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Welcome to the latest edition of the IACI e-news.

Founded in 1962, the IACI is the leading Irish American cultural organization. The IACI is a federally recognized 501(c)(3) not-for-profit national organization devoted to promoting an intelligent appreciation of Ireland and the role and contributions of the Irish in America.

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A Rambling Old House in Black Earth, Wisconsin

By Steven G. Farrell

I had tricked my wife into moving back to my native state of Wisconsin from Los Angeles by fibbing to her that we were relocating to Madison, the state capital, when in reality, we were headed for Black Earth, a small town in Dane county. I compounded my sin by also lying that I had inherited my family old rambling house, whereas the old homestead was a rambling dump that the townspeople used to tease us by calling it “The Shannon Family Shanty.” The taunt was unkind but true. It was also true that the Shannon family were an Irish Catholic clan at the bottom of the social heap in a small village of smug Protestants. My mother had actually loaded all of us kids into the family station wagon and drove us to a parochial school in Madison, so Wisconsin’s state capital did figure in my childhood landscape.

It took a lot of blarney on my part to talk my wife of roughly a decade to part from her beloved California backdrop and the faint promise that she could make a rebound in her musical and acting career after a long, slow descent into obscurity as an American pop back number. Tara O’Neill, my wife, and the Extreme Sensations, haven’t scored a hit on *Billboard 100*, since disco pop died in the late 70s. A reunion with her fellow sexy singing sirens in the early 90s hadn’t generated much interest in the world of music; at least not as any serious media attention. Most of the critics scorned the reunion movie she starred in 1989. The made-for-television movie based upon her hit television from the early 80s, *The Pop Doctor*, flopped dead in the ratings. I hadn’t paid much attention to her singing or acting career when it was in process. Whenever I had seen her on television by accident, I noticed that she was a Queen of the Foxes, who was ravishingly beautiful even without the fancy outfits, coiffed hair, and pounds of facial makeup.

Tara, who was petted and feted for years by the tabloids and the hosts of television talk show circuit for her boldness and outspokenness, strolled up to me after a presentation I had made at a *Sons and Daughters of Celtic Ireland* lodge meeting in Malibu. It was in March 1997 and I had been getting some extra work amongst the Irish social clubs in the immediate area as a special topics speaker.

“I dug your performance on Irish American gangsters in film, Chubby,” she announced while I was hunched over and signing copies of my books in the back of the room in hopes of earning enough money to pay the rent without having to resort to extra days of substitute teaching in the inner city of the Lost Angels. My lecture on *The Irish American in Film* had drawn an audience of 38 spectators, a good draw for me, and was the best way for me to sell copies of my collection of stories and essays as well as my lone novel.

“Thank you very much,” I said thankfully as she dug into her jeans to extract the cash for my book. “My name is actually Hugh Shannon.”

“Do you present on any other subjects?”

“During the month of October I always appear in several libraries in L.A with my presentation entitled *Universal Classic Horror Films*. I show clips from *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *The Wolf Man* and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. ”

“You should do one about Irish American Hellcats; women who raised Cain in their days, like Molly Brown, Anne Sullivan, Nelly Bly and Mother Jones. It would appeal to the women of the late 20th century”

“To whom shall I sign the book to?”

“Tara O’Neill,” she said, giving me a watchful eye to see if I responded to her in a star-struck manner as her adoring fans had done so from the olden days of yore. I must have disappointed her because I had no clue of her identity.

“No doubt you’re from the royal line of the O’Neill clan of Ulster?”

“The County Tyrone, if you please,” she said with a laugh.

I handed over the book along with my business card for my fledgling writing and speaking services.

“So you’re giving me your telephone number and email address without me even begging for me for my numbers, eh professor?”

“I think they call it networking.”

“I thinking they call it hustling,” she said with another laugh; this time she had a twinkle in her eyes as she made her exit in an exotic and enticing sway.

I thought about her on the drive home and I was still thinking about her when I fired up my computer and signed in. I googled her name and was stunned that I had to be reminded who this lady had been in her times. According to her birth date at Wikipedia, she was 37 years old, six years younger than me. Her record and film histories were also listed on the page of information, some of it triggering memories. Then I forgot all about Tara O’Neill until she telephoned me.

“Hugh Shannon, I have read all of your things online and I’m you’re biggest fan!”

I married my biggest fan after a whirlwind courtship, a trip to Disneyland and several late night discussions about Yeats. None of her band mates or former co-stars attended our church wedding and we honeymooned over in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. The rapid wedding was a bold move for a conservative, confirmed bachelor like myself, who was an adjunct professor at U.C.L.A, a substitute teacher for the Los Angeles public school system, and a struggling writer/speaker. Thinking back on it now, I guess I assumed she had money, although I found out soon enough that she was virtually broke.

“This honeymoon is just about the end of my fortune, Baby Hughie,” she announced to me inside of the Sherlock Holmes Museum on Baker Street in London. I chuckled because I assumed she was joking, but she wasn’t.

The supermarket magazines had a field day with our photographs. They hurled unkind headlines about us like *The Superstar and the Substitute*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Tara and the Teacher*. Mercifully, we were promptly forgotten by the world and the media, but not before they accused her of being broke, bipolar and a drunk, and describing me as an overweight loser from Wisconsin and a want-to-be screenplay writer, who had flopped on Sunset Strip. The accusations were uncalled for and mostly untrue. We resumed our lives in California, barely scaring up the loot to continue living inside of her mostly empty fancy mansion off of rental property money from other homes she owned. I kicked in and ante-upped by holding on to my teaching gigs and also by selling an occasional article or story. The taxes eventually swallowed up the houses and we had to move into a low-scale apartment. The years passed and we were still in love. I wrote and taught while she smoked and walked. She was a good wife and I did my duties as a husband. On occasions, we cut loose and did our share of drinking and bar hopping, but neither one of us ever took to drugs.

Once we took a short weekend getaway trip to San Francisco, where we attended a Giants-Dodgers game and saw the 60s television pop band, The Monkees, in concert before the game. The word somehow got out that Tara O’Neill was in the house and she was soon ushered up on to the stage, where she joined Davy Jones in singing *Daydream Believer*. She looked and

sounded great and *Rolling Stone* magazine openly wondered if she was embarking on a comeback. Of course, there was no truth to the rumor, and the furor died down quickly.

In October of 2011, we finally vacated the west coast for Black Earth, Wisconsin, where I was now the sole owner of the Shannon's unlucky castle on the outskirts of the town in a neighborhood, where the other marginalized outcasts of the village had resided back in the day. The house wound up in my hands after the death of my oldest brother, John Francis. The surviving Shannon siblings, scattered far and wide, wanted no connection with the house of their collective shameful past. The term "white trash" hadn't been in popular usage in Wisconsin back when I was growing up poor and Catholic, so I hadn't been tarred by that brush. Even all of these years later, I feel that dreaded label didn't apply to the Shannon family. My father had worked regularly inside of a factory in Madison and provided for us. We always wore clean clothes, did our homework at school, and attended Sunday mass without fail or criminal records. If I was afraid that I would be greeted with hoots of "there's one of the poor Shannon tribe," my fears proved to be unfounded because I was ignored as though I had never existed. People did give my beautiful wife an eyeful; some wondering where they had seen her face before. One time, she was confronted by a nosey woman inside a grocery store, but my spouse denied her identity quicker than Peter denied Jesus in the Gospels.

"For a guy from the town the size of Mayberry, North Carolina, you sure don't know a soul in Black Earth, Hugh Whelan."

"I am as much of a stranger in a strange land as you are, Tara O'Neill Shannon," I quipped, adding, "I left this burg years ago for the army and I never came back except for a few weddings and funerals."

"You're a wandering soul."

"Now I have wandered back home to Black Earth, Wisconsin and nobody was here waiting for me."

"I'm a wandering soul alongside of you...and the house was waiting for the both us."

"At least we're not lost souls."

"Your sentiments are sappy and sweet, but I like being lost here in the woods alone with you, chubby."

The old house had two floors; we mostly lived on the bottom floor, which featured a parlor, living room, our bedroom, guest bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and closed-in porch that I converted into my study. Much of the old furniture from my childhood still cluttered up the place. We rented out the top floor to some students from the University of Wisconsin, who transformed the flat into the squalor and the party mess that could easily rival that Delta frat house in the movie *Animal House*. It was just our luck that one of our neighbors snapped a picture of us, the police and the evicted fraternity boys brawling on a windy march night, the end product appearing in every scandal sheet in the nation under headlines such as *Former Rocker Evicts Party Boys* and *Clamor Girl Now Old Hag*. I thought she looked sexy in her nightgown but I'm convinced I looked like a beached whale in my sleeping attire. Her facial expressions caught by the camera made her look like the *Landlady from Hell*. I looked like a bemused buffoon. The worst of the affair was that her identity was now exposed to the curious eyes of the residents of the city. I think the revelation bothered me more than it did her because she still went about her daily life as though nothing had happened. More directed hellos in her direction and stares in the pews at church didn't bother the former pop star as much as it did her reclusive husband.

Our luck took a nice turn for the better when an old Extreme Sensations number, penned and sung by Tara, was used in a Hollywood feature-length film that became a blockbuster, providing us with some sought after royalty checks, which we used to repair and refurbish our upstairs rooms. The extra space became her refuge from me and the outside world. It was where she could play records, read and write her poems for no one but me. I was lucky enough to track down low scale teaching gigs in Dane County, a community college situated in downtown Madison and public schools in the outlying sticks that needed a standby for a sick faculty member. I still pecked away at my creative writing pieces that occasionally found a home online, or in a glossy newsstand magazine. I was also sometimes a special correspondent, or a stringer, for a Madison morning newspaper. The two of us lived quietly and contently until her coughing fits became progressively longer and louder. She went cold turkey with the cigarettes, but the hacking continued unabated.

“I think it’s time to see a doctor, Hugh,” she spat out between attacks, it sounding more like a question than as a declarative statement of fact.

I only nodded my head, keeping a trained smile upon my lips, as I gently squeezed the hand of the woman who was my love and my life. I suppose I was guilty of expecting the worst before the x-ray results were in even, but I still felt shocked to my core by the negative report. The sickness had rapidly crept throughout her fifty-seven year-old body, making any chemo therapy a pointless and painful option.

We were private people living in our own private corner of Black Earth, Wisconsin. We felt no need to blab our woes to the ignored outside world. I rationalized that there were always folks worse off than yourself and that the cries of those in anguish would never cease until the planet Earth was nothing more than a burnt-out cinder, floating among the stars in the great cosmos. We vowed to one another to make the most of a horrible situation, savoring our final days together in the knowledge that we were running out of tomorrows.

Only our closest friends and relatives were informed about Tara’s illness and we both stressed that no more was to be said about it. Afterwards, the days of the weeks and months fell off of the calendar with an unnatural swiftness. The warmer months were better because we could sit on our sagging front porch and admire the night sky, wishing upon shooting stars, while listening to the music orchestrated by nearby forest crickets. We mostly talked about literature and history, the two of us shared an interest in all things Irish and of Ireland. We would retreat back into the living room and snap on the television set, seeking out old movies that featured the likes of Chester Morris, Cagney, Cary Grant Myrna Loy, the Marx Brothers and John Wayne. She popped the popcorn and I made the lemonade.

Tara rarely dwelled upon her past, merely touching upon it with passing short comments about places she had played or the actors she had worked with. I didn’t probe her with a needle to get her to divulge any secrets, and I certainly wasn’t keen to hear anything about the starting lineup of her past lovers. I kept my assumptions to myself and she returned the compliment by not pressing me for any intimate details about my rather boring history. I have now reached the conclusion that our marriage was all the better for the two of us staying in the moment and not looking backwards in time. She never displayed any bitterness, resentment or anger by the turn around in her fortunes.

“I enjoyed being on the top, chubby, but I knew it wasn’t going to last. I’d rather not grow old in public.”

“You’re still beautiful, Tara, even if you’re a bit too mouthy.”

“Chubby, indeed!”

We liked gently teasing one another and then following our taunts with hugs and kisses. I could see that my wife was fading away right before my very eyes. Her transformation made me love her all the more intensely. I held on tightly to her shrinking body as though I wanted to protect her from the hands of the Grim Reaper. I was fighting a losing battle.

The end came in the early evening of St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 2017, during a rainy and windy interlude after a beautiful spring-like day. We were cuddling together on the couch watching *A Quiet Man*, our favorite movie, broadcasted by Turner Classic Movies. We had been holding hands when I felt her grip go limp, then she turned cold. We haven't even reached the film climax yet when her life had reached its conclusion. I will never watch the movie again.

Family and friends from far and near came to the Catholic Cathedral in Madison for Tara O'Neill Shannon's funeral, some even flying in from Hollywood, Broadway and So Ho. Honestly, most of the people inside of the church were there only to gawk during the Requiem Mass for a celebrity from the long and distant past. There was also a slew of bothersome reporters and photographers from the local, as well as the national media. They had ignored Tara for thirty-five years and now, once again, she was front page worthy. The news hounds wanted a story laced with sex, drugs, alcohol, poverty and suicide. Perversely, they only received a story about an aging, quiet couple living in an old house in backwoods Black Earth, Wisconsin, living out their lives in peaceful dignity. They lost interest in her when Tara was laid to rest in the ground, but I shall never lose interest in you, dear lady. Thank you for being my lover!

The End

The Famine Irish in New York City
Part II
Saved by a Visionary Priest

by
Raymond D. Aumack

Although most certainly tired and poor, the Irish did not arrive in America yearning to breathe free; they merely hungered to eat. Largely destitute, many exiles could progress no farther than within walking distance of the city docks where they disembarked. While some had spent all of their meager savings to pay for passage across the Atlantic, others had their voyages funded by British landlords who found it a cheaper solution to dispatch their tenants to another continent, rather than pay for their charity at home.

And in the opinion of many Americans, those British landlords were not sending their best people. They became Manhattan's underclass. The tens of thousands of Irish seemed like a lost community. They were mired in poverty and ignorance. They were destroying themselves through drink, idleness, violence, criminal behavior, sexual deviance and illegitimacy. They were not like the industrious, Protestant Scotch-Irish immigrants who came to America in large numbers during the colonial era, fought in the Continental Army, and tamed the frontier. These people were not only poor, unskilled refugees huddled in rickety tenements. Even worse, they were Catholic.

What made them this way? Over a century of oppressive British rule denied them the opportunity to grow intellectually, socially, and culturally unlike their British oppressors and unlike the people of continental Europe. The Irish were denied their language, education, culture, and progressive human development.

Their Catholicism was a source of derision in Protestant America. It was, however, the only thing that forged a foundation on which they might build. However, because of British oppression it was only a shadow of the teachings and practice of Catholicism. In many communities in Ireland, the priest was the only one who could read and write. Irish Catholicism was theologically uninformed. The quality of faith depended on the local parish priest and that varied from priest to priest. Also being the only educated person in some communities led some priests to become rather

autocratic in their pastoral ministry. For instance, industry and the manner of doing business was already changing on the cusp of the Industrial Revolution. The priest had every opportunity to learn about industrial and social changes but rarely passed the information to his people. *“They really aren’t prepared for these changes.”* We heard something like this just over a century later at the close of Vatican Council II. In most instances, it was the priest who wasn’t ready for social and industrial change.

Many Irish were totally unskilled for the kind of labor force required in Manhattan. Competition for even the most menial jobs was intense because they were in competition with free former slaves. As I wrote in last month’s article, women were at a better advantage to enter the workforce as servants, cooks, nannies, and embroidery services.

After several years in America, many Catholic immigrants became sorely disillusioned. "American Dreams" of rich farmland and easy money evaporated in the run-down, neglected quarters of big cities and died during long hours working low-paying, backbreaking jobs. Yet sooner or later, many families managed to improve their economic situations, through luck, ingenuity, hard work, and—they strongly believed—help from God, the saints, and the Church.

Within a generation, New York’s Irish flooded into the mainstream of New York life. The sons of criminals were now policemen, the daughters of illiterates had become the city’s school teachers; those who had been the outcasts of society now ran its political machinery. The transformation was remarkable. There were no welfare programs; there was no job training. There was a moral transformation, a revolution of values. It came about because of the derisive characteristic of most of the Irish. They were Roman Catholics.

Dagger John

A clergyman was responsible for the cultural change that liberated New York’s Irish underclass from their self-destructive behavior. He was John Joseph Hughes, and Irish immigrant gardener who became the first Catholic Archbishop of New York. How he accomplished that can teach us volumes about how to deal with social issues in the 21st century.

Space prohibits me from exploring the details of his life. I can refer you to the outstanding new book by John Loughery, [Dagger John and the Making of Irish America](#). He was one tough man. Hence, the appellation given by New York’s Protestants and the city’s politicians and administrators., “Dagger John.” He also

signed his name with a cross before it, a practice common among bishops. Protestants would see in the cross the symbol of a dagger.

There are interesting components to Dagger John's career. He was rejected by the head of the Seminary, a French priest named John Dubois. He continued to work in the seminary gardens at Mount St. Mary's, at Emmitsburg, MD.

By a stroke of luck, Mother Elizabeth Bailey Seton frequently visited St. Mary's and was impressed by the gardens. She was a Protestant convert to Roman Catholicism and recognized in Hughes all the qualities that Dubois had overlooked.

When she learned of his story, she wrote a letter to Dubois recommending the uneducated Irish laborer for admission to the seminary. By this time, Mother Seton and the deep pockets of her wealthy family fashioned a prominent influence on American Catholicism. After her death, she was canonized as the first native-born American saint. Hughes was admitted to the seminary in September 1820 and was ordained a priest in 1826 for the Diocese of Philadelphia.

Hughes was recognized as a born leader and was a tireless and courageous crusader on behalf of the immigrant poor, especially the Irish. In the decade from 1820 to 1830 the Catholic population increased by 60 percent to 600,000. The new immigrants were mostly Irish, unskilled, country-folk with nothing in their backgrounds to prepare them for urban living. They encountered a relentless barrage of anti-Catholic bigotry that was disheartening and contributed to demoralizing and freezing the progress of their social development.

The nativists, as they called themselves, were highly organized anti-Catholics and included Protestant fundamentalists who considered the Catholic Church to be the work of Satan and superstition. Intellectuals considered Catholicism to be incompatible with democracy. These prominent leaders included names such as John Jay, John Quincy Adams, John Calhoun, Stephen Douglas, and P. T. Barnum. In Boston, a mob led by a congregationalist minister, Lyman Beecher, the father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, burned a convent to the ground. Church burnings were common. Samuel Morse tapped out rumors of Catholic attacks on liberty over his transatlantic cable. Books depicting sexual license in convents and seminaries circulated everywhere.

Hughes was outraged. He didn't want Catholics to be second class citizens in America as they had been in Ireland. He thought it his duty to not repeat the mistakes of the clergy in Ireland. He began a letter-writing campaign to every newspaper in the country, criticizing what he saw as a chauvinistic nationalism.

During the 1834 cholera epidemic in Philadelphia, which nativists blamed on Irish immigrants, Hughes worked tirelessly among the sick and dying, while many Protestant ministers fled the city to escape the possibility of infection.

After the epidemic subsided he wrote that the Protestant ministers distinguished themselves by their absence while the Catholic Sisters of Charity cared for the sick and dying without regard for their own safety.

Meanwhile, his nemesis, now Bishop John Dubois, who had been serving as Bishop of New York fell ill. Rome appointed Hughes as the coadjutor-bishop of New York, He was consecrated a bishop at old St. Patrick's Cathedral on Mott Street, the street where my grandparents lived a century later.

How Did He Change the Irish?

The first thrust of Hughes's crusade was to get the Irish educated so that they could benefit from America's limitless opportunities. He knew this firsthand from his own experience.

He quickly started a war with the schools that were administered at that time by the The public school society, a group unfriendly to Irish aspirations, was in practice a religious private Protestant organization. The Society received state funding for their schools. Hughes, with the help of the Jewish community, sued to get funding for their respective school systems. The outcome of the struggle pleased no one. The Maclay Bill of 1842 barred religious instruction from public schools and provided no state money for denominational schools.

Hughes then threw his energy into building a Catholic school system. Education for him was the priority. Build the schoolhouse first and the church afterwards.

Hughes' schools emphasized not just education but also a faith-based code of personal conduct that demanded respect for everyone. Parents had to attend meetings with teachers and do repair work and cleaning in the schools. The schools produced students who were capable of functioning in the mainstream of American life. By the end of his tenure, he had built one hundred Catholic schools. Not content to build primary and secondary schools, he founded or helped to found Fordham University and Manhattan, Manhattanville, and Mt. St. Vincent colleges.

The Famine Irish

In 1845, Hughes faced his biggest challenge. The potato crop failed completely in Ireland and the Great Famine struck, lasting to 1849. It resulted in the complete social collapse of Ireland and two million people left Ireland to come to the United States,

Canada, and Australia. More than six hundred and fifty thousand came to New York City.

In New York they took up residence in homes intended for single families. which were subdivided into tiny apartments. Cellars became dwellings, as did attics three feet high, without sunlight or ventilation, where whole families slept in one bed. Shanties sprung up in alleys. Without running water, cleanliness was impossible; sewage piled up in backyard privies, and rats abounded. Cholera frequently broke out in the Irish wards. No Americans, before or since have lived in worse conditions than the New York Irish in the mid nineteenth century. Those who stayed were predominantly the scattered debris of the Irish nation. Lost in a land where many did not want them, violent, without skills, the Irish were in need of rescue. This was Hughes flock, and he was prepared to rescue them.

New York's Irish formed an underclass; every variety of social pathology flourished luxuriantly among them. Family life had disintegrated. The lack of stable family relationships was fatally undermining the Irish community.

The immigrants crowded into neighborhoods like Sweeney's Shambles and at Five Points. The New York Irish were afflicted with poverty, alcoholism, and addiction to opium and laudanum.

An estimated 50,000 Irish prostitutes, known in flash talk as "nymphs of the pave," worked the city in 1850. Five Points alone had seventeen brothels. Illegitimacy reached stratospheric heights and tens of thousands of Irish kids roamed the streets. Violent Irish gangs brought havoc to their neighborhoods. Over half the people arrested in New York in the 1840s and 50s were Irish, so that police vans were called "paddy wagons." The gangs fought one another and the nativists.

Death was everywhere. In the Five Points area, one in seventeen died At Sweeney's Shambles, it was one in five in 1854. Life expectancy for the Irish in New York in the 1850s was forty years.

Respiritualizing the Irish

Hughes solution for his flock's social ills was to re-spiritualize them. He wanted to bring about an inner, moral transformation which he believed would solve their social problems. He put the ultimate blame for their condition squarely on the shoulders of a century of British oppression that robbed them of the faith of their ancestors and the cultural heritage that should have guided their behavior. That was the past. Now it was time to regain what was lost.

He bought abandoned Protestant churches in the Irish wards, formed parish churches, and sent in parish priests on a mission of urban evangelization aimed at giving the immigrants a faith-based system of values. He had his priests emphasize religious teachings perfectly attuned to re-socializing the Irish and helping them succeed in their new lives. It was a religion of personal responsibility that they taught stressing the importance of the sacraments, especially penance, (confession) not widely known among the Irish who emigrated during the famine, most of whom had never received a formal religious education. This had the ultimate result of the Irish taking responsibility for their own actions and it taught them to focus on their own responsibility in creating their misfortunes.

Hughes stated that the Catholic Church is a church of discipline. This seems to be one of his core beliefs. Self-control and high personal standards were the key. Hughes proclaimed they need to avoid sin. His clergy stated clearly that certain conduct was right and other conduct was wrong. People must not govern their lives according to momentary desires or instant gratification. They had to live up to a code of behavior that had been developed over thousands of years. This teaching produced communities where ethical standards mattered.

The priests stressed the virtue of purity. Sex was sinful outside of marriage, no exceptions. Packed together in apartments with sometimes two or three in a single room, the Irish lived in conditions that did not encourage chastity, or even modesty. The relentless crusade against promiscuity, with the strong possibility of out of wedlock births and venereal disease, began to take hold. In time, most Irish began to understand that personal responsibility was an important component of sexual conduct.

Alcoholism was a problem and Hughes promoted the formation of the Catholic abstinence society. In one city wide mission in 1848, over 20,000 people took the abstinence pledge. It also was effective in Ireland because about 40 years later, my grandfather took the pledge and kept it until the end of his life.

A religion of such discipline could have become a self-defeating gloomy affair. He encouraged a devotion to the Sacred Heart that emphasized a personal relationship with Christ. To a people despised by many, living in desperate circumstances, Hughes' Catholicism was upbeat and encouraging. Such a teaching was a bulwark against anger, despair, and fear.

A Role Model for Women

He put Catholicism's Marian doctrine at the center of his message. Women outnumbered men by 20%. The focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus, declared the importance of women. It encouraged women to take responsibility for their own lives, to inspire their men and their children to good conduct, to keep families together, and to become forces for good behavior in their own neighborhoods.

The nuns encouraged women to become community leaders and to play major roles in activities like fund-raising for the Church. These notions were radical for a male dominated society where women did not yet have the right to vote. In addition, Irish women and men saw nuns in major executive positions, managing hospitals, schools, orphanages, and church societies, sending another highly unusual message for the day. Irish women became important allies in Hughes war for values; by the 1850s they became forces for moral rectitude, stability, and progress in the Irish neighborhoods of the city.

In his parishes he encouraged support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and women's groups to help people with neighborhood concerns and personal problems.

Hughes worked hard to get jobs for his flock. The nuns in his parishes became employment agents for domestic work. The nuns encouraged women to open and run boarding houses for Irish immigrants and to become fruit and vegetable vendors. Irish women soon dominated New York's produce business. Some went on to own their own grocery stores.

Hughes formed the Irish Emigrant Society out of which the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank later emerged. They saved what little money they earned. That put them in a position to take loans to start businesses. Irish bankers guided the process to protect the debtors to become profitable. The society helped people find jobs in sail making, construction, carriage repair and maintenance, and grocery stores. The society encouraged men to good behavior on and off the job; bad behavior incurred the wrath of the Emigrant Society.

By way of charity, Hughes brought in services groups that had demonstrated success solving tough social problems elsewhere in the world. One was the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a group of laymen who provided services for the poor. They visited prisons, organized youth groups, and taught reading and writing.

For the 60,000 or so Irish children roaming the streets in packs, Hughes founded the Catholic Protectory, and antecedent to the famous Boys Town of Nebraska. Dr. Levi Ives ran the Protectory. He purchased a 114-acre farm, and built facilities for both

boys and girls. Ives' mission was to provide people religious instruction and education in the trades, he could raise children above their slum environment. The project was supported by free will offerings from the parishes as well as state and federal funds.

In 1850, because of the large number of Catholics in New York, the Pope, Pius IX, personally installed Hughes as Archbishop. This was also a tribute to the Catholics of America and particularly of New York. At this time Hughes planned a magnificent Cathedral, a sign to the Protestant elite, that Catholics also knew how to make New York City the greatest city in the world. It was also good for the morale of Catholics who would finance the project. No matter how poor, was not too poor to achieve something grand. The cornerstone was laid in 1858 before a crowd of 100,000. The only concern was the question of why the Cathedral was built so far out in the *country*.

In 1863, construction of the Cathedral was paused by the Civil War. Riots broke out over the draft procedures. At that time the wealthy could buy out of the draft. The poor were vulnerable because they could not afford it. The largest casualty rate came from the Irish youth who were assigned to the front lines and not trained as well as the Confederates. When the rioting broke out in the city, 1,000 died in three days. Also rumors spread that once the slaves were freed they would take Irish jobs and live off their taxes. The Irish attacked the Blacks, the Nativists, and by the third day, anyone who was still around. This was the tragic episode referred to by Ann Coulter in a recent article in Breitbart Magazine that generated a lot of publicity. It was a dark moment in the history of the Irish in New York.

Hughes summoned the rioting leaders to meet with him. He personally supported the war and railed against slavery from the day of his ordination. After his appeal, the leaders went back to their neighborhoods and the violence soon melted away.

Bishop McCloskey was saying a prayer for the dying as John "Dagger John" Hughes passed away on January 3, 1864.

Of course, despite the moments of sheer frustration, he had not failed. Just twenty years before, the Irish immigrants were licentious, desperate, drunkards who were considered a plague on New York City responsible for 60% of the crime in New York. By 1880s that was reduced to less than 10%. Three quarters of the police force were Irish. The Irish were the prosecutors, the judges, and the jailers.

By the 1880s, 60% of women and one-third of the men abstained from alcohol. The Irish sections of the city were known for their cleanliness, peacefulness, and order. The infamous Irish promiscuity was also gone. There were almost no Irish prostitutes

in the city and the wandering gangs of youth disappeared as well. Irish family life, formerly so frayed and chaotic, became strong and nourishing. Irish children entered the priesthood and the convent, the professions, showbusiness, and commerce. In 1880, William Grace became Mayor of New York. The Irish assumed control of City politics. The single hand that made the high quality of life happen was the hand of the Archbishop, John “Dagger John” Hughes. St. Patrick’s Cathedral was finished four years after Hughes’ death. Over a century later, the newly refurbished cathedral remains the iconic center of midtown Manhattan. How did Hughes know that the plot of ground that he bought would become the centerpiece of midtown New York?

Epilogue

I first met Dagger John in the wonderful novel of Peter Quinn, The Banished Children of Eve, and I didn’t like him. I thought he was one of those arrogant ecclesiastical bullies. Perhaps my friend, Peter Quinn did as well. However, through research for this article, I grew to genuinely appreciate him. There was nothing in his background or training, including his superficial seminary education (six years starting with less than a little primary school in Ireland). I marveled at his visionary and creative thinking, daring activity, and his openness to the Spirit. I marveled at his faith in Catholicism and how he transferred that faith to the illiterate, licentious, and desperately poor wild Irish. His life and his priesthood was an incredible adventure. There were vestiges of his parish programs in the parish that I grew up in and some still exist today. When I was still a child, I used to accompany my grandfather to missions at our Lady of Grace church in Hoboken. The church was filled with about 700 men, almost all Irish. As I recall them now, the missions preached the gospel according to John “Dagger John” Hughes. He was a man who knew the tremendous potential of the Irish immigrants. His faith in God gave him faith in his people. He took them at the lowest level of moral and human depravity and turned them into saints, scholars, leaders of commerce and politics, poets and patriots, leaders in war and peace.

For this article, I used many sources that were not the biographies of Dagger John. I am indebted to Julie Byrne, the Department of Religion, Duke University, who wrote lesson plans about the famine and the lives of the famine Irish in America. It was her paper that directed the first words that I wrote. My gratitude to William Stern, for an article in the City Journal, Spring, 1997, that provided the outline for this article. The many things I read contributed to this piece including letters from the famine Irish in America to the folks and family in Ireland. The history of the coffin ships that transported the desperate Irish across the ocean is another tragic story. Over forty thousand died during those trips and that is why they are called coffin ships.

The salvation of the New York Irish did not happen in .ne grand gesture.

There were certainly moments when Hughes tore even more hair out of his already bald head, moments when he ran to his liquor closet, moments when he fell to his knees in desperate prayer for desperate situations. There were many battles, some lost, some won. He laughed over the successes and wept over the losses. It was a gradual upward sweep but in less than a generation he built a sober and pure community of hard working people that became the center-piece of New York society.

The Coming Solution

In a July 4, 2017 *Irish Times* article by former Irish diplomat Ted Smyth, Mr. Smyth postulated a coming crisis in Irish-American identity due to a lull in Irish immigration to *na Stait Aontaithe* – the United States. Mr. Smyth sees that living connection to Ireland as pivotal to Irish American identity, and while not overtly advocating for an increase in Irish emigration to America, he suggests that the Irish government invest more in graduate Irish studies programs in the U.S. and young scholars in the field. While not arguing Smyth's basic point, I would suggest that the Irish government, if it does anything, go deeper than that. Irish identity will not be effectively fostered from the top down, but rather from the bottom up. Irish American identity should be promoted at the middle and high school level, as well as at the undergraduate and graduate level.

I consider my own Irish American identification and my own humble up-bringing when I suggest that Ireland and Irish America invest more in the secondary education of our youth. I have no graduate degree in Irish studies, though friends would describe me now as “obsessed” with Irish history and culture. The reason I have no such degree is that it wasn't until well after college that I became aware that there was any such thing as “Irish studies”.

My mother and her family are thoroughly Irish American. Her mother was a product of two Murphys, one with a McCarthy background as well. My parents visited Ireland shortly after my birth, and brought back a souvenir for me that I have to this day. We were introduced to the *seamróg* – shamrock – and we certainly celebrated St. Patrick's Day. My mother used phrases like, “screaming like a Banshee”, and, “you'll put us in the Poor House”. Her fondest instrument, both for cooking and for discipline, was a wooden spoon; and her other weapon of discipline, which one can imagine originating in a simple rectangular cabin in Ireland, was corner standing. Yet, as I entered high school and read of IRA exploits in the news, I had absolutely no idea who the IRA was or what they were fighting for, and neither did my mother. While the IRA understandably gets mixed reviews, if you can't explain the IRA to your children the “Irish” in “Irish American” isn't very strong. To be fair, though, American women in those days weren't expected to get too deep into politics, and early on my mother chose the itinerant life of a military spouse, so I didn't really grow up in an Irish American community. I did, however, attend American schools in a diverse array of locations, foreign and domestic.

In “The Real Irish American Story Not Taught in Schools” (*Huffington Post* blog, 14 May 2012), Bill Bigelow bemoans the almost complete omission of the Irish from American history text books. I am a high school educator, and he is not wrong. In my own education there were brief mentions of An Gorta Mór – The Great Hunger (Famine), and an equally brief acknowledgement of the “Know Nothings”. That was it. There was no discussion of the role of the Irish in the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, or World War II, or much of anything else for that matter. Even local Irish American greats like Bill Carrigan and John (Feeney) Ford were

never mentioned. Carrigan led the Red Sox (the local team) to two consecutive World Series championships, and Ford was the preeminent American film director of the 20th century.

Fortunately, text books are fast going out of style. Teachers have far easier and less expensive access to historical material through the internet. Perhaps, if anyone wants to promote Irish American identity they should do so by providing professional development (if not professional formation) opportunities for middle and secondary teachers. There are plenty of them with Irish heritage loitering about in the United States, and there is plenty of Irish and Irish American material for history, literature, language, and art teachers to sink their teeth into for illustration of their fields.

The primary objection to an Irish focus that I have heard from colleagues is that they do not see the “relevance” of Irish history and culture to today (and tomorrow). It is, not entirely without merit, suggested that we teach Arabic and Middle Eastern history instead, in light of the Somalian and Middle Eastern immigrants recently arrived in our communities. But there are tensions between newer Americans and some older ones; perhaps a study of the Irish and Irish America as a “neutral” example has some merit, too. And then, of course, there are the obvious connections: The Great (Irish) hunger with famine in Sudan; The Great (Irish) Hunger and the concept of “Environmental Carrying Capacity”; comparing the American Revolution (successful) with the 1798 Irish Revolution (unsuccessful); and the effects of global warming on an island country like Ireland, among others.

The classroom, though, is not the only place that Irish American identity can be promoted in the school. To take a page right out of Irish history, Irish or Celtic themed clubs could be organized at schools for a less formal exploration and experience of Irish culture and history. I did this last year with a small but dedicated crew in a high school, and we produced several educational displays, attended a Celtic themed concert, and shared our Celtic cooking. I had similar success in a slightly different format in an after-school program at the middle school that feeds our high school. These students experienced Irish music, art, food, and language which they would not otherwise have been exposed to. They now also know that there is such a thing as “Irish Studies” in college, an advantage that I didn’t have.

There are, I suppose, many reasons that different people might have an interest in promoting Irish American identity in American secondary schools. Ireland, of course, punches well above its weight in the world due to its diaspora; not the least them in the United States. Continuing a strong Irish American connection is in Irish interests. Irish and Celtic Studies programs at American universities will continue to want students, and it is middle and high schools that feed universities. It is a supply chain thing. Irish heritage centers in the U.S. , as well as Irish dance schools would also benefit from a strong Irish American identity. But there has to be something more. Not everyone has a strong Irish American community immediately to hand, so why promote Irish American identity?

For me, studying Irish language, history, and culture is more than a mere academic thing, and more than a merely social thing, though it is indeed both of those. For me, it is a spiritual thing. Being Irish for me started with documentation of my Irish ancestry. This began in the fourth grade, and culminated in a formal genealogy and accompanying biographies of the principal subjects of that genealogy. This, of course, led to a wider study of Irish and Irish American history, which I found fascinating, perhaps because it had been omitted from my formal education.

Then I discovered traditional Irish music, and it's amped up rock and roll versions. If you are at all amongst the living, Irish music and dance brings great joy to you. I am happy to report that I am very much amongst the living. Eventually, I found my way to an Irish American Club and an Irish American Heritage Center, and I knew that I fit in, and knew I was not alone in my Irishness.

My exploration of Irish language, history and culture helps to answer the question of who I am, though I determine who I am every day through my actions. History engages me with my ancestors and the conditions that they lived in. I have gained empathy for those people of today and tomorrow who are or will experience what my ancestors experienced. Learning the Irish language has opened windows of understanding and insight that only language can. I am closer to my ancestors, and the Ireland of today and tomorrow. The music and dancing, of course, makes all of this connection KINetic.

Ireland for me is not some far off fairy land, though anyone who has been there cannot deny its magic. Because the study of Ireland for me has led to spiritual fulfillment, I have persisted. I have found deep meaning. There isn't much I regret about my life; I have had adventures and travels that most people only dream about, and I have found what it is that makes my life worthwhile. I only regret that the educational infrastructure was not there for me to find it earlier so that I could have made an honest career of it. Maine, where I live, is not particularly known as an "Irish" state, yet we have at least nineteen Irish pubs and restaurants in all kinds of unexpected places. We also have an Irish, or at least Celtic, music festival or two. The people are here, where is the education in our schools?

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THIS DAY IN IRISH HISTORY - JULY

1st 1892 - Edward Carson sworn in as Solicitor-General for Ireland.

1916 - First day of the Battle of the Somme. The 36th Ulster Division sustains 5,000 casualties on this day alone.

1950 - The former British Representative, Gilbert Laitwaite, becomes the British Ambassador to Ireland.

2nd 1970 - Neil Blaney is cleared of conspiracy to import arms.

3rd 1918 - Lord Lieutenant bans Sinn Féin, the Irish Volunteers, the Gaelic League and Cumann na mBan.

1924 - Teaching of Irish to be made compulsory in schools.

4th 1921 - James Craig refuses to attend a peace conference in Dublin because De Valera had addressed the invitation to him personally instead of using his title of Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

1957 - The Ne Temere boycott at Fethard-on-Sea is debated at the Dáil.

5th 1922 - Cathal Brugha refuses to surrender to pro-Treaty forces and is badly injured.

1977 - Jack Lynch is elected Taoiseach.

6th 1907 - Irish state jewels are stolen from Dublin castle.

1946 - A new republican party, Clann na Poblachta, is founded in Dublin.

1953 - Sit-down protest by the unemployed in Dublin.

1962 - First ever episode of The Late Late Show.

1997 - Violence flares at an Orange Order march down the Garvaghy Road.

7th 1905 - Drunkenness (Ireland) Bill debated in the British House of Commons. Irish MPs object that it is offensive.

1913 - Home Rule Bill carried in the House of Lords, despite Andrew Bonar Law's attempts to obstruct it.

1966 - A new secondary education scheme is announced.

9th 1959 - The first twelve female recruits are selected to join An Garda Síochána.

10th 1914 - Provisional Government of Ulster meets for first time in the Ulster Hall.

1917 - Sinn Féin's Éamon de Valera is victorious at the East Clare by-election.

1927 - Minister for Justice Kevin O'Higgins assassinated by the anti-Treaty IRA.

11th 1901 - The Celtic, now the largest ship in the world, is launched in Belfast.

1921 - Truce in the War of Independence.

1938 - Three Cork harbour ports are returned to the Irish government.

13th 1922 - The Irish government appoints a War Council, including Michael Collins.

1962 - The Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant, arrives in Dublin.

14th 1935 - Sectarian rioting in Belfast leads to five deaths.

16th 1971 - The SDLP withdraws from Stormont.

17th 1974 - The Contraceptive Bill is defeated at Dáil Éireann.

18th 1951 - The Abbey Theatre in Dublin is burned down.

19th 1997 - The IRA declares a ceasefire.

20th 1982 - The IRA kill ten servicemen in bomb attacks on two parks in London.

21st 1914 - Buckingham Palace conference to allow Unionists and Nationalists to discuss Home Rule.

1972 - Bloody Friday: nine people in Belfast killed by IRA bombs in Belfast.

1976 - The UK Ambassador Christopher Ewart-Biggs is killed by the IRA.

22nd 1848 - Habeas Corpus is suspended so that the Young Irelanders can be detained without trial.

1957 - The Gough Monument in Phoenix Park is blown up.

1985 - The Virgin Mary is seen to move at Ballinspittle.

23rd 1803 - Robert Emmet's attempted Rising in Dublin.

1916 - Thousands gather at Phoenix Park to discuss British proposals to partition Ireland.

24th 1990 - The IRA kill three policemen and a nun in a bomb attack.

25th 1917 - Irish Convention meets for the first time.

1957 - A boy who was beaten at school is awarded £100 compensation.

26th 1914 - Erskine Childers and his wife land 2,500 guns for the Irish Volunteers at Howth.

28th 1927 - Ireland's first automatic telephone exchange opens in Dublin.

1957 - The Carlisle Monument in Phoenix Park is blown up.

29th 1848 - The Young Ireland rebellion in County Tipperary is a failure.

1915 - Republicans under Patrick Pearse take over the Gaelic League at its Dundalk Conference, forcing the resignation of Douglas Hyde.

1959 - The Department of Transport and Power is established.

31st 1893 - Gaelic League established by Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill.

1947 - The Soviet Union blocks Ireland's entry into the United Nations.

1969 - The halfpenny is withdrawn from circulation.

1972 - Operation Motorman begins in Northern Ireland.

1975 - Three members of the Miami Showband are killed by the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Irish Geography Trivia

In which county is Blarney Castle?	County Cork
What is the county town of Leitrim?	Carrick-on-Shannon
What is Killbegs, in Donegal, main industry	Commerical fishing
Lough Kee is in which county?	Roscommon
Name the river that flows through Belfast?	Lagan
Name the county town in Mayo that featured in John Ford's <i>The Quiet Man</i> ?	Cong
Name Mayo's county town?	Castlebar
Which County K has the Nore and the Barrow?	Kilkenny
Which town of Co. Antrim beginning with C has a name meaning 'rock of Fergus'?	Carrickfergus
Which K is Ireland's only inland city?	Kilkenny
Which E is the county town of Fermanagh?	Enniskillen
The villages of Drumshambo and Dowra are located in which Irish county?	County Leitrim
Athlone is situated at the southern end of which lake?	Lough Ree
Which Irish town name means "Ford of the Kings"?	Athenry
In which county is Roaringwater Bay located?	County Cork
Which of these towns is most Northerly - Ballyshannon, Letterkenny or Buncrana?	Buncrana
How many counties does County Tipperary border?	8
Which city lies where the river Lagan meets the Belfast Lough?	Belfast