

Brooklyn's Cemetery of the Holy Cross

By Joseph M. Silinonte

NYIHR member Joseph M. Silinonte is a genealogist who is currently compiling a list of Irish graves at Holy Cross.

Holy Cross Cemetery is located in Flatbush, Brooklyn. The Cemetery embraces 100 acres and the remains of more than 500,000 are interred there. Holy Cross is under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn. I became interested in Holy Cross more than ten years ago, when I began tracing my family tree. I discovered a number of ancestors there.

In June 1991, I conducted a tour of Holy Cross as a member of NYIHR. My research, while preparing for the tour, uncovered for me a wealth of history I had not known. The history I write of is not just of the 100 acres of land. It is the history of every one of the more than one-half million people interred there. Each of those 500,000 plus has a history of their own. They may have been rich or poor. They may have once stood at the top of the social ladder or they may have been at the lowest rung of that ladder. Their span of life may have been several hours or nearly a century. No matter what their previous conditions, they now rest side by side in Holy Cross. Diamond Jim Brady may be buried just a few feet from an immigrant laborer who never had a stone marking his grave. At Holy Cross, it seems, that the peacefulness of the consecrated grounds embraces all, their previous status being totally irrelevant. Brooklyn and its people have never been humble. However, as you walk up and down row after row of graves, you will not see the ostentatiousness you will see in other local cemeteries. As you walk towards the center of the cemetery, you get the feeling that you are not in the City any longer. It is the feeling of the quiet of a small town at the beginning of the day. The fact is that when Holy Cross opened its gates in 1849 it was in a small town. The town of Flatbush, Kings County, New York.

By the middle of the 19th century, the population of the City of Brooklyn was growing rapidly. This growth was due in large part to heavy immigration. In the mid 1840s hundreds of thousands of Irish Catholics were fleeing Ireland. This was caused by mass starvation during the potato famine. For many, America was their last hope.

Brooklyn was not part of New York City until the consolidation of 1898. Before that, Brooklyn was a city within Kings County. Besides the City of Brooklyn, the towns of New Utrecht, New Lots, Flatbush, Flatlands and Gravesend made up the remainder of the County of Kings. In the mid 1850s the City of Williamsburg and the town of Bushwick became part of the City of Brooklyn.

The 1840 census showed the City of Brooklyn with about 36,000 people. By 1850 the number had grown to over 96,000. The population of Brooklyn in 1860 was 266,000. Of that number, 104,000 were foreign-born, of the foreign-born over 56,000 were natives of Ireland. That is slightly less than fifty percent. It is fair to assume that the vast amount of the Irish-born were Roman Catholics.

Poor, uneducated and with little or no training in any trade or profession, the Irish crowded into neighborhoods along the waterfront and the Navy Yard. They turned certain wards into Irish enclaves. By 1860, the leader of the Kings County Regular Democratic Committee was Hugh McLaughlin, the son of immigrants from Donegal. By 1870, one-third of the Aldermen of



A photograph of Abbeyknockmoy, Co. Galway native Peter Kelly, who died at age 25 on September 9, 1913, makes his headstone unique. Photographs of the deceased were more common on Italian rather than Irish headstones.



The monument to William E. Clifford is another rarity in Holy Cross, because all the writing pertaining to Mr. Clifford is in Irish. He was born in Ballina, Mayo on February 11, 1877 and died August 15, 1930. The Irish verse translates as:
 "From the foot of the cross I look up
 O Jesus, our Lord, bend down
 I profess the true faith
 with heartfelt love and everlasting hope."

the City of Brooklyn were Irish Catholics, e.g., William Dwyer (2nd Ward), John Clancy (5th Ward), James Dunne (6th Ward), James Boland (8th Ward), John McGroarty (9th Ward), Michael Coffey (12th Ward) and Francis Nolan (14th Ward).

With the large numbers of people crowding into the above mentioned areas, many problems arose in connection with employment, education, housing and health care. These problems concerned this life. But what about the next life? What happens when someone wants to be buried according to the traditions of his or her faith? The civil authorities were not concerned, so the Catholic Church took action.

The original burial ground for Roman Catholics in Brooklyn was the yard at St. James Church on Jay Street. The parish was founded in 1822. Today it is known as St. James Pro-Cathedral. By the 1840s space was running out at the St. James' graveyard. (The Diocese of Brooklyn was not created until 1853. Until that time, Brooklyn and all the areas east to the tip of Montauk Point were part of the Archdiocese of New York.) Father James McDonough, Pastor of St. James, was asked by the Archdiocese to find a suitable final resting place for Roman Catholics in Brooklyn.

The land which composes Holy Cross has a history of its own. The 100 acres which make up the cemetery were not bought all at once, but in stages. The land was once part of the Old Joost Van Brunt farm. Mr. Van Brunt sold the farm to Hendrick Suydam, in 1772, who passed it on to his son Cornelius. Several acres were sold to Dr. Adrian Vanderveer. A group of speculators bought a number of acres and planned a village within the town of Flatbush. The financial crisis of 1837 put an end to that plan. A gentleman named John Gill took over the land from the speculators. During the 1840s a Brooklyn coffee and spice merchant, James Duffey, paid Mr. Gill \$2,700 for land where he intended to build a mansion and a spice-mill. Mr. Duffey changed his mind and sold the land to Father McDonough. The purchase was made in June 1849 and consisted of seventeen acres, three rods. Another acre was bought from a Samuel Young for \$500. Mr. Young's house had burned and he did not want to rebuild. Dr. Vanderveer would not sell his land to the Church, but after his death his heirs sold the church nineteen acres, three rods for \$500 per acre. In 1869, another twenty-two acres were bought from Leffert Cornell for \$18,000. Before the turn of the century, the final boundaries of Holy Cross Cemetery would be established.

The Town of Flatbush had been settled by Dutch farmers in the 17th century. In 1849, the descendants of those Dutch settlers were still in control of the town government and many other aspects of daily life. Many Americans who were descended from the old Protestant stock were not happy with the large influx of Irish Catholics. There were people in Flatbush who agreed with them. The first burial at Holy Cross took place July 12, 1849. The funeral did not go off smoothly. The deceased was Michael Moran, a cholera victim from Flatbush. Fueled by references made by some Protestant ministers to "countless hordes of semi-barbarous immigrants," several Flatbush farmers stood across the road with weapons attempting to prevent the burial. The farmers finally moved and Mr. Moran was laid to rest in peace. Michael Moran's death from cholera was not unusual at that time. Cholera epidemics, or "The Cholera" as it was also known, visited Brooklyn many times. In one week prior to 1883, Holy Cross had 278 burials and cholera was the cause of death for a large portion of the deceased.

In 1855, John Loughlin, first Bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn, dedicated the chapel which is still used. In 1926, a large scale renovation took place under the leadership of Bishop Thomas

Molloy. The task was directed by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. John N. Gorman with Msgr. Edward J. Mullaney assisting.

There are a number of notables buried in Holy Cross. Some names are familiar. Some are not familiar. All helped to create a rich history.

James Buchanan "Diamond Jim" Brady (1857-1917), Railroad Tycoon

James B. Brady was born on Cedar Street, Manhattan in August 1857. As a child he and his family moved to Brooklyn. His first job was a messenger boy with the New York Central Railroad. He later became a salesman for the New York Central. It was said that he could sell anything from a seat to an entire railroad car. As a salesman, he also earned the reputation for being an impeccable dresser. He also earned a fortune. He loved food, jewelry (hence "Diamond Jim"), and actress and singer Lillian Russell. Known for his generosity during his life, he did not deviate after his death. At the time of his death his estate was estimated to be between ten and twenty million dollars. He died April 13, 1917 in Atlantic City. Most of his estate went to charities.



Times Wide World Photo.
MAGGIE CLINE
as She Appeared in One of Her
Last Roles on the Stage.

New York Times, June 12, 1934

Maggie Cline (1857-1934), Singer/Actress

Maggie Cline, the daughter of John and Ann Degnan Cline, was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts on the first day of 1857. After working in a shoe factory for a few years, she decided there was no future in shoes. She tried out for a part in a Boston burlesque show. She got the part for \$3 plus board a week. The name of the show was "March of the Amazons." She sang a "Laryngitis solo" entitled "My Dream of Love is O'er." She sang this while sitting on a big swing which was pushed out over the audience.

As her popularity grew, she performed throughout the country, from summer engagements for the wealthy in Newport to the mining towns of Leadville and Goldfield. Her two most popular songs were "Down Went McGinty" and "Throw Him Down McCloskey." As she sang, she would walk across the stage raising her fist at the balconies, enticing the Irish audiences to join in the chorus. By 1900 her weekly salary was \$500. She retired in 1919. Afterwards, she moved to Red Bank, New Jersey. In 1888 she married

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James McAnnally's stone is a reminder of the thousands of Irish who died while crossing the Atlantic to New York. He was 56 years old when he died February 14, 1850. Below his age is this poem:

*"Tossed on a sea of distress,
Hard trying to make the blessed shore,
Where all is assurance and peace,
And sorrow and sin are no more."*

Dr. John H. Duff's monument is one of the few brownstone memorials in Holy Cross. Caduceus the symbol of the medical profession sits above Dr. Duff's name.



Malachi Coffey's headstone is rare because it identifies him as a member of the St. Patrick's Association. Coffey died in 1873.

This monument was erected by officers and members of the Brooklyn Fire Department. At the top stands a fireman holding a hose. There are three names inscribed on the stone:

*"Hugh McGowan who fell through the roof of a burning building
December 4, 1891, 33 years old."*

*"John F. Spaulding, died during a fire at Harbeck's stores
November 12, 1892, Age 29; and*

"Christopher D. Boyne, died during a fire March 21, 1901, Age 33."

*"Died at his post like a hero brave
Sweet in his sleep in a hero's grave
Noble unselfish and truly great
He thought but of others, and met
his fate."*



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a Brooklyn cafe owner, John Ryan. They did not live together. Maggie Cline Ryan died June 10, 1934.

Patrick C. Keeley (1816-1896), Architect

Patrick Keeley was born in Tipperary in 1816 the son of an architect. He emigrated to America at the age of 26 and settled in Brooklyn where he remained for the rest of his life. In 1847, he was asked by Father Sylvester Malone to design the Church of St. Peter and Paul on South Second Street, Brooklyn, known then as the Eastern District. After the church was completed, Mr. Keeley's reputation spread. He designed cathedrals in Boston, Louisville, Halifax, Patterson, Hartford, Fall River, Springfield, Manchester, Burlington and Portland. He also designed dozens of churches in Brooklyn. Some of these churches are St. Mary Star of the Sea, (Court Street), St. Peter (Hicks Street), St. Charles Borromeo (Brooklyn Heights), and Visitation (Red Hook). His work also included St. Mary's Hospital and the Mother House for the Sisters of Mercy. Mr. Keeley said that his talent was God given. He attended mass daily. He died August 11, 1896, a few days after his eightieth birthday.

W.R. Grace (1832-1904), Businessman and Mayor

William Russell Grace was born May 10, 1832 at Riverstown, Cork, son of James and Ellen May Russell. His lineage is traced to the Norman family of Raimond LeGros. He went with his father to Peru to build a business. His father, being unhappy, returned to Ireland, but William stayed and landed a position with a commercial house. After several years he became a partner. During the American Civil War, British and native Peruvian commercial houses refused credit to American vessels in the Port City of Callao. Mr. Grace had his business at the disposal of the Americans, something which was not forgotten years later. In 1868, Mr. Grace set up his business in New York. A wealthy man, his fortune increased in the 1870s. When Peru lost a war with Chile, W.R. Grace took over the debt of the Peruvian government. This was in exchange for silver mines, oil and mineral land, and railroad property. In 1880, running as a Democrat, he was elected the first Catholic Mayor of New York. He did not run in 1882 but was elected again in 1884. He was known for his philanthropy. He married Lillius Gilchrist in 1859 and had several children. W.R. Grace died March 21, 1904 at his home in Manhattan.

Hugh McLaughlin (1827-1904), Democratic Leader

Hugh McLaughlin was born in Brooklyn in April 1827, son of Hugh and Grace McLaughlin. The McLaughlins were immigrants from Cloncar, Donegal. At an early age, Hugh Jr. learned the trade of a rope maker. Later on he sold fish with his brother Luke. He joined the Democratic organization in the 1850s. In 1857 he was appointed Master Mechanic at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in charge of all civilian hiring. It was here that the word "Boss" was first attached to McLaughlin's name. In 1860 he was a delegate to the Democratic convention. The same year he also ran for Kings County Sheriff and lost. He ran three times for City Register and was elected twice, but he preferred running political affairs from behind the scenes. For forty years, he was Brooklyn's Democratic leader, but his influence went beyond local affairs. Kings County was the second largest county in New York State in the second half of the last century. McLaughlin helped swing votes at state conventions. He supported Grover Cleveland for Governor in 1882 against Tammany Hall. In 1862, he married Sarah Ellen Kays, a convert to Catholicism. Hugh McLaughlin died at his home on Remsen

Street, December 7, 1904. In 1908 Mrs. McLaughlin was given the title Marchioness by Pope Pius X. She died April 2, 1915, age 85.

Patrick Ford (1837-1913), Journalist

Patrick Ford was born in Galway in 1837. The son of Edward and Anne Ford. Ford championed Irish nationalism. Together with his brother Austin, he founded *The Irish World*, a newspaper later banned by the British in England and Ireland. The paper was also the first in circulation to reach the one million mark in America. Ford was an active organizer for the Irish Land League. He died April 12, 1913 in Brooklyn.

Captain John Dunne (1830-1863)

John Dunne is probably the only person buried in Holy Cross who fought in both the Crimean War and the Civil War. John Dunne was born in the Parish of Ratoath, County Meath, Ireland in 1830. In 1847 he enlisted in the 44th Regiment of the British Army. During the Crimean War he fought in the battles of Alma, Inkermann and Balaklava. He was wounded twice during the siege of Sabastopol, once in the groin and once in the eye, which left him disfigured. After his service he joined his mother and sisters who had settled in Brooklyn. During the Civil War he was attached to the 164th Regiment known as the Corcoran Legion. While marching through Virginia he encountered skirmishes at Peninsula and Suffolk. He developed a fever and died of typhoid dysentery, September 29, 1863.

There are many other interesting tombstones in Holy Cross. The following are a few who represent the average Irish and Irish-American caught up in history:

Harry M. Supple of St. John's N.F.D., killed on the Brooklyn Bridge 6/14/1878

Harry Supple was a rigger foreman during the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. He was struck by a strand and suffered a fractured skull. The Supple family first went to Ireland with Strongbow in 1171.

Mary Walsh 5/27/1893, age 51

For 33 years a faithful servant in the same family.

Mary Walsh represents one of the thousands of young Irish girls and women who became domestic servants to support themselves and their families.

Mary Rooney who lost her life on the SS Lusitania 5/7/1915

Mary Rooney is not buried in Holy Cross. She may be resting in the Atlantic Ocean. Her name is inscribed on the same stone with her brother and sister.

There are a number of Civil War servicemen buried in Holy Cross, such as

"IN MEMORY OF COL. JAMES E. MALLON 42nd REG. I N.Y.V. KILLED AT THE BATTLE OF BRISTOE STATION VA. OCTOBER 14th, 1863 AGED 26 YEARS"

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