

# Armagh

by  
JIM CULLEN

Breathes there a man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself has said  
This is my own, my native land

My Armagh is the land of quiet, penetrating, ageless beauty, of educated people, some very good, some very bad but all of them sincere and faithful to whatever cause they espouse. It is a history book that everyone is aware of but few have studied. It is the endless hours of Huckleberry Finn, the speckled trout in the Callan river, the yellow mass of buttercups in the Granemore meadows on the first of May, the flowering currants on the way to Markethill on a warm day in June, the smell of honeysuckle on the road to Keady after the rain, the mass of pink and white apple blossoms between Loughgall and Richill, the unsurpassed beauty of world renowned McGredy roses in Portadown, the view of Lough Neagh from Lurgan as the sun is setting, the Blackwater, Knappagh Castle with its tall oaks, the horses at Charlemont, the Cathedrals, the mist as it hides the bottomless lake on Slieve Gullion, the sailboat on Camlough lake, Flagstaff with the glistening waters of Carlingford Lough beneath the purple mountains. I remember, too, the stream of long horned cattle as they crossed the "border" in 1936, the bullet-throwing the greyhound races, the gypsies, the barkers on a market day in Armagh Sundays, the Eucharistic Congress, the appalling hiring fairs in Newtown, City, the driver of the last bus on a Saturday night on a line owned by Tommy Nugent who had a gold tooth and whose brother helped start this Association in New York in 1894 and whose grand-nephew married President Johnson's daughter; my teacher, Brother Adrian, who boasts of having taught government officials, big executives, a millionaire and a Bishop. I remember it was a crime to take a pound of butter from County Louth as a gift to some needy Unionist friends; the portly woman who wanted to surprise her husband with the gift of a bottle of whiskey but surprised the customs man when carrying it next to her bosom — the cork popped. I remember "to hell with King Billy" and "No Pope Here" and I remember my father riding forty miles on a bicycle in the rain and not getting the job because he was Catholic and the bread box that had none and the Protestant woman who brought us soup and milk for nothing. This was my Armagh — a changing epoch of history but is it really?

The City of Armagh which is the capital of the County has occupied many important pages in Irish annals. Its name was said to be derived from the name of a Queen "Macha" who reigned over the area four centuries before Christ and excavations are being made in an attempt to obtain some authentic evidence of history. The site of these excavations, Navan Ring, was reputed to be the headquarters of those Red Branch Knights whose place in Irish folklore is similar to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

**Pray For Peace In Northern Ireland**

In the year 444, Saint Patrick came to County Armagh and in the following year he built a church in the City and established it as the primatial See in Ireland since he had been ordained a Bishop by Pope Celestine some years before. A sequential list of the Bishops of Armagh who followed can be found in Stuart's Historical Memoirs.

A great college and abbey were established by St. Patrick and they flourished under the order of St. Augustine but the entire City was burned in 775 A.D. and again in 783 A.D.

The Annals of Ulster assert that in 795 A.D. the Danes or Normans invaded Ireland. Finally, in the year 832, the Danes and Norwegians coming in from Newry briefly occupied Armagh and upon their expulsion they burned the City again. The Danes ruled by terror and starvation usually beating their victims with large clubs and burning their homes. It was not, however, until 1014 that the Danes were completely driven from Ireland by Brian Boru at Clontarf, Dublin. Brian was mortally wounded in that battle and at his request his remains were buried in Armagh City and his grave is reputed to be on the site of the present Protestant Cathedral as indicated by the plaque there. In 1179, the Anglo-Norman, commander, John de Courcy, reached Armagh after his expeditions in Antrim and Down, possession of which, he achieved partly by conquest and partly by treaty. Again the monasteries and colleges were sacked and it was only with great ingenuity that valuable records were saved.

As soon as Elizabeth I was firmly seated on the English throne, a Parliament convoked by Sussex in 1559 adopted new laws to forcibly convert Catholics to Protestantism. The Bishops of Armagh were prime targets and were imprisoned in London. In August of 1598 an English army under the command of Sir Henry Bagenal was despatched to subjugate the dissident people of Armagh and Tyrone but it was defeated at the battle of the Yellow Ford by Hugh O'Neill. In 1669, Oliver Plunkett was nominated Primate of Armagh and was consecrated at Ghent by the Bishop of Ghent. Blessed Oliver Plunkett rallied the Catholics to practise their religion and helped renew their faith. With a price on his head, he adopted many disguises, sometimes that of an itinerant musician. Eventually, he was captured and "hung, drawn and quartered on Tyburn Hill, London, his corpse being publically burned."

According to the "Historical Memoirs of Armagh" by Ambrose Coleman, 1900, a Dr. Crolly was confirmed Primate of Ireland by Pope Gregory XVI in 1834. He had many trials to bear from the Orangemen in County Armagh. On July 12th, 1845, "serious riots took place in the town of Armagh, owing to their procession through the streets, and an inoffensive Catholic was brutally murdered." In his sermon the following Sunday, Dr. Crolly appealed for calm, prayers and faith in God.

From the time of St. Patrick, Armagh has placed all of its emphasis on scholastics. For a population of 10,000 in the City, it has five distinguished high schools. In the 18th-century Royal School, many famous men were pupils such as Wellington, Castlereagh and the historian Lecky. The Protestant Cathedral is probably the oldest church in Ireland that is still

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in use since the main structure was begun in the 13th century and the crypt in the 9th century while the Catholic Cathedral was built in 1840-73. The public library houses many valuable manuscripts including Jonathan Swift's personal copy of "Gulliver's Travels." and the new planetarium had its origins in the Observatory started in 1791 and one of its present scientists assisted in the U.S. Moon landing program.

With this background, a group of immigrants banded together in New York and formed this Association in 1894. Probably, few of them realized what their background was or their impact on the history of Armagh just as we fail to realize ours. However, they recognized the beauty and the brutality of life in Armagh and designed our Charter from the standpoint of brotherhood not brutality.

I sat for an hour watching the great artist, John Luke, as he worked on a small painting of the Callan Bridge in Armagh in the style of the old Masters and I asked him why there were no people in it. He said, "I spend months trying to encompass the beauty of a scene; I would need much more time to capture the divinity and the baseness of people."

To-night, this Association has made a donation from the receipts of this affair to help the victims of riots as we understand that "serious riots took place in the town of Armagh in August 1969 owing to processions through the streets and an inoffensive Catholic, named John Gallagher, was brutally murdered. We also understand that the Primate, Cardinal Conway, in his sermon on the following Sunday, appealed for calm, prayers and faith in God."

Will our commemorative journal of 2044 reveal that history repeats itself, over and over again?

#### **EXTRACT FROM CHARTER DATED OCTOBER 12, 1894**

SECOND: That the said Association or society is formed for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of the County Armagh, Ireland, and of persons and their descendants born in said County, and for the doing and encouragement of acts of benevolence and charity among such persons and the members of the society, and for all other benevolent, charitable, literary and historical purposes relating to said County or said persons, descendants or members.

THIRD: That the number of Trustees of said Association or society shall be and are nine in number, and that the names and residences of such Trustees who shall manage its concerns for the first year are as follows:

James Nugent, 111 Madison Street, New York  
Frank S. Campbell, Madison Avenue Hotel, New York  
John Winslow, 64 Madison Street, New York  
Patrick McCann, 231 East 34th Street, New York  
Parick Renaghan, 330 East 29th Street, New York  
Thomas Campbell, 169 Amsterdam Avenue, New York  
Thomas O'Callaghan, 246 East 27th Street, New York  
William Digby, 144 East 8th Street, New York  
Felix Kelly, 263 West 20th Street, New York

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