

CALL ME KATE

Meeting the Molly Maguires

MOLLY ROE

Tribute Books
Archbald, Pennsylvania

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The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Call Me Kate: Meeting the Molly Maguires
by Molly Roe. – 1st ed.

Summary: Coming of age amidst the seething unrest of the Civil War era, feisty fourteen-year-old Katie McCafferty infiltrates the Molly Maguires, a secret Irish organization, to rescue a lifelong friend. Under the guise of “Dominick,” a draft resister, Katie volunteers for a dangerous mission in hopes of preventing bloodshed. Katie risks job, family, and ultimately her very life to intervene. A series of tragedies challenge Katie’s strength and ingenuity, and she faces a crisis of conscience. Can she balance her sense of justice with the law?

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*Dedicated to my wonderful aunt, Margaret Bonner,
family memory keeper and my biggest fan.
Margie's vivid family stories inspired this book
and kept our ancestors alive for another generation.*



*Each person dies three times.
First, there is the moment
when the physical body stops functioning.
Second is the time
when the earthly remains are consigned to the grave,
never more to be seen.
Third, there is that moment,
sometime in the future,
in which the person's name is spoken for the last time.
That's when the person is really gone.*

Mexican saying

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PRAISE FOR CALL ME KATE

The writing style employed in the book entertains, educates and communicates to the reader a general understanding of the hardships of life in the anthracite coal fields of northeast Pennsylvania in the nineteenth century and Irish-American history.

- *Bill Strassner*

Museum Educator

Eckley Miners' Village

Weatherly, Pennsylvania

www.eckleyminers.org

Call Me Kate absorbs the reader into a tightly woven narrative of tumultuous times in the anthracite region. Through *Kate*, the reader becomes a participant in that story.

- *Ruth Cummings*

Museum Educator

Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum

Scranton, Pennsylvania

www.anthracitemuseum.org

The Lackawanna Historical Society is always pleased to see new and creative ways to promote an interest in our local history. A young adult historical fiction like *Call Me Kate* is a wonderful example of this! We are delighted to know that local authors are using their heritage to develop new publications.

- *Mary Ann Moran-Savakinus*

Executive Director

Lackawanna Historical Society

Scranton, Pennsylvania

www.lackawannahistory.org

READER COMMENTS

Call Me Kate is the absorbing story of young Kate McCafferty, caught in the struggle between the Irish miners and the cold-hearted mine owners who use them up and throw them away. Set in the tumultuous period of the Civil War, the plucky Kate must find a way to stop the terrible bloodshed threatening her people, the miners of the Patch. Kudos to the author whose meticulous research has made this slice of history come alive!

- *H. Morgan*

Roe's considerable skill as a storyteller brings this important time alive for the next generation.

- *K. Williams*

By way of skillful storytelling and rigorous research, (the author) has infused the saga of Kate's everyday life in early coal mining days with the history of a forsaken people and their tragic times. Kate proved herself a mighty heroine. Great reading!

- *M. Bonner*

Call Me Kate has an authenticity that only comes from personal knowledge of the tumultuous times that gripped the coal mining country and its coal-dust blackened denizens in their struggle... Bravo!

- *M. Robinson*

Katie McCafferty is an unlikely heroine who will steal your heart. Rising from family tragedy and poverty with determination and spunk, she sees the world of the 1860s as a place of rights and wrongs and chooses a dangerous path of loyalty to her friends and to her own conscience.

- *Ann Vitale*

INTRODUCTION

The tensions of the Civil War era, a turbulent time in American history, pitted immigrants against nativists, management against labor, and pro-slavery factions against abolitionists. In many northern states, support for the war was weak. President Lincoln had to draft soldiers to fight.

When the Northern draft was enacted in October of 1862, resistance built up in regions where the common people's interests were in jeopardy. Riots broke out in several states, including Pennsylvania. The coal region and farmlands were hotbeds of resistance since losing a breadwinner threatened the survival of the family. The outbreaks of hostility in Pennsylvania were not as large or as violent as the ill-famed New York riot of 1863, but they highlight the lack of northern unity regarding the war. The slogan "rich man's war, poor man's fight" became popular among the masses.

Immigrants resented the hostile reception they received from the Know Nothing Party and other nativist groups who opposed the influx of workers from Europe. At the same time, the country was experiencing a surge of growth in industry and needed cheap labor to mine coal for the production of steel for railroads and other businesses.

Northeastern Pennsylvania had a particularly high percentage of immigrant workers. Irishmen who were recruited for mine

work were usually poor unskilled laborers, not certified miners who commanded a higher wage. They performed strenuous and dangerous tasks and were paid by the miner from his earnings. The cultural and religious differences between English and Welsh bosses and Irish and German workers worsened already strained labor relations.

Pay was based on filling coal cars with good clean anthracite, so important safety considerations, like shoring up the roof and clearing rubble, were often neglected in order to fill the cars. Colliery owners were known to pay workers in scrip which could only be used at the Company store, limiting their buying power and their independence.

Mine workers suffered when there were strikes or stoppages, but also when overproduction caused the price of anthracite to drop. Work injuries and deaths were common, and without public welfare agencies, the families had to rely on themselves, their churches, and their benevolent societies. The draft was a flame set to the tinderbox that was the coal region in 1862.

Benjamin Bannan, editor of *The Miners Journal* of Pottsville and Schuylkill County draft commissioner during the Civil War, blamed the “Molly Maguires” for voter fraud, political defeats, the draft riots, violence at the mines, and murders. He contributed to the anti-Irish hysteria of the era by associating the Molly Maguires with the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a benevolent association.

While Katie’s adventures are fictional, the events of *Call Me Kate* depict the common experience of those turbulent days.

CHAPTER 1

Coal Mining Crisis – November 1860

“S’ter, s’ter, I need to see Katie right away!” The disheveled boy who burst into our classroom was my friend and former classmate, Con Gallagher. He bent to catch his breath beside the well-polished teacher’s desk.

Twenty pairs of horror-filled eyes turned in my direction, then darted back toward the frowning nun, expecting the worst. Sister Mary Charles never tolerated disruptions, especially to her beloved literature class. I was in for it unless Con had a darn good reason to be here.

Ink splashed from the inkwell as I jumped up from my desk, but Sister was even faster. Accompanied by the rattle of rosary beads, she dragged Con into the corridor by a sooty sleeve and told me to return to my seat. I hesitated, then plopped back down. What in the world was happening?

My friend Annie leaned across the aisle and whispered, “This better not be one of Con’s pranks or you’ll both get paddled.”

“Shhh!” Everyone strained to hear the conversation in the hall, but whatever was said did not take long.

“Miss McCafferty, go to the cloakroom and get your belongings please.” Sister Mary Charles’s no-nonsense voice was tinged with kindness, usually reserved for the Latin scholars.

Since I expected a scolding, Sister's concerned tone bewildered me completely. As I stepped forward, the piercing breaker whistle split the air. A mine accident!

The frightening sound spurred chaotic movement. Girls hugged each other and cried, then one by one my classmates slid to their knees. My whirling thoughts fixed on a terrifying conclusion. Please God, no. Please no.

I ran into the hallway without stopping for my shawl and screamed, "Con, what happened?"

Con caught me by the elbows. His blue eyes met mine. "The coal face your father was working collapsed. His legs are pinned. But he's alive, Katie!"

I broke from his grasp and dashed out of the schoolhouse into the cold gray November morning, a day as bleak as Con's news.

"Does my mother know?" Strands of my unruly auburn hair escaped its pins and stuck to my tear-dampened cheeks. I rubbed it back with my palms.

"Bad news travels fast. She may have run to the scene already, I don't know. I went right to school to tell you to get home."

"HOME? I'm going to the mine!"

"No Katie, go to your house. Someone needs to be there. Dinny went to get Gram and her remedy kit so she'll be set to treat your da' when he arrives. I'll help you tear cloth for bandages and boil the water that Gram will need to clean your father's wounds. Your da' may even be home by now." Con's words made sense so I bolted down the alley, a shortcut to the house.

As we reached the side porch, I heard a measured clapping sound echo down Front Street. My heart clenched and missed a beat. The hoofbeats of the Black Mariah, that omen of misery and death, was headed to the mine. Panic flooded through my veins.

There was no sign of life at our house. I opened the back door and called for my mother. Hollow silence met my call. Down the cellar!

I ran out to the rear of the house while Con went to check with the neighbors. When I lifted the heavy door to the storm cellar, I heard Mother singing a cheerful tune as she sealed jelly jars in a pot of boiling water. She looked up, startled, as I dashed down the steps.

“Katie, what’re you doing home before lunch?”

“Didn’t you hear the whistle? Hurry, Father’s injured!”

The surprise on her face turned to horror. She ran up the stairs, using her apron to wipe her steam-flushed brow as she raced outside. “How do you know?”

“Con came to school to tell me. Father’s pinned in the chamber. The men are clearing the entrance to free him.”

“Oh God, oh God!” My mother wrung her hands and looked helpless.

I ran inside and got mother’s woolen shawl and my old cape. By the time I returned, Con was there, reassuring her that help was coming. “My grandmother is on the way in case her skills are needed.”

Con had left before anyone knew how bad Father’s injuries were, but the huge fall of rock had killed Johnnie Pat, the young nipper working the doors.

Mother and I set off for the colliery. Con didn’t argue this time. He offered to stay behind to read’ up for his grandmother. Mrs. Gallagher was a stickler for cleanliness, and her sickbed requirements were well known to Con and his brother Dinny.

A huge crowd had gathered at the mine entrance. Friends rushed up and offered sympathy and news. I turned my back on the large black coach and dark horses hitched nearby. The gloomy-looking Black Mariah reminded me of a large crow hovering over a dying rabbit.

Mother composed her face and stiffened her spine as she came to grips with the situation. I tried to imitate her restraint, even though I felt like sobbing. Our outward courage was shattered an hour later when an ear-piercing scream tore through the crowd.

Johnnie Pat's mother saw her son's body carried out on a litter. He was covered from neck down with sailcloth, but blood from his saturated shirt had seeped through the canvas, and smudge marks marred his still, marble-white face. The younger children, clinging to Mrs. McFadden's skirts, began to howl, echoing their mother's cry. She collapsed next to the litter, sobbing bitterly. Her elderly father comforted her, then turned to beckon to our parish priest.

Father Maloney, wearing a violet stole over his black cassock, anointed Johnnie's forehead while intoning in Latin "Si es capax." If thou art alive. No one here had any doubt that Johnnie was dead.

I automatically translated the Latin prayer. Through this holy unction may the Lord pardon thee of whatever sins or faults thou hast committed. Johnnie's faults were minor - quarreling with his older sister, teasing his little brothers, maybe pocketing a few mints from the barrel at the Company store. Johnnie Pat had been in my younger sister's class until he went to work in the mines. If God is just, then Johnnie's place in Heaven will be higher than the biggest boss's here on Earth. Where would the owners stand on Judgment Day?

The women of the Patch surrounded the boy's heartbroken mother. They cared for the other McFadden children while their brother's body was whisked away. In the Patch, giving comfort to the grief stricken was a well-cultivated skill.

I held my mother's elbow to steady her as Father was brought out. Although he was alert, no one knew just how serious his injuries were. The priest once again stepped forward, this time to perform the last rites in full. Father clasped a

crucifix while the priest anointed his eyelids, ears, nostrils, lips, hands, and feet. Mother moaned once, then bit her clenched fist to keep from sobbing.

After the blessing, the company men carried Father to the waiting coach. Mother and I kept pace alongside as best we could, but fell behind the horse-drawn vehicle on the steep incline of Ridge Street. I was glad Con had stayed behind to wait.

By the time we reached the house, the workers had taken Father from the tall black carriage and lowered his mangled body onto the splintery porch floorboards. Mother choked back a cry at the sight of his gray, pain-filled face and awkwardly twisted torso. She knelt and caressed his bruised hand.

“Here’s Gram,” said Con, leaping the bannister to help the white-haired woman who trudged across our yard carrying a bundle. Old Mrs. Gallagher, Con and Dinny’s grandmother, was renowned as a healer and herbalist. Her daughter-in-law, Deirdre, was right behind her, toting a large satchel. Dinny, Con Gallagher’s identical twin, arrived with a basket of supplies as the workers hurried off to deliver the next accident victim to his grieving family. Directions flew as the old woman went into action.

“Dinny, go over street and get Catharine McCall and Aggie McCafferty.” Dinny dashed off to get my grandmother and great-aunt who lived across town.

“Con and Katie, take hold of one side of this sheet and help lift Jack. Deirdre, you and Mary take the other side. Careful now!”

We shuffled our way into the parlor and placed Father on a pallet on the floor. Mrs. Gallagher opened her bag and took out several items.

“Katie, I need soap and water, and clean rags.”

Quickly cutting off Father’s shredded pants legs, she expertly removed scraps of fabric and embedded coal from the wound, then pressed it to stop the bleeding.

As she began sewing up the wounds, I frowned, sensing something strange. Father was not screaming with pain. He did not wince at the cleaning of the wounds or stitching of his flesh. Mrs. Gallagher shook her head and glared at me when I opened my mouth.

“Katie, take these soiled rags to the burner and bring fresh.” She shoved a bowl of blood-drenched cloth at me with a meaningful look. I scrambled to obey, but by the time I returned the procedure was finished.

“Rest and quiet are what Jack needs now. Go on, all of yeh, and let him sleep off the shock.”

Deirdre and my mother began cleaning the parlor while Mrs. Gallagher lifted Father’s head to give him sips of willow tea. Con and I went out on the porch where I asked the questions that were pounding inside my head.

“Tell me how the accident happened. Were you right there? Who else was hurt?”

“Hold on, Katie. Calm down. I’ll tell you what I know, if you’re sure you’re ready to hear it.”

I inhaled deeply and sat on the railing, hugging the post. “Tell me.”

“I was outside in the gangway loading coal while Sam Davison and his buttie were in the chamber preparing to blast the coalface. Your father had just taken a hand augur into the room for Sam to drill a hole for the powder when there was the creaking sound of a squeeze. I only had time to cover my head and crouch. It was pure luck that the coal car protected me from the shower of rock.” Con shook his head at his miraculous escape.

“Poor Johnnie Pat wasn’t lucky. He only started as door keeper last month, and he didn’t recognize the warning sounds. The rock slide shattered the beams, and Johnnie was hit by a flying splinter.” Con stopped and rubbed his forehead, screening his eyes from my sight before continuing.

“When I heard him scream, I ran to help, but the stake was lodged solid in his chest. I couldn’t do anything but pillow his head with my jacket.” Con’s voice cracked. “The poor lad cried out ‘Mama! Mama!’... then he died in my arms.” Con hid his face in the crook of his elbow.

“I’m so sorry for making you relive the horror, Con. Please forgive me.”

“No, I want to tell what happened.” Back in control, Con recounted the rest in a near monotone. Once started, he seemed incapable of stopping his recitation.

“I yelled into the blocked chamber and your father answered. He, Sam, and Packy were all injured. The only entry was blocked so I couldn’t get to them.”

“Thank God they weren’t suffocated,” I said. “Why aren’t there two exits?”

“We’ve been trying to convince the owners that there should always be two shafts sunk every time a new mine is opened, but they say the cost is too great.”

My sorrow simmered into rage at the operators’ neglect.

“When the rescuers came to free the men, I ran to school to get you.”

“Oh no, Sarah and Maymie! No one went to their classroom.”

“It’s better that your sisters stay in school until your mother is settled and your grandmother’s here. Maymie, especially, is too young to help, and she’d be horrified by the blood. Thank God she didn’t see Johnnie as we saw him today.”



That day permanently changed our lives. Father’s wounds healed, but he did not regain use of his legs. Everyone in the family assumed new chores, and a feeling of insecurity fell upon us. Then the Christmas season arrived, and the busyness of the

holidays helped take our minds off the future. The money that Sarah, Maymie and I had saved to buy candy and small gifts for each other was put toward the household accounts, but no one complained. The best Christmas gift was that Father was still with us.

Our family income was at its lowest point. Father had been earning only part-time wages since late spring. The mines had just started up full time for the winter heating season when the tragedy occurred.

We sold Father's tools and made a tidy sum, but much of the money went toward medical needs. Our family buckled down and made cuts in the budget.

December 1860 was a time of change for the whole country, not just our family. Distant events would have far-reaching consequences for almost everyone in the Patch.

The week before Christmas, my mother and I ran into Annie O'Donnell and her family at the Company Store. Annie and I were whispering about the handsome stock boy when the tone of our mothers' conversation caught our attention. Mrs. O'Donnell held a newspaper with a banner headline that read, "The Union Dissolved."

My mother frowned and said, "South Carolina has finally broken away?"

"Yes, Lincoln's election gave South Carolina the reason it was looking for." Mrs. O'Donnell looked disgusted. "This will mean war. President Buchanan will have to defend federal property in South Carolina."

"Why do they want to leave the Union?" asked Annie.

"They've been threatening for years now, but the election of Lincoln set a flame to the slavery issue," sighed Mother.

"At least South Carolina is far away," I said.

Mrs. O'Donnell declared, "Not far enough. Even though no shots have been fired, my boys are already talking about going off to soldier."