

a cloth weaver, and carried on business at Smithstown. He held a lease of some land, which lease had but six years more to run. He found a good customer for the lease and selling it out, received enough money to bring his family to America.

The family lived in Ireland close by the castle of Killeen, which was bombarded by Oliver Cromwell and his forces. Cromwell was unable to take the castle, however, as it was too strongly fortified to be subjugated by his soldiers. A large rent in the castle walls made by Cromwell's soldiers is nearly 400 years later pointed out to tourists and visitors. Mr. Downes relates an interesting anecdote about a lord of this castle. A farmer who owed him some money tendered the payment to the lord but the latter told him to come up to the castle the next day and dine with him, and to bring the money with him. He did as requested, but on reaching the castle became agitated over the prospect of dining with the lord. The butler, however, assured him that his master was dining alone and enjoined the farmer to do just what the lord did. The farmer was seated at the table opposite the lord and followed his instructions literally. When the lord finished eating he drew himself back in his chair and the farmer did likewise. But the farmer lost his balance and fell over backwards. As he fell he seized the table cloth and pulled the dishes over on top of him. The son of that farmer afterwards came to the United States and was a Bishop at Little Rock, Ark.

A Long Voyage.

Mr. Downes's family was six weeks and three days in crossing the ocean, landing at Quebec. The family went direct to Carthage, Jefferson county, reaching there in 1832. Later the family removed to Brownville, the same county, where Mr. Downes, sr., engaged in the weaving business. At the age of 16 Nicholas Downes worked for a farmer at a salary of \$100 a year and never spent a penny of his salary. Subsequently he attended school at the Watertown academy. The Rev. M. Boyd, author of Boyd's "Rhetoric," was principal of the school, and among his classmates was Judge Cooley of Minneapolis.

After studying three years at this academy Mr. Downes engaged in teaching school at Brownville, and later at Oswego. While he was teaching school at Oswego the measles broke out in the school and Mr. Downes gave the scholars a vacation and decided to visit Chicago. He went to Chicago by the way of the lakes and his boat was becalmed in the St. Clair river for a week, and was a month in getting to Chicago.

In Early Chicago.

Chicago had only 10,000 inhabitants at that time, 1845, and Mr. Downes says that it was the dirtiest place he had ever visited. The stench from the river was almost unendurable. A man offered to sell him an acre of land for \$500, but he refused to buy it, as he did not have much faith in the future of Chicago on account of the filthy condition of the city.

The Palmer House and some of the costliest buildings in Chicago now cover this acre of ground, which is worth several millions of dollars to-day. Mr. Downes returned East in December of that year coming on the propeller Syracuse. The ship encountered a tremendous storm on Lake Erie, and was forced to take refuge behind Long Point, where it was anchored seven days before venturing out into the open sea again. The storm was so great at Buffalo that ships were washed up into the streets of that city. On landing Mr. Downes read in the newspapers the

names of those lost in the storm and found his own name in the list. Nearly 400 people were lost in this great storm on Lake Erie, which was the severest ever known before or since.

The next year Mr. Downes started to revisit Chicago, but on reaching Syracuse he learned that a severe epidemic was raging in that city and that the citizens were dying off very fast. He decided to remain in Syracuse, therefore, and found employment as a temporary bookkeeper with Mathew Murphy and his brother, whose stove and hardware store were located in East Water street, where the office of Gates Thalheimer is now located. He engaged with this firm in 1847 and remained in their employ until 1856. In the latter year Mr. Downes formed a partnership with Robert McCarthy, formerly a member of the State Board of Charities, and with John Radigan, the firm name being McCarthy, Radigan & Downes.

Engaged in Business.

Mr. Downes took charge of the stove department of the business, his department being located in Water street, just west of Warren street. The hardware business of the firm was carried on in the corner store west of Warren street. This partnership lasted until 1859, when Mr. Downes formed a partnership with E. P. Hopkins, who was at one time County Clerk of Onondaga and who came to Syracuse from Onondaga Hill. Three years later Mr. Downes sold his interest in this firm to E. T. Tefft and started a business for himself in 1862. His store was located in the present Joy block in East Genesee street. The store was then owned by Joseph Barton, a rich tobacco dealer, who built the Barton opera house on the site of the present Grand opera house. About 1864 Mr. Barton owned several stores in East Genesee street and decided to build the Barton block, containing an opera house, in the belief that a theater in that locality would enhance value of property in that section of the city. The Wieting hall, located on the third story of the Wieting block, and Shakspeare hall, located in the third story of the Bastable block, the two popular play houses in those days, were supposed to add greatly to the value of property in their immediate vicinity, and Mr. Barton was urged by property owners in East Genesee street and on Fayette park to build.

His theater was up two flights of stairs and was a fine audience room. It did not pay, however, and later was dropped down one story. The block and theater subsequently passed out of his hands and were later burned. The present Grand Opera House block and theater, on the same site, were built by John Moore, the well-known contractor and builder.

In 1863 Mr. Barton raised the rent of Mr. Downes's store from \$250 to \$600 a year, and Mr. Downes rented a store in the block at the corner of James and Warren streets, now occupied by Andrews Brothers' grocery. This block and his store were consumed by fire in 1867.

Confessed to Arson.

A man who died in Oswego a few years ago confessed that he set fire to the block because Francis Hall, its owner, had refused to go on his bond to enable him to obtain a license for selling liquor in a saloon kept by him in the block. Mr. Downes then moved into the Brintnall block opposite the Government building in Warren street, at present a continuation of the Vanderbilt House block. He took in as partners S. Neary and his nephew, M. McCanna. In 1870, Mr. McCanna died

and Mr. Downes conducted the business alone until 1870. This was a period of great business depression. The salt interest was in bad shape and the iron trade of the country went all to pieces, nearly all the big hardware concerns of the country failed.

Mr. Downes then turned his attention to manufacturing water filters, for which he owned a valuable patent. He met with considerable success in this business, and started a manufactory in New Orleans. He was taken sick with malarial fever in the Southern city, however, and, returning to Syracuse, was confined to his house for three years. At the end of that time the cities of the country had begun to build waterworks and the boom fell out of the filter business.

For the last twelve years Mr. Downes has been engaged in the insurance business as agent for the New York Life Insurance company. Mr. Downes was married in 1851, his wife being Mary A. Stapleton of Kingston, Ont. Mr. Downes has always been a Democrat in politics. He was one of the organizers of the old National Guard in Syracuse in 1849, and was the Second Captain of the company.

Mr. Downes has seen Syracuse grow from a small village to a large city and he still is an important personage in the life of the town. He is hale and hearty and is universally respected in this community, where he has been in business for half a century.

From the
Downes Family File
Onondaga
Historical
Association

My (g.f.d.)
grandfather.
He was born
only 45 years
after the Declaration of Independence was signed
One of the very
early settlers in
Syracuse.