Dear Patrick,

The French historian + philosopher, Voltaire, is credited with saying that history is a trick played by the living on the dead.

I tried not to play any trick in writing the enclosed life history.

J. McM.

Easter, 1995

THE LIFE OF THE ANCESTOR, PATRICK JOSEPH McMENAMIN

An old family Bible has in writing the birth dates of my McMenamin grandparents. His is given as "May 25, 1854"; hers as "January 1, 1855". Their marriage date and location are there too: "June 8, 1876" at "St. John's Church, Greenbush, New York". They were then young immigrants; he was just twenty-two and she, twenty-one. He had emigrated to work on a farm several years beforehand; he was illiterate but showed signs of being talented with good judgment. She was literate and though she bore the same surname before marriage it was always claimed that they "were not related". Their marriage must have been agreed upon before she emigrated; her baptismal name was Mary; his, Patrick.

We of this generation tend to impose our own stereotyped images of the new world into which my paternal grandparents entered. Understandably so. Yet the truth reveals something different than the picture so long held in my own mind. When Patrick McMenamin's vessel of immigrants sailed into New York harbor, there was yet no statue of Liberty to greet him. If he had been entering Paris instead there would have been no Eiffel Tower. He was probably met by his brother Owen or Michael from East Greenbush who took him up the Hudson River to the city of Albany, which was not far from East Greenbush.

There is a family story about his immigrating that could have been true. It was related to me in a letter from his nephew, Jamie, a 70-year old retired drover in New Zealand. Jamie wrote that the immigration vessel's departure date made the lad's leaving on schedule impossible because he had yet a few weeks left to complete a verbal contract as a laborer with his employer, a local landlord, who refused to release him from the contract. So my grandfather's family and friends subsidized the passage fee which he expected wages would have financed.

It is sad to report that none of us (his children or grandchildren) can tell much of the circumstances he endured on his immigration voyage. I do recall that he came with a companion, Jim Crowe, who was a brother* of his own older brother -

*"brother-in-law"

Owen. (Owen and his small family had already settled near relatives in East Greenbush, Rensselaer County, of the State of New York.) Patrick also had another older brother, Michael, who had settled himself in this area; so he was not coming into a world of strangers. I have yet to find documentary evidence as to his year of entry, but it must have been about 1874 since we know he was married in 1876 to a girl who had known him in Ireland and who followed him to America.

A tintype photograph taken at the time of their wedding has been preserved through copies. Young Patrick was then twenty-two years old. His hair, we know, was Irish red and his hands look to be strong and large, of importance for a young farm laborer. Young Patrick, we were told, rose early in the dawn after his day of marriage to milk many cows.

By late 1879 his thoughts were given seriously to becoming a naturalized citizen. His second son (my father) had been born in July. In October Patrick appeared in the Albany Justices' Court declaring his intention to become a U.S. citizen and to "renounce forever all allegiance . . . particularly to the Queen of Great Britain." This, of course, he found easy to do but his naturalization was not finalized until he had moved his small family to Illinois.

I can imagine my young grandfather's interest upon seeing his first live snake when he worked as a newly arrived immigrant in the farmland of Rensselaer County, New York. The only snake familiar to him was the serpent he had seen in the stained glass window of his parish church back in Ireland. In fact, young Patrick would also see his first toad and skunk in America, as these did not exist in Ireland due to the island's long geologic isolation.

It happens, however, that Ireland does have one wild flower not found on the Island of Britain, or the whole European continent. I would like to think it greeted him with its blue violet blossoms when he was (years later) inspecting the wet areas of the large farm he had purchased in Illinois.

This wild flower and I have been special friends ever since I was introduced to it by a botany professor. I still recall how we botany students on that field trip enjoyed trying to pronounce this grasslike plant's Latin name - *Sisyrinchium*

angustifolium. Its common name was so much easier - "blue-eyed grass". Each blossom (produced in early summer) is only about a half inch in diameter and consists of six similar petals. Although the plant resembles a grass plant it actually belongs in the iris plant family. Years later I was to learn that the only other place in the world this little plant grew besides North America was in my grandfather's native part of Ireland.

Clustered colonies of blue-eyed grass are said to be conspicuous when blooming in wet places near the shorelines of rivers and lakes of Northwestern Ireland. Which leads me to thinking that my grandfather in his boyhood years must have seen large colonies of blue-eyed grass along the shorelines of the River Derg, so near his native home.

And I like to imagine that he discovered this familiar sight many years later when he first traversed the wet areas of his newly purchased prairie farm in Illinois. I can see his own blue eyes light up with recognition on that early summer day. I like to think he carried home a cluster of the blue-eyed grass blossoms to surprise my grandmother. "Here Mary, see what I found!" She, too, had grown up in the same area of Ireland.

Now, I wish it were possible to have blue-eyed grass growing on their Illinois graves.

My grandfather died in 1938. We have no colored photographs to show his twinkling blue eyes, but I was pleased to learn some forty years after his death his eyes were still recalled. His only surviving niece (then almost ninety) surprised me with this comment: "Two things I'll never forget about Uncle Pat were his sense of humor and twinkling blue eyes!"

Those of us who visited him during his final illness cannot forget how he could still muster up that smile and ask that there be plenty of food on hand for his "wake".

What was the year Patrick moved his little family to Illinois and who prompted it? These are family facts that have been lost. We do know that he had

become a naturalized citizen of the U.S. in October, 1982, for we have a copy of the document issued at DeKalb County's open court and witnessed by Mike Minegan and Peter Redmond. The witness to Patrick's signature, confirming his mark "X", was W.W. Whitmore. The document cites that Patrick had resided at least one year in the State of Illinois and he had "behaved himself as a man of good moral character . . .".

It becomes evident, then, that thirteen years had elapsed between the time he had applied for citizenship in New York State and the time he actually obtained it. By this time (October, 1892) he had become the father of nine children, two of whom had died. (His wife, Mary, had no reason to bother with citizenship even though she was literate. Why? The answer undoubtedly is that she was a woman and women could not vote then.)

Even so, she was to die before she would have been able to vote in his newly adopted country. She died in 1913; it was 1920 before the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave female citizens of the U.S. their right to vote. Patrick, then a widower, was probably unaware (or if so, disinterested) in the event's historical significance.

So much has been lost as to how that young family (Patrick, Mary and their small sons Jim and John) traveled to Illinois. Hand-me-down tales suggest that the journey was accomplished by one or two stops where Patrick obtained money to progress further by working temporarily as a section hand on the railroad. The time must have been in the early 1880's. They were certainly aware that their social status set them apart from mainstream America because of their poverty, religion and culture. But they had pluck and vision of a better life in Illinois, so they forged ahead hoping for promise of opportunity in the rich agricultural region of DeKalb County.

If there was a purpose in their decision to consider the town of DeKalb as the end of the trek, I cannot say. But there is the story told by Patrick, himself, of his riding a horse about 10 miles to seek employment as a renter of Gormley farm property in Pierce Township southeast of DeKalb. He succeeded. This Gormley farm was to become his growing family's first Illinois home for several years. It was

here the event took place which Patrick, himself, told me about many years later. I will tell it in his own words as I wrote them down during a visit with him in 1937.

> "I was swilling[1] pigs one morning after a rain when we lived on the Gormley place. A fellow came walking down the road with his grip.[2] I was very dirty. He came up to me and said, 'Good morning, Sir! Nice bunch of pigs!' He was as brown as a mulatto. I sized him up and said, 'I think I have seen you before' and shook hands with him. He was my older brother, Jim. I took him in to see my wife and other children . . .",

whereupon I interrupted him and asked for the names of his children:

> Jim - about age 10 years,
> John - about age 8 years,
> Mike - about age 5 years,
> Edward - about age 3 years;
> Mame - about age 6 months

Using these children's birth dates I conclude that Patrick and Mary had not yet lost Edward, who was to die soon. Mame was born in 1886, so the year of this visit must have been about 1887.

My grandfather went on telling how Jim stayed with them about three weeks, during which time they visited their younger brother, Hugh, who had come to the DeKalb area and had married an Irish immigrant girl in 1884.

Another thing my grandfather could recall about the day of his brother Jim's coming to the Gormley farm was that he had had his sons Jim and John out in the

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[1] "Swilling" was feeding a liquid consisting of milk, water, and maybe some ground grain that had fermented.

[2] "Grip" meant a suitcase.

corn field helping him plant white navy beans in each corn hill where gophers had eaten out the seed corn. He even recalled that the planted beans had produced a yield of eight to ten bushels that fall, so the visit must have occurred in late June.

Memories of this visit also gave more information about his remarkable brother, Jim, who was "a great traveler", "never married", "the smallest in stature" of his siblings, "didn't communicate much", and "was very independent".

How long did Patrick's growing family live on the Gormley farm? We have clues that give us an estimate. My father, John, told of attending the nearby rural school with my wife's mother, Sarah Powers, who was four years older. He was also said to have attended catechism lessons with a neighbor, Michael Malone, riding to DeKalb in a horse-drawn wagon.

On a cold day in March, 1896, Patrick McMenamin moved his family for the third and last time as a renter. His children now numbered five sons and three daughters. His wife was pregnant and the girl she would deliver in November would die shortly thereafter. They had already buried two boys.[3]

Their three eldest sons, James 18, John 15, and Michael 14, were able to help Patrick with the heavier farm work. Frank, who was 8, had learned to milk and was soon able to drive a gentle team pulling the milk-ladened wagon to the milk depot three miles away. Later in his memoirs son Frank wrote, "I do not yet understand how it was possible to play two ball games on Sunday and work as hard as we did during the week."

It was that hard work which Patrick expected of his sons that enabled him to purchase the 120 acres adjoining his rented 240 acre farm and within another few years even buy the 240 acres as well. So, prior to the turn of the century, Patrick McMenamin, the former Irish immigrant, owned more land than any landlord in his boyhood County Tyrone of Northern Ireland.

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[3] And in August, 1890, brother Owen's coffin was sent to DeKalb by train. Patrick was asked to bury him in St. Mary's Cemetery.

But in September, 1910 Patrick must have realized that his success had not been without cost. Three of his sons had left for the Northwest (Washington and Oregon). They saw better opportunities for education and a healthier life. The "West" was said to be freer of hay fever than Illinois. Their want of an education must have been something Patrick wondered about. Each of these sons had the advantage of some elementary school learning. Unlike him, they could read and write. He, their successful father, could do neither.

That he was changeable in his thinking I digress here to point out; before he died he presented me with a $20 bill to express his appreciation of my graduating with high honors from the University of Illinois. He was 83 years old then; I am 82 now.

Today, I am more aware of the different changes this man experienced in his lifetime. Transportation, as his family grew, was chiefly by horseback or horse-drawn vehicles. In 1895 (the year prior to moving his family to the farm he would soon own) there occurred the first gasoline-powered automobile race in America from snowy Chicago to Evanston when on Thanksgiving Day the Duryea brothers won, making the round trip in ten hours. Their car looked very carriage-like and had, instead of a steering wheel, a "tiller".[4] If anyone told Patrick of this historic event, I can understand his lack of interest.

My "Uncle Jim" was the first to leave the farm for a better life. Contacts with his Chicago cousins (Owen's family) must have been influential. In the City of Chicago Directory of 1898 his name (James H. McMenamin) is listed at the same business address as his cousin, Eugene M. McMenamin. In October, 1902, for the first of his three marriages, my "Uncle Jim" (Patrick's eldest son) married a girl he met at Valparaiso College where he was a graduate of law. The marriage was brief. In 1903 he had left his bride and opened a law office in Tacoma, Washington. On the 31st of March, 1903, he had by a legal decree[5] separated himself from his bride

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[4] The handle or bar for turning a boat's rudder.

[5] Decree #23485, County of Pierce, Tacoma, Washington.

on said grounds "that they have been constantly quarreling and they are so entirely different in temperament" and "that there is no issue of said marriage."

So, Patrick's eldest established himself as an attorney and something of a magnet who would draw his siblings, Michael, Frank and Anne, to the Washington -Oregon area.

That my father, John, was also tempted to follow suit is expressed in his own words in a letter written in 1909 from Tacoma to my mother (whom he had yet to marry), saying: "Everybody is trying to influence me to come out and start in business here, so don't be surprised if Mrs. John McMenamin would be out here some time in the near future."

But John was evidently not to leave Illinois or the farm his parents now owned. A month later he was writing about his farm home to my mother, saying that she was "the magnet that is ever drawing me nearer to you." And another month later he wrote: "Sold our hogs today; it is great to be a farmer at the price they are paying for pork . . . I heard they are going to close the creamery depot the first of the year (January 1, 1910) so I told Pa yesterday I didn't care to take chances on keeping so many cows and that it would be best to sell some. He seemed to agree with me and if he does we will sell some 30 to 40 head. That will leave 20 or 25 for me to keep."

In late January of the New Year, 1910, John was writing about his parents' plan to build their retirement home, which was to be built nearby on the first 120 acres purchased. "One of the architects from DeKalb just ate dinner with us; he is looking after the contract for building the house."

Patrick did have the new house built. He and his ailing wife moved into it in 1911 before John was married in August. If Patrick surmised he was facing retirement years with less stress and challenges than his earlier family years had been he was in for a succession of surprises.

He and his wife had moved into their newly built home less than two years when she died of diabetes; and the three sons who had remained with him were

giving him growing concern. Eugene, the youngest, was but 12. Charles, who had been a problem adolescent and chose not to attend the local high school, was 21 and incommunicado when his mother died. John, recently married, who had chosen to remain home and work the large 360-acre farm, was by August 1914 in a sanitorium at Hinsdale, Illinois.

Did Patrick ever wonder at the successful lives of his three elder sons who had left him early in the family years? Their growing careers were an obvious contrast to the sad outcomes developing for those sons who remained with him.

Considering what he himself had accomplished without any education, maybe he felt he should have enabled those who "went West" to attend the local high school. But there was John who never went beyond seventh grade. And Charlie, who chose not to go beyond eighth grade. And there was his youngest, Gene, ever a problem, whom he had sent to Notre Dame Academy, who entered the local high school in 1918 and chose not to graduate.

True, his three daughters had done better with educational opportunities. Mame, his eldest girl, had entered high school at 17. (Her mother and he were not convinced their daughters needed an education.) So "Mame" did not graduate until 1907; but by 1910 she was earning a salary teaching in a nearby rural school. By 1912 his daughter, "Nan", had graduated from a nursing school and two years later "Kate", who had attended a parochial academy, would graduate at 18 from the local public high school; she, too, would be teaching in nearby rural schools.

Before their mother died it seems that Patrick must have realized that his three daughters should have more education than their mother had (who, I was told, usually read the daily newspaper to him). By 1910 Mame was teaching in a nearby rural school. Nan was learning how to become an accredited nurse, and young Kate had been sent to a parochial academy in Iowa. Patrick and Mary had adjusted their thinking to the changing times but not without some opposition at first. (Their eldest girl, "Mame", did not enter the DeKalb Township High School until she was 17 and graduated therefrom in June 1907, when she was 21.) Obviously they were pleased that she was soon a wage earner as a teacher.

Illiteracy certainly does not prevent an intelligent person from indulging in meditational hindsight when one reaches the lonely years of old age. I recall my grandfather's frequent rests and pipes of Prince Albert tobacco as he lay on his couch. It was in a nearby chair that I sat and wrote down some (but not enough) information about his early life. It seems now that he looked pleased that anyone would be interested to ask him to reflect.

It must have been during his later years, during lonely rest periods, that he concluded he should leave a second Will. Kate, his youngest daughter, and her husband had come to live with him and farm the 160 acres which was his retirement home. He decided they had merited the property for keeping him comfortable in his old age. He was completing his 84th year in 1938. He signed a second Will to this effect, leaving the rest of his estate equally distributed to his surviving children.

And so, about a week after his 84th birthday, Patrick McMenamin, retired farmer, "for over 50 years a resident of Afton Township", DeKalb County, Illinois, died. One could not have wished him a more beautiful death. I was there, home for a few days prior to the University of Illinois commencement ceremony at which I was to receive a diploma for the degree of Bachelor of Education. I chose to remain at home and attend the funeral instead of attending the ceremony.

Over a half century later my perspective reflections focus on the positive aspects of Patrick's death scene. He died knowing that his three adult daughters were attending him, as well as "round the clock" nurse, Mary McCormick. He died hearing about twelve of us kneeling about saying our beads - the Sorrowful Mysteries, of course. He died in the same bed he had knelt beside, with bowed head in his hands, when I slept with him, an overnight visitor of six. Above his death bed still hung the framed picture of the Assumption of the Virgin.

And so ended the life of one Patrick McMenamin. Only one of his offspring would know a longer life span; that was Kate, who lived to be 94. Three of his children had died in childhood; four in their sixties; three in their seventies; and one (the eldest) reached eighty.

My grandfather died without the fears of coldness of a nursing home or the problems that come with senility. He lived out his life showing us that "Living is a thing you do now or never." I think he realized the choice was up to each of us.

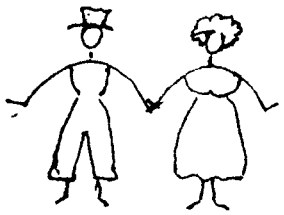
Joseph Patrick McMenamin
April, 1995

PATRICK J. McMENAMIN'S BOYHOOD FAMILY IN IRELAND'S COUNTY TYRONE

1844 – 1864*

HIS FATHER

WAS BORN CIRCA 1815 DIED CIRCA 1890 (HIS DEATH CERTIFICATE UNAVAILABLE.) HAD A BROTHER NED WHO EMIGRATED TO NEW YORK

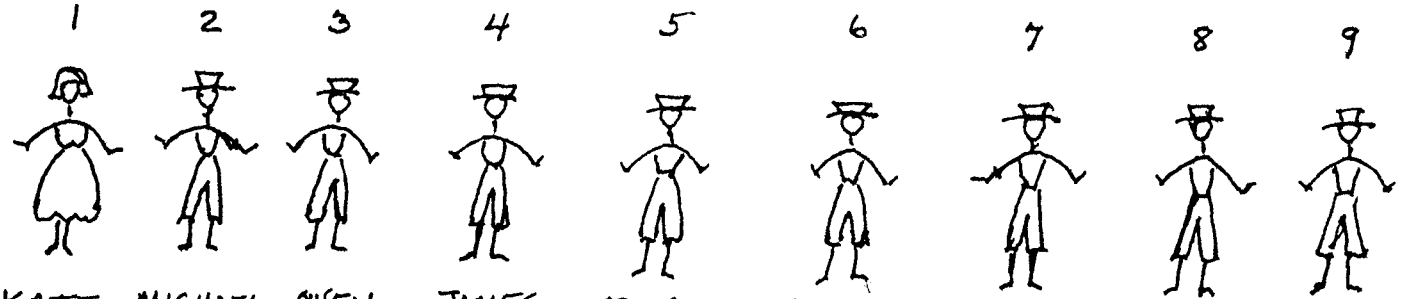


JAMES = ANNE

1843

HIS MOTHER

WAS BORN IN 1815 AND DIED IN 1885. SHE WAS CALLED NANCY, AND WAS A McMENAMIN BEFORE MARRYING JAMES



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
KATE	MICHAEL	OWEN	JAMES	EDWARD	PATRICK	HUGH	HENRY	JOHN
1844	1845	1846	1850	1852	1853	1856	1858	1860

1. The above sibling sequence was given by No. 6 to his godson, Joseph Patrick, in 1936; Patrick, No. 6 died in 1938.
2. Above birth years may be slightly inaccurate for various reasons; for example, Patrick's birth year on his grave stone is 1854, but in his family Bible as 1853; it was not uncommon for the elderly Irish born in the 1800's to forget their birth year; Owen's death certificate cites his birth year as 1846.
3. Sibling No. 1, 4, 5, and 9 never married or emigrated.
4. Siblings No. 2 had 5 offspring; sibling No. 3 had 13; sibling No. 6 had 12; sibling No. 7 had 7; and sibling No. 8 had 6.
5. Owen died in 1890 when his 13th child was nine days old.
6. Two of Henry's sons emigrated to New Zealand: "JAMIE" and "MICK"
7. Sibling 5, called Ned, known locally as a teacher and surveyor lived out his days with his sister, Kate; he coped with a "club foot"

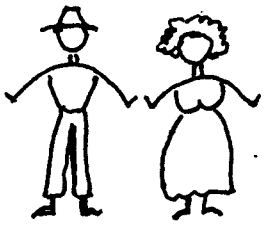
* Date span chosen arbitrarily.

1876 — 1911*

THE PATRICK McMENAMIN FAMILY

OF AFTON TWSHP., DEKALB CO., ILL.

PATRICK = 6th CHILD OF JAMES + ANNA McMENAMIN COUNTY TYRONE, IRELAND, WHO NEVER SAW ANY of THEIR MANY AMERICAN GRANDCHILDREN.



PATRICK = MARY ANNE

MARRIED: 6-8-76
St JOHN'S CHURCH, GREENBUSH, N.Y

MARY ANNE = 5th and YOUNGEST CHILD OF BERNARD McMENAMIN + MARY McHUGH OF THE COUNTY TYRONE, IRELAND. DIED OF DIABETES: HER DIABETIC OFFSPRING SHOW THE LETTER D BENEATH THEIR AGE AT DECEASE

1	2	3	4	5	6
JAMES	JOHN	MICHAEL	EDWARD	PATRICK	MARY
1877	1879	1881	1882	1885	1886
1957	1955	1957	1885	1886	1952
(80)	(76)	(76)	(3)	(1)	(66)
	D				

7	8	9	10	11	12
ANNE	FRANCIS	CHARLES	KATHRYN	JOSEPHINE	EUGENE
1888	1889	1891	1894	1896	1901
1964	1952	1957	1988	1896	1965
(76)	(63)	(66)	(94)	(3MO)	(64)
D					D

NOTE: MARY DIED OF BONE CANCER; MUST HAVE BEEN Rh NEGATIVE; lost 3 MALE INFANTS AT BIRTH.

* 1911 = THE YEAR PATRICK + MARY RETIRED AND MOVED INTO THEIR NEWLY-BUILT HOME IN AFTON TOWNSHIP, DEKALB COUNTY, ILLINOIS