

**MORRISSEY FAMILY HISTORY NEWSLETTER**  
**DESCENDANTS OF PATRICK MORRISSY AND MARY PHELAN**  
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Editor: Stephen Morrissey, [Morrissey@Champlaincollege.qc.ca](mailto:Morrissey@Champlaincollege.qc.ca)  
Webmaster: Jake Morrissey, [Jake.WalshMorrissey@mcgill.ca](mailto:Jake.WalshMorrissey@mcgill.ca)

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*Welcome to the Morrissey Family History Newsletter. This, and future issues of the Newsletter, will contain Morrissey news and updates for the family history website. I hope you find something of interest in the Newsletter. Please email me if you have news you would like included in the Newsletter or if you know someone who would like to be added to the mailing list. The list of newsletter recipients is not shared or sold. Please email me if you would prefer to not receive the newsletter and I will delete your email address from the list.*

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**Notes on a Summer Day in Montreal:**

Due to illness in the family, family history hasn't been of much concern for me this past summer. However, there was one July day when I managed to spend a few hours visiting a few historical sites after leaving the Montreal Chest Institute.

The Montreal Chest Institute is a good place to begin these notes. Located on St. Urbain Street—a street made famous by the novels of Montreal-born author Mordecai Richler—the hospital is just a half block south of Pine Avenue. The history of the Montreal Chest Institute begins with the Anti-Tubercular League of Montreal which was founded in 1903 in response to the many deaths caused by Tuberculosis in this city. Then, in 1908, the Royal Edward Hospital was established, and in 1911 the Laurentian

Hospital began taking patients at its facility in Sainte Agathe des Monts. These institutions predate the establishment of the present-day Montreal Chest Institute, but are associated with the MCI. In 1930, the Royal Edward Institute opened at the current location of the Montreal Chest Institute. Today, The Montreal Chest Institute is a world-class hospital dealing in pulmonary illnesses; it is affiliated with the Royal Victoria Hospital located on Pine Avenue near University.

As you leave the MCI's front door, there is a cornice stone, originally from another building, that reads "Royal Edward Laurentian Hospital 1952." On an adjoining building, facing St. Urbain Street, is an inscription on one of the hospital's walls: "1931/Royal Edward Institute." Next door to this building, set back, you will find "Jeffrey Burland School" over a side door. A plaque on the wall as you enter the MCI states that Jeffrey Burland is the son of one of the original benefactors of the MCI.

Another reminder of Montreal's history is an inscription over the door of the Meakins Christie Laboratories, which is next door to the MCI, and reads "Montreal Foundling Hospital." On either side of this inscription there are bas-reliefs of baby's faces, wings behind the babies suggest something angelic.

It is a ten minute drive from the Montreal Chest Institute to St. Michael's Church in Mile End. I have written about this church and Father Luke Callaghan in previous newsletters, but I don't think I ever really appreciated either the church or Father Luke as much as I did as on this occasion. As in a previous visit, the church was open to the public during the day. Inside the church, there was only a student guide, an older man washing the floors, and myself. I sat in one of the pews close to the altar and thought about Father Luke; his great accomplishment was certainly building and running this church. St Michael's has a seating capacity for 1400 people and when additional seating had to be used, folding chairs were placed in the center aisle. St. Michael's was once the largest English-speaking parish in the province of Quebec with 1,809 families attending the church and close to 15,000 parishoners.

Father Luke Callaghan was a unique man; indeed, he was a visionary. He helped raise the money to build St. Michael's, he was instrumental in the choice of architecture for the church, as well as the choice of stained glass windows and interior decorations. Looking at the paintings by Guido Nincheri that decorate the interior of St. Michael's, you will see some of the most interesting church art in Quebec. There is also the marble facing on the walls, and a painting on the interior of the church dome of St. Michael the Archangel. It seems no expense was spared in the building and interior decoration of this incredible church!

I used to think that St. Michael's was in some ways a folly of Father Luke's, as the church is a copy of Hagia Sophia (Greek for Holy Wisdom) in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), Turkey. However, it isn't unusual to copy famous churches on a reduced scale. For instance, Mary, Queen of the World Cathedral, located on Boulevard-René Lévesque (formerly Dorchester Boulevard) near the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, is a smaller version of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

Hagia Sofia began as a church in Constantinople; it was rededicated in 537 AD and was (and probably still is) one of the largest churches in the world. In 1453 Constantinople and Hagia Sofia fell into the hands of Muslim jihadists. Constantinople became Istanbul and Hagia Sofia became a mosque. In 1935, Kemal Ataturk, the

reformer of modern-day secular Turkey, converted Hagia Sofia into a museum. Recently Pope Benedict XVI visited Istanbul and Hagia Sophia and the building still resonates with historical and spiritual importance.

There must be a “story” as to why Father Luke decided to build St. Michael’s church in a Greek Orthodox design. There is really no other church in Quebec like St. Michael’s with its turret just to the right and behind the poured concrete dome. The student guide informed me that the turret, which is 160 feet high, was originally the church’s bell tower but this use had to be abandoned as they were afraid the turret might collapse. The copper dome outside has also recently been cleaned, so it now has a shiny, almost golden appearance when reflecting the bright summer sun.

Inside of the church, on the inside of the dome, as one stands and looks up, there is a painting of Michael the Archangel, large wings behind him, standing on the dragon that he has just slain. The painting is magnificent, set in a circle in the dome, then there are two outer circles: the first outer circle seems to contain many faces whose significance is not apparent. Then, after some patterned decoration, there is a third circle of angels each with a distinct personality. Also, a repeated pattern of decoration is found throughout the church, the pattern is a painting of a dragon with a sword thrust through it, no doubt the work of St. Michael. The art is original and inspired and there are many other delightful embellishments throughout the church.

Additionally, there are two very large half rosette stained glass windows facing each other on the east and west sides of the church. There is a kind of shamrock design to the eight outer windows, then nine large windows are set between these, and a final shamrock at the bottom, all in a huge semi-circle. The same window design is found on either side of the church, it is non-representational, and almost *art nouveau* in appearance. A traditional stained glass window would have been out of place in the church.

If you stand at the front of the church, at the altar, you can look across the whole expanse of the church and pews, to the second floor balcony where the organist would sit, and more pews, and then a large round stained glass window of eight shamrock patterns circling a center design. When the sunlight enters the church these windows are a veritable glowing fountain of light. It is unfortunate that the church itself, perhaps because of its size and that the windows are set so high on the walls, is in relative darkness most of the time, and this gives it a rather gloomy feeling. The altar is unfortunately also in darkness because of the absence of natural lighting, but I assume there is auxiliary lighting that can illuminate the entire church.

Again, as you stand at the altar and look across the church, seeing the balcony and the main floor, there is a painted decoration on the wall between the floors, of a repeated pattern of a dragon impaled by a sword. The sword, of course, also suggests a cross and the dragon or serpent reminds one of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, symbolic of man’s fallen state. The interior condition of the church, the painted walls and ceiling, is still very good, suggesting that the art may be frescoes, or alternatively that there has been little water or other damage over the years. The dimensions for size of the windows is suggested by the size of the dome: the half dome measures 52 feet in diameter, the full dome 75 feet in diameter, with 24 windows.

On the main floor, at the entrance to the church, there are three doors, with a glass semi-circle of shamrocks over each door, almost like transoms. If you stand just inside of

the church entrance and look upwards at the ceiling, you will see written in Latin some names, among them “Pope Benedicto XV”, “Archbishop Paulo Bruchesi”, and “Luca Callaghan.” Other names can also be found in the other groupings of names on the ceiling.

Father Luke Callaghan was a great administrator, a pastor who guided his many parishoners and constructed and then ran St. Michael’s for twenty-one years, from 1910 to 1931. I am not personally convinced that copying Hagia Sofia was the greatest idea, but it was certainly an original idea. Sitting in St. Michael’s that July day, I had a growing admiration for Father Luke. His sights were set on greatness, and he accomplished a great feat in building St. Michael’s Church. He was a scholar, had earned a Ph.D. in Rome, and had an important posting at the Archbishop’s Palace in Montreal on LaGauchetiere Street. He is a man who accomplished much because of his intelligence, his commitment to hard work, his sense of responsibility to his congregation and the Church. Not as colourful as his older brother, Father Martin Callaghan, he was nevertheless a man of great substance and determination.

The next stop was another ten minute drive, it was to Mount Royal Cemetery and the adjacent Notre Dame des Neiges Cemetery. As I often do when alone and passing near Mount Royal Cemetery, I visited my father’s grave. Since our family has lived in Montreal since the early 1840s it is possible, in a matter of an hour, to visit the graves of ancestors in both cemeteries; among them are Laurence Morrissey (my great great grandfather), Thomas Morrissey (my great grandfather), Martin Morrissey (my grandfather), and Edgar Morrissey (my father). Also, all the grandmothers are buried here (respectively Johannah Meany, Mary Callaghan, and Edith Sweeney), also maternal grandparents and numerous aunts and uncles (Uncle Alex and Auntie Ivie, Auntie Mable, Uncle Frank, Uncle Bill, and others, Callaghans, Tanseys, Sweeneys, and more!).

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### **Notes on “The Daily Witness” issue of 14 April 1906**

*The Daily Witness, a Montreal newspaper that published between 1860 and 1913, has an article in its 14 April 1906 edition on the July 1852 fire that devastated Montreal. Beside me, as I write this, is the original one hundred year old 14 April 1906 front page from The Daily Witness, folded in four, the paper yellow and crumbling; it was at my grandmother's and then at my mother's, in the dining room sideboard, for as long as I can remember. It seems to me that I heard that a relative worked for this newspaper, perhaps Elizabeth Ryan (“Aunt Lib”). The newspaper had a reputation of supporting equal voting rights for women and may have hired women writers.*

### **The Great Fire of 1852**

An event that may have had a profound effect on the Morrissey family, and anyone else living within close proximity of the fire, is the Great Fire of 1852. At that time Laurence and Johannah and their six children were living at 9 St. Charles Borromée; they moved to 51 St. Charles Borromée in 1853. Some time after 1921 St. Charles

Borromée (which began at Pine Avenue and ended at Craig Street; Craig is now called St. Antoine Street) was renamed Clarke Street, and is one street west of Boulevard-St-Laurent (what English-speakers still call "The Main" or St. Laurence Boulevard). Laurence's home at 9 St. Charles Borromée would have been in sight of the Great Fire. Perhaps damage from the fire led them to move further north to 51 St. Charles Borromée, outside of the reach of damage caused by fire.

The Daily Witness article begins by saying, "There are few among the citizens of Montreal who remember the great fire which devastated the city in July, 1852." However, this was not just one fire, but many fires that occurred during that month. The result of the fire was "a thorough reorganization of the Fire Brigade, and in the passing of a by-law prohibiting the erection of wooden houses within city limits." Often, visitors to Montreal have commented to me that all the buildings here are brick construction, and this is the reason for that. The article continues,

The fire broke out at the corner of St. Laurence and St. Catherine streets, and swept a pathway right through to St. Denis street. By five o'clock in the afternoon it seemed to have burned itself out, but it recommenced at nightfall in Dalhousie Square, and during the night all the houses between LaGauchetiere Street and the river, and from Dalhousie Square to the Papineau Road, were destroyed.

The fire burned for several days, and those who lost their homes were taken in by other citizens. Mayor John Young opened the immigrant sheds at Point St. Charles "to all who chose to avail of them." I assume these were the same sheds that housed Irish typhoid victims in 1848. By the end, "the fire (had) destroyed one-fourth of the city, rendering homeless a population of from 8,000 to 10,000. It was fortunate that at that time there were quite a number of empty houses in other parts of the city..."

### **Thomas D'Arcy McGee**

On the reverse of the page discussing the fire of 1852 is an article from the Daily Witness records for 1886. Workers in Ottawa had unearthed a memorial slab placed where Thomas D'Arcy McGee had been assassinated by a gun shot through the back of the head. The memorial reads, "Here fell, on the 9th of April to assassins—Thomas D'Arcy McGee."

McGee, born on 13 April 1825 in County Louth, Ireland, moved to Montreal in 1857. He was a newspaper editor and writer, poet, composer, and a Member of Parliament for St. Anne's Ward which included Griffintown. McGee both helped to draft the Canadian constitution and was one of the Fathers of Canadian Confederation. He was first elected to the Canadian legislature in 1858; however, by 1862 he was made president of the Council and in 1864 he was Minister of Agriculture.

McGee began his political career as an Irish nationalist, but after moving to Montreal, he renounced using violence to secure Ireland's independence. This put him at odds with his former colleagues in the Fenian Brotherhood who had the intention of invading Canada from the United States, naively thinking this would necessitate the deployment of British troops from Ireland in order to protect Canada. The Fenians thought this tactic would lead to the liberation of Ireland from British occupation.

There were several Fenian invasions of Canada, all of which resulted in failure; for instance, on 9 June 1866 two hundred Fenians were defeated at Pigeon Hill not far from Montreal. On 25 May 1870 Fenians assembled near Malone, New York, but they were repulsed when they crossed the border. In fact, their invasion of Canada was close to where I used to live on Route 138, about six miles south of Huntingdon on the road to Malone. Soldiers would have passed my house at 4359 Route 138. In the long run, the Fenian threat helped push through the British North America Act of 1867, which established the Dominion of Canada. The Fenians' logic saw them conquering Canada and then returning Canada to the British in exchange for Irish independence.

Thomas D'Arcy McGee was assassinated by Patrick James Whelan, a Fenian sympathizer from Montreal, who felt that McGee had betrayed the cause for Irish independence. After a late night session in Parliament, McGee was shot through the head, from behind. It is quite moving to read in Hansard, the parliamentary record, McGee's last speech in the House of Commons on the evening of April 7, 1868 and then, turning the page, finding Prime Minister John A. MacDonald's text eulogizing McGee in Parliament the next morning.

McGee's position was that Irish immigrants to Canada had found greater prosperity and assumed greater political authority here than they had in the United States, that Irish had more freedom in Canada than in Ireland, and that the Irish community should respect this freedom by not importing from the United Kingdom or the United States violent politics that have no place in Canada. Canada, for McGee, was an example of ethnic tolerance, as it still is today. McGee wrote, "The British flag does fly here, but it casts no shadow." In a speech given in Quebec City in 1862, McGee said, "We Irishmen, Protestant and Catholic, born and bred in a land of religious controversy, should never forget that we now live and act in a land of the fullest religious and civil liberty. All we have to do is each for himself to keep down dissensions which can only weaken, impoverish and keep back the country."

McGee's state funeral, held on 13 April 1868, was one of the largest events ever held at St. Patrick's Church in Montreal. McGee's mausoleum, newly restored in 2000, is located at Notre Dame des Neiges Cemetery. A plaque on the door reads, "In Memory of Thomas D'Arcy McGee, The Most Eloquent Voice of The Fathers of Confederation." He was a great Canadian patriot and he is still the dominant Irish Catholic figure in Canadian history. In a poem, "Home-Sick Stanzas," McGee writes,

Where'er I turned, some emblem still  
    Roused consciousness upon my track;  
Some hill was like an Irish hill,  
    Some wild bird's whistle called me back;  
A sea-bound ship bore off my peace,  
    Between its white, cold wings of woe;  
Oh, if I had but wings like these,  
    Where my peace went, I too would go.

Patrick James Whelan was arrested for murdering McGee. His was the last public hanging in Canada, on 11 February 1869. While he admitted that he was present when McGee was assassinated, he always denied that he killed McGee and, indeed, there are

some who still question his guilt. In recent years, there have been books, plays, poetry and radio programmes about D'Arcy McGee. There is even a play about Patrick James Whelan. If Whelan did not himself assassinate McGee, he was, by his own confession, complicit in the conspiracy to kill McGee; even assuming that Whelan had co-conspirators, it is doubtful that we will ever know more about McGee's assassination than we know today.

Mary Teresa Caffrey was born in Dublin and married Thomas D'Arcy McGee in 1847. They had five children, but only two survived to adulthood. Mrs. McGee was promised a pension after her husband's death, but it was not immediately forthcoming. She was apparently long-suffering but much loved by her husband who wrote poems dedicated to her. She died, while praying, on 17 January 1871, at only forty-six years of age.

The last time I visited Ottawa I walked the grounds of Parliament Hill. Behind the Library of Parliament is a statue of Thomas D'Arcy McGee. I passed Frank McKenna, the former premier of New Brunswick, as I walked along Sparks Street where I noticed The D'Arcy McGee Pub on the corner of Sparks and Elgin and enjoyed an excellent and inexpensive lunch while there; I was directed by a waitress a half block west from the pub to the Thomas D'Arcy McGee Building, which belongs to the Federal government. This building is located on the site of the rooming house where McGee lived, and outside of which he was assassinated on 7 April 1868. Just up the street you can see Parliament Hill.

Six months previous to McGee's funeral, Thomas Morrissey and Mary Callaghan were married at St. Patrick's Church. Today, McGee's pew is marked by a maple leaf flag; over the Christmas holidays one year my wife and I attended a concert at St. Patrick's and, by coincidence, sat next to D'Arcy McGee's pew.

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### **Notes on The Irish Famine of 1847**

Just east of where St. Anne's Church was constructed in Griffintown in the 1870s, at the corner of Mountain (formally McCord) and Wellington is "Grey Nun near Wellington" where Laurence Morrissy, his wife Johannah Meany and their family settled around 1843. A few years after Laurence and Johannah's arrival in Montreal there was the Great Famine in Ireland, when the potato crop failed due to blight.

While other crops were grown in Ireland, it is common knowledge that the potato was the main diet of the Irish peasantry. According to Thomas Gallagher, in *Paddy's Lament, Ireland 1846-1847*, a family of five people would consume an astounding 280 pounds of potatoes in one week. Gallagher writes, "Since three in the family would have been children, the father must have eaten twelve to fourteen pounds a day—more than enough, if shortly after they were cooked he ate them, skin and all, with some milk and an egg or two a day, to supply him with the necessary nutrients to be energetic, active, and healthy."

The numbers of the dead from starvation are staggering, between 500,000 and two million in Ireland. Some who survived starvation and arrived by ship in Canada in a weakened condition were then susceptible to typhus fever. According to conservative official numbers 3,452 Irish died in quarantine at Grosse Ile, near Quebec City; 5,293

people died on ships coming to Quebec or while in quarantine on board ship near Grosse Ile; 1,041 died in the Marine Hospital in Quebec City; 3,249 died in Lachine, Quebec, St. John, New Brunswick and in Upper Canada; and 3,579 died in "fever sheds" in Point St. Charles in Montreal.

Grosse Ile is an island near Quebec City, in the St. Laurence River, that was used for many years as a quarantine station for immigrants to Canada. It is now a national park and memorial for the Irish who died there, or on board ship sailing to Canada, attempting to escape the famine in Ireland. Susanna Moodie, in her autobiography *Roughing it in the Bush*, describes Irish immigrants arriving at Grosse Ile in August 1832 during an earlier cholera epidemic. She writes,

It was four o'clock when we landed on the rocks, which the rays of an intensely scorching sun had rendered so hot that I could scarcely place my foot upon them. How the people without shoes bore it I cannot imagine. Never shall I forget the extraordinary spectacle that met our sight the moment we passed the low range of bushes which formed a screen in front of the river. A crowd of Irish emigrants had landed during the present and former day and all this motley crew--men, women, and children, who were not confined by sickness to the sheds (which greatly resembled cattle-pens--were employed in washing clothes or spreading them out on the rocks and bushes to dry.

...The confusion of Babel was among them. All talkers and no hearers--each shouting and yelling in his or her uncouth dialect and all accompanying their vociferations with violent and extraordinary gestures, quite incomprehensible to the uninitiated. We were literally stunned by the strife of tongues. I shrank, with feelings almost akin to fear, from the hard-featured, sunburnt women as they elbowed rudely past me.

Moodie continues like this for several more pages, describing the Irish immigrants as barely human, as savages whose presence sullied "the purity of the air and water with contaminating sight and sounds!"

In 1847, Irish passengers disembarked from ships at Common Street in present day Old Montreal. Symptoms of typhus fever soon appeared and authorities ordered ships to dock nearby at Windmill Point. Common Street runs parallel to Wellington, along the St. Laurence River, and Windmill Point is just south of Normand Street, one street east of Grey Nun. The height of the epidemic in Montreal was the summer of 1847 with twenty-one sheds having been built to house the sick and dying. Some of those who nursed the sick also succumbed to typhoid fever; these include Montreal's Mayor Easton, and members of the Catholic and Anglican clergy. The dead were hastily buried at the Old Immigrants' Cemetery, which is located at the foot of Bridge Street on the east side as one approaches the Victoria Bridge from Montreal.

Marking this mass gravesite is the Black Stone, a monument to the Irish dead. This stone and plaque were erected in 1859 by Irish workers who were constructing the Victoria Bridge, after finding the remains of typhus victims who had been buried in a mass grave. If you visit there today you will find the Black Stone monument; however, just a few dozen feet east of this is the actual site of the cemetery, which is now a parking lot. On the last Sunday of every May, there is a march from St. Gabriel's Church in Point

Saint Charles to the Black Stone, followed by a solemn ceremony remembering the dead of so long ago. I have joined this march on several occasions and been deeply touched by the it.

I mention the Famine and the victims of typhoid fever because it is a pivotal and very important event in Ireland's and Montreal's history, but also because of the close proximity of Laurence Morrissey and his family, and other Irish immigrants living in Montreal's Griffintown neighbourhood, to the fever sheds. Fever sheds were hastily constructed barrack-like buildings where the newly arrived immigrants, stricken with typhoid fever, were hospitalized until they either died or recovered from their illness. This is a whole chapter in Canadian history that deserves greater attention, not only regarding the immigrants, but also the heroic action of those who cared for them. No wonder the Irish who came to Canada wanted to assimilate into the Canadian population, for Canada was a country of freedom and respect for them.

As I have written elsewhere, at Notre Dame des Neiges Cemetery there is a gravestone that reads, "Patrick Morrissey and his wife Margaret Slattery and Family" and below this "Last Survivor Died March 21, 1935". I don't know if these people are related to our branch of the Morrissey family, but "Last Survivor" strongly suggests it is the Famine that is being referred to. This is extraordinary because the psychology of many victims has been to avoid the past and to concentrate solely on the present and future. As far as I know, this gravestone and the Black Stone monument, and the annual march to the Black Stone, are the only public expressions in Montreal acknowledging the terrible experience of the Irish of the past. If we don't keep alive our history, no one else will.

There are no lists that I know of identifying those who died in the fever sheds in Point St. Charles, or the names of the people buried at the Old Immigrants' Cemetery. But two "Morrisseys" are listed in *Repertoire des Deces de 1847 a la Grosse-Ile et en mer* (1997) as having died either quarantined on board ship at Grosse Ile, near Quebec City, or while still at sea coming to Quebec. They are Ellen Morrissey, age one year, aboard the Alert which arrived at Quebec from Waterford on 15 July 1847, and William Morrissey, age 21, from Limerick, aboard the Vanilia which arrived on 11 July 1847. However, Marianna O'Gallagher's *Grosse Ile, Gateway to Canada 1832-1937* coincidentally contains a facsimile of the same pages purportedly transcribed in *Repertoire des Deces de 1847 a la Grosse-Ile et en mer*. The original document of the 1847 "Report of Vessels Boarded at the Quarantine Station, Grosse Isle", mentions an Ellen Morrissy, but age ten, who arrived there on the Penelope, from Youghal, Ireland, and was admitted to hospital on 22 May 1847. She died of typhus fever on 6 July 1847 and her possessions were "taken by her niece." In this same document there is no mention of William Morrissey.

At this same time in Ireland people were being evicted from their homes. Due to starvation some of them were driven to crime, as was Daniel Morrissey, age 31, whose crime was "assaulting police escorting flour and robbery." His trial was held in Clonmel, where a famous courthouse was erected in 1800, on 21 July 1846, not far from where Patrick Morrissy and Mary Phelan lived up to the late 1830s. Daniel Morrissey's sentence was "transportation [to Australia] for seven years". In *Flight From Famine*, Donald MacKay writes, "In Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, troops had to be called in to break up violent demonstrations." Later, MacKay quotes a medical officer writing about inhabitants of Clonmel who were "so paralyzed (from starvation) that they had more the

appearance of ghosts than of living human beings." It is possible that some of our relatives that stayed behind in Ireland were victims of the famine, but who they were or what their circumstances were we don't know. I mention Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir as they are both near Mullinahone in County Tipperary, where our family may have originated. Indeed, some family members may have come from Carrick-on-Suir.

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Notes:

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**Web Stats:**

There have been over 14,000 unique visitors to [www.MorrisseyFamilyHistory.com](http://www.MorrisseyFamilyHistory.com) since the site went online in 2003.

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I hope you have all had terrific summer vacations and a pleasant fall. Please email me any news you would like included in the next newsletter, or family history that you'd like on [www.Morrisseyfamilyhistory.com](http://www.Morrisseyfamilyhistory.com) and eventually it will make its way online.

Stephen Morrissey  
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