

Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444

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PORTRAIT *of a* **Dublin Lady**

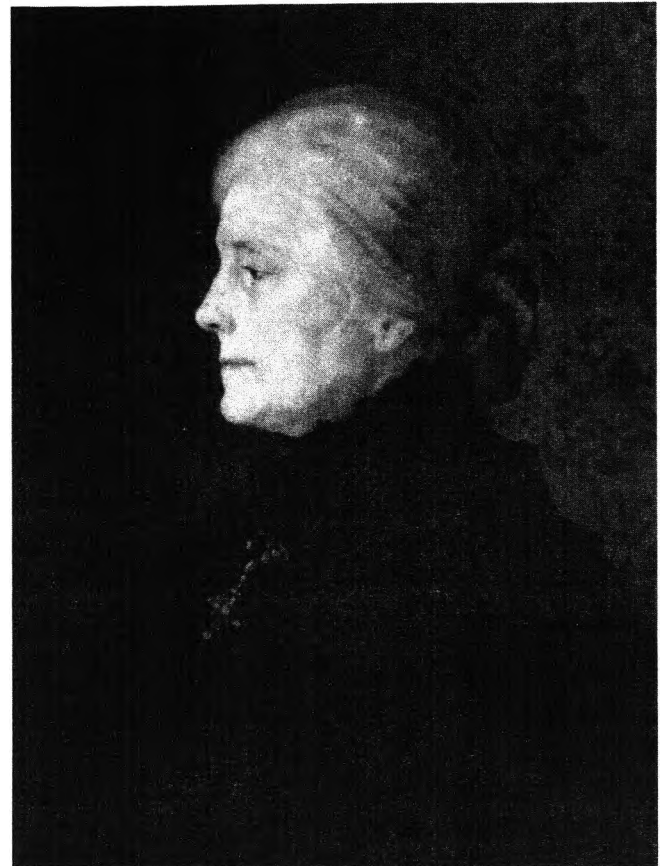
It is our custom in these newsletters to report recent gifts to the Society, mainly to express appreciation to the givers, but also pour encourager les autres. These acknowledgements usually appear towards the back. Last month, however, we received a gift which is distinctly front-page news.

In 1916, Nancy Douglas Pearmain, eldest daughter of George deForest Brush, painted a portrait of Margaret Pearmain Osgood, her late husband's aunt. In the course of time, the portrait descended to the artist's grand-daughter, **Betsey McClennen Miller**, who lives near the seacoast in North Hampton. With great generosity, Mrs. Miller has given us the picture so that it can be seen by a wider audience. We are enormously grateful to her.

In addition to its artistic merit, the picture has close historical connections to Dublin, both the artist and the sitter having lived here. Mrs. Osgood, moreover, had a life story that stretched from Dublin, New Hampshire to Dublin, Ireland. She was the mother and mother-in-law of gun runners, and grandmother of a President of Ireland.

The Osgoods of Boston and Dublin

Margaret Pearmain had a privileged upbringing in



This reproduction scarcely does justice to a wonderful work of art. Come and see the original at the Archives Building any weekday morning.

Chelsea, Mass., as the daughter of William R. Pearmain, a successful businessman and banker. For our purposes, however, her tale begins with her marriage in 1870 to Hamilton Osgood, a Boston physician. In 1878, the Osgoods built one of the earliest summer cottages in Dublin – the house off the Old Harrisville Road now owned by Charles and Sally Collier – and later three other cottages on the south side of the Lake.

The Osgoods had two daughters. The elder, Gretchen, grew up to marry Fiske Warren of Boston.

John Singer Sargent's painting of Mrs. Fiske Warren and her daughter, Rachel, is one of his most flamboyant society portraits. For this story, however, the important Osgood daughter was Mary Alden, always referred to as Molly. Gretchen and Mary Osgood are listed, along with their parents, as contributors to the construction of the Dublin Town Hall in 1882.

Molly Osgood's childhood summers in Dublin were marred by an injury which left her crippled for life. She seems to have survived at all by virtue of sheer courage and an iron will. Her parents did everything possible to make her life as normal as possible. One of the things she could do was sail, and since Dr. Osgood kept a 30-foot sailboat on Dublin Lake, it is a fair guess that she learned to sail here.

In October, 1903, Sumner Pearmain, Margaret's brother and Molly's uncle, gave a dinner party for a group of visiting Englishmen. Among the visitors was Erskine Childers, recently returned from ser-

vice in South Africa and already becoming known as the author of a sailing classic, *The Riddle of the Sands*. At that dinner party Molly and Childers sat next to each other, and it was apparently love at first sight. They were married at Trinity Church, Boston, in January, 1904. Since Molly and Erskine were both avid sailors, Dr. and Mrs. Osgood's wedding present to them was a 49-foot Colin Archer ketch, built in Norway and christened *Asgard*.

Running Guns to Ireland.

The years between 1904 and 1914 saw the climax of agitation over Irish home rule. Unlike most Bostonians, the Osgoods had always sympathized with Irish aspirations and had entertained Irish agitators who came to Boston. Molly had thus grown up with a pro-Irish view of the independence question. Childers felt the same. An Englishman by birth, much of his youth had been spent in County Wicklow where, although a member of the Protestant ascendancy, he became a sympathizer first with home rule

Portrait of the Artist

Nancy Douglas Brush was born in Paris in 1890, the second child and eldest daughter of George deForest Brush and his wife, Mittie.

The Brushes began coming to Dublin in the summer of 1899. At first they rented cottages on the South side of the Lake – the “Latin Quarter” – but later bought Brush farm on the East Harrisville Road.

Among Nancy's summer playmates was Robert Pearmain, the son of Sumner Bass Pearmain, who had bought a cottage in the “Latin Quarter” – the one now belonging to the Kinyons – from his brother-in-law, Hamilton Osgood. As he grew up, Robert Pearmain decided to be a painter, and, along with Barry Faulkner, became a student of George Brush. While studying with Brush in Florence, he fell in love with Nancy, and they became engaged. During their engagement, Robert



wrote to her from Ireland, where he was visiting his Aunt Margaret Osgood, her daughter Molly and Molly's husband, Erskine Childers.

Nancy Brush and Robert Pearmain were married at Brush Farm in September, 1909. (Among the guests were John Singer Sargent and Isabella Stewart Gardner, who happened to be staying at Loon Point with the Joseph Lindon Smiths.) Their daughter, Mary Alice – usually called Polly – was the mother of Betsey McClennen Miller, the generous donor of this painting.

Robert Pearmain died in 1912 at the age of twenty-four, so Nancy was a widow in 1916, when she painted the portrait of Margaret Pearmain Osgood, her late husband's aunt. The following year, however, she married Harold Bowditch, himself a widower, with whom she lived happily ever after.

Nancy Brush Pearmain Bowditch, 1920. Courtesy of Nancy M. Aldrich.

for Ireland and ultimately with Irish independence.

In the summer of 1914, an Irish underground group bought a stock of small arms in Germany. The British, however, forbade the importation of arms to the South (though not to Ulster). As known Irish sympathizers, Erskine and Molly were asked to smuggle the arms into Ireland. Their British yacht and British citizenship were considered good cover.

Accordingly, they sailed *Asgard* from her berth in Wales to a rendezvous in the English Channel, where they took aboard 900 rifles and 20,000 rounds of ammunition. This cargo they landed at Howth harbor at the mouth of Dublin Bay, where the event is commemorated by a bronze plaque on the seawall. *Asgard* is also remembered: the present Irish sail-training vessel is named *Asgard II*.

It is a great adventure story, well told by Burke Wilkinson in his book, *The Zeal of the Convert* (New York, 1976). What concerns us here is that a gently bred young Boston lady, the daughter of the subject of our portrait, was engaged in gun-running in a sail-boat provided by her parents, and that her proper English husband thus became an Irish hero.

Some of the arms were later used in the ill-fated Easter Rising in Dublin, but there were no immediate consequences for Erskine and Molly. Erskine certainly never thought of his exploit as involving disloyalty to England, and scarcely a month later he reported for duty in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, in which he served as an officer through most of World War I, winning the Distinguished Service Cross.

A Victim of "The Troubles"

In 1919 the Childers family, which now included two sons, moved to a house in Bushy Park Road in Dublin, Ireland. There Childers began work, with Molly's whole-hearted support, as a propagandist for Eamon de Valera's Irish Republican Army.

This is not the place to recount "the Troubles", the Irish Civil War that ensued between the I.R.A. and the government of the Irish Free State. For many months Childers operated underground, publishing his newspapers wherever and whenever he could. In November, 1922, he was captured by Free State troops in the Wicklow house where he had grown up. Within two weeks of his arrest he was tried, convicted of carrying arms and executed by an Irish military firing squad.



Molly Osgood Childers (left) holding one of the rifles aboard Asgard. The other woman is the Hon. Mary Spring-Rice, whose cousin, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, was British Ambassador in Washington at the time.

Following Erskine's death, Molly stayed on in the house in Bushy Park Road. There she continued to speak out in justification of her husband's life, and as time went on, he gradually became recognized as an Irish hero, rather than an Irish traitor. The Childers' sons both achieved distinction. The younger, Robert, was a newspaper publisher in London and later a general in the Irish army. The elder son, Erskine Hamilton Childers, made a career in Irish politics as member of the Dail, cabinet minister and finally, in 1973, President of Ireland, the only Protestant president Ireland has had.

Molly's mother, Margaret Pearmain Osgood, the subject of our painting, went to live with Molly in Bushy Park Road, where she stayed until her death in 1934. While there she produced a remarkable book, *The City Without Walls*, published in London in 1932. Its title page describes it as "An Anthology setting forth the Drama of Human Life". The book reflects an open and receptive mind, as well as an astonishing range of reading in many periods and several languages.

One selection from Margaret Osgood's book, a short poem by the Irish poet, Joseph Campbell, has a special resonance with her portrait and her life:

*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.*

-J.W.H.

Society News

The **Schoolhouse Museum** will be open from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday afternoons in August.

The museum has acquired several more pieces of the Dublin souvenir china that was sold around the turn of the century by Henry D. Allison on one side of the street and George W. Gleason on the other.

In addition to the portrait of Mrs. Osgood, the **Archives** have received a number of welcome gifts from other donors, including **Yankee Publishing, Inc.** Through the kindness of **Jud Hale**, we have been given a subscription to *Yankee*, so that our complete set will be kept up to date. We are also grateful to **Lorna Trowbridge** for indices to *Yankee* from its first issue in 1935 through 1988.

James and Alice Howe of Walpole have given us a number of diaries and account books of Mr. Howe's great-grandfather, Oscar L. Howe, a former Dublin resident. We have purchased, with money from the **Archives Fund**, the orderly book for a militia unit, the Dublin Grenadiers, for the years 1844-1848. Other gifts have been gratefully received from Nancy M. Aldrich, Helen Bastedo, Patrick Bauhan, The Currier Gallery of Art, Verne M. Greene, Timothy L. Jacobs and Donald T. Spaulding.

The **Annual Meeting** will
be held on
Wednesday, August 19,
at 8:00 p.m. in the
Louise Shonk Kelly
Auditorium at the
Dublin School.

After a short business
meeting, **Jud Hale** will
speak on the history of
The Old Farmers Almanac.

AN AUTUMN EXHIBITION AT BROWN UNIVERSITY WILL INCLUDE
FORTY PAINTINGS BY **JOSEPH LINDON SMITH.**

THE SHOW *ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARTISTS IN EGYPT* WILL BE AT THE
ANNMARY BROWN MEMORIAL, 21 BROWN STREET,
PROVIDENCE FROM OCTOBER 8 TO NOVEMBER 21
(MON. - SAT. 11:00 - 4:00)

Diana Wolfe Larkin, daughter of our late member, Abe Wolfe, is guest curator of the exhibition and co-author of the illustrated catalogue.

For more information call (401) 863-3132.

C R E D I T S

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

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