



Historically Speaking

With Town Historian
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Waverly and the American Civil War

Annie's song comes to an end

This article is co-written by Patrick Buckley.

For both Annie Adams and the Irish quarry workers who lived in the Waverly section of our town, the American Civil War was an extremely painful experience.

The Civil War had brought with it a decline in construction and the demand for marble. Many of the recently arrived Irish immigrants who did the unskilled work in the quarries were out of work. The Irish were the last hired and the first fired. The state and federal government at that time offered no relief. The only recourse for the unemployed quarrymen was to throw themselves at the mercy of the local poorhouse or Catholic Church.

Sometime in the first years of the Civil War, Annie Adam's husband James passed away, soon to be followed by her youngest son Thomas. Family stories claim that James was a blacksmith. In the census of 1860, James Adams is listed as a farmer. In the column containing information on a person's perception as "dumb, blind, idiotic, pauper, or convict," James is enumerated as "insane." What this meant is anyone's guess. Was he violent when the census-taker arrived, or possibly drunk? Did he have an affliction like multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, or ALS? This will probably never be known. According to the census, the value of the Adams real estate on Tuckahoe Avenue was shown to be \$1,500, which back then was a considerable sum.

After James passed, life must have been very challenging for Annie Adams. She had a young daughter Harriet and son James, to support. In her house on Tuckahoe Avenue that is no longer standing, west of Caldwell Street, it is very probable that she took in boarders to support her family.

The Irish had experienced centuries of oppression at the hands of their British rulers, and when they arrived, they faced relentless discrimination from the white Protestant majority

that controlled America. Irish immigrants, unskilled and illiterate, were forced to take jobs if they could find them that no one else wanted. Working in the Tuckahoe quarries was one of those jobs. In April 1861, the Civil War began and over the next four years over 620,000 Americans lost their lives. The Irish quarrymen of Tuckahoe were forced to deal with the realities of the first involuntary draft in American history.

On a hot Saturday in July of 1863, when temperatures in the northeast reached near 100 degrees, word came back about the horrific casualties from the Battle of Gettysburg where over 50,000 were either killed or wounded.

Some of the Irish who lived in Eastchester fought in this conflict. There were Irish who volunteered to fight in the Eastchester Company of the 5th New York Heavy Artillery Regiment. This regiment fought in every major battle in Virginia after Gettysburg. Others took a bounty of \$300 dollars to replace their more affluent neighbors.

But there were some Irish quarrymen in Eastchester and many Irish in New York City who were resentful that an Irishman was worth only \$300, while an African slave on the open market was worth as much as \$1,000. When news of the horrendous casualties at Gettysburg reached New York City on July 11, 1863, the New York City draft riots broke out. Working class Irishmen irrationally blamed African-Americans and the Republican Party for the war. A grotesque race riot ensued.

Roving bands attacked and lynched African-American men, women, and children. An African-American orphanage was set ablaze. Irish firemen led 20 children to safety. The entire New York City police force as well as five battle hardened regiments of United States troops were brought in to halt the murders and restore order. In the end, at least 105 people were killed, making these draft riots as the most violent insurrection in American history.

Disturbances from the New York City draft riots spread to Eastchester. Rioters tore up rails on the New York and Harlem tracks near the Bronx River. A sympathetic mob from the marble quarries at Tuckahoe went on the march into Mount Vernon armed with sticks, stones, and other makeshift weapons with the avowed purpose of burning down the houses of all the Republicans in the place. Capt. William Barker assembled a home guard and took a stand in a cartridge factory on Fifth Avenue near First Street in present day Mount Vernon. Several prominent Democrats met the mob and convinced them to give up the notion of burning houses.

The widow Annie Adams must have heard the complaints of the quarrymen who rented at her house. But Annie had two children to support and she probably had little time to dwell on the complaints of the men. Records show that Anne Hyland Adams left Waverly with her two surviving children soon after the Civil War. They went to Manhattan. Her options as a widow were few. She remarried, had two more children, and died in 1891 at the age of 59. She, like so many Irish Catholic immigrants, was buried in Calvary Cemetery.

The 1867 map of Waverly shows another house owned by an Irish immigrant named Tom Lawler. Tom fought in the war and was wounded at Cold Harbor 11 months after the draft riots. Bob Lawler, a direct descendant of Tom, lives only a few blocks away from his Civil War ancestor.

Annie Adams would never come back to Waverly, but the Irish were here to stay. As time passed, the descendants of the first Irish to come here would have an increasingly more prominent role in the development of the town.

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

