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**OWEN CONNOLLY—BENEFACTOR**

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In the year 1839 a young man, nineteen years of age, without money, friends or influence arrived on the shores of Prince Edward Island. This youth from Donogh, County Monaghan, Ireland, was destined to do great things for his adopted country and for the generations of the sons of his fellow exiles in this province. Owen Connolly, although only nineteen years old had left his parents, friends and native land to seek his fortune and salvation in this province far-removed and relatively unknown to him. With his gifted natural ability, foresight, and honest, hard and determined effort he did find a fortune which he later bestowed in a most generous manner upon succeeding generations of Irishmen. But first something about the man, his life and his activities.

After his arrival in the province, Mr. Connolly was employed as a farmer by a Mr. Smallwood, at Lot 48, in whose service he remained about two years. Having saved some money he purchased a farm on the Monaghan Road, Lot 48, on which he settled. When he achieved success in his new venture he sent to Ireland for his parents and settled them on an adjoining farm which he had purchased for them. About this time he married Miss Anne Hughes of the same settlement in which he lived. After his marriage he began a small country trading business, which he operated for a few years before he moved to Charlottetown in 1852, where he opened a small grocery store and shoe-making establishment on Dorchester Street. He closed the shoe making business after a short time to devote his whole attention to his other interests. He combined strenuous devotion to his business and keen-sighted executive ability to make his new enterprise an immediate and enduring success. His business so expanded that in 1865 he built new brick stores on Dorchester Street where he established a wholesale and retail business in liquors, groceries, tobaccos, etc.

Some misinformed people have accused Mr. Connolly of making a great deal of his fortune in illegal liquor business. This is most untrue and a very unfortunate misrepresentation by many ill-informed persons. There is no doubt that he did a large liquor business and made considerable portion of his accumulations at this trade. But the important thing to remember is that liquor at that time was handled by the grocers and merchants, just as tea, sugar



and molasses. There were no government regulations such as we have today controlling the sale of liquor. It was sold in the same way as any other commodity and the fact that Mr. Connolly made some money at it just adds further lustre to his brilliant business ability since he competed with all the other merchants of the City for its sale.

His success was so marked during his prime that people often said that 'everything he touched turned to gold': Mr. Connolly, finding it necessarily to expand still further, erected more commodious quarters on Queen Street between Dorchester and Sydney. He owned his own wharf of three piers where the L. M. Poole & Co. business now stands, as well as several vessels which supplied the goods for his stores and carried the produce which he bought to the foreign markets. He bought every type of produce which the people had to sell and was able to supply them with most of their requirements. In later years he owned the largest pork-packing business in the Maritime Provinces on the site where the Charlottetown Hospital now stands. Mr. Connolly also had the distinction of owning his own bank, the Merchants Bank of Halifax, which he founded in connection with his enterprises. He also started the first system of chain stores in Prince Edward Island with stores in Souris, Summerside, Montague and Cardigan. He owned a great deal of land on the outskirts of the city as well as several farms at St. Peter's, Orwell, Morell and Lot 48. At the time of his death the daily papers referred to him as 'our highly respected and most wealthy citizen', and, "for many years reputed our wealthiest citizen." While we do not subscribe to the belief that the amassing of a fortune is the only or the best test of determining a man's worth or whether he has been a success, however, success in one's chosen avocation, especially to such a degree as Mr. Connolly attained, reflects a certain greatness about the man. Two questions might be asked at this point. Did Mr. Connolly acquire his fortune honestly? and, why was he such an outstanding success? First, Owen Connolly did acquire his accumulations by honest business transactions. An editorial in "The Daily Examiner" on the day of his death said, "He was as scrupulous and exact in the performance of his obligations to others as he was in requiring the performance of obligations to himself." It continues, "He paid out his money freely in the fulfillment of his contracts." The honesty and integrity of Owen Connolly were never questioned and were always outstanding characteristics of his life.



Owen Connolly arrived here in 1893 an almost penniless immigrant; forty-eight years later when he died he was the Island's wealthiest citizen. To what can we attribute his rapid acquisition of earthly possessions? He had no spheres of influence but had instead considerable opposition when he first began his business in Charlottetown; his education was very limited because of the suppressive penal laws enforced against Catholics in the land of his birth; he had no capital to buy land or equipment and there seemed to be little reason to expect any great success in Prince Edward Island. It is quite evident that Mr. Connolly possessed rare natural ability for business. Like any man who attains success in the business world he had keen foresight, zeal and an almost unlimited determination. At all times he exercised a strict supervision over his large business and was exact and scrupulous in the performance of his duties, and demanded the same of his employees. But perhaps the greatest reason for his success was his zest for hard work. Hard, honest effort were watchwords of his busy life as he labored strenuously, always expending himself to his physical limit.

Mr. Connolly was always highly respected by all the citizens regardless of differences in race, religion or opinion. He was a man of large ideas, broad-minded, temperate, devoted to his religion and always anxious to do anything he could for the betterment of the people with whom he was very popular. But the most outstanding trait of the great man was his kindness to the poor. He was rich in good works as well as in the things of the world which he bestowed lavishly to relieve the sufferings of those in distress. His charity was of the practical kind which furnished food, clothing and fuel to those in need. Not only the poor of the city were recipients of his benefaction but also the poor of Ireland received generous sums of money from him during the famine of 1880. The Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island, and St. Dunstan's College were also assisted by Mr. Connolly. His charitable acts were well known to the public and at the time of his death the public press repeatedly lauded this characteristic of his life.

On the morning of December 27th, 1887, Mr. Connolly was supervising his business with his usual vigor. At half past nine he went into his office and, while writing an order for a load of coal and two blankets for a poor woman, he suddenly collapsed; ten minutes later he was dead. It is interesting to note that the last act of his busy



life was to provide a destitute woman with materials to relieve her suffering. But although his charitable acts were already legend his greatest benefaction was not at that time known by the public. It was revealed a few days later when his will was made public.

Owen Connolly made his last will on the fifth day of May, 1885 but before his death he made several changes by adding codicils from time to time. After making generous provision for his wife and a few relatives amounting to all to about \$40,000, he directed his trustees as follows: "And in the third place to collect the interest dividends, rents, issues and profits of the balance of my residuary estate and to apply the whole thereof less expenses of collection for the purpose of educating or assisting to educate poor children resident in Prince Edward Island, who are Irish or the sons of Irish fathers, such assistance to be given in the best manner my trustees for the time being shall approve of." The total value of the residuary estate was never made known by the first trustees but it was reliably estimated by "The Watchman", a weekly newspaper, on August 7, 1890, to be in the vicinity of \$250,000.

We may wonder what prompted Mr. Connolly to dedicate almost the entire accumulations of his busy life to so worthy an object as the education of the sons of the poor. Certainly we can think of no nobler object upon which a man of wealth could bestow his riches. Perhaps it was because he had seen how tyranny and iniquitous laws had deprived the people of Ireland for many years of even an elementary education. The impressions of his early life were no doubt indelibly stamped upon his mind. Since he had been a most generous man all his life and one possessing noble ideas, we can look upon this act as a culmination of a life of charity and the final realization of his most cherished ambition. It has also been suggested that Archbishop Lynch of Toronto, who had visited Mr. Connolly some years before his death, may have made such a suggestion to him. But whatever the reason for such a magnificent idea it matters little.

Unfortunately the three trustees whom Mr. Connolly appointed left much to be desired in administering the affairs of the estate after his death. As "The Watchman" in several issues during July, August, September and October 1890 pointed out, they failed to fulfill their obligations as trustees of a public trust. They also neglected to carry out Mr. Connolly's explicit order regarding the number of



trustees which was to be maintained at all times. This state of affairs prevailed for twenty-nine years until 1918. In that year, through the efforts of Bishop Henry J. O'Leary and a number of interested Irish Canadian citizens, the estate was incorporated by an act of the Provincial Legislature. By adding a number of new trustees and by inserting a by-law, the control of the estate gradually passed to a new group of trustees under the leadership of the Bishop. When this transfer took place the estate was valued at \$191,000. During the first period of twenty-nine years, \$94,521 or an average of \$3,150 each year, was paid by the Estate for educational purposes. In the thirty-four years since 1918 \$336,569 or an average of over \$9,000 a year has been spent for the education of students of Irish descent. Thus we can easily see the benefits of the change in the control of the Estate.

The purpose of this brief sketch is to acquaint all those who are receiving, did receive or will receive assistance from the Connolly Estate with a few facts about the man who made that assistance possible. Mr. Connolly died from over-work in his efforts to build up the value of the estate he would leave to us. Do we fully appreciate that fact or do we just accept without thought or appreciation what comes to us so easily? Do we ever pray for Owen Connolly, the greatest benefactor this Province ever had? We who are the recipients of his generous benefaction should be the first to remember him in our prayers. Owen Connolly was a living example of what hard, honest effort and determination can do. Do we exhibit even to an noticeable degree the same keen determination and do we work as untiringly as Mr. Connolly?

JOHN MULLALLY '53

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"They can only set free men free . . .

And there is no need of that:

Free men set themselves free."—James Oppenheim

"Every man has by the law of nature a right to such a waste portion of the earth as is necessary for his subsistence."—Thomas Moore

"Habit with him was all the test of truth;

'It must be right: I've done it from my youth.'"

—George Crabbe