

FOUR FAMILIES FROM IRELAND

The story begins with four families, the Sheridans, Brennans, Murrays and the Hickeys all left Ireland in the early or mid 1800's. The first recorded dates for their presence in America were found in New York State. For the Brennans, Sheridans and Hickeys it was Lockport-Lewistown area in Niagara County. It was reference in a Catherine Sheridan Moran's obituary that led our search to there. A day at St. John's Lockport was most fruitful as Sister found marriage records for the Morans, Loftus-Brennans, as well as baptismal records for their children and those of the Sheridan-Hagerty family. To understand their settlement at Lockport we must realize the vital part that the Erie Canal played in the 1820-1850 period of the Irish immigration. The canal was largely built by Irish labor and Lockport was the key town at that period. As early as 1830 the Irish emigrants had formed the first Catholic congregation in Lockport and dedicated it to St. John the Baptist. In 1842 the church was practically rebuilt to accommodate the increasing Irish population and the church annals record that in January 1848 the Bishop came to Lockport to give a two-week retreat in preparation for the confirmation of the 170 Catholic adults. The 1850 Census Niagara County lists John Brennan as employed by a Mr. Franklin Sage and in the History of Dakota County John L, Brennan had related that he worked in Lewiston, New York. In James Hickey's obituary, it states that he worked on the Erie Canal and Erie Railroad. By the early 1850's the westward call to bounty lands opening up in Minnesota was heard by all four families and they reached Dakota and Scott County in 1854-1856 making claims in Lakeville and Spring Lake townships. Again, the new beginnings were centered around their church and to tell stories here the story of the churches they helped build needs to be related briefly.