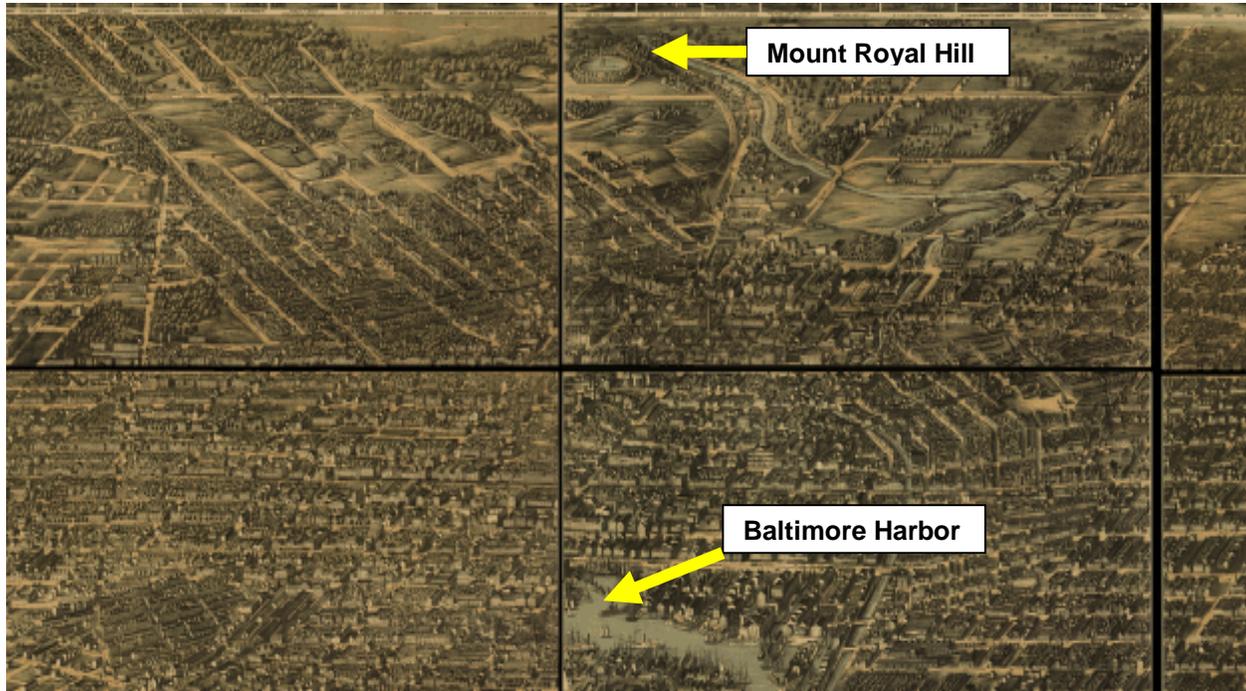
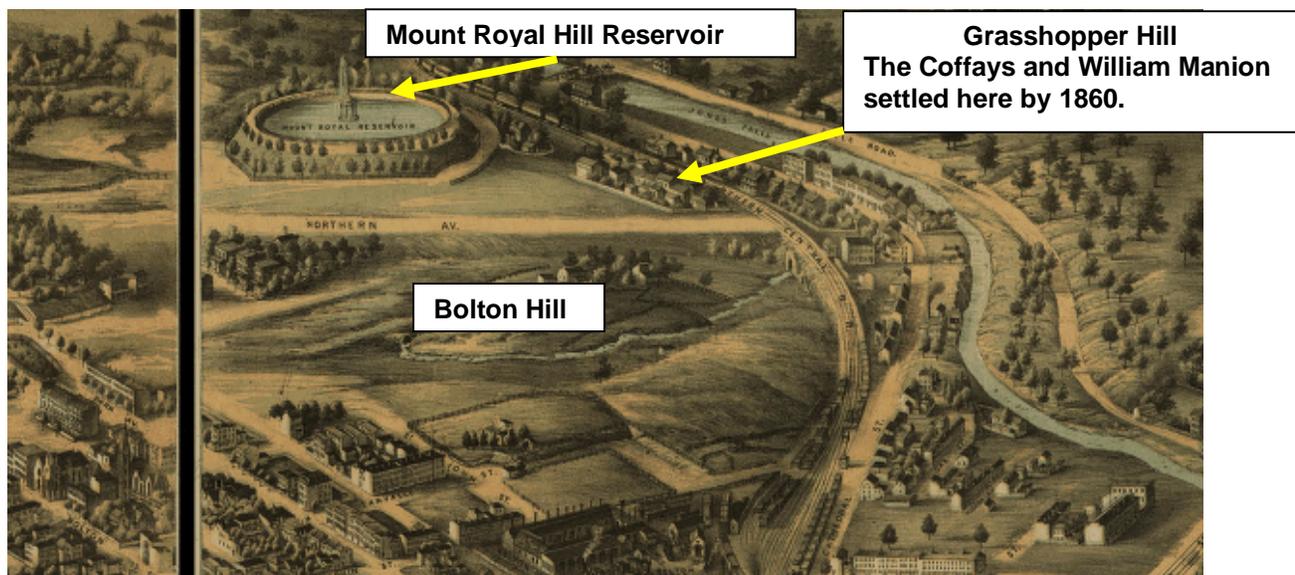


Chapter 3: Mt. Royal Hill & the Falls Road Quarries

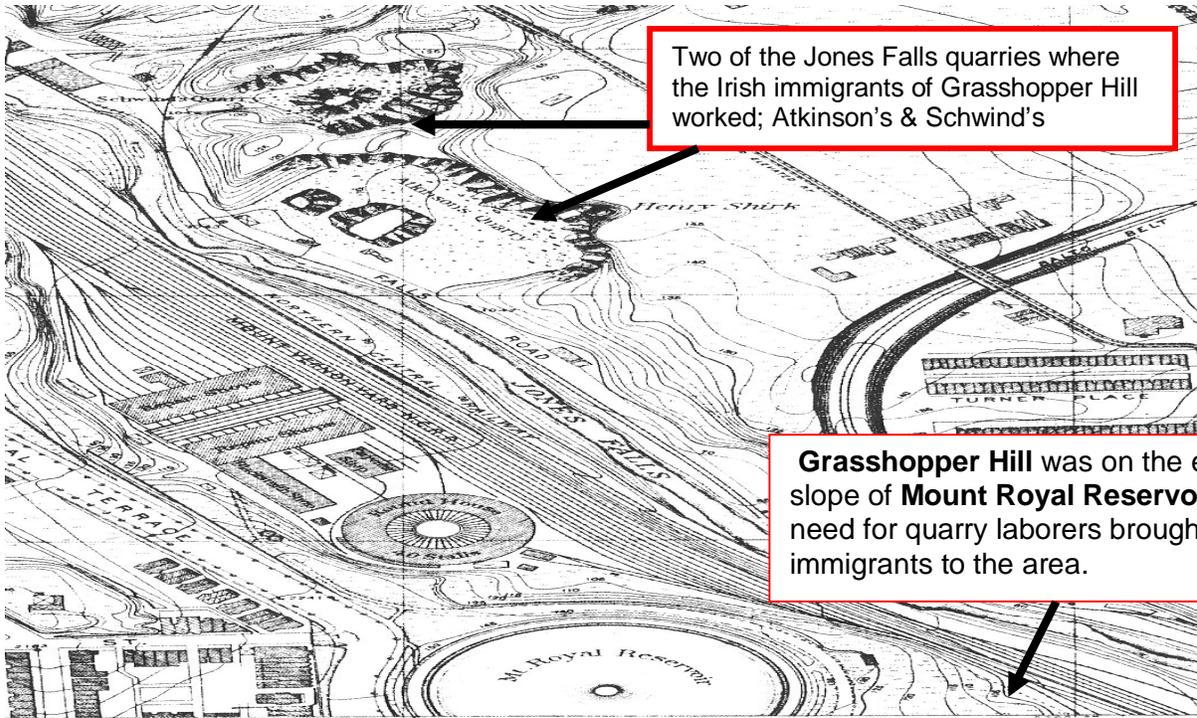
There was another settlement of Irish immigrant quarry workers located on and around **Mount Royal Hill** at the northern border of Baltimore City, about two miles north of the Baltimore Harbor. There were several quarries nearby along the eastern side of the **Jones Falls River** and along the adjacent **Falls Road**. By 1860, **John Coffay** moved his family (including **William Manion**) from Texas, Baltimore County, to **Mount Royal Hill**, probably to work in one of the Falls Road quarries.



Although near Baltimore City, the Mount Royal Hill area was mainly rural countryside dotted with estates of the wealthy who wanted to live near, but outside of the city. The area was known for its natural beauty and much of it would later be incorporated into Baltimore's **Druid Hill Park** which was designed by the Olmstead brothers, designers of New York's Central Park. On top of Mount Royal Hill, there was a lake which provided fresh water for the Irish families who lived on the eastern slope of the hill. The lake eventually became the **Mount Royal Reservoir** by the late 1860s, providing water to the developing northern sections of Baltimore.



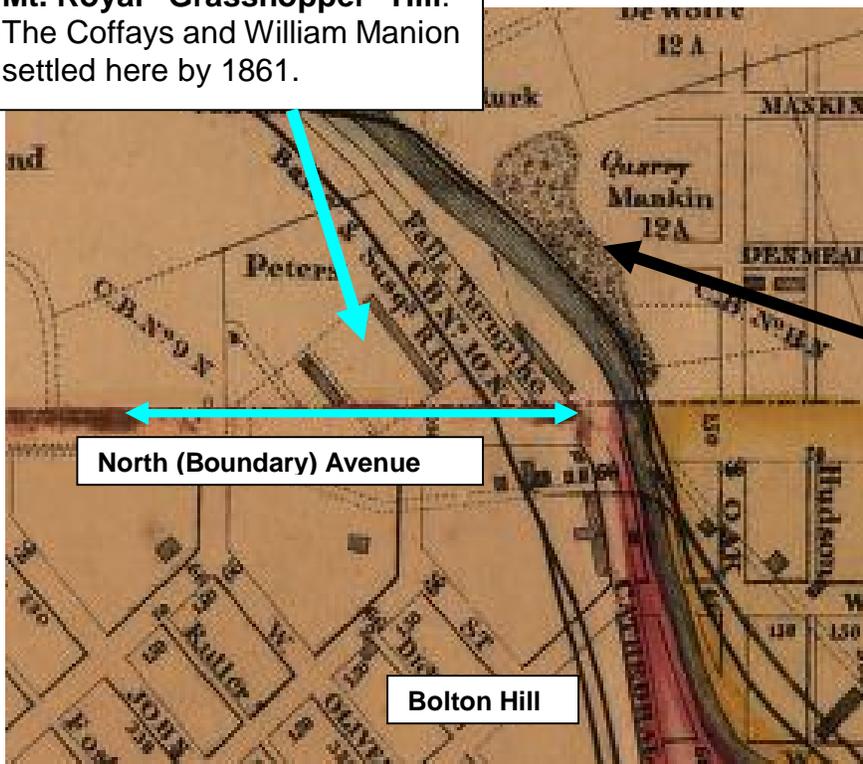
The settlement of Irish immigrants was sometimes referred to as “**Grasshopper Hill**” and was located on the eastern slope of Mt. Royal Hill. It began just below the reservoir and continued downward towards the Jones Falls River. At the time, the Jones Falls was a fast moving body of water and was used to power several mills along its banks. It flowed past Mount Royal Hill and continued to flow through the center of Baltimore City, and into the harbor. (Today, the Jones Falls Expressway, I83, covers much of it.)



Two of the Jones Falls quarries where the Irish immigrants of Grasshopper Hill worked; Atkinson's & Schwind's

Grasshopper Hill was on the eastern slope of **Mount Royal Reservoir**. The need for quarry laborers brought Irish immigrants to the area.

Mt. Royal “Grasshopper” Hill.
The Coffays and William Manion settled here by 1861.



This 1856 map shows the area where the Coffays and William Manion relocated to from Texas, MD. The Mt. Royal Reservoir hadn't been built yet, but you can see housing in the area. Falls Turnpike was on the west side of the Jones Falls River and a **quarry** was directly across.

The Quarrymen

The workers in the quarries were divided into two types; laborers who broke away large rocks into smaller ones using explosives and hand tools, and stonecutters, who refined the rock into building stones. The laboring jobs usually went to unskilled immigrants. When they could get some experience they could advance to stonecutting. The stonecutters or stone masons were able to get work in stone yards around the city that specialized in preparing certain types of stone.

Our ancestors; John Coffay, John Coffay Jr. William Manion, Michael Coffay, and William Manion's son, William Mannion Jr., were all in the stone business and so were some of their in-laws. Thomas Lee (Mary Coffay's husband) was a quarry laborer and Stephen Gunther, (William Manion's son-in-law) was a stonecutter. Other stonecutters and quarry workers lived on and around Mt. Royal "Grasshopper Hill."

This was a rugged trade to say the least. The quarry workers used explosives to break up the large rock. The newspapers chronicled various injuries of the stonecutters. Some lost fingers, limbs or their lives. Mary Coffay Lee's husband, Thomas Lee, was paralyzed due to a quarry injury. He could no longer work when they had five young children at home.

Along with the danger, there were periods of inactivity in the quarries. The workers had to find other employment or find work in other locations and stone yards. William Manion's oldest son, William Mannion, Jr., moved frequently with his family, from job to job, around the Baltimore area as well as to Washington D.C., working as a stonecutter.

There were periods of unemployment when the stonecutters just couldn't work and spent more time in saloons. This may have contributed to a reputation that quarry workers were often drunks and rowdies.

The economic Panic of 1893, along with an increase of immigrant laborers, caused competition for jobs. By the 1890s, Italian immigrants moving into the Falls Road area were seeking work in the quarries. From 1893 – 1896 there was an economic depression in the country which affected Baltimore. Businesses closed or reduced production causing a high rate of unemployment, especially among laborers. The Central Relief Committee of Baltimore began an effort to put people back to work by opening stone yards around the city for unemployed laborers to earn money to feed their families. Hundreds of laborers were put to work breaking and cutting stone which would be used for municipal projects in Baltimore. One of the temporary stone yards was set up at Atkinson's quarry on Falls Road, near Mt. Royal Hill. While this relief effort provided help for some, it only increased the anger and frustration of "career" stonecutters who now had to compete with hundreds of laborers for their jobs. There were fights and other acts of violence between Irish, Italian and other groups of laborers. It was not unheard of for a gang from one group of laborers to cause bodily harm to keep members of another group from getting work.

An article appeared in the Baltimore Sun on September 24, 1922 in which the author describes the history of the Falls Road area and the quarries,

To the right as you roll along you will see what is left of the old quarries. There are yellow banks and a deep pool 60 feet some say, and holding tragic stories of drowning, but they are not what they were in the old days. Then, they extended for a quarter of a mile.

John Harris owned the biggest quarry on the Falls road. He used eight six-mule teams – 48 mules in all – hauling building stones to Baltimore. Everybody knew John Dash who managed the quarry; he was one of the big, burly, powerful men of his day. But you won't find Harris' quarry today, for over the top of it the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad now has its shops and yards.

Next to the Harris quarry was Jacob Fifer's, next to that, John G. Schwind's, and next to that, James H. Atkinson's.

“There is no way to measure the amount of stone – the really enormous amount – that these quarries furnished in the building of Baltimore,” said E. Clay Timanus, “Thousands of foundations, walls and steps came from them. Their operations gave liveliness to the life of the Falls road that has never returned. It was the time of the workingman and the big teams, and there was no Volstead law along the way.”

The teams made impressive spectacles as they passed through the streets. The rule was six mules and bells. If your team got stuck, the man who pulled you out took your bells. Thus we see the pride of the road and the spirit of rivalry that prevailed.

Along the road, there were only a few stray houses and these were small, but well along the way was Pat Dolan’s road house, and there are traditions that it had most of the toughness of the rough days in which it thrived, it had its fights and its hard drinking and its road incidents, but its people were well disposed and the old characters are recurred with kindly memories.

The following incidents were reported in the **Baltimore Sun** newspaper during the period our ancestors were living near and working in the Jones Falls quarries. They are graphic examples of the hazards of quarry life:

1850 November 29,– Accident

...A laboring man, Patrick Kane, was very badly injured while engaged at work on the stone quarry of Mr. John Grady, near the city limits. It appears that a very heavy iron crane whilst in the act of being adjusted, fell to the ground with considerable force, and stuck Kane on the shoulder and leg

1853 March 8,– Fatal Accident

...a dreadful accident took place at a stone quarry situated on the Falls road...One of the laborers named Patrick McNeale, whilst working therein, was crushed in an awful manner in consequence of a mass of rocks falling from above, one of which mangled his leg....such was the nature of his wounds that he died...He leaves a wife and three children.

1856 December 20 - Accident at a quarry on the Falls road

..the match burnt to the powder so quickly as did not allow him time to get out of the way, the consequence was the explosion took place almost immediately and a portion of the rock struck his arm.. the man was so seriously injured that it was found necessary to amputate the arm...

1859 December 8 - Severe Accident

Michael McCann, employed in a stone quarry on the Falls road, was severely if not fatally injured during a blast. With others who were blasting, he ran off as soon as the fire was lighted, and after the explosion returned too quick. While returning he was struck on the back by a large stone which felled him insensible to the ground.

1860 March 22 - Admitted Into the Infirmary

James Mann, employed at the quarry of Mr. Fifer on the Falls road was admitted...suffering from a compound fracture of his left arm received by a piece of falling rock. Dr. G. Johnston amputated the arm...Amos Homan was admitted several days since with a fracture of his left leg received at a stone quarry near the above.

1868 March 20 - Fatal Accident

...a man named Thomas Walsh, whilst working in the quarry of John Curley on the Northern Central Railroad, was fatally injured by being caught under a bank of earth and stone, which had been undermined. He was taken out alive a short time after the accident, by his fellow workmen but the unfortunate man only survived about two hours. He leaves a wife.

1869 May 25 - Accident

..a stone was blown by a blast from the quarry of Mr. Curley on the Falls road, and fell on the roof of a blacksmith shop, about eighty yards distant, breaking through the roof and striking Mr. John Rhyn a blacksmith at work at the time, on the head fracturing his skull...late last evening there was very little hope of his recovery

1871 March 15 - Fatal Accident

John Glenn, 23, was instantly killed by being struck in the head with a large piece of rock, while engaged at Pfeiffer's quarry on the Falls road. The rock it appears came from a blast in the quarry of J.H., Atkinson, which adjoins that of Pfeiffer.

1872 November 22 - Accident in a Quarry

...in a quarry on the Falls road a man named James Donegan met with quite a serious accident. He was engaged with...blasting rocks and a charge of powder not exploding in time, he went forward to ascertain the cause. When within a few yards the explosion suddenly took place and he was struck by a large fragment of rock on the right thigh fracturing the bone and injuring him seriously

1873 September 15 - Fatal Accident at a Stone Quarry, One Man Killed and Another Badly Injured

...at the stone quarry of John G. Schwind by the premature explosion of a blast which resulted in the death of John Hamilton and the severe injury of Wm. Munk. It appears the two men had drilled a hole, and were preparing it for blasting when the explosion took place, supposed to have been caused by the men striking a hard rock while filling up the cavity previous to touching fire to the fuse. Hamilton was fearfully injured about the back, his right thigh and leg near the knee broken, the little finger of his right hand blown to pieces and in fact his whole person fearfully marked...

1876 September 9 - Accident in a Stone Quarry

Charles Martin, quarryman in Fieffer's stone quarry, Falls road, had his arm broken in two places and was otherwise badly bruised and injured by a fall of about 15 feet from the ledge of a high standing rock upon a pile of stones below. He was drilling, preparing for blasting, and the ledge was slippery from recent rains.

1879 July 23 - Killed in a Stone Quarry

Daglen Connory, quarryman in Harris's stone quarry, on the Falls road just above North Boundary avenue, was struck by a rock which slipped from an embankment above his head and instantly killed him. He was buried under about ten tons of stone and earth. Mr. Connory lived on Cathedral street near Boundary bridge, was 56, and leaves a wife and two children.

1885 July 9 - Probably Fatal Shooting

Joseph Foster of Hampden, armed with a double-barrel shotgun, started for Harris's quarry on the Falls road, and when he had reached the place and had got within twenty feet of James Ragan, quarryman, fired at him. The whole charge entered Ragan's head. The two men worked in Harris's quarry and there was a long standing feud between them...

This was the environment in which our Irish immigrant ancestors lived, worked and raised their children. By the late 1880s, the city of Baltimore was developing northward and brought opportunities for some of our ancestors to work outside of the quarries and stone yards.

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