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## Save the Date!

The annual  
Walks of Life dinner  
will be held in late Spring 2023:

Thursday, April 27, 2023, 5:30 pm  
Windows on the River

# Preserving Our Heritage, Sharing Our Stories

The Newsletter of the  
Irish American Archives Society of Cleveland & Northeast Ohio

Volume 25, Number 2, Fall 2022

## IRISHTOWN BEND UPDATE

A variety of community partners have been hard at work for several years now to realize a shared vision for a park development on the hillside overlooking the Cuyahoga River at the so-called Irishtown Bend.

The nickname “Irishtown Bend” evokes the storied past of the Irish in Cleveland. But most Clevelanders are hazy about when and why the moniker arose and stuck.

IAAS has embarked on the detailed research needed to accurately portray the history of Irishtown Bend and is working to make this story an integral part of the park development.

Census records, city directories, property deeds, plat maps and archival photos and news items must all be scoured so that facts can replace lore. For instance, preliminary work suggests that the settlement is Famine era, not Canal era, as is often claimed. The records do substantiate a strong Irish immigrant presence in the area from the mid-1850s through the early 1900s, drawn especially by work on the coal docks and railroads. But the staying power of the term “Irishtown Bend” may have as much to do with recurring civic discussions about river navigation challenges in the 1910s-1940s.



In 1851, an early real estate developer named Hiram Stone began selling lots on the hillside above the future Irishtown Bend on the west bank of the Cuyahoga River.

Student interns Daniel Burrell and Sean Joyce assisted IAAS Executive Director Margaret Lynch in an intensive research initiative this past summer. Burrell is a recent John Carroll University graduate who has begun graduate studies in public history at Kent State University. Joyce, a recent Holy Name High School graduate, is currently enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

The IAAS research will be distilled for inclusion in the official hillside stabilization report commissioned by The US Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority, and The Ohio State Historic Preservation Office. The work will also be shared with the entities involved in the park development--Ohio City Incorporated, LAND Studio, and Canalway Partners. IAAS is eager to share news of this exciting development as it unfolds!

## IAAS Podcast Resumes in November

The Irish American Archives Society Podcast, titled “Finding Home,” will resume November 8. First launched in May 2020, the podcast advances the IAAS mission by presenting information about the history of the Irish in Cleveland. A total of 80 episodes have been released since the initial launch, logging 10,000 “plays” in all.

A first series of 50 episodes ran weekly from May 2020, through April 2021. IAAS Executive Director Margaret Lynch researched, wrote, and delivered the 15–20-minute episodes that made up the first series. The series presented topics chronologically, from the earliest-known Irish settler in the Cleveland area—a fur trader in the 1740s—through an overview of the Irish clubs active today.

The second series, which ran from October 2021, through May 2021, featured 30 weekly 45-minute interviews with Clevelanders who had information and stories to share about the history and present-day activities of the Irish in Cleveland. The interviewees included past Walks of Life and Parade honorees, small business owners, musicians, priests, and Irish club leaders, among others.

A third interview series, with a similar range of interviewees, is set to launch November 8, 2022, sponsored by Ohio Real Title. The third series will consist of 16 weekly episodes, with a two-week pause during the Christmas holidays. A link on the home page of the Irish American Archives Society website ([www.irisharchives.org](http://www.irisharchives.org)) directs listeners to an episode menu. Listeners can follow the episodes in order or pick and choose episodes according to their own interests. Hear how Clevelanders are advancing the story of the Irish in this city.



Al O'Leary, pictured at left with Julia Burke, is one of the Parade Grand Marshals who will be interviewed in the IAAS Podcast Series 3

**Trustees:** Hon. Ken Callahan Jr., Dan Conway, Thomas D. Corrigan, John Coyne, Ray Daull, Margaret (Meg) McGarry, John Myers, Erin O'Toole, Kevin O'Toole, Jim Proctor, Hon. Colleen Reali, Thomas J. Scanlon. **Trustees Emeritus:** Helen C. Malloy, Mary Karen O'Neil, Gerald Quinn.

**Executive Director:** Margaret Lynch, PhD.

Visit the IAAS website  
at [www.irisharchives.org](http://www.irisharchives.org)

Taimid ag suil le do comhlúadar  
We look forward to your company!



# Letter Found in a Jam Jar Links Cleveland to the Irish Civil War

In September of last year, contractors who were rehabilitating an old shed near Newport, in County Mayo, made an unexpected find. Wedged into a stone wall by a gable window was a jam jar filled with old letters, receipts, a membership roster, and a small diary.

The shed and the property it stood on belong to Patrick Chambers, who inherited it from his great uncle by marriage, Thomas Mulchrone. The papers all related to local IRA activity a century earlier—during the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and subsequent Civil War (1922-1923). Even though Thomas Mulchrone was too old at the time for active combat duty himself, he was a staunch republican who had provided shelter and aide to IRA soldiers on the run. His house would have been raided from time to time, and he must have hidden the IRA records for safekeeping.

And hidden the documents remained, for nearly a hundred years. When the jam jar was opened, a letter with Cleveland connections was found among the papers.

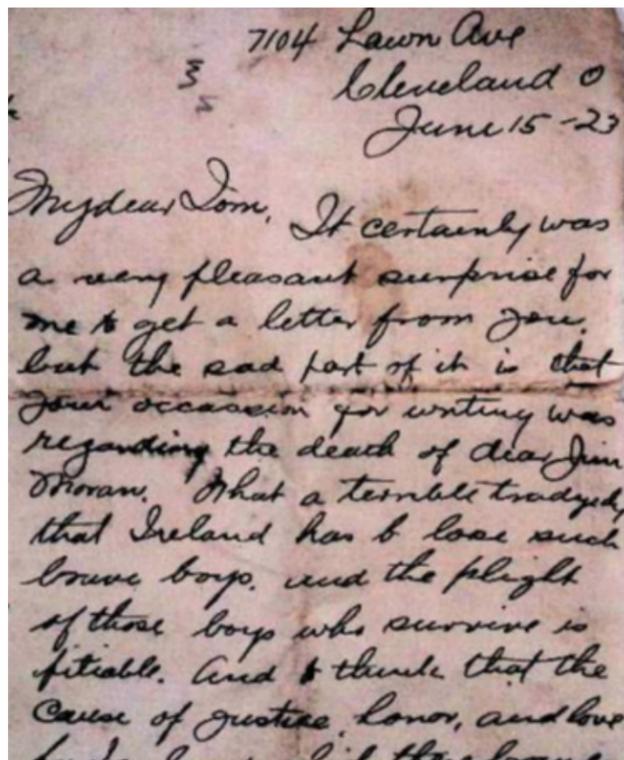
As the Michael Davitt Museum staff prepared the documents for display, volunteers from the Tiernaur Oral History group, which compiled the 2019 book *Remember Us: The People's War*, Newport Area, Mayo, 1914-1924, began to research the identity of the Cleveland letter writer: husband and wife, Sean Cadden and Peggy Moran, along with Mick Mulchrone, who was born and raised on Cleveland's West Side, and Margaret Poole, who had met a Cleveland Chambers contingent at a 2011 reunion in Newport.

The letter was originally thought to be written from Cleveland by Thomas Mulchrone's brother John. However, the Tiernaur volunteers began to wonder if the letter had instead been penned by John Chambers, the older brother of Cleveland funeral home founder, William F. Chambers. John Chambers and Thomas Mulchrone were of a similar age and grew up in adjoining townlands—Derradda and Doontrusk—outside of Newport. They shared a fierce commitment to the cause of Irish independence.

A couple of Clevelanders were able to assist in the identification: two children of John Chambers (Mary Patricia Chambers and her brother Bill, along with his wife, Kathleen Cooney Chambers) and their cousin, Francine Chambers Tirpak, daughter of William F. Chambers, the founder of Chambers Funeral Homes.

Bill and Kathleen Chambers fortuitously had the originals of several letters that John Chambers had written to family members in Ireland. A Chambers relative had returned the originals to Bill during a visit to Ireland. Bill and Kathleen were able to send copies of Bill's father's letters to the Tiernaur Oral History Group. They were excited to see that the handwriting in the verified Chambers letters was a match for the handwriting in the letter found in the jam jar. In addition, the jam jar letter is dated "June 15, '23" and bears the return address of 7104 Lawn Avenue. A Chambers couple who lived at that address during the 1920s opened their home—on a side street near St. Colman church—to members of the funeral home family when each arrived in Cleveland.

Not surprisingly, John Chambers' letters to family members in Ireland focused on family news. Writing to his father in 1935, John Chambers announced the birth of the second son of his brother William, described the vegetable garden in his backyard on W. 93rd Street, and referenced an episode of Fr. Charles Coughlin's weekly radio hour. In 1950, he wrote to his sister to break the sad news of the unexpected and untimely death of their brother William.



The first page of the John Chambers letter provides an important clue: the return address of 7104 Lawn Avenue.

In the June 1923 letter to Thomas Mulchrone, John Chambers reflected on news of the Irish Civil War. It was a dispiriting time for anti-treaty supporters such as Chambers and Mulchrone. After calling a ceasefire in April 1923, the anti-Treaty forces ordered their men to surrender in May 1923. The ascendancy of the government's pro-Treaty forces would cement the partition of Ireland.

Having raised funds for the cause of a united Ireland in Cleveland, John Chambers expressed frustration that the money may not have reached soldiers in the field when it could have made a difference:

*America has paid out money willingly and frequently, and we believed we were helping the army all over Ireland. We had an [Irish] army man here a week ago, and I questioned him, others too, regarding the money. He said that the funds were not given out to Divisions in money, but were given in supplies. In Cleveland alone, I believe \$15,000 has been subscribed for Ireland these last 6 or 8 months. I would very much wish to have from the army or Western Division officers to what extent has that Division been helped in the form of supplies.*

Chambers reported that Clevelanders sent an additional \$155 directly to Newport for "smokes for the boys," which was apparently a code phrase for weapons. Chambers hoped that the pause in fighting was only temporary and was concerned about the morale of anti-treaty partisans like his younger brother William. "I suppose our William is having a hard time too. I know that all are. I suppose the fight is over for a time," Chambers lamented. "How will it end?" he plaintively asked.

John Chambers immigrated to Cleveland in 1915, before the start of World War I. A chapter of the Clan na Gael, a secret, pro-nationalist society, was active in this city when Chambers arrived here. A 1914 roster of the Cleveland group is preserved in the archives of the Western Reserve Historical Society, among the papers of John M. Gallagher, who was one of the club's leaders. At the top of the 1914 roster stood the name of Con Chambers, the future father-in-law of John Chambers' brother William. The nationalists raised money for the cause of Irish independence at a summer picnic each year. John Chambers must have joined the group after his arrival.

John's younger brother William stayed in Ireland throughout the struggle for independence and the Civil War, aligning himself with the anti-treaty forces and only immigrating in 1925, after the Civil War was quelled. In Cleveland, in 1929, William F. Chambers married Agnes Chambers, daughter of Con, the Clan na Gael member. William Chambers found work as a policeman but was forced by an injury to leave the force. As an IRA veteran, he petitioned the Irish government, which had announced that pensions would be awarded for army service during the 1920s, even for anti-treaty combatants. Chambers hoped for a pension or medical assistance. According to IRA historian Gavin Wilk in the book *Transatlantic Defiance*, the Cleveland Clan na Gael members felt that Chambers "was not given a square deal by the medical department of the IRA." They decided to assist Chambers on their own. In 1933, he opened an undertaking business in Cleveland, the business that is still run by his descendants today.

John Chambers and his brother William are only two among many Irish nationalists with Cleveland ties. John Chambers' letter joins a handful of documents with Cleveland connections that bear first-hand witness to the struggle for Irish independence. In addition to the John M. Gallagher collection of Clan na Gael documents, can be added the memoirs of Bryan Corrigan of Owenduff, great uncle of Cleveland fire captain Patrick Corrigan. IAAS supporters Jim and Jake Boland have a poem written by their father, James C. Boland, an IRA veteran from West Clare, commemorating two colleagues who lost their lives at the hands of the Black and Tans.

As the tale of the jam jar suggests, you never know where or when such treasures will surface. Scour your own attics: maybe you, too, will find documents that provide a firsthand account of history.



Wedding photo of 1923 letter writer John Chambers (abt. 1892-1967) and Mary Masterson, daughter of Thomas "Coal Oil" Masterson, married in Cleveland in 1927.