



Makers of iron make a connection from afar

By **TIM O'BRIEN**, Staff writer
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In the worst years of the Irish potato famine, the families of Emly, County Tipperary, began to look for other lands where they could settle.

Emly, a community then with 4,100 residents located in the south of Ireland, was home to farmers and nailers -- iron workers. As they contemplated new lives in new lands, many of them struck out for a community where a man who knew how to forge iron could make a living.

The city they came to was a growing industrial power, where the mighty waters of the Hudson River turned the water wheels that powered the factories. These new arrivals' names included the likes of Donovan, Toole, Baker, McEniry, Humpres, Crowe, McGrath, Shaw, Ryan and Welch.

commemorate the lives of those who left their Irish hometown to ensure their families' survival, the town of Emly has erected a monument to its emigrants. On five granite pillars arranged in a semi-circle are many names and the news that they left the community to go to Troy, N.Y.

James F. Baker's great-great-grandfather -- also named James Baker -- was one of them.

"A lot of the people who lived in Emly in the famine years, the 1840s, were farmers and iron workers," the Troy resident said. "They worked in the old nail factory in Troy. My great-great-grandfather came from Emly, and his father is buried over there."

In 1980, Baker traveled to Emly to see the town where his family had come from. There, he met Des Mulhall of Emly, who became a close friend and who filled him with an enthusiasm for tracing the connections between the families here and there.

"The reason he became interested in it, he found some of his family had emigrated to Troy," Baker said.

At St. Ailbe's Church there, records dating back to 1810 detail where many of the Irish immigrants went. Together with the Rev. Seamus Rochford, Mulhall worked on a memorial to those who had left the small parish, now with a population of 800, to travel to other lands. Baker attended the dedication in August 2000.

Baker and Mulhall regularly traveled to each other's native lands. This past May, Mulhall came to Troy and the two went up to St. Joseph's Cemetery in South Troy. There, Mulhall found some of his ancestors buried, and other graves as well, that noted "natives of the parish of Emly, County Tipperary, Ireland."

promised his friend he would work to get the word out to others of Irish descent, trying to find more people who traced their roots to the same hometown, more names they could add to the memorial in Emly. Mulhall returned to Ireland but, much to Baker's shock and sadness, died last month.

True to his promise, Baker still is seeking the families of the Emly immigrants. Those who know their ancestry and wish to have names added to the Emly memorial can write to Father Seamus Rochford, pastor, at St. Ailbe's Church, Parish of Emly, County Tipperary, Ireland, or can e-mail him at emly@eircom.net.

also is willing to help people. He can be reached via e-mail at BakeBeau@aol.com.

Baker said Rochford is willing to do limited research in church records for those who think their ancestors may be from the town but are not sure.

"I feel you should know your history, where you are from. It must be an Irish thing," Baker said. "The people in Emly, those who stayed, they go back centuries there. I thought it was a very nice idea that they did. It was the first time it's been done to honor the emigrants who left."

Many of whom came to a city of promise and hope called Troy.

Tim O'Brien's column on Troy topics is published each Thursday in the Rensselaer TU. He can be contacted at 454-5096, or by e-mail at tobrien@timesunion.com.

