

A FINN VALLEY MAN MAKES GOOD IN AMERICA.

BY NOEL SLEVIN.

*f/ballybofeel
Co. Donegal*

Many people from Ireland have made their mark in America and other foreign countries and, in the following story, we relate the story of Denis Kelly, originally from near Cornashesk, Crossroads, Killygordon, who made his mark in the history of Pennsylvania and Delaware County in the United States. Journalist, Noel Slevin, wishes to thank Monsignor Francis A. Carbine, of Saint Charles Borromeo Church at 1731 Hulmeville Road, Bensalem, Pennsylvania, who sent on most of the material for the story which was related in a publication marking the sesquicentennial history of the Parish of St. Denis, Havertown, Pennsylvania, an Augustinian parish with deep roots in the past.

Denis Kelly was born at Trubach, near Cornashesk, Crossroads, Killygordon, in July of 1779, and when he arrived in America he was almost twenty-seven years old. Standing with him on the deck of the merchantman which had taken two long hard months of travel on rough seas to reach the States, was his young wife, the former Mary Boyle. She was born in 1783 at Donaghmore, Castlefin, and at that stage she was twenty-three years old. She was holding their daughter, Margaret, who was just about a year old. The Kelly's had been married in the Finn Valley in 1804.

Swelling in his heavy woollen suit, the young Denis Kelly helped his wife and child across Front Street, Philadelphia, and walked past the Sign of the Bible Inn and the London Coffee Shop, heading for Bank Street where the Stage Coaches left for New York and the West. They probably obtained lodgings at one of the many Inns which were located there, such as the Boar's Head or the Blue Bell Inn.

Happy to be off the bouncing boat, Denis and Mary enjoyed walking along the cobblestone streets, taking in all of the sights. Philadelphia was a busy town in 1806. It was a microcosm of this last growing country. People from practically every country walked the streets which were packed with all sorts of sights but the young Kelly's were more fascinated with the leering life which existed there and the market which ran along High Street and which was chock-full of all sorts of fresh fish, meat, butter, vegetables and fruits..... and the housewives pushing and shoving looking for a bargain in the foodstuffs which were fresh off the farm that very day.

Philadelphia, at that time, had a population of 47,786 people, which included 5,256 Negroes, 50 of whom were slaves. The entire City lay between Vine Street and South Street and had, in 1870, 13,241 buildings.

Strange Sights. The streets were

crowded with hand-drawn wooden carts with large wooden wheels, drays, wagons, and even wheelbarrows on their way to the various markets.

Although Denis Kelly had a dream of going West, owning a ranch, and raising cattle and horses, he must have been sorely tempted to remain in this mercantile centre where young businesses were thriving. Little did he realise that in another half a century, proteges of his, young men whom he would bring over from the Finn Valley, would own businesses in these very streets. But, for now, he was young and full of adventure, and wanted to move on.

Warm Hearted. Denis Kelly has been characterised as "a warm-hearted, exemplary and prosperous Catholic neighbour", and, in later years, Dr. Thomas Middleton, O.S.A., a Villanova Priest-Historian, said that Catholicism in the Philadelphia area, "owes much to Denis Kelly and his family". This being true, it would only be expected that he and his wife would, on their arrival, make a visit to the local Catholic Church and thank God for a safe journey from Ireland, a journey during which many of their fellow-passengers died from hunger and the rigours of the crossing. This two months trip across the sea was the longest either of them had been away from their Church.

Left fatherless at an early age, young Denis was raised by his mother, who, like most other Irish mothers, instilled into her son a deep and abiding faith that would last for a lifetime.

Denis Kelly was destined to have a close and lasting relationship with the Clergy of Philadelphia and it may very well have begun in June of 1806. Some of these clergy would not only baptise and marry his children, but would serve as Godfathers as well. He was then in no position to talk of founding a Church nor did he have the wherewithal to dream of such a thing, but no doubt he visited the various Churches and met the priests. Before leaving the City, Denis, no doubt, visited the tiny

Church of St. Joseph. Built in 1734, the "Romanish Chapel", as it was then called, became the cradle of religious liberty for the Catholic population of Pennsylvania.

Vile Man Changes Destiny. Denis Kelly was a happy man when eventually he got around to paying for his trip to Pittsburgh, which was his next stop. He knew that it would be a long trip and a hard one, but he also felt that he and his family were sufficiently rested to undertake the journey. The first day would be an all-day jaunt, twelve hours from Philadelphia to Lancaster. The cost in 1809 was \$3.50 per person.

Very early in the morning, before the sun rose over the Highlands of New Jersey, the Kelly's made their way down Bank Street to the stage depot. Little Margaret was thrilled with the many horses in the nearby stables and Denis carried her to where the hostlers were hooking up four horses to the stage that the Kelly's were to board.

The stage coach was simply what its name implies -- a coach that travelled between stages. It looked like nothing more than the body of an overgrown baby coach, suspended on springs, attached to four big wheels, except that the body of this coach held ten people. The luggage was tucked under the legs of the passengers. There were few comforts in these coaches because they were solidly built for rough roads.

The Kelly's journey began peacefully enough as the stage went out Market Street and across the new Bridge which was opened on January 1st of 1805. The Kelly's fellow passengers talked about how fortunate they were to be travelling on the Lancaster Turnpike, the first in America.

God's ways are strange ways indeed, and some say, God writes straight with crooked lines. And, God indeed was about to play a strange trick on the young Denis Kelly as he enjoyed looking at the rolling countryside, dreaming about settling on the frontier.

One of the passengers on the coach was a very vulgar man, and, of all people in the world, God

was about to express his will through this fellow. As the wagon rolled across the countryside, so too did the vulgar fellow's tongue spew out curse after curse. He refused all entreaties to shut up. Finally, Mrs. Kelly had had enough. She called out to the driver to stop, and he finally reined in the double team of horses and when he turned to look to the rear of the coach, he was astonished. For here were the Kelly's, with their luggage and their baby, climbing over the other passengers to get to the front of the stage to debark.

There was nothing but open fields all around them. The driver pleaded with them to stay on the coach and so too did their fellow passengers. But Mrs. Kelly was adamant. She wanted to get off. So did her husband. They just would not pass another milestone with this evil man.

Dents Settles. There was one thing in the Kelly's favour -- a similarity in the habits of the people in the early 19th century with their counterparts in the 20th century. Simply stated, a man never had to go far for a drink. There were 61 Taverns along the 66 mile route of the Lancaster Turnpike. No one is quite sure where the Kelly's got off. But, wherever it was, they retraced their steps to the last Inn which the stage had passed. It could very well have been Ye Old Buck Tavern which Denis Kelly would one day own and would remain in his family until it was torn down to make way for a Hot Shoppe restaurant on Lancaster Avenue at Buck Lane in 1969. We now know that it was in the immediate vicinity of Villanova that Denis Kelly established his first home in America.

It was with a heavy heart that Denis Kelly awoke the next day. His plans of settling in the West not only were destroyed, but the money he had set aside for his fare was spent. He went back to the transportation company and demanded a refund but was refused. He continued to argue, pointing out that he had very slender means and could not afford such a loss as he needed the money to provide for his wife and young child. Finally, the man relented

and they compromised, splitting the fare and returning to Denis half the amount.

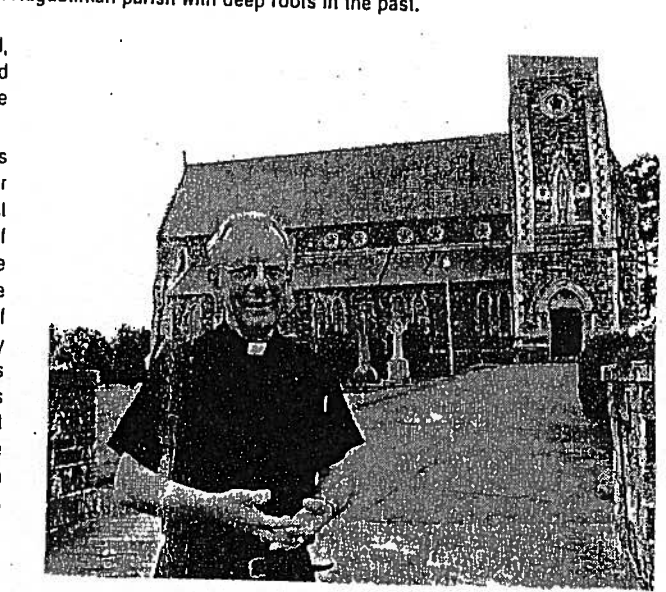
Young Denis settled his family at the Guyger Farm and then went about the business of making a living. For the next few years he performed all sorts of manual labour. Strangely enough, his first job was on a mill dam which was then in the course of construction "Near where he now lives". This dam probably was on Cobb's Creek, north of Manoa Road. In this job he began a tradition in that he eventually owned every place where he ever worked.

First Mills. The area that was to be both Denis Kelly's permanent home and the scene of his commercial activities for the next half century and more was Cobb's Creek. As the young Denis Kelly carried stones as a day labourer at the mill dam, the solitude of nature was disturbed by the low pounding of the stampers of the nearby Nire Hall Powder Mills, which could be heard night and day.

At the turn of the 19th century, most of the Mill activity in the valley was restricted to the making of black powder, or to grist and saw mills for the benefit of local residents. These were the mills that Denis Kelly would later purchase and transform into textile factories.

From his little house on the Guyger Farm, Denis Kelly walked far and wide over the rolling hills of Radnor Township in search of work. Up before dawn, he'd have a log burning in the fireplace before Mary and the children were up. He was now the head of a growing family -- Margaret and Hannah, and a boy, William.

During most of his travels he noticed that most of the farmers had looms on which their wives and daughters wove flax and towlinen cloth. But, there was a scarcity of cotton and woollen mills. Having been apprenticed to a linen manufacturer back in Ireland and being acquainted with mills because his father owned one before he was killed in an accident, young Denis probably realised that this was the quickest way to make a fortune. So, he began to make his



Monsignor Francis A. Carbine, P.P. St. Charles, Borromeo Church, Pennsylvania, a native of Cornashesk, Crossroads.

plans long-range though they were.

Denis Kelly must have been a gregarious fellow because, to fulfil his ambitions, he had to make friends with people who were total strangers to him in almost every way. But, he carried it to them, probably with a story, or an Irish saying, or maybe even a song, even though his soft Irish brogue was very foreign to the language of the Quakers.

Donegal People Go Out. As an Irish Catholic, a Romanist, a Papist, or whatever, Denis Kelly was virtually alone. However, when the War of 1823 broke out, there was a great demand for cloth for the Army and, by then, Denis Kelly was in a position to supply the cloth, which was scarce, and he was able, faithfully, to fulfil all of the Government's contracts.

Mary, the fourth of the Kelly children, was born on February 16th 1811, and, by then Denis had progressed to owning his own woollen mill named Clinton Mills. This was an immediate success and then Denis purchased more land and more Mills and entered into a contract with the United States Government under which he sold large quantities of textiles for the Army and Navy.

With these Government contracts coming in, Denis Kelly and his family were able to live in a manner befitting a wealthy mill owner. Between 1811 and 1815, he moved into a new house. Known as "The Mansion". This as to be his third and last home in the land of his adoption. Another daughter, Sarah, was born here in 1815

and also Denis, who only lived to be three years old. In May of 1819 Mary also gave birth to twins, a boy, also named Denis, and a girl named Elizabeth Xavier.

Just to the North of the Kelly Mansion was another stone building, the home of Patrick Boyle, a nephew of Mrs. Kelly's, also from Donoughmore, and a protege of Denis whom he succeeded in the operation of the mills. He was married to Catherine Duffy of the Finn Valley. Hugh Brogan of Donegal also lived near there for a time. Both men are mentioned in the annals of the Parish of St. Denis. It was in the Boyle home that the last of the Kelly children, Ann Margaret, was born on May 10th 1824.

Of all of the friends and relatives that Denis Kelly brought out to the States in that period, and there were many, the one closest to his heart was his 18 years old Nephew, Charles Kelly. Born at Ardnaganagh, outside the village of Crossroads, on August 2nd of 1803, not far from where his uncle was born, Charles was just as generous and energetic as Denis had been.

Married. In 1821, the same year that Charles arrived in America, he obtained a lease on another cotton mill near where his uncle Denis had a mill. This, of course, was done under the sponsorship and with the advice of Denis, and together they formed the firm of D and C. Kelly.

On June 20th of 1831, Dr. Michael Hurley of St. Augustine's, Philadelphia, married Charles and Margaret

Kelly, Denis's oldest daughter.

As his uncle had done before him, Charles encouraged fellow Irishmen, particularly those from the Finn Valley, to come to America and work in his Mills, and, by 1845, fifty stone dwellings sprang up in the vicinity of the mills and the population grew to between five hundred and six hundred people, most of them from the Finn Valley and East Donegal area. The area was known as "Kellyville" and Charles was its first Postmaster. The area was along the East side of Darby Creek and it had a railroad station known as the "Kellyville Station".

As the years wore on, the empire of Denis and Charles Kelly expanded rapidly and they had cotton and woollen mills galore, all of which flourished and made them a lot of money.

Denis Kelly and his family were very generous to the Church and were steadfast in their faith, a trait carried on by their family down the generations.

To-day, the wild area that Denis Kelly first came to back in the early 1800's, is barely recognisable. He certainly made his mark on his adopted country and, in the Parish of Saint Denis, in Delaware County, his name will live forever.

Many people from the Finn Valley are buried in the cemeteries of the St. Denis Parish and another son of the Finn Valley, Monsignor Francis A. Carbine, is now Parish Priest in the nearby St. Charles Borromeo Church in Pennsylvania