

Boss Murphy 100th Anniversary

Saturday – December 11th 2012 – marks the 100 anniversary of the death of William “Boss” Murphy at Leap, Churchtown whose name is remembered on the pub in Churchtown that bears his name. William Murphy - farmer, historian, raconteur, musician (fiddler) and musical instrument maker – was born on 28th May 1831 at Egmont, Churchtown where his father, Daniel, was a tenant farmer. William’s love of music was fostered by Thomas Croke at a local hedge school. In 1854, he moved to the present Murphy family home at Leap. In that year also, he married Margaret Ryan, Ballyhea, with whom he had three children – Daniel (1855-88), Matthew (1857-1926) and Ellen (1860-1938); all three emigrated to the USA. Daniel and Matthew were ordained priests. Ellen married Dennis Delay in Castle Grove, Iowa, on 7th November 1888 and William was invited and attended the wedding, which was performed by his son, Reverend Matthew Murphy.



Following the death of his wife Margaret in 1861, William married again – to Margaret Bourke, Coolasmuttane, Newtownshandrum in 1869. The couple had five children: Bridget (1870-1910), Bill (1871-1906), Mary (1872-1962), Margaret (1874-1913) and John (1875-1955). William’s youngest son John went on to collect the local music in North Cork and his labours were published posthumously as *The Boss Murphy Musical Legacy* in 2003. This book was compiled by Dr Colette Moloney from Charleville.

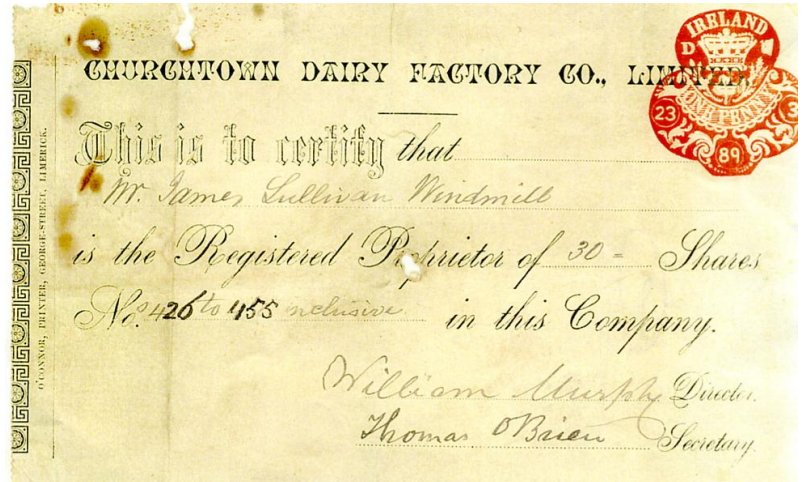
The passing of the Ashbourne Act enabled William to acquire the house and lands on which he had been a tenant for over 40 years. It was at that time that he most likely acquired the appellation ‘Boss’, which was often used to describe an employer in those days. His son John (1875 – 1955) was also called “Boss”.

William made the arduous trip to America on at least two occasions to visit his two sons who were priests in Iowa. He also travelled to London to engage with the Earl of Egmont. An accomplished musician, he made his own musical instruments, including a violin. His passion for music, song, culture and folklore ensured the household at Leap maintained a role in terms of community entertainment. The *seanchaí* (storyteller) was a welcome caller, as was the travelling musician, singer or dancing teacher.

William ‘Boss’ Murphy was a nephew of the legendary William Murphy who, in 1868, having seen off the challenge of McCarthy in a sledge throwing contest, threw the 12-pound sledge high over the 60-foot wall of Lisscarroll Castle. The event is immortalised by Con O’Brien (1883-1946), ‘The Bard of Ballyhea’, in the poem ‘Murphy’s Famous Throw of the Sledge at Lisscarroll’, a verse of which reads:

*Now big William Murphy, well known far and wide,
A fine able man, without swagger or pride,
Was famous for throwing the sledge, and the weight,
About his friends sent a challenge, for miles all around,
Declaring his master could nowhere be found.*

William Murphy lived through the rebuilding of his native Churchtown village (1822-49), the Night of the Big Wind (6-7th January 1839); the launch of the *Cork Examiner*, 1841 (now the *Irish Examiner*); the launch and entire run of *The Nation* (1842-91); the Great Famine (1845-49); the death of Daniel O'Connell (1847); the Fenian era (from 1858); the Land League (from 1879); the Parnell era (1875-1891); the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association (1st November 1884); the founding of the Gaelic League, *Conradh na Gaeilge* (31st July 1893) and the founding of the Abbey Theatre (1904) "Boss" was still around in 1907, when Patrick Heeney and Peadar Kearney collaborated on our future national anthem, 'The Soldier's Song.'



William 'Boss' Murphy died on December 11th 1911 and lies buried in the Murphy family plot at Kilbrin Cemetery. If you are in Churchtown on Sunday night next raise a glass and toast Boss Murphy. We are sure he would approve.

Caption

William's Murphy's signature which was captured in a founding share certificate (above) for Churchtown Creamery (dated 1889).

William Murphy