

Who Were John and Jane Hayes of Clonakilty?*

John Hayes, the son of Henry Hayes and *Jane Hayes*, was born about 1790 in or near Clonakilty, County Cork, Ireland. He married *Jane Hayes*, the daughter of *John Hayes* and Anne (Nancy) Phipps about 1819. Jane was born about 1797. Jane and John were the parents of eight children, two of whom were our great-grandparents: John Joseph, who married Rachel Eleanor Wagstaff, and George, who married Frances (Fanny) Phipps.

The Hayes family lived on Chapel Lane and were next door neighbors to Fanny's parents, Edward Phipps and Mary Atkins. It is interesting to note that three of the Hayes' children married at the height of the potato famine: Martha married William Splane March 7, 1847, in Kinneigh Parish; Henry, a widower, was married for the second time to Hannah Hurley on August 10, 1847, and George Hayes and Frances Phipps were married October 23, 1847. Both of these marriages took place in the Kilgariff Parish Church (Church of Ireland).¹ One wonders how the newlyweds made their way during those dreadful times when thousands were dying of starvation.

What little we know about John and Jane is gleaned from bits and pieces of information: official documents, historical research, and family lore passed down from generation to generation. For example, our great-grandfather John Joseph said he didn't have a pair of shoes on his feet until he learned to make them himself; he lived through the Irish famine when their



"The nineteenth-century Irish countrywoman, with a pot on the fire and basket full of 'praties.'"

*This short sketch was first prepared by the president of the John & Jane Hayes of Clonakilty Family Organization (JHFO) for its website, June 2002; revisions and additions were made September 2002. Illustration from Kenneth Neill, *An Illustrated History of the Irish People*, N.Y.: Mayflower Books, 1979, p. 105.

only food was potatoes and some fish, with bread only at Christmastime; and he kept himself in school by winning prizes for memorizing the most scriptures (could we call it a parish school “scholarship”?) These few statements provide insights into the family’s economic condition and about life in Ireland during the mid-1800’s.²

Irish historians tell us the poorer people in Ireland did not wear shoes, which were considered a fatiguing incumbrance and were scarcely ever worn except on the Sabbath or other holidays. Journeys were usually made barefoot, the shoes and stockings tied together and thrown across the arm. We can still see pictures taken during the 1900s showing poor Irish children playing barefoot in the street.³

John Joseph’s statement about living on potatoes and some fish is also consistent with Irish history. Even prior to the potato famine, little bread was eaten because people could not afford to buy flour. Meals consisted mostly of potatoes three times a day, which were boiled in a big iron kettle over an open fireplace. When they were done, they were placed in a basket and allowed to “teem” (drain). If fish was served, it was placed on top of the basket and considered only as a garnish. But the usual “kitchen” (garnish) was simply salt and water or buttermilk, placed on a saucer into which the potatoes were dipped. Such a meal was called “‘blind herring’ or ‘scudum up the road,’ since the presence of scadan (herring) had to be imagined.” Children going to school would carry cold potatoes for lunch and would often give their largest lunch potato to the schoolmaster. Even in the poorest homes, the door was always kept open during mealtime as a sign of welcome for any travelers or beggars who might be passing by. Such people were always welcome to eat with the family, and a large portion was served them even if it meant less food for the others.⁴

Even though John Joseph only attended school for a short time, he always loved education and learning. This too, is consistent with historical fact. Researchers tell us that a love of learning was characteristic of the Irish peasantry, and that education was more general among the poorer classes than was found in other European cultures. They would go without milk with their potatoes to save a few pennies to pay their children’s schoolmaster.⁵ Education must have been prized in John & Jane Hayes’ family, too, because John Joseph, and perhaps some of the other children, were sent to school. Because of his diligence, John Joseph was able to earn his own tuition by memorizing scriptures, but his schooling was rudimentary, and he probably had to learn his trade of shoemaking at an early age. Since poverty was widespread everyone had to work, and boys were taught a trade early so they could help maintain the family. John Joseph was fortunate to get the schooling he did. Throughout his life he was an avid reader and became a “self-educated” man. And because his only textbook was the Bible, those early lessons stayed with him throughout his life; he became known as “a walking Bible.”

A reference to the mother, Jane Hayes, that opens a window onto her character appears in the sort biographical sketch of her son George, which says, “George joined the British Army, but his mother thought him too young to serve as a soldier, so she scrimped and saved until

she had enough money to buy him out.”⁶ During that period of time, it was possible to buy out a term of enlistment for about ten pounds.⁷ Given their economic condition, that must have been a lot of scrimping and saving. How much money could she make? How long did it take? How much was ten pounds (£10) worth in 1840?

Ten pounds then had the buying power of £473.85 today, but an Irish laborer earned only 4 to 8 pence a day; women earned even less, and steady employment for either was hard to find. The average employment for men only covered 22 weeks a year during potato planting, growing, and harvesting season, so it would take a long time to save ten pounds.⁸

One wonders what kind of work Jane did. Perhaps she knitted stockings, spun wool or flax for the local linen weaver, or even did weaving herself. Since her mother was a Phipps, and some of the Phipps family was weavers, she might have taught her daughter to weave. Or Jane might have been engaged in piling turf in the peat bogs, dropping, weeding, or digging potatoes in season, stacking wheat and oats, or gathering hay. Maybe she kept chickens, a cow or goat, and sold butter and eggs at village fairs or market days, walking barefoot for miles to get there. And like most Irish women, was she a wonderful bargain driver, arguing for an hour over the split of a penny?⁹ Whatever she did, she finally got enough money to buy George out of the army.

And what of the father, John Hayes? What kind of work did he do? We know from his children’s marriage certificates that he was a cordwainer, a person who made and repaired shoes. Like his father before him, he taught his sons the same trade, since official records also show at least three of his sons were shoemakers: Henry, George, and John Joseph. And another son, William, was very likely an apprentice shoemaker, because family lore tells us he died from swallowing a mouthful of shoe tacks. (Shoemakers held the tacks in their mouth and spit them out as needed.) Since William was only fourteen, his inexperience might have led to the accident. Nothing is known about the fifth son, Edward, other than he is named in temple records by his brother John Joseph.

Daughters born to this couple were Mary Ann, Martha, and Jane. As noted before, Martha married William Splane, a school teacher from Clonareague Parish of Kinneigh, the son of John Splane, a steward. Jane married Thomas Jermyn, a laborer, from Shannonvale Parish of Kilnagross, whose father was also named Thomas and who was also a laborer. They had five children.¹⁰ Jane’s husband, “Uncle Jermyn,” was still alive in 1912 and appears in pictures of the Hayes and Phipps’ homes taken when John Phipps Hayes, grandson of John and Jane Hayes, visited Ireland in September of that year. Two of the Jermyn children, John and Susan, emigrated to the United States. John went to Boston, Massachusetts in 1904, and Susan married a man named William D. Poteet and lived in Washington state, where she became the mother of a large family.¹¹ Nothing is known about Mary Ann. Like Edward, she is named in temple records.

Another bit of family lore tells a little about one of the grandmothers who lived with the family and how she saved John Joseph’s life. Of this, his son William L. Hayes wrote:

When about ten years of age he [John Joseph] contracted cholera. It was a very vicious type of cholera and people often died within hours of being attacked, and on account of the fatal and contagious nature of the disease, and no place but the home to care for the dead bodies, they were often buried within a few hours, always the same day they died. He was taken violently sick and soon was in a spasm and to all intents and purposes was dead. His body was laid out and the chin tied up prepared for burial. His old grandmother was the chief mourner for she was especially attached to the bright witted little fellow. As he lay stiff and cold she said, ‘O, I know my little Johnny will not leave me. I can’t let him go.’ And at that she took the kettle of hot water from the stove and poured it down his throat which caused him to fight for breath and she nursed him back to life.¹²

Tantalizing bits of information like this arouse our interest in the old Grandmother Hayes, John and Jane, and other members of the family. Which grandmother was she? What was her life like? And what momentous events might she have witnessed during her lifetime?

As we study Irish history, we learn our ancestors endured incredible hardships—poverty, disease, the Irish famine—and lived in circumstances beyond our modern-day understanding. But we can look back on them with pride, for they are part of our flesh and blood; our very existence is due in large part to their courage and fortitude. And as we trace our Irish lineage, we see their names printed neatly on paper, but we would like to know more. We would like to see beyond the paper to learn about the real people those names represent—people with hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows, love of family, plans for the future. In our modern-day interest in them, they live on, and an ancient prophecy is fulfilled: “And He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers . . .” (Malachi 4:6)

Notes

1. Quarterly Returns of Marriage 1847, Vol 2, p. 541. FHL film 101283.
2. Eleanor Jane Hayes, daughter. "Biography of John Joseph Hayes," p. 1.
3. T.C. Croker. *Researches in the South of Ireland*, Shannon, Ireland, 1969, p. 222; and M.M. Morrow. *The Irish Century*, 1999, pp. 26, 58.
4. Edwards and Williams. *The Great Famine*, New York, 1957, pp. 392-393.
5. The Irish peasant's love of learning can be seen in the "hedge schools" that sprang up all over the country when English law made it a crime to educate Catholic children. Parish priests risked death for teaching Catholic children to read and write in the hedge rows. C.E. Maxwell. *County and Town in Ireland Under the Georges*, pp. 166-167.
6. "Short Biography of George Hayes and Frances Phipps Hayes," adapted from a biography by Sharlee Doxey, great-granddaughter.
7. J.M. Kitzmiller, II. *In Search of the "Forlorn Hope," A Comprehensive Guide to Locating British Regiments and Their Records (1640-WWI)*, vol. 1, p. 9.
8. Source for the purchase power of the pound: John J. McCusker. "Comparing the Purchasing Power of Money in Great Britain from 1600 to Any Other Year Including the Present," Economic History Services, 1001, <http://www.eh.net/hmit/ppowerbp/>
There are 240 pence in a pound. Assuming Jane could only earn 4 pence a day (since she was a woman), and worked the usual 12 (or more) hours a day, six days a week, it would take ten weeks (2.5 months) to earn a pound, or 25 months to earn 10 pounds. From that she had to deduct living expenses. Source for Irish workers' wages: T.P. O'Neill, p. 43 (Sorry, I lost the full citation.)
9. P.F. Jones. *Shamrock Land*, New York, 1908, p. 237.
10. The children of Thomas and Jane Hayes Jermyn were: John, born 4 June 1866, FHL Film 101134, p. 69; Susan, born 24 Sept 1867, FHL Film 101044, p. 74; Mary Jane, born 1 Dec 1869, FHL Film 101046, p. 90; Eliza, born 8 June 1871, FHL film 255831, p. 81, and Thomas, LuRena Hayes Johnson archive sheet. See respective film numbers in the Quarterly Returns of Births, Ireland, for the other children.
11. Source for John Jermyn's emigration: notes by LuRena Hayes Johnson on the back of an archive sheet. Children of William D. Poteet and Susan Jermyn were: Emmaline, Florence, Pearl, Nellie, John, "Red," Albert, Bill, Harry. Correspondence from Emmeline Poteet Zimmerman (Mrs. Ernest) dated 9 July 1951, and Harry Poteet to LuRena Hayes Johnson, 11 June 1953.
12. William L. Hayes, son, "Life Sketch of John J. Hayes," p. 1; and T.C. Croker, pp. 171-172. Croker tells us the chief mourner was usually an old woman; perhaps a relative or close friend, who would "keen" or lament over the dead. Sometimes paid mourners were hired. The keen was melancholy, wild, unearthly, yet somehow grand, and recounted all the deceased person's good deeds, pedigree of ancestors, manner of death, and so on.