
A Chronicle of Limerick life

As far back as 1690, when William III was besieging the then walled city, a Paris reprint is the authority for stating that a book by an Irish Capuchin priest was printed in Limerick at that time. The next Limerick book recorded is "The Libertine School'd" which was printed by Samuel Terry & Boxon in 1722.

Whilst it would be futile to attempt provide a constant guide to a domain of the numerous commercial, or job, printing houses that flourished in Limerick, since Caxton introduced to Westminster in 1476 the "Art, Greatest of all Arts", it goes without saying that the Shannonside city was well served with news down the years, as the following list shows.

1716—The Limerick Newsletter, 1739—The Limerick Journal, 1749—Munster Journal, 1766—The Limerick Chronicle, 1779—The Limerick Journal, 1788—The Limerick Herald and Munster Advertiser, 1790—The Limerick Weekly Magazine, 1804—The General Advertiser, 1804—The General Advertiser or Limerick Gazette, 1811—The Limerick Evening Post, 1819—The Munster Telegraph, 1822—The Limerick News, 1824—The Irish Observer, 1831—The Limerick Herald, 1832—The Munster Journal and Limerick Commercial Reporter, 1833—The Limerick Guardian, 1834—The Limerick Times, 1837—The Limerick Standard, 1845—The Limerick and Clare Examiner, 1850—The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 1851—The Munster News, 1853—The Limerick Herald, 1856—The Limerick Observer, The Limerick/Tipperary/Waterford Examiner 1863—The Southern Chronicle, 1867—The Citizens Paper, 1887—The Daily Southern Advertiser 1889—The Limerick Leader, 1893—The Limerick Star, 1898—The Limerick Echo, 1917—The Limerick Herald, 1923—The Limerick Herald, 1937-38—The Limerick Herald.

The Limerick Herald (1917, 1923, 1937-38) was published by the Limerick Printers Strike Committee, during trade disputes lasting seven, eleven and seventeen weeks, respectively.

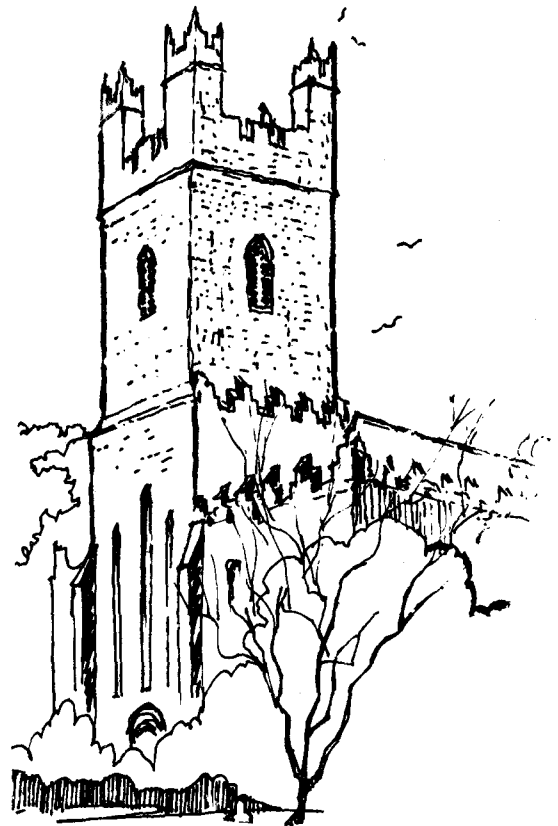
Samuel Longhorne Clemens (Mark Twain) once said of our city, "not alone a place where they take life easy - and often ... but also a place where something has been happening, right back to the days before the Danes and the Vikings came, and long before King John of the many Irish castles built his fortress on the island which still bears his name."

The town lay fair in the path of the O'Brien's and their Dalcassian warriors on their marches of conquest into North Munster and beyond - the gateway into and out of Munster, and the road to Connacht. To the Gael and the Gall alike it was a strategic prize - a setting for war, famine, pestilence, bravery, heroic death and tragic capitulation, glorious sacrifice and heart-breaking disappointment.

Although the three Dublin dailies, the "Cork Examiner", and many of their English contemporaries enjoy a considerable circulation in Limerick, a local journal, now published weekly, has for a very long time been the established "friend of the family" in most homes. This paper, of course, is the Limerick Chronicle. The oldest newspaper in the Republic, it is now nearing the end of its 213th year.

The Chronicle, first published in 1766 at Quay Lane, has recorded for two centuries the outstanding events of world and national history, the American Wars, the French Revolution, the Insurrection of '98, the bitter fate of Robert Emmet, the Risings of 1847 and 1867, the British colonial and European wars from Napoleon to Hitler, the 1916 Rising and the Irish War of Independence

by *W.W. Gleeson*



St. Mary's Cathedral

which followed.

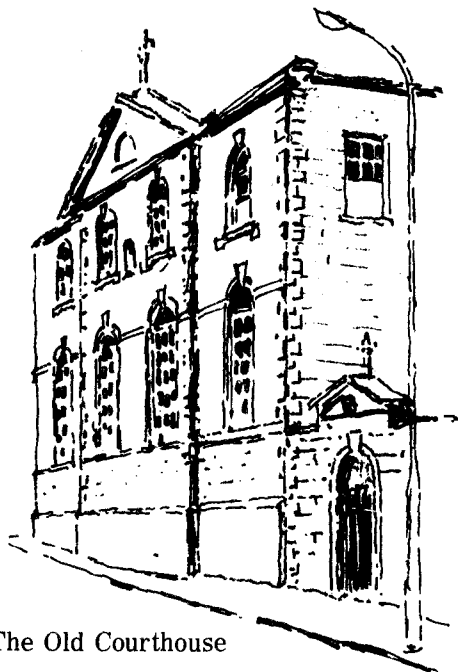
However, it is the service rendered locally, by its consideration for all the little things which mean so much in the lives of the people living in the Limerick area, that furnished the recipe for the journal's longevity.

In the earlier times the paper championed the establishment and the privileged classes of the community. However, when the new political era began, the paper, gradually adjusted its editorial policy. To-day the revamped Tuesday Chronicle is well-printed and lively but still, happily, devotes much of its space to local history.

The "Chronicle" was founded by poet and historian, John Ferrar, author of the "History of Limerick", whose roomy house stood in the sandmall until recent years.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the paper moved from where it was first published in the Englishtown, "two doors from the Exchange". It went first to 2 Rutland Street, then to 39 and still later to 59 O'Connell Street (then George Street). For seventeen years past its home has been at 54 O'Connell Street. The Limerick Chronicle appeared twice weekly up to 1862, when the paper tax was abolished, and for the first time - from February 11 in that year - publication was on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

A search through the older files of the Chronicle illustrates what was new yesterday, yesteryear and the



The Old Courthouse

years before:

Thrilling reads the story of Andrew Buchanan of Thomondgate, who in 1784, long before Bianconi was born, first regularised road transport and ran his stage coaches on the perilous Dublin-Limerick route. The "rocky road to Dublin" was then infested with highwaymen, the Chronicle informs us, "and grinding through the brutality and blood of the muddy roads, Buchanan's wagon wheels turned mileage into money."

The aerial voyage of one Richard Crosbie, was recounted on May 1, 1786. A detailed account was given by the aeronaut himself of his ascent by balloon on April 29th, from the Strand, and his eventual landing in the area now occupied by Shannon Airport, in Co. Clare.

The story of the trial and public execution of John Scanlan for the murder of Ellen Hanley, in a boat on the Shannon, was told in detail in the columns of the paper in the summer of 1820. The murder had taken place the year previous and excited enormous public interest at the time, and later was to furnish inspiration for Gerald Griffin's novel, "The Collegians", Boucicault's play, "The Colleen Bawn", and Benedict's opera, "The Lily of Killarney".

"The Night of the Big Wind" - January 6, 1839 - recalled still throughout Ireland and England, saw "thirty ships in the busy Limerick docks and in the pool torn like matchboxes from their moorings and many of them were smashed to pieces against the parapet of Wellesley (Sarsfield) Bridge".

In Ireland, everyone knows what happened in 1846 and 1847. So, it comes not remiss when the Chronicle reports "the total failure of the potato crop and the collection of £5,000 in the city for the poor".

One of the worst shipping disasters off the Irish coast which the paper has ever covered was that of the "Edmond", which was wrecked off Kilkee Bay in November, 1850, with the loss of 98 lives (mostly women and children). The ship was an emigrant barque - a "coffin ship" - carrying 195 emigrants who were leaving a country stricken with the aftermath of famine to begin a new life on the great American continent ... The 'Edmond' was pounded to matchwood in one of the fiercest gales in living memory.

"In 1884 the first Gaelic sports held under the rules of the G.A.A. and I.C.A. in Limerick took place at the Market's Field. The event concluded on October 2 with the first great band contest ever held in the city."

The outstanding event of 1891 in Ireland was the death

of Parnell, which was announced on October 6. Seven years later, John Daly became Limerick's first Fenian Mayor and 1901 was the year in which a controversy occurred when Mayor Daly took the chain of office with him on a visit to America. His critics maintained that the Mayor, not being sent directly by the city or by the Corporation, had no right to take the chain. On his return, Daly silenced the opposition thus: "My right to take the chain was vindicated by the brainy men of America, for they said that here was a man who had been in chains for most of his life, and Limerick now sends him to us with the golden chain of office."

The files of the Chronicle, for October, 1907, retell the tale of the epic rescue of the crew of the French windjammer, "Leon XIII", in tempestuous weather and boiling seas, by the fishermen of Quilty, Co. Clare. The rescuers put out in their currachs - frail craft without keel or rudder - to save the stricken sailors.

One reads of the appalling murders, on March 6, 1921, of Mayor George Clancy, ex-Mayor Michael O'Callaghan, and Volunteer Joseph O'Donoghue, at the dead of night in their own homes.

The Civil War period in the city, described in the Chronicle as the fifth Siege of Limerick; and covered so efficiently that, reading it, one almost re-lives the days of Ireland's greatest modern tragedy. Photographs of a barricade in O'Connell Street, premises damaged by gunfire, the shell-shattered facade of the old Strand Barracks and the burned-out shells of the Ordnance Barracks and New Barracks as they appeared after their evacuation, convey a vivid impression of the time of travail.

The Castle Barracks, part of which included the Palace of King John, is to-day only a memory. The modern part of the structure was completely destroyed, and nothing remains but the outer towers and grey old walls flanking the river which withstood the Williamite guns in 1690 and 1691.

Tragedy again in 1926: "the Dromcollogher fire in which 48 people lost their lives" in what was, up to then at any rate, the worst cinema-fire disaster in these islands.

Other interesting features to be found in the Chronicle tell the full story of when Limerick was Ireland's gayest city, 1809; Limerick's first convent school, 1837; Clare Treasure Find, 1854; the Mayoral Chain; the great Limerick Show of 1883; 92 days on a desert island, 1887; McMahon's disastrous fire, 1911; the old Theatre Royal (destroyed by fire, January 23, 1922); "Drunken Thady", by Michael Hogan, Bard of Thomond; Biddy Early, the wise woman of Clare; five miles of waterway - Doonass and Castleconnell.

All these stories, and many more, are to be found in this continuous Chronicle of Limerick life.



Conway's Bar

(Drawings by Jim O'Farrell).