

# The Shanachie

Connecticut  
Irish-American  
Historical Society

2010  
Vol. XXII, No. 1  
www.CTIAHS.com

## Mixing family trees and Christmas goodies

Our CTIAHS genealogy group meets monthly to swap information on tracing family roots. The 12 members of the group who attended the Dec. 5 meeting at the Irish-American Community Center in East Haven enjoyed holiday decorations and cookies to go with the usual coffee and conversation. Among them were, left to right, Ellen Bohan, Maureen Delahunt and Pat Heslin. Anyone interested in attending meetings should contact Pat: 203 248-6050.



## Pot-bellied stove of Irishman warmed entire Connecticut village

*Town clerk, postmistress kept patrons' feet & backsides toasty*

*Editor's note: Here is an article with many of the elements that make researching the history of Connecticut's Irish people a constantly fascinating pastime. The article is made up of equal parts of authentic history, folklore, storytelling, seasonal flavoring and the life stories of several Irish immigrants. Especially, it is a reminder that Irish people settled and left their mark not only in crowded neighborhoods in major cities, but in every nook and cranny of the state of Connecticut.*

By Neil Hogan

A major claim to fame of the little town of Bethlehem, Connecticut, is that each Christmastime its post office attracts numerous visitors who travel many miles to mail their greeting cards in the Litchfield County namesake of the place where Jesus was born.

But the story of postage stamps canceled in Bethlehem is not the only interesting tale about the post office in this small Connecticut community of about 3,500 souls.



Eighty years ago, the Bethlehem post office was located in a colonial vintage home on the town green at the junctions of routes 61 and 132. The building, known as the Bird Inn or Bird Tavern, served not only as the home and office of the town's postmistress, but also as the home and office

(Please turn to page 4)

## INSIDE

### Membership

Envelopes have been inserted with this issue of the newsletter as a reminder that it is time to pay dues once again. .... Page 2

### Fond memories

Student who became an educator writes of a great teacher he had at Hillhouse High School. .... Page 3

### Long-lived veteran

An Irish-born resident of Stonington was among the last survivors of the French and Indian War. .... Page 6

### Tenement life

What it was like to grow up in a flat in New York City during the early 20th century. .... Page 7

## Mark Twain's favorite maid to highlight annual Irish tea on Jan. 31

The favorite maid in the household of America's favorite author will grace the Jan. 31 annual Celtic High Tea sponsored by the Irish History Round Table.

The high tea will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. in a home in North Haven. Seating is limited and can be reserved by contacting Maureen Delahunt, (203) 272-7144, or Pat Heslin, (203) 248-6050. There is a suggested donation of \$10 per person. Gentlemen are welcome at the annual high tea.

The after-tea program this year will feature Karen Tracy presenting a theater piece titled, "Mark Twain's Maid, the Feisty Katy Leary."

Tracy will bring to life the story of Katy Leary, an Irish-

American girl who hailed from Elmira, N.Y., the hometown of Twain's wife, Livy. Katy came to Hartford at the request of the Twain family and was the female major domo in the Twain homestead from 1871 until 1903.

Katy's mother, an Irish immigrant, saw to it that there were two interviews before Katy took a job as a servant with the Twains. One interview was of Katy by Mrs. Twain. The other was of Mark Twain by Mrs. Leary.

When Leary arrived in Hartford, Twain noticed her dark eyebrows and eyes. He said to his wife, "Did you notice them wide, thick black eyebrows of hers? Well, you know she's got a terrible fierce temper, I believe. Nothing halfway about her. Yes,



*Katy Leary*

I think you'll find she has a temper. She's Irish."

Temper or not, Leary became Twain's most trusted and beloved domestic servant. She was the only person, other than Livy, who was allowed into the study where Twain did his writing. And after some

bickering with the author, she convinced him to allow her to clean up his desk with all its scraps of paper and drafts of his tales.

One of the other Irish maids in the Twain home wrote about Leary: "The Irish wit of her, the Irish quickness of her, the Irish deftness of her and sometimes, when necessary, the Irish blarney of her was something to think over, to laugh over and something sometimes to weep over."

Katy was a more realistic icon of the often quite talented, intelligent and denigrated Irish maid in American homes.

Don't miss the high tea this year with its focus on one of Irish-America's truly memorable women.

## Notices and reminders to begin the year 2010

### *Email newsletters*

With the new year, we are going to explore the possibility of sending our quarterly issues of *The Shanachie* by email to those members who wish to receive it that way rather than by regular mail.

Sending the newsletter electronically would save postage, printing and labeling costs as well as the time and effort to do the sealing, stamping and addressing.

If you would like to try receiving your newsletter by email, make sure to add your email address, written clearly, on the membership renewal envelope along with the notation "email newsletter."

We will continue to send the paper copies of the newsletter by regular mail to those who wish to receive it that way.

The email version will be in Adobe pdf format.

### *Membership renewals*

Envelopes for renewal of memberships are being included with this mailing of *The Shanachie*. Please make your renewal as soon as possible after you receive the newsletter and envelope.

Dues for membership remain the same as they have since the CTIAHS was organized way back in 1988-89. The \$10 dues for an individual and \$15 for families are bargain basement prices. So we urge members that if you can do so without breaking the bank, please send an extra contribution, small or large, with your dues for the year.

Over the past several years, our membership has shown a slight upward trend. We hope we can maintain that trend in 2010. The more members we attract, the more funds we will have to continue programs and to undertake new projects.

As much as we hope to increase our revenue, we also need to increase the participation of members. One of our most successful programs has been to start up a small, but active genealogy group. Ten or 12 members of the group meet monthly for informal workshops. All members are welcome to attend these sessions.

We also need to expand the number of volunteers who staff our archives and library and to enlist others with media, graphics, research and writing skills.

### *Jan. 16 meeting*

The next business meeting of the CTIAHS will be on Saturday, Jan. 16, 2010, at the Ethnic Heritage Center, 270 Fitch St., New Haven (on the campus of Southern Connecticut State University.) The meeting will commence at 10 a.m. The agenda will include:

- Report on genealogy group sessions.
- Discussion of CTIAHS involvement with Ethnic Heritage Center.
- Report on computer and technology equipment.
- Report on materials for Sacred Heart parish in New Haven.
- Organize committees to arrange for speakers for CTIAHS programs, and for breakfast meeting in March or April.

# Irish teacher's charm, warmth and wit won hearts and minds

## *Memories of Miss Garvin of Hillhouse High remain bright through a lifetime*

By Dr. Barry E. Herman

**S**ophomore year at Hillhouse High School in New Haven in 1949 was a new experience for me. Coming from a junior high school of 400 students and entering a new high school of over 1,400, I found myself a scared lost lamb.

The first class in my program card was English II. When the bell rang to pass to this class, I found myself moving along crowded corridors to a name and room number which said — Miss Garvin — Room 236.

### Woman of great stature

Upon entering her room, I came face-to-face with a woman of great physical stature and, later to learn, of great mental stature as well. This woman possessed a charm, warmth, and wit that won over a class of scared lost lambs as they sat before her. Her opening remarks have long been forgotten, but not her ideas and personality.

Miss Garvin said that she would teach us grammar, but not the way the school prescribed it. She told us to buy an English grammar workbook, called *Camp Fires*, because this book would teach us English grammar by a painless method and would be like the candy coating on a bitter pill.

When it came time to order an English magazine, again she rebelled against established precedent. She wanted us to be exposed to all kinds of magazines. So, one month, we would read *The Saturday Evening Post*, and another month *Reader's Digest*, and eventually even *Esquire Magazine*. We were thrilled at not having to buy the dull type of school magazine that English teachers usually ordered for their classes. The first

assignment in *The Saturday Evening Post* was to read the jokes and humor. I can never remember a more stimulating and thought-provoking lesson when we discussed the jokes and answered questions like, "What is humor?" and "Why do people laugh?" We just could not wait to read the stories and articles in the magazine. No other English teacher has ever motivated me to read like Miss Garvin did that day.

Miss Garvin would tell us about her pet animals. She was a lover of animals, as well as of people. She had a parrot named Tony. She called him Tony because he loved to eat spaghetti and meatballs. His taste for Italian cuisine was inherited from an Italian family who owned him before she did. She also had two dogs, a cat and a hamster named Machiavelli. The hamster was so named because of his cunning nature and clever ways. Miss Garvin gave the hamster the run of her living room and his antics would delight her to no end, and would horrify her friends who visited her frequently.

### Supplied paper, pencils

Miss Garvin was constantly at odds with the school authorities. She bought her own pads of paper which she gave out in class. She even had her own desk from home moved into school so that she could be more comfortable. In addition, she supplied us with her own pencils and ink. Actually she saved the taxpayers of New Haven many dollars with her eccentricities.

We loved to listen to her

frank lectures. She had the rare gift that only a master teacher possesses. She taught mostly all-boy divisions: college course students and general course students, and could meet the needs of both. She never had to send a boy to the principal's office.

Neither did she have to scold a student nor send for his parents. She commanded respect and gave respect to each student as each student sat mesmerized before her. Every child who had her for a teacher loved her. She was truly a dedicated and inspiring teacher.

### Students sought her advice

After school, her room was filled with students who came back to see her on their own. We just wanted to talk to her or be with her. Often a student had a problem and came to see her. Her advice and understanding answers would be the necessary medicine that would send a glum-looking student back to smiling again because his problem had been solved.

Sometimes Miss Garvin would say, "I'm sorry, kids, can't stay tonight; Grandma has to go downtown." We later learned that when "Grandma went downtown," it was to appear in court to help out a former student who was in trouble. She always found the time to help anyone who needed her. She had friends in every segment of society. The president of Yale as well as the assistant custodian of the high school could be counted as friends of Alice-Esther Garvin.

Then she started being absent from school and her absences became more frequent and for longer periods of time. Before one of her absences, we were reading *Julius Caesar* and she asked us to read Mark Anthony's speech. We had a substitute teacher the next day and she made us write out the speech, word for word and comma for comma. When returning to school, Miss Garvin was horrified. She said, "How can I ever teach you 20th century grammar when a substitute makes you write something using 16th century grammar?" This made sense then and more sense now as I wonder how many teachers feel the same way.

### Felled by cancer

Finally, we saw how sickly Miss Garvin began to look and how she started losing weight rapidly. We later learned that she was dying of cancer. We were all heartbroken because we loved her dearly. In December, she had to leave school permanently. When the holidays came, I mailed her a Christmas card and she mailed me one in return. Her card was of her own design and contained a beautiful yuletide message which she had written. I kept the card that said, in part: "Once again I gladly greet you: you are important to the happiness of my Christmas thoughts ... On the hearth, yule log flames leap high, matching in warmth the holiday smiles, friendly handclasps, Merry Christmas salutations ... Today I wish we could all ... all friends ... be together to share the tradition that is Peace ... And for the New Year and all years, my wish is that you may experience the joy you have brought to others."

(Please turn to page 8)



Alice-Esther Garvin

## Irish hospitality and stove warmed Bethlehem post office patrons

(Continued from page 1)

of her Irish-American town clerk husband, James W. Flynn. And, as if that weren't enough functions for one house, the Flynns also kept "a candy and chewing gum counter" there.

In November 1929, the *Waterbury Republican* sent an unnamed reporter up to Bethlehem to write a story about the Flynns and their home, office and candy store on the town green. The news "hook" for the story was that the Flynns had just disposed of a time-honored pot-bellied stove and installed a brand new heating system.

"No mail is delivered in Bethlehem," began the reporter by way of explaining the importance of the Flynns' stove. "People come from the center of the town and from the outlying sections around Carmel Hill to get their letters and their mail order catalogs, their boxes of new chicks and their farm magazines.

"In winter, when the Bethlehem winds blow and the snow drifts in front of the church, it is like making an expedition to the North Pole to go for the mail. People have driven sleighs for miles over the frozen roads with nothing to cheer them up but the thought of the big round stove radiating friendly heat from the center of the post office floor. There was no thrill akin to that of pulling off the woolen mittens and holding the hands before the stove door."

Town Clerk Flynn, nearly 70 years old, told the reporter that every time he looked at the spot where the black stove stood for 30 years "like a good-natured, one-eyed goblin," he felt cold even though his new heating system created a balmy June-like atmosphere inside the post office.

"Even if one got nothing through the mail but an

advertisement for a mother-of-pearl cigarette case, it was worth the trip," wrote the Waterbury reporter. "The boards around the stove are worn from the teetering feet of hundreds who stood with their back to it, and got all warmed up before they wrapped their mufflers around their necks, cut off a fresh plug of tobacco and started out again.

"This winter, of course, the town clerk's office and likewise the post office will be warmer than ever before, but they just won't seem the same old places. And what will people do now with bills or corn plaster ads they don't want, when there's no stove to throw them in? Mr. Flynn has placed a tin bucket near the spot where the stove once stood, but there just won't be the same thrill attached to throwing things away."

### Flynns in Bethlehem

The Flynn family turned up in Bethlehem around 1880. That year, the U.S. census listed, Susan Flynn, 49, a native of Ireland, and apparently a widow, as head of a household including two sons and a daughter — James 20, Ruth, 19, and Francis, 17. All three siblings were born in Connecticut, and all worked as day laborers.

On the 1900 census returns, 40 year old James was listed as a farmer, while his mother, Susan was living alone. Susan's name does not appear on subsequent census returns.

By 1910, James W. Flynn was listed as a "general farmer" and the husband of Mary E. Flynn, aged 39. Mary was born in New York as were her parents. A widow, she had married James when she was 31 and he was 37. They had no children.

In 1920, however, the Flynn's had a third person living with them: 18-year-old Mary E.

Toman, a native of Ireland who had arrived in America in 1910, and been naturalized in 1913.

Mary Toman was listed as a companion on the census returns. The returns show that she and both her parents were born in Northern Ireland. Toman is a traditional Irish name, written as "O Tuamain," and often found in County Tyrone in Ulster.

The census returns show that James W. Flynn was born in Connecticut of a father born in the Irish Free State and a mother born in Northern Ireland.

### Famous old tavern

Whatever the genealogy, James W. Flynn acquired the Bird Tavern around 1900. One source says the date was 1889, while another says 1903. He purchased it from Theodore Bird, a descendant of the family that owned it since the late 1700s.

The two-story saltbox has a long and storied history. It was built on the northwestern corner of the town green by Samuel Church about 1740. In 1797, when Church's daughter, married David Bird, the house was given to her as a wedding gift.

The building had been constructed to serve both as a residence and as a roadhouse, and the Birds conducted it as such. Unlike many colonial homes, the tavern had no center chimney, but rather a chimney at each end, "so that there were always two roaring fireplaces."

The tavern also is said to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad by which slaves who escaped from the American South made their way to Canada.

The Bird family history indicates that Joshua Bird, perhaps the son or grandson of David and Betsy would be called upon at night to pick up a runaway slave in some town south of Bethlehem and hide him

or her at the tavern, or to take a slave north to another safe house.

Whatever dramatic role the tavern played in pre-Civil War days, it also had a reputation as a free-wheeling entertainment attraction.

The house had a wide front doorway, that was used apparently as something akin to a fast-food, drive-up window. "The story goes," wrote one Bethlehem historian, "that horsemen used to ride into the inn, draw up at the open bar that extended across the back of the room, in loud voices order their drinks, consume them without dismounting, and ride into the courtyard and down the street."

The second floor was entirely devoted to a ballroom, and to maximize its use as such, a stairway was built outside the frame of the house.

"For years," wrote the reporter, "the big stagecoach with four horses, which made regular trips from Litchfield to New Haven, stopped for the night at Bird's Tavern ... The ladies in their crinolines and beribboned bonnets were deposited with their hat boxes and work baskets and flowered carpet bags, at the door of the inn, the gentlemen following with their more manly bags.

"Hot dinner was ready, the fowls and pies being kept warm in the big ovens on either side of the fireplace. After dinner, the music was started and the night was spent in dancing and dicing with frequent trips to the bar for rum toddy. No one went to bed. As dawn broke, the travelers were fortified with a hot breakfast, the horses were harnessed up, the ladies and their boxes were hoisted into the coach and the journey was continued."

The ballroom in the Bird Tavern continued to be used into the early years of the 20th

century when, it was said that dances were attended "by flappers who drank out of bottles."

### Home-fires kept burning

Ironically, given the fact that Irish people suffer from an unfair stereotype of being wild and overly fond of strong drink, it was only when an Irishman and his wife acquired the house that most of the licentious behavior stopped and the old Bird Tavern became a place where government business was transacted and people gathered for neighborly conversation.

Since both Mary and James Flynn were involved in politics, their home and offices were often the venue for political discussions. The Waterbury reporter wrote: "Practically every political plan that has been hatched in Bethlehem was born around this stove."

"Mr. Flynn has been town clerk off and on for the past 30 years," wrote the reporter, "and he has held several other town offices. It was the most natural thing in the world to hold star chamber sessions and committee meetings in the town clerk's office which is also the post office."

"The political arguments that were held there were often so hot that it was not necessary to put a shovel full of coal into the stove for hours at a time."

"Among the matters debated around the old sheet-iron heating device, was the famous question of the location of Bethlehem's new school which became such a tender topic that the town was divided into rival and fighting clans known as the Daniels-Minor and the Flynn-Johnson factions. Both factions originated right around the stove, and although Mr. Flynn says now that the matter did not deserve all the publicity that it got, it is said that members of the opposing factions still do not speak as they pass by."

School consolidation was another matter that provoked debates so intense that "the coals glowed in an enthusiastic appreciation. Townspeople who stopped by to pick up their mail or pay their assessments paused by the stove both to join the argument and warm their hands and feet."



*The Bird Tavern in Bethlehem as it is today, right, and as it was, above, when the Flynn's owned it in the early 1900s.*



### Raccoon hunters

Still another group that made use of the post office/town clerk's office was composed of raccoon hunters who traditionally chased their prey during the autumn season.

Bethlehem, the Waterbury reporter, stated, was a great town for raccoon hunting. Hunters from all over New England knew that, he wrote, and many men who grew up in the town "go back in the fall for the coon hunting, and no small part of the fun, is talking afterwards."

"The proper place to talk about it," he argued, "is around a nice hot stove with the feet resting on the nickel trimming. More than one coon story has been related around Mr. Flynn's stove during the past 30 years. Coons have been caught by day and by night, and they have been

recaught and retreed around the old stove, as the hunters crowded on the ancient bench, made of the headboard of an antique bed."

### The Woodward connection

By 1930, two families were occupying the old tavern. In the early 1920s, the Flynn's young Irish companion, Mary E. Toman

family of New York City. The Faradays owned the Bellamy estate in Bethlehem as a summer residence.

Stephen Toman left Bethlehem to work as in the Belmont racetrack stables. His daughter, Mary, became the foster child of James W. and Mary E. Flynn, explains Betty.

In the 1970s, the old tavern, under new owners, became an antique shop and a residential apartment building. In the early 2000s, it was purchased by a Bridgeport native, Jerry Reveron and his wife, Adele.

The Reverons have not only given the old salt-box a new lease on life, but turned it into one of the premiere restaurants in Connecticut under the name Woodward House. Both wife and husband are graduates of culinary schools and have between them 45 years in the restaurant business.

Dining critics of Waterbury, Danbury, Hartford and Litchfield County newspapers, to say nothing of the *New York Times*, have given their restaurant glowing reviews. In 2007, Jerry was named Connecticut restaurateur of the year by the Connecticut Restaurant Association.

It touches a tender spot in an old Irishman's heart to know that the excellent fare served there today is a continuation of the warm welcoming spirit cultivated by James and Mary Flynn and Mary Toman when they presided there and served townspeople's needs during the age of the pot-bellied stove.

*Sources: Waterbury Republican, Nov. 3, 1929. Homes of Old Woodbury, Old Woodbury Historical Society, 1959, p. 106. Bethlehem, Connecticut: A Primer of Local History, Old Bethlem Historical Society, 1976. "Underground Railroad" article on [www.ci.bethlehem.ct.us/history-genealogy](http://www.ci.bethlehem.ct.us/history-genealogy). Woodward House restaurant website, [www.thewoodwardhouse.com](http://www.thewoodwardhouse.com). U.S. census returns for Bethlehem, 1870-1930. Conversations with Anne Small, Carol Brown and Betty Hawkes.*

married Charles Woodward, the son of a local farmer, Andrew Woodward, and his wife, Celia.

The newlyweds, who by 1930 had three children, took up residence in the spacious tavern with the Flynn's. When Charles and Mary Flynn died, they left the tavern to Mary Toman Woodward.

Interestingly, the book *Homes of Old Woodbury* contains a description and photograph of the home in the mid-1950s and identifies it as the home of Mary E. Woodward, that is, Mary E. Toman, the Irish girl who at the age of 18 became part of the Flynn household.

Mary Toman Woodward's daughter Betty Hawker grew up in the tavern. She recalls that Mary came from Ireland to Bethlehem with her father, Stephen Toman, who was a horse trainer employed by the Faraday

## Stonington Irishman among last survivors of French and Indian War

*Joseph Cook fought at Fort Duquesne in 1755, and lived until 1829*

Joseph Cook was not the last surviving veteran of the French and Indian War of 1755-1762. But when he died in Stonington at the age of 102 in 1829, he certainly was among the last surviving Irish-born and Irish-American veterans of that conflict.

Cook fought in the first major campaign and battle of the war, whose 250th anniversary is being observed during the years 2005 to 2012.

That campaign began in the winter of 1755 when the British hazarded a perilous winter crossing of the Atlantic to rush two infantry regiments to America after learning that their rivals for North American hegemony, the French, had built a fort where Pittsburgh, Pa., stands today.

France considered Fort Duquesne essential to protect its far-flung, western fur trade. England considered it a provocation that threatened the legitimate westward expansion of its own Atlantic seaboard colonies.

Major General Edward Braddock was appointed commander in chief of British forces in America and ordered to make the capture of Fort Duquesne his first priority.

### Irish troops

The two regiments — the 44th and 48th foot — had been stationed in Ireland for a number of years and had a large proportion of Irish troops and officers. Companies of the regiments posted in Galway, Dublin and Limerick rendezvoused at Cork 900-strong and sailed in January 1755. Among the troops was Joseph Cook.

The ships docked in Virginia in March, and the regiments

assembled near Alexandria for training before marching into western Pennsylvania along a route roughly parallel to the Potomac River.

Cook and his comrades were in for a rude, and in many cases fatal, awakening in the New World. Supplemented by colonial troops and officers, including a Virginia colonel named George Washington, Braddock's force of about 2,400 men set out in mid-April through wilderness and over mountains almost 300 miles to Fort Duquesne.

On July 9, 1755, when they had come within 10 miles of the fort, they were attacked by 300 French troops and 700 of their Indian allies. Accustomed to fighting in open fields in orderly formations, the British were no match for the French and Indian bush-fighters who picked off the redcoats from well-camouflaged positions in the underbrush.

### British routed

Within a couple of hours, two-thirds of the British soldiers had been killed or wounded. Among the dead was Braddock himself. He was buried along the road his men had cut in the wilderness. It was a disastrous beginning for the British in their all-out contest for control of North America.

Joseph Cook was among the lucky ones. He came out of that debacle alive and probably remained with the British forces that fought the French for five more years before final battles at Quebec and Montreal culminated in the annihilation of New France.

Cook may have served with the 48th Regiment of Foot. That regiment was quartered in Connecticut during the winter of 1758. The regiment's winter layover in Connecticut may



explain why Cook eventually settled in eastern Connecticut.

When the Revolutionary War began, Cook joined the Continental Army. Two of the three battles that his obituary says he fought in were critical to the ultimate American victory.

The battle of Trenton is remembered because of Gen. Washington's daring crossing of the Delaware River on Christmas day to mount a surprise attack on the Hessian garrison in Trenton.

After just an hour of fighting, Washington's army had captured more than 1,000 of the enemy at a cost of only six casualties.

Strategically, Trenton was a huge morale booster for an American army that had been chased out of New York and across New Jersey during the fighting in 1776.

### Yorktown decisive

Yorktown was the final decisive victory in the war. In 1782, Gen. Washington and his French allies had planned an attack on New York City. When word came from Virginia that British Gen. Cornwallis had allowed himself to become

penned up on a narrow neck of land in Chesapeake Bay, Washington marched his American-French army to Yorktown. His siege there led to the surrender of Cornwallis's entire army and to negotiations that ended with American independence.

### Cornwallis called in sick

A little drama was played out at the time of the surrender. Cornwallis took a sick day and left the difficult duty to his second in command, the Irish Gen. Charles O'Hara.

The British could not stand the thought of surrendering an imperial army to mere rebels. They hoped to get through the ceremony by surrendering to the French.

Thus, when O'Hara approached the place where the American-French army was drawn up, he stopped his horse in front of the French commander to offer his sword in surrender. The Frenchman would have none of it and motioned him to continue to where Washington sat astride his horse.

When O'Hara reached Washington, he was snubbed again for Washington was not prepared to deal with a second in command rather than Cornwallis. Washington gestured instead to one of his generals, Benjamin Lincoln.

That was a final snub of the British for Lincoln had commanded the American army that surrendered to Cornwallis at Charleston, S.C. In that instance, the British had refused to grant the customary honorable terms of surrender on the grounds that the Americans were, in modern day terms, "insurgents." So what went around, came around in American-British relations that day at Yorktown.

After Yorktown, Joseph Cook returned to Connecticut and settled in Stonington where he lived another 47 years. In 1827, his ripe old age caught the attention of the *Pittsfield (Mass.) Sun* which reported, "There is now at the Poor House in Stonington (Conn.) an old soldier named Joseph Cook, who is one hundred and one years old. He is a native of Ireland; was a soldier at the time of Braddock's defeat; and also served in the Continental Army during the Revolution."

Two years later, on Feb. 19, 1829, Cook's death at such an advanced age caused newspapers from as far away as Boston and Baltimore to reprint the obituary that appeared in the *Stonington Telegraph*: "Died at the poor house in the town of Stonington, Connecticut, on the 19th ultimo, Mr. Joseph Cook, aged 102 years. Mr. Cook came to this country from England at the age of 28 years; was present at Braddock's defeat, afterwards at the breaking out of the revolution, he enlisted into the continental army, and was a faithful soldier during the war; was under the immediate command of Gen. Washington, and shared in the dangers at Monmouth, Trenton and finally at Yorktown."

"Since the close of that war, he has resided in (Stonington). Although poor and extremely illiterate, he ever sustained the character of an honest, industrious and temperate man. Ever since he arrived at the age of 100 years, he partly supported himself by his own labour."

Lacking further evidence, at least for now, Ireland seems to hold the edge as Cook's birthplace. The one article makes him "a native" of Ireland. The other article says only that he "came from England."

Is there any scholar among us who can fill in the blanks about Joseph Cook?

## Memoir recalls life in New York City tenements

*On Sunday, Sept. 13, 2009, a busload of CTIAHS members and friends journeyed to New York City to visit the Tenement Museum, pictured below, on Orchard Street on New York's Lower East Side. Joseph McCarthy of Guilford, an author and retired professor in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University, wrote us recently after reading about our trip in the autumn issue of The Shanachie. McCarthy's father, Daniel, grew up in just such a tenement in the early years of the 20th century, and Joseph sent along some excerpts from his dad's handwritten memoir of what life was like in the tenements. The elder McCarthy's memories add many real-life details to the basic outline provided by our guided tour. The excerpts are printed below as Daniel McCarthy wrote them with only minor editing by his son.*

"Born Sept. 30, 1899, reportedly at 11:55 p.m. Missed Oct. 1 by five minutes. Born in a tenement flat between 3rd and Lexington Aves. On 112th Street, East Harlem then, now El Barrio."

"Tenement flats, also called railroad flats were two to a floor, running the length (depth) of the house. (They were) walk-ups (and the) location referred to so many flights up. (For example) One flight up (would) now be called the second floor."

"My mother always preferred the middle floor. In case of fire below, we could go to the roof and over to one of the adjoining houses. If above, we could make it to the street. Since there was no heat, the kerosene heater was in widespread use, and the cause of many of the frequent fires, (when) someone bumped into a (heater). In winter, faucets were never closed tight, but left with some water dripping, to avoid freezing."

"Toilets were one to a floor, at the head of the stairs, (with) ventilation via a transom over the door. (There were) no locks, and the toilet was shared by two families. There were no bathrooms, so baths were taken in galvanized tubs, with water heated on the stove. Later, I went to public baths."

"Flats ran the length (depth) of the house with the kitchen in the back. The kitchen



overlooked the back yard, which had a tall clothes pole. The clotheslines ran from the pole to one of the kitchen windows. Monday was always wash day, and the clothes were hung on the clothesline to dry."

"A small, half-sized bedroom was just off the airshaft, between the larger bedroom (relatively speaking) by the kitchen, and a smaller one adjoining the front or 'sitting' room."

"Next to the kitchen was a bedroom, with a large opening in the wall to the kitchen for ventilation, which was also provided by a window into the airshaft. Airshafts were between all the tenements, and ran from the cellar to the roof. These provided ventilation to the inner rooms. There was usually a 'dumb waiter' to help bring heavy packages from the cellar to the kitchen."

"There was no privacy. From kitchen to front room, no doors. The greatest width was 10 feet and the greatest depth was 50 to 60 feet. The 'large' building lots in New York were 20 feet wide. From the overall (footprint) building space, deduct space for the airshaft and the stairs, and there might be 300-320 square feet of actual usable space in an East Harlem tenement flat."

"Tenants looked for places with (monthly) rents no more than one week's salary. Rents were collected by agents and delinquents either moved fast, or were promptly dispossessed."

## Modest high-school teacher was woman of great achievement

*(Continued from page 3)*

In just four short months, this great woman became a part of each of us. A succession of substitute teachers came and went but none could rekindle the flame that Miss Garvin had lit. In June we graduated but Miss Garvin's memory remained with us. Her teacher friends kept us informed of her progress. She was not allowed to have visitors. I wrote one card after another. Her condition remained unchanged. Hers was a losing fight. Time was all she had.

Two years later, Miss Garvin passed away. Her picture and story appeared on page one in our local paper. Now her full

story could be told.

### Many talents

One word, modesty, could describe her. Miss Garvin had been a licensed assistant pharmacist at the age of 16; an author of several books, an author of 200 published monographs ranging from vitamin therapy to dog training and from cirrhosis of the liver to juvenile delinquency.

She was a poetess of national fame, a college lecturer, a doctor of philosophy candidate from Yale, a writer of lyrics for over 25 songs, a charitable and civic minded person and a very understanding humanitarian

whose guidance over the years had helped many troubled students become useful adults.

When I pick up a Hillhouse High School class book of any year, I am drawn to a music page with the nostalgic Hillhouse Hymn words written by Alice-Esther Garvin:

"God of youth be Thou our guidance,

"God of wisdom light our road;

"Where-e'er men from Hillhouse gather, Enter into their abode.

"God of war watch o'er our heroes, Hillhouse men, who died afar.

"God of peace stand Thou

beside us, Lest the future years we mar."

### Her memory cherished

After reading these words, I choke up inside and think back to a dedicated teacher of English whose fond memories I will always cherish.

*Editor's note: Dr. Barry E. Herman is a professor of Graduate Programs in Education at Sacred Heart University and a member of the Hamden Board of Education. He is also president of The Ethnic Heritage Center. He is retired from the New Haven public schools where he served as a teacher, principal and district administrator.*

## The Shanachie

Published quarterly by the  
Connecticut Irish-American  
Historical Society  
P.O. Box 185833  
Hamden, CT 06518  
(203) 392-6126  
www.ctiahs.com

President George Waldron  
Vice President Vincent McMahon  
Secretary Maureen Delahunt  
Treasurer Tom Slater  
Shanachie Editor Neil Hogan, (203) 269-9154

Membership \$10 individual, \$15 family. Send name address and check made out to CIAHS to address at left.

In Ireland, a Shanachie is a folklorist, historian and keeper of the traditions of the people.

"We have kept faith with the past; we have handed a tradition to the future."

— Padraic Pearse

Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society  
P.O. Box 185833  
Hamden, CT 06518