

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Irish Americans

Personal Experience

O H 1884

JOHN MARSH

Interviewed

by

Sally Pallante

on

October 22, 1997

P This is an interview with John Marsh for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Irish Americans, by Sally Pallante, on October 22, 1997, at John Marsh's home, at 9:45 a m

M I was born in Jamestown, New York, May 13, 1916 My parents and grandparents were all of Irish descent The grandparents came from Ireland Grandparents by the name of Thomas Marsh and three of his brothers came over when our Civil War was on I suspect the year was 1862 My mother's parents came earlier, Thomas Foley in the 1850's The name Marsh is not an Irish name It originated in England. My great-great-grandfather was Abraham Marsh, who emigrated from England to Dublin and married a Mary O'Callaghan They had four sons, James, Thomas, John, and Frank. They settled in Jamestown, New York, and they were members of Saint Peter and Paul's Catholic Church, which was built in 1880 My parents were born there, and I was baptized there My mother's father, Thomas Foley, bought some six acres of land in what is now the center of Jamestown, and they had a farm that I had gone to and had seen my first chicken butchered I was very much shocked by that

At the time that I can first remember church-going with my parents, they were quite young After church, they would stand outside and talk with friends Quite often, you would wind up going to one of the friends' homes or Dad's mother for a Sunday morning breakfast The love and affection and feeling of belonging was unbelievable. I just felt a part of everything Another thing that affected my life is we only lived some three or four blocks from the library, and I started school at five and was able to read quite well I would go to the library, and the women would make a big fuss over me and wanted to know what I wanted to read and so on It laid the foundation for a lifetime of reading that has been one of the most satisfying things I know (tape stops) In 1926, we moved to Warren, Ohio This, at first, was quite a change We knew nobody, but things developed quite well

P Do you know why you moved to Warren?

M Yes Dad was working with his brother, and they had a business in Jamestown Frank Woodward in Warren inherited a similar business, and he knew of my father's reputation. So, they came up to Jamestown, (and) made him a good offer This worked fine until the Depression We bought a house in 1930, and the Depression started about a year before. Survival was a real problem from then on Probably in 1932, the only money coming into our home was what I could earn from a paper route. five or six dollars a week Hamburger was probably ten cents a pounds, bananas a nickle a pound With that little bit, we were able to have the food we needed Dad could borrow money on an insurance policy that he had, enough to pay the interest so they did not foreclose on our home

When I was 17, I could not find work after graduation. I went back to

Jamestown, New York, and worked there until I was 18. Then, I was able to get a job at Republic Steel here when I was 18. After being out of high school some four years, I started working night turn and carrying a full load at Youngstown College and, after five years, had a degree (tape stops)

The next event that shaped our lives was the start of World War II. In 1941, I was at my fiancée's home for dinner on December 7 when the bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred. The country, at that time, was united as they had never been before against a common enemy, [the] Japanese. The hatred that we felt demanded that we put out all our effort and some way rectify what had happened. (tape stops)

My wife-to-be, Marie, had finished college in 1941 and was teaching in Mecca. It was impossible to get a contract for teaching in Youngstown without previous experience. Graduates of the various schools wound up getting their practice in suburban communities. After teaching for some two years, Marie enlisted in the Women's Air Force Service Pilot Training Program in Sweetwater, Texas. She had previously completed civilian pilot training and was one of some seven women in the whole country to have completed the advanced portions of that program. After graduation from the W A S P training program, she was assigned to the headquarters of the weather wing in Ashville, North Carolina. She was gifted, a good student and had a 98 in the army meteorological exam. I do not know if this was one of the reasons that she was assigned to the headquarters of the weather wing. In 1944, the need for male pilots was diminishing. The critical need for women pilots also diminished.

We were married in June, 1944. Our life was an exciting adventure. We had a large family, eight children. We traveled extensively. We both loved the game of bridge. Until death separated us in April of 1997, we were very, very close. I do not think I could say much more. The time that I now have available I have been using to write biographies and to do a bit of writing, feeling that there is no other communication between my youth and Marie's youth other than what I set down at this point.

- P: When we first met, we talked a lot about some of the Irish things because that is the focus of my work.
- M: I know what I am going to do. I am going to go in here and get the book that I did on Marie's ancestors. Then, we can go over any of the pictures and maybe add to it (tape stops)
- P: John has gotten out some albums that he has been working on diligently for some time, and he is going to just share some of the pages with us.
- M: The first picture in the book is one of Richard Lawlor, who was born in Kilkenny, Ireland. He was the father of Thomas J. Lawlor. Richard Lawlor married Mary Collins who was born in Dublin. They came to the U.S. and settled in Lowellville, Ohio, and were farmers and had eight sons. This is Richard Lawlor and Mary

Collins, who was born in 1823 and died in 1898 I have a picture of the two, Richard Lawlor and Mary Collins -- she is standing and he is seated -- and also brothers who died over in Ireland, and the holy cards were sent back They had Anglicized the spelling of Lawlor L-A-W-L-O-R The cards from Ireland were L-A-L-O-R. The date of marriage was 1848, and the church is Saint Andrew in Dublin

Their son, Thomas Lawlor, married Anna Collins Anna Collins was the daughter of James Collins that we did the write up on, the Civil War vet that was wounded in the Battle of the Wilderness and laid for three days on the battlefield He was quite a successful tailor and a businessman in Youngstown. I think he was instrumental in some of the construction of Saint Calumba's Cathedral His marriage to Anna Collins was in September, 1880 Thomas Lawlor died in 1921 (tape stops) From that union, three daughters were born, Marie Lawlor being the mother of Marie Barrett.

Marie Lawlor married Jack Barrett who was the son of Patrick J. Barrett born in Ireland, came to Youngstown and died in Youngstown in 1929 Jack Barrett was gifted He went to Western Reserve and had a chance to play professional ball as a catcher for the New York Giants but did not, continued with his education, eventually was a brilliant lawyer in Youngstown He entered World War I as a private and eventually held the rank of major We have pictures of Jack Barrett in uniform for World War I and then carrying on to where he was commander of one of the reserve bases of the American Legion Patriotism was prevalent in the family Marie and her two brothers served in the military The older brother, Tom, flew the "Hump" from India to China. The younger brother was a C B , building bases in the Pacific

When Marie's mother died, Marie and I had to dispose of some of the personal items that had accumulated over the years We found three personal letters that were written by her great-grandfather, James Collins, to his wife, Anna McDermitt Collins These two were married over in Wiggin, England, when they were both 21 years old In the early 1850's, they both had left Ireland because of the famine and met in England They stayed there for a period of time His background was one of where he had completed an apprenticeship in tailoring in Ireland and was evidently pretty good He could find work most anywhere Within a matter of a few years after moving to Pittsburgh, they Pennsylvania, had three daughters In 1861, he enlisted in the 263 Pennsylvania Volunteers I believe so that they would have a steady income

He did not see his family again until the war was almost over. He was severely wounded in the Battle of the Wilderness with a mini ball that entered above his knee and exited out the hip and shattered everything in between He came to Youngstown and opened a tailor shop and was quite successful but died at age 46 The records that were available were unbelievable, the Civil War records as well as the medical records. It gave me a very clear picture of what his sufferings were

P I think you had mentioned he was born in Limerick I think we ought to establish

that

M Yes. His birthplace was Limerick, Ireland, in 1831. Knowing that the famine was at full depth in 1847 would indicate that, at 16, he would have probably finished in the apprenticeship and moved then to England to survive and met his wife-to-be in England. The appalling conditions that are written up in this book that you wanted to review?

P Angela's Ashes by Frank McCork

M Angela's Ashes I found through records. I had hired a research woman in England, and she dug into the background of this Barracks Yard. It was appalling -- 45 families, no running water, four privies, practically no privacy. The reason I first started doing some thinking about this was knowing that two unmarried people were using the same address as Barracks Yard. I knew there was no hanky panky, and I wondered what Barracks Yard was. We researched this and found it was pretty much what was covered in the book.

P In the book, they called them lanes, but that particular one was Barracks Yard. Let us go back to your own children. You have eight children. Since this tape is a lot about your family, I would like you to name your eight children for us.

M Alright. My children, we originally had eight, of which one was killed tragically when he was 15. The surviving children: My oldest son, John Jr., was a graduate engineer and has been in business for himself for some years now as a manufacturer's representative and manufacturer. Next is Kathleen Fowler who had two sons, one of which, Nathan, just entered medical school. The younger one is completing engineering. They are both equal scholars. Nathan went to the service in order to get money to go to college and was in the tank battalion. He came back and finished school at University of Houston. As a grandchild I will brag a bit. He had a 4.0 the senior year with a major in microbiology and was accepted into University of Texas Medical School. As a veteran, his tuition and his books are free.

Next is my son, David. He has four children, three boys and one girl, and lives close to us and is the joy of our life. The next two children are twins, James in Hubbard and Janet in Hartford. They are both C P A 's. Jim has received many honors, Man of the Year and other various awards, President of Trumbull County Builders' Association, was given the keys to the city of Hubbards. Bob lives within a few miles and is in charge of the computer programs for Giant Eagle in Pittsburgh and has been a joy in that he is working me through some of the complicated programs that exist in the present times. Last, my son, George, lives with me, a delight to be with, has a salvage yard in Brookfield for motorcycles and cars. I also have two dogs that give me their affection.

P What was the name of your son who was killed?

M. Thomas

P We have talked a lot about your family, but we have not talked about some of the values of your family I know you belong to Irish Heritage. That had to have come from some of that background Do you remember anything?

M At 16, I would have been happy if I could have gone into the priesthood I had a deep faith and a love of religion Our values were the traditional Irish family values where the priest is the all-knowing guiding counselor I remember going to an ice cream social at Jamestown when I was quite young My mother was on the committee and serving. I thought she was the most beautiful person in the whole hall She had a set of values that could not be beat Dad worked at the time in the sheet metal shop with his brother I came home from there one day with some punchings, so pleased that I had found that these were the same size as a penny I went down to Eckerd's, a little store that we shopped in, a grocery store, and was amazed and pleased that I could put these in and get gum balls I came home and was so smug telling my mother about it She grabbed hold of me and walked right back down to the store "You give Mr. Eckerd the pennies that you cheated from him " This was just typical Being typical, you experienced it many different times

P That is very good Do you feel the Irish influence in your family has carried on to your children? Do you maintain any traditions?

M I think that I will say this. There is a deep affection between each one of our children It is a close knit family I think none of them are church goers at this point But, their values are good What they are able to impart to their children is a traditional set of values that we have held as a family.

P I think that the information you have given us today is very valuable and will be preserved Is there anything that you feel we have not talked about that you wanted to bring up?

M The Erie Canal opened in 1931 If the immigrants came to the New York area, they could come up the canal to Buffalo. Then, there were rails all the way Westfield, New York, and there were also ports of entry, Fredonia and Dunkirk I went up there a couple of weeks ago and looked at the manifests in the libraries and could not find anything What I did find was more of this problem dealing with sick immigrants In the one ship, 25% of them died When they came into New York, they were unable to handle the sickness and properly care for the poor people Some were given tickets to Dunkirk. They said, "When you get to Dunker, all your problems will be taken care of " They bought these tickets which was the cheapest way to get them out of New York

When they got to Dunkirk, a commission had been set up to help out This commission was supposed to be funded by monies from New York State.

The sick immigrants would die if monies were not found immediately. The ones administering the assistance came up with their own money. As an example, they may have spent \$2500 for the help. When they filed the claims into the New York commission, they came back to them and said, "Well, we will settle for \$1000." It came right out of their own pockets and almost devastated the ones that had tried so hard to help.

P Research is not always easy, is it? You said on one of your trips to Boston you met a relative just by pure coincidence at Celtic Weavers.

M Senier S-E-N-I-E-R. He asked me where I was from, and I told him Youngstown, or rather Warren. He said, "Do you know the Reddington family in Youngstown?" I said, "Yes, I do. They used to come to the family reunions, the Barrett reunions that my wife belonged to. One of them was a nun." He was amazed at the coincidence that I would know them, so he called them by phone. Regina Reddington said how much she liked Marie. She knew her as an outstanding woman and had injured her back so that she was unable to attend the funeral of Marie's. Again when we got talking, Mrs. Reddington said that her mother had been orphaned as a child in New York City and was taken by a family named Corkery in Jamestown, New York. The Corkery family were relatives of mine through marriage. Two coincidences at this time in such a short order seems unbelievable.

P John, I want to thank you very much for the information you have given to us. I know you have more information. Youngstown University is going to separately interview you on some of the flying aviation stories that you have with regard to Lansdown Airport, and the Irish Archival Society appreciates your family information. Thank you very much.

End of Interview