

# Discovery of

## *The Whelan & Lyons Connection*

by

*Robert F. Lyons*

written while living in Cork, Ireland for a Year.

Springtime 2001

Living in Ireland for a year (September, 2000-July, 2001) affords us the opportunity to explore and enjoy many aspects of Irish life, including family history. Nona and I have roamed about Ireland, inch by inch, making many discoveries. On one of our several trips to Dungarvan, we visited the local library and checked out the local history section. We discovered a book on the Comeragh Mountains by Sean and Sile Murphy which led to introductions to the Whelan and Whelan-Whyte families of Kilrossanty, a farming community outside Dungarvan, Co Waterford, Ireland.

There are many parallels between the stories of the Whelan and Whelan-Whyte families of Kilrossanty and Dungarvan, and the Lyons-Whelan traditions in South Dakota, USA. These similarities along with relevant baptismal records and data from Griffith's Valuation (1856) and the living memories make a persuasive case that I may have discovered some living Whelan cousins--or at least, kissing cousins--maybe our rich Irish cousins.

Both Ellen Whelans of Kilrossanty appear to have been strong and "proud" women with clear standards and expectations for their families. The photographs of Ellen Whelan Whyte (1847-1946, daughter of Pierce Whelan) and Ellen Whelan Lyons (1822-1889, daughter of Thomas Whelan) suggest a family resemblance, possibly of cousins or aunt and niece. Ellen Whelan Lyons had a brother named Pierce who also emigrated. He was called Pierie. Among the descendants of Ellen Whelan Whyte, Pierie is a common name.

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In the Lyons-Whelan tradition, this story of our ancestral Irish parents, Ellen Whelan and Jeremiah Lyons is passed down:

*Jeremiah Lyons of Dungarvan, the son of a poor flax farmer married Ellen Whelan who was the daughter of a wealthy father and landlord in 1841. Ellen had a governess and was educated beyond the station of most Irish women at the time. She thwarted her father's intentions, by marrying the handsome and stalwart Jeremiah. She was an accomplished seamstress. Jeremiah Lyons (1819-1894) and Ellen Whelan (1821-1889), sailed to the United States with two children, Bridget and Margaret in 1846 from Dungarvan, a seaport in County*

*Waterford, Ireland. Jeremiah and Ellen made their way across New York State, he, working on the railroads and she as a seamstress and cook. In 1849 the growing family went to Chicago where they bought a farm. My grandfather, William Lyons, was born there in 1860, the youngest of ten children. [Twins were born in 1858. I [Bob] am a twin. There are [wins in the Ellen Whelan Whyte family tree also]. Jeremiah and Ellen moved to Winnesheik County, Iowa in 1867 where they farmed until moving farther west to Madison, South Dakota in 1884 to spend the autumn of their lives with their pioneer sons and daughters. Their oldest son, Richard, with his younger brother William (my grandfather), led a wagon train of 44 Irish farmers from Iowa to Dakota Territory (South Dakota) in the 1880s. These immigrant sod-busters are buried beneath the prairie sod in Madison, South Dakota: Ellen 1889 at age 68, Jeremiah 1894 at age 75.*

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The first two stories that follow were written in 1954 by two grand-daughters of Jeremiah and Ellen Whelan-Lyons: Ellen Lyons Smith and Florence Finley Kohlbach, from South Dakota, USA. I add the baptismal records from Kilrossanty Parish, Co Waterford and data from Griffith's Valuation (1856), the only detailed guide to where people lived and to the property they possessed in 19th century Ireland. Finally, I include notes about Thomas Whelan and Pierce Whelan, and Ellen Whelan Whyte, based on my visits to Kilrossanty and Dunganvan February, 2001 with:

+ Kathleen Whyte, (Mrs. Jimmy [Whelan] Whyte, 051-291149)

e-mail: [daughter:Whyte.Colette@maiJ.esb.ie](mailto:daughter:Whyte.Colette@maiJ.esb.ie)

+ Catherine [Kathleen] Whelan (088-2198744)

+ Sean & Sile Murphy (051-291157, writers & local historians.

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## **Whelan & Lyons**

By

Ellen Lyons Smith (Mrs. Frank J.)

[Daughter of Richard F. Lyons, the son of Jeremiah Lyons and Ellen Whelan]

1954

*These recollections of family history I write from memory. I was fifteen years old when Grandma [Ellen Whelan] Lyons died (1889) and twenty when Grandpa [Jeremiah Lyons (1894) died. I knew them well. Many of these events they have related to me; others are from stories my father [Richard F. Lyons) has told. Many dates are accurate; others are estimated by their relation to known facts.*

Continue below

*Persons of Irish birth have told me that the chief ambition of every Irishman is to be able to trace his ancestry back to a Lord or Prince. Grandpa [Jeremiah Lyons and Grandma [Ellen Whelan] Lyons were born in County Waterford, which is on the southeast coast of Ireland, the largest town of which is Dungarvan, a seaport. In 1947 a San Francisco newspaper issued a St. Patrick's Day Supplement containing a map of Ireland, taken from records dating back several centuries. This map gives the name of Lord Lyons or Lehan, and of prince Phelan, later Whelan, both families in Waterford County. Little attention is given to the day and month of birth-only the year.*

*Grandpa [Jeremiah] Lyons was born in 1819 and Grandma [Ellen Whelan] in 1821; they were married in 1841. They had two children, Margaret and Bridget, when they decided to emigrate to America. Bridget was a baby of about one year. Aunt Bridget was born May 12, 1844. [Different spelling and date on baptism record.]*

*Grandma's name was Ellen Whelan. Her father was a landlord, and the family enjoyed a comfortable living. Grandma was educated by governesses and she had many opportunities of culture not enjoyed by the average person in Ireland at that time. The Whelan family belonged to the class of Irishmen who show influence of the Danish invasion--the light hair, fair skin, and slender build. Grandma told me the story of her romance--how her father had selected a husband for her, in their own social sphere. She refused and made her own choice. One can understand the slight, fair girl being attracted to the stalwart Jeremiah, the true Irish type with the broad shoulders, deep-set eyes, rosy cheeks, and black hair. She never regretted her decision, though their early life together was not easy from a worldly point of view. [Ellen Lyons Smith 1954]*

#### **Baptismal Records from KILROSSANTY PARISH**

**KILROSSANTY CHURCH, CO WATERFORD, IRELAND (near Dungarvan)**

**79 WHELAN, ELLEN**  
**Father: THOMAS**  
**sponsors: BOW, JOHN**  
**Priest: ?**  
**B/1822-1858 P. 3**

**Continue below>>>**

**Baptism of Ellen Whelan**

**5 DECEMBER 1822**

**Mother: BOW, MARY**

**BOWE, ELIZA**

**Baptism of 4 Lyons Children**

**1917 LYONS, MARCARET**

**18 MAY 1842**

**Father: JEREMIAH**

**Mother: WHELAN, ELLEN**

**Sponsors: WHELAN, JOHN**

**WHELAN, M.**

**Priest: CASEY, J.**

***B/1822-1858 P. 107***

**2044 LYONS, BRICID**

**28 JULY 1843**

**Father: JEREMIAH**

**Mother: WHELAN, ELLEN**

**Sponsors: WHELAN, DAVID**

**FITZGERALD,  
CATHERINE**

**priest: CASEY, J.**

***B/1822-1858 P. 115***

***B/2196* LYONS, PATRICK**

**15 JANUARY 1845**

**Father: JEREMIAH**

**Mother: WHELAN, ELLEN**

**Sponsors: LYONS,  
DENIS**

**CUNNINGHAM  
, BRICID**

**Priest: CASEY, J.**

***B/1822-1858 P. 125***

**2279 LYONS, UNKNOWN (page torn)**

**3 JAN 1846**

**Father: JEREMIAH**

**Mother: WHELAN, ELLEN**

**Sponsors: LYONS, MICHAEL**

**WHELAN,  
MARY**

**Priest: CASEY, J.**

***B/1822-1858 P. 131***

[Waterford Heritage Services conducted a search of records in 39 parishes in diocese of Waterford and Lismore in April, 1999. Baptismal records for Kilrossanty begin in 1822; marriage records begin in 1859. Jeremiah and Ellen married in 1841. These are the only records which show Jeremiah Lyons & Ellen Whelan with children named Margaret and Brigid for the entire 19th century in Ireland. Margaret and Brigid [Bridget] emigrated with Jeremiah and Ellen to U.S. in 1846. Family history says, "John" died in infancy in Ireland. Discrepancy in remembered birth-death dates is common according to Waterford Heritage genealogists.]

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**Stories from Kilrossanty**

Sean and Sile Murphy, local historians, Kilmacthomas (near Kilrossanty) acquainted us with local history and interpreted Griffith's Valuation (1856). Nona and I visited them February 10, 2001 at their home. Sile, a story teller, is a teacher in the Kilrossanty School. Sean works for Social Services in Dungarvan. They are authors of an excellent local history: **THE COMERAGHS: Famine Eviction and Revolution. 1996.**

**Continue below>>>**

## Thomas Whelan and pierce Whelan, Kilrossanty, Co Waterford

*Thomas Whelan and Pierce Whelan--according to Griffith's Valuation (1856)--occupied jointly a homestead with a great deal of acreage in Kilrossanty, in a townland called Cutteen South, near the old National school (built 1831 and 1834). [Conjecture: Pierce is younger brother or cousin of Thomas Whelan. These two men also had a partnership with Rev. John Casey who served Kilrossanty Parish 1844-78. Casey was the priest who baptized four Whelan-Lyons children according to church records.*

*Thomas Whelan--father of Ellen Whelan-Lyons, according to Kilrossanty baptismal records--occupied 283 acres in Cutteen South with Rev. John Casey, leased from Board of Education, E. Galway, consisting of Houses, land & offices. Ellen married Jeremiah Lyons in 1841.*

*Pierce Whelan--the father of Ellen Whelan Whyte--occupied 44 acres in Cutteen south, leased from Board of Education, consisting of House, offices & land. Ellen married James Whyte in 1883.*

*Thomas and Pierce Whelan and Rev. J. Casey occupied 688 acres leased from same Board of Education, of School-house & land in Cutteen South. Together, these three men leased a total of 1024 acres--approximately three-fourths mountain land--valued at 166 pounds for land and 18 pounds for buildings in 1856. Their acreage included the Whelan Whyte farmlands, farmed today by two sons of Kathleen Whyte (Mrs. Jimmy [Whelan] Whyte), and the land that was the farm of Michael Whelan (father of Catherine [Kathleen] Whelan and James Whyte's cousin). Two Whelan families resided at the original Whelan homestead together.*

The only match for the names **Ellen Whelan and Jeremiah Lyons** in the 19th century records for Co Waterford and for all of Ireland is that documented in Kilrossanty Parish records. We will never know with certitude how Ellen Whelan of Kilrossanty met and married Jeremiah Lyons of Dungarvan. Perhaps their fathers were in a landlord-tenant relationship, or the young Jeremiah spotted Ellen with her "light hair, fair skin, and slender build" on market day in Dungarvan, or she had her eyes on the "stalwart Jeremiah with the broad shoulders, deep-set eyes, rosy cheeks, and black hair." Four children were born and baptized in Kilrossanty. Only two survived to immigrate with their parents to America in 1846.

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### Pierce Whelan (1815-1888)

Catherine [Kathleen) Whelan, grew up on her father's (Michael Whelan) farm in Cutteen South, Kilrossantv, at the foot of the mountain near the farm of cousin James [Whelan) Whyte. I visited her in Dungarvan February 12, 2001.

*My father, Michael, (1910-1994) always said that the Whelans were from Lismore. They were gentleman farmers who moved to Kilrossanty. At the old homestead, there were two Whelan families. They dressed up in suits and ties, and had maids. Thomas' schoolmaster said: "Thomas Whelan, you know the stars, I can't teach you anymore." The Whelans were a generous people. They gave to poor farmers in the area. The Casey family was from Tipperary. Through some devious deal, Rev. Casey confiscated part of the Whelan land. The Whelans took him to court in Waterford. The judge said: "The old man, Whelan, is in the right; I can't go against the priest he has to have the land." My father's father was John Whelan, (1866-1906). His grandfather was William Whelan whose sister was Ellen Whelan [Whyte] (1847-1946). Their father was Pierce Whelan (1815-1888) ..... There were twins [also] in our family tree and an artistic streak. I am a painter ..... A boat full of people from a strange land [Vikings] sailed into Waterford Harbour some centuries ago. Local people did not understand the language and called them FAILAIN'S (Phelan's), which is Irish for seagull. They were the things that came in from the sea. College friends of my son Raymond call him "GULL" (seagull/).*

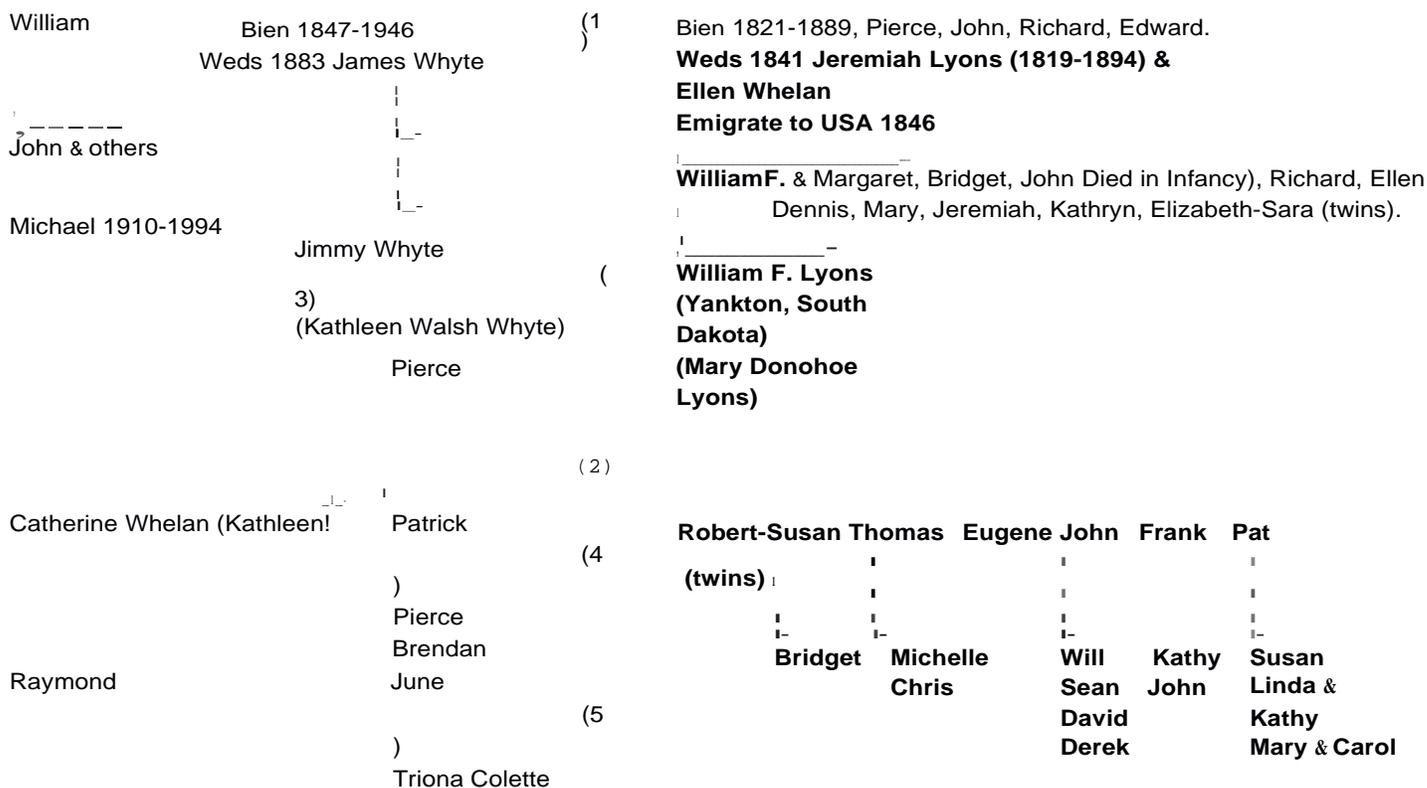
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## THE WHELAN-LYONS FAMIL V TREE

Pierce Whelan 1815-88

+ Kilrossanty+

Thomas Whelan?



6 **Continue below**

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## Ellen Whelan Whyte (1847-1946) Kilrossanty

Kathleen [Walsh) Whyte, Cutteen South, Kilrossanty lives in the original Whelan home and homestead. Kathleen and her late husband, Jimmy [Whelan) Whyte built up the farm. I visited her at the farm on February 12, 2001 and met her son, Patrick.

James Whyte's grandmother was Ellen Whelan, daughter of Pierce Whelan. Ellen married James Whyte in 1883 and lived to age 98. She was always spoken of as "a *proud woman*." Two photographs of Ellen Whelan Whyte bear a remarkable family resemblance to the photograph of Ellen Whelan Lyons, wife of Jeremiah. The Ellen Whelans may have been cousins or aunt and niece, depending on whether Thomas Whelan and Pierce Whelan were brothers or cousins. Pierce Whelan, his daughter Ellen Whelan-Whyte and grandson, Jimmy Whyte are buried under a huge Celtic Cross with Irish inscription in Kilrossanty Church cemetery.

Kathleen Whyte with her six children operated the farm after her husband, James died in 1984. Her two sons farm the original Whelan homestead: Patrick, Brendan. They raise cattle and graze sheep in commonage--several hundreds of acres up the mountain for 600-800 sheep. Patrick has won the All-Ireland for his Blackface sheep with the specially groomed curled horns.

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## Whelan & Lyons

Galway Bay-Our Family

By Florence Finley Kolbach

(Daughter of Elizabeth J. Lyons Finley, daughter of

Ellen Whelan Lyons)

1954

*.... Great Grandfather Whelan was a man of renown,  
He lived in a castle and mayored the town,  
From fields of flax, manufactured Irish linen,  
He had for his partner one Patty O'Flynn.*

*Great Grandfather Lyons had fine judgment and knowledge,  
His education was limited without high school or college,  
He had few earthly holdings, no money to burn,  
But made human welfare his lifetime concern.... (Kolbach, 1954)*

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*Of the Whelans, uncle John [Ellen's brother] was the oldest, an aristocrat all through, who wore a silk hat and carried a cane when he went out and walked with great dignity, to the amusement of his young American relatives. The youngest brother, Pearce, called Pearie, a favorite of Grandma's [Ellen Whelan-Lyons, met a tragic fate. As he left her house one dark, rainy night his path lay along the edge of the Chicago River. He was never seen again and was believed to have drowned.... Other members of the Whelan family were Richard and Edward, who with their families went to northeastern Kansas when that country was being settled up....*

*Grandpa Lyons worked his farm, and the boys found work where they could. My father [Richard F. Lyons] often spoke of working on the canal. It was the custom at that time for people to read aloud, and Grandma [Ellen Whelan Lyons], who was a fine reader, frequently read to her children. Their early education was acquired that way. I do not know the date of the Lyons family emigration to Iowa. Many of the children of the family were born in Chicago (1850-1860) .... Aunt Mary Lyons was the member of the family between the older and younger groups. I remember her as we called to say goodbye to Grandpa and Grandma Lyons and their family when we were leaving for Dakota Territory in 1879. Aunt Mary had heart trouble and dropsy. She was sitting propped up in a rocking chair with each foot on a pillow. Her feet were so enlarged as to be nearly beyond recognition....*

*Priests have used the expression "the pious Irish". That designation fitted Grandma [Ellen Whelan] Lyons very well. She was truly pious. My first recollection of her was on Good Friday, 1879, the Lent before we left for Dakota Territory. It was her custom to gather the family together and have them remain kneeling while she led the prayers from 12 to 3 p.m. on Good Friday. Uncle Will was working in the field not far from the house. As she told someone to call him in, Grandpa [Jeremiah Lyons] said, "The spring is late; leave him in the field." But he came in. I was sitting on my father's chair. He remarked to Grandma that I would not be able to kneel. Her reply was, "Let her try." Sleep soon ended that devotion. Grandpa observed many customs of the Irish, too. On Easter Saturday he baked eggs for us children in the hot wood ashes on the hearth. He warned us that we must be up in time to see the sun dance as it rose on Easter Morn. To this day I awaken for the sunrise on Easter. Nowadays, nearly all Christians observe Easter by early devotion. (Ellen Lyons Smith, 1954)*

## Jeremiah Lyons, Dungarvan

Jeremiah Lyons is listed in Griffith's Valuation (1856) as living on Third Cross street in Dungarvan where he leased from the Duke of Devonshire, a House, forge and yard; net annual value, 2 pounds, 5 shillings. There is no documentation that this Jeremiah is related to Jeremiah Lyons, husband of Ellen Whelan. But he must be a Dungarvan relative of some degree. There are Lyons and Whelan tombstones in Aglish cemetery a few miles away and not far from Villierstown where two Lyonses lived until recent years. This was flax growing territory. Jeremiah was the "*son of a poor flax farmer.*" Oral tradition says that the sheep of the Irish were allowed to graze in Villierstown [Anglo-Irish, Protestant town] but the Irish could not live there. Griffith's Valuation lists a William Whelan as a landlord with extensive holdings in Monksland. Kathleen Whelan's research reveals that a John and Bridget Lyons lived in Kilrossanty in 1866. Kathleen Whyte heard from an old timer that an Ellen Lyons lived there 50 years ago.

I have been unable to document a direct relationship between the Lyons-Whelan family and the late Jim Lyons of Dungarvan (d. February 2, 2001) and his brother, Willie. In my Celtic soul, however, I conjecture a shared ancestry. Willie resembles my father William at a younger age.

only DNA testing would confirm whether or not the Whelan-Whyte and Whelan families of Kilrossanty are blood cousins of the Whelan-Lyons families of south Dakota and the USA. But one of the advantages of being Irish is that you can populate the countryside of your ancestors with the people you choose and you can select a set of family relations to which you would want to admit. That much, I have accomplished by my visits to Kilrossanty, and with this compilation of stories. A red headed cousin in Vermont, quite attuned to spirits of the earth, told me, after visiting the three holy wells at Kilrossanty: "*I know it's the right place. I could feel Ellen and Jeremiah there.*" If the next discerning relative who visits Kilrossanty divines a different truth, he or she should be advised that the Lyons family motto remains:

**NOLI IRRITARE LEONES \* DON'T IRRITATE THE LIONS!**

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Castlelyons, **Co Cork**

Lyons people presume an ancient relationship to the clan **Ui Liathain**, at **Castlelyons** just over the Co Waterford border in Co cork. From the 5th to the 11th century, the Lyons chieftains and tribe held sway over the whole of East cork from Corrin and the hills north of Castlelyons to

the sea at Youghal and Cork. An ancient Celtic church thrived there. After strong bow's invasion in 1170, the Barry family took over Castle Lyons and scattered our ancient Lyons ancestors in the area of Co Waterford and Co Cork. *[The name John Lyons is inscribed in Irish and English on the Republican monument at University College Cork, executed by British, March, 1921 during War of Independence].* The impressive ruins--castle and Franciscan monastery from the Norman period--were rebuilt several times. An English tourist, George Holmes in 1797 wrote of Castle Lyons. *The houses are antient, and respectable in their appearance .... The gardens are extensive and very beautiful within which is a pleasant canal; the river Bride meanders through the deep park producing many agreeable views. In throwing down some old walls of Castle Lehan [Castleyons], an antient chimney-piece was found with this inscription: LEHAN O'CULLANE- HOC FECIT, MCIII. (Lyons built it, 1104 A.DJ*

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**CAISLEAN O LIATHAIN - CASTLELYONS - UNTIL THE 12TH CENTURY WAS FOR SEVEN HUNDRED YEARS AN IHPORTANT FORTRESS OF THE UI LIATHAIN PETTY KINGDOM. FROM THENCE TO THE 18TH CENTURY IT WAS A CASTLE OF AN BARRACH MOR BARRYMORE.**

**AFTER THE 12 CENTURY NORHAN INVASION, THE CAIIBRO.:NORMAN PHILIP OE BARRI BECAIIE "LORD OF OLETHAN", LATER BARRYS BECAIIE EARLS OF BARRYMORE. DE BARRI EARLY IN THE 13TH CENTURY BUILT HIS CASTLE NEAR OR ON THE SITE OF THE ANCIENT UI LIATHAIN FORTRESS.**

**THE CASTLE PLAYED AN IHPORTANT PART IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURY WARS -- IN 1645 THE CASTLE WAS CAPTURED BY THE INSURGENT IRISH FROM CROMWELLIAN FORCES. VARYING ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES - NORMAN, TUDOR, JACOBEAN - I NO I CA TE ITS HANY RECONSTRUCTIONS. THE FINAL RECONS7RUCTION OF THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY CONVERTED IT INTO A "STRONG AND STATELY HOUSE. WITH A SPACIOUS HALL AND A NOBLE GALLERY 90 FEET LONG, GARDENS AND A DEER PARK. " THE CASTLE WAS ACCIDENTALLY BURNED JULY 1771. (Marker)**

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The Lyons princes reigned from the 5th to 11th centuries at Castlelyons, Co Cork. The O'Phelans [*Whelans*] were princes of the Desi tribe before the 12th century Norman invasion; It was written:

*Great is the allotted territory / of which O'Felan holds possession.*

**Ó Faoláin** is the diminutive of **faol** = **wolf**. Hence it is that offspring of the Whelan-Lyons union lay claim to a blend of the cunning of the wolf and the strength and beauty of the lion.

*All the best!*

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