

A letter posted from New Orleans to Limerick in 1834

by Tony Browne

A letter which was posted in New Orleans in 1834, addressed to Henry Shannon in Limerick, was purchased on behalf of this writer, by his cousin Gerard Browne. He noticed the Limerick address on the letter, which was being auctioned in the appropriately named Deal, in Kent, England. The provenance of the letter after its arrival in Limerick is unknown. It was written by Pierce Shannon and addressed to his father Henry, care of his uncle, the well known merchant, who was also named Pierce Shannon. New Orleans was a thriving city in the 1830s¹ as its population doubled with an influx of new settlers, following the building of the Pontchartrain railway between 1830 and 1831.² A growing population offered a variety of opportunities for Irish exporters and entrepreneurs.

While the opening part of the letter is missing, there is enough information in the extant portion to deduce that the Shannon family venture in New Orleans was well established in 1834. A timber mill, distillery and general hardware business are all mentioned in the letter, which was essentially an update on the progress of their enterprise. The updates appear to be on a regular basis, as the writer promises to write every two weeks. The letter also refers to the fact that Henry Shannon had visited his son before returning to manage the thriving business in Limerick. The letter-writer gives a wonderful insight into trans-Atlantic trade between Louisiana and Limerick before the Great Famine:

...one dollar a tray, five cents per hamper the balance could be sold for one dollar each in New Orleans by the carton, they ought if possible to arrive in the month of December. There is nothing else that we know of that would answer to ship to this country that there could be immediate sale found for. We have written to New Orleans making

enquiries what quantity of slate and what the price they may be disposed of at, there will be the usual quantity of flax seeds raised in the west this season, the prospect for the wheat and corn crop is not very flattering. Since your departure we have had several heavy frosts, which have nearly destroyed all the fruit, the mills are in successful operation and is au... now cutting 2500 feet of plank a day. The distillery will be in successful operation by the first of September. It is on Burk's Plan so that there can be 4BP or 10BP distilled daily. We shall continue to write to you every two weeks and all join in sending our love to yourself & my uncle & family.

Your affectionate son,
Pierce Shannon.



Envelope addressed to 'Henry Shannon, care of Pierce Shannon, Merchant, Limerick'

one dollar a tray five cents per hamper the balance could be sold for one dollar each in New Orleans by the carton the ought if possible to arrive in the month of December there is nothing else that we know of that would answer to ship to this country that there could be immediate sale found for. We have written to New Orleans making inquiry what quantity of slate what the price they may be disposed of at - there will be the usual quantity of flax seeds raised in the west this season the prospect for the wheat & corn crop is not very flattering - since your departure we have had several heavy frosts which has nearly destroyed all the fruit the mills are in successful operation & the mill is now cutting 2500 feet of plank a day the distillery will be in successful operation by the first of September it is on Burk's Plan so that there can be 4BP or 10BP distilled daily - we shall continue to write you every two weeks & all join in sending our love to yourself & my uncle & family

Your affectionate son
Pierce Shannon

Letter signed 'Pierce Shannon'

IN THE COURT OF THE COMMISSIONERS FOR SALE OF INCUMBERED ESTATES IN IRELAND

CITY AND BOROUGH OF LIMERICK.

Sale at LIMERICK, on SATURDAY, the 19th day of JULY, 1856.

In the Matter of the Estate of
PATRICK ALOYSIUS SHANNON, Esq., Owner and Petitioner.

RENTAL AND PARTICULARS

OF THE VALUABLE FEE FARM ESTATE,



Consisting of DOSES,

IN THE CITY

STORES, and PREMISES

OF LIMERICK,

Producing a Rental of £530 7s. 9d., also the

FREE-SIMPLE LANDS OF CORBALLY, IN THE BOROUGH OF LIMERICK,

Containing above 284 acres, English Statute Measure, producing a net Yearly Rental of £917 13s. 4d.; and also

The Estate of the Owner in this Matter: a sufficient portion of which

will be set up for Sale by Auction,

IN 23 LOTS AS STATED IN ANNEXED RENTAL AND MAPS, (if not previously disposed of by Private Contract.)

By Mr. JAMES MARSHALL, Auctioneer,

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSIONERS,

At LIMERICK, on SATURDAY, the 19th day of JULY, 1856,

At the hour of One o'Clock, p.m. Pursuant to the order for Sale in this Matter.

For Rentals and all further information, apply at the OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS, 14, Henrietta Street, Dublin; or WILLIAM KEATING CLAY, Solicitor for the Owner and Petitioner, having Charge of the Sale, Office, 23 College-Green, Dublin; EDWARD WILLING BEAUCHEAMP, Limerick; ROBERT ANGLIM, Esq., George's Street, Limerick; DAVID FITZGERALD, Esq., Limerick; MENY K. NIAF, Esq., Street, Liverpool; Mr. WILKINS Incorporated Estate Agent, Edinburgh; and Messrs. MALTSY, ROBINSON & JACKSON, Bank Buildings, London; or to Dr. WHITTY, Civil and Mining Engineer, 15, Beaufort-Street, Dublin.

Rental of property owned by Patrick Aloysius Shannon, for sale under the Incumbered Estate Court; 19 July, 1856. (Courtesy of Limerick Archives)

Ship-Chandling and Bar Iron
Ware-House,
NO. 1, MERCHANT'S-QUAY.

PIERCE SHANNON,

HAS arrived to him, Ex the *Industrious*, Captain
PATTIGARD, the following Cargo, viz.—
1467 Bars Flat and Square Iron,
869 Bundles Iron Hoops,
200 Do. Nailors' Rods,
21 Bundles Sheet Iron, and
32 Tons Pig Iron.

He is also in daily expectation of
20 Tons Foreign Iron, Ex the *Limerick
Trader*, and

12 Sheets Milled Lead, } Per the *Jane and
12 Casks White Lead, & } Alice,
150 Bags Patent Shot,*

And has on hands for Sale, at reduced prices,
along with his usual general Assortment,
100 Tons Russia, Swedish, and English Bar
and Bolt Iron,

40 Tons Nailors' Rods,
200 Tons best Swansea and Newcastle Coals,
200 Barrels Stockholm and American Tar,

150 Do. Pitch and Rosin,

20 Bolts Bleached and Brown Sail Cloth,

20 Casks Oils and Colours,

10 Tons English blistered and Coach Spring
Steel,

500 English and Irish Metal Pots, Ovens, &
Furns,

20 Tons New and Twice Laid Cordage,

10 Tons Scotch and Irish Sock Colters,
shovels, sledges, Crow Bars, &c. &c.

Limerick, Dec. 17

Advertisement from *The General Advertiser or
Limerick Gazette*, 17 December, 1817.

Pierce Shannon was not alone in his American venture. While his name is at the end of the letter, he uses 'we' throughout. He was assisted by Patrick Shannon and the two men submitted a memorial to the US Senate on 1 March 1839. They were requesting the Senate to allow them import materials duty free from Great Britain, which would be used to construct an iron steamboat. They intended using the new steamboat on the River Mississippi and its tributaries to improve commerce on the river.³ The Shannon family, which hailed from an area around Annagh, near Miltown Malbay, on the Atlantic coast of County Clare, built an expansive business empire in Russia, the Baltic region and of course in America.⁴

Pierce Shannon of New Orleans

Pierce Shannon had returned to Limerick by February 1841, when he married Margaret Shannon,⁵ the widow of the late Edmond Shannon, who died just over a year earlier in September 1839.⁶ The marriage notice, which still referred to the groom as 'of New Orleans', stated: 'On the 23rd Feb, in Limerick, Pierce Shannon, Esq. of New Orleans, North America, to Margaret, relict of Edmond Shannon, of Berry Lodge, Co. Clare.'⁷

Pierce succeeded his uncle and namesake who died while serving as Mayor of Limerick in 1844.⁸ He served the Thomond Ward as an Alderman from 1846 to 1852 and the Abbey Ward from 1853 to 1855⁹ and lived in Geraldine, one of his uncle's houses in Corbally. At a meeting of the Town Council in January 1847, Pierce Shannon applied and was granted a portion of the Potato Market for the use of the Soup Committee of St. Mary's Parish. The Potato Market was also given to the owners of the turf boats to discharge their loads, for the purpose of retailing them to the poor 'who at present only get two or three sods for a penny, whereas the turf men engage to give them twelve.'¹⁰ Earlier that month it was noted that 'the soup kitchen established by Rev. Mr. Brahan and Mrs. Pierson Shannon is rapidly progressing to active operation.'¹¹ The charitable work carried out by Alderman Pierce Shannon was a natural progression from similar work carried out by his uncle the mayor.

Pierce Shannon, Mayor of Limerick

As early as 1812, Pierce Shannon, the uncle of the letter writer, was running an extensive business at 1, Merchant's Quay, Limerick, which included the sale of Russian and Swedish bar iron.¹²

Twelve years later, he was living at 31, George Street, Limerick and the iron, coal and timber business was now trading at Cornmarket Row. He had diversified into rope making and he was also listed as an agent for the Hope Fire and Life Insurance Company.¹³ In the same year, 1824, he used his accumulated wealth to build a large three storey residence in the townland of Corbally, which he named Corbally Park.¹⁴ The house was constructed on a grand scale and cost £2,500 to build. He also built a large mansion nearby, which he named Albert Villa.¹⁵ This house was later renamed Lanahrone. Both houses were demolished in the late twentieth century. St. Munchin's College is built on the site of Corbally Park and Lanahrone was replaced with a modern housing estate which preserved the house name when it was named Lanahrone Estate.¹⁶

The new houses built by Pierce Shannon were in an isolated and undeveloped suburb of the city, when they were first constructed. He proceeded to build a new thoroughfare, from the junction at Mill Road to Athlunkard Bridge, opening up new access to County Clare from that side of the city. In 1833, he bought the greater portion of the townland of Corbally from William Thomas Monsell, Tervoe House, Clarina for £22,000.¹⁷ Over the

next twenty years he acquired a lot of the big houses in his new neighbourhood. These included; Roseneath Cottage, which was built in the 1820s, India Villa or Indiaville described as 'an exclusive modern residence', Geraldine Cottage, which was a late eighteenth century house subsequently renovated and Corbally House, also built in the 1820s by Poole Gabbett for £1,700.¹⁸

In 1841, Pierce Shannon was elected to Limerick Corporation, representing the Thomond Ward and he immediately arranged to have Corbally incorporated within the city boundaries. In 1844, he was elected Mayor of Limerick. Later that year Daniel O'Connell was arrested and imprisoned. The mayor was a leading Repeal advocate and organised a campaign to have the Liberator released from prison.¹⁹ On 6 June 1844, he was invited to chair a meeting at the Exchange 'to address the Liberator and his fellow martyrs in prison'. When he arrived at the Exchange he felt faint and died shortly afterwards from heart failure. The meeting was not cancelled, but moved to the Potato Market. There was no inquest at the request of his family.²⁰ The remains of the dead mayor reposed at Corbally Park before the funeral. After a High Mass celebrated in St. Patrick's chapel, Clare Street, the huge funeral cortege left for St Munchin's graveyard, where the dead mayor was buried.²¹ He was survived by his wife Mary (nee Hogan), whose father, a local wool merchant, died in 1845 on the anniversary of his son-in-law's death.²²

Mary died in Dublin in 1891.²³ Pierce had three daughters from this marriage and one died as an infant only three months before his own death. Pierce was previously married to Mary McLoughlin who died in 1820. Three daughters from this marriage married locally; Amelia married Dr William Murphy, from Kilfinane in 1850.²⁴ Eliza married Robert Anglim in 1856²⁵ and Mary Antoinette married James Russell of Mount Russell, Limerick and she died in 1855.²⁶

Patrick Aloysius Shannon

Pierce Shannon had only one surviving son, Patrick Aloysius, who continued to live at Corbally Park, after his father's death. Like his father and cousin, he too assisted the poor during the Great Famine. He provided a large house in Pery Square for the establishment of some new Catholic Poor Schools, which provided education for poor children.²⁷ Patrick was a J.P. and served as Sheriff in 1851. He married Jane Morrogh, of Old Court, Doneraile, County Cork and had a large family. In 1848, there was a fire at the Shannon business premises, in Cornmarket Row and a man named Andrew Brennan, otherwise Guerin was burned to death.²⁸ The effects of this fire at the height of the Great Famine proved too much for the Shannon family. Like many landlords at this time P. A. Shannon became bankrupt and in 1856 he was forced to sell his estate through the Incumbered Estates Court.²⁹ This effectively liquidated all the land, property and other assets his father had acquired. Even though Corbally Park was

included in the rental it was not sold until 1867. In 1858, two years after the sale of the estate, Patrick Shannon died. He was described as having '...a character beyond reproach, liberal, hospitable, with a stable full of horses and kennels full of hounds and fond of hunting. He was the friend of all who knew him, and his house was open to all who came to partake of its hospitality.'³⁰ He left a wife and family to mourn his loss and later his wife Jane moved to London with the younger members of the family.³¹ Two of their sons emigrated and became prominent physicians in New Brunswick, New Jersey.³² Another son, also named Pierce, died aged 32, in 1872.³³ This Pierce was married to Josephine Creagh of Ralahine, County Clare.³⁴

Epilogue

It is rather poignant that now, over 180 years after the letter was written home from New Orleans, apart from Shannon Street, which is believed to have been named to honour the family, that there are no reminders of the business run by the Shannon family. The houses built have even been demolished in the name of progress. Fire and the ravages of the Great Famine swept away what remained of a once thriving business. While the demise of great enterprises and industries is not unusual, it is worth recalling one that became an international success in an era when communications and transport were much slower and more cumbersome than in modern times.



A lithograph of Corbally House and toll bridge from 1856. (Courtesy of Limerick Archives)

Endnotes

- 1 New Orleans was founded by the French before it was acquired by the United States in 1803, under an agreement known as the Louisiana Purchase.
- 2 History of New Orleans available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_New_Orleans
- 3 Public documents, Memorial of Pierce and Patrick Shannon of New Orleans on 1, March 1839, available at: <https://books.google.ie>
- 4 Library Forum, a partnership of Clare County Library and Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library, available at: <http://www.ourlibrary.ca/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4840>
- 5 Margaret O'Grady, of Shorepark, Kildysart, County Clare was previously married to Edmond Shannon.
- 6 *Limerick Chronicle* 25 September 1839.
- 7 *Freeman's Journal*, 1 March, 1841.
- 8 Pierce Shannon is listed as one of the chief mourners at the funeral of his uncle.
- 9 *Limerick Municipal Elections 1841-2009*, compiled by John Cusack and Liam Hanley and edited by David Lee and Debbie Jacobs. Available at: www.limerickcity.ie/media/Elections%20final%20amend.pdf
- 10 *Limerick Reporter*, 16 July, 1847.
- 11 *Limerick Reporter*, 12 July, 1847.
- 12 Áine Thornhill, A List of Merchants...., who placed advertisements in the *Limerick Evening Post* for the period 1811-12., in *The Old Limerick Journal*, Volume 30, Winter Edition, 1993.
- 13 Pigot & Co., *City of Dublin and Hibernian Provincial Directory 1824*. (For Limerick; see pp. 280-293) (Manchester, 1824).
- 14 Corbally Park was also known as Corbally House, which should not be confused with another house of the same name built by Poole Gabbett and later acquired by Pierce Shannon. It was also renamed 'The Palace' by Bishop George Butler, who acquired it in 1867. The house was demolished in the early 1960s and St. Munchin's College is now on the site, while the other house, named Corbally House, is now a nursing home.
- 15 *Ordnance Survey of Ireland 1839-40 containing the Field Name Books of the County and City of Limerick with the Place-Names ... by John O'Donovan, with the addition of The Ordnance Survey Letters for County Limerick*.
- 16 Denis O'Shaughnessy, *Reflections on Limerick*, (Limerick, 2013).
- 17 Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its history and antiquities, ecclesiastical, civil and military*, (Limerick, 1866) pp 473-4.
- 18 Landed Estates database. Available at: <http://www.landedestates.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2356>
- 19 Daniel O'Connell was released on 5 September 1844, three months after Pierce Shannon died.
- 20 *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 June, 1844.
- 21 *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 June, 1844.
- 22 *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 June, 1845. The only inscription on the vault, where the mayor was interred, is dedicated to his first wife and reads as follows: 'This monument was erected by Pierce Shannon of the city of Limerick in the memory of his wife Mary Shannon who dep'd this life 1 Nov 1820. May she rest in peace.'
- 23 *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 June, 1891.
- 24 *Limerick Reporter*, 25 October, 1850
- 25 *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 18 January, 1856.
- 26 *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 May, 1855.
- 27 *Limerick Reporter*, 16 July, 1847.
- 28 *Limerick Chronicle* 4 March, 1848. It appears that Pierce Shannon continued to run the business at Cornmarket Row, after his uncle died, as he is named as owner in this report.
- 29 Incumbered Estates' Court Rentals. (Limerick Archives). Rental of property owned by Patrick Aloysius Shannon, in Corbally, and in George's Street, Bedford Row, Robert Street and Cornmarket Row, Limerick, 284 acres in total, for sale under the In-Cumbered Estate Court; 19 July 1856.
- 30 Biographical and portrait cyclopedia of the third congressional district of New Jersey... available at: https://archive.org/stream/biographicalport00wile_3/biographicalport00wile_3_djvu.txt
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Colonel James Grove White, *Historical and Topographical Notes etc. on Buttevant, Castletownroche, Doneraile, Mallow and places in their vicinity*. (Cork, 1906). Available at: http://www.corkpastandpresent.ie/places/northcorkcounty/grovewhitenotes/monanimyparishtoshandrum/gw4_139_152.pdf
- 33 *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 December, 1872.
- 34 Colonel James Grove White (op cit).

I would like to thank Paddy Waldron for providing details of Mayor Shannon's first marriage.



Another view of Corbally House (also known as Corbally Park).



Shannon family crest on the vault in St. Munchin's graveyard, with the Latin phrase 'Cavendo Tutus' which translates 'Safety through Caution'.

Tony Browne is a native of Limerick city and has a life long interest in local history. He was a member of Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society for over forty years and he founded his own Limerick Historical Society in 2013.