

United IrishmanTM

200th Anniversary Commemorative Edition

1798



1998

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"The age of fiction and political superstition and of craft and mystery is passing away" - Tom Paine

THE END OF MYTHOLOGY

We, the editorial panel, are representatives of a group of people who were highly influenced by a political newspaper entitled 'The United Irishman' during the 60s and 70s. Indeed the formative stages of our republican and socialist perspectives were shaped by the content of that journal. The paper we believe influenced the whole of Irish political thinking in those years.

Many of us were members of the Official Republican Movement and sought by various means to overthrow the existing social and political order in Ireland. Those were the days of few doubts and political theories written in stone.

Of late we have not been involved in party politics having become disillusioned with existing parties. We have come together to play our part in seeking a way for-

ward from the present morass of radical thinking.

This paper arose because an event seemed to insist that something should be said. That event is the bicentennial celebrations to mark - the 1798 Rebellion.

The something was generally intended to controvert the purveyors of received wisdom that the rebellion of 1798 and the French inspired republicanism which helped to bring it about are best forgotten as we ap-

proach the 21st century. As we move our way towards the new millennium through the fog of both domestic and global politics, there must be a voice for those of us who continue to stand for liberty, equality, and solidarity with equal opportunities for all.

We welcome whole heartedly the Good Friday Agreement as an attempt by both governments to break the link between territory and politics. Britain has recognised that within it's territory (the North of Ireland), many people do not consider themselves British and nor do they subscribe to many aspects of their neighbours Britishness. Equally the Irish government has committed itself to forego aspirations to the territory of the

six counties in return for an acceptance that the Irish nation in real political terms extends beyond the Irish state. We congratulate all the parties involved in the talks, especially those with paramilitary links and from whom we hear realistic and refreshing ideas.

This presents us with an excellent opportunity for the beginning of real politics in Northern Ireland for the first time in it's history. Institutionalised sectarianism is a price we must pay for that privilege. Our goal must be to eventually outnumber the sectarian camps in the new Assembly with 'others'. Therefore all those on the left who are serious must endeavour to set in place some sort of coming together of

ideas. Political sectarianism must give way to open and honest debate. Once violence has been removed from the political equation all things change utterly.

Already we can see monoliths beginning to crumble. The broad left must be ready with an alternative. The sectarian parties cannot continue to appear to be "all things to all people".

It is time that the people of 'no property' are brought from the margins of our society in order that they play their full part in developing a prosperous future for all our children. We must embrace the debate that will determine the future of the entire island of Ireland in the next century and its place in European and World politics.

'The Agreement'

AN INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

I have many reasons to have high regard for the peace agreement in Northern Ireland, which was supported by a clear majority of the Irish people.

The conflict is over. Conflict which was literally destroying this beautiful land and its wonderful people with whom I am familiar. It finally reveals the perspective of a peaceful life, free from shootings, bombings, ambushes and without the trauma caused to people and society.

It was not easy to achieve this solution. How many times did it seem that the peacemakers would give up, that the strength of the opposition was unbeatable? It required a lot of patience, faith in the prospect of success and the desire of ordinary people for a peaceful life. And most important of all - it required determined daily work, honest talks, dialogue and a search for unconventional solutions.

I would like to pay tribute to those who took part in this difficult search. First of all mention should be made of the efforts of all the representatives and their willingness to set aside the burden of centuries of mutual distrust in order to make progress towards a compromise. Grateful mention should also be made of the Nobel prize winners, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, who also called for compromise in their time.

Another important factor in achieving success was the serious and responsible approach of the governments of the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom to this issue. Another very important factor was the election of Tony Blair as Prime Minister. He was not influenced by the apparent stagnation in the talks progress, but instead used his energy to find an exit from an apparent dead end.

From a personal point of view I am very glad to note the significant contribution to achieving this peace agreement by my friend, former Senator George Mitchell who demonstrated exceptional intuition and powers of persuasion in his role as chairman of the negotiations.

I recall our conversation a couple of years ago when he was getting ready to start his mission. He was fully aware of its huge complexity - and at the same time he was determined not to give up in the face of the difficulties ahead.

I welcome the wisdom and maturity of the hundreds of thousands of Irish people who ratified the agreement by a majority in the Referendums. I cannot resist the temptation to cite this decision as an example for other peoples involved in ethnic and interreligious conflicts. I am sure that they will make the same choice, and hopefully as quickly as possible.

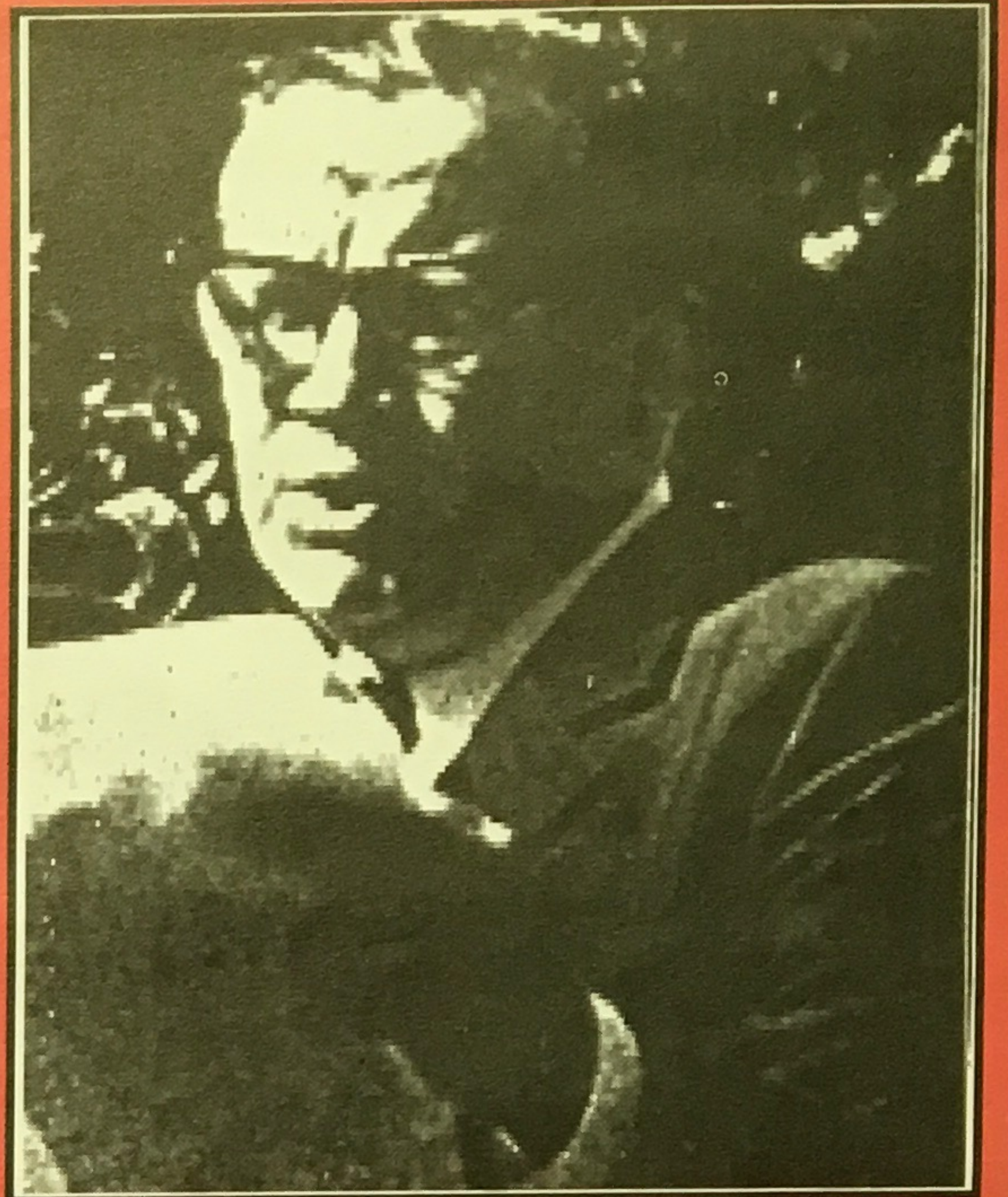
Of course, every conflict has its own special features and is unique in its own way. But the example of Northern Ireland can have a strong demonstrational effect. This Peace Agreement was not imposed from outside. The original structure of mutual obligations was worked out internally, taking account of the interests of all sides involved. It will be necessary to look for different solutions, structures and compromises in relation to other conflicts. But it cannot be achieved in any other way than by persistent peaceful negotiation.

The choice is clear. Either dogmatic stubbornness and mutual hate coupled with numerous victims, blood, tears and destruction, or realism and eagerness for mutual trust and a refusal to accept the image of "enemies". In our time we ended the Cold War which was the correct choice. Following this path we can end bloody conflicts in different parts of our planet. I wish all the people of Ireland a happy, peaceful and constructive future.

President Mikhail Gorbachev
Moscow, Russia



"We stand not on
the brink of victory,
but on the brink of
sectarian disaster"



Liam McMillen

Bodinstown June 28 1973

The **LIAM McMILLEN MEMORIAL LECTURE**

*"Separatist, Secular,
Socialist, Republican"*

An appreciation of the man,
his life and political beliefs

**Friday 11th September
7.30pm**

**Belfast Unemployed
Resource Centre
45-47 Donegall St
Belfast**

*Later: Music and Craic at
Kavanagh's Bar (upstairs)*

*Inaugurated and sponsored as an annual event by the
editorial panel of the United Irishman newspaper*

Mick Ryan was born in Dublin. He joined the Republican Movement in 1954. He took part in the '56-62 Campaign', during which he spent time in Mountjoy Jail and a year in the Curragh Internment Camp. He became a member of the leadership of the Movement during that campaign and remained so until the mid 1980's. Here he gives a personal history.

THE UNITED IRISHMAN

The United Irishman is not just a title; it's a reminder of our origins at the heart and head of republicanism, of an obligation - born 200 years ago and never forgotten or betrayed - to stand together and resist sectarianism, whatever flag it follows and however it cloaks its divisive intentions.

Through the most dangerous years, which some have forgotten and many, too young to remember, can barely imagine, THE UNITED IRISHMAN remained as good as its name and as proud of its origin as any struggling paper could be.

Newspapers have always played an important part in political movements in Ireland and elsewhere. Lenin edited ISKRA. Connolly was editor of THE IRISH WORKER. THE NATION was not only the title of a paper, it was the name by which the group it inspired came to be known.

THE UNITED IRISHMAN in the 1960s and 1970s had at least three roles. (Particularly under the superb editorship of Seamus O'Tuathail) It stimulated debate inside the republican movement and had a powerful influence on the way the movement developed and the direction it was to take.

It represented the republican movement to the public - in particular, to that section of the working class which was republican minded but also sensed the need for change and development.

And it was a unifying force in an organisation one of whose tasks was to supply and sell the paper, often in circumstances that ranged from difficult to hostile.

The paper's managing editor, too, had overlapping functions. One was to encourage political analysis and debate, setting out and assessing the way we were - both in the organisation and in the country at large.

Another was to propose answers to the famous question: "What is to be done?" And, in the case of the organisation, not only to find answers but to persuade those in positions of power and influence to implement them. Working for THE UNITED IRISHMAN, you didn't have the luxury enjoyed by hurlers on the ditch.

There was something else which characterised the paper and the efforts of everyone who worked for it, month after month, especially in the most difficult years.

It's no exaggeration to say that the paper's struggles fairly reflected the state of the organisation; never more accurately than in the middle 1960s when the paper's circulation had fallen to a mere few thousand; its debts were in the region of £3000 - an enormous amount for that time - and its very future was in serious doubt. By the middle of 1967 THE UNITED IRISHMAN was on the verge of extinction, as was the organisation, I was soon to discover.

At that time I had been working for three years as an insurance agent, a job

which allowed a lot of spare time to travel the country carrying out odd tasks for the movement - unknown to my employers, though they were generally sympathetic to the republican cause. (In fact, it was one of the few employers in the country prepared to employ those of us who had participated in the '56-'62 campaign.)

Anyway, just before I was due to take my two weeks annual holidays in the summer of 1967, I was told by the only full-time member of the leadership of the organisation of the dire state of THE UNITED IRISHMAN paper - the huge debt, the poor circulation etc - and he asked me if I would use my two weeks holiday to travel around Ireland and meet as many of the sellers of the UI and the local leaders of the organisation as I could possibly fit in over the two weeks; and to collect as much money as was owed or by way of donations to save the UI and, also, I was to discuss the state of the organisation with all I met and report on same upon my return to Dublin two weeks later. (I had an Austin Mini that I was buying on the HP! By the way, there were no such things as 'expenses' in those days; everyone gave of their time and resources voluntarily; anyway, there was no central fund to supply expenses in any event. But the members around the country were always the 'heart of the corn' in their generosity; they'd always give you a bed, food and encouragement; and those who could afford it would even give you the few shillings to buy a pack of cigarettes, or a couple of gallons of petrol to take you to the next place you were calling to.)

I agreed to undertake the country-wide 'tour' on the basis outlined. Little did I realise that it was probably one of the most momentous decisions of my life and, moreover, was to have profound repercussions on the future of the movement as well.

I began my whirlwind 'tour' of Ireland on a Saturday morning in Kildare, where my first call was to two staunch members, a brother and sister, who sold a couple of dozen UIs in the Kill-Nass area. They had a few pounds ready for the UI and donated a couple of pounds as well, and after getting their report on the 'state of the organisation' - 'dire' - over a cup of tea

followed by a chat, I headed off for my next port of call, a man in Newbridge. (It was a matter of meeting the chairperson or secretary of the local or county 'organisation', where possible.) I repeated the formula here, got a few quid that was due to the UI and an extra few pounds as a donation and in a matter of an hour was headed on to a man in Carlow whom I was told would maybe sell the UI and give a donation. And so on to meet the few remaining republicans in each county. (Into Wexford, on to Waterford, Kilkenny and so on right round the country from the south-west up into Connaught, thence to Donegal, and then across into Derry, Tyrone, Armagh, Belfast and back down the east coast through Down and Louth.)

I soon discovered that our financial and organisational problems mirrored each other: sellers were scarce, sales were lower even than we thought, money was in short supply. But in the course of the fortnight, I collected £300, which was a fairly large amount for us at that time. I was delighted to be coming back with so much money as it helped to keep the paper in business.

But what was really a shock and disheartening was the awful state of the organisation and, just as bad, the refusal of some of our leaders to come to terms with this fact. No regular meetings were being held, there was a lack of direction, and the few members we had were in the main disheartened and demoralised and without much hope in a future for the republican ideal.

At leadership level it had been decided to end 'mealy-mouthed sentimentality' about the movement and that we would be totally honest with each other and be honestly critical of each other without falling out with each other. Yet, when they were told how few members we had in Limerick, Cork, Belfast, Derry and even in Dublin (and that in many places in Ireland we had no presence at all, not even a token one) some seemed unable to take it in, to recognise what it meant or even accept it as fact. This really bothered me because if we were to begin to make progress all must first accept that we were starting from poor beginnings, ie accept that we had no 'real functioning organisation'. And that if

the philosophical question - about the nature of the movement and its appeal to the public - was of the first importance, a well-run organisation was still essential to give it meaning.

Upon my return to Dublin two weeks later, among the recommendations I made in the course of my report was that if the movement was to survive we needed to put a full time organiser into each of the Four provinces, and soon. This was put to the leadership who a short time later agreed to the idea. And so it was that in December 1967 I was asked to go full time as the organiser for Dublin, the rest of Leinster and Waterford. It was also decided that the sale of the UI would be the basis of the beginning of rebuilding the organisation. Soon thereafter Malachy McGurran was appointed organiser for Ulster, and another two were appointed for Connaught and Munster. (McGurran and I agreed to go full time provided it was accepted by the leadership that 'there was no organisation as such'.)

In the middle 1960s our tactics and strategy changed radically and the paper, edited with great insight by Seamus O'Tuathail, not only reflected the change; it showed the way.

Housing, fisheries, unemployment, workers rights, women's liberation, the ownership and control of our natural resources, and civil rights - these were the subjects featured in our pages, issue after issue. They replaced an older, simpler but by now barely relevant appeal to what cynical Fianna Failers called the national question.

In the next couple of years - 1968-1969 - the UI was made viable and actual sales had reached 30,000 - and sold copies were being paid for because part of the organisers' job was to ensure the collection of money and return of same to head office for all papers sold. (But the UI still had large debts because it was now financing the rebuilding of the organisation. Now, however, it was able to meet its printing costs easily and its future was assured and safe.) And we began to rebuild the organisation. The UI during those years was a trailblazer, a radical, progressive relevant paper to progressive republicans, small farmers, fishermen and radical trade unionists and those involved in the struggle for civil rights.

There was a new, young, radical and energetic person joining the movement. Generous with their time and their money, as in the best tradition of earlier movements. We, the four organisers, of course, though promised a weekly wage of £10 got it for the first few weeks and then it ceased and we were thrown

back onto our own resources and the tradition of living off our supporters throughout one's area. And those supporters never failed us.

However, all was soon to change.

When the pogrom of August 1969 and the events which followed changed everything, in the movement and outside, the same national question became the excuse for some in Fianna Fail to provide financial - and more direct - support for those who departed the movement to follow the Provisional line.

For THE UNITED IRISHMAN, now more than ever, it was necessary to avoid the traps of sectarianism; and so from 1969 - as indeed it did previously - month after month THE UNITED IRISHMAN warned of the risks of civil war in which working class people would be set to fight each other while attention was diverted from the exploitative activities of their bosses, North and South.

I became managing editor - more manager than editor since Seamus O'Tuathail was editor and probably was the best editor of the UI ever - of THE UNITED IRISHMAN in January, 1970, at the end of the week in which the 'walk-out' from the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis occurred, the Provisionals were founded and the movement split irrevocably. There was a note of personal regret as I took over from Eamonn Mac Thomais (who had left to join the Provisionals) who shook hands with me as he handed over the books and said: "This is a tragedy". Unfortunately, not all who left felt like that.

The paid sales/circulation of the UI in December '69 was 30,000, a huge increase in a few short years. It still had a serious debt but it was going down gradually.

So now, in January 1970, I am managing editor of the UI, along with my other assignments. (I always seemed to get the 'nice' jobs at a critical time! But more about that at some future time).

Within a week of the split, however, in January 1970, that 30,000 circulation was dramatically reduced by half because of all those who left to join the Provisionals cancelled their orders. Now the UI was back to 15,000 sales per month.

Also in the early 1970s, as Fianna Fail and the Provisionals, the Irish Press group and RTE, launched a succession of political propaganda and assaults on the movement it became more and more difficult to sell the paper or to remain an active member of the now 'Official' Republican Movement.

Internment in 1971 was simply the most notable example of repression in the North. Day in and day out over

the years, those who supplied and many who read THE UNITED IRISHMAN were hounded and harassed by the RUC and the British Army.

The harassment continued even when, in line with the changes begun in the mid 'sixties, we moved towards the logical conclusion of our political development. But despite all that, the UI circulation began to recover and by 1973, within a 3 year period, circulation had risen to almost 90,000 countrywide, mainly in the south. All debts had been cleared and the UI was supporting the organisation in many ways.

Despite massive harassment and an unremitting barrage of vicious and jeering propaganda from many quarters, the UI and the movement remained steadfast: Our aim remained the achievement of a united socialist republic, but it was now to be achieved only through a 'combination of peaceful, democratic political action and physical force totally subordinate to the political programme'.

Alas, however, there were some at leadership level who felt that the UI, in its title and content, had no appeal to working class Protestants/Unionists or to trade unionists generally and that its publications should be discontinued and that, instead, a new magazine-style monthly paper entitled Workers Life be published. This new style magazine would, it was claimed, have a favourable impact upon working class Protestants/Unionists and indeed trade union activists in the south as well. A very laudable aim, but it never really got off the ground. Despite the huge expenditure of money and other resources, WORKERS LIFE never was popular with its target audience (indeed, most members of the movement didn't buy it and regarded it as elitist); and it was kept alive way beyond its natural life span at great cost to the movement. But that's another question for another day - as indeed is the fate of the WP itself.

THE UNITED IRISHMAN - and the proof is there for anyone who cares to look back over past editions - remained true to the great tradition espoused and represented in its masthead, and handed down from Wolfe Tone and those other great Irish republicans who were its inspiration.

I am proud to have played some small part in promoting it and what it stood for. And glad to have met some great and truly committed men and women in the course of the struggle, some of whom died for that great cause. We should never forget them, as we remember the past and prepare for the future.

THROW OFF THE FETTERS

Irish voices and the 'RIGHTS OF WOMEN'

The popular radicalism of two hundred years ago espoused many causes and imagined all possible futures. By the 1790s the political settlement of a century earlier was unravelling in Ireland. The rebellion of 1798 was constructed from a democracy of discontents. The grievances that shape the political culture of the 1790s resemble a kaleidoscope of complaint, in which fragments of the past and the present fuse and then dissolve to form different patterns of the future. The inheritance of religious dissent, agrarian protest, constitutional reform, transatlantic radicalism, freemasonry and prophecy combine and contend in the popular disaffection, to reinvent the order of society. The French Revolution was viewed as an event which heralded the change that was to come. Among the many futures that radicals of the 1790s dared to image was feminism.

There was, strictly speaking, no feminism in the 1790s. The word had yet to be invented in the early years of the next century by the French socialist, Charles Fourier. Nor was there an women's movement. But there were women, sometimes isolated from each other, who dared to imagine such futures. They spoke of the 'rights of women' when they explored the ideas of this emerging feminism, deriving their phrase, not only from the radical/revolutionary language of natural rights, but from the title of a 'justly celebrated book', published in 1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft 1759-1797.

The legacy which survives of their bold imagination is found in the testimonies of educated women, and men, who left letters, memoirs and diaries. Education was not always encouraged as an accomplishment among women. In a passage that might have come straight from the pages of the *Vindication*, Laetitia Pilkington, a daughter of Dublin's professional middle classes, wrote, *I was not permitted to look at a book, my mother regarding more the beauty of my face than the improvement of my mind: neither was I allowed to learn to read... this pleasure I was obliged to enjoy by stealth, with fear and trembling.* The women from the aristocracy and gentry, which made up the Irish oligarchy, lived for the most part within their large family country houses, which provided a small society in which ideas and accomplishments were limited. Margaret Mount Cashell, (1774-1835) married to Stephen Moore, the Earl of Mount Cashell, recalled, *I nursed my children, lived chiefly in the country and found my principal amusement in books.* The solitary pursuit of reading opened onto perspectives beyond the boundaries of the drawing room. Politics

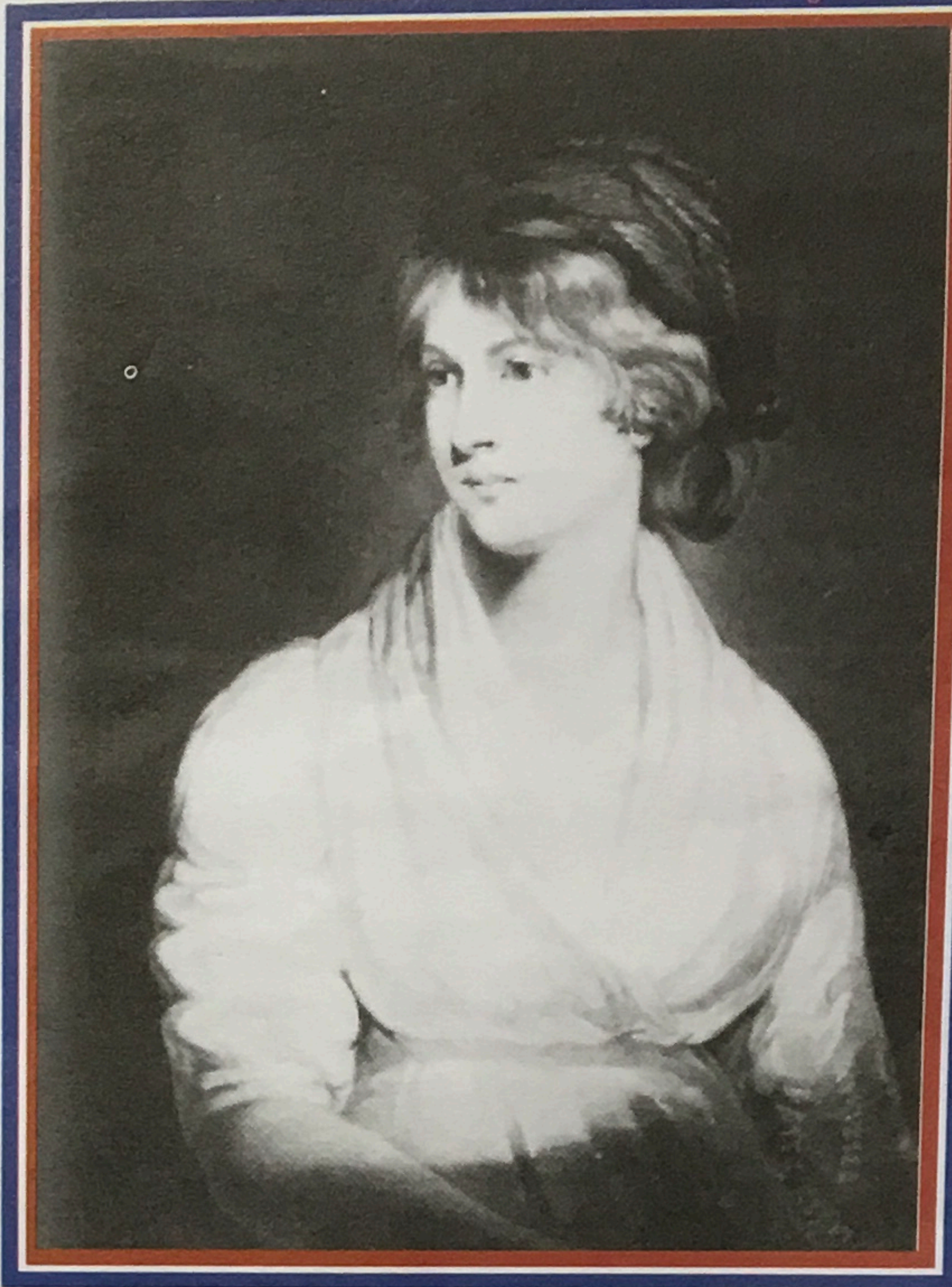
was mediated by books.

When Anna Wheeler, a London socialist feminist of the 1820s, was still living in Ireland at her husband's home, her daughter recalled her mother would be stretched out on a sofa, *deep in the perusal of some French or German philosophical work that had reached her translated via London (and who was unfortunately deeply imbued with the pernicious fallacies of the French Revolution, which had then more or less seared their trace through Europe, and who was besides strongly tainted by the corresponding poison of Miss Wollstonecraft book),* Lady Mount Cashell, who had begun her political journey to radical republicanism as Margaret King, daughter of the Kingsboroughs of Mitchelstown in Cork, one of the wealthiest families in Ireland, had more than one advantage over her contemporaries, despite what she felt were the disadvantages of her background, *the society of my father's house was not calculated to improve my good qualities or correct my faults; and almost the only person of superior merit with whom I had been intimate in my early days was an enthusiastic female who was my governess from fourteen to fifteen years old, for whom I felt an unbounded admiration because her mind appeared more noble and her understanding was more cultivated than any others I had known - from the time she left my chief objects were to correct those faults she pointed out and to cultivate my understanding as much as possible.* Her governess was Mary Wollstonecraft. That episode is told in Claire Tomalin's biography of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Since her brief year in Ireland in 1786-7 Mary Wollstonecraft had established herself as a writer within the world of London

radicals who had greeted the French revolution with enthusiasm. As well as her writing on the education of daughters that had secured her the Mitchelstown job, she had published a novel, and in 1790 she replied to Edmund Burke's attack on the French Revolution with *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*. Her title was appropriated by her political friend, Tom Paine, whose own response to Burke overtook her book the following year. In 1791 as a response to the decision to exclude women from political rights in the French republic, Mary Wollstonecraft sat down to write *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. It was written in six weeks. *A wild wish has flown from my heart to my head, and I will not stifle it... I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society.* The conduct of women, she attributes to, *a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men, who considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers... that the civilised women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect. Women must be respected, if it be fully proved that reason calls for this respect, and loudly demands justice for one half of the human race.*

A Vindication of the Rights of Women was first published in February 1792. It is still read today as the founding text of western feminism, and Mary Wollstonecraft is celebrated as a pioneering feminist. She argues with Rousseau, confronting his ideals of natural sexual difference, with the reason of the mind,



• Mary Wollstonecraft 1759 - 1797

which knows no distinction of sex. Her book was quickly welcomed by Ireland's republican and radical press. In her life of Wolfe Tone Marianne Elliot noted the Dublin journal, the *Universal Magazine and Review* praised Mary Wollstonecraft. It published a lengthy selection from the *Vindication*, "On Modesty" in March, and published a second extract on "the female character", in August. More often cited is the review from the *Northern Star*, 22 December 1792, probably of the *Vindication's* second edition in the autumn, and which Rosamund Jacob quoted in her 1937 account

of *The Rise of the United Irishmen 1791-4. We think we cannot better occupy a small portion of our paper than by recommending the perusal of every mother who can afford leisure, a justly celebrated book, lately published by Mrs Wollstonecraft entitled A Vindication of the Rights of Women. The work abounds with ingenious observations which do equal justice to the head and heart of the writer, it affords variety of judicious instruction, for the early management of the female mind, and frequently and pertinently corrects the assumptions*



• Mary Ann McCracken and her niece Maria (probably about 1801)

of the Tyrant Man, with a boldness and justice which demand admiration and convey conviction.

This precise review continues with a short passage from the 'fair writer' about corruption in educational institutions, which gives a flavour of both the writing and sentiment, because 'it is appropriate to the times'.

Among the keen readers of the *Northern Star* her niece recalled, was Mary Anne McCracken (1770-1866). John Gray's essay on the life and ideas of Mary Anne McCracken tells how the *Northern Star* advertised *A Vindication*, linking her book on women with Tom Paine's best selling *Rights of Man*. The Linen Hall Library obtained a copy in 1793, making it available to the radical readership of Belfast. At least one member of the United Irishmen knew Mary Wollstonecraft personally. Archibald Hamilton Rowan met her in Paris in 1794, when he was still new in the city, in flight from Ireland and a prison sentence for seditious libel. He wrote home that he was introduced to a lady who spoke English, and who was followed by her maid with an infant in her arms, which I found belonged to the lady. *Her manners were interesting, and her conversation spirited, yet not out of the sex. B. whispered to me that she was the author of the Rights of Women. I started! What! said I within myself, this is Mary Wollstonecraft, parading about with a child at her heels, with as little ceremony as if it were a watch she had just bought at the jewellers. So much for the rights of women, thought I.*

In France she had, he explained, submitted to a republican marriage to Gilbert Imlay, the American father of her child, and was treated as his wife by all who knew her. *My society, which before this time was entirely male, was not most agreeably increased, and I got a dish of tea and an hours rational conversation, whenever I called on her. The relative duties of man and wife was frequently the topic of our conversation; and here I found myself deeply wounded; because if my dearest thought as Mrs Imlay did, and many of their senti*

continued on
page 5

ments seem to coincide, my happiness was at an end.

They became firm friends. She valued his good opinion, and seems to have confided in him as her relationship with Gilbert Imlay disintegrated. His account of their first meeting in Paris makes clear that Rowan was already acquainted with Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist argument. The letters that passed between Belfast and Dublin, between brothers and sisters, from Mary Ann McCracken to her brother, Henry Joy in Kilmainham, 1797 and between William Drennan to Martha McTier, a year later, demonstrate a similar familiarity with Mary Wollstonecraft's works and the detail of her life. Mary Anne McCracken had certainly absorbed Mary Wollstonecraft's argument when she wrote to Dear Harry a letter with news from Belfast in March, 1797. ***I have a great curiosity to visit some female societies in this Town (although I should like them better were they promiscuous, as there can be no reason for having them separate but keeping women in the dark and certainly it is equally ungenerous and uncandid to make tools of them without confiding in them.) I wish to know if they have any rational ideas of liberty and equality for themselves or whether they are contented with the present abject and dependent situation, degraded by custom and education beneath the rank in society in which they were originally placed; for if we suppose woman was created for a companion for man she must of course be his equal in understanding, as with equality of mind there can be no friendship and without friendship there can be no happiness in society. If indeed we were to reason from analogy we would rather be inclined to suppose that women were destined for superior understandings, their bodies being more delicately framed and less fit for labour than that of man does it not naturally follow that they were more peculiarly intended for study and retirement.***

As she envisions future liberty and equality for Irish women punctuation disappears in her dash to complete her thoughts at two o'clock in the morning. But to return, it is not almost time for the clouds of error and prejudice to disperse and that the female part of Creation as well as the male should throw off the fetters with which they have been so long mentally bound and conscious of the dignity and importance of their nature rise to the situation for which they were designed, as great events at least display

if they do not create great abilities I hope the present Era will produce women of sufficient talents to inspire the rest with a genuine love of Liberty and just sense of her value without which their efforts will be impotent and unavailing. I do not hold out the motive of interest as an inducement for man to be just, as I think the reign of prejudice is almost at an end and that the truth and justice of our cause alone is sufficient to support it, as there can be no argument produced in favour of the slavery of women that has not been used in favour of general slavery and which have been successfully combated by many able writers. I therefore hope it is reserved for the Irish nation to strike out something new and to show an example of candour generosity and justice superior to any that have gone before them.

A few months later, in August, she sent her brother 'Mrs Wollstonecraft's travels thro' Norway, Sweden, etc', complemented with a book by William Godwin, whom Mary Wollstonecraft had recently married. ***How does it happen that people do not act according to their reasoning as he notwithstanding all he says against matrimony is now married to Mrs Wollstonecraft who had cone an equal contempt for the ceremony, but she was cured by experience for Mr Emily [sic] the gentleman to whom her letters are addressed was much attached to her and wished to marry her, but she was greatly involved in debt she refused to submit to what she called a monkish ceremony as it would oblige him to pay what she contracted to serve her friends. This I think was a false principle of honesty as it was more fit that she should be in debt to her husband than to anybody else. The event proved she was wrong for though she considered the contract as binding as any ceremony could make it the gentleman did not and when she returned from her travels with her infant daughter whom she had taken with her altho it was his business which she was about which his situation prevented him from doing himself, yet she got him publicly living with an actress. The effect which this had on a woman of feeling is easier imagined than described, she refused even to see or speak to him more...***

Mary Anne McCracken was well versed in radical women's literature. She recommends to

Henry that he should read, *Emma Courtney*, a novel by Mary Hays, a feminist herself and, as Mary Anne McCracken knew her to be, a 'particular friend' of Mary Wollstonecraft. When William Godwin published his life of Mary Wollstonecraft with her posthumous works, soon after her death in childbirth at the age of 37, William Drennan wrote to his sister in Belfast, Martha McTier, 1798 with some excitement.

Dear Matty, Have you heard of the memoirs of Mrs Wollstonecraft Godwin, written by her husband? It is a book exciting, and in some way gratifying to male and female curiosity, and were I not afraid of sending you what is generally called and perhaps truly an immoral and licentious book, I should make Robert Orr the bearer of it.

He recounts how Godwin, 'a most curious philosopher, married a woman of 34 or 38 years of age, whom he had kept 8 months as a mistress, who had been kept by another man who is still alive, and who with a perversity of attachment had pursued that other man after the most abominable insults, and had even with heroic meanness consented to live in the same house with him and his other mistress, and being refused in this gratification, had thrown herself

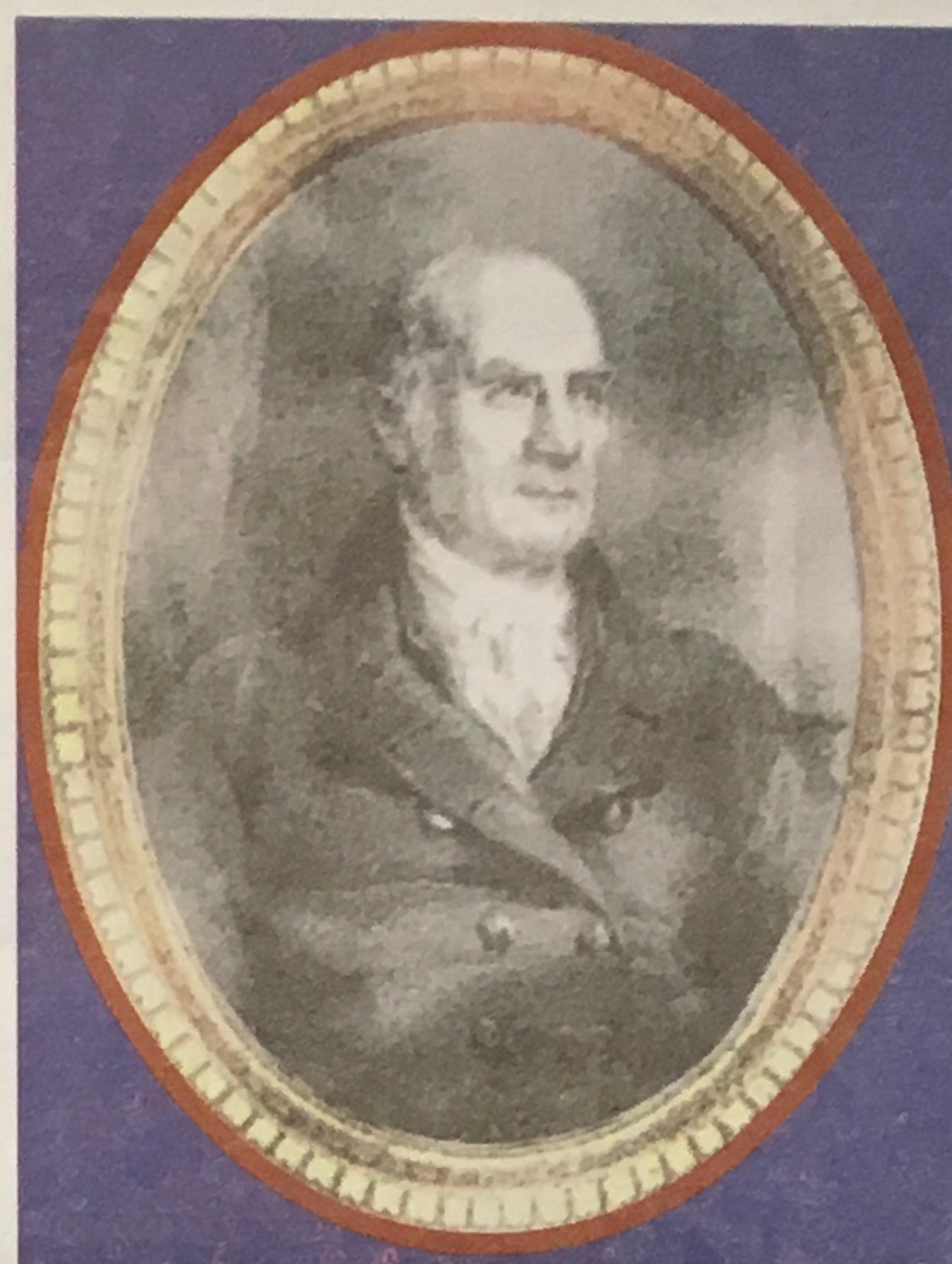


• Henry Joy McCracken

into the Thames. Her letters which I have not yet read and some posthumous Works are annexed but the price is too high. He had heard 'she is not so handsome as her portrait represents. She had been governess in the Kingsborough Family, but Miss King was then a very child. She was a compound of caprice and constancy, and her example shows that the rights of women are not to be exercised for some time, without the control of Man or God. The Rights of Man are this day (21st March) in full and free exercise throughout the French republic.

William Drennan's familiarity with the Wollstonecraft biography deserves more research.

Her two sisters by then lived in Dublin, where he worked as a doctor, and they had opened a school. In a postscript he mentions that his bookseller would not stock Godwin's life in deference to them. Whilst he had not met Mary Wollstonecraft, they



• Archibald Hamilton Rowan

knew people who did. Martha McTier is able to report from Mrs Blake, "she was pretty - had a fine neck and graceful carriage." Martha McTier was not impressed by Godwin's life of his wife. ***It appears to me a coarse, ill-written catchpenny hurry up at the moment favourable for gaining money and contempt to its Author - you are no further interested in it than because a pretty and clever woman you were in some manner acquainted with is the subject.*** In the published collection of their letters Martha McTier's dismissal of Godwin's book as 'a coarse ill-written catchpenny' is credited to her opinion of *A Vindication*, a book which she holds in higher regard. ***True, in her very clever rights of women she had neither what is generally called much religion or moral precept - but nobly did she assert her sex's independence - yet what a miserable slave was she - Virtue and Prudence must ever be absolutely necessary to independence.***

These readers constantly engage with Mary Wollstonecraft's private life as well as her public argument. They have understood her personal determination to live her life according to her principles was as much part of her advocacy of women's rights as her argument. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote within vocabulary of the radical republicanism of these readers. Her discourse of tyranny and corruption, reason and rights was the language in which her readers framed her own political opposition to the ruling oligarchy. They did not derive their ideas on the rights of women from her book so much as demonstrate their recognition of what she is saying. ***This work, may if perused with attention, be very useful. It is calculated to open the***

road to truth by clearing away prejudice. That the present system of female education is miserably erroneous, that mind has no sex, and that women are unjustly enslaved, are opinions I have long entertained. What proportion of power in the government of the world ought to be entrusted to the female sex is a question which I cannot decide. However Godwin has in some measure made up (my) mind on the subject by proving that government to be best which laid fewest restraints on private judgment. Surely the judgment of

the one sex ought to be as unshackled as the other.

The young lawyer Daniel O'Connell, had begun to read *A Vindication* in the new year of 1796 with some enthusiasm. By the end of January, as he finished the book, he had wearied of it. ***In the Rights of Women there are many truths mixed with factual errors. The authoress certainly posesses a strong mind. Her style is not good, though the language is correct. She is too fond of metaphor. Images crowd too fast on the reader. And in the decoration we lost sight of the substance.*** These fragments only suggest the extent to which feminist ideas were part of the political culture of the 1790s. What the sources expose is that this was an underground debate. The rights of women did not become part of the public debate and as the Paris Convention closed its ears to the French call for women's citizenship, the United Irishmen's movement did not include the political rights of women in their democratic programme. The political debate on the rights of women in Ireland was conducted almost exclusively in private.

Theresa Moriarty is a writer and researcher on the role of women in Irish Labour History.

NOTES

The quotations from the Irish readers of Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women, were included in the script of Dangerous Reputations, staged at the Belfast Festival and Liberty Hall, Dublin, November 1992, with Francesa Annis, Jacquetta May, Fiona Shaw, Tim Loane, and were edited by Sally Alexander, Jean McCrindle, Ursula Owen and Sheila Rowbotham.

Mary Wollstonecraft's feminism retained its inspiration to Irish radicals among the co-operative socialists a generation later. When William Thompson dedicated *An Appeal* on behalf of one half of the human race, women, against the pretensions of the other half, men, to retain them in political, and thence civil and domestic slavery, to Anna Wheeler in 1825, he both employed Mary Wollstonecraft's phrase, 'one half of the human race', in his title and paid tribute to the pioneering feminist democrats that went before them.

Anxious that you should take up the cause of your proscribed sex, and state to the world in writing, in your own name, what you have so often and so well stated in conversation, and under feigned names in such of the periodical publications of the day as would tolerate such a theme. I long hesitated to arrange our common ideas, even upon a branch of the subject like the present. Anxious that the hand of a woman should have the honour or raising from the dust that neglected banner which a woman's hand nearly thirty years ago unfolded boldly, in the face of the prejudices of thousands of years, and for which a woman's heart bled, and her life was all but the sacrifice - I hesitated to write. Were courage the quality wanting, you would have shown, what ever days experience proves, that women have more fortitude than men. Were comprehensiveness of mind, above the narrower views which all too often marred Mary Wollstonecraft's pages and narrowed their usefulness, the quality wanting, - above the timidity the impotence of conclusion accompanying the eloquence of Mary Hays, addresses about the same time that Mary Wollstonecraft wrote in the shape of an 'Appeal' to the then closed ears of reasoning men; yours was the eye which no prejudice obscured, open the rays of truth from whatever quarter they might emanate.

AGREEMENT '98 - TH

INTO THE FUTURE WITH SINN FÉIN

Two hundred years ago an enterprise long-wished for by Irish people spluttered to a start before being rapidly quenched. Today that same enterprise remains uncompleted, but not for long.

In this historic year Sinn Féin believe that we can complete that enterprise. Within sight are Liberté, Egalité et Fraternité for all the people of the island of Ireland.

All avenues, open or closed, will be used by Sinn Féin in the peaceful pursuit of the goals of Irish Freedom and Irish unity. We have proven the necessity for the Six County statelet and its bigoted military, judicial and administrative apparatus to be dismantled and to be replaced by democratically-answerable all-Ireland bodies.

Only a government representative of all the people, with guaranteed civil and

religious liberties and the fruits of Ireland's economy being enjoyed by those who create them will achieve a peaceful and prosperous future for our country. Is gá chomh maith go mbeadh meas ar cultúir, stair agus theangacha na nÉireannach uilig. To achieve these goals has been the desire of millions of Irish men and women over the last two centuries and before, we can now achieve that dream and build an Ireland which will once more stand proud and be an example to other struggling nations.

Aoengus Ó Snodaigh
Sinn Féin



• L-R Taoiseach Bertie Aherne, Talks Chairman Senator George Mitchell and

ULSTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY

"I have never been of the opinion that somehow Northern Ireland was destined to forever tear itself apart over religious, political, cultural and, real or imagined, ethnic differences.

I have always believed that we, as a society, were capable of resolving the underlying issues of the conflict to a point where we could at last consign to the dustbin of history a culture of our differences ultimately manifesting themselves in violent conflict. I believe that the Agreement now provides us with the opportunity to do just that.

For the first time ever the people of Northern Ireland have jointly co-determined their future. They have determined that they wish to share power and responsibility with each other for the benefit of all of our community, further than that, broad nationalism and unionism have decided, in democratic structural form, to explore fully the potential for co-operation throughout the British Isles. In short, the totality of relationships can now be addressed in a true and genuine manner. My hopes for the future probably differ very little from those of other people who have sought for many years to bring a positive influence to bear on our situation. I hope I am elected to the Assembly so I can continue the painstaking process of conflict resolution. But, irrespective of my own political fortunes, I hope that the vast majority of those who are successful in the Assembly elections go there determined to make the Agreement work. Most of all, I hope the legacy of our efforts is a quality of life for our children infinitely different from that which we have endured."

Cllr David Adams UDP

THE UNITED IRISHMEN LESSONS FOR TODAY

The United Irishmen have remained a powerful source of inspiration to all those in Ireland who have sought by peaceful means to create a democratic and inclusive society, embracing all traditions.

In their time the United Irishmen representative the enlightenment - that fundamental shift to modernity based on the "rights of man", which took place in Europe and the American colonies in the latter half of the 18th Century and which in Ireland became a programme of

uniting Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter as the means to establish democratic government on the island.

The United Irishmen were therefore pioneers in the creation of a new political tradition in Ireland - democratic and non-sectarian, which, unlike previous essentially

aristocratic traditions, decisively broke with the past and sought to build a society based on civil rights in order to involve the mass of the people in the political system.

The genius of the United Irishmen was to recognise that this democratic reform could only be achieved by bringing together, on the basis of political equality, the different traditions on the island so that the accommodation of their interests would form the basis of a democratic system of government.

The United Irishmen were therefore not simply interested in changing the flag flying over Dublin Castle, but were about real change through the building of a new inclusive and democratic society in Ireland. Their vision has been a powerful inspiration to reformers and radicals ever since.

Genuine republicanism is therefore not about flags or emblems nor about ensuring that one group dominates another. Republicanism is, or should be, the business of

establishing inclusive democratic institutions to which all sections of our community can give allegiance and in which all citizens are equal and free.

This is the position that the SDLP has constantly held to over the years and which forms the basis of the Good Friday Agreement.

The essence of the Agreement is the essence of the United Irishmen - both traditions working together in partnership and equality.

The Agreement

threatens no one. It provides a basis to turn the aspirations of the United Irishmen into concrete objectives and a practical programme to create a New Ireland based on the ideals inspired the United Irishmen - civil rights, equality, accommodation of diversity and respect for diversity, as the means to bring peace, justice, stability and the opportunity for creativity which people clearly want.

Laurence Moffat
SDLP

THE PARTIES SPEAK



...ell and Prime Minister Tony Blair, Stormont 10 April 1998.

P.A. PHOTOGRAPH

PROGRESSING WITH THE PUP

The Progressive Unionist Party believe that because of political instability in Northern Ireland and inept representation, the real issues have 'gone by the board'. We therefore welcome the restoration of devolved government to Northern Ireland, within the context of sharing responsibility and inclusiveness.

We wish to see a new Northern Ireland Assembly, where all members are fully accountable to their electorate and administer for all of the people in an atmosphere of honour and trust. It is the intent of our Party to relentlessly pursue the 'fundamentals' which heavily impinge on people's lives, issues

such as ...conflict transformation, human rights, economic development, adequate education provision, a cleaner and safer environment and many more.

The Party supports the principle of co-operation between the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Ireland on matters of mutual interest. We also look forward to the proposed establishment of strong and meaningful relationships between the several regions of the United

Kingdom.

The Progressive Unionist Party look forward to the day when all the people of Northern Ireland can live together in an atmosphere of peace and trust and when all individuals are treated with equality, dignity and respect regardless of gender, race, colour, religion, political opinion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, prison record or social background."

Eileen Ward

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

My first reaction to 1798 is to say that it was a tragedy involving the loss of thousands of innocent lives. I am sure that there were men and women of honour among the United Irishmen but I am sure the same was true of their opponents.

I am slightly puzzled by the parochial nature of the discussion in Ireland of 1798 in this the 200th anniversary year. Nobody in Ireland seems to ask the pertinent question - what would have been the consequences for the

country of a French victory? Elsewhere in Europe many countries found the arrival of the French armies a prelude to disaster.

One thing I am clear about: in 1798 the United Irishmen at no point succeeded in mobilising a majority of Protestants and Catholics. No doubt because of their radical separatist republican politics. In

part because it fully acknowledges the British as well as the Irish dimension, the Stormont Agreement has so far retained the support of a majority of Catholic and - just - a majority of Protestants. It must continue to do so if 1998 is not to join 1798 as just another tragic date in Irish history.

Stephen King

Hopes and visions for the future of our society

In many ways the 1998 was an auspicious year to try to reach agreement in Northern Ireland. Two hundred years ago, 'Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter' united briefly, finding common cause with the wind of change sweeping Europe - embryonic democracy.

On 10th April 1998, eight parties reached agreement at the Stormont Talks - representing virtually every position within Northern Ireland's political spectrum.

For the Women's Coalition, the key to success (previously elusive) was the inclusive nature of this process. We believe that the implementation of the Agreement must be equally inclusive. The Agreement respects the differing aspirations of people, and guarantees their chosen identities. It is based on accommodating diversity, it reflects a gain for all rather than a victory for one side.

The Women's Coalition believes the Good Friday Agreement is a fair and balanced 'blue-print' for the future. Now, it is the task of politicians to make it work in practice.

Three principles rest at the heart of the Women's Coalition: respect for Human Rights, Inclusion and Equality. They underwrote our successful contribution in the Talks. Respect for them is the strongest possible safeguard for the Agreement. The ideals of 1798 have not been lost - we must now take the opportunity to build on them.

Barbara McCabe
Women's Coalition

The Alliance Party's vision for Northern Ireland

'- a tomorrow together.'

Northern Ireland is a community in transition. The Good Friday Agreement was the culmination of many years of negotiation between the political parties. It was effectively a draft outline of how Northern Ireland might effectively govern itself. On May 23 the people of northern Ireland endorsed that draft - the Agreement became a settlement.

We must now continue the transition. We must take the settlement and run with it. In many ways the people of Northern Ireland have moved ahead of the politicians, and ahead of the media. Many of our politicians appear determined to cling to issues on the old agenda - issues which the Agree-

ment made irrelevant.

We must hope that the burden of responsibility - of actually taking tough decisions on how we govern ourselves, educate, employ and look after one another - will force these politicians to move on. Politics, public debate, and the media spotlight will move on.

In our election manifesto, Alliance set out the vision for a new society in Northern Ireland. A society where everyone can feel val-

ued and where everyone has a part to play. A stable, prosperous and fair society. The next four years - the first term of the new Assembly - will be an exciting time for Northern Ireland. Our vision of Northern Ireland at the end of that term is of a society where we as a single community have rejected forever the politics of division and despair, and are building a tomorrow together.

Richard Good

HISTORY, THE LEFT AND 1798

Almost as soon as it was over the insurrection of 1798 began to signify much more than a series of historical events. Far from fading into the past Ninety Eight has, in recent years, become a battleground of ideas. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, to some extent, it has come to signify a variety of ideological positions in themselves. This has inevitably led to gross distortions and deliberate twisting of historical facts to suit the particular thesis to which the protagonists subscribe. In light of this situation it is incumbent on the Left to enter the fray but not as the sole guardians of the Irish revolutionary tradition intent on running away with the flag of Liberty before it is stolen by the nefarious new-nationalists. The events of 1798 should be analysed so as to gain a serious understanding of these events and a critical awareness of the manner in which they influenced the subsequent history of Ireland.

At the risk of oversimplification, the different conceptions of Ninety Eight that have now emerged could be categorised as follows:

The Rebellion as Entertainment

The Rebellion as a sectarian Catholic Jaquerie.

The Rebellion as a National Revolution.

The Rebellion as a Secular Republican Revolution.

To dispense, initially, with the first concept. Given that the anniversary year is upon us, there is a certain inevitability about the transformation of the Rebellion into the stuff of Theme Parks. At its best this concept of the Rebellion as Entertainment has popularised knowledge of the complexity of the events of Ninety Eight. All too often, however, it has contributed to sanitisation and simplification, divesting it of any radical content which might be subversive to the ruling order. The 'cash' in syndrome has contributed to the Disneyisation of the Rebellion, particularly in Wexford. It is rather ironic that same class who would have most to fear from the radical content of the United Irish discourse, are those who now seek to make a quick killing. The supreme irony has been the establishment of a phony 'Wexford Senate', seats available to the ultra-rich only for a large dollop of dough, to commemorate what was a mass uprising of ordinary people.

The characterisation of the Rebellion as a Catholic Jaquerie has its basis, almost exclusively, in the nature of the Wexford uprising. It is a matter of debate as to what extent sectarianism

played a part in fomenting and sustaining the uprising in the south east. Modern research has seen a complex picture emerging of a fairly well organised United Irish organisation primarily led by the Catholic large farmer class allied to a small section of the more radical Protestant gentry, with the traditional role ascribed to Catholic priests such as Father Murphy now being increasingly seen as exaggerated. This is not to deny that sectarianism played a part in the events of 1798 in Wexford but to characterise sectarianism as the sum total is patently untrue. The progeny of this characterisation lies in two propagandistic projects. Firstly, came the determined efforts of pro-government propagandists to portray the Wexford rising as such, both, in word and by illustration. The primary aim of this project was to crush the patriot/republican sympathies of a section of the Protestant population, particularly the Presbyterians of Ulster. Musgraves portrayal of the rebellion as "a priest-led conspiracy" combined with Cruikshanks crude illustrations of ape-like rebels impaling loyalists undoubtedly had an effect. It should be noted, though, that Presbyterian radicalism did not completely disappear after the Rebellion despite the governments propaganda, indeed it was to survive in the form of Ulster Liberalism up until the Home Rule crisis of the 1880's.

Ironically, the hijacking of the Rebellion by the Catholic Church and the gombeen men of the Home Rule party in the late 19th century (largely facilitated by the

work of the clerical historian Fr. Kavanagh) had the dual effect of massively overemphasising the role of the Catholic clergy while ignoring the intense hostility of the Catholic hierarchy of the day to the Rebellion and of obscuring to a further degree its radical republican nature, thereby strengthening the Catholic Jaquerie thesis. Nowadays this view of the Rebellion in Wexford is often employed by those with unionist sympathies in combination with the tendency to downplay the extent of the Ulster Rising and assert the rapidity with which the Presbyterians abandoned republicanism.

The process by which a complex series of regional risings, in which a widely varying interplay of class, religious, local and personal loyalties dictated the nature of events, became in the minds of most people a single national and nationalist revolution has its origin in the previously mentioned work of Fr. Kavanagh and the 100th anniversary celebrations held in 1898. Mainstream nationalism appropriated the Rebellion and reshaped it to its own needs. Hence the Ninety Eight ballads of P.J. McCall seem to have had a far greater impact on the perceptions of many Irish people than knowledge of the actual events. The picture that emerges from this transformation is of heroic pikemen led by patriotic priests driving the British Redcoats before them and subsequently being slaughtered by same.

This distorted picture had a profound effect right up until the 1970's as anyone who was subjected to the

Christian Brothers primary school cartoon book on Irish history can attest to. With the Rebellion tightly squeezed into its ill-fitted nationalist suit, gone was 'the French disease', the radical secular egalitarianism of Tone. Ulsters' role in the Rebellion faded into the background leaving little trace in the popular imagination other than the odd ballad such as 'Roddy McCorley' and 'Henry Joy'. Ironically, the latter-day version of the Rebellion as National Revolution tends to downplay the sectarian dimension in a mirror image of the loyalist view of the Rebellion, as witnessed by the recent controversy about the context in which the massacre of Protestants at Scullabogue during the Wexford rising occurred. Attempts to create a sanitised, untainted vision of the rebellion, as if it were an immense unified and one dimensional revolution by which a nation tried to throw off the yolk of foreign tyranny, may serve a certain modern political agenda but it bears only a partial resemblance to what really happened.

The Left, of course, has not been immune to baking its own historical pie, leaving out the ingredients deemed to be distasteful. As the Republican Movement moved left wards in the 1960's the old nationalist myths were replaced by a portrayal of the Rebellion as a radical democratic revolution led by determined cadres influenced by French Jacobinism. On the positive side, this development reclaimed fundamental truths about Ninety Eight, that the ideals which inspired the leaders, and to a certain degree the foot soldiers, were those of the French Revolution; that the future they dreamed of was a Republic based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity; that Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter did join together to overthrow oppression, if only briefly and in certain areas.

Unfortunately some on the Left have gone further and tried to remold the Rebellion so as to shape its main

protagonists into mirror images of themselves. This is not to deny the radical republicanism of the United Irishmen but simply to warn against unnecessary myth-making. The United leaders were by no means socialists, nor could they be since socialism in the modern sense of the word simply did not exist at the time. Such efforts to push them into the straitjackets of contemporary ideology will inevitably come to grief on the rocks of detailed historical research. In a similar vein the Left must avoid the manner in which our opponents simply overlook those aspects of the Rebellion that they find distasteful or contradictory to their interpretation. To take one example; one cannot understand the course of the Ulster Rising without analysing the role of Defenderism. The Left traditionally cast the Defenders in the role of primitive sectarian gangs, yet a far more complex picture of this organisation is now emerging combining as it did Catholic sectarianism with a vague but clearly republican-inspired radicalism. Once again the dangers of oversimplification are exposed.

What then is the Left to make of this event, now so distant but given a renewed relevance in this anniversary year? Three fundamental points arise in my view:

The Rebellion is history but there is history and there is history. Facts and events can be objectively attested to but the great currents running beneath the surface, the reasons why, are matters of dispute. Before claiming the United Irishmen as glorious ideological ancestors, the Left should engage in serious analysis of the events of 1798. It is rather surprising, that for all the interest in that era, no major studies of the socio-economic background using Marxist concepts have appeared despite the ever increasing number of works on the Rebellion. Surely a period in history when class so clearly played a role in the unfolding of events demands careful analysis by the Left?

1798 should also act as

a warning sign to those on the Left who emerged from the Republican tradition. We may not want to believe it but some of the negative traits of Republicanism, which effectively prevented the transformation of the Official Republican Movement into a radical and democratic socialist party can be seen as emerging from the United Irish tradition; Conspiratorialism, elitist leadership, reliance on violence. This is not to use the benefit of hindsight to condemn what were, after all, the products of the time but to locate the seeds of recent problems in the past - all the better to overcome them.

Finally, without succumbing to romanticism, the Rebellion can be an inspiration for a very dispirited Left. The following are tentative suggestions:

• *At a time when much of the so-called Left has abandoned popular activism for the PR man and the spin doctor. Ninety Eight is a timely reminder of the role of the great mass of ordinary people in bringing about social and political change.*

• *As Catholics and Protestants from paramilitary backgrounds are moving slowly towards a realisation that is the exclusion and poverty of their class that unites them, the memory of the determined anti-sectarianism of the United Irishmen could also act as a further push in the right direction.*

• *The struggle for human emancipation weaves through history, sometimes stagnating in the fetid backwaters of oppression only to burst forth in a great tidal wave of anger. If many have abandoned that struggle recently, due to venality or careerism, disillusion or plain tiredness, there are many others who have not. Here is an opportunity for us to rededicate ourselves to that struggle, to make real the abstract principles of true liberty and equality by engaging in the everyday struggle for a better life for all.*

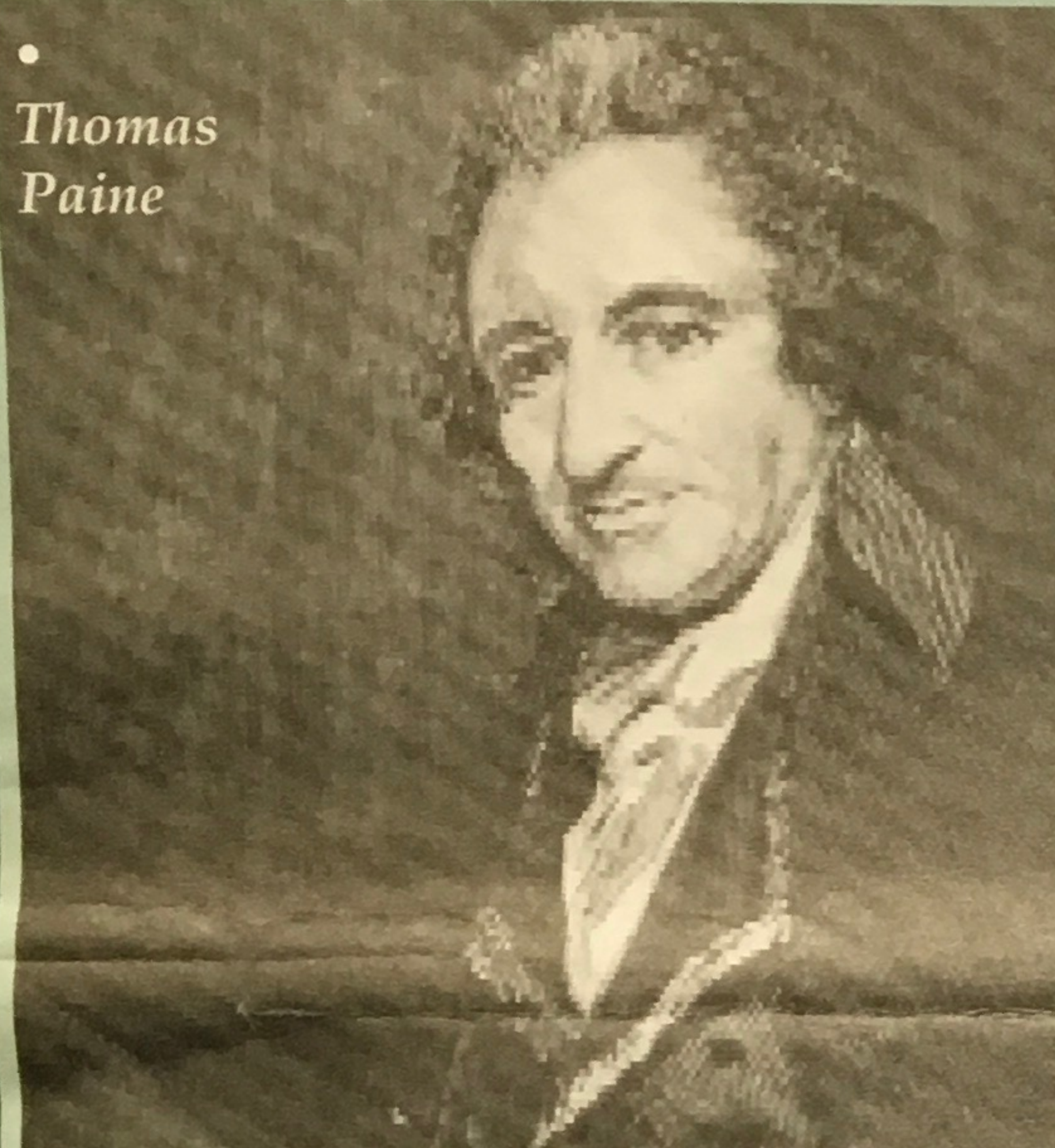
**Colm Breathnach,
Dublin
July 1998**

Paddy Joe McClean is a former chairman of The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and is the current chairman of Democratic Left Northern Ireland.



Thomas Paine and The Rights Of Man

Thomas Paine's three books 'Common Sense', 'The Rights of Man' and 'The Age Of Reason' made him the most widely read author of the 18th Century and his works had a profound effect on political thinking in Ireland in the 1790's.



Thomas Paine

This extraordinary man was born in Thetford, England in 1737 and died in drunken penury in 1809 in New York State. His book 'Common Sense' became a cornerstone of the struggle for American Independence. During the American War of Independence he was a soldier, a war correspondent and a friend and advisor to George Washington. Indeed it was general Washington himself who declared that 'the increased hostilities added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet 'Common Sense'.

He was the architect of American Federalism, and his book 'The Rights Of Man' heavily influenced both the American Constitution and The Bill Of Rights. During the French Revolution he moved to Paris where he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies and helped draft the Constitution of the infant French Republic in 1793.

It was in Paris that he wrote 'The Age Of Reason', a powerful plea for secularism, and was jailed during the terror and narrowly escaped the guillotine. It was said of Tom Paine at the time

that he was 'the worlds chief public defender of republican democracy, the living symbol of the fight for the rights of the citizen against absolutism and the divine right of kings'.

Of his writing Paine said 'It is my design to make those who can hardly read understand. I have therefore avoided any literary ornament, and put it in a language as plain as the alphabet'. His aim was to encourage individuals to become citizens capable of thinking, speaking and acting clearly and confidently in public.

As our own politicians sit down at last after 30 years to give substance to our own 'Bill Of Rights', the words of Paine echo down the centuries;

'When it shall be said in any country in the world, my poor are happy, neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them, my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars, the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive... when these things can be said, then may that country boast its Constitution and its Government'.

THEN AND NOW

by Seamas O Tuathail

Then was November 1967 when I was appointed editor of the United Irishman, a position I was to resign from in June 1971. I was lucky. Everything of significance in national politics happened between 1968 and 1972.

From the massacre at Derry in January 1972 to the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast, a period of 26 years, the country north and south was dealing with the reaction to the critical events that had taken place between 1968 and 1972.

August 1968 saw the first civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon in County Tyrone. An idea sparked by events in Alabama took root in Northern Irish politics. The crusade of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement aimed at achieving equal and fair treatment for all in the six counties. Its aims were heresy to some Republican ears who saw the demands in the UK context as acceptance of partition. The civil rights movement initially included all shades of liberal opinion in the North, including Unionists. It split the Unionist monolith - where, for example the '56 - '62 IRA campaign had failed to make any impact. Faced with the political demands for one man, one vote in local elections, a points system for housing and an end to repressive legislation, hard-line Unionists led by Bill Craig undermined the Government of Terence O'Neill which was under pressure from Westminster to relax the discriminations against Nationalists.

By 1971 Unionists were down to their last Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, whose introduction of internment in August 1971, helped launch the war of attrition which ended with the cease-fires and the Belfast agreement. The confusion of those days split the Republican movement as well, giving birth to the Provisionals. Even the power struggles between Charles Haughey and Jack Lynch in the South was defined in the arms crisis as a policy split on the Northern issues. In March 1972 the British Government, faced with the growing political instability in the North and anxious to blame the Unionist

administration for the massacre at Derry; prorogued Stormont. William Whitelaw was dispatched to Ireland with a blueprint for a new type of devolved administration shared between Unionists and Nationalists.

More than a quarter of a century later, the new Assembly represents mark 3 of the basic blueprint. In the interval however nationalist political sophistication has matured. Abandoned by the middle classes of the South, northern nationalists have become assertive, articulate and highly conscious of their rights.

By contrast, Unionism still suffers from the basic split first inflicted on it by the Civil Rights Movement. With the ending of the conflict, that split now reflected in the 'yes' and 'no' campaign for the Assembly, as revealed to the wider world and the widespread media exposure on issues like Drumcree adds to the fissures destroying political Unionism.

Perhaps the main problems for Unionism is that Britain's interests no longer requires Unionism of the traditional variety. In my view it is still the British which sustains Unionism in its various forms. Until or unless Britain decides that it should no longer have a role in Ireland, its main political ally on the island will continue to argue the terms of its conditional loyalty - even to the point of attacking "Her Majesty's" army and police.

The condition of Unionist loyalty always has been the exercise of supremacy over Nationalists trapped within the borders of the 1920 partition of the island. Only when no link remains for Unionists to be loyal will mainstream Unionism be free to deal with its Nationalist neighbours on the basis of true equality. When they lose the province they gain a country.

Seamas O Tuathail was editor of the United Irishman from 1967 - 1971.

BELFAST TRADE UNION VIEW ON CURRENT EVENTS

Exactly a year ago, after 17 years of a right wing reactionary Tory Government with their vicious anti-trade union programme and narrow view of the world we were celebrating the election of a Labour Government.

There was a glimmer of hope then and 12 short months later as we commemorate the 200th anniversary of 1798 and proclaim the slogan of the United Irishmen "Unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter" we are living through momentous times when our dreams and aspirations of peace and social progress can at last come to fruition.

Through the historic Good Friday Agreement we now have a unique opportunity to create a genuine accommodation between the two sections of our divided people.

The agreement is balanced and provides the basis for political differences to be resolved without the excuse of a fall back position to anti-democratic acts of terror.

Everyone, not least trade unionists must continue to build a new society based on human rights, respect for each others traditions with economic and social justice.

The alternative is further division, despair, a continuation of futile sectarian violence and a deepening sense of hopelessness resulting in a paralysis of our people to act with all their creativeness and energy. Therefore in the coming months the progressive socialist voice of tolerance and class unity must be heard above the narrow rhetoric of bigotry.

It's also important at this transitional stage in the political situation that the trade union policies on the economy and social progress be advanced.

The peace divided must not be for the exclusive use of multi-national corporations and property speculators cashing in on the feel good factor.

The benefits of peace must be translated into effective economic activity to target areas and groups of greatest need and involve them in the decisions which effect their community.

In Belfast we will shortly have the opportunity to map out the future direction and values of our city.

The Belfast City Partnership Board in June will be launching a draft vision for 2020 followed by a massive consultation process, asking organisations and individuals what type of city they want in 25 years.

Now as citizens we can negotiate the future of our city.

- Long term substantial economic growth
- Peoples City
- A city of values
- City that accepts diversity as a strength
- Socially cohesive city
- City of Tolerance

All these things and more can be achieved in Belfast if we can underpin peace and social progress with civil society, such as trade union and community groups, playing an active role in local governance through partnerships.

So while we reflect on Belfast and its revolutionary activity of 1798, let's make sure that in another 200 years the citizens of Belfast will say 1998 was the year we made the transition from;

**VIOLENCE TO PEACE
BIGOTRY TO TOLERANCE
DIVISION TO AN
INCLUSIVE SOCIETY**

**DESI MURRAY
CHAIRMAN
BELFAST TRADES
COUNCIL**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Our thanks also to Eoin Magennis and the staff at the Linen Hall Library for their help and guidance, to Cathy Dobbin and Frank Fox and everyone at The Andersonstown News for their hospitality, courtesy and professionalism.

Signed the editorial panel of the United Irishman.

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Roger Torney

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REFLECTIONS ON '98

BY JOHN GRAY

The bicentenary of the 1798 rising is upon us and in particular of that fatal week from 7th to 13th June which saw the smashing of the Untied Irish endeavour in the north, first at Antrim and then at Ballynahinch. What is really clear is that the bicentenary, unlike the centenary, has been marked on an extraordinary broad ranging basis, and across the community divide.

This is reflected at a general level by the support of 19 out of 26 district councils in Northern Ireland for programmes of events to mark the bicentenary. More specifically one can point to a variety of major exhibitions; to extensive documentary coverage on television and radio; to revivals of old plays and the performance of new ones, and to the appear-

ance of an extensive new literature often dependent on the work of talented local historians.

Above all the momentum for all this has come from the local level and it is at local level that discussion of the 1790's has created enabling space for debate on issues which still have resonances to this day. What has actually happened has con-

founded those of our lofty academics in the north who have contributed little to the process of understanding while warning us of the dangers of making the attempt.

Certainly, two hundred years after the event, we should be open hearted enough to remember more than the Untied Irishmen who fell. Let us indeed remember all of the approximately 30,000 people from both sides, or none, who died in the rebellion and surrounding events. They found a tragic equality in death, in a decade which throughout Europe was marked by extraordinary violence; a decade of high hopes of reform met by repression, of revolution met with counter-revolution, a decade marked by the horrors of total war.

Even now, however,

we see no equality in the positions struck by the parties to that conflict. We particularly remember the United Irishmen and women as modernisers, the first in this island to espouse democratic principles, and the 'Rights of Man'. The first too to identify what remains a fundamental truth; that it is not possible of any one section of a people to secure a real freedom for themselves at the expense of others. Hence their call for a 'brotherhood of affection' and for 'an union of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter' is one that should haunt us to this day.

Yes they were patriots for their own country, but not in any narrow sense. They were also 'citizens of the world' looking outwards to progressive developments elsewhere notably in America and France, and alongside their own movement encouraging United Englishmen and United Scotsmen. Culturally they encouraged the revival of the Irish language and of traditional Irish music, while at the

same time relishing the work of Rabbin Burns and writing their own Ulster Scots verse. They were people with a vision which knew no boundaries. Happily too new research on the United Irishmen enables us to rediscover their breadth of outlook. Increasingly we can cast aside those 19th century fables of a 'faith and fatherland' rebellion, or alternatively, and particularly in a northern context, of an 'ourselves alone' and self-interested Presbyterian rising.

What then of those who opposed the Untied Irishmen? Let us regret equally their deaths, but let others, if they must, celebrate their agenda; their opposition to democratic reforms only uneasily and partially granted over the following two centuries; their acceptance and encouragement of communal division as a bulwark against change; their retreat from the world into inner fortresses. Certainly following the smashing of a radical generation in 1798 these were to be the dominant

themes of Irish political life north and south for much of the following two centuries. It brought freedom of a sort - of the sort to be found while forever defending battlements - but it brought neither justice nor ease, even for the apparently victorious.

Time indeed to look again at the one great endeavour in Irish history to chart a more generous course, and we can do so in the sure knowledge that in doing so we favour the myths of no tribe. If many Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters embraced the United Irishmen, we know, equally, that they were opposed by people of all faiths. In that sense the 1790's provided a tantalising glimpse of what ought to be our modern politics, a politics separate from confessional identity.

John Gray
Chairman United Irishmen
Commemoration Society
Linen Hall Library
Belfast

1798 - Commemorating the past and preparing for the future

Today's Ireland is perhaps the most dynamic, well educated and potentially prosperous country in the European family. Our geographical location, small population and high standards of education allow us to offer a sound base for investment in industry, corporate services and more recently in the international field of Information Technology. Ireland also enjoys a generous economic aid package from Europe and America and has managed a steady growth in Tourism and Agriculture.

At the heart of this new found prosperity and growth is Ireland's young people, the age group that I have particularly worked with in the past number of years is the 16-25 year olds being a member of this group myself I write from that perspective. These young people are the backbone of any society, they are the politicians, the judges, the lawmakers, the Fathers and Mothers of the future. I know it is an old cliché but the future really is in their hands. Without them any idea of creating a stable society in which peace and prosperity can flourish is lost. So, is the future really that bright? Do we really have the right conditions to ensure stability? We must look at what pressures and burdens young people in our society have to deal with and how best we can use opportunities like the 1798 commemoration to bring together our young people and educate them in their shared heritage, the commemoration must promote ideas of common interest, to recognise each others differences and learn respect, to show that the message of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity belongs to us all.

A large proportion of Ireland's youth have long been brought up on a diet of mistrust, suspicion, separate education, religious bigotry and the constant threat of violence. These burdens put our young people in a unique position within western society, not only do they have to deal with these issues but they have to also deal with the other social issues that affect most young people on a world-wide scale like unemployment, education, sexual health, drug abuse and crime. The combination of all these issues have created a highly complex and intellectual group of young people at all levels in our society. Each have their own perceptions of one another mostly based on lies or half truths which only serves to drive a wedge further between our communities. There is a deep mistrust in politicians and

**A young persons
view by
SEAN
McGRATH**
Political Education
Representative
Northern Ireland
Youth Forum

understandably so, for years the established political parties have been promising peace but have failed to deliver instead resorting to hurling abuse at each other across a television studio or facing each other across barricades in disputed 'territory'. The politicians that espouse doomsday scenarios cast a dark shadow across the often optimistic outlook of young people and I have sensed in my work a deep depression descending at times such as Drumcree or the last sectarian murder. The hopelessness expressed by so many young people has led to violent confrontation between each other or with the authorities, another result of this instability is the large scale emigration of Ireland's most promising youth. In Southern Ireland the violence and bigotry of the North have lead young people there to try and forget, they try not to form any opinions on the situation one way or the other preferring to 'keep the North at arms length' this too has led to misconceptions and mistrust, instead of seeing how we can help each other economically, socially and politically our young people attach labels to each other like Fenian, Prod, Southernern, Paddy, Billy, Free Stater in order to detach or even demonise and dehumanise each other.

Many of this years commemoration events have been organised to take part in either Nationalist or Unionist communities, from an educational point of view this is to be welcomed but we have to examine what effect these 'single identity'

commemorations have on our collective understanding of 1798. In my view, commemorations that are not all inclusive and cross-community cannot truly espouse the aims of the United Irishmen or recognise the parts played by our communities on both sides in the rebellion. In the months leading up to the 1798 commemoration I visited youth and community organisations to ask questions about how our modern political ideologies have influenced how we view the past. Opinions from young people on the vents of 1798 are as diverse as 'all the Catholics ran away' or '1798 lead to the famine' or 'the crown forces were all Catholics'. These misconceptions have been allowed to proliferate in Ireland, this has been backed up by a conscious effort by communities to forget the role their predecessors played if it does not facilitate their modern political thinking. As the 1798 rebellion is looked at more and more closely by young people I have found a willingness to accept that there are valuable lessons to be learnt from this period in our history and in the right hands these lessons can be applied in finding a political solution to our troubles. Young people are taking from 1798 the ideals for a country free from hate and bigotry, equal rights and liberties for all and in the words of the United Irishmen themselves 'a future together, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter under the common name Irishman/woman.'

The 1798 commemoration must be allowed to express the views, hopes and fears of all our young people. Ireland is slowly but surely becoming a more open, multi cultural, multi racial society like many of our European partners. This diversity of our society must be allowed expression during the commemoration events. This commemoration must be remembered for its bringing together of all the people sharing this island, this is the wish of young people, they are new, they are strong and they shall be heard.

JAMES "JEMMY" HOPE

James Hope was born in Templepatrick in 1764. His family was Presbyterian. He remembered Protestant regiments going off to fight in the American War of Independence in 1776. When Britain had difficulty getting recruits, Lord Hillsboro said "discourage the linen trade, create unemployment and you will have volunteers."

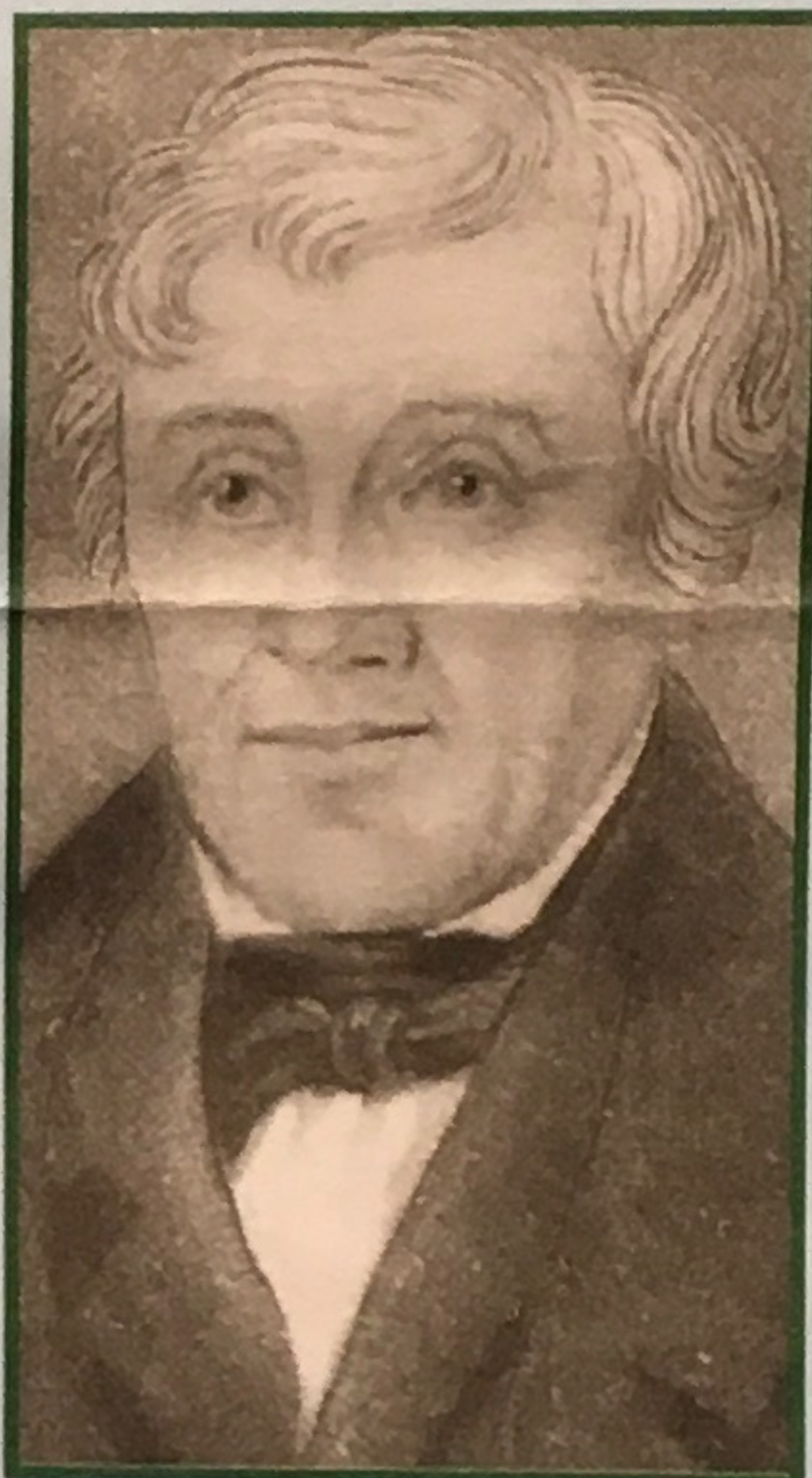
James Hope spent thirteen weeks in school. He started work as a mechanic, he also worked as a farm labourer before serving his time in the linen trade. His political life began when he joined the Roughford Corps of the volunteers in 1790. He joined The United Irishmen on the 26th June 1795. He says "the members were chosen by ballot and had to take a test, but was said that their objectives could not be pursued by more open means." James Hope was not a great public speaker, his mind he said was like Swift's church "The more that was inside the slower the Mass came out."

James Hope always maintained that the reason for the '98 Rebellion was misunderstood. The manufacturers and the industrialists in the North were accumulating wealth. Their children were more skilled at saving monies. They rented cottages from Catholic farmers and were able to pay high rent to landlords, creating ill-will between the farmers, the traders and h new trades. Catholic tenants were been forced off the land. The Catholics joined together to create The Defenders, the Protestants the Peep O Day Boys.

Sam Neilson and Luke Teeling had the idea of forming a union between United Irishmen and The Defenders. Through their efforts, many Peep O Day Boys and Defenders became friends and were sworn into The Brotherhood of the United Irishmen. However it was Henry Joy McCracken who organised the 7000 strong body of men, which were ready for 1798.

Hope said the South was corrupt but the North was even more corrupt. "Belfast was the most corrupt town on the face of the earth." Besides the interest of the Churchlords and the Landlords, there was the interest of manufacturing and commerce, of fictitious capital, fictitious credit and fictitious titles. On top of this, you have state funded clergy propagating bigotry from the pulpits. Both the pulpits and the law were completely controlled by the aristocracy. Aristocratic Monetary influence was so complete that only it's own corruption could destroy it. Power was law and physical force settled every question. He also said "there are circumstances which should never be forgotten in relation of 1798". The people were excluded from any say in the forming of the laws by which they were governed. The higher ranks usurped this right as well as many other rights by force, by fraud and by lies. It was

by
Seamus McDonagh



by force that the poor were subdued and dispossessed of their land and by fiction that the titles of the spoilers were established."

To write the history of Ireland from 1798 to 1804, Hope said "was a difficult task. Man useful documents are missing and only a few are alive who have a true knowledge of the events of that period. The power and the ingenuity of our enemies in suppressing and distorting the truth has never been surpassed in any age."

"When writing of Ulster you will require an extensive view of the influence with which the patriots had to contend - sectarian mercantile and landed interests greater than in another part of Ireland. The other provinces had only the landed and church interests against them, our landed aristocracy extended to the forty shilling freeholders, a class hardly known in the rest of Ireland. We also had the manufacturing aristocracy, little known in the South and corruption ran through all of these different channels. To contradict falsehood was called "sedition" in the wicked times of Pitt and Castlereagh as a result the work of the historian is very difficult."

Neilson, McCracken, Russell and Robert Emmet were the leading men in that struggle and men with whom I had the closest intimacy. They were Irishmen of whom none could be me true. The cause of Ireland was then confined to a few individuals. The Masses had no idea of the possibility of managing their own affairs. It is easy to asperse our struggles, we had bad men amongst us, but no

good cause requires the support of bad men. The bad men who joined s had to play the hypocrite. They had the enemies ranks to retreat to and whenever they feared detection they charged us with their own evil intentions. I was a bosom friend of Neilson, McCracken, Russell and Robert Emmet, I mean there was not a thought about public affairs that one of us would conceal from the other and for their truth I would answer with my life. Volumes have been written recording the crimes of mankind, but the cause from which they spring is often overlooked. If the historians would only stage what are known to be the facts, truth would run in a freer channel form age to age. From the extension of literature the present age lies under heavier responsibility than any other for the transmission of the truth to posterity.

Observing the Orange Order which was set up in 1795, Hope said that it was composed of yeomen, renegade croppies, hangers on around landlords, lower order clergymen with spies and informers together with the bullies of the market place. These renegades caused more bloodshed in 1798 than the open enemy whom we knew we could avoid. From 1795 onward the influence of the United Irishmen spread, everywhere their pressure was felt. There was more unity and less quarrelling. The Peep O Day Boys and the Defenders made peace. For a while Ulster was united. A delegation was sent to Dublin to get the views of the organisation there.

James Hope and John Metcalfe comprised the delegation. He first lived in Balbriggan where he worked as a weaver and later in the Liberties where he carried out the work of the United Irishmen. He remained in Dublin for ten years. He opened a drapers shop at No 8 the Coombe with help from Charles Teeling. He avoided the upper class as much as possible as he considered them totally untrustworthy.

When the political climate became safer he returned to Belfast where he worked for John McCracken who treated him badly. He lived in miserable conditions until 1847 when he died. Mary Ann McCracken had the following memorial erected over his grave:

**Erected to the memory of
James Hope
Who was born 1764
and died 1847
one of nature's noblest works
An honest man.**

THE UNITED MEN

During my childhood I was unaware of the historical existence or significance of the United Irishmen. I suppose this was to be expected of a young Protestant growing up on the Shankill Road in 1950s Belfast. Irish history was to me, a closed book.

The only aspects of my Irish past of which I was conscious were the Siege of Derry, the Battle of the Boyne and St Patrick. The siege was prominent in the stories I was told, and it was seen as encapsulating the Protestant experience of persecution. Stories of our "forefathers" surviving on the meat of cats, dogs and rats, was seen as the culmination of a process of suppression, which included the Spanish Inquisition and the flames of martyrdom in England and Europe. I personally identified with the Protestant sufferers, and when in 1961, I first saw the spot in Oxford at which Latimer and Ridley had burned at the stake, I felt a deep surge of emotion which I can still recall. These martyrs were my heroes.

As the conflict in Northern Ireland began to take a violent form I began to engage in a belated form of education in Irish history. Much of this was distorted but it was a beginning. I soon realised that history was not a factual account of real events, but rather an interpretation of the past, coloured by the preconceptions of amateur and professional historians. I began to decipher and gain some understanding of Ireland past.

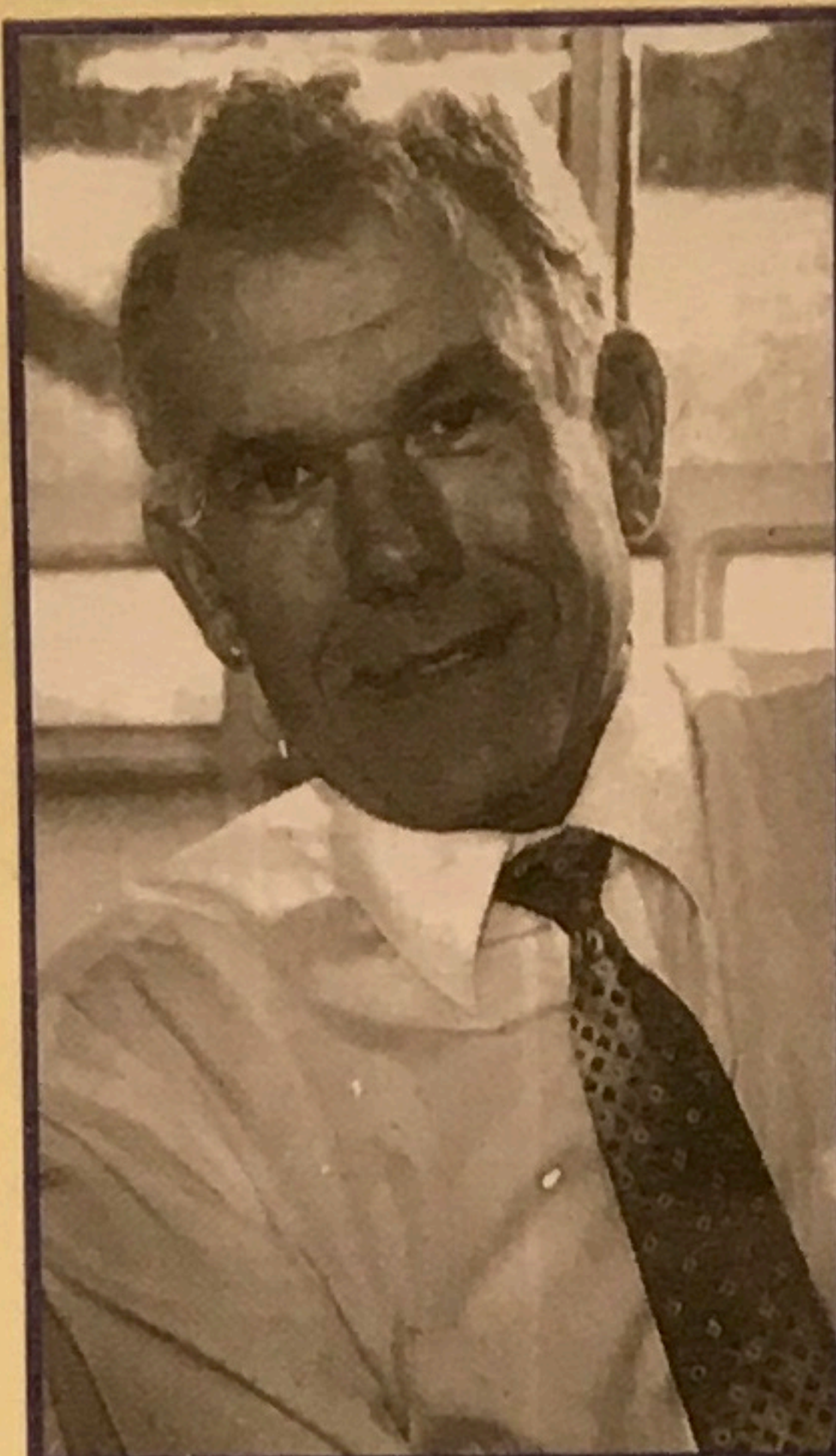
Schooling had been

of little help. History in school seemed to consist of an endless stream of English Kings and Queens which held little interest for me. A more effective awakening to the past, was experienced at the Unionist celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Ulster covenant at Balmoral in 1962. Ian Paisley's celebration of Gun-running followed two years later, and seemed to be an implicit endorsement of the violence which followed.

I imagine I first heard of the United Irishmen in the late 1950s. I found the spectacle of Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken, Russell, Neilson, Simms and others, pledging themselves to free Ireland on McArt's Fort overlooking Belfast, inspiring. I had often climbed the slopes of Cave Hill and even today when I reach the fort I always recall Tone and his friends gazing across the city.

When I became more politically aware in the 1960s I learnt that the inspiration for the United Movement came largely from the French Revolution. This was presented as anti-Christian and secular, and certainly I found the violent aspects of the French Revolution uninspiring. I also remember first being told about the

by
Roy Garland



burning of Protestants at Scullabogue in Wexford. The United movement had it seemed, degenerated into sectarian warfare in the south east.

However there was a complete absence of folklore relating to 1798 in my own family. This may reflect the selective folk memory which has shaped so much of our thinking. My parent's families had been members of the Church of Ireland and, on my father's side, staunchly Orange. However when I met my future father in law, in the late 1960s, I was fascinated to discover that although he was Reformed Presbyterian or Conventer, he was proud of the tradition that his ancestor Tommy Cromie, fought at the Battle of

Ballynahinch in 1798.

This was incorporated into his perception of loyalist history. There were no sense of the united tradition being in conflict with Orange traditions which he also shared. Yet he knew of the anti-monarchist views of the Conventers. This intertwining of traditions was found in another friend who proudly proclaimed direct descent from Henry Joy McCracken, while taking an intense pride in his Scottish ancestry and membership of the Orange Order. There are elements in all those often antagonistic relationships, which are held in common. I remember asking a senior loyalist about the origins of the "new thinking" which has permeated loyalism leading to a new accommodationist approach in politics. The reply was that this had always been part of our tradition, and that Protestantism itself has radical roots.

Tommy Cromie, the Presbyterian Rathfriland insurgent, after fighting at the battle of Ballynahinch and being wounded, escaped with a ball lodged in his leg, into the Mourne Mountains. He boarded a ship at Warren point and sailed to America. In 1810 he was granted a pardon and returned to Rathfriland where he is believed to have lived until about 1840.

Some years ago I also discovered that James Garland, a Lurgan poet, had written about the execution of four Unitedmen from within the Monaghan Militia, at Blaris

Camp near Lisburn, in 1797. According to other stories James, a Protestant United Irishman, was also executed. It is possible that James Garland was a relative of mine but if so, this has been deliberately obliterated from memory.

For me it is sad that we have suppressed so much of our past because it didn't fit with later notions of who we were. One man told me how, after becoming interested in family history, a Protestant friend was presented with detailed material on his ancestors, proving they were United Irishmen. His reaction was immediate and drastic, he burned the lot and gave up the quest to find his roots for good. That to me was very unfortunate. It is perhaps understandable, because republicanism has been so closely associated with violent nationalism, but historical diversity should be regarded as a source of pride rather than disquiet.

Only when we begin to acknowledge and respect the realities of our past, can we begin to move forward in confidence. When some Loyalist began in the early 1970s to re-examine the nature of Irish history, there were attempts to castigate them as modern United Irishmen in order to stymie debate. It is however possible to appreciate the radical contribution made by the men of '98, without ascribing either to the desire to break the connection with England, or to advocate the use of violence. Hence Young Unionists in re-

cent years have celebrated the United Irishmen.

The most inspiring aspect of the Presbyterian United Irishmen was their ability to empathise with their Catholic neighbours and to seek redress of Catholic, as well as Presbyterian, grievances. In his sense Ulster Loyalists follow the same traditions and present a challenge to those who seek only their own advantage. Loyalists are determined to see a new dispensation in which the needs of nationalists and unionists are mutually accommodated, without the humiliation of either. Unionists have carried the burden of our ancient relationships with the other island, through difficult times. Today in the context of an agreement which respects self-determination of the Irish people north and south, total independence makes little sense. Rather the future lies in interdependence and mutual respect.

The Good Friday Agreement was accepted by a significant majority in both parts of Ireland. This I believe, would have been enthusiastically welcomed by the founders of the United Irishmen and their Orange opponents, in the last years of the 18th century. For once the people of this island have overwhelmingly accepted the need to take seriously the call for inclusion, non-violence and mutual respect. There are others for whom change seems only to mean death and decay. We must remain patient, for they stand where many of us once stood.

Personal Reflections on United Irishmen

Two days after I was released from the H-Blocks I stood above McArt's Fort on Cave Hill for the first time in my life. It was a brilliant, clear day and I looked down into the Lough, across to prosperous North Down and back around the city and its industrial landmarks and allowed my mind the same freedom of vision so that I was prompted by a blaze of questions.

Where were the heartlands of republicanism exactly two hundred years earlier when Tone and the United Irish leaders swore "never to desist in our efforts, until we had subverted the authority of England over our country, and asserted her independence"? What happened to the legacy of those Protestants and Dissenters who disseminated the seeds of freedom and who took valour from international events and developments? Who, if anyone, had inherited their legacy and kept faith with it to this day?

Every questions, it seems, spawned a dozen conflicting answers, just as now several organisations compete for the mantle of the true Republican Movement, are preoccupied with lineage, though I have concluded in middle-age that in real life it doesn't really matter. May as well argue over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.

I first became interested in republican politics ironically as a result of sectarianism. Although my uncle Harry White had been a senior IRA figure in the forties he lived in Dublin and was too far away to be of any major influence. It was back in September 1964 when I was eleven and couldn't get a bus to school from Beechmount in the Falls because of rioting and saw Paisley on TV threatening to come into Divis Flats and remove the Tricolour that I became aware of and afraid of Protestants. Up until I was ten I had lived in Protestant-free Andersonstown and had only recently learnt that Protestants were people who got divorced (which was a sin) and used contraceptives (which was a big mystery).

The fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966 and the commemoration of sacrifice and struggle further appealed to something inside me, though the killings of John



Danny Morrison, the former Director of Publicity for Sinn Féin-turned-writer, reflects on the influence of Tone and the United Irishmen on his formative thinking

Scullion and Peter Ward a few weeks later were stark reminder of the real world, like the riots two years earlier. I remembered being fired by the civil rights movement - and thinking what a great idea. Dead simple. You march. Protestants suddenly realise you are being discriminated against. The government passes new laws. Hunkey-dory. But then I saw the Duke Street baton charge on TV and I was present in Castle Street when the RUC beat the late Malachy McNally up and down the road and ripped the coat and shirt off his back for attempting to sell the United Irishman. To my shame neither I nor anyone in that street lifted a finger to help him, so cowed were nationalists in general.

There was always this see-sawing between idealism (or theory) and reality: the desired ideal of uniting

Catholic and Protestant, unity of the working class, on the one hand, and the fact that, on the other, our political situation was loaded dead against any such development. Partition and the establishment of the Northern Ireland state in 1921 presented imponderables for which not even Tone had legislated. Tone had insisted that religion must be divorced from politics, but now sectarianism was the official hallmark of the state - the 'Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People'. Connolly had got it right when he predicted that partition in the North would lead to a 'carnival of reaction'. And, of course, partition accentuated the Catholic ethos of the southern state to the extent that it is only in recent times that the Catholic Church's 'special' position has been written out of the constitution.

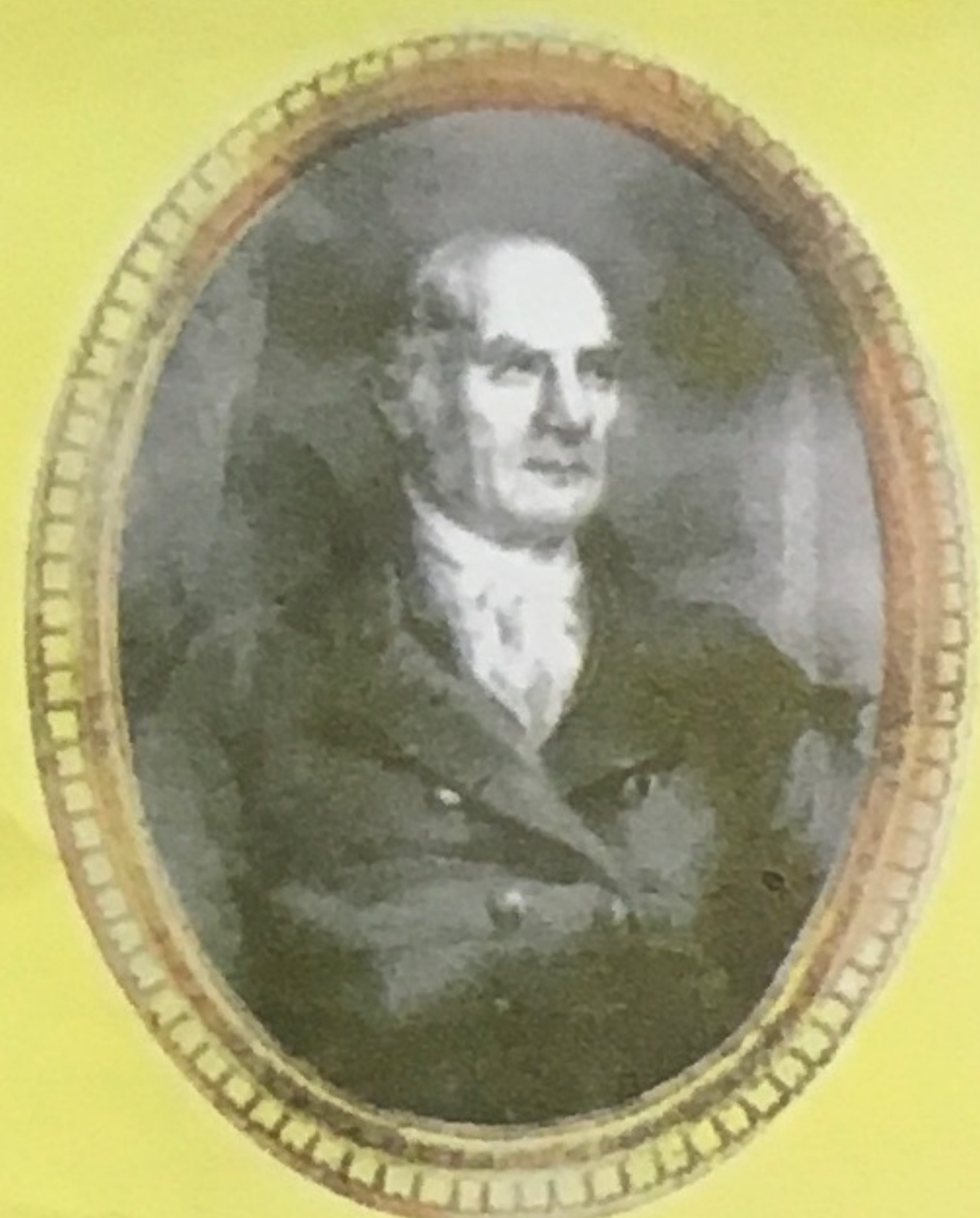
Around 1968 I had become part of a pirate radio

circle in Belfast and had just made friend with other pirates from the Shankill and Sandy Row. We had begun visiting each other's homes and helping each other build new transmitter. But after the pogroms of August 1969 we broke up. My transmitter went into the Long Bar where, along with others, it was used as Radio Free Belfast. And I recognised from its signal and strength that the transmitter of a Protestant friend from Third Street had become Radio Shankill.

We could argue for days why the Republican Movements split in 1969/70. No one would argue that besides politics, personalities and ideological differences, that that split was not unrelated to defence - which is why the IRA will not decommission until the security of the nationalist community is guaranteed one hundred per cent. We could argue for weeks over aspects of armed struggle - be it commercial bombings, the killings of out-of-uniform members of the RUC and UDR, the degeneration into feuding and sectarianism. Feuding and sectarian attacks were, and are, disastrous - yet they were a working-class phenomena. Not too many business executives drove around spraying each other's fancy restaurants.

But in the 1990s things began to slowly change. The electoral rise of Sinn Féin and Sinn Féin's adoption of

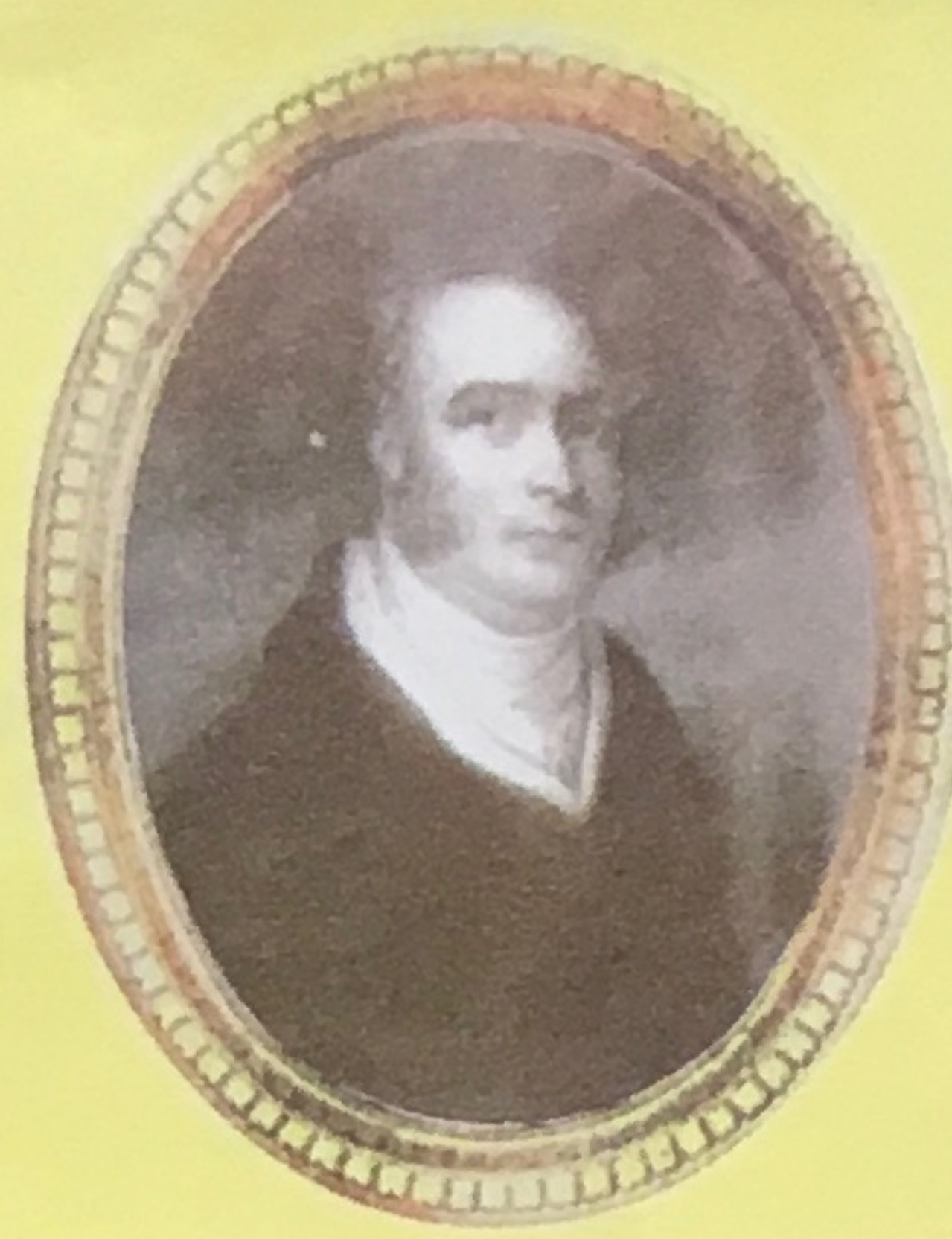
progressive politics, the eventual consensus on the military stalemate, the appearance of radical voices representing loyalism, a British government prepared to do business, a modification in the demands that parties were making, all contributed to the creation of the circumstances in which we presently find ourselves. Many parties and organisations have taken considerable risks, both in terms of unease in their own base and in gambling upon the sincerity of their opponents and former enemies. There have been splits along the way and denunciations. It has been a nervous experience and shall remain fraught with difficulties for many years to come. As a republican I believe in breaking the connection with Britain. I want to see an independent, united Ireland - with a united people. I believed that armed struggle could sap the will of the British establishment to remain in Ireland. I took succour in Tone in part because he was a Protestant, and the republicanism of his Protestant and Dissenter rebels who fought the English, defied and contradicted the way unionists described and defined themselves. Naively I hoped that what was once possible could be recreated. Now I trust in today and in the living and in the words and deeds of my fellow islanders.



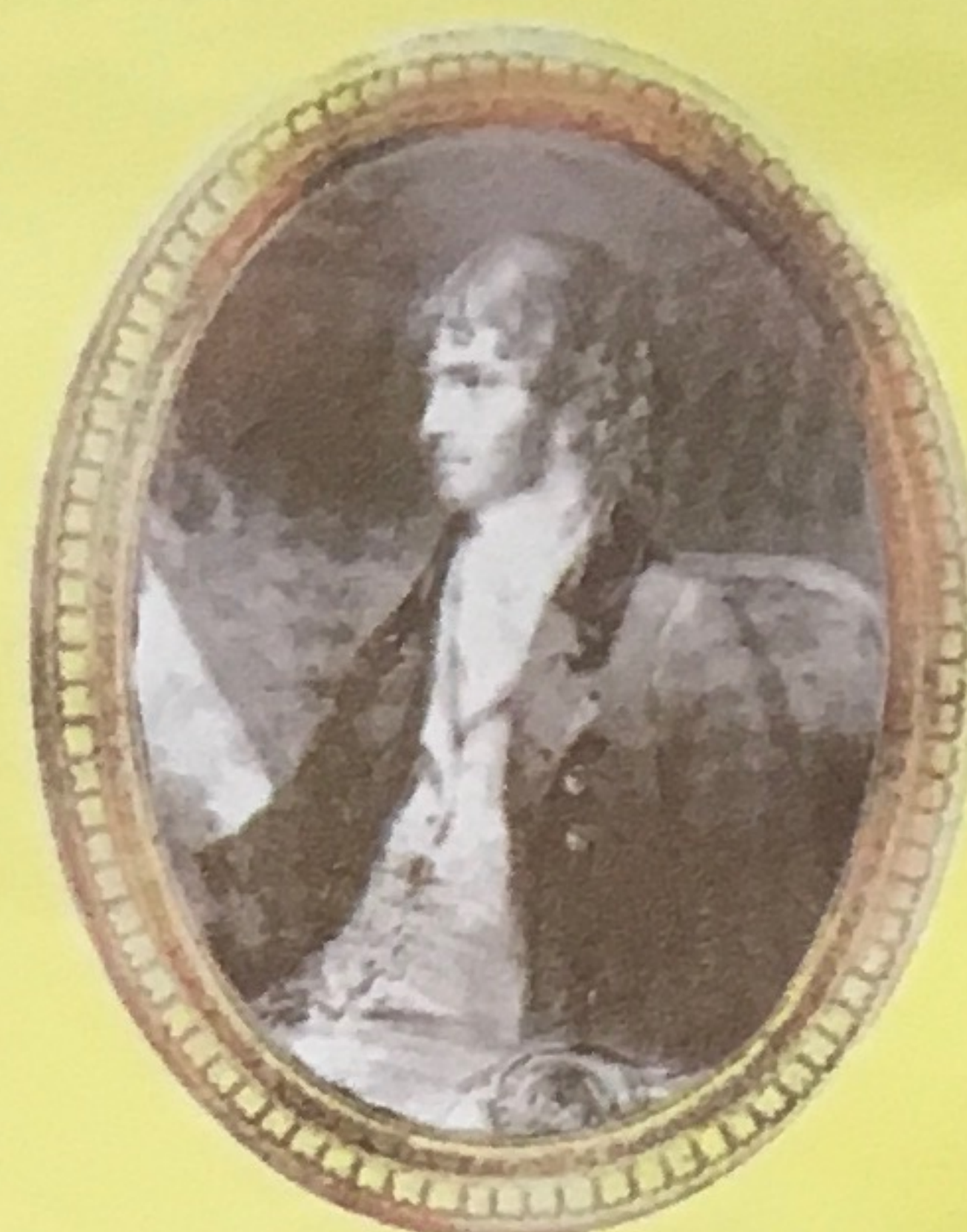
Archibald Hamilton Rowan



Wolfe Tone



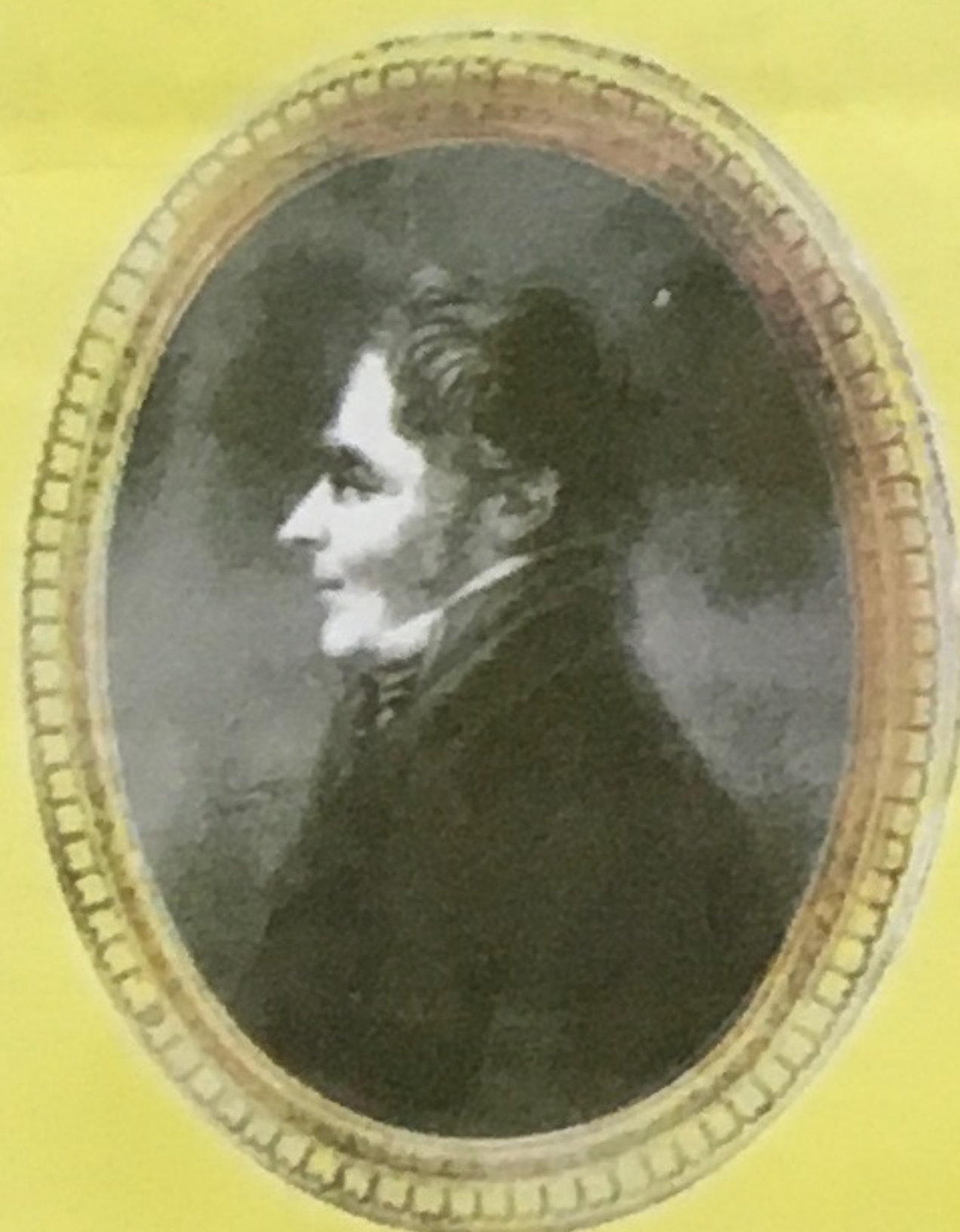
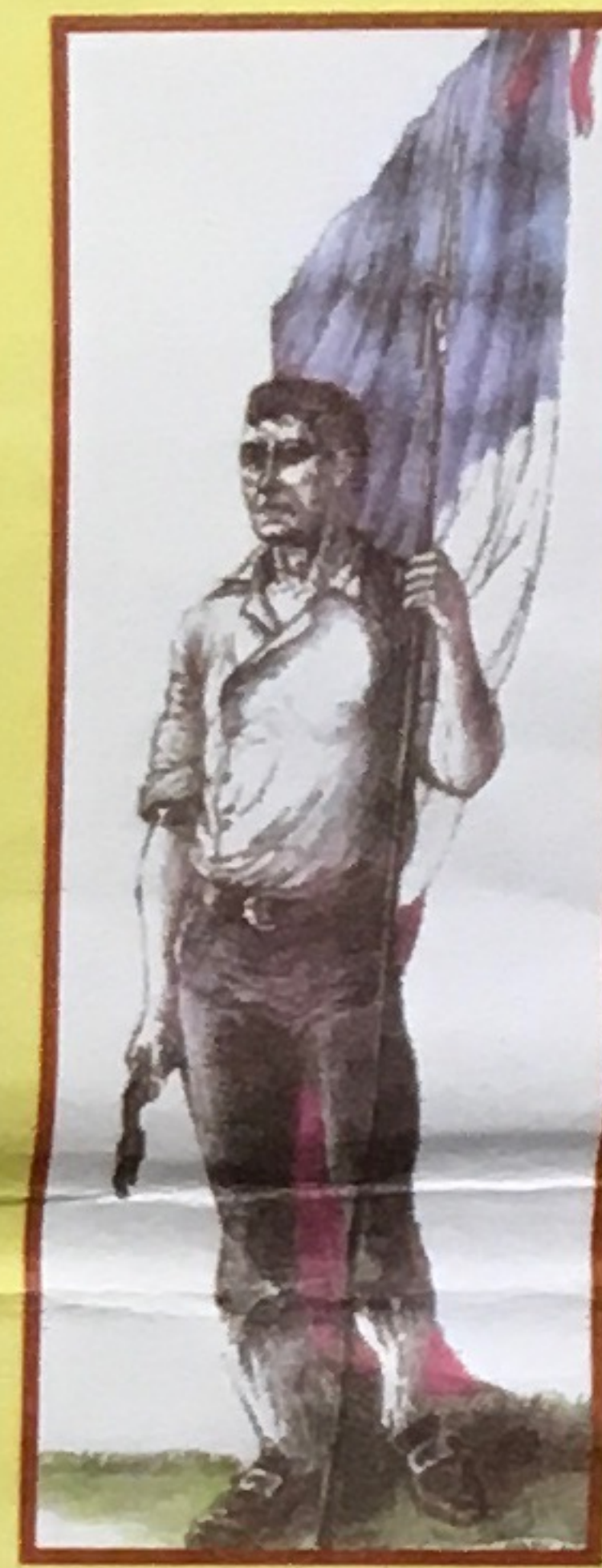
Henry Jackson



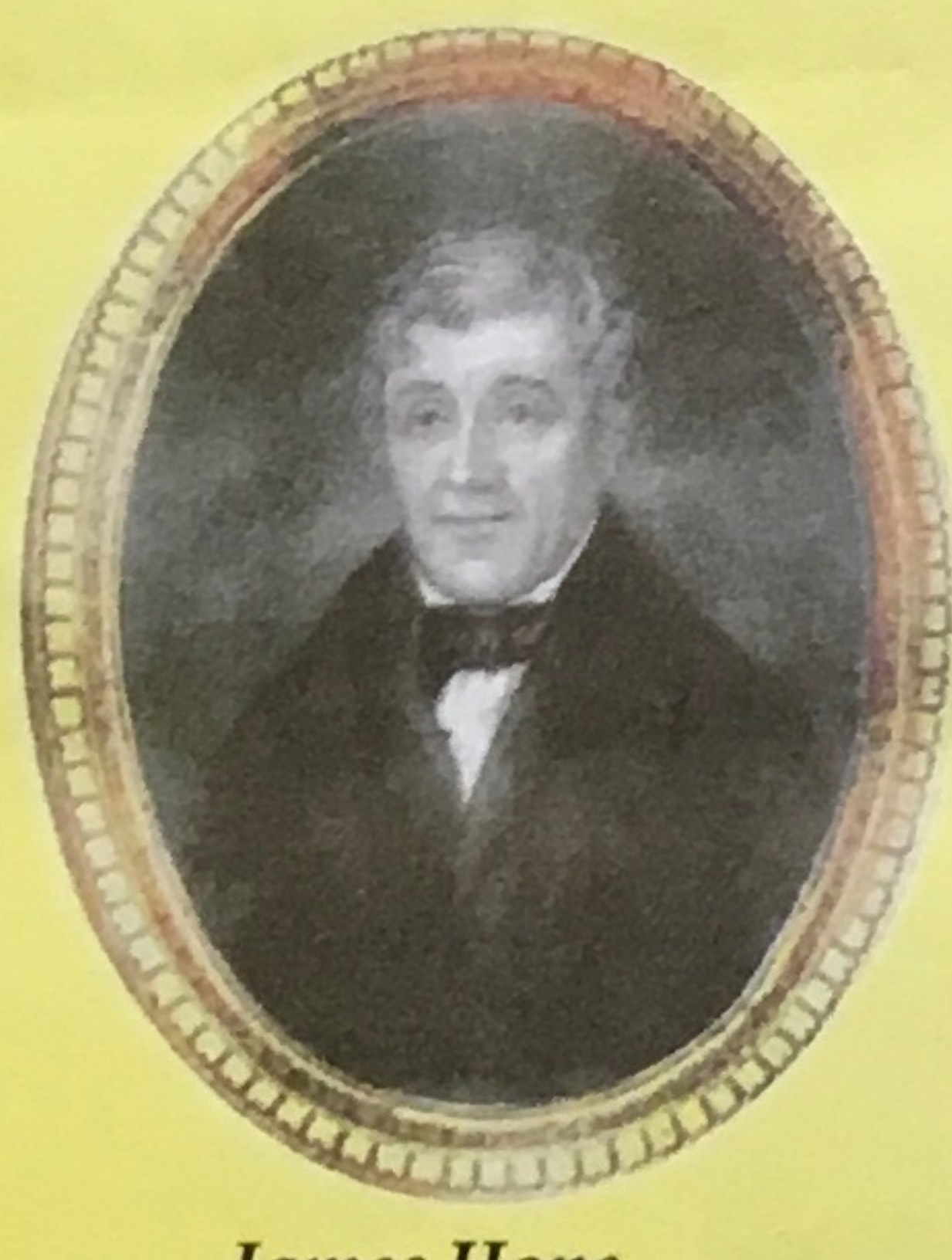
Henry Joy McCracken



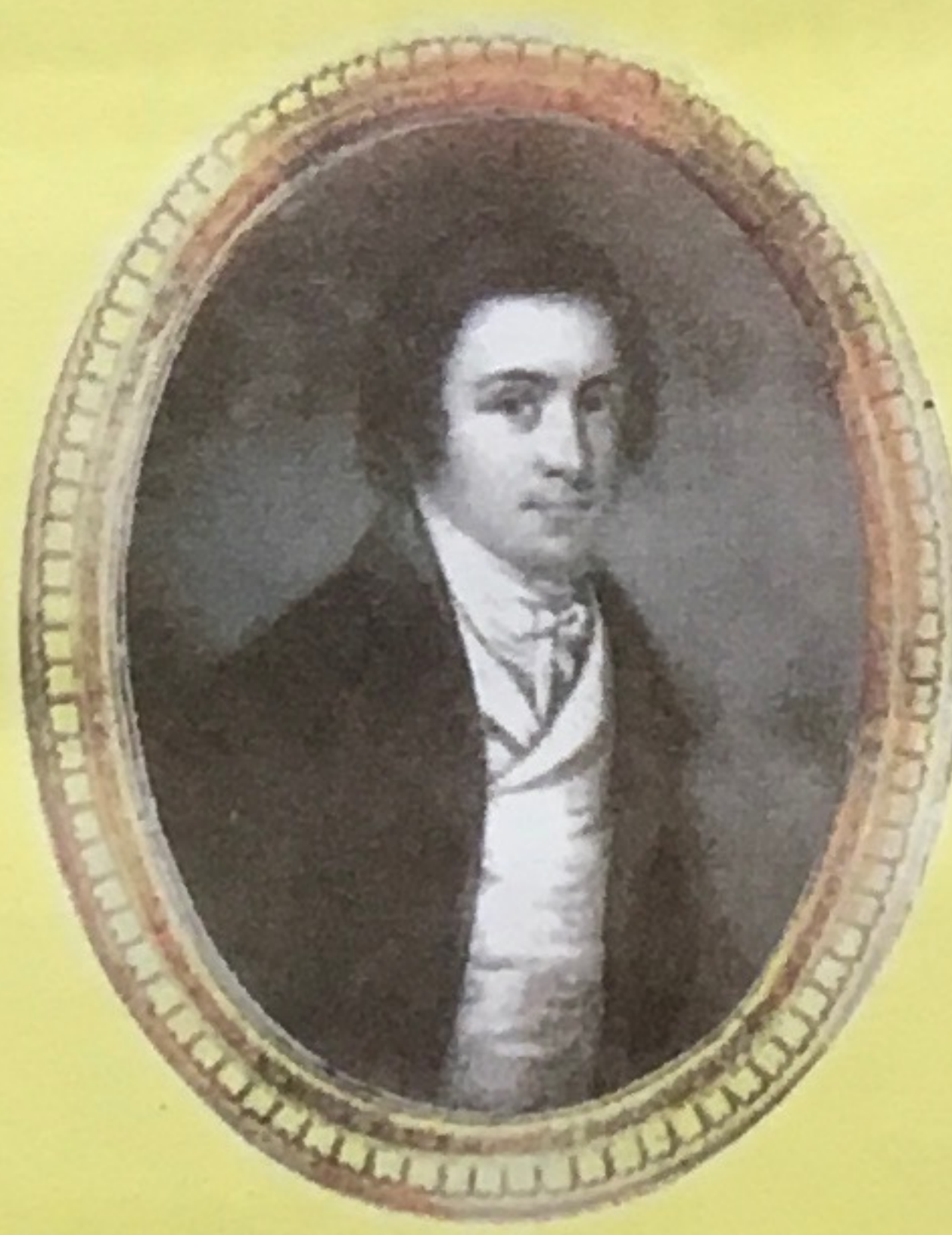
LIBERTY
EQUALITY
FRATERNITY



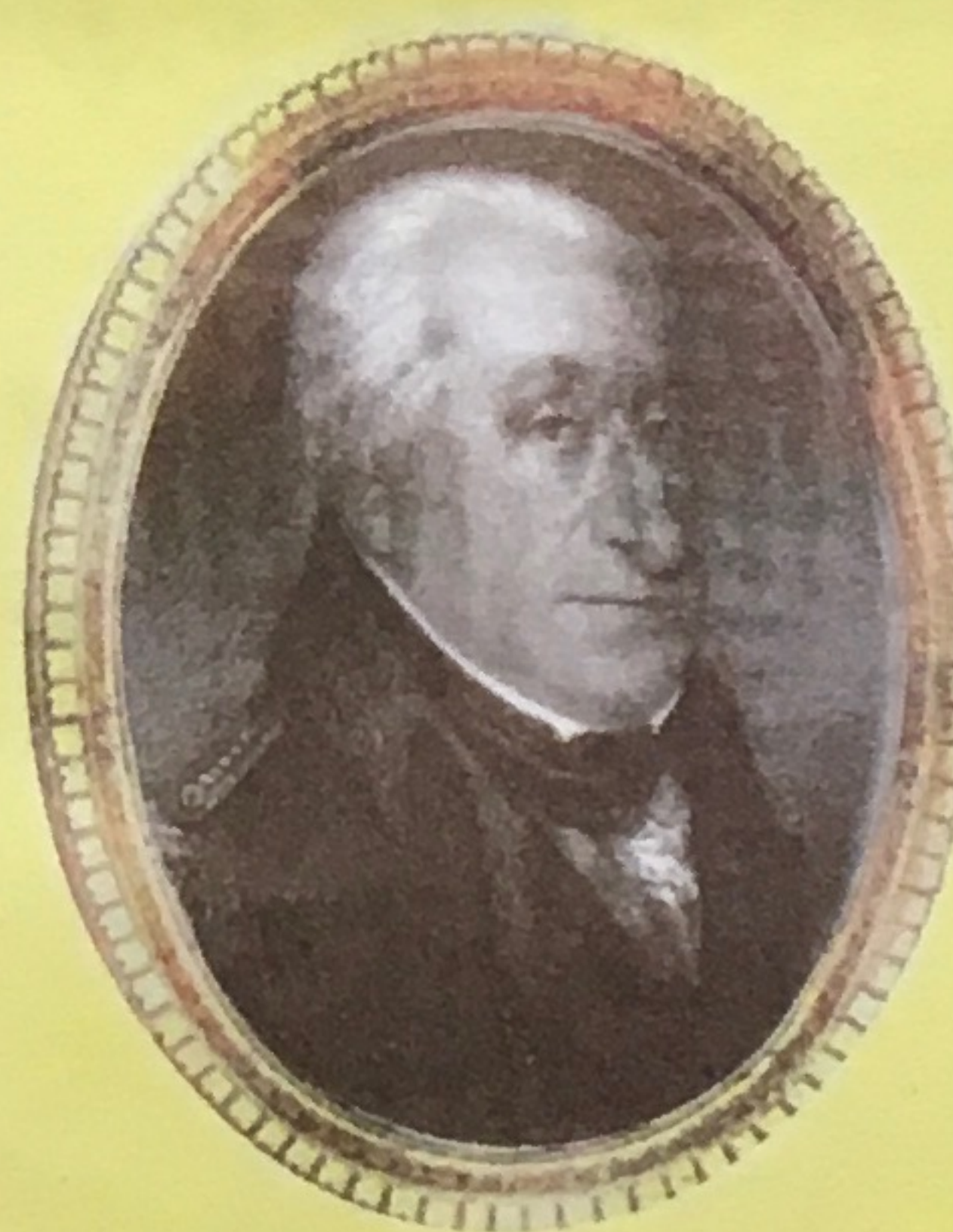
Arthur O'Connor



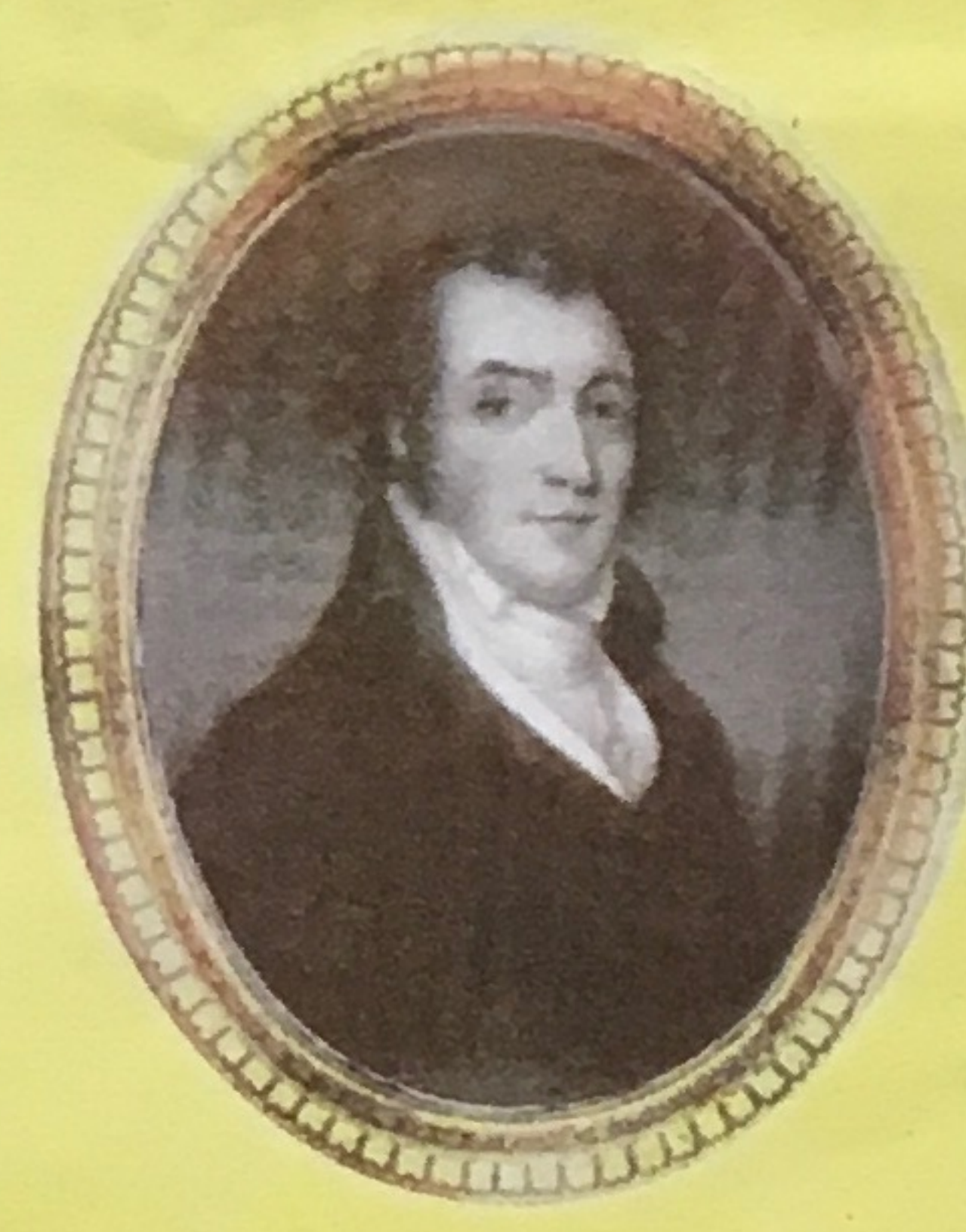
James Hope



John Sheares



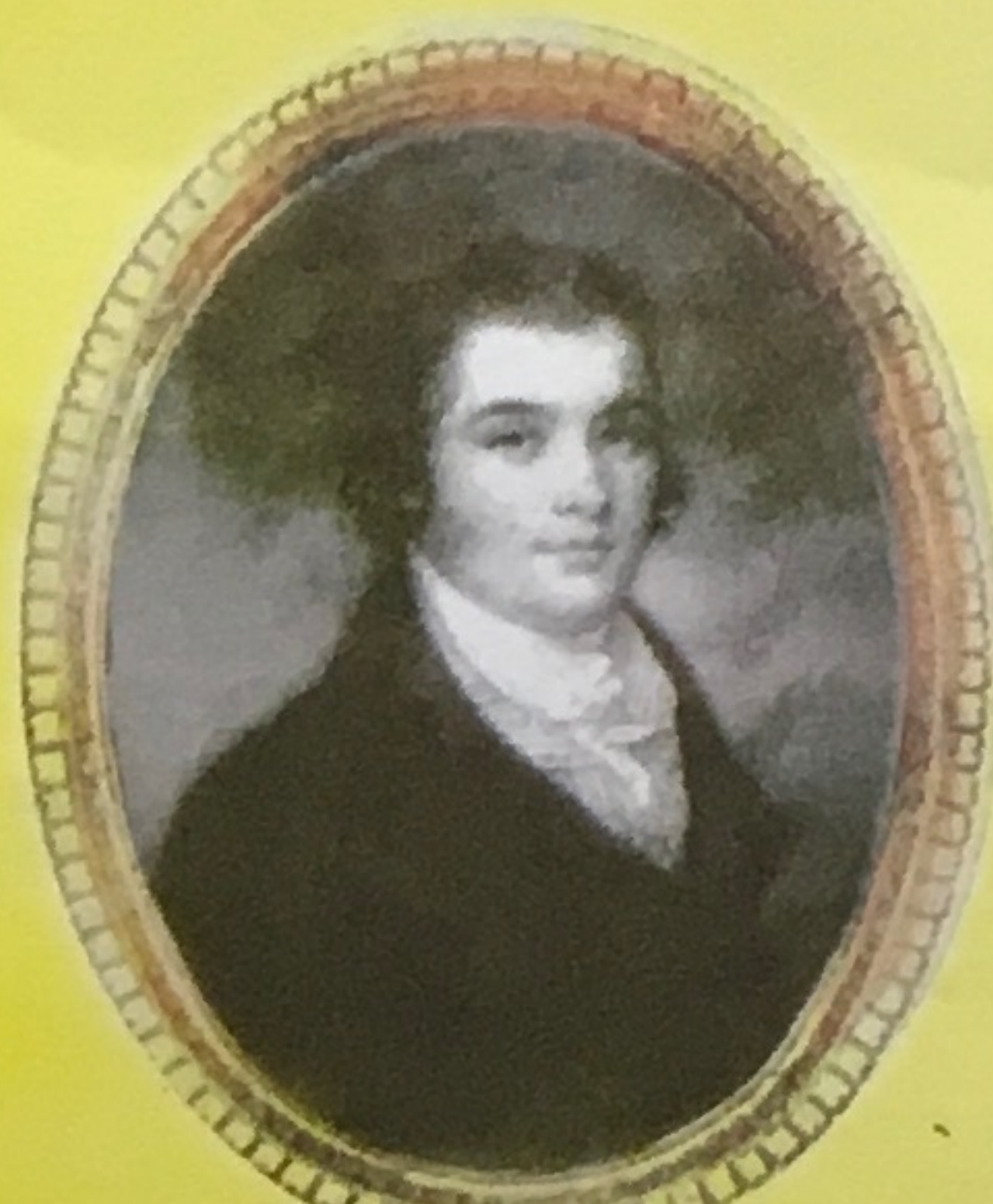
James Napper Tandy



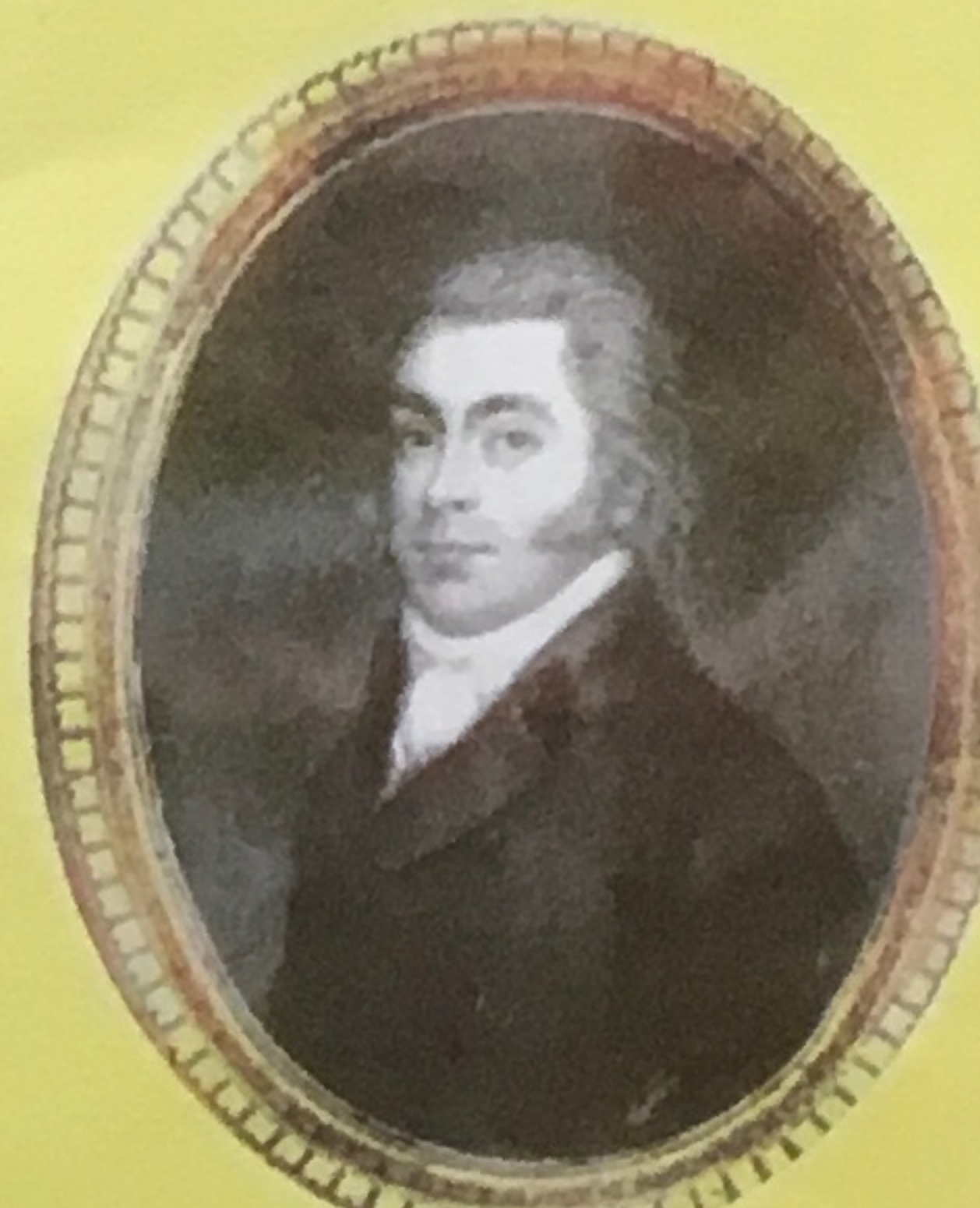
William James Macneven



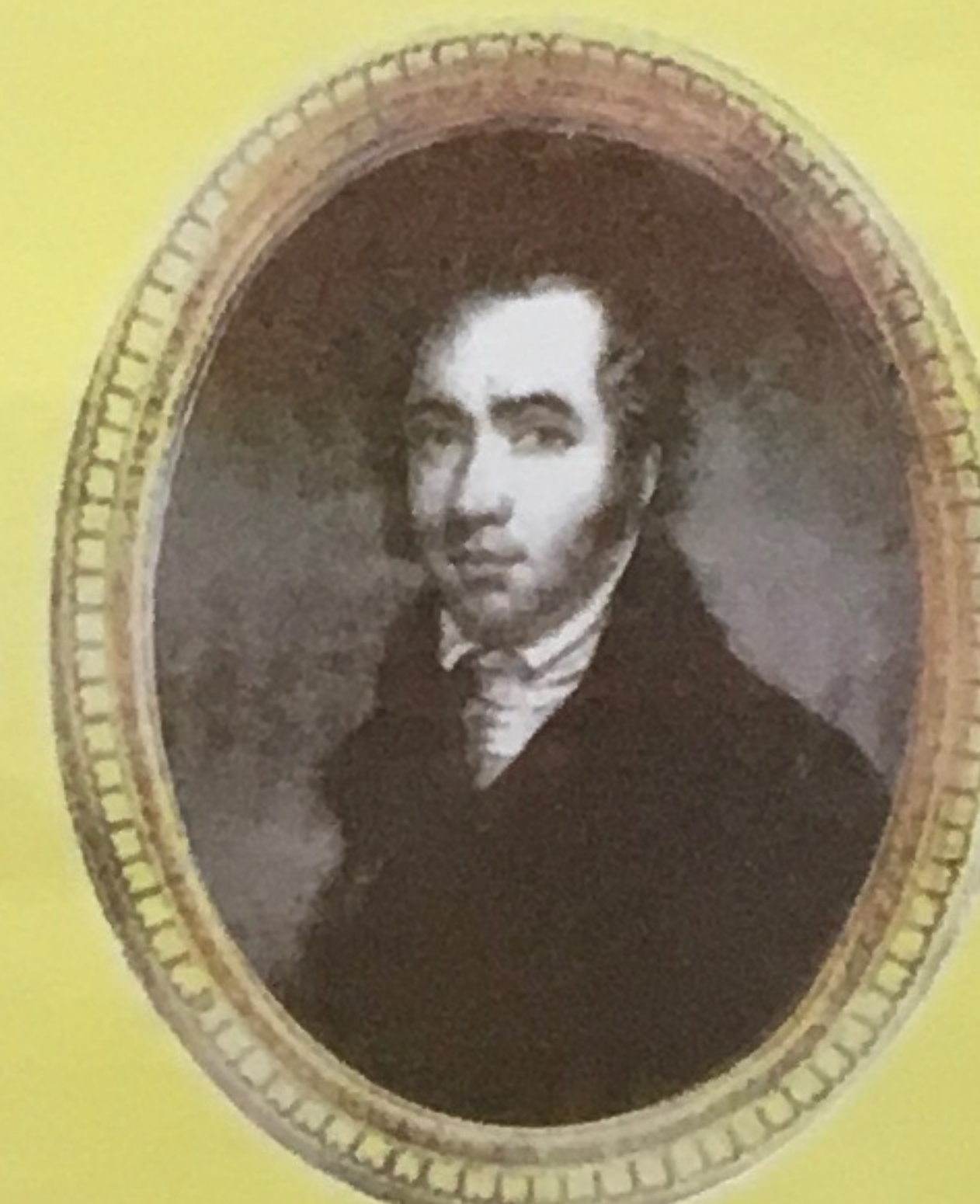
Lord Edward Fitzgerald



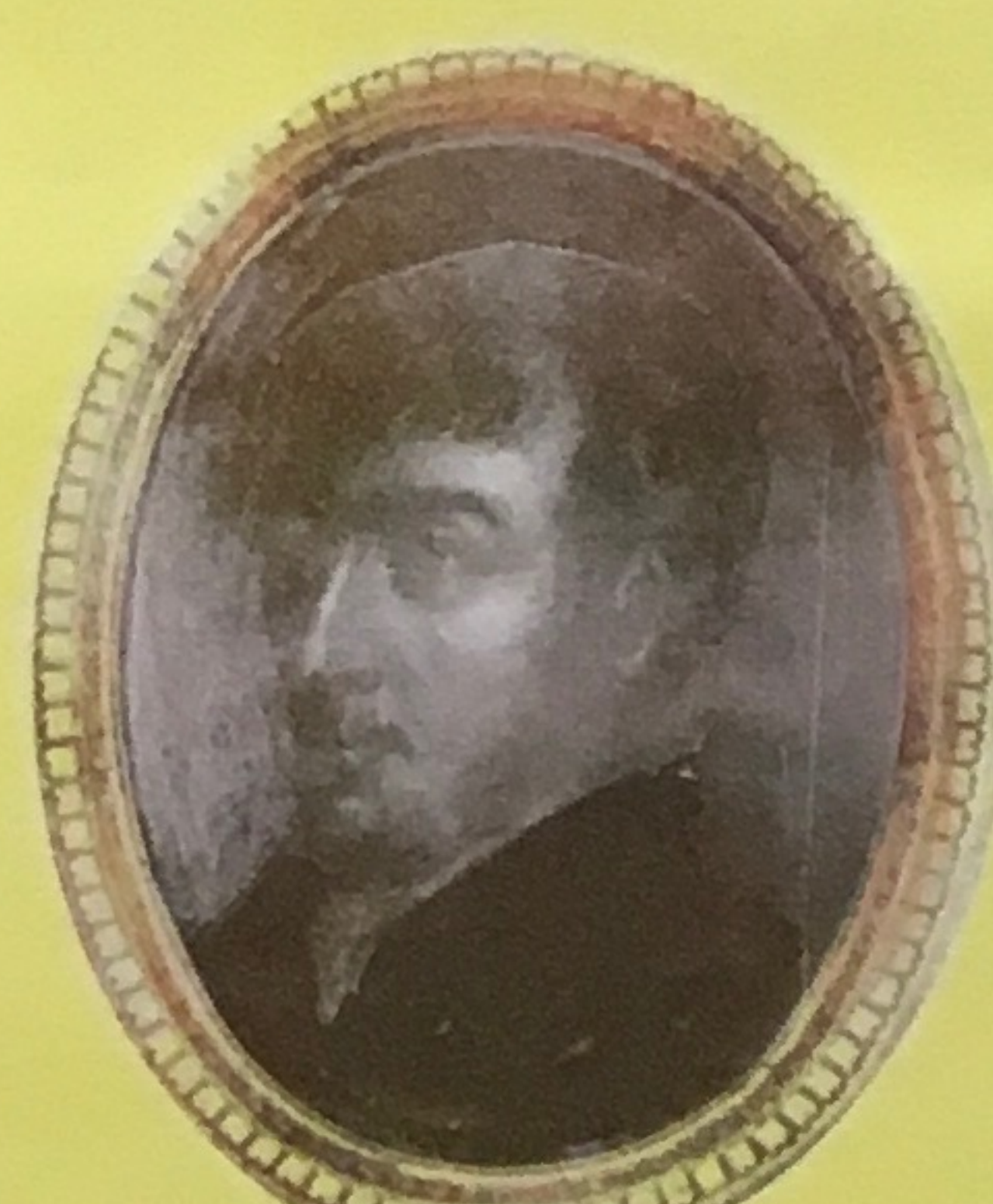
Samuel Neilson



Henry Sheares



Thomas Addis Emmet



Thomas Russell

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