

## FROM CLARE TO THE CLARENCE



*Any people who are indifferent to the noble achievements of remote ancestors are themselves unlikely to achieve anything worthy to be remembered by their descendants.*

*Macaulay.*

## FROM CLARE TO THE CLARENCE: THE HINCHEY STORY

*(Information gathered by Margaret Hinchey, RSM, from Anne and Jack Connolly, Shark Creek neighbors and classmates of Michael Hinchey, our father, on Margaret's trip to Maclean in May 1979. Also included is information gathered from Clare heritage Society, Ireland during Margaret and Cecily's visit there in 1990.)*

The original Hinchey Australian pioneer was Michael Hinchey, born 1834 in Killerk, Co Clare, Ireland who with his bride, Anne Rouhan, came to the Clarence River in about 1867. They settled on a farm on the south arm of the Clarence River where two sons were born, John our grandfather, on 14/06/1868 and Michael, on 14/01/1870. They later moved to the top end of Shark Creek, where the rest of the family was born, making twelve in all.

Michael must have been a man of great initiative. He brought out two sisters, Honor (Nora) and Bridget, who arrived on the ship "Wallasea" on September 27, 1865: then his brother Patrick, who arrived on board the ship "Burlington" on February 16, 1867: finally his mother and father, Mary (O'Keeffe) and Dennis, born c 1802. They arrived in Sydney in the late 1860s and lived with Michael and Annie in the house at upper Shark Creek.

Dennis, our great, great grandfather was known as "the old grey". According to Anne Connolly, his job in Ireland had been collecting the bodies of the victim's of the Great Famine. It is possible that our branch of the Hinchey clan immigrated to Australia as a result of the hardship caused by the Famine. In 1841, the population of Clare was 286,000. After the Great Famine, the population fell to 166,000 in 1861, and the decline in population over the whole of Ireland continued for many generations. Dennis died on March 19, 1892, aged 88 years, and Mary died on November 23, 1879, aged 68 years.

According to the account of the Clare Heritage Centre there were nine Hinchey families recorded in the Parish of Killone/Clareabbey between the commencement of the Register in 1834 and 1900. (Killerk is a town land in the old civil parish of Killone). However, they must have been severely hit by immigration, as the last Hinchey baptized in the Parish was David Hinchey in 1861, son of Dennis Hinchey and Mary O'Keeffe.

In the tithe books of 1826, a John Hinchey was shown as having two acres of first quality land, and two and three-quarter acres of second quality land at Drumadrehid, Killone. However, by 1855 there were no Hinchey's listed having property in the Parish of Killone. Not every family in Ireland at this time had property, as poverty, hunger and oppression by landlords took their toll. In Clare in 1850 there were 16,000 families living on less than four acres, while another 16,000 families had no land at all. The Hinchey's must have come under the latter section.

On our visit to the area in 1990, Cecily and I discovered a Tom Hinchey living in the area known as Killerk. (The locals say that there is no difference between Henchy and Hinchey). He was a bachelor living in a little old house but on a rather large and beautiful piece of land. He showed us his birth certificate very proudly, and told us that his mother was a Mary Ellen Hinchey, but that he did not know his father. He remembered when he was a little boy hearing the old people talking about the Hinchey's living nearby whom "all went away". Tom told us where to find the little cottage that was possibly our ancestral home. Cec and I found this humble, tumbled-down little cottage, (photo not yet in the gallery). It is situated in beautiful, rural countryside, but was a sad reminder of the hunger and poverty our ancestors must have experienced.

According to Anne Connolly, Michael and Annie Hinchey were considered well-off in Shark Creek because they owned a horse and buggy! Anne Connolly's mother, who lived further along the creek, would tell of the warm hospitality of the Hinchey's whenever she passed their home. Michael would never fail to call out to the families as he passed by in his buggy to see if anyone wanted anything in town. It was Michael who was responsible for having had erected a badly needed bridge in the area. Whilst others talked about approaching the Public Works Department, Michael Hinchey to Sydney and personally contacted Mr. E.W. O'Sullivan, then minister for Works, who promised a bridge would be erected without delay. It was constructed in 1908, and was thereafter known among the locals as "Hinchey Bridge".

All that remains of their original Hinchey home are a couple of large flat slabs of stone, probably the remains of the steps and fireplaces. There are still signs of a house built by Thomas Maguire, our maternal great, great grandfather, right beside the Hinchey home. The huge Moreton Bay Fig, that stands there now was planted by Michael, according to Anne Connolly.

In a paddock about five kms along Shark Creek road, between the Maloney's and Connolly's, there is a monument built by the children of Shark Creek Public School, of whom Dad was one, and their teacher Joe Walsh, to the memory of the pioneers of the district. (See the Souvenir paper recording in the Photo gallery). Among the names on the monument are M. Hinchey and D. Hinchey, our great grandfather and great, great grandfather respectively.

Michael and Annie's eldest son, John, our grandfather, married Catherine (Kate) Maguire. Anne Connolly spoke of her as an outstanding woman. Indeed, she was considered to be of the "elite". Her family was very go ahead, and seemed to make a go of whatever they did. Kate had been a boarder at the Convent at Grafton (Mercy). Because of her ability, the nun wanted her to continue her education but she had to come home to look after her brothers! She was highly intelligent, artistic and a beautiful seamstress. It was mainly Kate who ensured that Dad, Josie and Annie had a good education and who sent Dad to Sydney for an apprenticeship because she saw no future for him in Shark Creek.

Anne Connolly said many were the kindnesses Kate did for her mother, according to Josie and Dad. Anne remembers a beautiful dress Kate made for her First Communion. She remembers too, the cups of tea always ready for people who passed by, and the pretty gardens Kate planted around the house in triangular shaped beds. The pathways to the front door were only dirt, but swept so hard it was like concrete to walk on. Josie remembers her mother bathing her and Dad and dressing them up in good, clean clothes before their father would return from the farm that night. Kate was often wanting to say to Dad, who was the baby of the family, and obviously doted upon as Josie says he was absolutely gorgeous, "Michael, control that temper before it controls you!" Whilst Kate loved music, she could not sing in tune, and Dad and Josie used to hide outside the window giggling boldly as their mother warbled and wobbled through "The Rose of Tralee".

John and Kate built their home on the opposite side of the Creek from Tara Hall, the meeting place for socials and also where Mass was said on Sundays. This spot is about two km's along the road from the main road. All that remains of their house are the timbers and iron roof, which is almost covered by lantana. The Hinchey's had a square-bottomed boat in which, by means of a rope attached to either side of the Creek, they were able to ferry themselves across to the other side.

Tara Hall, the remains of which are a few wooden foundations on the slope of the hill opposite the Hinchey home, was the scene of many a wild social. Anne remembers Dad as one of the best dancers whirling the girls around the floor! His sister Annie and Uncle Mick would be amongst the musicians, playing the piano and the fiddle respectively. Apparently Tara Hall was a rather flimsy building. Dad told of the days when the wind would be blowing a gale and they would all lean to one side to keep it steady. There could be truth in that because Anne Connolly said, "One day it just fell down".

Annie, Dad's sister, was an accomplished musician having gained her A.Mus.A She was a highly respected and accomplished woman and her untimely death in her late twenties as a result of pernicious anemia, was a tragic event for all who knew her, especially her family and husband, George Cox and young son, Gerald.

Dad also learnt piano and taught himself to play the violin, even managing trick playing behind his back and between his legs. He also seldom did his theory homework when he should have, and used to be scribbling down as he waited to go in for his lesson. Such traits seemed to have passed on to the next generation! Dad's musical ability included a beautiful singing voice. He was boy soprano and his voice never broke in the usual way but gradually developed into a glorious tenor. He was trained by a Mr. Richards whose pride in Dad's voice led him to hold on to his training when my Dad may have been better served by being sent to the Conservatorium or such like where more opportunities to break into the world of opera etc. may have occurred.

Josie also had the family gift of music, learning the piano, which served her well in her teaching career. She went to Sydney for her teaching training, and then served as a teacher and Infants Mistress in various schools in NSW. John was a delicate boy and having suffered a nervous breakdown soon after his father's death spent most of his life in a psychiatric hospital in Balmain.

Dad would tell of his school days in Shark Creek Public School, which he attended because there were no Catholic Schools. The teacher was a Catholic, all the pupils but one were Catholics, they had an altar in the classroom, which would be removed when the inspector was coming to visit, and at the end of the day, the pupil who wasn't a Catholic would be sent home and then all the other boys would be taught how to serve Mass as altar boys!

John and Kate had two farms, one near their home and one further up the creek in Tyndale, where they had dairy cattle. Dad and John used to have to help milk the cows before they went to school each day and again when they returned home. This was very low lying country, and in the 1921 (?) flood, they lost their whole herd, when the water rose so quickly they were unable to move the cattle to higher ground. By the time Dad, John and their father reached the cattle they were standing in water and were too cold to be able to move. Apparently, the Hinchey's never really recovered from this loss, which came after previous floods had taken their toll. In 1927, they moved away from Shark Creek to Rous on the Richmond River.

On my visit there in 1979, I went back to the main road and drove back about 5km to the Upper Shark Creek turnoff and followed that around, as that brought me to the side of the creek on which were the home and farms of Dad's family. The low lying nature of the land was evident, We had a couple of days rain a few days earlier, and water still covered the ground on either side of the road. I presumed that this would have been where the dairy farm was. As I turned a bend, there were a number of kangaroos sitting on the road. They bounded ahead of me for a few yards then bounded off into the bush. Lovely!

The land seemed untouched, except for sugar cane planted along the creek. I followed a track made by the sugar cane harvester's right along the creek. It was all private property of course, maybe belonging to the Maloney's, but I felt I had a bit of claim to it! Eventually I came to the ruins of the house where dad had been born. Such a shame it no longer stood as it had, so that more of the atmosphere of those early days could have been captured. However, I took some photos, which are now in my ancestor folder. The whole afternoon had been a pleasant and even moving experience, as it was when Cec and I found our ancestral home in Clare.

In the long journey from Clare to Clarence, four qualities in particular seem to stand out as a characteristic of our Hinchey forbearers:

- Hard Working
- Strong Religious Faith
- Warm and Open Hospitality and
- Love of Music and Entertainment

To sense just a little of what kind of people my ancestors were and what they had been through, both in Ireland and as pioneers in the Shark Creek district, gave me a deeper appreciation of our family's history, something which I believe we of succeeding generations need to remember with Gratitude and Pride!

**PICTURES OF THE ANCESTORS WILL FOLLOW SOON – BUT CAN ALSO BE FOUND IN THE PHOTO GALLERY ON [www.hincheynet.net](http://www.hincheynet.net)**