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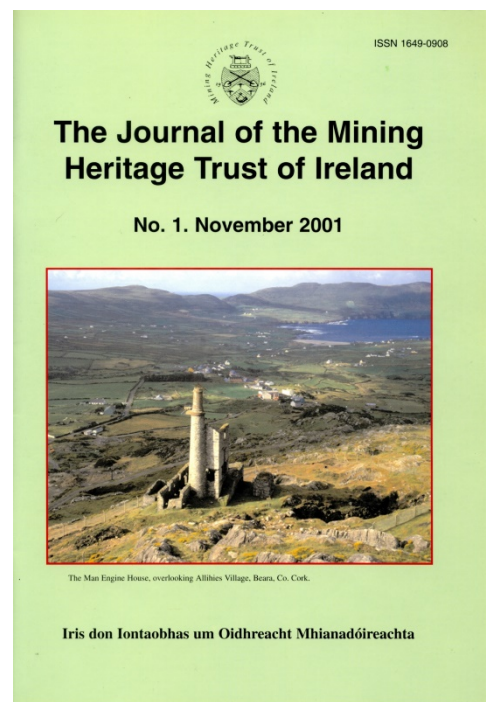
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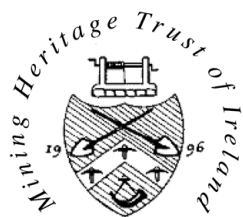
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FROM THE BEARA TO THE KEWEENAW: THE MIGRATION OF IRISH MINERS FROM ALLIHIES, COUNTY CORK TO THE KEWEENAW PENINSULA, MICHIGAN, USA, 1845 – 1880.

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Abstract: The diaspora of Irish miners, their families and others to mining centres in the USA during the 19th Century is reasonably well known and documented in some instances. This is particularly the case of the Irish who emigrated from Allihies, Co. Cork to the copper mining district of Butte, Montana in the 1880s when copper mining finally ceased in Allihies. Less well known, however, is an earlier diaspora of Irish miners from Allihies, and other parts of the Beara Peninsula, to the "Copper Country" in the remote Keweenaw Peninsula of Michigan. Emigration to this earlier copper mining centre in the USA probably started in the 1840s and continued to at least the 1870s, before the importance of this mining centre was gradually eclipsed by the discovery and development of the Butte deposits in the 1880s. This paper presents an introduction to the story of the Irish who emigrated from Allihies to Michigan, the social context within which they did so, both in Ireland and in the USA, and documents the decline of what was once a vibrant Irish community, now evidenced primarily only in overgrown graveyards and street names. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 1, 2001, 19-24.

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after Edward Ryan ¹, a 22 year old, Irish-born store clerk, was elected sheriff of Houghton County, Michigan in 1862, the Portage Lake Mining Gazette, in its January 17, 1863 issue, pointedly expressed relief that concerns that he would favour his fellow countrymen, rather than do his job fairly and objectively, had not been realized. While complimenting Ryan, there is a clear undertone of anti-Irish sentiment:

Sheriff Ryan, we are happy to say has thus far disappointed the many predictions we have heard made that when he came into office, the Irish would be allowed to do as they pleased, — rule the town perhaps, — but the prophets have all proved false for the Sheriff and all his prominent friends are laboring hard and earnestly to make their countrymen keep the peace, — and they have done well, considering the provocation they have had to act otherwise.

Ryan's election to the important position of sheriff highlights how large the Irish community was in Houghton County barely twenty years after settlement in the Copper Country had begun.

For example, in the old Clifton Catholic cemetery, now long abandoned and overgrown, near the site of the Cliff Mine, there are several tombstones that help establish this migration from the Beara peninsula to the Copper Country. Cornelius Harrington, and his son, Daniel, are commemorated on a stone that now lies on the ground, but which records his birthplace as Baerhaven [*sic*], Ireland. Cornelius died on June 30, 1872 at the age of 63. Some distance away lies the toppled stone of Patrick Hanley who died December 187? at the age of 53, and whose birthplace is given as Barehaven [*sic*], Ireland. A third stone, on which the name has long since eroded, also lists Barehaven [*sic*] as the birthplace of the person whose final resting place it once marked. Additional tombstones indicating birth in the Beara Peninsula are found in the Irish Hollow Cemetery near Rockland, the site of the Minesota [*sic*] Mine, the Hecla Cemetery in Laurium, and the Holy Family Cemetery in Ontonagon (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Tombstones in the Pine

¹ Edward Ryan was born in County Tipperary in 1840 and emigrated to the United States in 1844. His family moved to the Copper Country in 1854. His two older brothers became very prominent mine captains, but he went to work for Ransom Sheldon, a pioneer merchant in the area, initially hauling goods from the dock to the store, later delivering to the various mining locations, and finally as a clerk in the store. In November 1862 he was elected county sheriff and served from 1863-1864. He did not seek re-election in 1864, but instead opened a general merchandise store in Hancock shortly after leaving office. In 1868 he opened a second store in Calumet. He was among the founders and officers of the Peninsula Power and Light Company, and founder and president of the First National Bank of Calumet. He became known as the "Merchant Prince of the Copper Country" and was one of the area's most active and successful businessmen. He owned, with one of his brothers, the Hancock Copper Mine as well as several iron mines on the Gogebic Range. He was very active in Democratic Party politics at the local and state level, as well as Irish fraternal organizations, and the Catholic Church. He and his wife were noted for their many charitable activities. He died in 1900. His nephew, John D. Ryan, who had worked for him, became head of the Anaconda Mining Company and the Montana Power Company.

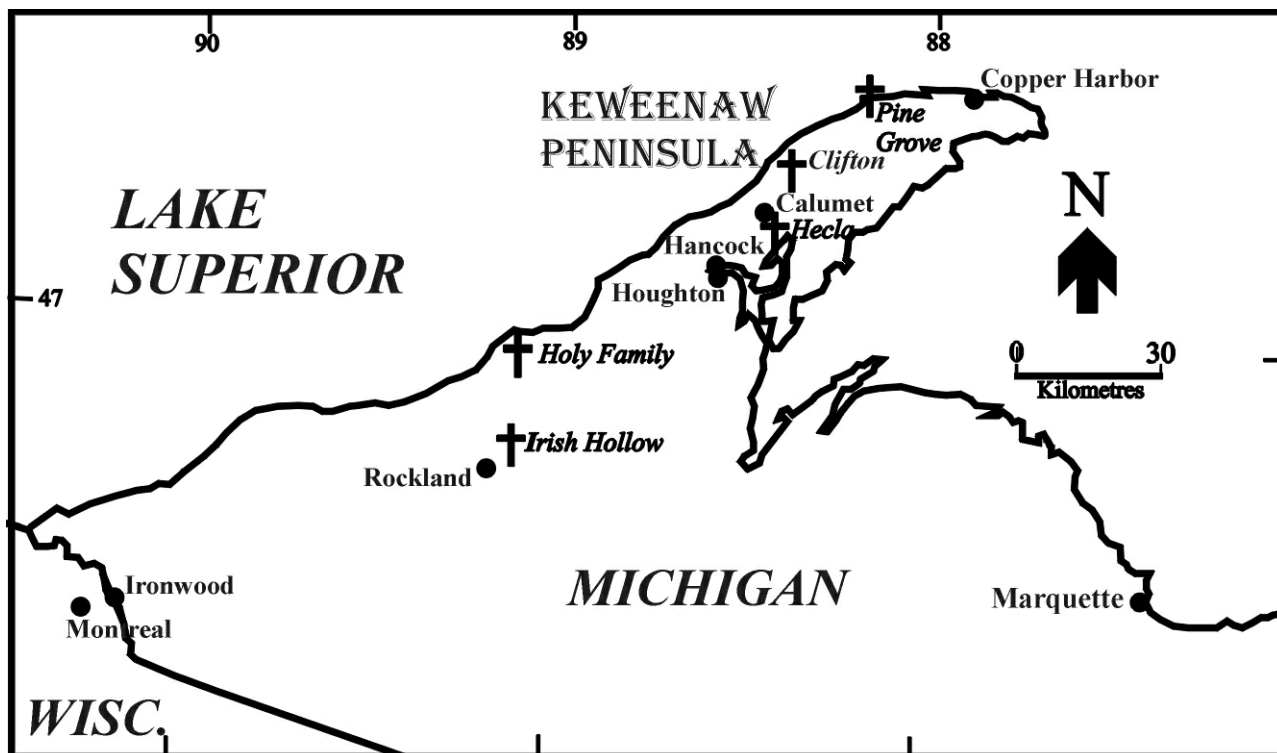


Figure 1. The Keweenaw Peninsula, Michigan, USA. Approximate location of cemeteries described in text marked by cross symbol and names in italics. Latitude and longitude in degrees north and west respectively.

Grove Cemetery at Eagle Harbor, Irish Hollow and, Clifton refer to Kill Parish, the site of the Knockmahon mines of County Waterford generally ². In addition, the genealogical research of Riobard O'Dwyer (1976, 1988, 1989a, 1989b) contains a number of references to emigrants from the Beara going to Michigan. Comparisons between the surviving employment records from the mines at Allihies, the Parish Applotment lists, and Griffith's valuation with U.S. census schedules from the 1850 and 1860 censuses, and early Quincy Mining Company employment records, reveal a strong similarity in names.

Ireland's mining history is generally not well known: indeed, for many years, the standard school text books used in Ireland asserted categorically that there were no mineral resources of economic value in Ireland, except peat. Yet, for much of the nineteenth century investors, mostly British, pursued numerous mining ventures in Ireland, mainly for copper. Although most failed quickly and dramatically, the tremendous success of the mines at Allihies was constantly exemplified by *The Mining Journal* as reason to try yet again. The other large-scale copper mining areas in Ireland were the Knockmahon mines, centered around Bunmahon in County Waterford, and the Avoca area in County Wicklow. Cormac Ó Gráda (1994) summarises this activity:

Yet, all in all, Irish mines were at best marginal propositions, worked only when the market for the relevant metal was very buoyant, as with copper in mid-century and iron ore a few decades later. A great deal of money was invested — and lost — in mining activity. ... despite considerable expenditure of capital, not much mineral wealth was found or generated. (320-1)

The person most responsible for initiating this nineteenth-century boom in Irish mining was Colonel Robert Hall, an English military officer. While stationed in Ireland, Hall commanded a regiment which contained a large contingent of Cornishmen, many of whom had worked as miners in Cornwall. Through them he became aware of surface signs of significant copper deposits at a number of places, including Allihies. After he left the British army, Hall returned to Ireland in 1805 and began developing mining properties and encouraging others to invest in copper mining. Nearly every nineteenth-century metal mining venture in Ireland has some connection to Hall's efforts (Hall, 1845; Hall, 1883; Williams, 1991).

Among those Hall interested in mining was John Lavallin Puxley, whose family had received grants of land in the Beara

² Mentions of specific places of origin in Ireland are rare in the newspapers. An exception was a brief notice regarding Patrick Dooling, who had come to the Quincy Mine from County Waterford around 1867 (Portage Lake Mining Gazette July 26, 1888). Unfortunately, the two oldest Catholic cemeteries in Hancock are no longer extant. The earliest cemetery was abandoned around 1863, the second in the 1960s when the Church of the Resurrection was erected over it. The transcription of the latter in The June and Richard Ross Collection is very hard to use because Irish place names are almost indecipherable as transcribed.



Figure 2. Irish Hollow Cemetery (sic), Rockland, Ontonagon County, Michigan.

Peninsula from the crown for its military services in the early eighteenth century. The Puxley's great house, Dunboy, was erected near the ruins of the abandoned castle of the O'Sullivan



Figure 3. Monument: "Erected by William, son of William Dwyer, Native of Barhaven (sic), County Cork, Ireland. Born 1830, died Aug. 16, 1868". Irish Hollow Cemetery.

Bere Sept, who had arrived in the Beara in 1192 (Williams, 1991; O Mahony, 1987)

With additional land leased from the Earl of Bantry, the Puxley's developed a series of mines at Allihies, beginning around 1812. Initially, they brought a small group of miners from Cornwall. They built a small village of slate-roofed, stone cottages for their Cornish workers, as well as a Methodist Chapel. Local men and women also worked in the mines and in processing the ore for shipment to Swansea, the great copper smelting centre. The Irish workers in the Puxleys' mines were paid much less than the Cornish, even when Irish workers had attained the same jobs as miners, and they were not provided with housing (Williams, 1991; O Mahony, 1987; Cowman, 1983).

In the 1840s the Allihies mines and all British copper mines faced several challenges, the most significant of which was the appearance of large quantities of Chilean copper on the world market (Mining Journal, *passim*). While the impact was most severe on the deeper mines in Cornwall that found it hard to compete with the much cheaper, but comparable quality, Chilean ore, the depression of prices exerted strong downward pressure on the already low wages of the Irish miners at Allihies. In addition, beginning in 1845, the potato crop, the main source of food for the miners, failed, heralding in the first of the series of disastrous years that resulted in the Great Hunger. Employment at the Allihies mines decline steeply after 1850. The mines remained profitable for the Puxley's and, briefly, for a group of Mining Company of Ireland (MCI) board members, to whom the mines were sold in 1869. This sale triggered a bitter lawsuit between MCI and the board members, who had organized themselves as the Berehaven Mining Company. As a result, conditions that were already poor and hard, became even worse.

Shortly after the Puxley's sold the mines, they became increasingly unprofitable in the new world copper market. As a result, employment also became increasingly insecure, and ceased entirely with the closure of the mines in 1884 (Williams, 1991; O Mahony, 1987). Emigration from Allihies and the Beara peninsula began in response to these changing conditions and disasters. Castletownbere (then often referred to as Castletown Berehaven) was an active seaport located about eight miles from Allihies by road. Ore had, at one time, been shipped from there to Swansea, as it had been from the small harbour of Ballydonegan, close to Allihies. However, this had been abandoned for direct shipping of ore because of treacherous winds and currents (O'Dwyer, 2000).

The exact route followed by those emigrating from the Beara in these early days has yet to be determined, but most likely they went from Castletownbere to Cork or Cobh (known as Cove until renamed Queenstown in 1845 in honor of Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland, and then re-renamed Cobh after independence). From either Cork or Cobh there were frequent packets for Manchester. However, it is probable that most Beara emigrants departed from Cobh, as, from the 1840s onward, it had become the major port of departure for emi-



Figure 4. Monument: "Cornelius Murphy, died April 27, 1890, aged 68 years 2 months, 5 days. A native of County Cork, Ireland". Irish Hollow Cemetary.

grants, a position it retained as long as ocean liners were the primary means of travel. Many Beara folk in the early period of emigration ended their journey in Boston and Fall River, Massachusetts, finding work in the textile mills in the latter city, and establishing a distinctive neighborhood (Beara-L). Others, doubtless, stayed in Manchester.

The Michigan copper mines began to develop in the early 1840s with the opening of several mines, most notably the Cliff Mine at Clifton, and the Minesota [sic] Mine near Rockland (Hyde, 1998). The Keweenaw Peninsula (Fig.1), also known as the Copper Country, comprising modern Houghton, Keweenaw, Baraga and Ontonagon counties in the far western part of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, was the site of the first great mining boom in the United States, pre-dating the more famous California Gold Rush by about five years. When newspaper editor, and later presidential candidate, Horace Greeley issued his famous advice to young Americans to "Go West" he was describing the mining activity he observed at first hand in Copper Harbor, Michigan. The earliest mines in the Keweenaw, mined masses of native copper – i.e. pure elemental copper. In nearly every case the mines developed exposed

veins, which had been mined by a prehistoric culture.

As production at the earliest copper mines declined, their place was taken first by the Quincy Mining Company, near Hancock, which was joined slightly later by the mines of the Calumet and Hecla (C&H) Mining Company around Calumet (Fig. 1). The Quincy and C&H were both large-scale operations, deep underground mines with extensive surface works. These developed rapidly, ultimately to employ thousands of people, and produce large quantities of copper for the United States and world markets. From the late 1840s until the early 1880s the Michigan copper district dominated U.S. production. According to Hyde (1998), the district produced more than three-quarters of U.S. copper for 25 of the 34 years between 1847 and 1880, averaging 84 percent between 1871 and 1880. The copper the Quincy and C&H produced was pure elemental copper, but, rather than appearing in large masses, it was dispersed in amygdaloid and conglomerate formations. This ore type required stamping and smelting to separate the copper, adding to the size of the mining companies' operations.

The investment capital behind these early ventures, as well as



Figure 5. Monument: "Mary, wife of Jeremiah Fleming, Born Bare Haven, Co. Cork, Ireland 1827 died August 25, 1882. Jeremiah Fleming died Mar 17 1889 aged 72 years". Holy Family Cemetery, Ontonagon, Michigan.

the later Quincy Mining Company and Calumet and Hecla Mining Company, originated almost entirely from Boston, a well established centre of Irish settlement (Gates, 1951). In addition, there was, for the time, extensive coverage of the new Michigan mines in the Boston papers. The Michigan mines were also discussed in the British trade paper, The Mining Journal. There were thus several potential sources of information for miners in Ireland, and, it is consequently conceivable that they emigrated with the specific intent of seeking employment in the Michigan mines. Research on this continues, however.

This supposition is, however, complicated by two factors – the evidence that is available suggests a very low literacy rate among the miners, and the migrants from Beara before the 1870s did not maintain much contact with the community they left, especially those who ended up in Michigan. Those who left the Beara peninsula in the mid-1870s and later for the Butte, Montana copper mines did maintain contact with home, ironically joining with fellow Irish miners, many with links to Beara, who had moved to Butte from the Michigan copper country.

Education for Catholics in rural Ireland before the National School Act of 1830 was limited. Hedge schools offered some instruction, but it was sporadic and unstructured. The generation that emigrated to Michigan as adults beginning in the 1840s would not have had much benefit from the National Schools. In fact, the declarations of intent to become a citizen filed with the Houghton County clerk show a high level of illiteracy among Irish immigrants. Of 1005 Irish men who filed a Declaration of Intent to become a United States citizen between 1847 and 1888, 551 signed with a mark and 12 forms had neither a signature nor a mark (Declarations of Intent to Become a Citizen Books 1 to 8 (1848-1887), Houghton County Courthouse, Houghton, Michigan). The Beara peninsula in the early nineteenth century was also a gaeltacht, an Irish speaking area. While this would not necessarily indicate an inability to communicate in English – and those who worked in the mines would have had to have some English to communicate with the Cornish and the Puxley's – it does suggest the possibility of problems using English, at least initially. There is very little information about the language spoken by the Irish in the Copper Country, if one disregards the phonetic mocking of Irish speech frequently appearing in the Portage Lake Mining Gazette, especially in the 1860s. Only one brief article – reprinted from the New York Tribune – refers to a Beara miner, James Sheehan, who had worked at the Osceola Mine, near Calumet, and had no ability to speak or understand English. He was in New York to arrange for his wife and twelve children to join him (November 3, 1881).

There are additional factors that explain the lesser degree of contact between these early migrants and home. The Michigan Copper Country was a very remote place in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. The lure of the mines had brought people well beyond the line of settlement – there was a lot of wilderness between the Copper Country and the developed parts of Michigan and Wisconsin. Wilderness without railroads or other roads and which received hundreds of inches of snow during long, cold winters. While the Great Lakes provided access to

civilization, lake navigation in the pre-1870 period closed generally in late October and did not reopen until late April or even early May some years. For long periods each year the Copper Country was cut off from regular contact with the outside world – the arrival of mail in the winter, an infrequent event, was always mentioned in the press, as was the opening and closing of navigation. Not only was the Copper Country remote, there was a strong awareness of their remoteness. This isolation, combined with a low rate of literacy, was a significant obstacle to keeping in touch with family in Beara, or even in Fall River.

And in Ireland, there were additional barriers to the maintenance of communication. The Famine had wreaked havoc upon the rural life style which had existed for generations. Death of family members, and the dislocation of the population due to massive evictions and the workhouse system, would have made it very difficult to maintain contact during the late 1840s, and then reestablish it in the 1850s. The people of Beara, as with all of Ireland, were torn from their traditional homes and cast to the winds in large numbers. Thirty years later, when the emigration to Butte began, there was much more stability in Ireland, community life had been restored, along with a much higher level of literacy, due to the National Schools. In addition, the railroad came to Butte very early in its development and provided reasonably dependable year-round contact with the outside world.

The Copper Country Irish were a vibrant and active community who developed rapidly a wide range of institutions. The Portage Lake Mining Gazette is full of stories about Irish organizations, balls, lectures and fund raising events for various Irish causes throughout the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. These activities became more varied and more frequent over time. By the 1880s there is a marked change in attitude toward the Irish in the paper, reflecting their role as leaders in the community.

The 1880s, were, however, a watershed, as from then onward, the community began to decline in numbers. A significant number moved on to Lancaster County, Nebraska and there established a farming community on land purchased from the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Company (Sullivan, nd). Others went to other mining communities in the Upper Peninsula, especially on the Gogebic Range where Edward Ryan and other Copper Country Irish businessmen had mining properties (Beara-L, Portage Lake Mining Gazette). However, by far the largest group appear to have headed for Butte, Montana (Emmons, 1989)

Wages were higher in Butte and the mining company there, the Anaconda, was headed by Marcus Daly, an Irishman. Daly was succeeded by John D. Ryan, a native of the Copper Country, whose father had been a captain at the Quincy mine and whose uncle was Edward Ryan, the former sheriff and very successful Copper Country businessman. The local paper referred to the higher wages in Butte, in one of many articles, or short notices, on residents moving west (Portage Lake Mining Gazette, May 3, 1888). However, a more important cause for the movement of Irish out of the Copper Country is suggested in a letter from Thomas F. Mason, president of the Quincy Mining Company, the largest employer in Hancock, to Capt. S. B. Harris:

I have been a little fearful that the organizing of

Knights of Labour up there might bode trouble, but hope we may escape any trouble from that source for the near future – The Irish being the worst disturbing element I suggest that in any changes that are being made it may be well to keep in mind that it is not best to increase in that nationality. (April 20, 1887, Quincy Mining Company Collection, Box 336, folder 015)

The Copper Country Irish had achieved a great deal in their new home in the face of a great deal of prejudice. As in other areas, their success saw the decline of the level of hostility which they faced initially. Editors of the Portage Lake Mining Gazette devoted more space to Irish accomplishment than to drunkenness and violence after the early 1870s than before, for example, and use much more positive language in describing Irish people and Irish activities. In the 1880s one of the economic pillars of that success - access to good jobs at the Quincy Mine — was weakened, and Butte offered a new opportunity, of which many availed. The economy of the Copper Country was not very diversified, as its location made such diversification difficult. By the time of the first World War, the Irish had disappeared from the Upper Peninsula, and a generation later their onetime presence survived largely in the names of streets, business blocks, schools - and in cemeteries.

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