

James Rooney

This pioneer was born in Carlo County, Ireland in 1821. Like a great many other pioneers he was enthused about new adventures and riches of a new country. He evidently was a farmer in Ireland as that was his vocation the rest of his life in the United States. He ventured to the New World in 1846, landing in New York and immediately set forth to farm near Utica, New York. He knew what he wanted and went straight toward his ambitions. His brothers, two of them, came to the United States a little later but journeyed straight on to northern Michigan and were never heard from again.

James farmed for ten years in New York State and during that time he met and married a pretty Irish miss, Bridgett Mc Caul, also from Ireland. She was born in about 1825. When their first child was about two years old, a daughter, Mary Ann, they decided to go to California above all places. After traveling by train from Utica, New York to Dubuque, Iowa, they embarked on a river steamer and came to St. Anthony. Bridgett was very weary and heavy with pregnancy so she was willing to compromise and take Minnesota for California. Her husband James set forth from St. Anthony with assistance from the United States Government Office, then located in St. Anthony and found a piece of land which delighted him in Plymouth and Medina Townships. He immediately returned to St. Anthony and purchased with cash the following property: on April 3, 1856; SW 1/4 of SW 1/4 of Section 7 and the NW 1/4 of NW 1/4 of Section 18 in Plymouth Township. In Medina Township the same day and with the same entry number 1431 he purchased the SE 1/4 of SE 1/4 of Section 12 and the NE 1/4 of NE 1/4 of Section 13. In all his land comprised 160 acres, judging now, a fine location right on the edge of the town of Hamel, Minn., on a new super highway and near a large metropolis. What better choice could he have made but of course unconscious of what the future held. An Irish man named Tuey located directly south of him on a farm purchased the same year but in the month of August. Perhaps he was a friend, being of the same nationality and religion. Like nationalities settled

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together and it must have been rather comforting to have a good Irish friend near amongst the German, French and English settlers in that territory. Also since Bridgett expected another child who was James, born in 1856 it was a blessing to have a good friend near in a crisis like that. This is all supposition but from a little information later, I believe this must be true.

Next child born was John in 1860, Thomas in 1866 and Eliza born in 1868. Besides these children Bridgett had two infants who died very young and were buried on the home farm.

A very good and unusual story is told by the grandson Earl Rooney, who in turn was told by his father and uncles and it is supposed to be true. James Rooney Sr. had built his home of tamarack logs which he obtained north of his farm. He had already completed his home and was going to build a barn. He stepped out of the house and hitched up his oxen when he spied two men busily engaged in cutting and making a place to build a cabin and of all places, right on James Rooney's land. That piece of land is just where the La Point property is now in Hamel (1954) Mr. Rooney did a lot of thinking, but took his oxen and cart or sled and proceeded to go after his logs. When he returned later, the men were still busy. James unhitched the team, put them in whatever place he kept them and went into the house. He obtained a bottle of whiskey, not to entertain those men, oh, no, got a pistol and out he went. He went right to the men asking what they were planning on doing. They informed him they were building a cabin and had the right to do so. They in return were informed that the land belonged to Mr. James Rooney and to cease building. The two men refused and continued. James just took the bottle of whiskey from his pocket and took a (made believe) big " snort " and lay the bottle down. Then he proceeded to pick up his pistol and the two men, seeing the big " snort " and pistol, knowing not when the whiskey would take effect and the pistol working, raced away toward St. Anthony. Later James Rooney heard through grapevine telegraphy that the

two intruders thought they would pay back Mr. Mooney in like manner and proceeded to buy whiskey and plenty, together with guns, they started for Mr. Mooney's farm. But they imbibed too freely with what James had made believe and got to quarreling between themselves and one man shot the other man's arm off. Finis.

The method of transportation to the farm from St. Anthony with his wife and family made it wonderful for a settler to be inconvenienced. He bought a team of oxen and had foresight to equip himself with a covered wagon in which they lived until living quarters in his cabin were complete. In all the stories I have heard of settlers here in Plymouth, I have never heard that. Perhaps others did but it was never mentioned by descendents. Maybe that California vision included a covered wagon and this part was what materialized of it. Plymouth Township was all the richer for this as she gained another pair of good citizens.

With so many young people around, there was bound to be parties and get togethers. Dancing and games were the main forms of entertainments. These parties were held in homes and barns and were furnished music by John and Thomas, two of James's sons. Thomas was famous for both fiddling and calling off square dances and ~~were~~ in great demand.

Vivian and Earl Rooney (1954) grand daughter and grand son of James and Bridget tell of the difficulties the old settlers had in attending church. As priests were missionary priests and church was held in homes until cabins could be built for church purposes, the James Rooney family attended mass where ever it happened to be. It is known that mass was held in the Andrew Jordan home near Rooney's and it is possible they attended there. When Holy Name church, a rude building by Hansman Lake, was erected, the Rooneys happily attended mass at that place. Later when St. Anne Church was built at Hamel, there of course you found the Rooneys. We often hear of the physical hardships of these settlers but should we not contemplate their mental discomfort when unable to obtain sacraments of the church when needed? They were very devout people and church and schools were deemed a necessity.

At the time of the Indian uprising in 1862, James Rooney took his wife and children to St. Anthony. There is some vague remembrance on the part of the grandchildren, Vivian and Earl, that the Rooneys went to Osseo to stay with the Fureys or something to that effect. This is where I connect the possibility of Tuey, the family in Plymouth, south of the Rooney farm. The pronunciation was vague in their minds and so was the spelling but they may have been a part of the Tuey family next to whom they lived. James left his family in either Osseo or St. Anthony for safety and returned to spend the days and nights in the tall brush, looking for Indians and trouble. Neither materialized to their relief, James was armed with his pistol and was really ready to defend his home. All other settlers were on the alert as was James Rooney and some left and never came back. When this scare was over, the wife and family returned and life went on as usual. James had to go to St. Anthony for necessities and took two days for the trip with the oxen. It took much less time to go by foot but carrying provisions ~~opack~~back, wasn't too easy either. James's wife and children usually stayed at home as they were too small and the trip was too strenuous. She must have been very brave to face loneliness and fear of Indians while her husband was on these trips. It is not known when the first horse was purchased.

Indians used to come and beg for food, especially white bread and offered venison in exchange. But this became a nuisance at times as flour had to be toted a great distance and it was necessary to have flour on hand for food. One time two Indians looked in for bread and saw James's gun over the door frame. He decided to own it and took it from its resting place. James ordered his wife to step into the lean to and get his pistol. In the meantime James grappled with the Indian and managed to make the Indian drop the gun. When the Indian saw the wife with the pistol, he and his comrad departed rather hastily.

When John F Rooney became 22 and James B 26, they purchased a farm in Minnetonka Township in the year of 1882. It was located in Section 3 and contained 200 acres. These two young men batched it together, going back and forth between

their farm and their father's to assist with the work. Thomas stayed on the home farm with the father. John married Annie Rooney from Ireland in 1903. He was the only boy in the family to marry. This couple had two children, Earl and Vivian who gave the information for this story.

Mary Ann the eldest girl and child married Henry Mc Ginty of Minnetonka Township and son of a very early settler there. This young man had just returned from the Civil War and Mary Ann who was only 18 years of age and her husband settled down to farming. Mc Ginty Road in Minnetonka Township is named after this Mc Ginty family. They had four children, one of whom is still living .(1954) This child is a daughter. Eliza the youngest daughter, went to Montana while quite young, either to visit or work and there contracted pneumonia in 1903. She was to have been married but her sickness and death ended that. She was buried in Montana.

James Sr. died in 1901 and his wife Bridget in 1895. Both were buried in Hamel. John and Thomas also died in 1922 and James Junior in 1939. Three in this family died within one year. James Junior who died in 1939 lived with the Rooney's in Minnetonka Township a long time before his death.

The old Rooney farm was divided among the relatives, Vivian and Earl Rooney still retaining 22 acres. They declare they will never part with them. The old frame, ^{house} James's first frame one, was built about 1870 or later. It was torn down in just recent years.

John was treasurer of school district # 105 from 1906 to 1920. He was active in public affairs and was highly respected as a neighbor and a helpful citizen. If all the people in the community were as aware of the history of their ancestors there would be much to relate. Vivian and Earl Rooney had the advantage of listening to their father and two bachelor uncles who at some time in their life always lived with them, and they listened with intensity and were able to relate incident after incident which makes information important. Never once did I hear " I am sorry but I wish I had listened or written this down ." They did and are so very grateful for what they do know about the Rooney family.