

# Wrong Way Corrigan and the New York Irish

BY JOHN T. RIDGE

The story of Douglas “Wrong Way” Corrigan’s flight from Brooklyn to Ireland in 1938 began with something of a mystery as the *New York Times* for July 18th reported:

## *Pilot of Old Plane Wings Toward Sea*

### *Flier Who Came Non-Stop from Coast Vanishes Eastward on His ‘Return’ Trip*

As mysteriously as he flew in a week ago and calmly announced that he had completed a non-stop flight from the West Coast in a nine-year old \$900 plane, Douglas Corrigan took off “for California” from Floyd Bennett field at 5:17 o’clock yesterday morning, and early this morning there was no report on his whereabouts.<sup>1</sup>

Only a week before, Douglas Corrigan had flown from California to Roosevelt Field, and then on to Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn a few days later. His vintage plane was almost nine years old and had been patched up many times by its 31-year-old owner, a gifted mechanic who had worked at Ryan Aircraft on the construction of Charles Lindbergh’s *Spirit of St. Louis* in 1927. Corrigan had applied a year before for permission from aviation authorities to fly to Ireland, but after one look at his self-described “crate” the Department of Commerce had resulted in a flat refusal. Certainly, the condition of his aircraft left a lot to be desired. Like in Lindbergh’s plane, fuel tanks blocked his forward view, and he could only see forward by slightly banking in flight from side to side. He carried no radio, no parachute, some homemade gas tanks and his only instruments were a compass and a bank indicator.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of July 17, 1938, Corrigan’s heavily fuel-laden plane gained altitude very slowly as it lifted slowly to the northeast and continued to fly and disappear in the



**Photo:**  
Douglas “Wrong Way” Corrigan stands beside his “crate” at Brooklyn’s Floyd Bennett Field shortly before his 1938 epic flight. Courtesy of John T. Ridge.

morning mist. The whole operation was so “do it yourself” that when the fuel truck driver had attempted unsuccessfully to turn the prop to get the engine to start, Corrigan was forced to get out and do it himself. Officially, he had signed in the register that he was flying back to California, but attendants at Floyd Bennett Field began suddenly to have doubts about his destination when he took off due east with no sign of a turn for California to the west. Aided by a tail wind, Corrigan landed just over twenty-eight hours later in Co. Dublin’s Baldonnell Aerodrome, becoming only the sixth person to complete a west-to-east solo flight between North America and Europe.<sup>3</sup> Corrigan now faced his first crowd and set off the legend of “Wrong Way Corrigan” when the following took place, according to the *New York Times*:

*I’m Douglas Corrigan,” he told a group of startled Irish airport workers who gathered around him when he landed. “Just got in from New York. Where am I? I intended to fly to California.”*<sup>4</sup>

Right after Americans got word of Corrigan’s landing, it was John J. Harrington, general sales manager of the *Brooklyn Eagle* working with the then-numerous Irish societies of the borough, who immediately sent a telegram to the American minister to Ireland, John Cudahy, in Dublin, jumping the gun on the rest of the city to invite Corrigan to attend a reception and parade specifically in Brooklyn. According to a report in the *Eagle*:

*Brooklyn Irish and other citizens want Corrigan to return to Bennett Field for the start of a gigantic welcoming procession through their home town of two and one-half million people enroute to the City Hall. The local Irish had acted so quickly that from that point on the welcome was stamped as fundamentally a celebration of the connection between Irish-Americans and Ireland. Although very little was known about Douglas Corrigan, by the fact he had an Irish surname alone he became, at least in the eyes of most Irish-*

*Americans, an heroic ideal for everyone of that ethnicity in America.”*<sup>5</sup>

James A. “Jamie” Kelly, head of a Brooklyn society called the Celtic Circle, was appointed permanent chairman of the reception committee and set a distinctive Irish tone to the planned event when he stated “I think it is a noble idea and typical of the Irish heart. The hop from Brooklyn to Ireland was like a message of goodwill from the land we love only second to America.”<sup>6</sup> Cudahy’s answer from Dublin was published the following day: “Corrigan expects to arrive in New York in next ten days. He is very pleased by reception you propose.”<sup>7</sup>

James Kelly was the type of individual who could make the Corrigan event a success. He was firmly entrenched in the city’s Irish organizations, including a term as New York State president of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and as an old-time Brooklyn political leader his connections stretched to hundreds of other societies of all ethnicities and interests. Cleverly securing the services of Brooklyn President Raymond V. Ingersoll as an honorary chairman, he was able to draw in a large selection of representatives from business, civic, fraternal, and religious communities. The working committee, however, remained distinctly Irish, with surnames like Burns, Grace, Bennett, Sexton, O’Hagan, McCarthy, Sullivan, Gallagher, Cullen, McAteer, McNevin, and O’Reilly prominent among them. At this point in time there was no other planned Corrigan reception. It looked like Brooklyn had beaten the rest of the city to the punch.<sup>8</sup>

#### TO DERAILED THE BROOKLYN EFFORT

The quick formation of a welcoming committee for Corrigan in Brooklyn had caught the rest of the city by surprise. The reception for Charles Lindbergh after his flight to Paris in 1927 had resulted in a massive program of activities, including a ticker tape parade, in honor of the young flier. The suddenness of the Corrigan flight had left city officials, and Mayor LaGuardia in particular, out in the

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cold. But now a rising wave of interest in Douglas Corrigan and his unprecedented trip to Ireland was sweeping the nation. What may have started out as a mere stunt to be dismissed, now, thanks largely to Corrigan's easy-going and humorous style, attracted interest unlike anything since Lindy's flight eleven

organization. While officially protesting innocence, the mayor was out to derail the Brooklynites, and Howe used all the power of the mayor's office to line up city officials and employees in a Manhattan alternative to the borough across the river. While on the surface, the struggle for control of the Corrigan festivi-

*Photo:  
Corrigan's airplane in a hanger at Baldonnel Aerodrome, Co. Dublin, after he completed his flight. The plane was a Curtis-Robin built in 1929 and modified by Corrigan. Courtesy of National Library of Ireland.*



years before. They had called Lindbergh the "Flying Fool," but Corrigan's accomplishment was chalked up to be more of a courageous event. Here was an unknown flier with an Irish name who made a dangerous crossing to the land of his ancestors in a craft the equivalent of a home-made entry in a soap-box derby. Whereas Lindbergh was stiff and formal, Corrigan was bright and funny, almost like a Texas version of humorist Will Rogers. Although newspapers tried out the appellation "the Flying Swede" on Lindbergh, the name didn't stick. But Corrigan was immediately dubbed the "Flying Irishman," a name that remained with him and even became the title of a Hollywood film that appeared less than a year later in which Corrigan himself starred.

Mayor LaGuardia worked through his secretary, Stanley Howe, to organize a rival committee to the now long established Brooklyn

ties seemed like a simple battle between Manhattan and Brooklyn, it was firmly rooted in the struggle of two factions for political control of the city. LaGuardia, who assumed office in 1934, had defeated the Tammany machine which was widely supported by the city's Irish. His victory dramatically cleaned house of many city employees whose jobs had been secured through the old regime. Brooklyn politicians, like James Kelly, were not just Brooklyn partisans, but LaGuardia political opponents.

The Manhattan committee began to organize city employees named Corrigan, initially twenty-nine in number, to kind of make a clan welcome for their namesake. James McGurrian, president of the American Irish Historical Society, was soon named as the head of the Manhattan welcoming committee. Soon they were able to cobble together an organization

with a representation of Irish names. The Manhattan committee was especially good at winning Douglas Corrigan's relatives to their side. The Reverend S. Fraser Langford, a Baptist pastor from Los Angeles, was Douglas Corrigan's uncle and, following the death of his parents, a father figure for the flier who lived for a time with Fraser and his wife. A few days after the Reverend Langford was in their camp, the Manhattanites captured Corrigan's brother and his wife as they arrived in Newark airport and shuttled them off to a hidden location in the city. Charles Ramsgate, another LaGuardia administration representative, was bold enough to drop in on a meeting of the Brooklyn Committee to tell Jamie Kelly and his supporters that it was customary for Manhattan to honor distinguished visitors to the city with a ticker-tape parade. Immediately, the room erupted in an uproar of protest. Kelly told the Manhattan visitor that Brooklyn had already made plans to meet Corrigan on the arriving liner *Manhattan* while it was in the harbor but not yet docked.

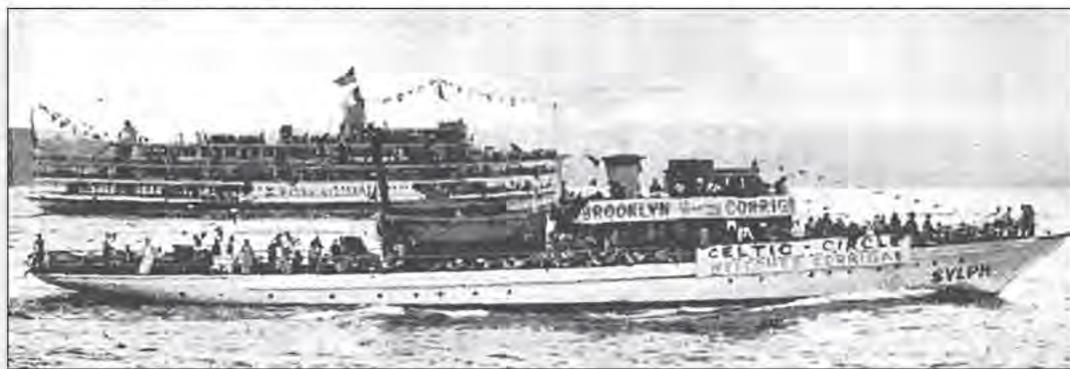
A peace conference between the two sides was called, but it quickly became little more than a verbal slug fest between the disputants with the unnamed mayor implicated by the Brooklyn side as the cause of the row. LaGuardia claimed that he had "no intention of intervening in the rivalry between the bor-

policed properly. At this point Brooklyn Committee member and *Eagle* manager Harrington charged that "This police business is a weak-kneed alibi." "By whom?" demanded Howe indignantly. Harrington answered simply "By someone who wants to keep the parade from Brooklyn."<sup>9</sup>

Several times, Douglas Corrigan's uncle, the Reverend Langford, had to jump into the fray to calm everyone down, arguing that they needed to get together "in the spirit of harmony." But there was to be no compromise. In the end, it was Douglas Corrigan himself who was forced to make the decision. A report in the *New York Times* stated:

*Admitting his fear of how "the fighting Irishmen in Brooklyn" would take his decision, Douglas Corrigan decided last night the battle between the boroughs for the privilege of the first to welcome him. He will receive the traditional greeting for successful ocean fliers tomorrow at noon—a ride from the Battery through the canyon of lower Broadway to City Hall.<sup>10</sup>*

Because Douglas Corrigan arrived late in the afternoon on the liner *Manhattan*, the ceremonies were scheduled to begin the following day. Brooklyn seized one last chance to best LaGuardia and the Manhattan committee



**Photo:**  
The decorated yacht, *Sylph*, chartered by Brooklyn's Celtic Circle and jammed with passengers. It welcomed Corrigan on his return in New York Harbor. Courtesy of John T. Ridge.

oughs," as if his hand-picked men were not the leaders of the Manhattan side. The Manhattan side, citing city-provided information, claimed that a parade through the borough from Floyd Bennett Field down the length of Flatbush Avenue was too long to be

when they chartered a large yacht named *Sylph* on which they stretched two gigantic banners proclaiming "Brooklyn Welcomes Corrigan" and "Celtic Circle Welcomes Corrigan." The flier was welcomed by the Celtic Circle Band, the thumping of tin pans, whirling rattles and,

according to one report "...proud Brooklyn Irishmen shouting greetings to one of their own." Photos of this yacht and the banners made it to many newspapers across the country, scooping the New York reception which came the following morning. Another boat carried 166 Corrigan on board who enthusiastically welcomed their kinsman.<sup>11</sup> When one of the welcoming Brooklyn officials, a Mr. Tichenor, boarded the *Manhattan* in New York harbor, he told Corrigan that "We are proud of you. We knew when you took off you would get there..." Corrigan immediately replied "Then you knew a whole lot more than I did."<sup>12</sup>

It was only after the next mornings' ticker-tape parade, the welcome by the mayor at City Hall, and a luncheon at the Advertiser's Club, that Brooklyn would get an in-person visit from what they now regarded as their hometown hero. (Despite all the squabbling, "Corrigan Day" in Manhattan proved a tremendous success with the ticker-tape parade rivaling, and according to some sources perhaps even surpassing, the welcome for Lindbergh.)

The afternoon parade in Brooklyn from Floyd Bennett Field up Flatbush Avenue had spectators lining the streets over the entire route. At Borough Hall, the crowd was so big that hundreds of viewers climbed up the elevated subway then nearby for a better look. Humorously, Corrigan was presented with a large working compass which the flier used to point the way to Ireland in contrast to one he claimed did not work on his "wrong way" flight.<sup>13</sup>

Later in the day, before Corrigan got to the reception at Yankee Stadium, he attended a concert of Irish airs and symphonic pieces at Lewisohn Stadium where the members of the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra played and where Irish tenor and radio personality John Feeney serenaded him with a number of Irish songs including "Killarney," "Molly Brannigan," and the "Rose of Tralee." Country-boy Corrigan spoke honestly and briefly announced, "This is my first concert and it is indeed very educational and interest-

ing."<sup>14</sup> The final event of the long day was a gathering at 10 p.m. of some thirty-thousand people at Yankee Stadium which was carried live by many radio stations. The *Daily News* stated that:

*Douglas Corrigan, from the listeners' viewpoint, was perhaps the most popular celebrity ever greeted by the city. So the broadcasters did themselves proud in bringing this tumultuous reception to millions of listeners.*<sup>15</sup>

#### JAMIE KELLY'S CELTIC CIRCLE

The welcome of Douglas Corrigan to the City of New York was a celebration that almost did not come off. The divisive nature of New York politics in 1938 also split plans for the welcome. James A. Kelly had seized early on the idea of giving Corrigan an unofficial welcome, based on Brooklyn local pride, by the Irish political association he had founded and controlled, the Celtic Circle. When New York's City Hall realized that their Democratic Party rivals had the Corrigan event entirely under their purview, they acted to subvert their control and ultimately to wrest it away from them. Yet, the city-wide Corrigan welcome would never have been the massive celebration it turned out to be without the work of the Celtic Circle and Kelly, who was its founder. Kelly, a Co. Longford-born small-time politician and well-known figure in the Irish community in Brooklyn, founded the Celtic Circle in early 1932, not coincidentally an important election year. Although he was not always the nominal head of the organization, Kelly was always the leader behind the scenes and almost always the spokesman before the public. The names Celtic Circle and James Kelly became virtually synonymous.

The Celtic Circle resembled the fading namesake societies, those groups that bore the name of its standard-bearer, such as the Timothy D. O'Sullivan Association in Manhattan in 1902 and the Peter McGuinness Association in Brooklyn in 1912. These societies were particularly popular in the generation previous into the 1930s. The Celtic Circle was a platform for Kelly that allowed him to use his



**Photo:**  
*The size of Manhattan's ticker-tape parade for Douglas Corrigan rivaled, according to some reports, that for Charles Lindberg in 1927. Corrigan's Manhattan parade, however, was not without initial controversy, especially in Brooklyn. Courtesy of John T. Ridge.*

favorite son status within the organization to serve as his power base for personal and political support. From time to time, the Celtic Circle agitated for political support for appointed office or advancement for himself or others. The organization contained a loyal cadre of supporters of "Jamie" Kelly, who were close friends and political allies. If it wasn't Kelly himself who was cited in newspaper reports of Celtic Circle events, it was one of his cronies who served under the title of "chieftain." The chieftains were elected usually without opposition to head one of the branches; the members of the branches were commonly closely identified with Democratic Party organizations or were city employees in the Brooklyn courts and city agencies around Borough Hall. In the 1930s and through most of the 1950s, Borough Hall and the patronage jobs were still held by individuals of Irish background. This large pool of employment was particularly important during the Depression years, and remained so as long as the Irish politicians could maintain control in an ethnically changing Brooklyn. When LaGuardia came to office in 1934, the old Irish Democratic machine lost not only power but also jobs for its supporters.

Kelly enjoyed politics and, like many others, he realized the importance of keeping close

to those in leadership positions, not only working closely with them on a day to day basis, but keeping an active schedule of social contacts through evening political and civic social events like dances, concerts, and entertainments of various types. Reading the accounts of the Celtic Circle events that appeared regularly in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the borough's lively daily newspaper, the familiar names of the Irish contingent of Democratic Party officials, ward leaders, elected and appointed officials and judges appear again and again. "Wrong Way Corrigan" was the perfect cause to embrace to bolster the power and prestige of the Celtic Circle and old-line Democrats. Although an Irish organization, it was not a Roman Catholic society, and had several prominent Irish Protestants in its ranks, some Irish-born. Not at all interested in Irish politics, it could secure the help of societies like the Unionist Ulster Irish Society into the Corrigan Committee.

While James Kelly never actually ran for public office in an election, he remained close enough to the political leadership, especially the remaining Irish political power in the borough, to slowly work his way upward in importance in the ranks of public employees. He held the office of Deputy

*Photo:*  
*Brooklyn Corrigan*  
*Committee*  
*members, (l. to r.)*  
*Willets Shorwell,*  
*chairman James A.*  
*"Jamie" Kelly,*  
*Joseph McGoldrick,*  
*and John J.*  
*Harrington. The*  
*Committee battled*  
*Mayor LaGuardia*  
*for control of the*  
*city's welcome to the*  
*intrepid flier.*  
*Courtesy of*  
*John T. Ridge.*



County Clerk for many years and served on a number of occasions as Acting County Clerk. If the system of choosing the County Clerk had remained an elective office rather than being shifted to the choice of the judicial bench, Kelly probably would have been elected to higher office, but several times others were chosen in his place.

Although he had been brought to America at age seven from Ireland, Kelly grew up in Brooklyn with a deep appreciation of its history, and finished off his public career as the unpaid Brooklyn Borough Historian. This sense of the past doubtless fueled Kelly's hometown effort to make the Corrigan reception a Brooklyn event. Kelly was a politician, Brooklyn patriot, and performer. For his many friends he was the one time vaudeville star and author of Tin Pan Alley songs like the once popular "If We Only Had Old Ireland Over Here." Like many politicians of the time, Kelly not only delivered speeches, but sang and danced his way into the hearts of his listeners. As a member of many Brooklyn organizations, from veterans groups like the American Legion to neighborhood civic associations, he was very well-known and popular. All these connections were called upon for his Corrigan celebration. Kelly's own commitment to the celebration was so great that he completely forgot his own ninth wedding anniversary.<sup>16</sup>

The Celtic Circle had some experience with parades before Douglas Corrigan arrived. In November, 1932, the Celtic Circle under Jamie Kelly's leadership held a parade

and commemoration in Prospect Park in conjunction with the bicentennial of George Washington's birth. The park was situated on the site of the heroic stand of the patriot army during the Revolutionary War soldiers. Brooklyn Irish societies occasionally marked the battle with ceremonies. The organization was rather ambitiously said to have been "organized last year for the purpose of keeping alive Erin's ideals and creating a closer relationship among its millions of people in this country."<sup>17</sup>

Kelly's Celtic Circle was not entirely parochial in its interests, and this is why it could appeal to non-Irish organizations at the time of the Corrigan flight. In March, 1933, for example, reacting relatively early to the first reports of the frightening persecution of the Jewish population in Germany, the organization sent a letter to both the German ambassador in Washington and the Consul General in New York stating that "no such campaign of bigotry as has been pictured as having occurred in Germany can be condoned."<sup>18</sup> Subsequently, the Circle issued various warnings on a regular basis such as in 1938 when it advised Americans "must be careful of what the youth of this nation is taught if they are to ward off Fascism, Communism and Nazism."<sup>19</sup>

The Celtic Circle grew slowly in the 1930s, but always achieved some recognition from the ruling elite of Brooklyn Irish politicians, including several judges from the various Brooklyn courts. In the wake of the

Corrigan celebration, the Celtic Circle expanded rapidly, even adding a few branches in places like Nassau County and Staten Island. It was very much the child of Jamie Kelly, fading as the political ambitions of Kelly faded, and eventually became defunct around the time of his death in 1971.

#### DOUGLAS CORRIGAN—IRISHMAN BY POPULAR DEMAND?

Before Douglas Corrigan made his epic flight to Ireland, he was a virtually unknown flier. His biggest achievement came only a few days before his flight to Ireland when he flew non-stop from California to Roosevelt Field before moving on to his departure point, Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. He was born in Galveston, Texas, where his father was a civil engineer who deserted nine-year-old Douglas and his two younger siblings when business failed. The children's mother borrowed money from a relative to run a boarding house, and young Douglas went to work, initially as a paper boy and eventually into the mechanics of aircraft in order to support his love of flying. His father's abandonment could have hardly endeared

his father's side to him, yet he carried no regret about his last name. But "Clyde" Corrigan, as Douglas was called from his birth, legally changed his first name as a teen-ager in homage to movie star hero Douglas Fairbanks.

When Douglas Corrigan spoke in his easy nonchalant style, his accent was usually described as a Texas drawl, but on at least one occasion a newspaper termed it a part Irish, part-Texas drawl. This would have been remarkable, given his origins and family background, for Ireland and things Irish were about as far removed from his life as they could be. He moved to California as a teenager, but apparently the only thing Irish about him continued to be his surname. As far as is known, he neither lived in a neighborhood with people of Irish origin or participated in any Irish-American cultural activities.

As a mechanic on the *Spirit of St. Louis*, he was proud of his contribution to the flight of another hero in his life, Charles Lindbergh. He tinkered and rebuilt planes and with his own \$900 plane that he called *Sunshine*, he dreamt of his own flight across the sea. Even ten years after Lindbergh's flight there had been only a handful of successful East/West crossings of



**Photo:**  
Douglas Corrigan at City Hall reception with Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and crowd of admirers on "Corrigan Day." Corrigan's day was filled with activities including an afternoon parade along Flatbush Avenue, a concert of Irish music, and a gathering of 30,000 people at Yankee Stadium. Courtesy of John T. Ridge.

the Atlantic. Corrigan had one interest in life and that was flying.

Just who were the Corrigans and where did they come from remains something of a mystery. Like his fellow Texan Audie Murphy of World War II fame, the trail back to Ireland remains obscure. Several speculative family trees appearing on the internet point to several possible Irish county origins—Armagh, Tyrone and Donegal, but nothing is for sure. It seems probable though the Corrigans arrived in Texas from Pennsylvania and perhaps their immigration was as recent as the time of the Great Hunger. Having left school at an early age, Corrigan's sense of Irish geography was probably only as great as the two maps he tore from an atlas on the eve of his flight. But perhaps there is something mystical about the pull of Irish heritage.

Fellow flier Charles Lindbergh, and Corrigan inspiration, seems to have had a touch of this mysticism. Lindbergh, after flying over the coast of Co. Kerry, recalled in a letter to his mother in 1936, his own feelings on first sighting Ireland and asked if it was “possibly because a love of the old country is passed on even to the distant descendants of all Irishmen.” Lindbergh's mother responded to an inquiry about her ancestry from the president of the American Irish Historical Society, stating that her maternal grandmother was born in the Isle of Man, but the family had returned to Tipperary from where they had originally come. She told the A.I.H.S. president: “Do not thank me for revealing Irish inheritance. All Irish descendants boast of it.”<sup>20</sup>

When news of Douglas Corrigan's flight to Ireland first broke in America, it seems that only on the strength of his surname and destination alone that he was judged to be “the Flying Irishman.” But Corrigan was not the stereotypical Irishman of New York or Boston. He was a Texan and thoroughly American in all his mannerisms. Like his Baptist minister uncle, he was committed to his faith and was a life-long teetotaler. Many years after his flight, he appeared on the Prohibition Party ticket in California. When he arrived in New York he

was probably a bit surprised about how he had become an Irishman with little or no reference to his American birth and Texas origins. Newspaper editorials created an image of man they didn't really know. One editorial in the *Pittsburgh Press* offered this depiction:

*CORRIGAN'S APPEAL*

*To understand the sudden and immense enthusiasm shown by the American people for Douglas Corrigan, we have to go into the realms of psychology, personal and national.*

*Personally, Corrigan is Irish; he is human, humorous and whimsical, he is an entirely new type of hero, whom most Americans find appealing.*

*Beyond that, isn't he a symbol of American individualism and daredevilry, defying red tape, rebelling against restraint, refusing to be bottled up, breaking loose and doing what he wants to do, regardless of the consequences?*

*Lindbergh when he reached Paris said quietly, “Well, I did it!” Corrigan when he reached Dublin seemed to say, “Well, what are you going to do about it? And he gets away with it. It is at once very Irish and very American.”<sup>21</sup>*

Mostly, American newspapers just smothered the Corrigan coverage with pure blarney, like a statement from a Pittsburgh publication: “But we know that ‘twas the Irish heart of him that guided him, like a homing pigeon to the old land.”<sup>22</sup> One of the New York Irish weeklies, the *Irish Advocate*, a newspaper with a staff and readership almost entirely composed of individuals born in Ireland, took a more balanced view of Corrigan:

*The singular feature of the Corrigan flight is that he is of Irish extraction and mapped his way across the ocean without any of the modern instruments that air science now provides aeronauts with. His arrival in Dublin instead of Los Angeles has some romance connected with the flight, and it may be that Corrigan was nettled by the refusal of U.S. flying authorities to okay the air*



*Photo:*  
*"The Flying Irishman"*  
 Douglas Corrigan  
 points in the direction  
 of Ireland before an  
 Aer Lingus flight to  
 Ireland in 1988 to  
 commemorate the fifti-  
 eth anniversary of his  
 1938 solo trip across  
 the Atlantic. Courtesy  
 of John T. Ridge.

worthiness of his antique plane. The obvious moral of the flight seems to be that Irishmen dislike the prohibitions on their progress, and invariably take to breaking restrictive laws with an innate indifference to the promulgators. At any rate, Ireland and Irish folks in the United States will speak of the Corrigan defiance for many a moon, and there will be few Americans who will not also applaud a daring adventure accomplished without fanfare or newspaper ballyhoo.<sup>23</sup>

Several poems appeared in the New York Irish weeklies including one by J.D. Curtin who set the chorus to the Irish air of "Men of the West:"

*Then here's to our Gallant Young Hero  
 Who brought fame to the name and the Race  
 Receiving his "Laurels"—so modestly  
 And the Irish Own Smile on his face  
 Great heroes were honored all o'er  
 And great numbers had time to prepare  
 But Corrigan rode blind to His Glory  
 When he spread out his wings on the Air<sup>24</sup>*

In a radio address delivered over radio station WHN, James McGurrin, President of the American Irish Historical Society, put Corrigan in an historical perspective:

*Corrigan, as his name implies, is Irish—but he also stands forth today as the symbol and embodiment of the spirit of America—the dauntless courage and the invincible faith that have made America great. There is also something about him and what he has accomplished that recall to our minds the long line of Irish pioneers who have colored and enriched the most stirring annals of our country's history.<sup>25</sup>*

At the New York celebration held for Corrigan, however, the crowd seemed to focus on Corrigan as an Irishman rather than as an American. "Corrigan Day" in New York was an overwhelming exhibition of Irish New York, a day immersed in Irish cultural and musical activities. The Mayor, an expert on ethnic pandering, at his City Hall ceremony referred several times to Ireland and the fact it was a great day for the Irish. The mayor seemed to forget that while Corrigan may have made a daring flight to Ireland, he had not changed his nationality. The aviator chose to gently correct his honor, according to a *Daily News* report:

*I'd like to remind the Mayor," Corrigan, after an embarrassed but winning pause retorted, "that we came back all-American. We came back a passenger on the United States liner*

*Manhattan and our plane is coming back on the American ship Oriole. And we're going to keep right on being all American.*<sup>26</sup>

#### EPILOGUE

After New York, Douglas Corrigan was given similar welcomes in several American cities including Boston, Newark, Washington, D.C., Atlantic City, Cleveland, Albany, Syracuse, Atlanta, Buffalo and finally a return home to the west coast and a reception in Los Angeles, the place where his flight began. In Rochester, a thousand members of the Orange Order interrupted their convention then being held in the city to charter buses to take them to his arrival at the airport where they proclaimed him as a descendant of "good old Ulster."<sup>27</sup>

Although he maintained his smile in all his public appearances, Douglas Corrigan was plainly worn-out by the attention and tried to settle in to his old life. A book, *That's My Story*, and a film, "The Flying Irishman," in which he played himself, soon followed. With the proceeds of his book and film and a number of advertising endorsements, he purchased an orange grove in California where he spent many years until heavy taxes forced him to sell it. During World War II he ferried aircraft from place to place for the military and conducted test flights. After the war Corrigan headed his own business running various charter flights and a freight service to destinations as far as Alaska. While he appeared occasionally at air related events, he seems not to have had any connection with Irish organizations or activities thereafter. He did visit Ireland on the fiftieth anniversary of his flight as the guest of Aer Lingus, the Irish airline, in 1988. A plaque in his honor was unveiled in Dublin Airport. He died in 1995 at age eighty-eight. His kept his plane in his garage, and from time-to time at his sister's. It remained there until last year when one of his sons had it moved to storage. It awaits, hopefully, a home in a good museum where he and his epic flight can be honored.<sup>28</sup>

#### Endnotes

- 1 *New York Times*, July 18, 1938
- 2 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 12 and 18, 1938
- 3 *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1938
- 4 *New York Times*, December 14, 1995
- 5 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 19, 1938
- 6 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 19, 1938
- 7 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 20, 1938
- 8 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 22, 1938; *New York Times*, August 1, 1938
- 9 *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 1, 1938
- 10 *New York Times*, August 4, 1938
- 11 *North Shore Daily*, August 6, 1938
- 12 *New York Times*, August 5, 1938
- 13 *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 6, 1938
- 14 *New York Times*, August 6, 1938
- 15 *Daily News*, August 6, 1938
- 16 *New York Times*, July 10, 1971; *Brooklyn Eagle*, August 6, 1938
- 17 *Brooklyn Eagle*, November 23, 1932
- 18 *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 30, 1933
- 19 *Brooklyn Eagle*, April 25, 1938
- 20 *Star Press*, Muncie, Ind., June 6, 1927
- 21 *Corning Morning Leader*, August 22, 1938
- 22 *Pittsburgh Press*, July 19, 1938
- 23 *Irish Advocate*, July 23, 1938
- 24 *Irish Advocate*, July 23, 1938
- 25 *Irish Advocate*, July 30, 1938
- 26 *Daily News*, August 6, 1938
- 27 *Democrat and Chronicle*, August 18, 1932
- 28 *New York Post*, September 6, 1956; *New York Times*, December 14, 1995; *Morning Call*, July 19, 1988; KABC TV, Los Angeles, February 8, 2018