Their lot was a life of hardship; it is ours to enjoy the fruits of their work.

Not only the privations of this cold, uninviting country were theirs to suffer, but intolerance and bigotry met them at the threshold of the country to which they were about to bring a blessing. Rev. Dr. Morison, in his centennial address, said that when the Smiths, Wilsons, Littles, and others arrived, "It was noised about that a pack of Irishmen had landed." They were denied even lodgings. Mr. Winship of Lexington, who extended a welcome to them, however, said, "If this house reached from here to Charlestown, and I could find such Irish as these, I would have it filled up with Irish, and none but Irish."

If there is a town or city in this broad land owing a greater debt of gratitude to that green isle over the sea than does this town, I know it not. If there is a place that should

extend more earnest and loving sympathy to Ireland in her struggles, I know not where it is. It was there that your forefathers and mine were born; there where their infant's feet were directed; there where they were educated in those grand principles of honesty, sturdy manhood, and bravery well fitting them to become the pioneers of any country, and fortunate it was for that land toward which they turned their faces.

Here they built their log cabins and shrines to worship God, and reared families of from eight to sixteen children, for they were people among whom large families were popular, and the more modern aversion to a large number of children had not taken possession of those God-fearing men and women. Happy it was that the duty of populating this country was theirs, and not that of the present generation, whose disposition to do this might be doubted. Dr. Smith writes in our town history: "Of the large and influential families of Todd, Templeton, Swan, Allen Stuart, Cunningham, Mitchell, Ritchie, Ferguson and many more, not a single individual of their family remains in town; and of the large families of Steele, Robbe, Smith, Morison, Moore and Holmes, their numbers are greatly lessened, and they are growing less every year."

In reviewing the character of these men, we should not, as a first essential, go into an inquiry of how they worshipped God; or what were their religious or political beliefs; whether Protestant or Catholic, Whig or Tory. We only ask were they, honest men, holding fast to those principles which they believed right? The answer to this will not bring the blush of shame upon our cheek, nor the consciousness of regret that their blood is part and parcel of our bodies. If we follow in their footsteps in our dealings with men; if we are as honest and courageous as they; if we do an equal share to make the world better and more attractive to future generations, we can when the toil of this life is over, rest in the secure belief of duty well done.

=====