

The Chieftains

A Historical Novel

by

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Preface

The fictional story of Thomas and Bridget here is intended to fill in for the total absence of any information I have about my great-grandparents from Ireland before they arrived in Chicago. Somehow they had married, immigrated in the early 1830s to New York (note: before the famine years), had 9 children there, then quietly moved to Chicago about 1854, all without leaving a single trace in any records before 1856. Quite an achievement to remain so inconspicuous, especially when I contrasted them with my German and English ancestors on my mother's side, who never seemed to miss a census or city directory, who even took pictures and wrote in Bibles. On my father's side, all that was missing. How could I not want to account for what had gone on in their lives in Ireland, and what on earth could have prompted them to leave in the early 30s, before the famine years, when things seemed to have improved for the Irish after the Emancipation in 1829. Perhaps there lay the clue to the hopes they brought with them to America, and then transferred to Chicago in the 1850s and then to Kansas City in the 1870s.

To supply the deficit of narrative on my father's side, and to give them a history of their own, before the time of their records began, I have concocted one for them. I knew a bit about what they did in Chicago and Kansas City, where my grandfather actually appeared in several newspaper articles!. How could I not want to know more, when I see the genes, talents and values that they have passed on to their descendants?

I would research what life would have been like for a young couple in the Ireland of the early 19th century, what could have made them want to leave and given them the confidence to leave. I would imagine a Thomas and Bridget who could have been my great-grandparents. This Thomas and Bridget acquired a life of their own and if I were to meet my real great-grandparents, I would still like to think I am descended from their fictional counterparts.