

HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENTS  
OF THE TOWNSHIP OF CEDAR LAKE

Scott County, Minnesota  
(from May 1855 to January 1939)  
by William J. Casey

The Township of Cedar Lake is situated in the southeastern part of Scott County. It is bordered on the north by Spring Lake Township, on the east by New Market Township, on the west by Helena Township and on the south by Rice County. It takes its name from a lake on the western border where groves of red cedar trees grow along its shores.

Thomas O'Donnell and Michael Flynn came to what has become Cedar Lake Township early in the spring of 1855 and were the first white people in that vicinity. Michael Flynn remained only a short time, but Thomas O'Donnell located his claim the same year in the northeast quarter of section 18, where he has since resided. During the several months after his arrival, the surrounding territory literally swarmed with indians, at one time more than 50 tepees being on his claim alone. Being unmarried, he had no society whatever and lived in a small log cabin, doing his own cooking and housework, which however, was not very extensive.

In August 1855, A.B.McMinders located in the northeast quarter of section 4. He was the first married man that settled in the township, his wife being the first white woman. He came from Indiana, and lived the greater part of his life on this site.

Martin Pyne was also an old settler, coming in the spring of 1855, remaining but a short time when he left for unknown parts. These were followed in the fall of the same year by several Irish families, among them the following: Patrick Kiley who located with his wife and 2 daughters on section 7; James Clear with his wife and one child in section 8; Martin Phelan, unmarried in section 30; Edward Murphy, married with 2 children in section 6; Martin Timmons with wife and 2 sons in section 6; Martin Marrinan and wife in section 3; John Carroll in section 2; Edward Champion in section 7; Cornelius O'Connor in section 22; Thomas Driscoll in section 1; George Porter in section 6; Michael Flynn in section 7; Patrick Riley in section 8; Edward S. Beck in section 9; Wright D. Adam in section 9; and John D. Ryan in section 8.

In the following year settlers began coming so rapidly that any attempt to enumerate them would be futile. These settlers, as may be noted from the names were nearly all of Irish nationality. This has continued so for many years.

The first birth in the township occurred in the fall of 1855 being a daughter born to Patrick & Kate Kiley. The first death was that of Michael Murphy, son of Edward and Eliza Murphy who died on August 13, 1857. The first marriage in the township was on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of June 1858. Alvin Clark was united in marriage to Betsy Walsh by Cornelius O'Flynn, Justice of the Peace. Clark came direct from Maine and settled in section 14.

The township has during its history remained strictly rural; has had neither railroads nor municipal activities within its borders. The soil is very productive rich loam with a clay subsoil, some natural meadows with drainage consisting of several small streams flowing into the Minnesota River. There are a few small lakes. All small grains and grasses, especially the clovers, thrive here. In later years, corn has become the principal crop. Cattle, horses, sheep, hogs and poultry have been produced since the first settlements were made and much improvement has been made both in quality as well as quantity along these lines.

Like all wooded areas, the building of roads was a great problem. Slow progress was made until the advent of the automobile. Today Cedar Lake Township has a splendid system of highways. In like manner from the humble log dwellings of the

pioneers, the modern farmsteads have been developed on all sides.

Those early settlers were a philosophic, happy people, of deep religious convictions, viewing life from a hopeful viewpoint. Most of them acquired the first homes here that they could call their own and naturally they put forth their best efforts to make them as livable and comfortable as possible. They cultivated intimate and friendly relations with each other, and many of the members of the families of the second generation have intermarried.

Of special interest, we think, is the relating of Michael Ryan now living at 88 years of age, wherein he states his father, John D. Ryan, mother and 2 boys left Elgin, Illinois, on May 2, 1855 via ox team and covered wagon, drove overland to Cedar Lake Township, arriving here on June 2 of that year, settling on section 8.

### POLITICAL

The first annual town meeting was held at the house Thomas Quill on April 10, 1858. The following officers were elected for the coming year: Thomas Quill, Chairman; John Ryan and John Marrinan, Supervisors; A.B. McMinders, Clerk; Wm. Quain, Assessor; George Porter, Collector; Thos. Hickey, Overseer of the Poor; Cornelius O'Flynn and Martin Phelan, Justices of the Peace; John Flynn and

Michael Phelan, Constables; and Patrick Gordon, Overseer of Roads.

A keen interest had taken hold of those old-timers in the affairs of state, locally and nationally. Hugh Johnston is given as the first county commissioner from this town to represent the fourth district. He was followed in office by Martin Marrinan, Thomas Hyland, Michael Nash, James Kennefick and James J. Ryan. Daniel S. Campton and Dennis Dealey were chosen to represent Scott County in the State Legislature. Patrick O'Flynn served as County Superintendent of Schools for many years as has Thos. Walsh, the present highly efficient County Auditor, who first saw the light of day in this township.

### CHURCH HISTORY

St. Patrick's Catholic Parish might be said to have come into being within a year or two after the first settler's arrival, as nearly all of them were of the Catholic Faith. Traveling missionary priests came occasionally to minister to the spiritual needs of these people as often as was possible; but under prevailing conditions at that time these visits were rather infrequent. To ride horseback or to travel on foot were the only means of travel over these trails and the ever presence of the "red man" did not add any to the comfort of the travelers. However, those brave soldiers of Christ did make the rounds.

Services were held at the homes of Thomas Quill, Edward Campion and John D. Ryan. A log church was built at St. Patrick's about 1864 and served until the present stone edifice was erected in 1873. The building is of Jordan sandstone, was drawn that long distance of 13 miles largely with ox teams and was considered a great undertaking under those conditions. It was dedicated on October 11, 1873 by Right Reverend Thos. L. Grace, Bishop of St Paul. One priest was raised in St Patrick's Parish, Father Frank O'Brien.

Nuns raised in the parish are as follows: Elizabeth, Theresa and Bridget Hickey; Sabina Garry; Mary Ann Ryan; Mary and Catherine O'Brien; Ann Clear and Mary Hyland.

One of the very fine cemeteries in these parts is close beside the church. The indians used to call it "tepee hill" and it is cared for by loving hands and is a fitting resting place for those good souls who did so much to establish the church and "God's Acres."

### EDUCATIONAL

The first school in Cedar Lake Township was taught by Cornelius O'Connor in section 22 in the summer of 1860. About 37 pupils were in regular attendance during the first term. Another school was started in the following fall at the house of Martin Phelan, Mary Phelan being the teacher. In 1861, a school was taught by Mary Ann Quill in a log house

situated in the SE quarter of section 7 where school district #32 now is. The following year school districts were organized and schools became general throughout the township. The township contains 5 school districts--#31, 32, 47, 48 & 69, all frame buildings well equipped. As may be noted, the greater number during all the years, were active residents of the townships; doing their grade work here in the local schools and taking their high school training at different institutions throughout the state. These local schools are now connected with the high schools in the surrounding towns by school bus and thus better facilities for obtaining an education will be available as time passes.

### POST OFFICES

Cedar Lake post office was established in 1860, Martin Phelan, postmaster. This office was situated in the residence of Mr. Phelan in section 30. Cornelius O'Connor was the postmaster and was appointed in 1866 at which time the office was removed to the northern part of section 22. He held office until the rural delivery was installed. St. Patrick post office was established September 17, 1874, Patrick O'Flynn was appointed first postmaster. He also ran a general merchandise store in connection with the post office as did Walsh Bros. for a number of years, disposing of both the store and

post office to Michael Sheehan. Mr. Sheehan then held this office until the advent of rural delivery.

Plum Creek post office was established in 1872 and was located in the SE quarter of section 25. Robert Gardner was the first postmaster. On January 14, 1878, it was removed to the NW quarter of section 25 and J.W. Soules appointed postmaster.

Another post office was established about 1879 in the NE quarter of section 4 by the name of Liberty and A.B. McMinders was appointed postmaster. This office however was discontinued a short time later.

Those post offices were supplied with mail matters from the post office at Shakopee and were carried by the so called "star route" once a week at first, then twice weekly and later daily via Marystown, Lydia, St.Patrick, Cedar Lake, Plum Creek, New Market, Suel, Maple Glen, and thence to Shakopee. These services have been discontinued since rural delivery has taken place.

### SOCIAL

Musical talent was in evidence in those early days. Johnny Driscoll, Robert & Billy Bradshaw, Mike Sheehan, Pat Golden and Jerry Connors used to delight all who heard them discourse sweet music on the violin.

Eddie Champion, Margaret & Catherine Ryan were leaders in church and community singing for



many years and were a real source of inspiration to all music lovers.

There were orators in the persons of P. O'Flynn, Martin Phelan, Joseph Mulkern and P.D. O'Phelan, who were capable of intelligent discussion on all current topics. They were often called on at public gatherings in debate.

Cornelius O'Connor was the local interpreter of the law, having held the office of Justice of the Peace during the greater part of his residence here. He drafted many legal papers and was somewhat of a legal counselor.

Chas. Kennefick took on the title of poet laureate, composing many inspiring little ditties, using local characters in his verses, some of which were set to music.

James Corcoran was the pioneer thresherman. He operated a horse-power machine until the coming of the steam engine. Frank Ceilash and son were first to us the steam thresher, being followed by Jim Connors and Tom Barnett. Today this work is almost all done by gas power.

Mike and John R. Ryan, Pat Cummings and Jim Connors were the early judges and trainers of horses, and would furnish stiff competition even now for any of our present day expert judges of good horseflesh.

John Casey was the first resident of the town to build up a purebred herd of shorthorn cattle, staking

his confidence in this class of livestock, by paying \$100.00 for a young sire at the age of one month in 1873. The progeny was to be found on many farms thereabout for many years.

Patrick and Richard Quill introduced highly bred Southdown sheep on their farms and took great pride in producing and feeding large flocks of these animals.

Steven Stevens and Martin Phelan were outstanding during their entire lives in agitating the principle of relief for the suffering people of Ireland never letting an opportunity go by, and also urged their neighbors to do likewise. If they were alive today, they would witness in “That Little Isle Across the Sea”, a free, happy and contented people, conditions toward which they contributed generously.

Thomas Driscoll, Patrick Hurley, John Nash and David Cavanaugh were outstanding philosophers of the community; manifesting at all times a keen interest in everything that had to do with the well being of social, religious, educational and general development of their new homeland they loved so much. They each earned well the title of “Nature’s Noblemen.”

Helpful angels of mercy those noble, tireless pioneer women proved themselves on many occasions. In times of family or neighborhood suffering or need, mere words are inadequate to

express the admiration and love we have for them. Unselfishly they shared what little they had with such as seemed in greater want. Cedar lake pioneer women have carved a place in the hearts of all who had the good fortune to know them as real builders and mothers of men.

Times change and we change with them. Commander Byrd says that in ten years the air will be filled with airplanes, that the birds will be wearing bumpers and we will have to carry steel helmets to protect our heads from falling bolts and nuts. Whether this will come to pass or not, there will be great changes in the future. But the spirit of the sons and daughters of those valiant pioneers will continue to be the same wholesome, lovable, kindly, sensible God-fearing Christians and good Americans that their fathers and mothers were. I am sure of this for I have mingled with them and admired them for long and am proud to be accepted as one of them. "Tis the place of my birth" and my wish is that we will always be just ourselves. And until future events will make more history, I humbly sign off.----W. J. CASEY