



Old St. Denis Church

Legacy

of Dennis and Charles Kelly

By Msgr. Francis A. Carbine
Grandson of Donaghmore

The Donegal Townlands of “Speckled Hill” and “Hill of Geese” do not appear on tourist maps.

Detailed maps, however, show the Irish names – “Tievebrach” and “Ardnagannah.” Both are in the Finn Valley — near bor-

der with County Tyrone. These townlands are in the parish of St. Patrick, Donaghmore (“Large Stone.”) This is parish of Dennis and Charles Kelly.

From Tievebrack, Donegal, Dennis Kelly came to the Port of Philadelphia. The year was 1806.

In all probability, passengers would have received health clearance at the Quarantine Station on the Delaware River, Tinicum

Township. This Station began operations in 1799.

With Dennis came his wife, Mary Boyle, Castle Finn, and their infant daughter, Margaret. The family departed in a stage coach from Philadelphia.

Their route was Lancaster Pike; their destination, Pittsburgh. However, the violent language of the teamster caused Mary Kelly to reconsider.

She decided not to entrust her life – and certainly not that of Baby Margaret – to this vulgar teamster. Consequently, the Kellys climbed off the stage coach – probably in area of Ardmore.

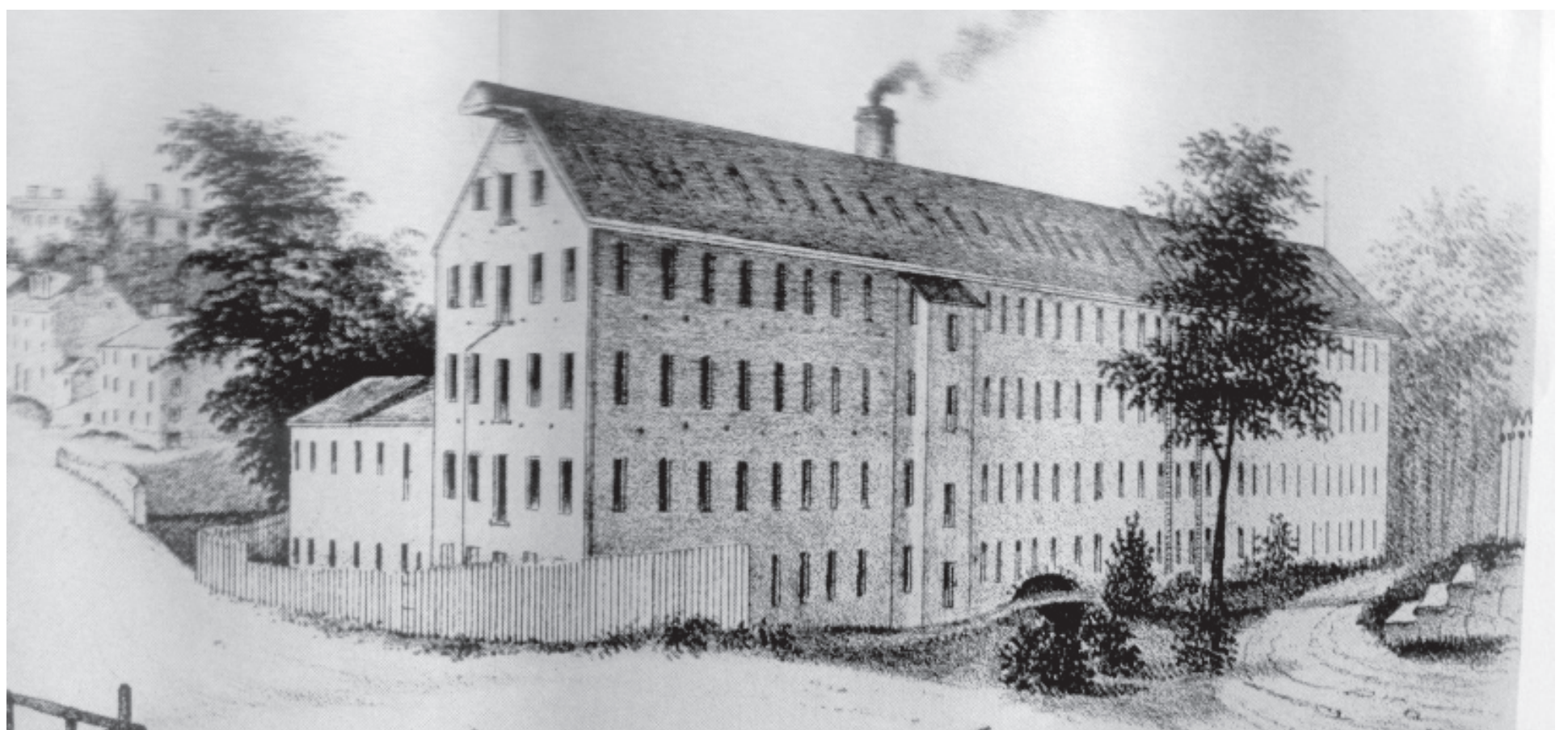
Unwittingly, this marked a major beginning in Catholic and economic life in Delaware County.

During the 18th century, Eastern Donegal experienced growth

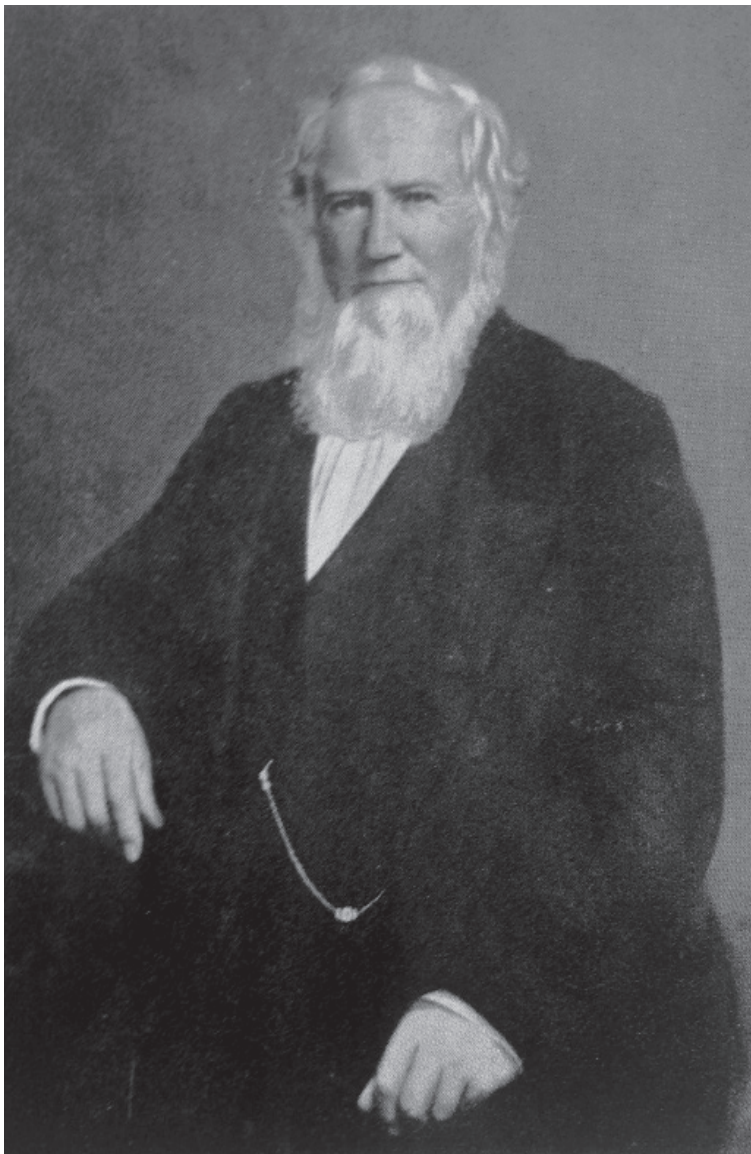
in the making of linen. Flax growing and linen manufacture became a “cottage industry.” Families were provided with spinning wheels.

Dennis eventually opened a cotton mill in Havertown along Cobbs Creek. He obtained American military contracts. As an entrepreneur, he prospered.

In 1825, he supported the founding of St. Denis Parish,



Mill owned by Charles Kelly in an area once called Kellyville



Lay Founder of St. Charles Borromeo Parish
Charles Kelly
1804-1864

Havertown. Initially he brought Augustinian Fathers from St. Augustine Parish, Philadelphia, for Sunday Mass.

The "Augustinian connection" also made possible the founding of Villanova University in 1842. The University holds archival resources for the "Kelly" story.

In 1821, Charles Kelly, Dennis' nephew, travelled from Ardnagannah to Delaware County. Charles had been born in 1803. He opened a cloth mill in Clifton Heights along the Darby Creek.

He repeated the pattern of his uncle, and in 1847 donated land for St. Charles Borromeo Parish,

Drexel Hill. A former name was "Kellyville."

By 1851, Charles' fabric mill employed about two hundred persons. Many were women. (Michael Carbine, born in Donegal and great-uncle of this writer, is listed in the U.S. Census, 1880, as age 19 and a "weaver." Michael is buried in "Kellyville.")

For 362 years, churches that the Kelly's helped to found have served the people of Delaware County. Also, the Villanova Wildcats still roar! The Kelly tradition continues in the commitments of the "Dennis Kelly Division" of the Ancient Order of

Hibernians.

AOH members help families heat their homes; sponsor young people's exchange with St Malachy's College, Belfast; and assist the Irish Immigration Center. The spirit of the man from "Speckled Hill" is alive and well.

"Enormous" is how Charles Dirvin, a descendant of Dennis Kelly, describes the Kelly legacy in Delaware County. Kelly mills were part of the local textile industry that lasted for a century. Uncle and nephew sponsored and employed immigrants.

One story is that in 1847, the blackest year of the Great Hunger, Dennis and Charles sent two ships loaded with food, but the food rotted in the Port of Derry.

Charles Dirvin has done intensive work on Irish Genealogy and his "Kelly connection." He has clarified that today there are "nine different Kelly families" in Donaghmore area!

Stones in St. Denis Cemetery attest to Havertown's Donegal connection. The major monument is inscribed: "Sacred to the memory of Dennis Kelly who departed this life, July 21, 1864."

Other family stones – Marley, Sweeney, Loughrey — are engraved: "Parish of Donaghmore."

In the "Kellyville" cemetery, a text on an obelisk reads: "Sacred to the Memory of Charles Kelly who departed this life, March 27, 1864." Stones inscribed — "Parish of Donaghmore" — include McMenamin, Hughes and Carbine.

In both cemeteries names appear that would have been known to the Kelly's: Sharkey, McLaughlin, McCormick. However, weathering of stones has made many inscriptions illegible.

"Speckled Hill" – an ancient Irish description – may be so-called because of boulders or bushes dotting the hillside. "Hill of Geese" ... is what it is!

Nonetheless, the Kelly's from Tievebrach and Ardnagannah have created a wonderful legacy.



St. Denis Church, Havertown, PA

Renewal

Soar the stars delphinium seas
Swim when you will noon and night
Float with far moons in luminous pools
You are in and with The Peace
While wisdom holds grief in gentle hands
It speaks of your courage in living
Your Faith, your Loving, your Giving
Your dream will keep our memories true
The Peace is in and always with You.

-Katharine Gilbert

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