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IRISH BOY IN AMERICA

by Gerald Baughman

(Gerald Baughman grew up in Philippi, West Virginia, graduated from Alderson-Broadus College, and retired as a human resources manager for the United States Forest Service. He wrote this biographical sketch for his grandson, Anthony Ewin Baughman, Jr., who asked about the origin of his middle name.)

A few years ago I found myself in a small graveyard facing the headstone of William Ewin, born in Ireland, October 18, 1808. I was touched to have found the grave because I had been in the area with my grandparents fifty years before when they were unable to locate it. William was my great great grandfather and I was interested in him because my grandmother and father had Ewin as a middle name, as do my eldest son and his son. Both my grandmother and great grandmother talked about William, and my great grandparents lived near the site of his home in Tucker County, West Virginia. He seemed almost like a member of my immediate family, though he died fifty years before I was born.

When I became interested in family history, the principal characters in the story were no longer available to answer my questions. Fortunately I had some written records to draw from, and some memories. Genealogy is detective work that may never be completed, but I have learned enough about William to prepare an interim report.

It is generally accepted that the Ewing clan were Presbyterians and originally from Scotland. James Ewing, son of William and Mary, was born in Drumcliff, Ireland, on Sligo Bay in about 1770. Deborah Dickson, a daughter of John William Dickson and Margaret Baird, came from nearby Tawly, County Leitrim. English Kings beginning with Henry VIII had taken land from the native Irish, who were mostly Catholic, to give to English families who supported the monarchy, who were mostly protestant. The English Dicksons were one of the major landlord families of the Tawly area. James and Deborah married about 1798 in Kinlough, and their son William and eight other children were born in Baloor, a hamlet within the area of Tawly and probably on land owned by her family. They emigrated from Ireland to New York City in the United States in about 1822. I wonder what caused the couple to make such

a wrenching change in their life. It could have been religious turmoil, the shortage of new land and employment, or - was it simply the desire for a better life in America? At any rate, it took courage to pack up their family of eleven and, tickets in hand, say goodbye to their home.

It would have been a difficult trip, two to three weeks under sail, and a typical nineteenth-century ship had no heating system, no running water, no flush toilets, and no way of keeping food fresh after the initial supply of ice melted. A cow kept on deck might have provided some fresh milk.

In New York, James's last name was recorded as "Ewin." One Ewin descendent says James changed it when he married, and another reported that son William encouraged his father to make the change because there was a Catholic family in Tawly with the name Ewing. However, it was common for changes in the spelling of names to take place when they were first put into writing in the new country. Perhaps James had a thick Irish accent and the immigration clerk didn't catch the "g." Both James and Deborah are reported to have died in New York City on August 23, 1831. Their death on the same day might be explained by a cholera epidemic that peaked in New York in 1832.

William, my great-great grandfather, found himself in New York City at age fourteen. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and other signers of the American

Frances Littlefield Ewen



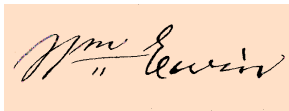
Declaration of Independence were still farming, writing, or enjoying retirement in the new young country while William was... what? Maybe running on cobble stoned streets in knee pants and a flat cap like a boy in an old movie. His life in the city is still a blank, but we know he was married on Wednesday, February 28, 1827, to Frances Littlefield. She was also born in Ireland in 1808, in Sligo. Two years later, Frances gave birth to a son, William Dickson Ewin. Then, sometime between 1829 and 1833, the little family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where Frances died in 1834.

A year after Frances's sadly early death, William married again, to Martha Ann Dennis. Ann, born in 1813 in Baltimore, was a daughter of John

Dennis and Nancy Thomas, whose background was English or Irish.

From 1833 to 1840, William's name appeared in the Baltimore city directory under a business address, first as a mathematical instrument maker at 3 Commerce Street in 1833. A reference on surveying instruments says: "William Ewin first came to public attention in 1833 when, in partnership with Isaac Heartt, he began to manufacture mathematical and optical instruments. Their advertising in the American Railroad Journal reads: 'Ewin & Heartt at the sign of the quadrant, No. 53 South Street, one door North of the Union Hotel, Baltimore.' William Ewin continued in partnership until Heartt's death in 1836. The last records for Ewin were in 1840-41...."

Signature of William Ewin



A railroad goniometer is a special surveying compass and only three are known to exist. One is signed, "William Ewin, Baltimore Md," and a picture is available at the Virtual Museum of Surveying site on the internet. The customer for this instrument was the Roadmaster of the Chicago Branch of the Illinois Central Railroad; another customer represented the Tunnel Residency of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company. My step great grandmother, Summa Phillips, who lived near William's home, told me that people occasionally stopped at her house asking about his instruments and tools.

These few paragraphs make it seem that William matured smoothly from a newlywed in New York to an established tradesman in Baltimore. In fact, it could not have been easy. This transition suggests a lot about his intelligence and drive but the details are hidden from us.

I don't know where the Ewins lived in Baltimore, probably within walking distance of his work near the Inner Harbor and in sight of the masts of sailing ships at the city piers there. Ships did not cross the ocean without the help of sails until 1838. There is a receipt given to William for rent on a Baltimore house at twenty dollars for ten months in 1834, but no address is included, and family letters were addressed to the business location. Modern buildings fill the blocks of both business addresses and the surrounding area today.

William and Ann stayed in Baltimore for five years - were they happy there? The United States suffered through a depression in the 1830's, so there could have been business or family problems. The opposite might also have been true: William may have been prosperous and bored and simply had a desire like his father to strike out for new territory. Did some customer for his surveying instruments tell him where cheap land was available? At any rate, on November 19, 1839, William paid three hundred dollars to the estate of a deceased Baltimore couple for the purchase of 3,400 acres of land in Randolph County, Virginia, and prepared Ann and three small children to move.

In June of 1840, a friend named Solomon Parsons wrote from Western Ford in Randolph County, advising William on buying goods for housekeeping and farming, and

referred to their having met the previous fall. William and Ann moved later that year, the date bracketed by the birth of daughter Mary Jane in Baltimore August 31, 1840, and October 26, when a letter from the Odd Fellows Lodge in Baltimore said that "...our beloved brother..." William "...has removed from this state." He had evidently prepared in advance for the move, because the Postmaster General of the United States appointed William Postmaster of Western Ford on the 17th Of November, 1840. Sadly, William and Ann's two-year old son Tommie died December 15. William took the oath of office as Postmaster December 18th.

William had a log house built: "...two stories high, with two rooms to each story and a large fireplace in each room... later a two-story addition was added to one end, and the chimney was opened on that side." The same source says that "nearly all the furniture was made by him as a cabinetmaker." My grandmother used a walnut drop leaf table William made. Several years later a letter from his daughter Frances mentions a stable almost full of horses every day because of visitors, and a barn full of goods. There may also have been a small school house. The location of the home, where Clover Run meets the Cheat River, was known then as Western Ford, Randolph County, Virginia, and is now the town of St. George, Tucker County, West Virginia. My father once showed me the foundation of the house, almost obscured by the approach to a new bridge over Clover Run on West Virginia Route 72. The road would have been at the beginning of the front yard and busy with horse, wagon, and foot traffic, including the tramp of soldiers' boots during the war.

This part of West Virginia is a beautiful spot - rich bottomland surrounded by hills where roads following the old Indian trails slope down to the Cheat River. However, I am greatly intrigued by the couple's courageous move from a presumably settled life among their family in Baltimore to an obscure spot in the Appalachian mountains, which must have been a near wilderness. The first visitors settled there in 1776, and in 1840 the community still included only a few families. The population is small even today, because 65 per cent of the county is government forest or parkland. In February of 1840 William's sister wrote from New York: "Now about your farm, I think you had better let well alone and stay where you are; don't give up a certainty for uncertainty. The idea of a country life is very pleasing, but you may find more difficulty than you are aware of. However you are the best able to judge. I would not like for you to go." A year later, Ann's sister wrote from Baltimore about the death of the little boy: "It must have gone very hard with you to experience a death in a strange place where there was none but strangers around you." A letter to William in July 1841 said: "...I am sure you must suffer excessively in the woods." Western Ford was certainly in the forest, about 225 miles from Baltimore. Solomon Parsons said that if he could not sell his cattle locally, he would drive them to Baltimore. He also spoke casually of traveling there on business, but much of the trip would have to be made by genuine horse power, because the Baltimore and Ohio railroad would not come to the area until 1850 when the nearest station would still be 20 miles away. Hunters were still finding panthers and wolves in the hills in the late 1850's.

The Ewins had six children in Western Ford, including my great grandmother Frances, in 1852. They maintained a connection with Baltimore through correspondence and visits, and their oldest son married there in 1864. Anne's big family was in Baltimore and one of their letters mentions John Ewin, William's brother. Telephones and electricity were still in the future, but people wrote often. One of Ann's letters refers to writing for every mail, and letters are often dated just a few days apart, so it appears that postal service was effective, but writers sometimes complained about letters that had not been delivered.

There are some clues to William's activity from 1840 to about 1855. Census records and family letters refer to his farming, and we know he had become a lawyer by 1855. That profession could be acquired by attending law school or by "reading the law" with a practicing lawyer; it is most likely that William learned by working with someone else. His status as a lawyer is confirmed by several written histories because he was chosen as legal representative by the people of northern Randolph County to represent them in a petition to the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond for the formation of Tucker County, completed March 7, 1856. One history of the county says: "...an ambitious and prominent attorney... He, more than anyone else, should be credited with being the father of Tucker County." This was the beginning of a political career that would help define the remainder of William's life.

A story documented in the History of Tucker County, and popular with William's descendents, is that he purchased the bell for the first Tucker County courthouse. It was cast by the Baltimore Bell Works in 1859, shipped

on the new Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to the nearest station, and carried by wagon to St. George. In 1888 the railroad was extended to the Cheat River Valley and chose to pass through the small community of Parsons (named for a son of Solomon Parsons), rather than St. George. Parsons grew quickly and in 1893 a group of its citizens made a nighttime raid to steal the county records, the sheriff's safe, and the bell and move the county seat to Parsons, where it is today. Photographs of the event show a wagon load of records surrounded by a crowd enjoying a rowdy parade. The bell was taken for the new courthouse in Parsons, but was replaced by a clock and donated to the First United Methodist Church there. Hand-tooled stone from the old St. George courthouse can be seen in the foundation and back porch steps of my great grandfather Phillips's house, built five years later on William's farm.

The General Assembly of Virginia appointed William to serve as the first Head of the Tucker County Commission and assist in organizing the county government. Another commissioner was his friend Solomon Parsons. For duties such as choosing a site for the courthouse and outlining magisterial districts, they were paid two dollars each day. When the first county election was held in 1856, William was outvoted for the job of Circuit Clerk, but in 1858, he was elected to the office and served until 1861. The Clerk of the Circuit Court is responsible for recording judicial matters, collecting fines, and safeguarding documents. William was on the Democratic ticket, opposed by the Whig party. The Republican Party began in 1854, but was not nationwide until 1860, when Abraham Lincoln got no votes in Tucker County.

The Circuit Clerk position did not use all of William's energy. On August 20, 1859, he was appointed by the Virginia Board of Public Works as Director of the Gnaty Creek and West Union Turnpike Company. This company is so obscure that I suspect the directorship was a title with few duties attached, nevertheless it suggests a certain standing in the business community. More importantly, letters and land grant documents show that William obtained grants of 2,628 acres on the east side of the Cheat River in 1850; 100 acres in Randolph/Barbour County in 1855; 6,940 acres on the west side of the Cheat River and Clover Run in 1857; 1,250 acres on the west side of the Cheat at Clover Run in 1858; then 860 acres on the Black Fork River and 700 acres on Cheat Mountain in 1859. From 1779 to 1948, the Governors of Virginia and West Virginia could grant vacant "waste or unappropriated" state lands to individuals for a nominal fee, though there was little unclaimed land after the civil War. I believe that William's main income in his Virginia years was through a combination of surveying, legal, political, and financial skills - in short that he had the resources to make a living by buying and selling land.

In April, 1861, something dramatic happened - Virginia left the United States, taking Tucker and its other counties with it. County officials, including William, showed their feelings by hanging confederate flags over the court house. Federal troops were dispatched to "...capture the flag and punish the offenders" who escaped to the Prosecuting Attorney's hunting cabin on top of Backbone Mountain near the town of Thomas. A descendent of Ann's brother William Dennis provides a related family memory about daughter Mary Jane:

"Mary Jane was in sympathy with the Union during the Civil War. Her father, however, at the home near Horse Shoe Bend, West Virginia, was in sympathy with the South. Before Mary became a Union Army spy, as she did later, she learned that a troop of Union soldiers had been sent to capture her father, who was in hiding. While he was still away from the home, the troops arrived there, and stayed all night. Determined to protect her father despite her growing sympathy for the North, Mary Jane swam an icy river, found her father and warned him. He escaped capture. Then Mary Jane again swam the river, crept through Union picket lines and returned home." My grandmother Phillips, William's granddaughter, told me that when Union soldiers searched the house, the family silver was hidden by having the girls sit on it and spread their wide skirts; her mother Frances would have been nine years old that year. Our family still has some silver spoons with the "W. E." engraving.

Another Civil War account concerns Confederate Lieutenant Robert McChesney, the third Confederate officer killed in the Civil War. He died at Hannahsville near St. George on June 29, 1861, when he and his troops tried to break up an election being held by the Restored Virginia Government. Lieutenant McChesney's body was buried at night in the Ewin family burial plot until it could be taken home to Virginia by his family.

The Ewins were one of the many families divided by the Civil War. In addition to Mary Jane's sympathies, the oldest son, Sammie, served in the Union Army for three years, and William's friend Solomon Parsons was elected Tucker County's delegate to the Restored Virginia Government, which represented the Union. There is no evidence as to why William himself supported secession; there were a

few slaves in Tucker County, but no evidence of any in the Ewin household. Possibly the intense desire of the Irish for independence from England led him to support Virginia's decision.

A series of letters from various officials to Ann cover William's return to his home. These are in response to a request delivered by Solomon Parsons who "...expresses himself firmly and in high terms of Mr. Ewin, except his secessionism." The most pertinent letter is from the Executive Department of the Commonwealth of Virginia saying in part: "...I submitted the question to the Governor who is very much engaged but promises to write to your husband himself. He says that if your husband takes the oath giving up any secessionist arms if he has any and deposes himself as a loyal citizen of the United States, he, the Governor, will instruct his officers that patrols which he is about to establish will not interrupt him. He can remain at home in safety from the government officers." The Confederate Government of Virginia was in Richmond, but the letters are from Wheeling, Virginia. They were from the "Loyal Virginia Government" or "Restored Government" of thirty-nine counties that stayed loyal to the United States and held conventions in Clarksburg and Wheeling which would create the new State of West Virginia. The Restored Government had power because of its relationship with the Federal army which was rapidly occupying the mountain counties, but the Confederacy had not yet given up control. The letters were written July 26, 1861, in the middle of the two-month period of the Battles of Philippi, Laurel Mountain, Rich Mountain, Corrick's Ford, and Cheat Summit, which Generals George B. McClellan and Robert E. Lee were fighting - a campaign which General Lee lost. It was an exciting and dangerous summer.

One of the letters from Wheeling about William's return home in 1861 says: "We adjourn today, our business is all caught up except the subject of division of the State that is now under discussion & we will take a vote this afternoon." West Virginia became the thirty-fifth of the United States June 20, 1863. The first capital was in Wheeling, but in 1870, the State Legislature made Charleston the new capital. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway was being built there, and the government believed Charleston would quickly become a center of business. Five years later, the Legislature decided to restore the capital to Wheeling. State officials went back up the Ohio by riverboat in May, 1875, but it wasn't until late August that the files and records reached Wheeling, so the delay put government work on hold for three months. Debate continued over the best city for a capital. Finally, the legislators decided to have the citizens vote on three possible locations: Charleston, Martinsburg, and Clarksburg. In May 1885, the state's officials and records went back down the Ohio and up the Kanawha River to Charleston to stay.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution says in Section 3: "No person shall...hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath...to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof." William did not hold another public office until after December 25, 1868, when President Andrew Johnson granted by Executive Order: "...unconditionally, and without reservation, to all and every person who directly or indirectly participated in the late insurrection or rebellion, a full pardon.."

It is not clear whether county offices were included in the Federal ban, but the State of West Virginia had a similar constitutional amendment that would have affected counties. The restriction began with a disenfranchising amendment retroactive to 1861 that took away the voting rights of disloyal Confederate citizens and limited office holding to voters. When Confederate veterans returned to the state after the war, about 30,000 of 50,000 potential voters could not vote or hold office. This created a demand to amend the constitution in 1871 to return the right to vote. The amendment also allowed African Americans to vote - men, that is - women could not vote in West Virginia and most other states until 1920.

His correspondence during what would be a ten-year break from elected office shows that William was fully occupied with legal and land work - In 1867 Governor Boreman of West Virginia approved a land grant to him of 422 acres on the Black Fork River, adjoining the 860 acres he received in 1859... for eight dollars and sixty-seven cents.

In 1871, William re-entered politics by election as Prosecuting Attorney of Tucker County on the Democratic ticket. He served until 1877, then in 1879 was elected to the West Virginia State Senate, serving until 1883. Correspondence from John J. Adams, the Tucker County Circuit Clerk (and William's daughter Angelica's husband), shows that William was still actively engaged in land business. An 1879 letter from William to Ann: "Tell John Adams to enter an appearance in the Pendleton vs. Rex case... " and the letters to her from the Virginia Restored Government, indicate that she could have been active in business affairs in

addition to her roles as mother and homemaker.

William was reared in Ireland so surely had an accent, but I don't know what he looked like. I imagine him with dark hair and mustache like all four of my great grandfathers. Pictures of William's contemporaries in the Tucker County Bar and West Virginia legislature show white men in dark suits and hats, differing mostly in facial hair styles. Sometime around 1890, William's daughter Frances put up her hair, slipped into a dark pleated blouse, and had several portrait photographs made; a note on the back of one says her eyes were dark blue, so odds are that William's eyes were blue also. A letter from son Will refers to a photo William sent to Frances that "...seems almost like a visit." Maybe we will see it someday.

There are some clues to William's character. In a letter to Ann he says: "I met my friend? Leatherman, and all was bowing and scraping, but no hand shaking," so I'll say he had a sense of humor. The Hu Maxwell History of Tucker County exceeds its usual flowery style when describing him: "At the bar, he would not condescend to unmanly abuse or resort to chicanery to gain an advantage over a rival. If he could not succeed by fair, honest, and honorable means, he preferred failure. It was known that what he said was uninfluenced by prejudice or partisanship, and he was taken at his word." William and Ann must have encouraged independence in their children, as shown by Mary Ann's and Sammie's Civil War activities, and William's appointment of Frances as executor of his will. Letters show that Frances and her niece, William's granddaughter Carrie Adams, stayed in Wheeling with him for several weeks during his senatorial term in 1882. They left St. George by wagon on Monday to arrive on

Wednesday, probably by train as they stayed overnight in the depot towns of Rowlesburg and Grafton. He clearly enjoyed their company.

William brought teachers into the community - an 1866 contract refers to his employing teachers "...to teach a school at his school house... for the term of 3 months... at ten dollars per month (without board)." William had other children in his household and paid the cost of their schooling; one, George B. Workman, he referred to as his apprentice and the other, Florence Swisher, was referred to in a letter from Frances as a "...number 1 girl." Son-in-law John J. Adams reported in 1882 that he had visited over the river and "mother & girl were quilting - of course must have something to do."

Religion played a part in William's life as shown by several references. An 1841 letter from Ann's sister in Baltimore says they are; "...very glad to here that uncle Ewin has got religion." He contributed toward building the Methodist Episcopal Church South in St. George in 1859, a building that is still in use - "Tucker's first school house," according to a newspaper account. In 1866 he was Secretary of the St. George circuit of the church, and apparently a Sunday School teacher because church minutes refer to him as leader of the class at St. George. His obituary was printed in the Nashville Christian Advocate, the official publication of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. William was sufficiently intelligent, personable, and energetic to advance in several lines of work, sometimes at the same time. I think it would be a pleasure to visit with him.

Ann passed away July 19, 1882, possibly in a hospital somewhere, as her death is not recorded in Tucker County. Surely her death was not

simply overlooked, because the County Clerk who certified the records each year was her son-in-law, John J. Adams. Homer Fansler's Tucker County history says William himself was forced to retire from public life in 1883 by "...the gnawing pains of an inward cancer," an illness confirmed by the record of his death on November 25, 1886.

William's Will: children Lewis and Frances, the two youngest children, and not yet married, got lands previously conveyed but not yet recorded, plus household and kitchen furniture, farm implements and tools, and the family library, equally divided. The library would have included my copy of the 1884 History of Tucker County; I like to think of William holding it and reading the passages about him. Other children received fifty dollars each; apprentice George B. Workman, "alias Mack," got two hundred dollars; and a small tract of 160 acres was to be sold and the proceeds divided among the living grandchildren. William E. Talbot and daughter Frances L. Phillips were named executor and executrix "...unless she shall be under coverture."

"Coverture" refers to old laws under which a married woman was included in the legal person of her husband. Because of coverture, married women did not have the legal capacity to hold their own property or contract on their own behalf. Frances was married to my great grandfather when William died, so the will was executed by William Talbot. When William prepared his will, he was suffering from cancer, Ann had died, and Frances and Lewis were not yet married, so I imagine that Frances was taking care of her father and managing the household.

I like to picture William as well enough in his last years to enjoy a good chair and a warm fire in his log home while my great grandmother Frances puttered around the wood cook stove. From an upstairs front window he could have watched the ford across the Cheat River, the Church he helped found, and the Courthouse with the loud brass bell. Perhaps, too, he would think about growing up in Ireland and the long sea voyage, courting his first love in New York City, or living with his children on a busy street in Baltimore.

From a window to the left, William could have seen the Ewin family graveyard on a rise about 400 yards away. Ann was there, and probably his two sons, both named Thomas Jefferson Ewin, who died as boys, daughter Deborah, who lived only three years, and two grandchildren who also died young. Hu Maxwell's history describes it as: "a retired and beautiful spot, shaded by several fine trees, and commanding a beautiful view of the Cheat River and the adjacent village of St. George. A lovely daughter of his sleeps there." There are thirteen graves marked with field stones, plus formal markers for Frances, Ann, and William himself. Looking down from that spot today we can see the home site, the river, and wide fields as green as County Leitrim where William was born.

UPDATE

William Ewin in Philadelphia:

In November 2006, a collector of surveying instruments phoned me about a letter that fills in the years from William's immigration to New York City in 1822 to his work in Baltimore in 1833, a period I had referred to as a blank.

On September 30, 1830, John G. Brown wrote to William in Philadelphia

saying that he was in business as Brown and Heartte, Makers of Mathematical Instruments, at 53 South Street in Baltimore. He explained that they were short of hands and he would like his old acquaintance to come work with them "with an inducement of as high wages as you can get in Philadelphia."

Brothers John and Edward Brown were instrument makers who previously worked in a shop in New York. It now appears that William may have worked there also. A typical seven-year apprenticeship would fit his time in New York from 1822 to the birth of his son Will in 1829 and a move to Philadelphia in 1830. A welcome surprise.

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William Ewin papers, West Virginia University, West Virginia and Regional History Collection.

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