

## Some Typical Irish Communities

According to the *Boston Pilot*, the "West is full of colonies of Dutchmen, Norwegians, Portuguese and Hollanders, while the Irish though they are *everywhere* in units are nowhere together." This might be true of many Irish in Iowa, but there were a number of areas where there was a definite Irish settlement. A closer look at some of these communities reveals how they were established and grew.

### *Garryowen, Jackson County*

In 1838 and 1839 a settlement known as Makokiti was started about twenty miles from Dubuque by Irish who were mostly from Cork and Limerick. The first church was built in 1840, with the first mass being offered that year by Reverend Samuel Mazzuchelli, an Italian. It is interesting to note, too, that the priest in this Irish parish ten years later was a Frenchman, John C. Perrodin.

By 1840 there were scarcely one hundred Irish in the parish. The number rose to 260 in 1841 and six hundred by 1843. One early group came from New York. Other families arrived in the United States in the winter of 1841-42. They waited in St. Louis while one member went to select a home. He reported that he found nothing equal to the Makokiti settlement in either Missouri or Illinois.

A school was erected in 1842. One of the instructors was Dennis A. Mahoney. He initiated the move to change the name to Garryowen. For a number of years there was conflict between the Cork Irish and those from Limerick. Finally Limerick won out.

By 1850 most of Butler Township around Garryowen was occupied. A check of sixty-five families living in one area shows that all but four were farmers. John Phillips and George Morrow were laborers, John McCartney, the shoemaker, and Michael Burke, the country schoolteacher. In addition, there were fourteen single men, two single women and three widows without families living in the neighborhood.

Although Garryowen and the surrounding territory had not been settled long, fifty-five had been able to acquire land valued at \$47,000 or an average of about \$850 per family. Some holdings were valued at only \$125, while Daniel O'Herrin had a farm worth \$3,000 and Michael Redden one valued at \$9,000.

Both husband and wife were Irish except in two cases. William Green was born in New York while his wife, Margaret, was Irish. William Matthews' wife, Mary Ann, was born in Pennsylvania. The William Rink, Richard Donovan, David Burke, Henry Burke, Henry Mahaney and Daniel O'Herrin families were among the first arrivals at Makokiti, all being there before 1840.

The others came year by year in no organized movement. At least half had lived in some other state or in Canada before coming to Iowa. Some lived first in the south — Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi or Louisiana; others stopped in New Brunswick or Newfoundland. Several families lived in New England (Massachusetts or Maine) or in Pennsylvania, New York or Maryland. Still others migrated from nearby states such as Missouri, Illinois or Ohio.

The famine seemed to have a limited effect on migration. All but nine of the families had left Ireland prior to 1845. The presence of five orphans may indicate that the Irish were caring for children whose parents had died during the famine.

Fifty-one of the families had children ranging in number from one to thirteen. Many apparently did not leave home upon becoming of age. Instead, they continued to work on their fathers' or some neighbors' farms.

#### *The Irish Settlement*

Irish farmers settled first south and west of Des Moines in Polk County. Then, in 1853, Reverend Timothy N. Mullen brought a number of Irish families fifteen miles southwest of Des Moines to form "The Irish Settlement" and "Churchville." The first group came from Wisconsin in covered wagons drawn by ox-teams. Good land was the attraction.

Among the early arrivals was Felix McManus,

who operated a general variety store in Bevington. He came from County Down. Patrick Dowd was a native of County Roscommon; James Gillaspie and William Kennedy were from County Derry and Patrick Smith from County Cavan. All arrived in 1856.

By 1860 the Irish Settlement had become well and favorably known. It spread over four townships — Lee and Crawford in Madison County and Linn and Jefferson in Warren County.

In Madison County there were forty Irish families in the two townships in 1860, with a total of 225 persons. Of these, 126 or 65 per cent, were second generation Irish-Americans. Eighteen adults were unable to read or write. Even in a short time they had been able to accumulate considerable wealth, reporting to the census taker \$9,420 personal property and \$37,070 real estate.

Ten years later the number of Irish families had risen to sixty-three with 371 children and adults. The number of second generation Irish had decreased by about five per cent. On the other hand, there were at least sixty-three who could not read or write. In acquiring property, the Irish had been especially successful. In personal property it amounted to \$91,789, and in real estate, \$152,881. John Cunningham was by far the most prosperous. In 1860 he had only \$11,000 of property, but in 1870 it had catapulted to a fabulous total of \$57,220.

*Emmetsburg Township, Palo Alto County*

Seven Irish families and two single Irishmen set out from Kane County, Illinois, in 1856 to find new homes. With six ox-drawn wagons they crossed the Mississippi River at Dubuque and followed the old trail many others had used through Manchester, Independence and Waterloo. Their destination was to be some place near Sioux City. Their only protection was a gun and pistol.

After several weeks of weary travel, they reached Fort Dodge. Here they met a fellow Irishman, Lynch, who had been up north the previous year with a government surveying party. He advised them to go up the west fork of the Des Moines River. There they would find plenty of timber, an abundance of water and excellent grass which proved the soil must be fertile.

The party's final choice was Section 14 near Medium Lake. Upon arrival they began to fell trees, hew logs and construct log cabins. The first cabins had clay floors and sod roofs. It was too late for a crop. However, they began breaking up the prairie by doubling up their ox teams on the plows. The next task was putting up hay and building sheds to protect the live stock. Supplies and provisions were obtained from Fort Dodge.

The first party was made up of James and Anastasia Nolan and their children, Maria, James and John; John and Bridget Nolan and son Charles; John and Margaret Neary and children, Ann,

Ellen, John and Myles; Martin and Mary Laughlin and children, Lott, John, Patrick and Ellen; Thomas and Ellen Downey and daughter Ellen; Orrin Sylvester and his wife; Patrick Jackman and Thomas Laughlin.

They were joined early in the fall by James and Margaret Hickey. The Hickey's daughter was the first white child born in the county. Late in the fall Jeremiah Crowley arrived with his wife and five children. In January, 1857, Patrick Nolan and Michael Maher were new additions. After the return of the Spirit Lake Massacre Relief Expedition, the group went to Fort Dodge for protection. Most returned with the coming of spring and at least six of the families were still living in the area in 1870.

Early in 1858 three Fort Dodge speculators, Hoolihan, Cahill and Cavanaugh, came to Palo Alto County and made extensive plans for laying out a town. A site was selected on the west bank of Medium Lake. The town was staked out. They built a log court house, store and blacksmith shop. The first postoffice was at John Nolan's.

Hoolihan, well-educated and an enthusiastic champion of the cause of the oppressed Irish, suggested that they name the town after Robert Emmet, Irish patriot. The town was never officially platted or filed for record in this location and was later moved to its present location.

The same year the county government was or-

ganized. The first officers who were elected were James Hickey, county judge, Felix McCosker, clerk of court, John Mulroney, treasurer and recorder, John Shea, drainage commissioner, James McCosker, county surveyor, Orrin Sylvester, coroner, and Thomas Tobin, sheriff. All were from the Irish colony or nearby.

*Neola Township, Pottawattamie County*

Neola has been described in recent years as being an area largely occupied by descendants of Irish settlers. An early Irishman in the area was John O'Brien. Others took claims as early as the 1850's.

This section of the state gained little prominence until the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad came in 1869. The town was platted and three years later a petition to form a new civil township of Neola was approved.

About twenty families organized a Catholic church which they completed in 1874. The first church, which was twenty-eight by forty feet, was built by Philip Mooman at a cost of \$800. The first priest was the Reverend B. P. McMemory. By 1882 there were 100 families in the parish.

In 1880 there were fully thirty-one persons in Neola Township who had been born in Ireland. There were also seventy-eight persons whose parents were born in Ireland, but who themselves had been born in Canada or one of the states. In addition to being farmers, they held such occupations

as school teacher, shoemaker, hotel keeper, cook, saloon keeper, liveryman, lawyer, grocer, dress-maker, and a scattering of laborers.

*Dubuque*

Dubuque from the very first had many Irish. As early as 1846, the city was divided into wards. The First Ward, which made up the southern part of Dubuque, was called "Dublin" and became well-known as the home of many Irish. The *Dubuque Herald* said that nearly all who lived there were guilty of the crime of being poor. Whiskey was their greatest enemy, the newspaper said.

Of the 13,045 inhabitants of Dubuque in 1860, 13.9 per cent or 1,800 were born in Ireland. This included 992 married adults, 317 single women, 183 single men, 98 widows, 18 widowers and 182 children under sixteen. The 992 married adults represented 535 families.

Among the men there were 305 day laborers, most of whom lived in the First Ward. In addition, there were fourteen teamsters and twelve draymen. Nine ran boarding houses or inns while another eleven were saloon keepers. Sixty-three were following the building trades — carpenters, tinnerns, painters, bricklayers, plasterers, and stonecutters and masons. As might be expected near the Dubuque lead mines, fifty-six were miners. River and rail transportation employed some as mail agents, express drivers, ferrymen, boatmen and baggage men.



There were fifteen merchants and fourteen grocers. Only one Irishman was a butcher, grain dealer, druggist, poultry dealer, or confectioner, although eighteen were shoemakers and sixteen tailors. Only eight were manufacturers of any kind. Their products included glass, carriages and wagons, stoves and cabinets.

Most of the single women were servants, 196 in all. Some worked in the boarding houses and hotels, while many worked for the wealthier families of Dubuque. Widows were more likely to be washwomen, housekeepers and dressmakers.

Fifteen men could be classed as professionals. They were lawyers, printers, teachers, an editor, an architect and an engineer. Only two held government positions — both were justices of the peace.

The *Herald* was correct in saying many knew only poverty. Only 151 owned real estate. It was worth \$543,950, or 10.8 per cent of the total in Dubuque. Fully 199 had personal property worth \$99,200, or 7.4 percent of the total. There were exceptions, of course. Among these were J. Sullivan, a mason, who had property worth \$40,000; W. P. Young, glass manufacturer, \$155,000; Joseph P. Nagle, saloon keeper, \$20,150; Lawrence Mahoney, merchant, \$117,000; Mathew Curran, day laborer, \$7,150; and the widow, Ellen Sullivan, worth more than \$50,000 at the age of 35.