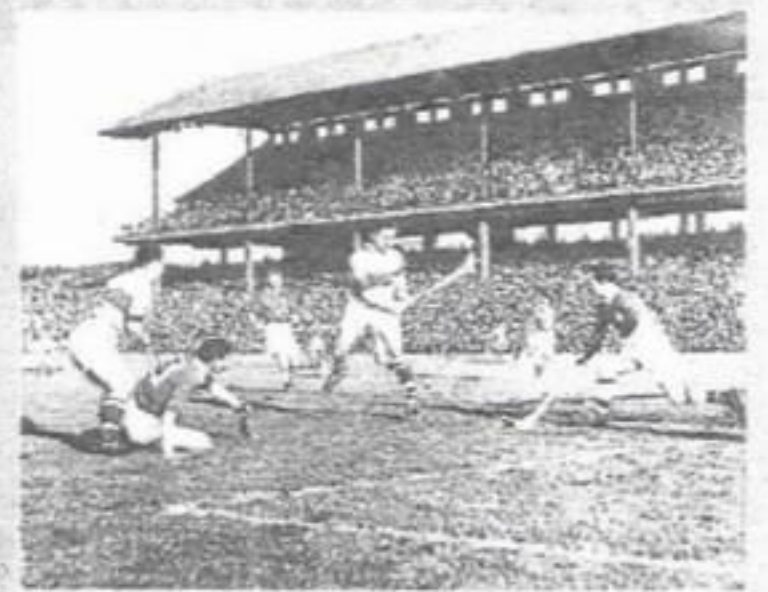


LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Celebrating
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of the GAA*

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DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE

Limerick link to Boston

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NOTEWORTHY links between this country and the United States usually take shape on the other side, there being little scope here for the realisation or advancement of the ambitions of an American.

This trend was reversed, however, in the early part of the last century when John Thayer, one of the most remarkable Americans ever to settle in Limerick, made an impact, that is well recorded in our local history.

Thayer, a remarkable Bostonian became so famous in the city that his followers were known as "Thayerites."

John Thayer was born in Boston in 1755, of wealthy parents, who were said to be descendants of the early Puritan settlers.

He was educated at Yale, where he ran a brilliant course and afterwards became a Congregationalist minister and served as a chaplain in Washington's force during the War of Independence.

When his country had achieved its independence, he fulfilled a long cherished ambition to visit Europe and especially Rome, where he could study for himself at the very cradle of his pet hatred - the Roman Catholic religion.

Like all those who set out to find faults, he found much to criticise, especially the reported miracles wrought through the intercession of Blessed Benedict Joseph Labre, afterwards known as "The Beggar Saint," who had just died.

However, after his own private investigation of the strange happenings, he was convinced beyond all doubt that the miracles were real.

He was so impressed that he immediately embraced the Roman Catholic Faith and after studying for the priesthood, was ordained in Paris in 1789.

He returned to his native Boston, where, with remarkable courage, he preached his newfound faith to those who once listened to his condemnation of it.

In 1803 he returned to Ireland to seek assistance in fulfilling a long felt wish of setting up a convent in Boston, a mission that ended successfully when he founded an Ursuline Convent in his native city.

While inspecting the Limerick area, he became acquainted with the Bishop of Limerick, Dr. John Young, with whom he struck up a lasting friendship; so much so that he settled down in Limerick.

This was a time before the clergy



Fr Thayer was attached to St John's and St Michael's parishes where his sermons reversed the accepted trend among congregations of hoping that they would be "short and sweet"

enjoyed the comforts of their own homes; the adventurous convert was lucky to find a good home in the household of James Ryan, who carried on a thriving drapery business at the "Sign of the Golden Eagles," No. 34 Patrick Street - which was known as "The Hogan Stand" before its recent demolition.

Ryan was fortunate too, in that four of his five daughters were taken off his hands through the influence, no doubt, of his clerical lodger - they call became Ursuline nuns.

The fifth was married to a Mr. Quirke, but not to be outdone by her sisters in religion, she too became an Ursuline after the death of her husband and for good measure, her three daughters entered the Ursuline Convent, which was established on the North Strand in Limerick in 1826 and her only son became a Jesuit.

An unprecedented occasion in Limerick was the profession of Mrs. Quirke and his eldest daughter, which took place at the same time in

the Ursuline Convent.

Two ladies pronounced their perpetual vows in the presence of their Bishop, Dr. John Ryan.

This solemn event took place on November 29, 1828.

Fr. Thayer was attached to St. John's and St Michael's parishes where his sermons reversed the accepted trend among congregations of hoping that they would be "short and sweet."

He made such an impact on the parishioner that they flocked to his

residence to make their confessions when he came infirm and was confined to the house.

His name was indelibly engraved in the minds of the people, even the generations that came after him.

When he died in 1815, his funeral to St. John's, where he was buried in the tomb of Dr. Michael Peter McMahon, Bishop of Killaloe, is reported to have been the largest ever seen in Limerick.

-Written by John Thayer