

Famine Survivors, 1845–1855

James Hennessy, Ireland's Deputy Consul General in New York, spoke in White Plains in October at a Day of Remembrance for Famine victims. He had his four-year-old daughter by the hand on stage with him, and Hennessy commented that at a similar event last summer his daughter asked him to explain what a famine is. When he told her 150 years ago the Irish people didn't have anything to eat, she asked if they got sick. He told her yes, a million or even two million people died. She then asked him an arresting question: "What were their names?"

Mr. Hennessy said it made him stop and reflect more than he ever had before that the Famine dead were more than abstractions, dead ancestors, or evidence of an historic wrong: "but people like us who had hopes and dreams of their own." In an attempt to give a few of the Famine immigrants names, the following are a selection of family stories that members of the New York Irish History Roundtable have sent in for publication, describing the travails and real-life experiences of members of their families who emigrated to New York in the 1840s and 1850s.

Margaret Haughey

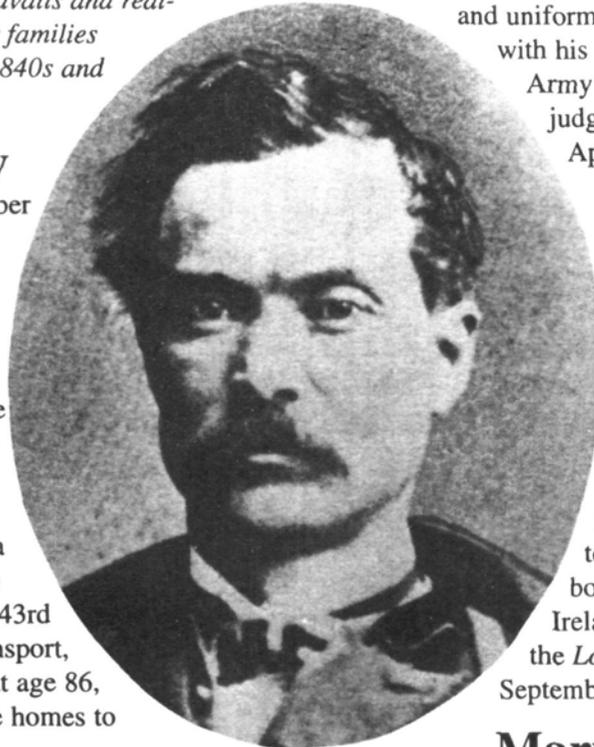
great grandmother of NYIHR member Marilyn Beck, came to New York with her younger brother in 1845 from Teelin, County Donegal. Her mother arrived the year before but survived only two years, leaving Margaret, age 11, to be raised in the home of a music teacher. Margaret Haughey went to work as a music teacher herself, on the Lower East Side. At the age of 30 she married a railroad engineer from Canada. She lived in White Plains, later on East 43rd Street, and in 1865 moved to Logansport, Indiana. At the time of her death, at age 86, she was prosperous enough to leave homes to each of her ten children.

Michael Mulqueen

great grandfather of NYIHR member Sister Eleanor Carr, left Limerick at age 18 in 1847–1848. He took lodgings in St. James Parish and found work as a caulker, presumably in one of the East River shipyards. He worked his way up to inspector, switched careers to become a liquor dealer, and died of pneumonia at age 39.

Catherine Donovan Mulqueen

Michael's wife, died of pneumonia as well when she was only 38, leaving three sons to be cared for by a dressmaker aunt, **Ellen Donovan**.



James Huston

Joseph Mulqueen

son of Michael and Catherine, attended City College and was appointed an instructor of Latin at age 20. Joseph received his M.A. from the College of St. Francis Xavier, graduated from Columbia Law School in 1884, became a judge in the Court of General Sessions on Chambers Street, and was appointed as a trustee of City College. Mulqueen lobbied successfully to keep the old City College buildings on East 23rd Street in service, when the main campus moved to Convent Avenue—for the convenience of boys on the East Side, 6,000 of whom enrolled for night classes by 1921.

Cornelius Carr

Sister Eleanor's great grandfather, came to Brooklyn from Donegal during the Famine, stopping first in New Brunswick, Canada. He and his wife **Mary Gallagher** ran a small grocery store. Cornelius, an ardent Fenian, stored muskets and uniforms in the attic and is said to have drilled with his fellow Fenians in Brooklyn's Grand Army Plaza. His son **William** also became a judge, in Brooklyn, and was appointed to the Appellate Bench in 1911.

James Huston

(pictured at left) great-great uncle of NYIHR member George M. Huston, was born in the town of Coleraine, County Kerry, Ireland, in 1819. Active in the rebellion of 1848, he was the organizer of one of the first Mitchel Clubs in Kerry. The purpose was to train men in the use of firearms. The British took exception to this and offered a £50 bounty for his arrest, forcing him to leave Ireland. James departed from Liverpool on the *Louisiana* arriving in New York City in September 1848. He resided at East 26th Street.

Mary O'Donnell

and James Huston married in 1850 at St. James Roman Catholic Church on Oliver Street in New York

City. Father Patrick McKenna performed the ceremony. James and Mary became parents of three children, one of whom was named after the patriot John Mitchel, whom James knew from Ireland. During the years 1852 through 1859, James held various jobs such as bookkeeper and clerk. In 1856 and 1857 his business address was on Pearl Street where he worked with teas. From 1857 to 1859, he was a dyer and silk finisher.

Commencing his military career in 1850, James became a Lieutenant in the Ninth Regiment. In 1851, he was a founding member of the Sixty-Ninth Regiment where he served as Captain and commanding officer of Company "K." In April

1861 James Huston enlisted as Captain in Company "E" of the Eighty-Second Regiment, New York State Second Militia. He was promoted to Lt. Colonel in 1862. At the battles of Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg he commanded the 82nd. In all he took part in 19 battles. Promoted to Colonel, June 19, 1863, James led the Eighty-Second at Gettysburg where he was killed in action, July 2, 1863. His wake was held in the Governor's Room of New York's City Hall, July 18, 1863. A full military funeral was conducted the next day. The Colonel was buried in Calvary Cemetery, Queens, New York.

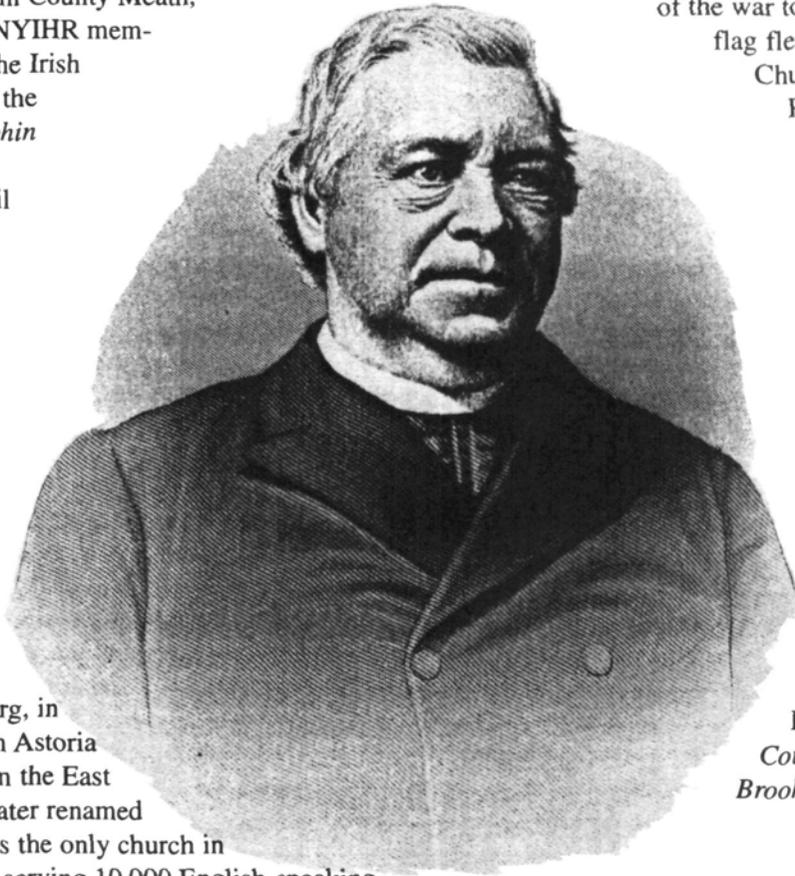
In later years his widow moved to Knoxville, Tennessee in 1899, where she died in 1901.

Rev. Sylvester Malone

(pictured at right) of Trim in County Meath, great-great granduncle of NYIHR member Len Keating, crossed the Irish Sea just before the start of the Great Famine, on the *Dolphin* from Kingstown to Liverpool, where he set sail for America on the packet ship *Susquehanna*. Barely 18 years old, Sylvester landed in Philadelphia on May 12, 1839, and the next day started for New York to study for the priesthood at St. Joseph's Seminary.

After ordination in 1844, Father Malone became the pastor of St. Mary's Church on South Third Street in Williamsburg, in a parish that extended from Astoria to Myrtle Avenue, and from the East River to Middle Village. Later renamed Sts. Peter and Paul's, it was the only church in Williamsburg or Brooklyn serving 10,000 English-speaking Catholics. During the Famine, anti-Catholic bigotry was common in New York, and Father Malone's parish was no different. It was not unusual for Malone to be a target of insults and abuse when passing in front of the volunteer fire house. During an Election Day riot in 1854, a Know-Nothing mob smashed an iron cross from the front gate of Sts. Peter and Paul's, broke windows, and attempted to burn down the church.

The Famine years brought a number of Malones to Williamsburg. Sylvester's youngest brother **Edward** emigrated around 1848 from Trim to attend St. John's College and medical school at New York University, and was a physician for 30 years on South Second Street in Williamsburg.



Reverend Sylvester Malone
Reprinted from *History of the County of Kings and City of Brooklyn*, by Henry Stiles, 1884.

Edward's two oldest sons became attorneys and practiced law on Montague Street in Brooklyn Heights. **Mary Fay Malone**, Sylvester's sister-in-law, sailed for America with three sons just after the death of her husband, Thomas, in Trim. Nine months pregnant, Mary gave birth to **Marcella Malone** either in transit or immediately after arriving in Brooklyn. If Marcella correctly reported her birth date to the 1900 census taker, that event occurred in February 1854. Marcella is the great grandmother of Roundtable member Len Keating.

Although Irish-born, the Malones were American patriots and supported the Union in the Civil War. When General Beauregard fired on Fort Sumter, Father Malone ordered the American flag flown from the spire of Sts. Peter and Paul's Church, and astonished the eyes of early churchgoers the next morning. It was the first American flag ever displayed on a church, and it was later given to the first volunteers from

Williamsburg to carry to battle. From the outbreak of the war to Lee's surrender, an American flag flew from Father Malone's Church. When the news of President Lincoln's assassination reached Malone, he lowered the flag, draped it in black, and raised it at half staff.

In 1863, **Edward Malone** served as Surgeon on Staff for New York's Eleventh Brigade during the Gettysburg campaign, and one of Marcella's brothers served the Army of the Potomac as a drummer and orderly.

William Greany

great grandfather of NYIHR member Marion Sinnott, emigrated from Cork City in 1845, stayed in London for five years, and moved to the Weeksville area of Brooklyn. Family legend has it that he and his wife **Margaret** assisted runaway slaves as part of the Underground Railroad. Greany opened two offices for his painting contracting firm in downtown Manhattan and died in 1862. His son **John** built up the firm with many municipal contracts, until demands for payoffs by Tammany Hall politicians wreaked havoc with his business in the 1890s.

“My great grandfather left County Cork during the year of the worst blight, 1847, he was virtually penniless after he paid the fare of \$17 to New York. When he arrived, he was as hungry as he’d been in Ireland. He didn’t like New York. He said it was God’s forgotten place, where you couldn’t see the green grass or the blue sky so he headed for Pennsylvania. . . .”

Maggie Sloan

Quoted from “Detroit’s Famine Irish,” a paper presented by Kay McGowan, Ph.D., Irish American Unity Conference, Washington, D.C., 1994.



James McCafferty

great grandfather of NYIHR member John F. Timmes, was born in 1839, probably in Donegal. He was the son of Patrick McCafferty and Bridget McConologue. James came to America in the 1850s with his brother Neil. It is believed there were other McCafferty relations here when they came out. Their mother, sister, and brother came to America in 1866. James lived in downtown New York, at one time living on Oliver Street. He worked at varied jobs: as a butter-and-egg man, running a saloon (which he gave up at the request of his wife), and he had a grocery on Henry Street.

Mary Cullinan Gallagher

(b. 1835) and James McCafferty married around 1865. Mary’s parents emigrated with her from West Clare in 1851 and lived in downtown New York, possibly the East Side. Little is known about Mary except that she once saw President Lincoln. The 1880 census reported James and Mary living with their seven children on Henry Street.

Shortly after the Brooklyn Bridge opened in May, 1883 James told his family he was going to walk across it. That was the day of the “panic” on the bridge when a dozen people were killed and many injured. James disappeared that day; his body was never found. The family believed that because he carried large sums of money with him it was possible he might have been robbed, preventing any identification. His death had a disastrous effect upon Mary and her children. Shamed by the rumors that James may have deserted them, she struggled to keep the business and her family going, only to succumb in April of the following year to pneumonia and exhaustion at her home on Market Street in the 7th Ward. Mary was survived by six children ranging from 16 to 4 years of age. John Timmes’ grandmother **Fanny** was the second oldest, age 14, when her mother died.

Sylvester A. Murphy

great grandfather of NYIHR member Frank Murphy, was born in 1822 (probably) in Wexford, of **Nicholas Murphy** and **Catherine Harper**. Sometime before 1851, he left Ireland with a cousin, bound for Argentina hoping to raise horses. They were shipwrecked off the Isle of Wight and changed their plans. They arrived in New York City aboard the *Stephen Whitney* out of Liverpool in July 1851 listed as “Sylvester Murphy, 27, laborer” and “Sylvester Harper, 27, joiner.” Sylvester Murphy first applied for citizenship through the county clerk’s office of Wayne County in February 1853. This coincides with the year the New York Central Railroad was building its line through Wayne County and may have been the reason he was there. His mother, **Catherine Harper Murphy** (b. 1796), came to America in 1853 with her brother, **Thomas Harper**, a carpenter, and his wife, also named Catherine, settling in Brooklyn on the border of the Gowanus and Red Hook sections.

Panic on the Brooklyn Bridge, May 30, 1883

Frank Leslie’s, June 9, 1883

Mary Elizabeth Smith

great grandmother of Frank Murphy, was born in Ireland in 1831 of **Simon Smith** and **Ellen Troy**. Mary arrived in New York City with her father, Simon (b. 1793), a laborer, and a younger sister and two younger brothers on June 1, 1848 aboard the *Infanta* out of Dublin. She rented a room with the Murphy's and the family legend is that she tried on Sylvester's hat and great-great grandmother **Catherine** declared "If you wear a man's hat, you must marry him." Obediently, Mary did just that in St. Paul's Church in Brooklyn Heights in 1854. The 1855 census indicated the newlyweds, their first born son, **Nicholas**, and the groom's mother were living in the Turtle Bay section of Manhattan somewhere in the East 40's. All the Harpers were nearby at 59th Street and Second Avenue and the three males in residence were carpenters.

In 1856 Sylvester Murphy bought a lot on East 54th Street on which he built a 3-story row house which he lived in and shared with three other families, two of them headed by Irish carpenters, and one by a German drover, according to the 1860 census. The 1860 city directory lists him as having a carpentry shop on the corner of 45th and Second Avenue.

Sylvester attended Cooper Union sometime after it opened in 1859. Cooper Union had a tuition-free program aimed at giving adult "mechanics" a professionalizing education. He served as a captain with Company 5 of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the New York State National Guard, sometime around the Civil War. This unit was stationed at the Armory in Central Park. He left behind a sword of the model used by British regimental band members, so possibly he played in the regimental band.

By 1867 he had access to enough capital to build a 12 brownstone row (running eastward from the southern corner of 50 Street and Second Avenue) and one brick commercial building at 932 Second Avenue. The latter is now Runyon's Bar which displays the date of construction "1867" on its facade.

There is an early connection with the Augustinian Order, which may extend back to the old country as Sylvester's middle name was Augustine. Supposedly the first Augustinian missionaries to New York City stayed with Sylvester's family. Later, when they were established at Villanova, outside Philadelphia, he would board a train carrying a suitcase filled with whiskey and travel to Philadelphia to relieve their holy thirst. On one such occasion, his two eldest sons replaced the whiskey with bricks and he did not discover the switch until he arrived at Villanova. He was reported to have been a gentle man and the survival of his two sons attests to this.

He sent two sons to Villanova and two daughters to its women's affiliate, Mount St. Joseph. His eldest son, **Nicholas**, joined the Order of St. Augustine and rose to become Provincial of the Eastern District of America. In 1873, the year his son, Nicholas, was to begin his seminary training, Sylvester took him on a tour of Europe. On their return to New York City they learned that Sylvester had "gone broke" in the Panic of 1873.

By 1878, he was back building brownstones, moving

north with the expansion of the East Side and began to serve a more middle class clientele. He built six on the corner of Park and 64th, one of which he lived in and six more during the 1880's on the south side of 65th, west of Lexington Avenue. In 1889 he built the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Valley Falls, New York, where his son was now pastor. After that the brownstone boom died out, Sylvester reached his 70's, and future firm activity is attributed to his sons. This Irish immigrant had achieved comfort and a good measure of success as a developer of brownstone row houses. His sons would, as construction contractors, receive large municipal, commercial, and church contracts.

Patrick Sinnott

a second great grandfather of NYIHR member Marion Sinnott emigrated from Kilkenny in 1849. His future wife **Catherine** emigrated from County Antrim, sailing to the U.S. at age 14 with an uncle who was a mate on a sailing ship. She worked as a maid upon arrival, marrying Patrick in 1854 in Flushing and raising 12 children. In old age, Catherine lived on Blackwell's Island with her daughter and son-in-law, the deputy warden of Blackwell Prison. Two of Catherine's sons were horseshoers and blacksmiths, one of them **Martin**, moved to New Jersey to raise horses. Another son became a tailor, making uniforms for the New York City Police Department.

Patrick Sinnott and his brother **Michael** are listed in the 1860 census as farm laborers in Roslyn, New York. Michael and a third brother **Edward** ran a pig farm together on Empire Boulevard. A fourth brother, **Joseph** (who spelled his name as his grandfather did: Synnott), became a landscape gardener in Montclair New Jersey. His son, **Rev. Dr. Joseph Synnott**, was president of Seton Hall University, 1897-1899.

Patrick Devoy

a third great grandfather of Marion Sinnott, migrated to the U.S. in 1848 and settled on Hester Street. He made his living as a watchman, later a detective at the Astor House on Park Row, and ultimately held a responsible position in the cashier's office of the New York Custom House. He joined the "Fighting 69th" prior to the Civil War, and became adjutant of the First Cavalry. Devoy died in 1898, his son, **Charles S. Devoy**, became Chief Clerk of the King's County Supreme Court.

Charles S. Devoy
Brooklyn Eagle
 November 15, 1900



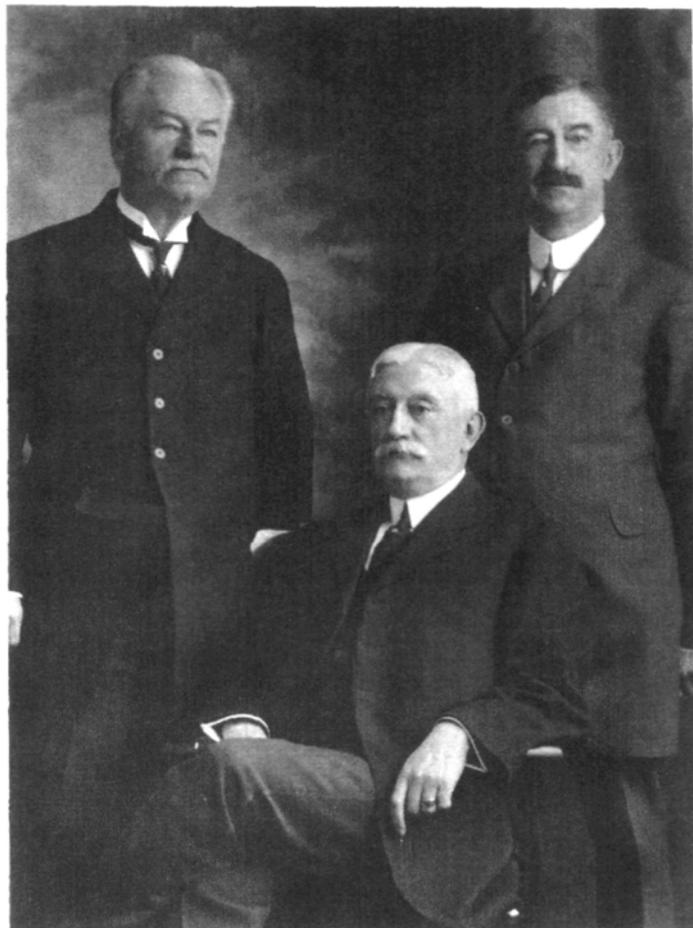
Famine-Era Great-Great Grandfathers

Matthias Gavan

great-great grandfather of NYIHR member Brother Jordan Baxter of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, emigrated from Ireland around 1849 after spending several years in London. He and his wife **Mary Costello Gavan** lived in Brooklyn at Ocean near Vanderbilt Avenue in 1851, until Mary died of cholera in 1854 at the age of 50. Gavan worked as a building mason in Brooklyn, and lived until 1886. His two sons enlisted in the Union Army in 1862; both were wounded, and one spent five months in Andersonville Prison.

Michael Joseph J. Reynolds

married Gavan's daughter, **Ellen C. Gavan**, in 1854. Reynolds had emigrated from Ireland to Brooklyn by the early 1850's. He was a house builder and worked with his father-in-law, Matthias Gavan for many years. Ellen died in 1871 when she was only 42 years old, after which time the Reynolds and Gavan families lived together through 1882.



Reynolds died at age 58 in 1888 from injuries sustained in a fall through the cellar of a building he was working on in Brooklyn. According to his obituary, he "was near-sighted and evidently did not see the opening through which he fell." Reynold's son **Charles Gavan Reynolds** built about 500 apartments and houses in the Bushwick and Bedford sections of Brooklyn and lived until 1926.

James Kelly

Brother Baxter's second great-great grandfather, emigrated with his family from County Tyrone around 1849-1850. In 1853 he lived on Rivington Street, New York City and was a blacksmith; by 1860 the family had moved to 1st Street in Brooklyn. He was an anchor and ship smith by trade and carried on an extensive business at the foot of Stanton Street, Manhattan. He lived until 1900.

Edmund (Edward) Byrne

Brother Baxter's third great-great grandfather, emigrated from Tipperary, Ireland to Troy, New York before 1850. His family settled in Brooklyn by 1854 in the "Old Sixth Ward." He was employed at the Citizens Gas Light Company in Brooklyn and lived until 1893. His oldest son, **John B. Byrne**, was for 25 years chief clerk of the Appellate Division in Borough Hall, Brooklyn and described himself as "the happiest father in Brooklyn" when his son **Edward J. Byrne** was sworn in as a Justice of the Supreme Court following his appointment by Governor Al Smith in 1927. Byrne's second son, **Thomas Eugene Byrne** (Brother Baxter's great grandfather) organized the Kings County Lighting Company in 1900 and was its chief engineer, general manager and vice president. Edmund Byrne's third son, **Edward J. Byrne** was superintendent of the Citizen's works of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company. Two of Thomas Eugene Byrne's daughters married two Baxter brothers. **Juanita Byrne** married **George G. Baxter**; **Katherine V. Byrne** married **John E. Baxter** (Brother Baxter's grandparents). When Katherine Byrne Baxter died in 1953, the *Brooklyn Tablet* wrote "that few members of the laity in the history of our diocese have made a finer contribution to Catholic life, and over a longer period of time, than this deceased noble lady." Of John E. Baxter, the same paper wrote that he was "one of the finest laymen in the Church in the United States."

(Left to right) **Thomas Eugene Byrne**, 1852–1917; **John Bernardine Byrne, Sr.**, 1851–1930; **Edward Joseph Byrne**, 1869–1936