

Desart, May 9th, 1976

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AN Irish cross-roads with tall blackthorn bushes and taller trees, silvered grass verges, singing birds and blue sky — the everyday permanent scene. An F.C.A. Guard of Honour rigidly saluting, the Band of the Curragh Camp playing solemn anthems followed by the lilt of Tunes of Glory, flags sinuous in the breeze, a platform, and people, crowds of them — the locals, the neighbours from the city, and the visitors from far, far away — all there for just a moment, a history-marking moment. And why the special moment? What had brought the influx? Nothing less than the White House in Washington, D.C., for the hosting in the quiet by-road was all concerned with the plinth, its plaque still veiled, the focus of attention. It marked the spot where James Hoban, architect of The White House, was born in 1762. Though he died in the New World that had become the scene of his success, the thatched home, where he had lived in un auspicious circumstances during that sad period of our history, was still occupied till 1930 and was not razed till 1940.

The place of this unique celebration was Desart, Co. Kilkenny, the principal guest, H.E. Walter J. P. Curley, Ambassador of the United States of America, native of Pittsburg, graduate of Harvard and Yale, wartime marine, president of many banks, President of the American-Irish Historical Society and of the Irish-American Foundation. Mrs. Mary Kenealy, President of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, introduced him, and Mrs. Margaret Phelan, Hon. Sec., spoke of the policy of the Society to honour in a visible, substantial, permanent way, the memory of great Kilkenny men, and Charles Kickham and Canon Carrigan had already been selected.

The Ambassador then addressed the audience: Hoban, he said, had left a tangible imprint on the development of the new nation, the new society, the U.S. He, friend of George Washington, was the architect of The White House, the symbol of the free and democratic way of life of all citizens of the U.S.A. H.E. also referred to the Archaeological Society, causing members' hearts to swell with pride when he commented that it was "the premier Archaeological Society of Ireland." He added that he had long been acquainted with Kilkenny and its treasures.

Then he unveiled the plaque and read aloud the inscription :—

Séamas O hObáin 1762—1831

James Hoban 1762—1831

Is anseo a rugadh Séamas O hObáin, an t-aittire a leag amach an Teach Bán i Washington. Spreag George Washington é chun cur isteach ar an gcomórtas le haghaidh dearadh an Ti Bháin agus bhuaidh sé é. Nuair a chuaigh an foirgneamh trí thine i 1814 chóirigh an tObánach é agus chuir sé dath bán air chun lorg an dóiteáin a cheilt. Fuair sé bás 1831.

James Hoban, the architect of The White House in Washington was born here in 1762. He studied in the Royal Dublin Society's school before emigrating in 1785 to Philadelphia where he designed the State Capitol at Columbia. He was encouraged by George Washington to enter the competition for the design of the White House and won it. When fire damaged the building in 1814 he restored it and obliterated traces of burning by painting it white. He settled finally in Washington where he designed the State and War offices and the Great and Little Hotel. He died in 1831.

As the Ambassador was reading he became aware of the beautifully made model of a thatched house being displayed close-by. Mr. Denis Barry had made it, a miniature of the former Hoban homestead. Having lived in the house till its demolition, he knew all about it. Pleasant conversation followed between the visitors, Mr. Barry and members of the committee and crowd. Then the presentations took place — to the Ambassador, an illuminated scroll with the text he had just read; to Mrs. Curley, a bell made of Callan glass, bearing the date of the Centennial Year.

The scene changed rapidly to another old house, but this one still standing in elegant perfection, the one-time home of Bro. Ignatius Rice at Westcourt, where the party visited the museum displaying many objects of domestic use in the 18th and 19th centuries, and then the up-to-the-minute church of post Vatican II. The Brothers gave hospitality to the visitors, and a portrait of the founder was presented by Bro. Dunne to Mr. Curley who receiving it revealed that one of his ancestors was John Rice of a northern county.

But this was not the first reception of the day. The ceremonial had started in the Club House when the

ambassadorial party, consisting of H.E., Mrs. Curley, her mother and her sister lunched with the organising committee from the Archaeological Society, the mayor, and, most happily, collateral descendants of James Hoban — Dr. Paddy Cassin, Mrs. Kitty Fitzgerald and her family from Tullaroan, and Mrs. Shelly O'Brien and her family.

The visit ended back in Kilkenny with another reception, this one in Rothe House. Mrs. Sheila Lane, Hon. Curator, gave a brief account of the history of the house and its treasures, gifts were presented, speeches made, antiquities looked at, and then the visit was over. Rothe House closed its door and another memorable entry was inscribed in Kilkenny's Book of Memories.



6-8-1827

"I accompanied Joan Burkes funeral to Newtown . . . It is an extremely ancient 'Kill' for from the few narrow high pitched windows with but little ornament one of them but a few inches wide it is obvious that it is soon after St. Patrick's time that it was built. For after the Catholic Religion was first established in Ireland the Irish used to go on pilgrimage to Judaea and Jerusalem that is to a warm country where they learned not to let much light or heat into the chapels. However they learned long afterwards that that kind of window was not suited to this cold land of Ireland and accordingly we see fine large ornate windows in the chapels of Kells, Callan, and elsewhere!"

Diary of Humphrey O'Sullivan.



Under the flat of this stone in heavy sleep,
Until awakened by the last trumpet
Lie the body of a sound generous christian
The melodious Irishman Donough O'Sullivan
His son Michael beneath his breast
To protect him from the rain and cold
His wife Mary by his side
And the children of Auliffe sweet and beautiful.
Pray for them pious reader
Eternal rest in the Heavenly Kingdom.

From the Irish — Kilbride Churchyard, Callan.