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FAMILY HISTORY

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Based on Mary WelchFoley's research

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This is a picture of my grandparents, John and Minella, on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. I remember my father and I had driven out to the farm to pick them up. I remember my grandfather saying, "I'm still the handsomest man in Whiteside County. Why Minella and her mother chased me all over."
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We celebrated at Mary and George Foley's home. Almost all their children and grandchildren were there: There is my Aunt Mary ... and Uncle George with their children Maureen and Mary Pat, - my Uncle Al and Ruth with their son, Mike, - Dodo, Edward, and their children, Eddie and Patricia, - Eleanor and Chuck and their daughter, Nancy, - my Aunt Dede and her son, Donnie, - and my family: my father, Lourde, my mother, Regina, my sister, Jeanne, my brothers, John and Pat - and myself.
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My grandparents had been married on the last year of the 1800s - Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-Nine. What were their hopes that day? All the generations of laughs and tears, of trials and errors, of hopes for the next generation ... all this they brought to one another. But who were those who came before them - who are a part of them and all of us? We find our roots in Ireland.
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Ireland, - a beautiful land, a land of mountains, green valleys and clear lakes, - but a land of terrible beauty for Irish Catholics in the early 1800s. They were not permitted to own land. Their children could not be educated. There was little food. All they had was their love of God and their family.
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My grandfather never knew his grandparents. His father's father was from Tipperary County, - Patrick Walsh and his wife, Catherine Stapleton. It was here is Upper Church,
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a little town nestled in the mountains that John Walsh was born in the area they call the Silver Mines. His wife-to-be lived within six miles of him at Toomevara. How little we know of this time but that it was very hard for all Catholics in Ireland.
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John's wife baptized Nancy but called Anna was only nine years old when her home was destroyed by the British. In 1847 during the great famine, the English landlord wanted the land of Toomevara for grazing. The Irish refused to leave their homes. The newspaper described the incident.

The happy homes of the villagers were swept away as if by a tornado. The agent of the landlord came and destroyed every trace of the once popular village. The sight was terrible. House after house was tumbled by the crowbar brigade. And as the debris was cleared away - men, women and children crowded into the churchyard and threw up huts against the chapel walls. These were later knocked down by the vigorous blows of sundry bailiffs and their inhabitants scattered far and wide over the country.
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9 Anna's father was Patrick James Kennedy. This is Anna's mother, Judith Corbett
10 Kennedy. She was forty-seven years old when she died. As they fled that night from
11 the English, what hopes could they bring their children. But the next generation found
their hope. And this hope they found in a new land, - America.

John Walsh married Anna Kennedy. He was thirty-seven years old, she but twenty-three. They were married in Ireland and came to America on their honeymoon. They believed that there was hope.

12 John Walsh worked first for the railroad. He and his wife lived in a boxcar where their
first four children were born. Then John bought a farm where he and his growing
family lived in a three room house. Where did they put those ten children? The boys
13 slept in the loft. But that was a good house for those days. For there were neighbors
still living in sod houses. Then they built the big house which was the finest home
around. The housewarming lasted three days. John Walsh was a fiddler and he was in
great demand at any merry making festivity. His musical ability and love of people, he
gave to my grandfather . . . also his stories of the little folk. Behind the house was a
hill. One cold night, they heard a cry beneath the window and my great-grandfather
crossed himself and said it was a banshee, one of the little people who foretold the
death of a loved one. His wife said that it was probably one of the neighbor's children
who was lost and she insisted that her husband go out and try to find the child. So off
John Walsh went with his oldest son, - out into the cold night. They could hear the cry
ahead of them and so they walked to the crest of the hill . . . but always the cry stayed
just ahead of them. John Walsh came back home and told his wife that it was a
banshee headed to the west. The time was ten minutes after ten. The next day news
came that his sister in Iowa had died at ten minutes after ten!

14 Great-grandma Walsh never learned to read or write in English. She had a baby every
two years for twenty years. Her first child died at birth and she lost a daughter at
eleven years. The biggest possession these people had was one hundred dollars worth
of books. Education was so important to them, - education for their children.

15 My grandfather, John, was the seventh child and third son of the family. The children
could not spell when they came to school. So the teacher said they would spell the
name as it sounded. And so WALSH became known as WELCH.

16 There is a story that my grandfather's oldest brother had the buggy ready to go out on a
date . . . but that my grandfather took it instead and went courting Mary Ellen Ford, my
grandmother.

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My grandmother, Minella, knew only her maternal grandmother for it was she who came from Ireland. **Let us return to Ireland.** Minella's grandmother, baptized Ellen and called Nellie, descended from a long line of Irish ancestors dating back to the chieftains of Ireland. Their descendents moved to Normandy but later returned to Ireland with Prince John who later became King of England. Nellie was born in Ballagdareen, Ireland in the county Mayo in 1824 **in this house.** She was a second cousin to John Dillon, the famous patriot.

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When Nellie was seventeen she married Bartholomew McDermott and bore eight children. Her husband was thrown from a horse and she was left a widow, - his last child, Jenny, being born a month after his death. Nellie had lost one child in infancy and another child after her husband's death. **Nellie remarried in 1860, James Durr.** They too had hope. James Durr left for America.

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Nellie stayed behind with the children. Can you imagine how hard it was for these women, seeing their husbands leave, never knowing if they would see them again. How did they get along? Nellie had his child while she was still in Ireland. But two years later, James Durr had earned enough money to send for her to come to America with the children. With seven children Nellie sailed for America in 1862.

Seven long weeks they spent on a sailing vessel. Nellie had no money. Her only wealth was in her children's clothes. For she had raised the sheep, carded the wool, and woven their garments. But there was a terrible, terrible storm at sea and the captain said that they would have to throw all their cargo overboard. And so Nellie arrived in the land of hope, America with her seven children. Jenny, the child born after her father's death, remembers sleeping on a mossy bank her first night in America.

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Somehow Nellie brought her children to Hahnaman township where her husband had homesteaded a farm. Nellie never forgot her Irish roots. **When she was eighty-two,** she called her children to her and said, "My children, - my rarest and richest gift to you is the name of Dillon. Honor that name. It deserves the highest and noblest ideals. The family motto is, 'While I have breath, I hope'.

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It is here on this farm that her **daughter, Kate,** my great-grandmother, grew up, - Kate who had been born in Ireland, daughter of her first husband. It was not an easy life. They told how they would have to ride steers to herd the other cattle and that their legs would be slashed by the razor grass, a prairie grass that grew up to your waist. And that they would have to jump over nests of blue razor snakes. Kate was slim with auburn hair. And despite all, was remembered as always happy. For there were many good times with eight sisters and one brother.

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Kate married John Ford who was nine years older than she. John was the son of Peter Ford and Mary Muldoon. Mary Muldoon was part Spanish. Mary's father had left Ireland to serve in the Pope's army for six months. There was no pay but at least you would have food and lodging. He then wandered into Spain where he married a girl whose father had done the same thing. Mary was born on a ship between Spain and Ireland for her father wished to come home to Ireland.

maybe insert of Ford family tree

Peter and Mary were married in Ireland but then he left for America and worked on the Erie Canal. Three years later, he sent for her. Mary with her two children joined him in Ontario, Canada. The census report at that time relates how this group of people lived in dire poverty. The census taker writes:

"In winter these people cut wood. They just barely eck out an existence. They are to be pitied."

But finally they made their way to Hahnaman Township where they purchased a farm. They did well. Peter Ford's son, John, first went into farming. But when he was in his forties, he moved to Deer Grove and ran a livery stable and sold surreys. Also he and his wife, Kate, ran a hotel. They named their first daughter, Mary Ellen. They called her Minella.

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Kate did all the cooking, the canning, the cleaning. She was the midwife for the area. Whatever she did, she did beautifully. She had lovely clothes that she had made and a home. She was clever as well as artistic. In 1909, Kate gave the family reunion. Her mother, Nellie, sits in the center of the second row. Kate sits to her right. Her daughter, my grandmother, is at the right end of the third row holding Al. My grandfather stands beside her to her right. In the first row are their children: Lourde, Ligouri, Mary and LaRita.

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But Kate never forgot her Irish ancestry. Aunt Mary remembers a reunion with all the aunts gathered in the kitchen.

"Well anyway on this particular day, you know a lot of chatting and visiting. And one of them said, "Kate, you remember how you used to dance the Irish jig? And Grandma said, "Yes, and I can do it today!" Oh and with just a lot of hilarity, someone got a broom stick and Grandma pinned her long skirts up and I don't know where they got the harmonica, but someone produced a harmonica and played the Irish Washerwoman and Grandma danced a jig like ... well, I don't think Anthony Quinn did any better in his famous dance."

This is the family in which my grandmother grew up, - aunts, uncles, a grandmother ... always that sense of family! This is my grandmother, Minella, when she was sixteen years old. She was the first of all of her ancestors to go to college. She had a degree in fine arts, music and elocution. Perhaps it was only fitting that the brightest young woman of Paddy's Island should fall in love with the handsomest young man in Whiteside County.

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My grandparents ran a store for while in Deer Grove. Granddad was also the postmaster. They then moved to a farm right across from the old Island School. **Here they are** with their three sons and two daughters: Lourde, Ligouri, Mary, LaRita and Aloysius. Together they worked hard to build a better life for their family. Minella founded the first PTA in the area and a woman's club in the county. She was even asked to be superintendent of schools but could not. She was pregnant with Eleanor. Mary remembers Mom making bread and reading from a propped up book while she kneaded the dough. She read the poem, Snowbound, many, many times to them.

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The first farm house burned down and another one built. **This is that farmhouse.** Upstairs there were three bedrooms. Downstairs there was a bedroom which they used simply for state occasions, an unheated parlor, and a combination dining room and kitchen.

Stop and think of getting meals and washing dishes for eleven people three times a day, making your family's clothes. Life was not easy but there was still plenty of time for fun. In the picture is Lourde who is trying to get Cecil back into line. There are the children: Lourde holding Cecil, Mary, Ligouri, LaRita, Aloysius, Dolorosa. Eleanor is inside in the crib.

Mary remembers playing in the barn.

As children, we had to make our own fun. And we never were lost for things to play. We improvised games as we went along. And we used to play ... it was a form of charades as I look back. One would be a robber. You never knew which one was the robber and that was wonderful about it. And we had leather pouches in which we kept our valuables. I think we must have been reading Canterbury Tales or Knights of the Round Table or something. In the one horse stall there was a log dividing the space between where the horses would stand. And one of the things that you could always tell who was the good guy was that instead of just jumping out of the manger, - if someone would take the perilous route of walking down that long, smooth, slick pole. And we used to pretend that the haystack was the Alps. Now the haystack was absolutely off-limits. Now I can understand why Papa didn't want us to be on the haystack. Because we would make holes in the hay and then it would rain and the hay would rot. But we didn't know ... we were simply told to stay off the haystack ... which was one reason why we always loved to go out and play on the haystack, scaling the Alps.

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John and Minella moved their family down **the road to this farm.** It is in this very house where you sit that they raised their growing family. My grandfather built the house. Ligouri, the second son, took this **picture of the family.** Here are the children now young adults: Lourde, Mary, LaRita, Al, Dolorosa, Eleanor, Cecil and Dede with their mother and father, my grandparents.

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The earlier games now gave way to dances and boy and girl friends. But there was still the family fun and the family pranks. Mary remembers:

LaRita seized upon the opportunity to make some fudge. And she and Al had been quarreling. He was out in the barn playing around. LaRita made the fudge and put it out on the back porch to cool. Of course, we were all just drooling, absolutely drooling, at the prospect of having fudge. And Al came up, sneaked the pan of fudge, took a ladder, climbed up on top of the porch, pulled the ladder up after him and sat there and ate it in front of us. I recall, I think the folks must have come home before we murdered him!

And so these children grew up, married, and had their own families. All but Cecil who died of pneumonia when he was twenty-two. They lived in a world that knew the two greatest wars that mankind has ever experienced. They would not be farmers but would rather go into business. And they moved away from Paddy's Island.

33 I remember when I was a little girl growing up on this very farm. Paddy's Island was my universe. I took for granted the aunts, the uncles, the cousins who came to visit. But I always knew that I was part of a great family. **Here I am with my Aunt Dede and Aunt Dodo.**

34 **And so my generation too** grew up: lawyer, doctor, geologist, professors, accountants, business men and women. Our families scattered even farther, ... and our children
35 grew up. **Cecil, who died** so young, wrote a letter to Al right before he died. In this letter he wrote a poem. He said so well what I felt as I wrote this history of our family from my Aunt Mary's remembrances. A few of the stanzas are:

36 Much hope is placed in heaven's grace by men of religious lore.
They little know that man is made by what has come before.

Not knowing whence he came or whither he is going,
An endless cell on an endless sea from an endless river flowing.

For every ray of light that comes out of the east,
Tho' it marks a new life's dawning, it shall mark a life deceased.

And every weary pilgrim shall finally fold his tent.
Life's zenith passed, his sun has set, his steps are westward bent.

Let's sip our wine together ere our journey here is done.
For life is but a shadow and will vanish with the sun.

37 **And so we come** together from near and faraway to celebrate with pride our heritage:
Our trust in God,
Our love of family,
38 **And our pride** in the name of WELCH.

I then went backward to Welchwood in fall #31