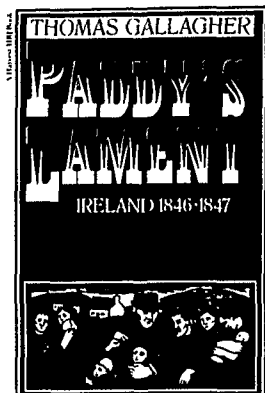


Paddy's Lament: Through the Golden Door

by Thomas Gallagher



NYIHR member Thomas Gallagher is the author of *Paddy's Lament: Ireland 1846-1847, Prelude to Hatred* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982). In the following excerpt from Chapter 22, Dolores Kinsella, Micky Quinn, and Big Gil, fresh off the Mersey from Cork, experience the New York of 1847 for the first time.

The lower part of the island, on which the city was then built, is shaped like an acute angle, with great bays to the south and deep rivers running along its sides. Steamboats going to and from the interior or round to Boston and other seaports hauled themselves to long wharves down

by The Battery at the southern tip of the island. From there, running roughly northward for three miles on either side of the angle-shaped city, were the ocean-going ships of all nations, tied to docks to discharge or receive cargo, their flags and pennants flying as if in tribute to the ferry-steamers that kept running back and forth between Manhattan and such satellite cities as Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Jersey City, and Hoboken. These ferries were the finest of their class in the world; resembling floating platforms, they were capable of accommodating many carriages in the middle part and hundreds of foot passengers along the sides in long, weather-protected rooms from which the short crossing could be observed as well as enjoyed.¹

With no bridges spanning the rivers at this time, these ferries were as numerous as they were essential. They came and went every five to ten minutes, and as the charge to Brooklyn was one cent, to New Jersey three cents, and to Staten Island, five miles away, only five cents, they handled an immense traffic from dawn to nightfall. Down at the foot of Peck's Slip, Dolores and her friends were stunned when a whole streetful of passengers, carriages, wagons, and carts moved forward on cue and boarded the Williamsburg Ferry. No sooner was she loaded and her gate closed than she steamed off on another trip, sliding through the water between the busily loading and unloading ships from all over the world.

The city was literally jammed with maritime traffic, with ships all but on the streets themselves on both sides of the island, their unloaded cargoes pressing day by day upon the business and residential sections in the middle. In this lower part of the city, with merchandise arriving from near and far, space at a premium, and trade and commerce expanding, there was a growing tendency for a particular kind of business activity to gravitate into the same street and concentrate itself there. The hardware dealers, for example, were located on Platt and nearby streets; the leather dealers on Ferry Street; the hat and fur dealers on Water Street, and the wholesale grocers on Front Street and intersecting crosstown streets like Beekman and Dover. Wall Street had the money, stock, and bond operations, and Pearl Street, the most irregular and most important business street in the city, had the lucrative importing and dry-goods businesses, which had already expanded into William, Pine, Cedar, Liberty, and other streets.

Reprinted with kind permission of Thomas Gallagher © 1982.

Dolores, Micky, and Big Gil, accustomed as they were to the "still life" of Ireland, where animals often appeared as stationary as the trees and carts moved at a pace slow enough to conceal their movement, hardly knew what to make of the crowds, stores, excitement, and, most of all, combative urban traffic, in which horse-drawn omnibuses, carriages, and hacks, their warning bells keeping pace with their speed, competed like warriors for every inch of passageway. With no stop signs, no traffic cops, and no way of knowing whether a carriage was about to veer around the nearest corner, they had good reason to doubt their own judgement on this first day of their arrival. They would soon learn how it was done, but right now they lingered at intersections, trying to learn when to risk crossing, when not to, and, given the manure and other debris that had to be avoided during the flight to the other side, how much time it required. Once they reached the offices of the Irish-Immigrant Society and were able to check their bags and luggage *free of charge* they became more athletic and daring, more like New Yorkers, in the way they crossed this or that avenue or street.

Nearly half a million human beings now lived on this island where two centuries earlier only a few hundred traders lived. The end of the American Revolution had seen an influx of people fired with ambition, enterprise, and a new spirit of freedom. They had come from both the hinterlands and Europe, creating a population growth never equaled in the history of any city of the Old World—from approximately 22,000 in 1777 to almost 500,000 in 1847, an increase in seventy years of over 2,200 percent.²

Buildings were springing into existence in one street after another, while the city advanced northward into the adjoining country and ascended story upon story into the air. The mixture of poor wooden structures and splendid mansions was giving way to a long series of high and handsome buildings of brown sandstone and brick, with several of white marble and granite. In the old sections below Prince Street, private homes, long since vacated by the wealthy, were being replaced by six-story and sometimes nine-story brick or stone buildings whose main floors were rented by fashionable stores and shops.

The hoist, or elevator, a device used to provide vertical transportation in buildings, made these higher structures possible. Though Elisha Graves Otis was yet to invent the safety device (1853) that would prevent an elevator from falling in the event a support cable broke, impetuous New York contractors couldn't wait: the buildings went up higher and higher in the endless quest for more space in the same place and in the belief, so strong then in America and especially in New York, that if an improvement such as a safety device was necessary, it was also inevitable.

Dolores and her friends would come to realize that this kind of hectic transition was characteristic of New York, a city forever in the process of changing from one state or stage to another. Unlike Paris and London, with their homogeneous populations, their built-in resistance to change, and their appearance fundamentally unaltered year after year, New York shocked even returning natives who had been gone only a year or two.

But even more impressive than the upward-soaring buildings were the busy avenues and the streets between them. It was anticipated by the city fathers, when they laid out the plan for the streets of Manhattan, that the heaviest traffic would be east and

west between the rivers, the lighter traffic north and south. They accordingly spaced the crosstown streets close together and the longitudinal streets wide apart. And though they did not envision the invention of the automobile and what it would do to the island's north-south traffic, they wisely made the avenues running north and south wider than all but a few of the crosstown streets.

All the same, in the tightly huddled business section around the southern tip of the island, known as Tory New York because under British rule the city was limited to that area, the streets were the product of accident rather than design. The principal streets—Water, Queen, William, Nassau, and Broadway—ran roughly parallel to the rivers but were interlaced by crosstown streets that started, stopped, and picked up again without any definite aim or direction, met other streets at all sorts of angles, ended in churchyards, narrowed into lanes, or flowed into forks where they mysteriously lost their identity. Some ran into Broadway and then continued on the other side—though never exactly straight through—under a different name. Others were so narrow that sidewalks were forbidden on them. Still others, were so packed with churches, taverns, cemeteries, tailors, grocers, hatters, haberdashers, and lawyers' and doctors' offices that it was hard to imagine a need that could not be satisfied within the distance of a few cobblestones.

These picturesque irregularities in the layout of the oldest city streets delighted some residents and annoyed others. In some sections, trees grew out of the middle of sidewalks, which were often no more than hard-packed dirt lanes, slightly raised, or planked with oak. Pump handles, hitching posts, bay windows, pitched roofs, stairs, stoops, and open gates obtruded into walking areas. Odd and even numbers were given to houses regardless of the side of the street they were on, and in some cases two houses bore the same number. The tailor at 62 Broad Street might or might not be next to the lawyer at 64. A grocer who happened to like the number 65 might be between them. The still-unpaved streets were seasonally so filled with puddles, mudholes, sheets of ice, or swirling pockets of dust that women "foot passengers" were carried by their husbands or friends from one side to the other, while their male counterparts gave the widest possible berth to carters, draymen, and fishmongers driving faster than a walk. Even the paved streets presented problems, though, for the cobblestones were laid in at such a slant from the curbs (to form a sunken and usually clogged gutter in the middle of the road) that New Yorkers were said to be identifiable by their gait alone. . . .

It was impossible to live in New York long without developing an eager interest in the news. Everybody from the shoeshine man to the doctor was aware of yesterday's murder or scandal, the number of casualties suffered in the most recent tenement fire, and the latest news from Europe, brought to town by the constant flow of incoming ships. "What's the news?" had already been shortened to "What's new?"

Unlike London, where everything taxable was taxed, New York had no duty imposed upon publishing or advertising, no tax levied on the manufacture of paper, no bond or security requirements at the custom house. The result was that a newspaper sold in New York for one-fourth what it did in London, where it was shared in every hotel lobby by the hotel's guests and then read the next day and the day after that by the hotel staff. In New York, newspapers were so plentiful and sold for so little (the high-circulation dailies sold for a penny) that they were to be seen in the hands of the laboring as well as the wealthy classes. On Broad-

way, at the doors of department stores, in railway cars and omnibuses, boys sold them until each day's edition ran out. At the Astor Hotel, every man sitting down for breakfast had his own *Herald*, *Post*, *Sun*, *Tribune*, or *Commercial Advertiser*. Over 120,000 newspapers were sold every day in New York in 1847, and read by the majority of its half-million residents. In Dublin, where the price of a newspaper was eight times that in New York, there were but five thousand copies published a day for its 300,000 inhabitants.³

Almost every idea about New York and how to improve it found voice in the daily press. Every officeholder, every legislative measure, was scrutinized with the most searching freedom. The press entered every home, office and public place, generating and spreading ideas with epidemic speed among the families of charwomen, cartmen, merchants, lawyers, manufacturers, and public officials. The children of the poor were fed almost as many ideas a day as those of the wealthy; every garret, cellar, cottage, townhouse, and mansion became, in the evening at supper, a center of discussion about the day's events. With no radio, no television, and only the ringing of the bell in the cupola of City Hall to tell New Yorkers the approximate location of the latest fire, information came from letters received, visiting friends, incoming ships, and, most of all, because it was always on time and always anticipated, the daily press.

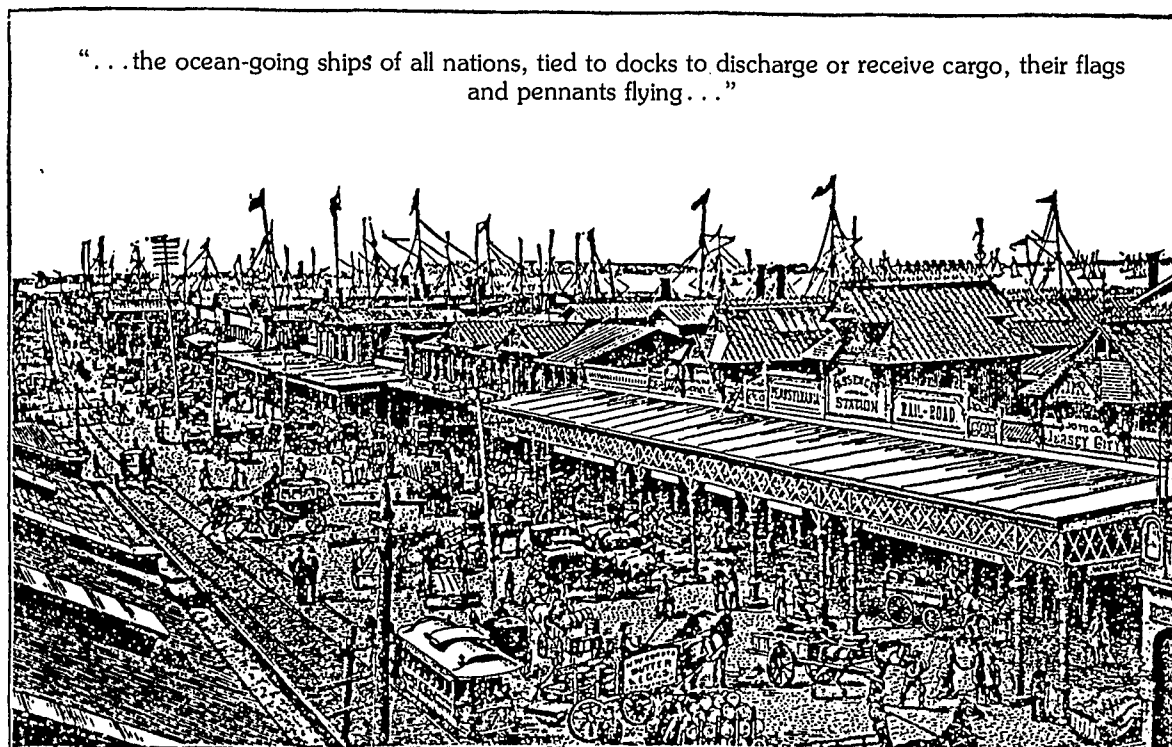
People knew that the newspapers lied, that the telegraph lied, that it was hard to get at the truth, and yet they wanted to hear or read about the latest talk, gossip, or rumor. They had to know what was said about this or that civic proposal or jury verdict, who was being talked about and by whom. Tomorrow would no doubt bring more contradictions and more lies, but for now they had to join the crowd and take in the strange fun and excitement. And if a controversy arose and two opposing sides developed, they would take one side or the other. There was no time to think, inquire, reason impartially, or wait for evidence and certainty. The great gregariousness of New York, the crowding in of ships from the world over, the telegraph, the public meetings, and the teeming press, all combined with the nervous temperament and tempo of the city to keep the people in a state of compulsively cooperative excitement. . . .

As they walked along, going whichever way impulse took them, Dolores and her friends were struck by how often they passed a slaughterhouse—sometimes two in the same street.

"I say this without fear of rebuttal," Gil said. "More meat is eaten in this city in a week than in all of Ireland in a year."

There were in fact over one hundred slaughterhouses in the city at this time, many of them operating in the most densely populated tenement areas. With no reliable refrigeration to preserve the meat for any length of time (natural ice from commercial icehouses went mostly to restaurants and oyster cellars), droves of cattle, sheep, and hogs were driven six days a week to these establishments, through streets clogged first with their droppings and then, after they were slaughtered, with their blood and waste matter. In many cases, the slaughtering could be seen by anyone passing along the street, and after school hours, the presence of children—twelve-year-old boys hired to clean the floors—was not uncommon. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children apparently did not consider this cruelty, for the practice continued for another forty years. On Eldridge Street, Dolores and her companions saw one woman with a four-year-old girl talking to a butcher in plain sight of the slaughtering. Judging from the look on the little girl's face, it was a sight she would never forget.

Not far away, in the same neighborhoods, were related trades,



noisome places where entrails were cleaned, bones boiled, fats melted, hides cured, tripe treated, and swill prepared, all of them adding to the emanations from the manure heaps, uncleaned stables, and overflowing backyard privies. Without a brisk wind blowing it was hard to breathe, let alone live, eat, sleep, and cook, in such a neighborhood, but live there the Irish did, along with a few ragpicking Germans and perhaps one or two of the early-arriving Russian Jews. It was a question not so much of choosing a suitable place to live but of finding a place you could afford, within walking distance, if possible, of where you earned your living.⁴

Most surprising to Dolores was the closeness of these foul neighborhoods to the charming streets where the wealthy lived in townhouses well attended by Irish servant girls, who every day, she would soon learn, brought good things to eat from the townhouse kitchens to their mothers and fathers in the adjoining slums. Dolores, unaware that this proximity of poverty and wealth had been a peculiarity of New York since early in the eighteenth century, was unable to imagine that it would continue through her century and on into the twentieth, when the highest and most sumptuous apartment buildings would rise next to and share the same shops and restaurants with the ugliest slums.

Even the wealthy, famous, and well-traveled found New York an extraordinary place in the middle of the last century. It did not and never would achieve the indefinable unity of atmosphere that characterized Paris, nor did its precious few landmark buildings compare with those strewn like gems all over London. With its constant influx of new people with different religions, languages, and backgrounds, its new buildings going up and old buildings coming down, its ever-changing banners, advertisements, and newspapers, New York seemed to be trying day in, day out to divest itself of the past. Yet it was this very feeling of transitoriness, that each new day, win or lose, was worth a wager, that made New York something like a vast and marvelous casino.

The famous department stores with their abundance and variety of merchandise only added to the excitement and diversity. Wealthy visitors wrote home about these stores and shops, the sumptuous hotels, the service, the food, and the beautiful women,

whose delicacy and butterfly caution accentuated the filth of the streets on which they were seen. But they would remember New York primarily as a place whose power and alacrity to change far exceeded their own capacity to adjust.

In most European cities, the wealthy and the poor were separated not only socially but geographically as well—in fact, the one group seldom saw the other. The wealthy had no reason to visit the poor sections, and while the reverse was true of the poor, they did so only with good reason, when called upon to render some necessary service. The European visitor to New York was thus unprepared to find a charming neighborhood within walking distance of the underside of the city's life and its Pandora's box of evils—the obnoxious debris, night soil, vegetable refuse, and all the smells they created. It was not unusual for a judge to live only a block away from the chimney sweep who every six months cleaned his chimney. The judge lived with all the amenities in a beautifully kept house built to his specifications. The chimney sweep lived with no amenities at all in a room with his wife and six children. True, the wealthy were in the process of moving to the more exclusive sections to the north, where the streets were now being numbered instead of named, but the process took time, and meanwhile, the Europeans continued to write home about how their wealthy New York friends lived right next door to poverty. Not even their New York friends would have believed that such would always be the case, no matter where in the city they moved.

Footnotes

¹ William Chambers, *Things As They Are In America* (London & Edinburgh, 1854), p. 35; E. Porter Belden, *Past, Present & Future* (New York, 1849), p. 35.

² Belden, *Past, Present & Future*, p. 44.

³ Belden, *Past, Present & Future*, p. 117; Chambers, pp. 203-07.

⁴ J. Mooney, *Nine Years in America* (New York, 1850), pp. 144-45; John Duffy, *A History of Public Health in New York City: 1624-1866* (New York, 1968), pp. 180-84; *New York Evening Post*, June 12, 1832, March 18, 1839; New York Association, 41st Annual Report, 1844, pp. 21-24.

THE RECORDS

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

Vincent Martin

WAS INITIATED A MEMBER

of the

**FERMANAGH MEN'S
S. & B. Association**

ON

Thomas Monaghan Fin. Secretary

Address *251 Forest ave*

**FERMANAGH MEN'S
CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS**

ARTICLE I
Name and Object

Section 1. This organization shall be known as The Fermanagh Men's Social and Benevolent Association.

Section 2. Its objects are: First, Mutual Benefit. Second, Promoting social entertainment. Third, to take concerted action, whenever practicable, with Irish National organizations in all matters pertaining to the welfare of our race and the advancement of our country's cause.

ARTICLE II
Membership

Section 1. To be eligible for membership a person must be a native of County Fermanagh, Ireland, or have resided there, or be a descendant of Fermanagh people.

Sec. 2. Definitions—FERMANAGH MEN: Men born within the County of Fermanagh, or men born anywhere descended from a Fermanagh parent. Member in Good Financial Standing: A member of this Association entitled to sick and death benefits.

Sec. 3. Any person wishing to become a member of this Association must be proposed by a member in good standing.

Sec. 4. No member shall propose a candidate for membership unless he knows him personally and considers him a proper person for membership in this Association.

3

1931 By-Laws



Meeting of County Fermanagh S & B Association of New York at the Irish Institute, January 1956

**CONSTITUTION AND
BY-LAWS**

**Article I
NAME**

The Association shall be known as the County Fermanagh Social and Benevolent Association of the City of New York.

**Article II
OBJECTS**

1. To assist each other in obtaining employment.
2. To encourage each other in business.
3. To preserve and promulgate a spirit of Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism among all Irishmen.
4. To encourage the study of the language, literature and history of the Irish people.
5. To render every assistance possible to a brother in distress.

**Article III
BENEFITS**

1. On the death of a member of this Association who is not precluded by its rules and who has been a member in good standing for twelve months, the sum of \$100. shall be appropriated from the funds towards defraying his funeral expenses.

1

1946 By-Laws

Page 375 131

Certificate of Incorporation

The County Fermanagh Men's Benevolent Association

of the County of New York

for membership corporation

I, the undersigned Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York do hereby approve of the within certificate

Dated at *New York City*
this *27th* day of *May* 1903.

John W. Ryan
JUSTICE OF THE SUPREME COURT
OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

STATE OF NEW YORK
SECRETARY OF STATE
JUN 9 - 1903

John W. Ryan
Deputy Secretary of State

1903 Certificate of Incorporation

The County Fermanagh Men's Benevolent Association made its first marching appearance in the New York St. Patrick's Day parade in 1892. On 27 May 1903 the organization incorporated as the County Fermanagh Men's Patriotic and Benevolent Association of the County of New York (above center) with five directors all of whom were living in the Chelsea/Hell's Kitchen area of Manhattan.

By 1919 there was also a Fermanagh Ladies Association and both men and women's groups met on the fourth Thursday of every month at Murphy's Assembly Rooms, 810 Eighth Avenue and held their Grand Annual Ball at the Imperial Lyceum (right). Their recruiting slogan at this time was "Help us in the struggle of Self-determination for Ireland. We need your assistance. Ireland needs our help now."

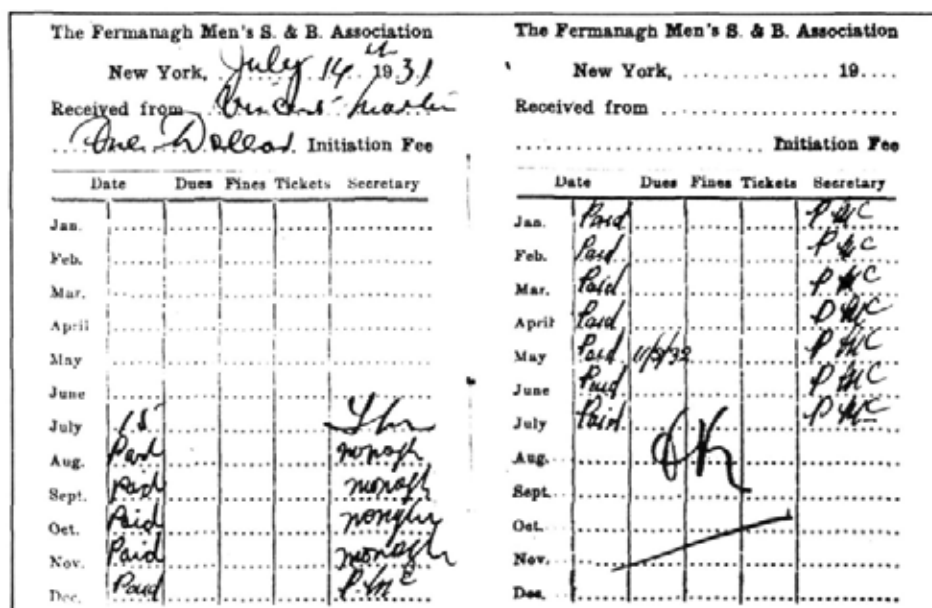
Membership in the Fermanagh Men's Association cost a \$1 initiation fee plus 25 cents per month in 1931 when Vincent Martin joined. His first year's dues were recorded in a little brown membership book (top left and middle right). You could join the association if you had been born in Fermanagh, had resided there, or were the child of a Fermanagh parent.

In 1931 Article XI of the By-Laws prohibited discussion of any question of politics or religion at meetings but provided for Welfare and Sick Visiting Committees as well as Sick and Death Benefits. These amounted to \$6 per week for up to thirty-eight weeks for

SPEAK



Fermanagh dance at the Palm Gardens (?)
circa 1940s.



1931 Dues Record

sickness and between \$50 and \$100 for death depending on one's length of membership. By 1946 sick benefits had been eliminated and the \$100 allotted for the death of a member in good standing was to be paid "only when the treasury balance warrants same." Meetings continued to be held once a month from September to June and from the 1950s often took place at the Irish Institute, 326 West 48th Street. The photo at left shows such a Fermanagh meeting at the Institute; the mural in the background portrays scenes of ancient Ireland and was painted by Irish Institute member Patrick McSweeney of Brooklyn.

Between 1931 and 1946 the objectives of the organization were changed (left top & bottom). "Patriotic" had been replaced by "Social" sometime before 1931 and now "Men" was dropped from the association's name. Accordingly, the emphasis was more on social and cultural activities. One of the 1931 objectives of the Fermanagh Association was "promoting social entertainment" and the 1946 By-Laws included rules to govern balls and entertainment. In the photo at right, an emcee appears to introduce the Arrangements Committee at a dance; notice the accordion player on the far left, the American and Irish flags, and an old Fermanagh County banner. The current banner (above center) portrays the monastic site of Devenish Island in Lower Lough Erne on one side and St. Patrick on the other.

—Marion R. Casey

—Marion R. Casey

Photos and other materials courtesy of John T. Gilroy.

GRAND ANNUAL

2 BALL 2

OF THE

.County Fermanagh.

Men's and Ladies Associations

AT IMPERIAL LYCEUM

Saturday Eve., February 22d, 1919

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY

· Music by Prof. McIntyre

OFFICERS

T. B. Breen, Pres. J. J. Neehan, Vice-Pres.
James Breen, Treasurer J. J. Lynch, Rec. Secretary
James Cleary, Cor. & Fin. Sec. A. Maguire, Sgt.-at-Arms
H. Connelley, Asstt.-at-Arms

TRUSTEES

Andrew Murphy, Chairman M. Rogers Patrick Breen

OFFICERS

Sarah Breen, President Tracie Cox, Vice-Pres.
Margaret Breen, Treasurer Louisa Monaghan, Rec. Sec.
E. Dunlop, Cor. Sec. Mary Higgins, Fin. Sec.
Agnes Owens, Sergt.-at-Arms Annie Bannon, Asstt.-at-Arms

TRUSTEES

Annie Monaghan Mrs. McGouker Mrs. P. Murphy

W. J. McQuinn, Publisher, 212 East 24th St.

County Fermanagh Ball