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Author: Various and Thomas Hamilton Murray

THE IRISH PIONEERS OF THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY

BY EDWARD A. HALL, SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Since the organization of the American-Irish Historical Society, in 1897, with Hon. Theodore Roosevelt, whose father's mother was Irish, was one of the charter members, and Rear Admiral Richard W. Meade was the first president-general, many important facts have been recorded of the contributions of the Irish element in the upbuilding of this republic.

A distinguished statesman and statistician recently stated that within the memory of men now living upwards of twenty-one million immigrants arrived and settled in the United States. This same authority states that almost two-thirds of our entire population is represented by English and Irish blood in about equal proportions. In this computation, it should always be remembered that England was given credit for many of the earlier Irish emigrants who were obliged to sail from English ports and compelled to adopt English surnames.

It is, however, with thousands of Irish pioneers who immigrated to this country before the time of men living now and who settled in many of the towns in or bordering on the Connecticut valley that I wish to occupy the attention of my readers.

Up to a few years ago, the popular opinion seemed to be that the Irish first began crossing the Atlantic after the famine of 1846, or about the time of the building of the canals and railroads. That many Irish men and women came to the Connecticut valley and participated in the formation of the first settlements, that is from 1635 to 1735, practically the first hundred years of American life, the records of the towns will prove.

The descendants of the old Irish settlers here, in many cases, ceased to look upon their ancestors as Irishmen, or at least forgot about, or appeared not to be familiar with, their Irish origin, because of the prejudices that existed respecting the more recent comers from the "evergreen isle" that have tended to make them disinclined to acknowledge an ancestry which was so little in general favor and popularity.

As we become more educated, intelligent, and enlightened as a people, however, and become familiar by careful study with the early history of our country, we will learn to our great advantage of the names and deeds of Irishmen who played a prominent part in the establishment of this government. We will appreciate more fully something of the pride that should animate us for being so fortunate as to be able to trace our ancestry back to the such a worthy relationship.

The people of this race, men and women, born on Irish soil, and their descendants, have been here from the first “prompted by the motives common to all emigration, dissatisfaction with the old order of things and the resolve to obtain a freer and better life in the new land under favorable conditions.”

Here in the Connecticut valley the best, the cleanest, and strongest blood of Europe has come in to strengthen and accentuate the old stock that existed here, and the result has been the enterprising and progressive communities of today in the cities and towns of the valley.

A recent publication announced the death of Sir William MacCormic, who passed away recently, as the “celebrated English surgeon,” although he was born in Ireland. Similar freedom has been taken in the case of the Duke of Wellington, Edmund Burke, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Dean Swift, Justin McCarthy, and other famous Irishmen. This is even worse than being called “Scotch-Irish,” as is the fate of many of our famous Americans of Irish ancestry.

We are all Americans and the Irish are all Irish, whether their ancestors were from Spain, France, England, or Scotland; they all became Irish as we became Americans, and the Irish who came here in the early days of the colonies represented all the blending of these races. We are all of us the results of a great many different, and, apparently, antagonistic races. We commonly became Irish, Scotch, or American as the result of the surroundings of two or three generations.

The first settlements in the Connecticut valley were made from Cambridge, Dorchester, and Watertown, Mass., to the towns of Windsor, Hartford, and Weathersfield in Connecticut. This migration took place in 1634–’35. It was of a wholesale character, almost depopulating those towns in the eastern part of Massachusetts. Along with this exodus, there was another from Roxbury, Mass., led by William Pynchon in May 1636. This migration settled on the eastern bank of Connecticut in Springfield, Mass. Middletown, Conn., was settled soon after and may possibly have been called after Middletown in Ireland.

Among the early records of Springfield, Mass., we find that Henry Chapin sold to John Riley sixteen acres of land running 120 rods along the west side of the Connecticut river, on Nov. 4, 1684, the property is described in the record as “West of the Connecticut River and north from the Riley tract,” which would indicate that the 16 acres were an additional tract to other lands previously owned by some member of the Riley family. The sale was witnessed by Miles Morgan, who made his mark in the form of a pick axe and the deed was recorded by John Holyoke. This is a part of the territory known as “Ireland Parish” and is the present site of the Holy Family Institute for orphan children at Brightside.

Col. John Cummings purchased the territory of Cummingtown, Mass., of the government, on June 2, 1762, for £1,800. This town was furnished to American literature by the poet William Cullen Bryant. He was the son of Dr. Peter Bryant and was born on Nov. 3, 1794. As a poet, he ranks

among the best. His productions are marked by great simplicity and clearness of expression, pure morality, a genial and gentle philosophy, and a well-tempered imagination, combined with superior comprehension. Both names, Cullen and Bryant or Bryan, are distinctive of Irish origin but are often called English, like many of the earlier Irish immigrants.

Among the Revolutionary soldiers from Cummington, the last survivor was Daniel Timothy, born Jan. 7, 1755. He was in the service during the entire war and lived to be over 100 years old. He was known by the name of "Teague," which is Irish for Timothy, and this is the name given to him in his pension certificate.

Felt's history states that the town of Greenwich, Mass., was settled about the year 1732, by an Irish colony, and among the names of the first families are Powers, Hynds, Patterson, Cooley, Rogers, and Gibbs. Capt. N. Powers was a descendant of the Powers from Ireland, as was also Mr. Patterson, who died April 19, 1811, at the age of 79 years. In the Revolutionary struggle, the men were patriotic and furnished their full quota for the war.

The settlement of Hadley, Mass., was commenced in 1659, by a company of persons residing in Windsor, Wethersfield, and Hartford, Conn., and is, therefore, one of the oldest towns of the Connecticut valley, and has an interesting history. The original territory of Hadley included the present town of Hadley, Hatfield, Amherst, Granby, South Hadley, and a part of Whately. A portion of the town was called "Patrick's Swamp," possibly after some Irishman who resided there. Among the early settlers, we find the families of Thomas Coleman and John White.

Among the early settlers of Middlefield, Mass. was Col. David Mack, who defined the boundaries of the town. It was incorporated on March 12, 1783. John Ford built the first grist mill about the year 1780. Here also settled the families of Malachi Loveland, J. Taggart, and M. Rhodes.

The district of Williamsburg, Mass., set off from Hatfield, was incorporated a town, Aug. 23, 1775. Early tax lists show Irish names, such as Joseph Carey, Thomas Finton, George Dunn, James Ludden, Edward Curtis, William Finton, and Joseph Ludden.

The settlement of Worthington, Mass., was so rapid that from the time the territory was sold at auction, on June 2, 1762, the settlers flowed in and became so numerous that the town was incorporated in 1768. Among the first settlers are such names as John Kelley, Thomas Kinne, James Kelley, Jeremiah Kinne, Mathew Finton, and N. Collins. The inhabitants of this, like many other towns, were composed of a mixed population from England, Ireland, and a few from Scotland and France.

The first settlement of Bernardston, Mass., commenced about the year 1738, and it was here, on May 18, 1676, during the Indian troubles, occurred what is known as the "Falls Fight," when Capt. Turner with only a comparatively small body of men attacked and destroyed hundreds of

Indians at what has been called in honor of the commander of the forces, Capt. Turner,—who lost his life during the engagement,—Turners Falls.

Major John Burke built one of the first four houses erected in the town, and among the first settlers are the names Griffin, Lee, King, Gleason, Baker, and Bradshaw. Major Burke was a clerk of the town for twenty-two years and became the first representative in 1764.

The history of many of the towns of western Massachusetts shows that several of them had been set off and named in the first years of the eighteenth century. They had very few inhabitants previous to the coming of the Irish in considerable numbers about 1718. Several towns laid out and named after that time, like Colerain, Montgomery, Gill, and Charlemont, Conway, Monroe, Huntington, were called after places in Ireland from whence the early settlers immigrated.

West of the Connecticut river the territory was divided up into towns soon after the settlement of the boundary line between Connecticut and Massachusetts, which took place in 1713, when the present town of Suffield, formerly in Massachusetts, was thrown into Connecticut, and in 1632 the owners of the tract of land in that territory were given an equivalent tract of six miles square by the Massachusetts legislature, and this territory is included in the present town of Blandford, Mass., one of the first towns almost entirely settled by people from Ireland who arrived in this country in considerable numbers about that time.

These people were Irish Presbyterians who came from Ireland in the year 1718. Francis Brimley, A. M. Collins, Samuel Knox, and Patrick Boies came up from Hartford, Conn., and purchased the land of Christopher Lawton and Francis Wells, to whom the legislature had conveyed undivided parts of the township.

The first clergyman was Rev. Mr. McClenathan, an Irishman, who received £135 a year for his services. He did not give satisfaction and remained for only two years when he became a chaplain in the army. Rev. James Morton, also an Irishman, was installed as pastor in August 1748 and preached to the people for twenty years. He retired on June 2, 1767, and lived in Blandford, Mass., until his death, which occurred in October 1793, at the age of 80 years.

Many of the representatives of the town to the legislature for nearly a hundred years after its settlement were native-born Irishmen or the sons of Irishmen, among whom were Reuben Boies, William Knox, Timothy Blair, John Ferguson, Daniel Boies, Patrick Boies, Samuel Knox, Daniel Collins, and David Boies. The following are the names among the early families: McClinton, Reed, Brown, Taggart, Blair, Wells, Montgomery, Stewart, Campbell, Ferguson, Boies, Sennett, Wilson, Gibbs, Knox, Young, Carr, Black, Anderson, and Hamilton.

Hon. Patrick Boies, a descendant of the Boies family who settled in Blandford, Mass., was the first lawyer admitted to the Hampden county bar, in 1812, and one of the first sheriffs of

Hampden county. A daughter of Patrick Boies was the organist in St. Mary's church, 48 Westfield, Mass., for several years. The first clergyman of the Congregational church of Blandford, was, as stated, an Irishman named McClenathan, one of the petitioners to Governor Shute.

Chester is another of the towns of Hampden county, Mass., settled a few years after Blandford, almost entirely by Irish. The present town formed one of the ten original townships sold at auction by order of the general court, on Jan. 2, 1762. About that time the first settlers of the place began to arrive who in all probability were like large numbers of Irish coming to this country at that time, Presbyterians, although the names of some of them would indicate that they were Catholics, such as John and David Gilmore, Thomas Kennedy, Daniel Fleming, William Moore, Thomas McIntire, William Kennedy, John McIntire, James Clark, Andrew Fleming. Other prominent settlers were the Gordons, Hollands, Knoxs, Henrys, Hamiltons, Quiglays, Elders, and Bells. This town was incorporated on Oct. 31, 1765, when it was called Murrayfield. Among the clergymen who officiated at Chester, we find the name of Rev. Andrew McCune.

The first settlers of Granville, Mass., which was first called Bedford, were almost all from Ireland. Following the first settler, Samuel Bancroft, came Daniel Cooley, Thomas Spellman, John Root, Peter Gibbons, and Samuel Church. Dr. Holland in his "History of Western Massachusetts" refers to the longevity of the early settlers of this town as quite remarkable. The ancestor of the Cooleys from Ireland died at the age of 90 years; of the Spellmans, who died in 1767, at 93; of the Gibbons at 92; of the Churches at 95, and of the Roots at 103. Hamilton, Goff, Curtiss, Gibbons, Clark, Moore, and Phelan were also early settlers at Granville.

The one-hundredth anniversary of the settlement of Rev. Timothy M. Cooley, in 1795, took place in Granville in August 1895, at which a large number of the descendants of those early Irish settlers were present when they most fittingly honored the memory of their ancestors. J. G. Holland says that the facts were communicated to him by Rev. Mr. Cooley in 1854 when he was 83 years of age. He was born in Granville and like many of the Cooleys of Hampden county was descended from old Daniel Cooley from Ireland.

Among the early inhabitants of Rowe, Mass., which was settled in 1744, we find the names of Michael Wilson, Henry Gleason, William Taylor, Mathew Barr, and Joseph Thomas. They were a portion of the Irish colony in Worcester county, which after a short time scattered to form new settlements. The first permanent of Shelborne was in about 1760 by several Irish families who had lived for a time in Londonderry, N. H. Among them are the names of Joseph Thompson, Patrick Lawson, Robert Wilson, John Taylor, James Ryder, Daniel Nims, and Samuel Hunter.

Quite a number of these men were soldiers in the Revolution and also took an important part in Shay's insurrection. The first settler of the town of Ashfield, Mass., was Richard Ellis, a native of Dublin, Ireland. He was soon followed by Thomas Phillips, whose sister he married. Phillips built a log house for himself and his family almost a half mile north of Mr. Ellis. A family named

Smith, which had settled in South Hadley, soon joined them and they were followed by other families from time to time so that in ten years they numbered about twenty families and over one hundred people. They labored as none but the pioneers of the forest know how to toil to obtain comfortable support for their families. The town increased years later in population and prosperity and was incorporated in June 1765, and ten years later they like thousands of their countrymen took an active part in the Revolution, when they drew up a preamble and resolutions signed by Ellis, Phillips, and sixty-five others, denouncing England.

The settlers of Pelham, Mass., were Irish Presbyterians and in the agreement of the original committee with Col. John Stoddard, of whom the territory was purchased, occurs this passage: "It is agreed that families of good conversation are settled on the premises, who shall be such as the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Ireland or their descendants and none to be admitted but such as bring good and undeniable credentials or certificates of their being persons of good conversation and of the Presbyterian persuasion and conform to the discipline thereof."

The Irishmen of Pelham was on the right side in the Revolution. They issued an address to their countrymen in Boston, on Nov. 3, 1773, of which the following extract is an illustration: "We are not at present much intimidated with the pompous boasting on the other side of the water or the claim that Great Britain could blow America into atoms." They unanimously voted their acquiescence in, and support of, a declaration of independence fourteen days before the Declaration of Independence was made at Philadelphia, and throughout the war, they furnished from their slender means and resources more than their proportion of men and money for its prosecution.

The town of Chesterfield, Mass., was first occupied about 1760 to 1765 by Simon Higgins, George Buck, Pierce Cowing, Charles Kid, Robert Hamilton, and Benj. Kid, Con. Bryan, Thomas Pierce, John Holbard, Jerry Spaulding, William White, and David Stearns. They were mostly Irishmen from Pelham and elsewhere. The first pastor called to preach the gospel was Rev. Peter Johnson of Londonderry. They named one of the principal streets of the town, Ireland street. This street was accepted on March 17, 1763, and is the only street in the town that has remained unaltered. The people of Chesterfield were patriots in the Revolution and voted, in 1775, to purchase 400 pounds of powder, 400 pounds lead, and 1,200 flints to supply the forty-seven Minute Men who marched to Cambridge upon the Lexington alarm.

Of the territory comprising the original county of Hampshire, Mass., from which the counties of Hampden and Franklin have been set off, the Irish settled a large portion of the area from which the early organized towns were formed, such as Palmer, Chester, and Blandford. Pelham, Colerain, Charlemont, Sunderland, and many districts were later set off and organized into townships, such as Granville, Brimfield, Southwick, Russell, Montgomery, Goshen, Conway, Ware, Amherst, Orange, Gill, Huntington, Rowe, Greenwich, Worthington, and Middlefield.

The history of the towns of Berkshire county, Mass., shows that they were mostly all organized

a generation or two after the coming of the Irish, who settled the original territory from 1718 to 1740, and although the names on the town records show that many of them were settled by the sons and grandsons of the settlers from Ireland, we can only guess at the origin of others by their Irish names, such as the Plunketts of Pittsfield and Adams, Patrick Murphy and Michael Sweet of Savoy, with Patrick Tyrell, Whalen, or Phelan, Casey, Kerwin, Kneel, or Neil, Hale, and McHale, Bryan, or Bryant, in several towns of the county.

Isaac Magoon came from Ireland with the colony that settled in Palmer, Mass., in 1727. The farm allotted to him by the legislative commission was at the southwest corner of the Reed estate. He left two sons, Alexander (who also left two sons, Isaac and Alexander), and Isaac who married Lucretia, daughter of John Downing, and had thirteen children. This family-owned about 1,400 acres of the best land in Ware, Mass. Several of the descendants of the Magoon family afterward settled in the Western states, and many of them probably know very little of their Irish ancestry.

Among the very early Irish settlers whose descendants are at present residents of the Connecticut valley, and of whom we have authentic records, a few families deserve special mention because of the prominence to which they have attained in the community. Irish men and women, boys and maidens, were imported to these colonies in the very first years of the settlements, while in June 1643, Irish immigration took place that far outnumbered the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts. Of the descendants of these early settlers, Hall J. Kelley, one of the most enterprising men of Palmer, Mass., who developed the village of Three Rivers, was born in New Hampshire, on Aug. 24, 1790, and was a descendant of John Kelly, who settled in Newbury, Mass., in 1633. John Riley and his wife, Grace O'Dea, came to this country from Ireland in the year 1624. They settled at Hartford, Conn., where their first two children were born,—John in 1646 and Joseph in 1649, after which they moved to West Springfield, Mass., where Jonathan was born in 1651, and afterward Mary, Grace, Sarah, Jacob, and Isaac, the dates of whose births are unknown, but all the eight children are named in this order in his will of 1671. With the Rileys came a nephew of Mr. Riley, named John Riley, and a young sister of Mrs. Riley, named Margaret O'Dea. This couple got married in Springfield, Mass., in 1660, and had two daughters, Margaret, born Dec. 21, 1662, and Mary, born June 2, 1665. John died Oct. 24, 1684, and his wife died Aug. 22, 1689. He had two brothers, Richard, who remained in Hartford, and Patrick, who with his wife Bridget moved to Middletown.

Garret and Miles Riley came in 1634 from County Longford, Ireland. Patrick and Richard Riley came to Windsor and Wethersfield, Conn., in 1639. John Riley and his wife, Margaret, came to Springfield, Mass., in 1640, where two daughters were born. Mary, born June 2, 1665, married Joseph Ely, on June 2, 1685; Margaret, born Dec. 21, 1662, married William McGraney on July 19, 1685.

Bridget Clifford, who died at Suffield, Conn., May 7, 1695, came from Ireland to this country

with her brothers, John, aged twenty, and Oliver, eighteen, in the vessel Primrose for Virginia, 1635. John died on Dec. 25, 1668.

James Coggin and John Cogan, from Dublin, Ireland, settled at Windsor, Conn., and were removed to Hartford in 1641. John Connor, whose parents, Philip and Mary Connor, came from Cork in 1634, was born in Middletown, Conn., on June 14, 1686. His son John was taken prisoner at Quebec, in 1775.

Robert Smith, born in Ireland in 1672, came to Palmer, Mass., in 1728, where he died on Dec. 21, 1759.

Edward King is located at Windsor, Conn., about 1635, and is described as "An Irishman and one of the oldest settlers in this vicinity."

John Cleary of Hadley, Mass., died in 1691. His son John was born Oct. 4, 1647, while his son John, Jr., was born April 3, 1671, and was slain in Brookfield in 1709. Joseph, son of old John, was born Nov. 30, 1677; and Joseph, son of John 3d, died in 1748. Joseph's son Joseph was born Sept. 3, 1705.

John Clark was born in Ireland, in 1704. He had two sons, John and Moses, living with him at Hadley, Mass.

The following interesting extract is from the records of Northampton, Mass., Sept. 17, 1663: "At a legal Town Meeting there was then granted to Cornelius, the Irishman, three acres of land upon condition that he build upon it and make improvement of it within one year, yet not so as to make him capable of acting in any Town affairs, no more than he had before it was granted to him."

John Fleming, born in Ireland in 1673, came to America and settled in Palmer, Mass., in 1721. Robert Farrell came from Ireland in 1720 and came to Palmer a few years later. Samuel Shaw came from Queenstown, County Cork, in 1720, and to Hampden County, Mass., in 1736.

The first inhabitants of Colerain, Mass., were mostly those who had immigrated from Ireland in 1718, although many of them, did not leave Ireland until about the time of the settlement of the town in 1736. Some came from the Irish settlement of Londonderry, N. H., and more from Stow, Pelham, Woburn, and Roxbury, Mass., where they had previously settled before coming to Colerain. Holland says, "They were a robust set of men; six foot or more in height with frames of the corresponding size; possessing constitutions capable of great endurance and fitted for every emergency."

Capt. David Hamilton of Blandford, Mass., was born in Ireland, on July 11, 1742, and his wife was born on July 17, 1752. He immigrated to this country prior to the Revolutionary War, and in that struggle for independence took an active part, being captain of a company in the

Continental army. After the war, he purchased a farm in Blandford, on which his thirteen children were born and reared, and hundreds of their descendants have been active forces in the development and prosperity of the community.

The Codmans were descended from William Cod, who came to this country from Ireland and settled at Amherst, Mass., in about 1740. The last syllable of the name was added by his sons, one of whom was Dr. Henry Codman, who died in 1812. Michael Carroll sold land in Hartford to Isaac Graham for £180, on May 13, 1728, and his grandson, Michael Carroll, graduated from Harvard in 1813.

Richard Ellis, the first settler of Ashfield, Mass., and the ancestor of many of the families of that name in the Connecticut valley was born in Dublin, Ireland, on Aug. 16, 1704, and was thirteen years of age when he landed in this country, as stated by one of his descendants, Aaron Smith of Stockton, N. Y. Tradition has handed down the following account of him: Mr. Ellis was the only son of a widow. A native of Ireland who had become a wealthy planter in Virginia, and had no children, made an application to a friend in Dublin to send over a youth of promise to be adopted into his family and brought up under his care and patronage. Young Ellis was selected and started for this country. On his embarkation, his passage was paid and an agreement was made with the captain of the ship to land him safely in Virginia, but the captain proved faithless to his trust, brought the youth to Boston, and there sold him for his passage money. After serving out the time thus unjustly exacted from him he left Boston and settled in Easton, Mass., where he married Bridget Phillips and removed to Ashfield, then called Hunstown, where he probably made a settlement about the year 1742. Here they lived and raised a family of eight children.

One of the most distinguished soldiers of the Revolutionary War from western Massachusetts was Col. Hugh Maxwell, who lived in that part of Charlemont now within the bounds of Heath. Col. Hugh Maxwell was born in Ireland, on April 27, 1733. He was a devoted patriot and rendered his adopted country valuable service in the French and Revolutionary wars. He was in the battle near Lake George and at the capture of Fort William Henry. It was chiefly owing to his influence that there was not a Tory in his town. On the Lexington alarm, he marched as a lieutenant with a company of Minute Men to Cambridge. He was in the battle of Bunker Hill and received a ball through his right shoulder, and although he never entirely recovered from his wound, he served throughout the war, fighting at Trenton, Princeton, and Saratoga. He was also with the suffering army at Morristown and endured the horrors of Valley Forge. Col. Maxwell enjoyed the friendship of Gen. Washington and other distinguished patriots of the Revolutionary struggle. At the age of sixty-six years, Col. Maxwell started on a trip to visit the land of his birth and was lost at sea during the voyage.

Benjamin Maxwell, a brother of Col. Maxwell, also did service in the French and Indian wars and was a lieutenant in the company of Minute Men in the Revolution. He lived in Heath, in the

homestead occupied by his daughter Mary. His sons were Winslow, Benjamin, and Patrick.

For more than a hundred years the descendants of the early settlers of this valley have been spreading out far beyond the borders of New England into the ever-retreating West, to people with thousands of their kit and kin from Ireland, and to develop the fertile fields and reap the harvests of prosperity and of cheerful endurance, daring enterprise, and patient perseverance. Their love of liberty, their devotion to religion, and their respect for law and order, chastened by sacrifice and suffering, make them ideal citizens to found and develop states and maintain the principles of the institutions established by the fathers of the republic.