



Clinton County Trails

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A Chronological History of Three Wild Irishmen, written by Dan D. Kinney from snatches of what his father told him when he was a little boy about his father and his two uncles, George and Richard, who were all born in Ireland; also some things about his mother, my grandmother, and some of her relatives who were born in the state of New York.

by Dan D. Kinney, age 79
October 25, 1951; Lansing, MI

Sometime between the 1795 and 1805, three Irish lads were born in or near Cavon in the province of Ulster, county of Monaghan, Ireland. Their names were **Richard, George, and William Kinney**. As they grew to manhood they foresaw that their chances of getting very far ahead in worldly goods in the land of their birth were slim, so they decided to migrate to that great land of the free, the United States of America.



and they did! >

Now, they are in America after an adventurous trip of 90 days in a sailing vessel on the broad Atlantic.

My father told me that his father told him how the ship would become becalmed for days at a time; then again how they would come into a storm of strong wind, blowing in the wrong direction, and would be blown miles off their course. This would require them to tack back and forth until they struck their correct course again, not having gained a mile with all this extra sailing. Eventually, they landed in New York City, somewhat battered, but still in the ring and full of the stuff it takes to make a successful pioneer—vim and determination, of which they had a plenty.

My records fail to state in just what year they migrated from the “old sod,” but we do know that they were in Michigan in the early 1830’s from the fact that we found where they purchased real estate in Olive Twp., Clinton Co., Michigan, about the time that Michigan became a state in 1837.

Upon reaching New York, they proceeded to drift westward, and when we next hear of them they are in Buffalo. From there Richard and George drifted into Canada until they came to the village of Orangeville where they made a temporary halt. William, who was equipped with a trade, that of a shoemaker or cobbler, found employment and remained in Buffalo.

Evidently, he found a sweetheart, a girl whom he married in Maple Rapids, Michigan, in 1839 at the farm home of her sister, Mrs. Margaret Minor. Her maiden name was Eliza Nestell. She was born about 1815 at Sugar Camp, on the Mohawk River in Herkimer Co.,

New York. This romance lasted forty years until his death in 1876.

There are no records to guide me in saying how long they remained at Maple Rapids, but in the early 1840’s we find this couple in Wacousta, Michigan, a small pioneer village on the Looking Glass River in Watertown Twp., Clinton Co. Here they procured a house and lot and he established himself in business, that of a shoemaker and cobbler. His customers were the pioneers and the Indians who were very plentiful at the time.

They remained in Wacousta until 1851 when they traded whatever property they had with one of the Daniels brothers for a “wild 80” acres of land in the southeast corner of Watertown. Here they moved with their children, Harriet, Eliza, and Benjamin. William was born in 1858, one year after they settled in the woods.

My father, Benjamin, has told me many times that he was four years old when they moved onto that farm, a solid forest or wilderness. There were no roads and no section lines surveyed out to guide them in finding the boundaries of their new property. It took them nearly two days to make the trip of eight miles, winding through the wilderness and fording the Looking Glass three times. They traveled with two yoke of oxen hitched to wagons bearing the family, their furniture, and other worldly possessions. They arrived late in the afternoon on a hill somewhere near or on what they thought was their land. Later, when the surveys were made, they found that they were nearly in the center of the farm from north to south and only a few rods from the west boundary line. As I have said, it was late in the afternoon and there was not a sign of shelter for the children, so they cleared a small spot

and erected a shanty before the neighbors who had helped them move returned to their homes in Wacousta. On that farm some of the Kinneys lived for more than fifty years.

After the surveys were made, grandfather built them a substantial two-story log house. It was in a maple grove of beautiful trees where the road was established on the section line. The maple trees were the pride of the family for years and were protected and cherished as long as a Kinney owned it. Sad to tell, this property eventually fell into the hands of a foreigner, and he made short work of them for lumber and firewood.

As a further description of the house: It was built from some of the longest and choicest beech and maple logs that could be found in the forests surrounding it. The bark was peeled off and one side was hewed flat. The flat side was laid on the inside of the house. This made a smooth surface on which he later nailed matched flooring, up and down. They papered on this with newspapers or wallpaper if they could get it. The floor was made of 6" white ash, dressed and matched. The lean-to was built of beech or maple 2x8 joists and 2x4 studs and sided with good quality basswood. The roof covering was of white oak shave (shingles). They were 2' long, dressed to a width of 8" and laid about 16" to the weather. Such a roof was good for half a century. The house sat lengthwise to the road and was about 28'-30'. In the east end a partition was built about 10' out, and this was divided in the middle making two bedrooms. In the southwest corner of the main room a stairway was built to the upper story which was divided into three bedrooms; also, in the west end, was a huge fireplace about 5' wide,

made of handmade red clay bricks. In the fireplace were two or three pot hooks besides the two andirons on which the 4' wood was laid. The kitchen had a buttery or pantry partitioned off in one corner. The balance was used for the cooking and dining room.

Soon after the erection of this mansion, grandfather had a well dug not far from the kitchen door. This improvement, needless to say, relieved grandmother of a hell of a chore, that of carrying water in two wooden buckets with a neck yoke on her shoulders from a spring a mile and a half away.

He also had a small frame barn built not far from the house for the shelter of his pair of horses, a yoke of oxen, and a cow or two. At the beginning feed for these animals in the winter was hard to procure and one of the chief sources of hay was a course grass called cut-grass that grew abundantly in the swamps and swales. It had to be mowed with a scythe, tied into bundles, and then hauled in on a stone boat with the oxen wiggling and twisting among the trees and brush. Its food value was not very high and no animal in his right mind would eat it in the summer when it was green, but in the winter time it was either eat it or pick the buds from the limbs of trees they were chopping down to clear the land to get in a crop.

In the front yard and around the house grandmother had such flowers as bleeding hearts, corn lilies, sunflowers, sweet Mary, phlox, sage, smilax, and other flowers common to the day. Looking back through this narrative, we find this man and his family who were located on this "wild eighty" also had such trees as white ash, black ash, blue beech, white beech, hard or sugar maple, soft maple, red oak, white oak, swamp

