



Historically Speaking

With Town Historian
Richard Forliano

Annie's Song: "The Great Hunger"

Note: This article is co-written by Patrick Buckley.

Annie was one of the million Irish Catholics who was forced to migrate to America during the great Potato Famine of the late 1840s. The reason why her story or song is so fascinating is that it has only recently been learned that she came to live and raise her family in the Waverly section of Tuckahoe in 1851. Waverly Square and the surrounding streets were the center of the Irish community that fled what the Irish called the "the great hunger" or the "the great trouble." The overwhelming majority of Irish who lived in Waverly were semi-skilled laborers in the Tuckahoe marble quarries.

In 1851, Anne Hyland (also known as Annie and Anna) came to live and raise her family near Waverly Square on Tuckahoe Avenue. Her story is what novels are written about. Annie, born in Ireland around 1832, was forced to leave her home and move to England where she worked as a servant girl during the "great hunger." There she met and fell in love with James Adams from a wealthy Protestant family, a man 12 years her senior. Family stories claim that the Adams family disowned him, in order to avoid the shame of their son marrying a poor Irish Catholic servant girl. They were sent off to America sometime after 1848.

A passenger list of the ship *Columbine* that arrived in New York for London on May 18, 1851 includes the names of James and Anne Adams. There were 230 passengers on board. At this time, the voyage across the Atlantic was in wooden, three-masted ships known as "packet ships," named as such given their cargo. Packet ships were the mail transport vessels of the day and took a considerable portion of the passenger travel across the North Atlantic. The trip was also available by steam - but the cost was much greater, nearly double that of the voyage by sailing vessel. Though faster, most Irish immigrants could not afford this luxury. They would be berthed below in dark, damp, and crowded conditions for nearly a month. Many perished.

But there was no report on fatalities who arrived in New York City with James and Anne Adams. Ships like the *Columbine* pulled up to the piers of the Battery in lower Manhattan and immigrants disembarked. There was no aid or assistance given to the destitute and wary new arrivals after their long voyage across. They were easy prey and fell victim to many scams and schemes. The massive immigration of famine-era Irish Catholics inundated the cities of the Northeast with Europe's poorest most unskilled peasantry. The Irish were totally unfamiliar with the demands of city life.

Peter Quinn, the Irish historian and novelist, described the plight of the famine Irish, "The absence of any previous immigrant group to blaze the path or how to act or what to do, put the Irish at a distinct disadvantage." At time, the Irish faced relentless discrimination and grinding poverty. They inherited a legacy of centuries of persecution at the hands



Immaculate Conception Church in Tuckahoe.

of their English Protestant oppressors. These realities frustrated the Irish as individuals but galvanized them as a group. Starting far behind America's old stock Protestant whites, despised for their religion and clannishness, and burdened by poverty and social dislocation, many of the famine Irish would find it hard to pull themselves up and move to something better in the slums and tenements of New York City.

In the beginning James and Anne Adams would not face the disadvantages of the Irish who settled in New York City. Less than a year after arriving in Westchester County, a deed shows James Adams purchasing land in the Waverly section of Tuckahoe for \$300, a huge sum that in terms of money today would have the same buying power as \$8,700 today. James did not buy the property alone. A John Q. Adams, from Lewisboro, probably a distant cousin, was also listed on the deed that listed Caleb and Hattie Morgan as the sellers of the three acres of land. It can only be guessed where James received the money but the 1860 census mentions that James was a farmer, with a wife named Anne, and three children, Harriet age 5, James age 3, and Thomas age six months.

The Adams family was not a typical one that lived in the Waverly section of this town. James Adams had the ability to purchase his own land and farm. In the beginning, James Adams had the advantage of being from a prosperous English family, and not being Irish may have had its benefits. But the consequences of history and his health would soon take those advantages away and in the 1860s Annie Adams and her family would have to shift for themselves. But more about Annie's 'song' in the next article.

The Waverly section into which the Adams moved was an enclave of Irish immigrants who worked first as unskilled quarrymen in Tuckahoe's two quarries. The newly completed New York and Harlem River Railroad had brought the Irish to Tuckahoe and the marble quarries provided the jobs. Annie, like most of her Irish Catholic neighbors, probably celebrated mass and took confession administered by the Irish born priest Father Thomas McLoughlin, the founder of Immaculate Conception Church in 1853.

Life was tough for the famine Irish who worked as quarrymen in the Tuckahoe quarries. But back then the Irish who lived in this community had distinct advantages over the Irish living in the slums and tenements of New York City.

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The next article will describe how during the Civil War the Adams family will fall on hard times. We will also take a more in depth look at the life of the Irish who worked in the Tuckahoe quarries.

Many thanks goes to Patrick Buckley. Patrick has traced his ancestors back to James Adams and Anne Hyland. This article that Patrick helped co-author could not have been written without his sharing his research that gives new insights into the Irish heritage of this community.



Patrick Buckley, a descendant of James Adams and Anne Hyland