

FAMILY BRANCH NARRATIVE

Sylvester Kelly and Johanna 'Jane' Murphy

Great Great Grandparents

County Kildare

This Family Group story follows Sylvester Kelly and Johanna Murphy (known affectionately as Jane) from rural County Kildare, Ireland, through famine-era upheaval and migration, to the working-class Irish Catholic community they built together in Auburn, New York.

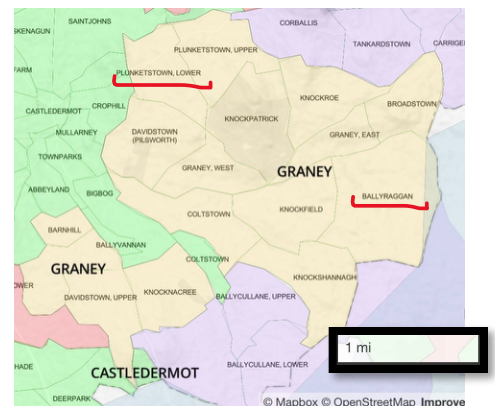
To understand Sylvester and Jane's beginnings, it helps to look first at County Kildare and the wider province of Leinster. This landscape was historically layered with ancient kingdoms, early Christian sites, Viking trade routes, Norman conquests, and centuries of English political pressure. Long before the Kelly and Murphy families appeared in surviving records, Kildare had already become a place where land, faith, language, and identity were deeply intertwined.



By the ninth century, Norse settlement at Dublin had created one of Ireland's most important trading centers. In the twelfth century, the arrival of Norman forces under Strongbow reshaped Leinster again, drawing the region more firmly into the orbit of the English Crown. Over the following centuries, English authority rose and receded, at times shrinking to the fortified area around Dublin known as "the Pale." By the early modern period, the older Gaelic order had been steadily displaced. Leinster carried the enduring marks of conquest, resistance, adaptation, and survival.

That history still resonated in the nineteenth century. The 1798 Rebellion, organized by the Society of United Irishmen, had brought major uprisings to Leinster and left a lasting memory of political unrest. Sylvester and Jane were born decades later, but they entered a world shaped by these older struggles over land, religion, and power. County Kildare matters here not as background scenery, but as the specific rural world that forged their identities before immigration.

Zooming in from Leinster to the civil parish of Graney brings the story closer to home. Sylvester and Jane were born about five to seven miles apart, near Castledermot and the County Carlow border. In this rural world, families, neighbors, work, worship, and marriage prospects overlapped within a tight circle.



Townlands

A townland (baile fearainn) was the smallest traditional unit of Irish land division, functioning as both address and identity. Before modern records standardized place names, people were commonly known by the townland where their family lived and worked. For Sylvester, that place was Plunketstown Lower; for Jane, it was Ballyraggan. Both townlands sat inside a small rural orbit, ensuring their childhoods unfolded in the same shared community.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

Just Y And the EYers

Irish names deeply connected families to older clan histories, local communities, and inherited identities. Common names like Murphy and Kelly appeared frequently in official records, but within their own townlands, they were part of a living network of kin, neighbors, sponsors, witnesses, and marriage connections.

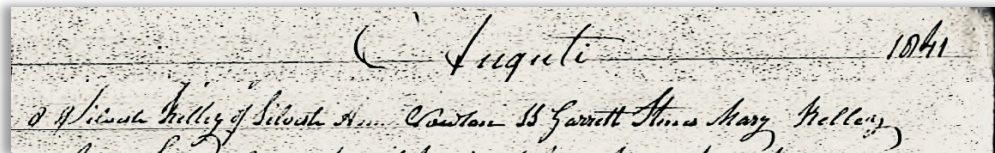
Spelling during this era was highly fluid. The same family might appear as Kelly, Kelley, or another variant depending entirely on the whim of the priest, census taker, clerk, or newspaper editor. Throughout this document, spelling follows the available primary record whenever possible. Therefore, spelling differences should not be read as separate family lines or distinct identities.

Kelly: Derived from Gaelic forms like Ó Ceallaigh or Mac Ceallaigh. The root Ceallach translates to war, strife, contention, or alternatively, "bright-headed" or "red-headed."

Murphy: Derived from Ó Murchadha or Mac Murchadha, stemming from murchadh, which translates to "sea warrior."

Sylvester and Jane did not arrive in Auburn simply as isolated immigrants. They carried with them a specific place, a Catholic community structure, an agricultural rhythm, and a naming culture rooted in family continuity. Their migration story begins not at the port of arrival, but in the fields, roads, church records, and kinship networks of rural County Kildare.

1841 Sylvester



August 1841

8 Sylvester Kelley of Sylvester [Kelley] & Anne Nowlan SS [sponsors] Garrett Stines & Mary Kelley
Co. Kildare: Digital images provided by E-Celtic Ltd; Dublin, Ireland; Irish Catholic Registers

Sylvester Kelly was baptized on August 8, 1841, meaning his birth occurred that same day or shortly before. In mid-nineteenth-century Ireland, Catholic baptisms took place rapidly—often within one to three days of birth. High infant mortality rates and religious doctrine dictated that unbaptized infants who died would remain in limbo forever. Tragically, these infants were often denied burial in consecrated ground, placed instead in unmarked, informal burial sites known as cillíní.

Sylvester's parents were Sylvester Kelly and Anne Nowlan (also spelled Nolan). Surviving baptism and marriage records identify seven, possibly eight children in the family: Patrick (b. 1830), Mary (b. 1832), Michael (b. 1835), John (abt 1838), James (b. 1839), Sylvester (b. 1841), Catherine, and Edward (b. 1844). Sylvester's baptismal sponsors were relatives. One sponsor, Garrett Stines, may have been an uncle or cousin connected to Sylvester's paternal grandmother, Mary Stynes Kelly. The other sponsor, Mary Kelley, was also likely an aunt or cousin.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

1844
Jane

Jane's exact birth record has not yet been confirmed, but U.S. census records consistently indicate that she was born in 1844; the 1900 census specifies June as her birth month. If she was born in Castledermot parish, as Sylvester was, the relevant registers may be difficult to decipher because of faded ink and damaged or illegible sections. Until an Irish baptismal record is uncovered, her birth date remains a well-supported estimate.

Surviving marriage records from the Church of the Holy Family in Auburn, New York, identify Jane's parents as Patrick Murphy and Maria Dallon (possibly Tallon). Marriage records for Jane's siblings, Alice and Thomas, name these same parents. Additional siblings may have existed but have not yet been identified in surviving documents.

Peace
be with
You



Sylvester and Jane's childhoods unfolded during a period of massive transition in Irish Catholic life. Catholic Emancipation in 1829 had removed many formal legal restrictions, but poverty, local power dynamics, and older religious tensions still heavily shaped daily life.

In and around Castledermot, daily life existed beside visible reminders of a much older religious landscape: high crosses, medieval ruins, and the remains of the Franciscan Friary. These landmarks connected ordinary rural families to a long memory of faith, loss, resilience, and continuity.



Castledermot Abbey

Parish clergy were central figures in communities where many people had limited formal education. Priests recorded baptisms and marriages, offered counsel, and helped anchor Catholic identity. In the mid-nineteenth century, growing regularity in Catholic practice gave many families a stronger communal structure during years of deep economic uncertainty.

For the Irish, land represented identity, security, and a profound spiritual connection to history, stemming from centuries of dispossession and colonial tenancy. Irish mythology and folklore often personified the land as a woman, imbuing geographical features with stories of the supernatural and making the landscape sacred rather than just functional.

Land

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, land meant survival; losing it meant starvation, making it the ultimate focal point of personal dignity. Because no complete household census survives from their childhood years, land occupation records are the vital links used to determine exactly where the Kelly and Murphy families lived.

Griffith's Valuation was the general valuation of rateable property in Ireland, completed in this region during the mid-nineteenth century. In the absence of traditional census records, this valuation serves as a primary tool to anchor the Kelly and Murphy families geographically, proving just how deeply their pre-emigration lives were rooted in the exact same rural landscape.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

1853

PLUNKETSTOWN,
LOWER.
(Of S. 38 & 40.)

Sylvester Kelly, Same, House and land.

PRIMARY VALUATION OF TENEMENTS. PARISH OF GRANBY.

No. and Letter of House or Shop.	Tenements and Occupies.	Immediate Lessee.	Description of Tenement.	Area.	Net Annual Value.			
					Land.	Buildings.	Total.	
					£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	
KNOCKSHANAGH. (Of S. 40.)								
1	Robert Stevenson.	Lord Wm. Fitzgerald.	Office and land.	103 1 18	100 0 0	2 10 0	102 10 0	
2	Thomas Sharpe.	Robert Stevenson.	House, office, and garden.	0 1 21	0 0 0	0 10 0	0 10 0	
3	Thomas Dwyer.	Lord Wm. Fitzgerald.	House, office, and land.	102 3 22	0 0 0	10 0 0	102 3 22	
4	Mary Frawley.	Same.	House, office, and land.	22 3 11	18 0 0	0 15 0	21 10 0	
5	Patrick Kehoe.	Same.	House, office, and land.	4 2 16	0 0 0	0 5 0	4 2 16	
6	Thomas Frawley.	Same.	House, office, and land.	8 3 2	0 0 0	0 10 0	8 3 2	
7	Margaret Frawley.	Same.	House, office, and land.	43 1 26	22 0 0	1 15 0	25 15 0	
8	Same.	Same.	House, office, and land.	22 3 21	10 0 0	1 5 0	23 10 0	
Total.				388 3 30	230 0 0	17 10 0	535 10 0	
PLUNKETSTOWN, LOWER. (Of S. 38 & 40.)								
1	John Kelly.	Lord Wm. Fitzgerald.	House, office, and land.	32 2 2	17 10 0	1 0 0	18 10 0	
2	John Kelly.	John Kelly.	House.	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	
3	Michael Doyle.	Same.	House and land.	2 0 23	1 0 0	0 5 0	2 10 0	
4	John Kelly.	Same.	House, office, and land.	4 3 7	2 10 0	0 10 0	4 3 7	
5	Sylvester Kelly.	Same.	House and land.	2 3 23	1 10 0	0 10 0	2 3 23	
6	Patrick Lyons.	Same.	House, office, and land.	24 0 29	11 0 0	2 10 0	27 10 0	
7	Garrett Stynes.	Same.	House, office, and land.	12 2 13	0 0 0	0 15 0	12 2 13	
8	James Stynes.	Same.	House and garden.	0 0 30	0 10 0	0 10 0	0 2 0	
9	David Nolan.	Same.	House, office, and land.	4 1 30	2 0 0	0 10 0	4 3 0	
10	Ellen Nolan.	Same.	House, office, and land.	87 2 0	48 10 0	2 10 0	91 10 0	
11	William Kennedy.	Same.	House.	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 0 0	
12	John Ryan.	Lord Wm. Fitzgerald.	House and land.	9 2 12	2 0 0	0 5 0	9 7 0	
Total.				206 4 21	100 10 0	11 10 0	318 10 0	
PLUNKETSTOWN, UPPER. (Of S. 38 & 40.)								
1	James Kelly.	Thomas Dwyer.	House, office, and land.	7 1 10	3 0 0	0 10 0	7 2 0	
2	David Ryan.	Same.	Land.	14 3 15	0 15 0	—	14 5 0	
3	James Stynes.	Same.	Land.	3 0 12	1 10 0	—	3 10 0	
4	Garrett Stynes.	Same.	Land.	10 2 0	4 0 0	—	10 2 0	
5	Ellen Nolan.	Same.	Land.	49 1 8	20 0 0	—	49 1 8	
6	Henry Brown.	Same.	Land.	121 0 23	70 0 0	—	121 0 23	
7	James Whelan.	Thomas Dwyer.	House, office, and land.	3 3 2	1 10 0	0 10 0	3 4 0	
8	Patrick Nolan.	Same.	House and land.	3 1 5	1 0 0	0 5 0	3 6 0	
9	Edward Nolan.	Same.	House and land.	3 3 30	1 10 0	—	3 4 30	
10	Edward Nolan.	Same.	Land.	3 1 26	1 10 0	—	3 2 26	
11	Edward Nolan.	Same.	Land.	3 1 25	1 0 0	—	3 1 25	
12	Martin Doyle.	Same.	House, office, and land.	10 0 4	5 0 0	0 10 0	10 1 0	
13	James Brown.	Lord Wm. Fitzgerald.	House, office, and land.	27 2 0	12 0 0	0 10 0	29 2 0	
14	John Nolan.	Thomas Dwyer.	Land.	12 2 0	7 0 0	—	12 2 0	
15	John Nolan.	Lord Wm. Fitzgerald.	House, office, and land.	25 1 9	12 10 0	0 10 0	27 1 0	
16	Patrick Brown.	John Nolan.	House.	0 0 0	0 0 0	—	0 0 0	
Total.				312 1 3	177 10 0	10 0 0	499 10 0	
GRANGEHOLM. (Of S. 38.)								
1	James Halligan.	Andrew Dunn.	House, office, and land.	6 3 23	3 15 0	0 15 0	6 5 0	
2	Andrew Dunn.	Duke of Leinster.	Land.	27 3 11	14 0 0	—	27 3 11	
3	Duke of Leinster.	Is he.	Land.	108 1 23	49 0 0	—	108 1 23	
4	James Grant.	Same.	House.	0 0 0	0 0 0	—	0 0 0	

The valuation records Sylvester's father, also named Sylvester Kelly, renting a house and land from Lord William Fitzgerald. The younger Sylvester lived on this holding as a child of about ten years old, experiencing the daily realities of Irish tenant farming firsthand.

The immediate neighbors listed formed the core of the family's social and spiritual circle:

Garrett Stynes: Lived next door and stood as the godfather and sponsor for young Sylvester's baptism on August 8, 1841.

John Kelly: A neighboring holder who was likely a brother to the senior Sylvester. Mary Kelly served as the baptismal godmother for young Sylvester, suggesting she may have been John Kelly's wife.

James Kelly: Located a few miles away in Plunketstown Upper, possibly brother to Sylvester Sr.

Edward Hayden, Patrick Murphy, James Fitzgerald, Edward Hayden, Office and land, House, House, office, and land.

Patrick Murphy leased a house, outbuildings, and farmland from his landlord, Edward Hayden, in the townland of Ballyraggan. Also living in that small area was Catherine Tallon, whom evidence suggests was Jane's maternal grandmother and the mother of Maria Dallon. The surnames Tallon and Dallon appear to have been used interchangeably in the local records.

These records reveal that the Kelly and Murphy farms were not isolated plots. They sat within an intimate, interlocking network of kin, neighbors, and trusted lifelong companions.

PRIMARY VALUATION OF PARISH OF DUNMAGOG.

No. and Letter of House or Shop.	Name.		Description of Tenement.	Area.	Net Annual Value.			
	Tenements and Occupies.	Immediate Lessee.			Land.	Buildings.	Total.	
MAGANEY, UPPER. (contd.)								
Exemptions:				1 2 2	0 15 0	12 10 0	16 5 0	
National school-house.				—	—	3 10 0	3 10 0	
Total of Exemptions.				1 2 2	0 15 0	15 0 0	19 15 0	
Total, exclusive of Exemptions.				373 0 29	304 10 0	24 5 0	502 10 0	
NEWTOWNPHIL. (Of S. 35.)								
1	Patrick Grant.	James Byrne.	House, office, and land.	6 3 24	4 10 0	0 10 0	6 0 0	
2	James Byrne.	Duke of Leinster.	Land.	3 1 2	1 10 0	—	3 1 2	
3	Patrick Hoffman.	James Byrne.	House, office, and land.	63 2 37	0 0 0	15 0 0	63 2 37	
4	Charles Hickey.	Same.	Land.	163 2 17	96 0 0	—	163 2 17	
5	John Grant.	Duke of Leinster.	House and garden.	0 0 14	0 1 0	0 0 0	0 1 0	
6	Edward Griffin.	Same.	House.	0 0 2	0 0 0	0 10 0	0 1 0	
7	Michael Grant.	James Byrne.	House and garden.	9 2 28	1 10 0	0 10 0	9 3 28	
8	James White.	Same.	House, office, and land.	3 1 23	1 10 0	0 10 0	3 2 23	
9	Therese Grant.	Same.	House, office, and land.	17 2 20	10 0 0	0 10 0	17 3 20	
10	G. S. & W. Railway Co. (Chatter house).	Is he.	Railway (140 ft. per).	3 1 12	1 10 0	0 10 0	3 2 12	
11	Barrow Navigation Co.	Is he.	Lock house.	—	—	2 0 0	2 0 0	
12	Is he.	Is he.	Street houses & lavatory.	—	—	—	—	
13	Is he.	Is he.	Yard (220 ft. per).	8 1 35	—	—	30 10 0	
14	Is he.	Is he.	Garden and land.	1 2 25	1 10 0	0 10 0	2 3 0	
15	Is he.	Duke of Leinster.	Land.	1 1 35	1 0 0	—	2 3 0	
16	Is he.	Is he.	Land.	1 1 35	1 0 0	—	1 0 0	
Total.				287 3 35	163 14 0	16 10 0	206 10 0	

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

Both Jane and Sylvester's families resided in the civil parish of Graney, a rural landscape of open, rolling agricultural plains. Much of the land had long been cleared of native woodland and was strictly managed through large landlord estates, with the nearby village of Castledermot serving as the local commercial and social hub.

By 1841, Ireland's population had climbed to a historic high of roughly 8.18 million. Local households in townlands like Plunketstown Lower and Ballyraggan were frequently crowded, multigenerational, and entirely dependent on small landholdings, volatile wages, and shared family labor.



Ar scáth a
chéile a
mhairimid

*We live in the
shelter of one
another*

Samuel Lewis's 1837 Topographical Dictionary described the region as having "*neither trade nor manufacture.*" This stark phrase underscores just how narrow local economic opportunities truly were. Most families subsisted on farming, agricultural day labor, and seasonal livestock work. The fertile plains around Plunketstown supported potatoes, grain, and livestock, but agricultural fertility did not equate to economic security. For tenant families, the land could feed them and employ them, but it would never fully belong to them.

Kinship was the ultimate safety net against this systemic uncertainty. Extended relatives lived in close proximity, shared grueling physical labor, minded children, pooled tools, and sustained one another through illness, harvest pressures, rent demands, and lean seasons. To keep holdings intact, families typically passed land or tenancy rights to a single heir, leaving other siblings to remain nearby as laborers or landless supporters. In this tightly knit world, Sylvester and Jane grew up within a small, familiar radius of relatives, neighbors, fields, and markets.

When Sylvester, Jane, and their families walked into Castledermot for Sunday Mass, market days, or errands, they moved through a landscape visibly layered with history. They watched mail coaches thunder along the main Dublin-to-Cork Road, passing beneath the shadow of a medieval round tower, granite high crosses, and the weathered ruins of the Franciscan Friary. These landmarks served as daily reminders that their ordinary routines unfolded among centuries-old stories of faith, settlement, conflict, and endurance.

Daily life for children like Sylvester and Jane was defined by hard labor from an early age. Mornings typically began with a simple meal of potatoes, occasionally paired with milk or buttermilk, before the day's chores commenced. Because the local forests had been cleared generations prior, securing fuel for the household hearth was a vital, ongoing task.

Castledermot lay near the southern edge of the massive Bog of Allen, making peat—or turf—the most accessible fuel for rural households. Long before coal became affordable, turf dried on the bog was what cooked the family food, warmed the small rooms, dried wet clothes, and sustained the evening fire.



Sleán



*Picture depicting cutting turf late 19th
century Ireland*

Sunrise,
Sunset

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

In early summer, men and women cut wet turf sods from the bog using a narrow, specialized spade called a *sleán*. The heavy, wet sods were laid flat along the heather to dry in the sun. Families later stacked the partially dried sods into small, upright pyramids called "footings" so the wind could draw out the remaining moisture. Only after weeks of seasoning could the turf be carted home to burn cleanly in the cottage hearth.

Farm and household chores overlapped constantly. Owning a single pig, a small dairy cow, or a few laying hens mattered immensely, providing vital nutrition, extra market income, or a small buffer against eviction. Children helped weed gardens, clear stones from the soil, tend livestock, carry heavy water buckets, and gather kindling.

When the autumn season arrived, everyone took part in the critical potato harvest. Families cultivated their crops using raised ridges of earth known as "lazy beds"—a highly efficient, labor-intensive method for growing potatoes in damp, uneven Irish soil. The weeks just before late July and early August—when the new crop was ready to dig—were always anxious, even in good years, as old winter stores dwindled and families stretched whatever meager food remained.



Household labor was equally demanding and physically punishing. Laundry was done entirely by hand, requiring water hauled from rain barrels, streams, or nearby brooks. Clothes were soaked, scrubbed, beaten with a wooden stick or battledore to drive out dirt, rinsed, and boiled when fuel allowed. Finally, the wet cloth was spread outdoors over bushes, hedges, or stone fences to bleach and whiten in the summer sun. Soap was a luxury, often handmade from wood ash and rendered animal fat. These were repetitive, exhausting tasks

required just to keep a mid-century household functioning.

Evening brought a brief, welcome shift in rhythm. Animals were tended one last time, turf was brought indoors for the night, and the main meal of potatoes and cabbage was shared around the hearth. By the dim light of a rushlight or a glowing turf fire, neighbors and relatives gathered in the cottage to share stories, sing songs, play cards, and discuss local news. In this setting, community was not separate from survival; it was the framework that allowed families to endure ordinary hardships before the Great Famine made hardship extraordinary.



Rush light

An Gorta Mór

The Great Hunger
1845–1852

County Kildare was not among the regions most completely devastated by potato dependence. Its local agricultural economy was diversified, featuring commercial grain crops, cattle, and sheep alongside subsistence plots. A smaller percentage of Kildare's arable land was dedicated exclusively to potatoes compared to the harder-hit western counties. While this diversity softened the absolute worst mortality rates of the blight, it did not eliminate the pervasive terror. For families already living on the knife-edge of poverty, even a partial failure of the potato crop triggered immediate hunger, debt, and the threat of eviction.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY



In 1845, the catastrophic potato blight reached Ireland, rapidly rotting the primary food source upon which millions depended. It returned with devastating force in 1846, initiating years of profound hunger, epidemic disease, inadequate relief efforts, mass evictions, and desperate emigration. The Great Hunger (An Gorta Mór) lasted from 1845 into the early 1850s, fundamentally transforming the country demographically, economically, and emotionally.

Sylvester and Jane were young children during these dark years. Sylvester was roughly four years old when the blight first struck the fields; Jane was an infant of about one. No surviving written record details exactly how the Famine breached their specific households—whether they endured failed crops, soaring rents, typhus, hunger, or the sudden disappearance of immediate neighbors. What can be said is that they grew up in a bruised community where the Famine years were remembered not as distant history, but as an intimate, lived trauma.

In Kildare, the impact was uneven. The county's agricultural diversity and lower population density helped it avoid some of the highest mortality seen in the west, but rural families remained highly vulnerable. Tenant households depended on land they did not own, wages they could not control, and harvests that could fail without warning. The Famine exposed how little security many families actually possessed.

The years immediately following the Famine were just as decisive as the crisis itself. The Encumbered Estates Acts of 1849 allowed heavily indebted estates to be sold at auction. This legislative shift brought in a new wave of speculative landlords and corporate investors who were less bound by traditional, local relationships.

In many districts, small tenants and agricultural laborers were systematically pushed off the land as estates were consolidated into large-scale, profitable cattle and sheep grazing farms. For young people like Sylvester, Jane, and their siblings, the message of the 1850s was unmistakable: remaining in Ireland offered no guarantee of land, steady work, or a secure future.

Over the subsequent decades, County Kildare and much of rural Ireland shifted heavily toward this commercial livestock economy, rapidly drying up opportunities for agricultural day laborers and younger sons or daughters who stood no chance of inheriting land. By the 1870s, the remaining tenant farmers and laborers began organizing politically through aggressive agrarian movements like the Land League. But for many families, the practical answer to changing economic realities had already become emigration.

For the Kelly family, migration became a distinct family pattern. Sylvester and his siblings all eventually left Ireland. Most settled in the Auburn, New York area, while his brother Edward went to Canada before eventually making his way back to Auburn.

Their departures suggest not a single dramatic break, but a deliberate chain of decisions made across years. Relatives and neighbors created pathways across the Atlantic, establishing a foundation that made it easier for the next person to follow. Family researcher Dr. Valerie Burke DeLeon (descendant of Sylvester and Jane's youngest daughter, Genevieve) compiled important work on this branch of the Kelly family, including mapping Sylvester's specific immigration route.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

U.S.A.
Sylvester
1861

Sylvester was 18 years old when he embarked on his journey to America. He boarded the Dreadnought, a vessel famous for its speed under the command of Capt. Samuel Samuels. Between 1853 and 1864, the ship completed 31 roundtrips between New York and Liverpool, averaging 26½ days for westward passages and 19 days for eastward trips. Sylvester, alongside his family and neighbors from Plunketstown Lower, travelled in the steerage berth.



Steerage, the least expensive class of travel, was located on the ship's lower decks. Hundreds of passengers were crowded into large open compartments, where bunks were often stacked two or three levels high. Families and unrelated travelers frequently shared cramped wooden sleeping areas.

These decks had little ventilation and no portholes. During storms, crew members sealed the hatches, leaving passengers in darkness with poor air quality and the suffocating odors of overcrowding and seasickness. Seawater often leaked through the deck above or through ventilation shafts, soaking mattresses filled with straw or seaweed and forcing passengers to sleep in damp, cold clothing.

1. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
2. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
3. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
4. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
5. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
6. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
7. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
8. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
9. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
10. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
11. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
12. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
13. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
14. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
15. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
16. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
17. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
18. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
19. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
20. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
21. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
22. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
23. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
24. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
25. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
26. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
27. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
28. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
29. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
30. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck
31. John Kelly	21	St. Patrick's	Irish	Upper Deck



Clipper Ship Dreadnought (1861)

Arrival Date: April 27, 1861

Port of Departure: Liverpool, England

Port of Arrival: New York City, New York

Ship Master: Capt. Samuel Samuels

Ship Class/Deck: Steerage / Upper Between Decks

Source Citation: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897; Microfilm Publication M237.

Under British and American maritime laws at the time, steerage passengers received raw food instead of prepared meals. They had to cook for themselves by building fires or waiting to use communal galley stoves. Their diet consisted mainly of hardtack, salted beef, oatmeal, and vinegar. During the weeks-long voyage, food often spoiled or became infested with weevils.

Sylvester's arrival occurred decades before the opening of Ellis Island (1892) or the dedication of the Statue of Liberty (1886). In 1861, tugboats and barges transferred steerage passengers directly to Castle Garden in Lower Manhattan, while cabin-class passengers bypassed this inspection altogether. This circular fort served as the primary immigrant receiving station. Health officers briefly examined incoming travelers upon landing. Officials separated the severely

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

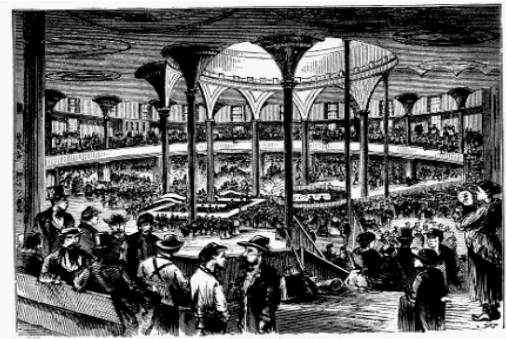
U.S.A.
Jane
1863

destitute or sick, sending them to hospitals on Ward's Island or Blackwell's Island. Healthy immigrants moved directly into the main rotunda, where clerks recorded names, ages, occupations, birthplaces, and destinations.

Castle Garden functioned as a vital resource center. Newcomers collected mail, retrieved money sent by relatives, and exchanged currency. They also purchased steamboat or rail tickets and obtained help finding lodging or employment. For an immigrant traveling to upstate New York, Castle Garden was the indispensable bridge to the American interior.

Sylvester traveled toward a clear, predetermined destination. His older siblings, uncles, and cousins had already settled in and around Auburn by 1855. Other neighbors and relatives from Plunketstown Lower lived in the same area. Auburn was a deliberate choice, driven by a chain migration network linking rural County Kildare to central New York.

Jane Murphy followed a similar path of immigration, also likely traveling with companions from her childhood. Her sister, Alice Murphy, was already established in Auburn by 1860, renting a room and working as a domestic servant. Their brother Thomas and father Patrick also appeared in local records by the mid-1860s. Jane entered a pre-existing community where family and parish connections helped soften the shock of her arrival. The 1900 United States census records that she arrived in America in 1863. Until a primary ship manifest is uncovered, this year remains the accepted baseline.



View of the interior of Castle Garden
Harper's News Monthly, 1871

Civil War
1861-1865

Sylvester arrived just two weeks after the first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. The conflict split the nation and created an intense demand for soldiers and industrial labor. The crisis dragged immigrant enclaves directly into national debates over loyalty, citizenship, work, and emancipation.



Roughly 150,000 Irish-born men served during the war, primarily in the Union Army. Many enlisted out of allegiance to their adopted home, while others sought steady wages. Some hoped military service would combat rampant anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice.

New York's Irish Brigade earned fame on the battlefield, but this pride coexisted with deep unease at home. Irish laborers feared job competition from newly emancipated slaves and resented the 1863 Conscription Act. This draft system allowed wealthy citizens to avoid service by paying a commutation fee or hiring a substitute.

These class tensions erupted violently during the New York City Draft Riots of July 1863. No evidence suggests Sylvester or Jane participated in these events. However, they lived through a volatile era where Irish immigrants faced difficult questions about their place in a fractured republic.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

Auburn N.Y.

Auburn offered immediate jobs, but like any community begun by European settlers in the New World, it carried a complicated history of displacement. The area around Cayuga Lake had long been home to thriving villages of the Cayuga Nation before those communities were dispossessed in the aftermath of the American Revolution.

In 1793, Revolutionary War veteran Col. John L. Hardenbergh claimed land in this area. He built a gristmill and a sawmill along the Owasco River. A settlement grew near the former Cayuga village and river crossing known as Wasco or Owasco.

The village was renamed Auburn in 1805 and grew rapidly throughout the nineteenth century. Abundant waterpower, regional agriculture, and the opening of the Erie Canal fueled this expansion. By the time Sylvester and Jane arrived, Auburn was a bustling industrial and civic hub.

Auburn stood at the crossroads of several major reform movements. Harriet Tubman lived there during these years, and the city was deeply connected to abolitionism, women's rights, penal reform, industry, and transportation. While Sylvester and Jane's personal thoughts on these public issues remain unrecorded, their new home placed them inside a community shaped by national change.

For Irish Catholics, Auburn could be both a refuge and a challenge. Like other Irish immigrants, they likely encountered suspicion from a largely Protestant establishment that often-viewed Catholic newcomers as foreign, clannish, poor, and politically suspect. In response, Irish families leaned heavily on kinship networks, neighborhood ties, and the Catholic Church.

Parish life helped make Auburn livable. The church offered worship, sacraments, schooling, social recognition, and a place where Irish immigrants could gather without explaining themselves. For Sylvester and Jane, this Catholic community became one of the main bridges between the world they left and the family they built in New York.

1864
I do

A Transcription Of Marriage Records For Holy Family Church - Auburn, New York August 1864 - December 1866 Sorted Alphabetically By Groom's Surname

MARRIAGE DATE	GROOM	FATHER OF THE GROOM	MOTHER OF THE GROOM	BRIDE	FATHER OF THE BRIDE	MOTHER OF THE BRIDE
10/9/1864	Kelly, Sylvester	Kelly, Sylvester	Nolan, Anna	Murphy, Johanna	Murphy, Patrick	Dalton, Maria

Sylvester J. Kelly and Jane Murphy exchanged vows on October 9, 1864, at the Church of the Holy Family in Auburn. According to Griffith's Valuation of land in Ireland during the 1850s, the Kelly and Murphy families had farmed land within a mere two-mile radius of each other. Their shared roots in County Kildare were transplanted to Auburn as they embarked on this new chapter and established their place in the community.

After marrying, Sylvester and Jane built their Auburn household within a close, supportive network of relatives. Sylvester's father, also named Sylvester, and



Included in 1875 Cayuga County Atlas

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

Clann Family

his mother, Anne Nowlan Kelly, both remained behind in Ireland. However, siblings, in-laws, cousins, and neighbors surrounded the young couple in Auburn, continuing the overlapping relationships they had known in rural Kildare:

- *Patrick, John, and Michael Kelley*, Sylvester's brothers and their families farmed land near one another outside Auburn, echoing the close kinship-and-labor patterns familiar from Ireland.
- *Mary Kelley, Catherine Kelly Carroll*, and brother *James Kelley*, Sylvester's siblings, lived in Auburn.
- *Edward Kelley* and his family settled in Ontario, Canada and eventually returned to Auburn.

Jane's side of the family was also nearby. Her mother likely died in Ireland, and her father, Patrick Murphy, followed his children to America. On the 1865 census, he is noted as a widower living with his daughter, Alice Murphy Tracey, and her family in Auburn. By the 1870 census, he had moved in with Sylvester and Jane. Jane's known siblings also settled in the area:

- *Alice Murphy Tracey* settled in Auburn.
- *Thomas Murphy* and his wife and family also settled in Auburn.

Sylvester and Jane's children anchored the next chapter of their lives, their names mapping a family geography that stretched back across the Atlantic. Their eldest son, Sylvester, born around 1865, was named for his father and paternal grandfather. Their second son, Patrick, born in 1867, carried the name of Jane's father, while James Francis followed in 1869, named for Sylvester's brother.

In total, Jane gave birth to thirteen children. However, the fragile nature of nineteenth-century childhood meant that only seven survived by the 1900 census. Among the lost was young Patrick.



Jane Murphy Kelly

He appeared as a seven-year-old in the 1875 census and then vanished from later records—a silent indication of an early death.

Losing a child in America brought old-world customs into a shifting new setting. When Patrick died in the late 1870s, Sylvester and Jane grieved at the intersection of Irish Catholic tradition and the increasingly formal mourning culture of Gilded Age America. Their sorrow was not a private burden alone; it unfolded within the comforting embrace of family, parish, and neighbors.

A wake would have been held in the home's front parlor. There, relatives and neighbors gathered to pray, sit vigil, and support the bereaved parents, likely assisted by a local undertaker—a reflection of changing American funeral customs. The spiritual heart of their farewell centered on a Catholic Mass at the family's parish, Church of the Holy Family, followed by burial at St. Joseph's Cemetery.

Patrick's passing was a tender, intensely felt loss, wrapped in the dignity of ritual and community.

An infinitely starker, lonelier grief also pulled at Sylvester's heart during these years. Shortly before Patrick's death, Sylvester and his siblings learned that their elderly father, Sylvester Sr., had died back in Ireland. The elder Sylvester had remained behind when the rest of the family emigrated, though the reasons for his solitude remain locked in the past. Without the vital support of his brothers, sons, and nephews, sustaining a farm was an impossible task. He relied

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

instead on his trade as a blacksmith, likely leaving the ancestral lands of Plunketstown Lower for a more populated area where his anvil might still yield a meager living.

By 1869, his wife, Ann Nolan Kelly, had passed away, leaving Sylvester Sr. utterly isolated. With no family left in Ireland to tend to his declining health, he made the agonizing choice to enter the South Dublin Union, one of Ireland's largest and most austere Poor Law institutions. Designed intentionally to be "less desirable" than the poorest conditions outside to discourage reliance on public relief, the workhouse was a place of institutional coldness.

South Dublin Union Workhouse

Name: Sylvester Kelly | **Sex:** Male | **Age:** 75 | **Condition:** Widower | **Employment or Calling:** Smith | **Religion:** RC (Roman Catholic) | **Description of disability:** blank | **Name of relations /Friends:** blank | **Relations' Address:** South City Mansion House ward | **Admission to Workhouse:** 4 November 1869, South Dublin Union | **Death:** 8 May 1870, South Dublin Union, Ireland

The brief lines of his survival record (above) reveal a life weathered by immense historical crosscurrents. At age 75, Sylvester Sr. had survived the devastating upheaval of the Great Famine, the heartbreak of mass emigration, and severe economic decline, only to find himself destitute at the end of his days. His death within six months of admission matched a tragic pattern among the elderly institutionalized poor, who often entered the workhouse only when illness or absolute frailty left no other choice.

For Sylvester Sr., there were no traditional Irish mourning customs, no family to sit vigil, and no community to join in a ritual wake. He was moved directly from the workhouse infirmary ward to the dead house. The Board of Guardians provided only the barest necessities: a simple, unpainted deal (cheap wood often pine) coffin supplied by cheap contract carpenters, and a basic canvas shroud instead of his own clothes. A plain contract cart served as a hearse to transport his body to the graveyard; his coffin marked only with a name scrawled in chalk. With only paid staff or fellow inmates to act as minimal pallbearers, a workhouse chaplain performed a rapid, perfunctory committal service at the graveside.

Sylvester and his siblings' coping mechanisms in the face of this loss remain unknown. In traditional Irish culture, fathers were expected to provide for their families and serve as moral pillars. Even if estrangement or distance had created a rift, their father's resilience and determination had played a crucial role in ensuring the family's survival during one of the darkest periods in Irish history. This unwavering strength alone earned him their deepest respect and profound grief.

An rud a
ghoilneas ar
an gcroí
caithfidh an
t-súil é a
shileadh.

What pains
the heart must
be washed
away with
tears.

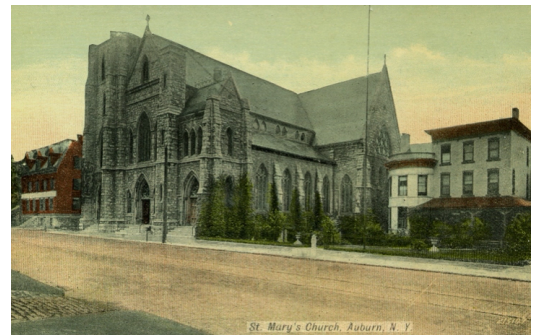
Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

1870s

The contrast between the burials of Sylvester's young son and his father must have weighed heavily on him. Patrick was laid to rest in America with the dignity, prayers, and communal support prescribed by tradition. Meanwhile, Sylvester's father was buried an ocean away in a pauper's grave, stripped of the rituals that comforted the living and honored the dead. This disparity likely remained a private, haunting sorrow throughout Sylvester's life—a poignant reflection of Irish grief, which paired a profound spiritual fatalism toward suffering with a dogged, survivalist faith in the future.

Both Sylvester and Jane held the belief that those that went before them walked along side them as their family continued to grow. The surviving records begin to show the shape of their everyday life in Auburn. Sylvester was listed as a laborer in the 1870 census, a broad term that could cover many kinds of physical work in a growing industrial town. John Francis was born about 1872, followed by Edward Patrick about 1874, Michael William in August 1876, and Bernard J. Kelly in June 1878. These were years of childrearing, wage work, parish obligations, and steady adjustment to the rhythms of an American city.

Church records help trace that adjustment. At first, the Kellys belonged to the Church of the Holy Family on North Street, near their Chapel Street home. In 1868, Holy Family was divided and St. Mary of the Assumption was organized west of State Street and the Owasco River. By the mid-1870s, the Kelly children were being baptized at St. Mary's on Clark Street, suggesting that the family's religious life shifted westward along with their household.



The same movement appears in city directories and census records. In 1870, the family was on or near Chapel Street. By the 1878–1879 Auburn city directories, they were on Division Street, north of the fairgrounds and close to the railroad tracks that helped define this part of the city. Their addresses place them in a working neighborhood where home, church, and employment were closely connected.

By then, Sylvester was working as a railroad watchman, most likely for the South-Central Railroad. The job was practical, visible, and important: protecting crossings, warning pedestrians and wagon drivers, raising and lowering gates, and signaling with flags or lanterns as trains approached. It was not prestigious work, but it was steady work, tied directly to Auburn's expanding transportation network and to the daily safety of the neighborhood around the tracks.

1878 Auburn Morning News article provides a vivid snapshot of the environmental risks surrounding working-class families like the Kellys. A fire occurred in a barn and shed rented by Sylvester. It was near the city fairgrounds—an area heavily intersected by rail lines and manufacturing plants like the Auburn Manufacturing Company and E.D. Clapp & Co.

VOLUME 13.

Auburn Morning News.

Official Paper of the County.

TUESDAY, JULY 16, 1878.

FIRE.—A barn and shed near the fair grounds, owned by Mrs. Cowan and occupied by Sylvester Kelly, were burned yesterday afternoon with a quantity of hay.

The alarm was sent from the Auburn Mfg Co.'s works, the apparatus at the E. D. Clapp & Co. works being out of order.

Chief Engineer Morris was present and aided aided by his efforts and advice in saving the dwelling, which but for the timely aid of neighbors would have been destroyed. The use of wet blankets and quilts was effective in preventing the flames from taking effects on the structure.

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY



Home
Sweet
Home

The failure of the local fire apparatus during the emergency underscores the unreliable municipal infrastructure of the era. For an urban laborer like Sylvester, renting a home with a barn and shed was common, and losing a 'quantity of hay' represented a stiff financial setback. The preservation of his dwelling by a bucket-and-blanket brigade of neighbors illustrates the tight-knit social safety net that working-class neighborhoods relied upon when city technology failed.

Work and parish life were also joined by the formal steps of belonging. By the 1870 U.S. census, Sylvester had obtained citizenship, and Jane was recorded as a citizen on the 1875 New York State census. To become citizens, they had to complete a multi-step federal legal process

handled locally through a court of record, which for them was the Cayuga County Court. The process took a minimum of five years.

First step, in the presence of the county clerk, they signed a document swearing their intention to become a U.S. citizen and to renounce all allegiance to foreign sovereigns—specifically Queen Victoria, the reigning British monarch at the time. Then they had to accumulate at least five years of continuous residence in the United States. Last step, they had to bring two witnesses who were U.S. citizens to court. The witnesses formally swore under oath that the immigrant had met the residency rules and was

a person of "good moral character." At the time they became citizens, there were 37 states in the union, and the President was Ulysses S. Grant.

Also noted on the 1870 census was that both were able to read, write, and speak English. Those skills mattered. They helped the couple move through public records, employment, church administration, legal transactions, and the ordinary paperwork of American life.

On March 31, 1881, years of work, parish belonging, and family consolidation became visible in a deed. The house at 112 Van Anden Street was transferred to Jane Murphy Kelly by Sylvester H. Griswold for \$1,319.75, and the family lived there for many years. The record does not explain why the property was placed in Jane's name. It may reflect family finances, inheritance, legal strategy, or simply the circumstances of the purchase.

Regardless of how the purchase was arranged, Jane's ownership was significant. New York's Married Women's Property Act of 1848, expanded in 1860, gave married women the legal right to own, buy, sell, and protect property in their own names. The deed



112 VanAnden Street, Auburn NY
as it looks in 2026 on left
and using A.I. to render it the way it looked in 1881

Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

records Jane not only as a wife and mother, but as a property owner. For a working-class Irish immigrant woman, the house represented more than shelter. It symbolized security, stability, and a permanent stake in her new community.

The move to 112 VanAnden Street must have felt worlds apart from the cottages of County Kildare. Yet despite its brick walls and urban setting, daily life remained physically demanding and largely untouched by modern conveniences.



The house had no connection to municipal water service. Water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and bathing had to be pumped from a well or collected from a rainwater cistern, then carried indoors by hand. The kitchen contained a simple dry sink, typically lined with zinc, soapstone, or wood. Without running water, it was filled from buckets or pitchers and drained through a pipe leading outside.

Indoor plumbing did not exist. The family relied on a wooden outhouse at the rear of the property, while chamber pots kept beneath upstairs beds provided a nighttime alternative. Bathing required carrying water indoors, heating it on the stove, and pouring it into a portable metal wash tub set on the kitchen floor.



Heating also demanded constant effort. By the 1880s, fireplaces had largely been replaced by cast-iron stoves vented through brick chimney flues. A decorative parlor stove heated the family's main living area, while a large kitchen range provided warmth, hot water, and a place to cook. Upstairs bedrooms had no direct source of heat. Small floor grates allowed limited warmth to rise from below, but winter nights in upstate New York remained bitterly cold, making heavy blankets and flannel-wrapped heated bricks essential.



Electricity had not yet reached neighborhoods like VanAnden Street. The family depended on kerosene lamps for light. These lamps required regular maintenance: wicks needed trimming, fuel reservoirs refilling, and soot-coated glass chimneys cleaning. The lamps also produced smoke and a persistent oily odor, so they were used sparingly and carried carefully from room to room. Candles made from tallow (rendered animal fat) or beeswax provided a cheaper, portable light source. Although Auburn had manufactured gas service, it was generally reserved for streetlights and wealthier homes.

Food preservation presented another challenge. Before electric refrigeration, perishable foods were stored in an icebox, an insulated wooden cabinet lined with metal and cooled by a large block of ice. The ice, harvested from frozen lakes and rivers during winter, was stored in commercial icehouses and delivered to homes throughout the warmer months. As it melted, water collected in a drip pan that had to be emptied regularly to prevent flooding. Food that could not fit in the icebox was stored in a cool root cellar or, in some cases, suspended in sealed containers within the cold backyard well.



Family Branch: KELLY | MURPHY

1909
1910

Apart from living in a brick two-story house and heating with wood or coal instead of peat, many aspects of daily life remained remarkably similar to the routines Sylvester and Jane had known in Plunketstown Lower and Ballyraggan.

Their youngest child, Genevieve Loretta Kelly, was born in January 1882 and was known in the family as Jennie. By then, Sylvester and Jane had spent nearly two decades turning arrival into rootedness: steady work, Catholic parish life, nearby kin, children baptized and raised in Auburn, and finally a house held in Jane's name. From that home, their children entered adulthood, married, moved, served, worked, and created families of their own, eventually giving Sylvester and Jane forty-one grandchildren.

The final years brought both continuity and loss. Jane died of pneumonia on March 27, 1909, at the age of sixty-four and was buried at St. Joseph's Cemetery in Auburn. Sylvester survived her by about a year and a half. He died of dysentery on August 31, 1910, and was buried in the same Catholic cemetery as Jane along with so many members of the family and community they had joined, strengthened, and helped carry forward.

Their lives began in the agricultural heartland of County Kildare, passed through the memory and aftermath of the Great Hunger, and took root in Auburn, New York. There, they raised children, worked, worshiped, bought a home, buried loved ones, and became part of the Irish Catholic working-class fabric of Cayuga County. Their names may not appear in national histories, but their story carries the weight of migration, endurance, faith, labor, grief, and continuity. In memory, Sylvester Kelly and Jane Murphy remain a bridge between the green townlands of County Kildare and the streets of Auburn, where an immigrant household became a family rooted in American soil.



The following section shifts from Sylvester and Jane's shared story to brief profiles of their surviving children and grandchildren.