

"The emotional shock of being in the very room where my mother was born."—B. T. Hines.

Irish-American, Benedict T. Hines, came from Randolph, Massachusetts, and held this as his abiding memory of his first trip to the home of his ancestors.

In a wonderfully descriptive account he recaptures here his many other impressions of his

FIRST VIEW OF IRELAND

THE GIANT Aer Lingus plane glided down over the Atlantic, soared silently over the broad quilt of green patches, with Galway Bay just to the left and a misty grey hovering over the Ring of Kerry far south to the right, then turning into its appointed pattern, dropped swiftly toward Shannon.

Not a word was uttered, no need for any, just the squeeze of the hand by my good wife Marie when Ireland first came into view, and no need for words as we touched down, ending five and a half hours of smooth flying out of New York. And now we were taxiing to the portal of history in this enchanted land. For it was a search into history that prompted this trek to the land of my parents who had "gone out" to America in the late 1890s.

With slim leads to go on, it was necessary to explore Athlone in County Roscommon, birthplace of my father, and Manorhamilton in County Leitrim, homeland of my mother.

On the way in search of both areas we encountered experiences delightful to record and stirring enough to charge us with the desire to return.

For Ireland is only a dream for most Americans, enlivened around St. Patrick's Day in song and parades. But to see it is better than to dream.

With little sleep after a night flight and the sun rising to greet us in Eireann, we moved through Customs—not hurriedly, our first lesson here—and drove out of the airport in a right-hand-drive Volks., keeping to the left-hand side of the road, mindful of the joshing at home that more tourists get lost that way on the first day over.

Heading south out of the airport for a confirmed reservation at the Inter-continental Motel in Limerick, we passed under the very parapets of Bunratty Castle, to which we returned that evening for dinner and medieval entertainment, following music and mead in the upstairs hall.



Medieval Feast at Bunratty

Courtesy Bard Failte

Monday, arrival day, was Whit Monday and in Limerick the shops were closed. Still we toured the streets of the silent city across the River Shannon from our motel. One window sign was intriguing. The racy message read . . . Turf Accountant.

On our way Tuesday we passed through County Clare again by the airport and headed north-east toward Athlone, "capital of the midlands" and a thriving city at the crossroads of industry in Ireland.

Moving north through Nenagh on the western edge of Tipperary, we stopped for lunch at Birr. It was a small place on the square where we had sandwiches and tea. Just prior to noon in came a group of neatly attired schoolboys. Conversation picked up as they ordered their tea, some bringing in their own lunches. Obviously it was a daily visit by the boys and the hostess knew them all by name.

Suddenly the boys stopped talking and all bowed their heads. Outside a bell sounded. It was the time for the Angelus. The devotion of the boys was both remarkable and memorable.

On through Birr, stopping only to give room to a lad driving his small herd of cows down the street back toward town and market. He was too enthralled in his job to interrupt.

Soft rolling lush green fields bordered by stone walls edged the road. Further on peat cutting on a commercial scale could be seen on both sides of the road, leaving the brown land looking as though shaved vertically with a giant sharp razor. More green fields. More cutting of peat. Beauty on the one hand. Needed heat supply on the other. Tiny two-wheeled carts hauled tall conical shaped cans of milk, with the farmer riding high over the little painted pony, reminding the tourist that agriculture still leads the industry parade in Ireland.

"Cead Mile Failte"

But tourism is catching up, as is evidenced at Shannon, Limerick and now Athlone. The "Great Ford" as Athlone was known, begins with several "schemes of houses" as one enters from the south-east, the Westmeath side of the Shannon. Then come the neat shops and the welcoming hotels, very much aware of the slogan "Cead Mile Failte."

It's a warm, clean city and one that encourages travellers to stay on.

Immediately across the River Shannon on the Roscommon side, is the Town Hall, King John's Castle, the Army garrison and the twin-steepled Church of St. Peter and St. Paul.

The Town Hall was our first call on Tuesday afternoon in our search into family history. Then a perusal of the baptismal books at St. Peter and Paul which, written handsomely in longhand, go back to the Famine of 1846. Our search there proved hopeful, and on Wednesday the postmaster at Curna Fulla provided more leads, as did a 95-year-old gentleman who turned out to be a classmate of my father.

It was a grandson of my father's schoolmaster and his wife and daughter who, over a cup of hot strong tea, gave us the final directions to the very site of my father's home in Curna Fulla North. It had been burned in 1916, twenty years after he had gone to America in his teens. When we arrived the sun suddenly appeared and filtered through a lone pine standing vigil over the plot.

With half of our history search solved, we headed north towards Manorhamilton on Thursday, hoping for equal success, but again with no solid leads to work on.

Lunch at Carrick-on-Shannon, county seat of Leitrim, prepared us for our entry into Manorhamilton. Drumshanbo, then Lough Allen, one of the three big Shannon lakes, and the Iron mountains we kept in view to our right before coming upon the sign to Manorhamilton, with the inscription in Irish . . . "O'Rourke's Little Field" . . . suitably inscribed.

The main object of interest to the traveller here is supposed to be the ruined baronial mansion built by Sir Frederick Hamilton in 1638. But our visit was of a more personal need.

Our first lead, church records, couldn't be checked out adequately at the time we rode into town, so we checked into a small hostelry (Clare Villa) and drove on to Sligo for dinner at the Great Southern Hotel. It is easy to

understand why Yeats loved this country. The drive is beautiful by way of Glencar.

That evening we were warmed on returning to Manorhamilton by good news of an unexpected lead, plus the hospitality and conversation of our host and hostess.

On Friday morning our trail led to a wonderful aunt, hitherto unknown to us, and the search was almost ended. One more try. My mother's home.

Emotional Shock

Brackerymore is a townland high in the hills outside Manorhamilton. Brackerylane is a bit harder to find. But a uniformed postman on his bicycle plus a poetic neighbour combined to show us the way.

And there it stood, a long white thatched-roof stone house, set in a grove of trees on a bluff overlooking a range of mountains and famed O'Donnell's Rock.

Then the emotional shock of being in the very room where my mother was born, in the home her father had built one hundred years ago. We lingered long and silently here before departing from a very special spot in all Ireland.

Back to Athlone to close a bit of business, we dine at the Prince of Wales Hotel and talked tourism with a handsome young waiter, ambitious both for himself and for Ireland in this bright new industry.

O'Connell Street, Dublin.

Courtesy Bord Failte



With the work portion of our trip now tucked away, we set out for Dublin on Saturday morning, with the famed Cabaret at Jury's the goal that night.

Having checked into the Moira Hotel, sister to the Jury, we mingled with the weekend throng, walked along O'Connell Street, stopped to hear a political candidate, visited a city newspaper room, sat by the Liffey, enjoyed an Irish coffee.

But the highlight of our brief visit to Dublin and the chief attraction to vacationers from abroad, is the cabaret at Jury's, where Ireland in song and dance and story is superb entertainment.

Sunday morning following a Mass said entirely in Gaelic, including the sermon, we headed south, planning to reach Wexford for dinner and possibly a visit to the Kennedy Park. Enquiry at Wexford railroad station showed that the park was located in New Ross, County Wexford. A bright, clean dining-car type train was just leaving for the beach at Rosslare. We let it go, but purchased a timetable for fourpence as a souvenir of a railroad run as a National enterprise, a bit startling to us. Westward to New Ross, we made it to Kennedy Park, a spanking new sprawling area for picnicing and pictures, fashioned and maintained by the Irish government in memory of John F. Kennedy.

In the little town of New Ross photos of the late American President's visit here adorn the walls inside several buildings, including a tiny pub.

Talbot Hall, a handsome stucco Georgian mansion, was our stopover that night. After dinner we strolled down to the gate house to chat with the farm manager, whose post could be comparable to our ranch foreman.

Next morning, our second Monday in Ireland, we moved south-west out of Talbot Hall toward Waterford, hoping without hurrying to cover a good portion of the south coastline as far as Cork. At mid-morning we crossed over the River Suir from the Ferrybank suburb smack onto the bustling quay, old business section and banking area of

Waterford, the principal seaport in the south-east corner of Ireland.

Considerable shipping trade with the Continent and Britain explained the presence of so many ships. The apparent transport of containers reminded us of similar action in American ports.

An ancient fortification on the east end of the Quay is Reginald's Tower, busy almost 1,000 years ago defending the city behind walls ten feet thick. Today it is busily dispensing tourist information through very attractive and articulate young ladies.

A visit to Waterford should include a tour of the famous Waterford Glass works. For safety sake only half a dozen visitors can pass through in a single group and reservations should be made.

With Marie in one group and myself in another, we watched intricate glass-making. In my group of six were five quiet ladies. This writer made up for their shyness by sticking close to our attractive guide in order to get in the first question above the noise as we moved around the factory. I had her ear all to myself, since not one was as inquisitive and the reward was a bundle of information about an industry that is earning again the fame Ireland enjoyed in glass in the eighteenth century.

There are no sales, nor are there any samples at the factory. But uptown in Waterford, Joseph Knox is kept busy daily shipping out Waterford Glass to all corners of the world.

Due south of Waterford is a pleasant resort town called Tramore and one can tell by the tan of the natives here that the beach is a popular place in season. Although it was still early in June, we tried the St. George's Channel and discovered it as warm and the beach as clean as the best in our native New England.

Heading straight west to Cork city, a busy metropolis at commuter hour, we stayed on the north side of the River Lee and through the efforts of the friendly owner of our motel we made it to Blarney Castle that evening.

Before sundown we climbed the narrow

steps to the top, stepped out into the glaring sunlight to be greeted by the sunburned guide who provided support as we leaned back and down to grip the bars. We kissed the famous Stone, received our certificates on accomplishing the feat (at the shop below), purchased a blackthorn walking stick and strode cockily out of the Castle grounds.

Secure now in the knowledge that we could best anyone in the matter of speech, we headed out of Blarney town on a sunny Tuesday morning, lunched west of Macroom and followed the Lee down to Ballylicky and Bantry Bay. We had the entire Ring of Kerry in mind (it's a must say our advisers in the States) but instead we heeded the suggestion of a tall handsome Garda to try Tim Healy's Pass. So on to Glengarriff we toured the northern shore of Bantry Bay as far as Adrigole where we filmed the sign and headed across the Cara mountains. The way is rugged, the narrow road edged in stone, roaming rams or just space. You have no choice but to keep going until you reach the summit, where you thank the Lord a bit as you bravely take pictures equal to those sold in a tiny shop at the peak.

Heading down toward Kenmare river, the mountains on the Kerry side of Healy Pass are verdant, and further on by Glonee, the beautiful purple and rose rhododendrons run on for miles it seems, some two storeys high. It's a breathtaking sight and a grand entrance indeed into the friendly town of Kenmare.

North by Killarney we sped by Moll's Gap and at dinnertime we entered the famous resort city, not expecting to find it difficult to get accommodation. For Killarney, we soon learned, seems to be the target town for people of Europe on holiday and since June is the beginning of the tourist season, the city was crowded.

Killarney, mecca for jaunting cars, is awakened each morning by the clip-clop of the ponies heading back to the post across from the International and the Great Southern hotels, near the theatre where the Abbey Players perform. Killarney, land of lakes with Lough Leane getting most atten-

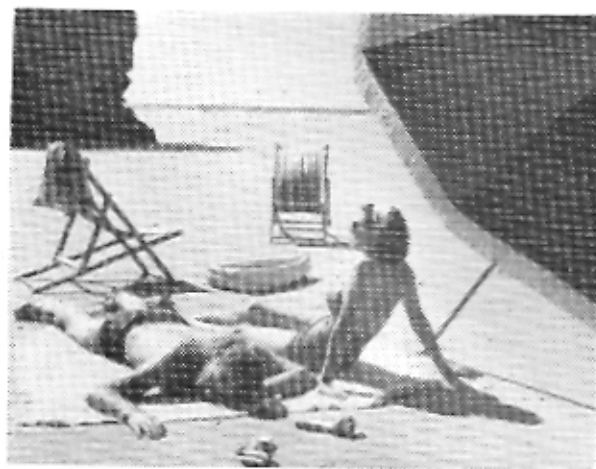
tion particularly in pictures from atop Ross Castle.

Returning from the Castle Wednesday morning, we stopped by the racetrack, the quietest spot in town since racing hadn't started. A lone painter turned out to be an entertaining conversationalist as well, and while he and Marie chatted, I attempted pictures of the track, stands and jumping hedges. On the way out, the informative dauber whispered to me: "Is she a Killarney woman?" . . . which thoroughly pleased my Nordic wife.

In the afternoon we travelled to Tralee, famed for we Americans as the source of the song, "The Rose of Tralee," on a John McCormack record. But the author who made the thrill of the music possible was the native-born William Mulchinock. Tralee also is the birthplace of Roger Bresnahan, famous ballplayer who is credited with being the mind behind the shinguards made and used first in America's favourite pastime (baseball).

Thursday we drove to Galway which historically traded with Spain, so much so that there are strong traces of Spanish architecture in the city and one of the tourist attractions is the Spanish Arch. Adding to today's history, however, is the new and beautiful Galway Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and Saint Nicholas. Completed in 1965, our own Richard Cardinal Cushing of Boston dedicated the edifice. In the Mortuary Chapel heads of two famous statesmen are in mosaic: Patrick Pearse, leader of the Easter Rising in 1916, and John Fitzgerald Kennedy, late President of the USA. Galway is a famed resort city and at Carraroe we looked south to the Aran Islands at the mouth of Galway Bay. Corral Strand is a place for meditation, with the Atlantic sweeping off to the west with the sun.

At Salthill we enjoyed a late afternoon swim at Silver Strand, an excellent beach. Dinner at the Tavern Grill on the advice of a charming Bord Failte girl, then a return to a live spot on the Promenade where songs



As warm and as clean as the best in our native New England
Courtesy Bord Failte

were provided by the same people who requested particular numbers, a pleasant Irish trick which adds enjoyment to the entertainment.

Drinking in Irish Literature

Goodbye to the "city of the tribes" on Saturday morning and down to Ennis with the sun still shining its eighth day in a row. The Old Ground Hotel in Ennis, capital of County Clare, is aged but comfortable and a fitting respite for the last night in Ireland. Shannon Airport is sixteen miles to the south. Poets Corner is a quiet little pub adjoining the hotel and here one drinks in Irish literature in the presence of Ireland's best, caricatured on the walls . . . Yeats, Stephens, Shaw, Moore, Mangan, Wilde, Joyce. Behan most probably will go up next.

On the way to the airport on Sunday, we drove into the spacious grounds of Dromoland Castle at Newmarket-on-Fergus. The old castle brought up to lavish level is open from April to October and a golf course surrounds the high round towered structure adding to its attractiveness. Tea and biscuits was our fare in an atmosphere melding the ancient with the modern.

On to Shannon and some last minute shopping before the flight out. Watching the refuelling of the plane which will take us

home, we recall moments of our first view of Ireland. Like shopping for ties at the new store in Ballinahown, Connemara. Interviewing an elderly man on a ladder as he re-thatches his cottage roof just outside Athlone. Strolling after dinner at the Royal Hotel and coming upon a plaque over a door on a side street telling that John McCormack was born here. The lady piano-player at Salthill carrying on a conversation with a friend and not missing a key as a new singer attempts a melody. "Have you had your mead, sir?" asks the pretty maiden in medieval dress at Bunnratty. Barefooted at Tramore. Palm trees on the east, south and west coasts. Salmon racing at the Weir at Galway. Tourism encouraged all over Ireland by young people counting on a bright future in a new industry here.

Departure is swift and the green patches fall away. But the urge is strong within us to head back to Leitrim and a special spot on a bluff overlooking a quiet valley at Brackerymore.

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