



Historically Speaking

With Eastchester Historian
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Annie's Song: Life among the Quarrymen, part 2

Note: This article is co-written by Patrick Buckley

In 1850, a very special woman came to live in the Waverly section of Tuckahoe. Her name was Annie Hyland Adams. A few years before her sojourn to America, Annie had been sent to England to flee the ghastly potato famine that killed a million of her countrymen.

But her story is somewhat different from that of the million or more Irish who would follow her in their trans-Atlantic migration. In England, James Adams from a wealthy Protestant family fell in love and married Annie Hyland. Annie, although we have no pictures of her, must have been very beautiful. Why else would James Adams have allowed his family to disown him, send him and his Irish wife to America, and be forced to survive in the rural hamlet of the Waverly section of Tuckahoe?

In the 1850s, the Adams were more privileged than their Irish neighbors who worked in the quarries. They were able to buy a farm and build a house on that farm on Tuckahoe Avenue. Initially, the scars of the Irish potato famine must have been harder to erase for the Tuckahoe quarrymen. They suffered from physical want, starvation, and the brutal and dangerous journey across the Atlantic. They were also left with deep emotional scars, a sense of powerlessness, and anger toward a brutal and repressive government, and a pent up rage against anyone or anything that threatened their self-esteem.

Life was hard for Annie's neighbors, most of whom worked in the quarries. The instability of the marble industry in Tuckahoe made the life of the quarryman a difficult one. Many workers never knew just where their next job would come, and they were frequently placed in desperate situations. It was the job of the quarryman to remove the stone from the quarry. It was not uncommon sight to see quarrymen

removing blocks of marble 150 feet long, eight feet thick, and seven feet wide. Some of these blocks weighed as much as 33 tons.

The work was hard and brutal. Scores of men with long, flat, and pointed drills called jumpers struck the marble until it could be raised from its bed and hoisted from the quarry. They worked six days a week and 10-hours a day. The pay for their labor was \$1.25 a day!

It was totally the responsibility of the worker to take care of himself if he were sick or hurt. A prejudice against Irish Catholics made it almost impossible to find other work. The phrase "No Irish need apply" was more than a slogan. An Irish Catholic worker could appeal to his family, or his church and throw himself at the mercy of the overseer of the poor in the municipal government. But the semi-skilled Irish quarryman was more or less on his own.

Yet, his life was better than that of his fellow immigrants who lived in the slums and tenements of New York City. New research shows that for some Irishmen working on the quarries within less than 10 years after the arrival of James and Annie Adams saw conditions improve.

It was originally thought that the stonecutters who dressed and finished the marble were not Irish. These skilled craftsmen, who cut, dressed, and finished the marble were paid almost three times as much as the quarrymen and were in high demand. These stonecutters were represented by a powerful union dating back to 1839. It was believed that before the Civil War, only those of English and Scandinavian descent were stonecutters.

However, new research is proving that the Irish had indeed become stonecutters. According to the census of 1860, the neighbors of the Adams were Irish stonecutters and they were probably not alone. Samuel Fee, an Irishman, became superintendent of the quarries after the Civil War, and in 1883 built the Washington Hotel that would become the center of Tuckahoe life and the headquarters of the Stonecutter's Union.

While life might have been getting somewhat better for some of Annie's Irish neighbors, it did not get better for Annie Adams. Soon after 1860, it is believed that James Adams, her husband (the search for James Adams' grave site by his descendants still goes on to this day) passed away. Her youngest son, Thomas, died shortly after. For many immigrants, death was all around them. It was a part of life.

It must not have been easy for the widowed Annie Adams to support herself. An 1867 map shows a Mrs. Adams owning a house on Tuckahoe Avenue. The assumption is that Annie Adams took on boarders to support herself, renting rooms to laborers. The Civil War had brought with it a decline in construction and the demand for marble. The Irish were the last hired and the first fired. Life must have been difficult for all.

The story of the Irish in Eastchester from the Civil War to near the end of the 19th century will soon follow. By that time an influx of Italians and African Americans will start to come into Tuckahoe. Their story and the saga of other groups will be forthcoming.

"Historically Speaking" runs bi-weekly. This is the third in a series on the history of immigrants in the town.

