

This is Skibbereen and District Historical Society's second annual journal. It contains eleven articles of varying lengths and on diverse topics, all with a local interest. The subjects covered range from The Role of the Normans in Dún na Séad Castle, Baltimore, a treatise on Seán Ó Coileáin – 'The Silver Tongue of Munster', to a study of the Carbery Show 1836–2006. The journal is a valuable addition to the collection of local history publications which play such an important part in recording for posterity the events of our past.

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# Journal

*Cumann Staire An Sclobairín is a Cheantar*



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is no definite indication as to how he came to live at Dromore other than that it is believed that he came to the area for the construction and later operation of the local mill. There is no indication as to where Ellen Brophy may have been a native of. On their deaths, John and Ellen were interred at Ardfield cemetery [near Clonakilty] and in 1903, Patrick arranged for the erection of a headstone to their memory in that cemetery. The inscriptions are in Irish and English and the addresses of John and Ellen are shown as 'Ballyva and Dromore, West Cork'.

During his teenage years, Patrick became interested in Fenianism. When he was seventeen years old he witnessed the only cow of a poor neighbour being seized by the bailiff. He organised a group of his friends and rescued the cow from the bailiff and returned the animal to its owner. From this point onwards he was a 'wanted' man by the Crown forces and had to leave the locality. He got a job on board a cargo ship at Bantry Pier and travelled in it to Rio De Janeiro. From there he sailed to New York and travelled westwards through the United States. On hearing of the intended invasion by the Fenians of Canada he joined the Fenian movement under a former American Civil War Officer named General John O'Neill at Vermont. In May 1870, O'Neill led a large contingent of Fenians over the Canadian border but the military there had advance notice of their arrival and O'Neill was arrested. Patrick O'Brien and a small group of other Fenians under Captain Short made a separate crossing over the Border on their own and raised a green flag on Canadian territory. On learning of O'Neill's arrest the party retreated back to the United States.

On the failure of the Fenian Insurrection, O'Brien earned a reputation as a big game hunter and it was in connection with this activity that he became known as 'Rocky Mountain O'Brien' and he derived much pride from this title. He married an American born lady named Margaret O'Sullivan whose father had emigrated from Rosscarbery, County Cork. With his wife, he took up residence in Brooklyn, New York, but his wife died at a relatively young age in 1899. He travelled through many of the States as a representative for the New York timber merchants of McCusker and Company. He at all times maintained a very close friendship with O'Donovan Rossa - particularly while the latter resided in the U.S.A. - and he is reputed to have helped him out financially when O'Donovan Rossa was going through a lean time and spurned by some of his former Fenian friends.

In the early 1900s, O'Brien frequently returned to Ireland and made public speeches outside Church gates - all touching on nationalism. His feelings were very much anti-British and it is difficult to understand why he wasn't arrested for some of his utterances. In 1904 he published a book titled 'Birth and Adoption' which was a book of prose and poetry. He wrote a lot of poetry, rhymes and prose with many references to his native Dromore, Caheragh and Bantry. He led a very physically active life and was a very colourful and extrovert character. In January 1919, he took ill and was admitted to a hospital run by the Dominican nuns at Long Island New York. While in hospital he insisted on the United States and Irish flags being displayed at his bedside and told the nuns that if he should die, he would like to die under those flags. On February 8th of the same year he died and was interred at the Calvary Cemetery in New York.

During his visits back to the parish in the early 1900s he made a generous donation to the Parish Priest, Fr. O'Hea. This was utilised to build the belfry and the entrance gates to St Mary's Parish Church at Killeenleigh. He arranged to have a bell cast at a New York bell foundry and had it transported to Caheragh and erected in the new belfry at Killeenleigh. When the church was demolished following the erection of the new Parish church at Corliss, the belfry and gates of the old church were left standing and they remain as a salutary monumental sentinel to the memory of one of Caheragh's best known sons - Patrick 'Rocky Mountain' O'Brien.

## Diarmuid O hEigearthaigh from Letter

Diarmaid O hEigearthaigh was born at Letter [part of Clouncugger] in Caheragh Parish in February 1856. His parents were small farmers who barely eked out an existence and they were long resident in the area. Other branches of the Hegarty family had also settled in the parish as well as in the nearby parishes of Skibbereen and Aughdown. It is believed that the family originated in West Cork after the Battle of Kinsale when at least one of O'Neill's soldiers from Ulster bearing the surname remained behind in West Cork after the battle. This theory is supported by the fact that there are a number of families right across Ulster who bear the name Hegarty. As a young boy, Diarmuid learned much about the history of his family from his grandmother who also lived at Letter.

He attended the National school at Killeenleigh. He was obviously a bright pupil because when he finished his primary education the schoolmaster called him aside and said to him 'Bring your boots on you every



other day Jerry, you are appointed as a monitor here'. [A school monitor was an apprentice school – teacher and it was a common practice in the late 1800s and early 1900s to appoint bright pupils to the position when they had finished their primary education. They invariably went on to become primary teachers.]

Diarmuid's wages as a monitor were ten shillings [50pence or about 60 cents] per month. In the second year his salary was eight pounds per annum and on his third year it was ten pounds per annum.

After three years experience as a monitor he was appointed as a Grade One apprentice teacher. Monitors normally worked for five or six years in that position before reaching this Grade.

Shortly after reaching this Grade he was appointed as an assistant teacher at Dromore national school on January 13th 1878. While there he further pursued his studies by attending special classes given by the principal teacher at Killeenleigh on such diverse and advanced subjects as seamanship, heat, agricultural mathematics and phonetics.

Oddly enough it was not until the late 1870s that Diarmuid became acquainted with Gaelic script even though quite a lot of Irish was spoken in the locality at that time. Gaelic was not taught in the schools as a subject but Diarmuid set out to make a special study of it. His study of the language was very much helped by Irish books which he received from one of his uncles in America. The Irish language became the love of his life and was his treasured subject while he taught school until 1921.

In 1882, Diarmuid O hEigartaigh moved to Lowertown national school near Goleen where he was appointed Principal and he taught there until his retirement in 1921. He was a great teacher and kept up his pursuit of knowledge all through his career. In 1889 he underwent a special training course for teachers at St Patrick's Training College in Drumcondra and received a first class teaching qualification as a result.

He wrote and published many short stories in the Irish language. In 1934 a book which he had written 'Tadhg Ciallmhar' was published and regrettably he had died a few months before its publication. In 1926 he completed a book titled 'Is Uasal Ceird' which was basically a book of his memoirs as a teacher and as a boy and young man growing up in Letter. This book was not published until several years following his death. In 'Tadhg Ciallmhar' he included much history and folklore about his family and about events which had occurred back into the 18th century, much of which he had obtained from his grandmother as a young boy. As

a teacher and as a writer and historian he was outstanding. The fact that he was basically a self-educated scholar, made his work all the more meritorious. His writings and books cover a very important time in Irish history and he has left a very important legacy through his works.

In 1881, Diarmuid married a Miss Eileen Barry who was a teacher at Kilcommene school. They had seven children – four boys and three girls. They lived in the official teacher's residence at Lowertown. One of his sons also named Diarmuid became Secretary of the first Dail Eireann in January 1919. Diarmuid O hEigartaigh died in 1934 at the age of 78 years.

### Michael Pat Murphy, T.D. M.C.C. Corliss



Michael Pat Murphy was born at Corliss, Caheragh, in March 1919. He attended the local primary school at Killeenleigh and later the Duggan Private secondary school at Skibbereen. He was a very bright student and from an early age developed a deep interest in politics. He supported the Irish Labour Party. He worked at a number of jobs until he was co-opted on to Cork County Council when the sitting Labour T.D for West Cork – T.J. Murphy of Dunmanway – was

appointed Minister for Local Government in the 1948 – '51 Coalition Government. On the death of T.J. Murphy while in office his son Billy took his seat in a bye-election in West Cork but he did not stand for re-election in 1951. Michael Pat stood as a candidate in the General Election of 1951 and was elected to the Dail having got 6,103 first preference votes. In the subsequent General Elections he was re-elected each time with