

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Lyons Family History Jeremiah & Ellen Lyons

By  
Ellen Lyons Smith (Mrs. Frank J.)  
(Daughter of Richard F. Lyons)  
1954

**These recollections of family history I write from memory. I was fifteen years old when Grandma Lyons died (1889) and twenty when Grandpa (1894) died. I knew them well. Many of these events they have related to me; others are from stories my Father has told. Many dates are accurate; others are estimated by their relation to known facts.**

\*\*

Persons of Irish birth have told me that the chief ambition of every Irishman is to be able to trace his ancestry back to a Lord or Prince. Grandpa and Grandma Lyons were both in County Waterford, which is on the southeast coast of Ireland, the largest city of which is Dungarvan, a seaport. In 1947 a San Francisco newspaper issued a St. Patrick's Day Supplement containing a map of Ireland, taken from records dating back several centuries. This map gives the name of Lord Lyons or Lehan, and of Prince Phelan, later Whelan, both families in Waterford County. Little attention is given to the day and month of birth--only the year.

Grandpa Lyons was born in 1819 and Grandma in 1821; they were married in 1841. They had two children, Margaret and Bridget, when they decided to emigrate to America. Bridget was a baby of about one year. Aunt Bridget was born May 12, 1844. The voyage was made in winter, in rough seas--part of the time the ship was off its course--making a journey of many weeks. Sickness broke out, called "ship's fever". Their nursemaid, Patty O'Flynn, died and was buried at sea. In one severe storm, with ship listing badly, orders were given to lighten ship. A chest of solid silver (or sterling now) that was in Grandma's dowry had to be thrown overboard. Then Grandpa came down with the fever. Boston was the first port touched; there all seriously ill passengers, including Grandpa were taken off. Grandma and the children went on to New York, their destination. When landed, Grandpa had \$1,500 sewed in his underwear. Three months later when he prepared to join Grandma in New York, both underwear and money were missing. A period of time was spent in New York City; then the family moved up the Hudson River to Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where Grandpa worked as a farmhand. Here it was that their first son was born, named John, who died in infancy. It was in Poughkeepsie, on August 15, 1848, that their second son, Richard Francis was born. He was my father. About this time a new railroad was surveyed from New York to Washington, and men were called to build it. The family returned to New York City and Grandpa responded to the call. That rail line, now one of the most heavily traveled in the United States, was built by Irish immigrants with picks and shovels. The Superintendent of Construction made the statement that these husky Irishmen would do more

work in a day than the average man would do in two. Grandpa Lyons was one of those Irishmen. I believe Uncle Den was born in New York City. About the time the railroad was completed--1852--the family moved to Chicago, and the other members of the family were born there. My father's boyhood was spent in Chicago. Grandpa bought a farm on the outskirts of the city, on Archer Avenue, or, as Grandpa called it "the Archie Road." The Livestock Pavilion, where the political conventions were held in July, 1952, is on that ground, as I was told the stockyards were built on that farm. Others of the Lyons family settled in downstate Illinois, among them Grandpa's youngest brother, Thomas, and a sister, Ellen, a Mrs. Scanlon. Margaret Lyons, Thomas' daughter, came to Carthage and lived in the Coughlin home for three years. Ellen Scanlon's son came out to visit and look over the country but did not stay long. They lived at a place they called Arlington. It is not shown on the map but it is near Peoria, I think.

Soon after Grandpa and Grandma Lyons and family settled in Chicago, other members of Grandma's family came out from Ireland. The name Whelan was originally Phelan. Grandma's name was Ellen Whelan. Her father was a landlord, and the family enjoyed a comfortable living. Grandma was educated by governesses and she had many opportunities of culture not enjoyed by the average person in Ireland at that time. The Whelan family belonged to the class of Irishmen who show influence of the Danish invasion --the light hair, fair skin, and slender build. Grandma told me the story of her romance--how her father had selected a husband for her, in their own social sphere. She refused and made her own choice. One can understand the slight, fair girl being attracted to the stalwart Jeremiah, the true Irish type with the broad shoulders, deep-set eyes, rosy cheeks, and black hair. She never regretted her decision, though their early life together was not easy from a worldly point of view.

Of the Whelans, Uncle John was the oldest, an aristocrat all through, who wore a silk hat and carried a cane when he went out and walked with great dignity, to the amusement of his young American relatives. The youngest brother, Pearce, called Pearie, a favorite of Grandma's, met a tragic fate. As he left her house one dark, rainy night his path lay along the edge of the Chicago River. He was never seen again and was believed to have drowned. The youngest daughter, Johanna Sinnott, was an invalid for years and died while quite young. Her daughter, Mattie Sinnott, visited Carthage one summer. Another daughter, Sister Marcelline, joined the Sisters of Charity. Marcella Finley was named for her.

Other members of the Whelan family were Richard and Edward, who with their families went to northeastern Kansas when that country was being settled up. Mary Sinnott Brassel and family went with them. Atchinson was the county seat, but I believe they settled at Effingham, about twenty miles from Atchinson. A friend from here who visited relatives in Atchinson met three nuns, all of the Whelan or Brassel families.

Grandpa Lyons worked his farm, and the boys found work where they could. My father often spoke of working on the canal. It was the custom at that time for people to read aloud, and Grandma, who was a fine reader, frequently read to her children. Their early education was acquired that way. I do not know the date of the Lyons family emigration to Iowa. Many of the children of the family were born in Chicago. As they left the city, two members remained in Chicago--Aunt Margaret, who married Timothy Kane and lived her whole life in Chicago, and aunt Ellen, who stayed and later married James Coughlin there. They joined the Whelan families

in going to Kansas, living at Seneca and Centralia, before coming to Carthage to make their home. Aunt Mary Lyons was the member of the family between the older and younger groups. I remember her as we called to say goodbye to Grandpa and Grandma Lyons and their family when we were leaving for Dakota Territory in 1879. Aunt Mary had heart trouble and dropsy. She was sitting propped up in a rocking chair with each foot on a pillow. Her feet were so enlarged as to be nearly beyond recognition. That was just before May 1st and she died in mid-July. Nell Kane was the one who looked so much like Aunt Mary.

Priests have used the expression "the pious Irish". That designation fitted Grandma Lyons very well. She was truly pious. My first recollection of her was on Good Friday, 1879, the Lent before we left for Dakota Territory. It was her custom to gather the family together and have them remain kneeling while she led the prayers from 12 to 3 p.m. on Good Friday. Uncle Will was working in the field not far from the house. As she told someone to call him in, Grandpa said, "The spring is late; leave him in the field." But he came in. I was sitting on my father's chair. He remarked to Grandma that I would not be able to kneel. Her reply was, "Let her try." Sleep soon ended that devotion. Grandpa observed many customs of the Irish, too. On Easter Saturday he baked eggs for us children in the hot wood ashes on the hearth. He warned us that we must be up in time to see the sun dance as it rose on Easter Morn. To this day I awaken for the sunrise on Easter. Nowadays, nearly all Christians observe Easter by early devotion.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Galway Bay-Our Family**

**By Florence Finley Kolbach  
(Daughter of Elizabeth J. Lyons Finley)  
1954**

### **Dedicated to Jerry and Ellen**

In behalf of the Lyons, throughout the nation,  
We pay tribute to a past generation.  
Let us go back over a century of years,  
Years of sacrifice, happiness and tears.

It's a beautiful story and true  
Of our family life in Ireland in 1832.  
As aunt Kate Harrington told this story,  
I hope to tell it to you.

### **Characters**

**Great Grandmother and Great Grandfather**

**Whelan and daughter Ellen  
Great Grandmother and Great Grandfather  
Lyons and son Jerry  
Patty O'Flynn and infant daughter Kathaleen.**

Perhaps you have never heard of Patty O'Flynn,  
To the Whelans, he was some kith or kin,  
Who know joy and sorrow early in life,  
With the birth of a daughter and death of his wife.

Great Grandfather Whelan was a man of renown,  
He lived in a castle and mayored the town,  
From fields of flax, manufactured Irish linen,  
He had for his partner one Patty O'Flynn.

Great Grandfather Lyons had fine judgment and  
knowledge,  
His education was limited without high school or  
college,  
He had few earthly holdings, no money to burn,  
But made human welfare his lifetime concern.

England ruled Ireland, religion and school  
Seized their property and deprived them home rule.  
Affairs were discussed by Lyons and Whelan,  
To America they often wished they were sailing.

Whelan wished for his family all of the best,  
For his lovely daughter Ellen, joy and happiness.  
Lyons hoped his fine son Jerry, would some day own his  
home  
In a country where he could call his soul his own.

So they made a deal with 'Flynn to care for his  
little daughter,  
If he would take a shipment of linen across the  
water,  
It seems all Irish wares the English was bookin'  
So Pat sailed for America, 'jest to see what was cookin'.

They had a meeting when Pat returned,  
They came from near and far.  
The roads were lined for miles and miles  
With Irish jaunting cars.  
He told tall tales of the new world  
Far across the sea,

Where each one worshipped as he pleased  
And all the land was free.

After a short stay in Ireland, O'Flynn sailed from County  
Cork, With another shipment of linen, he landed in New  
York,

The Irish luck was with him, riches came galore.  
Ireland's future was filled with suffering and  
despair

Every Mother's son planned a new life in the new  
world over there.

Soon hundreds of thousands set out in  
immigration

Those left behind were facing starvation.  
It was a blessing in disguise when the hand of God,  
Caused a potato famine in the land of the 'old sod'.  
There were many rules concerning immigration,  
No man without a wife was issued transportation.

Lyons and Whelan together planned  
In marriage to give Jeremiah Ellen's hand,  
This Ellen received most reluctantly,  
She did not wish a bride to be.  
She was so young and gay and free,  
and never had known responsibility.

This brings our story up to 1836.  
They must not have known about Dorothy Dix,  
The young folks took heed of what their parents  
said,

So Jerry and Ellen were wed.  
Immediately placed their application,  
It sometimes took a year to arrange for  
transportation.

Two years passed, ships came and went,  
Twice Ellen and Jerry were left behind awaiting  
'blessed events'.

When the time came to sail Ellen was sad,  
Leaving dear Ireland, her parents and her brother just a lad,  
She know not when, if ever, she'd see them again,  
But was happy to be taking with her, Kathaleen  
O'Flynn.

They took huge chests of silver, china and gold,  
If left in Ireland the English would order them sold.  
There were no travelers' checks or drafts to

the bearer  
Their money was sewed in the pocket inside Jerry's  
underwear.

They waited until the wind was right,  
To set sail, and for forty days and forty nights  
They battled rough water and elements,  
There were no radios, cables or messages sent,  
Or no way of knowing a story to be,  
For many days they were lost at sea.  
The water supply was low, food was rationed,  
They had little knowledge and no medication.  
They were weak and hungry and very cold,  
The angel of death was very bold,  
An epidemic of cholera spread, all cargo was  
thrown overboard  
To make room for beds.

Ellen was grieved and in desolation  
To see Kathaleen and Jerry put in isolation,  
She stayed on the top deck and prayed  
To the same God we have today, and showed  
His love in the same mysterious way.

The ship was surrounded by hungry sharks  
Every night after dark, they would lower the dead  
to a grave unseen,  
Death's Angel claimed Kathaleen,  
The ones up on deck did not know  
Who the sick and dying were down below.  
After many days the ship must have been guided  
by God's hand,  
At day break, they sighted the promised  
land.  
They were driven from the ship like a human herd  
From the isolated ones they had not a word.  
The patients were not allowed to land, until their  
illness had been defined,  
Then they were placed in pest houses along the  
shore line.

Ellen was not met by O'Flynn as planned,  
The ship was given up as lost when past  
scheduled to land.  
But one day she met Patty on the street,  
He took her to a boarding house, small but neat,

The landlady was very kind, and told Ellen the  
children he would mind,  
While they would search for Jerry along the shore line.  
The pest houses were just old shantys and shed,  
Patty was discouraged and thought Jerry dead.  
Ellen insisted on searching every shanty and  
shack,  
Each evening went home, but in the morning went  
back,  
The autumn days were short, she knew she must  
hurry,  
She would stop and inquire, if they had seen her  
Jerry.  
One day a man said, "Well, yes, but it just couldn't be him"

"He was so old, and bearded and thin."  
If she wished she may come in and look,  
There were no records on the book,  
He seemed to be traveling alone,  
His memory was gone, and without name or  
home.  
Thus she found Jerry, lying on a bed of straw,  
His face was drawn in a look of awe,  
What had happened in the past there was no  
telling  
He raised his head and whispered "ELLEN".

That night she went back, but not alone,  
She and Jerry were together, at home,  
A small room, a stove, table, two chairs and bed.  
With their two babies they sat by the candle and  
read.  
Ellen was an artist, her fingers were nimble,  
She made their living with a threaded needle and thimble,  
Many nights she would sew all night at her work,  
To finish some Prince Charming's wedding shirt,  
With many tucks and pleats in Irish linen,  
Material was furnished by Patty O'Flynn.

Winter passed, each day grew a little longer,  
And each day Jerry grew a little stronger,  
Spring came and one fine day, Jerry started work  
on the first railway,  
From New York to Chicago.  
Ellen cooked for the men on an open hearth,  
They lived in tents or dug their home in the earth, In due

time they reached Chicago where many years were spent,  
Life seemed so full of 'blessed events'.  
To this union six daughters and six sons were born,  
The death of two daughters and two sons they  
    Were left to mourn.

They moved to Iowa and made their home,  
The family left one by one for homes of their  
    own,  
And soon Jerry and Ellen were left alone.  
The older Grandchildren tell how welcome  
They were in their children's homes,  
Grandmother with her kind and gentle ways,  
Grandfather's Irish songs and stories of Galway  
    Bay,  
He hoped they would some day go across the sea  
    To Ireland,  
And maybe at the closing of the day,  
They would sit and watch the moon rise over  
    Cladda,  
Or watch the barefoot garsoons at their play.

With the best of their years laid by,  
They made their last home with Bridget and John Rei,  
They helped twist hay, to burn and keep warm,  
On New Year's Eve, in eighteen eighty-nine  
In the midst of a South Dakota snow storm,  
Death's Angel called for Ellen and bade her come.  
Two years later Jerry joined her in their last home.  
If there is a life hereafter, and 'faith'  
I'm sure there is going to be,  
They would ask their God to let them make their Heaven,  
In that **DEAR LAND ACROSS THE IRISH SEA.**

*The End.*