

BRUSNAHAN
MEMOIRS

1985

Property of Alice Rowen Easley
3735 Carmel Drive
Carmel, In 46032

Note names marked:

Rowen, Chepp,

Heimlich, Clark

Switzer, Hammerton

History: Parr, Indiana,
Union Township, Jasper
County

1 9 3 5

Limited Edition of 100 Copies
Published by E. Paul Brusnahan

to my Mother

IDA M. BRUSNAHAN

Dec. 8, 1862—Aug. 10, 1934

THE BRUSNAHANS IN IRELAND AND IN AMERICA

MICHAEL BRUSNAHAN, the son of John B. Brusnahan and Mary Brusnahan, whose maiden name was Calaher, about 1840 lived close to the little town of Killarney, Ireland, in the county of Kerry. John Brusnahan and his sons, for years previous to the above day, were engaged in farming; the sons were hard working and industrious, but the elder Brusnahan did not stick close to the work, but spent much of his time trying to reform the abuses which he seemed to think existed in his day. Oftimes his voice might be heard vindicating the cause of the common people of Ireland. A typical Irishman and patriotic to the very core.

In Ireland, in those days, one could not buy land outright, but could buy what was called a free-hold. This would not give a person a real title to a place, but would give a title for a number of years, based upon the lives, generally, of three men. At the end of their lives the free-hold expired. About this time the

free-hold, which was held by my father, his father and brothers, was nearing expiration. Two of the parties mentioned in the free-hold had died, and the one living was a man well advanced in years.

My father, in viewing this matter as it really existed in its proper light, and having heard of the green fields of America, decided that he would go and see them. Consequently, about the year 1844, he and my mother bid farewell to their friends and relatives and took sail for America. The account of their voyage was a very pleasant one, with no excitement of much consequence on the way. It lasted six weeks which was considered, in those days, a very quick trip.

After arriving in America, they made their home in Boston. From Boston they moved to Saxon Village, Roxingham County, Vermont. At this place I was born in the year of 1848.

About the year 1852 there was an effort made by the state of Indiana to drain the swamp lands of the Beaver Lake country, and about that time there was a contract made out to some parties whom I do not positively

know but believe them to be John Ball, Jake Merckle, and Major Pute. However, my father and a man by the name of Steven Clifford took a sub-contract for the construction of a great state ditch, which was to extend from Beaver Lake to the Kankakee river, and thereby drain the lake.

This work lasted for over two and one-half years. The work ended, my father and three others started out in search of more work. They came to Rensselaer. There, father met George Spitler with whom he entered into a contract for the digging of two ditches, the Murphy and Smith ditches, in Jasper county.

In said contract it was specified that the work should be paid for, one-third in merchandise, one-third in land, and one-third in cash. This work, which lasted about two years, was finished in the latter part of 1854, and settlement made. There was a deed made to my father for forty acres of land in Barkley township, Jasper county. My father did not seem to place any great value in the land, but my mother persuaded him to build thereon.

About the 20th day of November, 1857, with

about an inch of snow on the ground, we moved into the little log cabin, on the first land that father ever owned in America. This he improved and made to look much like a home. There, I will say, I spent some of the happiest days of my life.

Here a number of my brothers were born, namely: James, Cornelius, Stephen, Jeremiah, and John. Elizabeth Brusnahan was born in Rockville, Indiana. There were two sisters preceding me who died in infancy.

These statements are made according to the best of my memory. We lived on this place ten years, or approximately. In March, 1869, we moved to one of the David Nowels farms, where we were engaged in farming for a year. The next move was to the Orphan Asylum farm, now known as the John Nowels' farm. Here we were engaged in farming for about six years. While living on this farm, our house burned one night when the temperature was sixteen degrees below zero, and the family records were lost. For that reason I am unable to give some dates that I would like to.

In the year 1872 my father owned about eighty acres of land near to what is now Parr, Indiana. The land was entirely unimproved. Father had to clear, ditch and break the land, as well as fence it. I remember hearing one of our neighbors say that Brusnahan must have a big heart to face such a task. Men in that neighborhood called him "The King of the Woods."

There are many things I have omitted for the sake of brevity, but I have tried to give a plain statement of the subject and whether it will be kindly accepted or otherwise, I will bring my writing to a close.

As far as the remaining history of the family is concerned, it is well known to all concerned at it is to me. Some of these facts have been recalled to my mind by my brother, Steve.

—*Thomas F. Brusnahan.*

MEMORIES OF EARLY DAYS

IN CONNECTION with the article previously prepared and read by my brother, Thomas F. Brusnahan, at the family reunion in 1929, I might add that Father Brusnahan and Mother Margret Kain Brusnahan often talked of the beauty of the Lakes of Killarney which were only a few miles from where they were raised. Also the beauty of the mountains and valleys surrounding the lakes. Those valleys produced the most abundant grasses and it was there that Mother Brusnahan often herded the cows, as this was a great dairy section. The Kain leasehold carried, together with the land, grass for ten cows. My mother's people, the Kains, were small of stature, while the Brusnahans were a large, strong race of men, who greatly enjoyed any athletic game or sport.

It was the custom to have fairs in the neighboring town, which in this case was Milltown, and also Caverservein, where all kinds

of farm products were offered on the market and athletic sports were indulged in. Father Brusnahan always took an active part in those sports. The fairs were largely attended by the surrounding neighborhood. I might add that Mucross Abbey and Blarney Castle were also near, and are today very much visited spots by tourists.

In that day under England's iron rule, the Irish people were compelled to buy and sell everything of the English government; forcing the Irish people to pay a tax to the government for everything they sold as well as what they bought. To avoid this tax the younger men of that day, namely of 1840, resorted to what was known as smuggling. All transportation at that date was done by means of horse and cart. The carts would be loaded with the farmers' products and delivered to the market towns by night, getting the goods on the market before the tax-collector began operations. Father Brusnahan often did this work which was considered by loyal Irishmen to be an honor

All this has since been changed, thanks

to such emancipators as Daniel O'Connell, and William Stuart Parnell, who was an American of an Irish mother. He fought the battle of Irish freedom for years. William Gladstone, the great English leader, during the latter years of his rule, valiantly advocated freedom for the Irish people; and it was at this time that the Land Act was passed allowing Irishmen to own land and compelling the English landlords to gradually reduce their holdings in Ireland. Prior to this time, and since the time of the Reformation, no Irishman was allowed to own land. Even the land that was made on the hillside by the loyal Irish sons and daughters by carrying dirt from the valleys and bogs up to the mountain side in baskets and buckets was taken from them by English landlords, forcing them to pay rent. Happily this is all past, and today the Irish Free States are enjoying almost as fine a measure of freedom as we enjoy in America.

I might add that Daniel O'Connell, one of the first agitators for freedom, was compelled by his English opponents to fight sev-

eral different duels. From these he escaped death by being wounded three times. O'Connell killed two of his adversaries and wounded three. This is only a few of the thoughts of conditions that the Irish people have gone through in their seven-hundred years' struggle for freedom.

It seems as though Father and Mother Brusnahan were very fortunate in leaving Ireland in the year of 1844 as the following year brought on a potato famine in Ireland. Being an extremely wet season, the potatoes rotted in the ground. As potatoes were the staple bread food of Ireland at the time, hundreds of people starved to death because of this catastrophe. And two years following this is what is often referred to by the old Irish people as the year of the Big Wind, which killed a great many people and caused great destruction. In the old days you would ask an Irishman when it was that he had come to this country, and he would reply that it was the year before the Big Wind, or two years after the potato famine, as the case might be. These are two dates the old Irish

people never forget and often refer to.

Father Brusnahan after arriving in Castle Gardens, after six weeks on a sailing vessel, then hired to the captain of the boat and made an additional trip up to Montreal, Canada. At that time I had one sister, born in Ireland, who was the pet of all the sailors and passengers. This trip was really an enjoyable one for my father and mother.

Brother Tom's previous account relates the incidents which brought the Brusnahan family to Barkley township about 1854. From this farm we moved to near Rensselaer, living there six years, then moving to the farm near Parr, which was in 1874. The first house on this farm was a log building, formerly the Brushwood schoolhouse, which was moved and used as our home. Living here for a number of years must account for the fact that so many in the family became school teachers. James D. Brusnahan, a confirmed bachelor of Eureka, Utah, who was 74 years old on August 15, 1934, was the first and likewise pioneer teacher. Then followed Mary Brusnahan Richardson, Leo Brusnahan, Dorothy

Brusnahan, Ura Brusnahan McGuran, Ray Brusnahan, Clara Brusnahan Waymire, Lucy Brusnahan Lane, and Stan Brusnahan. The strange thing, as I find it in the Brusnahan family, who were always farmers, is now we find only four farmers in the entire family.

At the time we took up our residence at Parr there were no roads and no fences nearer than what is now Surrey, and no railroad nearer than Francesville, Indiana. I might add that Brother Tom drove cattle from the farm to the Stock Yards in Chicago, about the year 1876, as the Monon railroad was not built north of Rensselaer until 1881.

This is only a hint of the conditions which we have passed through. The present conditions and conveniences you all are acquainted with, as well as myself, might be made a subject at the next reunion by some of the younger Brusnahans.

—S. A. Brusnahan.