

PIONEER IRISH OF

ONONDAGA : Nicholas Downes

(ABOUT 1776-1847)

Putnam's
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BY

NICHOLAS DOWNES

THERESA BANNAN, M.D.

Nicholas Downes declares (March 18, 1909) that the National Guards were organized in Syracuse in 1850 by Irishmen to protect themselves on St. Patrick's Day during their parade. It was a military organization and received its arms from the State and responded to the State's call, when needed to quell disturbance of any kind. So the enemies of the Irish feared to molest the State military men on the seventeenth of March. Men of other nations were members in the minority, and the Citizens' Corps, another military company, often joined them in parade. The first captains of the National Guards were Edward Pendergast, Nicholas Downes, John Radigan, Dennis Driscoll, and Timothy Sullivan. It became Company C of the Twelfth Regiment, N. Y. Vol. Infantry, with Dennis Driscoll, Captain.

Nicholas Downes was the son of Michael and Ann Downes Downes, and was born January 1, 1820, being now nearly ninety years old and blushing with embarrassment when he is reminded that the members of the National Guards were considered very handsome and gallant young fellows. He was born near historic Tara in County Meath. His great-grandfather and an English official in Ireland having the same name, Downes, the Irishman was frequently called upon to disclaim any English blood in his veins. He lived within the Pale at Trim, whence the Irish had been driven and were forbidden to return. The Pale was the residence of the English, and if an Englishwoman married an Irishman, she was drummed out and driven beyond the Pale. Downes never knew why he was permitted to remain nor could his friends discover the reason. They knew that Downes was Irish, not only from his own assertions but from the traditions of the family. In Ireland a mixture with foreign blood is remembered for generations, especially in the country districts, and there is no memory of English mixture with this Downes family.

Michael Downes, the father of Nicholas, and

his two brothers were in the rebellion of 1798, while their mother, in the secrecy of a cave on the farm, baked bread for her soldier sons. Two were killed and Michael escaped the penalty of rebellion by binding himself to the weaver's trade. He became a farmer later, and influenced by Patrick Reynolds, who had located in Carthage, N. Y., Michael and his family emigrated to America in 1832. They came on the *Stephen Wright* from Dublin to Quebec in six weeks and three days, hitting an iceberg on the way at Newfoundland. Carthage was their destination, but they first went to Montreal, then to Ottawa, and finally located in Watertown. Here Nicholas attended the Institute and became a schoolmaster, teaching in Oswego, Watertown, and Brownville, coming to Syracuse about 1846. At that time the great question of the day was the name of the city, Syracuse or Salina, the latter urging its superiority in drainage as compared with the flooded streets of its rival. Nicholas became clerk and bookkeeper in the hardware store of John and Matthew Murphy and about 1860 formed the partnership of McCarthy, Radigan, and Downes, continuing it twenty years. He then travelled through the United States with a patent filter of his own design until he retired. He saw the introduction of stoves for coal into this region and the passing of the sheet-iron variety. He married Mary, the daughter of John Stapleton, and they have one adopted son. *Edward*

(Rideau opened in 1832.)