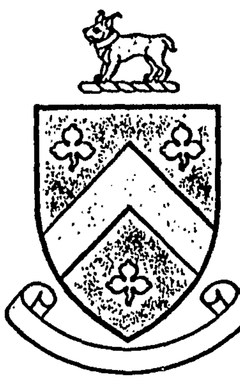
100 Years of the Lynch Family in America

by Joseph Milkovits



LYNCH

Joseph Milkovits, a native of Ozone Park, Queens, wrote the following family history while a student at the University of Michigan.

James and Mary Lynch, my great grandparents, lived in Dungimmon, Co. Cavan, Ireland. Dungimmon was a small townland, which was the lowest form of political subdivision, the order being city, town, village, and then townland. The arrangement of "townlands" was a legacy of the Cromwellian division of Irish land among his generals and other military personnel. Most of the townlands, in fact, bear the name of the person who once bore title to them. Dungimmon, the township in question, had no post office, general store, or church, it was little more than a location of farms. It is located about 30 miles from Cavan town. My ancestors, Jim and Mary, were farmers on this land. They didn't own their land directly, they paid "rates" to an absentee landlord (name unknown) on a 99-year lease.

James and Mary had seven children. Paddy, the oldest, was heir to the land and farm. The others, in order of birth, were Bessie, Brian, James, Mary, Conor, and Philip, my grandfather. There was no required schooling of Irish children, but all the Lynch children, exlcuding Paddy and Conor, did attend. It was at a "hedge" school, meaning it was one room on an unknown neighbor's farm. It was located seven miles from the Lynch farm. The pupils were taught to read, write, and do "sums". After school, the children worked on the farm until dark.

There is no recollection of the actual day to day family life of the Lynchs at this time. However, the emigration of some of the younger Lynch children to America was seen as the only way out, not because they weren't happy, but because America was perceived as a greater opportunity. Bessie Lynch was sent by her parents to America. In 1909, Bessie left Cobh, Co. Cork, and emigrated to South Orange, New Jersey. None of the trials and misfortunes of other immigrants beset her; there is evidence the Lynchs were not poor, and not one of the Lynchs who emigrated to America ever came "steerage". She was met in New York by Katherine Beggan, who was from nearby in Ireland, and had previously emigrated to South Orange. South Orange was a large Irish community at the time. Bessie got a job as a live-in housekeeper for an unknown family in South Orange. Her wages and her social life are unknown to later generations of the Lynchs. However, what extra money she had was sent to Ireland to expedite the emigration of another sibling. This could be accomplished by not only sending money, but also by arranging sponsorship by Americans looking to employ the new immigrant. To this day, very little is known about Bessie Lynch after these early recollections. It is known that Bessie married, and bore six children. All the children died before the age of six, and this turned her into a bitter person. It was said by Philip Lynch that Bessie "had a sharp tongue."

Brian Lynch emigrated to America later in 1909. Cobh was also his point of departure. It is known that upon arrival in New York, he moved quickly to South Orange, and lived in a boarding house run by a woman named Halpin. These boarding houses were an important part of the socialization process of the Irish in South Orange, Lynchs included. These houses resembled the co-ops of today, where "members" worked around the house in exchange for reduced living rates. Also, the "members" of the house arranged marriages among the new immigrants, and maintained a solid social structure in the expanding community. It was not uncommon for married couples to live in this setting.

Brian got a job at Standard Oil of New Jersey within two years of his arrival. Once a good job was had, he was an eligible target for marriage. It was said he was a good dancer, and a handsome man. He decided, however, to marry the owner of the boarding house in June of 1912. Miss Halpin was a plain woman, twenty-five years his senior. This surprised the family, and it seems it was based on financial reasons. Brian had two children with Mrs. Lynch nee' Halpin, boys named James and Conor. This branch of the clan has never been very close to mine, and I did not establish contact. It is noted here that information on the birth, marriage, and death statistics on Bessie, Brian, and James Lynch, all of whom resided in Essex County, N.J., could be more complete with consultation of the county records.

The third member of the Lynch clan to emigrate was James Lynch in 1910. He also came over to South Orange. His early movements here are unclear, but sometime during 1911, he moved out to Newark, N.J. At some time during the next three years, he became a policeman in Newark. He retained close ties with the South Orange community, and married Katherine Beggan of South Orange. Kathleen was "an upstairs" maid for the Hopkins family in South Orange, but quit her job after her marriage. This marriage produced three children, Mary, Kathleen, and Robert. Descendants of James Lynch (granddaughter Kathleen Weathers) reside in Newark to this day.

In 1911, Mary Lynch emigrated to America. She followed in Bessie's footsteps as a domestic, and was employed by the Walsh family in Newark, N.J. until 1913. She took a vacation to visit her parents, and fell in love. Mary married James Coyle, and had five children, Bernie, Rose, Moire, Paddy, and Tommy. She never returned to America. It is unusual that Mary returned to Ireland in any case. It is felt that the small amount of wealth amassed by the Irish Lynchs made this costly excursion possible. Most immigrants of the time didn't go back; Brian and James never visited Ireland again.

Philip Lynch, my grandfather, came to America sometime in 1912. Since James had established a home in Newark, Phil settled there after his arrival in New York. He lived at 111 Ogden Street in Newark, in a boarding house run by a Mrs. O'Brien. His first job in America was procured through Brian at Standard Oil. Phil worked there for almost a year, and then moved on to a shipbuilding yard (name unknown), and worked as a ship caulker until World War I.

At the boarding house, Phil lived with many Irish immigrants, many of whom were "right off the boat." They were notorious for their illiteracy, which hindered their entry into American society. Phil Lynch acted as the "translator" of the O'Brien boarding house. He aided in the completion of working papers, and letters back to Ireland, as well as reading letters written to the immigrant. Also he taught any willing person to read and write themselves. Another example of Phil's desire to help people was his involvement in the Knights of Columbus. He was active in the social group, and organized dances and parties to help consolidate the local Irish. Phil Lynch had also taken the vow of temperance upon arrival in America, because he was offended by the drunkenness and the shame it brought on fellow Irishmen.

Phil continued these social activities until the conscription of all the able-bodied men in 1918. The representative of the army came to his place of employment, and Phil registered with him. He was inducted April 2, 1918, in Newark, N.J. There is no record of his participation in any battle or skirmish. His discharge has a note: "Knowledge of Vocation: Ship's Caulker". Phil completed training in one month and on May 2, 1918, was put on "indefinite furlough." By his own recollection, during this time, he continued to work for the shipbuilder as before, because his job was war-related. He did have to report to the army every week. This continued until Nov. 15, 1918, when Phil Lynch was discharged honorably from the U.S. Army "By Letter A.G.D.". This was a letter written by his employer to release his employees from the Army after Armistice. On Dec. 20, 1918, he reported to Camp Dix, N.J., for clean up and organizational work after the war. On Jan. 10, 1919, he was finally discharged. This service completed, Pvt. Phil Lynch, of the Depot Brigade, receiving detachment, was not a veteran of the U.S. Army. On Feb. 24, 1919, he accepted a $60.00 payment by Act of Congress.

There is an unhappy epilogue to my grandfather's service record. He was never given a pension by the U.S. Army. In order to qualify, he needed 90 days of duty in the Army. His days working for the shipbuilder did not count towards this, and he was about one month short. He remained convinced that he was under their jurisdiction while at the shipyard, and wasn't free to move about, and considered the refusal of the pension to be a betrayal by the country he had served faithfully.

To continue Phil's history, he was naturalized April 29, 1919. He continued to reside at 111 Ogden St. in Newark, and work at the shipyard. His life returned to the way it was previously, before the war. In 1921, Phil returned to Ireland. It was supposed to be a vacation, but upon his return to Dungimmon, his mother took ill, and his father passed away. The farm was in bad shape, because Paddy had not been keeping it up. At this point, Phil left America for good, and began to take over his family. He had been frugal in America, and had over $3000.00 in savings. My grandfather arranged a marriage between Conor and Mary Lynch (not related) from nearby. He had been in love with her, but there had been no possibility of marriage. Phil bought the family farm from Paddy for $500.00, and gave it to Conor so he could marry. This is probably why Phil referred to Paddy as a "lazy devil". Phil then arranged another marriage between Paddy and the widow Mary Caffrey, the widow having two farms, but many debts. Phil paid off the liens and all the creditors, but really never spoke well of Paddy again. Paddy and his wife bore no children.

After Irish independence, the government instituted a system called land division. If you registered under this plan, the government gave you land, if you could prove your ability to work it. It was mainly for families, but Phil Lynch applied. He was given a small piece of land in Oldcastle, Co. Meath. He didn't build a house on it, however he bought a small house in the town, at 101 Chapel St., and named it "The House of Blessed Oliver Plunkett", in honor of the Catholic Bishop drawn and quartered by the English in the seventeenth century. He settled down in this way, as a bachelor farmer, until 1930, when he met and married "Nurse" Anne Heary, my grandmother. "Nurse" Lynch, as she came to be called, delivered every baby in Oldcastle from 1920 until 1957, and she was the only woman in town with a car. To this day, she is a proud, sharp woman, who considers herself a member of the gentry, and still likes to get her own way.

Philip and Anne Lynch had six children, Mary (1931-1935), Kathleen (1933-), James (1935-), the twins Eithna and Monica (my mother) (March 3, 1937-), and Thomas (1939-1941). By my mother's and uncle's accounts, it was basically a happy home, where America was perceived as a land larger than life. My mother tells the story of how, up until she arrived in America, a statue of a lady, large enough so that you would walk in her crown, was not believed when told by her father to the Lynch children. In the late 1950's, when my mother was reaching adulthood, she quit a job she had as a secretary for the Bank of Ireland in Oldcastle, and was undecided what to do with her life. Simultaneously, my uncle Jim returned from Roscommon, where he had been working as a yeoman on a large farm. At this period in time, the two of them decided to emigrate to America to realize greater opportunity. There is some evidence that my mother had just had a bad breakup of an engagement, and my uncle was arguing with his father over the fact that my uncle didn't want to take over the farm, as the oldest male normally would. My mother would neither confirm nor deny these inferences.

On October 20, 1960, James and Monica Lynch boarded an Aer Lingus 707 in Dublin, destination, New York City. My mother relates how, in a stop-over in Shannon Airport, older men with violins were crying over the emigration of Irish from their home. Their flight stopped in Newfoundland, and then arrived in New York, 14 hours later. They were met by Bertie Cadden, a man from Oldcastle, who drove them out to the Bronx. My mother settled on 165th St. and Grand Concourse in the South Bronx. Her recollection is that it was a "grand" neighborhood. The ethnic make-up of the area was mainly Irish and Jewish who had risen out of the city ghettos of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My mother liked it there, and by her own admission, preferred staying there rather than at Gaelic Park, where my uncle socialized. She said, "I didn't associate with those kind of people in Ireland." She is affectionately chided for putting on airs by her eldest son. Regulations for immigration and green cards were very lax. My mother arrived on a Saturday, and got a Social Security Card and green card on that Monday, as did my uncle. Jim also reported for the draft. She interviewed for a job with the phone company, but was rejected because she couldn't pronounce "Schenectady." Later in the day, Monica applied for a job with the National Advertising Company. Her qualifications were good, but the lady who was to do the hiring was from North Carolina, and she claimed "never to have hired a Negro or an Irish Person." This prejudice in 1960 against Irish people is assumed negligible by most of the general texts on this subject (Duff and McCaffrey). My mother asked for a chance and convinced the woman to hire her, although my mother never felt comfortable around her during the full term of her employ there.

Jim, after getting his Social Security Card and green card, went to the Carpenter's Union to look for a job. He hung around the hall for a few days until he was told a man named Hughes needed workers to finish a job on Long Island. Jim worked out in Glen Cove, N.Y. for two weeks with a group of other "greenhorns." When the job was done, Mr. Hughes had absconded with the money. He was a big man in the union, and complaints were useless. Soon after this setback, Jim got steady work as a skilled specialist with D.I.C. Construction Company. Here he met John Perez, who later became his business partner. In 1961, Jim met Leila Bresnan at Gaelic Park, and married her one year later.

Monica went out socially with women from the advertising company. My mother doesn't drink, but from her own testimony, she loved to dance. At a house party given by a girl from work, she met Joseph Milkovits, my father. He worked in the tax department of Chase Manhattan Bank, and is of German extraction. They met in January of 1962, and married on October 13, 1962. The new couple moved to Ozone Park, Queens, where my father had lived most of his life, and took an apartment on Linden Blvd. and 96th St. This neighborhood was and still remains predominately Italian in ethnic background. My mother commuted into Manhattan to continue her job until December of 1963 when she became pregnant and quit. With a new arrival on the way, Joseph and Monica purchased their own home on 97th St. and 134th Rd. about three blocks from their old apartment. On June 23, 1964, at 10:17 a.m., Joseph Milkovits was born into this world. My mother didn't continue to work after my birth.

Jim and Leila had their first child one month later, on July 31, 1964, a daughter named Deirdre. One year later, on November 12, 1965, their second daughter, Siobhan was born. Jim and Leila moved from their apartment on 237th St. and Van Cortland Pk. East to a larger home on Avenue U. in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. Jim and some friends from work fixed up this house in two years and sold it for a profit. Jim and his family then moved four blocks away to Avenue P and 86th St. and repeated the process and made $15,000 total on the two houses. Then Jim invested all he owned in 1971 into a very large older home in the Prospect Park section of Brooklyn. The house was in shabby condition, but in three years, it was sold for a $135,000 profit. The neighborhood had gone through an urban renewal financed by the City of New York, and Jim had caught the windfall. This windfall was divided two ways, one, a new house in the Belle Harbor section of Queens, N.Y. was purchased. It is the Lynch family's current residence. Second, Jim and John Perez started their own contracting business, the Zerep Construction Company, headquartered on 8th Ave. and 14th St. to this day.

Monica was a housewife after I was born. In 1970, she bacame pregnant again. On Jan. 14, 1971, she born twins, named Sean and Philip. It was two years after the birth of the twins that Monica decided to work again. This met with significant resistance from my father, but my mother persevered, and juggled the household work, and her new job at H&R Block Income Tax. She has worked there since 1974, and is now processing supervisor of the entire Queens #3 district.

This is the story of the Lynch family history in America. My family weren't immediate post-Famine Irish, they were relatively late visitors to these shores. The time frame 1910-1915 is usually dealt with in the general history of the Irish-America as one of the growing political clout of Irish-Americans and also the end of negative stereotyping of the Irish by the media. It can be said that these prior immigrants paved the road for my ancestors, and made their American experience much easier. No doubt the absence of runners, steerage, "No Irish Need Apply", and the "Stage Irishman" eased their entry into American culture. Was the early Lynch experience (1910-1920) assimilatory? On the overall, I don't think so. The fact that upon arrival, the Lynchs entered stable Irish American communities, helped to preserve ethnicity. This is not to say America did not influence them, or they didn't do American things. However, they retained such a close link with Ireland that two of the five returned there to stay.

Footnotes, *(Continued from page 53)*

[93] *Irish Voice*. 24-31 December 1988. 40-41.

[94] *Irish America Magazine*. December 1988. 20-23, 36-37. *Newsweek*. 5 October 1987. 35. *The New York Times Magazine*. 20 November 1988. 28, 30-34. Grant infromation based on discussions with Sean Benson of the IIRM the weeks of 5 and 12 December 1989. Pat Hurley's presentation at the AOH convention was discussed in the 15 October 1988 interview. The testimony and activity in Washington DC during the September 1988 hearings was reveiwed and discussed with various members of the Irish community, including Don Martin and IIRM members.

[95] Donald Martin. Written testimony on behalf of the IIRM before House Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and International Law Committee. 16 September 1988. Courtesy Don Martin.

[96] Interview with Gerry Quinn. 8 February 1989.

[97] Interview with Msgr. Murray. 27 January 1989.

[98] According to an editorial in *Irish Voice*, one of the reasons the IIRM had not been granted its funding proposal was their failure to produce the financial statements and records the government requested. The editoral denies any misdeeds, just questions the general financial "tidiness" and management of the group. 11 February 1989. 14. Note that the *Irish Voice* recently reported the Irish government is expected to give $100,000 (total) to some immigrant groups in the United States, including the IIRM. 7 October 1989.

[99] *Irish Voice*. 30 January 1988. 9.

[100] The ball and staff information is based on discussions with Sean Benson, 5 and 12 December 1989.

[101] These goals were taken from a fact sheet in an IIRM press package and interviews with Sean Minihane and Pat Hurley.

[102] *Irish Voice*. 29 October 1988. 1 and 23.

[103] —. 15 October 1988. 17.

[104] *Irish Echo*. 5 October 1985. 4.

[105] Interview with Gerry Quinn. 8 February 1989.

[106] The MacBride Principles are an effort to ensure fair employment practices in Northern Ireland, particularly regarding the hiring of Catholics.

[107] Jailed members of the IRA in Northern Ireland went on hunger strikes in protest of the problems in Northern Ireland. Several of the strikers died, The most famous being Bobby Sands.

[108] Interview with Joe Jamison. 1 February 1989.

[109] At the 1984 national convention of the AOH, Thomas Murray, national chairman of the immigration committee, urged all Americans to support Simpson-Mazzolli, an early version of IRCA. The AOH voted unanimous support for the bill. *Irish Echo*. 4 August 1984. 1.

[110] Interview with Nick Murphy. 29 January 1989.

[111] —. —.

[112] The sequence of events between February and the end of 1987 are according to Msgr. Murray including his meetings in Ireland.

[113] Interview with Trish O'Callaghan. 31 January 1989 and 2 November 1988.

[114] —. 31 January 1989.

[115] *Irish Echo*. 11 March 1989. 1.

[116] Interviews with Fr. Joe Delaney (March 1989), Sr. Lucia Brady (March 1989), Fr. Martin Keveny (19 October 1988 and 23 March 1989) and Msgr. Murray (27 January 1989).

[117] Interviews with Sr. Lucia Brady (March 1989) and Fr. Martin Keveny (23 March 1989).

[118] *Irish Echo*. 18 February 1989. 5. 11 March 1989. 6 and 7. 18 March 1989. 8. *Irish Voice*. 11 February 1989. 9. 18 February 1989. 5. 4 March 1989. 30. 11 March 1989. 22. 25 February 1989. 9.

[119] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "There Are Some of Us Left." *Beyond the Melting Pot*. 1963. 251. Lawrence McCaffrey. *Irish Diaspora in America*. 1976. Both authors discuss the demise of Irish ethnic identity.

[120] Interview with Dr. Maureen Murphy. 16 November 1988.

[121] Timothy Meagher. "Irish All the Time: Ethnic Consciousness Among the Irish in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1880-1905." *Journal of Social History*. Winter 1985. 273-290. See 289.

[122] Interview with Ted. 23 March 1989.

[123] For a discussion of the stronger economy and the emergence of an entrepreneurial spirit in Ireland see *New York Times*. 15 August 1988. D1. *Irish Echo*. 1 April 1989. 12. Albert Reynolds, TD. "Enterprise—Ireland's Opportunity." *Emigration, Employment and Enterprise*. Ed. Joe Mulholland and Dermot Keogh. Cork and Dublin: Hibernian University Press, 1989. 193-203. (Patrick MacGill Summer School 1988.)