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If you have Irish blood you are certainly proud of it and you may wonder where your ancestors came from. Thanks to my great-aunt Sr. Zacchaeus Ryan, I know where mine came from. She has been working on our Irish roots for over 25 years.

Genealogy is a human science involving people, relations, friends and countrymen.

To tell the story of my people, the Ryan and Garry ancestors is to tell in part the story of the beginning of St. Patrick's parish, Cedar Lake MN, for it was the setting in which our pioneer ancestors carved out their homes and lived their faith in God and each other.

Like most of the Cedar Lake settlers, the Ryan's and Garry's were natives of the western counties of Ireland. Garry's from Mayo and Ryan's from Limerick.

The earliest recorded white settler at Cedar Lake was Thomas O'Donnell. He was a little Irishman, who seemed to have no dread of the local Indian community that had a large established village on his claim. This former Indian village known as Tepee Hill was on the site of the present St. Patrick's Church.

The Garry's and Ryan's settled in the St. Patrick community in the mid-1850's and so its beginnings were a rich source of stories that were passed down by our ancestors.

We learned that the name of Cedar Lake was from the cedar trees that grew at its shoreline. Celebrations have always been a vital part of life at St. Patrick. Traveling medicine shows, plays by local actors and actresses, as well as card parties and dances at Walsh Hall.

St. Patrick's Day was a high point in the Lenten season. In my grandma's memories in the 1930's they celebrated Mass in the evening in honor of the patron saint and afterward a program in Cilhar's Hall. They sang Irish songs, had card parties, and the last few hours the band came to play for the dance. The women prepared a lunch, which was served about midnight. Her mother would bake a 13-egg angel food cake and decorate it with green and white frosting. Often her cake was chosen to be raffled.

St. Patrick's Church was the focal point in the lives of the people as a place of worship as well as the center of their social lives. It was at this same church that

650 of us returned to pay tribute to the memory of our ancestors. Archbishop John R. Roach very eloquently recalled for us the joy of celebrating our common heritage of faith. This is some of what he said in his Homily.

“What was life like for those who went before us, many of whose graves are in this cemetery of St. Patrick’s. What was their life like and what was their common strength, their common bond? What made life for them really worth passing on one generation to another? None of us can adequately answer that because we weren’t there but most of us are the inheritors of the bloodlines, which we celebrate. Now I recognize that not everyone comes from the Irish families celebrating our common heritage. Some of the Irish got kind of foolish and married other nationalities. But we are celebrating essentially our Irish Catholic Tradition, the Faith.

When the Irish came to St. Patrick, Cedar Lake, as they came to many, many small villages throughout this state and across the country, they brought with them some very precious kinds of traditions. They were lovers of song, they were lovers of good storytelling, and in some cases they even had some devotion to work. They also have a devotion to church and throughout this country you have small pockets of Irish families, who for whatever reason left the country they loved very dearly – that country which had fallen up some very hard times – and they came to a new country, a new land. They came with hope, but with great fear. That is very clear in the early Irish literature of the country. It is clear in the departing songs as the Irish left Ireland. But they came with a bond of faith, they worked together, they celebrated together, they prayed together, they worshipped their God together, and they recognized that if they were going to really succeed, if they were going to make real the dreams they had, then they were going to have to form themselves around some kind of common element, and the element generally was the church.

You and I know we came from simple, but God-fearing, God-loving people, and that is a very great blessing. I would like to leave you with this Irish blessing.

May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rain fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.”