

The Immigration and Children of Dennis Neylon (1829-1891) and Catherine Doherty (1828-1893)

Ireland in the 1840s and 1850s was a place of famine, crop failure and depressing social conditions. The potato crop had failed in 1846 and in the following two years as well. Ireland was overpopulated and owned by foreign landlords. The farmers only had small plots of rented land. With the crop failure came famine and diseases like typhus that caused a deadly fever. Thousands died and thousands more migrated. In many cases immigration was the alternative to famine and death.

These were the conditions of Ireland when Dennis Neylon and his wife, Catherine Doherty Neylon emigrated from Ennis, County Clare to the United States in 1860. They landed at Castle Garden, Castle Isle, New York. They eventually settled at Hardwick, a small farming community in central Massachusetts. A 1963 account of their history by a grandson, Daniel Andrew Neylon, mentions that they went to Palmer first, then to Hardwick. They brought their sons with them. Michael Joseph Neylon was about eighteen at the time of immigration. John Dennis Neylon may have been a little older than Michael. The existence of a third son is disputed. Daniel Neylon's account mentions a son, Dennis Neylon, who after coming to Hardwick, decided to seek his fortune elsewhere and went to California. Dennis and his descendants settled there. Harrison Neylon, grandson of Michael, says his father John never mentioned an uncle named Dennis during his entire lifetime.

In Hardwick, Dennis and his family went to work in the fields near Hardwick for Frazier Paige. The Paige's house was on Poverty Hill. Dennis was 31 and Catherine 32 when they emigrated. Within a few years, with Catherine saving the money they made, they were able to rent a house and barn on Charity Hill. This was an eight-room brick house with a good barn. Dennis and Catherine lived and worked there for awhile. Dennis was known as Grandpa Charity because of the location of his house.

Michael met Johanna Elizabeth Carney shortly after emigration to Hardwick. Johanna Carney had herself emigrated with her mother, Margaret Cayer Carney, her sister Ellen and a brother in 1847 in the first wave of Irish immigrants. Johanna's father had died in the old country. Johanna's brother caught the measles on the voyage and died on board ship and was buried at sea. Such was the suffering of the immigrant families that made their resolve to survive and succeed in America that much stronger. Johanna was five years old when she arrived in Hardwick. She was working for William Mixter in Hardwick when she met Michael. A short time after he arrived, Michael secured work as a teamster in Palmer, driving a team of horses. It could have been associated with a factory delivering supplies or with a business requiring delivery of goods to customers.

Michael had this job when he married Johanna. They got married in Ware since there was no Catholic Church in Gilbertville, the section of Hardwick where the Neylon's lived at the time, 1864. It is not clear whether Michael and his father Dennis stayed in the employ of the Paiges throughout the 1870s and 1880s, but that is what is probable.

The other son, John Neylon, went to Springfield to live. He married Catherine Hogan and raised eight children there. One of his daughters, Elizabeth Catherine, married Ben Pierce. Their son, Dwight Pierce, was a veterinarian on the horse race track circuit and led a rather exciting life.

Dennis and Catherine in their later years moved to Springfield and died there. Dennis died of peritonitis in 1891 according to his death certificate and Catherine died of pneumonia in 1893 according to her death certificate.

Michael was busy during this time raising a family and working as a farmer in Hardwick. Michael and Johanna raised eleven children. Their names and birth years are:

Catherine Anne Neylon (1864-1889)
Margaret Elizabeth Neylon (1866-1961)
John Dennis Neylon (1868-1950)
William James Neylon (1871-1962)
Joseph Neylon (1873-1961)
Daniel Andrew Neylon (1875-1966)
Francis Martin Neylon (1877-1936)
Unknown Child Neylon (1879-1879)
Michael Edward Neylon (1880-1965)
Johanna Isabel Neylon (1882-1961)
Christopher Neylon (1884-1888)

James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

John Dennis, the eldest son, started working in the fields with his father when he was eight years old. Around 1890, Michael and John bought the Dow farm and worked it together. John married Ruth Thresher of Hardwick in 1913, lived in the town, but continued to work at the farm. He also had a cattle and horse trading business. Michael died in 1929. In the early 1930s, John left the farm to Johanna Isabel and worked in town. John moved to Worcester with Ruth, daughter Elizabeth and son Harrison and bought a house in 1941. Harrison lives there now in 1992.

Johanna Isabel, Joseph and Francis Martin worked the farm until the late 1940s, when because of their age and the rigors of dairy farming, they had to sell it. They moved into the town of Hardwick and lived there until they died. The Dow place is still a working dairy farm as of 1992.

Of the eleven children of Michael and Johanna, only John, Daniel and William married. Daniel went to business school in Springfield, married Margaret Mary Flannery, and raised nine children, six of whom survive in 1992.

Daniel Andrew's children were:

Daniel Joseph Neylon (1904-2000)
William Michael Neylon (1905-1975)
Mary Veronica Neylon (1907-2000)
Susan Elizabeth Neylon (1909)
James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973)
Miriam Josephine Neylon (1913-1970)
Katherine Rita Neylon (1915)
Agnes Rosemary Neylon (1917-1999)
Francis Xavier Neylon (1918-1996)

James Christopher Neylon married Carla Wilhelmina Melander in Springfield, in 1936. They had six children, all of whom survive in 2002. James left the family fold in Springfield, packed up his family and took a train to Cleveland in 1947 seeking his fortune in the chemical industry. It is reported that his father Daniel Andrew once remarked that James "had lost his religion" when he went to Harvard.

James, raised, Catholic, was not in later life a church going person. However the family always gave thanks for their thanksgiving dinner with James reciting some unintelligible prayer in Latin. Anyway, Carla and the children gave him the benefit of the doubt that it was in fact a prayer of thanks. Christmas was always celebrated Swedish style with Carla preparing dishes handed down from her Swedish mother.

James and Carla's children are:

Jean Carla Neylon (1936)
Ann Jennifer Neylon Waters (1938)
Lynn Valerie Neylon Gazda (1939)
James Christopher Neylon, Jr. (1942)
Eric Geoffrey Neylon (1947)
Bruce Alan Neylon (1950)

William James Neylon married Catherine Z. Cooney in 1892, settled in Barre, bought a farm and raised seven children:

Gertrude Hazel Neylon (1898-1983)
Catherine A. Neylon (1900-1978)
Mary Louise Neylon (1903)
William James Neylon (1905)
Dennis Vernon Neylon (1908-2000)
John Dennis Neylon (1910-1986)
Michael Edward Neylon (1914-1998)

Michael Edward Neylon, known as Ted, still lives on the farm that his father William bought. This is the place where the Neylon family reunions have been held in recent years.

Some interesting Christmas traditions were passed down by word of mouth from John Dennis Neylon to his son Harrison Leon. Michael and Johanna did not have Christmas trees but instead had a Christmas candle. They would buy the candle at Hitchcock's store in Gilbertville, set it in a jug and place pine boughs around it. They called it the Blessed Candle and would light it on Christmas Eve.

James Christopher Neylon (1911-1973) and Carla Wilhelmina Melander (1910-1994)

On Christmas Day, Catherine would prepare stewed chicken for breakfast, then roast a goose for Christmas dinner. After dinner, with all the meat removed from the goose, Catherine would put a red jacket around the skeleton of the goose and make it look like a little man. Michael would then sing, talk in Gaelic and rock the "little man" back and forth while telling a story.

Of the seven unmarried children of Michael and Johanna, Margaret was the most remarkable. She was very motivated and an adventurer. In order to get a good high school education, she moved to Ware in her teens in the 1880s. She worked cleaning houses to support herself and went to Ware High School. After graduation, she went to a business school in Springfield and eventually started a dry cleaning business, Neylon Cleaners. At that time, 1890s to early 1900s, there was a certain style of dry cleaning called French cleaning. Margaret based her successful business by being a French cleaner. She had the first delivery truck in Springfield. She had a chauffeur who had a grand uniform with leather gloves. He would drive the truck during the day and drive her around at night and at her leisure. She made an excellent living and often took vacation in Atlantic City. In one particular hotel near the shore, the bath was set up to allow cool seawater to wash up into the tub. Margaret would often cool herself in the salt-water bath to beat the heat. Always generous, Margaret helped support her brothers and sister on the farm as well as her brother William's children. Harrison's earliest memory is of Aunt Margaret bringing him a toy at Christmas in the late 1920s. She lived high and fast for a Victorian era woman and is a good example of what a determined, liberated woman could do for herself in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Another son of Michael and Johanna was Michael Edward. He went to California, settled and died there. At the end, he was stone deaf. When Daniel Neylon, at the age of 91 in 1963, wrote about the third son of Dennis, Harrison suggested that perhaps he was thinking of Edward.

Johanna Carney Neylon's mother, Margaret Cayer Carney was a young woman when she emigrated in 1847. Shortly after arriving in Hardwick, she met and married William Daunte. They had five children, Catherine, Julia, Margaret, William and Mary.

All of them married, William (1849-1928), had nine children. One of his great grandsons, Stephen Brewer, is reportedly a Massachusetts State Senator in 1992.

Johanna Carney's sister, Ellen, married Michael Mahan. They had four children:

John Patrick Mahan (1876)
Daniel C. Mahan (1870-1941)
Thomas Mahan
Mary Ellen Mahan (1875-1932)

One of John Patrick Mahan's daughters was Elizabeth. She married George Crombie of Hardwick. Together they managed a turkey farm in Hardwick and raised four children.

This information about the Neylon clan should be talked about and any other memories, recollections or correction of what is stated here should be written down so this record can be updated.

Joyfully submitted by
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Husband of Christine Marie Pratt Consoletti,
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December, 1992

Respectfully transcribed and updated by
James Christopher Neylon, Jr.,
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