

PADDY NOLAN IN CALGARY

by Grant MacEwan



he citizens of Limerick should add the name of Patrick (Paddy) James Nolan to their growing list of famous sons and daughters, just

as the Canadian city of Calgary has done.

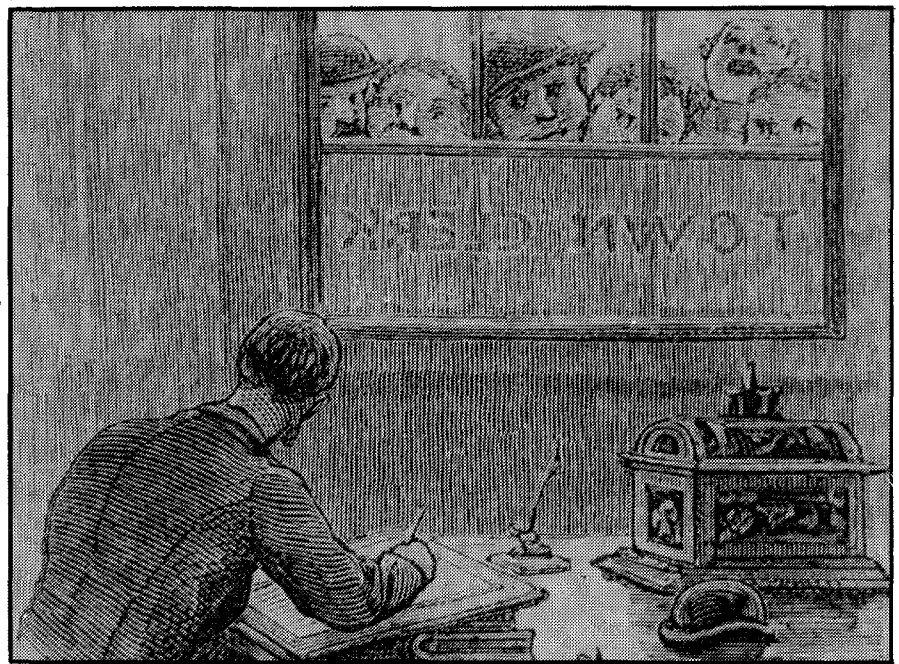
It is now 96 years since the young man, who had graduated with honours in classics and a gold medal in oratory, was one of the thousands of discouraged young people who were tearing themselves away from the land they loved, hoping to find opportunities they could not find at home. Most of them were going to the United States or Australia but for reasons never very clear, Nolan's choice was the frontier town of Calgary in the Canadian North West Territories.

It was 1889, only six years after the first railroad was built as far west as Calgary, and five years after the frontier town was incorporated. It was 16 years before the Province of Alberta was created. The town that now has a population of more than half a million, could count only slightly more than 1,000 people at that time. Ireland's population was about 3½ millions and shrinking.

The O'Nolans (or Nolans) were Wexford and Carlow County people and representatives distinguished themselves in church, professional and military service and at least one was said to have become a successful outlaw on the western American frontier.

Paddy's father James Nolan, who married Mary O'Rourke, moved to Limerick, where he became a successful flour merchant in William Street, and where their children were born in the city; Bridget O'Rourke was Mary's daughter from a previous marriage and became the Mother Provincial in the Good Shepherd Community of Nuns; sons Michael J. and James J. became medical doctors; Paddy, as noted, distinguished himself in Canadian law and William M. became Mayor of Limerick and held office in 1895 and 1896 and then served as town clerk for 37 years.

The Nolans constituted a happy family, living in modest comfort in their home at Barrington Street, within shouting distance of the beautiful People's Park, where today's majestic



The Limerick Town Clerk at work.

big trees were seedlings when Paddy went away.

Arriving at Calgary, where the North West Mounted Police had so unwittingly and recently constructed Fort Calgary for use in stamping out the illicit whiskey trade that was seriously demoralizing the native people, Paddy Nolan was admitted almost at once to the Bar of the North-West Territories and was soon a leading lawyer with a reputation for singular success in courtroom defence.

Not only was Paddy Nolan one of Canada's foremost criminal defence lawyers but he was one of the biggest in poundage — around 300 pounds — and was one of the most memorable wits and humorists and one of the country's finest orators. All in all, big, jovial and talented Paddy Nolan became a sort of Calgary legend and an attempt will be made to gather the stories and legends that surrounded his life. Hence this writer's visit to Limerick in May, 1985. The visit was a thoroughly delightful experience and gratitude is expressed herewith to all those who gave encouragement. More information about the Nolans of Limerick will be appreciated and may

be sent to Grant MacEwan, 132 Hallbrook Drive, S.W., Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2V 3H6.

Paddy Nolan died at Calgary in 1913; leaving his wife, Mary Lee Nolan, and one son, Henry Gratton Nolan, who became another distinguished lawyer and was the first native Albertan to be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The *Calgary Herald* editorialized at the time of his passing February 1913:

"Stories of him are told around the world, each one testifying to the breadth of his Irish kindness, and to the marvellous flow of his Irish humour. Nor must we forget that which was better and deeper than any talent, the good heart that was always ready to throb on behalf of the suffering and the deep and unostentatious philanthropy that embraced, in his conception of the brotherhood of man, the entire world ... It has been a privilege to this city and country to have given him his career. His life holds many lessons, not the least of which is what tells us that a warm heart makes a warm fireside".

Such a man was Paddy Nolan.