

## Extracts from "Reminiscences of Limerick Friends"

---

**T**HOUGH Limerick Meeting was described by the Clerk of [Dublin] Y.M. in 1930 as "the smallest of our Meetings," for many generations it was a large and active body, both in the Society and in public life. Its records go back to 1653. Limerick Meeting is the most westerly Meeting in the British Isles—Quakerism made no headway across the Shannon.

[Notes on the following families follow :]

**ALEXANDER.** The first record is that Edward Alexander, of Moate, married Elizabeth Davis, of Limerick, about 1754. Alexanders opened a grocer's shop and ships-chandlery in a field at the edge of the City. These premises, corner of William Street, were in the family for about 120 years, and are now the very centre of modern Limerick. Business flourished with them and attracted another well-known family of Limerick Friends,

**HILL,** to open a shop opposite them. This was Joshua Hill, who, from his autocratic manner, won for himself the nickname of "The Great Commander." A bill-poster posted a bill on his premises which displeased him mightily, and resulted in the following lines :

Post no bills on Joshua Hills  
For he's the great commander,  
But post them on the opposite side,  
On snuffy Alexander.

Thus early Friends shewed their love to each other !

Besides building up a prosperous business the Alexanders found time to promote and develop useful public institutions.

The best known of this family was Edward Alexander (1788-1836), who travelled largely in the ministry. He

“ apprehended it to be his duty to publish a solemn warning to the people of this nation [Ireland] in reference to that awful visitation, calling them to repentance ; which, being united with by his Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, was, in accordance with his concern, posted up in most cities and towns through out this Kingdom, [Ireland] 1831.” The plague of cholera was ravaging the country in 1831 and 1832.

Another well-known member of this family was Samuel Alexander (1818-1905). He opened a carpet warehouse, 121 George Street, and, to distinguish him from the numerous other Alexanders, he was known as “ Sam Carpet.” He married Isabella, daughter of Benjamin Clark Fisher of Limerick, and some years after removed to London where for forty or fifty years he was an acknowledged Minister. He was father of Edward and William Henry [Fisher] Alexander, well-known for all their activities in connection with London Y.M.

Anna Alexander (1799-1892) and her niece, Deborah Martin (a relative by marriage of “ Billy Martin,” of Cork, who influenced Father Mathew to take up temperance work), small in stature, wearing grey silk dresses and Quaker bonnets, lived at the Alexander home, called “ Evergreen,” the peculiarity of which was that it was built upside down, that is, that it was built in a hollow, the hall-door was level with the ground and the bedrooms and other apartments were downstairs.

There is now not left in Limerick a single Alexander of that once great Quaker clan, for generations a power for good, for progress and enterprise.

[Then follow several paragraphs relating to the famine in 1848.]

**BENNIS.** Mitchell and Eliza Bennis had a son, William, who married Mary Fisher, daughter of Reuben and Jenepher Fisher, of Youghal, 1825. He had a country flour mill in a lovely glen at the foot of the Broadford Mountains, called Ballycorney, about fourteen miles from Limerick, and every Sunday he and his wife used to drive into meeting with their children. These children were greatly amused at two old maiden aunts, who every Sunday had

the same greeting for each other when they met in the Meeting House :

“ And how is thee, sister Mary ? ”

“ But poorly, sister Jane, but poorly.”

“ And how is thee, sister Jane ? ”

“ But poorly, sister Mary, but poorly.”

Every Friday William Bennis drove in to Limerick for money to pay his workmen, and one Friday night in 1839 the house was raided by “ whiteboys ” (robbers who went about in white nightshirts to terrify decent people), and William Bennis was wounded and died from the effects three years afterwards. Six men were tried and Mary Bennis was principal witness, but she knew that if she identified any one of them as the man that wounded her husband he would be hanged, and as Friends objected to the taking of life, she only stated that they all helped in the robbery. The result was they were all transported to Botany Bay. Five out of their eight children died young. Their sixth, Anna, married Joshua Jacob. The two youngest were Edward Bennis, settled in England and was an inventive genius<sup>1</sup>, and Joseph Bennis, who married Emilie Frances, daughter of James Carroll, of Cork and a neice of Edward Carroll.<sup>2</sup> Joseph was an ardent astronomer and a look through his telescope was appreciated by rich and poor. During the guerilla warfare in 1921, when bullets were flying and houses being burnt down, one evening about 11 p.m. he placed his telescope out of the window of his house in George Street to view some planet. Very soon there was a thundering at the hall door, and a demand to know what that Lewis gun was doing at the window. He offered to show them the planet he was studying, but Black and Tans took no interest in planets, and they told him that if he did not take it in at once the house would be burned down. Some time in the 1870's Joseph went to London and brought back, as the latest novelty, a few bananas, which he expatiated on to the wonder and admiration of Limerick citizens.

Ernest H. Bennis [the author of these Reminiscences], son of Joseph F. Bennis, has been clerk of Limerick Monthly Meeting for many years.

<sup>1</sup> See, for some of his inventions, *Jnl. F.H.S.* xviii., xix.

<sup>2</sup> For Edward Carroll, see *Jnl. F.H.S.* xiv., *et seqq.*

[Reference to graveyards] the very old graveyard in Pump Lane off Nicholas Street and the new one at Ballinacurra.

FISHER. The first of the Fishers to come to Limerick were James and Sarah, who removed from Cork in 1788. Benjamin Clark Fisher was the first man to introduce an umbrella into Limerick. It was sent to him by steamer from London, and so anxious was he to get it that he went down the river in a boat to meet the steamer.<sup>3</sup>

FAYLE. Susannah Fayle<sup>4</sup> removed from Clonmel to reside in Limerick in 1883. She was a recorded Minister. In 1896 she visited U.S.A., but not long after arrival she sickened and died.

GRUBB. Thomas Grubb had a tailor's shop in George Street, opposite the County Club. He had the reputation of being possessed of a most unruffled temper. One day his temper was the subject of discussion at lunch at the County Club, and one gentleman made a bet with another that he would succeed in causing T.G. to lose his temper. Accordingly one busy day when T.G. had already been delayed from getting to his dinner, this gentleman walked in and asked to see some cloth. Very genially T.G. took down a roll; but, no, it would not do, so roll after roll was exhibited and looked over again and again, and still without pleasing the would-be customer. At last the gentleman decided on one and asked T.G. to cut off as much as would fit on a penny. This he did, wrapped it up and with a smile handed it to the purchaser, saying: "Thank thee, friend, and next time thee calls I hope thy order will be for a larger amount." So the gent. lost his bet and T.G. enhanced his reputation. Thomas Grubb married Elizabeth, daughter of Benjamin Clark Fisher, and had a large family. His son George was clerk of Dublin Y.M. for many years.

HARVEY. Very prominent Friends were the Harveys, who, besides taking an active part in everything connected

<sup>3</sup> *Jnl. F.H.S.* xi.

<sup>4</sup> Susannah Fayle (1828-1896) was a daughter of Samuel and Eleanor Fayle, of Clonmel. Her first visit to U.S.A. was in 1888 and her second in 1896.—*Annual Monitor*, 1897; *The Friend* (Phila.), vol. 80.

with Friends, were, in public life, some of the most enterprising and progressive of citizens. Joseph Massey Harvey, of Cork, married Rebecca Mark, of Limerick, and came to reside here in 1786. They built and lived in a fine house called Summerville. J.M.H. was a pioneer in importing baulks of timber and sawing them into planks. The vessels discharged the timber into the river, and by means of horses the baulks were drawn up an inclined platform into his yard. His youngest son, William Henry Harvey, M.D., F.R.S. (1811-1866), was a professor in Trinity College, Dublin, also author, traveller, and botanist "of world-wide fame in his own lines."

JACOB. Joshua Jacob, one of the "White Quakers," opened a shop in Dublin and made a fortune by selling tea and sugar in farthings-worths. His nephew, Joshua Jacob, son of Joseph Jacob, of Mountmellick, imbued with the same desire, came to Limerick and served his time at Mary Bennis's. He married her daughter, Anna Bennis, in 1862. He opened a grocery shop himself in High Street, which, in spite of his eccentric ultra-conscientiousness, soon became the leading grocery business in Limerick. Anna Jacob died in 1874, after the birth of her eighth child; in 1875 Joshua married Catherine Reynolds, of Bessbrook. About 1870 he transferred his business to 41 George Street, a shop with a fine plate-glass window, but as plate-glass was "worldly vanity" he had it taken out and small panes of common glass put in instead.

He belonged to the "Grey Quakers," so he painted his premises a drab grey, the same colour as his clothes and other belongings. He dressed in knickers and untanned leather shoes, a broad-brimmed hat and collarless coat, and dressed his daughters as little Quakeresses. He always used the plain language and always addressed people by their Christian names. The public looked on this as extreme conscientiousness, and flocked to his establishment. His manner of attending customers was extremely attractive and courteous, and his clientèle included many titled persons. Lady Clarina, an aristocratic old lady, mother of Major-general Lord Clarina, commander of the British forces in India, would come in and give him her order, at the conclusion of which J.J. would courteously say: "Thank thee, Mary Massey."

"Lady Clarina, please," was the equally courteous reply. One day a strange clergyman from the West of Ireland, choleric and self-important, called and gave a good order, and asked to have his parcel sent, and addressed to "The Venerable Archdeacon Jones." "Did thee Say Thomas Jones?" asked J.J. "No," was the emphatic reply, "I said the Venerable Archdeacon Jones." However the parcel was sent addressed to "Thomas Jones," and the clergyman, furious, said he would never enter that shop again to be insulted.

But Jacob catered also for the poor and was a pioneer in the cheap restaurant business. He opened a restaurant in William Street, which continued to be carried on for many years after his death. Perhaps he is best remembered by his conscientious objection to vaccination, and as he had thirteen children he was continually in trouble with the authorities. When summoned, he would appear in Court with his hat on, and when requested to take it off, he would say: "I uncover my head to Almighty God only," at the same time lifting his hat but promptly replacing it. As he was a leading citizen and a courteous gentleman, to overcome any unpleasantness when he was to appear in Court the officials arranged to have a policemen at each side of the entrance staircase, gently to remove his hat and keep it till he came out again. He was a good judge of horseflesh and was fond of driving, preferring a fast-going horse. His peculiarities were not a help to Limerick Meeting; though he often spoke, his messages were not always helpful.

J. Jacob and his family removed to Philadelphia in 1880, and he died there shortly after arrival.

**TAVERNER.** Edward Taverner (1623-1685) and Susannah, his wife, came to Ireland in Third Month, 1653. They had twelve children—one was born in Cork, others in County Limerick, County Tipperary and in Kings County. Taverners were members of Limerick Meeting for nearly two hundred years. The last of them, Fanny Taverner, was not a member but frequently came to meeting, died about 1894.

**UNTHANK.** The Unthinks were numerous and active Friends from 1712 to 1895. In the old and dilapidated part of Limerick called Mungret Street there is a plot of ground

still known as "Unthank's Garden" and a lane as "Joss's Lane." These took their names from Joss Unthank, who had his business and property there. The same Joss caused the Meeting a good deal of trouble as from time to time he would disappear for days on drinking bouts. The penance the Meeting imposed upon him was that he should stand at the door of the Meeting House as Friends were going in and each one passing by would look at him and say: "Fie on thee, Joss." One penance day when several Friends had thus admonished him, a sprightly young Quakeress did so too, but at this his patience reached its limit, and, turning to her, he said: "Fie on thee theeself, I'll not stay here any longer," and walked off. The last of the Unthinks was Gabriel Fisher (1814-1895), always known as "Gabe."

[The family names in the Reminiscences not mentioned above are Davis, Barnes, Baylee, Abell, Evans, Fitt, Journeaux, Malcolmson, Newsom, Pease, Pike, Scarr, Sikes.]

ERNEST H. BENNIS.

---



---

## The Penalty of Greatness

---

"How did the righteous compass me about from the Sovereign, the princes, and the princesses, down to the poorest, the lowest and the most destitute!

"How did the poor sinner of almost every description seek after me and cleave to me!

"What was not said of me! What was not thought of me, may I not say, in public and in private in innumerable publications, &c.!"

ELIZABETH FRY, under date of 25 iv. 1819.

---



---

"Henry Callaway lived at 34 Finsbury Circus. He left Friends and became Bishop of Kaffraria. The Bishop was calling on my great-aunt, Sarah Sterry, previous to returning to South Africa. Her parting words are said to have been: 'Fare thee well, Henry Callaway. I don't expect to see thee again in this world, and I am sure I don't hope to see thee in the next.'"

*Contributed by Arthur Shillitoe, Salcombe, Devon.*