

How did your ancestors wind up in Minnesota?

Did you know that your Irish ancestors came to Minnesota before it became the 32rd State in 1858 and before the Civil War (Apr 1861- Apr 1865) and the Indian War, and Homestead Act in 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln, wherein farmers were allowed up to 160 acres of free land and had to live on and improve the property for a period of 5 years to take full ownership?

Through the signed treaties in 1851 of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, the federal government acquired over 24 millions of acres of land from the Dakota people. After the signing, heavily advertised campaigns encouraged people to come West and settle the land west of the Mississippi River.

At least 169 years ago, during Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan's Presidencies, John D. Ryan and Mary Bridget Ryan arrived in Minnesota sometime between Jan. 1856-Sept. 1857 after living in Elgin, Illinois for several years prior. James Garry and Sabina Quinn moved from Essex Cty, NY to Helena Township between Mar 1856- Aug. 1858. John L. Brennan and Bridget Sheridan arrived and settled into Lakeville, MN between 1854-1856. Michael Hickey (age 26) and Margaret Murray moved from Ohio to Spring Lake Township in 1855. These facts are through birth records of their children and census records.

Speculators of all backgrounds began platting townsites in 1854 and seized more land each year as the decade progressed. Buying up potential town sites was the most profitable form of speculation, and an estimated 700 town sites were platted between the years 1855 and 1857. Land prices in the period of land speculation were highly inflated. Farmers could purchase plots from the land office for as little as \$1.25 an acre - minimum of 40 acres, but speculators would buy them as soon as they were available and immediately raise their prices for resale. Settler-colonists could not legally buy and live on a plot of land until it had been surveyed by the US land office. Most of them, therefore, were squatters. However, they arrived in Minnesota so quickly and in such large numbers that the land office failed to keep up. Congress granted preemption rights to squatters, promising that when their land was surveyed, they would get the first chance to buy it. But officials executed this policy clumsily, opening land for sale only to put it on hold for months. Scrip was government "IOU's" generally ranging from 40 to 160 acres, entitling the owner to enter a specified acreage of land within specified localities. The scrip of various types were issued as substitutes for actual land grants or as repayment for certain dispossessed claimants. Most scrip could be assigned or transferred. In fact, there was an open and recognized market in land paper, particularly in the land office towns. The warrants and scrip had a face value of \$1.25 per acre but many were discounted by brokers at considerably reduced rates. The speculative bubble burst in 1857 when a large New York finance/bank failed. Panic struck Minnesota with extreme violence. Eastern banks and creditors called in their loans, leaving everyone in debt and the territory was literally emptied of money. Railroad building, immigration, etc. literally stopped. Those who were farming suffered rough times. There was a mass exodus from Minnesota - but your people stayed.

Imagine your ancestors' fortitude and hardships in life. Most leaving all family behind during the Potato Famine (1845-1852) and never being able to return to their homeland. Did you ever wonder how the Irish could afford a one way ticket to the US at that time? Ships filled their holds with free or nearly free "human ballast" on their return trip to America after delivering goods such as cotton, timber and tobacco. That is why there are not as well preserved records of Irish Immigrants as others. It is truly amazing what Sister Z was able to find without documentation and the internet! Arriving in New York and thereabouts, with prejudiced "Irish need not apply" because they had nothing when they arrived. Finding work, keeping and starting their own families, and then making an incredibly hard decision, again, to head "West" where there was nothing. They had to start their own farms, build houses and schools, banks, stores and churches. Cost of items needed for new farm settlers in 1855 was approx. \$254.50 just for equipment, which included 2 horses \$100, double wagon \$50, 1 hammer and 10 lbs of nails \$1.25, 1 cow \$15, one ax \$2, etc. This did not include food supplies, land, and other necessary supplies which they needed to save for and acquire before traveling West.

Remember you come from a stock of determined and successful people. - L. Ryan