



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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AUTHOR FIALKA DISCUSSES HIS NEW BOOK *SISTERS—CATHOLIC NUNS AND THE MAKING OF AMERICA*

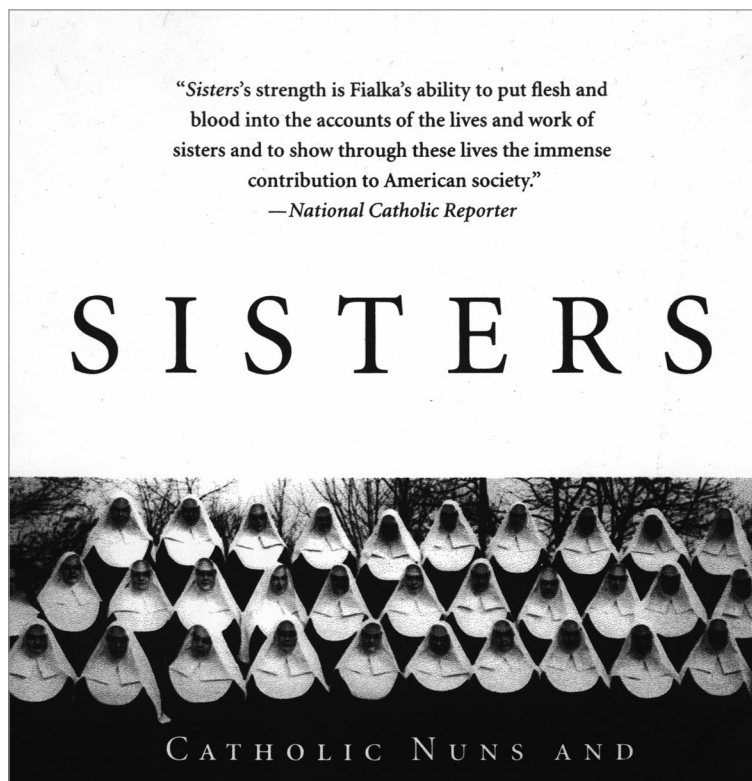
John Fialka of the Wall Street Journal's Washington bureau will give a talk on his new book *Sisters—Catholic Nuns and the Making of America*. This event is co-sponsored by Salve Regina University and The Museum of Newport Irish History on Tuesday evening, June 8th.

To quote the book jacket: "In the 1800s, nuns moved west with the frontier, building hospitals and schools in immigrant communities. They provided aid during the Chicago fire, cared for orphans and prostitutes during the California Gold Rush, and brought professional nursing skills to field hospitals on both sides of the Civil War.

In the 1900s, nuns built the nation's largest private school and hospital systems, and brought the Catholic Church into the Civil Rights Movement. Nuns became the nation's first cadre of independent, professional women. Some nursed, some taught, and many created and managed new charitable organizations, including large hospitals and colleges. Sweeping in its scope and insight, *Sisters* reveals the spiritual wealth that those women invested in America."

While Mr. Fialka's book discusses many of the four hundred orders of nuns that emerged in America, he concentrates his story on the Sisters of Mercy, who, not coincidentally, established Salve Regina University in 1934 in Newport. Fialka's book relates the details of the founding of the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin by Catherine McAuley, and her determination to build the first home on posh Baggot Street in 1827. It was to be a statement about the Irish emerging from the Penal Laws of the 17th Century.

Mr. Fialka's talk should be insightful and entertaining. Please save the date, Tuesday, June 8th at 7 p.m. A light reception will follow his talk and copies of the book will be available for sale and signing. The program will be held at the Young Building (The Pell Center), Bellevue Avenue, corner of Ruggles.





GRANT AWARDED AT RECEPTION

Board member Alex O'Donnell hosted a reception at her home for the Museum Board members to meet Eric Hertfelder, the new Executive Director of Fort Adams Trust, and for the Museum to present a grant award check to architect Richard Long. At the April 7th reception, President Vincent Arnold presented Architect Long with a check for \$1,500 for Richard's drawing set of what is now a part of 19 Sherman Street, Newport, but was originally the Barney Street St. Joseph's church building. The Museum had obtained a grant from the Newport Restoration Foundation for this effort.

President Arnold presents a check to architect Richard Long at the April reception at Alex O'Donnell's home. Alex is on the left of the photo, Long in the center. (Museum photo)

MUSEUM DONATIONS

An 1841 poster for the sale of property and "Interest in two Lives" was donated to the Museum by Father George McCarthy. The poster, right, details the property to be sold and the "interest in two lives, presumably the interest in indentured servants who were to be sold with the land. Also, note that the 'lives' (Not even the names, or gender are noted) are also insured for 600 pounds-quite a sum for that time. (Kings County is now called Offaly). Father McCarthy also donated a ceremonial sword and scabbard, of the Knights of St. Patrick, beautifully engraved, from about 1890. The Museum plans to photograph the engraving and provide a suitable case for display.

KING'S COUNTY

To be Sold,

THE

INTEREST IN TWO LIVES,

Ages, 35, and 46, (both in perfect health,)

In a Property adjoining the Post and Market-town of Frankford, known as part of the Lands of Kilnegaul; and Blakeley's Holding, consisting of a Country Mill, several Houses, and about Thirty Acres of Land, Irish Plantation Measure. The whole let to two Tenants, and producing £80, 2s. 3d. per annum.

Said Property is not subject to any head rent, and a Policy of Insurance for £600 on the two Lives in question will be handed over to the Purchaser.

N.B.—If not Sold, a Loan on Mortgage would be negotiated for on advantageous terms to the Mortgager, and the Policy of Insurance kept up at cost of Mortgager to secure the Lender.

Application to be made to JOSHUA NUNN, Esq. Solicitor, 6, Dawson-street, Dublin, who will shew the Title Deeds; or to WILLIAM B. M'VITY, Esq., Belturbet, Co. Cavan.

NOVEMBER 26, 1841.

P. JOLLY, Printer, 15, Angleson-street, Dublin.

Timmy the Woodhooker

by Martin Murphy

The time is around the 1930s or 40s. Depression time in a two level economy in Newport.

Drive around the breathtaking Ocean Drive and inhale the salty aroma and listen to the crash of the waves on coastal rocks older than mankind.

The landscape, mostly on the inland side of the drive, is lined with well-groomed estates. Mansions meticulously kept, all staffed with the most professional of career servants available, trained in a time-honored occupation, maintaining their posts to the ultimate in perfection.

Along the famous Bellevue Avenue, you can see the long driveways which lead to substantial homes, with expensive chauffeur-driven limousines awaiting the orders of the day. Gardeners raking the gravel driveways, footmen tending their duties at the door and you can just imagine how busy it is inside the mansions. For twelve miles you are surrounded by opulence. The summer watering holes of the robber barons, the captains of industry, the decision makers of our country. They all followed the roads that lead to Newport.

Side streets offer a diverse selection of costly large homes, all competing with each other. The crucial point here was how far can you go to for social acceptance. To be established in this society was the goal of many who chose to build and summer here.

In many cases, social and business careers were made or broken in this summer capital of society. Stories too numerous to unfold here are a part of this history.

But look, what is that coming down palatial Bellevue Avenue? It's not a limousine or a horsedrawn carriage. Cautiously approaching this shape, it emerges as a person walking,

slightly bent from some burden at hand. The burden, at closer examination, is a wheelbarrow. A wheelbarrow full of odds and ends. Items that look like they were part of a trash pickup. And they were.

Who was this person and what was he doing on this road, let alone in this area? Most of the 32,000 citizens of Newport knew very well who this person was and what he was about. His name was Timothy

THE TIMMY THE WOODHOOKER STORY

With the kind permission
of the author,
Martin Murphy III,
we have reproduced
Martin's story on
the legendary Timmy
the Woodhooker
which appeared in
Newport Life in its
Fall issue of 1993.
We think you'll enjoy
this article, as we have
had a number of
citizens mention their
experiences with Timmy
and his sister Julia.

Francis (the Woodhooker) Sullivan. He was, in the most positive sense, a town character.

A little background on Timmy, at this point, would be helpful. He was born on November 15, 1883, in Fall River, Massachusetts, the son of Eugene Sullivan, a section foreman for the railroad. His mother's name

was Mary and her maiden name also was Sullivan.

Conflicting reports show the residence of the parents in 1883 as Fall River. He had a sister who was affectionately known as "Dirty" Julia. He attended St. Mary's church and elementary school on Spring Street in Newport.

His home was located on Sharon Court on the fringe of the 400 society, namely the famous 5th Ward of Newport. His peers were mostly Irish Catholic blue collar workers and to the man, they all had nicknames. "Woodhooker" came from Timmy's eventual choice of a career.

To describe Timmy, you would have to place him in another part of town, for his appearance and demeanor were certainly in contradiction to his surroundings. He was tall, slightly bent, usually wore work clothes or clothes that eventually became work clothes, regardless of their original intent. He was a kind person, though perhaps a little scary to the young. His friendliness was unmistakable and if he was without his wheelbarrow, most often he would be offered a ride by any passing motorist—well, most motorists.

He was conversant on a multitude of subjects and as he spoke, one would suspect that he was well educated, as his speech offered a touch of "Harvard lockjaw," giving you the impression of his association with higher learning.

Timmy's sister, "Dirty" Julia, was no female Beau Brummell. Like her brother, she was independent and an individualist. She could often be seen in her yard attired in a heavy bathrobe. Sometimes with a sneaker on one foot and a rubber boot on the other.

His family owned several pieces of property in the Sharon Court area of lower Thames Street. His sister, for a time, owned a variety store of sorts near the corner of Thames and Wellington Avenues.

Timmy worked at several trades in his early years—from 1907 to around 1936, he worked for Dalton E. Young, Grocer; as a driver for Pinninger & Manchester Coal Co. and the Perry Coal Co. Other occupations included being laborer at the Naval Training Station and later a driver for a company at 24 West Narragansett Avenue.

The old Gruen Villa estate was being broken up on Bellevue Ave., and parcels became available for sale. A former gardener's house, located on the southwest corner of Bellevue and Howe Avenue, was bought at auction by the Sullivan family. The style of the house was Newport Cottage.

In 1937, Timmy's ventured into the salvage business. Though a hard worker who kept long hours, Timmy's main drawback was that all his pickings of the day ended in his yard on the corner of Bellevue and Howe Avenues. Many locals would come here to pick up that old sink or tub, that certain length board or an old door and paid good cash for their purchase. As he collected more and stored his inventory in his yard, he would increase the lack of aesthetic compatibility his property had with his elegant abutters.

Most residents in the ward were not surprised to see Timmy wandering through the neighborhood, seeking out the re-usable, re-saleable items that former owners considered junk. Timmy had an eye for value.

The saying, "One man's junk is another man's treasure" certainly suited Timmy and his assessment of the day's harvest. Trip after trip, day after day, Timmy would truck through the highways and byways of the "ward." How many treks he would make per day with his booty no one knows. He was an accepted part

of the scene in that delicate economic

Neighbors became nervous, letters were written, confrontations ensued. To make matters worse, amidst the clutter that now reached to the front of the house, Julia would do her laundry and hang it out to dry on the front porch. Two prominent sisters, known to receive company on a certain day each week, were horrified to find out that their guests had to pass the array of miscellaneous clothing waving in the breeze during a drying cycle. The sisters obviously changed their calling days.

Groups of the summer residents even contacted city fathers, to no avail. Offers to buy out Timmy and Julia, lock, stock and barrel, fell on deaf ears. Even a proposal to send the Sullivans to Florida for a time, all expenses paid, while the yard got cleaned up, never got off the ground.

Howe Avenue was also the road used by Mrs. Peyton Van Rensselaer, who owned the estate called "The Hedges," at the end of Howe Avenue. Mrs. Van Rensselaer was visibly upset each time she had to travel past this ever encroaching collection of "for sale" household items. As time went on and the assortment in Timmy's yard grew, it would appear that it was pushing the boundaries of his property further into Howe Avenue, giving the impression that the street was being absorbed like take over a jungle trail being taken over by nature. Envision Mrs. Van Rensselaer pushing her way through while wielding a large machete to clear a path. She continued her fight for a long spell. She was gutsy and stood up for what she believed to be her rights.

In the ensuing battle of Timmy "The Woodhooker" verses "Society," Timmy was always the gentlemen and as time went on, I am sure that this invoked additional wrath from Mrs. Van Rensselaer's followers. Eventually, Mrs. Van Rensselaer and company circulated petitions to the

neighbors resulting in thirty-six signatures. It asked the Sullivans to remove the debris. The case against the Sullivans weakened when several notables refused to sign the petition, such as Mrs. Auguste Noel and Sullivan's next door estate owner, Mrs. Harold Brown, who was quoted as saying, she'd "never put anyone out of his home."

Finally, in 1949 Mrs. Van Rensselaer was successful in obtaining a court order preventing the Sullivans from using Howe Avenue as a storage area. The two adversaries came to some sort of agreement. Timmy would not use Howe Avenue for storage and Mrs. Van Rensselaer promised not to interfere with Timmy's operation.

On October 18, 1957, Timmy passed away. In an obituary concerning Timmy's, death "It was alleged that she (Mrs. Rennselaer) had attempted to disturb their way of life, had rendered gratuitous advice to Miss Sullivan on her coiffure, had taken unauthorized photographs and tried to examine the contents of Mr. Sullivan's wheelbarrow." His funeral, held at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Newport, was one of the largest held there. He was a legend in his own time. His sister Julia passed away twelve years later. The home on Bellevue was demolished several years prior to Julia's death.

In researching Timmy's interesting life, I visited the Fall River City Hall. Not knowing where to begin, I approached a police sergeant on duty there and explained my mission. His name tag displayed a name of obvious Irish origin. He showed me where I could find the birth records that I was looking for. His curiosity: got the better of him and he asked me to give him a few hints about the story. I couldn't resist telling him the entire tale. I will never forget his parting words. With a hint of an Irish brogue, he said, "For sure, God put him there."



Photo credit: Katherine Whitney Lucey

A MEMORIAL

The entire state paid final respects to Judge Florence Murray, who passed away on March 28, 2004. Retired Rhode Island Supreme Court Justice Florence (Kerins) Murray was the first woman to serve on the State Supreme Court, and was respected by all for her diligence and service to the law. The Museum of Newport Irish History recognizes Judge Murray, one of the original Honorary Board members, for her support for the Museum's work. Her knowledge and support of Irish history and immigration in Newport County was legendary. Judge Murray will be sadly missed.

MUSEUM WISH LIST

Standard 4-drawer file cabinet (good condition)

Typewriter stand

Please call (401) 847-2890 or (401) 848-0661
and leave a message

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Museum welcomes recent new members

From Portsmouth:

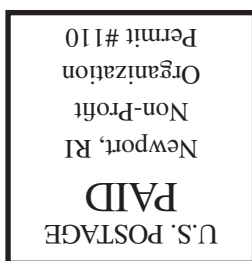
Bill and Edna Parker

Charley and Sheila Collins

From Little Compton:

Jim and Eileen McDermott

WELCOME TO ALL AND THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY
P.O. Box 1378
Newport, RI 02840

JOIN THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY AND SUPPORT YOUR IRISH HERITAGE

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