

Birthplace of Margaret of New Orleans

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The older Margaret from a sculpture by Martin Doyle, Carrigallen

BY NOW Margaret of New Orleans maybe a household name. As we recall Margaret Gaffney was born in Tully South, Carrigallen, County Leitrim in 1813, the fifth child of William and Margaret Gaffney. In 1817, following many years of extremely unfavourable weather, William along with his wife and three of their six children including Margaret (then aged five), her older brother Kevin, and her baby sister Kathleen, emigrated to America, while the three eldest children remained at home, under the care of their uncle Matthew O'Rourke, until such time that they would be sent for.

They arrived in Baltimore where William got employment and was soon in a position to send money back to Ireland for their remaining children. He had almost saved enough money to send for the children when disaster struck. A yellow fever epidemic struck and William, his wife Margaret and baby Kathleen died. The older brother Kevin disappeared. A Welsh lady, Mrs Richards who had made their acquaintances on the ship overtook young Margaret in as a domestic servant.

On 10 October 1835, Margaret married Charles Haughrey, a native of County Cork. He had ill-health and Margaret persuaded him to go to a warmer climate. They left Baltimore and reached New Orleans on 20 November

1835. On medical advice he was advised that a sea voyage would help his condition but this was delayed pending the birth of their first child, a daughter named Frances. Margaret again was to receive bad news, Charles died shortly after reaching his destination. This was devastating news and Margaret's life was thrown into further turmoil by the loss of her baby daughter Frances. She was alone in the world at twenty three years of age.

At that time Sr Regis managed the Poydras Orphanage in New Orleans. Margaret was moved by the plight of the children and helped in the orphanage. She was aware of the shortage of food needed to feed the children and linking back to her Irish roots, she recommended the purchase of some cows and eventually turned this into a profitable business.

In 1853 the yellow fever struck again with many children being left as orphans. Margaret was moved greatly by the plight of the children and she set up the Baby House which was solely funded by all her resources, and a loan which took sixteen years to clear.

Having loaned money to a local baker, Margaret discovered later on that she was the main shareholder in the business. This was also a source of food to feed the

children and the poor. Her bakery flourished.

She was very charitable, kept little for herself, and invested the profits for the betterment of the poor of New Orleans. Throughout her entire life she conducted many profitable businesses, worked in an advisory capacity to other business people of New Orleans, and yet remarkably, Margaret could not read or write, and she signed her will with an 'X'.

At the age of sixty nine Margaret became ill. During her confinement Pope Pius IX sent his blessing and a crucifix. She died on Tuesday 9 February 1882. New Orleans' newspapers were edged in black as a mark of respect. She received a state funeral and was buried in St Louis cemetery beside her friend, Sr Regis. A statue was erected in her honour, the first



Margaret's Birthplace PHOTOS BY TONY FAHY



Loughlin & May McManus, committee members, sitting by the fireplace in Margaret's birthplace in Tully, Carrigallen

monument in the USA erected in honour of a woman.

Bringing you up to date, the *Birthplace of Margaret of New Orleans Committee* are busy organising celebrations for Margaret's bicentenary. Originally the committee was formed so that a replica of Margaret's home in Tully South could be built and this was achieved by local voluntary help. According to research, Margaret was born on Christmas Day 1813. As of yet the committee do not have her birth certificate but are actively working on tracing her ancestral roots. As a coincidence, 2013 sees *The Gathering* happening all over Ireland. We have established links with *Beloved Margaret Haughrey of New Orleans* committee members, co-ordinated by Danny O'Flaherty, who have made numerous visits here and members of our committee have also made a trip to New Orleans.

In September 2011 the committee, along with the *Bredagh Old School*, came together under a project co-ordinated by Rural Development Committee and funded by International Fund for Ireland (IFI). This project involved

the integration of the two communities' heritage, the Story of Margaret of New Orleans and Percy French's links to Carrigallen. This project culminated in the performance of a play entitled *'The Other Place'* written and directed by Maura Williamson with songs and poems by Tony Fahy. This performance included sixty members from both communities and performed in front of three packed audiences in the Corn Mill Theatre, Carrigallen, Co Leitrim.

During the months of July and August, Margaret's house was

open to the public every Saturday and Sunday from 2:00pm to 5:00pm. This year saw displays of arts and crafts, storytelling sessions, and traditional musicians.

Our ongoing work includes the tracing and making contact with Margaret's distant relations. We would be grateful if anyone out there who has any information could please make contact with us on www.margaretsbirthplace.com or through our Facebook page, *Birthplace of Margaret of New Orleans*.

We are indebted to Sinéad McDermott, Leitrim Tourism Officer for all her help and guidance throughout our journey.

Walking in Margaret's Footsteps, and relating her remarkable story so that it lives on for generations to come, is our mission statement. This entails the running of fundraising events such as pub quizzes, busking, card games, and coffee mornings, so that we can literally *walk in Margaret's footsteps* and help donate funds to local charities.

First winners of the Margaret of New Orleans Pub Quiz fundraiser in Carrigallen: Charely Farrelly's represented by—Cormac Doonan, Killian McGuinness, Kevin McManus & John Lockhart. Kevin is holding the Aidan Harte Perpetual Memorial Trophy sculpted by Martin Doyle.

