
Broderick's Academy

by W.W. Gleeson

THE Limerick Corporation recently announced plans to rebuild the Johnsgate part of city. This rebuilding scheme will, it is hoped, bring new life and vitality to the old, historic place. There is no reason why, with proper planning and design, the building of new houses and cluster industries should not harmonise with the old walls of Limerick, under the shadow of the neo-Gothic tower of St. John's Cathedral.

In the centre of Johnsgate area is a street that has long and varied associations with Limerick's educational history. Brian Merryman, the eighteenth century Clare poet and author of *The Midnight Court*, conducted a school at 5, Old Clare Street. When he died in 1805, the Limerick Chronicle described him as "a professor of mathematics".

The Lancastrian School, situated near the present Good Shepherd Convent, is still recalled by the everyday use of the popular name for the steep extension of Old Clare Street, the "Long Can", an abbreviated corruption of its original title.

The third educational academy, Old Clare Street Boys' National School, became generally known as "Broderick's School", because of the long association the principal teacher Denis Broderick had with the school. A native of Milford, Co. Cork, Denis Broderick, acquired a B.A. degree when such a qualification was rare amongst national teachers. After a period at a school at Newport, Co. Tipperary, he joined the teaching staff of the Old Clare Street School and remained there until his retirement in the late 20s.

My own introduction to Broderick's in the early spring of 1915 was as inauspicious as my hurried departure from Quay Lane C.B.S. the day previously, when I did my "Leaving" at the tender age of 10 years! However, I soon settled down in my new surroundings and it was not long before I could count among my friends - even to this day in 1980 - boys from every part of the city. It was our good fortune to have such teachers as Patrick Haugh, Willie Duggan, Patrick Kirwan, Patrick Quinn (music teacher) and, of course, the principal himself. Denis Broderick imparted his lessons thus:

The area of the Sahara Desert is 3 million square miles or 26½ times of Great Britain and Ireland. The biggest mountain in the world is Mount Everest (29,141ft.). The six principal towns in China were Peking, Nanking, Amoy, Foochoo, Hong Kong and Ningpo. The area of the Pacific Ocean is 77,000,000 square miles. The first and last books of the Bible are Genesis and Revelation.

The principal also insisted that every boy should be able to recite the 48 States of America and the names of all the capital cities of the world.

One day Denis Broderick asked our class who was the boy who wrote on the newly-whitewashed toilet wall the words: *Mr. Broderick's Academy for Young Gentlemen*. There was no reply, of course, but all eyes centred on me. Tom Quinn and Jack Bernard afterwards accused me of being the culprit. I wasn't too happy to be saddled with the blame and said I knew the real author - Tom himself! However, the rest can be left to history, and the elegant name stuck. And so, from that day on, whenever or wherever the name 'Broderick's' is spoken of throughout the world, the word 'Academy' is automatically added.

Another old boy of Broderick's Patrick (Patti) Ryan, of New York has recorded his memories of his days spent at the Old Clare Street School.

From the time I was enrolled in the 'half-penny' or infant class to the days when I attained the dizzy heights of the

seventh standard I got a lifetime of experience never to be forgotten. In 1911 when I attended there all the classes were confined to the lower floor of the building and Mr. Broderick lived upstairs, before he later moved to Pery Square... Our lives were never dull or monotonous then - certainly not! I remember when a pupil got really exasperated and tossed a slate at a teacher (not Mr. Broderick). It crashed against the wall over a clock but nobody was injured except some one's pride. That exploit finished the attendance at the school for one pupil, because he never came back. Even then, in 1911, we had rebellious school kids.

Patti pictures for us the school as it was then: the rack inside the main door for those very often dripping wet coats and caps, the advertisements for Van Houten's cocoa over the press, the pictures of wild animals at ceiling height.

Mr. Broderick always arrived by bicycle from his home in Pery Square. He had a unique way of mounting and dismounting the bicycle, using the step which in those days was attached to the axle of the rear wheel. Patti Ryan continues his story:

Mr. Broderick really believed in the axiom 'Spare the rod and spoil the child', hence the rod had to be replaced occasionally. When a new cane was needed he would say to some pupil: "Go up to Carey's in the Irishtown for a new cane - and get a good one!" Naturally, none of us wanted this job, but who would dare say no? Often the purchaser of the cane would be the first to sample its sting. In those days there were great "moochers". A great hide-out from Mr. Fitzgerald, "the Cruelty Man", or truant officer, was in the ruins of the old cooperage on the canal bank... We either had to worry about the examination cards or the fisticuffs to decide the difference between two pupils. We had our own private arena, the bare patch in the Sally Grove, which is now a public park. Mr. Broderick really had his hands full trying to educate us and make gentlemen of us. We even went on strike once - an unheard of thing at that time - but I believe that we won our rights.

The last principal of Broderick's was Chris McGrath, who transferred to St. John the Baptist School when the "Academy" closed in 1944. It would be impossible to list here all the surviving past pupils of the old school but a few distinguished Broderick's boys should be mentioned, such as Jack Bernard, the architect in America; Christy Byrnes, the high-ranking Department of Finance civil servant and Patrick Stundon (of Nicholas Street) winner of the King's Scholarship, and many, many more.

The school also had its distinguished teachers including Pat Kavanagh of Ennistymon and Seamus MacMathuna, the Gaelic scholar who was to go on to become the first principal of St. Patrick's National School.

The Old Clare Street building, once used as a hospital during the cholera epidemic of 1900, is now no more. But the name of Broderick's Academy still lives on in Limerick. It is to be hoped that when the new Johnsgate arises from the rubble and dust, the name of Denis Broderick, national teacher, disciplinarian, spiritual guide, family man and, above all, educator of wayward youth will be commemorated in the old street where he spent most of his teaching lifetime.