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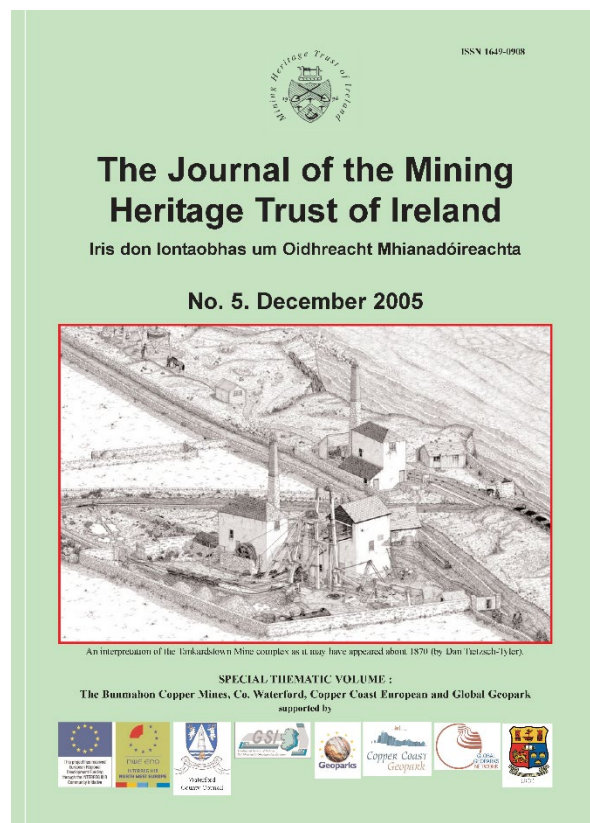
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THE FATES OF THE TANKARDSTOWN MINERS: SOME EXAMPLES

by Des Cowman

Abstract: As Tankardstown was developed in the early 1850s there is evidence that famine and pre-famine emigration continued regardless of employment opportunities. Economic factors greatly influenced accelerating departure rates through the 1860s and 1870s. The fates of only a tiny proportion of those who left can be sketched without knowing whether they were exceptional or the norm. Finally the fate of a few of those who tried to stay in the area is suggested. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 5, 2005, 47-52.

PRE-1850 EMIGRATION

Random survivals of information indicate a pre-famine pattern of trans-Atlantic migration from the Bunmahon area though not always of the conventional sort. For instance, Michael Hogan of Bunmahon arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1827, was in Boston twelve years later where he left his wife and children. The last they hear from him was that he was in Ontario in 1843. William McGrath left Kill for Quebec in 1826 from which he moved to Ohio and John White, a local tailor was in Toronto by 1834. Perhaps more typical was Michael Blake of Bunmahon who arrived in the copper-fields of Keweenaw, Michigan, in 1840 where he worked under a "Captain Vail" (probably *Veale*, indicating connection with a local earlier mining emigrant). (Boston College web-site). Boston may have been a recruiting ground for such immigrants (Mulligan 2001). Timothy Fling (Flynn) from Kill was there in 1841.

The potato crop was still healthy when Phillip McGrath left for California in June 1845. Fifteen years later his nephew, Thomas (McGrath) tried to contact him from Bunmahon to give him "good news" and that he should contact the local clergy which suggests some rudimentary system of communication linked right across America. If so, it did not work for Margaret Power (nee Terry) who arrived with her husband John in 1847 and then moved to Montreal where John was drowned. Her brother William in Massachusetts could not find her in 1849. Patrick Murphy headed for Michigan during the famine also where he mined under a Captain Wirney, but his brother William did not know where to find him in 1848 while he stayed with one John Power in Pennsylvania.

Likewise, a Patrick Power left Kill in 1848 on the *Lawrence Forristal* from Waterford but when his brother James went out to join him, Patrick still could not be located by 1855. Thomas Power arrived in Boston in 1849 and stayed with probably another Bunmahon emigrant there, Nicholas Fleming. When his wife Catherine (nee Gough) got the money to follow him in 1850, she could not find him. Likewise, another Gough, Margaret, by 1854 was looking for her daughter Margaret who had married a local Casey in 1846 and they were in Pennsylvania in 1849. (Boston College web-site)

These suggest a pattern of trans-Atlantic migration from the Bunmahon area that continued after the famine. The fear of renewed potato blight may have been a factor and indeed such was reported around Bunmahon in 1852 (Doudney 1852) While there was only one recorded instance of assisted emigration by

the local workhouse guardians in Dungarvan during the famine the acceleration of such assistance over the following decades presumably represents an acceptance by many locals that there was where the future lay (Fraher *et al.*, c. 1998).

CONTINUING MIGRATION IN THE 1850S

Almost no detail survives about these famine and post-famine migrants except for one who went to Australia. William Barkla was over forty when he left St. Agnes for Bunmahon about 1837 along with his wife and at least four children aged eleven to one year. At least four more children were born during his stay here. In 1852, aged 57, he made the dramatic decision to move his family to Australia. He spent the rest of his life at Kapunda mine in south Australia and at least one child was born there. His wife died in 1863 and William in 1874. From his photograph he looks quite an exceptional person (Pers. Comm. 1). Thomas Mansfil (Mansfield?) through Quebec had gone to Forest Hill mine, Keweenaw by June 1854 with some of his children, presumably to be joined by his wife, Nancy. However, she could not find them. Similarly, John Desmond from Bunmahon went to the Michigan mines via New York in 1854 but his wife, Nancy, following him out could not find him by the end of 1856. Eileen Reilly (nee Hurley, parents James and Catherine) was in Ontario by 1857 but when her sister went out to join her, she could not be located. A clerical line of communication is again suggested by the fact that David Whelan's family tried to contact him in St. Louis through Fr. William O'Connor in Ohio.

These are but the bones of heartbreak and tragedy for local families. John and Bridget Whelan of Ballinarraid, for instance, had at least three children - Ellen (married to a McCarthy) and Johanna (to a "Baldin" - Baldwin?). The latter couple arrived in Pennsylvania in 1855 but lost contact and her brother James had not found her from his base in Ohio by 1863. Such obviously only represent a fraction of the demoralised tide that left the Bunmahon area in the uncertain decade after the famine. From 1860 on, other forces were at work. (Boston College web-site)



Figure 1. William Barkla in Australia.

THE EXODUS OF THE 1860S

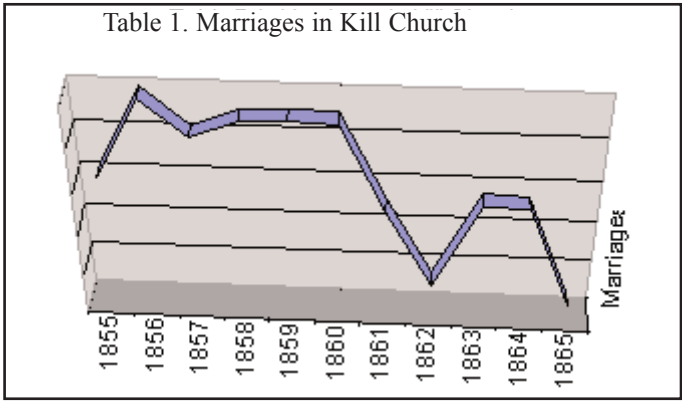
The full story of the strike and lockout of 1860 will be told elsewhere (Cowman 2006). It does seem to have lead to a demoralisation, or perhaps victimisation with a quickening of transatlantic migration. This was hastened by a decline in the quality and quantity of the ore from Tankardstown in 1865 with the threat of lay-offs.

The result may have been disillusioned workers departing for the United States leaving their wives behind. The birth register of 1864, for instance, shows five children born in Bunmahon to mining fathers who had gone to America, presumably over the previous nine months (Birth Registers). This must have been only a small fraction of the total, assuming most emigrants were unmarried or did not leave their wives pregnant before departing. The demoralisation implicit in this affected other members of the community also: shoemaker John Hogan left his pregnant wife behind in Bunmahon as did labourer Michael McGrath of Ballylaneen. John Kopp was a watchmaker in Bunmahon and went to America leaving his wife Catherine (nee Nichols) behind with their infant daughter (born 8th September 1865) and year old son (born 24th March 1864). He probably left in the Spring sailing of 1866 as the third child was born that October. Possibly the unknown fathers of the children born to Mary Whelan of Bunmahon and Johanna Murphy in Ballinasissa (both births in April 1864) had similarly departed as single men. (Birth registers).However, for women also America was "El Dorado --- and this longing extended to both rich and poor". Reportedly, any women with skills, were particularly disposed to depart (Emilia's Story).

Another aspect of the demoralisation that followed the lockout is the drop in marriage numbers in the nearest church, Kill, as depicted in Table 1 and, as somebody at the time took the trouble to note (Marriage Registers, Kill) in the five years up to and including 1860, they had averaged 38 per year. In 1861 it dropped to 28 and then to 19, slightly recovering briefly and dropping to 17 in 1865 after which other issues prevailed. If marriage is a gesture of confidence into the future, Table 1 charts its decline.

Of those who left, family tradition records something of a Patrick Linahan who married twenty-four year old Mary Whelan in Kill in 1841. She was one of six children born to Patrick Whelan who had married Margaret Meaney in Stradbally in 1825, both being of farming stock. Four of the six Whelans went to America including Mary and her husband, Patrick, along with their five children (aged between sixteen and two years). Possible they went first to the mines in Michigan in 1868 but they went on to Butte where the family grew up (Pers. comm. 2). This seems to have been one of the happier experiences.

The Flemings were less fortunate. James Fleming was born in 1823, one of five children. His youth coincided with the rapid expansion of the mines and in 1844 he married Mary Power. Their first-born in 1846 was Michael and in due course he too became a miner. About 1868 he married Mary McCarthy and the birth registers record their first child to have been Ellen, (born 1872). However, family tradition suggests that there were four children by then, one of whom Mary Anne was also born



in 1872. As she was the informant's great-great grandmother, this version must be respected. Shortly thereafter the Flemings took their four young children off into the unknown and wound up in Houghton, Michigan. There four more daughters were born between 1876 and 1882. Disaster struck for the entire family when Michael was killed in a mining accident in 1884 with Mary expecting their ninth child. He was born a month later but lived only four days. Mary aged thirty three, was stuck in Michigan with six girls and two boys all under the age of fifteen. However, they gained the sympathy and support of one Thomas Whalen (presumably ex-Bunmahon also) whom Mary in due course married. As the Fleming children grew up, some moved on to avail of the mining opportunities in Butte while others stayed in Michigan (Fleming web-site).

It is possible that the family of Martin Dee (b. 1801) were not miners but availed of the trail of mining connections in the States. Just as the mines were starting he married Ellen Power (b. 1805). In due course there were four boys and possible two other children. The four boys must have emigrated relatively early along with a local family called Allen (again not a recorded mining name) and the second eldest child was born in Keweenaw in 1860. The proud parents were Patrick Dee (b. 1829) and Hanora (nee Power) (b. 1840). They had four more children all born in various Michigan mining localities between 1863 and 1874. A certain Americanisation had already taken place by 1863, the baby being named Jefferson. He was the only one of them that is recorded as following the traditional mining train to Butte where he died in a mining accident in 1929 at the age of sixty six, only eight years after his father, Patrick, who died in his ninety fourth year (Dee web page). Patrick's brother William and Ellen his wife also had at least four sons who stayed in Houghton County. They were James R., described as "president" of a chain of shops; Thomas S., a company manager; William H., a wholesale cigar dealer; and John B. "a self-made man" who left school at the age of fourteen. As well as being manager of the Michigan Bell Telephone Company he was an activist in the republican party (Fig. 2). (Pers Comm. 3).

Fleeting glimpses are afforded of the lives of some others. Thomas Kiely married Margaret Quilty, possibly before they left Bunmahon at an unknown date. They took the usual mining route Keweenaw, Michigan in the 1870s and then on to Butte. They reared seven children there. Their grandson, Tom Kiely became a prominent Attorney in Butte. However, the local records there again show local families availing of the established trail to Butte and creating family lines there (Pers. comm. 4).



Figure 2. The successful grand-children of Martin Dee and Ellen Power - James, John and Thomas Dee, c. 1900.

Michael Dooley and his wife Anastasia (nee Purcell) had a boy (John) and a girl (Mary) in 1864 and 1865. Sometime thereafter they left for the mines of Houghton County, Michigan. Possibly they had more children there as family tradition states that some of the family stayed there and others migrated to the copper mines of Butte, Montana. They may have been related to John and Anastasia Keane who emigrated first to the mines of Swansea post 1871 and then to the copper mines of Butte about 1878. John Patrick Kane (the "e" was dropped from the name somewhere en route) became a mine superintendent there. The family did well and four of his children became medical doctors in Butte (Pers. comm. 5). Not all who crossed the Atlantic wound up in the mines. James Holahan was born in the parish of Kill on July 10, 1842, the son of Michael and Johannah (nee Thompson). He stayed in Fall River, Massachusetts and in the process his name had changed to Holleran (Pers. comm. 6).

As has been pointed there was a wave of emigration by married miners in 1864 but there is no such evidence of this happening again until 1873. In a thirteen-month period from May 1873 ten children were born to miners who had gone to America and two to miners in England. This obviously only represented a fraction of the numbers leaving. From Table 2 the cold statistics of migration may be inferred and while the verses above are conventionalised, even romanticised, they do help to put a human face on the wrenches to people's lives. However, once they got there, according to the song, they were welcomed by those who had gone before them:

*"With pick and bore all in our hands, the navvies there will smile,
And we'll welcome one another then, all from Knockmahon mine.*

Many of those who left Tankardstown for the U.S. in the 1860s and 1870s probably made their way to Keweenaw in Michigan, recruited thence by the "Copper Country"'s Boston owners. No specific research has been done on the Waterford component of its vibrant Irish community but their deaths are recorded on gravestones in three local cemeteries. A Richard Dooling (or Dowling) who came from Waterford in 1867 is the sole one noted among the living there (Mulligan 2001).

What caused many of them to abandon the relatively benign mining environment of Keweenaw for the mile deep hell-holes of Butte Montana, can only be speculated on. Perhaps the word went out that this was largely an Irish-run operation, part controlled by Marcus Daly of Cavan. Possibly the fact that their Allihies kin flocked there (these composed 55% of the mainly Irish workforce) lured the ex-Tankardstown miners to this highly dangerous environment with death from accident or disease an everyday risk (Emmons 1990). No specific study has been done of the Waterford component, but family traditions do recall the casual death-rate there.

Farewell to Tankardstown, from the 1870s (Ballad)

*"On the night that we were leaving, with sorrow our hearts did fill,
We took one look at our dear homes from Ballynasissala hill
Saying there they were, Knockmahon mines where I spent many a day,
Now forever I must leave them for to go to Americay"*

*Then at Kilmacthomas station, as the train it did roll in,
We kissed and hugged the loved ones whom we never would see ag'in;
While on board the ship at Queenstown, one thought was in our minds,
God bless our dear sad friends at home and farewell Knockmahon mines.*

History sanitises the agonised decision making and fearful voyages into the unknown and all that is left is a few random facts about a tiny percentage of those who left. One of these was Thomas Cullinan of Tankardstown, born in 1850. His parents apparently foresaw the end of mining there and they left for the USA about 1870. Young Thomas returned in 1875, a wealthy man. With extraordinary prescience he had made his way to Montana (i.e. about 10 years before the discovery of the great copper lode), began prospecting in partnership with others and discovered a rich seam of silver at Basin. Family tradition has it that he wanted to work it but his partners insisted (at gunpoint!) that he sell. However, he made enough money to return, buy first a hotel in Fenor, sell it and buy a farm and in 1880 marry the local schoolteacher, Ellen Lynch (later principal of Bunmahon NS).

They had a family of fifteen children and many of the older ones retraced their father's footsteps and seemingly found themselves in a Waterford mining context in Butte to judge from their marriages. Mary married Patrick Ronayne ex-Tankardstown and Bridget married James Morrissey ex-



Figure 3. Left, Tom and Joe Cullinan in a studio in Butte c.1917.

Figure 4. Right, Patrick Lenihan, born Bunmahon 1850 and right his tombstone in St. Patrick's cemetery, Butte, 1892.



them off mining and even currently two of Bridget's grandson's are mining engineers in Butte. Another sister, Ellen, married an English miner, Claude Courtney, (causing various religious tensions in the family) and they came back in 1905 or '06 in the hope of a re-opening of Tankardstown.

Three other of Thomas and Ellen's sons went to Butte two of whom later returned. One of the younger ones, James, was sent to school in Mount Mellary. When he refused to return there his father threw him out so he ran off to join his older brothers and sisters in Butte. This was about 1910 and he returned from there in 1917, settled down and married. His son, another James (Jim) is the repository of the family tradition and I would like to thank him for imparting it to me.

Some information emerges about two Lenihan (variously spelled) families (apparently unrelated). Peter Lenaghan and Mary (nee Noonan) lived at Rathquage near Bunmahon where their son Patrick was born in 1850. By the mid 1860s he was working for MCI, probably at Tankardstown. Another son John was born in 1859. It is likely that the entire family emigrated when Patrick was in his early 20s. He may by then have married a Miss McGrath. What he did in the ten years or so before he arrived in Butte in 1885 goes unrecorded (Michigan, perhaps).

The fate of the parents goes also unrecorded but Patrick flourished there and became foreman of Modoc Mine. His wife died however and he married a second time a Catherine Doucey of county Cavan origin. Patrick himself, then died aged 42. The following news item appeared in *The Anaconda Standard* on Saturday 12th November 1892.

Walkerville, Nov. 11th - Patrick Lanihan (sic), the foreman in the Madoc mine died today at his residence in West Daly Street from a liver complaint. He was 42 years of age and leaves a wife and four children. Mr Lanihan came to Butte on October 1st 1885 and went to work at the Madoc mine where he was employed steadily up to the time of his death. He was a man of quiet disposition and unassuming nature and was exceedingly popular both with the men employed in the mine and the citizens of Walkerville.

His wife, Catherine, returned with her young family to her parents in Cavan sometime afterwards. Her grandchildren maintained the Cavan connection and only when her great-grandson, Finbarr Mooore arrived in Bunmahon in 1998 as an authority on ogham stones was his Bunmahon ancestry revealed. His father Seamus and aunt Mary Walsh kindly provided these and other details of the Lenihan family.

Stories such as these come only from those who withstood the original rigours and successfully adapted. Such a family were the Lees. Miner James Lee married Catherine Colbert in Kill church in October 1852 and they had seventeen children. Four of them (Fig. 5) went to the United States. Something of Tom's movements can be traced. In 1875 aged nineteen he arrived in Boston, then to Baltimore where he met Theresa Rising, married her but was tempted to try mining at the newly discovered Butte about 1880. A daughter had been born in Baltimore in June 1879. His wife seemingly did not join him there until early 1885, reputedly against her parents' wishes. The next child was born in January 1886.

Thomas went from mining in Butte to farming in other parts of Montana with intermittent mining work. Altogether nine children were born in Montana between 1886 and 1900. Apparently the promised reopening of Tankardstown in 1906 tempted the fifty-year-old Thomas back. The collapse of that enterprise in 1907 left him with no choice but to return to his wife and ten children in Montana. He spent the last years of his life on road construction and died in the same month as his wife in April 1924. Their youngest child, Anastasia (m. H. McAlear) survived until 1991 (Pers. com. 7).

There was also probably a pattern of local emigration after the mines were well closed. A James Morrissey was born on 24th July 1868 the son of miner Michael and Bridget (nee Mulcahy). Assuming he followed the established trail directly to Butte in his early twenties (not stated when he married Bridget Cullinan of Tankardstown), he did well becoming a Mine Inspector there by the age of thirty two. He could then send for his younger (?) brother Nicholas (married later? Johanna McCarthy) giving him a ticket and \$5 in 1900 according to their grand-daughter, Barbara, when she came back to see Bunmahon in June 2003 (Waterford News and Star).

Much more has been chronicled about Bunmahon's most famous son, John Wheatley. The origins of the Wheatleys have not been discovered but it is a name associated with Sussex. John's grandparents were in the area by 1840 living first in



Figure 5. Tom, Mary, Bill and Jim (back) Lee in USA, early 1900s.



Figure 6. John Wheatley, born Bunmahon 1869, MP for Glasgow from 1922, Minister for Housing in first Labour Government 1924, died 1930.

Knockmahon (Survey Field Books) but by 1848 they were in Tankardstown, returning to Knockmahon c.1849/'50 (Valuation Office). Assuming Mary and Thomas to have been their children, by the 1860s they were each married and living in the area. Mary lived in Kilduane with her miner husband, Patrick McNamara (married 1858) (Marriage Registers Kill) They had five children between 1865 and 1877 though there might have been older children as well. Her (younger?) brother, Thomas was also a miner and married Johanna Ryan. They lived in Bunmahon until 1871 when they too moved to Kilduane. Their first baby was John born 19th May 1869, followed by Michael (1871), Thomas (1872) and Mary (1877) (Birth Registers).

The fact that both Thomas and Mary Wheatley were still in Bunmahon in 1877 shows a great reluctance to leave and they were among the last to go. Mary and Patrick McNamara sought alternative mining employment in Wales and wound up in a coalmine in Maesteg (Pers. comm. 8). What drew Thomas to bring his family to Scotland is not clear, but John was drawn out of Knockmahon national school (he was registered there in 1876, his age being noted as six) and wound up at the mines near Breahead in Lanarkshire. John continued his schooling there until the age of fourteen when he joined his father briefly in the mines but then found other more congenial employment. He also started taking night classes. Out of that he obtained a job as a reporter and became increasingly attracted to socialism. By 1907 he had set up a printing works in Glasgow and among the pamphlets he produced were his own *How the Miners are Robbed* (1907) and *Miners, Mines and Misery* (1909) as well as ones advocating social housing. (Schoolnet website).

He was politically active in Glasgow, particularly during the First World War and was elected Labour MP for the city in 1922. When the first Labour Government was formed in 1924 he was appointed Minister for Health. His Housing Act was one of the only successes of that short-lived (eleven months) Government. He remained an MP up to his sudden death a week before the sixty-first anniversary of his birth in Bunmahon. His legacy is to have a college named after him in Glasgow (Wheatley College web-site).

THOSE WHO STAYED BEHIND

With Tankardstown all but closed by 1878 many miners (twenty of them became fathers 1878-1881) seem had remained in the area but most now defined themselves as "labourers". Two then departed for America and two for England leaving pregnant wives behind them. Many others had young families forcing the fathers to stay on and get whatever casual labour they could. James McCarthy and Ellen Mooney of Knockmahon had no children, apparently, so in late 1880 or early 1881 James left his wife behind to establish a base in America, possibly not knowing his wife was pregnant. (Birth registers)) We do not know the sequel.

A little is known of another ex-miner who stayed on. In the 1850s James Lee (born 1825) married Catherine Colbert. According to family tradition his father and grandfather had also been miners so presumably he hoped that his two sons, born pre 1864, would in due course follow him down Tankardstown. Fifteen more children were born. All may not have reached adulthood. Four went to the USA and the fifth may have died on her way there. However, parents James and Catherine stayed on, he turning his hand to other ways of making a living including being a grocer for a time. Catherine died in 1891 and he lived on to the age of ninety-one, being buried in Kill in 1916. His elder children would by then have been in their fifties, but he never saw them again once they left, nor his grandchildren (Pers. com. 7).

The workhouse in Kilmacthomas was a last refuge for some. The average number there in 1860 was about ninety persons; by 1871 this had gone up to about 155. While there is no direct evidence that this was due to mine retrenchment, two examples of 1871 suggest it was a factor. Margaret Whelan had married an ex-Allihies miner called Sullivan and he headed back there to look for work about 1870, putting his wife and five children into the workhouse. Once he had established himself there he sent for them, providing £2 towards the journey. The workhouse granted them £2-5/- for clothes as those of the children were "bad". Ellen Keegan from Knockmahon entered the workhouse while her husband went to look for work in America. In 1871 she was granted 30 shillings to leave that institution at the age of 55 and head out into the unknown with the ticket he had sent her. The workhouse books from Kilmacthomas provide

other instances of similar occurrences but without the references to indicate whether they are mine related (Minute Book, Board of Guardians).

Seven other ex-miners died in the workhouse, two from "senile debility", aged 66 and 71 along with five from lung infections. Richard Cooney, born 1854, is an example of the later. In the mid 1870s he married Catherine Kinsella and baby John arrived in 1876. Sometime afterwards it was discovered that Richard had consumption and apparently had no option but to enter the Workhouse where he died on 16th May 1883. He was only 29. Glimpses such as this are afforded into only a fraction of such tragedies and the fates of the families go unrecorded (Death registers).

Two miners' wives also died there. Mary Ann Mara (or Meara) was born in 1845 and married James Reilly in the early to mid 1860s and between 1866 and 1871 three children were born to them. James then left to seek a living for the family in America, possibly not knowing that Mary Ann was expecting again, baby Joanna being born in October 1873 when he was away. He must have decided against bringing four children under nine to the States and returned to Ballynasissala where in due course John was born in November 1876. How they survived the next fifteen years is unknown but in late 1891 disaster struck. Mary Ann, now aged 47, was expecting again. Perhaps consumption had already been detected but the Workhouse loomed. Her baby was born there in April 1892 and the mother lasted until 1st August, predeceasing little Jane by eighteen days (BoG Minutes and Death Registers).

Those who stayed witnessed the disintegration of the community. In the 1860s as almost one third of the families departed into the unknown and another third departed left in the 1870s. Half of those who held on into the 1880s were gone by 1891 (PP Census). Those still there in 1892 were thus described

"bent old crones, barefooted and brief of skirt stooping under creels of sea-weed; tall, thin, melancholy-eyed men with fine features and a world of patient endurance on their faces; brown legged and brown eyed little boys abound and they have alas the picturesqueness of extreme poverty"

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Personal Communications

1. Photo and information from Andrea Kalazic of Western Australia. Further research by Diane Hodnett whom I thank for the information.
2. Thanks to their granddaughter, Cathy Whalen of Austell, for this information. However, it is hard to reconcile children's ages with the dates provided.
3. I thank Mary Lou Dee Gahan of California, descendant of William Dee, for this and for sending me Houghton extract from *Men of Michigan* (Michigan 1904), p. 115. This is also on website above from which the phototgraphs of the three Dee brothers are taken.
4. I thank Frank Quinn of Butte for this and much other information. He was president of the local Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in the early 1980s and availed of his contacts to put together a picture of Waterford descendants in Butte. Only Kiely/Quilty could be definitely identified as ex-Bunmahon.
5. Thanks to Nancy O'Neill of Butte for letting me know of her ancestors.
6. I thank James' great great grandson, Tom F Travis for this.
7. I thank Mrs. Breda Colfer, Bunmahon for collating details of her family history and for putting me in contact with her cousin in New York, Mary Butts, who has provided information on the descendants of James and Catherine Lee.
8. Information from Mary and Patrick's great grand-son, Peter Howell of Chapman, Australia.

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