

Barquilla de la Santa Maria

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A Gift from Ireland to America: The Spirituality of the Magevney Cousins

This story was written for a publication in Ireland dealing with emigrants from the Diocese of Clogher. It should be of interest to our readers, for among the nine priest and religious cousins of this family, six worked in Ohio for periods varying from a few years to almost a lifetime. Five worked in the Diocese of Columbus.

The Magevney family of Memphis, Tennessee originated in Michael McGivney of Sessiagh, Cleenish Parish, County Fermanagh. Five of his children migrated to the United States, namely Eugene, John, Philip, Michael, and Catherine. Among Michael's grandchildren, some born in Ireland and some in this country, were nine priests and religious. While the ancient Catholic Church in Ireland in this period was recovering from centuries of struggle under the penal code, it was mainly a recovery of the physical, whereas in America the Church was young in all its aspects, was an immigrant Church, and needed strengthening in every way. The Magevney and Lilly children provided much mature spirituality to the Church in America.

Eugene Magevney

The first of the family to leave Cleenish was Eugene, who had been born in Sessiagh in 1798. It was he who first changed the family name to Magevney. He was given a good education and studied for the priesthood but, doubting that he had a religious vocation, he became instead a

school teacher before deciding to leave his homeland. He went to Pennsylvania in 1828 and for a time worked as a bookkeeper but soon returned to teaching. He taught at several locations in Pennsylvania before going west in 1833 to Memphis, then a frontier town on the Mississippi River. There he opened a "Male Academy" in a log cabin in Court Square, became the first Catholic schoolmaster in the city, and, being an excellent teacher, he prospered. He eventually became wealthy, but only indirectly because of his teaching. As payment for a bill for educating the sons of the Topp family, he accepted ownership of a pasture outside of the town. He did not sell the land, but held onto it as Memphis grew in that direction and in time the property was very valuable, being located at Main and Union Streets. Meanwhile, in 1837 Eugene had purchased a small wooden house on Adams Street, which became his home for the rest of his life. He sent for his former student and fiance, who was patiently waiting in Fermanagh. Mary E. Smyth left Ireland for America in 1840 and the couple were married in Eugene's little house in Memphis, today the oldest existing home in that city.

The first Mass offered in Memphis was in Eugene's house. He was instrumental in establishing St. Peter's Catholic Church (next to his house), St. Peter's Orphanage, and St. Joseph Hospital in Memphis. He also helped organize the first system of schools in the city. In the 1840s he served as a ward alderman and in 1848

he unsuccessfully ran for election as mayor. He was stricken with yellow fever during an epidemic in 1873 and died in his home. Mary died in 1889. They left two daughters, Mary and Catherine.

Mary and Catherine both received their early education at St. Agnes Academy in Memphis, which was operated by Dominican Sisters from Springfield, Ky. After completing the studies available there, they both went to St. Mary's Academy in Somerset, Ohio, also taught by Dominican Sisters, where Mary was graduated with the highest honors in 1859. In 1863 Mary became a member of that community and she rapidly became a dedicated and exemplary religious, known as Sister Mary Agnes. She was somewhat an extremist in her adherence to her vow of poverty, yet she was known to be mischievous and entertaining. She became novice mistress and later secretary of the community. In 1868, after a fire had destroyed their convent, school, and chapel in Somerset, the sisters established St. Mary's of the Springs in Columbus, which became the motherhouse of a large and prosperous teaching order. In 1873 Sister Mary Agnes and Sister Rose Lynch, with the permission and even encouragement of Bishop Rosecrans, broke away from St. Mary's of the Springs and founded the Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart. The first home of this congregation was in Columbus, near the Cathedral, in two grand old houses where they conducted Sacred Heart Academy for girls, funded in great part by Sister Mary Agnes's inheritance. The good sisters were not accustomed to business, however, and soon lost both of the buildings and moved their convent to Somerset where, though poor, they reopened their academy and began to grow anew.

After becoming Bishop of Columbus, Rt. Rev. John Watterson in 1882 decided that he did not want two congregations of Dominican sisters in his diocese, and was going to forbid the growth

of Sister Mary Agnes's group and, after her death, merge it with the Sisters at St. Mary's of the Springs. Sister Mary Agnes, sorely tried, moved her congregation and Academy to the Diocese of Galveston, Texas. There and in Houston they have prospered ever since, though as might be expected they were hit hard by the defections of many religious in the 1970s. Mother Agnes, always bright and spirited despite hardships, showed forth her lovable nature full of humor, wit, and originality. Her silvery, bell-like laughter was contagious, and yet it was said that she was deeply spiritual and those around her could not help but feel their hearts burning with love for God when in conversation with her. She was ill for much of the last ten years of her life and died in 1891, praying that God would watch over her little community.

Kate Magevney, sister of Mother Mary Agnes, managed her father's estate, diversifying into stocks and bonds, so that when she died in 1930 it was worth over \$3.5 million. She had married, been widowed, and married a second time, but had no children except an adopted daughter, Blanche. Because of provisions of Eugene Magevney's will and because Kate left no will there was quite a court battle among the Magevneys over the estate, but in the end it went to Blanche and the Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

John Magevney

The next Magevney to migrate to America seems to have been Eugene's brother John, who was born about 1810 and was in America by 1842. His wife Susan McClanahan was a native of South Carolina. They lived in Memphis, where John was a tailor, and even by 1850 the family was relatively well off. They had five children, of whom three became religious, name.

Hugh Legare Magevney, the eldest son, was born in Jackson, Tennessee in 1845 and received

his early education from private tutors in Memphis, until normal life was interrupted by the Civil War. During that conflict he served with distinction as an aide to Confederate General Bedford Forrest. He entered the Society of Jesus in October of 1864 and was sent to St. Louis University and Florissant Seminary, then studied canon law at the Jesuits' college in Woodstock, Maryland. He was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop John B. Purcell of Cincinnati in 1876 and returned to Woodstock as a professor of ecclesiastical history and sacred eloquence. He left the Jesuits in 1883 and came to Columbus, to become the first president of a short-lived Catholic College for boys, meanwhile achieving notice as a speaker of great ability in a series of lectures given in Cincinnati and subsequently in New York and Washington.

The rest of his career was marked by brilliance in preaching and teaching the Word of God. "His masterful exposition of Catholic faith and doctrine presented in matchless eloquence and logically and convincingly propounded, brought many noted converts into the true fold." He became ill in the spring of 1884 and, upon recovery, became a professor in the Jesuit College of the Sacred Heart at Morrison, near Denver, Colorado. About 1896 he moved to the diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, and in 1900 he returned to Cincinnati. He worked as a diocesan priest until March, 1905, when a fatal illness struck. He retired to a private home near Cincinnati and there was prevailed upon to prepare a manuscript of many of his lectures and poems, which was published in Cincinnati in 1906 as *A Legacy of Lectures and Verses*. He died in 1908.

Sallie Ann Magevney, John's daughter and born in Memphis in 1849, was educated by the Dominican Sisters at Somerset, Ohio, where she received her First Communion and was confirmed by Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati in 1861. She joined the Sisters of the Sacred Heart

at Maryville in St. Louis, Missouri in 1872. She taught music, was an organist, and taught classes in St. Louis, St. Charles, and St. Joseph, Missouri and in Omaha, Nebraska. However, deafness, which had become apparent by the time of her profession in 1890, became more acute and she was forced to give up teaching. She accepted her weakness and faithfully participated in the community life to the best of her now limited ability. The Sisters noted that during their annual retreats she never missed an instruction, although she never heard a word, but looked fixedly at the preacher who, without doubt, reminded her of her two Jesuit brothers, whom she loved in an extraordinary manner. She died in 1929 in St. Joseph, Missouri. (With thanks to the Society of the Sacred Heart, National Archives, U.S.A., St. Louis, Missouri; and to Miss Lydia Schlegel, translator.)

Eugene A. Magevney, younger brother of Hugh and Sallie, was born in Memphis in 1855 and was sent to St. Louis University for his education at the age of ten years. At the age of sixteen he was received into the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. He received his seminary education at Woodstock in Maryland, but a four-year hiatus during which he taught at St. Xavier College in Cincinnati delayed his ordination until 1886. Except for five years of missionary work, Father Magevney spent his career teaching poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy in various Jesuit colleges, including service as president of Creighton University in Omaha from 1908 until 1914. Beginning in 1915, he was employed exclusively in the study of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and in giving retreats. He died in 1919 at the House of Retreats, Brooklyn Station, Cleveland, Ohio. Father Magevney was a man of considerable natural ability and untiring industry, yet was retiring to such an extent that his abilities rarely came to the attention of the public. From his school days he cultivated a natural gift of ready and fluent speech that never failed him and his cheerful conversation, rich in



Rev. Michael D. Lilly, O.P.



Sister Frances Lilly, O.P.



Rev. Hugh F. Lilly, O.P.

imaginative power and vivid portrayal of character and scenery, made him a welcome companion of individuals or groups. He was a devout and exemplary member of the Society of Jesus, of which he was a loyal, loving son. (With thanks to the Midwest Jesuit Archives.)

Catherine Lilly

Michael McGivney's daughter, Catherine, born in 1807, married Owen Lilly. The Lillys were a branch of the Maguire family and were long associated with Cleenish Parish. Owen's father was John Lilly of Sessiagh (ca 1771-1838) and his brothers were named Patrick, Matthew, and Denis. Owen and Catherine Lilly had eight children, all born in Ireland before their migration to America. The children were John (1829-1910), Michael (1831-1901), Philip (1834-1857), Owen junior (1837-1912), Hugh (1841-1914), Patrick (1843-1866), Catherine (1846-1934), and Denis (1849-1857). Assisted by Eugene Magevney, the family left Ireland and settled in Memphis about 1853.

The son John Lilly served as a Sergeant in the the Confederate army, in the Tennessee Infantry. He

married Mary Reilly and lived to the age of 81 years, in Memphis. John's brother Owen Lilly junior served the Confederacy as a Sergeant in the 154th Tennessee Infantry. After the war he founded a prosperous carriage and coach factory, called the Lilly Carriage Company, of which he was president until his death. He married Catherine O'Connor and raised a family in Memphis.

Michael Lilly was educated in a hedge school near Sessiagh by a schoolmaster named Cassidy. In 1853 he entered the Dominican Order at St. Joseph's near Somerset, Ohio, taking the religious name Dominic. He was ordained in 1856 by Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati. He was professor of mathematics and natrual philosophy at St. Joseph's College near Somerset, then Prior of St. Joseph's. At the end of the Civil War, in 1865 he was sent to St. Peter's Church in Memphis as Pastor, where he remained three years. Along with many assignments at parishes in New York and Connecticut, from 1881 until 1886 he served a term as Provincial. Father Lilly was described as a saintly man, a distinguished preacher, and a lovable character.

Hugh Lilly followed his brother Michael into the Dominican Order, arriving at St. Joseph's near Somerset in 1862. He took the religious name Francis and was ordained to the priesthood at Louisville, Ky. in 1869. He served at various churches staffed by the Dominicans in Ohio, Kentucky, New York, and Minnesota. From 1877 until 1883 he was Prior at St. Joseph's near Somerset. As such he was able to warn his cousin, Sister Mary Agnes, of the intention of Bishop Watterson to prevent the growth of her congregation. This warning allowed her to prepare the ground for her community to move to Texas. Father Hugh Lilly was noted as a very gifted, zealous, and exemplary priest and a fine orator and literateur.

Catherine Lilly at the age of fifteen was taken by her brother Michael to St. Mary's Academy in Somerset, Ohio to complete the education that had been begun in Memphis. Three years later she entered the novitiate there and made her religious profession in 1866. She took the name Sister Frances. Her qualities of strength and tenderness were such that in 1876, at the age of just thirty years, she was elected Prioress at St. Mary's of the Springs and later was elected to two additional three-year terms. After 1885 she served, often as Superioress, at several of the schools operated by the congregation in Ohio and New York. During her first term as Prioress, she had difficult times with the Bishop of Columbus because he asked her to supply sisters to assist at the new school founded by her cousin, Sister Mary Agnes. It is told that once when he arrived to see her, she wanted a little time before meeting him, so she had a sister bring a ladder and put it under the window. She climbed out and down to the yard below, then walked around the building and entered it by the front door, calmed and ready to meet the Bishop in the hall. Sister Frances always displayed great generosity to others, born it is said of an ability to comprehend their problems. Her spiritual life was marked by a lively faith that was akin to a

vision and enlivened by a grateful sense of the favors she had received from God. At the time of her death in 1934 she was the oldest member of her congregation.

Michael Magevney

The youngest son of Michael McGivney of Sessiagh was his namesake, born about 1817. Michael and his wife Mary (Plunkett) left Ireland and settled for a time in New Brunswick in the late 1830s. About 1842 they moved to Massachusetts and by 1844 they were in Tennessee. Like his brother John, Michael was a tailor in Memphis and, also like him, by 1850 seems to have been relatively well off. He later was in the real estate business. Michael outlived two wives and married a third and had a total of nineteen children. The youngest child was Hugh Magevney Sr., a well-known attorney of Memphis. Among the nineteen were two members of the Ursuline community headquartered in Brown County, Ohio.

Catherine Magevney, born in New Brunswick in 1841, took the religious name of Sister Borgia. She was a musician and one who could bring merriment with her guitar and Irish songs. A child is said to have remarked, "I believe Sister Borgia could draw music out of a stick." She also was able to write very interesting letters, written so well that teachers would use them as examples in English classes. She died in 1908.

Ellen Magevney (1872-1960) was Sister Borgia's half-sister. It was while visiting Sister Borgia at Brown County that her widowed father Michael met Elizabeth O'Driscoll, who then was a postulant there. Elizabeth soon realized that she did not have a religious vocation and instead became Mr. Magevney's third wife. Ellen was one of the children of this marriage.

After completing high school, Ellen spent a year in France studying piano and French. She joined

the Ursuline community, taking the name Sister Angela, and became a teacher of piano, English, French, religion, and biology at the Brown County academy. She was sent to the community's girls school in Cincinnati to teach in 1898 and soon was appointed Directress there. Under her wise guidance, the small school grew, which greatly encouraged its friends. In 1916 she was elected Superior of the community and returned to the Mother House at St. Martin's in Brown County. She was reelected Superior in 1919 and subsequently served as Mistress of Novices. She was an "exact religious" and worked with precision. It is said that she was a "lovely lady." (With thanks to the Ursulines of Brown County.)

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Michael McGivney died in 1854 in Sessiagh, never having seen America. But his children, and especially his nine religious grandchildren, made great contributions here, using their rich spiritual heritage from Land of Saints and Scholars to help build up a new branch of Christendom.



**Abstracts from
The Catholic Telegraph**
(Continued, from Vol. XXIII, No. 11)

November 26, 1846

INFORMATION WANTED
Of JAMES WHELAN, of Old Grange, County Waterford, Ireland. When last heard from he was in Cincinnati. Any information respecting him will be thankfully received by his nephew,

JAMES WHELAN,
Somerset, Ohio.

December 31, 1846

Subscriptions received:
Rev. Mr. L'Amy, Danville, O.
M. Stafford, Marietta, O.
Valentine Owsney, Steubenville, O.
James McGinness, do

Jan. 21, 1847

Subscriptions:
L. A. Zimmer, Portsmouth, O.; William White, Dover, O.; Rev. C. P. Montgomery and John Lynch, Zanesville, O.

Feb. 11, 1847

DIED in St. Mary's Convent, Somerset, on Sunday morning, 31st ult., sister Josepha (LYNCH) after a painful and protracted illness of nearly two years, which she bore with a degree of fortitude and resignation worthy of a Christian and a religious.

Subscriptions:
Mrs. Beecher, M. Garaghty, and Henry Blair, Lancaster, O.; E. W. Leeds, Columbus, O.

February 25, 1847

Subscriptions:
Hugh Brennan, Marietta, O.
William Wiseman, Sen., West Rushville, O.

March 4, 1847

[Died at the residence of her father Mr. Edward Gallagher near Wooster, Miss Eliza Gallagher, aged 16 years.]

Subscriptions:
John Gallagher, Batesville, O.; W. J. Clark; Conrad Snider, and Michael Dittoe, Somerset, O.; Thomas McMullen, Mt. Vernon, O.; James Taylor, Duncans Falls, O.; W. Mattingly, Zanesville, O.

May 6, 1847

Subscriptions:
William M'Caddon, Zanesville; Rev. M. Lamy, Danville, O.; Michael Boyle, Mt. Vernon, O.

May 13, 1847

[Account of the laying of the cornerstone of St. James Church, Wheeling.]

Subscriptions: Jacob Fink, Somerset, O.

May 20, 1847

Died, on the 5th inst. at St. Mary's Literary Society, Somerset, Ohio, Miss Emily J. M. Wilson of consumption, in the fifteenth year of her age.

The deceased amiable young lady was Niece to the Very Rev. G. J. Wilson, O.S.D. and was at the age of eight years received by him into our holy Church, and soon after placed, for education, in the above mentioned institution where she became distinguished by the most amiable qualities of her sex and age, obedience, humility, gentleness, and suavity of manners to all around her. The exemplary patience and resignation she manifested in her sufferings, especially as the close of her mortal life approached, together with the unearthly sweetness and benignity that beamed on her countenance, inspired her beholders with admiration. ...Miss E. J. Wilson gave up her soul into the hands of her Creator on the feast of St. Pius the Fifth, Pope and Confessor,...

May 27, 1847

Subscriptions:

Edward Gallagher, Batesville, O.

June 17, 1847

Subscriptions:

P. McMullen, Rehoboth, O.

C. McCarthy, Newark, O.

Robert Gallagher, Batesville, O.

F. Dantramont, Wheelersburg, O.

Joseph Mattingly, Zanesville, O.

INFORMATION WANTED

Of JOHN M'NAMEE, son of Conrad M'Namee and Mary Nugent. When last heard from he was at Portland, Ia. [Indiana], on Wabash River. -- Also -- of PETER, son of the same parents, last heard from at Baltimore, Md. Any information or both or either will be thankfully received by their parents and family residing in the neighborhood of Rehoboth, Perry Co., Ohio.

June 24, 1847

Subscriptions:

W. Edwards, Chauncy, O.

July 8, 1847

Subscriptions:

Rev. N. D. Young, Somerset, O.

Martin Scott, Somerset, O.

Thomas Kelly, Zanesville, O.

July 15, 1847

Subscriptions:

M. Mennet, Somerset, O.

J. F. Bidenhorn, Batesville, O.

John O'Rourke, Rehoboth, O.

P. McMullen, do

James Gallagher, [Old] Washington, O.

July 22, 1847

Subscriptions:

W. M. Anderson, Chillicothe, O.

Thomas Kelly, Zanesville, O.

Rev. Mr. Schonat, Columbus, O.

Miss Martha Clark, Columbus, O.

August 5, 1847

DIED on the 12th July, in Delaware, Ohio, of consumption, Mrs. Mary McKibben, in the 30th year of her age. Mrs. McK. was a convert to the Catholic Church, of which she was a most edifying member. She was attended in her last illness by Rev. Mr. Schonat of Columbus, and received the sacraments...

Aug. 12, 1847

DISTRIBUTION OF PREMIUMS

AT ST. MARY'S LITERARY SOCIETY,
SOMERSET, OHIO, JULY 29TH, 1847.

[Names of pupils receiving awards:

Mary Bradley, Eveline Beckwith, Catharine Bennet, Harriet Bennet, Susan Cain (senior), Maria Cain (senior), Catherine Colinbaugh, Louisa Costigan (junior), Maria Costigan, Regina Costigan (junior), Margaret Coulehan (senior), Ellen Cross, Ann Delong, Gertrude

Dittoe (junior), Mary Drogy, Elizabeth Elder, Maria Elder, Martha Elder (junior), Emily Fink, Matilda Fink (junior), Sarah Fink, Matilda Freeman, Sarah Freeman, Catharine Gallin (junior), Mary Gallin (junior) Agnes Handwerker, Elizabeth Hart (senior), Clara Harvey (junior), Mary Henderson, Isabella Hewit (junior), Mary Hewit (senior), Margaret Jackson, Mary Jackson (senior), Laina Johnson, Catherine McDonald, Elizabeth McDonald (junior), Sarah McDonald (junior), Catherine McKenny (senior), Mary Magruder, Mary Murphy, Mary O'Brian (senior), Louisana Orndorff (senior), Mary Padgett (junior), Ann Parder, Penelope Parker, Margaret Polon (or Polan) (junior), Caroline Postlewait, Malinda Postlewait (senior), Elizabeth Reese (junior), Mary Sheridan (senior), Ann Slevin, Mary Slevin, Sarah Slevin, Harriet Trunnel (junior), Jane Trunnel (junior), Mary Walker, Margaret Young]

August 19, 1847

Subscriptions:

John McNally, Frankfort, O.
St. Mary's Seminary, Somerset, O.

August 26, 1847

OBITUARY

Died at St. Mary's Convent, Somerset, Ohio, on the 12th inst., Sister Angela Lynch in the 25th year of her age. We record with grief the death of this pious Sister; her loss to the community of which she had been for 4 years a most exemplary member cannot be easily repaired. In the prime of her life and in the midst of her usefulness, her

sisters in religion as well as the pupils of their Academy, will long feel her death as a great affliction for themselves...

Sept. 16, 1847

Subscriptions:

Adam Muler [?] Jr., Delaware, O.

[An advertisement for St. Mary's Female Literary Society, Somerset appears in this issue.]

Sept. 23, 1847

Subscriptions:

And. Stanton, Wilksville, O.
A. Buckingham, Mt. Vernon, O.

Sept. 30, 1847

Died on the 18th inst. of pulmonary consumption, at his residence on Meigs-creek, Morgan county, Ohio, Mr. PATRICK SHERLOCK, aged 62 years. The deceased was a native of Ireland, born in county Tipperary, and emigrated to this country in the year 1816. -- For the last 28 years he lived at his late residence on Meigs-creek, where by his zeal and genuine Catholic piety a new and beautiful frame church sprang up in the midst of the forest, surmounted by the emblem of the true Faith and sign of man's salvation. In the erection of this temple of God, where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is monthly offered, he met opposition and encountered difficulties... He has left a numerous and excellent family to mourn his loss, consisting of a fond and affectionate wife and twelve children, all walking humbly in his footsteps...and a large circle of friends and acquaintances...

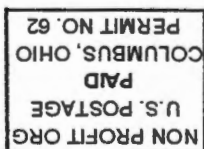
(To be continued)

Catholic Record Society – Diocese of Columbus

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