Trail bench to honor memory of Tom Slater

Already rich in Irish lore from the days when Paddies were employed in excavating it, the Farmington Canal soon will have another link with Connecticut’s Irish.

On Sunday, Oct. 2, at 11 a.m. the Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society will unveil on the canal walking trail in Hamden a memorial bench in honor of the late Tom Slater.

If the early Irish canal diggers did much of the heavy lifting to make the canal a reality, Tom, in recent decades, was among the heavy lifters on all things Irish in our region.

To cite just a few examples: After serving on the St. Patrick’s Day parade committee and as grand marshal, Tom took on the job of enlisting marching units for the entire parade. As those who watched the parade over the years know, he did a splendid job, continually lining up new musical and marching units to keep the event fresh and exciting each year.

Tom also performed a lasting service for the parade by collecting all kinds of information and artifacts about it for a Library of Congress American Memories project.

Tom was also a dedicated member of the Irish historical society. Years ago, he joined some other members of the society in arranging and conducting genealogy workshops in eastern Connecticut. The objective was not only to promote our society, but also to remind Connecticut’s Irish of their history and get them working on projects in their communities.

First Catholic burying ground rediscovered in New Haven

A 177-year-old Catholic cemetery in the center of New Haven made front-page news in mid-July this summer.

The cemetery was known only as “the Catholic burying ground,” when the first burials were made there in the spring of 1834.

The burying ground served parishioners of the city’s first Catholic place of worship, Christ Church, which was located at York Street and Davenport Avenue. The parishioners came not only from the city, but also from outlying communities such as Middlefield. (Please turn to page 3)

The Irish World became the best read Irish-American newspaper in the country in the late 1800s and early 1900s by filling its pages with the events and names of immigrants all over America. Today, it is a valuable resource for genealogists and for historians. (Page 6-7)
CTIAHS archives find a niche online

Thanks to Sacred Heart University and two members


Within the past few months, our historical society has been fortunate to become a partner with Sacred Heart University in Fairfield on an important computer project. Sacred Heart this summer has made available on line a full run of 20 plus years of The Shanachie.

The university also has put online three of the books published by our society: The Cry of the Famishing, about the Great Hunger in Ireland in the 1840s; Green Sprigs from the Emerald Isle, a collection of Paddy and Bridget stories from early American newspapers; and The Wearin’ o’ the Green, a history of 150 years of St. Patrick’s Day celebrations in New Haven.

The newsletters and the books can be read online at: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/ctiahs.

The web page that comes up on the screen with that address is titled Sacred Heart University Digital Commons@SHU. Near the bottom of the page, there is a heading “Browse the Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society Collections. Below that are separate headings for The Shanachie and for Monographs.

Clicking on The Shanachie brings up on the screen a list of the volume number and issue number of each Shanachie. Clicking on one of these brings up the full text and pictures of that issue. Likewise, clicking on Monographs brings up a listing of the three books and clicking on one of them opens up the full text to be read.

Sacred Heart has also expressed an interest in putting other materials from the CTIAHS archives online. By doing so, the many Connecticut Irish history items that we have collected over the years become available to a wide audience of historians, genealogists and researchers.

Another important development in spreading the word about Irish Connecticut is the opening of websites by two CTIAHS members: Janet Maher and Sherry Faughnan Doherty

A resident of Maine with Irish roots in New Haven, Doherty has a website — www.newhavenirish.org — with a number of useful items: an entire New Haven city directory for 1894; lists of New Haven vital records up to 1850; lists of burials in St. Bernard’s Cemetery in New Haven; listings of Irish immigrant advertisements from the Boston Pilot newspaper.

Maher’s website is www.mahermatters.com. It contains much information that Janet, a native of Waterbury, has collected over the years on Connecticut Mahers and other branches of the clan. Among her items are: notes on St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Waterbury with details of many Irish gravesite there; pictures and text on cemeteries in Carlow and Kilkenny with Maher graves; pictures and text on numerous historical sites in Ireland.

With such resources to tap into, it is a wonderful time to be engaged in researching the history and genealogy of Irish ancestors.

Bookmark these dates

Sept. 3—10 a.m. — CTIAHS meeting at Ethnic Heritage Center, New Haven. Agenda: Tom Slater Memorial Bench; Posting of CTIAHS documents on Sacred Heart University website; participation in Milford Irish festival; wreath laying at St. Bernard’s Cemetery in New Haven; selection of new logo for CTIAHS.

Sept. 16-17 — 6 to 9 p.m. Friday and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday — Milford Irish Festival at Fowler Field in downtown Milford. The festival will feature Irish music and dancing, shopping, dining and refreshments. Check the Irish Heritage Society of Milford website: milfordirish.org.
Old burial ground has story to tell

(Continued from page 1)

Derby and Orange. For the most part, they were Irish immigrants settling in small groups throughout the region wherever they could find work.

The news about the burying ground was that some graves were uncovered during a construction project at Yale-New Haven Hospital. State Archaeologist Nicholas Bellantoni confirmed that the remains were those of people buried in the old cemetery. Catholic priests came to the site and blessed the remains. The remains were then taken to the Yale University Biological Anthropology Laboratories for forensic study to determine sex, age and ethnicity. The construction project was for an expansion of the hospital’s emergency room.

Discovery of the remains renewed interest in the earliest period of large-scale Irish immigration to Connecticut during the middle of the 19th century. Fortunately, the records of the burials in the old cemetery have been preserved in the Vital Records of New Haven.

Among the interesting features of the records is that they identify in many cases the causes of death of the deceased. There are a number of deaths in 1847 and 1848 that are attributed to “ship fever.” That term is a certain identification that the deceased were among part of the huge wave of Irish exiles who fled to America during the Great Hunger in Ireland in the late 1840s and 1850s.

Summer spent copying data from stones

Genealogy group plans to publish grave inscriptions

This summer, on sunny but cool mornings in May through July, several volunteers from the CTIAHS Genealogy Group completed a project to copy those headstone inscriptions from St. Bernard’s Cemetery which include the immigrants’ birth place names in Ireland. These inscriptions may be the only remaining clue to where their descendants may find mention of their ancestral place of origin in Ireland.

Suspecting that many of the headstones would yield this valuable information, our volunteers were somewhat surprised to find that of the thousands of headstones in the cemetery, more than 500 included either the name of a county, parish or townland.

Each of the full inscription, including dates, spouse or children was also copied to allow readers to identify the decedent. In 1934 a state-sponsored survey of all Connecticut cemeteries, the Hale Collection of Cemetery Headstones, included names and dates - though not place names - from all headstones existing at that time. In the 77 years since 1934, some headstones have since been worn or damaged as to be difficult or even impossible to read, thus this earlier compilation is valuable for comparison. Our Genealogy Group carefully examined difficult-to-read stones and found some additional inscriptions missed by Hale workers. Project coordinator Paul Keroack has compared our reading of the stones to the Hale Collection in order to make as accurate a final report as possible.

During our visits, several early stones indicated that some family members had been buried “in the old cemetery.” This was a reminder that substantial Irish immigration predated the 1851 establishment of St. Bernard Cemetery. City records and published sexton’s lists include names, ages, dates of death and in some cases causes of death of several hundred persons buried in the earliest Catholic cemetery in New Haven, located at the corner of York Street and Davenport Avenue, adjacent to Christ Church, the first Catholic sanctuary in the city, founded in 1834. That first structure and a later church built on the same site — St. John the Evangelist, 1858 — are long gone, and with the removal of headstones from that graveyard, its existence was unmarked and apparently forgotten by most. Portions of Yale New Haven Hospital and its grounds occupy the site today.

CTIAHS plans to publish the history of both cemeteries including the names of persons buried in St. Bernard’s with their associated places of Irish origin, as well as the names of those buried in the “Old Cemetery,” and hundreds of Civil War veterans whose names are noted on individual stones and also celebrated by an obelisk monument placed on the grounds by the state in 1886.

In 1923, Margaret O’Connor of New Haven left home to start a career in a distant place: Middlefield, Connecticut. The third child of two Irish immigrants, Patrick O’Connor of Donoughmore, County Cork, and Mary Rea O’Connor of Kildorrey, County Cork, Mary was born in the Hill neighborhood of New Haven on March 29, 1904. Patrick worked on the railroad.

Normal School grad

Margaret attended Sacred Heart School, where she was an outstanding student, graduated from Commercial High School in 1921 and from New Haven Normal School in 1923. Her daughter, Mary Wallace, a CTIAHS member and a teacher herself, explains how her mother came to teach in a rural community: “In those days, it was difficult for graduates whose parents were immigrants to obtain teaching positions in city schools. Most jobs went to women who had attended private colleges or had connections.

“As a way to assure that students were resolute in their desire to become teachers, Normal School students were often reminded that they would probably be teaching in a town far from New Haven.”

During her first year as a public-school teacher, she commuted. In those days, a New Haven-Middlefield commute was about the equivalent of a New Haven-New York trip today. “I went by train from New Haven to the Middlefield Railroad Station and then walked about a mile and a half to the school ... It was a dirt road then, and the ducks came quacking to the road as I passed by.”

In later years, Margaret O’Connor Augur recalled with great fondness the quacking ducks, a wood-burning stove, cold lunches, outdoor plumbing and four grades in a single classroom.

“I went by train from New Haven to the Middlefield Railroad Station and then walked about a mile and a half to the school ... It was a dirt road then, and the ducks came quacking to the road as I passed by.”

Margaret O’Connor Augur

The number of students in East School’s one room was 29, large by today’s standards. Her daily teaching was made even more difficult because the class included 14 pupils in grade one, six in grade two, four in grade three and five in grade four.

Boarding beat commuting

During her second year in Middlefield, Wallace says, “Margaret and her friend Vera McNamara, also a Middlefield teacher and commuter from New Haven, became boarders at the lovely home of a couple in the Rockfall section of Middletown.

“The man owned the local grocery store, and his wife was a wonderful cook and hostess. Getting to school was easier and it enabled the teachers to become a part of the community where they were often invited to dinner at the home of students.”

Vera McNamara became Sister Mary Florine of the Sisters of Mercy in 1927. She taught in parochial schools throughout the state. She died in 1992. Margaret was married in 1934 to Elbert Augur and lived in Northford until her death in 2004 at the age of 100. The Augurs had three children: Elbert, Joseph and Mary Augur Wallace. Margaret’s history of her career is brief, but she had a nice way with words and included numerous details that leave a fascinating portrait of life in the early 1920s.

“The population of Middlefield at that time was about 1,047,” Margaret wrote, “and the school enumeration was 309. The mill rate was 19 mills.

“The school was small, and the shed in back held the wood to keep the fire in the stove burning. The janitor was a fourth grade boy; his father assisted when necessary. The boy sometimes had to be re-
minded to put wood in the stove to keep the room warm.

“There was outdoor plumbing. In the winter, it wasn't pleasant going outside.

“Many of the older boys had to milk cows before they came to school. As the children arrived they played outdoors during the warm weather until the teacher came to the door and rang the hand bell. The children put their brown paper bag lunches in the entrance hall. There was an organ in the hall also.

Making cocoa for lunch

“At noon I heated water on the stove to make cocoa for the children and myself. It tasted delicious with the cold lunches.

“The state supervisor and the music teacher came once a month to observe teacher and pupils.

“In one-room schools, pupils had to concentrate on their own work while other classes were in session around them. However, listening in was also educational. Reading was an important subject in the one-room schools since it was the foundation for every other subject studied. Enthusiasm for reading meant better understanding of arithmetic problems, spelling, essay writing, etc.

“Christmas was a happy time in the little school house. The children made red and green construction paper rings into chains to decorate the room. We had a small decorated Christmas tree. There were no lights on the tree as there was no electricity in the building. I remember buying calendar pads, and the children made calendars for their parents as Christmas gifts.

“When I went back to my one-room school after spring vacation in New Haven, one of my third grade boys, Waldo Harris, had died of pneumonia.

It was a fatal disease in those days. I still remember the Easter card Waldo had sent me the Easter before his death:

May Easter Joys
Your Pathway Bless,
And Fill Your Life
With Happiness.

“I often think of Waldo with his pretty smile and blonde hair.

“They were good children and happy to do their assignments. There were no discipline problems in those days as the children were happy to be in school.

“Many of the children have made good contributions to society and have been successful in their chosen fields.

“My salary was $1,000. I taught one year in the East School and was promoted to a three-room school in the same town. The old East School is now an attractive home on Cherry Hill Road in Middlefield.

“Those were happy days in my one-room school!”

In Margaret’s later years, when she could no longer drive, her daughter took her on Sunday afternoon drives through Middlefield and Rockfall.

“My mother loved her days in Middlefield,” Mary Wallace recalls. “On our drives, we always stopped at Lyman Orchards because many children of the Lyman family had been her students.”

Editor’s note: Mary Augur Wallace provided the pictures and background information on her mother’s career for this article. Her cousin, Joan O’Connor Weber, provided the three-page text of Margaret’s account of her first year teaching. Our Shanachie welcomes stories about this kind of grassroots history of Irish people who settled in Connecticut.
Folksy New York newspaper is historians and genealogists dream

The largest circulation Irish-American newspaper of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of Irish people in America or in Irish-American genealogy. The Irish World and American Industrial Liberator was founded in New York City in 1870 by a politically radical and progressive Irish immigrant printer named Patrick Ford.

Ford supported the causes of the peasants of Ireland. On American issues, he also stood for civil rights for black people, women’s suffrage, labor unions to balance the power of industrial and commercial companies, the eight-hour day for working people, an income tax and temperance.

Ford filled the columns of the Irish World with grass-roots items from all over America and even the counties of Ireland.

The items were neatly packaged by states and each weekly issue of the Irish World printed five or 10 Conn-

(Please turn to page 8)
CONNECTICUT.

HARTFORD.—At a recent meeting of the Cathedral Lyceum the following officers were elected: President, James H. McCormick; vice-president, William White; recording secretary, John F. Conough; financial secretary, William Riley; treasurer, Joseph P. Kennedy; press agent, Charles P. Mulcahy; executive committee, Robert Sullivan, James C. Martin, Edward White, John Manin and James Hopkins.

Mrs. Mary Mulhall, wife of Jeremiah Mulhall, died suddenly at her home, 54 Francis avenue, New York, Aug. 27. She was a native of Ireland and lived in this country the greater part of her life. She leaves besides her husband, six children by a former marriage, Patrick, James, William, Mark and Bernard Maloney and Miss Margaret Maloney, all residents of this city.

NEWINGTON.—Patrick McNerney, who died recently, was born in Ireland March 1, 1833. He came to this country when quite young. In 1858 he married Miss Mary Lyons, lived in Wethersfield until 1888, when he moved to Newington, where he had lived since. He was a very successful farmer, owning a large farm. Besides his wife he leaves seven children, four daughters and three sons, Mary, Nellie F., Elizabeth L., Jennie L., James F., J. Edward and Andrew L. The funeral obsequies were celebrated in the Sacred Heart Church, Wethersfield, and the interment was in New Britain.

NEW HAVEN.—Michael Walsh, for the past fifty-three years in the employ of W. & E. T. Pickford, 707 Church street, died on the 21st. He leaves a widow and five children, the latter being: Mrs. John Landy, Mrs. John Clerkin, Mrs. M. Leonard, Mrs. J. Eagan and Mrs. Walsh. The funeral was held July 4 from his late residence, 83 Green street, and at St. Patrick’s Church, where a Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated. The interment was in St. Bernard’s Cemetery.

BRISTOL.—Edward Counih, one of the oldest Irish residents of the town, died at his home, 41 R griev, avenue, recently. He was born 73 years ago. He worked for nearly forty years for the Bristol Brass & Clock Co. He leaves several children—William F. and Edward, James Kather and Mrs. Home—and all of this town. The funeral services were held in St. Joseph’s Church, Rev. Thomas J. Kenny officiating. The interment was in the Catholic Cemetery.

DORAN.—Information wanted of Patrick Doran, blacksmith, last heard of in Philadelphia, about 5 years ago. Also Sylvester Doran, last heard of in Meriden, New Haven, Connecticut, about 4 years ago. The address of either is sought by their brother, FRANCIS DORAN, 3 Raleigh place, Dublin’s Barn street, Dublin, Ireland.

UNITED STATES.
(Continued from page 6)

necticut items — deaths, weddings, meetings of Irish organizations, ordinations, etc. — listing the names of many who were involved.

On these two pages are reprinted samples of Connecticut items and paragraphs from the various counties in Ireland. At a time when communications were difficult, Ford provided a means for immigrants to stay in touch with families in other states and in Ireland. Often the brief paragraphs were filled with a wealth of data on Connecticut Irish families, such as employment, place of birth in Ireland, etc.

The news items reproduced here from The Irish World and American Industrial Liberator were found on www.genealogybank.com, a subscription genealogy website.

Genealogybank has online archives of numerous American papers from every state. Its state holdings are sometimes spotty. For example, it sometimes offers more than enough colonial papers and too few late 19th century papers. However, it does have some gems like The Irish World whose issues contain much historical and genealogical data.

A number of libraries also have The Irish World, either on microfilm or printed copies. Some libraries make microfilm rolls available through interlibrary loans. Check at your local library for the procedure for loans.

Below is a list of some libraries holding The Irish World

- New Haven — Yale University — microfilm, 1878-1950.
- Boston Public Library — microfilm — 1871-1950; original copies, 1923-1943.
- New York Historical Society, Newspaper Project — 1879-1883, 1902 and 1920
- New York State Library — Albany — original copies, 1883, 1886, 1888, 1900-1909, 1911, 1914, 1922.
- Library of Congress, Chronicling America program.

Irish World newspaper is treasure house of history and genealogy data

“We have kept faith with the past; we have handed a tradition to the future.” — Padraic Pearse