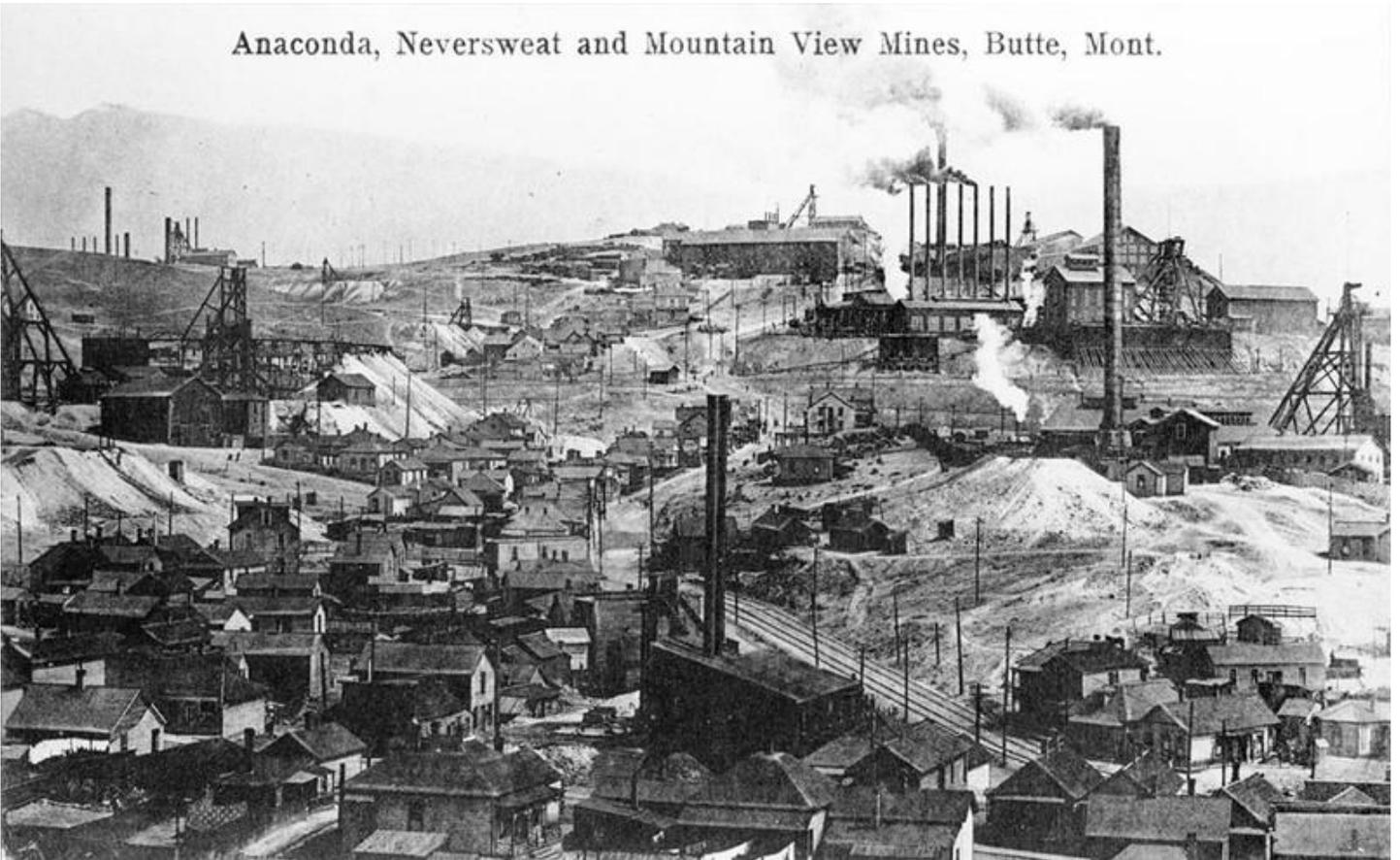


IN THE SHADOWS OF THE HEADFRAMES

Anaconda, Neversweat and Mountain View Mines, Butte, Mont.



Central Butte Hill and Dublin Gulch | Anaconda, Neversweat and Mountain View Mines | Butte, Montana | Source: Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives | Helena, Montana | Creator: Photographer unidentified | Date: [circa1905]

*“ . . .when you get to the new world, don't stop in America.
You go straight to Butte, Montana.*

— Mary Hagan to her daughter Lizzie Keough, County Clare, circa 1910

Prologue

At the turn of the twentieth century, Butte, Montana, was often referred to as “The Richest Hill on Earth”. What began in the 1860s as a modest gold and silver camp had transformed by the 1890s into one of the world's premier copper mining centers, dominated by dozens of mine shafts whose steel headframes rose like skeletal towers above the city. These headframes, the tall structures that housed the massive wheels lowering men and equipment into the earth and hoisting ore back to the surface, punctuated Butte's skyline in such numbers that the hill itself seemed to bristle with industrial monuments. Today, only fourteen remain standing, preserved as reminders of an era when more than 200 mines operated simultaneously on the slopes above the city, with over ten thousand miles of underground workings. ^{[1], [2]}



The headframes cast shadows, both literal and figurative, over the families who lived in their proximity. Wooden houses clustered so tightly around the mine yards that children played within sight of the hoists and women hung laundry where mine dust settled on the lines. The shadows represented more than the absence of sunlight: they marked the constant presence of danger, the risk of cave-ins and explosions, the making of widows and orphans, the lung disease that came from breathing copper dust, and the precarious economics of boom-and-bust metal prices. For the thousands of Irish immigrants who made Butte their home in the late 1800s, these shadows were the price of wages that seemed generous compared to what they'd left behind in Ireland but which barely covered the high cost of survival on the Montana frontier.

This is the story of one Irish family who lived and loved and lost in those shadows.

Copper mine in town, Butte, Montana | 1939 Summer
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division | Washington, DC
Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White
Negatives
Creator: Arthur Rothstein

From Ireland to America

Joseph Kieran was born around 1864 in Drumgoosat Townland, Magheraclone Parish, County Monaghan, Ireland, the son of Peter Kieran and Jane (Martin) Kieran.^[3] He was one of ten children, seven sons and three daughters, born between 1857 and 1879. As the third-born son of a tenant farmer, Joseph knew he had little chance of inheriting the lease after his father's death. Hearing about Marcus Daly, an Irish immigrant from nearby County Cavan who had amassed a multi-million-dollar fortune as the owner of a large mining and reduction company near Butte, prompted his decision to emigrate. Joseph made his way to Butte in 1887^[4], where the copper mines and railroads were hiring. By October 1892, at age twenty-eight, he had become a naturalized American citizen, appearing before the Third Judicial District Court in Anaconda, Montana, with witnesses Pat Carr and B. Keenan to complete the process.^[5]

Catherine Myres was born October 16, 1865, in Ower Townland, Killursa Parish, County Galway, Ireland, the daughter of John Myres, a tenant farmer, and Honora (Hennelly) Myres.^[6] She was one of nine children, three daughters and six sons, born between 1858 and 1879. In 1895, when she was nearly thirty years old, Kate immigrated to America and made her way to Butte, following the path her younger siblings Delia and Denis had taken years earlier.^[7]

Sisters Kate and Delia Kieran
Photo believed to have
been taken in Ireland
circa 1886^[8]



Delia had arrived in America in 1887 and by 1889 was employed as a domestic worker at a residence in Helena, about seventy miles northeast of Butte.^[9] ^[10] Kate may have stayed with her sister initially, or she may have gone straight to Butte, where demand for domestic workers in the mining camp's boarding houses was high. Although there are no records or family stories to explain Kate's decision to immigrate, a possible explanation is the difficulty of securing a suitable marriage prospect in Ireland in the wake of the Irish diaspora. American cities, particularly Butte, presented a substantially larger population of Irish and other Catholic men, in contrast to other locations.

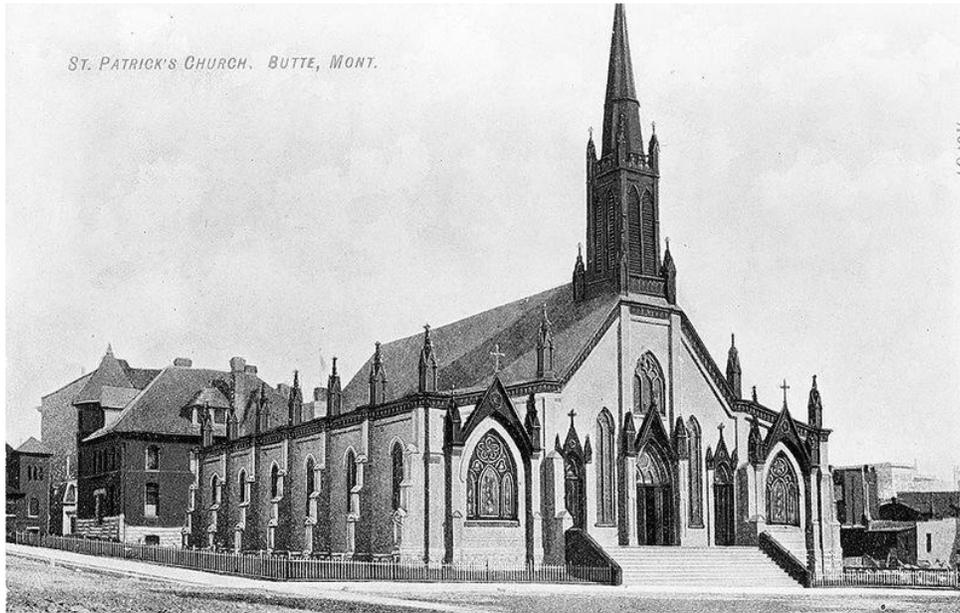
Joseph and Kate: 1899–1902



The circumstances of how Joseph and Kate came to know each other was not preserved in the family's oral history, but church and civil records show that they married at St. Patrick Catholic Church in September 1899.^[11] By then, the city's population was just over thirty thousand, with Irish immigrants making up roughly a quarter of those residents.^[12] Drawn from counties such as Cork and Mayo, Donegal and Kerry, Monaghan and Galway, Irish immigrants tended to cluster in neighborhoods where you could hear the old language on the streets and attend Mass with people from your home county.

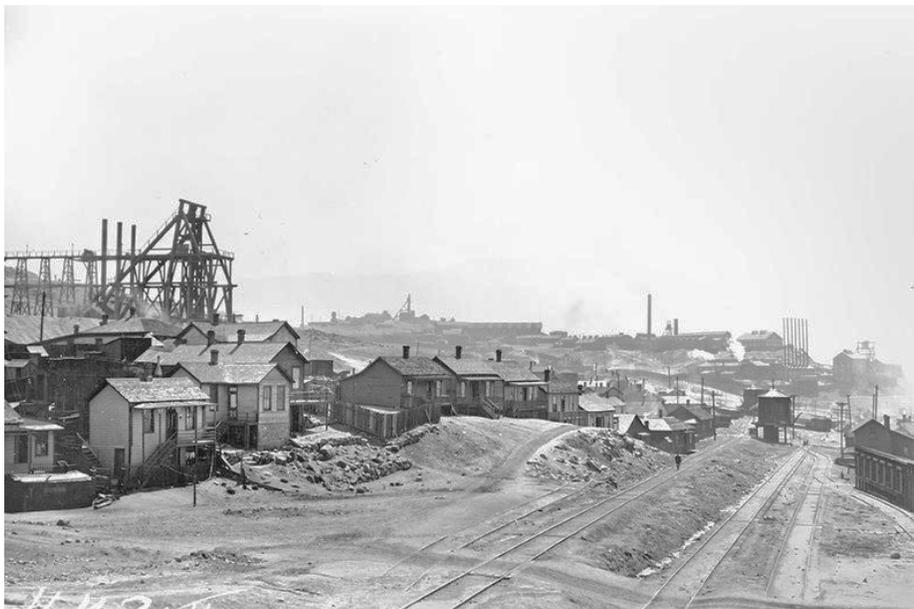
The mines ran day and night, their headframes rising above wooden houses built so close to the shafts that families lived almost on top of the copper veins their men worked. Joseph, now thirty-five, was a section foreman for the Montana Union Railway.^[13] Kate, at thirty-three, brought years of experience managing households and caring for others. Both were building something in a place where wages were comparatively good but the cost of survival was high.

Wedding photo of Kate Myres and Joseph Kieran.
Kate is seated center front with her left hand on Joseph's knee.^[14]



St. Patrick Catholic Church | Butte, Montana | Date: Between 1896-1920^[15]

The couple settled in the neighborhood known as Dublin Gulch, in a railroad section house high on the hill. The house, provided by the railroad, was located at 805 North Wyoming. Adjacent to the tracks, it functioned as both the Kieran family home and a boarding house for Joseph's crew and other laborers. When the United States census taker arrived in June 1900, Joseph was listed as section foreman for the Northern Pacific Railway. In addition to Kate, the household also included seven boarders, reflecting Butte's immigrant mosaic: a twenty-year-old Irish waitress who couldn't read or write; five railroad workers from Finland, Canada, Sweden, and Indiana; and a miner from Michigan.^[16] This was standard practice on the Butte Hill, where miners and railroad workers often boarded two to four men per room to save money and where housing costs were steep.



Scene in Butte, Montana, 1909

North Central Butte. Butte Anaconda and Pacific ore train line in center.

Catalog #946-052 January 1909 | Source: Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph Archives, Helena, Montana

Creator: John L. Maloney | Date: January, 1909

The boarding house was a bustling, slightly chaotic spot. As wife of the section foreman, Kate managed the household—cooking, cleaning, laundry for nine people—while Joseph supervised a gang that inspected and maintained a defined stretch of track for the Northern Pacific Railway, which hauled ore between Butte and Anaconda, where the smelter was located.

Railroad section work was outdoor labor in all weather, physically demanding but steadier than mining. In addition to the physical labor, Joseph filed reports on track conditions, ordered materials, and kept time records. It was front-line responsibility for the railroad's safety and required years of experience to earn the foreman's position. The work kept Joseph out on the right-of-way for long days, while Kate ran the boarding house and managed the steady flow of men through their home.

During this first year of marriage, Kate must have felt particular joy when three of her four younger brothers began arriving from Ireland. Her oldest brother, Denis, who may have arrived as early as 1887-1888, had worked and saved money, then paid for the passage of their brother Thomas, who arrived in May 1900.^{[17]. [18]} Later, Thomas did the same for their younger brothers Patrick and Michael, who traveled together to Butte in May 1901.^{[19]. [20]}

On September 7, 1900, Kate gave birth to twins: Nora and Peter.^[21] They named the children following Irish naming traditions—Nora for Kate's mother, Honora “Nora” Myres, and Peter for Joseph's father, Peter Kieran.^[22] The naming may have also been an act of memory, a way of keeping family close in a place far from Ireland.

Baby Peter lived only four days, dying September 11.^[23] Infant death was common enough in Butte, where crowded housing, mine pollution, and limited medical care created conditions that killed babies before their first birthdays. But common or not, the loss marked the household. Joseph and Kate buried their son and carried on with baby Nora, the boarding house, and Joseph's railroad section because that was what you did. You kept working, kept managing, kept living in a place where the copper veins ran deep and the risks ran deeper.

By 1902, the boarding house at 805 North Wyoming had become something of a Myres-Kieran family compound. Kate's four brothers were all in residence, and Joseph's brother Thomas Kieran, who had followed Joseph to Butte a short while earlier, lived there as well.^{[24]. [25]} When Kate became pregnant again in late 1901 or early 1902, she was surrounded by family in a way she hadn't been when the twins were born. The brothers may have helped with the household work, assisted with nearly-two-year-old Nora, and provided the kind of support that Irish families on the Butte Hill depended on for survival.

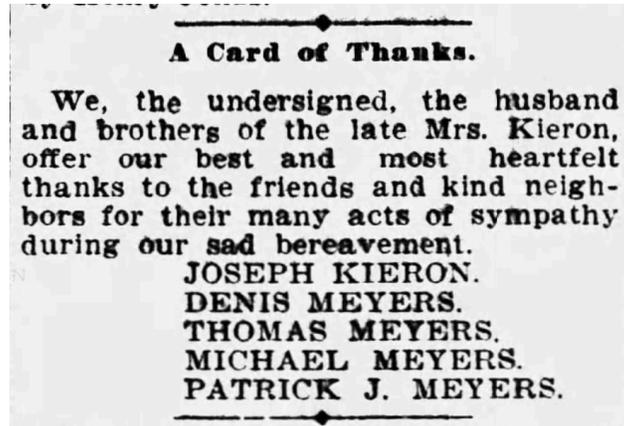
Later that year, Kate gave birth at home on August 1. The delivery had been difficult, and Joseph managed the situation as best he could, juggling his railroad work with the household's crisis, while the brothers stayed nearby. For two days, the entire household was on edge. Tragically, both Kate, who was only thirty-six, and the baby died on August 3.^[28]

Childbirth in early 1900s Montana carried serious risk. In Butte's working-class neighborhoods on the hill, women often hemorrhaged after unattended deliveries or suffered fatal infections because no doctor could reach them in time. The mining-camp environment added risk factors that made every pregnancy anything but routine. The funeral announcement described Kate as “loved by all her neighbors” and “a charming companion to her devoted husband and child.”^[29]

Butte's Irish community networks, the parish churches, the ethnic halls, the benevolent societies, existed precisely for moments like this, when a family needed help beyond what wages could provide. Kate's brothers remained at the boarding house, helping to care for their niece Nora and managing the household that Kate had run. Joseph's brother Thomas continued to live there as well. The presence of these family members must

have provided some measure of comfort to Joseph during the months following Kate's death, even as the daily reality remained stark: he had to be out on the tracks managing his crew while his daughter Nora needed care.

On August 6, *The Anaconda Standard* published a card of thanks signed by Joseph and Kate's four brothers: "We, the undersigned, the husband and brothers of the late Mrs. Kieron, offer our best and most heartfelt thanks to the friends and kind neighbors for their many acts of sympathy during our sad bereavement. JOSEPH KIERON. DENIS MEYERS. THOMAS MEYERS. MICHAEL MEYERS. PATRICK J. MEYERS."^[30]



The Anaconda Standard | Wednesday August 6, 1902

The word *bereavement* appeared in newspapers often enough in turn-of-the-century Butte—a mining camp where men died underground and women died in childbirth and children died of diseases that had no cure. But this notice, formal and brief as it was, marked the end of a marriage that had lasted less than three years and the beginning of a grief that would reshape Joseph Kieran's life.



Kate's gravestone was inscribed as follows:^[31]

KATE
Wife of
JOSEPH KIERON
Died Aug. 4 1902
AGED 28 YEARS.
Also
INFANT BABY
Aged 2 Days

Joseph and Julia: 1903–1905

In 1903, a single twenty-three-year-old woman who had arrived in Butte the prior year from County Cork, Ireland, moved into the boarding house. Her name was Julia Dennehy. Listed in the city directory as a domestic servant, she was now the woman responsible for keeping the house and likely helped with Nora's care.^[32] Joseph was still employed as a section foreman for the Northern Pacific Railway, still managing and living at the boarding house on North Wyoming.^[33] By that time, however, the only brother still residing there was Joseph's brother Thomas.^[34]

On February 16, 1904, eighteen months after Kate's death, Joseph married Julia Dennehy in Walkerville, the neighborhood on Butte's northeast slope near the mine yards.^[35] Julia was entering a household marked by loss: graves in St. Patrick Catholic cemetery, a three-and-a-half-year-old child who had lost her mother, a section foreman who worked long days on the railroad, and a house now occupied by Kate's brother Michael and Joseph's brother Thomas.^[36] ^[37] Whether the marriage was born of affection or necessity, or both, it reflected the pragmatic calculations that working-class immigrant families had to make. Joseph needed a partner to help raise Nora and manage the boarding house while he worked. Julia needed the stability of marriage in a mining camp where Irish women had limited options for independent survival.

By January 1905, less than a year after the wedding, Julia gave birth to a daughter they named Margaret.^[38] Joseph now had two daughters: baby Margaret, and five-year-old Nora, too young to remember her mother. The household continued to function as it had, with two poignant differences: Kate's brothers had once again moved on to other locations in Butte, and Joseph's brother Thomas died later that year of bronchial pneumonia at the age of thirty-six.^[39] Following a double funeral held for Thomas and his best friend Edward O'Neill who died in a mining accident several days earlier, Thomas was buried near Kate in the Catholic cemetery.^[40]



Thomas Kieran | Died Oct 14, 1905 | Aged 30 Yrs.^[41]

Around them, Butte's mines operated day and night, the headframes and hoist houses dominating the skyline, the ethnic neighborhoods supporting each other through strikes and accidents and the constant grind of industrial life. The city's Irish population, packed into neighborhoods such as Dublin Gulch and Corktown, maintained their parish churches and union halls and fraternal societies as a safety net against a world that offered good wages but little security.

Epilogue

Joseph Kieran's life from 1899 to 1905 was both particular to him and emblematic of the Irish immigrant experience on the Butte Hill: the marriage at St. Patrick Church, the boarding house full of laborers and family, the twins named for lost parents, the railroad section work, the maternal death that statistics predicted and neighbors mourned, the brothers who stayed close, the remarriage born of survival, and the children who would grow up in the shadow of the headframes.

The gravestones of Joseph Kieran's family stand today in St. Patrick Catholic cemetery alongside other markers from Butte's Irish dead, another chapter in the story of the Richest Hill on Earth and the people who worked on it, married on it, gave birth on it, and died on it.

Endnotes

1. "The Headframes of Butte," Jason L. Parish, Butte-Silver Bow Public Information Officer, *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bf2d50cd4ea345f9b715e999f8fb96ef> (accessed 13 Feb 2026).
2. "Butte, Montana: The Case For Fhe Mining Metropolis" Bradford Watson & Sean Burkholder, *Scenario Journal*, <https://scenariojournal.com/article/butte-montana> (accessed 13 Feb 2026).
3. An Irish birth record for Joseph Kieran has not been located. Church birth records located for his siblings lead to the conclusion that he was likely born in about 1864 in Drumgoosat Townland, Magheracloone Parish, County Monaghan.
4. 1900 U.S. census, Silver Bow County, Montana, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 91, sheet 15, dwelling 287, family 384, Joseph Kieron household; noting that Joseph Kieron immigrated in 1887; Ancestry.com (accessed 6 Feb 2026); citing records of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. **Note:** The surname Kieran appears in multiple variant spellings across historical records. The form *Kieran* is used in this story based on its appearance in Irish birth, marriage and death records of Joseph's parents and siblings. Variant spellings are preserved in individual source citations.
5. 3rd. Jud. Dct. Ct. Anaconda Mont., "Montana, U.S., County Naturalization Records, 1867-1970," p. __, naturalization of Joseph Kieron; Ancestry.com (accessed 7 Feb 2026); > Image Group Number 1183780, image 2562.
6. Birth record of Catherine Myres, 7 Sept 1900, Ower Townland, County Galway, Headford, Tuam, Ireland; birth register entry, Group Registration ID 8323272, Registration Area Tuam, p. 546; Irishgenealogy.ie (accessed 10 Feb 2026). **Note:** The surname Myres appears in multiple variant spellings across historical records, including Irish records. The form *Myres* is used in this story based on Kate's birth record. Variant spellings are preserved as recorded in cited sources.
7. 1900 U.S. census, Silver Bow County, Montana, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 91, sheet 15, dwelling 287, family 384, Joseph Kieron household; noting that Kate Kieron immigrated in 1895.
8. Photograph of Kate Myres (left) and sister Delia Myres, circa 1886, County Galway, Ireland; original photographic print; Blacker Family Photograph Collection, privately held by Lark M. Dalin; identification based on family tradition.
9. 1900 U.S. Census, Lewis and Clark County, Montana, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 172, sheet 6, dwelling 96, family 96, Julius Mitchke household; noting that Delia Mitchke immigrated in 1887; Ancestry.com (accessed 11 Feb 2026); citing records of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.
10. City directory entry for Delia Myers, 1890; Helena, Montana; 617 N Rodney, Domestic; p. 214; *Helena, Montana Directories, 1889-91*; Ancestry.com (accessed 11 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
11. Marriage record of Joseph Kiaron and Kate Myers, 20 Sep 1899, Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana; marriage register entry, page 285; Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950, Ancestry.com (accessed 7 Feb 2026).
12. Moffatt, Riley. *Population History of Western U.S. Cities & Towns, 1850–1990*. Lanham: Scarecrow, 1996, 128.
13. 1900 U.S. census, Silver Bow County, Montana, population schedule, enumeration district (ED) 91, sheet 15, dwelling 287, family 384, Joseph Kieron household; noting that Joseph Kieron worked as a section foreman for the Montana Union Railway. **Note:** Joseph's railroad employment appears under several names in contemporary records, including *Montana Union Railway*; *Butte, Anaconda and Pacific Railway*; and *Northern Pacific Railway*. These companies were closely connected through ownership, control, or operational agreements during this period. Variations in employer names across census and city directory records likely reflect corporate structure or reporting conventions rather than separate or successive employers.
14. Photograph of Kate Myres (seated center) and Joseph Kieran (seated right), 1899, Butte, Montana; original photographic print; Blacker Family Photograph Collection, privately held by Lark M. Dalin; identification based on family tradition. **Note:** The other two individuals in the photo were thought for many years to be Kate's sister Delia and her husband Julius Mitschke. However, Delia and Julius were not witnesses to the wedding (see marriage record). Those individuals were Thomas Duffy and Mrs. J. J. Cotter. Also, the author contacted descendants of Julius Mitschke who do not believe the man in the photos is Julius. Because Delia died one year after Kate, there are very few pictures of her and therefore difficult to confirm whether the woman is Delia.
15. Photograph of St. Patrick Catholic Church, circa 1896-1920, Butte, Montana; digital scan of original photograph; PAc 946-092, Montana Historical Society Research Center Photograph, Archives, Helena, MT.

16. 1900 U.S. census, Silver Bow County, Montana, Joseph Kieron household.
17. City directory entry for Dennis Maher, 1889; Helena, Montana; fireman Parisian Steam Laundry; p. 234; *Helena City Directory*; Ancestry.com (accessed 12 Feb 2026); citing original published directory. **Note:** Although the spelling of the name is questionable, this “Dennis Maher” worked at the same location where his sister, Delia Myres, worked several years later. Perhaps Denis and Delia immigrated together, or perhaps Denis arrived first and paid for Delia’s passage later. More research is needed.
18. Passenger manifest for Thomas Myers, aboard *SS New England*, arriving 18 May 1900 at Boston, Massachusetts, United States, from Queenstown, Ireland; p. 83, line 1; noting that his passage was paid by his brother and that he was traveling to join his brother Denis Myers in Butte, Montana; *Boston Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1943*, Ancestry.com (accessed 8 Feb 2026); citing records of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. **Note:** No passenger arrival record has been located for Denis Myers. His presence in Butte in 1899 is inferred from the passenger manifest of his brother, Thomas Myers, who arrived in the United States in 1900. That record states that Thomas was traveling to join his brother, Denis Myers, in Butte, Montana. This document provides the only direct contemporary evidence identified to date placing Denis Myers in Butte at that time.
19. Passenger manifest for Michael Myers, aboard *Commonwealth*, arriving 31 May 1901 at Boston, Massachusetts, United States, from Queenstown, Ireland; p. 397, Ocean Contract No. 63397; *Boston Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1943*, Ancestry.com (accessed 10 Feb 2026); citing records of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
20. Passenger manifest for Peter Myers, aboard *Commonwealth*, arriving 31 May 1901 at Boston, Massachusetts, United States, from Queenstown, Ireland; p. 397, Ocean Contract No. 357; *Boston Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1943*, Ancestry.com (accessed 10 Feb 2026); citing records of the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
21. Birth announcement for daughter and son of wife of Joseph Kierons, *The Anaconda Standard* (Anaconda, Montana), 9 Sept 1900, p. 15; copy of newspaper clipping in private possession of Lark M. Dalin.
22. Traditional Irish naming patterns commonly included naming the first daughter for the maternal grandmother and the first son for the paternal grandfather.
23. Record of Interments for Peter F. Kieran, *St. Patrick Church* (Butte, Montana), 11 Sept 1900, p. 24; copy of original document in private possession of Lark M. Dalin.
24. City directory entries for Denis Myers, Michael Myers, Patrick Myers, Thomas Myers, 1902; Butte, Montana; boards Joseph Kieran, laborer NP Ry; p. ___; *Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana, Directory, 1902*; Ancestry.com (accessed 12 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
25. City directory entry for Thomas Kieran, 1902; Butte, Montana; boards Joseph Kieran, Miner; p. ___; *Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana, Directory, 1902*; Ancestry.com (accessed 12 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
26. Death announcement for Mrs. Joseph Kieron, *The Anaconda Standard* (Anaconda, Montana), 4 Aug 1902, p. 5; copy of newspaper clipping in private possession of Lark M. Dalin.
27. Grave marker inscription for unnamed infant, reading “Also INFANT BABY Aged 2 Days,” buried with Kate Kieron; St. Patrick Cemetery, Butte, Silverbow County, Montana; photographed by Lark M. Dalin Robart, date unknown; privately held photograph.
28. Kate's age at death presents a challenge in the historical record. Her birth record from County Galway indicates she was born Oct 16, 1865, which would make her thirty-six when she died in August 1902. However, her 1899 marriage record lists her age as twenty-nine (suggesting a birth year around 1870), the 1900 census gives her birth year as 1864, and both her 1902 death announcement and cemetery marker state she was twenty-eight years old at death (suggesting birth around 1874). This essay uses the Irish civil birth record as the most reliable source, but the discrepancies reflect the challenges of genealogical research and the inconsistencies common in historical documents of this era.
29. “Funeral of Mrs. J. Kieron,” *Anaconda Standard* (Anaconda, Montana), 5 Aug 1902, p. 12; copy of newspaper clipping in private possession of Lark M. Dalin.
30. “A Card of Thanks,” *The Anaconda Standard* (Anaconda, Montana), 6 Aug 1902, p. 11, col. 6; Newspapers.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original newspaper publication.
31. Photograph of Kate Kieron grave marker, 1902, St. Patrick Catholic Cemetery, Butte, Silverbow County, Montana; original photographic print; Blacker Family Photograph Collection, privately held by Lark M. Dalin.
32. City directory entry for Julia Dennehy, 1903; [Butte], Montana; 805 N Wyoming, domestic; p. 247; *Bozeman City Directory*; Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
33. City directory entry for Joseph Kieron, 1903; [Butte], Montana; 805 N Wyoming, section foreman N P Ry; p. 383; *Bozeman City Directory*; Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
34. City directory entry for Thomas Kirnan, 1903; [Butte], Montana; 805 N Wyoming, Miner Anaconda Mine; p. 387; *Bozeman City Directory*; Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
35. Marriage record of Joseph Kieron and Julia Dannehy, 16 Feb 1904, Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana; marriage register entry, page 181; Montana, County Marriages, 1865-1950, Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026).
36. City directory entry for Michael Myers, 1904; Butte, Montana; 805 N Wyoming, lab N P Ry (Hill Yd); p. 469; *Butte City Directory*; Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
37. City directory entry for Thomas Kiern, 1904; [Butte], Montana; 805 N Wyoming, miner Gray Rock Mine; p. 366; *Bozeman City Directory*; Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original published directory.
38. Birth announcement for daughter of Joseph Kierns and wife, *The Butte Miner* (Butte, Montana), 14 Jan 1905, p. 6, col. 3; Newspapers.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing original newspaper publication.
39. Death record of Thomas Kieran, 14 Oct 1905, Butte, Silver Bow County, Montana; death certificate no. 9250; Ancestry.com (accessed 13 Feb 2026); citing Montana State Historical Society; Helena, Montana; FHL Roll: 47-90.
40. Photograph of Thomas Kieran grave marker, 1905, St. Patrick Catholic Cemetery, Butte, Silverbow County, Montana; original photographic print; Blacker Family Photograph Collection, privately held by Lark M. Dalin.

Author Bio

Lark M. Dalin, whose family history is deeply rooted in Montana from the mid-1860s to the late 1890s, wrote this story to preserve the memory of her great-grandfather, Joseph Kieran. An Irish immigrant from County Monaghan, Ireland, Joseph's life had largely been lost to family memory. Lark undertook the research and writing to honor her mother, the family's proud, half-Irish storyteller, and to ensure that Joseph Kieran is not forgotten.

A Note on AI Assistance

Writing this story required two things: years of careful genealogical research, and help turning that research into a narrative worthy of the people it describes. I used Claude, an AI tool developed by Anthropic, to help draft the first version of this story, drawing on the documents, records, and historical context I had assembled over many years of digging through archives, census rolls, and old newspapers. From there, I reviewed every word, revised extensively, and worked to make the story my own—adding my voice, my judgment, and my deep familiarity with this family. Any errors or discrepancies in the final text are mine, not the AI's.