

The story of an Irish family who immigrated to Texas in 1834

by Rosalie Bridget Hart Priour



(1825 - 1903)

Excerpt from:
The Irish Progenitors Of Texas
Roy Miller

Within the narrow confines of San Patricio and Refugio Counties, which border the coast immediately north of the city of Corpus Christi, very early pioneer events occurred that predated the settlement of the remainder of the State and the frontier. These events tell a story of patriotism, perseverance and fortitude that finds no parallel in the annals of any nation--things that almost stagger credulity. The Irish settlers, James McGloin, John McMullen, James Power and James Heweston, *Mrs. Rosalie Hart Priour* and others were at the heart of these events.

***CAPTAIN TOM HART OF THE WATER GUARD AND HIS WIFE ELISABETH
O'LEARY HART AND THEIR FAMILY TAKE UP RESIDENCE IN
THE LITTLE CASTLE BUILT LONG BEFORE
TO GUARD THE ENTRANCE TO CORK HARBOR***

When I was about three years old the government appointed my father to the lighthouse of Cork. As they had, in addition to his salary, to furnish him a house, fire and candle-light, as well as a servant, we received the castle at the foot of the hill on which the lighthouse is built as our residence while we remained there. It was one of the most picturesque situations that could be found anywhere with the bay extending as far as the eye could reach in one direction and the farms with their fields of waving grain in the other.

At a short distance from the castle was a spring. I remember going with mother one day to a country gentleman's. (I do not remember his name, but I think it was Rooch.) On our way we stopped at the spring. Young as I was, I thought no words could possibly describe the loveliness of this scene. The spring was on the side of the road, and had a small spring-house built over it. The dipper chained to a post, benches placed around, everything so cool and pleasant seemed to invite the weary traveler to repose and rest from toil.

Not far off the picturesque residence of Mr. Rooch as it sat embowed in trees and shrubbery was enough to delight the eye of an artist, and, child though I was fifty-six years ago, still the scene made such an impression on my mind that as I write everything appears as distinct and fresh in my mind as if seen only an hour since.



Almost 200 Years later. Marked only by a few stones and some outbuildings two centuries of ocean waves have eroded away most of the earth from the site of the castle where young Rosalie Bridget Hart lived with her parents while Thomas Hart was Captain of the Waterguard at Roche's Point, Cork, Ireland. But the beauty of the setting can still be seen as Rosalie remembered it. *"It was one of the most picturesque situations that could be found anywhere with the bay extending as far as the eye could reach in one direction and the farms with their fields of waving grain in the other."*

A VESSEL CONTAINING CORPSES DESTINED FOR MEDICAL COLLEGES IN ENGLAND DRIFTS INTO CORK HARBOR

One day during my father's watch he saw a vessel drifting about in the offing, and, as it was his duty to board every vessel that came into the harbor, he ordered the men to man the boats and go on board.

(There he found the barrels of corpses described below.)

At that time the kidnapers, as they were called, were at their worst, and there was not a day passed but more people were killed by them. They had regular contracts made with the medical colleges in England to furnish corpses for dissection. Their mode of procedure was to go up to a person and put a sticking plaster over his mouth so that he could not give any alarm, and no one was safe from their attacks.

In the present instance, the vessel in question was chartered in Dublin to carry a load of dead people to some town in England. They were preserved in rum. The barrels containing the dead bodies were marked "water". The captain when he left port expected to arrive at his destination in two days, and only took water for that length of time, but, according to the old saying "Man proposes and God disposes", he was disappointed. The weather was so calm the vessel could make no headway, and in four or five days the crew suffered so much for water, the ship's carpenter took his adze and broke the end out of the hidden barrels marked "water", when, Oh horror!, in place of water he saw his uncle and cousin whom he had left in good health in Dublin only a few days before. Their bodies were preserved in rum in the barrels he had opened.

(The captain had killed his crew when they discovered his illegal cargo, but could not sail the ship by himself. When it drifted into Cork Harbor he was arrested and tried for his crime. Sentenced to prison for the rest of his life.)

ROSALIE RECEIVES A SCAR THAT STAYED WITH HER UNTIL HER DEATH IN TEXAS SEVENTY-THREE YEARS LATER

Father went up to the light-house to call the roll. I stole away from my nurse and followed him. It began to rain, and he sent me back to the house. I ran down the hill. The yard was paved with flags, and, my feet being muddy and the flags wet, I slipped and fell on the scraper at the back door. I do not remember the accident, but Mother told me she thought I had killed myself. When she picked me up she saw that the flesh was scraped entirely from the bone of my forehead over the left eye, and the bone looked as white as chalk.

It was the beginning of a storm, and they had not even a sticking plaster to draw the wound together. All they could do was to bind a wet towel over the place. The storm continued for three days, but as soon as it was safe to go to the cove, I believe it is now called Kingston, Father ordered a boat and took me to a doctor twelve miles from the light-house. There was only one doctor there. He did the best he could, but my forehead was so sore and so much inflamed that he could not sew it, and I will carry the scar to my grave.

THEY VISIT A LIGHT SHIP STATIONED IN THE HARBOR

Before returning to the light-house we visited the light ship stationed in the harbor to see one of Father's cousins who was in charge of the ship. To me it looked like the hull of a vessel without masts, and I was too young to understand for what purpose it was anchored in the Bay. I told Mother I thought it was very foolish of the government to have a man stationed there to watch such an old wreck as that.

***A PARTY OF PORTUGUESE TOURISTS HAVE A PICNIC AND
DANCE NEAR ROCHE'S POINT LIGHT-HOUSE***

One day a party of rich Portuguese who had been visiting the different scenes of interest along the coast of Ireland landed at the light-house. Won by the beauty of the place they decided on having a picnic and a dance before returning on board the boat. As all the inhabitants were going to see the dance and hear the music, Mother thought she could let my sister and me go to see what was going on, and gave my nurse strict orders not to let either of us out of her sight.

While enjoying ourselves a lady joined us, and taking her lunch basket made Elisabeth eat a cake steeped in wine. It was not long before she went to sleep. The lady, taking advantage of the nurse's carelessness, carried Elisabeth into a cave under the hill, and concealed her under her cloak, prepared to wait until the tide would rise. As the boats had been moored so close to the shore it would be impossible for them to leave before that.

The lady was very wealthy, and, as she had been married for several years without having any children of her own, my sister's beauty tempted her. She was under the impression that if she could get away from the place without being discovered the child was so young she would soon forget her own family and think that she was her mother. But God would not permit her to carry out her wicked designs.

As soon as the nurse missed her she and I searched everywhere for her, inquiring of everyone if he or she had seen Elisabeth, but all in vain. At last, becoming afraid, we turned our steps homeward and informed Mother and Father of the disappearance of our darling. In a few minutes the whole neighborhood was searching for her in every direction, but all in vain, and as the coast is rugged, and the banks washed by the tide, they were afraid she had fallen from the hill, and her body had been carried out by the tide.

The nurse could give no account of her, only that we were sitting on the hill watching the dance and listening to the music when a lady from among the crowd joined us, and gave my sister cake steeped in wine to eat, and both of them disappeared without her being able to tell in what direction. I then remembered seeing her go under the cliff, and it was supposed she was in one of the caves under the hill. The search was then renewed, and every care taken to search each cave and crevice. When they were about to give up in despair, Father saw some dark object in a recess in the largest cave, and, upon searching more closely, he saw a lady with a bundle under her cloak.

The following conversation ensued:

"Madam, will you be so kind as to let me see what you have under your cloak?"

She said, "It is nothing. I am only waiting in this quiet place until the boat can take us to the yacht. I was tired of that excitement and noise at the light-house, and came here to rest."

"You will pardon me, lady, but I am an officer, and it is my duty to see what you have concealed under your cloak."

At this moment Elisabeth awoke and hearing Father's voice said, "Oh, Pappa!"

(The Portugese woman returned to her ship, and Elisabeth was restored to the family. The Harts fired the careless nurse and never again allowed the children to go among strangers without one of the parents along.)

***CAPTAIN TOM HART'S SQUAD CAPTURE SMUGGLERS
DURING THE DARK OF NIGHT***

The life of a water-guard is very dangerous and full of exciting adventures. One day it was rumored that a great deal of smuggled goods would be landed that night on the coast during Father's watch. About three o'clock in the morning he came to the line which divided his beat from the next station. He did not meet the guard, and, as his duty compelled him to continue until he did meet the patrol in the next station, he had no choice but to advance.

About three or four miles from the line he saw several wagons loaded with goods. He followed them to the cave where they were hiding their cargo. He summoned them to surrender, and, as they seemed about to resist, he ordered his men to fire into the air.

The one who seemed to be the leader cried out, "It is Tom Hart! Run!"

All obeyed orders except the teamsters who would not abandon their teams. He only took five prisoners. The cave was full of all kinds of costly wines, tobacco and silk. Everything was brought to the castle and stored away until sold by the government, and, as Father had taken them in another station, he received a double portion of the prize money as a reward from the government.

***ELISABETH O'LEARY HART PERSUADES HER HUSBAND
TO GIVE UP THE DANGEROUS LIFE OF A WATER GUARD CAPTAIN AND
GO TO HER FATHER'S FARM IN COUNTY WEXFORD***

When Mother heard the firing (the rifles fired when he captured the smugglers during the night) she was badly frightened for fear Father had been killed. When Father was ordered to County Kent in England she persuaded him to sell his commission and go to my grandfather's farm in County Wexford. My mother was the only girl in the family, and Grandfather gave her fifty acres of land on which Father built a house.

***THE TOM HART FAMILY DECIDED TO SAIL TO FARAWAY TEXAS- THEN
A PART OF MEXICO- AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE MEXICAN
GOVERNMENT'S OFFER OF A LEAGUE AND LABOR OF LAND.***

Amazing courage and incredible perserverance overcame constant danger, death of loved ones, and seemingly impossible physical and emotional challenges to establish another Irish pioneer family in Texas history. That Irish heritage has been revered by nine generations of their descendants in Texas.