

Joseph Campbell and the School of Irish Studies at Fordham University, 1928-1932

by Thomas C. Hennessy, S.J.



Donald Keough, retired CEO of Coca-Cola Corporation, made a \$2.5 million gift to the University of Notre Dame in 1993 to establish a center for Irish studies. In publicizing the goals of the gift, which also endowed an Irish studies professorship, the president of Notre Dame noted that four of the founding religious of Notre Dame were Irish emigrants and that 14 of the

16 presidents of Notre Dame were of Irish descent. That announcement moved me to investigate Fordham's University Archives for details of the former School of Irish Studies at Fordham University.

—Thomas C. Hennessy, S.J.

Belfast-born poet Joseph Campbell emigrated to New York in the mid-1920s. Embittered by his arrest and internship for several years as a sympathizer with the Irish Republican cause, Campbell hoped to transpose his cultural ideals for Ireland to New York. In 1925, at the age of 46, he began organizing The School of Irish Studies (along with a partner, Michael Walsh) as one expression of those ideals.

Campbell first proposed the school at a recital of Irish poetry at the Hotel Majestic, which stood across the street from the Woolworth Building on Broadway in downtown Manhattan. Apparently after reciting some of his own verse, Campbell sketched out his hopes and plans for a school. A subsequent meeting assembled friends and sup-

porters—and within three weeks the group had its own quarters at 6 East Twelfth Street in Manhattan and the school was under way.

At first operating independently as an institute, the school did not initially offer academic degrees. (Only in 1928 was the school integrated into Fordham University at its Manhattan campus in the Woolworth Building.) The 1925-26 prospectus of the school announced themes it was able to offer as academic courses within a few years: First, the history of Ireland from the earliest times to the latest developments; second, Irish literature from the ancient hero-tales like the *Tain Bo Cualnge* to the post-James Joyce younger writers. The prospectus announced Irish art, Irish music, and traditional singing would be taught when resources became available.

The most striking aspects of the 1925-26 prospectus are its cultural objectives: the publication of an Irish literary magazine, endowment of scholarships in Gaelic research, and the creation in New York City of an Irish social center. The social center was to be a place where “distinguished visitors” would be received and where Irish writers and artists would gain exposure to American audiences. These cultural goals would prove frustratingly elusive for Campbell in the years ahead.

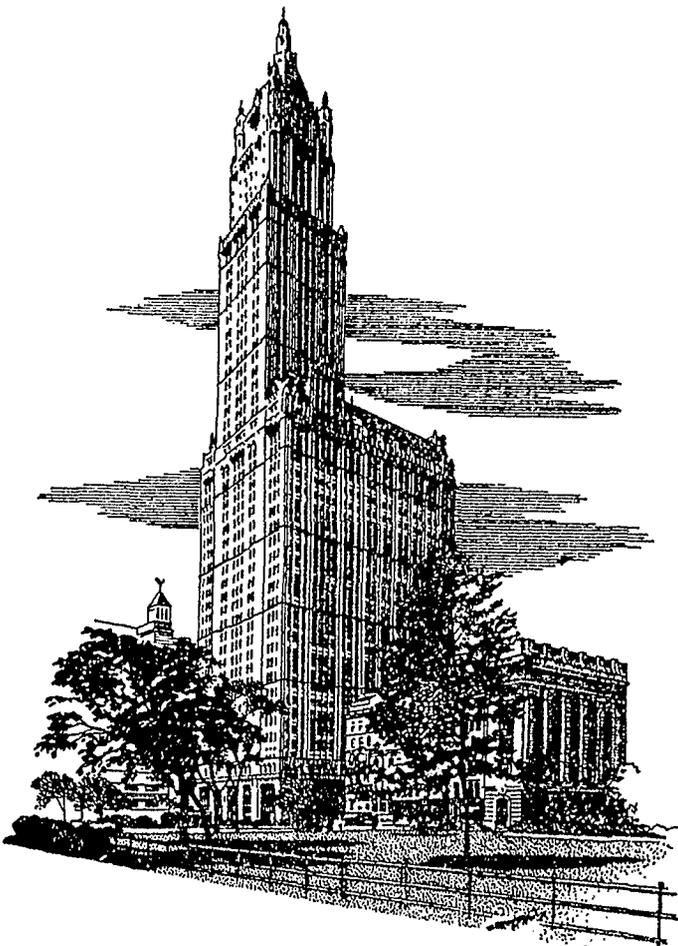
We have no information about how widely the prospectus was circulated. It was printed simply, without any artistic embellishment. This must have disappointed Mr. Campbell as he himself illustrated some of his earlier publications. For instance, for his 1917 book of poetry, he drew 21 symbolic line drawings. Later publications sponsored by Campbell contained fine traditional Celtic-style illustrations.

During 1926 and 1927 the school opened its doors with a series of impressive scholarly presentations. These included lectures on Irish history, art, language and literature, offered by faculty members or graduates of Columbia,

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Harvard, Fordham, Brown, Trinity, City College, and the University of Paris. The presenters were undoubtedly well known in their own day but probably only the following would be known by a later generation: Padraic Colum, the Irish poet, Theodore Maynard, biographer and poet, Dudley Digges of the Abbey Theatre, and Dr. James J. Walsh, physician and historian. The school's "non-insular policy" resulted in a presentation of Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" and in two chamber music concerts of works by Wagner and Debussy.

A 1928 booklet, "Irish Culture, An Announcement of the School of Irish Studies in Fordham University," most fully expresses Campbell's ambitions for the school, bolstered that year by the resources of Fordham University. The cover page of the booklet and one of its illustrations are reproduced on the back cover of this journal. Running 50 pages, the booklet includes brief essays edited by Campbell, Dr. Edward J. Kavanagh and Dr. James E. Tobin. The first essay is on the distinctive features of Irish art, such as the scribes' illumination of books as seen in the Book of Kells, and the metal work demonstrated in the Tara brooch and the Ardagh chalice. A second essay is devoted to Irish literature, and particularly to the importance of writings in the Irish language of which many individuals like the poet Thomas Moore were ignorant. (Moore admitted later that he should not have written his history of Ireland because he did not know the Irish language.) The last part of the 1928 booklet sketches how the School of Irish Studies came into being.



And often there of quiet summer eves
 We gather, Seoghan and Shamus, Feighlim Og and I—
 My Gaelic School—to sit within the leaves,
 And listen to the red-bees twilight lullaby.
 And Seoghan will take a poem from his breast,
 Chanting it to the purple sunken sun,
 Until the merging glow of day and night
 And murmurous drone and singer's voice are one,
 And Dana's secret eyes from heaven's height
 Look down upon our little world at rest.

—Joseph Campbell

The school's 1928 merger with Fordham came about as a result of classes Campbell began teaching, independently of the school, for the English department of Fordham University's Manhattan division in 1926. Campbell taught Contemporary Irish Poetry, Irish Dramatists, and a Survey of Irish Literature. All three courses would become a staple part of his academic repertoire for the School of Irish Studies. In 1927, in the same department, Campbell offered a course in the Irish language (in that year titled Gaelic, but thereafter titled Irish).

Fr. John P. Monaghan who was also a member of the English faculty of Fordham University, and a supporter of Campbell's School of Irish Studies, suggested to Campbell the possibility of a linkage with a local university to assure academic credit for their students. In December 1927, Campbell met with Fr. Miles O'Mailia, S.J., dean of the Fordham Graduate School, and with Rev. William J. Duane, S.J., then president of the University. The result was the incorporation of the School of Irish Studies into Fordham University, done so rapidly that four courses of Irish Studies, five public lectures, and two plays were transferred to Fordham for the 1928 spring semester. (Today such a move would ruffle so many administrative and faculty turfs it would take years, not weeks.)

Campbell proudly pointed out a difference between his program and those at other universities such as Harvard and the Catholic University of America. Their departments or chairs distributed courses over the general field of Celtic studies: Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and other Gaelic studies. Fordham's program, on the other hand, focused solely on the field of Irish studies.

The planned course of studies at Fordham embraced four disciplines: Old and Modern Irish language courses were taught by Edward J. Kavanagh, Ph.D., chairman of the department of Classical languages at James Monroe High School, who began teaching these courses in 1922. Irish literature was taught by Campbell. Irish history was taught by

(left) In the 1920s, Fordham's Manhattan course offerings, including Irish studies classes, were held in the Woolworth Building.

**Of homely folk and lowly things:
Of tilling men who plough and reap;
Of piping men who tramp the roads
And ply their chanters for a crust,
A threadbare coat, a place to sleep,
A shelter from the rain and dust. . . .**

Joseph Campbell

Herbert Donovan, Ph.D., who was also chairman of the history department of James Madison High School. Art was taught by Joseph Tierney, graduate of the School of Art, Dublin. Campbell noted that with the syllabus now in place: "the only thing that is lacking is Irish music." He hoped to rectify that situation if there were sufficient demand.

Campbell wrote in 1928 that, for the success of the School, there were additional material needs which would require endowments from benefactors. Fordham's library needed to add a special collection of books and journals to enable graduate students to do original research and other scholarly work. Campbell proposed translations from German, French, Scandinavian, and Italian sources which at that time contained the bulk of top-flight research on Irish philology and early Irish history. In addition, Campbell solicited endowments furthering the general scholarly work of the School, funding student scholarships, and underwriting a proposed monthly or quarterly Journal.

In the final brochure in the archives, the one for 1929, two developments are discerned. The first is that the original plan for a social center was dropped and instead he proposed a fraternity under the patronage of "St. Brigid, saint, seer, and patroness of the arts." The organization was meant to be primarily for students and graduates of the School but was to be open also to others who were interested in "the finer things of Irish origin—in poetry, drama, music, painting and illumination." The fraternity encompassed dinners, recitals, and receptions that emphasized social and cultural relationships. The organizational plan called for officers to be addressed by Gaelic titles such as Ceann (Chief) and Sgibhneoir (Secretary). Members were to receive issues of the fraternity bulletin, "The Fiery Arrow." There is no information as to whether the fraternity every got off the ground. Some issues of the fraternity bulletin were published but were not found in the archives.

The second development noted in the 1929 brochure was in the area of music and drama. While the absence of music is mentioned in the 1928 curriculum offerings, the 1929 listing boasts two music courses: The Music of Ireland (a survey of distinctive Irish music, musicians, and collectors of Irish music) and Irish Choral Singing. The latter is described as a practical course for those "with good voices." Both of the music courses were taught by Helga McC. Salkeld who studied music in both Brussels and Petrograd. The music courses became so popular that they

subsequently drew criticism—for being "recreational" and not up to the usual level of academic standards.

There were other changes in the 1929 course offerings. The total number of courses increased by five, from 15 to 20. The course in art was not listed. And the major increase in courses was among those cross-listed with Fordham's English department; 10 in 1928, 15 in 1929. (This may also have had negative consequences subsequently, for poaching on turf Fordham's English professors considered their domain.)

Having examined the school's publications, I turned to registration for the school's courses. The number of students who register for courses is a standard criteria for evaluating the success of an academic program. In the four academic years of the School's existence, the numbers of students who registered for courses were 273 in 1928-29, 294 in 1929-30, 374 in 1930-31 (the banner year for registrations), and 314 in 1931-32. In his correspondence, Campbell stated that his classes averaged 14 or 15 students, and such numbers were judged satisfactory in a private university. In a report on these registrations the claim was made that Fordham's number of students in Irish studies during those years exceeded that of any other college or university in the United States. Unfortunately the records do not indicate what percentage of the students were graduate or undergraduate.

In sum, the School seemed to prosper in its first few years. Why, then, did Fordham phase out the School after only four full years of existence? Academic decisions are usually based on analyses of numerous considerations that point to one final conclusion. It is rare that a single reason can be assigned for the closing of a school or program. In the case of the School of Irish Studies the decision seems to have been based upon conflicting concerns: Campbell's dissatisfactions and Fordham's disappointments. Let us examine both.

Campbell's Perspective

Campbell's dissatisfactions seem to have been primarily monetary. Apparently, Campbell was hired on an adjunct or part-time basis (as opposed to being a full-time teacher). He was paid on a per course basis. For generations the remuneration of adjunct or part-time college teachers has been scandalously below that of full-time faculty. Fordham contended this was appropriate since Campbell did not have an academic degree.

In a letter to the graduate dean, Fr. O'Mailia, dated New Year's Day, 1932, Campbell complained that what with "house claims" and having to pay the term fees for two sons at Trinity College, he felt that he was barely earning a living wage. Yet he carried a course load of 26 hours a week in fall 1931. Today, Fordham would not allow a faculty member to teach so many classes. He would not have time for course preparation, grading, and counseling students.

Campbell expressed two other complaints. The first had to do with teaching in the English department: "Paradoxical, is it not, that I who have spent 30 years of my adult life fighting the inroads of a foreign culture in Ireland, would now be forced to serve in a department teaching that culture?" He maintained that the School of Irish Studies should be allowed to operate as a self-contained unit (a difficult request for the university to comply with).

Campbell also complained that he had been ordered by the graduate dean to stop accepting doctoral-level students in his program. Campbell took umbrage that two excellent students would have to go elsewhere to complete their work. And then he made this unusual statement: "The majority of my students have the High School mentality, but these two are of real University caliber, in the European sense." Behind this sentence must have been a grave sense of disappointment in the scholastic backgrounds and abilities of his students.

Having stated his financial difficulties, Campbell announced that "Next August [1932] I plan to withdraw for

a while to write. I shall return to Fordham only on condition that you give me a status worthy of my ability. . . ." By this he clearly means status as a full-time faculty member. Although the letter was equivalent to resigning from the faculty (and he was never granted the status he considered his due), in fact he continued teaching at Fordham until 1938. However, the above correspondence effectively precipitated the demise of the School.

The University's Perspective

Fordham University's archives do not contain a direct evaluation of the School, but we can make conjectures based upon correspondence and upon some of the decisions that were made. The University's primary criticism was of the academic level of the courses, which it charged were "recreational." When Campbell was told in 1932 he could no longer offer graduate courses, the problem probably lay with the courses being too ambitious, covering too much in a survey manner at the sacrifice of depth. Campbell inadvertently confirmed this criticism in complaining of the "High School mentality" of the majority of his students; it is likely that he pitched the level of his courses to that mentality. Campbell may not have sufficiently distinguished between content adapted for popular presentation vs. an acceptably college-level approach.

Nearly equal in importance, however, from the University's perspective, may have been Campbell's at times abrasive personality. Admittedly, a man of poetical dreams, Campbell may not have properly attended to political realities, particularly getting along with people in a university. He wrote of himself that "I seldom say much [about myself]." Perhaps he did not sufficiently explain the School or his literary work either. Just as Campbell's poems contain allusions to extremely local Irish geography and obscure mythology, perhaps Campbell insufficiently explained (and defended) the rest of his professional life?

Further personality problems flowed from Campbell's exaggerated sense of his admittedly multiple talents. He ended one New Year's letter with the sentence: "I write not in anger . . . but in pity that the Genius must be a beggarly suppliant, while the Politician and the Schoolmaster take all." Is he the Genius in that sentence? If not, why make this statement?

A clue to Campbell's relations with other faculty members may be detected in his poem, "The Professor" in which "The Poet from the Stars" speaks [of the professor]:



*Go, ploughman, plough
The mearing lands,
The meadow lands,
The mountain lands:
All life is bare
Beneath your share,
Ail love is in your lusty hands.*

*Up, horses, now!
And straight and true
Let every broken furrow run;
The strength you sweat
Shall blossom yet
In golden glory to the sun.*

Poetry by Joseph Campbell, illustration by M.T. Marique from the 1928 catalogue of the School of Irish Studies



Illuminated chapter heading from 1928 catalogue

... None but scoffed
 At me, when hats were doffed
 to gowned fools.
 ... Now from the Seraphs' Stair
 I watch you in your chair,
 Professing me—for gold—
 Who never bought or sold.

Campbell's biographers Saunders and Kelly describe the poet at various times as: intransigent, odd, outspoken, clumsy and tactless in dealing with people, anything but genial, impulsive, melancholy, self-pitying, truly belligerent, "a difficult tetchy, unyielding man." Such traits generated friction that undermined all his projects and associations. His political activity in Wicklow, his marriage, his partnership with Michael Walsh, his relationships with publishers, with W. B. Yeats and the Abbey Theatre — all were acrimonious. His marriage with Nancy Maude by whom he had three sons broke up some months after his release from prison. Campbell had strengths outweighing many of the blemishes in his personality, but his problems at Fordham were part of a life-long pattern.

The Verdict

In 1931 Campbell asked that the academic offerings of the School be expanded and that the school be reorganized under a director, a full-time Professor and associates. He received a response on January 4, 1932, not only vetoing

additional classes but telling him to reduce his number of course offerings from 13 to ten. Campbell was subsequently informed he could only teach courses at the undergraduate level. Furthermore, graduate studies in the School of Irish Studies were to be subsumed by the department of English. This last decision must have come as a—truly galling—blow to Campbell. In addition, the January 4th letter instructed him to drop his position as director. Since no provision was made to name a new director, the School folded at the end of the Spring term, 1932.

Campbell took steps to move his School of Irish Studies elsewhere. On March 19, 1932, he inaugurated the Irish Foundation. Its goals were even more ambitious than those contained in the original 1926 prospectus. Besides the School of Irish Studies and the social goals, the new organization would include a reference library, an orchestra, a restaurant, and a store. Furthermore, there would be branches in other American cities, and a collateral branch in Dublin.

Although the Irish Foundation received a number of generous contributions, by 1936 it was draining Campbell's bank account. Undeterred, in 1938 he reorganized the Foundation and briefly achieved a measure of success. Before returning to Ireland in the summer of 1939, Campbell revived the School of Irish Studies with six public lectures on ancient Ireland, one of which he gave himself. The lectures were held in the rooms of the American Irish Historical Society (then at 132 East 16th Street in Manhattan). Campbell personally offered a series of classes on Irish theatre, poetry, folklore, and epic tales, evenings from Tuesday to Friday, in the Spring of 1939 at the Master building, 310 Riverside Drive.

That proved to be the last that was heard of the Irish Foundation and the School of Irish Studies. Joseph Campbell stretched his dreams for a home for Irish culture in New York City from 1926 until 1939. He died, alone, at age 65, on June 7, 1944 at his beloved farm, Lackandaragh, Glencree, County Wicklow.

The Old Woman

As a white candle
 In a holy place
 So is the beauty
 Of an aged face
 As the spent radiance
 of the winter sun,
 So is a woman
 With her travail done.
 Her brood gone from her,
 And her thoughts as still
 As the waters
 Under a ruined mill.

Joseph Campbell: An Appreciation

Joseph Campbell was described by students and others as "a magnetic personality," whose enthusiasm for his subject matter was contagious. His biographers note frequent references to his "fine, deep, vibrant, strong, rich, resonant voice" which must have been effective in his talks on New York and Dublin radio. Even his physical appearance was appealing: Saunders and Kelly describe him as sturdily built, with well-defined features and a good complexion, surmounted by thick, wavy white hair. A portrait of Campbell by Estella Solomons in the Ulster Museum depicts him in middle age with a thoughtful furrowed brow.

Campbell's idealism attracted many admirers, as well. To the end of his life he remained committed to a united (32 county) republic in Ireland. When he ceased to be politically active, he devoted himself completely to the arts. He held himself to an equally high standard in his personal values. Though he was bedeviled by money problems to the end of his life, he condemned the materialism and greed that he saw in America and indeed later in Ireland.

The poems on the preceding pages speak of Campbell's gifts for writing verse. Though he was talented in drawing and in music (he wrote several popular Irish songs), his main focus was the written word. He maintained rigorous standards in evaluating others' writing and his own work, so high that at his death he left many manuscripts unpublished, including a largely autobiographical novel. For many readers his best known poem, said to be inspired by his mother, is "The Old Woman" (printed on the facing page).

Perhaps the best appreciation of Campbell's work at Fordham can be found in a six-page report in the University archives celebrating the arrival in 1941 of the United Irish Counties Feis at Fordham. While the report does not mention its authorship, an article in the June 29, 1941 *New York Times* attributes the material to Collins Healy, an adjunct faculty member. The paper by Collins Healy, lists ten Fordham University doctoral dissertations "pertaining to Ireland and to persons of Irish ancestry" over the period of 1922-1939. In addition, 83 masters theses in that same category are identified. The dissertations and theses explore issues in history and literature. The literary issues (which predominate) were likely inspired by Campbell. In fact many of the titles of these works resemble the course titles that Campbell taught. There was an upsurge of such scholarship after Campbell's arrival at Fordham and that interest continued until his departure.

Though the Fordham University School of Irish Studies ceased to exist by 1932, over the years individual professors in the University continued to foster and promote courses and topics related to Ireland. The Healy paper, referred to above, named 17 teachers who contributed directly to the Irish studies programs at Fordham up to 1941. In addition, it named 41 courses that were offered at Fordham in the areas of Irish language, literature, and history. Later examples of faculty who offered similar Irish-related courses include: Charles Donohue, a specialist in Old Irish and Middle Irish in the Fordham English Department. Bro. Leonard Gilhooley, Mary Margaret Fitzgerald, and Gale Schricker taught courses in Anglo-Irish literature. In the History Department up until a few years ago, Maurice O'Connell sponsored and conducted a series of studies that centered around his great-grandfather, Daniel O'Connell. In that same Department, Nancy Curtin and Joseph F. O'Callaghan continue to present courses in the different stages of Irish history. In the Manhattan campus of the University during the 1940s and 1950s, Collins Healy taught courses on Irish literature, presented a series of public lectures, and sponsored a student organization dedicated to the study of Irish Culture.

Looking ahead with hope, it seems to me that the current environment favors an appreciation of one's cultural identity. Fordham is situated in a city and environs with more people of Irish descent than live in all of Ireland. Fordham's first faculty (representing five nations that took over a diocesan-founded college in 1846) included four emigrants of Irish heritage (Callaghan, Driscoll, Larkin, Murphy), and of the University's 31 presidents four were Irish-born (Moylean, Dealy, Pettit, Finlay) and 20 others are of Irish descent. Currently the University offers two academic programs in Afro-American Studies, has a Hispanic Research Center, and has two extracurricular Gaelic Societies. Its radio station features three programs of Irish interest (one on the Irish language, two on Irish music). Seemingly such a University would welcome the re-creation of some of Joseph Campbell's ambitious goals for Irish studies in literature and history.

Of course, in these days of financial stress, Joseph Campbell's plans could only be revived and adapted if another Donald Keough or a modern Maecenas matches the Notre Dame grants. What an honor it should be for an Irish-American benefactor to have a Chair or a Center of Irish or Irish-American Studies named after her or him.

—Thomas C. Hennessy, S.J.

Mary Holt Moore on Joseph Cambell

Mary Holt Moore, Grand Marshal of the 1991 St. Patrick's Parade, has childhood memories of poet Joseph Campbell, who used to come to her parents' house occasionally for dinner: [Sitting on his lap] "I used to admire the huge head of hair he had—snow white. I was fascinated by his string tie and his silky shirts. I used to love when he recited "The Nine-Penny Fiddle" -- I thought he made it up for me.

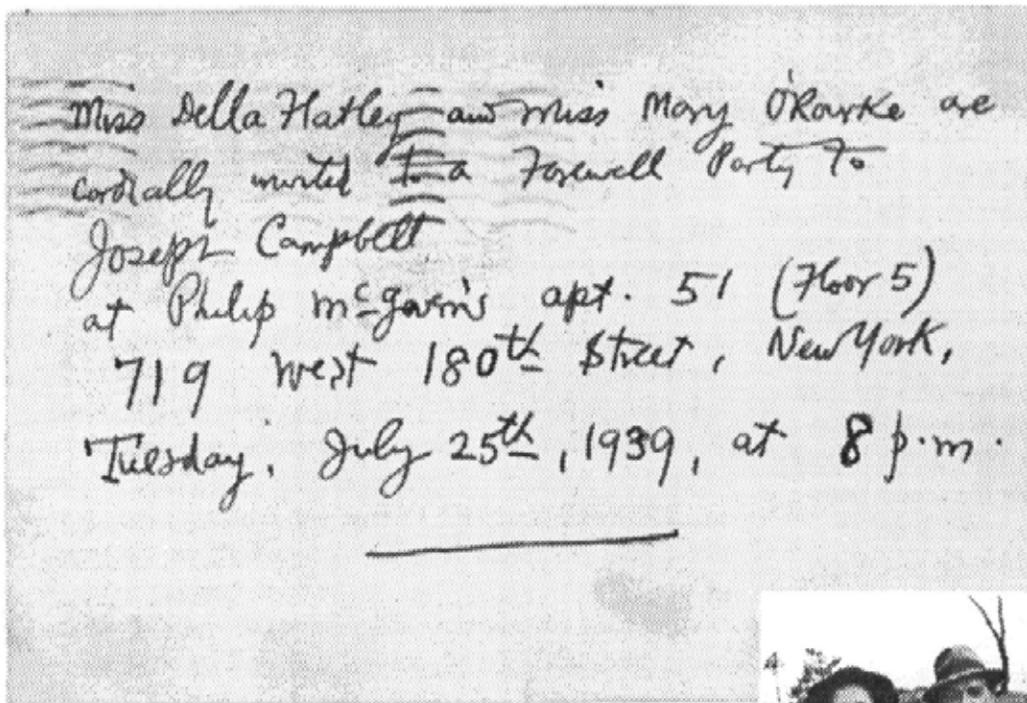
**My mother and father were Irish
And I am Irish too,
I bought a wee fiddle for nine pence
And it is Irish too,
I'm up in the morning early
To meet the dawn of day
And to the lint white piping
It's many the tune I play**

When Fordham let Campbell go in 1932, Mrs. Moore recalls her mother grumbling that it was: "just because

he didn't have a Ph.D." and "All Jesuits are intellectual snobs."

Moore's aunt, Mary O'Rourke, took her to a series of farewell luncheons and dinner parties held in Campbell's honor just before he left New York. One was held in the hall where the Gaelic Society used to meet: "above a movie theater at 66th Street and Broadway, [that's where] I met Padraic Colum, Dudley Diggs (an Abbey player in the movies here), and Sarah Allgood's sister (Brian Calendar who founded the Bronx Gaelic League was her nephew). Gifts poured in [for Campbell], simple things: whiskey, a bunch of flowers from an Irish cop. . . ."

Along with "The Nine-Penny Fiddle," Moore considers the poems Joseph Campbell wrote in the curragh (while interned) her favorites. In summation, Mary Holt Moore comments: "He was a patriot, a Fianna Gael, a consummate Irishman, a true blue. *Ni Bheath a leitheidi ann gho deo aris.*" (His likes will never be seen again.)



(above) Postcard invitation to farewell party for Joseph Campbell. Mary O'Rourke and Della Flatley are pictured at right, on either side of Mary Holt Moore's father, Frank Holt.

(top right) Mary Holt Moore delivering her 1991 St. Patrick's Day Grand Marshall's acceptance speech—in Irish.