



In 1954, Mayor Ted Russell welcomed Tommy O'Brien, second left, also known as the Singing Cop to Limerick. O'Brien was originally from Limerick before going to America and joining their police force and then making a name for himself as a tenor. Below Sharon recounts the story of how the mayoral chain went missing when Ted Russell brought it to the US for fundraising events

Case of the missing mayoral chain

Major hiccup on fundraising trip: Frantic search for chain in America

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IN 1957, the mayoral chain had vanished for 24 hours, but the news of this disappearance was not reported in the press until March 16, 1965 when the Chronicle told the story for the first time.

George Edward (Ted) Russell was a Freeman of Limerick city, where for more than half a century he was an outstanding public figure and leading businessman. He was five times mayor of Limerick in 1954-57, 1967-68 and 1976-77. He was also a member of the City Council for 37 years, until he retired in 1979. He served on the Harbour Authority for 46 years and was for 26 years chairman of the Limerick Harbour Commissioners, until he retired in 1992.

While serving his third term as Mayor in 1957, he and his wife, Derry Russel (nee Gleeson), visited the USA to raise money for the erection of a memorial to the murdered Mayors, George 'Seoirse' Clancy and Michael O'Callaghan.

The Leader, on April 1, 1957, told of the busy itinerary during Russell's trip to the United States. He left Ireland on Wednesday, April 10, for New York, where he met with members of the Limerickmen's Association. The following day



Mayor Russell wearing the mayoral chain in 1976, almost twenty years after he lost it while in Boston

(Friday), he called on the Mayor of New York, Governor Harriman and Cardinal Spellman. That same night he attended a dance in the City Central Ballroom. He went on to spend a few days in New York before travelling to Philadelphia on the 20th. The next six days were spent travelling through Buffalo, Washington, Pittsburgh, Chicago,

Detroit, Toronto and Montreal. He arrived in Boston on the 28th, spending a very stressful evening there before traveling to New York the following day to return to Limerick.

In the 1965 report, Ald Russell said, "It was the first and only time that I left the chain out of my hands during the whole four week tour. Among those who met us on arrival in Boston were Mayor Heinz and the City Greeter. Seemingly, the latter official was supervising transport arrangements for he took charge of our baggage - including the ceremonial chain. Our reception was a typical example of American courtesy and efficiency. Everything went smack smooth until we reached our hotel and found to our horror that the case containing the 137-year-old chain was missing."

Russell continued to describe the frantic search carried out by the hotel manager and a team of detectives. The search went on for hours as Russell recalled "the detectives seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely. But all I could think of was what explanation I was going to offer the City Council when I returned."

Luckily, for the Mayor, his wife was doing some detective work of her own and suggested that they check with Mayor Heinz. Eventually the detectives did and dis-

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- Mayor of Limerick Ted Russell

covered that the little black bag that contained the chain was in the unlocked boot of the car that brought them from the airport. It was most likely left behind by accident as the Mayor and his wife moved from location to location.

Despite the drama of the missing chain, the trip was a success as \$45,000 was raised to erect the memorial to the Murdered Mayors. The following year the memorial was erected in the grounds of what is now the Strand Hotel, O'Callaghan Strand, Limerick. Following the redevelopment of the site in 2007, the memorial was inset into the wall of the Strand Hotel facing Sarsfield Bridge.

Mayor Thomas Walcott, who took it to London in 1847, was the first time the chain was taken out of the country. Walcott's mayoralty coincided with the height of the Famine and his time in office was marred by controversy. He oper-

ated a mill under the name Stein and Co. in the city and it was discovered that he was removing good quality corn that arrived in his mill and replacing it with "unsound and damaged Indian meal of his own." Walcott was charged and was due to appear in the Petty Sessions but left Limerick the day before the trial for Dublin and arrived the day after. He put a notice in local papers requesting, "his fellow citizens will suspend their judgement relative to a late occurrence until a full opportunity is afforded him of placing the entire transaction in a proper light."

In 1901, Mayor John Daly took the chain to the U.S.A for the first time. Interestingly, just over twenty years before he was elected Mayor, John Daly was arrested for his involvement in a transatlantic conspiracy directed by Clan na Gael, the rebranded Fenian Brotherhood in America. He was sentenced to penal servitude in Chatham and was later moved to Portland Prison in Dorset, where he met and befriended a fellow-Fenian, Thomas Clarke. He was released from prison in 1896. Only five years later he was elected to the highest office in the city, while Limerick was still very much under the control of the British government.

Its only other trip out of the country was that fateful journey in 1957 with the Russells to Boston.