

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2022

2201 The Black Sheep? Oh Well ...

by Anne McEncroe

The black sheep? - Oh well ...

All the branches of the family tree on which I was a statistic for 70 years, were lopped off recently, when I discovered I was adopted! Instead of a Scottish Stephenson, I was now an Irish O'Halloran!

So far I have unearthed that my new found O'Halloran ancestors were an illustrious Irish family who had been dispossessed of lands in Galway at the end of the 12th Century. My new found grandfather's Aunt, Marianne Lacathon de la Forest (nee O'Halloran), relates the story this way:

“...One evening, my grandmother's grandfather was seated, surrounded by his family, in the principal room of his castle. Suddenly the door opened, and one of the farmhands all out of breath came in to announce that a party of English soldiers was about to enter the courtyard in order to search the castle and obtain a list of rebels which was known to be in possession of the master, their leader. Before the officers, who could be heard approaching, had entered, the latter had time to hide the list in question behind a brick in the fireplace, making each one swear to reveal nothing, no matter what might happen. Questioned by the English officers, he refused to reply. Threatened with being hanged at dawn if he continued to keep silent, he did not yield and, despite their great fear, those with him likewise remained silent. In the morning, before sunrise, our ancestor was hanged, the castle burned and the whole family was driven out of their country ...”ⁱ

The Eighteenth Century O'Hallorans continued in the persons of eminent Doctor Sylvesterⁱⁱ and his brothers, Michael – a Surgeon, John – Secretary to the Governor of the Bahamas, Joseph – Major General in the British Army and Thomas – a Pewterer. The distinguished military and colonial services rendered to the British Empire in the Nineteenth Century by Sir Joseph, Matthew, George and various others of the O'Halloran line, had ensured their secure social and economical position in the world. The author of *A General History of Ireland (1788)*,ⁱⁱⁱ the said Doctor Sylvester “created a stir, his tall slender figure attired in French costume, and with an impressive wig, cocked hat, and gold-headed cane.”

The Australian branch of O'Hallorans took root when two of Joseph's sons came to the newly founded colony of South Australia – William O'Halloran, as Secretary to Governor Grey in 1836, and Thomas Shuldham O'Halloran, Chief of Constabulary in 1839, establishing a farm and vineyard on O'Halloran Hill, where their descendants still live.^{iv}

However the (one could say ‘black sheep’) Sydney branch was sprouted on board the convict ship “Isabella” arriving at Port Jackson on 16 December, 1823 from Ireland. On board was one John O'Halloran, the father of the aforementioned storyteller Marianne. Her brother William was my great Grandfather. My new found forbear John was tall, fair haired, with blue eyes and aged 25. He could read and write; and plough and shear”. He was assigned to one Robert Crawford who had two grants of land one at Hill End and one near Camden.^v The circumstances of John's arrest and sentence of seven years transportation unfolded this way:

“(... altho (sic) a man of comfortable circumstances) he was principal in the disturbances in the North Liberties of this city, and where he was apprehended having been found out at an unreasonable hour of the night of the 24th inst. on which night a most serious outrage took place, the fourteen cows and the coppice in which they were confined having been destroyed by fire and he was taken just convenient to the place when the fire immediately after broke out.”^{vi}

The Chief Magistrate of Police was convinced, with this (to my mind) very circumstantial evidence enough to say,

“... I am satisfied that the conviction that took place in Limerick last week and particularly of Halloran (sic) will have a good effect in this County. Halloran has been a long time on my list as a notorious leader and sending him out of the Country was a most valuable proceeding ...”^{vii}

Fortunately for John and his descendants, and no doubt with a little help from his extended and eminent family, an Unconditional Pardon was eventually issued to John by the Governor in 30 March 1828.^{viii}

Between 1828 and 1849 not much is known of his whereabouts until records of his two children come to light in Capetown, South Africa. Marianne in 1850, and William Peter in 1851. After a two year stay in Cape Colony they moved to Tasmania in Australia. Tellingly, John’s Death Certificate notes a ‘short’ stay in South Australia. His two cousins were by then very well established in a colony that prided itself that it had never known convict transportation. As well they were Anglican. He was Catholic. It is very possible he would not have been welcome there! When he died in 1880 his address was Paddington Sydney.

John’s son William, my great grandfather, did not enjoy a happy relationship with his father. After (black sheepish-ly) being dismissed from the family home he went to live in Orange NSW where he met and married Helena Matilda Curran. The wedding took place on 28 January 1877. Children John (1879), my grandfather George Sylvester (1881) and great aunt and great uncles Lilian (1883), William (1885), Edmund (1888), and Fergal (1890) were the result of this union.^{ix} However that black sheep stain has persevered in this tree branch – unfortunately, I now find, in the form of myself. Born in 1944, I am the illegitimate offspring of George Sylvester’s daughter, Helena Mary O’Halloran.

But move over ersatz Stephenson forbears, thanks to dear pardoned convict ancestor John O’Halloran, my real family tree is blossoming and I am sharpening my gardening skills!

ⁱ deBérard, Pierre, letter dated 10.1.1983. (Stories told to him by Marianne Lacathon de la Forest (née O’Halloran the eldest daughter of John O’Halloran) translated by Anthony Hunt, O’Halloran family Archivist.

ⁱⁱ Widdess, J., *A History of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland*. E&S Livingstone Ltd, Edinburgh and London. 1963

ⁱⁱⁱ O’Halloran, S., *A General History of Ireland*. Publisher Hamilton, 1788

^{iv} The O’Hallorans in South Australia in *The Old Limerick Journal* (Australian Ed) Spring 1788. Pp 30-34

^v Convict Muster, 1827

^{vi} O’Halloran, J., *(1800-1880) Raheen, the Liberties, Limerick*. March 1823

^{vii} *ibid*

^{viii} Huskisson, Rt. Hon .W., Colonial Secretary. *Letter from Downing Street, London to Governor Darling*. 20.9.1827 (received by Governor Darling 26.2.1828)

^{ix} Hunt, A., O’Halloran Family Archivist, *Research paper* . May 1991

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