

## Robert Benner

(1802-1883)

Robert Benner was born in 1802, the 4th son of Samuel Benner (1763-1832) and Anne Cronsberry (??).

He married Margaret Ann Gallagher. They had four children:

Samuel Gallagher Benner (1833-1916)

William Gallagher Benner (1838-1880) m. Agnes Lunham (1838-1903)

Anne Gallagher Benner (1835-)

Frances Gallagher Benner (1843) m. James Donovan ()

Robert Benner, took the place of his father in the hotel trade. He extended the business, opening another Benners Hotel in Dingle, on the South Kerry Atlantic Coast. The hotel in Tralee was for the most part now known as Benners Hotel. It was the venue not only for food and lodging, but for all the fun and seriousness of the county's major town until the end of the century. A look through the Kerry newspapers shows how popular the hotel had become and how central it was to the social life of a now thriving town. There was a ballroom, a constant place [as the name suggests] for 'grand balls, race balls, assizes balls' etc. It was also used for music, both full dress classical concerts and popular shows

'Benners Ballroom under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen, presents grand morning and evening concerts of the original Ethiopian Serenaders.' (This seems to have been a Dixie minstrel show judging from the programme of songs).

The Roman Catholic Nuns held their bazaars there too 'for the sick poor as visited by the Sisters of Mercy' - presumably at times other than those when the Kerry Freemasons were holding their lodge ceremonies.

The Benners 'Grand Room' was used for meetings of almost everything – the Tralee Reproductive Employment Committee, the Tralee Temperance and Anti-Tobacco Society, the Tralee Protestant Total Abstinence Society to name just a few amongst the many. Major educational spectacles were also presented – 'The Great London Panorama illustrating the War with Russia' or spectacles for amusement – 'The Phantoscope – Goethes' romantic mystery 'Faust and Marguerite' with Phantoscope Illustrations and Gounod's Operatic Music'. Great nights presumably enjoyed by some of the great and the good of Ireland who rested at Benners awhile – Father Matthew on his Temperance Crusade, and Charles Stewart Parnell on his Home Rule tour.

