James M’Carthy
Teacher, Publisher and Politician

Not content merely to write about politics, James entered the fray. He became involved in local politics as a town councillor, a member of the Board of Guardians, and as a speaker at meetings of the national group advocating tenant rights. James’ cousin on his mother’s side, Laurence Quinlivan, had begun serving on the reformed Limerick Corporation in 1842 and represented Patrick Street Ward, the commercial hub of the city. Perhaps Quinlivan, who would serve as Mayor in 1850, encouraged Charles, in 1847, and James, in 1849, to stand as representatives for Patrick Street. In fact, all the M’Carthy men got involved.

The council chambers, sited in the new Commercial Building, were a short stroll from the Examiner newspaper offices at 8 Rutland Street. In 1848, Charles and other councilors questioned the sweetheart deal on a lease that Alderman Watson, proprietor of the conservative Limerick Chronicle, had obtained from the old corrupt corporation, depriving the now bankrupt city of needed revenue.

Charles, along with O’Connell’s supporters Martin Honan and Pierce Shannon, prodded the council to commission a portrait of O’Connell for the new chambers. The council was understandably reluctant to pay the one hundred and fifty guineas price in the midst of the Famine. When James joined the Council in 1849, the almost life-size portrait of Daniel O’Connell, painted by Joseph Patrick Haverty, dominated the meeting rooms of Limerick Corporation in the Commercial Building on Rutland Street. Limerick politics still reverberated with O’Connell’s ideas, even though he was dead two years. Because of his efforts, Limerick’s Catholic middle-class had asserted itself, and in 1841, was able to wrest control of the city’s governing body from the notorious ‘Corrupt Corporation.’ Many council members had been early supporters of O’Connell’s Catholic Association, and more recently of his campaign for Repeal of the Union of Ireland and England.

There was no portrait of the exiled William Smith O’Brien in the council...
chambers, but his actions were not forgotten. James, looking around the meeting room, would have seen a group crosscut by ancient and recent feuds: Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Repealer, Old Ireland and Young Ireland. The difficulty of guiding the affairs of a city in such troubled times was compounded by debts inherited from the previous Corporation and a disappearing revenue stream. A decade later, Michael Hogan, Limerick’s Bard of Thomond could still write:

When Limerick thought of the formation
Of that blast tribe, the Corporation,
The Devil’s angels went about.
To fish the gypsy truckers out.
From the back lanes, masts, alleys, holes,
Human gorillas came in stealths.
To form this heterogeneous school,
And play the scoundrel or the fool.

The group followed two sets of rules. One was based on procedures of the English House of Commons, probably as codified in 1844. The other was unwritten but often invoked: “Don’t introduce politics or relig-

ion into our business.” James McCarthy relied on the first set of rules when he needed it. As for the second, he evidently believed all the corporation’s business to be political and religious. A record of his performance in these meetings is available from at least three sources. The most unbiased information comes from the terse official minutes of the meetings. In addition, talented Nationalist reporters like Stephen J. Meaney made more detailed transcriptions for McCarthy’s Limerick and Clare Examiner. Maurice Lenihan published still another version in his Limerick Report and Tipperary Vindicator.

In the Council’s 1850 debate over a dinner to honor Lord Gough, an aging Anglo-Irish officer in the British Army, we follow James McCarthy’s rhetoric. First, Lenihan’s account of the exchange: McCarthy thought it only right to say that while he acceded to the proposal on the ground that ‘Lord Gough, having been invited to dinner, should be suitably entertained, he sincerely hoped they never again would give dinner to an English general.’ This created uproar, with voices crying out.

Field Marshal Hugh Gough

“He is an Irish general – an old Garryowen boy” (Gough is credited with the first use of the melody ‘Garryowen’ in a military context. After his battles, Gough had the regimental band strike up the tune.)

“He is an English general,” McCarthy insisted.

William Gobett, an Anglo-Irishman, pointed out, “He is an Irishman, and will be getting one of your sons a commission one of these days.”

“I do not want him,” McCarthy responded, “We will have an Irish army before that time comes round.” Alderman Watson, who considered it his duty to report all such sentiments to the Queen’s government in Dublin Castle, may have noted this last remark.

McCarthy’s paper gave this variation:

“Mr. McCarthy, who had come in a few minutes previous, said that although he differed with the principle of paying Lord Gough so marked a compliment, not on personal grounds, but because Lord Gough was a British soldier, he was ready to admit that Lord Gough was a brave and skilful (sic) general; that he fought and conquered with the true spirit of a Garryowen man, but they should all remember he was an officer of the British Government, which had oppressed and enslaved this country.

‘He would however, as the Corporation had unanimously decided on it, join in the demonstration to Lord Gough and for this reason alone, because he was most wondrously assailed by a Saxon press for being an Irishman.’

He regretted that Lord Gough’s sword was not employed in a more national struggle than in extending British rule, and subjugating a brave people.”

The Council took most of James McCarthy’s specifications with a certain grace, declaring, when he resigned in September.
1851, 'That the thanks of this council
be hereby given to our respected fellow
citizen James McCarthy, Esquire, for the
honest and independent manner in which
he discharged the duties of Town Coun-
cillor of the Corporation.'

James had become active in other
political arenas. In the summer of 1850,
he was called to Dublin for the formation
of the Tenant Right League. Founded
by Frederick Lucas and Charles Gavan
Duffy, this effort sought to fill the poli-
tical vacuum left by O'Connell's death and the
exile of William Smith-O'Brien. Initially it
was supported by farmers from both North
and South; and by the clergymen who had
backed O'Connell. Made a member of
the council of the League, James began speak-
ing at Tenant Right meetings. His speeches
proposed one of the three principals of
Tenant Right but began with an anecdote
from his life, as though he was reflecting
on his past and thinking of his future.

In Bally, in May: 'I was born and
brought up on the estate of the Marquis of
Lansdowne, I witnessed all the blessings of
tenant right on that estate.'

In Rathkeale, in June: 'I had unfor-
fortunately been a Poor Law Guardian.'

Later, 'He had been to the wilds of
America and saw what his countrymen's
toll there had effected - the yellow corn
waving where once was the damp morass
or stony crag.'

And finally, 'I, as well as you, must en-
counter greater difficulties, unless, indeed
as alas, many have already done, we stoop
to the gloomy necessity of huddling adrift
in native scenes and our own - and lovely
land, and repair to the wilds of America.'

The Limerick Union Board of Guar-
dians, to which he was elected in 1849, was
not as appreciative as the council or the
Tenant Right gatherings. The Guardians
met in the city, or in a bare room set aside
for them in the Old Storehouse. Once, when James was absent
from a meeting, Mr. Christopher Delmege commented 'We are
now able to do business, and look at things in their proper
light. Before certain individuals used to be speech-making and
recommending relief to be given to the poor, and we could not
attend to anything but answering him.'

He confessed, 'I was really paralyzed
with the man.'

In Limerick Corporation, Catholic busi-
ness and professional men were in the
majority. The Board of Guardians con-
sisted of ratepayers, elected to serve the
worthy poor, and to ensure that the rate-
payers' money was not misused. The two
digging did overlap, with Mayor, Aldermen
and Councillors serving as ex-officio.'
The Limerick Poor Law Union included
the large estates on the Clare and the
Limerick sides of the River Shannon,
as well as the city itself. As James looked
around the grey chamber, many were
the faces of Anglo-Irish landlords, John
Fitzgibbon, the second Lord Clare of
Mountshannon; Sir Richard De Burgh
of Castleconnell; Eyre Massey, the third
Lord Clare of Elm Park; and the Del-
mege, Senior and Junior of Castle Park.

To men like these, James McCarthy
represented their worst fears about Cath-
olic emancipation. Like Daniel O'Connell,
James refused to treat them with defer-
cence and he had the power of the printing
press.

In a Board of Guardians meeting, James
confronted Christopher Delmege by asking
'How dare he, an alien in religion, in blood
and in politics - a Swabian peasant, who
immigrated into this country, with bronzed
shins, and white pantoufles, use such lan-
dage to him?' His comment paraphrased a
song current at the time:

In the year seventeen hundred and nine
I came the brass coloured Patelines
From the ancient banks of the Swabian
Rhine.'

In response to a letter from Lord Clare
chastising the board for its rancorous de-
bates, James retorted 'I now deny the right
of Lord Clare in toto to dictate any course
to be pursued by me...I repudiate the idea,
and never did, nor will I now, recognize the
right of Lord Clare or any other Lord to
lecture me.'

Lord Clarina responded to James'
comment on the connection between exter-
minating landlords and indoor relief, 'We
are sick of the subject now.'

James replied 'We are sick of the Lords
of this country.'

In short James was not afraid to express
his opinion of the nobility and gentry, 'The
aristocracy are the rabble, or parliament;
I would rather be shot down tomorrow
than have recourse to such whining when
applying to a Saxon Parliament ... I object
to the words "honourable house." It is not
an honourable house.'

When he joined the Board, his father
was already serving as a Guardian and
tried to rein in James' criticisms. James
didn't spare his equals or inferiors from
tongue-lashings. One long-time member of
the Board, William Sheehy, aroused his
ire. James' behavior had consequences,
creating unlikely alliances between those
he offended. Protestant and Catholic.

In April 1849, James published an
account of a Guardians meeting which
displeased William Sheehy. Christopher Delmege came to Sheehy's defense. This report was taken down at the Boardroom, and I think the Board have a right to protect its members. Mr. Sheehy brought me a copy of the Examiner on yesterday and asked me if I was right that he should be put down as a Roman Catholic voting against an increase in the priest's salary.

M'Carthy responded, "Was I not true?"

But Sheehy was furious, "Mr. Chair, I want to know from this board if I will be protected? Mr. M'Carthy puts in his paper, in the first line under the heading, a saying from Horace. This is it. (Here Mr. Sheehy became puzzled, and having spent some time in spelling the words, read out) "Unswerving truth... and... and... unswerving truth."

M'Carthy shot back, "There is no such thing there at all. Give it to someone else to read if you are not able to do so yourself."

Mr. Sheehy dismissed him. "Make what you like of it then."

Mr. M'Carthy, "You ought to go to school before you again attempt to comment on the public press."

Perhaps it was James M'Carthy's career as a schoolteacher that inclined him to lecture his listeners. The family's combined presence in politics and in print irritated them. Many noted the powerful constellation of M'Carthy's father, brothers, brother-in-law Edmund Beveridge, and their cousin, the mayor, Laurence Quillivan. Sheehy, for one, resented James. He retaliated by accusing M'Carthy of "jobbing," that is, using his position on the Board of Guardians to obtain workhouse supply contracts.

Sheehy, Delmage, and James's detractor from Kilrush, Tom Browne, merchant at Limerick, combined to attack him.

Sheehy and Browne allied to the marriage of Maria, James's sister, to Edmund Beveridge, Sheehy's competitor in the linen trade, and a contractor to the workhouse.

Emigration, "the gloomy necessity"

Family stories to the contrary, James's decision to emigrate was hardly made hastily. Although he was not implicated in any but the first of the accusations, of having criticized a politician for refusing him a job, the trial surely caught attention to all the troubling accusations. James M'Carthy had written and said, things which outraged the Protestant gentry, and supported causes which, under the Coercion Laws, might have led to imprisonment. Far worse, to Catholic Limerick, who valued respectability, the M'Carthy family was tainted by scandal.

Charles had already sold the Limerick and Clare Examiner in March 1851. Later that year, James resigned from Limerick Corporation, citing his intention to emigrate. The two older girls were sent to the Sacred Heart Convent in Armagh. James, his wife Mary Anne, their four boys and their youngest daughter, Annie Agnes, embarked for New Orleans on September 29, 1851.

James M'Carthy found work on The Daily Orleans, published in English and...

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Mr. James M'Carthy.—This high-minded and patriotic Irishman, late proprietor and editor of the Limerick and Clare Examiner, left Limerick, accompanied by his family, for the United States, on Monday, September 29th. The Munster News justly says of Mr. M'Carthy that, "in regard to heart, integrity of purpose, educational culture in breadth and soundness of judgment on great public questions, strong sympathy with the people, fearless daring for the poor, and irresistible national prepossessions, few men ever left these shores qualified to be his superior. None ever turned from them to the great West more qualified to gain love, rank as a man, and widespread popularity."

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The Canadian newspaper, The True Witness and Catholic Chronicle, 31 October 1851
French by an Irishman, J.C. Prendergast. In 1859, the eldest son, Michael, died returning to Ireland for his health. James' brother, Charles, died in 1860; their father in 1863. Charles' widow moved to Dublin, where she had wealthy relatives. Her daughter Mary Teresa married a clerk, John Boyd Barrett, and had three sons. By 1901, on a visit to Ireland, James' grandchildren learned that no one in Limerick knew of the M'Carys.

The Limerick newspapers continued their editorial give and take for decades. Maurice Lennihan replaced James M'Carthy on the Limerick Corporation Council as a representative for Patrick Street.

In County Clare, with the exception of Fr Xerxen, James' allies in the clergy passed from the active political scene. The feisty Reverend Connolly of Kilkee fought his last political flight, helping to defeat Crofton Moore Vandeleur not once, but twice, in 1852 and 1853. Connolly died in 1854.

Some of M'Carthy's enemies came to hard ends. Tom Browne of Lawn Hall was dead at fever even before the libel trial. William Sheehy, who was elected to the Corporation council for Irishtown Ward in 1854, served as Alderman in 1858 and 1859. In 1860, Sheehy was viciously murdered and his body burnt, presumably by a disgruntled ex-tenant of the estate Sheehy acquired through the Encumbered Estates Court. DeBurgh was almost murdered by one of his own servants.

What if the emigrant M'Carthy had lived on in America? Patrick Lynch, the first proprietor of the Limerick and Clare Examiner, and Stephen J. Meehan, editor at the time of the 1851 sale, both emigrated to the United States and while working on newspapers there, enlisted in the Feiniain Brotherhood. James' jest about his sons joining Ireland's own army was ironically prescient: three boys enlisted in the Confederate Army when the American Civil War began. Only two survived to attend the wedding of their younger sister, Maria, to a County Roscommon man and Yankee officer, after the close of the Civil War.

In the United States, James' great-grandson, my father, Crosswell Bowen, was a crusading journalist and Eugene O'Neill's first biographer. Bowen was notorious in New York, Washington, D.C. and especially World War II British India, the Middle East and North Africa, for his abrasive questions and 'un-gentlemanly' style.

In Ireland, Charles M'Carthy's grandsons were of equally independent minds. E. J. 'Jack' Boyd-Butler was a psychologist and a prolific author. Trained in the Jesuit Novitiate at Tullabeg, and at the University, Louvain, Belgium, he was ordained in 1917. He left the priesthood and the Catholic Church in 1929. His younger brother Joe, captain of school at Congowes, was a doctor. Associated with the Sinn Fein movement, a friend of Arthur Griffith, he was involved in the Howth gun-running incident of 1914. He was also a painter and character in the writing of fellow medical man Oliver St. John Gogarty. Currently, James' great-great-grandnephew by adoption, Richard Boyd-Barrett, is the outspoken People Before Profit representative for Dun Laoghaire in the Dail.

REFERENCES
1 Laurence Quinlan (1800-1876) Listed in Slater's, 1846-Quinlan's Hotel, Laurence Quinlan, 10 William Street and as Corn, Flour and Meal Dealer, 'Fisher and Quinlan, William Street'; Member Limerick City Council, 1842-1876; Mayor 1849-1850; Married Ellen Mary Kelly, Kilrush, 1850; Member, Limerick Chamber of Commerce, 1859-1861; Married Margreeta Cullinan, Ennis, 1863; One of Quinlan's sisters, Anne, was the mother of Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, (1812-1917) Bishop of Limerick.
2 http://www.limerick.ie/digital_archives/limerickcitycouncillegal/ local›governmentcollections/limerick citycouncil›minutesbooks1841-1972/
3 Martin Horgan (-1848) First Catholic Mayor, since Treaty of Limerick, and one of original members of reformed city council, Wealthy woolen merchant.
4 Pierce Shannon son of Limerick Mayor of same name.
5 http://www.limerick.ie/digital_archives/limerickcitycouncilandlocal governmentcollections/limerickcitycouncil›minutesbooks1841-1972/
7 Joseph Patrick Harty (1794-1864) native of Galway City, lived and painted in Limerick and Dublin. Perhaps most well known for O'Connell portraits and 'The Limerick Piper.'
8 Michael Hogan (1832-1899) b. Thomond Gate, Limerick. Bard of Thomond, pseudo. Employed by Limerick Corporation as governor of the King's Island Bank at L1 per week. Poetry published in the Nation.

12 Lord Gough (1779-1869) Hugh Gough, born Woodstown House, County Limerick; Active Service British Army 1794-1850; Field Marshall, Commander-in-Chief in China, First Opium War, 1841-1842; Commander-in-Chief in India, Anglo-Sikh Wars, 1845-1849.

13 William Henry Gambett of Catherline (1765-1840) Grand Juror; Board of Superintendence County Gaol; Governor District Lunatic Asylum.

14 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 7 May 1850.

15 Laurence Fenton, The Young Ireland Rebellion and Limerick (Cork 2004).

16 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 8 May 1850.


18 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 1 May 1850.

19 Frederick Lucas (1812-1855) educated Quaker school; espoused Catholic Emancipation, converted to Roman Catholicism, aligned the Tenant League to form the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1851; MP for Meath County; denounced Cardinal Cullen's prohibition of clerical interference.

20 Ciarán O'Carroll, Paul Cardinal Cullen, Portrait of a Practical Nationalist (Dublin 2008) p. 32.

21 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 14 July 1850.

22 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 15 May 1850.

23 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 3 July 1850.

24 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 7 August 1850.

25 John Christopher Delmago (1780-1858) Held Castle Park from Lord Lansdowne.

26 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 18 May 1850.

27 John Fitzgerald of Mountshannon House (1792-1851) 2nd Earl of Clare; Educated Harrow School, where he was as said to be great friend of Lord Byron, and Christ Church Oxford; House of Lords, 1850; Privy Councillor, 1850; Governor Bombay, 1850-1855; Deputy Lieutenant County Limerick, 1849; Lord Lieutenant City of Limerick 1849-1851. His father, 'Black Jack,' was Attorney General and Lord Chancellor of Ireland, staunchly Pro-Union and against measures for Catholic political reform; the second Lord Clare was more charitable and tolerant.

28 Richard de Burgo, Bart. Landlord at Castledown.

29 Eyre Massey (1798-1872) 3rd Baron, Lord Clarina of Elm Park, military family.

30 John C. Delpmege junior, educated Trinity College, Dublin; called to bar, 1841, never practiced; JP and Poor Law Guardian for Newcastle, Rochdale and Limerick Unions; Grand Juror and Governor of the Limerick District Lunatic Asylum; Church of Ireland, Conservative.

31 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 25 August 1850. Pantouflage being wool liners for clogs.


33 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 26 February 1850.

34 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 4 May 1850.

35 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 1850.

36 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 12 February 1850.


38 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 13 April 1850.

39 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator.

40 Thomas Browne (-1851) Listed Slater's Directory of 1851 as Lines Draper as 6 Charlotte Quay; according to The Jutist, 12, 2, he entered bankruptcy proceedings in Manchester, July 28, 1849.

41 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 26 February 1850.

42 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 3 April 1850.

43 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 14 June 1850.

44 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 17 June 1850.

45 Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator, 29 July 1851; Limerick and Clare Examiner, 30 July 1851; Munster News, 30 July 1851.

46 Limerick and Clare Examiner, 25 March 1851.


48 Louise Conner Bowen to Louis Doughtery.

49 The Daily Packet, 19 October 1852.

50 Michael McCarthy, b. Limerick, 1837, d. 1859.

51 Limerick Chronicle, 31 August 1859.

52 Limerick Chronicle, 8 September 1869.

53 Limerick Chronicle, 12 November 1869.

54 Ignatius Murphy, A Sterling People, Life and Death in West Clare, 1845-1851, (Dublin 1999) p. 94.

55 Limerick Chronicle, 8 November 1865.

56 Limerick Chronicle, 24 October 1865.

57 According to Kevin Hannan, in the Old Limerick Journal, Vol. 15, Spring 1984, DeBurgos barely escaped with his life when he was attacked by his sailors after returning from a visit to Limerick on the 14th August, 1862. He was severely wounded and would certainly have been finished off were it not for the intervention of his wife and his guest, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

58 Limerick Chronicle, 10 March 1853.


60 Maria McCarthy (1863-1931) b. Limerick. Married William Edgeworth Doughtery and accompanied him to military postings on the American frontier; in the Philippine Islands and Cuba. No children; adopted her sister Annie Agnes's son, and invited nieces to visit posts. Widowed, died 1931, Birmingham, Alabama; buried with husband in Presidio, San Francisco, California.

61 Marriage Record, St. Patrick's Cathedral, New Orleans, 9 May 1866.


64 Joseph Herbert Patrick Boyd Barrett (1882-1944) b. Dublin. Captain RAMC, MD, Temple Street Children's Hospital.

65 Oliver St. John Gogarty, As I was Going Down Sackville Street, (Dublin 1938).