CHAPTER XV
ADDITIONAL NOTES OF INTEREST

City Walls; Bridges; Houses of Old Limerick; Parish Churches; Precious Relics of the Past; Our Lady of Limerick; The Mayoral Chain; The City Seal; Streets of Old Limerick; Old Registers; The Treaty Stone.

THE CITY WALLS:

The old walls, starting near Villier's Alms House for widows (which was established in 1815), leave traces between St. Munchin's churchyard and the river. The Wall runs along the Island, leaving St. Francis Abbey on the outside. It goes on between the Island Road and old Dominic Street, and along by the back of St. Mary's Convent. The wall continues along by New Road, where it forms an angle and extends along Exchange Street. From Watergate it goes from the corner of Loch Quay on through the grounds of St. John's Hospital. [In 1237 a toll was granted for the purpose of enclosing the city within a wall.] The wall then ran from the hospital across in front of the Cathedral to just beyond the Sarsfield Statue, then crossed Cathedral Street, and Gerald Griffin Street, down to Munget Street, then down via the Markets, towards Carr Street to Westgate and Baal's Bridge (see map). On some of the walls, houses were actually built so that when going into these houses people stepped over the city walls.

BRIDGES

THOMOND BRIDGE:

King John caused a bridge to be erected about 1210 A.D. As King John's Castle was of stone so probably was the bridge. It was very narrow, so could not be used for vehicular traffic. There was a fortified gate-house at the city end and a castellated gateway or drawbridge at the seventh arch (there were fourteen arches) and this was called Thomond Gate. That gate led out to the North of Munster or Thomond. Although this bridge cost only £30 it lasted 600 years. It was taken down in 1838 and the new one erected on the same site in 1840, cost £10,000.

BAAL'S BRIDGE:

This bridge connects English Town and Irish Town. In 1340 a charter was granted for building it. After the Sieges of Limerick (1690-1691) houses were built on each side of it, five or more on each side with just sufficient room in between to let a horseman pass. But in 1775 a high tide damaged the bridge and several of
the houses fell. One man fell through the kitchen floor into the river but was rescued by a sailor. The present Baal’s Bridge was erected in 1831 by the direction of Thomas Spring Rice.

MATTHEW BRIDGE:

For some time before its erection there was a ferry between Bank Place and Quay Lane. In 1762 a bridge of three arches was erected in place of the ferry. But it was dangerous to traffic so was re-built between 1844 and 1864 and called Matthew Bridge in honour of Fr. Matthew the temperance reformer.

SARSFIELD BRIDGE:

Up to 1824 Thomond Bridge was the only bridge connecting the city with Co. Clare. Then in that year a grant of £60,000 was given in the English Parliament for the erection of a bridge. It took eleven years to build at a cost of £89,061. For many years tolls had to be paid on any vehicles crossing it. Eoghan O’Curry was an overseer for some years while it was being built. It is a facsimile of Nevilly Bridge in Paris, and it has fine arches. One very stormy night ships at anchor were driven against the bridge and the damaged stone work can still be seen. It was called Wellesley Bridge, in honour of Duke Wellesley, the then Lord Lieutenant, but now it is known as Sarsfield Bridge.

HOUSES IN OLD LIMERICK:

All the old houses were built of stone and it is doubtful if there was a single brick house in Limerick before 1691. After that year the Dutch who settled here established brick works on the marshland on both banks of the Shannon and practically re-built Limerick. For this reason many of the stone buildings were faced with brick. The stones for building were taken from the Garry-owen district and also black marble from the Ballysimon quarries was used. The marble was so plentiful that it is said that the streets of the city were at one time paved with this stone.

THE EXCHANGE AND “THE NAIL”

The Exchange was built in 1673 by Alderman Yorke. It was first built as a Town Hall and the Corporation met there for nearly two centuries. One of old Limerick’s best known relics is “The Nail”, which was presented to the citizens by Robert Smith in 1685 and which was kept in the Exchange until it was transferred to the present Town Hall which was built in 1805. “The Nail” is made of limestone covered with copper, and on it the custom was to lay down or pay down the money in all transactions, hence the saying “Paying on ‘the Nail’.” It was transferred from the Town Hall to the Museum in 1907.