

# Son of Roscrea

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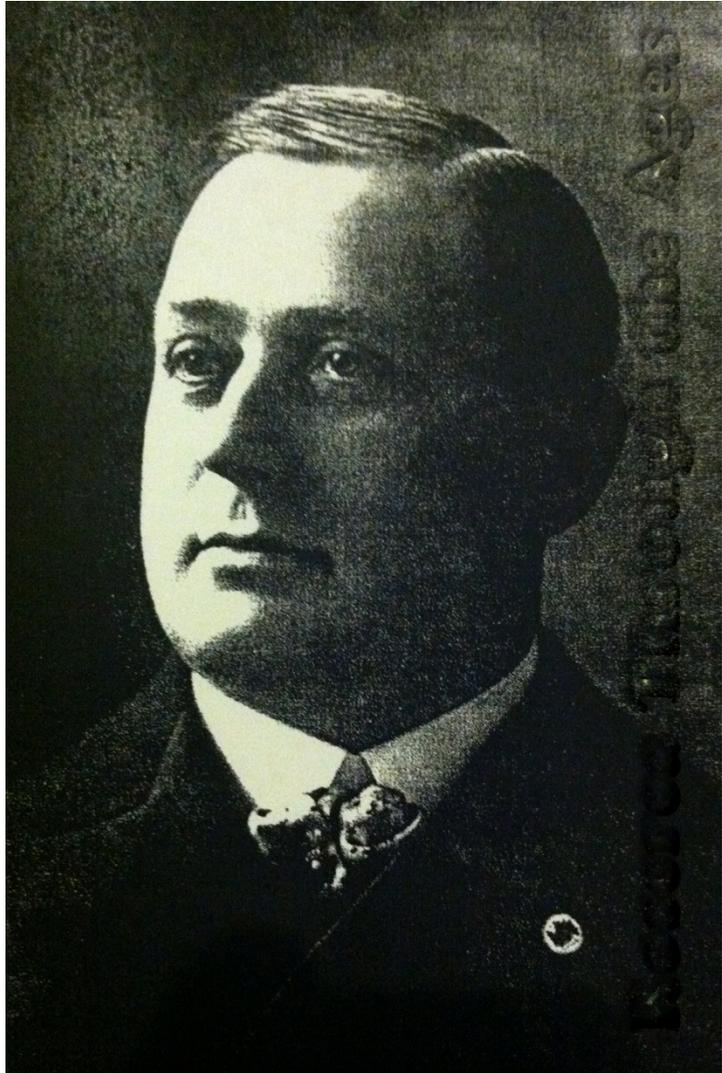
sent to us by Kevin Mooney in  
Cleveland Ohio

Michael Mooney was born on April 7, 1825 in Roscrea, Tipperary, Ireland. He was the youngest child of John Mooney and Judith Carroll who were married on April 28, 1816. They had four children – Anastatia, born March 4, 1817, Anne born February 11, 1819 and Mary born July 27, 1821 – all in Roscrea.

Little likely exists in the records related to Michael's childhood and no oral family tradition remains of those days. We can only surmise, based upon circumstantial evidence and the state of Roscrea between 1825 and when he left at age 21 in early 1847, that the family was a typical Irish Roman Catholic family of the area; conacre farmers, laborers, who tilled the land and lived harvest to harvest at the whim of natural law and the ruling London government.

Family traditional, those few faint whispers of our past, hold that the family's birthright was in and around the Knock Crossroads, just outside and southeast of Roscrea. A beautiful land, it is probable that the Mooney family cabin was nestled along a ridge line or stood wrapped in stone, pallid and thatched, along the fields of potatoes upon which their hopes relied. Then came the Great Hunger.

As the catastrophe of the Famine spread, and the crops failed for a second year in a row in late summer 1846, it is clear that the dreams of the Mooney's collapsed into frightful hunger, horror and death. Two of Michael's sisters disappeared into the mist of the hordes of skeletons that staggered onward towards the coasts. Mary, however, appears to have married a William Costigan and they survived the Famine, having many children and a line that survives to today. His parents, John and Judith, fade into the inferno, only to arise just more than a year later –



pencil marks on the Tipperary Coroner's Inquests – John Mooney of Roscrea, my great, great, great, great grandfather, died on January 19, 1848 downed with the verdict of a "Visitation of God" – and my sweet great, great, great, great grandmother, the silky hand that wrapped my Michael as a wee child, struggled in the misery of disease and was choked out of existence on February 25, 1848 from an effusion of the brain – the fever. They have no known markers and no records of their burials and likely were dumped into a mass grave, absent of dignity and ritual.

Between that crop failure and his emigration, it is probable that Michael worked on government projects and earned just enough money for passage to "Americay". Perhaps not enough was earned for passage for three and therefore Michael was forced to leave his parents behind, perhaps sent along first in hopes that he could make enough money in Americay to send for his parents. He then, with heavy heart and an English hatred untended, left our homeland of Ireland likely on a cattle boat bound, to his probable consternation, for Liverpool, never to see his family again.

Like tens of thousands of anonymous Irish of the times, there is no known record of Michael's time in Liverpool. He survived his stay and boarded the Oxford in Liverpool on or around March 1, 1847, assigned to compartment 13 in that ship's below deck steerage section. He had no more than a bundle of possessions. A farmer, day laborer, with no professional trade or skill-set, he crossed the wicked Atlantic, witnessing the horrors and experiencing the emotional trauma of a Coffin Ship crossing.

Upon his arrival in New York on April 15, 1847, and following the ship's quarantine, Michael Mooney found himself a 22 year old Irish Catholic in a predominantly non-Catholic and potentially hostile metropolis. It is known from his later life that during the year that he spent in New York City he made a network of contacts and learned an apprenticeship of merchant tailoring. Having learned his trade quite quickly, his talent secured him enough money to begin the process of building his life.

In the meantime and just months into his stay in New York, he met Ann Burke and her Mother, Margaret and two sisters, Bridget and Johanna. By the end of August, just four short months in Americay, the two lovers had consummated their spiritual commitment to each other, resulting in Ann's first pregnancy, and Michael's urgency for leaving the rat infested, epidemic centric lower Manhattan crowded Irish neighborhoods. The bustling and burgeoning city of Cleveland promised to be a city like no other, prospering and becoming one of the nation's most prized centers.

On May 18, 1848, Michael, along with his pregnant girlfriend, Ann, and her mother and two sisters, packed alongside a commercial vendor's cargo of 9,303 bushels of wheat, 200 barrels of salt, 10 barrels of flax seed and 68 barrels of oats, arrived at the port of Cleveland, Ohio, having traveled the last part of their journey on the grand Lake Erie on the Steamboat, Indiana. Baby Mooney, the first Irish American in my family, was born just two weeks later.

Michael settled the family quickly on its near East Side and launched his career as a merchant tailor in the city. He continued his popularity among other Irish in the city, prompted on by his

innate and unique ability to network and earn the trust of his fellows. His first advertisement as a merchant tailor appears in the Cleveland newspapers in autumn of 1848.

Then tragedy struck the family on November 30, 1848, when their six month old baby girl died. No record remains of her illness, yet it is suspected that the cruelty of the loss was exasperated by the fact that the family came to Cleveland specifically to provide a clean and abundant environment for a young family that the booming city of Cleveland promised.

It is surmised that Michael grieved in a manner centric to his Catholic community, surrounded by a support structure of friends and parishioners, as well as the loving support of the obvious strong female presence in his own home - the women he had so valiantly cared for and moved from New York. Based upon the records peppered through the next fifty years, it is clear that Ann was not isolated in her grief. Her sisters and mother shared in her grief and aided in the mending of her broken heart.

Michael, with no choice but to provide for his women, continued on his trajectory of his young career, appearing in the 1850 Smead and Cowles' General Business Directory of the City of Cleveland at 41 Bank Street (now West 6th Street) in downtown Cleveland, touting his tailoring business. Bank Street was significant for its proximity to not only the center of commerce and the arts of the city, but also to the burgeoning upper class that had begun to spread just east of Public Square along Euclid Avenue (what was to shortly become the famed Mansion Row) and along the Doric columned Superior, as well as the commercial center of The Flats along the Cuyahoga River. His naturalization papers were filed in Cleveland on November 25, 1850 and he was naturalized March 16, 1854.

During this time his merchant tailoring business boomed in the city and he moved his business several times to accommodate for the ever increasing demands on his expertise and the expansion on his client base. Mooney, M, Merchant Tailor business moved to 28 Public Square and advertisements boasted his styles in 1859. He was now known as one of the most progressive merchant tailors in the region and traveled frequently through the Northeast trail back to New York City. This travel continued through his life, aided by the initial contacts he made in New York upon his arrival from Ireland. His sons would eventually likewise continue with these Manhattan contacts as they expanded the family business even further years later.

Much changed for Michael in the 1850s and the decade was both filled with great heartache as well as great fortune. Ann became pregnant again and she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl who they named Mary. Mary, as can be imagined, surrounded by four women and a man of Michael's tenderness, was likely the jewel of the family. That jewel, wee Mary, however, tragically died at 14 months old on July 5, 1852. Although we do not know exactly when, the records seem to indicate that this is when Michael bought a 16-18 plot squared section in the new Irish Catholic cemetery in Cleveland, St. John's. It has always been my contention that he vowed never to allow any Mooney to ever again, like his parents, be dumped into anonymous graves - that here, in Americay, their New Ireland, they would own a place in which their bodies would be interred properly. Their first child, who died in 1848, was dis-interred from Erie Cemetery on 9<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Cleveland and her remains were moved to St. John's

where we suspect she was re-interred with her sister. The fifteen foot tall family monument in St. John's notes each of these babies by name, however, there is only one grave marker marking Mary's resting place.

The family had their home built in 1858 just after Michael secured an original ten acre plot of land from the Dodge family that bordered Euclid Avenue and fronted newly minted Dodge Street (now East 17<sup>th</sup> Street where Cleveland State University's business school now stands). The family home was listed through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as 182 Dodge Street. The area would eventually host two other family homes (180 Dodge and 164 Dodge, both at different times owned by Michael's daughter Mary and her husband P.C. O'Brien – the man who would run for mayor in 1899 against Tom Johnson). His love for real estate would cascade through the years, his desire to never be subjected to a landlord again, total. He would be the landlord. He would control the destiny of his family. He would never again have to answer to a lord. Through his life he owned and deeded nearly forty properties including on Rockwell, St. Clair, others on Superior and perhaps on Euclid, as well as in several suburbs, including Brooklyn. His wife, Ann, also recorded several properties and managed those accounts throughout the years.

It was in these years of the 1850s that the family finally took permanent root in America with the birth of four other children, who, after the tragic deaths of the first two children, all survived. Their names were Mary Mooney (a second, perhaps third daughter named Mary), born February 1854, John B. Mooney, born August 27, 1857, Margaret (Maggie) Mooney, born two days later on August 29, 1857 and Thomas J Mooney born in 1858. These children would all spend their childhoods in a loving home, preparing eventually for their adulthood through community service, fidelity to the church, and outreach to other Irish famine victims arriving in Cleveland. The Great Hunger hung on the family's history and never in these two generations subsided. Michael and Ann, along with her sisters and mother, who all lived at the Dodge main family home, conveyed their Irish heritage to the children, including the horror of the famine and the goal to ensure that all Irish who found their way to Cleveland would find the same opportunities provided to this family. Their years would be filled with picnics and fundraisers, famine relief, political rallies and efforts to aid the poor (so much so that Maggie would contract Typhus while helping the poor in 1912, leading to her being sent to the family home in St. Augustine, Florida, which set in motion events leading to John B.'s death when he came to visit her and went swimming with her son, Thomas, who then was caught in an undertow. John B. attempted to save his nephew and was either drowned in the undertow or killed by a shark. (His body was never recovered).

Michael's children would be leaders, civic and otherwise, and he saw to it to ensure their successes. The boys would be educated in the finest parochial school in town and John B. would attend college at Niagara University and law school at Columbia University in New York City, returning home to Cleveland to become a practicing attorney, a publishing house director, a president running a renowned grocery business with his brother in law P.C., President of the Cleveland Retail Grocers Association, and eventually taking over the family merchant tailoring business.

During their early childhoods, Michael made a series of business moves that brought him more profits and an undisputed reputation of a top businessman in town. In 1860 he retired his merchant tailoring business to 13 Public Square where the business continued to flourish for the next several years. The business was then moved to the Council Building in 1863. In 1865 he was located at 30 Monumental Park in downtown Cleveland and moved yet again in 1867 to 321 Superior Street where he remained through the 1880s. The family business would eventually extend three generations, known as Michael Mooney Merchant Tailor (1848-1875), then Mooney & Sons Merchant Tailors, with sons Thomas and John B. (1875-1888), then Mooney Bros. Merchant Tailors following his death in 1888, run by John B. and then his son Edgar (1888-1915), closed by his grandson, Edgar after more than a half a century of propriety. With his various real estate ventures and the success of building one of America's most progressive merchant tailoring businesses, the family was very well off. The contrast between the homeless Michael, with no trade and no possessions arriving in New York City in 1847 and his gift to his son, John B. at his wedding 38 years later in 1885 shows the success he became – for John B's wedding gift Michael and Ann gave him and his new bride a fully furnished home in the progressive Hough neighborhood at 1772 East 63<sup>rd</sup> Street.

A few concepts permeate Michael's life in Americay: (1) his love of family, (2) his love for Ireland and (3) his desire to ensure that the Mooney's would never be subjugated again to the cruelty of a landlord or the willful negligence or murderous intentions of an oppressive government. This meant that he would take the initiative to control the local government and be the landlord himself, as well as a clandestine local leader of the Irish and Irish American freedom movement. He quickly became a well-known, prominent and respected businessman, quite obviously involved in ward politics. He never ran for elected office (though his son, John B. did) and appears to have been in a position to manipulate the levers of ward politics to ensure his Irishmen were atop each of the wards, within the civic offices, had influence upon the city and county governments, and influence and an advisory capacity into various lines of industry to maximize the protection of the burgeoning Irish community. In this capacity, he and his associates could exchange favors, ensure votes, divvy up appointments, and consolidate party machinery in the Democratic Party.

Coupled with his reputation as a respected, honest businessman, as well as a shrewd political mover, he was, from its inception, a leading member of Cleveland's Fenian Brotherhood, although, as was his pattern, never took an official elected or overtly public facing position in the Fenians, partly to keep his reputation in greater Cleveland intact with non-Irish, non-Catholic citizens.

Like his fellow displaced Irish, who had survived the genocide, he labored at organizing the Fenians and attempted to strengthen the blade that would one day strike at the heart of the British Empire. Two major incidents occurred in or from Cleveland in 1866 and 1867, and he was likely aware of both of them, but I suspect was not supportive of either. The Niagara Raid (Battles of Ridgeway and Fort Erie) was a failed attempt to secure Canada militarily and hold it hostage in exchange for Irish independence. The second incident involved a group of local Cleveland Fenians overtaking a British schooner in Cleveland harbor, eliciting condemnation

from local government and from the public in general. While the Niagara Raid was a sanctioned event, the foolish attempt to take over a British navy ship was probably not. In 1880, Michael was one of the local Irish leaders who helped to host Parnell's tour, whose stop in Cleveland was essential to Irish American politics.

On October 30, 1888, Michael Mooney, always a Son of Roscrea, died after a two day painful struggle with intestinal blockage at the home that he built in 1858, his beloved 182 Dodge Street. He would be remembered at the magnificent St. John's Cathedral at a funeral service that can be recalled as being heavily attended by the Irish community, the business trades and civic and political leaders. He was interred at St. John's Woodland Catholic cemetery, two plots away from his beloved daughters buried thirty six years earlier. His headstone simply reads, "FATHER," and that he was – the patriarch of a family that barely survived the Great Hunger, established on his sweat equity in a New Ireland, a civic and political leader that helped to galvanize the Irish arriving in Cleveland into a potent and powerful community, a business leader, who with others, helped carve Cleveland into America's most prized city, a loving husband to his dear Ann and loving and present Father to all six of his children. He left Roscrea a son of the dispossessed and arrived in Cleveland a father – a father whose legacy includes a son, John B., and his son, Edgar J., and his son, William, and his son, William Jr., and his son, me, and mine, Nathaniel. Without this Father, my son, Nathaniel, my son of Roscrea, would not exist.



My Michael, we are the future you dreamed of yesterday –

Kevin Michael Mooney

Cleveland Heights, OH, USA