

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE LATER YEARS TOGETHER (1946 to 1960)

AS their children left home, Bill and Mary continued to operate the farm but with a reduction in intensity. The rural economy improved and as the family moved away family expenses diminished. They now had the resources to live their lives the way they desired. Because of living through the depression, they had never developed an expensive lifestyle.

One of Bill and Mary's few indulgences was the periodical purchase of new Plymouth cars. This provided them much satisfaction after so many years of making do with older, secondhand cars. It was also possible for them to make some long overdue household improvements. The house had "indoor plumbing" installed in 1949. No longer was it necessary to empty the chamber pots. A central, natural gas fired, heating system was installed. No longer did the big dining floor register and the kitchen range heat the house. No long was it necessary to stoke the furnace and remove the ashes. A transcontinental natural gas line ran through the farm near the house. The original right-of-way agreement signed by Bill in the mid-1930's when the Northern Natural Gas Company laid the pipeline allowed for connections to be made for the farm at any time. Rural access to the convenience of natural gas was rare. Mary finally installed modern kitchen cabinets and replaced a few pieces of well-used furniture.

Bill and Mary's family was still the centerpiece of their lives. Every achievement, career move, trip, courtship and event involving the children was watched with intense interest and pride. As their children married and grandchildren arrived it gave them an expanded sphere of interest. The daughters-in-law were quickly incorporated into the family. Little familial distinction was made between children and their mates. Bill and Mary vicariously lived the lives of their children.

An expectation always existed that as the children became educated many of them would move to other locations to avail themselves of career opportunities that could not be found in South Dakota. After the ice was broken when Pat left home to join the army, there was not any emotional difficulty for Bill and Mary when the children moved away from home and the Yankton area. With good communications and regular visits, close contact continued to be maintained.

Bill was intensely interested in the details of the careers of his children. When they were away at school or had left school and moved to new locations they could always depend on a good questioning about their affairs when they came home for visits. He derived satisfaction from sharing in their lives. He knew that his and Mary's efforts and encouragement during their growing up years enriched his children's lives. Mary sometimes thought that Bill's pride in his children should be toned down a bit when he talked to friends about their accomplishments.

Mary was a prodigious writer. When her children left home she wrote each of them a multi-page letter every week. The letters were not family form letters – each was individually written. She also regularly wrote to others. Bill shared her interests in all family affairs but he expected his input to be incorporated into her letters. Mary maintained a desk with all correspondence carefully organized on it. Birthdays, anniversaries and holidays were always

remembered. Although she could type, she preferred to write long hand in blue ink with her clear and confident hand. She did not take kindly to people, particularly her own children, who were negligent with their correspondence. If she found out that any one ever neglected to write a proper courtesy note for a present or after a visit, she firmly brought it to the offender's attention.

If Mary had lived a few years longer when e-mail became prevalent, she would have had a field day using it.

Bill and Mary's affection was still evident at this point of their lives. Even if they sat quietly with each other the bond between them was obvious. Bill still kissed Mary each time that he departed from the farm.

Long distance telephone calls were always brief. For Mary they were too expensive for idle conversation. She had the old fashioned idea that long distance calls were primarily to announce deaths, births and catastrophes. When Mary initiated long distance calls it was always with a written list of points to cover. When each point was efficiently concluded and checked off, the calls were over.

Mary entered comments and observations on her calendar each day with metronome-like regularity for more than 40 years. The last entry was a few days before her death. The Travelers Insurance Company issued annual calendars with large open space surrounding each date. This is where Mary wrote her comments and observations. Later in life she took all of the saved calendars and typed the entries on sheets of legal size paper. The calendars provide a brief, matter-of-fact record of the mundane events of the day. If important events occurred she expanded the commentary. The entries revealed Mary's feelings of joy at times of celebration and despair at times of tragedy.

Following are selected entries from Mary's calendar:

10 Jan. 1950 - Bill's Birthday

17 Jan. 1950 - Dance at Odd Fellow's Hall

25 Jan. 1950 - Democratic (Party) dinner
14 Feb. 1950 - Altar Society meeting
7 Feb. 1950 - Went to John Deere Days (dealer promotion event)
12Feb. 1950 - Willowdale (school) carnival. Blizzard.
28 Feb. 1950 - Grandma Donohoe – 94th Birthday (She actually had a birthday every four years because of being born on 29 Feb., Leap Year. She lived past her 25th Birthday)
22 Feb. 1950 – Open house (for Bill and Mary's 25th wedding anniversary). Many people called. Served sandwiches, cake, cookies etc. Over 50 guests. Blizzard and closed roads kept many home. Mock wedding. Outlandish clothes. Pat held shotgun. Jack played wedding march. Bob sang. Ruth played flower girl, wore bathrobe. Wonderful, memorable occasion. Danced.
12 Apr. 1950 - Farmer/Businessmen's dinner
14 Aug 1950 - 4H club meeting
1 Jan. 1953 – Dinner at Grandma Donohoes. Francis received draft notice.

The calendar went on for 41 years noting phone calls, visits, funerals, trips, weddings, letters, events of the day and observations.

Bill and Mary lived with many fears about the welfare of their children. One of them was poliomyelitis - also called polio and infantile paralysis. This terrible disease put dread and fear into the households of America in the 1930's and '40'S. Theaters, swimming pools and parks were closed in the summer to avoid risk of exposure. The disease often killed its victims or maimed them for life. Tomb-like iron lungs were used for people whose chest muscles were attacked and their function destroyed. Many of the victims were children. Prayers were offered at churches throughout the

country requesting relief from the dreaded disease. It was a great day for mankind when vaccines were eventually developed to prevent this appalling disease.

In quiet moments together a frequent topic of conversation for Bill and Mary was the general development of their children. They wanted them to improve themselves constantly and rise to their capability limits but not in a “lofty, above the field of battle” sense. They wanted them to jump into whatever field they chose with both feet. If they muddied themselves, that was simply part of the process of development and learning. Theodore Roosevelt wrote a verse that summarizes their feeling on people’s active participation in the arena of life:

It’s not the critic who counts,
not the man who points out how the strong man
stumbled,
or where the doer of deeds could have done better.
The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the
arena,
whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood,
who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again
and again,
who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions,
and spends himself in a worthy cause,
who at best knows achievement and who at the worst if
he fails
at least fails while daring greatly
so his place shall never be with those cold and timid
souls
who know neither victory nor defeat.

As the children entered adulthood, a pattern for tenacity emerged that was later confirmed throughout their lives. If there had been a list in high school yearbooks for “The Longest To Hold On After Biting Into Something”, Bill and

Mary's children might have topped the list. Once their life paths were established they steadfastly stayed on them with singular, purposeful determination. Most of them had high energy levels and could study, work or pursue their interests "until the cows came home." Giving up was not an option. An analogy could be made to the principle of compound interest where a small endowment grows to a large amount if allowed to increase at a steady, incremental rate over a long period of time. The Lyons children were able to take their endowments and, as with compound interest, make them improve and grow over many years.

Some of the popular songs of the post war era were: *Mona Lisa*, *It's Only Make Belief*; *Blue Suede Shoes*; and *How Much Is That Doggie In The Window*. The wonderful big bands such as Guy Lombardo, Glen Miller (although he died in the war) and Harry James were overwhelmingly popular until the late 1950's.

Hit movies of the era were *Sunset Boulevard* - a story of cruelty and cynicism, with Gloria Swanson; *A Streetcar Named Desire* - a masterpiece of self-delusion, by Tennessee Williams starring Vivian Leigh and Marlon Brando; and *Asphalt Jungle* - a crime melodrama, directed by John Huston.

Soon after the end of the war, drive-in movies sprouted up all over the country. The non-censored "personal encounters" of the moviegoers in their cars were often far more compelling than the dramas on the screens. Jokes abounded about film projectors failing and most of the audience not noticing it until hours later.

Many fundamental political decisions were made after World War II that set the pace for a half century or longer. Much of Europe suffered in abject and pitiful misery among the ruins of their devastated cities. The Marshall Plan, a U.S. economic package, primed the pump for the recovery of Western Europe. The European Jews who were not already murdered by the fiendish Nazis were given a homeland

when Israel was established. The resulting turmoil due to the dispossession of the indigenous Arab people in the territory of Israel is still not resolved. The Irish people, after 800 years of oppression, finally took full control of their homeland in 1922 but without the six counties of Northern Ireland. The military and political consequences of this incomplete nationalization of Ireland are still a consuming issue. It became obvious that Russia, a great ally during World War II, could not be integrated into the evolving capitalistic plans of the democratic west due to fundamental political differences and the xenophobia of Russia's leaders. The decades long, costly, adversarial relationship that was defined as the Cold War began. The Cold War sapped part of the energy of the West and eventually bankrupted and destroyed Russia.

The public was also treated to less serious matters such as the hoola-hoop craze, drive-in movies, and the singing and suggestive gyrations of Elvis Presley. The American automobile industry ran amok when they turned out cars that looked like non-flying airplanes with their bombsite inspired styling and fantasyland tail fins. Television became widespread. Programming was often designed for the lowest intellectual strata of society. Television was dubbed the "great wasteland."

Bill and Mary had good health most of their lives with the exception of occasional surgery for various ailments. This all ended with a heartbreaking crash in 1959 when Bill was informed that he had cancer. Mary waited in the car in front of the doctor's office during Bill's medical examination for a suspected serious disease. Bill got into the car after the examination and said "I've got it!" They drove home in stunned silence. Bill valiantly fought his ghastly ailment through sickening radiation treatment but to no avail. Near the end, when he was about to return to the hospital, he asked that he be allowed to stay in his home at the farm until

the end. His life ceased in his own bed and bedroom in 1960 while he was surrounded by many of his family.

An entry in Mary's calendar on Sept. 18, 1960 says, "FW's (Frank, Rita and daughter, Kathleen) left at 9:00 A.M. (after a visit). Bill knew he would never see them again. It was very heartbreaking for all of us." Frank knew how hard his parting was for Bill because he did not walk with him to his car as he normally did. During the last parting, Bill confided in Frank with despair, "My life was just getting to a point of comfort and ease and now it is ending. What will happen to Mary?" Frank shook hands with him and tearfully left the house. He then returned to try to reassure him by telling him that Mary would be well cared for. Frank felt that his words were terribly inadequate. But he then thought, what words, other than the normal platitudes, could be said? And what words could possibly be expected to give one iota of solace considering the infinite magnitude of the event of death. Death is ultimately a totally personal matter - and it must be dealt with all alone!

Mary's sad entry on her calendar on October 26, 1960, the day of Bill's death, simply and poignantly states: "Bill rested easier. I thought he was unconscious but then I thought he knew me when I spoke to him. Father Lawrence (a Benedictine priest and friend) and Dr. Kleine here. As they left they said to call them again anytime. I felt Bill was dying. Someone called Father Lawrence back. We recited the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary. Just as we finished Bill was gone. Immediately Father Lawrence started reciting the Glorious Mysteries. This was the day my world fell apart. I went to bed after taking some potent rest pills given to me by the doctor. No need to stay up now!"

Bill's death was incredibly hard on Mary. They had a storybook relationship of love, respect, and achievement for more than 30 years. Each was an extension of the other. They exulted in each other's company. Mary used her iron will and self-discipline to face her new life without Bill. She

forced herself to become involved in community activities and services. She found the way to carry on. However, her intense pain from the loss of Bill stayed with her like a chronic headache or the remaining 33 years of her life.

Bill's death was also hard on the rest of the family. It was the first death of a direct family member. Bill led a good and unselfish life. He worked exceedingly hard to raise a family and prevail against difficult odds – and yet it seemed that he was unfairly deprived of his reward of personal enjoyment as he and Mary were about to enter the autumn of their lives. His death gave his children pause to think of their own mortality even though they were all near the prime of their lives.



Bill Lyons and his Friend, Leonard Holtzbauer, at a
Livestock Auction 1949



Bill Lyons in a Jovial
Mood Circa 1955



Drive-in Movie

Circa 1960

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE LATER YEARS WITHOUT BILL (1960 to 1991)

WHEN Bill knew he would not recover from cancer he worried about the future welfare of Mary but he was so sick and devastated that he could not undertake the required planning. The management of the family financial affairs and the farm had to be done by others. After Bill's death it became obvious to Mary that it was impractical for her to manage the farm and continue to live alone in the farmhouse.

Mary decided to move to Yankton to live in the large Donohoe house at 1103 Douglas Avenue that was then owned and occupied by Mary's sister Ann Donohoe. They lived there together for many years until the house became too big a burden to maintain. They then moved to a condominium. Mary and Ann were close all of their lives and for them to live together seemed like a natural move. In many ways it was, but it also presented some stress and conflict as they tried to mesh together their independent lives and strong wills.

After Mary's departure from the farm, Pat and Pearl occupied it with their burgeoning family. They rented it for the first few years. During that time they made several extensive capital improvements to the property so an arrangement had to be found for them to consolidate their mounting investments. After a family council, Mary sold the farm to Pat and Pearl. The farm remained important to Mary. She spent many hours visiting it. To her it was always "The

Farm". With Pat's youthful vigor and aggressiveness and Pearl's steadying hand, the farm immediately became a beehive of activity.

Mary's financial situation was good enough that she could live, although modestly, for the rest of her life without the need for paid employment. She had income from the sale of the farm and from town rental property that she had inherited from her parents. The rental properties included several offices and a seedy saloon that elicited some gentle family "ribbing" about her being a saloonkeeper. She later sold the property. A Social Security check also added to her income. During the last few years of Mary's life, earnings from Ann Donohoe's estate, provided additional income to her. Ann preceded Mary in death by a few years. The income from Ann's estate allowed Mary some welcome minor extravagances that were not always possible before.

After Bill's death, Mary decided that one of the ways to cope with her grieving was to become a volunteer in the community and her church. She started to actively participate in "Business and Professional Women"; "University Women"; "Sacred Heart Altar Society"; "Human Services Center" and "Sacred Heart Hospital Auxiliary". She attended Mass daily. She started taking annual vacation trips to places such as Florida, Arizona and Hawaii. When Frank lived in Germany, she traveled there for a visit. She continued to devote part of each day to writing letters and ensuring that no anniversary, birthday, holiday or other event in the lives of her family or friends was ever overlooked.

The state legislature passed a measure in 1947 giving women jury rights. In 1948 Mary was the first woman to serve on a jury in Yankton County.

Later Mary returned to volunteer, part time teaching at the nearby parochial school. She worked as an assistant to her granddaughter, Mary (Lyons) Gross, who taught the first grade. She gave private reading lessons to slow learners and children who missed school due to illness. She once

said, "If I have to read or hear 'The Little Red Hen' one more time I will go mad!"

The antics and pranks of the Yankton College students gratified Mary's sense of humor. The college was located across the street from her house. Early one morning she looked out her window across the street to Look Hall, a men's dormitory, just as the custodian led a cow out the side door. This was her kind of humor. Perhaps it evoked memories of her involvement in similar pranks many years earlier when she attended the same college.

Frank recalled Mary's sometimes-quixotic sense of humor when he opened an old file containing one of her St. Patrick's Day greetings. Its message read, "It's St Patrick's Day and you know what that means! It means wear your green underwear in case you have to go to the hospital!"

In 1979 May was nominated for "Business and Professional Mother of the Year." Her nomination document states, "She provided for the general well-being and development of her children by contributions to and encouragement of civic and community growth."

In 1964, Mary bought a new, white, Dodge Dart sedan. She was quite proud of the car and its unique push button gearshift mechanism. She took good care of it and drove it for nearly thirty years until a short time before her death. Near the end she lost her ability to drive very well and had several "scrapes". Once when she did not see a truck stop she hit it in the back. She explained that it was due to her car's faulty brake system. She never did admit that she needed to discontinue driving but the problem was finally resolved by one of the grandchildren "borrowing" the car. Mary told everyone that she would drive again soon when the grandchild no longer needed the car to go to school.

On Sunday mornings Mary held court at her home. She served breakfast rolls and coffee. Members of the local family came for an hour visit. Lively informal conversations covered all of the family and community news - until Mary

had something special to say on a subject that she thought was of general interest. Then she expected and got silence while she told her special news. Boxes of toys were available for the smaller grandchildren. At times there was such a “tangle” of children that it was difficult for a casual visitor to sort out who belonged to whom. Fortunately the instincts of the parents and children were good and at the exit door they were again properly matched up.

If out of town visitors were present, or it was a special occasion, Mary lined everyone up for a picture taking session. There was usually a little grumbling when Mary interrupted whatever else was going on to take the pictures, however after she was gone several asked, “Who will take the pictures now?”

When any of the family called on Mary late in the afternoon, they could be assured of being offered a “highball.” Glasses, whiskey and other drinking paraphernalia were always at hand. Mary drank sparingly but she liked the ceremony and companionship of a drink.

Mary saved every morsel of left over table food even after the need for such frugality had long passed. The garbage can seldom witnessed any food other than scraped bones, fruit pits and well-trimmed rinds. Each meal showed clear evidence of what had been on the previous day’s menu. Once Pat teasingly asked, “What’s for supper?” Mary facetiously replied, “There’s a dish in the refrigerator with three peas.”

It was always comfortable and relaxing to visit Mary’s home that she shared with Aunt Ann Donohoe. Aunt Ann was like a second mother to her nieces and nephews. She was an exemplary person because of her humor, intelligence, professionalism and sensitivity. She gave generous gifts to family students and newlyweds. She was an important part of the lives of her nieces and nephews.

In the late 1980’s and the 1990’s, the heirs to the original Donohoe farmland in Yankton were Jim, George and

Jerry Donohoe, the children of Uncle Francis and Aunt Ruth. They decided to develop the land for residential buildings. The town had by then grown to the edge of their farmland. They imaginatively named all of the streets after their grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles. Thus the streets had names such as James, Francis, Ella, and Mary Street. The original Donohoe farmhouse was sold earlier and is now a funeral parlor with many “unfortunate” architectural additions.

Some of the popular songs of the time were: *Blowing in the Wind*; *Puff the Magic Dragon*; and *Climb Every Mountain*.

The movies went through a dramatic change as the film industry matured and the rapid social changes of the 1970's occurred. Some of the movies of the times were, *American Graffiti* - the story of the mores and attitudes in a small California town; *E.T.* -, the story of a loveable, intelligent creature from outer space that was inadvertently left behind by his spaceship; *The Empire Strikes Back*; and *Star Wars* - which opened the flood gates for movie sequels and the sale of related toys and games. And could anyone ever forget George C. Scott's dramatic acting in *Patton* - where he defined the mythical warrior nature of General George Patton.

Mary claimed that her exact age was “uncertain” due to a mix-up on her birth certificate. When old records were later read they revealed the “uncertainty” was because she did not want to admit she was four months older than Bill. At a Donohoe family reunion, Bob referred to her age “uncertainty” by saying, “I do not know her age but I counted 91 rings on her trunk last night and I do know that her odometer has been around a number of times.”

At the same reunion, Bob recited “The Legend of O'Donoghue.” Some might say the boundaries between this recitation and provable historical facts were porous. For others who enjoy a good tale, speculation on authenticity is a

foolish pursuit. As the Irish sometimes say “A good story, even if of doubtful probity, will be half way across the county before the truth can get its boots on.” For those who enjoy feasts of words they can read the “Legend of O’Donoghue” in appendix A.

Additional colorful Lyons family reunion stories by Bob and others can be read by referring to Appendix B.

Mary, who was over 90 years old, made her contribution to the family reunion, on the helping arm of a son. She spoke from her carefully typed notes. Sadly she needed aid in keeping her place on the notes and reading them. She explained her age by saying, “I am older than I was yesterday but not as old as I will be tomorrow

Shortly before Mary’s death, she wrote on her calendar a series of depressing entries about Susan’s and her deteriorating health. She lived in despair and sadness and with fading hope for improvement for either of them. Even her indomitable will and determination and her prayers could not prevail near the end. Her last entry on 31 Sept. 1991 refers to “The Bombshell” (news that she would have to go to the Sister James nursing home, the place that she always dreaded). She held out nearly to the end living alone in her apartment with daily assistance from a hired neighbor and frequent help from her local family. She died in the Sister James nursing home in Yankton ten days after admittance. She hated being there and after eating her lunch one-day apparently decided to “give up the ghost”. She quietly faded into the deserved comfort of death.

Mary led a good and valuable life. It was unjust that at the end of her life she had to endure such unhappiness and misery. It seemed that the reward for such a good life should have been a graceful and peaceful end.

At Mary’s funeral, Bob gave a eulogy that captured the essence of Mary’s life. It included the recitation of a poem by Mary’s favorite poet, Emily Dickinson, that characterized death as a civil, dignified, horse drawn carriage ride with the

horses heads turned toward eternity. His eulogy concluded with this:

Well, after a few more summers and so many years, when the rich flute-like melody of the meadowlark announces the hours of our passing from these prairies, we will join her, our father, our dear Grandmother and Grandpa Donohoe, and hundreds of other Lyons and Donohoes beneath the Dakota sod. And we shall expect to find upon our arrival, a basket of freshly baked kolaches (a favorite prune filled pastry), handwritten name tags affixed with clothespins to designate our permanent (and) proper place in the Kingdom – and after a warm hug and kiss, we will hear her gentle inquiry as to why it took us so long to get there. We will have but one reply: 'Mother, we came as soon as you called and sent tickets for our flight.' Au revoir, dear good mother - (and) Leave the porch lights on 'til we all get in.

With Mary's death a major driving force in the lives of her family ended – and the community lost an exemplary citizen.

Mary was organized and articulate to the end. Several days before she died she said to Jack. "Is there anything else that you want to know – when I'm gone it will be too late." She also gave Jack a list entitled, "What to do after I'm gone." It enumerated items such as: stop magazine subscriptions; cancel cleaning service; find home for cat; and utility bill due the first of the month. At the family dinner in a restaurant after Mary's funeral, Jack stepped out of the room and paid for the entire meal. Mary had arranged for him, as executor of her will, to pay for it from her account.

As a fitting tribute to Mary, the diners overcame their grief at Mary's passing and soon the dinner became lively with jokes, stories of Mary, and discussions of plans for the

future - just as Mary would have wanted it to be. To the brothers the slow, unspoken realization settled over them that they were now the family elders.

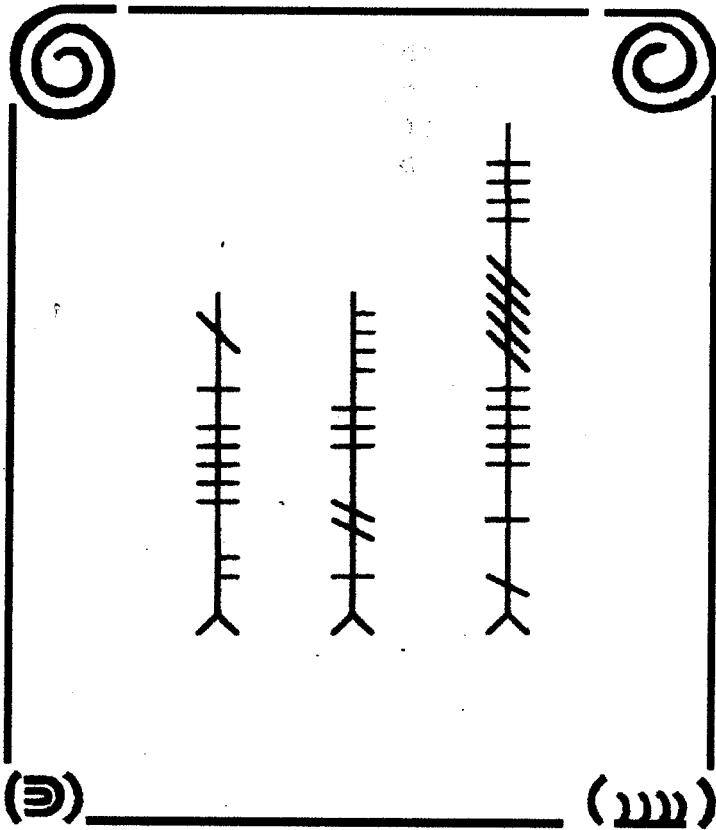
Some started to reflect on the considerable legacies left by Bill and Mary. It prompted them to start thinking about their own legacies and, in the time left to them, what they should do to make them as worthwhile as possible.

Several years after Mary's death Frank attended a business seminar. As was typical at the end of such seminars, a motivational speaker discussed the personal side of the attendees' business and professional lives. The speaker asked the participants to write a list of the most influential people in their lives. Frank first wrote a list of his teachers, bosses, and friends and famous figures. He was then struck with the overwhelming realization that Mary had provided more of his foundations than anyone else. The rest of the people on his list had only influenced the more superficial aspects of his life.



Mary's family . Back row – Pat, Tom, Jack and Gene.
Front row. Bob, Mary, Susan and Frank Circa 1979

OGHAM ALPHABET AND CELTIC SYMBOLS



I close the book with a bit of Irish whimsy. The above graphic recalls Bill and Mary's ancient Irish heritage. The

book title, *William and Mary*, becomes *Liam agus Maire* when translated into the Irish-Gaelic language. I wrote it in the twenty letter Ogham (pronounced “*Oh-yam*”) alphabet which was used in Ireland in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Ogham is written from bottom to top and left to right. The word *Ogham* is derived from the Celtic word for the god of literature and eloquence.

In the corners of the graphic, I showed the far older symbols of the Celts of 3500 BC – upper left, *dawn or beginning*; upper right, *dusk*; lower left *day’s end*; and lower right, *darkness and departure to the “Otherworld”*.

Throughout history, the centerpiece of the rich Irish culture was the Irish-Gaelic language. The language and the culture flourished largely as an oral traditional. The Ogham alphabet and Celtic symbols were limited in application to recording important names and events.

EPILOGUE

A public park sign reads, “Leave The Park a Little Better Than You Found It”. A paraphrase of this sign describes Bill and Mary’s lives - “They Left The World a Little Better Than They Found It.”.

Their lives could be characterized as the brief stewardship of their long, continuing hereditary lineage. They knew if they acted passively during the time of their stewardship they would leave a short-lived and negligible legacy. If they could pass on to their children wisdom, passion for continuous improvement, excitement for joyous living and a process for rational thinking then they would have left an enduring legacy. This they did.

Readers of this book may think that Bill and Mary, at certain times of their lives, were too easily satisfied and they settled for limited life objectives compared to the culture of current times where no bounds exist due the circumstances of birth or social position. Bill and Mary still carried with them some of the attitudes and beliefs of an earlier time. They knew that their forbears had experienced forced abandonment of their ancient and noble language, religious persecution, starvation, deprivation, eviction, and serfdom. They knew that a generation earlier, in certain American cities, employment signs were displayed that read, “No R.C.’s (Roman Catholics) or Irish Need Apply.” They were aware that many Americans were still disenfranchised from the promises of the United States Constitution. To Bill and

Mary a major improvement in life was simply the opportunity for “getting an even break.”

What would Mary think when she reflected on her life? The author will speculate on how she might answer this question. She would think that her faith and practice of Catholicism was the right spiritual path to have traveled but she would have preferred more flexibility and wisdom by the Church hierarchy as it faced modern issues

She would have applauded and welcomed changes that occurred in the world such as new freedoms for women, opportunities for better education, and improvements for the down-trodden. She would have regretted that the rampant liberalization of society was often done at the expense of respect for traditions and civility.

She would certainly think she was blessed to have had an ideal mate whom she loved without reservation and children in whom she took inordinate pride.

She would have challenged the Lord for taking Bill and Susan away from her so soon. She would have despaired as she reflected on the need to have suffered such anguish and unhappiness at the twilight of her life because of Susan’s lengthy illness and almost unbearable death.

She might occasionally chide herself for showing too much “intensity” when confronted with the smaller annoyances of life – but this she could offset this with the knowledge that she was a foundation of granite when she was required to deal with life’s “big pot holes”.

Mary would probably think she had fulfilled most of the role that she had pictured for herself as a bright and ambitious young woman. If she had control of her book of life she would not rewrite many passages or tear out many pages.

A line written by Tennyson could be an epitaph suitable for Mary’s grave - “To strive, to seek, to find - and not to yield.”

And what would Bill think when he reflected on his life? The author will also speculate on a suitable answer to this question. Bill would think he had the opportunity to live in civilization's greatest century as it changed from horse and buggies to jet airplanes. He would have felt relief that the hardships and stresses of the Great Depression were finally past and hope that the processes of government and society were in place so it would never happen again. He would hope that the horrors of World War II and the awesome threat of atomic warfare would continue to prevent future world wars.

If Bill tried, in retrospect, to write a criterion for choosing his life's mate, it certainly would have described Mary in almost every detail.

Bill would totally share Mary's opinion that they were blessed with children who fulfilled most of their hopes for them.

When Bill reflected on Mary's expanded range of interests and his children's enlarged stage in life due to their education, he would have regretted that his education had been truncated because of his family circumstances.

Bill would be pleased that he is still, in the minds of his family, the rightful occupant, with pipe in hand, of his customary chair at the head of the big table on the summer porch.

When he reflected on his life he would have thought that he indeed did "get an even break."

Bill's epitaph could read, "He was ready - when the pale horse came."

As Bill and Mary occupy their place in the next world and reflect on their stewardship of their heredity lineage in this world, they probably will be satisfied that they performed well and left an enduring legacy. They will likely conclude that they grew to the dimensions of the picture that they envisioned for themselves so long ago at the beginning of their lives together.

APPENDIX A

THE LEGEND OF O'DONOGHUE

(Presentation by Bob Lyons)

On July 13, 1986 at a Donohoe family reunion in Yankton, South Dakota, Bob Lyons recited the following:

Among the memorable accomplishments of the Donohues`, and the pleasures imparted by them to the world, none was more enjoyable to me, as what I received each day in 1955, conversing at lunch with my Grandmother Donohue, while I attended college across the street from her home at 1103 Douglas Avenue in Yankton. It was from her that I first heard The Legend of O'Donoghue, the ancestral father and Prince of us all, who rode his milk-white horse around the lake of Killarney in Ireland. This tale is still told in the south of Ireland not far from West Meath, where Michael Donohue came in the 1840's – and now all who bear his name shall hear *The Legend of O'Donoghue*.

In an age so distant that the precise period is unknown, a chieftain named O'Donoghue ruled over the country which surrounds the romantic Lough Lean, now called the lake of Killarney. Wisdom, beneficence, and justice distinguished his reign, and the prosperity and happiness of his subjects were

their natural results. He is said to have virtues; and as proof that his domestic administration was not the less rigorous because it was mild, a rocky island is pointed out to strangers, called "O'Donoghue's Prison," in which this prince once confined his own son for some act of disorder and disobedience.

His end – for it cannot correctly be called his death – was singular and mysterious. At one of those splendid feasts for which his court was celebrated, surrounded by the most distinguished of his subjects, he was engaged in prophetic relation of the events which were to happen in ages yet to come. His auditors listened, now rapt in wonder, now fired with his indignation, burning with shame, or melted into sorrow, as he faithfully detailed the heroism, the injuries, the crime, and the miseries of O'Donoghue descendents. In the midst of his predictions he rose slowly from his seat, advanced with a solemn, measured, and majestic tread to the yielding surface of the lake, and walked forward composedly upon the water's unyielding surface. When he nearly reached the center he paused for a moment, then, turning slowly around, looked toward his friends, and waving his arms to them with a cheerful air of one taking a short farewell, disappeared from their view.

The memory of the good O'Donoghue has been cherished by successive generations with affectionate reverence; and it is believed that at sunrise, on every Mayday morning, the anniversary of his departure, he visits his ancient domains: a favored few only are in general permitted to see him, and this distinction is always an omen of good fortune to the beholders; when it is granted to many it is a sure token of an abundant harvest – a blessing, the want of which during the prince's reign was never felt by his people.

Some years have elapse since the last appearance of O'Donoghue. The April of that year had been remarkably wild and stormy; but on Mayday-morning the fury of the elements had altogether subsided. The air was hushed and still; and the sky, which was reflected in the serene lake, resembled a beautiful but deceitful countenance, whose smile after the most tempestuous motions, tempted the stranger to believe that it belongs to a soul which no passion has ever ruffled.

The first beams of the rising sun were just gilding the lofty summits of Glenaa, when the waters near the eastern shore of the lake became suddenly and violently agitated, though all of the rest of its surface lay smooth and still as a tomb of polished marble, the next morning a foaming wave darted forward, and, like a proud, high-crested war-horse, exulting in his strength, reached across the lake toward Toomies mountain. Behind this wave appeared a stately warrior fully armed, mounted upon a milk-white steed that sprang after the wave along the water which bore him like firm earth. The warrior was O'Donoghue, followed by numberless youths and maidens linked together by garlands of delicious spring flowers, and they timed their movements to strains of enchanting melody. When O'Donoghue had nearly reached the western sod of Lake Killarney, he suddenly turned his steed, and directed his course along the wood-fringed shore of Glenaa. Proceeded by a huge wave that curled and foamed up as high as the horse's neck, whose fiery nostrils snorted above it. The long train of attendants followed on with unabated fleetness to their celestial music, 'till, gradually, as they entered the narrow straight between Glenaa and Dinis, they became involved in the mists which partially floated over the lakes, and faded from the view of the

wondering beholders; but the sound of their music still fell on upon the ear, and echo, catching the harmonious strains, fondly repeated and prolonged them in soft and softer tones, 'till the last faint repetition died away, and the hearers awake as from a dream of bliss.

And so - I first heard *The Legend of O'Donoghue* - which I pass on to you. Next Mayday, be alert to his milk-white steed in the rising sun - when O'Donoghue revisits the favored few.

APPENDIX B

LYONS FAMILY REUNION STORIES

NEW EVIDENCE OF AN EARLY LYONS ARRIVAL IN AMERICA (an “apocryphal version”)

By Bob Lyons

I have discovered new evidence in Boston, although disputed by some, it is believed by many, and certainly by those who would know me well, that the first Lyons in fact came to America in 1620 as a stowaway on the Mayflower with the Pilgrims. Things had been going from bad to worse under the English so young Jonathan O’Liathain, as the Lyons’ were called then, in the seventeenth century was sent on ahead to scout out other options in New England. When Jonathan arrived at Plymouth Rock he peered out of a porthole to an encouraging site in the clear, clean New England sky. Smoke signals were being sent to the approaching Mayflower and the signals read:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door”.

This message was being sent by the Wamponag Indians of the Bay Colony to welcome the new emigrants from Europe.

Jonathan did not desire that the stringent, suffocating Puritan culture would become his regular way of life so, discouraged, he decided to return on the next boat to Ireland which he did and gave counsel to the waiting O’Liathain (Lyons) and Phelan (Whelan) chieftains in County Waterford that they should wait until conditions became more favorable before making the permanent voyage to the new land - so wait they did for 200 more years until their anguished spirits and spent bodies could endure no more and in 1846 in the words of Yeats, “Out of Ireland we have all come, great hatred, little room, maimed us at the start”, but with Irish wit, wet and dry, to the banks of the Missouri River nearby, have we all come this day and survived to again tell the tales upon which we thrive.

THE MAGIC OF WRITING

By Ann (Lyons) Frye

One year I decided to give my parent’s a surprise St. Patrick’s Day party. I had just recently discovered the magic of writing and mailing things. If I wrote a letter and put a little stamp on it, wonderful things happened as if by magic. I wrote invitations and sent them to people who were nice to me such as the mailman, a teacher, and the garbage man – people who were not necessarily my parent’s friends. I made it clear that it was a surprise party. The day of the party arrived. It was a day that my little sister was ill and quite fractious as 20 guests arrived unexpectedly as we sat down to dinner.

My parents were bewildered but I was delighted and in seventh heaven to learn the power of writing. My father’s charm and easy-going manner saved the day and everyone had a marvelous time.

PRAYERS

By Peggy (Lyons) Harrington Thornhill

Peggy Harrington Thornhill wrote a series of stories for her grandchildren *“who will never see or live in or among the things that my generation has seen and done.”* Peggy spent the summers of her youth on the Lake County, South Dakota farm (near Madison) of her Irish grandparents **Kathryn Lyons** and Maurice Harrington from the late 1920s until the mid 1930s when they *“lost their farm to the Three D’s... Dust, Depression and Debt”*. Peggy’s great gandparents, **Jeremiah and Ellen Lyons** of Co Waterford and **John and Mary Theresa Harrington** of Co Kerry migrated during the Great Famine. Their families homesteaded in Dakota Territory. **Kathryn Lyons Harrington** was the sister of William F. Lyons (Sr).

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*I have spread my dreams under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams* W.B.
Yeats

My grandmother, Kathryn Lyons Harrington, was a *seanachie*, an Irish storyteller. Her stories bounced with a rhythmical swing and could sparkle with buoyant enhancements. She was a grand wordsmith who filled me with wondrous stories. If you questioned her with "is that really true" she would turn deep, blue eyes, as bright as the North Star, in your direction, and like the Bard softly purring, she would coax you with a Celtic lilt. I can still hear her voice:

"Sure and give me your hand and together we will

explore God's wondrous Land; this wondrous Land that is the blood of mankind; this wondrous Land that creates the marrow in the bones to strengthen mankind; this wondrous Land that makes the soul sing with joy. Each day holds an adventure and we will slip down the boreen into the forest and, anointed with the grace of wildness, we will race rivers as they laughingly flow. We will embrace the trees with their lofty, leafy arms painting a tapestry of shadow and light; we will search the purple foxglove for the fairies who live in their blooms; we will taste the tingling nectar of the wild wind and evade the whirlwinds of the wind fairies; we will smell the heavy, heady earthiness soft underfoot and step lightly around the lone white thorn bush. We will roll in the sweet, green grass and, remembering Ireland, not trod on the hungry grass*; we will listen for the music of the fairies that is somewhere, nowhere, beyond the horizon or in the sky and all about you, softly playing on the strings of your heart wild sweet songs that throb with pain, sounds that warm the blood of your heart and your feet spring into wild jigs and reels. We will listen closely to the words of the birds, the animals, the plants and bushes and to the ancient stories of the Ogham stones; we will sail from the forest's arms to the blue, blue skies and sink into cloudscapes that have no equal on earth and gaze in wonder at prairie sunsets on fire.”

Think of the imaginative ability of this South Dakota prairie farm woman, the daughter of Irish immigrants, who could stimulate the imagination of a child in this fashion! This caretaker of the soil spoke lovingly always of her country and its wondrous Land or Mother Earth. She always spoke of the Land in capital letters, as did my grandfather, Maurice and they were unabashedly patriotic.

I blamed the Land for their toil worn bodies; I blamed the

Land for quenching the dreams in their eyes; I blamed the Land that prompted hope each spring to cause their spirits to soar and say 'this year t'will be different as we will get a crop'. I blamed the Land for letting their top soil blow away with the hungry wind; I blamed the Land for lack of rain that made dust storms and the noon day turned dark as dusk; I blamed the Land for the invasion of grasshoppers with their voracious appetites that stripped the fields; I blamed the Land for their dreary retirement after the mortgage and taxes took possession of THEIR FARM LAND.

And yet, despite all this on-going and approaching tragedy, my grandmother taught me to love this wonderful country that welcomed my great-grandparents and to look for beauty on the prairie on the Land around me. At times, she could tease the bitterness out of me and force me to look with her eyes at the wheat fields moving languidly like molten gold in the warm afternoon sun; to hear the tall ripening corn rustle as the wee fairies ran freely around the stalks; to watch the beauty of the fruit trees from their lovely fragrant blossoms to the ripening of their gleaming fruit. Grandmother taught me to study the billowing cloud-studded skies and discover humorous stories with the leading roles played by neighbors, friend or relatives in their caricature cloud formation; to listen to the wondrous songs of the birds of the prairies -- the meadow lark, the bobolink, the red-headed black bird, the robin, the blue barn swallow, the wrens and sparrows; and we would laugh as we discovered quirks or personalities of neighbors, friends or relatives in the various farm animals.

Grandma's words would empower me to feel the exhilaration of a prairie thunder storm as she hastened from room to room sprinkling holy water and then, with lighted holy candle, we must retreat to the sod basement until the storm passed; to taste the vegetables fresh from the garden swimming in golden pools of freshly churned butter; to taste

and smell fresh bread from the oven spread with brown sugar and thick cream skimmed from the crocks of milk sitting in the basement. Her faith in prayers and the rosary was unshakable. When I would object to spending the length of a rosary on my knees and tried to slip into a sitting position in a chair she would cast steely, blue eyes at me and tell all the reasons that God listened more closely to prayers said on one's knees ... rather than sitting lazily in a chair. And the long, long, long list of people that she asked God to bless. I would be squirming as I figured we were finally nearing the final Amens and then she had to remember this long list of people.

We "God Blessed" every marriage and every birth for miles around. We 'God Blessed' and asked God to guide the various presidents and governors, particularly the Republican politicians. Business deals and bankers were prayed for but bankers only if they were evaluating a loan. However, as I grew older I learned to listen closely to the list as it was like a newscast of friends, neighbors or relatives. The sick List included the very sick, the feeling poorly and the under the weather. You knew the prognosis of their illness as most names eventually hit the God, We Thank You List. Occasionally, their names hit the Repose of the Souls list.

I rarely missed such nuances and I would try to act casual and uninterested as I raised my highest antenna for all new problems. "God Bless Mr. and Mrs. So and So and help them work out their problem." That one was a puzzler until the Thank You list included a "Thank you, God, for getting Mr. & Mrs. So and So back together again." Many of my favorite people were listed as "God Bless Tom, Dick or Harry and his problem." That remained a mystery for a long time until a few, not many, begin to hit the Thank You list with "Thank you, God, as Tom. Dick or Harry has taken the

pledge." Also, it was not unusual for a sick farm animal to be included in our evening prayers. Often, I was surprised at the people on the list. For instance, if the evening skies looked foreboding we had to pray for all the people at sea. This grand lady had never seen the seas and I was unaware of fishermen relatives but she was keenly aware of their welfare.

I was finally able to reach a higher level of understanding when I mastered the body language that accompanied the words. If Grandma said words in a hushed voice, arched her eyebrows and gave a glance to Grandpa, then the subject had deeper meaning than the words alone conveyed. Praying became fun when I learned that the post-rosary sessions – which at first seemed to be “dull adult talk” - were conducted according to my grandmother’s singular codification system. The code was kind of an improvised Dewey Decimal System as applied to sins, human foibles, acceptable behavior, good and bad, religion, crop reports, political views, and economic trends. Grandma’s code had an advantage over the Dewey Decimal System – it did not shy away from opinions and value judgments. I eventually broke Grandma’s code after I applied intuition, diligence and imagination. I learned that the lives of the relatives and neighbors were not as tranquil and dull as I had previously thought.

**hungry grass*... a spot in Ireland where some poor wretch died of starvation.

APPENDIX C

CONDITIONS IN IRELAND AND

AMERICA IN 1845

(Excerpt from *The Nunda Irish* by Bill McDonald)

The sailing of [Jeremiah and Ellen Lyons] from Ireland to America was to be in late March 1845, a time when the North Atlantic is known to be especially rough, stormy, cold and forbidding. Very few sailings were made at that time of year, partly because of these conditions, but even more because of the fact that most sailings were to Quebec, which was locked in ice throughout the winter. It was much easier to get into Canada than it was to get into the United States. Another Canadian port, St. John's New Brunswick, was also used. St John's was ice-free a little longer than Quebec was, but was smaller and more remote. The British government did as much as possible to encourage emigration to Canada because Canada needed settlers, while Ireland was overcrowded. England was very anxious to promote Irish emigration to Canada to relieve the pressure on England, many of the Irish poor were crossing to England and lowering the standard of living of the working man there.

The remaining population of Ireland in the early 1700's, after Cromwell's punitive measures had taken their toll, was only about half a million [Some histories say a little over 2 million people] . By 1840 this had risen to about nine million, and no industrial base had appeared to support the increase. The huge increase in population was seen as a ticking time bomb, but the Irish people strongly resisted all efforts to promote emigration. To leave Ireland was seen as a fate almost worse than death, a terrible exile. The Irish race of that time was one of the most gregarious human societies ever seen. Their joy was to share life with each other, to sit together and talk and joke, to commiserate with one another when there were aches and pains, to hold fairs, to dance. Often, during warm weather, they would gather at a crossroad with a fiddle and dance the whole night away. In

winter, they would do the same at someone's cabin, after carrying all of the furniture (such as it was) outdoors.

Irish hospitality was legend, any neighbor or stranger who happened by was urged to share the pot of potatoes. They lived in tiny mud huts, usually with a manure pile outside the door, most of them were dirty and illiterate, but they had potatoes to eat and turf to burn, and each other. Farms had been divided and divided again as the population boomed, and now they were crowded together on these tiny plots, and had developed a society to fit. Some of them were destined to become prosperous mid-west American farmers on huge tracts of land who bemoaned the loss of the old way. It was a sorry country, they thought, where one had to make do with neighbors who lived a mile away.

The effort to encourage emigration to Canada was systematized after 1807. Up until then, Britain depended upon Northern Europe for timber, and this was a very large business. As a result of a victory and a treaty by Napoleon, this source of timber was cut off, and had to be replaced by timber from North America. A huge increase in North Atlantic shipping came about from this, and return cargo was needed for these ships. The ship owners and the government hit upon the idea of promoting emigration by offering cheap fares for passengers on these returning ships. As time went on, revenue from the passenger business exceeded the revenue from carrying timber, and the passenger traffic became a sort of subsidy for Britain's timber business. There were many problems with the program because the ships were in no way set up to carry passengers, many emigrants suffered terrible hardships as a result.

The government responded by passing laws that put requirements on the ships, but this resulted in higher fares that few prospective passengers could pay. A series of laws followed, alternately increasing and decreasing the requirements as this or that faction gained power. One of the biggest arguments was over food, at first the ships provided

none at all, passengers were expected to bring their own. This did not work well at all, partly because the booking of passage came to be handled by “passage brokers.” These brokers painted a rosy picture of emigration in order to drum up business, but many of the brokers were unprincipled, heartless scoundrels who preyed on the poor and the ignorant. Many emigrants came aboard ship without adequate preparation for such a voyage, and lost their lives in the bargain. Beyond this, ships were often not seaworthy, and many were manned by captains and crew that were often drunk.

Many emigrant ships sank, records for 1834 are said to disclose that seventeen emigrant ships were lost in the St. Lawrence and that 731 emigrants drowned. Eventually the law on food came to be that the ship was required to carry seven pounds of food per passenger, not enough to even sustain life for most voyages. The bulk of the food was expected to be brought along by the passenger as “ship store”.

In spite of the problems, these enterprises grew. The 100 ships, or fewer, which had plied the North Atlantic for the timber trade at the turn of the century had grown to 2000 or more by 1845. The continued exhortations of the passage brokers, combined with the economic disaster that was Ireland, had made some small inroads that reduce the prejudice against leaving Ireland. Emigration in 1844 was estimated to be 68,000, a small number when compared to the torrents that were soon to follow, but still a big increase from the 5000 or so a year in 1800. As time went on, England found another pressing reason to encourage Irish emigration to Canada. Many Irishmen were coming to England, some came alone just to look for work, but more and more were coming with their families to stay. It appeared that England would not be able to absorb the flood if it increased further, and there were dire predictions that the

peasant of England would be reduced to the standard of living already being inflicted upon his Irish counterpart.

The passenger trade to the New World was not confined to the Irish. New Brunswick, in particular, was an attractive area because of its good ports and growing timber industry, and many came there from Scotland as well.

Although the Irish were encouraged to come to Canada, most of them did not want to go there, the relatively small group that was willing to emigrate at all wanted to go to the United States instead. It was much more difficult and expensive to emigrate to the U.S. than it was to go to Canada. The U.S. economy was booming at that time while Canada was lethargic, the United States was seen as [a] busy, bustling land of opportunity. The Governor-General of Canada is quoted to the effect that the British side of the line seemed to be waste and desolation compared to the prosperity on the American side. The “ancient” city of Montreal was said to not bear the least comparison in any respect with Buffalo, which was described as a “creation of yesterday”.

Many, many Irishmen solved this dilemma by the simple expedient of emigrating to Canada and then walking across the unguarded border into the U.S., often temporarily leaving their destitute families behind them in Canada as a burden on that beleaguered country. For some of the Irish emigrants who entered the U.S. from Canada, Henry Ford’s grandfather for example, the dream of opportunity was to be realized in full measure.

Among the Irish, the preference for the U.S. over Canada was based on much more than economic opportunity, the “Curse of Cromwell” was still strongly felt. There is a strange ambiguity here, however. Queen Victoria, as “Queen of Ireland” was a popular figure in Ireland, even at the height of the potato famine. When she stepped off the boat with her four children in Dublin in 1849 an old lady was heard to shout, “Ah, Queen; dear, make one of them Prince

Patrick and Ireland will die for you,” while the huge crowd roared its approval. Most sentiment in Ireland was for self-government with its own parliament, dominion status, within the empire. A desire for complete separation from Britain had not yet materialized, in spite of the overwhelming resentment toward England. Even so, the Irishmen who were willing to leave Ireland wanted to be shed of Britain entirely. Canada, they feared, would be another Ireland in this respect, but they went there anyway because they had no other choice. The result was grossly unfair to Canada, this small (in population) country was later to receive a torrent of refugees, and often most of them were destitute and fever ridden. Many of Canada’s leading citizens died in the effort to care for this wretched throng.

The Irish were anxious to come to America, but it cannot be said that the Americans were anxious to have them, nor that most of them were well treated when they came anyway. These were the days of the secret societies that led to the “Know Nothing Party,” America had a strong prejudice against foreigners, especially any that would work for low wages. There were strong anti-Irish and anti-Catholic feelings throughout the East, a three-day riot in Philadelphia in 1844 killed 13 people and wounded many others. The rioters burned down two Catholic churches, along with many houses, as they had done in Boston during a similar riot earlier.

The American of that day was often criticized for being cruel, calculating and heartless. Slavery was a big issue, the Yankee was often pictured in Punch as a cruel looking character with a sneer on his face, a calculating look in his eyes, and always a whip protruding from his back pocket. The slave trade image of America was strong in the European press, and acutely embarrassing to the abolitionists. We had several border disputes going with Britain, including Oregon Territory and the boundary of Maine, and it was politically expedient for American

newspapers and politicians to take extreme, warlike positions. Slogans were big, many so extreme as to be amusing (“Fifty-four forty or fight”), and Punch liked to poke sophisticated fun at these antics of these despicable rabble-rousers. The Jingoist press made reasonable diplomacy difficult and fueled domestic, racial and religious bigotry.

As it usually does, the racial and religious bigotry and discrimination has its roots in some real economic and social problems, although Know-Nothingism was also deliberately promoted in an effort to distract public attention from slavery issues. Even before the deluge of starving and fever ridden paupers that came from Ireland during the days of the potato famine, the Irish slums of New York and Boston were of great concern. It was a remarkable thing, in Ireland these people lived a rural life in one of the most beautiful countries in the world, and were so attached to the land that they would turn their entire crop over to the landlord and literally starve, rather than default on the rent and face eviction. Yet, in America, where millions were living in horrible city slums, crowded together in cellars and tiny rooms in stench and squalor, preyed upon by every charlatan and hoodlum, losing their children at the incredible rate of 67% mortality by the age of five. How could such a thing happen? The answer comes in several parts.

For the most part, the Irishman came to America without marketable skills. There was virtually no industry in Ireland, and farming was done in a primitive way. His only tool for raising potatoes was a spade, his house was made of native materials, there was little need for tradesmen, and few existed. He was strong, and knew little English, so works like the Erie Canal were largely built with Irish labor, but this was not enough. After the potato famine started, most emigrants were so starved and sick that they were unsuitable for such work anyhow. Most Irish immigrants were unsophisticated and unlettered, they came from a rural

area and had probably never been more than five miles from home before.

New York was a jungle, the scum of the earth had congregated there and organized themselves into a violent bands that systematically preyed upon every incoming ship. Often these bands were allied with the city officials that were supposed to control them. The financial guarantee required of the ship owner was the fuel, the result was an Emigrant Bonding business that has much in common with the slave trade.

The incoming immigrant was apt to find himself whisked off the ship by a band of men who spoke in his native tongue, and talked of Daniel O'Connell, but he soon found himself in a private poorhouse, with all of his worldly possessions confiscated for "rent", and his daughter sold into prostitution. Those who escaped were often sold rail and ship tickets for Illinois, but found out in Buffalo that the ticket was a worthless forgery.

Often, our illiterate peasant from Connaught eventually found himself pushing a cart for a pittance of a wage and living with his family in a cellar, with a grog shop on one side and a pig sty on the other. More often than not, that was as far as his generation got in America. Alcohol was everywhere, the grog shops were open seven days a week. The slums where he lived became hotbeds of violence, crime, and the fever epidemic that swept through New York in 1847 officially killed 1396 people, the real toll is thought to be much higher.

As the immigrants poured in, the slum landlords continued to build around, behind, in front of and over existing buildings. Flimsy, teetering structures everywhere, holding each other up and occupied by swarms of filthy Irishmen, half of them sick, the rest drunk – how could it happen? When a historical commission in Boston decided to restore Paul Revere's house, they found it to be entirely

encased in tenement housing so that no part of it was exposed to the outside.

How different this history might have been if these refugees could have been taken from the ships to open country in the Midwest. Still one must ask, why did it not happen with the Irish. Shiploads of Germans were coming into New York at the same time, but few of them stayed, no German slum culture developed. Most observers gave the Irish high marks as a race when it came to native intelligence and ability, why did it take them generations to get out of the slums of New York and Boston? The questions, no doubt, oversimplified, but is of more than passing interest today, when the Irish have left the slums only to be replaced by men of other nations.

The slums are much the same, characterized by violence, crime, drug abuse, hardship for children, low life expectancy and failure of the political process. The inhabitants, in addition to their burdens, are the targets of bigotry and discrimination, as the Irish were. The frontier is, to be sure, gone now, but most of the Irish never took advantage of it anyway. Two reasons have been suggested as to why the Irish became slum dwellers, their gregariousness and their low standard of living before they came. Certainly, a good logical case may be made for both explanations, even in the slums of New York the Irishman continued with his jigs, his jokes, and his fairs, they still had each other and often misery. Perhaps these same reasons keep our slums alive today.

If we may put our story aside for a moment longer, we should call our attention to another modern analogy. However much we may have gained by having John Ford walk across the border from Canada, the influx of Irish labor was one of the greatest compliments to the Know-Nothings. The government went to great lengths to stop it, and the clandestine small ship landings along the East Coast. Ferry operators on the St. Lawrence were put in prison for failing

to keep the Irish off the ferries and all ships were required to refuse them. They came in droves anyway, one cannot help but think if the situation along the Rio Grande today.

The entire episodes of emigration across the Atlantic during the potato famine has some elements in common with the story of the “boat people” from Viet Nam in recent years, although there are great differences also. Boston refused to allow ships carrying sick people to land. Some ships came with loads of starving, fever ridden passengers to land after a very hard North Atlantic voyage on which many died, and were turned back from port, told to go to Canada or elsewhere. Riots and mutiny erupted on some ships, but the passengers lacked the strength to overcome the order, and these desperate, starving people were taken back out to the dreadful sea. In one case in Boston the British consul took supplies of food to the ship before it was sent back out to sea with 118 cases of fever on board, and the rest of the passengers near starvation.

The Boston authorities did not undertake such measures lightly, when the potato famine made conditions desperate in Ireland, Boston received hordes of starving Irish beggars, many of them elderly, young children, and cripples, blind people and idiots. Crime skyrocketed, assaults were up 400 to 500% in five years, and there was great fear of an epidemic of typhus or cholera. Boston protected itself by diverting the scourge to Quebec, Montreal and New Brunswick. These cities suffered terribly, and the boat people suffered worse. We should add that, during the earlier years of the potato famine, America did mount a large charitable effort to help the starving people of Ireland, there was a great deal of compassion for the plight of the Irishman – as long as he stayed in Ireland. The American charitable effort, large though it was, was dwarfed by similar efforts in England both efforts proved to be faddish, and faded as the famine went on, perhaps because sympathy fades as the influx of refugees grew

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frank Lyons, The second son of William and Mary Lyons, was born on a farm in southeastern South Dakota in 1930. He earned a mechanical engineering degree and worked most of his professional life in the manufacturing and consulting industry in the U.S., Europe and Mexico.

Frank was motivated to write *William and Mary*, his first attempt at “story writing”, because of his interest in history and a vague dream of someday writing a book. He was further encouraged by his children who were concerned that his knowledge of “the old days” would be lost after he was gone.

Today, in retirement, Frank continues to work part-time for the manufacturing-consulting firm that he founded, volunteers as a business counselor and business teacher, writes, restores antique British cars and travels. He lives in Rock Island, Illinois.

