

Life Among the Irish

Churches and Schools

Churches were important in the life of the early Irish in Iowa. Patrick Quigley's log house in Dubuque served as the early headquarters for priests traveling through the area in the 1830's. In 1833 masses were offered daily for a week in the home of a Mr. Brophy in Dubuque. The same year James Fanning, James McCabe, Patrick O'Mara, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and N. Gregoire were named as a committee to collect funds, choose a site and take care of all business relative to building a church.

Reverend Terence Donaghue, a native of Tyrone County, landed with five members of the Society of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin at Dubuque in May, 1843. Soon many more arrived. In June, 1845, a new site was selected at St. Joseph's Prairie, eight miles from Dubuque, and an academy was opened. From 1843 to 1865 the Sisters of Charity were largely Irish.

In 1849 Bishop Loras visited Ireland to apply for a colony of Cistercian Trappists for his diocese in eastern Iowa. In his annual report he wrote:

We have been fortunate enough to secure from Ireland a community of Trappists which numbers 25 members, and

which will soon count 100. They have opened a school and they will bring upon our mission the most abundant blessings from Heaven by their prayer and angelic life.

By September of the next year New Melleray, named after Mt. Melleray in Ireland, was well started. A two story, large frame building was erected. The monastery owned 1,560 acres, 160 of it timber and about two hundred acres fenced and in cultivation. They expected to have three hundred acres under cultivation the next year. Education, religion and morality were taught in the boys' school.

The Trappists ate no flesh, fish, butter or eggs. Meals were simple, often consisting of cornmeal pudding or "stir-about," molasses, bread and coffee. When they arose at 2 a.m.,

The plains and prairie of Iowa, whose nocturnal stillness was broken only by the song-notes of the whippoorwill or the howl of the wolf, now resound with the matin hymns, Kyrielisons, Glorias, Cremos, Hosannas, Te Deums and Allaluias, from the lips and hearts of those pious souls more like angels than mortal men.

Visiting Speakers

Lecturers frequently came to Iowa to speak on behalf of the Irish and Ireland. One of the first was Thomas F. Meagher, who was later the commander of the famous 69th Regiment from New York during the Civil War. He spoke in Dubuque during June, 1857, on "Royalty and Republicanism" and on the life of Daniel O'Connell.

During 1869 Mrs. Rossa, wife of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, one of the Fenian leaders, came to Dubuque to give her readings. She was warmly welcomed and "made to feel that here are a class of people who can sympathize with her in the noble efforts she is making for the redemption of her native land."

On October 30, 1878, Michael Davitt, Irish nationalist, appeared at Globe Hall, Dubuque. After being introduced by Alderman O'Neill, Davitt appealed to all Americans to be sympathetic and give active aid to the Irish. "His remarks had a good effect and will win sympathy for the land all Irishmen love and all true Americans would love to see free," reported the Dubuque *Daily Herald*. Late the next year Wendell Phillips lectured to a large Dubuque audience on Daniel O'Connell.

In 1879 Charles Parnell was traveling in the United States, speaking on behalf of Ireland. On New Year's Eve a group of Irish and their sympathizers met in Des Moines. They formed a temporary organization which, on January 3, 1880, became the Irish Relief Association. They made plans to raise funds by staging the production, "Robert Emmet." On January 15 a committee composed of N. S. McDonnell, John Hughes and J. S. McCormick, was empowered to go to Chicago and make every effort to secure Parnell as a speaker in Des Moines.

Arrangements were made for Parnell and John

Dillon to speak in Dubuque. They were met at McGregor by a special committee, J. K. Graves, F. T. Walker, Fred O'Donnell and G. B. Busch. Hayden's Battery fired a salute at Eagle Point when their train appeared. In Dubuque they were received with great ceremony and escorted to the Julian House. A packed room welcomed them that night at the opera house. Parnell's address was "especially pleasing." Receipts amounted to \$743.10, with a net of \$637.50.

Meanwhile, other cities were making plans to raise money for one or both funds — the Irish Land League and the suffering poor fund. In the course of a few weeks Sioux City raised a total of \$1,014, Council Bluffs, \$700, Cedar Rapids, \$1,100, Charles City, nearly \$200 and Dubuque, \$3,700.

In December, 1881, the Honorable T. P. O'Connor, Irish envoy, spoke to another capacity crowd in the Dubuque opera house.

Amusements and Celebrations

The Irish were always looking for amusement and participating in celebrations. At the Fourth of July celebration held in 1834, Nicholas Carroll, an Irishman, was allegedly the first to fly the United States flag in Iowa. He paid \$10 for the flag which was made by a slave under the supervision of Eliphalet Price.

Charles Corkery opened the Shakespeare Coffee House in Dubuque in 1837. It became famous

for its convivial meetings and parties. He kept a file of newspapers from all parts of the country and various liquors for which his guests had a special desire.

St. Patrick's Day was frequently celebrated in Iowa cities. As early as 1838 it was observed at the Jefferson Hotel in Dubuque. In 1859 Keokuk celebrated at the St. Charles Hotel with President McCune presiding. Appropriate sentiments were expressed by Governor Law, General Van Antwerp, T. W. Cloggett and others. It was a "most successful and interesting party."

The Irish were at special events, too. When the cornerstone of Iowa's new capitol was laid in November, 1871, the United Sons of Erin was one of only two societies who participated in the parade that day. When Burlington celebrated its 50th anniversary on June 1, 1883, the Ancient Order of Hibernians took part in a big parade.

The Irish frequently engaged in athletics. A baseball club, the Red Stockings, was organized in Dubuque in 1878. It was one of the best clubs in the West, and even better in 1879. O'Rourke was the pitcher. Irish occupied most of the other positions on the team. On the roster we find Burns, Brady, Comiskey, Byrne, Sullivan, Cooney and Phalen.

Crimes and Disturbances

The Irish were sometimes involved in crimes and disturbances. Patrick O'Connor was prob-

ably the first. He was born in Cork in 1797 and came to the United States in 1826. Soon he arrived at Galena and started mining. In 1828 he fractured his leg which had to be amputated. The Galena citizens subscribed liberal sums for his support, although he was a known brawler and had a quarrelsome disposition.

Later he tried to receive further benefits from public charity by setting fire to his cabin. After being exposed by John Brophy, a respectable Galena merchant, O'Connor left Galena and came to the Dubuque mines in the fall of 1833.

He entered into a mining partnership with George O'Keaf, also Irish. O'Keaf found the door to their cabin locked one day and O'Connor would not open it. When O'Keaf forced the door, O'Connor shot and killed him. On May 20, 1834, the first trial for murder was held at Dubuque. Among the jurors were three Irish. A unanimous death sentence was agreed to by the jury.

There was no objection to the decision until Reverend Fitzmaurice, the Catholic priest of Galena, denounced it as illegal. He sought to alienate the feelings of the Irish people from support of public justice. A few days before the time for execution there was a rumor that two hundred Irish from Mineral Point were on the way to rescue O'Connor. However, he was executed June 20, 1834, without incident.

Disturbances involving the Irish occurred in

Iowa at an early date. Sundays in Dubuque were usually days of strife in the 1830's. Main Street was generally a field of combat between the Catholic Irish and the Orangemen.

The first district court in Fremont County was held by Judge McKay in 1850. James Sloan, an Irishman, presented his professional credentials and certificate of citizenship. He was permitted to take his place at the bar as an attorney.

Sloan became the next district judge and soon began to make arbitrary rulings. Before long he had made himself exceedingly unpopular with the citizens and the Bar. At one time A. M. Brown, a lawyer, was overruled on some points of law he had made. Brown referred Sloan to the Code. Sloan replied, "Go to hell with your *cud* Mr. Brown. I carry the *cud* in my head." It was decided that such lack of judicial dignity and courtesy entitled the court to the rite of "baptism." Only prompt interference by Stephen Cromwell, deputy sheriff, prevented Sloan from getting a ducking. Before long Sloan resigned.

On December 31, 1857, some Germans were holding a ball at the Western Brewery Hall in Dubuque when several Irish appeared. They began to make themselves "pretty free" with the dance and fights began. During the fights Thomas Gairnor was killed and his brother Philip mortally wounded. Two other Irish were injured by glass bottles or other sharp instruments.

One editor commented when several Germans were arrested for murder:

The Irish are notoriously fond of a little excitement even though it may promise a broken head or two, or some other equally unpleasant result. The Gainors and their noisy companions had no business at the ball, and if we were a jurymen we would be slow to convict any man who was repelling an attack upon his castle. The assumption on the part of a mob "to break up" what they cannot participate in, to come prowling around your house with tin horns and bells, . . . is practised too much in our country, and the sooner it is stopped . . . the better it will be for decent people and for blackguards also.

Grove City was the scene of a lynching in Cass County. In 1868 Michael Kelly, a rough character who kept a saloon, shot and killed Thomas Curran, an industrious Irishman, apparently without cause. Kelly was found three days later in a cornfield in Bear Grove Township. He was bound over to a grand jury following a midnight hearing. Less than one-half hour after he was left in the custody of two guards at the hotel, a dozen masked men took Kelly by force and hanged him to a nearby tree.

In Davenport, on October 14, 1871, Dr. George F. Lyon was fatally stabbed by Dennis Delaney, an Irishman employed in the railroad shops. It seems that Delaney's dog had been poisoned. Delaney charged Lyon with doing it. On October 11 it happened to another dog. On the 14th, when the fire alarm sounded, Dr. Lyon went out on his

porch to see where the fire was. Delaney came by and accused him of killing his dog. He told Lyon to bury it within five minutes. Lyon denied the crime, and Delaney stabbed him.

Newspapers, then and now, were inclined to emphasize such deeds of violence while ignoring the many constructive and worthwhile contributions of the vast body of Irishmen in Iowa. On farm and in city, in every walk of life, the sturdy sons of Erin provided the brains and native ingenuity as well as the brawn and sinews that have made them true "Builders of the Hawkeye State."

Irish Labor

Many of the Irish coming to Iowa were stone masons, railroad workers and others who added to the labor force. Among the contractors for this type of work was James McNamara in Keokuk. He got contracts for cutting through the streets in the old city of Keokuk and later built the yards for the Wabash Railway. The dike, which is the Illinois approach to Keokuk, and the Hamilton bridge were also constructed by him.

Lawrence Guggerty formed a company in Monroe County with Luke O'Brien in 1857. They contracted to construct sixty miles of railroad bed in the vicinity of Ottumwa. Morris Moriarty first worked on railroad construction and later engaged in mercantile pursuits at Agency and then Ottumwa.

In 1866 considerable progress had been made in

building the Des Moines Valley Railroad, but not rapidly enough to please all. The Des Moines *Register* urged its early completion: "The last intermediate station has been reached! Put out your engineer corps! — Call Ireland to the rescue! Shovel and pick-ax, do your duty! Sixteen miles from Des Moines!"

The next year Irish laborers were working along the west bank of the Coon River. They built shanties and were preparing for the extension of the roadbed of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad.

Miscellaneous

The first child baptized after Iowa was opened for settlement was at Dubuque on July 10, 1833. Henry, son of Patrick and Mary Sullivan Monaghan, was baptized by Father Charles Felix Quickenborne.

At a monthly meeting of the Catholic Temperance Society of Dubuque in March, 1840, over three hundred, including many ladies, attended. Nineteen took the pledge. The next year it was reported that there was a complete temperance reformation in Dubuque. It was effected by zealous Catholic clergy "among its much-abused Irish citizens in whose hands the glass has given place to implements of industry." A few years later contributions were taken up in Iowa for a fund to support Father Mathew's temperance movement.

To many Irishmen, American citizenship was a

prized possession. On June 1, 1841, the first naturalization papers were issued in Johnson County. They were granted to fourteen Irish — James Wicks, John Mullin, Hugh Deen, Harmon Luken, Francis Kerr, Patrick Smith, Jeremiah Driskel, Michael Keff, William Croty, Andrew McWilliams, John Hurley, John Conway, James Roach and John Conboy.

Soon after the outbreak of the Civil War an attempt was made to raise a separate Irish Regiment at Burlington. The reason given was to allow the Irish to have a chaplain of their own faith.

The next year an attempt was made to establish a regiment to serve in General Michael Corcoran's Brigade. John O'Neill, J. J. Lambert and James O'Grady were commissioned to raise a company for it in Dubuque. When the Irish regiment was first talked of, Dennis Mahoney was willing to assist. When it was decided that George M. O'Brien should be Colonel of the regiment, Mahoney's ardor cooled noticeably. At the same time John Sexton and Patrick McGavock of Independence were engaged in getting up a company for this regiment.

Iowans were aware of Irish destitution brought on by the famine. Newspapers in 1847 reprinted a letter from the Mayor of Cork to President Polk regarding the need for relief. The next year, continued poor crops caused one editor to write that "the people of the United States will, of course,

again be called upon for assistance." An editorial entitled "Poor Ireland," which appeared in the Burlington *Hawk-Eye* in June, 1849, gave a report on the latest death and destitution in Ireland. "Shame on England, with all its wealth, to permit such desolation. Let America again lend a helping hand to starving Ireland. We have enough and to spare."

Opposition to Irishmen was evident in many ways. In 1866 the Des Moines *Iowa State Register* had an article on the names of Iowa's counties. The writer concluded that the worst named county, "not even excepting Jones," was Mitchell County. He continued:

"It was named after the braggart Irishman, John Mitchell, who after being kindly and even warmly received in this country, turned around and did what he could to fan the flames of sedition in the South. . . . If we lived in Mitchell county, we wouldn't rest till the disgrace was wiped out and the county named after a decent man."