

IN MEMORIAM

Family History by Roundtable Members



Photo courtesy of Sean Mac Curtin

Fire Commissioner William D. Curtin

William D. Curtin was born in Rockchapel, County Cork, in 1873 and died in Mount Vernon, NY in 1970. He came to New York in 1896 and spent the last 70 years of his life in Westchester County. He was a member of the Mount Vernon Fire Department for 65 years and held the position of fire commissioner from 1932 through 1936.

One of eleven children, William D. Curtin was the son of Postmaster Denis J. Curtin and Bridget (Quinlan) Curtin. He was raised in Rockchapel and attended the local national school. His formal education apparently ended at about the age of 15.

In his early 20s Curtin ran one of his father's farms, across the Limerick border in Garravane. He seems to have liked farming very much and often spoke of his happy days in Garravane, even in his 80s and 90s.

The future fire commissioner left Ireland for good at the age of 23. Within a few years he settled in Mount Vernon, a suburb of New York City, and joined the local volunteer fire department. He worked his way up the ranks and was appointed fire commissioner in January 1932 by Mayor Bateman. After his term as commissioner ended at the end of 1936, Curtin continued to serve the fire department for another 29 years.

On November 15, 1965, at the 71st annual dinner of the Mount Vernon Fire Department, former Commissioner Curtin was presented with a plaque, . . .

"for his long and faithful service to the Mount Vernon Fire Department, 1900-1965."

While serving the fire department, Curtin also played an active role in the local Democratic Party for many years. Before he resigned from the party in 1940, he had held the position of chairman and served as campaign manager for several mayoral candidates in Mount Vernon. The former Garravane farmer became so prominent in the Democratic Party as to be recommended as a mayoral candidate on at least one occasion. He declined this opportunity.

Besides using his organizational talents in local politics, Curtin also applied his entrepreneurial ability as the owner of a liquor store near the Mount Vernon Railroad station.

During these years Curtin also held membership in the Lions Club and in the Elks Club in Mount Vernon. Also, for a few years in the early 1920s, he belonged to the local branch of the Friends of Irish Freedom.

The Irish civil war was a most tragic event for William D. Curtin and his relatives in Rockchapel and Brosna. Their first cousin, John O'Connor, was among the seven republican prisoners killed by a Free State bomb near Tralee, County Kerry, in April 1923. This became known as the Ballyseedy Massacre. William D. Curtin and John O'Connor were two of the 100 plus grandchildren of John D. Curtin and Joan (O'Connor) Curtin of Ahane, Brosna, County Kerry. Prior to this death in 1970, William was one of the last survivors of this large group.

Widowed in 1955 after 46 years of marriage to Elizabeth (Fell) Curtin, William was survived by two daughters: Genivieve Gray, who was living with her family in County Cavan, Ireland (and has since died); and Elizabeth Stroeble, who still lives in Scarsdale. He was also survived by three grandchildren, who now have a total of twelve children, nine in Ireland and three in Massachusetts.

A major event in the life of William D. Curtin was his only trip to Ireland, which he made in 1964, after an absence of 68 years. Accompanied by his daughter Elizabeth, he returned to New York on an Aer Lingus jet named Bridget. The next day, April 12, 1964, the nonagenarian and his daughter were featured on the front page of the *Sunday Irish Press*, which stated that William Curtin was then the oldest man ever to fly on a jet plane from Shannon to New York.

—SEAN MAC CURTAIN

Sean Mac Curtin is the grandnephew of William D. Curtin. Printed sources include *The Daily Argus* (Mount Vernon, NY), 15 November 1965 and 24 November 1970.