

# THE 19TH CENTURY O'NEILLS OF MANORHAMILTON

*Dominic Rooney*

*This is the story of a notable Leitrim family who claimed to be directly descended from Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone. Although many of its members had emigrated and distinguished themselves abroad by the 1860s, the family still retained property in Manorhamilton right up to the middle of the 20th century. Even today this building still prominently displays on its facade the O'Neill initials and motto 'Lámh Dearg Eirinn'.*

## Family Origins

Although the article deals with the O'Neills we must first of all briefly look at the Gregg family of Castlemoyle into which the young John O'Neill of Co Tyrone married at the end of the 18th century. The Greggs originally hailed from Belleek in Co Fermanagh but must have been long established in North Leitrim by 1784 when William Gregg mentioned his Armstrong, Wilson, Nixon and Whitaker cousins in his will. William and his wife Margaret Algeo had only one child Mary, born c.1775, and it was she who inherited the family home in Manorhamilton, Young White's Tenement (a business premises in the Main Street), White's Park (a

grouping of fields on the eastern edge of the town), lands in Castle-moyle and Cartrontemple as well as 'bonds, notes, other securities and ready money' which they possessed.

John O'Neill is thought to have come from Dungannon, possibly as an officer in the Leitrim Militia which he may have joined while the regiment was stationed in Co Tyrone. He then married Mary Gregg and moved into her family home. John and Mary went on to have seven children – 6 sons and a daughter – between 1801 and 1821. John, who described himself as a farmer, died in 1846 aged 79 years. He was predeceased by his wife in 1832. Both are buried in the old Church of Ireland cemetery on the Big Brae in a boxlike grave at the rear of the ruined 17th century church.

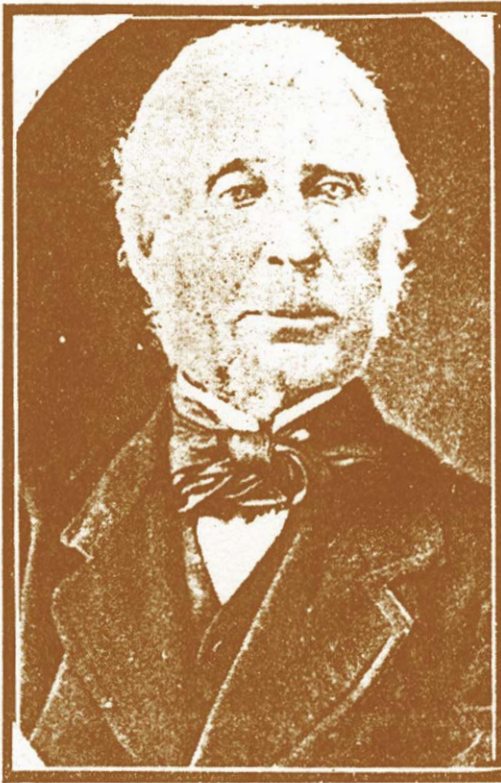
## Allan

Allan the eldest son was born in 1801. He qualified as a land surveyor and was employed for a time on the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. As this work was nearing

completion in 1842, he emigrated to New Zealand and joined his younger brother James in Auckland. There he surveyed new areas of the growing city such as the North Shore and the district around Takapuna on behalf of the government. After being appointed city surveyor he laid out a number of Auckland's streets. The New Zealand government then sent him to make a map of the district between Auckland and the Bay of Islands and design the 160 mile long road linking both areas. It was an eventful undertaking as Allan was the first white man to make this journey by land.

Following news of his father's death, Allan set out for Ireland on 19th September 1846. Although his youngest brother had been the major beneficiary of his father's will, Allan may have wished—as the eldest of the O'Neill siblings—to sort out some family business in Manorhamilton or perhaps to dispose of some of his own assets that he had acquired before going to New Zealand. He then set his mind to achieving another

JOHN O'NEILL + MARY GREGG						
(1767- 1846)			(c.1775-1832)			
Allan (1801-86)	John (c.1803-41)	Jane (1807-44)	Lewis (c.1813-1904)	Patrick (c.1814-47)	James (1815-82)	William (1821-1905)



■ **Allan O'Neill (1801-1886)**

personal goal. He married twenty-seven year old Anne Sophie Bell, daughter of Capt Henry Humphrey Bell of Ballymaguigan, Co Derry, whom he had probably known before emigrating in 1842. The wedding ceremony took place in St George's Church of Ireland parish church in Dublin on 4th October 1847. The couple then spent the next two years in Ireland before returning to New Zealand.

Allan had bought land on Auckland's North Shore peninsula which he had originally surveyed for the Crown and now built a home there called Dunoneill. The area became known as O'Neill's Point, although it was later renamed Bayswater after one of the most expensive new inner suburbs of London. This name

was also intended to evoke a sense of style as well as being a straight description of its physical location as a seaside development.

Allan O'Neill had many notable achievements in diverse fields in the years following his return to Auckland. He became one of the commissioners of the first Auckland Railway. He was elected a member of the Auckland Provincial Council and held the position of Provincial Secretary for three years. He was also a member of the Church Synod, chairman of the Takapuna Road Board and of the Lake School Committee. After serving the country of his adoption with great ability he died in 1886 leaving a family of 3 sons and 4 daughters.

### John & Jane

John, the second eldest son of John O'Neill and Mary Gregg, went to live in Tobercurry, Co Sligo, where he married a local girl Ann Townsend in 1824. In one of his son's marriage certificate he is described as a farmer, although another son claimed that his father was an officer in the RIC. John died at the early age of 38, leaving his widow to rear their five children on her own. Four of the children later emigrated to Australia. Lewis, the youngest, remained in Tobercurry and his son Henry Townsend O'Neill eventually settled in Lis-

more, Co Waterford.

When Jane O'Neill was 27 she married Andrew Irvine of Innismacsaint in Co Fermanagh on 2nd December 1831. It would seem as if Andrew came to live in Manorhamilton since their son James was born there in 1841. The couple may have had another son called John. Jane's father, John O'Neill, left her some property in his will which was drawn up during the summer of 1843. However she died nine months later on 25th April 1844 and is buried in her parents' grave in Manorhamilton. Her husband may then have moved back to Co Fermanagh. Their son James later married in Kesh and had 10 children, four of whom emigrated to the US. A descendant of one of them who now lives in Pennsylvania has compiled an O'Neill family tree.

### Lewis & Patrick

Lewis who emigrated to the US in 1834 was the first of the family to leave Ireland. According to a census in 1860 he worked as a brick-maker in New Jersey. By 1868, however, he had been ordained a minister of the Primitive Methodist Church. Some 12 years later he was a preacher in Philadelphia. He retired in this city and died there on 1st October 1904. Some few years after arriving in the US he had married Elizabeth (surname unknown) and they had six children. Lewis and his family

dropped the O' from their surname.

Patrick, the 4th son, was admitted to TCD on 28th May 1834 and graduated with an MA in 1841. In the meantime he had been ordained a clergyman in the Church of Ireland and had married Sarah (surname also unknown). They had two daughters, Sarah and Mary Jane, who were probably both born in Dublin. Patrick accepted a curacy in the town of Louth in Lincolnshire during the mid 1840s. His life and ministry were cut short some years later when he was accidentally killed by the wheel of a horse-drawn coach which rolled over him on 26th June 1847. He is buried at the nearby Beesby cemetery. Sarah, who was entitled to support as a clergyman's widow, went with her youngest daughter to live in the Alms House in Wragby, Lincolnshire. Her older daughter, meantime, was sent to the clergy orphan school for girls in Marylebone in London.

### James

The next son, James, began an apprenticeship as an apothecary at the age of 17, paying a premium to be taught the trade. He was granted his professional licence 5 years later in 1837 which entitled him at that time, not only to dispense and supply drugs and medicines, but also to set up as a general practitioner.

In the summer of 1839 he decided to emigrate to Australia and sailed for Sydney, reportedly as a ship's surgeon. En route he



■ **The Hon James O'Neill (1815-1882)** met and fell in love with Catherine Barry, a 20-year old milliner and dress-maker from Cork who, together with other members of her family, were travelling as assisted emigrants to the British colony. James and Catherine married in December 1839 and settled for some months in Melbourne. They then moved to Hobart in Tasmania and from there on 5th November 1840 to New Zealand, over which the British Crown had just claimed sovereignty. Because of threats of violence from the Maoris the new government was encouraging settlers to leave the Bay of Islands and move southwards to Auckland which had just been established as the capital of the colony. By the middle of August 1841 James had established himself there and was advertising his general medical practice and dispensing business in Lower Queen Street.

He continued to operate as a medical practitioner for a number of years, but being also somewhat of an entrepreneur he began importing general merchandise

into Auckland. This proved to be a very profitable business and he gradually succeeded in amassing a handsome fortune. In 1845 he purchased 110 acres of Crown land on Auckland's North Shore which his older brother Allan had just surveyed for the government. Later, in conjunction with Allan, he acquired a further 126 acres in the same general area.

James also took an active interest in politics. He was in turn a member of the first corporation of Auckland and the Auckland Provincial Council before being elected an MP in the first parliament of New Zealand in 1853. Although losing his seat two years later, he won it back again in 1861 and retained it until the end of that decade when he resigned. He was then appointed a member of the New Zealand Legislative Council—the upper house of the parliament. James also became a justice of the peace for the colony and assisted in the foundation of some of the leading institutions of Auckland. He was also a founding member and principal director of the Bank of New Zealand.

During a very active career James, together with his wife and family, travelled back to Ireland and the UK on several occasions and sent some of his 11 children to be educated at TCD. It is not recorded, though, if he ever revisited Manorhamilton. In 1872 he and his family left New Zealand permanently and took up residence

in England. He died at Southsea on 3rd June 1882 and is buried at Portsmouth.

### William

William was the youngest son of John O'Neill and Mary Gregg. His father, in his last will and testament on 31st January 1843, left all his remaining real and personal estate and property to William 'the least provided for' of all his children. This included the family home, Young White's Tenement and White's Park. William was also appointed the sole executor of his father's will. The young man eventually decided to follow his brother James into the medical profession. Entry into the career was, however, being reformed during the 1850s and William gained licentiates in midwifery and physician studies in various teaching hospitals before completing his surgical studies and being awarded his final MD qualifications at King's College University in Aberdeen in 1859. Perhaps to help finance his education he had taken up the post—at least for one school year—of schoolmaster in the Masterson School in Manorhamilton in 1856.

Upon graduating from Aberdeen William moved to Lincoln where he established his general medical practice first at Bailgate and later at Lindum Road. Apart from his medical career, William also took a deep interest in archaeology and was a member of the Lincoln

Architectural and Archaeological Society. He was author of *The Jordan and its vicinity* (1890) and *From Joppa to Jerusalem* (1891) and wrote several papers on Roman remains at Lincoln.

William continued to work as a GP well into his eighties. He died in October 1905 and is buried at All Saints, Canwick, Lincoln. His obituary in the Lincolnshire Chronicle stated: 'He was a true devotee of his profession. His services were particularly sought as a consultant in complicated cases and he was quick to diagnose the real cause of the mischief. A courteous courtly gentleman beloved by all classes, Lincoln is the poorer for his loss'. A stone plaque to his memory in the north transept of Lincoln cathedral lists his medical honours: *Member of the Council of the University of Aberdeen, Member of the Royal College of Physicians of London, Fellow of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society of London and Fellow of the Academy of Medicine in Ireland.*

### Young White's Tenement/ Gilbert's Chemist Shop

William seems to have disposed of most of his property in Manorhamilton soon after having taken up residence in Lincoln. He did hold on to Young White's Tenement, though, which he leased out to tenants for many years more. However, with the advent of the Land League in the early 1880s which aimed at

securing ownership of land and property by tenants and also at bringing about a reduction of rack rents, he began to consider disposing of it also. The building was let at the time to a publican named Patrick Connolly who probably refused to pay the prescribed rent. Not wishing to become directly involved in the dispute, William transferred ownership of the property to his sister-in-law Sarah in February 1885. He himself had never married and Sarah and her two daughters had come to live with him in Lincoln. During the summer of 1885 Sarah and her eldest daughter crossed over to Ireland and arrived in Manorhamilton to sort out the problem of the lease. After failing to come to a mutually agreed settlement, Sarah secured a court order for the eviction of Connolly from the premises. On Saturday 15th August, despite pleas from Rev Molesdale the local Protestant clergyman, and Mr Hurst, the RIC inspector who was responsible for enforcing the eviction, Sarah demanded that Patrick Connolly, his wife, their four-day old baby and Patrick's elderly father, be all turned out of the house. She was eventually forced to relent after Dr Rutherford, the local GP warned the RIC not to move Mrs. Connolly so soon after the birth of her baby. The large crowd of onlookers was delighted, but the eviction was in fact only postponed for ten days.

After securing vacant possession,

Sarah had the one-storey thatched building demolished and an impressive three-storey slated structure with two large bay windows erected in its place. To further illustrate her authority she had two concrete moulded plaques, supported by horizontal beams, set into the façade of the new building. The uppermost plaque carried her own initials S.O'N, the year 1885 and the ancient motto of the O'Neills *Lámh Dearg Eirinn* (The Red hand of Ireland). The other plaque was long and rectangular with a decorative floral design.

The townspeople were very annoyed with the whole incident and for several years no tenant could be found to rent the new property from her, out of sympathy for the Connollys. It was not until October 1892 that 'a returned yankee named Darcy' rented the building and opened up a new business there, after having paid Mrs. Connolly some compensation money. The premises then had a succession of short-term tenants until William Reilly Starkey Gilbert, a young pharmacist from Westport, took a lease on the house and opened up the first chemist shop in the town in 1904.

Sarah O'Neill died in Lincoln on 1st May 1913 at the advanced age of 89. Her only surviving daughter Mary Jane inherited the chemist shop in Manorhamilton. She never married, and left many of her belongings to the children of James O'Neill in Southsea. However, she passed the shop to another first cousin John Henry



■ Gilbert's Façade

O'Neill (eldest son of Allan of Auckland). He was a surveyor and sheep-farmer who had visited both Lincoln and Manorhamilton in 1904. He was not married either and in turn left the shop to his nephew James Frederick O'Neill of Auckland who attained the rank of lieutenant-commander in the New Zealand navy in World War II. He was also decorated

with the Distinguished Service Cross and the US Silver Star medal.

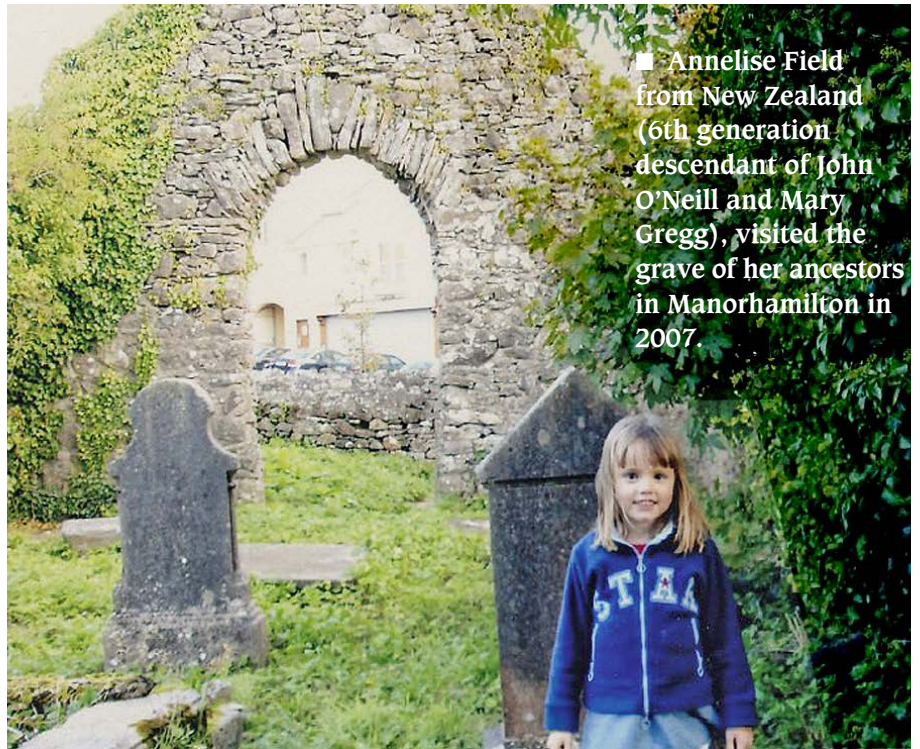
On 26th April 1950 James Frederick sold the chemist shop to Janet Gwendoline Gilbert, daughter of WRS and Jane Gilbert. The building was by then in need of repair and Janet had the two large bay windows at the 2nd storey level replaced by large flat ones. Janet disposed of the premises and business to Paddy and Eileen



■ **Lieut James Frederick Allan O'Neill**

Hughes in 1964. The whole façade of the house was dismantled and replaced by Haslette & Co, builders in 1983 and the rectangular decorative plaque was raised from the 2nd to the 3rd storey. In 1996 Mrs Hughes sold the shop to the present owners Finbarr & Deirdre Ryan who continue to operate it as a chemist shop under the trading name of Gilbert's Medical Hall.

So whenever we pass by the building today we might look up at the two plaques at the 3rd storey level and remember the



■ **Annelise Field** from New Zealand (6th generation descendant of John O'Neill and Mary Gregg), visited the grave of her ancestors in Manorhamilton in 2007.

O'Neill family who owned the property for over a century and a half. Let us not just recall Sarah who carried out the harsh eviction there in 1885, but also the many other members of the family who distinguished themselves in several countries throughout the globe.

*I am very grateful to Margaret O'Neill Field of Auckland, a great-great-grand daughter of John O'Neill and Margaret Gregg who has twice visited Manorhamilton and provided me with much of the O'Neill family history. My thanks are also due to Finbarr Ryan and Jim McMorrough who were most helpful in securing key documents relating to the Gilbert's premises.*

## CANADIAN AMBASSADOR VISITS GLENVIEW FOLK MUSEUM



■ **Kennedy family**

developed into a noted attraction in the North West of Ireland. Among the visitors to the museum are noted celebrities including Brian Dobson (RTE), Joe Duffy (RTE), Ken Loach (Director of Jimmy's Hall and The Wind That Shakes The Barley), and most recently the Canadian Ambassador Loyola Hearn and his lovely wife Maureen. The visit of Ambassador Hearn coincided with the completion of a new fully wheelchair accessible extension comprising of a new airy reception area, a new transport section, an enclosed area dedicated to farm machinery (and related artifacts), along with fully wheelchair friendly toilet facilities. Alongside the Museum, the Kennedys can cater for refreshments in their fully licensed bar and restaurant situated in Aghoo, Ballinamore.

THE KENNEDY FAMILY recognised the importance of preserving the past for the future and thus the Glenview Folk Museum was set up. Although the collection started humbly with just mainly agricultural machinery, it built quickly to become the popular tourist attraction that it is today. Brian Kennedy has had a keen interest in collecting old artifacts ever since he converted an old outbuilding into a traditional thatched Irish cottage, some years ago.

Featured on both national & international media, the Museum has