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In the name of heritage, country and church

The Downes family, longtime parishioners of St. John the Evangelist in Syracuse, are Irish Catholic pioneers of county

By Richard Long
SUN contributing writer

Long before Syracuse enjoyed clean Skaneateles Lake drinking water, Nicholas Downes was concerned about how to purify water for his fellow citizens.

After the Civil War he patented his own water filter and began to sell it at his store on Warren Street. An 1868 City Directory lists an ad for the filter.

John Downes, 81, grandson of Nicholas Downes, remembers that Richard Wright, former director of the Onondaga Historical Association, considered Nicholas Downes' water filter an important part of Syracuse history.

"People didn't have inside plumbing in those days and the proximity of water to waste materials was always a threat to health," said Downes, a parishioner of St. Michael's on Onondaga Hill, whose family has been connected with St. John the Evangelist in Syracuse for generations.

"Any means to purify drinking water was a forward step. Dick Wright told me," Downes said.

Downes, who is retired, is the former executive director of the Gifford Foundation.

He has cause to be proud of his grandfather for other reasons.

"He was a feisty Irishman, very proud of his Irish roots, his new country, America, and his Catholic Church," Downes said.

"He played an impor-

author of *Pioneer Irish of Onondaga*.

Downes told Bannan of the step taken to keep order during the St. Patrick's Day parade.

"The National Guards were organized in Syracuse in 1850 by Irishmen to protect themselves on St. Patrick's Day

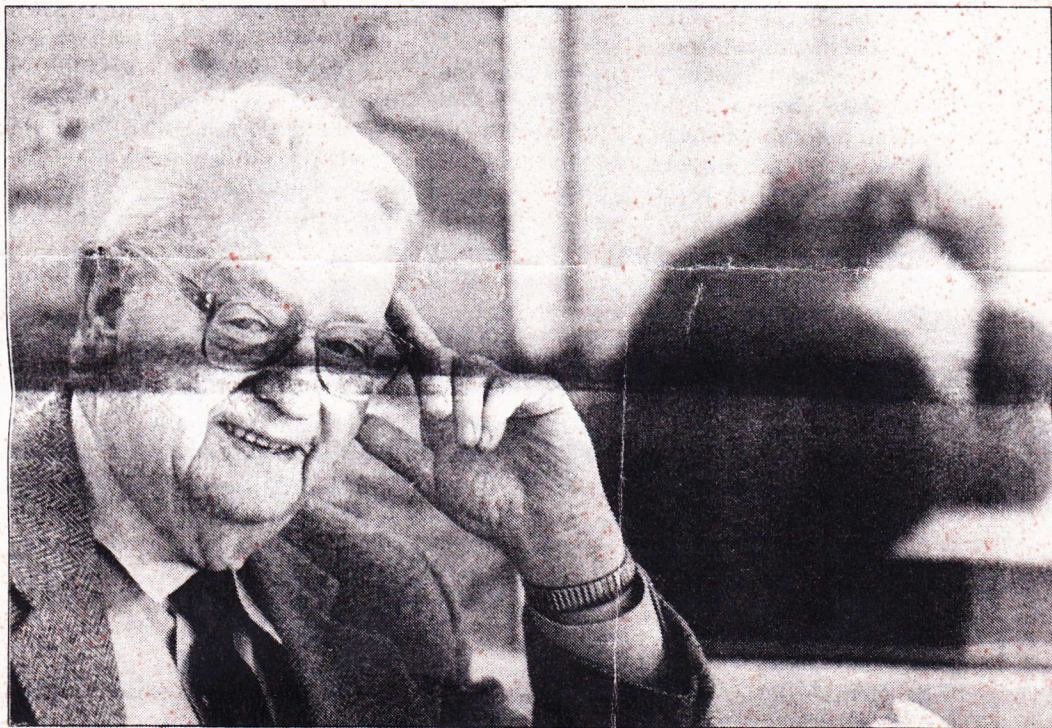
"Nicholas told my father (regarding the voyage)," John Downes said, "that it 'would be much easier to die. I would never do it again.'"

British ships were unsanitary in those days. Also the ship hit an iceberg at Newfoundland, delaying the voyage, which took more than six weeks.

The Downes family eventually settled in Watertown. Nicholas went to school there and eventually became a teacher at Brownsville and Oswego.

Nicholas had planned to seek his fortune in Chicago in 1847. However, when he heard there was an epidemic in that city, he decided to take a temporary job at a stove and hardware store owned by Matthew Murphy on

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John Downes, a former executive director of the Gifford Foundation, remembers his grandfather, Nicholas Downes, as a "feisty Irishman, very proud of his roots, his new country, America, and his Catholic Church."