

# FROM THE COLLECTIONS:

## JIM VICKERY AND THE GRADY MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

JIM VICKERY was an established legend by the time I entered the field of Maine history in the early 1970s. Indeed, one of the first things fellow researchers said was that if I needed to find out any thing to do with Bangor, eastern Maine, or the Penobscot River region (not to mention the town of Unity whose history he wrote), Jim was the first logical point of inquiry. In the years that followed, as a researcher for the Portland Museum of Art, the Maine Historical Society, and on my own mercenary endeavors, I tapped Jim's knowledge frequently on a variety of subjects ranging from nineteenth-century artists to Bangor's notorious "Devil's Half Acre" to furniture makers, ethnic groups, and possible forerunners of L.L. Bean's "Maine Hunting Shoe."

A unique combination of antiquarian, collector, exacting historian, and enthusiastic appreciator of the men and women who shaped our state and nation, Jim was exceptionally generous with his information and ideas. He was involved in the past, not for ego or academic glory, but because he loved it and through his own remarkable family was an integral part of it. Tom Weber of the *Bangor Daily News* aptly dubbed him "Bangors' Greatest Natural resource" in 1992. Jim was a born teacher who shared his latest finds with such extraordinary contemporaries as Francis M. O'Brien, Dorothy Healy, and Elizabeth Ring, as well as younger scholars including William B. Jordan Jr., James H. Mundy, and Earle G. Shettleworth Jr. He was a vital presence at Brewer High School, the Bangor Public Library, Bangor Historical Society, Fogler Library at the University of Maine, Maine Historical Society, and the Maine Historical Preservation Commission. In my friendship with Jim we traded numerous discoveries by post, during visits, but mostly by telephone. I deeply miss not being able to ask advice, check a fact, pose a question, or on those very rare occasions, tell him something fresh about the past.

It is said that no one is indispensable and the study of local and regional history has not ground to a halt since Jim's death in 1997. However, a vibrant and unique personal and professional connection was

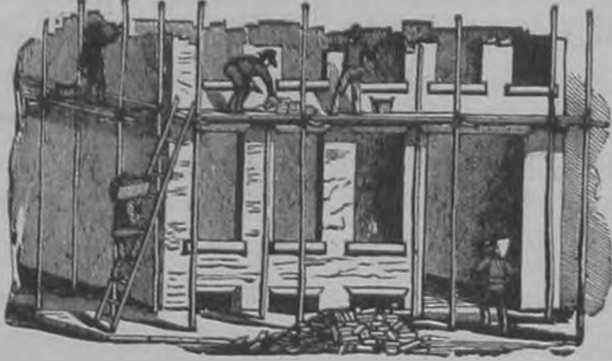
lost. Not a week goes by at the Maine Historical Society Library without some question or discovery that brings recollection of Jim and his great retentive memory to the fore. Jim's presence was particularly missed in June 1999, when the Maine Historical Society held its Irish American Round Table, the second in a continuing series of conferences on ethnicity bringing together scholars, genealogists, and students. Jim would, no doubt, have loved the reports on Irish sports, immigration, business, and, in particular, James H. Mundy's talk on nineteenth-century Hibernians in Bangor and Portland.

Like the rest of us Jim Vickery would probably have been astonished by what followed the conference. Having read about the Irish American Round Table, John O'Grady of Bedford, Massachusetts, offered to donate his late uncle William H. Grady's extensive research papers on the Irish in the Penobscot River region to the Maine Historical Society. While the Society's library was delighted to accept this donation, the manuscripts that arrived were more wonderful and enlightening than anyone expected. Furthermore, they introduced William H. Grady (1875-1953), a serious scholar of Maine history who seemed to have worked in near total isolation.

Vital records, city directories, and obituaries in the *Bangor Daily Commercial* and the *Bangor Daily News* reveal that William H. Grady was born in Bangor, Maine, in 1875, the son of John W. and Margaret Murray Grady. After attending community schools, William went on to graduate from Georgetown University and then Boston University Law School in 1899, a remarkable accomplishment for an Irish American of his time and place. Returning to Maine, William practiced law for a year or two and, according to his obituary, "taught in the Bangor Gaelic School." Now the mystery; in 1903 the *Bangor City Directory* showed "William H." as having joined his stone-mason father in the contracting and building firm of John Grady & Son, where he remained for decades. William never married and, aside from being a life-long member of St. Mary's parish, he seemed not to have participated in any other community activities. After he retired sometime between 1940 and 1946, he devoted himself entirely to researching and writing local Irish American history.

MAINE AND THE IRISH: THE GRADY MAUNSCRIPT COLLECTION (MHS COLL.1960) comprises three major sections and some ephemera. Section One is William H. Grady's herculian (or McCoolian) study, "Irish Immigration on the Penobscot and Its Environs, 1735-

# JOHN GRADY & SON,



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1865.” The first of three parts in Section One focuses on Irish settlers in Warren, Thomaston, Orrington, Holden, Brewer, Frankfort, Winterport, Hampden, Eddington, Bradley, Orono, Old Town, Milford, Hermon, Carmel (with a map of Irish households), Greenbush, Passademkeag, Enfield, Lowell, Lincoln, Winn, Mattawamkeag, Veazie, Glenburn, Bradford, Hudson, Stetson, Garland, Pymouth, Newburg, Corinna, Dexter, on the Piscataquis River, and in Penobscot Bay. Also included is an essay, “An Irish Utopia in Maine, 1830-1870, Benedicata” with an accompanying plot map. Part two in Section One is “The Maine Irish Immigration: 1760 to 1840,” a rich volume focused on Irish families in Bangor with a table of contents and an index of people and the year they arrived. Part three in Section One covers Irish immigration to Bangor from 1841 to 1865. Section Two is entitled “Footprints of early Irishmen and others on the Penobscot and its Environs: Miscellaneous.” It comprises thirty-two articles and over 400 typed pages. Finally, Section Three is William H. Grady’s ninety-one page summarization of William D. Williamson’s classic work he called, “A Digest of Williamson’s History of Maine (Bangor: 1832), from earliest Days to Separation, 1820.”

It is most baffling that William H. Grady never did anything with his substantive, exhaustively researched work. The papers are all neatly

typed and seemingly ready for review, if not publication. Were his friends or other scholars aware of his work? Why did William not deposit the material in one of Maine's historical societies? One wonders if it had to do with a lack of interest about Irish Americans on the part of such institutions, William's modesty, or the lack of interest on the part of local Irish Americans. Certainly by the middle of the twentieth century enthusiasm for Irish history, culture, and genealogy had waned among Maine's Irish. Indeed, antiquarians and historians from Francis M. O'Brien to Matthew Jude Barker believed that sustained participation in Irish societies, language groups, and the study of local ethnic research was at its height in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1944 Maine's great Irish American benefactor James A. Healey (1890-1975) observed: "interest in Irish history or literature is non-existent in Portland, that is among the Irish." There can be little doubt that the same was true in Bangor, where the scholarly William H. Grady labored.

Aside from William, the man most able to validate this theory would have been the consummate Bangor researcher, Jim Vickery. My first call would have been to ask Jim if he had ever known or heard of William. If not, he would certainly have known whom to ask, and he would have made a fast trip to the Maine Historical Society to survey the collection. Unfortunately, we cannot apply Jim's special insight and knowledge to help solve this mystery, though his own publications, *An Illustrated History of the City of Bangor* (1969) and *Made In Bangor* (1984), might help with the broader historical context. Now it is up to new generations of historians to assess the Grady Collection, unknown these fifty years and more. The study of Maine history moves on with new researchers and writers, all of whom will owe a large measure of thanks to the contributions of scholars William H. Grady and James B. Vickery III.

WILLIAM DAVID BARRY