

Dublin Historical Society

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SUMMER DUBLIN NINETY YEARS AGO

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF MARION SCHLESINGER WHITING

Jasper and Marion Whiting had led an unusual and exciting life as world travelers before their first visit to Dublin in the summer of 1919, when they rented the cottage (unidentified) so unflatteringly described below. They continued as Dublin summer renters, spending their winters in Boston, until 1927, when they settled as year-rounders in the house on the Old Harrisville Road now owned by Mary Ellen Moore.

Jasper Whiting (1871-1941) was an M.I.T. graduate who made an early fortune through a series of esoteric industrial inventions. At their first meeting in 1905, as described by his wife, "he was tall and fair with immense blue eyes and an engaging manner." He had just returned from China, where he had covered the Boxer Rebellion as a war correspondent. "An air of romance hung round him."

Marion Schlesinger Whiting (1882-1966) was born in Boston, to a family of great wealth. After her husband's

death in 1941 she closed the Dublin house and moved back to Boston, where she became active in charitable war work. After the war she sold the house and resumed the life of an adventurous traveler, punctuated by journalism and good works in Boston.

What follows is an extract from "Irresistible World", Marion Whiting's unpublished memoirs, evidently written in the late 1950s. In this part she describes summer Dublin as she first knew it. Though the chronology is not always apparent, it is clear that these are early impressions, mainly in the summer of 1919.

A copy of this memoir was given to the Society by Barbara deMarneffe in 2008. The following extract is published by permission of Mrs. Robert Lawrence, Marion Whiting's niece. Minor omissions and corrections have been made silently, since the full typescript is always available for comparison.

Jasper's frail health after World War I had first led us to this resort near Mt. Monadnock. High, dry air for the summer had been the doctor's orders. In searching for a place that met these needs we tracked down Dublin, one thousand five hundred feet above sea level, famous for its climate and offering the attractions of a typical American summer community.

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Message from the President – Winter Pot-luck Supper

Be sure to mark February 27 on your calendar. Our February meeting will have a distinguished speaker. **Jane Cayford Nylander**, president emerita of Historic New England (formerly S.P.N.E.A.), will tell us about **The Heyday of Decorated Coach Parades**.

Around the turn of the 20th Century resort hotels arranged popular competitions involving decorated horse-drawn carriages, usually carrying a bevy of local and visiting beauties. The center of these pageants was further north, but Dublin had at least one such event, documented with photographs.

All are invited to the Vestry of the Church at 6:30. Please bring a main dish, vegetable, salad or dessert. Snow date is Saturday, February 28.

– A. A.



July of that year, 1919, saw us installed in a dreadful little rented cottage close to Dublin Lake. Our house had no screened porch on which to sit free from mosquitoes, no comfortable chairs in the living room and only one bath for us and whatever guest were to use it. . . . But these drawbacks were not evident that first day when we stood, mosquito bitten on our piazza, breathing Dublin air. We filled our lungs with it immediately feeling as stimulated by it as if we had just had strong cocktails. . . .

It did not take us long to find that we had plunged into a hospitable but distinguished community. Here we felt content, stimulated by the contrasts which made up life in Dublin. Where else, we asked each other, after a day of roughing it in the open, could one dine in full dress among sophisticated surroundings, only the next evening to picnic in the studio of a famous artist? Where else could one sleep on a mountaintop and lunch the next day with Ruth St. Denis, the dancer, or a collector of Greek vases?

Nothing took place in the summer colony without Joseph Lindon Smith and his wife Corinna. They were the most beloved of the community. Joe had roamed the world, was famous for his paintings of Egyptian tomb frescoes, for pageants he had put on in many cities and especially for his wit and enthralling yarns. Behind his engaging smile he had an amazing fund of artistic knowledge. To me he represented the delightful combination of a gentleman and a Bohemian. Corinna complemented him with her beauty, her knowledge of Arabic and the Koran, her energy and extreme kindness. Together with their three daughters they created an atmosphere that sparkled.

The Smiths lived on "Loon Point." Here Joe expressed all that was in him - his artistic flare,

his imagination, his humor. With the toss of his hand he had turned a stretch of his land into a fascinating Japanese garden; he had taken a broken baby carriage, wrapped it in cotton, covered this with plaster and painted it so skillfully that most of his guests thought it a fantastic, ancient rock. Chipped drainpipes and mutilated wooden columns, in Joe's fingers, became integral parts of his "old" temples. He must have laughed to hear unknowing visitors exclaim in awe on these fabri-

cations of his skill as if they were antiques. Most attractive of everything on Loon Point was his *Teatro Bambino*, an exquisite little theatre with moss covered, child-sized ledges for seats, equally small boxes above and on the backdrop of the stage a fine Luca della Robbia plaque. Here the children of Dublin put on, under Joe's direction, a simple pageant.

By the time we had arrived in Dublin the *Teatro Bambino* had become too small to hold all who wanted to see Joe's performances, so he had built nearby a Greek theatre, large enough for the entire community. As each Labor Day rolled around in this open air enclosure, he staged a colorful show in which his family and members of the

summer colony took part.

The Smiths not only ran the Dublin Lake Club, the center for sports, lectures and dances, but they entertained constantly, often for some distinguished house guest, such as General John J. Pershing or Amelia Earhart. Corinna was away the evening Joe telephoned us to come for dinner with Miss Ruth St. Denis, then giving recitals with her husband, Ted Shawn, at nearby Peterborough. She arrived modishly dressed in a long evening gown. She was most attractive with smooth gray hair, sparkling brown eyes, slim figure and a face as delicately shaped as if cut by the chisel of Donatello. Her bond with Joe was a passion for the dance. Conversation flowed. At last Miss St. Denis left the table and began to illustrate a point



MARION S. WHITING from a clipping from the *Boston Traveler*, March 14, 1958.

she had just made regarding a certain dance.

"That's wonderful," Joe exclaimed. "Go on – but we must have footlights, a costume for you and music."

A victrola was started playing a Brahms waltz. From somewhere Joe produced a reading lamp of the snake-neck variety to serve as footlights, a long gossamer scarf to wrap around Miss St. Denis and she was off, swirling around, following no set pattern. It made no difference to her that she was spotlighted only dimly, that the space for her nimble toes was limited, or that her audience consisted of merely three people. She danced for her own delight. Many times afterward I saw Ruth St. Denis in her public performances, but never did I think she danced with such grace, fervor and intensity as on that evening at Joe Smith's.

Outstanding among our Dublin neighbors was the Honorable Franklin MacVeagh, who lived in Newport style, surrounded by lawns, terraces and rose gardens. He had served under President William Howard Taft as Secretary of the Treasury, a distinction he let no one forget. His extensive house was constantly filled with Washington officials and foreign diplomats for whom he gave elaborate dinner parties, too formal to be very lively but Dublin folk tumbled over one another to be invited to them. I grew very fond of Mr. MacVeagh. He was an excellent talker, a good listener, a discerning host. Frequently he would appear mornings at the Lake Club tennis courts, immaculately dressed in white with a blue tie to match the color of his eyes. Glancing around the crowd watching the game, he would occasionally drift toward me and whisper in my ear, "Come over this afternoon for a talk, just by ourselves."

Of course I went, flattered by his wanting me. He doted on gossiping of Dublin people but was at his best when speaking of world affairs and Washington politics. Being an ardent Republican, his opinions were definitely one-sided. To him

every Democrat, especially President Woodrow Wilson, was blackguard. There was no arguing with Mr. MacVeagh. He did not like to be disagreed with which was why I never really dared tell him I was a Democrat.

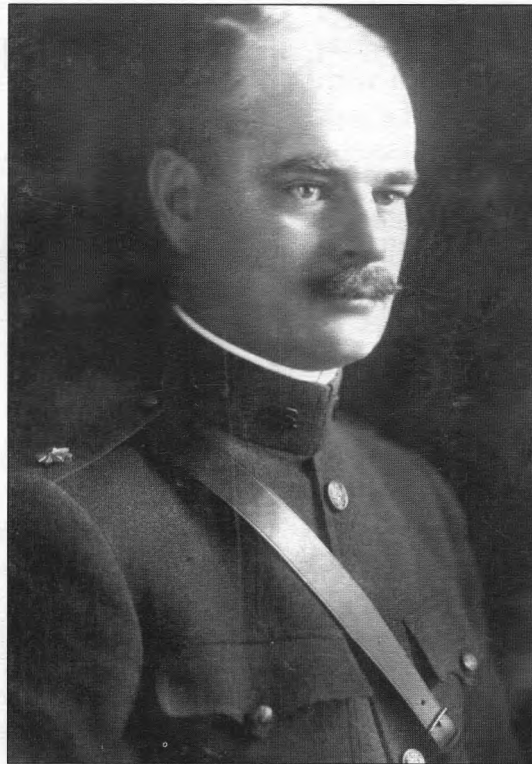
In startling contrast to the formal Mr. MacVeagh was the artist George deForest Brush, whose pictures hang in many American museums, including the National Gallery in Washington. Brush belonged among the American romantic painters of the mid-century. His best pictures are of "Mother and Child" subjects, something after the style of the Italian Andrea del Sarto but he seemed very much at home, too, in depicting Crow Indians with whom he lived at one time. His mounted hunters, Crow Braves and feathered warriors show a strong technique and graphic understanding of his models.

Mr. Brush was a short, agile man with an animated, winning manner. Unlike most artists he was always carefully groomed. Even his studio was tidy with brushes and tools each in its own place on the wall. Whenever I was with him he was gay and laughing, as though some joke were hovering inside him. With his wife, four daughters and talented son Jerome, he lived in a ram-

bling farm house on the outskirts of Dublin. To be invited for supper, sitting by the fire in their attractive living room was a Royal Command; no one ever refused. It would be hard to single out one member of the Brush family as being the most charming. Each in his way held a beloved place in the community.

There were a number of unique characters in Dublin of those days. We had been there only a short time when an old-time resident said to me, "There is no one here so queer that there isn't some one queerer next door."

I believe, though, that the oddest were Mr. and Mrs. Abbott H. Thayer. I never met Mr. Thayer, a



JASPER WHITING in World War I uniform.
Gift of Mrs. Robert Lawrence

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well-known painter, like Mr. Brush, of mid-century reputation but I was taken one afternoon to see Mrs. Thayer. The Thayers lived in a small, simple cottage, brimming with children, theirs and those of their neighbors. Mrs. Thayer suffered from frail health and to escape from the noise of her house had set in a nearby field a wooden packing case, built for shipping an upright piano, in which she had installed a bed. Here she spent her days and her nights. When I visited her I sat on a sawed-off tree trunk beside her packing case. She was a little woman with dark hair and a body so thin it seemed as if a puff of wind might blow her out of her shelter. As she lay in her bunk, fully dressed in gray gingham, we talked together. Not once did we mention Dublin or Dublin people but spoke of poetry, music, art, the world in which she lived. She had

a soft, melodic voice and punctuated her remarks with little brisk gestures. After being with her I felt refreshed in spirit.

While we were talking I was conscious of someone looking at me from the surrounding woods. It was Mr. Thayer, shy of meeting a stranger. Mrs. Thayer called to him to come and speak with me, whereupon the tall, lanky wraith vanished among the trees. Later when I went to the Freer Gallery in Washington, where one room is filled with his portraits and allegorical paintings, I could not but wonder how he could so vividly portray his models when he avoided human contact so assiduously.

After our first rewarding stay in Dublin, each summer, when not wandering abroad, we returned to its sheltering woods and exhilarating climate. Slowly Dublin got into our blood. It was no wonder, therefore, when we found ourselves tired with Beacon Street, that we should choose to establish ourselves as citizens of Dublin. ■

ACCESSIONS TO THE ARCHIVES

Judith Mied of Woodbine, Maryland, has given us the originals of twelve mounted photographs of Dublin subjects by Henry D. Allison, dated 1904. **Patricia Lawrence** of Dedham, Mass., has sent us a photograph of a miniature of her Aunt, Marion Schlesinger Whiting, at the age of 18, c. 1900. From the **National Gallery of Art** in Washington, in recognition of some help we were able to give, we have received a copy of the magnificent *catalogue raisonné* of the exhibition of George deForest Brush's Indian paintings. Many thanks to them all.

Carol D. Pace of Winchendon, Mass. has allowed us to make copies of old photographs of her great-grandparents' family, once owners of a sawmill on the Lower Jaffrey Road and builders of the house at the upper end of Mud Pond now owned by Lucia Sirois. Similarly, **Kitty Bass Cloud** of Peterborough has allowed to copy

photographs from a Jackson family album. Kitty's mother was Katherine Jackson, a daughter of the family that created Stonewall Farm (now the Harris's) in 1936. Among other things, these interesting pictures solve an old riddle: how was the house moved up the hill to its present spot? The answer: by means of a horse-driven windlass.

Anyone who has been around Dublin for more than a generation has photograph albums recording people and events relevant to the Town's history. As was done in the examples described above, these photographs (or, more usually, a selection from them) can be scanned and reproduced at the Archives without damage to either the album or the original photographs.

We are very grateful to the two thoughtful people who allowed us to make these copies from family albums. How about it?

C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society Newsletter was edited by John Harris.

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