

AN NASC

D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia



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The Self-Determination for Ireland League in Nova Scotia

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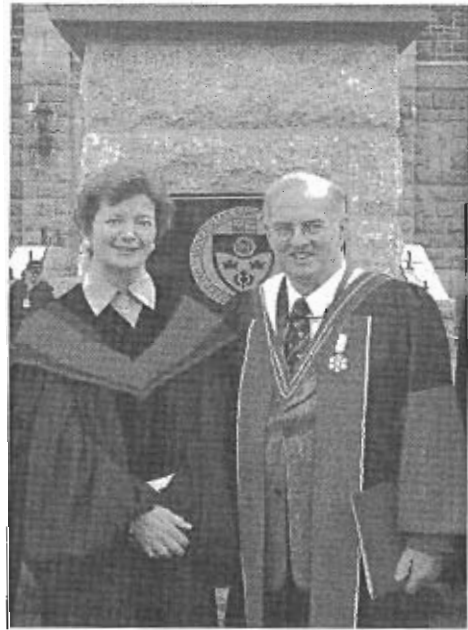
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DR. MARY ROBINSON RECEIVED THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF CIVIL LAW (HONORIS CAUSA) AT SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY ~ 5 JUNE, 2003

Dr. Mary Robinson, the first woman President of Ireland (1990-1997) and, more recently, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), has spent most of her life as a human rights advocate. Now based in New York, Dr. Robinson is currently leading a new project, the Ethical Globalization Initiative (EGI), supported by a partnership of the Aspen Institute, State of the World Forum and the Swiss-based International Council on Human Rights Policy. Its goal is to bring the norms and standards of human rights into the globalization process and to support capacity building in good governance in developing countries, with an initial focus on Africa. Following below is the citation presented by Dr. Cyril J. Byrne, C.M., Coordinator, D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies, for the special conferral ceremony.

Shown here, on her special
convocation day, is
Dr. Mary Robinson, former
President of Ireland and more
recently United Nations High
Commissioner for Human
Rights alongside
Dr. Cyril J. Byrne, C.M.,
Coordinator, D'Arcy McGee
Chair of Irish Studies,
Saint Mary's University



*Photo credit: Paul Fitzgerald,
External Affairs, Saint Mary's University*

A Shoilse, a Mháire Mhic Roibín, Mary Robinson as Béarla, tá fáilte chroíúil romhat go Ceanada, go hAlbain Nua, go Halifax, agus go hOllscoil Mhuire Naofa. Is mór an onóir dúinn í go bhfuil tú anseo inár measc inniu. Welcome to Mary Robinson, to this conferral ceremony which was planned to have occurred during your intended State Visit to Canada when you were President of Ireland. It is not at all out of place to mention the name of the late John Savage, Premier of Nova Scotia, with whom I worked very closely arranging that visit which was cancelled at the very last minute by the calling of a Federal Election. He would have been delighted to be here today for this ceremony. However, despite its long delay, there could be no more appropriate time for it than during this 200th anniversary celebration for Saint Mary's University.

The office of poet in ancient Ireland was a sacred one, a function of which was the creation of tribal genealogies. The frequency with which invaders became enamoured of the Irish and decided to stay on made it incumbent on the poet to incorporate them into the tribal mythology of the Gaels. In this way the non-Gaels such as the great Norman family of the De Burgo or Burke from whom Mary Robinson descends were grafted to the stem of the Irish nation — even non-Gaelic Celts such as the O'Briens were incorporated in this way. These strangers to the Gael who shared the revered strengths and heroic values of the Gaels could with appropriate genealogical dexterity be grafted to the common stock. As the saying goes "they became more Irish than the Irish themselves." Using this Irish poetic precedent I will draw the appropriate lines for this

academic conferral, grafting, if you will, Mary Robinson to the Saint Mary's family tree. Two Burkes had interesting roles in the history of Saint Mary's — Most Reverend Edmund Burke the revered founder of the University and Colonel Sir John Burke, who convinced the Governor of Nova Scotia to set aside the bigotry and hostility of the establishment to educational rights for Roman Catholics and allow his co-religionists their right to higher education. Sir John Burke was from a branch of the Burke family in Country Galway which was part of the ancient territory of Connaught the homeland of the Burkes from whom Mary Robinson descends.

The genealogist would have picked up on the similarities implicit in this in seeing this championing of civil rights as a mantra around which both the origin and ultimate course of the University would be linked with the career of Mary Robinson. For although Saint Mary's was established initially to provide education for the Irish Catholics of Halifax, we find in the very earliest list of students the Coates brothers who were not Irish but members of the Mi'kmaq first nation. Today the University offers its services well beyond its early ethnic and religious perimeter through its programs in Nunavut, with the Innu of Labrador, in the Gambia and South-East Asia. This openness is consonant with the spirit of our Burke progenitors who explicitly stated that no religious test or ethnic bar would be applied at this institution. Exceptional for its time, this extending of a basic human right throughout its first two centuries of existence, resonates strongly with the career of Mary Robinson.

In Mary Robinson one looks at an amazing career in which, like the Burkes I have alluded to, she was not reluctant to take

on established and entrenched attitudes placed in the way of people achieving their goals and finding their place in the sun. Before Mary Robinson battled her way to the Presidency of Ireland, the first woman ever to have done so, she was well known for her advocacy of Irish women's rights to planned parenthood and the means to do so as well as for the rights of gays and lesbians. As a barrister, she won a number of landmark cases in this area. Her years in Seanad Éireann, the Irish Senate, as a representative for Trinity College, Dublin gave her an intimate knowledge of the mystery of legislative behaviour preparing her for both the Presidency and her later role at the United Nations. It might not be untoward to mention one of her esteemed legislative colleagues from Trinity, David Thornley, who acted as supervisor of Dr. Guy Chauvin, a much valued member of the Saint Mary's professoriate.

But nothing in her life was more spectacular than her winning of the Presidency of Ireland, except what she did once she had attained it. This office, formerly a retirement ground for the male old guard of Irish politics, was transformed by Mary Robinson into an agency for change and renewal. "The Ireland I will be representing," she said in her inaugural address, "is a New Ireland, open, tolerant, inclusive." This clarion call to Ireland she extended well beyond its shores, for not only did this new President work to give voice and place to the underprivileged and voiceless in Ireland but she used her office to promote the international protection and promotion of human rights. She appealed to the vast multitude of Irish descendants throughout the world to link into her advocacy and to the

great powerhouse of moral and spiritual wealth the Irish Diaspora had carried to the four corners of the earth. People all over the world were amazed at the dynamic presence of this woman who had taken a moribund office and opened its doors and turned on its lights. Both literally and figuratively she placed a light in Áras an Uachtaráin, the Presidential Mansion. The lady from Ballina in County Mayo was a new Maeve telling Ailill and those who listened "the West's Awake." Ireland, that small Island on the western reaches of the European continent now spoke to it with an awakened authority. And it spoke to the rest of the world as well. Ireland had been conceived of in the poetry of the Gael as a woman under a bewildering set of poetic names — Banba, Cáit Ní Dhuibhir, Caitlín Ní Uallacháin, Róisín Dubh — and now for the world outside Ireland another name was added — Mary Robinson.

Arrivée au terme de sa présidence, Mary Robinson n'a pas hésité à relever un autre défi. En effet, les visites officielles qu'elle avait faites au Tiers-monde pendant sa présidence l'avaient convaincue qu'il restait beaucoup à faire pour promouvoir les droits de l'homme dans les pays en voie de développement. D'ailleurs, elle avait souvent l'audace de mettre en parallèle la crise actuelle de la pauvreté à l'échelle mondiale et la tragédie de la grande famine dans son propre pays au dix-neuvième siècle — tragédie qu'une politique plus éclairée aurait su éviter.

Bref, lorsque M. Kofi Annan lui a proposé le poste de Haut commissaire pour les droits de l'homme, Mary Robinson a vite fait d'accepter la nomination, nomination que l'Assemblée générale devait ratifier en mil

neuf cent quatre-vingt-dix-sept.

Having accepted the role of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson with her usual style and verve put her stamp on everything she did. She immediately focused on integrating human rights concerns in all the activities of the United Nations and further zeroed in on putting the resources of her office where they mattered most: at the country and regional level. Rwanda, South Africa, Colombia and Cambodia were visited by Mary Robinson during her first year in office. She was the first High Commissioner to visit China and signed an agreement with that country which she hoped would lead to the improvement of Civil Rights there. We are all aware of her outspoken criticism of the Chinese Government for its failure to live up to the terms of that agreement. Not only was she critical of China but she also directed some sharply critical remarks at the human rights record of our neighbouring great Superpower. Happy to say, Mary Robinson's term of office coincided with the period during which Lloyd Axworthy served as Canada's minister of External Affairs who like Mary Robinson was not reluctant to read from the same page as she. Her frankness and honesty have been impressive; and doubtless, did not earn her the approbation of those who do not appreciate her kind of direct" telling it as it is." Whatever her kudos with government administrations, Mary Robinson has won world-wide respect and admiration for the way in which she has been so clear in her great offices. To run over the lists of honours and awards that have come her way would be interesting but somewhat tedious. Moreover, the list might be a cause

of some embarrassment to a person whose only concern is in getting done the job of promoting human rights so that life for human beings may be lived in peace and order in well governed communities so that all of us may flourish as the human family all over the green earth.

Guímid gach rath ort féin, agus go n-éirí le do chuid oibre inniu is sna blianta atá le teacht.

Reverendissime Cancellarie, presento vobis Mary Robinson, quendam praeces Hiberniae et civis mundi, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse que admittatur, honoris cuasa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Jure Civile, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totique Academiae Scanctae Mariae.

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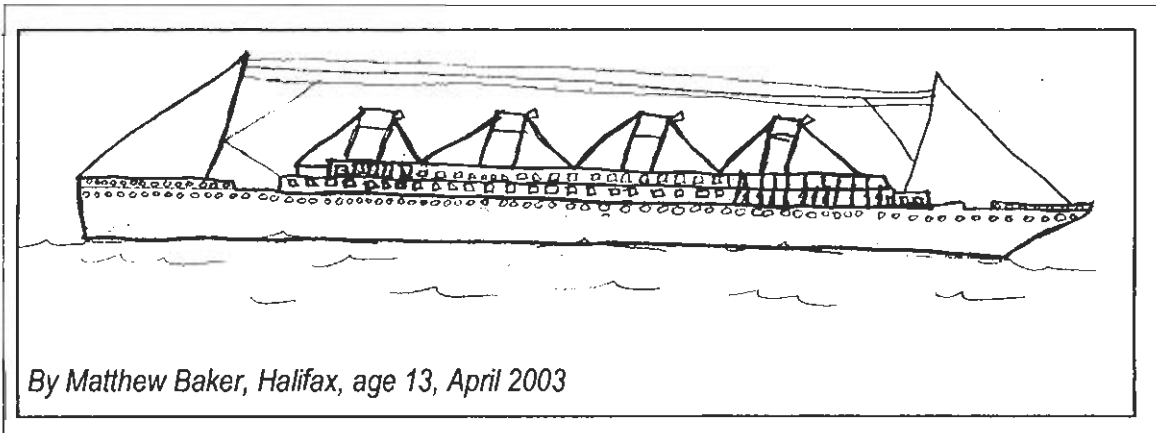
Titanic Connections

Brian Robinson

Titanic!—the subject is, as the persistence of the inevitable accompanying adjective suggests, unsinkable. Already, within a single sentence the submerinal implications are, for better or for worse, available to us in the amalgam that we choose to call our common culture. The unlikelihood of someone having somehow or other sealed themselves off from truths and/or myths associated with *Titanic* is as preposterous as the claim by the Ballard-like underwater explorer in the 1997 *Titanic* movie that he had failed to “let it in”. The very figures of speech are revealing—as are the risky titles and subtitles of these two recent additions to the continuing story: *The Age of Titanic: cross-currents of Anglo-American culture* and *Touched by Titanic: creative writing, poetry and drawings by children from Belfast, Cobh and Halifax*.¹

However, other than the *Titanic*, the two books may seem to have little in common. Foster’s is one by an academic whose acquaintance with the material is first hand

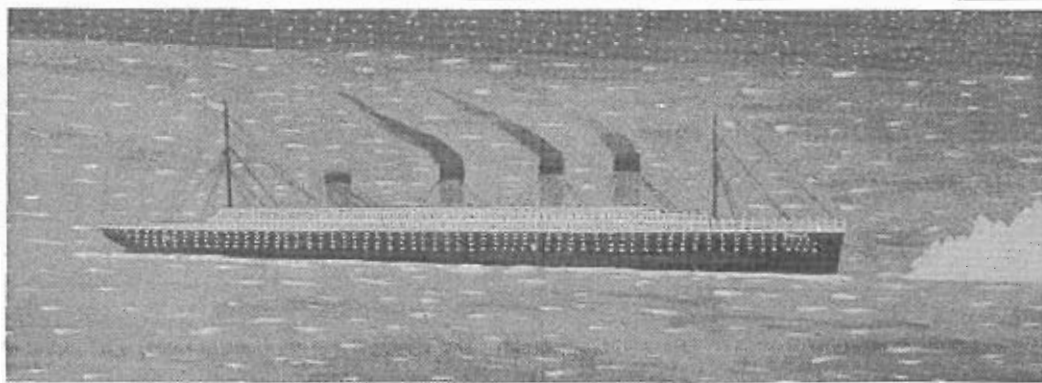
and carefully thought out, whereas the children’s compilation is reliant on more easily available sources which often merely represent the promptings of their teachers. But, in both cases, since *Titanic* has become such an ubiquitous cultural reference, it is the point of view of this review article that they do have much in common in how they imagine *Titanic*. Despite their different resource and intellectual bases, both books are symptoms of what drives the continuing interest in the *Titanic*. For, whether we like it or not, in popular culture, *Titanic*’s meaning continues to proliferate, connections are constantly being made, reference builds on reference—until that exasperated breaking point Jeremy Hawthorn (1996) reached: “There is something about this particular disaster which encourages...searches for minutely differentiated symbolic clues, as if the *Titanic*’s loss were a highly coded Renaissance painting or piece of medieval church architecture” (108).



"Connection" is such a commonly used word in the children's book that the antiquarianism of their heritage enterprise is simply taken for granted. The children have obviously been encouraged to think about and, more importantly perhaps, to imagine their respective locality's connection to the story of the ship and its disaster, hence such self-explanatory titles as "My family connection with the *Titanic's* recovery", "*Titanic's* connection with Cobh" or, quite simply, "The Halifax Connection". Interestingly, the word is not used in the Belfast section—perhaps it was considered redundant because Belfast's connection is better known than the others? But the Belfast topics are remarkably similar to the others, especially in the context of such researched genealogical connections as "The Dickenson Family of Number 1 McMaster Street", "My Great Grandfather—James Carnaghan", and "Results of An Interview with Mrs. McGuinness". Such connections literally familiarize and bring home what would otherwise be a story of larger than life Titans. On the other hand, it is notable that nearly all the children's paintings prefer the overly

familiar remote profile shots of the great vessel, thereby sustaining the clichéd gigantism of *Titanic* mythology.

The value of Foster's book is that, as the subtitle "cross-currents of Anglo-American culture" suggests, not only are connections made on a trans-Atlantic basis, but, in order to do so, it draws on the same local heritages that the children are familiar with. This is especially true of Belfast of which Foster has special knowledge because he is from the north of Ireland. At a more general level, Foster's approach to culture is virtually synonymous with the implications of the children's use of the word connection—a risky approach for an academic to take in an age which prefers its "culture studies" packaged in the more assimilable a priori forms of some theory or other. Certainly, Foster's "connections" are more loosely structured than, for example, those in Steven Biel's recent cultural history of the *Titanic Down with the Old Canoe* (1997) in which Biel steels himself against divining supposed social or political effects of the disaster because these often yield, what he dismisses as, "facile generalizations and tenuous



"Titanic at Night" by Charles Norris, Lower Prospect, Nova Scotia. Reprinted by permission.

connections”(7). Maybe, but, given the inherent contingency of the “what might have been” subject matter, is this kind of distinction possible? Furthermore, how is the fail-safe moment of diminishing academic returns to be established? Foster’s confident willingness to follow up as many leads as possible suggests where a more undisciplined approach than his may end up. His immersion in trans-Atlantic experience enables him to make critical judgment calls. On the other hand, it’s almost as if Biel’s defensive posture was a way to pre-define the meaning of meaning, in itself a frustrating enterprise, because, despite himself, in his more relaxed moments, Biel reveals how his human interest keeps showing through. For example, the most sympathetic section of Biel’s book is when he admits some empathy with *Titanic* “enthusiasts” who tour the sites covered in the same trans-Atlantic geography as Foster’s and the children’s books. Biel reports that the highlight of one tour was the visit to Harland and Wolff’s shipyard in Belfast; “There Ed Kamunda [of the Titanic Historical Society] experienced what he called the most remarkable moment in his long involvement with the *Titanic*: ‘the feeling of actually standing on the spot where she sailed from, and where she was born’”(201). Southampton, Cherbourg, Queenstown and Halifax, Nova Scotia, are other pilgrimage sites which follow the maiden voyage’s fatal linear chronology. Biel somewhat patronizingly refers to these visits as having enabled *Titanic* buffs “to escape the prosaic”(202). Once again, Biel’s academic aversions are understandable: “The *Titanic* is the stuff of what academically trained historians sometimes condescendingly refer

to as ‘popular history’, in which complex processes are ignored in favor of antiquarianism—amazing facts without significant interpretation—or reduced to single dramatic moments” (7).

There is of course considerable truth in this. For example, Halifax’s Maritime Museum of the Atlantic establishes its academic credentials by labeling as “popular culture” a separate display of *Titanic* postcards, board-games, bottles of “Titanic” beer and so on, as if this (more dubious?) exhibit can be differentiated from (the authentic value of?) “the world’s finest collection of wooden artifacts from *Titanic*”(Advertisement, Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, 2000). To cite an undoubtedly hypocritical claim, a few years ago during the height of *Titanic* (the movie) frenzy on Halifax’s post-modernised waterfront, a massive inflatable model of the sinking *Titanic*’s angled poop deck was used as a children’s slide (*Halifax Chronicle*-July 28, 2000, A8). The justification given by the owners was that there was educational value in such “a learning experience” (an opportunity for the children to empathize with the victims’ last moments as they plunged to their fate?). As I say, empathy can be an intrusive embarrassment for the academic historian, but, crass as this vehicle for entertainment was, it does show where popular culture may lead (and, not incidentally, where to draw the line).²

Foster does not apologize for his choices. Thus, in an earlier book, *The Titanic Complex* (1997), he nailed his colours firmly to the mast:

History, especially cultural history as it is today practiced, cannot make real



Titanic 'Slide', Halifax Waterfront,
photographed by Brian Robinson

that night, nor indeed have many 'creative' treatments since. Only the sympathetic imagination can re-create what happened: many hundreds of unprepared people (once the perilous reality of their situation sank in) consciously preparing to survive or die during an agonizing yet lethally brief period of warning (9-10).

Similarly, the children—prompted by teachers who have resorted to the emotions rather than empirical fact (loosely taught, if the evidence of their book is to be believed)—have humanist credentials that need no justification beyond invoking the reader to "Just Imagine", even as they are forced to admit that they cannot truly "picture" the

tragedy of those final moments (which were, it must be remembered, not just the *Titanic's*, but of over a thousand "unprepared people"). So both Foster and the children risk what political cultural studies avoids.

One explanation for cultural studies' aversion to popular culture's propensity to play fast and loose with connection may be unwillingness to appreciate just how contingent historic process may appear to the untrained mind which feels it must, in Christopher Gillie's words, "take responsibility for accident so as to transform it into meaning and shape coincidence into coherence" (cited in Page 1993,83).³ Admittedly this all too human reliance on coincidence is a notoriously undisciplined approach to the creative imagination. But this does not mean that there should be no room for the less learned kind of imagination's concern for, what George Eliot referred to as, "the dimmer yet eager *Titanic* life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings" (*Middlemarch* 1984, 188). It might be added that citing Eliot in this obviously anachronistic context suggests how the metaphors involved are a convergence where the imagination has begun to augment the *Titanic* buff's "events might have been otherwise" obsessions. For example, Belfast poet Ciaran Carson has shown that (by merely quoting some coincidences and retrospective omens) it is possible to imagine being immersed in *Titanic* lore like "a disembodied robotic eye gliding like a wayward star through the adits of its wrecked Atlantean cathedral, or through a porthole oculus, taking account of tilted apses and saloons, wandering their marble stairs" (1998, 55,60). As the particples and metaphors proliferate so

Carson's soluble imagination converges with *Titanic's* debris field of relics.

Or, in my more prosaic terms, the *Titanic* story has become replete with the kinds of contingency which the academy avoids because it cannot give credence to popular culture's notion that a one-off tragedy is fair game for a cult of connections.

Of course, this is to risk an obsession with the examination of every horseshoe nail in case the kingdom should be lost (Gould 1990, 286). Even at the local level, redundancy never seems to be an issue. In part this is because Foster wishes to write into the record those nuances of the ship's Belfast origins which have been neglected. For example, he points out that not every Belfast Roman Catholic rejoiced at the fate of a supposedly Protestant ship. At the same time Foster allows himself considerable latitude when it comes to the culture of coincidences:

Titanic was built by an over whelming (but not exclusively) Protestant workforce intent like their co-religionists on retaining an unqualified British citizenship in defiance of the strenuous wishes of Irish nationalists, most of them Catholic. That the ship should founder during the crucial stages of the third Home Rule Bill's passage (the bill granted Canada-like autonomy to Ireland) is a coincidence to warm the heart of any cultural historian.

Understandably, Foster is fascinated by how, in Halifax, "the major denominations claimed the bodies which were dispersed to their appropriate graveyards in interim divine judgment". On the other hand, the Halifax children indiscriminately list the three cemeteries involved — Fairview, Mount

Olivet, and Baron De Hirsh (Protestant, Catholic and Jewish respectively). This is because their heritage demands a local "Halifax connection" in the form of the city's claim to special knowledge of disasters:

Only one-third of the bodies could be identified. Even more would remain unidentified if it wasn't for the quick thinking of a local man named John Henry Barnstead, who came up with a new way to number bodies. His new and interesting way caught on. It was used by his son five years later during the time of the Halifax Explosion, December 1917.

Irrespective of whether or not this is an example of what Foster means by how "established cultural expressions and practices [await] their local version in the tragedy of *Titanic*", each local story reflects the wider tragedy in its own way. But there are also common themes which resonate with the numbing sameness of contemporary heritage projects. Indeed, it is these variations on a heritage theme that enable teachable topics and which provision "history" with those popular cultural elements deemed worthy of inclusion in local curricula. These children are not the innocent Romantic unconventional of the book's introduction (surely one of the most insidious myths regarding what children are supposed to bring to art). Some examples from each of the three sites will show how this ambiguous relationship between imagination, popular culture, history and/or heritage operates.

First, disaster facilitates educators with a more secure leverage point on the past than political or social history. The link between *Titanic* and the 1917 Halifax Explosion is an elision of chronological time which turns

history into a catalogable heritage of benchmarks (see for example the time frame display in Halifax's Alexander Keith Heritage Brewery). Indeed, without Ireland's Sommes, Bloody Sundays, Cromwell and so on, popular culture might find little narrative interest in history. But cultural heritage is also an evasion of critical social and political issues. Foster's sectarian shipyard is not an admissible aspect of Belfast's classroom *Titanic* lore. Instead, a heritaged sociology is documented in the form of aged photography (also a self-conscious technique of *Titanic* the movie). "Living History" invests the genealogy of the past in the reproduction of a typical (Protestant) working class house terrace from East Belfast (almost within the shadow of Harland and Wolff's giant cranes gazing out over the city like silent colossi). Thus daily life and working conditions are acritically riveted to the technology of how the world's biggest ship was produced in the world's largest shipyard (worldwide, reference to "world class" events, facilities and spectacles in general, is a stock in trade of how local heritagizing provincialises itself). In contrast, Cobh derives its connection from the real enough passenger link which it uses to personify Irish nationalism in the form of an emigration to America theme. So, whereas Northern Ireland's troubles are considered an embarrassment, those of Ireland's south are raised to the power of what the *Titanic* can do for the auld-sod trans-Atlantic connection. Once again, the film followed a similar romantic vector and, strained though it may be, given the inverted class structure of James Cameron's denouement, it is interesting to see how the director's seeded facts have become embedded in the

children's storyline.

Their reflection of the mores of Cameron's movie depends on how documented facts shore up the terrifying yet eminently imaginable end of the *Titanic* disaster. Being "Touched by *Titanic*" is therefore the children's conveyance for both factual lore (the stuff of their incipient buffdom) and the unimaginable. This is what Roland Barthes referred to as myth-making's capacity to fabricate "the accounts of the ineffable" (1973, 76) — a contradiction to be sure, but one which the technology of movie juxtapositions may sustain. Facts, and what is beyond words can live with one another quite easily. For example, the coincident connection between the film's Jack Dawson and Halifax's real graveyard victim "J. Dawson" is the most obvious mythical fabrication.⁴ More insidious is how the film has planted some unlikely art and love story connections whose ideology the children inadvertently report and reflect. For example, it is remarkable how often the film's otherwise rebellious heroine breaks away from her mentor in life and art (her vagrant lover Jack Dawson) to consult with the ship's architect, Thomas Andrews, on how things are transpiring in the real world of mature considerations. One measure of the unlikelihood of how the thoughtful Andrews and the impetuous Rose seem to understand one another is that, otherwise, her claims to fame are either the finger she so glibly shows to authority or the spitting techniques taught by Dawson. Meanwhile, as time runs out, only Andrews understands the defining nature of calculated time. The heroine's nose-thumbing shenanigans, by definition, should not need to consult, let alone defer to, any outside force. Her ability to defy time

and return to the *Titanic* as a bona fide creative artist is symbolized by our approving applause in the surround of the grand staircase conclusion (entertainment amphitheatres, preferably with glass domes, are fetishes of contemporary architecture culture, so it is understandable how the *Titanic's* staircase has become a cult object in its own right).

Much is permitted in this teen-cult movie, but what is entirely inadmissible is that Andrews should be allowed to personify an Irish example of modernity. On the contrary, according to the movie, Andrew's engineering skill has been stymied by the White Star Line's preference for luxury. In the film's only direct reference to Belfast, the city is presented as the foolish source of a poorly designed ill-fated vessel. Yet the film needs Andrews' dependable know how. The children accordingly defer to him with the same respect that Rose shows. In effect, what is personified in the sympathetic maturity of Belfast's Andrews, is only permitted because it can be undercut by Queenstown's fiery nationalism. Here trans-Atlantic Irishness of various broth-of-a-boy sorts (music, drinking, dancing and even a martyr who dies at the hands of "limey bastards") is metonymically associated with teenage rebelliousness. Young Ryan's brave Irish death is an aesthetic sacrifice which gives the movie political credentials it wouldn't otherwise have if it simply relied on the destiny of star crossed lovers who would rather go down with the timeless ship. If this were not enough, Irish nationalism is given an otherworldly dimension in the unfathomable music which pervades the waves of oceanic time in order to oppose the

linear modernity represented by the trajectory and speed of the ship. As in the trans-Atlantic amalgam of *Riverdance*, the Celtic new age articulates by means of the ineffable. Its aesthetic is a sounding of depths. It has no time for the accounts and calculations of the industrialized North—until, that is, Thomas Andrews is called in to give, as Belfast's children say, "the horrible news that the *Titanic* would sink".

It may seem that this is as far as a discussion of acritical *Titanic* connection should go. Certainly, in the context of how children are often force-fed their local heritage, a creaky film like *Titanic* should be held to account. However, my point is not that connections should be limited to the fathomable because, in the context of what Foster has found so alluring in *Titanic* ramifications, it is unlikely that the academic historian's protocols can set a limit to, what George Eliot in *Middlemarch* defined as, "the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts" (188). Often Foster's connections can be justified and his cultural approach shows how many of them can be followed up in a finely tuned and responsible way. This is to recognize that Foster's limits are set by judgment calls that come from acquaintance with the material involved.

Nevertheless, Foster's willingness to shape coincidence into coherence leaves him vulnerable to the risks of relying on culture as "sympathetic imagination". For example, he depicts the mass *Titanic* gravesite of Halifax's Fairview Cemetery as "a giant hieroglyphic, with the graves arranged to suggest the curvature of a ship's hull tapering towards her bow". Foster's language is careful and convincing. However, the

evidence as to whether or not this arrangement was deliberately monumental seems to be yet another story for buffs to worry over (compare Jeffers and Gordon 1998 with Ruffman 1999, 50). More to the point is the degree to which Foster's topographical glyph coincides with what is known since the vessel's rediscovery. Inevitably what is imagined of the ship's bow now rests uneasily between post-modernity's over-determined icon and shallow celebrity image. Cameron played with both ends of this spectrum in the opening three minutes of his film in order to reaffirm the prodigal chronology of *Titanic's* Launched, Lost and Found sequence (Lubin 1999, 17). So *Titanic* has become the submerged iconic Omega of "the skeletal wreckage...of the bow of the ship and, most notably, the railing" (Lubin 1999, 18). Unfortunately, the movie is hypnotised by its own affected arty retrieval agenda and Cameron's effects and apparatus smother the very mystery he is exploiting (Thomson 2002, 129). Nevertheless, this is, to raise the creative stakes, the same structure of contrasts as Thomas Hardy's poem "The Convergence of the Twain" with the ship's "cleaving" prow on its coincident path towards the iceberg. The critical difference is that Hardy's *Titanic* tomb remained prodigiously beyond retrieval. In a world where destiny preceded contingency, what else is to be expected? So, whereas Hardy defied humanised connections (including remorse), Foster's empathetic convergence is a ley line course connecting Halifax's graves to, "on the ocean bed miles below the surface", *Titanic's* skeletal prow apparently aligned with the cemetery's hieroglyphic direction. Foster is

so insistent on this coincidence that it is difficult to decipher what matters most, the magical appeal to sympathetic "connection", or the unforgiving spatial and temporal distances involved. Again, the question is one of trust in Foster's skill in handling the labyrinth of connections that is the *Titanic* story.

But Foster might have left well enough alone, leaving us with, what Cameron's movie would never have dared, some disconnect between concrete things and their emotional meanings (Thomson 923). Better some factual loose ends than mystified retrievals, is one fail-safe judgement call. Better still is an imagination which converges on the depth where *Titanic* now silently rusts. That silence recalls the moments as the cries of the drowning grew fainter until there was no sound at all and no trace of the *Titanic*. As novelist Beryl Bainbridge (1996) imagined this moment's finality: "All that remained was a grey veil of vapour drifting above the water" (221-2). Yet it is from that "lidded" surface that this relentlessly worked over popular domain begins...

ENDNOTES

¹ Foster, John (2002) *The Age of Titanic* Merlin: Dublin
Belfast City Council (2002) *Touched by Titanic* Belfast City Council: Belfast

Unless otherwise indicated all references are to these two books. Other sources are indicated in the text and in the citations at the end of the article.

² Compare Foster and Biel with Heyer (1995) whose approach manages somehow to reconcile some unlikely coincidences between *Titanic* and the grounding of the SS *Atlantic* near Terence Bay, Nova Scotia, with the theorizing claims of structuralism.

³ Gillie was commenting on "only connect" the famous epigraph to E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*.

⁴ A story which received world wide attention recently was the attempt to prove the identity of the "Unknown Child" grave using DNA. Apparently she is not related to the supposed mother buried, coincidentally, nearby.

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Celtic Languages and Celtic Peoples
Proceedings of the Second North American Congress of Celtic Studies

Saint Mary's University, Halifax, August 1989

Edited by:
Cyril J. Byrne
Margaret Harry
Pádraig Ó Siadhail

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The Shape of Irish History

by A.T.Q. Stewart

Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001.

Reviewed by Ron Beed

A.T.Q. Stewart's aim in writing this book, which has its origins as a discussion piece for his fellow historians and students, is to express his dissatisfaction with the framework and content of traditional histories of Ireland and their focus on events which lead inevitably to the growth of the nation State. Stewart offers several reasons for this situation, especially a flawed system of education of 'historical scientists' who are trained to analyze only well documented and researched historical events, leaving vast amounts of relevant material in a hidden or 'grey' area, the so called "unlighted" area of history. According to Stewart, historians operate in a form of "academic apartheid" that not only ignores the literary historians, like Beckett, Moody and Byrne but also the undocumented evidence from archaeology and geography on the ancient culture of prehistoric Ireland. In addition many historians have assumed that the major events in Irish history have occurred in Ireland, sitting alone and separated from the world, free from external influence and without reference to the European context. In other words Irish history has simply become what the historians have chosen it to be. This may be understandable if one accepts Stewart's opinion of the history profession namely: "The history Ph.D. Industry ... turns out ... monographs by historians who give the impression that they have never read

anything but other monographs. The treasures of experience from other humanities are ... locked away from them ... they are no longer encouraged to think about the material," and the research is simply... "too boring for the ordinary reader." Perhaps it is no wonder that the history of Ireland that emerges from this environment is a distorted one.

Stewart was deeply concerned about these matters and he took early retirement from Queen's University of Belfast to publish this alternative model of Irish history that not unexpectedly begins in the prehistoric era, reexamines the "unlighted" and hidden areas which surround the major events of traditional Irish history and discusses them in the English and European context in which many of them occurred. The new model or framework of Irish history which results from this review is useful. Stewart's discussion of important and formative events in Irish history like the invasions by the Norse and the Normans, Cromwell, and the Williamite war, as well as the French and Spanish influence in Irish history is built on a widened base of contextual material. As a result the notion that Irish history occurred only in Ireland is destroyed, the sense of separateness from Europe becomes irrelevant, the concept of a unique 'Irish Race' is shattered and Ireland is considered primarily as the place where much of European history was played out.

Stewart uses the example of Wolfe Tone in the Republican movement and 1798 rebellion to illustrate his opinion that historians simply read each other's work and no longer rely on original research material. Using the memoirs of Tone as the basis of his evaluation Stewart puts aside the traditional heroic role of the man in the Irish Republican movement and presents Tone as a man who had little real interest in or authority over the course of Irish history. His role in the United Irishmen is reduced to a minor one and he becomes an "...insouciant young Trinity graduate whose abiding ambition was to wear the British uniform."

The Shape of Irish History does not fit into the generally accepted categories of history texts. The book is not simply a catalogue of events, nor is it a discussion about the various administrations that have inserted themselves into Irish history over the centuries. Neither is it a highly focused analysis of a short period in the history of Ireland nor a specialized study of a particular event or series of events related to a particular theme, i.e., the Great Famine. The structure of the book is quite different from other histories in that it incorporates the evidence of other disciplines like archaeology and begins in the prehistoric era, and discusses the major events of early and modern Irish history up to the present day in Northern Ireland. The text also differs from traditional histories in that he broadens his discussion of the events or important individuals by examining them in the European context in which many of them must be considered. However, as a result of this process of reexamination, the events lose their uniqueness and merge into a homogenized

story where no particular event or theme is highlighted.

Homogenized version or not, *The Shape of Irish History* is written in the lively and easily read narrative style that is the trademark of A.T.Q. Stewart. The book is pregnant with detail and a comfortable familiarity with the events in traditional Irish history is essential for a fruitful reading of the text. It reads like a story, on-going and open ended, but it is not superficial. Like all well written texts it leaves the reader with more questions than answers. For instance, is his model a true reflection of Irish history or is it simply his own point of view (the answer is that it is probably a bit of each). Is this text fully understood only when considered in conjunction with the traditional model? While it may be reasonable to criticize the canonical quality of traditional Irish history, does A.T.Q. Stewart go too far in the opposite direction?

Ron Beed is a graduate of the Irish Studies program at Saint Mary's University.

IRISHMAN BURNS WHITE HOUSE

Pre-Bin Laden Terrorist?

August 14, 1814

Washington D.C. was occupied on this date by British Troops. The Presidential Mansion was scorched and later white washed - the first time but not the last when official Washington performed a "Whitewash!!" The troops who scorched the "White House" were under the command of Major General Robert Ross, a native of Rostrevor, Ireland. Ross himself was killed in action near Baltimore, Maryland, a month later. His remains were brought to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and were interred under a table monument in St. Paul's Cemetery.

A selection of photographs from
Women's History: Irish/Canadian Connections Conference
Saint Mary's University ~ 21-24 August, 2002

Photos by Laurie Mireau

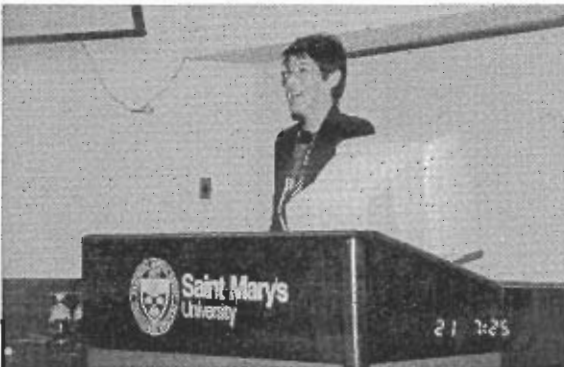


(pictured above l to r):

*Sylvia Hamilton,
Mary Dorcey,
Éilís Ní Dhuibhne,
Christine St. Peter*



*Gráinne Blair, University College Dublin,
Dr. J. Colin Dodds, President, Saint Mary's University*



Aibhfe Smyth, Director, WERRC



*Cyril J. Byrne, C.M., Coordinator, Irish Studies, SMU and
Pádraig Ó Siadhail, Irish Studies, SMU*



*Hon. Alexa McDonough, MP for Halifax and former
leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada*



Conference participants relax



Mary Cullen, Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, delivers the keynote address



(from l to r): Mary Cullen, Marie Hammond Callaghan, WERRC, University College Dublin, and Cyril J. Byrne, C.M., Coordinator, Irish Studies, SMU



(from l to r): Pádraig Ó Siadhail, Irish Studies, SMU, Dr. Terry Murphy, Vice President, Academic and Research, SMU and Alexa McDonough

Women's History: Irish / Canadian Connections was sponsored by the D'Arcy McGee Chair of Irish Studies, Saint Mary's University in association with the Women's Education Research & Resource Centre (WERRC), University College Dublin, Ireland.

The Self-Determination for Ireland League: 1920-1922

Notes on the League in Nova Scotia

Pádraig Ó Siadhail

On Easter Monday 1916, several thousand members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army launched an armed insurrection against British rule in Ireland. Though unsuccessful in itself, the week-long rising marks the beginning of a series of events that resulted in the establishment of the modern Irish state in 1922.

By 1920, Sinn Féin, the major separatist party, had unilaterally established Dáil Éireann, an independent Irish parliament, and the Volunteers, now popularly known as the Irish Republican Army, were engaged in a nasty guerrilla war with British forces in Ireland. Though Ireland was the major centre of activity, it was not the only front in the struggle for Irish political independence from Britain. There was also the international arena, where the Irish leaders of the separatist movement believed that they could appeal to the world community and where they could mobilize the Irish born and those of Irish descent abroad in support of the goal of Irish freedom.

The pro-Irish independence lobby in the United States had assembled by 1919 a massive propaganda machine which had garnered support not just from the Irish but from other ethnic groups and from those interested in social reform. Patrick McCartan, an Irish born propagandist in the States estimated that the American pro-Irish umbrella organization, the FOIF, the Friends of Irish Freedom Federation, had 250,000

members.

Canada presented a different picture. Until 1920, there had only been occasional public lectures on the situation in Ireland and no attempt had been made to mobilize Irish Canadian opinion on behalf of the cause of Irish self-determination. However, this was to change in the spring of 1920, when the journalist, Lindsay Crawford, and two ministers, J. A. H. Irwin, Presbyterian, and James Grattan Mythen, Episcopalian, lectured in Toronto and Quebec City. These three were members of FOIF-affiliated 'The Protestant Friends of Ireland,' a lobby group founded in the United States in December 1919, with the aim of countering claims that all Irish Protestants opposed Irish self-determination. It was reported that four thousand people attended the Toronto meeting of the Protestant Friends of Ireland in Massey Hall.

By the summer of 1920, both the Criminal Investigation Bureau of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canadian Military Intelligence were becoming increasingly concerned about the level of pro-Irish independence activity in Canada.

A RCMP Criminal Investigation Bureau intelligence report, prepared in August 1920, showed the interest of the police in this surge in pro-Irish activity in Canada. It reported that pro-Irish support groups—"Sinn Féin societies"—had appeared in Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver since the

start of 1920. While Roman Catholics were predominant in these groups, it was now clear that Crawford and "the Protestant element" were being pushed to the fore in order to suggest that the conflict in Ireland was not sectarian, the report continued.

The RCMP was witnessing the first outcome of a deliberate decision to set up in Canada a network similar to the one already in place within the United States. It is likely that it was Eamon de Valera, the most senior surviving commander from the 1916 Rising and the President of Dáil Éireann, who had been lobbying and fundraising for the Irish republican cause throughout the United States since the summer of 1919, who authorized an official Canadian pro-Irish organization. He took a personal interest in its development throughout. Similarly, it appears that the finances to establish it came initially from the Irish within the United States.

The task of establishing the Canadian equivalent of the Friends of Irish Freedom fell to two experienced organizers and propagandists, the Irish-born Lindsay Crawford and the Canadian-born Katherine Hughes.

Robert Lindsay Crawford (1868-1945) born in Lisburn, County Antrim, of Protestant Planter stock, gave little inkling in his early years that he was to become a prominent Irish nationalist. A journalist by profession, he was active in the Orange Order, left it to establish the Independent Orange Order, before seeing, as one might contend not entirely flippantly, the light and the errors of his ways. Within a short period during his thirties, while still living in Ireland, he rejected Unionism and Orangism and became a

supporter of Irish Home Rule, thus becoming something of a Lundy-figure (traitor figure) amongst his former colleagues. Not being able to find work in Ireland, he arrived in Canada in 1910, becoming eventually a member of the editorial staff of the *Toronto Globe*.

Once in Canada, Lindsay Crawford remained not just interested in his homeland, but an eloquent lecturer in support of Irish nationalism. In turn, when it became time to launch a nationwide pro-Irish organization in Canada, he was the ideal candidate to lead it, both because of his credentials as redeemed former Orangeman and his skill and experience as public speaker.

Katherine Hughes (1876-1925), a fascinating enigmatic figure, was born on Prince Edward Island. Both her parents were of Irish extraction — her uncle was Cornelius O'Brien, Catholic Archbishop of Halifax from 1883 until his death in 1906, one who had left his mark on this city due to his church-building efforts (Hughes published a biography of O'Brien in 1906). Hughes trained as a teacher at the Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown, worked for a number of years as a teacher at St. Regis Mohawk reserve (now Akwesasne) before becoming a journalist and heading west to Edmonton. From then on, her career took off. She became first Provincial Archivist of Alberta and then Secretary to two Alberta Premiers, Alexander Rutherford and Arthur Sifton. In addition, she published a highly acclaimed biography of the famous Oblate missionary, Albert Lacombe, and established in Edmonton the first branch within Canada of the Catholic Women's League. Transferring as secretary in the newly-established office

of the Agent-General of Alberta in London in 1913 proved a watershed in Hughes's career, as she encountered Irish political activists and writers there and was transformed into an ardent supporter of the Irish nationalist cause. She began learning Irish and co-authored a play in English with Pádraic Ó Conaire, the foremost Irish language writer of the time.

Back in North America in 1915, Hughes was moved by the Easter Rising of 1916 to become involved in presenting the case for Irish independence, published a monograph,



Katherine Hughes in Alberta, c. 1909.
(National Archives of Canada PA - 082240)

Ireland, in which she displayed a wonderful ability to marshal clear economic data in support of the cause, and became in 1918, a full-time nationalist organizer and lobbyist based in Washington, DC. By the late spring of 1920, Hughes, who had organized much of de Valera's publicity and fundraising tour of the Southern States, had just released a new work, *English Atrocities in Ireland*.

The Irish leaders in the United States made no secret of their plans to organize Canada. The New York *Irish World* and the *Gaelic American* carried reports in March 1920 that 'The Irish Canadian League' had recently been founded, "whose chief object in the future will be to further and promote an Irish Race Convention to be held at Montreal next summer, in favor of Irish self-determination ... Branches will be organized all over the Dominion, from Halifax to Vancouver, with headquarters of the League at Montreal." But it was from mid-May when Hughes arrived in Montreal, her Canadian base, to the end of June, when she began travelling widely, that comprehensive plans for forging a nationwide Irish support group were prepared. 'The Irish Canadian League' would now become the 'Self-Determination for Ireland League,' and a National Convention would be held in Toronto, not Montreal, in the autumn. Occasional public meetings were held during this period. For example, as the RCMP noted, Irwin and Crawford spoke at the Labour Temple in Toronto on May 26; Irwin and Hughes addressed a "huge meeting" at Windsor Hall, Montreal, on May 31; and on June 11, Frank P. Walsh, the prominent Irish American social reformer, lectured in Montreal. However, most energy was directed into contacting

supporters throughout Canada, preparing the ground for the continent-wide tour by Hughes, now appointed provisional national organizer of the proposed network.

De Valera's interest and influence in the new organization was clear. He could not visit Canada openly, lest he be arrested and extradited to Ireland or Britain. However, on May 30, he visited Plattsburgh, New York State, and convened a meeting with approximately fifty men and women from Montreal, at which "the plans of the recently formed Self-Determination for Ireland League were discussed." The *Montreal Gazette* observed that this meeting and the dinner that followed it were private functions, with the unnamed mysterious Canadian guests not registering at the hotel. The RCMP, though incorrectly dating this meeting, saw this strange gathering close to the Canadian border as central to the emergence of the Self-Determination League:

It was after this [meeting] that we noticed the name 'Self-Determination for Ireland League' used so extensively. The movement also had a fillip, and since then [the] organization has been active.

At a public meeting in Montreal on the evening following the Plattsburgh escapade, Hughes specifically urged the audience to enlist in the Self-Determination League.

The primary aim of League was straightforward: "To secure organized support for the right of the people of Ireland to choose freely without coercion, or dictation from outside, their own Governmental institutions and their political relationships with other States and peoples." It is clear that in choosing the name of the League, its founders were attempting to establish as

broad and as inclusive an organization as possible. Unlike its American counterpart, there was no mention of freedom, of independence, or of an Irish Republic, which might scare off possible supporters.

In the summer of 1920, Katherine Hughes began a national tour that would see her visiting all Canadian provinces and Newfoundland and crisscrossing the country within a three month period. She got off to a shaky and disappointing start in Halifax on 2 July when she lectured in the School for the Blind. Although she set up a branch of League that night, the numbers joining seem to have been small. Subsequently, Hughes travelled to Sydney where, on 4 July, she spoke to a full house at the Lyceum Theatre. It was noted in the *Halifax Evening Mail* (5 July) that the number of recruits for the Sydney branch, given as over 300, outstripped the number recruited in Halifax. It was also reported that the Sydney meeting drew not just the local Irish, but Scots, and "not a few Protestants."

Clearly the Halifax Irish needed cajoling. Hughes returned to the city on July 11, and spoke at a meeting at the Majestic Theatre at which John W. Regan, deputy mayor, presided, in the absence of Judge N. H. Meagher whose wife had passed away. The *Halifax Evening Mail* noted: "Every seat was occupied, while a couple of hundred had to stand. Both sexes were represented. The audience was both sympathetic and enthusiastic." (July 12, 1920) Arrangements were made for another meeting on July 14 in St. Mary's Parish Hall to complete the establishing of committees. By July 16, the *Halifax Evening Mail* was reporting that over 600 Haligonians were determined to sign up as League members.

Hughes' speeches in Nova Scotia set the tone for the rest of her "Facts about Ireland" tour of the Maritimes and of Central and Western Canada. She would state that she was speaking as a Canadian first and foremost (this was meant to refute allegations that she was an interfering American); outline the sacrifices made by the Irish during the Great War; contend that young Canadian soldiers, many of whom she had met in London, had died for the principle of self-determination and the rights of small nations; would move on to the economic plight of Ireland, caused by British exploitation; and aver that Canadians would never tolerate the conditions under which the Irish were forced to live in Ireland.

Similarly, the newspaper reports show a definite pattern in Hughes' activities. Local supporters and contacts had been advised beforehand of her visit and a public meeting was announced. Upon her arrival, Hughes would confer with the supporters, outlining all she hoped to achieve at the public gathering. Invariably, a motion proposing the establishing of a League branch would be passed that

Provisional Officers of Self-Determination for Ireland League 1920

Nova Scotia (excluding Cape Breton)

Chairman – W.P. Burns
Secretary – Mrs. M. Durand
Treasurer – Miss Ruth Kavanagh
Advisory Committee – Judge Longley, J.P. O'Connell,
Thomas Muldowney, Alderman E.J. Kelly, Alderman
E.J. Scanlan, Felix Quinn, Dr. Foley, Monsignor
Murphy, Alderman W.P. Buckley, M. Healy, Dr.
George H. Murphy, John W. Regan

Halifax Branch

President – Judge Meagher
First Vice-President – J.C. O'Mullin
Second Vice-President – Mrs. F.W. Smith
Secretary – P.E. Doyle
Treasurer – Miss Ruth Kavanagh
Membership Committee – John Burke (C.P.R.
Telegraph Co.); Miss Gough, 132 Robie Street,
W.T. Healy
Publicity Committee – Judge Meagher, R. Cumming,
May C. O'Regan, W.W. Page, (with power to add)
Inter-Provincial Man – W.A. Hallisey

*(Source "Self Determination for Ireland League
of Canada", Halifax Evening Mail, 16 July 1920)*

evening, and a provisional committee struck, largely made up of prominent Irish Canadians, which would ensure the election of an official committee and the continuation of the work. Before leaving for her next stop, Hughes would once again assemble the local activists to sketch out their future actions.

This first part of the tour was marked by the warm reception that Hughes received throughout the Maritimes. There is little suggestion from the newspaper accounts that she was heckled by individuals or groups, antagonistic to her message. This absence of hostility contrasted sharply with the infamous occasion later that year, when after Lindsay Crawford's League meeting in Fredericton had been banned, and it was reported that his "Irish Confab [had been] broken up at Amherst," he was mauled in Moncton, seemingly by ex-soldiers, and forced to kiss the Union Jack.

The lack of opposition in the Maritimes during July 1920 may be explained by the speed with which Hughes moved through the region. Opponents had little time to organize, whereas the attacks on Crawford came at the end of a summer and autumn where the League had received much publicity. In addition, being a woman probably allowed Hughes to escape much physical aggression, although she was tailed and experienced verbal abuse in Western Canada, and was attacked in an editorial in the *Calgary Herald*.

Hughes' visit to the Maritimes was extremely successful. Not merely did she establish pro-Irish support groups in all the major centres, but she had stressed to the Canadian Irish that their League branch was part of a nationwide organization, which would

soon hold a national convention, elect a national executive and would be able to exert positive pressure in support of Ireland. In a deliberate effort to build a wide coalition, Hughes, a dedicated Irish republican, left unexplained the relationship between Ireland and Britain and her Empire upon attainment of self-determination. A letter in the *Halifax Evening Mail*, shortly after Hughes' second visit to the city in July, brought home the dangers of publicly endorsing an independent republic. The author, 'Canadian', supported the League but wished to clarify the nature of Hughes' appeal to Irish Canadians. That appeal "was based absolutely on the principle of self-government for Ireland within the Empire," 'Canadian' stated. "Otherwise, of course, she [Hughes] could not logically seek support from loyal Canadians." Vagueness was a virtue in this matter and on this occasion for Hughes and the League.

The aforementioned RCMP CIB report, prepared at this time, sought to play up connections between the League and "other disturbing elements", including the newly-created One Big Union (OBU) and "the foreign population" in the Winnipeg area. In the light of the Winnipeg General Strike of May/June 1919, the security and intelligence service was extremely vigilant in that city and keen to note collaboration (real or imagined) between Irish activists and labour groups. On a more general level, the CIB seemed puzzled by the growth of the League in light of several considerations: the absence of official organizers—Hughes being the provisional organizer, or as the RCMP noted, "our lack of knowledge as to the authority under which she is travelling"; Crawford's involvement with the Protestant Friends of Ireland; and

alleged conflict between Crawford and Hughes. The police document continued:

it becomes important to notice the rather mysterious combination of organizing ability and lack of ostensible leadership which the movement presents. All those concerned so far are light-weight; Crawford is the most serious figure, and he in the first place is a Protestant in a body overwhelming Roman Catholic, and in the second place during his career has shown great levity of purpose. Who pays Miss Hughes' expenses?

Irish activists in Canada were aware that the Criminal Investigation Bureau of the RCMP was monitoring their activities. The Philadelphia *Irish Press* published a piece headlined "Tragic End of Secret Service Agent T. Bell", August 13, 1921. Bell, who apparently committed suicide, had been allegedly spying on the Self-Determination for Ireland League in Vancouver on behalf of the CIB.

If the Criminal Investigation Bureau was anxious about the political ramifications of efforts by Crawford and Hughes to organize sizable numbers of the Irish, Canadian Military Intelligence was alert for other reasons. Reports from Military District Four which covered Montreal concentrated on the alleged connections of prominent Leaguers with the Irish republican gunrunning chain which, it was claimed, extended through the United States and Canada to Ireland. The picture that emerges from the reports located is, on one side, of League branches which were riddled with petty jealousies, corruption, inept attempts at gunrunning and of a network infiltrated by informers in the pay of the British and Canadian security agencies. On the other side, Canadian Military Intelligence

seems to justify the copious myths about the imaginative genius and creative talents of security services worldwide. The Military Intelligence director in Montreal passed on to his superiors in Ottawa his agent's opinion that a plot was being hatched by the Irish for an armed attack on Canada from the United States, while their shady compatriots and other sinister groups would revolt within. While such reports are laughable in retrospect, it is evident that there was a real fear in official circles about the dangers of a 'Red' revolution at this time. Moreover, memories of the unsuccessful Fenian raids into New Brunswick and Canada in 1866 and 1870 were not fully dimmed.

There is only one local connection in this material. A Military Intelligence report in Montreal in February 1921 referred to a Mr. J. O'Riley, described as a representative of Sinn Féin from Halifax, who was visiting Montreal to arrange shipment of arms and ammunition to Ireland via Halifax. O'Riley's address was given as c/o Mary C. Regan, Evening Echo, Halifax.

The fear of being stigmatized as disloyal and of jeopardizing political, social and economic gains clearly failed to stop sizable numbers of Irish Canadian Catholics from participating in the Self-Determination League. While political violence continued in Ireland during this period, one major event was the source of much international focus on Ireland. In August 1920, Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork (and senior IRA commander) was imprisoned in Brixton Prison in England where he began a long drawn out hunger strike. Over the next seventy four days until his death on October 25, 1920, the situation in Ireland, and the

British Government's inept handling of it as represented by the slow painful death of MacSwiney, became the focus of much discussion in the international media, a rallying call for the Irish worldwide, and a major propaganda coup for Irish nationalists.

In Canada, while Catholic newspapers such as the *Northwest Review* carried reports of the League's activities and backed the League, it was useful politically for them to have Crawford, an Ulster Protestant, as their leader, and to push forward into prominent positions other non-Catholics. In addition, although there appears to have been no clear-cut rule in this matter, it was not unusual for League meetings to conclude with 'God Save Ireland' and then, deliberately, 'God Save the King.' More frequently, however, these meetings closed with 'O Canada' and 'God Save Ireland'. The report of a meeting in Halifax addressed by Hughes on September 26 declared that the meeting closed with 'God Save the King' "at the request of Miss Hughes, who said His Majesty had been personally favorable towards releasing Lord Mayor MacSweeney (sic), and with God Save Ireland." Moreover, in a leaflet published by the Ontario Provincial Headquarters in Ottawa, entitled, "Why You Should be a member of the Self-Determination for Ireland League of Canada and Newfoundland," the League sought, using a Question and Answer format, to provide its members and prospective members with material countering frequent accusations. "Is the Self-Determination for Ireland League Disloyal or Seditious?" runs the first question. The predictable response followed: "The Self-Determination League is in no way disloyal or seditious." As regards

violence in Ireland, it pointedly noted that it condemned violence by all sides and refused to be selective in its condemnation unlike the media and the British establishment.

Hughes returned to the Maritimes in late September 1920, in a final attempt to recruit members in advance of the League's first national convention. She lectured in Immaculate Hall in Antigonish in September 24, following which over 275 applications were made to join League. In Halifax on September 26, 1920, she spoke before a

**Nova Scotia
Provincial Convention,
28 September, 1920**

St. Mary's Boathouse, North West Arm

President – W.P. Burns
Secretary – Rev. Thomas O'Sullivan
Treasurer – Miss Ruth Kavanagh
First Vice-President – Mr. Augustin Dunn,
Amherst
Second Vice-President – Mr. Dulhanty,
Dartmouth
Third Vice-President – Dr. Hugh
MacPherson, Antigonish
Provincial Council – W.A. Hallisey, Halifax;
J.F. Lahey, Dartmouth; Mrs. M. Durand,
Halifax; Monsignor Murphy, Halifax; Dr.
W.F. MacKinnion, Antigonish; Mr. J.Z. L.
Maddin, New Glasgow; Rev. D. Foley and
Rev. Father Cole, Halifax

(Source *The Evening Echo*,
29 September, 1920)

large capacity crowd of over 2000 at the Casino Theatre. *The Evening Echo* (27/9/1920) reported that "When Miss Hughes took her seat the applause was deafening and it was several minutes before quiet again prevailed." Whatever about the seriousness of the occasion, and the anxiety caused by the hunger strike by Terence MacSwiney, the presentation in Halifax also featured local entertainers. The *Evening Echo* records: "The Hagarty Orchestra rendered an attractive programme of Irish music and Miss Edith Cahill sang 'Come Back to Erin' in splendid voice. Master Eric Murray closed the programme by reciting 'I'm Irish Every Inch.'"

Hughes lectured before a large crowd at the rooms of the Ancient Order of Hibernians on Charlotte Street in Sydney, 9 October 1920. The *Sydney Post* waxed lyrical: "That interest in the Irish Home Rule question has grown to feverish heat in Sydney within the past several weeks ..." (11 Oct., 1920) In the meantime, the first mainland Provincial Convention of the League was held in Halifax on September 28, with delegates chosen to attend the National Convention.

Katherine Hughes wrapped up this short tour just a week before the planned National Convention, now transferred to Ottawa, following an extended prohibition on League meetings in Toronto. Protracted pressure was exerted on the authorities in Ottawa to outlaw the gathering. This failed, seemingly after guarantees were sought and given that no seditious speeches would be made, but also after the Mayor of Hull, Quebec, invited the League to convene in his city.

The National Convention of the Self-Determination for Ireland League of Canada

and Newfoundland was held in St. Patrick's Hall, Ottawa on October 16 and 17. Despite grim predictions of dire consequences, it passed relatively quietly. Protesters demonstrated outside, sang 'God Save the King,' rallied round the Union Jack and "loudly declaimed that the Empire would remain steadfast and sure", but were restrained by police from physically interfering with the proceedings. Approximately seven hundred delegates from all the Canadian Provinces and the Dominion of Newfoundland attended the Convention, as did representatives of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League), and the St. Jean Baptiste Society. As the *Ottawa Morning Journal* observed, the resolutions "skilfully drawn, avoided specific mention of Sinn Fein or an Irish republic," although, of course, a strong resolution in support of self-determination for Ireland was passed, as was one in favour of rights for francophones. Lindsay Crawford was the centre of most of the attention during the two-day assembly. Hughes remained in the background, but was finally introduced "as the woman who had done more than any other for the cause of Ireland in Canada," and in an address "particularly eloquent and forceful" commented on her organizational work within Canada. The League, which she had told an audience in Sydney the previous week had about 25,000 members, would have 100,000 within six months, with a goal of one million. The opposition which she had faced during her work had come from the English press "junkers" and "uninformed Orangemen," whom "she pitied...because they did not know of what they spoke." The truth was spreading, however, she declared,

recounting an unlikely anecdote about Canadian Orangemen whom she knew who had travelled to Belfast to participate in the 12th of July Orange Parade, but who had returned home Sinn Féin supporters.

The National Convention broke up after electing National Officers, including Crawford as President, and Thomas R. Donovan as National secretary, and a National Council with representatives from each province. The Nova Scotia members of National Council were Mr. S. Burns, Mr. M. Coyne and Mr. F. W. Madden. The Cape Breton members of National Council: Mayor McCormack, Dr. Lynch and Mr. Joseph Sexton.

The months of work by Crawford and Hughes had successfully culminated in the creation of a Canadian counterpart to the FOIF in the United States and a sister-organization to the Self-Determination League in Britain. The uniting of large numbers of Irish Canadians was an achievement in itself, in the face of much hostility and charges of treason and treachery. This was merely the beginning, however. Now, it would be left primarily to Lindsay Crawford to maintain this coalition and the momentum on behalf of Irish self-determination.

Hughes, at de Valera's request, travelled to Australia and New Zealand to establish Self-Determination Leagues in those countries, while other agents organized South American countries. (Patrick J. Little, a descendant of Philip F. Little, Premier of Newfoundland in 1855, was in charge of South Africa.) Subsequently, she was charged with the responsibility of organizing the Irish World Race Congress in Paris in January

1922, to which representatives of the various Leagues would be invited.

Concentrating on the situation here in Nova Scotia, local branches of the League held periodic meetings. A large crowd attended a meeting at Saint Mary's Hall, Halifax, on 12 Nov 1920, presided over by W. A. Hallisey. Speakers included Joseph Mac Fadden, W. B. Buckley, Agnes MacGuire, Mrs Durant, and a Mr. Aucoin from Kentville who stated that Acadians in the Maritimes supported the Irish fight for freedom. The *Halifax Herald* reported on 15 November 1920 that on the previous night an "Irish Confab [had been] Broken Up at Amherst." This was part of Lindsay Crawford's tour of the Maritimes, on which he was accompanied by Thomas Donovan, National Secretary of the League. Donovan denied that this meeting had broken up in disorder. Crawford spoke at two meetings in Halifax on 15 November: at St. Joseph's Hall and at the Auditorium where he received a friendly hearing and much applause during his addresses. Rev. Father Thomas O'Sullivan also spoke as did Alderman W. P. Buckley. The meeting at the Auditorium closed with the singing of 'O Canada' and 'God Save Ireland.' In addition, Crawford spoke at the crowded Lyceum Theatre in Sydney on 16 November.

In November St. Mary's Young Men's Total Abstinence and Benevolent Society in Halifax adopted a resolution supporting self-determination for Ireland. And under the headline, "Alderman Buckley Praises the Irish in Spicy Address," the *Halifax Herald* reported on its front page on November 18, 1920, that at a meeting of the Charitable Irish Society at the Green Lantern: "A resolution

on self-determination for Ireland was referred to a special meeting of the society, which will be called for that purpose within the next ten days."

At the Charitable Irish special meeting on 29 November, the motion supporting self-determination for Ireland and condemning British violence was reworded to support self-government "acceptable to the Irish people" and condemning all violence especially indiscriminate reprisals, which was a code term for killings by the British. The Secretary's minutes report that the discussion "was of a highly loyal, and patriotic character" and while the motion passed essentially supported Irish self-determination, "[it] would also preserve Ireland as a partner in the Common Wealth of British nations..." The report concluded: "After singing 'God Save Ireland,' God Save the King was sung with great enthusiasm..."

Lindsay Crawford had continued work on behalf of the Self-Determination League, lecturing extensively from coast to coast during 1921. He is reported to have declared that the League had 200,000 members by the end of 1920, though it is impossible to verify such an unlikely claim. Although the League held its second National Convention in Montreal, at which Crawford was re-elected National President in November 1921, it had started to disintegrate on account of events in Ireland.

The disintegration had already commenced in the United States, where the Friends of Irish Freedom split in the autumn of 1920, following long-standing personal and political differences between de Valera and John Devoy and Judge Daniel Cohalan, the Irish American leaders of the FOIF. De

Valera launched a new organization, the AARIR, the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic (note the blatant title so dissimilar to that of the Self-Determination League).

In the United States and Canada Irish activists viewed the Truce of July 1921 as the first cautious step in the solving of the Irish question. The Treaty of December 1921, however, caused much confusion amongst the Irish abroad. Ironically, in the light of de Valera's hostility to it, many prominent AARIR figures initially declared in favour of the Treaty, thereby signalling the beginning of division within and decline of the organization. Although Cohalan and Devoy of the FOIF protested against provisions of the Treaty, they gradually moved first from a reluctant to a dogged acceptance of it, a shift that undoubtedly was influenced somewhat by de Valera's position.

Within Canada, Crawford was initially extremely critical of the Treaty. However, as with the FOIF, he quickly came to accept it as a means towards final political independence. As mentioned previously, the RCMP had suggested that there was animosity between Crawford and Katherine Hughes, explaining it partly as a clash of personalities, of empire-builders, but also linking it to the conflict in the United States between de Valera and Cohalan. In addition, whereas Hughes was a firm supporter of de Valera, another source was also suggesting by October 1921 that Crawford's sympathies lay with the FOIF and Cohalan.

Now, after Dáil Éireann's ratification of the Treaty and the Paris Congress, Crawford wrote to Judge Cohalan in February 1922:
We are marking time here. We have

decided to keep in being until after the elections in Ireland. It is necessary to do this in view of Paris activities and the possibility that K[atherine]. H[ughes]. may come here to organize support for the new D[e]. V[alera]. movement. The clerical Press went over at the drop of a hat, but we are doing nothing to widen the divisions in our ranks. I have taken steps to launch 'Canada First' Clubs over the country, as soon as we dispose of the S[elf]. D[etermination]. L[eague]. We formed the first Club in my office here and are getting ready to give it a good send-off as soon as the air clears. We are following the lead of the F.O.I.F. and will do nothing to embarrass the new Govt. [pro-Treaty Provisional Government in Dublin] or to help D.V.

When the *Northwest Review* commented after the Treaty had been signed: "The work of the League is now over, the battle of Self-Determination for Ireland won.... Justice has been heard and the Irish Free State established," it appears to have been speaking for most Irish-Canadians. But while most League members accepted, if not actively supported, the Treaty, as Crawford now did, there was a minority who bitterly rejected it. Later in 1922, after Civil War had erupted in Ireland, and Crawford had cabled a message of condolence to the Provisional Government on the death of the pro-Treaty Arthur Griffith while ignoring the killing of anti-Treaty leaders Cathal Brugha and Harry Boland, the *Irish World* carried a letter from John Loye of Montreal, a former League activist, in which he described the League as "traitorous" to the Irish cause. Loye continued:

As to the representative power of the Self-Determination League, let it be said that it has now ceased to be a cohesive or working body. Practically

all its branches throughout Canada have ceased to function, the Ottawa and Montreal offices have long since closed, while the Maritime and Prairie Province sections have disbanded. All that now remains of it is a remnant in Montreal [where Crawford was now based]; a very small body that has of late become one of the arms of British imperial propaganda. Abandoned by the Republican element and left to work in their own way without any opposition, this group of Dominion Home Rulers find it congenial to their nature to support Michael Collins [pro-Treaty leader] and the British Empire.

In the wake of a general belief amongst Irish Canadian activists that the Irish question had been settled in the best way possible in the circumstances, that the Treaty had been ratified by a majority of elected representatives in Dublin, but also in disgust and disillusionment as the Irish turned on each other, the League network had imploded. The 'Irish Republican League of Canada' was established in April 1922 in Montreal with Loye amongst its members to support the anti-Treaty side, but made scant headway.

There were a number of direct implications from the fallout from events in Ireland.

In Winnipeg, not merely had the League disintegrated, but it had also caused the demise of the Ancient Order of Hibernians which had amalgamated with it. Lindsay Crawford was soon to leave Canada to take up an appointment in December 1922 as trade representative in New York of the newly proclaimed Irish Free State. While this was a reward by the Dublin Government for services rendered to the Irish cause, Crawford's departure seems also to have

been an admission that Canada held no future for him. He had been too closely associated with a crusade which had been frostily received by those in power. He was marked as an agitator and a troublemaker.

Katherine Hughes did not return to Canada from France to organize pro-de Valera supporters, as Crawford had feared. Nor did she return to her native country to live. Like Crawford, it is evident that she realized that Canada would not joyously welcome her back and provide her with a living. She lived until her death in 1925 in New York.

As regards the League in general, it mushroomed and faded away within fifteen months, leaving little clear evidence that it had ever existed, apart from a soupçon of rancour amongst some Irish Canadian activists. Yet, it was important in that it gave the Irish in Canada access to another version of truth re Ireland not to be found in mainstream press largely sympathetic to British interests and hostile to Irish nationalism. In publicizing the case of Ireland abroad, one can contend that it put pressure on the British administration to make a deal with representatives of the Irish nationalist cause. One can argue about the desirability of the terms finally agreed to, but it seems that most of the Irish in Canada found the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, with Dominion status for most of the island of Ireland, on similar terms to that here in Canada, palatable.

On a local level, one would love to find out how representative of the Irish community in Nova Scotia the membership of the local branches of the Self Determination League were. Did they reflect class differences?

Splits between the Charitable Irish Society and the now-defunct Ancient Order of Hibernians? And one would love to find out what happened to the records of the local branches of the League. In preparing this talk, I have had to rely on two sources of information as regards membership and activities in Nova Scotia: local paper accounts and several issues of the newsletter of the local organization stored in the National Library of Ireland in Dublin. No copies of this newsletter seem to have passed into the keeping of local archives and libraries in Nova Scotia. If one could locate a fullrun of the newsletter and the minutes etc. of the League, and augment this with the jottings, fantastic or not, of the RCMP and Canadian Intelligence from this region, one could fill out a small part of the history of the Irish in Nova Scotia in a fuller manner than I have done here.

This is the text of a public lecture given at Saint Mary's University.

The Canadian Association for Irish Studies
L'Association canadienne d'études irlandaises

Conference / Réunion 2004

Saint Mary's University ~ Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
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