James M’Carthy
Teacher, Publisher and Politician

In 1849, James M’Carthy’s *Limerick and Clare Examiner* rivalled Lenihan’s *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* for the liberal, Catholic, middle-class readership of the city. In 1851, after the humiliating outcome of a libel trial, for remarks Lenihan published in the *Vindicator*, M’Carthy sailed for New Orleans. There he resumed his career in journalism, but died of yellow fever in less than a year. Fortunately, the story of James’ public life and times is available to contemporary Limerick readers and to his descendants, through the microfilmed version of the *Examiner* and its rival *Vindicator*. The one-hundred-and-sixty year old articles read like today’s newspapers: famine in the midst of plenty, tax cheating, disputes over tax-rates and boundaries, government corruption, private profiteering, mismanagement of public welfare, officially sanctioned violence, public lawlessness, and on and on.

A Youth on the Margins

James was born in 1813 just outside of the western municipal boundary of Limerick city. At this time a very few houses dotted these rural townlands. Across water meadows, the remaining walls, the towers and the spires of Limerick shimmered in the river mist above the ruins of 14th century Kilrush chapel. James could recall coursing for hares with hounds through the fields of an absent but benevolent landlord. This was the property of Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, the Third Marquess of Lansdowne, Earl of Kerry and Shelburne, and son of a former Prime Minister of England. James’ father, Michael M’Carthy, held Shelburne Cottage, surrounded by gardens, just south of the Ennis Road in the townland of Farranshine More. Michael had married, in 1808, a first cousin once removed, Mary Quinlivan, the Widow Palmer. She had inherited the lease of other sizable farming properties in the North Liberties. In the 1820s the M’Carthys were substantial enough farmers to be robbed of firearms along with their neighbours, William Maunsell of Castle Park and Edmond Palmer of Shanabally. Edmond was possibly Mary Quinlivan M’Carthy’s second child by her first husband, thus half-brother to James.

Following the introduction of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, Catholics in Limerick grew economically and politically more powerful, but in the townlands across the river, the Protestant gentry still prevailed. Two wealthy Limerick families established the area as a suburb of Limerick. The Barrington family built their quay and a villa. The Alexanders leased land from Lord Lansdowne, plotted the Circular Roads and built villas for themselves. Still later, the completion of Wellesley, now Sarsfield Bridge in 1835, made the area even more convenient for Limerick gentry who desired homes outside of but convenient to the city centre.

Little is known of James’ early schooling, but in 1833, he matriculated at Trinity College, Dublin. A programme to train
graduates to teach had just begun. Outside of classes, nationalist politics were of no offer. From classmate Thomas Osborne Davis and John Blake Dillon, and from Davis's follower, Charles Gavan Duffy, James McCarthy could learn the importance to the nationalist cause of the two careers he later pursued, teaching and journalism.

James never graduated from Trinity, although he attached T.C.D. to his name. He married Mary Ann O'Shaughnessy, the daughter of Limerick jeweller, watchmaker, fishing lure and tackle maker, Robert O'Shaughnessy, long established at 18 George Street. Both families opposed the match, on account of James's lack of any means of supporting a family. A cousin, Fr John Kenny, was parish priest in Kilrush, and perhaps because of this family connection, James and Mary Ann left Limerick and made Kilrush their home around 1885. If James's tenure at Trinity was brief, his sojourn in Kilrush completed his education in moral philosophy and politics. Approaching Kilrush from the Shannon on the Limerick steam packet, the McCarthy's would note the tall grain store and wide street rising to the market square. Butter, pigs and cattle were brought here from west Clare for export to Limerick and overseas. Fishing and oyster dredging occupied some 200 inhabitants of the town. In Kilrush the young couple were to meet the 42-year-old Fr Kenny. When first ordained he was sent as a curate to Kilmihil in 1815. He had served all over Clare. He was said to 'know more of the manners and customs of the native Irish of his time than perhaps any man living.' Yet waxes, patterns, Holy Wells, St. Senan's bed on Scattery Island, had no place in Fr Kenny's Catholicism. Fr Kenny had been of tremendous assistance to Daniel O'Connell in his campaign to represent Clare in Parliament. He became James McCarthy's parish priest, and probably his political guide as well.

James set up his Kilrush Academy at 1 Moore Street, and advertised for students. The course of education was similar to the one he had begun at Trinity: 'Greek, Latin and the various branches, which constitute a sound English Education. Composition, Declaration and Reading, Moral Habits and Manners.' Of this time, he would write: 'There was no part of my life I look back on with more pleasure than when I conducted a Classical Academy.' However, after he had left Kilrush, one of his detractors in Limerick claimed that 'by his bad teachings and sottish example, he had destroyed and ruined Kilrush's youth, who now haunts traprooms and card tables.' He claimed McCarthy had been routed from Kilrush by protective parents. Kenny, by then Dean of Killaloe, sprang to McCarthy's defence. He pointed out that 'Mr. McCarthy's school produced more clergyman than any Kilrush school for the same space of time ever did. The parents of the children,' Denly Kenny added, 'held out additional encouragement to him to remain, and presented him with an address expressive of their approval of his conduct upon his departure from Kilrush in 1845.'

James's family preserved a copy of that address, signed by Kenny, his curates and several dozen Kilrush townspeople. It speaks of him as a 'public character of sterling worth, not only as a Man, a Teacher, as Husband, a Father, a Scholar, a Patriot and a Philanthropist.' The address hints at McCarthy's outspoken character. As a patriot, it is quite unnecessary that your friends should bear a syllable of testimony; we leave that to the enemies of your country and her holy cause; those amongst...
them, honest enough to speak the truth, will acknowledge your zeal—the others will confess that a more determined, untiring antagonist they never would desire to meet."

During James's time there, Kenny, O'Connell, the Catholic Church and the Repeal cause were powerful forces in Kllrush. In 1840 Daniel O'Connell formed the Repeal Association in Dublin, and shortly after that Charles Gavan Duffy began a newspaper, *The Nation*, advocating Repeal. Between 1843 and 1845, James McCarthy, in Kllrush, sent subscription money; called a Repeal meeting, to the Dublin headquarters of the Repeal Association. He opened a reading room that subscribed to *The Nation*. McCarthy earned the title of Volunteer, one who had recruited more than 100 members of the Repeal Association. John O'Connell, the Liberator's son, called him 'one of the most active and useful Repealers in the country ... a man of much resource and ability."

There were other forces at work. As an observer wrote at the time, "Kllrush belongs to Crofton Moore Van deuleer. Van deuleer's father had transformed a fishing village into a thriving market and port town, planned and built to his specifications. The Vandeleurs received the rent from the entire town and usage fees for its pier. With its fine house and extensive walled garden, their demesne overlooked the town. Young Vandeleur, newly married, had settled in, determined to continue improvements to his property. If tenants could not pay their rents, he confiscated their cattle or evicted them."

He was fond of yachting and had a boat built in Clare and named it for his wife. Soon he had heirs, twin sons. Some official responsibilities were his automatically, because of his landholding status. Like his father, he wanted to be elected to Parliament, and assuage the pain of the election of O'Connell as Member of Parliament for Clare.

The passage of the Poor Relief Act of 1836 introduced into Kllrush a presence more powerful than Vandeleur. The British Parliament was determined to govern in a uniform, efficient manner. A centralized bureaucracy in Dublin would administer a system to provide relief to the deserving poor. Vandeleur and other west Clare landlords would be asked to contribute land, money and their time to the government's system, even as they continued to evict their tenants. In just two years, the Kllrush Union Workhouse, a stone building more imposing than the Vandeleur's mansion, with grounds more thinly enclosed than Vandeleur's walled garden, rose above the town. At about this time, Reverend Cottrell persuaded Vandeleur to donate land to build a Catholic church, and soon it too changed the skyline of the town.

In 1845, the Famine, a force greater than Kenny, O’Connell, Vandeleur or Parliament, soon filled the workhouse to capacity. From his school in the centre of Kllrush town James witnessed the onset of what he called 'an unprecedented calamity.' It began with a partial potato crop failure of 1845. As conditions worsened starving families walked the roads of Clare, and piled the waters of the Shannon, hoping to be admitted to the workhouse. There they encountered British Imperial bureaucracy. Entry required that they relinquish their tenancy of land, live separately from their spouses and children, wear workhouse clothes and eat the meagre 'dietary' portioned out to them. Each Poor Law Union had a Board of Guardians, which represented the largest payers of rate or tax. At their head was the principal landlord. Consistent with the machinery of the Poor Law, minutes were kept of the Board's deliberations, granting or refusing admission to the workhouse, devising the diet and clothing of its inmates. The Guardian managed the Master, Matron and staff who actually kept the workhouse functioning. A representative of the Commission, called an Inspector, made sure the Guardians followed all regulations.

In Kllrush, as the potato crop continued to fail, so did Vandeleur's crop of rents. He continued evicting his tenants from their small holdings and they entered the workhouse. Too often they exited in coffins. Priests could not serve on the Board of Guardians, but could serve as chaplains within the workhouse. They witnessed horrifying conditions inside, as well as in their parishes in west Clare. James observed enough to conclude that Vandeleur was an exterminating landlord.

Sometime in the winter of 1846, James took his wife, three sons and daughter, back to Limerick. His family for Vandeleur, the horrific conditions in Kllrush and the rise of the National Schools, any or all of these, could have forced the move. His birthplace, Shielburne Cottage, had changed as well. Just north, across the Ennis Road, stood Limerick's workhouse.

For about a year, James resumed work as principal of a classical school, this time in Catherine Street, Limerick, where his growing family also took up residence. In his advertisements, the approval of the Catholic Church favourably contrasted the school with the mixed education being offered at the National Schools. Protestant proselytizing through education or
ADDRESS
OF THE INHABITANTS OF KILRUSH
TO
JAMES M’CARTHY, ESQ., T.C.D.
LATE PRINCIPAL OF THE KILRUSH ACADEMY.

At a large and influential Meeting of your numerous friends and admirers in Kilrush, it was unanimously resolved that they should present you with a substantial memorial of their admiration of the many and amiable qualities that adorned your career whilst resident amongst them.

Taking you as a public character, we hesitate not to particularize those qualities, confident that the Citizens of Limerick, your fellow-Citizens by birth amongst whom you have been induced to locate yourself will fully concur in our feeling of sincere and profound affection for your sterling worth.

As a Man, a Christian, a Husband, a Father, you have well deserved the fullest approval of all good men.

As a Scholar, a Teacher, a Patriot, a Philanthropist, it would be difficult to do you justice consistently with those fine feelings of delicacy we well know you to possess. As a Scholar, those who had the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance with you can bear ample testimony. As a Teacher, we proudly and triumphantly point to the numerous pupils you have sent upon the world, well stored with a mine of educational and moral wealth that will be exhausted only with their lives. As a Patriot, it is quite unnecessary that your Friends should bear a syllable of testimony; we leave that to the enemies of your country and her holy cause; those amongst them, honest enough to speak the truth, will acknowledge your zeal—the others will confess that a more determined, untiring antagonist they never would desire to meet. As a Philanthropist, we turn for evidence to every circumstance that occurred during your residence with us, relating to the afflictions of the poor—to charity in every shape and form—they will acknowledge your sympathy, your liberality.

You will be pleased to accept the accompanying present, as a proof that we can estimate those high endearing qualities you are so amply gifted with, and that, when we bid you farewell, and express a most ardent hope that prosperity and happiness will forever be your companions through life, we are not actuated by “rac et præterea nihil,” but by that true sincere feeling, so well deserved by your manly, resolute, straightforward, unshrinking course.

Our sincerest wishes are for the uninterrupted happiness of you, your amiable Wife, and interesting Children.

Wm. Foley, M.D. Sec.
John Kenne, P.P.
Timothy Brennan, R.C.O.
Michel Brennan, R.C.O.
Pat. Moran, R.C.O.
Michael Foley, M.D.
John Kelly.
Denis Hynes.
John Curtin.
Jeremiah Boland.
Thomas Gannon.
James Brennan.
Richard O’Donnell.
James McCarth.
John McCarth.
Tomás Kelly.
Michael Foley.
Nicholas O’Lill.
Richard Foley.
Michael Moriarty.
James Quin.
Michael O’Herfe.
John Hanley.
J. Gullinan, Esq.
Thomas O’Donovan.
Francis Brow.
David O’Carra.
Pat. Gigbar.
Michael McGraith.
Michael McObrenny.
John Walsh.
Garnett Doherty.
James Comyn.
Pat. McCarth.
Thomas Moriarty.
William Heffern.
Mat. Herren.
Pat. O’Connor.
John McAmara.
Bartholomew Glyn.
Martin Mahony.
Andrew Mahon.

Address of the inhabitants of Kilrush to James M’Carth, Esq., T.C.D., Late Principal of the Kilrush Academy, 1845
through 'sousperism,' offering food in exchange for religious conversion, was a feature of these difficult times, and was one of the preoccupations of James' next career.

Limerick Journalism

In August 1847, his brother, Charles McCarthy, to 'give employment to James' literary talents' by naming him editor. Since newspapers of this era carried no bylines, we can only assume everything that appeared had James' authorship or approval. Under Charles' and James' ownership, the newspaper left little doubt of its political allegiance. Its masthead declared, 'The lovers of Peaceful and Constitutional Agitation will find in the Examiner unwavering advocacy. The peacefull policy of the lamented LIBERATOR is under all an every circumstances, zealously inculcated.'

The telegraph now swiftly spread international news, and the Examiner carried dispatches from London and the Continent. McCarthy's Examiner was at its best in delivering its motto of 'Unbending Honesty and Unswerving Truth' about the Famine. The Examiner published under 'Poor Law Intelligence' reports, gathered from Tuam to Tralee, on conditions in each workhouse. Guardians' meetings in Kilkenny and Limerick received detailed coverage, and letters were printed from priests and other observers of the Famine in the west of Ireland. James, or someone on his staff, could surely write well. An editorial, 'Depopulation of Ireland,' echoed Jonathan Swift's irony, proposing that to further reduce the surplus population of Ireland, the government should employ not only Emigration, but Workhouses, The Poor Law, Famine, Extermination, Transportation and Hangings.

The Examiner followed the cause of Repeal as the aging O'Connell's political star fell to the horizon, and another rose in his place. William Smith O'Brien was a descendant of one of Ireland's oldest families, a Protestant born in County Clare and with marital ties to County Limerick. Smith O'Brien grew frustrated with trying to bring about change through Parliamentary means and broke with O'Connell. This 'Young Ireland' or Confederation group, frustrated Catholic Limerick, as O'Connell's son and his followers, including some of the Catholic hierarchy, condemned it.

Meanwhile, Parliament tightened the laws forbidding writing, speaking or meeting to question Imperial policies. These Coercion Laws could lead to arrest, imprisonment, transportation or worse. The imprisonment of Smith O'Brien and other Young Irishmen under those laws softened the Examiner's stand against them. James formed and served as President of one of the Confederation's branches, the Hugh O'Neil Club of Limerick.

In July 1848, William Smith O'Brien led an uprising. He was quickly arrested and accused of high treason, a capital offense punishable by hanging, drawing and quartering. His closest conspirators fled the country. Some were sheltered and aided in their escape by Father Meehan, one of Father Kenny's protégés in west Clare. O'Brien's trial and transportation aroused sympathy for him, and left a vacuum of political leadership.

REFERENCES
1. James McCartney was my great-great-grandfather. I could never have imagined this project without the work that the late Chris O'Mahony of the Limerick Archives undertook in 1996 and help from the late George Harrett, in Kilkenny, the same year. Paddy Waldron first suggested James McCartney as a figure worthy of a write-up, and more recently, Ciarán O'Murchadha emphasized McCartney's newspaper as uniquely honest and persistent in reporting on the Famine. Brendan Burke and Kathy Rhodes made new discoveries and sparked my return to the topic. Peter Beirne of Clare Local Studies made available the Limerick and Clare Examiner and other papers on microfilm, and was always encouraging. To the many other citizens of Clare and Limerick who shared their love of local history and welcomed mine, Slainte.
3. Griffith's Primary Valuation of Tenements, St. Munchin's Parish, Farranfore. Note that Griffith's lists
TO ANGLERS.

THE Spring Salmon Fishing Season having commenced, O'SHAUGHNESSY, the Celebrated Manufacturer of the real Limerick Hooks and Flies, has the honour of announcing to the Nobility, Gentry, and the Public in general, that he has, this season, the largest and most varied assortment of Fishing Tackle ever presented to their inspection, consisting of Plug, Screw, and Splice Rods of all sizes, Landing Nets and Gaffs, Plain, and Clink Reels, Silk, Hair and Patent Lines, Salmon and Trout Gut, &c. &c. also, the Celebrated O'SHAUGHNESSY'S LIMERICK HOOKS AND FLIES of all sizes and descriptions.

On the receipt of a Post-office Order, Hooks and Flies forwarded free to any part of the world.

All Goods Ordered, if not approved of, will be refunded.

THE OLD ESTABLISHED WATCH AND CLOCK MANUFACTORY.

The Proprietor is, at present, supplied with a varied and well-assorted stock of Gold and Silver Lever, Geneva, and Vertical Watches, which, having been purchased for Cash, will be sold at unusually low prices, Gold and Silver Guards of the newest patterns. Seals, Keys, Rings, &c. &c. &c.

The greatest attention paid to the Repairs of Watches and Clocks. Clocks kept in Order and Wound, for Seven and Six-pence per year.

Advertise for O'Shaughnessy's fishing gear, Limerick and Clare Examiner, 21 January 1846

both the main house and cottage Shelbourne, and newspapers alternate including and omitting the 'o' As the Petty Fitzmaurice were Earl's of Shelbourne, I use that spelling.

4 William Maunsell (1791-?) Caherdavin, St. Munchins, Limerick, Rector of Kilnarry. The Maunsell family intermarried with the Gabbett and Delmoe families.

5 'Provincial Intelligence', Connacht Journal, Galway, 17 February 1853.

6 Edmund Palmer in the 1802 Tithe Applotments for St. Munchin's Civil Parish held 15 acres in Caherdavin, and 21 in Shanabally.


8 Phil Lovett, 'Quakers in Limerick,' Old Limerick Journal, 37 (Summer 2000) 8.


10 J.W. Stubb, 'During the Nineteenth Century,' The Book of Trinity College Dublin (Belmont 1892).

11 Listed in Pigot's Directory, 1824.


14 Louise Connor Bowen to Louis Dougerty.

15 Samuel Lewis, A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland, i (London 1733).

16 John O'Donovan, notes to Extracts from the Journal of Thomas Finley, the Journal of Kilbenny and Southeast Ireland Archaeological Society, ii (Dublin 1859) 26-30.

17 Ignatius Murphy, The Diocese of Killaloe, 1800-1850 (Dublin 1992) 77.

18 Rian Sheedy, The Clare Elections, Limerick 1849.


20 James McCarthy, Letter to the Editor of the Limerick and Clare Examiner, 10 July 1850.

21 Thomas Browne, Letter to the Editor of the Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 7 July 1850.

22 John Kenny, Letter to the Editor of the Limerick and Clare Examiner, 20 July 1850.

23 Charles Gavan Duffy (1815-1893) born Monaghan; self-educated; entered King's Inn, Dublin, 1841; co-founder of the Nation, joined the Irish Confederation, January, 1847; arrested July, 1848; released, April, 1849; joined the Tenant League; MP for New Ross, 1852-1855; emigrated to Australia, 1855. Historian and biographer of Young Ireland leaders.


25 Kilrush Repeal Rent subscribers who were also signatories to the testimonial included: Timothy Breen, R.C.C., Francis St. John, Jeremiah, Michael Foley, Richard Foley, Win Foley, MD; Thomas Gibson; Denis Hynes; John Kelly; John Kenny, PF; Michael Meehan, R.C.C.; Michael Morissey; Pat O'Connor; James Quinn.


27 'Novel Method of Collecting Tithes,' Freeman's Journal, 28 February 1835.

28 Clare Journal, 29 August 1837.

29 Thomas Askew Mooney, Compendium of the Irish Poor Law (Dublin 1887).

30 Clare Journal, 20 August 1838.


32 Thomas Askew Mooney, Compendium of the Irish Poor Law (Dublin 1887).

33 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 5 February 1850.

34 Advertisements, Limerick and Clare Examiner, 24 January 1846, 21 February 1846; 11 April 1846, 25 April 1846, 23 December 1845, 30 December 1846.

35 Charles McCarthy (1810-1880) Limerick City Council, 1846-1851; Limerick as a Proprietor with James McCarthy, Limerick and Clare Examiner, self-described as Freeholder in Free Trade speech, Limerick Chronicle obituary describes him as merchant.


37 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 22 January 1848.

38 Ibid., 140-141.


40 Ibid., 150-160.