



Shoebox **THE BYRNE FAMILY**

From Ballykelly to Western Canada

In Ireland, the summer of 1798 was one of the hottest on record. One morning in early June of that year, Martin Byrne, his wife, Mary, and his fifteen-year-old son, Edward, stood at the door of their Ballykelly home. As they gazed across the valley through which the Coolboy rivulet meandered they witnessed an alarming sight. As the early morning dew dissipated, a clear view emerged of a blazing inferno. Flames from the newly built Coollattin mansion of Earl Fitzwilliam appeared to be reaching the very sky. Also engulfed in flames was the old Malton House which had been left standing while the new house was being built. The Fitzwilliam property had been torched by a group of insurgents under the command of Wexford man, Esmond Kyan.



Designed by Yorkshire architect John Carr, a new house and stables had just been completed when it was burned to the ground by rebels in early June 1798.

Given that Byrne was his name, and Wicklow his native county, one would be forgiven for assuming that Martin should have been a member of the insurgent raiding party. Not so. As a young man, Martin had found employment as a servant in Malton House. Around 1782, he wed Mary Walker and they had one son. Martin's employer had treated him well. In

1796 he had been granted a lease on a small farm at a place called "Hinch's Waste," in the townland of Ballykelly. Some of the workforce engaged in the building of Coollattin House had been diverted from their work to engage in building a house for the family of Martin Byrne. In December 1796 the stone mason, James Geoghagan, was paid two shillings and sixpence for a day spent in laying out the foundation of the new Byrne home.



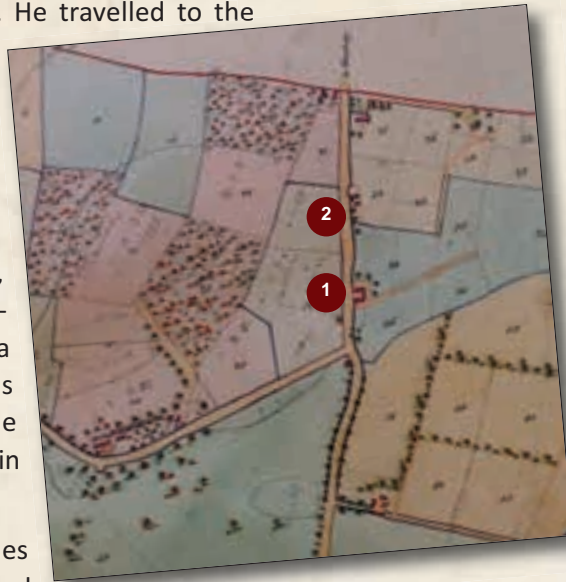
Tucked away in woodland are the remnants of the house built for Martin Byrne in 1797. Martin was granted a lease on this house as well as eight acres of land. The house was built on what was called Hinch's Waste in the townland of Ballykelly, a short distance from Coollattin House.

This small cottage was built next door to Martin Byrne's home. William Byrne was given a lease to this cottage and eight acres in 1801. It is believed that this William Byrne was Martin's father. He was a tailor by profession and like Martin, found employment in Malton House. Throughout the early part of the nineteenth century this property was occupied jointly by Patrick Byrne and Edward Deegan.

Deegan's wife was Anty Byrne. In 1817, Patrick Byrne together with some other local youths was tried and acquitted for the murder of the Coollattin farm steward, Robert Rickerby.



Fast forward 28 years. Ralph Byrne, Martin's eighteen-year-old son, left the family home in Ballykelly. He travelled to the nearest town of Tullow, County Carlow. On 11 March 1826, he enlisted in the British army. For the next seven years Ralph served in the West Indies. After his stint in the Indies, Ralph spent the next three-and-a-half-years in Canada or British North America as it was then known. Here he served with the 69th Foot in the Aroostook War.



▲ **1842 map of Ballykelly. No.1 is the house built for Martin Byrne in 1797. No. 2 is the house built for William Byrne in 1801.**

This encounter is sometimes referred to as the "Pork and Beans War." It was a bloodless stand-off between Britain and the United States over the international boundary between New Brunswick and the state of Maine.

In mid-May of 1842, Ralph and his regiment returned to the British Isles. In July 1847 he was discharged from the army in the town of Waterford. In October of the same year he married Catherine (Cassidy) Robinson in the town of Wexford. In 1850, Ralph, Catherine, and their two-year-old son, Martin, were living in Wexford town. Catherine was at this stage expecting their second child. Back at the family home in Coollattin, the Byrne family struggled to survive the ravages of the Great Famine. Over the previous four years, thousands of their neighbours and kinfolk had availed of Earl Fitzwilliam's offer to provide assisted emigration to Canada. Two of Ralph Byrne's siblings now decided to avail of what was being offered and seek a new beginning across the Atlantic. Simon (38) and his wife Margaret (39)



Sergeant Ralph Byrne's army record.

had six children aged between eight and 20. Simon's brother Thomas (44) and his wife Anty (44) had ten children aged between one and 17 years. The two families sailed from New Ross on board the *India* on 1 April 1850. The departure of two sons and sixteen grandchildren proved too much for Martin, the father of Ralph, Thomas, and Simon. Having reached the age of 95, the old man passed to his reward on 4 April 1850, just three days after the *India* sailed for Quebec.

Ralph followed in the footsteps of his two brothers. We do not know the precise date of his departure, but he turns up in Canada in 1852.

In that year, Ralph and his family are resident near Bobcaygeon in Verulam Township, County of Victoria, Ontario. He is in receipt of a British army pension. In January 1858 he was occupying a tract of land in Galway Township in the County of Peterborough. He had received the land grant in recognition of his army service. He could only gain title to the land after

▶ **P.J. Byrne dressed in the uniform of the 69th Foot Regiment. This was the regiment in which Sergeant Ralph Byrne served during the Aroostook War. P.J. is a g-g-g-grandson of Ralph Byrne.**



spending five years on the site and fulfilling certain conditions. Initially he was given 100 acres but soon afterwards acquired a further 100 acres. In the 1861 Canadian census the Byrnes now had five in the family, Martin, Michael, Thomas, John, and Mary. The last three children were born in Canada. The land that had been granted was very swampy and was agriculturally poor. Having obtained his title to the land, Ralph sold off the logging rights on it and acquired a better-quality farm, a short distance away in the Somerville township.

Ralph Byrne's eldest son, Martin, married a girl named Elizabeth Tynan and continued to work the family farm. The couple's first child, Ralph Kinnon Byrne, was born in November 1869. In June of 1901, Ralph Kinnon married Mary Ann Allen. Having left home, Ralph Kinnon went logging in Minnesota and across the northern United States. Around 1940 the family made their way back across the Canadian border and took up farming, first in Saskatchewan and later in Alberta. Ralph Kinnon and Elizabeth had a family of seven, five boys and two girls. One of the boys, Ralph, settled in Lethbridge, Alberta. His son Dennis became an airline pilot and spent 38 years flying Boeing 767s up and down North America, the Canadian Arctic, and overseas out of Vancouver. Another of Ralph Kinnon's sons, Bill John



Byrne, achieved a Doctorate in Archaeology from Yale University. He later became the Deputy Minister of Historical Resources in Alberta. It was under his guidance that the *Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump Interpretative Centre* was built and opened to the public. This tourist facility is in southern Alberta where the foothills of the great Rocky Mountains meet the Great Plains. It is the best-preserved example of the communal hunting techniques and of the way of life of the Plains people based on the vast herds of bison that existed in North America for more than five millennia.



Jenni Byrne is a direct descendant of Sergeant Ralph Byrne. Jenni served as a political adviser to the Conservative Party of Canada and former adviser to Prime Minister Stephen Harper. She was once referred to as "the most powerful woman in Ottawa" and "the other woman" behind Prime Minister Stephen Harper. She also served as principal adviser to Premier Doug Ford.



"Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump," a UNESCO world heritage site in Alberta. The establishment of the interpretative centre and the development of the site was the work of Bill John Byrne, a descendant of Sergeant Ralph Byrne.



This is an old Byrne wedding photograph dating from 1905. The big man sitting on the right is Martin Byrne, the son of Ralph, who was born in Wexford, Ireland, in 1848. The tall man standing behind Martin is Thomas, his brother, who was born in Canada in 1852. The small, bearded man wearing the light-coloured jacket is described as "Ralph, a cousin." This is of crucial significance in the quest to prove that the families of Ralph, Simon, and Thomas hooked up with each other in Canada. Simon and Thomas each had a Ralph in their family. Here we have the quintessential "Shoebox" item. Hopefully, it will provide the key that will unlock many family secrets for this Byrne family.