Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

Fall, 1990 Newsletter

Fall Meeting: A celebration of the Centennial of the Brookline Public Library's Children's Room featuring Michael Steinfeld, Doris Seale and Helen M. Ryan.

Date: Sunday, November 4, 3 p.m.

Place: Upstairs meeting room of the Main Library on Washington Street. All members and their guests are invited to attend. Please mark your calendar.

President's Report

The reprint in this issue of David Coleman's joyous Hibernian May 20 word-horde is just what your President needs. A breath of spring to banish the many long, arduous meetings that marked June, July and August for your trustees. Unavoidably, we had to come to grips with two immediate problems: the deteriorating condition of the Widow Harris House and the Putterham Schoolhouse, both in Larz Anderson Park; and the departure of the McIntoshes from the Edward Devotion House on Harvard Street. These are the three historic town-owned houses entrusted by the Selectmen to the Historical Society to supervise the preservation, care and benefit to the Town. But the story has a happy ending. So read on.

The Larz Anderson Park properties. With the slashed funds for maintenance and repair by Town agencies, the Widow Harris House and the Putterham Schoolhouse began to show serious signs of deterioration. Without a specific resident caretaker's agreement, at this crucial time, fulfilling the Town's trust proved more vague and difficult than ever -- for the Society as overseers and for the residents of the Widow Harris House as caretakers of both properties. The Building Department's report on deteriorating conditions only verified what trustees, Committee on Rooms, the resident caretakers and many Society

members had reported. Your trustees therefore decided to arrest further decline in these houses by arriving at a formal, binding agreement that would be fair, specific and beneficial to the parties thereto: the occupants of the house, the Society and the Town.

It was not easy to strike a delicate balance between people and things, between historic preservation and a contemporary life-style. We wanted the Tancks to enjoy living in the house as a rare treasure and not to confine them in a museum. Leslie Larkin and Nancy Peabody did all the spade work once the trustees had decided a resident caretaker's agreement was the only way. From agreements that have proved efficacious to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and to the Cambridge Historical Society, kindness of Warren Little, and from our own Devotion House agreement, Leslie and Nancy began to draw up guidelines. Our visits to the properties, conferences with the Tanck family and with the Building Department enabled Leslie and Nancy to refine the initial draft as we noted particular needs of the Tancks, the Widow Harris House and the Putterham Schoolhouse. Finally after three trustees' meetings and three revisions of the guidelines, we were ready to present our work in progress to the Town Counsel. He, in turn, would prepare the legal document to be co-signed by the Tancks, the president of the Society and, thereafter, the Selectmen.

We would never have got that far without the help of Nina Fletcher Little, Ray Moreno, Michael Steinfeld, John VanScoyoc and Chris Crowley. These five got us over separate hurdles. Nina's classic *Some Old Brookline Houses* told us exactly why the houses were such treasures; her encouragement and insistence that Widow Harris and Putterham were irreplaceable convinced us to carry on. The rest are Society trustees with particular strengths and expertise. Ray's technical know-how and familiarity with the properties and with his responsibilities as the Building Department's supervisor of town-owned properties enabled us to specify problems and solutions in preservation, maintenance and repair. We had the dreams; he supplied the foundations for those dreams. Michael knew just how to steer us to the nitty-gritty of the Town-Society caretaker responsibilities for maintenance and code enforcement, historical integrity and general care and security, respectively. As Town Librarian he instantly recognizes and respects turf. John VanScoyoc, seasoned reporter, eloquent spokesman and shrewd politician (the latter in the best sense of the word) alerted us to the Town agencies and individuals who had to be involved in the process. Beyond these trustees, there was Town Counsel David Turner, whose office transformed our amateur, well-meant guidelines into a legally binding agreement. And last there was Selectman Chris Crowley, who was determined to help us secure an agreement fair and acceptable to all, and he did. And for the rest of us? We worked hard, we tried, we persisted, and I think we have prevailed for the good of all.

Responsibilities, chores, benefits and procedures are clearly spelled out in this annually renewable agreement. We hope we have assured faithful preservation, constant care and reasonable improvement of these properties. Helen Ryan, vice president of the Society, has graciously agreed to head the new project of the Committee on Rooms: to refurbish and improve the two front rooms of the Widow Harris House so that we may proudly open it to visitors on a regular schedule. If you can offer decorating ideas, furniture, accessories or memorabilia that will enhance this 18th-century cottage, please call her evenings at 566-3881. Already visible are improvements in the grounds and the outside of the house. Glen Tanck has finished painting the house; the Parks Department has cleared the view of the house from the road. The Building Department is making much-needed repairs in the schoolhouse, and Glen has scraped and is painting the fence. Some anonymous angels planted bulbs. I knew we were on the right track when the very Society member who had called to complain about the neglect of the Schoolhouse called to tell me it looks great again. We hope you will see for yourself what's happening to these two properties. To schedule a visit, please call Glen Tanck evenings at 522-7134.

Curatorship of the Edward Devotion House. Frankly, we've been spoiled. Elizabeth and Fred Nelson had been custodians of the Devotion House for 30 years -- until Helen and Jim McIntosh became curators and docents 20 years ago. Attached to some 1977 papers in the file I find this note, headed Happy Thoughts: "McIntoshes should periodically be thanked for many deeds at Devotion House beyond call to duty: upholstery, caning." No name. Anonymous speaks for us all, only I'd change the periodically to daily. Together Helen and Jim have made the Devotion House the heart of Brookline: its social, historic, civic center; a showplace for visitors, a resource for students of all ages and a mecca for local history buffs, a meeting place for organizations, a bower for small weddings, a focus for the town's historic celebrations. This indefatigable hostess, guide, correspondent, scholar, teacher, writer, preservationist and her knowledgeable carpenter, plumber, electrician, gardener husband have made

(continued on page 12)

A History of Irish Brookline

(Paper presented to the spring, 1990 meeting of the Brookline Historical Society.)

By David A. Coleman

Cead Mile Failte -- I bring you "a hundred thousand welcomes."

Farewell to thee, Erin Mavourneen,
Thy valleys I'll tread never more;
This heart that now bleeds for thy sorrows,
Will waste on a far distant shore.
Thy green sod lies cold on my parents,
A cross marks the place of their rest --
The wind that moans sadly above them,
Will waft their poor child to the West.

-- From "The Emigrant's Farewell" as printed in the Boston Pilot of Aug. 16, 1862.

This ballad was typical of the grief felt by the emigrant and those left behind. For the Irish, leaving behind their families, their friends, their homes, was a shattering experience. Will we never again look upon the dear faces of our loved ones? Will we not see them again until we meet in the next world? So deep was the sorrow of parting and the dread of the unknown that in some villages, "American wakes" were held, as though the emigrants were dead. Neighbors and friends met to eat and drink the night before the emigrants left for the New World. There is still a marker near the harbor at Kinsale, where those who stayed behind knelt and prayed for the loved ones who sailed away.

The emergence of a race

In telling the story of the Irish, they and their religion are inseparable. For were they not persecuted for their beliefs over the centuries? Did they not fight and die for them? And when they came to America, they once again faced oppression and scorn because of their faith.

One cannot begin to talk about the Irish presence in Brookline without first considering why they left the homeland. Christianity was introduced in Ireland in 432 by St. Patrick. From the sixth through the ninth centuries, with the savages overrunning much of the continent, Ireland with its monasteries was privileged to be the teacher and leading cultural center of Europe.

Theological study was important, but the secular world was not neglected and the interests of the monks were broad and inquisitive. There was a monk named Dicuil who composed a universal geography. The Abbot Fergal was even more brazen -- he was teaching that the world was round. These were the producers of superb works of art and literature and there were the bards, the poets, the storytellers, the musicians. And there were the explorers for, as everyone knows, it was not that Italian fellow nor was it any of those three Scandinavian fellows but rather an Irishman, St. Brendan, who discovered America in 545 A.D.

Beginning in the eighth century, the Scandinavian sea raiders invaded Ireland and pillaged the land, remaining there until the Irish king Brian Boru broke their strength in 1014. Ireland then remained free of foreign interference for 150 years. In the 12th century, a feudal landholding system was imposed on Ireland when Pope Adrian IV, an Englishman, granted overlordship to the English king Henry II, initiating an Anglo-Irish struggle that has lasted for 800 years.

In 1559, during the reign of Elizabeth I, the Penal Laws were established, banning Roman Catholics from holding civil office and imposing penalties on those who failed to conform with the Church of England. What had been a political struggle now was merged into a conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Irish rebellions flared up repeatedly but were harshly suppressed by Henry VIII, Elizabeth and Cromwell. The land confiscations created an absentee landlord class and an impoverished Irish peasantry. As tenant farmers, they were compelled to concentrate on growing cash crops that would first pay the rent. Feeding themselves and their families became secondary. As a result, they could grow only potatoes for their own food.

Having been invaded and occupied -- but never subjugated -- by successive waves of Vikings, Normans, Medieval English, Elizabethans and Cromwellians, the Irish sustained yet another devastating blow -- the failure of the potato crop. And thus began what has been romantically called:

The Great Hunger and the crossing

If the potato crop were to fail, there would immediately be a famine. There was a minor one in 1817 and a worse one in the years 1821-1822. Then in three successive years 1845, 1846 and 1847, a blight began to appear on the potato plants. The people died by the tens of thousands, some from actual starvation but more from diseases due to malnutrition, fevers, dysentery and cholera. In order to save their lives, large numbers emigrated to America: 100,000 in 1846, 200,000 per year from 1847 to 1850, 250,000 in the year 1851 alone. For most, though their destination held promise, these crossings were indeed desperate voyages, frequently in unseaworthy vessels, fraught with peril and sickness. In the Famine Year of 1847, one out of six who departed perished before reaching America.

And so with such an inauspicious and distressful entrance, thus began:

The American experience

To some, it might seem as though there have always been Irish in America. Yet, early records and writings of their presence were scarce and generally disparaging. In 1686, there was a list containing the names of some thirty Irish folk who were "not approved by the selectmen of Boston to be inhabitants of ye Towne." There had been other people of Irish blood in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, but they were so completely assimilated that their Irish surnames were the only remaining link to their heritage.

But there were some who clung to their faith despite persecution. Perhaps the most memorable was Ann (Goody) Glover. The Rev. Cotton Mather, a paragon of virtue and tolerance, presented some pretty strong accusations -- one could not really label them evidence -- of witchcraft. He alleged that she was a witch; that she confessed to being a witch; she acted like a witch; and she had the artifacts of a witch. Or as he described her: "a scandalous old Irish woman, very poor, a Roman Catholic, obstinate in idolatry." She was kept in chains for several months prior to her trial on Nov. 15, 1688 and was hanged as a witch in the South End on Nov. 16, 1688.

At the height of the immigration explosion, Boston was a busy port of entry. Once in Boston, the newcomers discovered that lodging and work were difficult to obtain. There was a reluctance to hire them except for the menial labor jobs which the Americans spurned as degrading. By 1845, the newspaper advertisements began to read "None Need Apply But Americans" and later "Irish Need Not Apply." Their quandary was further exacerbated by the fact that, after deducting their daily living expenses from their meager wages, they were left with little to spend on rent, even for the dehumanizing conditions of the converted warehouses or cellars without light or air and with

limited sanitation facilities. In the long run, it was always their own -- the relatives, the friends, the countrymen, the churches -- who took care of their sick, their very poor, their homeless, because the immigrants brought with them from the old country an innate distrust of accepting assistance from the authorities.

The passage to Brookline

Apparently some Irish came to Brookline as early as the 17th century but they were so few in number that little or no written trace of them can be found. There is record of one Erosamon Drew, described as a native of Ireland, operating a sawmill in the Muddy River area, who was kept busy cutting boards for new houses and overseeing the construction of the First Parish Church, begun in 1714.

Another exception might be the 40 shillings reward posted in the Boston News-Letter for Sept. 5-12, 1720 for the return of Edward Coffee, an Irish man - servant who ran away with a chestnut sorrel horse from his master Stephen Winchester of Brookline. Said person and horse were to be conveyed either to Winchester or the prisonkeeper in Boston. The horse was described more favorably than the servant.

Some would have us believe that their ancestors were carried into Brookline nestled in the arms of Maeve, the queen of the Irish faeries. That may be so -- one should never question Irish folklore. In reality, most came the hard way. There were many different reasons that caused the Irish to move to this town. For some, it meant seeking employment or joining relatives already here. It was the oppressive living conditions and the intolerance in Boston that impelled many to seek relief by moving to other towns. Quite a few sought employment as unskilled laborers, particularly in the building of canals, projects which were so energetically undertaken in the 1820's.

About 1830, the age of railroad construction began in earnest in this area, requiring large numbers of laborers, most of whom were Irish immigrants. As each new line was finished, some of the workers settled in the towns or villages through which the work progressed. Such was the case when the Boston & Worcester Railroad was opened between Boston and Brookline in 1847, a project which brought Irish to live in the Village area of Brookline. As the turnpike was finished and regularly scheduled stagecoach service was initiated between Boston and Worcester and as the Mill Dam was completed, many wealthy people moved into Brookline and built mansions. This provided job opportunities for laborers, blacksmiths, carpenters and masons (with a small "m"), among the Irish. By the 1840's some 40 houses and stores were erected along lower Washington Street. The Village was indeed becoming crowded.

Yet, as late as 1844, persons of Irish birth were almost unknown in Brookline. In that year, a special town census showed only two heads of household with Irish surnames. The rest apparently were not counted. However, with increased employment opportunities, by 1850, there were 608 men, women and children of Irish birth living in Brookline. Most settled in the Marsh area of the Village and later in Whiskey Point and Ward's Farm, all of which were close to their jobs in Brookline and Roxbury.

The inception of neighborhoods

As the Village area grew, people were moving into other areas, which became sharply defined as ethnic neighborhoods, i.e. Irish. They were The Farm, The Marsh and Whiskey Point. The lines of demarcation were invisible but the discrimination was not.

The Marsh area, still called "The Mash" by older residents, was truly that, a swampy lowland used as a dump by many. However, those conditions did not stop the land developers from building tenement houses for the burgeoning Irish population. In 1860, the Brookline Land Company purchased the Ward farm across the road and built three-story tenements for the newcomers. This tract is still known as the Farm despite the erection of the overpowering Brook House, the Cooperative Apartments and the public housing development. One hundred years later, the redevelopment of this tract was destined to become an infamous era of insensitivity and mismanagement by Brookline officials in displacing 235 families. Resentment and bitterness are still voiced today, 30 years later, by some who were displaced.

Whiskey Point was a third neighborhood becoming established. Nobody can ever say definitively this is how or that is how it got its name. If you asked 12 people of the origin of the name, you would get 15 different answers. Captain Ben Bradley, who came from Ireland early in the 19th century, was one of the true characters of his time. His life makes an interesting -- some say an eccentric -- footnote to Brookline history, if you are satisfied not to try to separate truth from myth. Legend has it that the exploits of Bradley, not known as a man of temperance by any measure, may have been

responsible for the name "Whiskey Point," now known by most people as "The Point."

Besides the need for shelter and employment, the Irish felt a spiritual need. There was no church of their faith to which they could turn not only for spiritual comfort but also for the sense of community it provided. There was no priest who would share the pain of the loss of a loved one or the hopelessness of a debilitating illness. Although their numbers were small, they formed a church, which was to become the mother church of the Catholic community in Brookline. The first formal service of the parish of St. Mary of the Assumption was held on July 30, 1852 in the Lyceum Hall on the Boston-Worcester Road. The first church building was started on Andem Place, with the first Mass celebrated in the new church on Christmas Day, 1853. On Thanksgiving Day, 1855, the church was severely damaged by fire but the building was repaired. A new and larger church was completed in 1886 at its present location at Linden and Harvard Streets.

What price education?

During the Civil War, the Pearl Place Schools, first established in 1851 as a special school for those children "too old for the primary schools" but "too ignorant for the intermediate school," were moved to their new location in the Marsh. They were renamed the Ward Schools, serving only that section of Brookline Village south of the railroad, an area almost exclusively inhabited by the Irish. Conditions at these schools were adjudged to be the worst in the system. The School Committee then established the Ungraded School to isolate and control irregular attendees, many of whom had to work at that young age to supplement the family income. A minority of the School Committee objected: no American children were sent to this school. In the words of one member, "It is a degradation to be sent there."

Despite serious misgivings about the quality of education provided Irish-American children in the public schools and what they perceived as a curriculum in conflict with their religious beliefs, many years passed before a local parish could support its own school. It is significant that, as each parish was able to afford it, a parish school was established. It was not until 1899 that the pastor of St. Mary's invited five nuns to start a grammar school in the basement of a parish building. At the same time, at great personal sacrifice, the parishioners began to accumulate funds for a school building which was completed and opened in 1907. In 1924, after painstakingly collecting the funds, they erected a high school.

Public service

In his book, John Curtis tells us that the inhabitants of Brookline were so orderly that no police force or jail was needed until 1847, when the town voted $75 to build a lockup under the town hall. Constables performed law enforcement such as rounding up a wandering horse or cow or collecting unpaid taxes or collaring someone who spent too much time at the fair. In 1869, a one-man police force was established apparently in response to what the selectmen perceived as a crime wave. Not long afterward in 1874, the volunteer fire companies were replaced by professional firemen. During that same era, the Brookline Gas Light Company was formed to provide lighting to a number of streets. The company was later absorbed by the town. All of these organizations provided employment for local young men. Eventually, most of these jobs were held by Irishmen. For many families, this marked the beginning of a long and notable tradition of service to the town.

It would certainly be foolhardy to single out individual families by name and to state unequivocally who was here first because then one is confronted by that complaint not exclusively reserved by the Irish: What's the matter with my family? I have tried to avoid doing so but could not completely. We all know that the town's most famous Irish-American was Jack Kennedy.

Were there others who contributed to the growth and the quality of life of this community? Of course there were! We have produced doctors, lawyers, probably an Indian chief (honorary, of course), teachers, nuns, firefighters, priests, scholars, poets, judges, police officers, business and union leaders, musicians, artists and some of the best street corner debaters anywhere. There were the Hallorans and O'Hallorans, Manleys, O'Briens, Rileys and O'Reillys, Loves, Hanleys, Kirranes, Hickeys, Harrises, Meehans, Rafterys and Raffertys, Maguires with an "a" and McGuires with a "c", Rourkes and O'Rourkes, Egans, Maddens, Lallys, Mahons and McMahons, Sheehans, Gormans, Lynches, Flanagans and Finnegans and Finnerans, Larkins, Lyons, Fays, Hurleys, McNeillys, Caseys, Sweeneys, Sullivans and O'Sullivans, Colemans, Walshes, Wards, McManuses, Murphys, Corrigans, Condons, Hartes with an "e" and without an "e", Crowleys, Harringtons, Mulveys, Mullaneys, Maloneys, Moroneys, and Mahoneys, Callahans and O'Callahans, Dohertys, Hennesseys with an "e" and Hennessys without an "e", Learys and

By the turn of the century, Irish families were well established in Brookline. One such was the Scullys, represented here by young Mary and her mother and brothers. Mary became a champion swimmer at Brookline High. Brother Dennis, in fancy tie, became a Brookline policeman. Below, Michael Driscoll, superintendent of streets and the first person of Irish ancestry to serve on the Brookline School Committee. (From Jean Kramer's "Brookline: A Pictorial History.")

O'Learys, Stewarts with a "w" and Stuarts with a "u", McCormacks, McHughs, Sweeneys, Mays, Duggans and Dugans, Fords without an "e" and with an "e", Heffernans, Delaneys with the "e" and Delanys without the "e", McDonalds, Fitzpatricks, Fitzgeralds, Kickhams, Careys, Kelleys with an "e" and without an "e", Nyhans, Dewarts, Kendricks, McCarthys and McCartys, Ryans, Flynns and all the rest of McNamara's Band. And if you don't believe that is truly a litany of saints, I'll meet you in the alley afterwards.

There are ever so many families who came here in the 1850's and later who are fourth and fifth generation such as the Murphys, Duggans, O'Connors, Lawlors, Harringtons, to name a few, and who have continued service of 60 years and more with the police, fire and the public works departments.

Others such as James Driscoll came directly to Brookline in1828, became a well-digger and a builder of walls. In the words of his great-granddaughter Margaret: "He would not work for anybody unless his horse and team were hired also." By the 1840's , he was already contracting. Many an Irishman had his first hot meal in the United States at 17 Kent St. and was given work by the Driscoll contracting company. And there is the priceless story of Margaret's great-great-grandmother and her pal who, when they wanted to go to confession in the Irish, would sometimes walk to Tommy's Rock (St. Joseph's) in Roxbury or St. Columbkille's in Brighton. They didn't take the horse when the weather was too hot for him. She and her friend were over 90 at the time.

One immigrant who came by a circuitous route was John Boyle O'Reilly, court-martialed for nationalistic plotting while a member of the Tenth Hussars, sentenced to a penal colony in Australia, escaped in an American whaling ship, and finally came in exile to America where he eventually took up residence in Brookline. He became a celebrated lecturer, literary figure and influential editor of the Boston Pilot from 1870 to 1890.

In 1893, a number of people who came from Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Maritime Provinces of Canada established the Presbyterian Church at Holden and Pierce Streets. The church, which had become a landmark to local residents, was gutted by a fire on New Year's Eve, 1961. Valuable records were lost in the flames which had spread from the robe room to the Christmas tree and moved through the open assembly and up through the 165-foot clock tower and the steeple, which was left swaying in the wind. With great effort the parishioners constructed the present attractive edifice. At the same time, the population of Brookline was changing, becoming more cosmopolitan with fewer Protestants coming into town. Church records show long-term membership by such families as the MacNeilly, Stewart and Curran families.

Membership at St. Paul's Church included several of Irish descent such as Desmond Fitzgerald, an engineer and chairman of the Brookline Park Commission, who was an active parishioner and vestryman for many years. He also maintained an art gallery attached to his home on Washington Street. Clement Fay served as the church organist for many years, beginning in 1863, and was elected warden and clerk in 1875. Strangely, as did so many other churches, they had a devastating fire.

Times of recollections

One of my friends was born in the Farm area around the time of World War I. He remembers moving from one flat to a larger flat to an even larger flat as the family grew in size. As a boy, he and his friends could go only so far up Walnut Street from the Farm before the "Yankees" told them to go back to where they came from or the police would be called. They played baseball at Daisy Field over the Jamaica Plain line. They were joined by the undertaker's boys who were not good ballplayers, but they did have the new balls and bats. He attended the Parsons School and played in the Parsons Playground, both of which were swallowed up by the Brook House development. Some kids trapped muskrats in Muddy River and Ward's Pond, when one could get $2.50 for a pelt. He is also a member of the Goat Square Gentlemen's Club, founded in 1919. This is a group of about a dozen men who, quietly and anonymously, engage in acts of charity for veterans and others in need of the simple amenities of life.

Another friend remembers the bulls in the fields above where the Chestnut Hill Mall is now and how scared she was of them. And there was the Brookline Riding Academy behind the fire station in the Village, where ladies were taught either on sidesaddle or astride saddle; the Kent Street Fancy Laundry, corner of Kent and Station Streets, Driscoll Sisters, proprietors (shirtwaists a specialty, dried outdoors); Scarry's Dry Goods Store, where her mother was sent by her grandmother to buy clothes for her new sister. When asked about sizes, the youngster said: "I don't know; it's a baby." There was O'Reilly's Restaurant, where the watchword was: "Give that man an extra boiled potato, he's a working man." She spoke about her

grandfather in his 80's who walked to Roxbury Crossing every day, had two whiskies and then walked home. It was said that in the winter, he broke the path for the horses.

Doctors and nurses came from the Lying-In Hospital to provide free care to many families in the Village area at the Well Baby Clinic on Walter Avenue near Juniper Street. Many thought that Miss Dempsey, who was in charge, was better than most doctors. She recalls: "For a time, my father was a groundskeeper at The Country Club. He took me once to see the steeplechase races there. I didn't attend another horse race until I went with the senior citizens group to Rockingham Park a few months ago. My father and I used to have a great time talking Pig Latin -- nobody could understand us."

Another friend has less pleasant memories. Both of her parents were born in Ireland; her mother landed in Charlestown in 1906 and went directly to Brookline where a job as a domestic was waiting. Her father was a gardener and worked for the Water Department. Her first memory is of a three-decker on Pearl Street. The family later moved to Tabor Place, where they encountered what she describes as pure hatred. Her sister was called "white trash" by a neighbor, probably because of her friendship with a black girl.

The Irish Field Day Games which were held annually at Tech Field (now Harry Downes Field) attracted people from all over New England. Tech Field was also the site of the Scottish Games but always held on a different date, of course. The Davis Avenue area where Emerson Park is now located was settled mostly by Orangemen. They always had a big parade and picnic on July 12 to commemorate the defeat in 1690 by William of Orange of the Catholic forces of James II. The Orange Hall, which had "loads of dances," as one resident described it, was on Prospect Street where the new Pierce School is located.

The Irish Catholics went to Hibernian Hall or InterColonial Hall on Dudley Street, Roxbury. Many romances resulting in marriage started here. A colleen who was employed as a domestic was considered a good catch -- and there were lots of colleens there, each prettier than the next.

The move west

As the town's population grew, the Irish moved up Boylston Street but only into those areas sanctioned by those who made such decisions. There was the Alley, which is the tract opposite the Lincoln School, and further out the Settlement, which adjoins St. Lawrence's Church.

In the 1890's, John J. McCormack bought 100 lots on Clyde Street with the intention of laying out streets and building houses. He was met with strong opposition from the landowners in the area. Strangely, he also encountered difficulty in securing permits for utilities and streets and was forced to abandon the project. Around the same time, Messrs. O'Hearn and Kelly purchased a six-acre tract for 48 houses near the junction of Cypress, High and Chestnut Streets. They had no problems with neighbors or with permits for streets and utilities. Perhaps it was because McCormack's project was near The Country Club and the other was near Whiskey Point. Eventually, these differences were resolved and the area was opened to Irish families who settled in Clyde Street, the "Hill," and the Button Village sections.

Other voices, other memories

As that area grew, St. Lawrence's Church was built in 1897 to accommodate the influx of Catholics. In reading the shared memories of some of the older parishioners, one is reminded of an era never to be enjoyed again.

One lady begins: "Once upon a time, many years ago, I was born on Clyde Street and rode to my baptism in a horse and buggy." Later she says: "...also remember my first sight of an airplane which landed at The Country Club while the Sunday dinner burned in the oven." And "I attended a wedding in a big house which is now occupied by the Carmelites. I remember a man falling into the swimming pool. (I didn't know about alcohol in those days.)" Dorothy Gorman continues: "My father was a gardener on an adjoining estate. Alongside St. Lawrence's was an old vacant house where we used to play with the dumb waiter. On the other side was a row of three-family homes and there was Cotter's Store, where we bought penny candy. Up the street on the other side was Nellie's Store with a big pickle barrel and the only telephone around. In those days, hardly any home had electricity -- needless to say no radio or TV or refrigerator. Heaven forbid if you let the pan under the icebox run over! All these buildings were demolished when the turnpike was widened." There was Sunday School in the old parish hall with pot belly stoves on each floor. You were lucky if you got to sit on the front bench; it was cold in the back. The nuns were stern -- no talking, no nonsense, and a pinch in the ear if you were out of order. Missions were held yearly with fire and brimstone sermons. Made my

Confirmation here, was married here, buried my father, mother, brother and my husband 28 years ago."

"In this parish, there aren't too many families who can afford the $1,000 rents and most houses are occupied by transients and live-in couples who don't go to church. I frown on the disrespect of the kids in church. At times, it seems like a zoo!"

She concludes: "Maybe I'm too harsh in my observations, a little old-fashioned since I was raised in an era where there was self-respect, respect for elders and, mostly, the deepest respect for the church wherein Jesus lives."

Mary Duggan reminisces about: "very few houses, lots of woods and vacant land with a few stores: Gleason's Grocery, Huggard's Market, Quinlan's Drug Store (with a soda fountain), Prior's Tailor Shop and Taglino's Restaurant at the end of the street car line on Boylston Street. The Heath School was just where the new one is. It was a mile from the Hill -- no transportation -- we had to walk after the third grade. Before that, Jimmy Fagan had a bus. St. Lawrence's was down Boylston Street about a mile. Looking back, it seems that between the church and the school, we were always walking that mile. In the winter, when Hammond Pond froze over and when the ice was about 12 inches thick, the Ice Company cut and stored it in the ice houses where the Medical Building is now. The ice was delivered in open, horse-drawn pungs."

Another talks about moving into St. Lawrence's parish in 1910 when she was 10 months old. Her father, who was a herdsman at Cabot's on Heath Street, died in 1912, leaving her mother with "two alive and my brother not yet born. Fr. McManus kept his eye on the household as did Dr. Shanahan, a kindly man and a fine doctor. Mama refused to go on aid (your name would be written on the Town Report every year). Mr. Barkhouse, superintendent of the Cabot estate, told Mama that if she would feed the men who worked for him and do their laundry, she would be home and still have plenty of food for her children. The single men (mostly Irish) roomed in various families' flats in the area. That's what she did and that's how she brought us up; three meals a day, seven days a week. Not much money for all the work, but we were never hungry. After all those years, there was only one man who tried to sneak out on what Mama was owed -- and Mr. Barkhouse took care of him."

Marguerite Madden continues: "Our church organist then was a Mrs. Morse, a convert, who introduced a lot of songs in the senior choir that we had sung in the Heath School. Some would call them 'Protestant' but are universally used now."

She concludes: "I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the flu epidemic of 1918. The National Guard was on Corey Hill, living in tents, taking care of some ill people. People were dying like flies. My mother went to the funeral of a friend; all the pallbearers died, she almost did. Schools were closed; there were no public church services; upper church was closed; sky blue October weather; neighbors dying. Nellie Flaherty, who had a store in the Settlement, fed many children who came to her. Also, a group of wealthy women, God bless them, came into our house and made beds, etc. and custards, etc., were dropped off at the homes of ill people. There were no funeral masses, caskets were left above ground in the cemeteries. It was something -- God bless them all."

As the population of the town increased and the Coolidge Corner area grew, so did the need for another church. In December, 1910, Fr. Joseph Coppinger began St. Aidan's Church. He purchased the Chadbourne estate at the corner of Pleasant and Freeman Streets and built a structure of the English Gothic village style. While this parish had a share of Irish people, one would probably describe them as "old-line," having arrived in the United States in earlier immigrations and being of a different economic level than the rest of the town. For example, the Kennedy family were parishioners during their stay here.

An avocation: politics

Could any discussion about the Irish not include their involvement in politics? The Irish virtually arrived in America as Democrats. Andrew Jackson, the son of poor Irish immigrants, was the general who defeated the despised British in the War of 1812 and was the common man's choice as President.

The intense participation of the Irish in politics found elsewhere in Massachusetts never really developed in Brookline. It might be a carryover from the 19th century, when political leadership in the town was limited to a select few with birthplace and religious affiliation as the principal criteria. The Irish population was entirely excluded from positions of political leadership until 1875 when Michael Driscoll was elected to the School Committee. Prior to this time, no person of known Irish blood or the Catholic faith served as a selectman or a member of the state legislature. Since 1875, we have had a number of Irish-

Americans serving as elected Town Meeting members. Some have been appointed to various boards and committees. Some have even become selectmen, School Committee members, town clerk including Dr. Thomas P. Kendrick, Thomas Hennessey, Thomas May, William Sullivan, Christopher Crowley, Luster Delany, to name a few.

The fighting Irish

It has been said that the Irish have an aggressive personality and are unwilling to back off from a good fight. How was this transformed into military service?

In 1644, Governor Shirley of Massachusetts sent 160 soldiers in relief of Annapolis, Nova Scotia. Letters of that time indicated that some of the soldiers were "Irish Roman Catholics whom they forced to make the journey by keeping them in prison." You might call this the first known military draft in New England.

On April 19, 1775, three companies of soldiers from Brookline joined in the action against the British. Muster rolls of this and subsequent battles listed several soldiers with Irish surnames.

It was not until the time of the Civil War that the Irish allegiance to the United States became clearly demonstrated. They were shocked at the attempts to change or disassemble the lawfully established government of their adopted land. They enlisted in droves across the country, over 10,000 in Massachusetts alone. In his book, C. K. Bolton lists 720 "Brookline boys" who joined the Army and Navy of which there were some 25 with Irish surnames. Two Irish volunteer regiments were formed. The regimental flag of one, the 28th, displayed a harp and a slogan in Gaelic: "Clear the Road." Hardly a militant slogan, wouldn't you agree? Both regiments had several "Brookline boys" on their rosters, fought in several major battles and suffered heavy casualties.

Hundreds of our young people served in the armed forces during both world wars, the Korean campaign and the Vietnam War. Many gave their lives. Unfortunately, in recent years, it appears that they have been forgotten by the town.

The Irish did not throw off their cultural heritage as they sailed into an American port. Nor did they become the motion-picture Irish stereotype: the Bing Crosby singing "Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-La" or the Barry Fitzgerald leprechaun or the drunken, brawling Victor McLaglen. Not a fair image of us descendants of the High Kings, is it?

They brought color and texture to the fabric that is Brookline. The color was not just the green of Erin but a veritable rainbow of hues reflecting their realized hopes and their shattered dreams; their joys and their griefs; icy contention tempered by the warmth of their smiles. They worked and sweated where nobody else would. They polished the art of storytelling, sometimes colored by a slight exaggeration here or there. They had the love of music and the quick tongue and the sparkling wit. They never forgot the importance of the family nor the love of their church nor lost their fierce loyalty to the United States.

In numerous conversations, I have heard repeatedly: "There were many destitute people who would seek welfare only in desperation and as secretly as possible. Neighbors who didn't have much themselves shared what they could with their less fortunate friends or neighbors. We were poor but we didn't know it because we had each other." And what better support could they get?

Past ethnic and religious differences have become blurred. We are no longer the immigrant Irish. We have been productive, energetic, hard-working Americans who happened to be blessed with the blood of that enchanted land of song and story, scholars and saints.

A friend tells about how, as a young girl, she and her family and neighbors would sit on the front stoop and listen to the sounds of the men playing horseshoes behind the house, and a little further away the sounds of others playing the accordion or standing around a piano singing and feeling good about where they lived. Fifty years later, she still feels good about where she lives. And so do we, so do we.

Is there another chapter of Irish migration unfolding, this time out of Brookline? Unfortunately, the cost of housing and other factors have driven away so many of our people, young and old, who were born here and would have liked to continue living here.

As I worked through this fascinating undertaking, I began to realize that I can only hint at a few aspects of the story of the Irish in Brookline. I am reminded of a story my grandfather O'Brien used to tell of the fishmonger who came through the neighborhood shouting his wares. Mrs. Kelly pulled up a window of her third-floor flat and asked about his prices. When he replied, she cried out: "Have you no mercy?" "No, ma'am, only haddock and mackerel." For those who have

found this interesting -- and maybe a bit light-hearted -- I am pleased. From the others, I look for mercy. To all of you, thank you for coming and Godspeed.

President's report

(continued from page 2)
the Devotion House the ideal headquarters for any historical society. Individual visitor, student, class, group, organization -- all that opened the door would find a hearty welcome, unpretentious but vast knowledge of Brookline's history and people, civic pride and patriotism. And if they did not come to her, Helen would seek them out. She brought the house and Brookline to many a classroom, lecture hall and public function. In 20 years, Helen had made and become the Historical Society.

Now Helen and Jim are ready for a new life in smaller, more modern and comfortable quarters. But what will the house and the Society do and be without her? Not to worry. If we know Helen, easier living will only leave her more time and energy for the Society and the house. Wait and see. Gallantly we've begun our search for a new curator-docent for the Devotion House. We have no illusions that anyone can succeed Helen. But we've been amazed and delighted with the caliber of applicants for the position. Their resumes, references, interviews and visits to the house have renewed our faith and confidence in the so-called narcissistic younger generation. How to choose among such eminently qualified, eager and altruistic candidates? Your trustees will meet with them individually this month. Be patient. We regret that during the interim we have had to temporarily abandon visits to the Devotion House, but we certainly look forward to 1991, the hundredth anniversary of the renewal of the house. By the fall meeting on November 4, we hope we will have recommended for the Selectmen's appointment the new curator-docent of the Edward Devotion House. With luck he, she or they may join us at that fall meeting.

Please come with your friends, young and old, to this November 4 meeting, a celebration of the Children's Room's centennial at the Brookline Main Library. We start at 3 p.m. with a mini-history of the Children's Room -- past, present and future -- by town librarian and Society trustee Michael Steinfeld. Then Doris Seale, department head of children's services of the Public Library of Brookline, will share with us from our own collection treasures of the past and present and show us where juvenile literature is heading. Last, Helen M. Ryan, professional actress, master teacher of speech and drama and Society vice president, will provide dramatic and choral readings from the children's books that have been her Brookline frigates. After the presentation, social hour and refreshments appropriate to the occasion. And last, a guided tour of the Children's Room itself. Until then,

Cordially,
Miriam Sargon

Help wanted: volunteers for the Social Committee. Call Irene Heartz, 277-3508.

Jean Kramer's Brookline: A Pictorial History, second printing, is now on hand. We'll have copies for sale at the November 4 meeting. If you can't wait until then, call her at 566-5911.

Welcome to new Finance Committee members Betsy DeWitt, Patsy Ostrander and Daniel Raff.