

the Connelly Family

"Another big problem was the lack of good drinking water. Many ships ran out of water long before reaching North America, making life especially miserable for fevered passengers suffering from burning thirsts. Some unscrupulous captains profited by selling large amounts of alcohol to the passengers, resulting in "totally depraved and corrupted" behavior among them."⁵

The Connelly family made it safely, if not pleasantly, to the shores of America, arriving at the port of New York in May of 1847.⁶

The first few years after their arrival they spent in East Greenwich, Coventry, and Centerville, Rhode Island. Like Martin Cain, and many other Irish immigrants, they were probably working in the mills and factories there. The large Irish population would have made it a very comforting stopping place. It would have also made for a quick way to earn money which was then saved up to go west and buy land.

It was about 1849, shortly after Wisconsin became a state, when the influx of white settlers was becoming heavy, that Dennis and two of his sons (Michael and James) headed out to Stoney Brook near Stanton Mills (later called Chilton), in Calumet County Wisconsin. They were probably part of a number of industrious Irishmen who had been employed in building the Sheboygan and Fond du Lac plank road and who later became residents of Chilton increasing its claims to be called a village. Many Irish families worked on this road, saving money which they invested in land.⁷

The possibility of purchasing land at a low cost combined with the idea of freedom and the opportunity for advancement attracted many new settlers into the primitive forest.⁸ After this a steady stream of Irish families poured in.

First Generation

1. Dennis CONNELLY the grandson of Thomas Connelly of County Ulster, Ireland (a census taken there in 1740 states that Thomas was a cottier with 4 children under 14, 2 over 14 and a papist), was born on Jun 29, 1793 in Lissonuffy, County Roscommon, Ireland.^{9,10} The area he grew up in boasted "...magnificent preserved forest land with abundant wildlife."¹¹

Dennis and his future wife Winifred NOLAN (born between 1797 and 1799 also in Lissonuffy)¹² probably grew up together. She is likely the daughter of Patrick Nolan of Coggalstack in the Parish of Lissonuffy as such a gentleman appears in the index to Griffith's Valuation of Ireland 1848-1864. There is also a Robert in the same index living in Curry, however, Dennis and Winifred did not name any of their sons Robert but did name the eldest Patrick.¹³

They married about 1822, and had at least 7 children. All of whom were born in Ireland before the famine that instigated their move to America in 1847. There are records in Strokestown of only three of their children's baptisms:¹⁵ Brigid, on January 21, 1833, Elizabeth, on June 4, 1834 and James, on September 16, 1836. At this time the family was living in Ballinafad, which was just a short distance south of Strokestown. They were renting land from the Mahon Estate and Dennis is recorded as being in the Ballinafad Tithe Applotments Books in 1824. The Composition Act of 1823 resulted in a valuation of the entire county, parish by parish to determine what was to be paid by each landowner. Denis Connelly is listed as a tenant in Ballinafad in the Civil Parish of Cloonfinlugh."¹⁶

According to the 1850 Federal census in Wisconsin,¹⁷ Dennis' entry indicates that his occupation is that of tailor. It is possible that his having a trade made it easier for his family to cope with the famine in Ireland. And after the Connellys arrived in America, it might have also made it easier to find work in Rhode Island. Dennis only stayed in Rhode Island for a short time though, possibly only a year or two. Then, about 1848/49, Dennis and two sons (Michael and James) headed out to Stoney Brook in Calumet County, Wisconsin. He eventually purchased land and started preparing a home for Winifred so she could join him. In the meantime Dennis had applied for his first papers (to become a citizen) December 28, 1849

What's in a name

Most people spell the name Connelly. Occasionally in research you will run across the spelling Connolly and those people seem not to be related at all. Another acceptable spelling of the name was Conly...So apparently our ancestors were rather casual about the spelling of their name. According to the HeritageCenter at Strokestown, County Roscommon, Ireland it should be spelled Coneally and pronounced C'neal'ly. The spelling was changed when the Coneally's emigrated to America.¹⁴

