



BRADFORD-O'KEEFE

FUNERAL HOMES

O'Keefe Family History For Amateur or Professional Historians

Edward O'Keefe was the original immigrant and the first record to be located was a land deed for land purchased in Ocean Springs, February 3, 1859. This property was located on the northeast corner of Porter Avenue and Rayburn Avenue. Ned O'Keefe always used the name of Keith or Keef but Jeremiah I corrected the name to O'Keefe with a deed dated December 24, 1883.

Edward was born in Ireland in 1815 and had a sister Catherine Jane O'Keefe who married James Valentine Lee in 1853. Catherine was part of the Lee family here on the coast. The Lee family (Webb Lee) remembers the close ties with the family. General John O'Keefe was the last member of the O'Keefe family to visit the Lee family.

Edward married Mary Tracy in 1859, Mary was born in Ireland in 1832. Ellen Tracey was a member of this family group in the 1860 and 1870 Jackson County Census. Ellen Tracy married Martin Rooney and lived in Ocean Springs two houses away from the O'Keefe home. The St Alphonsus Catholic Church records contain vital information on Ellen Tracy Rooney.

Edward O'Keefe and Mary Tracy had two children:

Jeremiah I was born February 25, 1860 in Ocean Springs and baptized March 13, 1860 at Nativity B.V.M.Church in Biloxi, his sponsors were Martin Souden and Joanna Theal.

Mary Helen was born December 5, 1863 in Ocean Springs, and baptized March 28, 1864 at nativity B.V. M. Church in Biloxi, her sponsor was Catherine Souden. Mary died, before reaching the age of sixteen, September 5, 1878 in Ocean Springs of typhoid fever. (St. Alphonsus Catholic Church act #875)

Edward enlisted in the Confederate Army on September 18, 1861 in Ocean Springs by Capt. J.B. Deason. He served in the 'Live Oaks Rifles, Company A, 3rd Mississippi" in Capt. James B. McRae's Company. He served as a dispatch bearer and twice was almost captured when he was visiting home. Once, during a time when the union soldiers came to the house he hid under the house, the family dog almost gave his position away with the joyful barking, but a quick thinking family member shot the dog telling the Union soldiers that the dog was mad. Another time he disguised himself by donning a Mother Hubbard gown and a large sunbonnet and escaped by walking right pass the patrol.

In the Mid 1800's Edward O'Keefe was an undertaker, while also operating a livery stable. The livery stable enabled him to transport the casket to the burial site. During the era, the coffin was built overnight to fit the body of the deceased for the funeral the following day. The shortage of time between death and burial required posting of black bordered hand bills with information of death and burial.

Ocean Springs was a resort town and livery stables were very important. The livery stables would send carts/wagons to meet the steamboats to pick up the tourist and goods. When the railroad came to Ocean Springs additional services were needed.

As the need for livery service increased so did the need for lodging. The O'Keefe Boarding house could accommodate those seeking health and relaxation.

Edward and his son Jerry planed the Avenue of Oaks Trees on Porter Avenue about 1870. The trees are still evident and flourishing. These oak trees are very symbolic to the family and a source of pride to the citizens of Ocean Springs.

Edward died October 21, 1874 and is buried in the O'Keefe plot at Evergreen Cemetery in Ocean Springs. (St. Alphonsus Catholic Church act #813) states that he was born in Ireland, Bincher Parish, County Prary. (County Prary and Bincher parish are not listed in Irish Histories could this be County Tipperary and Inch Parish) Following his death Mary with 14 years old Jerry continued the livery service. This mother and son teams proved successfully with almost doubling of assets between 1887 and 1888.

Mary's lack of formal education did not hamper her desire to ensure that Jerry received a good education. The importance of a good education has been stressed by each generation, for all members of the family, male or female.

Jeremiah O'Keefe I was educated by the Christian Brothers in Bay St. Louis, being a member of the first graduation class of St. Stanislaus College.

Mary owned and operated the boarding house that carried on the Irish tradition of good food and god hospitality. An O'Keefe surrey met every passenger train that stopped even train #2 which arrived at Midnight. The boarding home was a large two story building with wide verandas and was very popular with visitors for New Orleans.

One of the visitors to Mary's Boarding House was Alice Cahill Riley would stay all summer. Alice was born in New Orleans on November 28, 1864 and was the daughter of Thomas Cahill and Mary Britton. Alice was educated by the Vincentian Sisters.

Jerry and Alice Cahill was married on August 3, 1888 at the St. Joseph Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, Witnesses for the wedding were Lizzie Dempsey and Jeff Egan, Jeremiah's best friend. Egan was also the son of an Irish immigrant, John Egan, who settled at the foot of Jackson Avenue and ran the local post office during the 1860's. It was Jeff Egan, whose business was

making glass doors, who designed and cut the pattern into the glass as a wedding gift to the couple. Alice was very protective of these doors and every time she left town. Her last words were "Remember save my doors", long after both Jeremiah and Alice has died and the family home had been sold, Alice's wish was remembered.

After the large house was sold in 1938, Mary Cahill O'Keefe moved to nearby cottage she owned and she took those cut glass doors with her. When she sold the cottage to make way for the Villa Maria Retirement Home, the doors were placed on the Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Home in Biloxi. These doors will be returned to the first home that Jeremiah built. Alice Cahill O'Keefe would be proud that her family had "Remember, save my doors".

The "O'Keefe Funeral Services" was established in Ocean Springs in 1892 by Jeremiah I.

Mary Tracy O'Keefe died February 18, 1895 (St. Alphonsus Catholic Church act # 875). Mary's night time ritual prior to going to bed was to warm her flannel night gown in front of the fireplace. Her night gown caught on fire and she burned to death.

Alice continued the fine tradition of the O'Keefe boarding House that was established by Mary. The Boarding House added a larger dining room, this enabled them to service a larger number of dinners.

Jeremiah I and Alice Cahill had five children:

Edward Joseph was born April 19, 1889 in New Orleans and baptized on April 13, 1889 at St. Joseph Church in New Orleans his sponsors were Patrick Kane and Mary Ellen Hill. Edward died on November 4, 1890 at Ocean Springs.

John Williams was born February 24, 1891 in New Orleans and baptized March 21, 1891 at St. Joseph Church in New Orleans his sponsors were John Cahill and Katie Hadin. John married Amelia Castanira in December 1919. He served as Mayor Biloxi in 1934

and resigned to accept the position of Adjutant General of Mississippi. Brig. General O'Keefe later served as Adjutant General for the District of Columbia. He held various positions as a chemist, superintendent in sugar factories in Louisiana, Cuba, the island of Trinidad, Santa Domingo and Haiti. John William received degrees from the College of Immaculate Conception and Tulane University both of New Orleans. He died September 14, 1985 and was buried at Biloxi National Cemetery with full military honors.

Mary Cahill was born March 16, 1893 in New Orleans and was baptized at St. Joseph Church on December 15, 1894. Her sponsors were Stephen Hill and Margaret Conners. Mary died January 1980 and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Ocean Springs. Mary Cahill O'Keefe served as superintendent of the Ocean Springs Public Schools.

Jeremiah II (Ben) was born in New Orleans, November 27, 1894 and was baptized at St. Joseph Church in New Orleans on December 15, 1894. his sponsors were Flo Zacharie and Eliza Dempsey.

Joseph Hyacinth (Jodie) was born in New Orleans on February 13, 1897 and was baptized on February 28, 1897 at St. Joseph Church in New Orleans. His sponsors were Thomas hill and Mary Hill. He was educated at the Jesuit College and Loyola in New Orleans. Jodie was a sugar chemist and assistant superintendent of the Matanzas Sugar Company in Cuba. Jodie died in Cuba on August 1, 1932. He died of a broken neck during a diving accident.

Alice would stay with her mother in New Orleans prior to the birth of her children. All of the children were born in New Orleans and christened at St. Joseph Church. The children were sent to New Orleans for their education. Alice's mother Mary Cahill, took care of the children during the school term. The house in New Orleans was established by Jerry as their second household. Each week vegetables and other food was sent to New Orleans by the train.

When Ocean Springs became incorporated, Jerry was appointed a provisional officer and later was elected to serve as a alderman taking office September 19, 1892. Jeremiah I was the first member of the family to hold a political office.

Jerry bought the first hearse in Ocean Springs about 1895. It was an ornate job, rubber tired, with the driver sitting high in front, and with plate glass sides giving a clear view of the coffin. Many years later this vehicle of tragedy had a tragic ending. It was returning from a morning funeral and was crossing the L & N railroad at the same time as train #37 thundered across Washington. The horses and driver got across but the old hearse was literally fragmented.

The "Pascagoula Democrat Star" newspaper dated November 30, 1894 carried an advertisement.

JERRY O'KEEFE
UNDERTAKER - LIVERY SERVICE

A positive response must have taken place because Jerry continued this advertisement each week.

Jeremiah I followed the O'Keefe belief that satisfaction could be found in meaningful work. This belief is still evident with male and female member so the family.

In 1906, Jeremiah I, built a two-and-one half story fame house. This house was built north of the boarding house. The old boarding house was no longer needed as a source of income and was removed. The boarding house still stands today, at 2122 Government Street, in Ocean Springs. The house stands proudly today as the finest example of Beaux-Arts "polite" architecture in Ocean Springs. The house and adjoining livery stable remain sound and structurally intact.

It is one of the few such structures standing today, and as such, is an irreplaceable element in the perception of architectural development in Ocean Springs.

Jeremiah I died November 6, 1911 following an operation for appendicitis. After his death, his sons conducted the business. Following his death Alice went to court to be appointed Guardian of the minor O'Keefe children. The children were awarded to her care. The children consented to the appointment of their mother as Guardian. The Court awarded the children '4/5 of interest in and to a certain livery stable, undertaking and wood business and the other one-fifth being owned by Alice. The court case #3013 lists assets of \$2,119.47.

INVENTORY

Five horses

One mare

Three mules

One hearse

Two 3-seated surreys

Three 2-seated surreys

One 4-seated surrey

One tally-ho

Two buggies

One runabout

Three wagons

One automobile

In 1915, Jerry (Ben) and Jodie petitioned the Jackson County Court Case # 3441 to be emancipated so that they could conduct business.

The petition states "That on the death of their said father it was necessary that said children earn a living for themselves and mother, which they did by taking charge of and operating said livery stable business, which is now being successfully operated by said minors and by which they have demonstrated their ability to take care of themselves and manage their own business, but are more or less embarrassed in the successful conduct of same by the fact of their minority and that it would conserve their best interest to have removed their disability of minority". At that period persons under 21 years old could not vote or conduct

business. The mother, Alice, stated in court “that said minors are sober, industrious and prudent in business matters, are in position to engage in an active business for themselves and that it is necessary that they do so, equipped as they are with horses and vehicles for the conduct of a delivery business and that respondent believes that they are as capable of attending to their own business as adults as she is to advise them and guide them in the conduct of their business, and that they will be in better situation for business by having their small estate set apart to them and under their own control.

Biloxi Funeral Home was established by Ben, John and Jodie O’Keefe on June 4, 1923, at 601 W Howard Avenue. The O’Keefe Burial Association was subsequently established. The enterprise that had started as a side-line of the livery and drayage business, had now become an independent business. Changes occurred. Now, bodies originally prepared at home of the deceased, were removed to the funeral home for the families for visitation. Later, a chapel was added for the funeral services for those who did wish to take the body to the church for funeral rites.

Alice died in Ocean Springs on January 5, 1921 and is buried in the Ocean Springs Cemetery.

Jeremiah II (Ben) attended St. Alphonse Catholic School in Ocean Springs, the old Jesuit College at New Orleans, and the College of Embalming in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ben took over sole ownership and management of the Livery Stable and Undertaker Business. He married, in 1921, Theresa Slattery of Shreveport, Louisiana. Ben met Theresa while he was visiting his sister in Shreveport.

Jeremiah II (Ben) and Theresa Slattery had four children:

Alice was born April 7, 1922 in Ocean Springs and married Leo J Sebastian. Alice and Leo have 10 children.

Jeremiah III was born July 12, 1923 in Ocean Springs.

John Bernard was born January 30, 1925 and married Sue Bidy July 4, 1954. John is an orthopedic surgeon practicing in Biloxi. John and Sue have 4 children.

Ben Married Jennie Boone and have 2 children.

Hard times forced the sale of Jeremiah O'Keefe I House in 1938 by Mary O'Keefe, sister of Ben

Jeremiah III attended Sacred Heart Academy in Biloxi and Soule Business College in New Orleans Jerry graduated from Loyola University in New Orleans. He Married Annette Saxton (his childhood sweetheart) on March 8, 1944 in California at the Marine Base. Jerry and Annette have 13 children. During WW II he served as a marine Fighter Pilot and in one day shot down five enemy planes. Jerry had devoted his time to local and state politics. He served four years in Mississippi Legislature and as Mayor of Biloxi for eight years. Both Jerry and Annette have been very active in community affairs. Annette had served as President of the Harrison County Mental Health Association.

Jerry III assumed ownership and management from his father in 1953. Later Jerry III purchased the Bradford Funeral Home Company. Three years later, the two companies merged forming the present Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Home, Inc. Bradford-O'Keefe also owns and operates funeral chapels in Biloxi, North Biloxi, ocean Springs, and Gulfport.

To meet the growing needs of the public, Bradford-O'Keefe also established the first crematory on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Jerry III originated and developed the Gulf national Life Insurance Company. This company did not sell and stocks and there was no risk to anyone but Jerry. Most Funeral Homes operated small burial insurance companies as a side line, but Jerry sold them on the ideal of letting him take over that responsibility. Gulf National Life writes both burial and industrial life. Now, this company is the largest such company in Mississippi. Gulf National Life operates for the benefit and protection of state citizens and all

funds remains in Mississippi. The headquarters are located in Biloxi.

Ben died November 19, 1954 and was buried in Southern Memorial Park.

Bradford-O'Keefe Funeral Home, Inc. had been serving the Gulf Coast for five generations.