

THE SHANLEYS OF BROADWAY

By Leo J. Shanley

Leo Shanley, a native of Manhattan, is the grandson of Tom Shanley and a fourth generation Irish New Yorker. The following article is based on family stories, newspapers, business papers and cancelled cheques.

In 1889 there were no first-class or de luxe restaurants operated by the Irish in New York. Shanley's was the first to gain recognition. (There were, of course, scores of Irish chop houses and saloons.) There followed in its wake Cavanagh's on W. 23rd Street in 1892, Healey's "Golden Glades" opened in 1897 and, around the turn of the century, there was the elegant "Churchill's" which was presided over by a former police captain of that name. Another "Irish eatery" that featured first-class cuisine and served the northern end of Manhattan was Fays Restaurant situated in the theatrical district along 125th Street. During and until well after Prohibition there was a Fays located at 207th Street in the Inwood area. There was also a certain Ben Reilly who, circa 1900, opened a rustic dining room in a former grand mansion located in what had been "estate country" on the Hudson River at 117th Street.

ENTRANCE ON FORTY-THIRD STREET SIDE



Exterior, Shanley's Broadway between 43rd and 44th Streets, NYC, circa 1915.

Within a short time of its opening, Shanley's was accepted as one of the three really important restaurants in New York. Sherry's and Delmonico's were the other two. Its nearest competitor on Broadway was Rector's which had styled itself somewhat blasphemously as the "Cathedral of Champagne." Shanley's actually led the city's restaurants in sales of champagnes, over 150,000 bottles a year, accounting by itself for almost a million solid gold dollars in revenue, and this for twenty-five years running.

The name "Shanley" is indigenous to Leitrim, more properly southern Leitrim. In the census of 1850 there were 100 families bearing this name living in the general area of Mohill-Dromod. The name is still quite common there.

In the late 1850's, a certain Margaret Faughnan married a Michael Shanley. They dwelt on his farm and brought into life ten children, eight boys and two girls. They were, evidently, a healthy and outward-looking young couple who could not fill their days with enough productive work to ward off the ever-present shadow of want, for they both were over ten years old during the famine-times. Margaret, a tiny woman, when seated by her stove, clay pipe in hand, would tell of her people's near-

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nakedness, their starvation, their disease and the deaths which came so fast and often that the townsfolk, almost emaciated, could not give them decent burial. They rolled the bodies in straw and pitch, then cremated them. There was scarcely a man or woman strong enough or well enough to dig any graves. Then, hard in famine's wake came the Fenians, clashing between the constabulary and the people, terrifying the country-folk with their guerrilla war-fare and arson.

The Shanleys worked their small farm, raised cows and pigs, ran the local general store and operated the small pub. In her spare time, Margaret, or "Monnie", made lace, both crochet and bobbin, for sale. Michael, a handsome and personable man, acted as salesman and broker for the livestock of his neighbors at the market-days in the towns about his own, for, it was told, he was always able to get more money on the sales than any other man the townsfolk knew.

However, in 1871, this household suffered a disaster. Michael died of pneumonia. He was barely forty, leaving behind Monnie and the children, the oldest was twelve, the youngest not quite one. Clearly, Monnie's laughing and dancing days were over. Without any help, except for what her over-worked family and friends could give, she had to bring up all these children. We have a few photos of her. Her attire is always the same: a Victorian feathered bonnet, a Galway cloak and a simple black dress. She perennially wore these with a most serious look. She seems to age with a granite agelessness: looking at them one asks, "How old is this woman anyway, 50?, 60?, 80?, 100?"



Margaret Faughnan Shanley (seated);
Agnes Murray Shanley (model in her youth)

She was neither permissive nor cruel. She was demanding, explicit and energetic. She had no way of knowing it but she was raising one top-notch farmer and seven excellent businessmen. Her two girls she sheltered with an almost Sicilian protectiveness. Authoritarian, she was no one's idea of a "Mother Machree."

As time went on, it was clear that not all the Shanleys could live on or from this Leitrim land. John, the eldest son, elected to stay. Tom, the second oldest, in his late teens elected to go.

The sale of one of Monnie's precious cows provided his fare. He was to go to America, set himself up, and then, one by one, her other boys would go to him on the strength of his remittances to her back home. She had no need to worry about him, he was bright and had had his apprenticeship with a draper in nearby Carrick-on-Shannon. He was clean-living and full of energy, like herself. She would not miss him much either, for he was stubborn

"Broadway, too, knew its big restaurants, restaurants with an *eclat* and a magnitude unknown in these days. Shanley's was a busy spot. 'Cabaret' was a new term. It was much in evidence here. An elaborate performance was given during dinner. The management consisted of the Shanley brothers, who operated two other Shanley restaurants. The tale is told of Edgar Gibbs Murphy, a genial boulevardier, who said, "Do you know what made the Shanley boys? Of course it was their fine chops and steaks, but there was an incident that helped things along. When the Broadway place opposite Daly's Theater was their main establishment, Charley Delmonico—the famous Delmonico, you understand—used to leave his 26th Street place every night and go up to Shanley's to get his dinner!"

George S. Chapell, *The Restaurants of New York* (NY: Greenberg Publisher, Inc. 1925)

and in love with his own ideas, quite irrespective of her particular discipline. Also he would be going to his American relatives.

By the year 1888 Tom was a buyer for "Ehrich's House of Fashion" on the miracle mile, at 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue, Manhattan, married and the father of three children. He earned a salary of ten thousand a year with bonuses, plus an annual European buyers' trip. He had brought over his three other brothers, Barney, Patrick and Michael. Barney was the Maitre d' of the Union Square Hotel, New York's most fashionable, while Pat was a waiter at Delmonico's. Michael was working at table in the sedate old Brevoort Hotel. A constant, widening flow of money-orders had been going to Monnie now, and the three younger brothers, Peter, Andrew and James, with sister Annie were on the high seas to join forces.

Some Irish tossed away their identity so completely on arrival in the new world that their descendants have no idea from which part of Ireland they came. Others came with a sense of exile, seeking a safe shelter from which to plan the liberation of Eire. Tom and his brothers, while they loved and respected their Irishness, had no great love for Ireland itself, although they loved their fellow Irishmen and -women. Tom and his brothers embraced America completely. Although resolute Democrats, they were "Teddy Roosevelt" style Americans within a short time of their arrival. Tom's attitude was clear, "The problem with Ireland is not the British *alone*, it's poverty. What can a nation of poor people do for themselves? As long as the Irish stay poor, they remain defenseless. Let the young and enterprising go forth to where there is money and opportunity, and send some of their plenty home to those who simply can't get away. If they live a better life, they'd be able to have more self-respect and then take care of the British in *no time*."

The brothers' love for one another and their mutual interdependence led them to form some plan that would allow them to work together. They resolved to go into the restaurant business, and with the guidance and friendship of young John Jacob Astor (1864-1912), they opened a modestly elegant place right in the heart of New York's theatrical and shopping area at 23rd Street and Sixth Avenue. It was an instant success. Tom, with his much travelled worldliness, his aplomb and detailed knowledge of the retail business, was elected by his brothers to head the venture.

In 1889 New York was in the throes of dynamic growth. It was becoming a huge world-city, so that with the opening of "the store," as Tom called it, the Shanleys had carefully prepared a fresh, new approach to dining, one more relaxed, yet totally elegant, on the basis of a menu which both the sophisticated and the naive could appreciate. Prior to 1889 New York was as rigidly stratified socially as was London. One would not dare to dine except "with one's own equals." The middle-class dined mainly in chop houses which,

while plentiful, were generally grim and crude. The service in many of the hotels was very poor, and only visitors and businessmen dined in them. To be sure, there were places of general congregation, such as Niblo's Gardens, Gilmore's Garden and Tony Pastor's, but they were cabaret-cafes, not restaurants. Bon Ton eateries such as Delmonico's and the new Sherry's specialized in banquets within their hotels, featuring restaurants to which blue-ribbon organizations and society repaired only for prime social occasions.

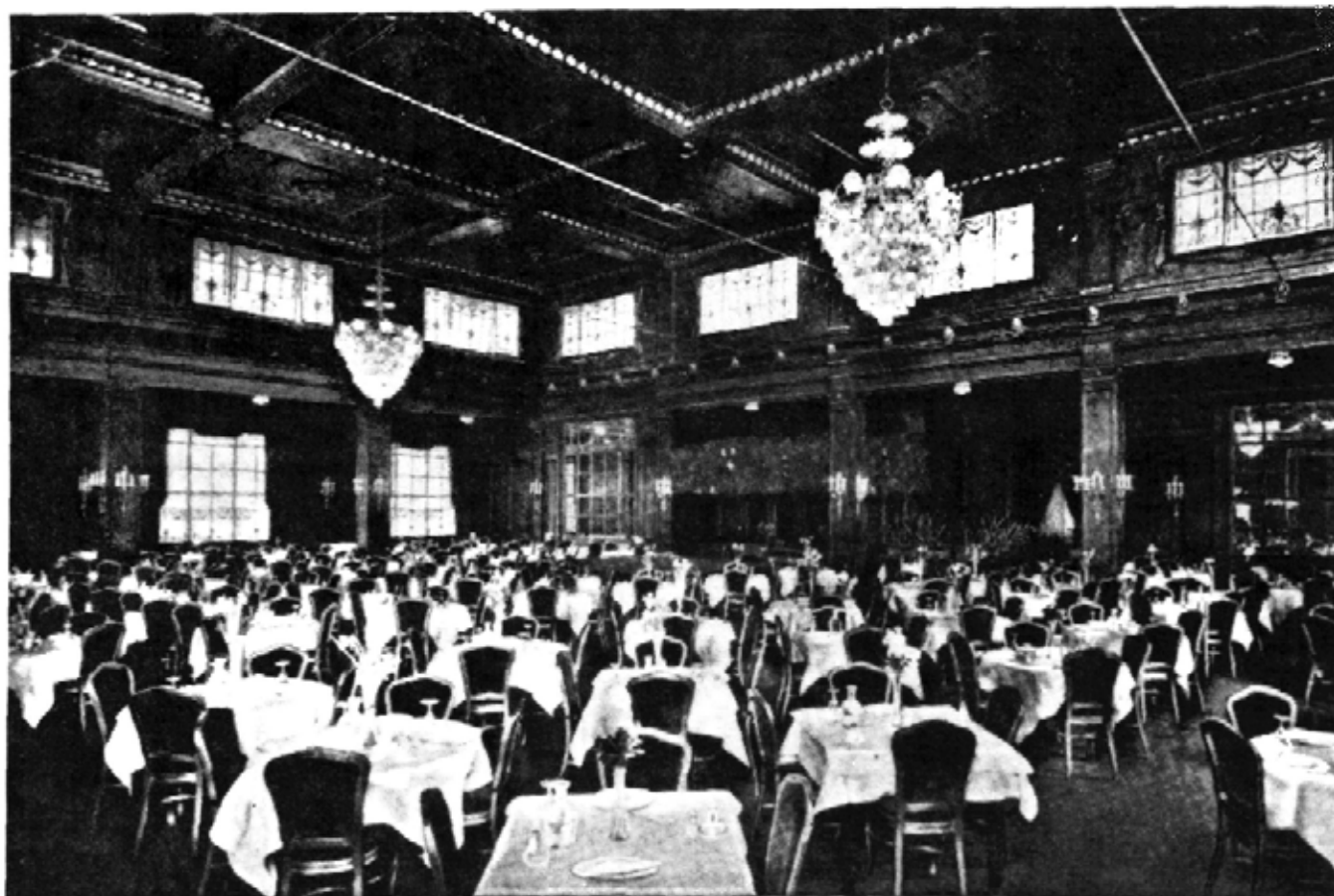


Tom Shanley, Sr., circa 1880

Politicians rarely "dined out," so circumspect were they, so aware of public opinion, but now, whether Republican or Democrat, they were to be seen at Shanley's along with famous athletes, singers, dancers, actors and actresses. There was such an aura of fresh, clean respectability at the "store" that gamblers, "kept" or loose women, shady flashy characters and other members of the demi-monde were never seen. The era of cosmopolitan dining was born and the Irish Americans, borne on the winds of new-found prosperity, dined there with obvious delight.

By 1901 there were three Shanley's restaurants in Manhattan: the original 23rd Street one, another at 30th Street and Broadway and a three story affair at 42nd Street and Broadway on the east side of Longacre (Times) Square.

MAIN DINING ROOM



SHANLEY'S—BROADWAY, FORTY-THIRD TO FORTY-FOURTH STREETS, NEW YORK CITY

Each operation was run by two brothers, with Tom still as president of the partnership-corporation. Many of the staff were countrymen from the other side. A great brace of first cousins were the captains and others, cousins and neighbors, were waiters and other staff. The only non-Irish in the house were the maitre d', an Alsatian, and the continental European chef and cooks who accounted for half the crew. The balance were American-born men and women.

The cuisine was American. Tom rightly decided that the place for European cooking and service was in Europe, that here in the U.S. it could only be a reproduction. America had superior meat, vegetables, fish, seafood and fruits. The cooking was down to earth and great. However, the French chef was not beyond making a few hearty dishes from his home-land, except that they were presented on the menu in English. Only the wines were European, and what wines they were!

By 1909, when the new store was opened on 43rd Street (on the site of the former Paramount Building), Tom had purchased and was serving the huge wine collections of the Baron Rothschild and the Duke of Nassau, thousands of bottles of the world's oldest and rarest vintages which he had obtained at auction in Paris for a mere half million dollars. He didn't matter much on Fifth Avenue, but on Broadway he was of the nobility!

The service in "Shanley's" was bright and prompt. Tom originated the saying to his waiters, "Be pleasant, be smart, be prompt and be gone!"

Tom's friendship with John Jacob Astor in no small way gave him some entree to the governing non-Irish power structure in

New York. Astor was always his landlord and assisted the Shanley brothers' development in vital ways. After Astor's death on the *Titanic* Tom grieved, for he had lost a genuine friend. In the late-1890s, Astor had suggested to Tom that he and his wife Sarah were ideal candidates for entry into "Society" and he would like to "bring them in," which was not a difficult thing for Astor to do; after all, his mother was Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, the empress of American Society and he was New York's leading realtor.

It was Sarah who put her foot down as well as her thumb. She could not abide the ascendancy-society of New York and felt that their loyalties should remain with the Irish Catholics. She valued and kept the personal friendship of John's wife, Ada, but she valued "Irish New York" more. Sarah refused to enter Ada and John's group, thus clearing the way for Thomas Fortune Ryan and his family to be the first Irish Catholics to enter into the world of the people of gold.

The new 43rd Street restaurant was awe-inspiring! It held 1,000 people in the main dining-room, 300 in the grill-room and another 300 in various private dining-rooms. The kitchen underneath it was a block long. And the wine cellar and storage rooms which ran below the kitchen also were one block in length. One entered the restaurant by way of two lobbies, both of which had champagne silk walls, Tabriz carpets and Louis XV furniture. The main dining-room was a huge space panelled in English bog-oak, 30 feet high and almost 100 feet long, with crimson drapes, pure white silk sheer curtains, crimson velvet chairs with gold leaf frames, and a dark brown carpet that weighed nine tons. Overhead were two Caulfield chandeliers six feet in diameter and

nine feet long (the pieces for which, except for a crown of rock crystal, were cast and cut to Caulfield's design by Baccarat). They threw their brilliance (300 light bulbs in each) up to a coffered oak and gold-leaf ceiling, and down on the crowd below. The grill-room was created with the male in mind: Italian walnut paneling, great walnut and leather chairs studded with gilt brass nails, all resting on a domino-black and white marble floor. There were Gorham silver trays for Limoges china (except for the hot plates, "Chenango" American). The glass-ware was elegant and Bohemian, the linen double-damask Belfast, specially woven with the Shanley logo, laundered and ironed on the premises.

In none of these restaurants was there to be found a bar, that is to say, a public bar. Drinks were served only to the seated. However, the most valued customers such as J.P. Morgan, William Randolph Hearst, Gene Tunney or John McCormack would be served at the long service-bar, a portion of which became New York's most exclusive club. Such magnates as Morgan, or the elevator manufacturer, Otis, had their own brandy glasses under lock and key and the careful eye of the head bartender, known as "John the Harp." Each brandy glass occupied its own cabinet.

The restaurants were a statement to the city and the world that American cuisine had arrived first class in a world city, and, more importantly to the Celt, it was in the hands of Irishmen!

The 43rd Street restaurant which was such a joy and an adornment to the public of New York had a massive overhead in spite of its fame and high attendance. In order to offset its costs, Tom, Jr. persuaded his father to offer a seventy-five cent lunch at noon and a full cabaret at night. When the special lunch was announced, the hopeful patrons that first day of spring in 1912 came out in such numbers that mounted police had to be called out to maintain order. For the good of the public safety, Shanley's had to cancel the lunches. The cabaret was something else and its success forced Shanley's chief competitor, Rector's, into bankruptcy. The cabaret had 23 acts, twice a night. Tom, Jr. was always on the look-out for vaudeville favorites and stars who were in town "on short notice," or who were "between engagements." He had a group of regular performers who were more or less secondary and permanent. And thus Shanley's could bring in an almost entirely new review each month, wisely supported by the "old favorites" whom the public loved. He made a few mistakes, though. One was not hiring a big-boned, tall, young soprano from Connecticut because he felt she wasn't physically attractive enough. Her name was Rosa Ponselle.

Broadway in the 1870's, '80's, '90's on to well past the turn of the century had a lot of Irish talent. Among them were Augustin Daly and William A. Brady who were its most prominent producer-directors. Some of its stars were Harrigan and Hart, Dion Boucicault, Chauncey Olcott, Ada Rehan, George M. Cohan, John McCormack, and Victor Herbert.

Victor Herbert was princely and gracious, except when aroused. He was a constant, loyal patron of Shanley's, but an uncomfortable one. If his entree, or the entree of his guest didn't *quite* look right to *him*, back it would go to the kitchen. He despised carrots. Should any one of his guests order them he would counter-mand the guest's request and follow with a short diatribe on carrots which near-by diners could also hear.

In 1914, Herbert conceived the idea of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers which would require that any restaurant, cabaret or hotel which played a composer-member's music would be required to pay a royalty to ASCAP for the pleasure of doing so. He came to Tom and Michael and

persuaded Tom to enter into a "test" case in order to prove ASCAP's legality. He assured Tom that he would bear all costs and, if he won, there would be no penalty or damages for the Shanleys to pay. Tom agreed. The case was heard by Judge Learned Hand, one of America's most brilliant jurists, who found that ASCAP had no basis for being, constitutionally. Herbert appealed to the Supreme Court, where he won.

Between the two hearings, while the case was on appeal, Herbert dined at Shanley's and was treated to a cabaret performance of his own hit songs. He left the restaurant, mid-meal, shouting revenge. When the victory for ASCAP came in, Herbert gleefully collected \$25,000 and all expenses from Shanley's. Thereafter Tom forbade Herbert's music at the store, and at home, tore up all Herbert sheet music and destroyed all the dozens of Herbert recordings carefully collected by his daughter Irene, as well as forbidding Herbert's entry into the store *ever again*. He did this not because he'd lost, but because Herbert did not keep his word of honor.

Another difficult luminary was George M. Cohan. His sprightly, energetic charisma was for the stage only. Short of stature and always dapper, he had a morose insistency about him. He was inclined to be surly with waiters and had the irritating habit of writing his musical ideas with indelible pencil on the tablecloths as he dined. Michael Shanley was outraged at this. Tom tolerated



Tom Shanley, Sr. June 1912

until the mountain of ruined double-damask Belfast linen continued to grow. Tom, in his most charming manner, took the matter up with George M., as he was known, and offered to supply him with any number of pads. George M. became very angry at this, as if he had just claim to write on the tablecloths. He left the store in a deep snit and did not return for two years.

The shower of gold started to let up for "Shanley's" when the troops came home from France in 1919. In the midst of the public delirium the day the Great War ended, William Randolph Hearst and Martin Davies, to celebrate, ran up a restaurant tab of

\$50,000 buying champagne for the house in the 43rd Street-Times Square Shanley's. But Youth, who had come to manhood on the high seas or in the trenches, went through a period of their return that was specifically anti-elegance. There were too many dead, wounded and disillusioned. The new generation had turned against all those stately and ornamental places that reminded them of either their happy pre-war days or of Europe. The coming of Prohibition sounded the funeral notes for Shanley's, Delmonico's and others. The lavender-precious journalist Lucius Beebe whined that Shanley's was a mere "Lobster Palace," no fit place for the refined palate, a cry and stance repeated by F. Scott Fitzgerald, whom Tom, Jr. personally bounced out of the store one night for being hopelessly drunk and totally obnoxious.

One by one each Shanley's closed its doors and finally in 1923, the 43rd Street store closed to the lamentations of the major journalists. The days when Mannie Chapelle, the North American sales director for Mumm's Champagne, his opposite number at Moet's, both with unlimited expense accounts, together with Diamond Jim Brady, would enter the store after theatre and buy champagne for everybody seated, a bottle for every table, those days passed into another world.

And the Shanley brothers? Pat, James and Peter kept on in the restaurant business. Tom and Michael retired. Barney and Andrew had died years before.

Tom tried real estate and made some money but lost more. He played the market, which ultimately destroyed most of his fortune. His life as a restaurateur had ruined him for anything else, for his career had made this Leitrim country-boy a "Broadway Baron." Now, he, like many others, was an aging man tied up in the tidal wave of the Great Depression. Nine years after the restaurant closed, Tom died. He felt he was a forgotten figure. Yet thousands came to his wake, and the *New York Times* reported that his funeral procession was two-and-a-half miles long.

One may be almost certain that he had forgotten that he and his brothers had trained over a thousand raw young men and women, fresh from Ireland, in a line of work from which they could make a decent living. He was a strict and demanding restaurateur but no tyrant. He had given experience and training to hundreds of men who became proprietors themselves, from New York to San Francisco.

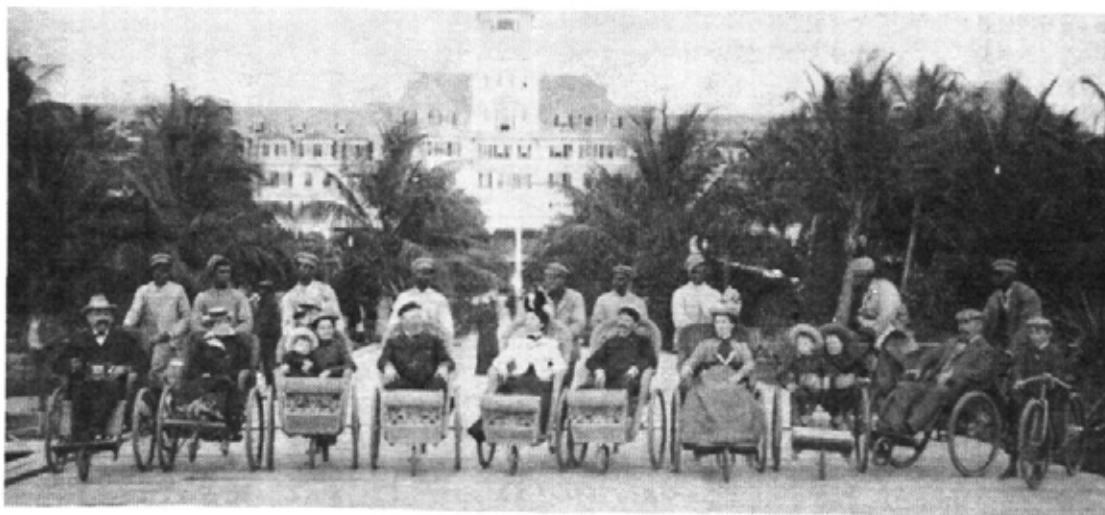
Open-handed and open-hearted all his life, Tom believed in today and the possibilities of tomorrow, he respected his past, but as he grew older never lived in it. He took his winnings and his losings like a man. His worldliness, which was considerable, was

not as strong as his ebullient spirit. When asked why he didn't join more groups, clubs and associations, he would reply with a rich chuckle and say in his mellow basso voice, "Why should I have had to? For over 50 years I have considered the whole world my club!" At his death he was a member of the Society of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick in New York City and he held for a long time a membership in the New York Athletic Club (not for himself but for his three very athletic sons). He'd always quote old Chauncey Depew, U.S. Senator and President of the New York Central Railroad, when asked why he never "exercised": "No, no! I've been to the funeral of all my athletic friends." Another membership which he considered most important (to everyone's surprise): he was a man who'd never missed Mass and the Eucharist on First Fridays for almost 60 years. He never mentioned Church, religion or God to family or anyone.

An old-time newspaperman and the city's most respected (and first) Broadway columnist, O.O. MacIntyre, attended Tom's wake and funeral. Some years later he spoke of it to my mother and myself: "It was eerie! The 'swells,' the celebrities and the big shots were all there, but there were these hundreds of old Irish people! Dozens of them approached your grandmother, Leo, with their Mass-cards in one hand and an envelope in the other. They all seemed to say the same thing, 'Please, Mrs. Shanley, take these! Mr. Shanley came to our help in our hour of need and would not hear of taking it back. . . I'm housebound' or 'He helped us get our Mary through teaching-school' or 'Our John could never have gotten to be a lawyer without the help he gave us' or 'He saw my Pat through his operation,' or 'God bless him.'"

In his beige and gold drawing-room, amid the forest of palms and flowers Tom lay, dressed formally in his Prince Albert coat, wearing his fine gold cuff-links purchased at West's in Dublin many years before. Nuns from Corpus Christi Monastery in the Bronx came to pray his soul from harm both day and night.

"It was," Mr. MacIntyre went on, "a wake and funeral of an ancient, lordly Irish chieftain from the remote past, brought back to us for the last time. . . I knew him well for so many years. He had style. Be proud of this man, young Leo, he never had great position, he'll never make history; but when he went out of business, all the company's bills were paid. We knew what Broadway was all about. He had the confidence of anybody who was anybody, but he never talked about these things. But when I was wrong about something in my column, he'd straighten me out! He was a great human being, and he was, as well, a damned good man, and never forget it!"



1898-The opening of the Royal Poinciana Hotel, Palm Beach, Florida
left to right: first two unknown, Nellie Quinn, niece of Shanleys, with Baby Harry, Boss Croker of Tammany Hall, fifth and sixth unknown, Sarah Shanley, Irene and John Shanley, Tom Shanley, Young Tom Junior