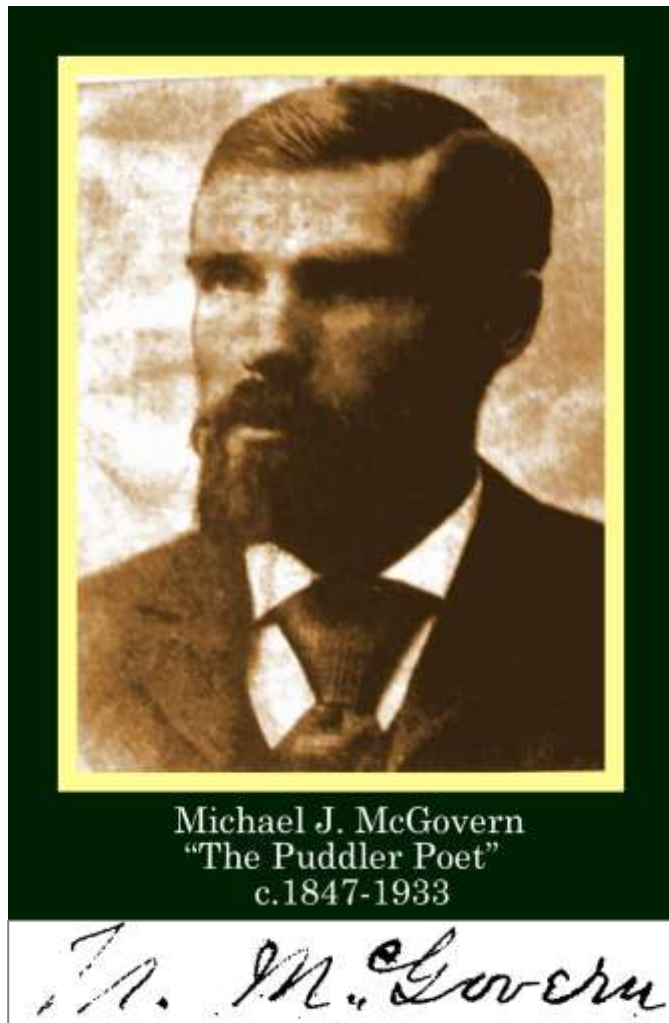


**“Copies of McGovern’s poems were circulated among the working men until, blackened and thumbed into tatters, they were unreadable but many memorised the poems and could repeat them as readily as the author himself. There were labor troubles in those days and in such disputes the ironmasters feared one of his poems more than the occasional violence by strike leaders.**

**McGovern’s old friends, men who saw hard hot summer**

**days** in the old mills with him, have memories of the tremendous influence his poems had **when he washed dirty hands at night** and turned to white paper”.





## **MICHAEL J. McGOVERN**

**“The Puddler Poet”  
Williamstown, Co. Galway  
Youngstown, Ohio  
1847-1933**

**Steel Mill Labourer  
Working Man’s Poet  
Social & Political Campaigner**

Michael J. McGovern, born in Williamstown, County. Galway, Ireland, became a stirring and powerful poetic voice for working men and women across America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He was according to contemporary accounts “the premier working class song-poet of his day” whose campaigning, challenging verses “were once memorised, recited and sung” across the United States.

Michael McGovern wrote over 1,000 song-poems during the course of his life. The best known were rallying cries for worker’s rights and union recognition in the steel mills and factories of an America which had just become the world’s greatest industrial power and a nation to which immigrants, desperately seeking a better life, were flooding to from all corners of the Old World. Others espoused the cause of American patriotism and Irish freedom. A small number reflect his unrequited emigrant’s love for his native County. Galway and borrow from or re-work ancient folk tales set in places like Ballymoe, Ballintubber and Williamstown.



McGovern was at his most trenchant and influential when a series of violent labour disputes in the 1880s and 1890s pitted recently unionised steel workers against powerful mining companies. One of the most notorious of these occurred in the town of Homestead in Pennsylvania in 1892 when the Carnegie Steel Company took on – and eventually broke - America’s most powerful trade union, The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers

Michael McGovern, himself a steel mill worker -a puddler- saw this as a titanic struggle for the rights of workers and their families. The poem he wrote in support of the striking and locked out Homestead workers evinces the mood of that moment and the power of his early verse.

### **LABOR'S CAUSE.**

(Read at a labor mass-meeting in Youngstown sympathizing with the Homestead strikers)

*We meet today to sympathize  
With Homestead men who seek redress;  
To soothe with hope the widow's cries  
And aid them in their sore distress....  
Send forth the words on spirit wings  
That wealth no longer shall maintain  
In this free land, its petty kings.  
With armed thugs to guard their reign.  
With justice in this noble fight  
Wealth's private armies we defy;  
With votes as weapons wielded right,  
The cause of labor shall not die.*

Michael McGovern named himself “The Puddler Poet”; he worked as a “puddler” or steel mill labourer in Yorkshire (England) & Pennsylvania and Ohio (U.S.A.); workers across America were imbued by his verse.

## A JOURNEY FROM FENIAN IRELAND TO INDUSTRIAL ENGLAND AND A “SMUGGLER’S” SHIP TO AMERICA.

The journey, that took Michael McGovern from Ireland to England and ultimately to The United States twenty years before he became the powerful poetic voice of America’s steel mill workers, was filled - it has recently emerged - with intrigue, subversion, militant Irish republicanism in England and a “double life” much of which is still shrouded in mystery. Michael McGovern was born during one of the darkest years in Irish history, “Black Forty Seven”, the middle year of the Great Famine of 1845-1849. It was a time of hunger, disease, fear and death. His family was living on a 10-acre farm, near the present day village of Williamstown (it didn’t exist in 1847). They survived the famine. Michael was briefly apprenticed to a local shoemaker but sometime about 1865 when he would have been 18 years of age he had a falling out with the cobbler and went to England.



In England, he made his way to Sheffield, which was then one of the world’s greatest “Steel Cities”. Sheffield was also, according to contemporary sources, “the main and most militant centre of trade union organisation and agitation in Great Britain”. And it was here that Michael McGovern’s double life began because Sheffield was then one of the most active centres in England of the secret, oath bound Irish revolutionary organisation “The Irish Republican Brotherhood”. Michael joined the I.R.B. in 1867 and became actively involved in its paramilitary campaigns in Yorkshire.



The I.R.B. was founded by the old revolutionary James Stephens in Dublin on St Patrick’s Day 1858. It’s sole aim was the overthrow British rule in Ireland by force of arms and the establishment of an Irish Republic. Its counterpart in the United States was organised by John O’Mahony and became known as the Fenian Brotherhood (later Clan na Gael). The members of both wings of the movement are often referred to as “Fenians”. We learn of McGovern’s involvement with the IRB in an undated one-page letter he wrote about 1927 when he was 80 years age. The letter was sent to the old Fenian John Devoy who edited the New York weekly Irish newspaper “The Gaelic American”. It survived because it became part of the Devoy papers, which are held in the National Library Dublin, Manuscripts Collection. In it McGovern tells us that he looks back to his days in the I.R.B. “with pride” having joined it as a boy when it was organised after the raid on Chester Castle in England.

*I joined it when a boy when it was organized after the “raid” on Chester Castle, England. I served as Centre and secretary in some of the Circles in Yorkshire. I was on a Committee*

The abortive Fenian Raid on Chester Castle took place on 11 February 1867. The audacious plan was to seize the huge arsenal of guns and ammunition held in the castle and ship it to Ireland for use by Fenian volunteers but on the night before the operation the plan was betrayed by an informer. McGovern continued to work as an IRB organiser in Yorkshire for the next 12/13 years but eventually as the police and Government agents closed in on him he had to be “smuggled out of England to America by I.R.B. men in Liverpool.”

*had reason to despise. After an incident in Sheffield in which the British government was interested in making inquiries I was smuggled to America by the aid of I.R.B. men in Liverpool. I was always*

How McGovern was spirited out of England and across the Atlantic, we still don’t know but that derring-do, episode clearly must have had a profound effect on his life, his political thinking and his writing.

Michael McGovern, abandoned Ireland, fled from England and escaped to America's shores where from the shadowed death pangs of an old Irish way of life and the flaring birth pangs of the modern industrial age he created a rich poetic mindscape of 19<sup>th</sup> century life, labour and love, hewn from his experiences in all three countries. The young McGovern and his family were of a people who owned nothing – not the little house they lived in (the now roofless part), not the land they worked, not the bog they “saved” their turf on, not even the well they drew water from. But they were possessed of a vigour that had seen 25 generations of their ancestors survive as subject people and yet never lose a sense of their own identity. It was an identity that was sustained as unshakeably by poets, bards and song-makers as it was by men at arms or politicians. The poet WB Yeats wrote of it as an “*indomitable Irishness*” and the people as “*the indomitable Irishry*”



*Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two eternities,  
That of race and that of soul,  
And ancient Ireland knew it all.*

*Irish poets learn your trade  
Sing whatever is well made  
(of those)...beaten into the clay  
Through seven heroic centuries.*

*Cast your mind on other days  
That we in coming days may be  
Still the indomitable Irishry.*

Michael McGovern emerges from that shadowland of American history wielding a puddling iron and a pen and writes his own story and the story of his fellow working men warm in empathy, as a blast furnace mill; cold in social commentary, as forged blue steel.

ROLLING MILL RHYMES.

*Hurrah for the bright redeeming light  
Which guides the cause of Labor,  
And union men who, with tongue and pen,  
Fear not the gun or sabre.*

These lines are from McGovern's poem “The Homestead Struggle or “Fort Frick's Defenders” were written in the immediate aftermath of that violent Carnegie Steel Company strike and lockout in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1892. This was one of the bloodiest confrontations in U.S labour history. Newly unionised steel workers seized the Carnegie Mill and the entire mill town. They armed themselves with rifles, a 20 pounder cannon and explosives and fought pitched battles with 300 armed Pinkerton agents (hired by the company) and 8,000 state militiamen who were sent in to re-take the steel mills and the town. Some of the fiercest of the fighting took place at flashpoints along barbed wire topped fences erected by Carnegie boss Henry Clay Frick.

“The Homestead Struggle” has uncanny resonances in the language of Yeats's seminal 1913 poem “The Great Day”.

*Hurrah for revolution and more cannon-shot!  
A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.  
Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again!  
The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on.*



### WITH A FEW MOUTHFULS OF AIR...

Poets, ballad makers and song creators occupy a special place in the life of every country; they labour as Yeats once said “to build the power and perfect beauty of rhyme; to find their own “voice” and then cast their words broadside to the world on a - “mouthful of air”.

*“They have spoken against you everywhere,  
But weigh this song with the great and their pride;  
I made it out of a mouthful of air,  
Their children’s children shall say they have lied”.*

[“Aedh Thinks Of Those Who Have Spoken Evil Of His Beloved” 1899].

Yeats believed great poetry had its greatest power when spoken. He himself, while working on new poems often walked alone through woods or meadowland, especially when at Coole or Ballylee in County Galway, reciting them aloud over and over again.

Song poets like Michael McGovern would have known exactly what Yeats was saying when he wrote of “making his song (his poem) out of a mouthful of air” ... and having the confidence to predict that it would be, in time to come, remembered and recited by “the children of the children” of that day.

Michael McGovern’s, the newly arrived young Irish immigrant, fetched up on the shores of America in the early 1880s, just a few years before Yeats wrote that poem, and became one of the two foremost and most famous “song poets” of his time. McGovern the steel mill worker and fellow Irishman Patrick Fennell, the railwayman, better known by his pen name “Shandy Maguire” were according to labour historian Clarke D Halker men of very considerable significance and influence in their day.

### The Youngstown Telegram

There were labor troubles in those days and in such disputes the ironmasters feared one of his poems more than occasional violence by strike leaders.

What is particularly significant is the speed with which McGovern became one of the most forceful labor voices in America and the power his verses had to rally working men when strikes and violent confrontations took place to win better wages and working conditions from steel mill owners and bosses. This extract from the “Youngstown Telegram” give a sense of McGovern’s stature

According to Clarke D Halker author of “For Democracy, Workers, and God: Labor Song-Poems and Labor Protest, 1865-95”, “McGovern’s song-poems earned him enormous popularity (initially) among Pittsburgh’s workers and (later) among steel and iron workers throughout the country” and it is clear that many of these poems were spoken by McGovern himself from trade union platforms or recited before and during union rallies by others when he himself couldn’t be present to deliver those “mouthfuls of air” that seemed to be able to galvanise audiences of working men and women.

McGovern quickly discovered workers receptive to his song-poems, and he maintained their support for over forty years. On his death in 1933 he had written over a thousand song-poems, appeared at countless union assemblages, published in numerous labor publications, and issued a compilation of his work. Perhaps the most appropriate compliment for the immigrant puddler and union song-poet came from those workers who memorized McGovern’s song-poems.<sup>52</sup>

Roger Evans, another Youngstown mill worker, “recalled when copies of the McGovern poems were circulated among the workmen until, blackened and much thumbed into tatters, they were unreadable,” according to the *Telegram*. “Many there were,” Evans said, “who memorized the poems and could repeat them as readily as the author himself.”

Strong and challenging poems and song poems, drawing on an earlier broadsheet ballad tradition, were a particularly significant weapon in the campaign to bring about radical social and political change in Ireland, in Britain and in the United States in the 1800s. We don’t yet know if Michael McGovern’s earliest labor poems were printed in the European broadside fashion, on single sheets of paper often illustrated with woodcuts, or if they were printed in newspapers, cut out and carried around by workers. But we

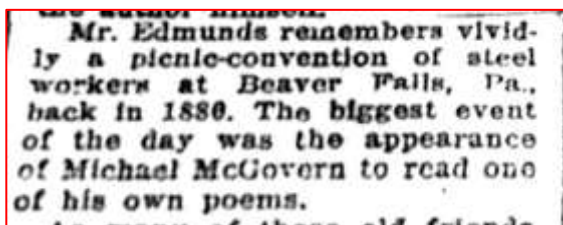
do know that **“copies of them were circulated among the working men until, blackened and much thumbed into tatters, they were unreadable and that many memorised the poems and could repeat them as readily as the author himself.”**

**STEELING WORKERS AT BEAVER FALLS, PA.  
1886; HOMESTEAD PA. 1892**

Michael McGovern left Ireland in his 20s with no formal education; worked as a steel mill labourer in England for 14 maybe 15 years before arriving in America with a wife and four children in 1881 or 1882 at the age of c 35. The America he arrived in was in a frenzy of industrialisation. The England he had left behind was gripped by the same break-neck industrial development and expansion. It was there that he was first exposed to some of the most militant trade unionism in all of Europe and by the time he reached the United States he was a skilled “puddler”; a by now self-educated man with a strong social conscience.



We don't yet know if he had begun to write poetry while in England but within just four or five years of arriving in the U.S. he had established a formidable reputation as a literary champion of the working classes. One of the first references to McGovern reciting his poetry to a labour gathering dates from 1886 when he working in Pennsylvania. A report in the Youngstown Telegram quotes a friend of McGovern's Edmunds who was there on that day.



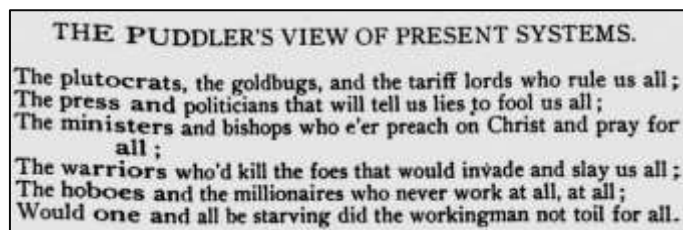
We don't know which of his poems McGovern recited in Beaver Falls on that day in 1886. But in 1872 Beaver Falls (pop 3,500) was the scene of the first strike in the history of America's cutlery industry. Staff at the Beaver Falls Cutlery Company went on strike after their wages were cut. Management brought in 200 Chinese strike breakers from New Orleans and eventually forced

the workers to back down. However the firm closed in 1886, the year McGovern read his poem to the town's steel workers.

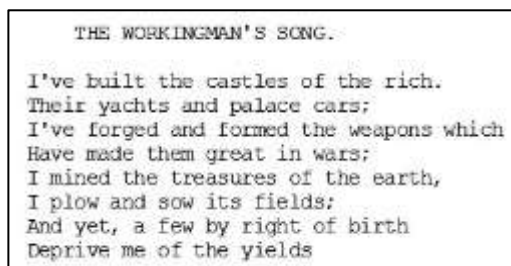
By 1892, when he wrote his poem in support of the striking Homestead, PA, steel workers, Michael McGovern was the “Puddler Poet Laureate”.

Michael McGovern hasn't yet been the subject of any significant biographical research or critical literary analysis. His single published volume of poetry “*Labor Lyrics and Other Poems*” (1899) contains just 150 of his lifetime output of over 1,000 poems. The vast majority of the rest were published in local newspapers, labour and union journals and Irish-American papers and periodical.

Today he is best known because of his once compelling, much recited labor poems. These flash and flare throwing off sparks of scorching, scorning profundity and assertory defiance aimed singularly at those he described as “plutocrats”, the tycoon millionaire owners of giant industrial corporations, craven corrupt politicians and strike breakers.



“*The Puddler's View of Present Systems*” captures much of what drove McGovern to “wash his hands at night; retreat to his writing desk, pick up his pen and fashion the thoughts of the day that ran like a hissing mercurial thread through the noise and searing heat of the rolling mills, into workingman's verse.



McGovern espoused many causes in his poems, song poems and writings; themes which would be carried into another century by men like Joe Hill Woody Guthrie & Bob Dylan. He railed against those who greedily, shamelessly exploited the working classes in the United States; yet he enthusiastically espoused American patriotism. Ireland's fight for freedom was another constant pre-occupation; this was a campaign he waged in both poetry and in many newspaper articles and letters.



## WEALTH AND EVIL – POVERTY AND SIN

Throughout his life Michael McGovern wrestled to reconcile one of the great contradictions of American life; the gulf between enormous wealth and grinding poverty. He was deeply concerned by the unequalness of society in what was then the richest country in the world. This was wealth created by surging industrialisation; driven by scientific breakthroughs and invention and the labor of millions of immigrants pouring into the United States from almost every corner of the globe.

To Michael McGovern the enormous wealth generated from the genius of America's giant industrial strides was sequestered by the rich and powerful denying workers a fair share of what their labor had generated. Many of his song

poems grew out of his sense of anger at this greatest divide in American life.

One - on its own - would have set McGovern apart from every other poet, thinker and social philosopher of his time. It's the haunting "Davy Brown".

In its ballad like construct, there's a declamatory power of immense impact and raw emotion. Oscar Wilde's "west Ballad of Reading Jail" comes to mind as one enters the story of the "puddler" Davy Brown caught up in the hungry days of "an Eastern Valley" steel mill strike. In desperation he leaves his wife and child and hits out in search of work, carrying his Amalgamated union card. At every twist and turn of his journey he finds himself being rebuffed and eventually broken, cold and hungry he has no option left but to try to make his way back east to re-join his family for Christmas Day.



Reduced from proud working "puddler" to train riding "tramp" his midwinter journey through snow covered lands, brooding mountains and icicle fringed forests becomes an odyssean tale. Davy, eventually thrown off the train by a "soulless conductor", is finally left to try to walk his way home through swirling snowdrifts "deep in the mountains far from any depot or town".

"And struggling along in the snowdrifts, he asked himself oft "if his weight. Could much interfere with the progress of carloads of ponderous freight? Or if it might lessen the profits of millionaires owning the road? If to hundreds of thousands of tons it might prove the last straw to the load?"

And as he eventually begins to lose his battle with time (and typhoid), sheltering under a cliff-side grotto, he reflects in reverie on the hand his life and his country have dealt him. Alone, friendless and broken-hearted at having failed his wife and child he grieves and prays and surrenders to his fate as the "moonbeams" of that universal night "glanced softly into his eyes" for the last time.

AND....

He prayed for the tyrants who caused him to wander away from his friends,  
Who trampled on labor in order to further monopoly's ends,  
And thought while comparing the homes of the rich with the nook he was in'  
That wealth had walked further with evil than poverty traveled with sin ;

**"That wealth had walked further with evil than poverty travelled with sin".**

It is one of Michael "The Puddler" McGovern's most memorable lines

To take a bead on McGovern's work, here is where the cross hairs meet.

To chart a course to his poetic soul, this is where the compass finds its True North.





## AB INITIO ... PUER NATUS EST

Michael McGovern (The “Puddler Poet”) was born Michael Govern in Williamstown, Co Galway in 1847 or 1848. His parents were John Govern and Bridget Flynn. Their name subsequently became McGovern. His exact birth date hasn’t been established but one US census record suggests that it was October 1847\*.

Most biographical references claim that Michael McGovern was born in Castlereas, Co. Roscommon.

*Michael McGovern, the “Puddler Poet,” emigrated to the United States from Castlereas, Roscommon, Ireland, in 1848 at the height of the Famine crisis. Like many refugees, McGovern first*

However new research by the Williamstown Heritage Society has established that he was born in this now derelict farmhouse in the townland of Castlefield (*Pairc an Chaislean*) about 4 miles from the present day village of Williamstown.

This Famine time house (part of which is almost 200 years old) is, according to local and family knowledge, where “Michael McGovern, the famous poet” was born.

In Williamstown today the McGovern name no longer exists. The direct patrilineal “McGovern’s of Castlefield” line has died out. When is not yet clear. But there are a number of families who are directly related to “The Puddler Poet”; The Flynn families of Williamstown and the Conama families of Ballintubber. The Flynn’s relationship is through Bridget Flynn who was Michael McGovern’s mother. The Conama families are descended from his sister Catherine Govern (McGovern)-Grady.

Local historians Leo and Eileen Finnegan have established that Padraic Conama (right) from Ballintubber, is a great -grandnephew of Michael McGovern and that Tom and John (below) & Liam (all Williamstown) and Mary Flynn-Mangan (Kilcock, Co. Kildare) are 3<sup>rd</sup> cousins of Michael’s. There are also Flynn relations of the same generation living in Chicago. There were 11 children in the Conama family; 9 are still living. Among the Flynns and the Conama families there are today 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> cousins of Michael McGovern.



Padraic Conama, is a great grandson of Michael McGovern’s sister Catherine who married John O’Grady. Padraic’s grandmother, Ellen Grady (Gready), was born in the old McGovern/O’Grady house at Castlefield. Padraic Conama often visited the house as a young boy and heard the family was related to “*the poet McGovern*”. According to Padraic “*My father often*

***talked about the ‘poet McGovern’ and how we were related but we were young at the time and unfortunately we didn’t think about asking more questions; we didn’t pay enough heed to what they were saying”.***

Padraic’s father was Pat Conama. He was the only child of Ellen Grady (Gready) and Michael Conama.

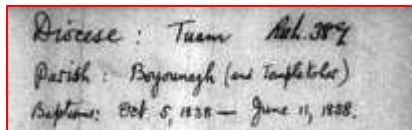


Despite the fact that family tradition has it that **Michael McGovern** was born at **Castlefield** in Williamstown, and that he certainly grew up there, there is no record of his birth in the Catholic Register of Births and Baptisms for Williamstown (Boyounagh /Templetogher) Parish.

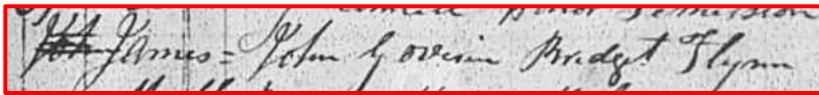
Michael was born during one of the worst years of the Great Famine, “Black ‘47”, and this may account for the fact that he wasn’t registered. It was a time of great distress and upheaval in Williamstown with, according to local tradition, many deaths and people being buried in unmarked graves. Births and baptisms were usually faithfully recorded but in Michael McGovern’s case a record of his baptism doesn’t seem to exist ....or hasn’t yet been located. The possibility that he may have been baptized in an adjoining parish is still being investigated.



The ancient handwritten parish register covers the period Oct 1838 to June 1858. We know that the



**Govern family** was living in Williamstown in August 1848 as the baptism of their son **James**, Michael’s younger brother, is recorded in this register. He was baptized on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1848.



Although there doesn’t appear to be a baptism record for Michael McGovern, there is however corroborating evidence that Michael was in fact born in Castlefield.

A biographical note published in the Sunday, September 25<sup>th</sup> 1937, edition of the “Youngstown Vindicator” tells us that **Michael McGovern was “born in 1848 in Castlefield, County Galway, Ireland”**. The article was written on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial headstone at his grave in Calvary Cemetery, Youngstown. It is likely that the information in the article was given to “The Vindicator” by a family member; or somebody from the committee which erected the memorial headstone and who would be familiar with Michael McGovern’s birthplace.

### Youngstown Vindicator

The bottom of the stone carries one of McGovern’s verses. McGovern was born in 1848 in Castlefield, County Galway, Ireland. He lived in the Mahoning Valley most of his life, and died in April, 1933.

There is only one Castlefield in County Galway and it is located in Williamstown parish.

Thirty seven years ago in 1980, Williamstown farmer and poet Tommy Scally, who was known as “The Bard of Carrowderry”, also remembered Michael McGovern *“the great poet who was born in Farm in Williamstown who went on to be a famous man of literature in America”*. Castlefield is one of a group of five townlands in the Farm district of Williamstown.

Tommy was speaking on an RTE radio programme. He was discussing the history of the parish:

*“And there did a man, from Farm from this parish .... by the name of Michael McGovern.... emigrate to America and he became a great poet and a famous man of literature. And he was home and ah...me mother remembers him home when she was a little girl in Farm He wrote several books of poems... and wrote poetry and prose in his time in the United States”*.



It has now been established that the visit, which Tommy Scally mentions, occurred in 1904; a ships manifest confirms that it took place. Michael McGovern may also have made a second trip about 1928. A newspaper reports in Youngstown suggests that he did. [\* Ships Manifest records return journey from Queenstown (Cork) to New York Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> 1904. SS “Celtic”.]

## LATIN, LABOR AND A LOVE OF LANGUAGE

Michael McGovern's own story; the story of a young Irish emigrant, who left home probably penniless but with perhaps a smattering of classical Latin and a love of language and storytelling rattling around in his head and who carved out a place for himself in the American imagination, has yet to be told. No biography of Michael McGovern has yet been written; although he certainly deserves one. His memory is preserved in the single book of poetry he wrote in the 1890s; in the files of local newspapers in Youngstown in Ohio and in the fragmented recollections of his descendants in the United States.



Up to recently very few people in Ireland knew of Michael McGovern's existence and the handful of distant relatives who did had only a vague sense of his importance as a poet, writer and social campaigner in the U.S. Some had been told by their parents that they were "related" to the "famous poet McGovern" and had visited the derelict old McGovern family home while they were still children.

But it was Tommy Scally's 1980 radio programme on the folk history of Williamstown that revealed - in just four sentences - the key to much of what was then known, in his native parish, of the poet Michael McGovern; that he had grown up on a farm there; attended one of the then underground/formerly illegal Catholic "hedge schools" in the locality, emigrated to America and went on to write "several books of poetry and become a famous man in America". In fact Michael only published one book of poetry although he was working on a second at the time of his death.



The significance of that almost throwaway remark in the middle of a programme dealing with the colourful customs and traditions of the parish in times past wasn't fully appreciated at the time. But 37 years later the Williamstown Heritage Society stumbled on the almost trackless trail of "The Puddler Poet's" life and began extensive research to establish his story and the story of his journey from a blighted farm in Famine time Ireland; to the dark and smoky mining towns of the North of England, to the grinding steel mills of the "With God, all things are Possible", State of Ohio and eventually into the "roll of honour" of American labour rights campaigners and the American labour poet's "hall of fame" .

"*Labour Lyrics and Other Poems*" is Michael's most accessible work although he wrote many newspaper articles and had many of his poems and published in contemporary newspapers including *The Youngstown Vindicator* and *The Youngtown Telegram* and in Irish-American periodicals including *The Gaelic American* and in the trade union newspaper *The Amalgamated Journal*.

The 156 page "*Labour Lyrics and Other Poems*" collection marshals -in forceful verse - McGovern's social and political analysis of the America he lived in and saw evolving all around him (not always to his liking) in the 1880s and 1890s. McGovern's work challenges at every turn the then rampant free-marketeering approach to labour employment and the attempts of industrial tycoons to prevent the large scale unionisation of American workers.

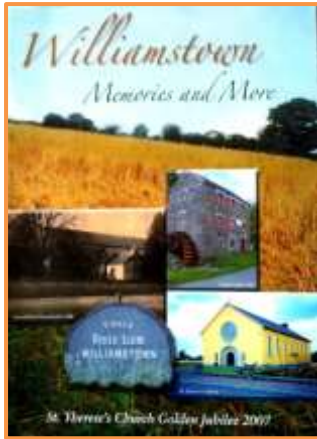
You get a stark sense of this from one of his early poems "**Squeezing His Lemons**". In taut language he introduces us to a mill boss who has strike breaking and union bashing and bursting on his mind. It's a theme Michael returns to time and time again. The language is always direct and uncompromising. He is the working man's advocate. The "lemon" tamer tycoon, mill boss remains squarely in the crosshairs. No quarter is expected and none is given.

the working class. His writings appeared in many newspapers and Irish-American periodicals. His book of poetry, *Labor Lyrics*, appeared in 1899 and received acclaim throughout the United States. He was a member of the Emmett Literary Society, the

### SQUEEZING HIS LEMONS.

#### CHAPTER I.

He stood before his workingmen  
As ruler of the mills;  
Who lived among the "upper ten"  
And sneered at labor's ills,  
And bid them come to meet him in  
His office one by one,  
To sign a new "agreement;" "then,"  
He said, "the mills will run."



**MICHAEL (Mc) GOVERN AND “AN ISLAND” OF POETS, RHYMERS, VERSE MAKERS, SINGERS AND MUSICIANS**



Tommy Scally, the Williamstown farmer-poet and musician, whose memories first triggered a new wave of interest in Michael McGovern’s life and writing in Ireland, was the lynch-pin between the people of McGovern’s time and the current generation. He was the inheritor of a versifying tradition that threaded its way back to Michael McGovern’s time and which, far beyond that, was stitched deep into centuries of Irish folk-history.

“The Bard of Carrenderry”, as Tommy was known, was a prolific “rural poet” who wrote simply and

engagingly of his native place, its landscape, its seasons, its life and its people.

**CRUCAN RUDH**  
 BY THOMAS SCALLY OF CARRENDERRY  
*Fond memories often bring me back to days now long ago,  
 When I roamed the hills and valleys where the heathery breezes blow.  
 To the cot that I was born in ever more I will be true,  
 And the furry hill beside it that’s known as Crucan Rudh.  
 I love it in the springtime when the bushes are in bloom,  
 The noineens and the buttercups the wild furze and the broom.  
 Then natures scenes are changing discarding old for new,  
 Round my home in Carrenderry, near the hill of Crucan Rudh.*

Tommy’s verses and the song poems, which he and generations of his neighbours, composed, recited, sang, sometimes wrote down and occasionally had published, were part of the fabric of the rural life Michael (Mc) Govern was born into. Folk memory suggests that there were hundreds of poems and verses which captured (sometimes wryly, sometimes mirthfully) daily

encounters, everyday events, local happenings and escapades. Tradition has it that Williamstown /Templetogher was something of “an island of poets, rhymers, versifiers, singers and musicians”.

**SONGS AND RECITATIONS OF THE PARISH**  
 The tradition of poetry and songwriting was very strong in this parish in the past. Songs and poems were written about all the various events which took place, especially anything out of the ordinary. Sadly many of these works have been lost forever, but on a happy note I was able to record a number of them, my sincere thanks to the people who contributed the words.

Many of the old songs and poems were lost with the passage of time but about 25 years ago local historian Eileen Finnegan began collecting the works which were still remembered in the locality and included them in her book “A History of The Parish of Templetogher and

Town of Williamstown from Earliest Times to 1990”. Some had been composed by Tommy Scally’s neighbour at Carrenderry, Patrick Connaughton; others by Mattie Connaughton, of Derryvode and Ballyroe, Edward Coyne, of Kilnalag and James Tiernan, Ballymoe,

**THE PIG FAIR OF ISLANDS**  
*It being the twenty fourth of May  
 The year of ninety four  
 There was held a fair in Islands  
 Where it never was held before  
 This fair was not placarded  
 Though it was rumoured up and down.*

**The Williamstown Song**  
 By Pat Connaughton of Carrenderry  
*the author of these  
 has been wrote  
 apprentice  
 Leatra poet.*

**THE BRAVE PADDY KNIGHT**  
*A few years ago when the times they were bad  
 And things were going hard on a poor working lad*

*greater in the winter  
 be cosy round the big turf fire when  
 ere I read 'bout Tone and Emmett and  
 my home in Carrenderry, near the hill  
 rolling, through sorrow*

*“What brought you to the river”, the magistrate he said,  
 When you should be at home with your wife in bed”  
 “If you want information I’ll tell you on the spot*

*When the water flows beneath the rocks, like music there it plays.  
 What a lovely sound it was at night, to listen to the mill,*

Some of the older verses and poems dated back to the early 1900s; others to the late 1800s, all were part of a living tradition of celebrating and responding to everyday events such as brushes with the law (Rodger Conneely – “So now ye loyal fishermen together all combine, And help poor Rodger pay the heavy fine.”; pig fairs (The Pig Fair of Islands – “This fair was not placarded, Though it was rumoured up and down.”) and an amusing collision of music and drink (The Congested Melodian – “They gave him a pint to make everything right, He wished them good luck in their fine new melodian.”). The nightly storytelling and recitation tradition that kept poems such as these alive around firesides in the Williamstown of his childhood was something Michael McGovern would later acknowledged in interviews with the editors of newspapers and magazines in the U.S.



**“PUDDLER” POETA - GENERATION ZERO**

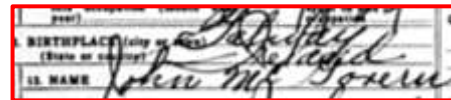
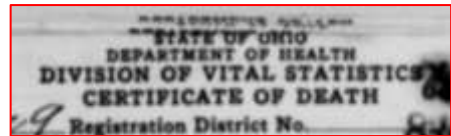
The current verifiable Generation Zero of Michael McGovern’s Family Tree in Ireland begins in the early 1800s with his mother and father John Govern (McGovern) and Bridget Flynn, of Castlefield.

We know that Michael’s father’s name was **John McGovern** from an entry in Michael’s own 1933 death certificate (right). His mother name is missing from the

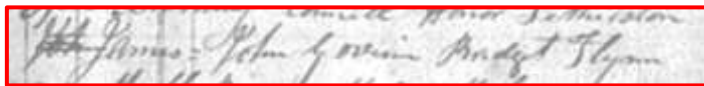
register which also records that Michael, “The Puddlers Poet’s”, birthplace was “Galway, Ireland” and not County Roscommon.

But we have confirmation that Michael McGovern’s mother was **Bridget O’Flynn**, from a report in “*The Youngstown Vindicator*” (April 3 1933).

Reporting on the death of Youngstown’s most famous writer, poet and social activists it tells us that Michael was “**the son of the late James and Bridget O’Flynn McGovern**”. Although the Vindicator incorrectly states that Michael’s father’s name was James when it was in fact John

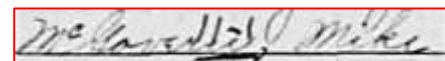
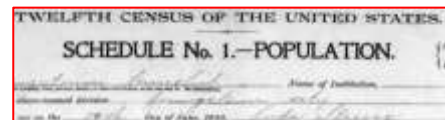


We know from the Williamstown Parish Register (from which Michael’s name appears to be missing) that **John Govern** and **Bridget Flynn**, were living in Williamstown, in 1848 when their son, **James**, “The Puddler’s” brother, was baptized on August 7<sup>th</sup> 1848.



The fading entry in the old leather bound book would appear to suggest that the priest, who was writing the entry, made a minor mistake which he quickly corrected. When entering the name of the child he had just baptized he began to write “John” rather than James – probably mistaking the father’s name for the new-born baby. The entry was quickly corrected and James’s existence established.

\***October 1847 appears** to be Michael’s most likely birthdate...but two sets of U.S. records have contradictory dates. In the 1900 Census for Ohio, **Mike McGovern**, (as his name was then written) of 208 Eagle Street, Youngstown, is recorded as being born in **October 1847**. On this census return, Michael is described as a “Puddler”, a steel mill worker whose job was ,as we know, to help turn “pig” iron into wrought iron (or steel) by using a 10 to 15 foot long bar or “rabble” to agitate the molten iron in a furnace. It was hot, back-breaking, dangerous work. Michael had previously worked as a “Puddler” in England.

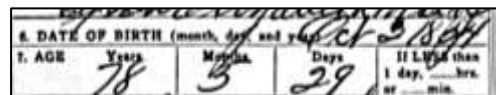


\* **October 3rd 1854** is the date of birth given for Michael J. McGovern on his death certificate issued in Youngstown, Ohio in 1933. It is witnessed and signed by his son John McGovern.

**The date is almost certainly incorrect.**

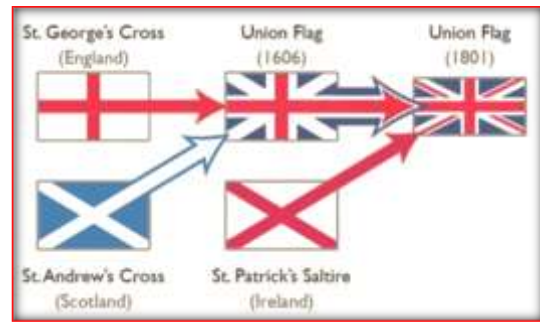
If Michael McGovern was born in 1854 he would have been married and a father at the age of 20 as his first child and oldest son was born in England, to which he first emigrated, in March 1874.

The 1847 date is far more plausible as it would have him marrying at age 26/27. From the various records which have so far emerged the weight of existing evidence points to Michael being born in the autumn of 1847 – possibly on **Sunday October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1847**

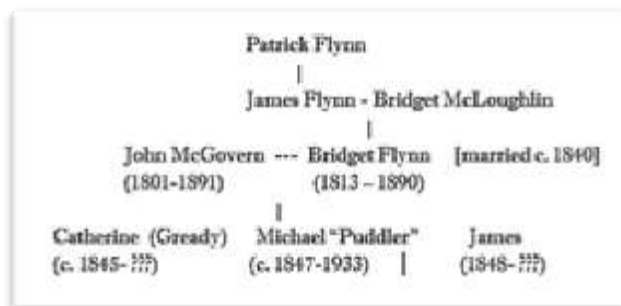


## GOVERN GENERATION MINUS ZERO

Michael McGovern's parents were **John Govern (1801-1891)** and **Bridget Flynn (1813-1890)** but beyond the scarce few lines entered into church and state records which confirm their existence we know almost nothing about them. They remain spectral figures in the shadowland of an Ireland leaving behind the "genealogically silent" 18<sup>th</sup> century and emerging into a more enumerated 19<sup>th</sup> century colony which had just voted its own parliament out of existence and appeared to be setting out to finally extinguish its own identity. In the aftermath of the bloody, failed 1798 Rebellion, the so called "The Year of The French", England, fearful of the spread of radical and revolutionary European ideas, unleashed a reign of terror and mass executions across Ireland; tightened its grip on the country by convincing the Protestant Irish Parliament in Dublin to vote itself out of existence and prepared to bind the two countries ever closer together in a new political union. What the government of the new United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland couldn't have anticipated was the catastrophic consequences which the Great Famine (1845-1849) would have on the course of Irish history, just 50 years later.



John Govern was born in the year of the Act of Union (1801) that extinguished the prospects of Irish independence for a century. He lived through both the Great Famine and the Little Famine of 1879; he survived some of the harshest decades of Irish landlordism and by the end of his life might just have sensed that 700 years of Irish history was moving towards one more (and final) dramatic turn. His wife Bridget Flynn, who was born 12 years later, would share that journey with him. Among the few facts we know about them are that they both were likely to have grown up on small farms; that their families lived less than a mile apart and that that they lived precarious lives dependant on the will of one of the West of Ireland's few great Catholic landlords and on the varying economic state of the times.



So far, it appears to be possible, based on family tradition, to push Michael McGovern's material Flynn family tree back to the 1760s while the Govern tree hasn't currently been pushed beyond 1801. The Flynn family tree is based on research carried out 30 to 40 years by Fr. John Flynn, an uncle of the current Flynns of Williamstown. He was a man who was said to have had "an enormous interest in the

heritage of the area and of his family lineage" (Eileen Finnegan)

**John Govern (McGovern)** was born **1801**; died **1891**, aged 90. **Bridget Flynn McGovern** was born **1813**; died **1890**, aged 77. We don't know if John was born in Castlefield. The first record of the Govern family in Castlefield is Griffiths Valuation of 1855/57. Bridget originally lived in Coarsefield (now Moorfield) about a mile from Castlefield. Bridget was 12 years younger than John. We don't yet know when they married. It would probably have been in the 1840s when John was in his 40s and Bridget perhaps in her late 20s or early 30s. Their son James was born in 1848; Michael was probably born in 1847, their sister Catherine sometime after that.

•



- **Bridget McGovern (Flynn)**, “The Puddler Poet’s”, mother died in her home at Castlefield, Williamstown, on Saturday, March 15th 1890. She was 77 year of age.. Her death, recorded in the Civil Register of Deaths, tells us that she was the wife of John McGovern, of Castlefield; that he was present at her death. Her occupation is described as “wife of a farmer”.
- **John McGovern** died at his home in Castlefield, Williamstown - a year later - on Friday, 25 sept 1891. He was 90 years of age.. In the Civil Register of Deaths, he is described as “widower” and farmer. His daughter Catherine was present at his death in Castlefield and provided the information entered in the register. Catherine McGovern Grady (written Gready at the time) was “The Puddler” Michael McGovern’s younger sister. Catherine was Padraic Conama great grandmother and the link between “The Puddler Poet” and the current Conama family in Ballymoe.

There is no record of where John and Bridget McGovern are buried but local tradition is that they were buried in Moore Cemetery (Williamstown) in one the two Grady plots. There are side by side with the two Flynn plots. The Grady plot has an unusual lead inscription plate which was originally attached to tall Celtic cross but which has since become detached. It records the death of Catherine Grady, of Castlefield, (wife of Pat Grady) who is believed to be a niece-in-law of Michael McGovern.

DEATHDATE	15/03/1890
PLACE OF DEATH	CASTLEFIELD
FIRSTNAME	BRIDGET
SURNAME	MCGOVERN
ADDRESS	CASTLEIFELD
STATUS	MARRIED
AGE IN YEARS	77

DEATHDATE	25/09/1891
PLACE OF DEATH	CASTLEFIELD
FIRSTNAME	JOHN
SURNAME	MCGOVERN
ADDRESS	CASTLEFIELD

INFORMANT	CATHERINE GRADY
INFORMANT'S ADDRESS	CASTLEFIELD
RELATION	DAUGHTER
COMMENT	PRESENT AT DEATH.



## So who was Michael McGovern?

In his own words, he tells us he was born on a tiny farm in County Galway, Ireland, at the height of the Great Famine (1845-1849); spent no more than “*a few months*” in school (a cabin with an itinerant teacher), learned the history of Ireland and its ancient heroes from his parents and grandparents as he sat around the fireside at night in a house “*where books and newspapers were rarely seen*”. That three roomed, thatched farmhouse, at Castlefield, Williamstown, stood close to the end of a ribbon of country road that spidered its way through a distant corner of the 29,000 acre estate of one of the country’s greatest aristocrat-landlords. The McGovern family were tenants living, at the will of that landlord, soldier and M.P., on 10 acres of his land.

### The Youngstown Telegram

instead. Many of the legends were handed down to me from my forefathers in Ireland and I heard them when a boy around the firesides in my birthplace. In those days when education was a luxury, story telling took the place of books and literature and the village story teller was a great man in every community. Newspapers were rarely seen, nor were books, so that you can see how the legends of bygone years furnished a means of entertainment and diversion for the countryside.”

The best description we have of Michael’s boyhood comes from an interview he gave to the “*Youngstown Telegram*” in 1907. He was 60 years of age at the time. He tells us that there was a long tradition of storytelling in his family that the village storyteller had a very special place in every community at the time; that his family hadn’t in previous generations produced writers but many were good singers – which he himself wasn’t.

Poignantly he explains that education in Ireland in the 1850s was “*a luxury*”; in fact there were no formal schools for Catholics and the school he attended for those few months was known as a “*hedge school*” which were originally illegal and underground but which by the

1850s were being allowed to function by the British Government which had earlier banned “*education*” for Catholics.

The location of the “*hedge school*” Michael attended as a boy has recently been established. A small cabin doubling as a schoolhouse, it was located “*under a grove of beech trees*” on a remote farm at Booklagh, Ballymoe, about three miles across country from his home in Castlefield.



“*The Puddler Poet*” may well be one of the few (if not the only) know “*past pupils*” of a Hedge School to have gone on to become an acclaimed poet, writer and literary figure – having been forced by poverty and lack of opportunity to emigration Ireland to make a new life for himself in America. There is no trace today of the little makeshift schoolhouse where children spoke Irish, learned English and were even introduced to Latin and occasionally to Greek.



However memories of it still linger and one of McGovern’s Irish cousins, Mary Flynn, was able to point out where it was located. “*My father (Tom Scahill) always told us it was just under those beech trees on Leary’s farm*”, she said, “*It’s very moving to now discover that Michael McGovern once went to school here*”. The encircling grove of beech trees still frame the field where the old school stood.

Families at the time often found it hard to raise the money to pay the hedge school “*master*”. We have no idea what Michael’s teacher “*a Mr. Cassidy*” charged but in County Donegal at the same time the standard “*hedge school*” fees were: *1/8 (one shilling and eight pence) per quarter for Spelling; 2/- for Reading, 3/3 for Writing, 4/- to 7/- for Arithmetic and 11/- for Latin*. These would have been substantial amounts of money, not everyone could afford. Clearly his parents were very anxious for Michael to be educated but he appears to have spent only a very short time in the Booklagh School.

## FIRESIDE TALES - “SCEALTA COIS TINE”

In his interview in the *“Youngstown Telegram”* (November 17 1907 Pg. 7, Col. 1) Michael tell us that *“many of the legends of ancient Irish mythology were passed on at the fireside of his birthplace (Castlefield) and at the firesides of neighbouring houses”*. The old McGovern house has long been abandoned and is now in a ruinous state. In recent years it was used as a roofless store for farm equipment which concealed its remaining feature. But in the Spring of 2017, when it was established that this was “The Puddler Poet’s” birthplace, the Williamstown Heritage Society was anxious to see if the ancient “storytelling” fireplace had survived. Another of Michael McGovern’s Irish cousins, John Flynn and the society’s chairman Leo Finnegan (above) removed large amounts of old sawmilling equipment from the chimney breast to reveal the still intact distinctive limestone fireplace.



Many of the legends and folk tales he had handed down to the young Michael McGovern feature in his poems – especially in his published collection *“Labor Lyrics and Other Poems”* (1899). Around that fireside at night or in the cabin schoolhouse, he would also have learned the many darker chapters of Ireland’s history. Years later they would echo and re-echo through his poems, and in the stream of newspaper articles he wrote in support of the fight for Irish freedom.

Michael McGovern (1847-1933) will always be best known as the poet of that 19<sup>th</sup> century generation of American working men who demanded the right to unionise and fight exploitation in the steel mills and factories of what today would be called “The Rust Belt” states of the United States of America. He was the rolling mill “puddler” who gave a voice and muscle to his fellow workers in Pennsylvania and Ohio.

But it wasn’t just “the wrongs” of American’s that Michael McGovern’s directed his literary and campaigning firepower at. He was equally passionate about “Ireland’s wrongs” and, as he saw it, its centuries of colonial “exploitation and misrule”. And more than fifty years after he had left Ireland forever he threw his weight behind the campaign which was waged across the United States to win public support for Ireland’s final bid for freedom.



Michael McGovern was the man who left his childhood home in County Galway, carrying with him little more than his parents’ blessing; the enthusiasm of youth and that “give anything a go” Irish generated gene. And his journey from Williamstown to Youngstown saw him become, in turn, steel mill worker, state oil inspector, fireman, saloon-keeper self-taught writer, newspaper columnist, poet, painter, philosopher, social and political campaigner.

He left behind a village (“Baile Liam”) that was “built for spite” following a 19<sup>th</sup> century dispute between two local landlords; found work and a wife in an English steel city (Sheffield), gripped by militant trade unionism and agitation, and eventually came to live in the “Forging Steel Valley– Sweat of Their Brow” city of Youngstown in Ohio.

Today in his native Williamstown/ Baile Liam, despite his achievements and his fame in America, there are only spectral, fragmented folk and family memories of Michael McGovern, “The Puddler Poet”. One hundred and seventy year after he was born all that is remembered of Michael McGovern could be written with a single stick of chalk on the “hedge school” slate he would have used to write his first words in English, Irish and maybe Latin on and struggle with the complexities of addition, subtraction and multiplication.





## EARLY REMBRANTS AND 29,000 ACRES OF LAND

Michael McGovern's parents, when he was growing up in Castlefield, were tenants-at-will of one of the most powerful landowning families in County Galway renting a 10 acre farm and the old family home from Sir Thomas John Burke, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet (1813-1875), of Marble Hill, a landed aristocrat, career soldier in the British army and a Member of Parliament for Co. Galway who sat in Westminster.

Through a series of inheritances and acquisitions the Burkes owned 29,000 thousand acres of land in South Galway around Loughrea and Portumna and in North Galway in the Williamstown and Glinsk areas.



The Burkes of Creggeen, later named Marble Hill (below), who were related to the Burkes, of Glinsk, were a Catholic "Galway gentry" family who managed to hold on to their lands because of "an accommodation" or deal with the neighbouring Protestant Masons family, of Masonbrook, who "nominally held the Marble Hill estate in fee during the long period of religious proscription when many Catholic families had their land confiscated".

Sir Thomas's father, Sir John Burke, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet, was Colonel of The "Fighting" 98<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot; a speculative investor in the powerful East India Company which had a near monopoly on trade between Europe and the Far East and an art lover who was reputed to have owned a substantial collection of the early works of Rembrandt. The two worlds - of

landed aristocratic privilege and back breaking tenant farmer poverty - were separated by both the high walls that surrounded the great estates and the ultimately unbridgeable social and economic gulf between the two.



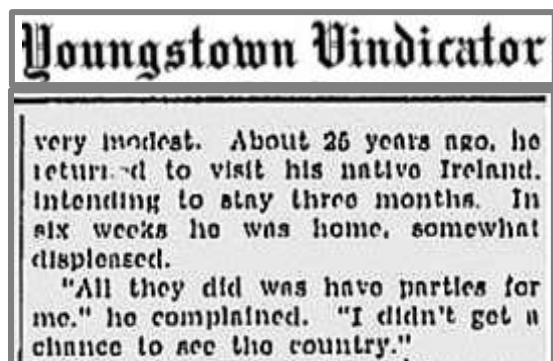
Marble Hill was burned to the ground and the family's 29,000 acres broken up and given to their one time tenants in the 1920s. Today it stands a roofless ruin on the wooded landscape.

No early photograph of the old McGovern homestead exists or has yet been located. This is somewhat surprising as we know that the already famous "Puddler Poet", Michael McGovern returned to Ireland in September 1904\* and may also have made a second visit in 1928. One would have expected that he would have been carrying a camera. "Returning Yanks" of the period usually brought a camera to take pictures of their old

homes or surviving of relations .The film was taken back to America and the black and white pictures were often hand-coloured.

According to a report in "The Youngstown Vindicator" the "Puddler Poet" had intended to spend three months in Ireland in 1904. However the homecoming turned, unexpectedly, into what must have been a rather extraordinary event. And for Michael McGovern who was then in his mid-50s it proved to be a somewhat overwhelming "homecoming".

One of the best descriptions we have of the old original McGovern house comes from the Irish census of 1901 and 1911. It is recorded as being a thatched roofed, stone house with three windows in front. It isn't clear how many rooms were in the original house. It is categorised as a "3rd class house with between 2 and 4 rooms". The farmyard complex had a cow house and a piggery.



## GREAT HOUSE – LITTLE HOME, BOTH UNROOFED

The roofless ruin of the once thatched McGovern ancestral home, where the family lived in the early 1800s and where Michael was born, still stands. Local tradition is that it was built sometime in the 1820s or maybe even slightly earlier. It is difficult however to get a sense of what the original single storey house looked like as part of it (about half of it) was subsumed into a new two story slated house which was built over and around the old home in the 1930s. The new enlarged “upstairs/downstairs” house had by then passed from Govern (McGovern) ownership to Gready (Grady) hands. Michael McGovern’s sister Catherine had married Patrick Grady (1871-1954) Patrick was the last occupant of the combined cottage and farmhouse. He continued to live there to 1954.

The single storey-two story house looks somewhat incongruous but it was probably a very practical arrangement when it was constructed. Both parts of the enlarged house were interconnected and lived in. Nobody now living remembers being in the McGovern/Grady house when it was still occupied. It’s clear however, even from the ruins which still stand, that it was a significant house on the landscape.

Both John and Tom Flynn, whose family home was next door and who are 3<sup>rd</sup> cousins to “The Puddler Poet” remember being in and around the old McGovern home in the 1960s and 1970s. By then it had been abandoned; the older single storey part was unroofed but the newer two story extension still had its slate roof and for a time was rented and used by their father as a workshop.



Today the doors and windows are gone and the house has a spectral look. The old ceilings are sagging but still intact; the last coat of light blue paint on the kitchen walls clings on tenaciously against advancing waves of dampness, the stairs has swooned into a thread of disjointed steps and a jumble of old furniture and later store room debris denies entry to the Puddler Poet’s old home.

The last occupant of the house Pat Grady was also a grand uncle of Padraic Conama. As a child Padraic’s father often pointed out the house to him from the road telling him that that was where “the great poet and writer” was born.

John Flynn recalled “We used to go next door and play in it when we were young. The roof on the two storey part of the house was intact and we were able to go in and out of the rooms and up the stairs. The stairs was still in good condition.”

“The upper floor of the extension was just one big room but it was divided into two bedrooms by a partition. The partition didn’t go right up to the ceiling so you could almost look in over it. The new part of the house had a ground floor kitchen with a fireplace”

Tom Flynn remembers when his father rented the old McGovern home in the 1960s and 1970s and used it as a workshop. “We were in and out of it lots of time”, he said.

The long, low, thatched early 1800s farmhouse (the original Govern homestead) appears to have been a relatively substantial building measuring c 40 feet by c 23 feet. It would have had a kitchen, a “good room” or parlour and two or three bedrooms. Its front door and windows are now broken down; the walls are covered with ivy, trees grow inside what was once the kitchen or parlour where the “storytelling” fireplace is located. Both houses have been used as storehouses in recent years. They stand on a “yard” which also includes a series of substantial stone built farm building.



The old McGovern later O’Grady homestead and farm are now owned by Matt Flanagan (left). The building was used in recent years as a storehouse.

The house is located on a gentle S-bend on the narrow, once cart-track, road leading through Castlefield “village” or townland; it is sheltered by old sycamore and ash trees and a single holly tree which would have been very valued in ancient times. John Flynn’s wife Mary admits that she still returns to Castlefield to strip some “berry holly” from the old McGovern tree to decorate her own home each Christmas.

Castlefield, approached by a narrow country road, is located in the rolling upland countryside of North Galway and runs up to the country boundary with Roscommon. It’s at the northern end of a parish of small farms and the homes of commuting workers who travel to work in nearby towns. Although Castlefield is signposted Pairc an Chaislean older versions of the name were written as Corr na gCaiseal (which would translate as the “round hill of the castle”) and Corn a gCaisiol which the antiquarian John O’Donovan translated in the 1830s as the “round hill of the stone forts”. Today there are no traces of either a castle or stone forts in the area

Today the McGovern home at Castlefield shares the fate of that of the family’s former landlord Sir Thomas John Burke, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet (1813-1875), of Marble Hill. The once great Marble Hill mansion with its marbled halls, ornate reception rooms, rich furnishings and art collection, approached by winding carriageways, set in gracious lawns is a ruinous shell. As with Castlefield, Marble Hill, has gaping windows, broken down doors, mantling ivy and vigorous trees growing around and through crumbling walls



It was burned to the ground by Irish volunteers at the height of the Black and Tan war on the night of June 13<sup>th</sup> 1921.

Local tradition has it that a member of the Burke family insulted a local priest during the celebration of Mass and the priest cursed the family. When the house was set on fire only its private chapel survived. It eventually also fell into ruin. In the 1942 the gates from one of the houses’ many gate lodges was removed and installed at the entrance to the parish church in Ballinakill by the then parish priest, Fr. Larkin.





Visiting the old homestead recently, Michael McGovern's great grand-nephew Padraic Conama, drew attention to the tiny cut stone fireplace nook, into which two very old glass bottles had been tucked; to the interconnecting door between the old and new houses and traces of the turquoise colour wall paint which still survives and to the ornate, once glass bead decorated, hall porch-way of the new house.

170 years ago the young Michael Govern was born in this house. Here in one of these rooms he would, like any young boy of his time, have dreamed of and wondered where life's journey would take his restless feet. We have no idea of how he planned that future or what his feelings were. But one of his poems, "The Vision of Young Contentment" written many years later (almost certainly in Youngstown) offers, initially, a dreamlike re-imagining of what might have floated in and out of his head at night in Castlefield as looked through the tiny window in his bedroom, gazed at the stars and thought, as young boys do, about the days and months and years that lay ahead.



### THE VISION OF YOUNG CONTENTMENT.

THE VISION OF YOUNG CONTENTMENT.

While young contentment sleeping lay  
 And dreamed the dreams of childhood.  
 His youthful fancies roamed away  
 Through Future's distant wildwood,  
 Where far beyond the dreamy haze  
 He saw with keen precision  
 Ambition's heights in glory blaze  
 Which beautified the vision

And up the narrow paths that led  
 "Toward the phantom mountains.  
 Where down from gold or diamond bed  
 Flowed nectared rills and fountains,  
 He noticed hosts of struggling forms.  
 Some young, some old and hoary.  
 Press on despite opposing storms  
 To gain the heights of glory.

But if the young Michael Govern, as he would have been then called, was dreaming of distant "wild woods" to be traversed, mountains to be scaled, and future gilded glories to be gained... the poem in a spinning moment lowers its trumpet, sheaths its sabre, furls its battle flag as a distant tocsin bell reverberates across the "phantom" landscape. The poet turns philosopher, alchemist; the future is assayed, weighed, evaluated. And the Old McGovern, positing himself as the Young Govern, shares with us a glimpse of his "Summa Philosophica, his "Alchemy of Happiness". Creating a moment Robert Frost would echo 20 perhaps 30 years later in 1920, Michael McGovern is telling us which of those "two roads diverging in a yellow wood" he took; where he believed he had found his "narrow path". It's a poem rooted in childhood days in Castlefield, Ireland and transmuting time and tide eventually washing up on America's shore and reaching Youngstown, Ohio.

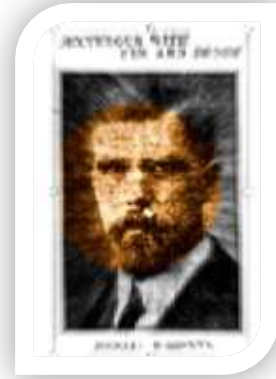


## "A LAND OF WEALTH AND FAME AND ROSES"

In posing the question: "Who was Michael McGovern?" this poem

### THE VISION OF YOUNG CONTENTMENT.

in particular suggests early answers to that very question - in Michael McGovern's own voice. And, it proffers interesting insights (and sun sights) into universal mankind's rites of passage. In the distinctive rolling verse born in the rolling mills of Pennsylvania and Ohio, the "Puddler Poet" charts the questing voyages of others he has observed and reveals to us the star and compass by which he has navigated his own passage.



- Some would walk the paths of love  
That shone like peaceful rivers.
- Some would chose to climb their way to fame  
On rounds of rhythmic volumes
- While others would their worth proclaim  
By leading martial columns.

Yet many a wandering, eager band  
Would never reached that "promise land"  
Of wealth and fame and roses.  
For every glittering, golden hill  
Which lured them to persistence.  
Deceived them by retreating still  
Into the gloomy distance.

As the poem progresses the Narrator tells us he has seen *"the old with youth's impulse swell many a marching legion; contemning (scorning) failure's sad results which seemed to guard that region."* But he has also seen many an old warrior eventually *"fall upon his staff, a prey to keen contrition; for wasting life in hopes to quaff of the honeyed fount, ambition."*



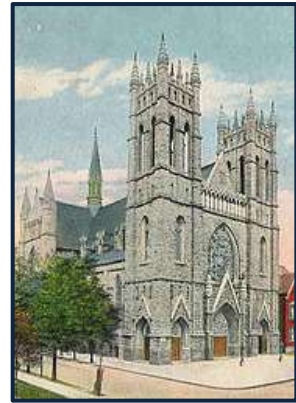
And when he woke he thought how vain  
To chase such fleeing treasures,  
'Twere as if parched lips would drain  
Sweet draughts from empty measures;  
And o'er the rural paths beside  
Contentment's humble fountains

He always paused if Wisdom's eyes  
In vain pursuits had found him,  
Till Reason, with its council wise  
Diffused its spells around him  
And though he saw some proudly win,  
He harbored no resentment;  
He found sufficient fame within  
The valley of contentment

**“THE INEXHAUSTIBLE RICHNESS OF THE IRISH NATURE”**

Despite the pride Michael McGovern’s Irish relations have in his successes and triumphs in America, there don’t appear to be any Irish newspaper articles, local or national, on “The Puddler Poet or reviews of his poetry collection “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems”.

But in Youngstown (right) Michael McGovern is remembered with pride by his descendants and his life is chronicled in many newspaper articles. He is remembered for his writing, his poetry, his campaigning for working men and women; he is also remembered for what he himself described as his “philosophical meanderings” articles in local newspapers where every day civic and political debates and decisions were weighed (and often found wanting) against the axioms of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and even Marcus Aurelius.



**Youngstown Vindicator**  
 Famous poet writes of steel mills in the valley

**Poet McGovern  
 Immortalized  
 Valley’s Mills**

Narrative poems dealing with Irish legends or incidents in American history, ballads and lyrics, all flowed from Mr. McGovern’s facile pen. He saw more in life than most men; he felt deeply, and he was never so happy as when pouring out his mind and soul. He was a master of smooth, melodious verse; there was nothing stilted or forced in it, and he left one with the feeling that he always had more to say than he put into words.

Artist and philosopher, sensitive and understanding lover of his fellow men, Michael McGovern will live in his writings and in the history of his home town.

**McGovern’s Poems Reveal  
 Kindly Philosophy of Life**  
 Kept Manuscripts of All Verses, Neatly Bound in Desk—Wrote Epigrams

Mr. McGovern made no pretense of education, but he was well-read. His bookcases at home are filled with good books. Although he wrote a little poem to former Mayor Joseph I. Hefernan, explaining he was not familiar with Virgil or Homer, his writings show an acquaintance with Dante, Shakespeare and less widely read authors, such as Schiller,

“The Vindicator” tells us that *“he was soft spoken, gentle, whimsical. That he quarrelled only with injustice and oppression”*. It goes on: *“In the labor verse for which he is best known he struck out unmercifully against unjust employers and selfish bosses. A large part of his verse, voice his indignation against the unfair treatment of workers”*.

The same profile of the “Poet of the Mills” tells us that there were hundreds of these verses and *that “wherever old time puddlers gather they talk of Michael McGovern The Puddler Poet whose poems were an inspiration to workers in the iron mills of the Mahoning Valley”* Another article tells us that Michael McGovern was “The Vindicator’s” oldest contributor who began submitting poems and long before the turns of the century (before 1900). *“Mr McGovern possessed true poetic feeling. He saw poetry all around him and could not, if had tried, refrain from putting the everyday life of his friends and the city into verse”*.

*“Other contributors came and went but he exemplified the inexhaustible richness of the Irish nature”... “He saw more in life than most men; he felt deeply, and he was never so happy as when pouring out his mind and soul... Artist and philosopher, sensitive and understanding lover of his fellow men, Michael McGovern will live in his writings and in the history of his home town”*.



In January 2017 Youngstown’s literary and arts society, “Lit Youngstown” hosted an event to remind the city of the importance of Michael McGovern as a poet and writer. *“Despite the first blast of winter”*, Bill Lawson, Executive Director of the Mahoning Valley Historical Society, *“filled the house as he reminded his audience of the style and popularity of McGovern’s poems.”* At almost exactly the same time in Williamstown, County Galway, Leo and Eileen Finnegan were telling the local Heritage Society that the village’s “famous poet” Michael McGovern was being “celebrated” in Youngstown, Ohio. Long forgotten in his birthplace; now remembered by no more than two or three people, it was time to undertake new research into his life and times in Ireland.



The “Lit Youngstown” Facebook Page proffered the kind of invitation “The Puddler” McGovern’s people, back in the day, would have called from the kitchen door to everybody and anybody passing the way. *“Come in out of the cold, let you – until, I tell you...”*

It simply said: “Come in out of the cold to hear about our poetry ancestor. Executive Director of the Mahoning Valley Historical Centre, Bill Lawson talks about “The Puddler Poet”, a famous Youngstown steelworker. Michael McGovern, Irish immigrant and ancestor of singer Maureen McGovern had a national following. Writing has a long history in this town”.



And so days later, Bill Lawson did what the old “Puddler”, himself, did on many similar occasions in Youngstown and elsewhere. He held an audience spellbound through a night in the grip of that *“first blast of winter weather”*.

Bill Lawson summoned up Michael McGovern *“the steelworker who created art, literature and music in Youngstown the city where he spent roughly half of his life; the quiet, modest family man whose inner feelings, opinions and experiences exploded outward in his poetry”*.

- **c. 1847/1848:** Michael McGovern emerges as the Irish emigrant/immigrant; farmer and failed shoemaker, who made his way to England in the mid-1860s; worked in its iron mills, married Anne Elizabeth Murphy in (Sheffield) in 1872 but is lured by the prospects of better opportunities in America.
- **c. 1881:** Michael McGovern decides to take his iron working “puddling” skills to the steel valleys of Pennsylvania and Ohio; settles in Allentown, Bucks County, PA and finds work in an iron mill there and bringing his young family over from England as soon as he has found a job and a home, c. 1882.
- **1881-1890:** In Allentown, McGovern (who had seen militant trade unionism unleashed with all its uncompromising ferocity in England factories and mills) becomes engaged in the labor movement in Pennsylvania and finds his voice as a “song poet” of the working class, In 1890 he is elected Secretary of the Ferndale Local of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers .
- **C 1891:** Michael and his family move to Youngstown; finds work as a puddler at the “Siberia Mill” of Cartwright & McCurdy Company, located between Lansingville and Haselton. By now Youngstown is one of the most prosperous centers of iron manufacturing in the U.S.; at one point in the 1880’s, Youngstown’s average per capita income was highest in the country.

In Youngstown, which had now become his hometown (1891-1933), McGovern continues to work as a “puddler” but also begins to have articles and poems published regularly in its two daily newspapers “The Youngstown Vindicator” and “The Youngstown Telegram” and also writes for cultural and labor periodicals including the “Gaelic American” and “The Amalgamated Journal” . The poems and song poems they publish soon gather “The Puddler” McGovern *“a large following of local iron and steelworkers, and thousands more throughout the country”*



**1899** sees the publication of Michael McGovern’s “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” by the Youngstown Vindicator Press. It’s an important milestone in the life of Michael McGovern.



## BLACKENED AND THUMBED TO TATTERS POEMS

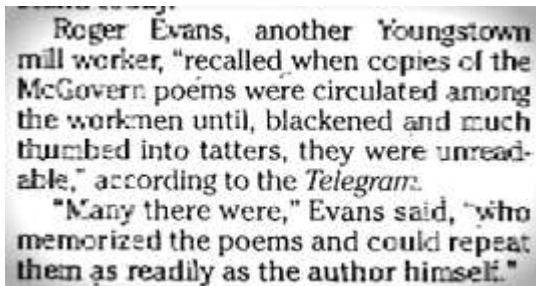
By 1891, Michael McGovern's now "hometown", Youngstown, had experienced "a tremendous population increase" - set as it was at the centre of the United States' massively expanding iron and steel industry. It had become "a city where some people had greatly benefitted from the growth of the iron & steel industry while others struggled against limited and substandard housing, disease and limited mobility".

In 1880 its population was 15,435; by 1890 it had reached 33,220 and by 1900 this had grown to 44,885. Bill Lawson now sets about his task "of placing some historical context on Michael McGovern's life, work and feelings and examining the influences that shaped his prolific poetry".

By 1880, more than half of Youngstown's population was foreign-born; the average age was 21 years old. Michael McGovern would have been c. 44 years of age when he settled in Youngstown. His work as a "puddler" was "hard, heavy and dangerous". The lifespan of puddlers and helpers after Civil War was less than 40 years. The hours were long. Puddlers worked 12-13 hour days, six days a week. And the wages were low. The work involved purifying cast or pig iron into wrought iron by working and boiling out impurities in puddling furnaces.



It was while working in the rolling mills that McGovern found inspiration for his poetry capturing in it all of the raw tensions and emotions running between workers and bosses; between labor and management, this played out against a backdrop of the politics and the religious attitudes of the day. "This is where his stand out work was forged", Bill Lawson told his audience, "rooted in his identity with working people and his mistrust of management, politicians and other leaders".



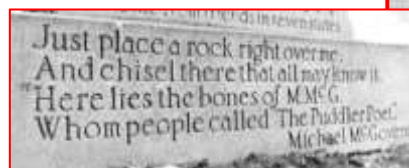
Having worked as a "puddler" and emerged as the "puddler poet" of his generation, Michael McGovern found himself being promoted to the post of Inspector in the Mills but walked away from the iron & steel industry during a strike. He later worked as a State of Ohio Oil Inspector and foreman in the Youngstown Street Department.

He was retired by 1930 and was working on a second book of poetry (which was never published) when he died of a heart attack on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1933. He was 84 years of age. His funeral Mass was at St Columba's Church and was buried in Calvary Cemetery. Four years later in 1937 a group of friends founded the Michael McGovern Memorial Association to raise money for a fitting stone grave marker.

The engraving on the headstone prompted by Michael himself read:

"Just place a rock right over me,  
And chisel there that all may know it.  
'Here lies the bones of M. McG,  
Whom people called the Puddler Poet.'"

--Michael McGovern





## PUDDLER, POET AND PHILOSOPHER

Michael McGovern “wrote” his own story, the story of his life, in the clangor of rolling mills, on the reverberating platforms of union rallies and wherever working men were gathered. As he shaped that story, and was shaped by it, he shared it with us in hundreds, maybe thousands, of newspaper articles; a stream of poetic commentary and columns of published letters.

When he selected 150 or so of his poems for inclusion in his first and only published poetry collection “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” (1899) we must assume he saw them as representing the main stands of his life; his poetic and philosophical expression of that life, his “voice” and what he wanted that voice to tell us. For the most part it’s a clear, full throated voice; however at times it can appear to speak different languages to and on the same subject.



The first fifty or so of the poems in “Labor Lyrics” are axed on the struggle between capital and labour; between exploitative industrial tycoons and exploited working men. They bristle with indignation and invective.

### THE BOSS WHO WOULD NOT SIGN THE SCALE.

“Ye Gods! what daring move is this?  
What treason vitiates the air?  
That those whom I considered serfs  
To my dictatorship should dare

“We’re scorned since the bosses came  
With glasses, rings and collars,  
Who hold their men and mules the same,  
For what they’re worth in dollars;

And, yet, in what initially appears to be an early contradiction of this ringing denunciation of mill bosses, “The Puddler Poet” says in the very first poem of the collection “The Rolling Mill” that he “loves the mill” – the steel mill where he spent most of his back-breaking working life.

**“I always love to hear—  
The thunder of the mill.  
The god of cheer, both night and day  
Unto the mill belongs;  
With him we flirt the hours away  
’Midst paddles, hooks and tongs;  
With him in capital’s employ  
We millmen e’er fulfil  
Our tasks amidst the hum of joy—  
The buzzing of the mill”.**

Oh, every valve beneath control  
Of man’s progressive skill  
Unlocks the music of my soul—  
The puffing of the mill.

It’s perhaps in the last line of that poem that he explains that contradiction. “*The puffing of the rolling mill unlocks,*” he says, “*the music of my soul*”. As he tells us in the introduction to the collection (which he calls a “curiosity”) “*the poems are the product of a puddler of thirty three years standing in the rolling mills and if their radical tenor hurts the feelings of those who get their living through less physical exercise and the loss of less sweat than a puddler they had better enter the rolling mills or other industry and to hear labor’s complaint.*”



Michael McGovern’s became by public acclaim “The Puddler Poet”; it was a soubriquet he appeared happy to accept, eventually directing that it be carved on his headstone. On occasions he also signed his newspaper columns Michael McGovern – “The Philosophical Puddler”. One has to look no further than this very first poem, in the anthology, to see how he sets out to justify this claim and how he uses a relatively obscure but very erudite classical reference to explain how one of the greatest critics of the tyranny of the rolling mills could sing in praise of what they released in his soul.



## ARISTIPPUS OF THE ROLLING MILLS

The young Michael McGovern, the farmhand who might have become a shoemaker, left Ireland with no formal education but with perhaps (by an accident of history) a smattering of Latin and classical history, which shall be explained later.

It is clear however that as he grew towards “man’s station in life” perhaps in England and certainly in America he – through self-education – developed a deep interest in literature; in the classics, in classical thought and philosophy. Many of his poems are spangled with classical allusions referencing the domains and the deities of mythological times and jousting with Greek and Roman philosophical thought.

**Aristippus of Cyrene** (435-356 BC) was a hedonistic Greek philosopher, a pupil of Socrates and the founder of the Cyrenaic school of Philosophy.

“The Puddler Poet” introduces his readers to Aristippus in the “The Rolling Mill” that first poem in his “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems”. This is the poem in which he celebrate the *“thunder of the mill - that has unlocked the music of my soul”*; this despite his lifelong denunciation of the harshness of life in these same mills. In this moment, however, he seems to absolve the mill owners and laud America’s industrial prowess and growth.

Away with voice Cyrenic though  
 With music’s flood it swells;  
 My choicest sounds of sweetness flow  
 From where industry dwells;

Aristippus was born in Cyrene, Libya (“The Athens of Africa”) c. 435BC. He travelled to Greece to see the Olympic Games; became a pupil of Socrates but eventually differed with him philosophically, mainly because Socrates would never accept payment for his teaching while Aristippus did. At the heart of Aristippus’s philosophy was *“the goal of life is to seek pleasure by adapting circumstances to oneself and by maintaining proper control over both adversity and prosperity”*

A saying of Aristippus that became famous in ancient times was:  
 ’εχω ’αλλ’ ’ουχ ’εχομαι - *“I possess, but I am not possessed”*

And so perhaps we can see why Michael McGovern placed the poem “The Rolling Mill”, with it reference to Aristippus and his Cyrenaic school of philosophy, right at the beginning of his “Labor Lyrics” collection. Clearly he was signaling that however dehumanizing and heartless life in the mills was he was not allowing his soul to be “possessed” or crushed by it; that it could soar beyond it and find a singing beauty worth celebrating in its hadean netherworld.



Just before he died in 1933 Michael McGovern was working on a second collection; it was never published. It would be particularly interesting to see if the later poems spoke with the same or a different voice. And there are many hundreds of more poems which were published in newspapers like “The Youngstown Vindicator”. The collection was in the possession of his grandson William McGuire in 1992. He told the “Vindicator” that the poems in McGovern’s own handwriting were all carefully filed but were in a very brittle condition”. He said he might do something with them someday – hinting that he might try to have them published.

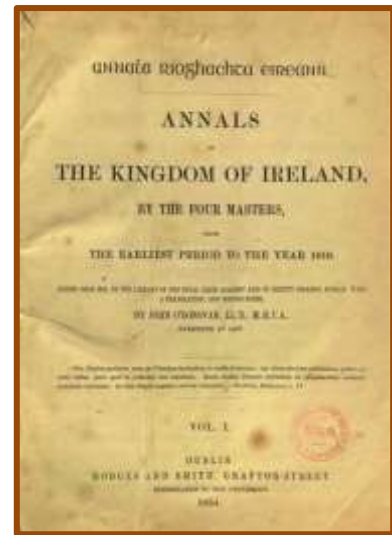
In his interview William McGuire said that *“McGovern was a man with little formal education but was a prodigious writer. He was just born with that talent. I think his education would have been about five or six years. [McGovern himself says months] He was a great reader. He read the encyclopedia”*.

Many of the hundreds of “newspaper” poems McGovern penned have rawness and an assertiveness you don’t find in “Labor Lyrics” – especially those relating to Ireland. In his published collection his “Irish verses” have a nostalgic tone more engaged with ancient epic struggles than contemporary events- but the “newspaper poems” in “The Vindicator” written between 1916 and 1921 are a visceral condemnation of 800 years of Norman/English rule in Ireland based on deep historical knowledge which he must have taken with him from the fireside at Castlefield in County Galway.

## REMEMBERING MULLAGHMAST 1577

The poems Michael McGovern wrote in support of the striking and locked out workers at the Carnegie Steel Mills in Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892; their struggle for union recognition and for an end to exploitation defined him as one of most acclaimed workingmen's poets of his time.

What he wrote almost 30 years later in the 1920s shows that he had the same burning zeal when it came to the struggle for Irish freedom and displayed a profound knowledge of Irish history. In one of his poems "Why Ireland Now Distrusts England" he drew on two obscure, genocidal chapters in Irish history to vent his anger on the old enemy – England; the so called "Hardly one in a thousand in Ireland today would know of either of these two atrocities. But in 1921, as Ireland was engaged in delicate treaty negotiations with England at the end of its War of Independence (1919-1921), Michael McGovern used them to powerful effect to warn the Irish delegation that it was in danger once more of being "treacherously betrayed and tricked" by **Betrayal of Clanaboy** (1574) and "**The Massacre of Mullaghmast**" (1577). England. Clanaboy and Mullaghmast were stories he had undoubtedly heard at the fireside in Castlefield, Williamstown, 60 years earlier; stories of betrayals that had happened 300 years before he was born.



In 1574 historic O'Neill Clan, of Clannaboy (an area surrounding current day Belfast) was slaughtered- in what was described as an unparralled act of treachery - by Walter Devereaux, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Essex. Sir Brian O'Neill had invited the Earl to a three day Christmas feast at his castle near Belfast as a peace gesture but during that feast the Earl's troops seized Sir Brian, his wife and brother in law and forced them to watch helplessly as they slaughtered between 200 and 500 O'Neill men, women and children. Sir Brian and his family were then taken to Dublin where they were hanged, drawn and quartered.

The Annals of the Four Masters recorded for 1577: "*That monstrous massacre and detestable and treacherous misdeed was a sufficient cause of abomination to disgust the Irish people.*"

Three years later in 1577, Sir Francis Cosby, commander of Queen Elizabeth I's troops in Counties Laois and Offaly (then Queen's County & King's County), invited all of the Gaelic Irish chieftains of the area -the O'Moores, O'Kellys, O'Nolans, O'Dorans, O'Dowlings, Lalors and others- to a "great banquet" at the fort of Mullaghmast, in County Kildare. The feast was to be a test of the willingness of the native clans to live in peace with new English settlers. But it turned out to be yet another trap that ended in great slaughter. Cosby's men slaughtered somewhere between 100 and 400 "of the leading men of the two counties; some put to the sword, others burned at the stake".

Mullaghmast became a by-word in Irish history for betrayal and treachery and is recalled in the poetry of the period.

"At the feast, unarmed all,  
Priest, bard, and chieftain fall  
In the treacherous Saxon's hall,  
O'er the bright wine bowl".

The massacre gave rise to the rallying cry that would reverberate down the years — "*Remember Mullaghmast!*" Clearly Michael McGovern had not forgotten either Clanaboy or Mullaghmast.



## THE SONS OF SAMHRADHAIN – BRIGHT AND NOBLE

How Michael McGovern, The Puddler Poet's, family came to be living in Williamstown, in Co. Galway, hasn't yet been established but it is likely that they arrived there sometime in the 1700s after being evicted from their ancestral lands in County Cavan. The name McGovern, *Mag Samhradháin* (the Son of Samhradhán), is derived from the name of a 10<sup>th</sup> century Gaelic chieftain whose ancestral lands were centred on Tullylaw and Ballymagauan in Co. Cavan. Samhradhán is described by poet historian, Giolla Padraig mac Naimhin (1290-1298) in the Book of Magauran, as "*bright and noble*".

Like many of the old Gaelic families they were evicted from their land during the Ulster Plantation (1609-1690) and were given the option of "Going to Hell or to Connacht" by Oliver Cromwell and the new Scottish and English settlers. These 17<sup>th</sup> century refugees became known as "*The Ultachs*" (The Ulster People) settling in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Some were able to rent small pieces of land from the predominantly Protestant, but sometime Catholic, landowners – men like Sir Thomas John Burke.

Others brought a wide range of skills including flax growing and linen manufacturing creating jobs for themselves in spinning, weaving and tailoring including gown and hat making. Michael McGovern's ancestors were likely to have been among those migrant- refugees arriving in North Galway sometime in the 1700s.

A snapshot of where Govern and McGovern families were living in Ireland in the early 1800s emerges from a nationwide survey which was carried out between 1823 and 1837 as part of a plan to impose a controversial new tax or "tithe" on all landowners to pay Protestant clergymen. Understandably there was fierce opposition to the tithes from Catholics who already had to pay for the upkeep of their own clergy but the Tithe Applotment Books are now a hugely important record as they list all of the families who owned or were tenants of an acre of land or more in every parish in Ireland in the early 1800s. These records are particularly important as almost all of Ireland's early census records were lost when the Four Courts Building, in Dublin, where they were stored, was destroyed during the Civil War of 1922-1923. However it has to be stressed that the records, valuable as they are, only list farming or land owning families and not those employed in business, trades or professions.

TOWNSHIP	NAME OF OCCUPIER	Quantity of Acres	Malt	Tithable Quantity of Potatoes	Tithable Quantity of Barley	Tithable Quantity of Oats	Total Tithable Acres
...	Govern	...	...	...	...	...	...

The Tithe Applotment books tell us that in the 1820s and 1830s (counting land occupying families only) that there were just:

**57 McGovern families**

and

**12 Govern families** in Ireland scattered across the country from Cavan/Monaghan to Wexford.

The **57 McGovern**s were to be found in Down, Cavan, Monaghan, Longford, Meath, Westmeath, Kildare, Wexford, Cork, Mayo (2 families) Roscommon (1) and Clare.

There were no **McGoverns in Co. Galway**.

The **12 Govern** families were in **Galway (2)**, Roscommon (2), Westmeath, Meath and Louth.

\* In Co. Galway, **Bridget Govern** was the tenant of a ½ acre "farm" in **Aughrim** in 1826.

\* In 1837, **John Govern** was one of 12 tenants on a 155 acre farm in **Kilconnell**.

\* In Co. Roscommon **Patrick Govern** had 2 acres in Cloonbilla (**Kilkeevin**) in 1832 and

\* **T & P Govern** had 8 acres at Ballymacurley (**Cloonygormian**) in 1833.

This "tithing" census doesn't record a Govern family in Williamstown at this period but there could have been as only those who had an acre of land or some form of additional income or wealth were registered for the new tax. And there was another reason for not being included. In many instances only the name of the principal tenant was recorded and other neighbours, relations or family friends to whom land was sub-let by the principal registered tenant were not individually named but were included by the phrase "& Co". – meaning "and Company".

While there was no Govern family at Castlefield, Williamstown, in the 1820s there was a Flynn family. **John Flynn & Co.** were tenants of 60 acres of land in Castlefield. The 60 acres appears to be divided into farms of 9, 14, 22 and 15 acres. We simply have no idea who the other sub tenants were but the possibility that one of them was a Govern cannot be ruled out.

As well as **John Flynn & Co., of Castlefield** there were five other Flynn families living in the immediate vicinity:



9	Castlefield John Flynn	06	9	14	22	15	60
			9	14	22	15	60
			9	14	22	15	60
			9	14	22	15	60
			9	14	22	15	60

- \* **Thady Flynn** with 50 acres was living in South Killgariff.
- \* **Thomas Flynn** (9 acres) in Kilmalag,
- \* **Michael Flynn** (16 acres) in Corralough;
- \* **Michael Flynn** (5 acres) who might be the same man/or a different person at Poulshask and
- \* **Martin Flynn** (3 acres of bog) at Beohough

As there is no record of “The Puddler” poet’s father, John Govern, living in Castlefield in the 1820s it may be that he was one of the unnamed sub tenants on the John Flynn farm or that he may have sometime later have “married into” Castlefield. We know, from family tradition, that he married Bridget Flynn, whose family lived at Moorfield (now called Coarsefield) about a mile from Castlefield. No record of his marriage has yet been located but it is likely to have taken place sometime in the 1840’s – 15 or 20 years after the Tithe census (above) was carried out.



The Flynnns were an old Gaelic family or clan one branch of which was based in the Castlerea area of Co. Roscommon and had close links to the medieval O’Connor, Kings of Connaught. The family name Ó Floinn (from the Irish word “flann” meaning 'reddish' or 'ruddy') appears to have emerged in different parts of the country at different times and been adopted as the surname of various Flynn or O’Flynn families.

The Roscommon Flynnns had extensive ancestral lands (as much as 25,000 acres according to some historians). It was located around current day Ballinlough, Kiltulla, Kilkeevin and across the Galway-Roscommon county boundary in Ballinacill (Williamstown).

Their main castle was built beside Ballinlough; the nearby mountain was called Sliabh O’Flynn (O’Flynn Mountain) and the nearby lake Lake O’Flynn.

Notable among the medieval Flynnns were Giolla na Naomh O’Flynn, Chief of Siol Maolruain (a territory stretching west from Castlerea to Ballinlough and Granlahan) who was “killed in resisting an army from Munster which had invaded Connaught” in 1133; Fiachra Ó Floinn, Chief of Síol Maelruain, “the most hospitable and expert at arms of all the chiefs of Connaught, who formed an alliance with the English by marriage, but was treacherously slain by the son of Richard Finn Burke, Mac William, and Mac Feorais in 1289” and Conor O’Flynn described in the Annals of 1307, “as the best man in all Connaught for making was on the English”.



The O’Flynnns ruled the territory of Síol Maelruain for four centuries but eventually they lost their lands and castle during the wars and confiscations of the 1640s.

It was from this historic old Roscommon family that Bridget Flynn, wife of Michael McGovern; “The Puddler Poet” was descended.



**1856: FIRST RECORD OF THE ANCESTRAL McGOVERN FARM & FARMSTEAD AT CASTLEFIELD, WILLIAMSTOWN**

Two buff and red covered, handwritten registers lodged in the vaults of The Valuation Office of Ireland, in central Dublin, contain the first record of John McGovern, father of Michael McGovern, The Puddler Poet, living at Castlefield (Williamstown). The year is 1856. In 1856, he is recorded as John Govern “the occupier” of a house and 10 acres, 3 roods and 10 perches of land. His name first becomes John McGovern in the 1889 register, 33 years later.

John McGovern’s name is one of over 2 million recorded in the vast collection of ledgers which were the first record of the Primary Valuation of Ireland (1848-1864). Also known as Griffiths Valuation, this nationwide survey (or census) was carried out to levy another tax – this one to pay for the upkeep workhouses and the care of the destitute people in each barony

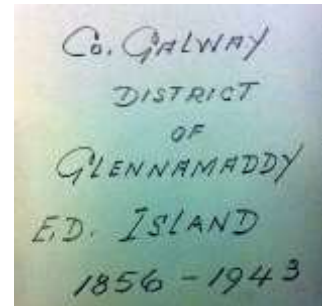
In 1856, John Govern is listed - in this Primary Valuation - as a tenant of Sir Thomas J Burke, Baronet. He is one of 8 “occupiers,” or tenant, living in the townland of Castlefield. His farm is No 2 on the map that accompanies the register.

The others are the mill owner Bernard Breheny (1); Michael Collins (3), Patrick Carly (4), Michael Carly (5), Michael Flynn (6), Thomas Leahy (7) and Bernard Sweeney (8). The entire townland contains 284 acres of which 168 are bog. This is held “in fee” i.e. owned by Sir Thomas J Burke, Bt.

John Govern’s 10 acre holding is one of the smaller on the estate. The house appears to be the smallest in the village from the valuation placed on it. The 10 acre farm is sub-divided into 10 or more smaller plots; some probably being used for tillage, others for grazing.

The house is located on an S bend on the road (its ruins still stand at exactly this point today).

Interestingly there was a lime kiln close to the old dwelling house. Lime kilns were used to burn limestone into a fine powder which was used for “white-wash” painting of houses and farm buildings and for fertilizing lands. The farms in Castlefield vary from 8 to 25 acres.



In this printed volume of the 1856 Valuation details of how much John Govern and his neighbours will have to pay for the upkeep of the poor are set out.

VALUATION OF TENEMENTS.			
PARISH OF TEMPLETOGHER.			
Names.	Description of Tenement.	Area.	Rateable Annual Valuation.

CASTLEFIELD. (Dist. S. 1.)							
1	Bernard Breheny.	Sir Thos. J. Burke, Bt.	Ho. off., corn mill, & ld.	17 2 13	4 15 0	4 0 0	8 15 0
2	John Govern.	Same.	House and land.	10 3 10	3 15 0	0 10 0	4 5 0
3	Michael Collins.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	11 3 35	4 0 0	0 15 0	4 15 0
4	Patrick Carly.	Same.	House, office, and land.	10 1 18	3 10 0	1 0 0	4 10 0
5	Michael Carly.	Same.	House, office, and land.	25 1 19	7 5 0	1 0 0	8 5 0
6	Michael Flynn.	Same.	House, office, and land.	8 2 11	2 8 0	0 12 0	3 0 0
7	Thomas Leahy.	Same.	House, offices, & land.	14 3 5	3 15 0	0 17 0	4 10 0
8	Bernard Sweeney.	Same.	Land.	16 3 24	2 10 0	—	2 10 0
9	Sir Thos. J. Burke, Bt.	In fee.	Bog.	168 2 3	1 10 0	—	1 10 0
			Total.	284 3 18	53 0 0	8 14 0	42 0 0

The changes in the “occupants” or tenants of the old 10 acre McGovern homestead [Farm No 2], between 1856 and the present day are traced in the Valuation Office registers in successive books in handwritten amendments. The dates are recorded in different colour inks- red, green, blue, etc. The map on the right gives a sense of the elongated shape of the “farm” and the extent to which it was divided into smaller fields or paddocks. The location of the family’s lime kiln is also clearly indicated.



In 1856, when the first survey was taken, John Govern was the “occupier” of Farm No 2 at Castlefield.

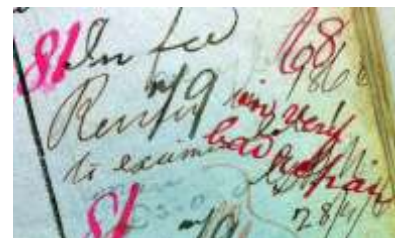


**In 1861**, when the first revision of the register was carried out, **John Govern** was still the “occupier” of Farm No 2 but three years later **in 1864** his son in law **John Grady**, was registered as the new “occupier”. John Grady, from the nearby Dereenteigue in Co. Roscommon, had married John Govern’s daughter **Catherine Govern**, the “Puddler Poet” Michael McGovern’s sister. They appear to have married (although no record has yet been found) in 1861/62; the first of their six children, Mary Anne, was born in 1863. John Govern is clearly still living in the house but John Grady has now taken over the running of the farm. Michael “The Puddler” had either left Castlefield or was about to leave. The “handing over” of the farm to John Grady is set out in the entry for 1864.

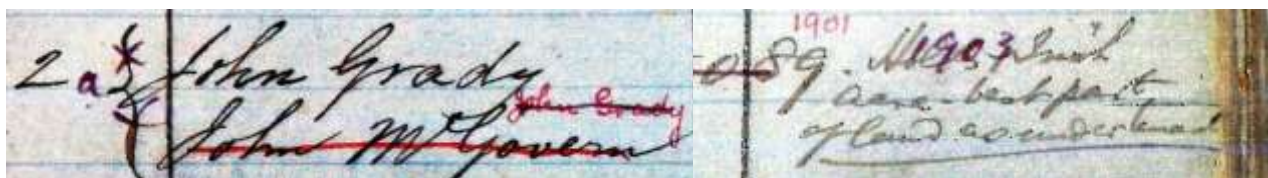


The name of the 1856 tenant, John Govern, is over-written in red ink and the year '64 in an adjoining column shows when the re-registration took place. The same page shows that Thomas Flynn took over Farm 4 at Castlefield from Michael Flynn in 1863.

**In 1868/81** when there are further changes of tenancies in Castlefield, John Grady continues to be the “tenant” of Farm No 2. The only noticeable change in the area, as recorded in marginal notes on the register, is that the village’s Cornmill is described as being “in very bad repair”. The mill is owned at the time by Bernard Breheny. As a result of an inspection of the mill its rateable valuation is almost halved from £4 to £2-10/-



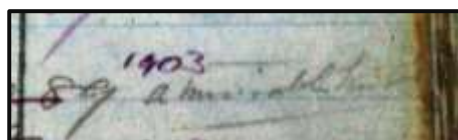
**In 1889** there are several interesting developments in the McGovern/Grady household in Castlefield. The first sees John Govern, “The Puddler Poet’s” father become John McGovern. He is still living in Castlefield with his daughter Catherine and her husband John Grady who had taken over the tenancy of the family farm there in 1864. They now have six children (born between 1863 and 1876)



Among the entries for 1889, the most interesting is that while John Grady is the principal tenant of the family farm, his father-in-law John (now) McGovern has re-emerged as a “sub tenant” on the farm. The register says John McGovern (now) “holds 3 Irish acres, the best part of the land, as under-tenant”. Why this would have happened we have no idea. Perhaps John McGovern was re-asserting his position within the household.

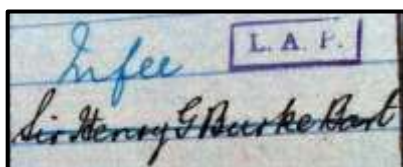
## 1889 “A MISERABLE HOUSE”

The 1889 revision of the Valuation Books gives us another very valuable insight into life in the McGovern/Grady household at Castlefield in that year. In addition to the return of John McGovern to a position of some authority within the family, we learn that the old family home – a long low thatched farmhouse dating from pre-Famine times – was in a state of serious dilapidation. The entry in the register is stark. The inspector, who arrived in Williamstown to carry out an assessment of the value of farms and houses there, had this to say about the McGovern/Grady home: “A miserable house”.



The pencilled note is faded and almost illegible. As a result of that inspection, however, the rateable valuation of the house was slashed from 10 shillings to 5 shillings. It was obvious to the Government official that the family was living in what at the time was a very poor house. It isn't clear how many people were living in the house at the time; by 1889 it is likely that some of the older Grady children (3 would have been in their 20s by then) would have left home. Catherine Grady died on January 10<sup>th</sup> 1900 at the age of 60.

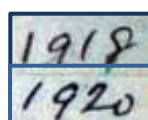
**1903:** The next entry in the register tells us that the “new” landlord, Sir Henry James Burke, who has succeeded to the title and the vast Burke estates across County Galway, previously held by Sir Thomas Burke, had leased a further 7 acres of land to John Grady. He now had 17 acres of land.



**1907:** By 1907 the days of landlordism in Castlefield had come to an end for good. The Irish Land Commission had been set up 1881 to carry out the mammoth task of “buying out” the great landlords who owned most of the country for the previous 300 years. The days of Sir Henry G Burke, Bart., of Marble Hill, ended in 1907 when the Land Commission acquired his vast estate and began dividing it among hundreds of tenant farmers. The end of an era of oppressive landlordism symbolised here with a single line in light blue ink being drawn across Sir Henry name in the Valuation Register. His estate had been acquired under L.A.P., Land Act Purchase. All of his former tenants were given additional land by the Land Commission. In 1907 John Grady got an extra 6 acres increasing his “own” farm to 23 acres. John died on May 11<sup>th</sup> 1907, aged c. 75. In 1907, The McGovern/Grady house still appears to be in poor condition. Its rateable valuation is just 5 shillings; the valuation of other houses in the village range from 10 to 17 shillings.



**1918-1920:** Brought further changes to Castlefield. Patrick Grady, John Grady's second eldest son, becomes the new owner of the old McGovern farm and home. The register shows the transfer of ownership taking place in 1920. It's likely that he “took over” the farm on his father's death in 1907 but the change of ownership wasn't recorded until the next review in 1920. Next door on Farm No3 there are changes too. Previously owned by John Collins it is now acquired by Thomas Flynn, whose aunt Bridget Flynn, of Coarsefield, was Michael McGovern's mother. Tom had emigrated to the U.S. worked in the Klondike gold mines and served as a marine in the US Army before returning home (about 1913, according to Flynn family tradition) to buy the old Collins farm next door to where his cousin Michael McGovern “The Puddler Poet” was born.



Thomas Flynn is registered as the new owner of Farm No 3 at Castlefield in 1918. Patrick Grady, who has taken over Farm No 2 at Castlefield from his late father John, is registered as its new owner in 1920. Both farms are now 23 acres.

With the death of Patrick Grady and his wife Mary (Kelly); the old McGovern farm and home becomes the property Thomas Flanagan (Galway City), Martin Flanagan (no relation) and eventually passed to his son Matt Flanagan, the present owner who now farms the land and has been extremely supportive of the efforts to discover more about Michael McGovern's time at Castlefield and his life in England and the United States after he decided that his future didn't lie in either shoemaking or farming.



## McGOVERN-GRADY-FLYNN-CONAMA-FLANAGAN

Leo Finnegan (chairman) and Eileen Finnegan, of the Williamstown Heritage Society are currently carrying out intensive research to try to establish when John Govern, the “Puddler’s” father, first arrived in Castlefield and where he originally came from. They are working with his great grandnephew Padaic Conama (right) and his 3<sup>rd</sup> cousins John and Tom Flynn to try to piece together the journey that brought him there and how he met and married Bridget Flynn shortly before the Great Famine changed Irish history forever.



**John and Tom Flynn** can trace their family tree to the 1840s and believes their great great grandfather **William (Billy) Flynn** was a **brother of the Bridget Flynn** who was **Michael McGovern’s mother**.

John & Tom’s great grandfather, William (**Billy**) **Flynn**, lived at Coarsefield in the early to mid-1800s. He was married to Mary Keane, Moorfield/Coarsefield. Their son, **Tom Flynn, Snr.** (later to become Sgt Major Flynn, U.S. Marine who fought in both the “Boxer War” in China and in the American-Philippines War, was born in Moorfield in 1868.. He emigrated to the United States, first working in the Yukon Gold Mines and later moving to Florida where he joined the U.S. marine corp. He returned to Ireland c.1913 and bought the old Collins Farm at Castlefield. The “returned Yank”, Tom Flynn, Snr., married Nora Connor. Their son **Tom Flynn Jnr.**, was born c 1918 and lived at Castlefield. He married Delia Keaveney. Their sons **John Tom & Liam** and daughter **Mary** also grew up in Castlefield) inherited the farm. They are now among of the closest relatives of “The Puddler Poet” living in Ireland.



This map dating from 1856 shows the locations of:

- 1 The old Brehony Farm and Mill
- 2 The Govern Farm and Home
- 3 The Collins, later, the Flynn Farm and Home

\* The Brehony Mill was a place which the young Michael McGovern would have been very familiar with and is referred to in one of his more evocative lyrical poems “The Cricket”. The ruins of the mill are still standing.

\* The Govern Farm, “owned” (as a tenant) by “The Puddler’s” father, John Govern, in 1856 was inherited by his daughter Catherine who married John Grady of Dereenteigue, Co.

Roscommon. He would be described in Ireland as “marrying into the place”. Local historians Leo and Eileen Finnegan believe this happened because any brothers Catherine had – so far we know of only two Michael and James – had decided that farming wasn’t for them or had left Castlefield by the time of her marriage . We know that Michael had emigrated first to England and later to the U.S.; so far we do not know what became of James.

On the occasion of his 1908 visit Michael McGovern’s nearest living relatives would have been his brother-in-law John Grady and his nephew Patrick Grady.

Another Flynn family (which may or may not be related to Bridget Flynn, the “Puddler’s” mother) was living in Castlefield in the 1850s. Michael Flynn’s house and farm was located at “ at the head of the road into Castlefield where the present day sign for Castlefield has been erected on the main road”. No trace of it remains today. It was later occupied by Tom and Ann Flynn and the last known occupant of that house was Ann Flynn, known as *Ann Gabha*, “Anne (of the) Blacksmith”...as her husband, Tom, was a blacksmith and that had a forge at the crossroads.



**The old Govern at Castlefield** house is reached by a country road, once a cart track, which led to a corn mill and the district's biggest store. To Leo and Eileen Finnegan, of the Williamstown Heritage Society, confirmation of the "Puddler Poet's" birthplace, is highly significant. Eileen recently described walking down the laneway to the old homestead, for the first time, as "*an exhilarating journey of discovery*"; imagining the world the young Michael Govern grew up in, the tiny house he was born in, the fields he worked and played in and the little road that took him to a church, to school, to work (as an apprentice to a local shoemaker) and eventually to the emigrant ship.



Recent research – carried out by the Heritage Society - has also established what life in Castlepark was like in the early 1800s. The most astonishing fact to emerge from that research is that in 1841, just four years before the Great Famine (1845-1852), 39 families and 200 people were living in this one small townland (284 acres). Ten years later in 1851 there were only 9 families and 49 people. Clearly there was hunger, death and mass emigration. During those ten years more than one million Irish people died of starvation and disease; another million were forced to emigrate.



**THE CASTLEFIELD DISAPPEARED** – Whether the 30 families and 151 people who "disappeared" from this one small townland in Williamstown Parish during the Famine years died, emigrated or were evicted by their landlord Sir John Burke, of Marble Hill, has yet to be established.

The then Castlefield, in addition to its 39 small thatched farmhouses had:

- A blacksmiths forge at the head of the road,
- A chain of 10 lime kilns, where limestone rock was crushed and burned at high temperatures, to produce lime which was then spread on grassland or used in all forms of building.
- A large corn mill (ruins right) whose story is etched darkly into the folk consciousness of the Famine years. John Flynn, who grew up in Castlefield recently recalled that the mill "*was owned by the Brehony family and serviced the people who lived in the Farm area of the parish*". As a boy, John met "the last surviving member of the Brehony family" who recalled hearing his grandfather say that "*in the Famine times, when the mill was being built, there wold be up to 200 men standing outside looking for work...but that he had none to give them and that many of them died around the mill*". Many of the hundreds of the Famine dead are believed to have been buried in a field near the mill known as Cloonreilig ("*Cluain a' Reilig*") – The Field/Meadow of the Graveyard".





### A FAMINE MILL “THE PUDDLER” PLAYED IN

The old mill, which would have been at the centre of life in the Castlefield area was, according to Tom Flynn “one of the most substantial in the area and would have been a vital part of life for people wanting to have grain ground to make oaten meal. According to Tom its construction in Famine times was a major engineering project as the adjacent Farm River had to be diverted and an extensive weir and mill race created. This work would have been in progress around the time Michael McGovern was born.

In his boyhood, the young Michael McGovern frequently made his way - down a cart-track lane -to this old mill. We know because he tells us so in one of his most endearing poems. It is certainly the case that he played in and around the mill for many years. A village corn-mill was always one of the gathering places in the parish, especially after harvest time. Children always sought to be brought to the local mill when corn was being ground to watch its arcane engineering majesty and to spent time exploring its locks and races. Michael himself tells us that this was *“a place of his childhood where he spent many summer nights”*

Back in the 1840s building the Castlefield Corn-mill would have involved significant engineering and building skills and employed a large number of workers – among them stone masons, carpenters, labourers and carters who would have used horses and carts to bring in building materials and milling equipment.



Tom believes the Famine time corn mill, which was a vertical mill – a mill with a vertical, water driven wheel – replaced an earlier horizontal (wheel) mill which was located a short distance away. Both used the race from the diverted Farm River.

Today only a tiny section of what Tom believes was the stone housing for the older horizontal mill survived. The nearby old millers house, an extensive building, still stands and is now converted into a cow byre.



A substantial but unroofed part of the newer vertical mill also stands but it now raised itself derelict on the landscape. Some adjoining buildings and stores also remain. The mill machinery has been removed but the great timber mill-wheel shaft, which could be 150 years old has also survived; sadly it was used for many years as a farmyard gate-post. It is still in good condition and towers over Tom, a six-footer, in its present sentinel position close to the mill.

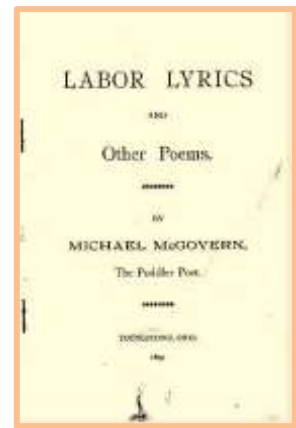
Tom, who has vivid memories of the newer mill as a young boy, is now working on creating a model and a painting of it. Because of its now recognised importance in Michael McGovern’s life, Williamstown Heritage Society is further researching its history.



This was the world Michael McGovern was born into and childhood memories of which seemed to sometimes hang in the air when- many years later in America – he set his pen to work on behalf of the rights of working men. Most of his poems are pungently directed at “labour’s foes”, capitalists, industrialists, monopolists and corrupt politicians. They speak to morality and ethics; of the struggle for social justice and the rights of men. They are filled with classical and biblical allusions and frequently attempt to bring a socially attuned European philosophical and political analysis to bear on what McGovern saw as the rampant, exploitative uncontrolled capitalism which he worried was developing in the America of his day.

But here and there in Michael McGovern’s “Labour Lyrics and Other Poems”, sandwiched between thunderous denunciations of heartless mine owners and their “pocketed” politicians, there are curiously placed lyrical poems set in the Williamstown and Ballymoe of his youth. Elegiac and evocative they recall old friends by name; treat of or imagine lost loves and partings, carefree days on the riverbanks and hillsides of Galway and Roscommon and even have him helter-skelter chasing the fairies of Ballintubber through long moonlit nights.

Among the most wistful is his ode to a cricket first heard as a child within “the heated nooks and crannies” of a mill. This would certainly have been Brehony’s Corn Mill standing next to his old home in Castlepark. The poem is called:



**TO A CRICKET.**

Clamorous cricket in the wall.  
 Thus chirping as night's curtains fall,  
 I often think with wonder how such bare-boned,  
 tiny thing as thou.  
 In heated nooks within the mill  
 Can rasp thy song all night so shrill.  
 How oft at night I've sat alone  
 And heard thy sharp peculiar tone,  
 If as a tone I may define  
 That scraping, creaking chirp of thine  
 And listening while no other sound  
 Disturbed the loneliness around.  
 It fell upon my childish ears  
 As fairy whispers, 'wakening fears  
 Till ghosts of every shape and size  
 Seemed flitting 'fore my drowsy eyes.  
 But sitting, listening to thee now  
 With whiskered face and wrinkled brow,  
 I smile at childhood's simple ways  
 Where strolled its goblins, ghosts and fays  
 And think—though some may think me wrong,  
 There's music in a cricket's song.  
 Sing, little, merry, cricket, sing;  
 Let thy elytracases\* ring  
 Because thy rasping song invites  
 My memory back to summer nights  
 And fireside myths, when I, a boy,  
 Had felt no grief and lived in joy.

(\*The tiny horny or shell like wings of insects)





## WHEN THERE WERE “PIPERS OF THE FIREPLACE” IN EVERY HOUSE

The last man to work in the old Breheny Mill, at Castlefield, the setting for Michael McGovern’s “To a Cricket” was Paddy Forde, now (2017) aged 82. As a boy he worked in the mill between 1948-49. Today he is President of the Williamstown Heritage Society. His family lived three miles away at Moneen and he cycled to work every morning. “We worked six days a week from 9 am to 8 pm for the six months of the milling season. “It was back breaking work. I spent my days carrying 8 hundredweight (64 stone/ 400 kilo- almost half a ton weight) bags

of oats up and down stone stairs. I spent days and nights drying the corn on the heated floor of a kiln and then hoisting it up and down the three floors of the mill. We were paid 25 shillings a week. It wasn’t a lot but the money was badly needed”.

The McGovern family had left Castlefield by the time Michael arrived there in the late 1940s and he has no memory of “the poet McGovern”. Neither does he remember, as a boy, hearing crickets in the mill but he says: “They were in nearly every house in the parish. They were in our own house and you would hear them every night. They made a “quare” (queer) old sound. They lived in the hobs on either side of the open fires, in warm places. People never bothered with them; they wouldn’t touch them, I think they felt it might be unlucky to do anything to them

Michael McGovern would almost certainly have first heard the cicada like sound of the “criogar” or the “píobaire an teallaigh” (‘the piper of the fireplace.’) as the cricket would have been known in his native Irish, in the family’s thatched home with its open fireplace at Castlefield. “It was only with the arrival of the electric light in the 1950s that they seemed to have disappeared” and according to Paddy if Michael McGovern had heard crickets at the old mill it would almost certainly have been in its dark and warm drying kiln. It would have been the perfect place for them.

Paddy worked in the kiln during his time at the Breheny mill carrying in those huge, almost half ton weight bags of oats from farmer’s carts; spreading the corn on the kiln’s raised sheet iron floor, lighting a turf fire under it and slowly turning it until it was dried and ready for grinding.

“The place would be almost dark; there was only a single door and no window. It was always hot when the fire was on. I would have to stand on the hot iron floor in my boots, turning the corn over and over with a timber rake until it was fully dry. Then I would put it back into the bags again, put them on my shoulder and take them into the mill where the oats was ground into oaten-meal. This was used for porridge (“stir-about”) and bread-making. It was what kept everybody fed at the time”.



Like many people in Williamstown, Paddy only recently became aware of Michael McGovern’s importance as a poet of the labor movement in the US. Reading the poem “To a Cricket” for the first time and encountering the lines:

“In heated nooks within the mill  
Can rasp thy song all night so shrill.  
How oft at night I’ve sat alone  
And heard thy sharp peculiar tone”

had a nostalgic, emotional significance for Paddy as it was written about the mill which the boy, Michael McGovern, had climbed over a boundary wall to get to 150 years ago and in which Paddy himself had worked as a young man more than 60 years ago. To Paddy the lines “*thy rasping song invites my memory back to summer nights and fireside myths*” would have the “Poet McGovern” sitting inside the warm mill drying kiln at Castlefield, Williamstown, on summer nights in the 1850s and many years later immortalising it and its crickets in verse - sitting at

a large wooden desk in his home in Youngstown, Ohio.



## WINDOW ON AN 1847 WORLD

An intriguing snapshot of what the world Michael Govern (later McGovern) was born into emerges from the **Saturday October 2 1847** edition of the local newspaper “The Tuam Herald” - published the day before he was/or may have been/ born.

The weekly paper, published in the town of Tuam, (right) 18 miles away, like most local newspapers of the time carried many columns of dense reports on world affairs (usually lifted from foreign newspapers); near verbatim reports of the debates taking place in the Westminster Parliament; speeches delivered by leading Irish politicians in London and occasionally at meetings in Ireland and raging controversies waged through inordinately long correspondences between Catholic and Protestant clergymen and Catholic and Protestant MPs and landlords.



The front page of the “Herald” of Saturday October 2 1847 was filled with advertisements clearly aimed, at the well to do, promoting life changing, cure-all- balms, pill and ointments ranging from the “famous” Perry’s Balm of Syriacum guaranteed *“to cure disorders which every other remedy would only have increased - general debility, seminal weakness, impotency, nocturnal emissions and a deficiency of natural strength”*. There were notices of upcoming land auctions and sales and by an odd co-incidence advance notice of the upcoming **“Williamstown Steeple Chase”** and **“An Ordinary Ball and Supper at Guilfoyle’s Hotel Williamstown** on November 8<sup>th</sup>.”

This, at a time when famine, the worst famine in Irish history, was stalking the land.

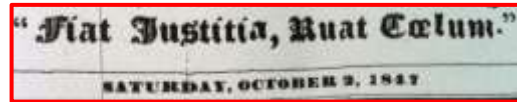


Weekly newspapers like “The Tuam Herald” which were purchased main by well to do landowners, local politicians, a growing middle class of merchants and professional people, were in the 1840s still pre-occupied by the comings and goings of local gentry; their lives (births, deaths, marriages, their engagements in London, Big House balls, hunts, race meetings and sporting achievements); the movements and activities of locally based army units, postings, promotions and what was described as “Foreign Intelligence” from places as far apart in Europe as France and Russia . Local news rarely made the “headlines” but through 1847 and 1848 it was clear that Famine had reached catastrophic proportions in the West of Ireland and there were increasingly alarming reports from parishes around Co. Galway.

Reports of starvation and disease emerged from meetings of local Poor Law Union Committees which ran workhouses in Tuam and Glenamaddy. And local clergymen and local “relief committees” were reporting evictions, the cabins of tenants being tumbled down, the workhouses filling with starving paupers. This in the week Michael McGovern was born.

Under its masthead maxim **Fiat Justitia, Ruat Caelum** "Let justice be done though the heavens fall", The Tuam Herald railed against what its correspondents were seeing and reporting on from all around the county and demanded Government action to save the lives of the starving thousands of men, women and children living in its circulation area.

This report of a meeting of the Tuam Board of Guardians is what Michael McGovern's parents in Williamstown would have read during the week on which we think he was born....that is if they could afford to buy the "Tuam Herald" ...which is extremely unlikely as it cost 6 pence, an enormous amount of money at a time when people scarcely had money for food and clothes.



Some of the paupers who claimed admission to the workhouse stated that they had been ejected a short time previous from their holdings, and their miserable cabins thrown down, on the property of Mr. Carter, in the neighbourhood of Headford. The guardians expressed their disapprobation, in the strongest terms, against the heartless cruelties of such conduct, as casting poor persons, in such a season as the present, houseless upon the world without the smallest means of preserving themselves from starvation but that the workhouse affords them an asylum. And the good and the humane...

The September and October edition of the paper carried reports of the growing crisis – In Westport in Mayo "we have witnessed creatures lying by the roadside, dying with no one to look after them". The Glenamaddy Relief Committee wrote to The Herald about "this last awful and unprecedented calamity". In Limerick "considerable bodies of peasantry assembled in different localities and carried off grain crops and prevented seizures being made". In Banagher, in Co. Offaly, "nearly 1,000 assembled and property to a considerable degree was carried away".

The West of Ireland's Catholic Bishops met in Loughrea in October 1847; asked every clergyman to conduct a parish by parish survey to establish the scale of death, destitution and starvation being experienced. They planned to send their report to The Pope and the British Prime Minister.

5. How many of those who, having a rood of land or more, together with a house, are still in a state of utter destitution.  
6. What is the condition of the people as to clothing.

The young Michael Govern probably wasn't immediately aware of the struggle his parents had to live through but clearly he grew up hearing all about the Famine and the destruction it wrought all around his Williamstown home. He grew up, like every other tenant farmer's son or daughter in the village, on a tiny patch of land which was barely able to grow enough potatoes to feed them and provide the grass for a cow that would give them milk and a calf every year. On a 10 acre farm there would just be enough room to sow crop or two of oats and/ or wheat to take to the mill to be ground into flour or to be sold to pay the landlord's rent.



By the time he was 7 or 8 years age he would have been helping farm the family's few fields but because of his parents determination to see him "better himself" in life he would have been sent - for a short time at least to Mr. Cassidy's "Hedge School" (right). He hints that this was no more than a few weeks or months (over a number of years) when in the introduction to his "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems" he says his poems "are the product of a puddler, of thirty-three years' standing in rolling mills, and whose life's school-term might be numbered by some few months".

When Michael Govern was growing up 2/3 of the people living in the parish of Templetogether were illiterate. The 1861 census tells us that 777 could read and right but 2,370 could not. But the 10 to 15 age group (which Michael would be in in 1861) were clearly benefiting from hedge school education. The ratios were somewhat better 235 children were still listed as being illiterate but 137 were able to read and write.

At the time Michael (and his family) would have spoken both Irish and English and Irish could well have been the first language in the Govern house.

## CHASING SHAWN MULDOON

It is clear from his poetry; his writing and what has been written of him that Michael McGovern was a storyteller. A story teller who had the gift to listening intently to other peoples' ancient stories, of memorising them and of fashioning their narratives into new and beguiling verse and prose of his own. In publishing his 1899 "Labour Lyrics and Other Poems", McGovern is clearly prioritising (in selecting particular poems from the thousands he wrote) the importance he attached to his "labor poems". But he make a point of stressing that he couldn't produce an anthology of his work without including "some Irish verses" and he actually apologises for not being able to include more.

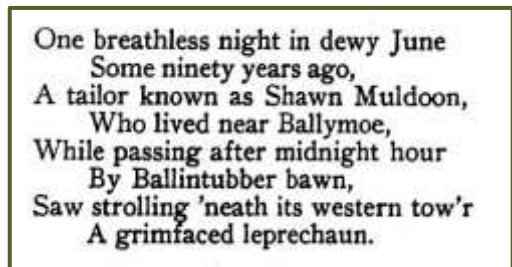
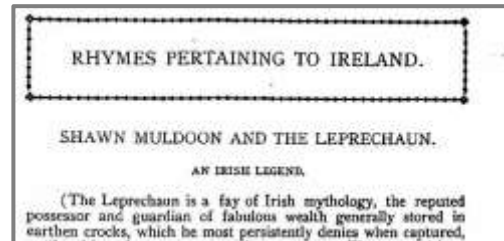
It is also significant that the McGovern Family of Castlefield was Irish speaking. Michael certainly was a proficient Irish speaker when he left home as his Irish "verses" contain many complex Irish phrases.

Most are set in his own locality (right are the ruins of Ballintubber Castle and Bawn) and some include the names of people who may actually have lived there at the time. The Williamstown Historical Society is currently probing the names and phrases that crop up in poems like "*Sean Muldoon and The Leprechaun*" and "*And Cupid Laughed-An Irish May Day Superstition*".

In Shawn Muldoon's midnight chase of the Leprechaun with the crock of gold, McGovern sprinkles the narrative with Irish phrases like my "*drechar og*" (my young brother) "*Forrier gair*" (alas and alas) "*skian*" (a knife) "*coiffe*" (a head-dress) and "*sceaghagh*" (a bush, usually a whitethorn bush in fairy tales). The Puddler Poet clearly has an ease and a familiarity with these phrases and places them judiciously into his rumbustious narrative.

"Be quick, "said Shawn, "before I twist  
Your head and neck in two.  
Until your guineas 'graze my fist,'  
I'll keep you well in view."  
And here he swore by saints on high.  
Whilst flourishing his shears.  
That if he told another lie  
He'd clip away his ears.

Shawn Muldoon may well have been a historical character in the Ballymoe/Williamstown area and research into the family to try to establish if there was a "tailor Muldoon" is being undertaken by the Williamstown Heritage Society. They have already established that there was a Muldoon family in Ballymoe up to the 1980s and that a country road leading from the McGovern home at Castlefield ( through Brooklagh) to Ballymoe passed by the Muldoon home in Ballymoe. In Co. Galway at the turn of the 19/20<sup>th</sup> century (the 1901 census tells us) there were several many Muldoon families; most were farmers, a significant number were shoemakers but there was no sign of a "Tailor" Muldoon. Michael McGovern may have been creating a composite character out of several prominent local names in North Galway.





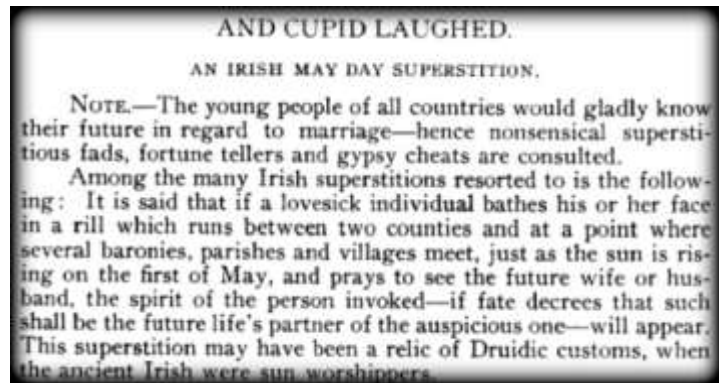
## CHASING LEPRECHAUNS, CHASING GIRLS, IN THE NIGHT

Growing up in Castlefield the young Michael McGovern would have spent a good deal more time chasing girls than leprechauns, or tales about local leprechauns which sometimes could go on- in their telling - for a week of winter nights.

Michael McGovern's thoughts may have turned to love and romance in Castlefield but as we know it would be in England that Michael would meet his future wife – Ann Murphy.

However it is with some bucolic, arcadian trysts across the “border-lands” of counties Galway and Roscommon, where he grew up, that he chooses to end his “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” anthology. “And Cupid Laughed” is one of the last in the collection.

Here the jaunty “Lanty” Kelly and his “jealous sweetheart” Nelly play out the old May Day superstition and despite slights and jilts and protestations they both find themselves by “Avonphooka” The Pooka’s River” on the border between Galway and Roscommon as the first rays of that May Day sun strikes the rill.



### LOVE'S CURIOSITY AROUSED.

Oh, Annie dear, what legends queer.

You keep relating always.

Why go into that dark ravine.

And pray by that lone rill between

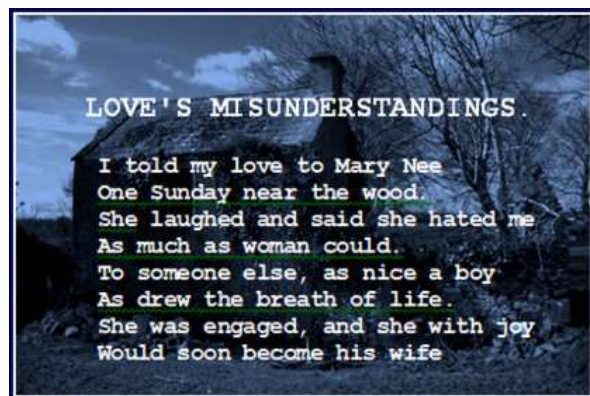
Roscommon's hills and Galway's?

The swain and his maiden eventually end up in each other's arms as the superstition says they will.

- “Lanty is a character who turns up in dozens of Irish short stories; the best known “*Lanty's New House*” by William Carleton written about 1846; another “*Lanty O'Hoolahan and the Little People*” by Frederick Story (1884) has Lanty, “*the foinest shoe-maker in Ballynahogue*”, tangle with the fairies who are trying to ruin his business.

Several of the “Irish Love Poems” refer to girls Michael McGovern had known in Ireland (and perhaps England). There was Nora “*with the matchless voice which was never equalled in Kincora*” the famed palace of King Brian Boru; Kate whom he “*courted for nigh a year*” and Kitty who “*when she met my glance at church oft made me forget my prayers*”

But the poem to “Mary Nee” suggests she was a girl he knew in Ireland ...or was a creation of his fertile imagination. Was she the “fancy” of the young McGovern? Did she live somewhere in the Williamstown area? Did he do some of his courting in a local wood? We don't know. But we do know he was left lovelorn as Mary rebuffed his amorous advances... and on the day after her final rejection he “sailed from Galway Bay”.



Next day I sailed from Galway bay

Mary Nee's lovelorn suitor may well have sailed

“poetically” from Galway Bay. But it's pretty certain that sometime about 1865/1867 Michael McGovern did not sail from Galway Bay - but rather from Dublin- as he boarded a boat to take him England in search of work, a wife and “that tide in the affairs of men”.

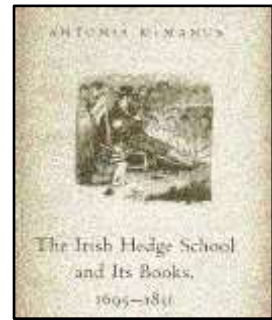


**COUNTDOWN FROM THE GREEN FIELDS OF IRELAND TO THE STEEL FURNACES OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA**

**1850-51:** Would have been significant years for John Govern and his Family. Michael, just 3/4 years old, wouldn't have been fully aware of the tumultuous events that were taking place in his little "village". Shortly before he was born, 39 families and 200 people were living in Castlefield but by the time Michael was beginning to take his first steps around their little farm and onto the road outside 30 of those families had left and there were less than 50 people in the village. We don't yet know if they were evicted like the tenants of many neighbouring parishes were...if they had died during the famine or if they had emigrated to avoid starvation and disease.



**1855:** Would probably have seen Michael making his way to "Mr Cassidy's" hedge school at Brooklough some two or three miles from his home at Castlefield to learn the 3Rs (*'readin, 'ritin and 'rithmetic*). Reading, writing and arithmetic were the main subjects taught at the schools. Many of the more famous hedge schoolmasters had a knowledge of Latin, so it is quite possible that Michael and the other scholars would have been taught some basic Latin lessons. Latin was also something that school children selected to serve Mass would have been familiar with as Mass was always said in Latin at the time. In the makeshift hedge schools Religion and History, particularly Irish history, were two other subjects that would have been given considerable teaching time.



**1860:** By now Michael (13) would probably have been called on to do an increasing amount of work on the family farm – tending to cows and sheep, sowing and harvesting crops, saving turf and probably going to fairs and markets. He would soon also be looking for employment and as his all too brief schooldays ended he was to be apprenticed to a local shoemaker. This would have been a very useful trade at the time...but as we now know Michael felt that he was not getting the training and probably the pay he might have expected. And he might even have been working for no pay as at the time apprentices often had to pay their employer while they were being trained.



**1865/1867:** Michael John Govern was now preparing to join the thousands of young Irish men and women who were emigrating to England in search of work. England was much easier to get to than America and there were endless opportunities to work on farms and in factories and in mines.



Yorkshire was a part of England to which many Irishmen made their way after taking the short boat trip from Dublin to Holyhead or Liverpool. Some went to work on farms (something which would have come easily to them); others joined the huge Irish labouring gangs which were building roads, railways and canals across the north of England...but for some reason or other the young Michael Govern or perhaps McGovern (by now) headed for Sheffield, "the greatest and most famous steel production centre in the world", at that time and became a "puddler".

**1867- 1881/2:** The first 14 maybe 15 years of Michael McGovern's working life were spent in Yorkshire in the North of England where he found work as a steel mill labourer. At the time there were scores of massive steel mills and rolling mills in Yorkshire and Michael over that c 15 year period moved around between Sheffield City, Elsecar village, Parkgate (Rotherham) and Kimberworth town. All of these places were within a 20 mile radius of each other and all of them had giant steel mills where "puddling" was the normal method of production. He was obviously following work from one steel town to the next and probably working his way up from being a general labourer to becoming "a puddler".



**“KEEP YOUR HANDS UPON YOUR GUNS” –MICHAL McGOVERN**

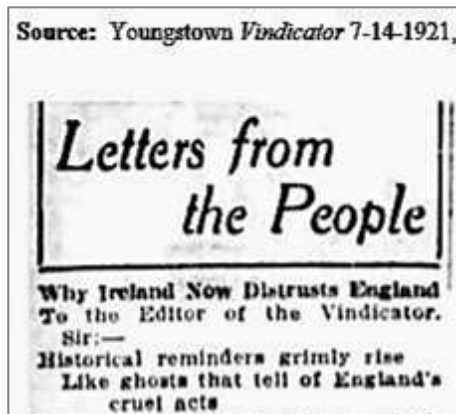


The 1860s was a period when Ireland was attempting “to get its breath back” after the horrors of the Famine. Mass emigration had slowed; the all-out struggle to break landlordism was still 10 years away and “the guns were put back under the thatch” after a betrayed/abortive Fenian rising.

What eventually prompted Michael McGovern to leave home and go to England in search of work we may never know – had life’s path taken him on a different journey he might now be remembered as “a very famous cobbler who lived in Williamstown in Co. Galway; a self-educated man who wrote powerful poems about the oppression of Irish tenant farmers and whose work had a major influence on the revolutionary leaders of the struggle to break landlordism in Ireland and win back the land of Ireland for the people of Ireland”.

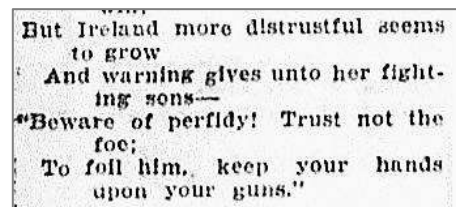
Instead his journey was to take him far from the little farms of the West of Ireland and into the epicentre, the seething cauldron, of England and America’s industrial revolutions.

So we have very little to tell us why Michael McGovern set off on this journey; why one day about 1867 he decided to turn his back on farming (and that career as a shoemaker), say goodbye to his father and mother, (probably) older sister, Catherine, and younger brother, James, swing a canvas bag of some kind over his shoulder and set out for England.



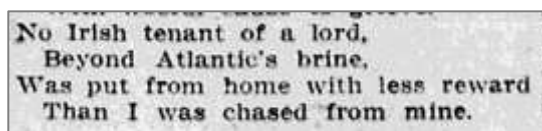
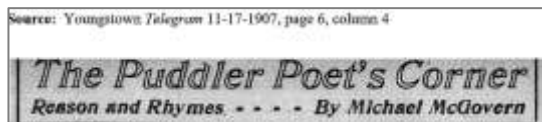
Michael McGovern would have been about 20 years of age at the time.

We have no idea if Michael had been involved with any agrarian or political activity as a young man. But his writings years later show that he was an implacable critic of British rule in Ireland and an unapologetic “physical force” proponent. This poem which he had published in the “Letters from the People” column of the “Youngstown Vindicator” in July 1921 shows the strength of his convictions. He is joining in the “newspaper correspondence” debate which was taking place in many cities across the U.S. while the Treaty Negotiations were taking place in London. In this and other poems he warns Michael Collins and members of the Irish negotiating team of what he believes is the duplicity of the British Prime Minister Lloyd George.



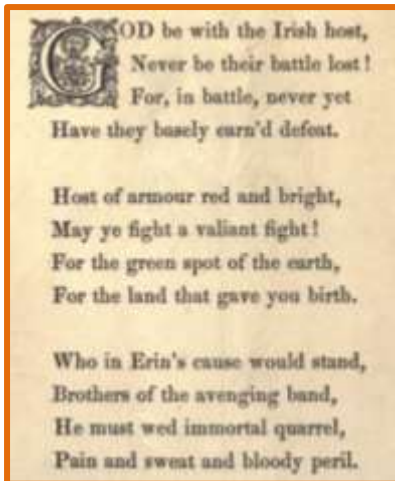
The message is stark: **“Trust not the foe; keep your hands upon your guns”**

Whether he carried some of these feelings with him as he left Williamstown or developed them as he watched Irish history unfold in the following years we simply don’t know at this stage. But somewhere between the 1867 era, of still dominant of ascendancy and landlordism in Ireland, and the eve of Independence in 1921 he certainly developed a radical revolutionary and republican spirit.



As early at 1907 McGovern was referencing the tyranny of the Irish landlord system. In one of his metaphorically laden and irony laced 1909 “newspaper” poems “The Complaint of an Evicted Rat” he draws a parallel between the plight of an evicted “rat” (substitute labourer) and “the tenant of an Irish

lord”. The Puddler here and elsewhere spares no invective on the “old enemy” – England; ironically the very country he would first emigrate to in search of work and a better life.



## OF POETS AND PAINTERS

**1865-1866:** In the two years before, we believe, Michael left Ireland 19<sup>th</sup> century poets and painters were again – after the rupture of the Famine - attempting to re-ignite and re-create the country's old sense of itself. In this they were drawing heavily on ancient epic and heroic tales and painting idealised images of a noble Irish peasantry.

One of the leading poets of the day, Belfast born **Samuel Ferguson** (1810 – 1886) was at the forefront of this bid to remind Irish people of the richness of their old story-telling and poetic traditions. In 1865, his "*Lays of the Western Gael*" was published; harking back to mythological and medieval times many of the poems had an "avenging" sense of purposefulness. Heroes were crafted out of warrior deeds and the clash of champions; ancient wars and conquests were played out in gory

and glorious detail. Ferguson was forging one more wave of cultural nationalism. Michael McGovern would probably have not been aware of what Ferguson was writing at the time; but Ferguson was later lauded by Yeats as "one of the greatest poets Ireland has produced whose feet have worn that pathway, many others will follow". They lived in very different worlds and different somewhat different times but here and there in many of Michael McGovern's poems (especially those published in newspapers rather than in his "Labor Lyrics") there are flashes of the language and the force of Ferguson's works.



Michael McGovern was not only a poet; he was also a painter.

In 1865 the same year as Samuel Ferguson was publishing his most famous work "*Lays of the Western Gael*", the artist **Augustus Joseph Nicholas Burke** (1838 – 1891), who was born in nearby Tuam, Co. Galway, painted his most famous work "*Connemara Girl*". One of the most identifiable paintings in Ireland, it depicts a young, barefoot goat-herder girl carrying a bundle of heather near the seashore in Connemara. The picture waivers between romanticism, naturalism and realism. The barefoot girl has what has been described as "a wide eyed look of calm determination" and the scene as having "an evenly balanced forcefulness and atmosphere".

The composition also subliminally draws immediate attention to the goat-herding girl's bare feet. It's a reminder that she and in all probability the young Michael McGovern were Irish speaking, barefooted children in the Ireland of the 1840s and 1850s.

It's unlikely that Michael McGovern would have been aware of Augustus Burke, the artist, when he was growing up and preparing to leave Ireland forever. But Augustus Joseph Nicholas Burke was a member of the old Norman Burke's of Glinsk family; whose ancestral castle was just a few miles from Williamstown and who were distant relations of his father's landlord, Sir Thomas John Burke, 3<sup>rd</sup> Baronet, of Marble Hill. Michael McGovern because of his abiding interest in Irish political affairs would almost certainly have heard of Augustus Burke's brother, Thomas Henry Burke (1829-1882) Permanent Under Secretary of the British Civil Service in Ireland. Thomas Henry and the Chief Secretary for Ireland Lord Frederick Cavandish were assassinated in an attack known as "The Phoenix Park Murders" on Saturday May 6th 1882. They were fatally stabbed with surgical knives by members of a secret Irish republican organisation known as "The Invincibles". They had been singled out for assassination because of their hard line policies during the Land War in Ireland.

Sir Samuel Ferguson and Arthur Burke lived in very different worlds to Michael McGovern. But they were men of Michael McGovern's time, in Ireland. A poet and a painter.

Michael McGovern was, as they were, poet, painter, additionally philosopher and puddler.

## LEAVING ON “LORD LUCAN of BALACLAVA’S” LINE

Michael McGovern – or Michael Govern as he would have grown up – might not have been aware in 1865 of the poet Samuel Ferguson or the painter Arthur Burke but he certainly would have been very aware of one of the most significant engineering achievements of the period – the arrival in 1861 of the first ever railway line to reach the remote corner of the West of Ireland where he lived; its arrival ushered in by and tailored to the needs of a great local landlord, George Charles Bingham, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Lucan, GCB (1800-1888), remembered today as “one of the most notorious members of Ireland’s 19<sup>th</sup> Ascendancy”. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl (right) had been a cruel and evicting landlord at the height of the Famine and then achieved even greater notoriety when he was one of the three British Army Commanders (Lord Raglan and Captain Nolan were the others) who ordered the fateful Charge of the Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava in October 1854.



He enters Michael McGovern’s world when in the 1850’s railway lines began to cuff their way westwards across Ireland from Dublin in the direction of Galway, Castlebar Westport and Sligo. Lord



Lucan’s, family seat was Castlebar House, in Castlebar, Co. Mayo, and as a founder of the Midland and Great Western Railway Company (MGWR) he used all of his political muscle to have the new railway line routed towards Castlebar (through his estate) and onwards to Westport. After many legal battles, with opponents, the MGWR succeeded in pushing its line from Athlone across the Shannon in the direction of Roscommon (Castlerea,

Castlebar, the Lucan seat, and ultimately Westport) between 1859 to 1862. The single line track reached Roscommon on February 13<sup>th</sup> 1860 and Castlerea by November 1860. A few months later in early 1861 intermediate stations were opened in Dunamon and Ballymoe.

This was the line which a few years later would take Michael McGovern on his way from nearby Ballymoe Station (right) to Dublin and onwards to Liverpool and eventually to Sheffield in Yorkshire.



The arrival of railway lines in towns, cities and villages all across the South and West of Ireland in the years immediately following the Great Famine facilitated, in a dramatic way, the flight of emigrants from stricken areas to the ports from which they would sail to England or America.

The young Michael Govern would probably have been able to hear the train whistle of the MGWR engine –as it made it way in and out of Ballymoe Station most days of the year.

Almost every railway station in Ireland has its own colourful history. Locals recall that as the line was being laid between Ballymoe and Castlerea a ballast train, conveying a gang of rail-layers, derailed and ran into a bog at Ballacaher near Ballymoe. A more light-hearted story recalled that “*there once was a signalman at Ballymoe who he never allowed a train to pass without acquiring a bucket of coal from the engine. But unknown to him,*” the story goes, “*while he was filling his bucket with coal from the train the fireman from the train was filling his bucket, with vegetables from the signalman’s garden!*”

The station in Ballymoe closed in 1963. It’s likely “The Puddler Poet” used it several times. Firstly when he left Ireland in c 1867 and again, when he returned to Ireland, in 1904 and possibly 1928.

# The great grandson of George Charles Bingham, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Lucan, was Richard John Bingham, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lucan, better known as “Lord Lucan”, the British peer who disappeared in 1974 after being suspected of his wife Veronica Duncan’s murder. He has never been seen since. He remains an enigma, his story still continuing to captivate the public imagination

**A JOURNEY TO “THE MOST MILITANT CENTRE OF TRADE UNION AGITATION IN GREAT BRITAIN”.**

Why Michel McGovern – having boarded that train in Ballymoe Station - would have chosen to work in the back breaking, often dangerous, intensity of an iron and steel mill in Sheffield we simply don't know, at this time.

Perhaps he knew of somebody who was already working there; perhaps it was because steel mill worker were better paid than most to compensate for the hard and dangerous conditions.

One gets a sense of how difficult and dangerous steel production work was in Sheffield at the time from the writings of the German Marxist political theorist and philosopher Friedrich Engels who visited Sheffield in 1844 and wrote his seminal *“The Condition of the Working Class in England”* about the struggle between labour and capitalism based on his personal observations.



Of Sheffield's steel workers he wrote: *“In Sheffield wages are better and the external state of the workers also. On the other hand certain branches of the work are to be noticed here because of their extraordinary injurious influence upon health”.* In the 1860s Sheffield was experiencing a population boom. In 1820 its population was 65,000; by 1860 it had trebled to 185, 00. Most Irish migrant workers and labourers lived in an area of the city known as *“The Crofts”* (centred on Solly Street then known as Pea Croft). It was an area of working class tenements and back to back houses interspersed with iron and steel works and workshops.

But apart from being the greatest steel production city in England (and perhaps the world) at that time Sheffield also had a second claim to fame...and one that may have had a very significant bearing on the life of Michael McGovern *“The Puddler*

Poet”.

As well as being England's *“Steel City”*, Sheffield was also at that very time ***“The Capital of English Trade Unionism” - the main and most militant centre of trade union organisation and agitation in Great Britain”*** - *The Anarchist*

**'Sheffield, then the capital of English trade unionism, was the only town where the decrees of the union were enforced by the blowing up of factories or shooting capitalists. Nor were these outrages the peculiar invention of William Broadhead [secretary of the Saw Grinders Union, who was heavily implicated]. Like machine smashing or rick burning, they were an inheritance of the evil days of oppression and coercion. When strikes are criminal offences, and unions are smashed with all the might of law, what method is there left but outrage?'**  
*(Sheffield Local Studies Library: MP 1744 S)*

Local histories record that *“during the 1840s-1860s, some of the increasingly militant, newly-formed unions used widespread intimidation and violence where they believed workers were being under-paid or non-union labour was being hired at very low wages.*

In the 1860s, the conflict between capital and labour reached new heights culminating in a series of riots, explosions and murders carried out by union militants.

These actions, which came to a head in 1866 - 1867, became known as the **Sheffield outrages**. In the middle of all of this agitation and uproar the Sheffield Trades Council organised a meeting in 1866 at which the United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades was launched; it was to become the forerunner of the British Trades Union Congress (the TUC). Millworkers at the time were earning 35 shillings a week which was regarded as *“a good wage”* with some of the more experienced *“puddlers”* earning up to £2 a week. By comparison coalminers were earning just 25 shillings a week

## PUDDLER AS ARISTOCRAT

Michael McGovern had left Ireland with no formal education; probably not much more than the price of an emigrant's boat ticket in his pocket and the dream of making something out of his life. He spent the first maybe 14/15 years of his working life in England, and then crossed the Atlantic to America where he spent the rest of that labouring life and writing life. Michael worked as a "puddler" – a skilled, now totally forgotten, early industrial age craft. Ask anybody today what a "puddler" was or is and they will probably suggest "a kid who walks down a perfectly dry road, finds the one single puddle there and proceeds to jump into it, stamp all over it and not stop until shoes, wellies or clothes are soaking wet". Michael's "puddler" days were very different. And to fully understand what "forge" his life and writing emerged from it is necessary to understand what exactly a "puddler" was.



The reflective Michael McGovern, having by 1899 worked for many years in both England and America, tells us in his own words that a "puddler" was a *"toiling man"*; a *"proud man"*, a *"dignified man"* and sometimes *"even a boastful man"*. But his poetry reveals too the darker side of mill life and the callous way workers were treated and abused. It was a world of *"tyrant fear"*, of *"plutocratic greed"*, of *"sulphurous days"* and *"men blown to death when mill elements explode"*.

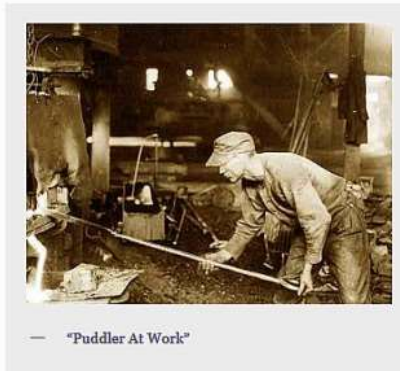
Two, somewhat differing focus, descriptions of "puddling" and "puddlers" emerge from studies of the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century period during which Michael McGovern was working as a "puddler" in England and in the United States of America.

"The *"Cambridge Economic History of Europe"*, Vol. VI, Part I, 1966, p. 447 gives us a resonating if somewhat romantic description of the "puddler and his status as a worker. To read it brings us as close as words can to the world of the "puddler"; to stand beside him as he thrusts his "rabble" into a searing blast furnace and sense what may be going on between his straining arms and his bending mind.

The editors of *"The Cambridge Economic History of Europe"*, **Sir Hrothgar John Habakkuk** and **Sir Michael Moissej Postan** give us a description of the "puddler" that Michael McGovern would immediately recognise and perhaps approve of. Sir John was one of the most distinguished economic historians of his time; Professor of Economic History at Oxford, President of the Royal Historical Society and a member of the American Philosophical Society. Sir Michael was Professor of Economic History at Cambridge described once *"as the only man at Cambridge who knew Marx, Weber, Sombart and the rest of the great Central and East Europeans and who took their work sufficiently seriously to expound and criticize it"*. Between them they conjured up this description and definition of "puddlers":

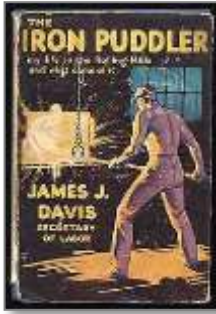
***"The puddlers were the aristocracy of the proletariat; proud, clannish, set apart by sweat and blood. Few of them lived past forty. Numerous efforts were made to mechanize the puddling furnace – in vain. Machines could be made to stir the bath, but only the human eye and touch could separate out the solidifying decarburized metal"***.

### Importance of the Puddler



The process of puddling was no easy task and these workers were held in high regard. The puddler was highly skilled and was the best worker in the company. This was a dangerous occupation, which required much physical strength, stamina and concentration, "The puddlers were the aristocracy of the proletariat, proud, clannish, set apart by sweat and blood. Few of them lived past forty. Numerous efforts were made to mechanize the puddling

furnace...Machines could be made to stir the bath, but only the human eye and touch could separate out the solidifying decarburized metal."<sup>[1]</sup> What also made the iron puddlers so special was that there were no schools or teaching of iron puddling. The process was passed down from father to son.



## PUDDLERS AS TOILER

In the United States, however, a starker and bleaker picture of life as a “puddler”, emerges from a series of books and studies of the iron and steel industry in Pennsylvania and Ohio, including The Mahoning Valley where Michael McGovern went to work in the 1880s.

The Mahoning “Steel Valley” region was one of the powerhouses of the industry in the United States in the 1800s. In 1892 *“the Mahoning valley contained 477 puddling furnaces employing 954 puddlers, 954 helpers, and 236 roll hands. Together, these furnaces and their workers produced 1,050 tons of wrought iron per day”*.



James Davis (left), a former puddler at the Sharon Iron Works in Pennsylvania and US Secretary of Labor from 1921 to 1930, regarded these mills as “*a veritable hell*”. In his autobiography “The Iron Puddler” he wrote: *“Life in these mills is a terrible life; men are ground down to scrap and thrown out as wreckage”*. Davis became known as “The Iron Puddler” and “Puddler Jim”. Former blast furnace operator Ralph Sweetser in his best-selling 1938 book, *Blast Furnace Practice*: wrote “many men were killed or maimed by blast furnace accidents, accidents that were terrific and horrible.”

In 1899 “The Youngstown Vindicator” carried a report of a steel factory worker being “roasted alive” as co-workers looked on in horror.

“The Youngstown Vindicator” was also the paper which published many of Michael “The Puddler Poet” McGovern’s early works. In the same year, 1899, his poem “Puddlers Die Like Other Men” was included in his “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” collection.

### PUDDLERS DIE LIKE OTHER MEN.

Some meet their deaths by jumping cars.  
Some freeze upon the road.  
And some are blown to atoms when  
Mill elements explode.  
But whether killed or blown to death  
The curious will find  
That death whene'er he takes their souls  
Leaves skin and bones behind.



*Clayton Ruminski, a specialist in the rise of iron and steel production in The Mahoning Valley [He grew up there] has written extensively on the harsh world of the “puddlers” who were “very often expendable Welsh, German and Irish immigrants”. He explains that the transition from pig iron production to steel production in the Mahoning Valley “was tempered in the blood of immigrant labourers who suffered **fates in the name of capital and production values.***

His description of the puddling process, of turning pig iron into highly valuable steel, sets out what men like “The Puddler” McGovern faced every working day of their lives: *“There is a major difference between iron and steel. Iron straight from the blast furnace – a tall, fire brick lined, steel-plated cylindrical structure that used temperatures of over 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit to smelt iron ore, coal, and limestone into molten iron – was brittle. This weak iron had to be refined into stronger wrought iron in a highly skilled process known as puddling, during which a puddler and his helper used a long iron prod to work 600 pounds of iron for over an hour in front of the intense heat of a puddling furnace”*.

\* In 1892 in The Mahoning Valley it took 954 puddlers, 954 helpers, and 236 roll hands to produce 1,050 tons of wrought iron per day. That same year, Youngstown industrialists proposed a single steel plant that could produce 1,000 tons of steel per day with a workforce of only 200 men. The scene was set for the elimination of skilled labour; the introduction of large-scale manufacturing... and inevitable confrontation. It was a story Williamstown born Michael McGovern would be at the heart of.





**ENGLAND –  
“THE MOST LOVELY LAND  
BENEATH GOD’S BRIGHT VAULT OF SKY”**

We know almost nothing of Michael McGovern’s years in England. It was, for an Irish labourer in Britain, a time of tension and upheaval. He would have arrived from Ireland, probably more comfortable, speaking Irish than English; with no experience of working in factories or mills and yet this is where he would spend 14 maybe 15 years of his working life toiling and earning a living in grim iron foundries surrounded by what he himself was to later eulogize in one of his poems as “England’s Clover Fields”.



**To England's clover fields.**

So far no documents, manuscripts or records of Michael’s time in England have come to light; there don’t appear to be any letters to his family at home in Ireland that have survived and his later published collection of poems makes no reference to his time working as a “puddler” in England’s industrial heartland.

But what he does write about England in the only substantial poem which alludes to his time there, (“Labor Lyrics and Other Poems”), paints a picture not of grinding steel mills but rather of the pastoral delights of the English countryside.

**ENGLAND'S CLOVER FIELDS.**  
The clover fields of England, oh!  
How beautiful they lie,  
Adorning the most lovely land  
'Neath God's bright vault of sky.  
No velvet lawns of fairy land  
Enclosed 'neath elfin seals,  
Possess the blossomed richness of  
Old England's clover fields.

When this poem was written we do not know. It was clearly written, in old age, many years later in America. And it certainly has more in common with the great lyrical English poets Keats, Shelly or Browning than the later work of “The Puddler Poet” of the rolling mills of Pennsylvania and Ohio. But it nevertheless an interesting statement from McGovern who writes in a similar vein in some of his more lyrical, bucolic poems set in Ireland and in the United States. While we strive to find some sense of how he experienced life as a steel mill worker in England in the

1860s what we find instead is an idealised and idolized picture of the rolling clover fields of “*the most lovely land beneath God’s bright vault of sky*” – the English countryside.

In years to come Michael McGovern would write of England in much less flattering and more excoriating terms.

But wherever it was and whenever it was that he sat down and penned his ode to the “Clover Fields” – England was then that idyllic place:

In passing round the globe I think  
Of those green fields again;  
Of childhood's merry laughter and  
Of loves that knew no pain;  
Of those with whom I left my heart  
And all the love it feels.  
Oh! loneliness you steer my thoughts  
To England's clover fields.



The other two poems of this brief “English cycle” – one dealing with the plight of a down at the heel English Lord; the other with the guile of a Scottish Laird - are amusing but throw no light whatever on Michael McGovern’s life in England. The central character in the English poem is “the descendant of a noble duke who has been reduced to sweeping chimneys”; the Scottish poem introduces us to a stag hunting laird who outwitted the greatest poacher of the day, James Mor, by the stratagem of “sending a rogue to catch a thief.”

#### JAMES MOR—A SCOTTISH LEGEND.

There lived beside a Scottish game reserve, in days of yore,  
A poacher of notorious fame, his name was James Mor,  
Who put by his successful raids the keepers’ skill to shame—  
Who prowled around where’er he wished and captured fish and game.

He was the great acknowledged king of all the poachers there;  
He knew the habits of the game and where to set his snare,  
Nor cared he for the angry “lords,” who saw each year elapse  
And fish and game diminish through his fish-hooks, nets and traps.



McGovern’s poem on the Noble Duke who becomes a chimney sweep is untitled. And there is prose preamble.

“The feeling is spreading among American working men that none but those who perform some useful kind of labor for a living should be considered respectable. And we may fancy the American toiler giving his opinions thus, when reading in a late issue of an English paper the awful announcement that the descendant of a noble duke is now earning a living by sweeping chimneys”.

The incident may cause the English upper classes weep,  
To think that the descendant of a noble duke should now  
Pursue, to get a living, the vocation of a sweep,  
To whom no man will raise his hat or boorish toiler bow.

There’s nothing in the chimney sweeper’s trade we can rebuke,  
Although his garments would not suit at royal dance, ’tis true,  
He’s nobler in his sooty clothes than monarch, prince or duke,  
Who’d scorn to sweep a city street, a chimney or a flue.

Nobility is here preserved, we’ve millionaires and “plutes,”  
Who from the toiling workingmen unearned harvests reap,  
Who like to dukes, being useless in laborious pursuits,  
Are classed beneath the level of the noble chimney sweep.

## THE BESSEMER CONVERTER AND STEELING ONESELF FOR LABOR MILITANCY

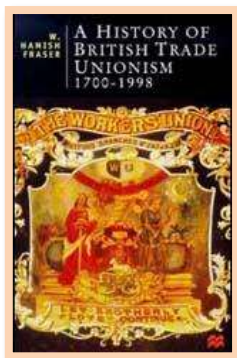
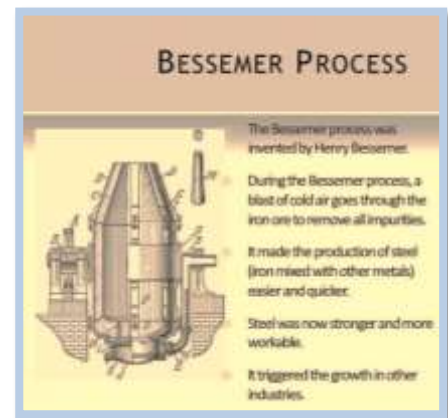


Before the U.S. Civil War (1861-65), American manufacturers made only relatively small quantities of steel because they hadn't yet developed the advanced technical and engineering skills and the huge mills needed to produce large quantities of steel through manual "puddling" and later through the use of the English invented Bessemer converter which revolutionized the mass production of steel. It was a time when an expanding United States desperately needed vast quantities of high grade steel to build battleships, cargo ships, bridges and railway lines and imports from England's Sheffield mills still dominated the American Markets.

The Bessemer process, developed in 1855- 56, was the first inexpensive industrial process for the mass-production of steel from molten pig iron. The mechanical convertor and the process was named after its inventor Henry Bessemer (1813-1898), who played a major role in developing the then town of Sheffield into the world's leading steel manufacturing city.

As early as 1861/62 American steel and iron engineers were visiting Sheffield to try to acquire rights to use the Bessemer converter in the US. By 1867 one group of entrepreneurs had set up a Bessemer convertor steel plant in Troy New York having paid Bessemer £10,000 for a licence agreement to manufacture in the US.

By 1877 the group had 11 mills in operation and soon their success caught the eye of a man Michael McGovern would clash swords with during later union/ labor struggles in the United States – the millionaire entrepreneur Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie had visited Bessemer in Sheffield in 1872, studied the Bessemer technology and very soon afterwards he and a group of investors established the The Edgar Thomson Steel Works in Pittsburg, PA., It opened in 1875, and started the growth of the United States as a major world steel producer.



Arriving in England from Ireland at a time when "puddling" was still at the heart of steel manufacturing and the new Bessemer technology was still in its infancy the young Michael McGovern has to have been influenced by the militant labour mood of the city. Here he would for the first time have come face to face with the growing strength of the labour and trade union movement and the opposition the birth of trade unionism was going to face from powerful industrial and political interests.

If Michael McGovern's labour militancy was forged in the steel mills of Pennsylvania and Ohio its first formative smelting took place in Sheffield in England.

Michael McGovern's journey from Williamstown to Youngstown would appear to have first taken him to Sheffield sometime in this turbulent 1865-1867 period. Coincidentally 1867 was also the date of a failed Fenian Rising in Ireland, a failed Fenian invasion of Canada from the United States and in Britain a failed Fenian prisoner rescue bid to release "The Manchester Martyrs" three leading members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who were on their way to the gallows.

It was for an Irish labourer in Britain a time of unease and rapid re-adjustment to a very different way of life.. We have almost no sense of what life was like for Michael McGovern in the 1860s but it is clear that he very quickly adjusted to this new life and there would be no turning back. His future lay in the mills and the nearby mines and it is here that he would meet his future wife and where at least four of his thirteen children would be born.



## WORK, MARRIAGE & 4 CHILDREN IN ENGLAND

It would appear that Michael McGovern met his future wife Ann Murphy in Sheffield sometime between 1867 and 1872. She was the daughter of Irish parents who had themselves emigrated to England. The 1900 census tells us that Ann was born in England but that her parents were both born in Ireland. It doesn't give any further details of where they had come from or what age they were when she was born. It records Ann's birthdate as June 1852. However the 1881 census records her as being born c.1847



Michael and Ann were married in 1872; on a date between April and June.

**Michael McGovern**  
England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915

Name: Michael McGovern  
Registration Year: 1872  
Registration Quarter: Apr-May-Jun  
Registration district: Sheffield

Ann Murphy

This is an extract from the England and Wales Register of Marriages for the year 1872.

M <sup>c</sup> GOVERN, Ellen.....	Bolton	8 c.
— Georgina.....	Sheffield	9 c.
— James.....	Selby	9 c.
— Julia.....	Bolton	8 c.
— Mary.....	Oldham	8 d.
— Michael.....	Sheffield	9 c.

This is an extract from another register of Marriages in England in 1872. It tells us that Michael was one of six McGoverns who were married in the North of England between April and June 1872.

So far we have been unable to get further details of their wedding; the church they were married in or the precise date of their marriage.



A newspaper article dating from the 1930 describes Mrs McGovern as *"a retiring woman, and a gracious wife. Mr McGovern is an esteemed poet who has also had considerable success with his paintings; Mrs McGovern has had her successes in the fine role of a wife and mother"*

The article was reporting on their Golden Wedding Anniversary and the surprise party which was thrown for them in Youngstown.

\* Undated "Youngstown Vindicator" article 1930s.

Michael and Ann had 13 children. Biographical details are available on 10 of them. Research into the remaining 3 is continuing,

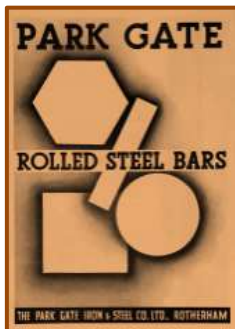
## A PUDDLERS WAY - SHEFFIELD, ELSCAR, PARKGATE, KIMBERWORTH



- **John Patrick** : Michael and Ann were living in **Sheffield** when their first son John Patrick was born on **March 17<sup>th</sup> 1874**. It is clear that he was named John after his grandfather, John Govern, and Patrick because he was born on St Patrick's Day! He came to the US with his parents when he was c. 7/8 years of age; followed his father into steel industry. He originally lived in Allentown and later moved to Youngstown with his family .He married Bridget D. Summers on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1903. He worked with the Carnegie-Illinois Steel Company for 50 years (according to his obituary). Census returns show him initially working as a "finisher in a steel mill" 1900; a "roller in steel mill" from 1910 to 1940 when he retired. In 1940 he became a mortician and director of a funeral home which was founded by his son John. He died 20 February 1964 in Youngstown.



- **Patrick James** : Shortly after 1874 the family left Sheffield and moved 10 miles north to the village of **Elsecar**, near Barnsley, where one of the oldest Ironworks in Yorkshire was located. Here their second son **Patrick James** was born on **January 4<sup>th</sup> 1875**. [He is named **Patrick Joseph** in his obituary in The Youngstown Vindicator]. Came to the US with his parents. Also followed his father into steel industry. Worked as "roller" with Carnegie-Illinois Steel Corporation. He married Mary E. Barrett on Oct 18<sup>th</sup> 1906. He died December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1937 in Youngstown after falling down stairs in his home.



- **Mary**: Within a few years the family were on the move again; this time 7 miles south to **Parkgate**, a suburb of Rotherham another major steel manufacturing centre. Their daughter Mary was born here on **February 11<sup>th</sup> 1879**. [An obituary in Youngstown Vindicator says she was born in Allenton PA]. She worked in Youngstown as a Caseworker with the Mahoning County Welfare Dept. Married James P. McGuire, a Youngstown merchant on Nov 21<sup>st</sup> 1909 in St. Columba Church, Youngstown, Was active in Democratic politics; long serving President of Mahoning County Democratic Women's Club. She was also a founding member of The Anna Maria Home for Girls. She died March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1964.



- **Anna**: By the early 1980s the McGoverns moved a short distance west of Rotherham to **Kimberworth** another very historic iron and steel production centre. One of its boasts is that the monks at nearby Kirkstead Abbey were smelting iron from around 1160. Michael and Anne's daughter Anna was probably born here in **Oct 8 1881**. [Her obituary says she was born in Allentown ] It's more likely that she was born in Kimberworth and came to the US with her parents. She died aged 20 "*a fair, bright young girl taken off in death*" in Youngstown on 29 Nov 1901 – The Youngstown Vindicator.

Sometime between c.1881 and 1882, Michael, who would then be about 35 years of age, his Ann and their four children made the most dramatic move of their lives – to leave England and go to live in America. It appears that Michael first travelled to the United States on his own and was later joined by his wife and their children.

**So far no record of when either of them travelled to the United States has been located.**



## ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA DAYS

Having arrived in the U.S. from England, the family first settled in, Pennsylvania, where their next four children were born. They appeared to have moved around the state, presumably as Michael changed jobs. They lived first in **Allentown PA** in east Pennsylvania (60 miles north of Philadelphia); next moved 75 miles west to **Farmdale PA**, appear to have returned to Allentown and later moved 200 miles west again to **Ferndale PA**. By 1891 they seem to have been living in and **Fredonia PA**, 130 miles north of Ferndale. Fredonia is just 30 miles east of **Youngstown, Ohio**, where the family eventually settled. Four of their children were born as they moved around Pennsylvania.



- **Agnes** born **August 21<sup>st</sup> 1887** in **Allentown, Pennsylvania**. Worked (1920-28) as a book-keeper and secretary in a doctors' office – Drs. Hartzell, Biercapp & Goldcamp. Was a soloist with St. Joseph's Church and the Catholic Daughters of St. Monica's Guild? Died unmarried at age 41, following a three year illness. Obituary (Youngstown Vindicator) says her *"charming personality, Christian ideals and devotion to her church won her a high place in the hearts of those who knew her"*. Died November 4<sup>th</sup> 1928.
- **William** born **Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 1885** in **Farmdale, Pennsylvania**. He was employed (1919) as a clerk with the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. He died on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1919 in Youngstown, Ohio.
- **Elizabeth** born **December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1886** in **Allentown, Pennsylvania**. Married Frank J O'Donnell. Died aged 35 on October 9<sup>th</sup> 1924. . Occupation on death certificate "housewife".
- **Margaret** born in 1888 in **Ferndale or Fredonia, Pennsylvania**, according to her death certificate. Her obituary in the "Youngstown Vindicator" says she was "just 4 years of age" when she died. She was buried in Mt Calvary Cemetery, Youngstown. Mount Calvary records Vol IV say Margaret was 4 years old and was buried on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1892.

The McGovern family moved from Fredonia or Ferndale, PA, to Youngstown, OH, sometime between about 1888 and 1890..The last two of their children - Martin J and Thomas Francis- were born there

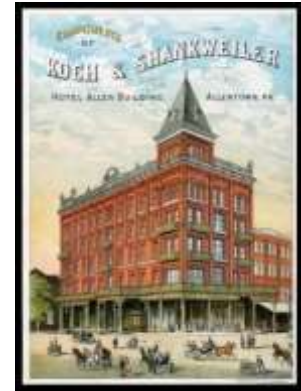
- **Martin J.** was born on **Dec 8<sup>th</sup> 1893** in **Youngstown, OH**. He also followed his father Michael into the steel industry. He was employed (1920) as a "crane-man, open hearth". In 1923 he was employed by the Republic Iron and Steel Co. Between 1924-26 he was employed as a "steelworker". Martin died at the age of 46 at the Mahoning County Sanatorium "after a long illness", according to his obituary in the "Vindicator". He was unmarried. He died on March 9<sup>th</sup> 1940 in Youngstown; was buried on 12 Mar 12<sup>th</sup> 1940 in Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Youngstown.
- **Thomas Francis** was born in **December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1894** in **Youngstown OH**. The Youngtown Daily Vindicator says his birthdate was **December 13<sup>th</sup> 1895**. When he was about 22 he enlisted in the Army joining the 56<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery on November 13<sup>th</sup> 1917. The unit became part of the American Expeditionary Force, which had been established in July 1917, and which played a significant role in France in World War I under the command of General John J Pershing. Thomas Frances was involved in the desperate 47 day [Sept-Nov 1918] "Meuse-Argonne Offensive" in north-eastern France described as "the greatest and bloodiest American battle of the First World War" It saw 26,000 American troops killed and 95,000 injured in a desperate attack on heavily fortified German positions. Thomas Frances "the World War I veteran was lost for days in the Argonne forest as the battles raged. He was honourably discharged from the army in 1919. Back in civilian life he found a job in the steel industry. He was employed (1920) as a "mill wright in a steel mill". By 1921 he was working as a "switchman" with the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad Company. In 1923 he was being employed as a "brakeman", with the company. In 1928 he was working at the Ford plant in Detroit. He married Margaret M. Ronan from Beaver Falls, PA. She died in 1926. He died November 14<sup>th</sup> 1930 in the Detroit Receiving Hospital in Detroit. He was taken home to Youngstown for burial in Calvary Cemetery.



## YOUNGSTOWN HOMETOWN

It believed that three other children were born to Michael and Anne McGovern, some of them possibly while they were living in England. Jen Giblin, a Youngstown genealogist and distant relation of the McGovern family has done an enormous amount of the work on this First Generation McGovern Family Tree. She is currently researching the remaining, missing, children of Michael and Anne McGovern.

Youngstown was where Michael and Anne and their family made their "hometown" in the U.S.



Youngstown, 65 miles south-east of Cleveland and 60 miles north-west of Pittsburgh, takes its name from a New Yorker John Young, who surveyed the area in 1797 and settled there shortly afterwards. He established a sawmill and grist mill in the settlement but it was the arrival of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal in 1849, the discovery of a rich coal vein in 1845 and opening of railway line in 1856 that transformed Youngstown from a village into one of the leading iron production centres in the U.S. In 1850 its population was just 2,800 but this had soared to 33,000 by 1890. Politically Youngstown's importance increased when the Mahoning County Seat was moved to the city from Canfield.

Source: *Youngstown Telegram* 11-17-1907, page 7, column 1.

### "Puddler Poet," Likewise a Scholar and an Artist



**WORKED IN MILLS.**  
Mr. McGovern was born in County Galway, Ireland, and when still a youth went to England where he learned the trade of puddling. Emigrating to America in 1878 he located in Lehigh county, Pennsylvania, where he worked for the Cattasauqua Manufacturing Co. until he removed to Youngstown 17 years ago.

Here he was employed at the Cartwright-McCurdy and Youngstown mills at his trade and remained in these works after their absorption by the United States Steel corporation and Carnegie Steel Co., retiring about six years ago. He resides on West Rayen avenue being a married man and the father of 13 children, eight of whom five boys and three girls, are still liv-

Michael McGovern spent a significant part of his working life in Youngstown. Newspaper articles give a glimpse of his life there. These two trace his journey from Ireland and his years as a "puddler" first in England and later in America, listing some of the companies he worked with in both Allentown and Youngstown.

# But the "Telegram" and the "Valley Voice News" continue the confusion over where Michael McGovern was born.

The "Telegram" which Michael wrote extensively for and was well known to its editors says "Mr. McGovern was born in County Galway, Ireland. The "Valley Voice" says "McGovern was born in Castlerea, County Roscommon in 1848.

### Poet found beauty in Youngstown's mills

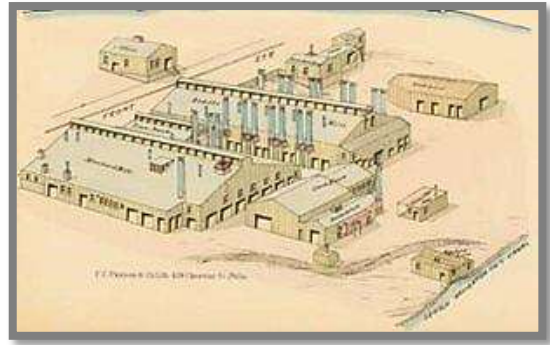
McGovern was born in Castlerea, County Roscommon, Ireland, in 1848. At an early age, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker, but after a short time, he decided his master wasn't teaching him the trade. So he fled to England, where he married Anne Murphy in 1872. He and his wife became the parents of 13 children.  
Shortly after their marriage, he and his wife came to America, where McGovern found work in the rolling mills in Allentown, Pa. Around 1888, he and his family moved to Youngstown, where he worked as a puddler in the Ohio Works of the Carnegie Steel Co.  
During a strike in the mills, McGovern left the iron industry, and later became state oil inspector.



Michael McGovern

## EARLY YEARS IN THE U.S. – A STEEL MILL WORKER “WHERE THE EARTH IS THIRSTY”

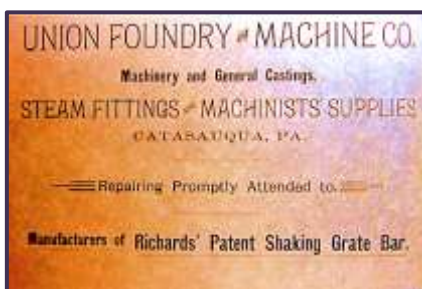
Most biographical articles on Michael McGovern say the first, or one of the first, companies he worked with when he arrived in the United States in the early 1880s was **The Catasauqua Manufacturing Company** also known as The Union Foundry and Machine Company, located in Catasauqua, Pennsylvania. Catasauqua is a suburb of Allentown and borough in Lehigh County. It is 4 miles north of Allentown; 7 miles west of Bethlehem and 90 miles west of New York.



The site of the first village of Catasauqua, founded 1805, was originally the ancestral land of the Lenni Lenape, native American tribe. The name of the town is said to be derived from the Lenni Lenape phrase “*gattoshacki*” which translates as “dry ground” or more poetically “the earth is thirsty”; “the earth wants rain”. It was originally called Craneville in honour of George Crane, an iron mill owner. In a move which Michael McGovern would certainly have appreciated an attempt was made in 1845 to change the name of the settlement from Cranesville to “Sideropolis”, the Greek for “Iron City”.

“A history of Catasauqua in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania” by James F. Lambert and Henry J. Reinhard (1914) tells “Another change of name was agitated for. According to the fertile mind of some ripe scholar the thought of “Iron City” was to be expressed in euphonious Greek and the town called Sideropolis. An application was made to the Post Master General in 1845 but for some unexplained reason the change was never made”.

The idea of his first “home” and workplace in the United States being called either “where the earth is thirsty” or “Sideropolis” (Iron City) would certainly have resonated with Michael McGovern. He had come from a country where everyplace around him was named for its geographic and historic associations – Boyounagh (one of the two old names for Williamstown parish) is said to be from the Irish “*buidhe eanach*” or “yellow bog” ; the other ancient name Templetogether, in Irish, “*Teampull a' Tóchair*”, translates as “the church of the causeway”. His own village of Castlefield is according to historians from “*Cor na gCaisiol*” or the “round hill of the stone forts”. And as McGovern was well acquainted with classical Greek literature the idea that “some ripe scholar” before his time would have dreamed up the idea of calling the little ironwork town “Sideropolis” or “Iron City” would have been intriguing. His own later poetic works are littered with Greek and Latin references.



But instead of becoming “Sideropolis” it was formally named Catasauqua in 1854, Three years earlier in 1851 The Union Foundry and Machine Company was established there. “*The mill contained many puddling furnaces*”. [One of its streets was called Puddler Row] It produced cast-iron columns which were shipped to all parts of America. In 1863 it became The Catasauqua Manufacturing Company and switched to making armour plate for battleships and railway lines. At a later date the mill again changed to the manufacture of tank and boiler plates and afterward added sheet-iron. In the 1880s, when Michael McGovern arrived there, it had a population of just 3,000 people.

The Catasauqua Manufacturing Co. also built a rolling mill in Ferndale (Fullerton) and we know that Michael McGovern and his family had moved to Ferndale by 1888 as their daughter Margaret was born there.





Catsauqua, once forest and farmland, found itself at the centre of America’s anthracite/coal mining boom in the early 1800s. The city claims to have had the United States “*first technically and commercially successful anthracite iron furnace*”. The opening of its first blast furnace in 1840 is described in local histories as having “*marked the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in America*”. The iron and allied industries brought much wealth to the town; such that by the early 1900s, Catsauqua had the highest concentration of millionaires per capita in the nation.

We don’t yet know if Michael McGovern had begun to write poetry while he was living in England or if it was here in Catsauqua that he first started to put pen to paper. Several biographical notes tell us that much of his work was written “during his earliest days when mill tasks were heaviest”. He himself says his poetry is “the product of a puddler standing 33 years in the rolling mills”. The poem “Our Country” charts the industrial, economic and political landscape which “The Puddler Poet” would occupy for the best part of 50 years – it’s an interesting starting point for an exploration of his world and his literary work.

**OUR COUNTRY.**

This western land, which God appears  
 To have reserved, concealed for years,  
 An outlet for downtrodden man  
 To occupy and cultivate,  
 To build its greatness—State by State,  
 And place it in the world’s van,

But having set out this utopian view of the young United States, McGovern rapidly proceeds to tell us how different it all turned out to be (as he saw it) within a hundred years of its declaration and foundation. “A monarch’s crown was hurled down...but the venomed heads of lawless trusts soon created its own corona of golden lusts

While men toiled on and felt secure.  
 The trusts combined to cheat the poor.  
 And lobbied laws to guard their course,  
 They stole the flag from patriot hands.  
 And 'neath it issue their commands.  
 Whereby they steal by legal force.

They stole our lands, our lakes'and mines  
 Our highways and our forest pines.  
 Thus owning every man who toils.  
 Until, instead of liberty.  
 Our land is swamped in misery  
 Where want extends its slimy coils.

The Puddler Poet was setting out his stall. His feet had landed where the “earth was thirsty”.



Catasauqua may or may not have been the first place where Michael McGovern found employment when he arrived in the United States. We know that he was working there, according to newspaper reports written many years later, in the early 1800s. As of now, we still do not know what “gateway” he arrived in America through – New York, Philadelphia or elsewhere; or if he worked for a time in some East coast city before making his way to Catasauqua. But once in the town where the “earth was thirsty” he found himself working again in the steel industry.

When he arrived in Catasauqua, the Allentown suburb, Michael McGovern and his wife Ann had four children (John Patrick, Patrick James, Mary & Anna). Did they live in Catasauqua or in Allentown? We don't yet know for certain.

When their next child Agnes is born in **1887**???? the record says she was born in Allentown but as Catasauqua is a suburb of Allentown it doesn't definitively establish where they were actually living.

They lived first in **Allentown PA** in east Pennsylvania (60 miles north of Philadelphia); next moved 75 miles west to **Farmdale PA**, appear to have returned to Allentown and later moved 200 miles west again to **Ferndale PA**. By 1891 they seem to have been living in and **Fredonia PA**, 130 miles north of Ferndale. Fredonia is just 30 miles east of **Youngstown, Ohio**, where the family eventually settled. Four of their children were born as they moved around Pennsylvania

**Agnes** born **August 21<sup>st</sup> 1887** in **Allentown, Pennsylvania**. Worked (1920-28) as a book-keeper and secretary in a doctors' office – Drs. Hartzell, Biercacc & Goldcamp. Was a soloist with St. Joseph's Church and the Catholic Daughters of St. Monica's Guild? Died unmarried at age 41, following a three year illness. Obituary (Youngstown Vindicator) says her “*charming personality, Christian ideals and devotion to her church won her a high place in the hearts of those who knew her*”. Died November 4<sup>th</sup> 1928.

**## William** born **Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 1885** in **Farmdale, Pennsylvania**. **He was employed (1919) as a clerk with the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. He died on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1919 in Youngstown, Ohio.**

**Elizabeth** born **December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1886** in **Allentown, Pennsylvania**. **Married Frank J O'Donnell. Died aged 35 on October 9<sup>th</sup> 1924. . Occupation on death certificate “housewife”.**

**???? Agnes** born **August 21<sup>st</sup> 1887** in **Allentown, Pennsylvania**. Worked (1920-28) as a book-keeper and secretary in a doctors' office – Drs. Hartzell, Biercacc & Goldcamp. Was a soloist with St. Joseph's Church and the Catholic Daughters of St. Monica's Guild? Died unmarried at age 41, following a three year illness. Obituary (Youngstown Vindicator) says her “*charming personality, Christian ideals and devotion to her church won her a high place in the hearts of those who knew her*”. Died November 4<sup>th</sup> 1928.

**Margaret** born in 1888 in **Ferndale or Fredonia, Pennsylvania**, according to her death certificate. Her obituary in the “Youngstown Vindicator” says she was “just 4 years of age” when she died. She was buried in Mt Calvary Cemetery, Youngstown. Mount Calvary records Vol IV say Margaret was 4 years old and was buried on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1892.

The McGovern family moved from Fredonia or Ferndale, Pennsylvania, to Youngstown, Ohio, about 1888 or 1892. The last two of their children - Martin J and Thomas Francis- were born there. Michael was **engaged in the labor movement and song poetry at this time; he was elected Secretary of the Ferndale Local of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers in 1890**



## PUDDLERS DAYS AT THE OLD SIBERIA ROLLING MILLS IN YOUNGSTOWN 1891- 1910?

The McGovern family – having spent 7 or 8 years moving through the iron and steel mining towns of Pennsylvania, where Michael found work – finally arrived in Youngstown, Ohio sometime between 1890 and 1891. We don't at this time have a precise family record of when that was; various newspaper reports put the date between the two years.

The Youngstown he arrived in – possibly by train – was a booming mining town with a population of around 33,000. He went to work at his trade as a “puddler” at the “Siberia Mill”, a rolling mill owned by the Cartwright & McCurdy Company, located between Lansingville and Haselton, 3 miles south of Youngstown city centre. Various newspaper biographies refer to him being employed at the Ohio Works of Carnegie Steel.

In 1892 several Youngstown based iron manufacturing companies including Cartwright-McCurdy and the Youngstown Iron Company merged to form United Iron and Steel. Seven years later in 1899 United Iron and Steel and the Ohio Steel Company were taken over by National Steel which operated them under the name of American Steel Hoop Company. [Picture shows the Upper Union Mills part of the Union Iron & Steel Co.]



In 1901 Andrew Carnegie sold his company to the financier J.P. Morgan who consolidated all his steel companies into U.S. Corporation which became the world's first ever billion dollar corporation. The Youngstown plant was known as the Ohio Works of Carnegie Steel. This picture shows No 1 Blast Furnace in 1916

### THE OHIO WORKS OF THE CARNEGIE STEEL COMPANY

In the year 1903 the present Carnegie Steel Company was formed by the merger of the Carnegie Steel Company, The National Steel Company and The American Steel Hoop Company, then owners of the Ohio Works, Upper and Lower Union Mills, Greenville Mills, Girard Mills, Warren Mills and the Niles Furnace. Girard and Warren mills were later abandoned.

Sometime between 1900 and 1910 Michael McGovern moved from being a Puddler to become an Inspector in the Mills; he later left the iron & steel industry (during a strike); worked as a State of Ohio Oil Inspector (obituary) and as a foreman in the Youngstown Street Department (1920 Census)

An article published in “The Mahoning Dispatch” in the summer of 1911 suggests that Michael (who is then “writing poetry that would do honor to Keats and Shelly”) is “employed by the city or county, a job that is surely not calculated to inspire lyrics and epics, sonnets and triolets (eight line poems) and trifles light as air”.

By 1930, Michael McGovern had retired, according to the 1930 census returns; at the time he was still writing and hoping to have another book of his poetry published.

## **CENSUS 1900**

\*October 1847 appears to be Michael's most likely birthdate. In the 1900 Census for Ohio, Mike McGovern, (as his name was then written) of 208 Eagle Street, Youngstown, is recorded as being born in October 1847.

On this census return, Michael is described as a "Puddler", a steel mill worker whose job it was to help turn "pig" iron into wrought iron ( or steel) by using a 10 to 15 foot long bar or "rabble" to agitate the molten iron in a furnace. It was hot, back-breaking, dangerous work. Michael had previously worked as a "Puddler" in England. In 1900 he is married to Ann McGovern (Murphy). She was born in England where Michael met her; her parents were Irish. She gives her birthdate at June 1852. In 1900 they had been married for 28 years.

**1899 “LABOR LYRICS AND OTHER POEMS” PUBLISHED-  
SONG POEMS OF STEEL AND STRUGGLE IN THE USA**

1899 was a very significant year for Michel McGovern. It saw the publication of his first, and only, collection of poems. “Labour Lyrics and Other Poems” is a collection of about 150 of the many hundreds of poems he had written by 1899. It bears the imprint of The Vindicator Press, Youngstown, Ohio

**YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO :  
THE VINDICATOR PRESS.  
1899**

But “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” may have been self-published; this is suggested in one of the more recent books on U.S. labor struggles which quotes Michel McGovern’s work.

The exact date of its publication hasn’t yet been established but we know from contemporary newspaper reports that it hit the streets and the book stands during the second week of May (7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>) 1913.

A copy of the book lodged with The Public Library, Youngstown, Ohio, is date-stamped MAY 1899. (right)



By 1899 McGovern was already well known in working class circles across Pennsylvania and Ohio and between Christmas 1898 and Easter 1899 he was still writing and circulating his poems to newspapers and union journals across the region...but he was also preparing for the launch of his first book of poems or verse as he often referred to work as.

The April 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the “Sunday Vindicator” gives us the first hint that he is in the final stages of compiling that collection and deciding which poems will be included in his soon to be published book of verse.



Page 9 of the edition carries a three column feature on one of McGovern’s latest poems which fires a broadside at the ever increasing number of multi company conglomerates or Trusts which were emerging at the time. In McGovern’s view these powerful, emerging trusts represented a huge threat to the working class. They would, in McGovern’s view, “corner” light and air and sell them back to the working man but for the fact that “God prevents their thieving there”

Under the headline **“TRUSTS – Trenchantly Considered in Verses by a Local Bard. Lines by M McGovern As They Originally Appeared in a Labor-Union Pittsburgh Newspaper”** we are told *“Michael McGovern of this city, widely known on account of his verses which are generally in behalf of labour, unionism and the oppressed is quite prolific with the pen. Besides his frequent contributions to the local press he favours outside journals with his lines and also has in preparation a volume of several hundred pages, proof that his industry and enterprises are equal to his fluency and the wholesome character of his themes”*.

The paper McGovern’s poem, entitled “A Rhyme Upon Our Trusts”, had appeared in the week before was the “National Labor Tribune” (1874-1958) based in Pittsburgh, Pa “Devoted to the interests of labor and to the protection of home industries” it was founded in November 1873 by a consortium of blacklisted printers. Issues sold for a penny a copy. In 1887 the paper became the official organ of the Miners National Association (Union) and by 1897 it was the organ of the Amalgamated Association of Iron Steel and Tin Workers of the United States and the American Federation of Labor.

**TRUSTS**

**Trenchantly Considered in Verses by a Local Bard.**

**LINES BY M. M'GOVERN**

As They Originally Appeared in a Labor-Union Pittsburgh Newspaper.

Mr. Michael McGovern, of this city, widely known on account of his verses, which are generally in behalf of labor, unionism and the oppressed, is quite prolific with the pen. Besides his frequent contributions to the local press, he favours outside journals with his lines and also, has in preparation a volume of several hundred pages, proof that his industry and enterprise are equal to his fluency and the wholesome character of his themes:  
One of his latest productions appear-

## COUNTDOWN TO PUBLICATION, McGOVERN RAILS AGAINST COAL, OIL & RAILWAY TRUSTS

In the years leading up to the publication of "Labor Lyrics", Michael McGovern had been a constant critic of the growth of Trusts. These "corporate trusts" were initially created to improve the organization of large businesses but they soon faced widespread accusations of abusing their market power to engage in anticompetitive practices, crushing smaller rivals. John D Rockefeller (1839-1937), generally regarded as "the wealthiest American of all time", headed up the Standard Oil Trust which by 1880 owned 14 separate corporations and had majority control over 26 more. Rockefeller's Trust was according to the New York World "*the most cruel, impudent, pitiless, and grasping monopoly that ever fastened upon a country*". It was against trusts like Standard Oil; J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie's U.S. Steel and J.B. Duke's American Tobacco that that "The Puddler Poet" continued to rail.



The Pittsburgh National Labour Tribune, which encouraged and published the work of labor poets from all over the country, was one of the most implacable critics of the giant trusts and men like Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie. The poem "A Rhyme Upon Our Trusts" which Michael McGovern had published in the Tribune and the Sunday Vindicator is an unrelenting attack on mining, banking and land trusts with he believed were plundering the wealth of the country.



One of his latest productions appeared in last week's Labor Tribune, of Pittsburg. The poem is entitled "A Rhyme Upon Our Trusts," and is as follows:  
 This country is o'er-ran by trusts,  
 And each within its sphere adjusts

This country is o'er-ran by trusts  
 And each within its sphere adjusts  
 Production and the price of that  
 Which it controls, not caring what

The people it plucks may say  
 For trusts possess the right of way  
 On all our great commercial trails  
 To crush the slow industrial snails  
 The trusts economy is seen  
 In big combines which seal the doom  
 Of those who live half way between.

- The poem was not included in "Labor Lyrics and Other Verse" which would be published about six weeks later. It is one of the hundreds which would be lost if the files of the Vindicator and the National Labour Journal had not been preserved and digitized.



(J.D.Rockefeller)

A church informs us how to pray  
 To God, and his commands obey;  
 And while we kneel and pray devout  
 Some banking trust may "clean us out"  
 Through bankruptcy, or mortgage  
 sales,  
 And yet the bank is rich that falls.

We've land monopolists who'll say,  
 "This land is mine. Come, move away;"  
 To even a weary tramp if found  
 Intruding on their titled ground,

For, work or vote, or beg or bow,  
 The trusts will pluck us anyhow,  
 We've coal and oil and railroad trusts,  
 Composed of plutocratic crusts,  
 Who hold our output in control,  
 While standing on each avenue,  
 When labor's products travel through,  
 They make the people pay them toll.

**MICHAEL McGOVERN "THE MILL WORKER OF THIS CITY WHO IS SO WIDELY KNOWN"**

To Youngstown and a swathe of the U.S. Midwest states, Michael McGovern was already, in the 1890s, well known as "The Puddler" poet and the build up to the publication of his first book of poetry continued in the May 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the "Sunday Vindicator".

The headline told its readers that "the bound poetic works of Mr Michael McGovern, the mill worker of this city, who is so widely and favourably known on account of his numerous contributions to the press on the question of labor and other themes, will make their appearance and be placed on sale. The book will be of many pages and have a very appropriate and ornamental title page which was designed and drawn by Mr McGovern, himself who is an artist as well as a fluent writer of prose and poetry. The work entitled "Labor Lyrics and Other Verse" will be retailed at the extremely modest price of 25 cents a volume. Among the pieces of work in the volume are the following, given to indicate the nature and style of the voluminous productions, the great majority of which are devoted to labour and the condition of the man dependent on his toil for his daily bread".

**THE SUNDAY VINDICATOR.**

**LYRICS,**  
Largely Devoted to Labor  
and by a Local  
Author,  
**SOON TO BE ISSUED.**

The monarch and the brigand, and  
The cease of the sea,  
Have grasped and used this power to  
An insolent degree;  
While men have toiled and worried  
To death  
Oppressor's frowning tower,  
Within which they had placed their  
rights,  
And locked away their power,  
The evil has been handed down  
Hereditary's line  
Until the rights of monarchs were  
Considered as divine,  
And so from history's down into  
Our own enlightened hour  
Ambitious men have plotted to  
Possess the wand of power.

Today, before the mirror of  
Our liberty, are seen  
Some crown's ambitious sages of  
The monarch or the queen,  
While vast accumulated wealth  
Our sacred right devour,  
For wealth is 'ere abuse and  
Deed arrogant of power.

We see the haughty autocrat  
Reflected in combines  
E'er crawling up our flimsy life  
A wreath of poisoned vines,  
His politics as queens can stalk  
And wear the nation's honors,  
While labor treads the thorns beneath  
Their concentrated powers.

**POLITICS IN THREE CHAPTERS.**  
"The world is composed of three classes: Workers, beggars and thieves."  
—Carlyle.

The Productions are from the Prolific  
Pen of Mr. Michael McGovern,  
the Iron-Worker.

In ten days, or at the utmost two  
weeks, the bound poetic works of Mr.  
Michael McGovern, the mill worker of  
this city, who is so widely and favorably  
known on account of his numerous  
contributions to the press on the ques-  
tion of labor and other themes, will  
make their appearance and be placed on  
sale. The book will be of many pages  
and have a very appropriate and orna-  
mental title page, which was designed  
and drawn by Mr. McGovern himself.

The two column article on Page 5 of the "Vindicator" contains four of the poems which would appear in "Labor Lyrics" two week's later - "The Complaint of the Tramp"; "Powers That Should Not Be", "Politics in Three Chapters" and "To A Caged Bird".

**THE COMPLAINT OF THE TRAMP.**  
If God has made the earth for some  
To own exclusively,  
I wish he ne'er allowed me come  
On earth a tramp to be.  
Twere better leave me still unborn  
Than bring me here to rue  
The systems that are made to scorn  
The many for the few.

**POWERS THAT SHOULD NOT BE.**  
Since Israel petitioned great  
Jehovah for a king,  
Our slavish and ambitious men  
To bad traditions cling;  
And contrary to God's intent,  
The many still will cower,  
Beneath some tyrant's lash to whom  
They gave away their power.

**TO A CAGED BIRD.**  
Ah, little songster, thus confin'd  
Within thy wiry cell,  
How can'st thou have the peace of mind  
To sing all day so well?

**POLITICS IN THREE CHAPTERS.**  
"The world is composed of three classes: Workers, beggars and thieves."  
—Carlyle.  
American definition: "Tradesmen, politicians and monopolists."  
Chapter I.

As McGovern's first book of poetry was being published by the Vindicator, the editor would have been very familiar with the 150 or so poems which were to be included in it and his selection of these four was clearly chosen to illustrate the range of subjects which would be dealt with in the volume. Three of the poems were illustrative of McGovern's highly politicised view of American life and the struggle of workingmen and women to earn a living, put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. The fourth, "To a Caged Bird", is one of the "Puddler Poet's" most searingly beautiful and poignant lyrical poems

How does this heart with gladness beat  
Within that little cage  
Or dost thy pour these strains so sweet  
Thy sadness to assuage?

Oh would that I could gaily sing  
My sorrows thus away  
And seem as thou poor captive thing  
"Midst Life's dark troubles, gay.

**A BOOK OF POETRY - SO VIGOROUS, SO TRUE, DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE OF LABOUR, FULL OF BEAUTIFUL SENTIMENT IS BORN**



Early on Sunday morning May 14<sup>th</sup> Youngstown's newsboys began popping 16 page, 5 cent editions of the "Sunday Vindicator" into mailboxes all along streets and avenues across the sleeping city. We have to assume that one of the most eagerly awaited copies fell thru the letterbox or was shoved into the mailbox of 209 Eagle Street, the home of Michael "The Puddler Poet" McGovern and his family.

In news terms, Sunday May 14<sup>th</sup> was clearly a "slow news day" but for Michael McGovern it was a red letter day

Lacking a single attention grabbing front-page story, the paper carried seven separate single column headlines reporting on the progress of the Spanish-American war in Cuba; efforts to negotiate a "commercial treaty" between the United States and Germany, the successful ending of a Longshoremen's strike in Buffalo, the growth of "municipal socialism" in Manchester and from London a report on the "invasion" of the English locomotive market by strong American conglomerates or trusts.

The report, probably to Michael McGovern chagrin, claiming that American locomotive manufacturers were "enjoying great advantages in the English market from the centralisation of industry".

It quoted an English trade union, leader George N Barnes, of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, who curiously was extolling the value and importance of "American combines whatever the temporary result on the status of workmen". The "combines" (trusts) had he claimed "resulted in the more economical use of labour; centralisation and specialisation giving an enormous advantage to American firms and in as much as they are entirely on the line of progress, we would welcome them here".

"The great advantage enjoyed by American producers arises from the centralization of industry. American combines, whatever the temporary result on the status of workmen, have certainly resulted in the more economical use of labor. Centralizing and specialization are giving an enormous advantage to American firms and inasmuch as they are entirely on the line of progress, we would welcome them here."

But a few pages on came the headline and the report that would surely have given the "Puddler Poet" a sense of quite satisfaction and achievement.

It was the first report – and the first review - of the publication of his "Labor Lyrics" collection, which we are told, had hit the bookstands during the week of May 17<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>.

And the review couldn't have been more glowing

**LYRICS,**

---

**Labor, Patriotic and Sentimental by the Puddler Poet,**

---

**MR. MICHAEL M'GOVERN,**

---

So Well Known Through His Labor Pieces Appearing from Time to Time in the Press.

---

On a number of occasions the Vindicator has contained notices relative to the poetical work of Mr. Michael McGovern, of this city, his book appearing during the week and being entitled "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems." Mr. Mc-

**McGovern has spent most of his years before the puddling furnace in the mill instead of with a pen in an attic or a parlour. His work so varied, so vigorous, so true to nature and some of it so full of beautiful sentiment, is another proof that the poet is born not made and that circumstances the most adverse and discouraging are futile when opposed by resolution, natural gifts, fine feeling and devotion.**

The article goes on to re-print in its entirety Michael McGovern's own introduction to his first ever book of verse and quotes extracts from poems dealing with labor struggles and the Puddler Poets love of nature and all its creatures.





**THE ONLY PUDDLER THAT EVER STOOD “ON TOP OF EARTH” WHO HAD THE DARING TO ISSUE A VOLUME OF POEMS**

The legendary founder and editor of the Youngstown Vindicator, William F. Maag (1850-1924), would have been well known to Michael McGovern. Maag like McGovern had an interesting life. Born in Ebingen, Wurttemberg, Germany he became a printers apprentice at the age of 14; emigrated to the US in when he was 17 and after a career in printing and journalism in the Midwest he bought the Vindicator after a disastrous fire burned down its print shop in 1887. He is regarded as its “real founder” as he grew the paper from a weekly to a daily and played a larger than life role in its development over the next 35 years.

It’s not clear if it was Maag or one of his sub editors who reviewed The Puddler’s “Labor Lyrics” but the new collection was given an enthusiastic welcome and had praise heaped on its author and on the first collection of his poems. The Sunday Vindicator reprinted McGovern’s own introduction to the book and paid glowing tributes to a selection of his work.

To, “All You who labor and are heavy laden,” etc.  
 Some of the greatest literary men have prefaced their volumes with excuses to the public, but these were literary men and not rolling mill men.  
 In issuing this “curiosity” I have no excuse to offer, except that it is the product of a puddler of thirty-three years’ standing in rolling mills, and whose life’s school term might be numbered by some few months.  
 Puddlers, however, are a boastful class of workmen. I therefore, in keeping with their dignified practice, make the boast that I consider myself the only puddler that ever stood on “Top of earth” who had the daring to issue a volume of poems.

**INTRODUCTION.**  
 To “All You Who Labor and Are Heavy Laden,” etc.  
 SOME of the greatest literary men have prefaced their volumes with excuses to the public, but these were literary men and not rolling mill men.  
 In issuing this “curiosity” I have no excuse to offer, except that it is the product of a puddler of thirty-three years’ standing in rolling mills, and whose life’s school-term might be numbered by some few months.  
 Puddlers, however, are a boastful class of workmen. I therefore, in keeping with their dignified practice make the boast that I consider myself the only puddler that ever stood on “Top of earth” who had the daring to issue a volume of poems.

It is clear from his self-penned introduction that Michael McG, as he sometimes referred to himself, was proud of his achievement in having “Labor Lyrics” published and although he calls his fresh off the presses, volume “a curiosity” he says he going to make no apology for publishing his poems. He tells us: “Puddlers are a boastful class of workmen and in keeping with their dignified practice make the boast that I consider myself the only puddler that ever stood on “Top of earth” who had the daring to issue a volume of poems”



He also reminds us he has come to poetry as a puddler of 33 years standing in rolling mills and that his” *life’s school-term might be numbered by some few months*”. Then there is the prediction:

**I shall be a veritable “Hayseed” for the critics, but**

McGovern says he won’t be surprised if the critics dismiss him and his poems as the work of “a hayseed” – an unlettered, unsophisticated country hick! But he warns the critics that they will find “the hide of a puddler more tough than sensitive”. And he urges his fellow steel mill workers and all of those who might be dismissed as “hayseeds” to “invest twenty five cents each in the purchase of a copy of Labor Lyrics” and after that he won’t care what the critics say or do.

**PATRIOT POEMS  
POEMS RECALLING LONGFELLOW  
POEMS OF FIDELITY**

Glimpses of Michael McGovern's personality emerge from his self-deprecating and yet bullish introduction to "Labor Lyrics and Other Poem". It's something which the "Sunday Vindicator" reviewer picks up on immediately.

*"An insight into his methods and into his feelings as an author are given with clearness and touches of humour in his Introduction or Preface".*

Several of McGovern's poems are quoted and analysed. The first in the collection "The Rolling Mill" is according to the article *"treated in a manner instantly recalling "The Village Blacksmith" that English classic by Longfellow"*.

I love to see the rays of light  
That from the furnace flow  
Like phantoms in the arms of night  
Quadrilling as they go.  
Parading o're the valley when  
The town is slumbering still  
Oh, then I think there is beauty in  
The shadows from the mill.

*Equally strong and full of fidelity are "When the Changing Whistle Blows"; "Labor's Drifting Cloud" and "The Workingman's Song" and many others in this very interesting, instructive and educating work dedicated to the cause of labor".*

*"There is also much poetry of a patriotic nature...inspired by the war with Spain. Lyrical poems mentioned include "Old Country Robin", "Mountain Brook" and "England's Clover Fields". Other beautiful pieces include "The Youthful Spring", "April Showers", "The Zephyr's and the Storm", "Midsummer Thoughts" and "To a Caged Bird".*

The double column review on Page of the "Sunday Vindicator" tells us that *"Mr. Michael McGovern (is) So Well Known through His Labor Pieces Appearing in the Press From Time To Time"* and that this collection is being highly commended by the union with which has had a lifelong attachment- The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers.

**Mr. McGovern's work has been heartily approved and highly commended by the officers of the Amalgamated association and other labor organizations. The book may be procured from the author, at the Vindicator office and elsewhere and is having a large sale, which is certainly merited.**

This volume is the product of  
An humble tolling workingman  
Who smatteringly talks of love  
In verse, which many may reprove  
Although he does the best he can:  
Who dares to tell in simple rhyme  
The little things, which through his  
mind  
Have ebbed and flowed from time to  
time;  
And though he lacks in flights sublime,  
And snail-like crawls far, far behind,  
He fain would for his weakly chime  
An audience of workmen find.

And if my thoughts with many themes  
Have flirted oftentimes away,  
And did not treat them well, I pray  
Forbear to harshly judge my dreams,  
For rhymers often dream by day.  
The poet's thoughts e'er bounding go  
From earth to stars, to heaven and  
hell  
And then will grope through polar snow  
Where midnight sun and icebergs glow,  
Then linger in some southern dell  
Where flowers in the sunshine grow.

Let workingmen my critics be.  
Let those who criticize the great  
Not pause to waste a thought on me,  
For planet-gazers seldom see  
The grub they trample 'neath their  
feet.

Yours respectfully,  
**MICHAEL MCGOVERN.**

RECEIVED BY THE  
LIBRARY OF THE  
AMALGAMATED ASSOCIATION OF  
IRON AND STEEL WORKERS  
1897

Although "The Vindicator" published "Labor Lyrics", it is likely that Youngstown is other daily newspaper, "The Telegram", also carried reports on the publication of the book. So far it has not been possible to check the relevant issues as "The Telegram", isn't yet online. However other newspapers were giving book an enthusiastic reception.



**LABOR LYRICS**

And Other Poems Com-  
mended Highly by a  
Writer in Ruskin.

**MR. M. M'GOVERN'S BOOK**

Greatly Enjoyed by the Editor of a  
Progressive Paper in  
Tennessee.

Under the head line "Labor Lyrics,"  
The Coming Nation, of Ruskin, Tenn.,  
has an interesting review of the book of  
poems recently issued by Michael, Mc  
Govern, "the rolling mill man" of this  
city. The article, omitting the introduc-  
tion or preface, previously given in the  
Vindicator, is as follows:

On the table before me lies something  
new in the literary line—a book of po-  
ems written by a "puddler," a man  
whose hands are hardened, and skin  
toughened by handling huge balls of  
molten iron weighing several hundred  
pounds.

For thirty years this man has toiled  
in the fierce heat, the stifling vapor and  
soot of a rolling mill until his back is  
bent beneath the fearful strain, and as  
he carries his dinner bucket to and from  
the glaring, roaring scene of this infer-  
nal tread-mill no one would imagine  
that within the grimy, stooping form  
dwells the spirit of prophetic poetry.  
And yet the reader will find in Michael  
McGovern's "Labor Lyrics and Other  
Poems," a wealth of inspiration. At  
times his denunciation of wrong is  
scathing, and then follows the prophecy  
of better days.

In common with the whole Irish race,  
Mr. McGovern is intensely patriotic,  
and some of his poems breathe this no-  
ble sentiment, while others touch with  
true poetic taste the softer chords of  
love.

I have enjoyed the little volume very  
much indeed. The author is truly one  
of nature's poets.

## WHO WOULD IMAGINE THAT WITHIN THE GRIMY STOOPING FORM OF THIS MAN DWELLS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHETIC POETRY

Within two weeks of its publication copies of Michael McGovern's "Labor Lyrics" was beginning to circulate through the Midwest and at least one copy had travelled as far afield as Tennessee.

The Sunday Vindicator of May 28<sup>th</sup> carried a report of a review on the book taken from "The Coming Nation" a socialist newspaper published in Ruskin, Tennessee, which Michael McGovern had also had poems published in, in the previous years..

"The Ruskin Commonwealth" was the location of a utopian socialist/communist settlement or "colony" in the 1890s. It was named after John Ruskin (1819-1900), the English writer, artist, social thinker and philanthropist.

"The Coming Nation" was published from this office (left), with its eye-catching signage, in Ruskin.

The Sunday Vindicator tells us that The Editor of this "Progressive Paper in Tennessee Greatly Enjoyed Mr. M. McGovern's Book" and had written a lengthy article about it. He wrote:

**"On the table before me lies something new in the literary line—a book of poems written by a "puddler, a man whose hands are hardened and the skin toughened by handling huge balls of molten iron weighing several hundred pounds."**

**"For thirty years this man has toiled in the fierce heat, the stifling vapour and soot of a rolling mill until his back is bent beneath the fearful strain and as he carries his dinner bucket to and from the glaring, roaring scene of this infernal thread-mill no one would imagine that within the grimy stooping form dwells the spirit of prophetic poetry"**.

**"And the reader will find in Michael McGovern's Labor Lyrics and Other Poems a wealth of inspiration. At times his denunciation of wrongs is scathing and then follows the prophecy of better days"**.

**"In common with the whole Irish race, Mr McGovern is intensely patriotic and some of his poems breathe this noble sentiment while others touch with true poetic taste the softer chords of love. I have enjoyed this little volume very much indeed. The author is truly one of nature's poets"**.

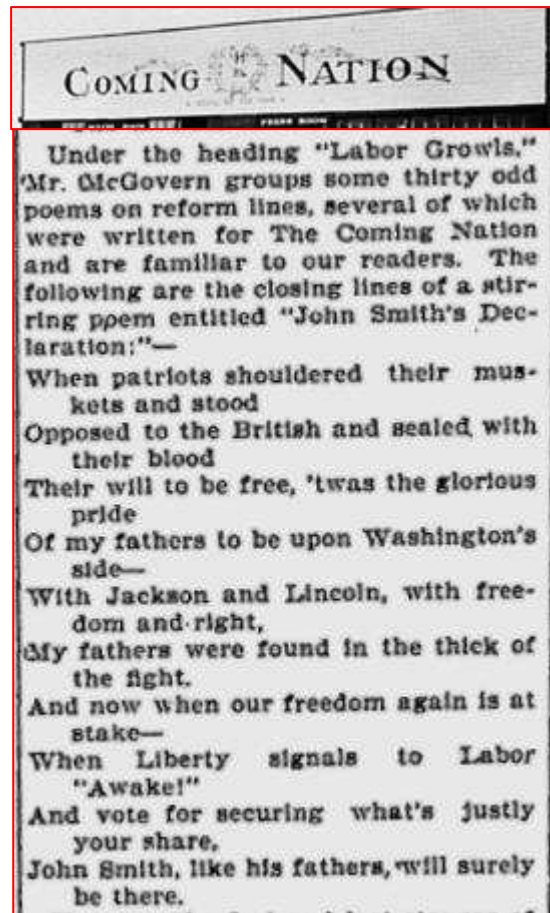
**“LABOR LYRICS” SHOULD COME SECOND ONLY TO THE BIBLE IN A WORKINGMAN’S LIBRARY**

Michael McGovern submitted hundreds of his poems to labor, socialist and trade union newspapers and magazines as well as to Irish-American newspapers over the years.

“The Coming Nation”, the radical socialist newspaper published in Ruskin, Tennessee was one of those McGovern had sent poems to. It had been founded by Julius Augustus Wayland in 1893; had a circulation of 60,000 and was regarded as “the most popular socialist newspaper in America”. Wayland, born in Versailles, Indiana, grew up in “abject poverty” after his father, four brothers and his sister died during a cholera epidemic. After just two years of schooling, Wayland began work as an apprentice printer, later became a journalist and founder of one of the most extraordinary social experiments in U.S. history – the Ruskin Commonwealth.

Ruskin is located about 50 miles west of Nashville. It was once the centre of the experimental community or commonwealth but today it is a “ghost town”.

The article from “The Coming Nation” tells us that many of the 30 poems in the collection, which are grouped under the heading “Labor Growls” were originally written for the paper and were familiar to its readers. It then goes on to quote at length from several of the poems including “My Workingman” and “John Smith’s Declaration:

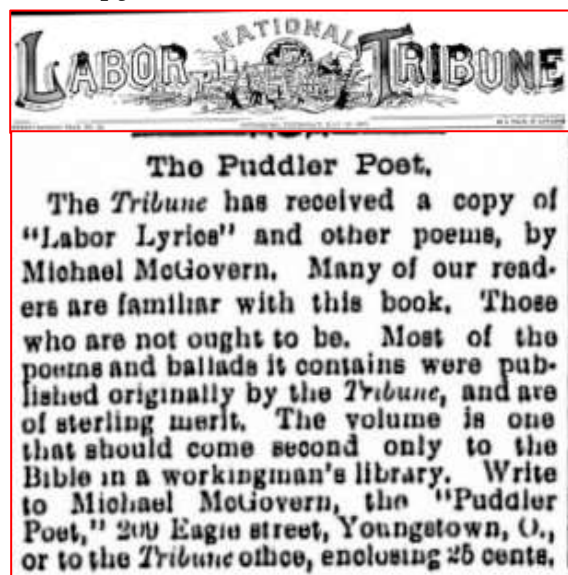


“When patriots shouldered their muskets and stood  
Opposed to the British and with their blood  
Their will to be free, ‘twas the glorious pride  
Of my fathers to be upon Washington’s side”.

The article ends with a description of the volume. *“Labor Lyrics contains 156 pages and is well printed and bound in illuminated paper covers. It can be procured from the author Michael McGovern, Youngstown, Ohio for the price of 25 cents a copy”.*

On Thursday May 18<sup>th</sup> 1899 - just a week “Labor Lyrics” was published and two weeks after it had

carried McGovern’s anti Trust poem, “A Rhyme Upon Our Trusts”, Pittsburgh’s “National Labour Tribune”, had a brief front page report on the launch of The Puddler Poet’s first collection. The article, sandwiched between reports of a Wyoming coalminers strike and wage increases for 3,000 West Virginia steel and iron workers, said the Tribune has just received a copy of “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” by Michael McGovern. It described the poems, many of which had originally been published in The Tribune as being of “sterling merit” and suggested that the **“volume is one that should come second only to the Bible in a workingman’s library”**.





Three weeks after its publication "Labor Lyrics" was still continuing to be discussed in local and regional newspapers across Ohio and Pittsburgh. Readers were beginning to write in "Letters to the Editor" of their admiration for the work of the "Puddler Poet". McGovern is being hailed as "a born writer" ...a man with a sincerity of purpose...who looks at life with "a racy style"

Newspaper's like Pittsburgh's "National Labour Tribune" was one of those labor/union papers which published – not just labor related and industrial news - but also featured a considerable amount of poetry, short stories and prose essays in every edition . It was a tradition that gave these papers an unusually rich texture recently been analysed in an essay in Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association. An article entitled "*Written for the National Labor Tribune: Community Formation through Poetry in Pittsburgh's Labor Newspaper*" argues that the poetry in the nineteenth-century newspaper the National Labor Tribune "*acted as a space for public dissent in the lives of the laborers who were readers of the paper*".

The Tribune encouraged "working class laborers, who doubled as amateur poets but were not professional writers", to write to the paper and correspond with each other to form a network outside the main stream circulation of print culture"

As a result of this, men like Michael McGovern became part of a loose federation of "*poets of the Labor Tribune who used writing to solidify the community of laborers brought together by the paper and to imagine the possibility of change in labor practices through the collective action encouraged by the paper*".

On Thursday June 8th 1899 The Tribune carried this interesting letter to its editor from a writer in Youngstown who signed himself "J".

His letter is given the headline THE PUDDLER POET Labor Lyrics and Other Poems by Michael McGovern. The writer who has "a copy of the book before him" describes it as "The work of a man who is a born writer and who should have been shoving a pen, all these years, instead of an iron tool into a furnace. No matter what his views may be no one can question the author's sincerity of purpose. Some who are won't to hug their economic delusions may be incensed but there is logic there and fair play. Our friend is noted for his fair-mindedness and his fidelity to the cause he represents"

"The book only costs 25 cents but it is well worth four times the cost to any man who appreciates good poetry".

- **More interesting than the letter itself is Michael McGovern's reply which appeared in the next edition of the Tribune**

**THE PUDDLER POET**

—  
"Labor Lyrics and Other Poems,"  
by Michael McGovern.

YOUNGSTOWN, O., May 31.

Editors National Labor Tribune:

This is an age of cheap literature and of cheap goods. Not all that is cheap is bad, however, and this work which lies before us cannot be thrown away as such. Our honest friend, the author, is no stranger to *Tribune* readers. Many have read his poetic and other effusions with delight and interest. Now a collection of the scintillations of his intellect is offered for sale to the public! The first portion of the book is devoted to "Rolling Mill Rhymes," which will be of interest to those especially who are employed in that industry, as well as persons who are familiar with its workings. Then follow portions under the headings of "Labor Growls" and "A Miscellany of Trifles." The latter portion seems to have a very inappropriate title, as some of the poems there are not what one would expect from a man who has toiled all these years with very little opportunity of comprehending nature's beauties and the higher side of life.

to interest the reader.

The work is the product of a man who is a born writer, and who should have been shoving a pen all these years, instead of iron tools into a furnace. No matter what his views may be, no one can question the author's sincerity of purpose. Some who are wont to hug their economic delusions may be incensed, but there is logic there and fair play. Our friend is noted for his fair-mindedness and his fidelity to the cause he represents.

The pedagogic mind may discover errors, but the reader will overlook this when he becomes interested in taking in the literary repast set before him.

The concluding portion, "Rhymes Pertaining to Ireland," is well written and will, of course, receive its merited attention from natives of that realm and their descendants.

A good likeness of the author also appears. All lovers of poetry and all interested in the cause of human justice should read this work, whether they agree with the views of the author or not. It is neatly arranged and should receive the attention it justly deserves from the laboring public. The book only costs 25 cents, but it is well worth four times the cost to any man who appreciates good poetry.

Yours, J.

## THE PUDDLER POET, THE SHEEP STEALER AND THE LIBERATOR – A BEGORRA TALE

As well as submitting poems to the Pittsburgh “National Labour Tribune”, Michael McGovern was clearly a reader/subscriber receiving a weekly copy through the post. The Tribune published in Pittsburgh every Thursday and his copy might have arrived over the week-end or on Monday. And immediately on reading “J’s” letter in the June 8<sup>th</sup> edition he set about replying. And in replying displayed once again his keen wit, his tendency to self-deprecation, his sense of humour and his great ability as a story-teller.



And central to his response is a roughish tale based on a supposed legal escapade involving a sheep stealer and the Great Daniel O’Connell, The Liberator.

The June 15<sup>th</sup> edition of The Tribune( Page 4) saw the Puddler Poet replying to “J” by recalling a wryly humorous Daniel O’Connell tale and composing a short poem of thanks to the anonymous letter writing “J”.

<p><b>O'CONNELL'S PLEA RECALLED.</b>  <b>The Puddler Poet Thanks a Tribune Correspondent.</b></p> <p>209 EAGLE STREET,          YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO. )</p> <p>Editors National Labor Tribune:</p> <p>I wish to offer my thanks to your Youngstown correspondent, who signed himself "J.," in your last issue. I own I never knew that I possessed such "poetic" qualifications until your correspondent pointed them out.</p> <p>His letter in my behalf reminds me of a case in which Daniel O'Connell was pleading for a client who stole sheep, and who, in that thieving profession, was an adept. The criminal, as well as other honest people, knew he was guilty, but through "Dan's" pleading the jury and the court were made to believe that, instead of the man being guilty, he was innocent and in fact made a victim of malevolent prosecutors, and accordingly he was acquitted with honor.</p>	<p>The thief afterwards, in a private interview with O'Connell, said with tears in his eyes. "By garras I never knew that I was such a victimized and abused man until I heard you make that speech in my favor." I accordingly, like the thief, will state that I never knew I was such a poet until I read that letter of "J.'s" in my behalf.</p> <p>A thief and a "poet" may be two oppositely-willed characters, yet the tears of each may generously flow in gratitude for a good turn done; but if the thief ever had the ungenerosity to forget O'Connell as a "friend in need," I will state that the "Puddler Poet" will endeavor not to forget the kindness of my unknown friend "J." Allow me to add:</p> <p>As murky clouds that pass above          Their moving shadows throw,          And darken in their airy flight          The landscape down below,          So words that bear malevolence          Will cast their shadows, too,          Upon our peace and hide awhile          Love's sunshine from our view.</p> <p>But words that give encouragement          Like prism'd sunshine flow;          They make the choris of Hope and Love          And make us feel we owe          A debt of friendship in return          Which duty tells us pay;          And, oh! this debt in sunshine wrapped          I feel I owe to "J."</p> <p>Yours,            MICHAEL MCGOVERN.</p>
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**OF PUBLICATION, OF PRIDE AND OF REGRETS,  
DID THE PUDDLER POET HAVE A FEW?**

Michael McGovern in his own Introduction to "Labor Lyrics" tells us that the inspiration for his poems came from the "great" industry he worked in and that his years as a puddler and a rolling mill man had sparked the muses in him. He says that perhaps the "*rhymes will be of little interest to men of other craft and if their radical tenor hurts the feelings of those who get their living through less physical exercise, and the loss of less sweat than a puddler they had better enter the rolling mills, or other industries and hear labor's complaints.*" Fighting, prophetic words.



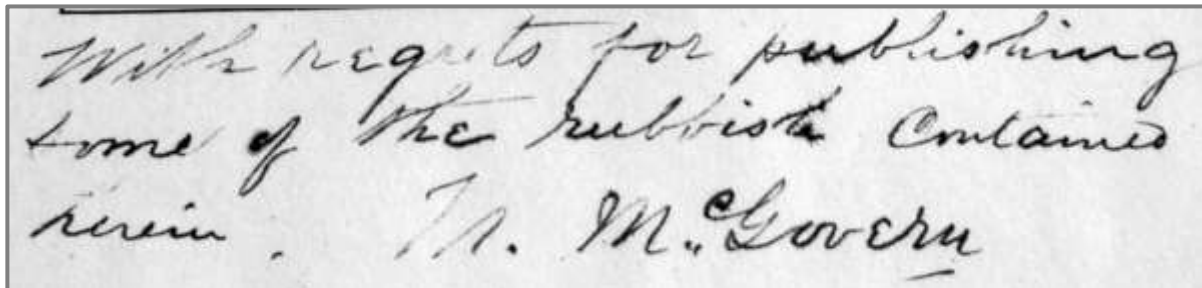
He then goes on to explain that the collection, he has selected, also contains some "amorous" verses because he wished to show that "*a rolling mill man has a heart as susceptible to the purest motives of love as those who have millions wherewith to purchase a title*".

And finally he adds "*being an Irishman I offer no excuse for my introduction of some few trifles pertaining to that "Dear old country," but regret that space forbids me adding more.*"

And until some further material emerges that is almost all we know about Michael McGovern's mind-set as he collected, selected and prepared his first book of poems for publication.

**EXCEPT...**

**Except**, that is, for one enigmatic entry in his own handwriting on a copy of "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems" which was deposited in the Youngstown Public Library.



"*With regrets for publishing some of the rubbish contained herein - M. McGovern*" are the self-deprecating lines he has written in his firm, slanting handwriting under his stately 1898 photograph.

**McGOVERN PUBLISHES HIS POEMS IN YOUNGSTOWN  
IRISH PEASANTS WELCOME FUTURE KING & QUEEN**

Although there doesn't appear to be a publication day report or review of Michael McGovern's "Labor Lyrics" in the Youngstown Vindicator in March, April or May 1899 the newspaper provides a fascinating glimpse into what was "making the news" in the United States and across the world at the time. St Patrick's Day 1899 saw the formal ending of the Spanish-American War and as had become customary on March 17<sup>th</sup> "The Vindicator" carried a series of articles on "Holy Saint Patrick" and the debt of faith Ireland and the world owed to them; telling us that "Ireland was the only country in which the Christian religion became early established without bloodshed."

By April 15<sup>th</sup>, The Vindicator's Page One headline story – and one wonders what Michael McGovern would make of this- is telling us that "anybody who is anybody socially" has left London for the "season" and that the "Yorks" - in this case not a hoard of New Yorkers but the Duke and Duchess of York, later to become King George V and Queen Mary" – have come to Ireland for their Spring/Summer visit accompanied by an enormous entourage of lords and ladies. Many of them pictured here while visiting Kilkenny Castle on Tuesday April 20<sup>th</sup> 1899.



**EVERYBODY**

Who is Anybody Socially  
Absent from London  
Just Now.

**THE YORKS IN IRELAND.**

The Coming Nuptials of Lord Rose-  
bery's Daughter Promising to  
Revive the Season.

London, April 15 -This has been a miserable wet week in London, and there has been a complete dearth of social festivities. All the fashionable people are either in Ireland with the Duke and Duchess of York, or attending the Newmarket race meeting, where "Tod" Sloan has had a popular run of victories. The strong head wind blow-

The Vindicator report is entitled:  
**EVERYBODY  
Who is Anybody Socially Absent from London Just Now  
THE YORKS IN IRELAND.  
The Coming Nuptials of Lord Rosebery's  
Daughter Promising to Revive the Season.**

Lord Rosebery's daughter was Lady Margaret Primrose and she would marry the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl (later Marquis) of Crew in what would be one of the most lavish weddings of the time; her mother was Hannah Primrose, Countess of Roseberry who became the richest woman in Britain after inheriting her father's fortune in 1874. Her grandfather was Baron Mayer de Rothschild.

The report supplied by a news agency, datelined London, April 15<sup>th</sup>, goes on to tell us that the Duke and Duchess of York have received a splendid reception in Ireland.

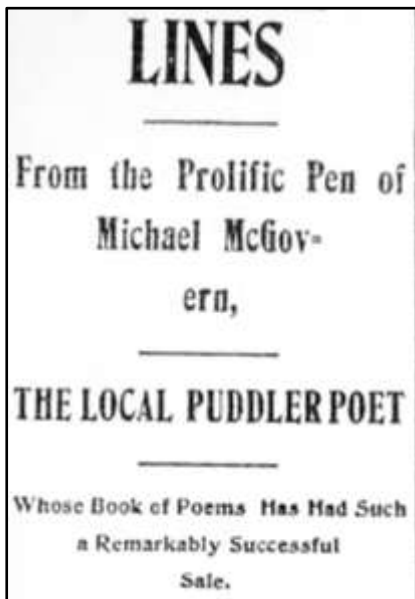
*"In fact the exceptional cordiality of their welcome from all classes including the peasants has made a considerable impression. The Daily Graphic remarks – The manifestations indicate that the Irish people are delighted to welcome any members of the royal family who will give them an opportunity to do so."*

The Duke and Duchess of York have met with a splendid reception in Ireland. In fact, the exceptional cordiality of their welcome from all classes, including the peasants, has made a considerable impression. The Daily

This taken directly from a news agency office in London elbows aside the other three subsidiary main stories on the front page of "The Vindicator" – including claims by the Attorney General of Ohio DK Watson that an attempt was made by an oil company to bribe him; the trial of Senator Matt Quay on charges of misappropriating state funds, a charge of which he was subsequently found not guilty and a bid by the legendary Irish –American politician "Boss" Croker of Tammany Hall fame to prevent a congressional hearing into his financial affairs.



June 25<sup>th</sup> 1899

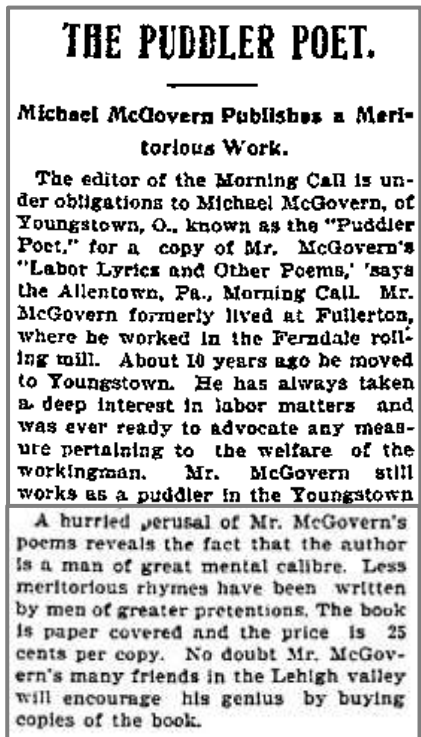


Although no contemporaneous account of the publication, the launch or the reception which Michael McGovern's "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems" got has so far been located it is clear from this report in the "Youngstown Vindicator" of June 25<sup>th</sup> 1899 (some months after it hit the bookstands) that the collection was enthusiastically received.

The article relates to a new poem of McGovern's which was being published in the paper on that day. The poem entitled "In search of Puddlers or The Wall of The Trusts" had first appeared in the "The Pittsburgh Labor World" and was now being re-printed in "The Vindicator". The headline confirming that "The Puddler Poet" was having great success with his "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems".

**LINES, it goes on, From the Prolific Pen of Michael McGovern, THE LOCAL PUDDLER POET, whose Book of Poems Has Had Such a Remarkably Successful Sale**

The article says "The following is one of the latest poems from the pen of Mr Michael McGovern, of this city, whose recently issued book "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems" has had a very successful sale". The article then goes on to quote from the poem in which Michael McG. comments acerbically on the hunt in newspaper advertising columns for "puddlers" now that the trade was going through something of a local revival after years of decline and years of exploitation of puddlers by mill bosses.



Six months later in February 1900 "The Vindicator" again reprints an article, heaping praising "Labour Lyrics and Other Poems" which first appeared in another newspaper. This time the article is from "The Allentown Morning Call", the town in which Michael McGovern worked before coming to live in Youngstown. McGovern had obviously sent a copy of his collected poems to the Editor of "The Morning Call" presumably hoping that it would be favourably reviewed.

It was.

"The Vindicator" headlines its Page 5 story:

**THE PUDDLER POET  
Michael McGovern Publishes a Meritorious Work**

It goes on:

The editor of the Morning Call is under obligation to Michael McGovern, of Youngstown, O, known as the "Puddler Poet" for a copy of Mr. McGovern's "Labor Lyrics and Other Poems", says the Allentown, Pa, Morning Call. Mr McGovern previously lived at Fullerton where he worked in the Ferndale rolling mill. About 10 years ago he moved to Youngstown.

Then it says that "a hurried perusal of Mr McGovern's poems reveal the fact that the author is a man of great mental calibre. Less meritorious rhymes have been written by men of greater pretensions. The book is paper covered and the price is 25 cents per copy. No doubt Mr McGovern's many friends in the Lehigh

Valley will encourage his genius by buying copies of the book."



## WHERE THE TIDES AND THE STRANDS OF A LIFE MET

Looking for the political and social influences that forged and moulded Michael McGovern's writing and his poetry, three obvious strands emerge:

- \* **His Irish Nationalism**
- \* **His American Patriotism and**
- \* **His Universal Egalitarianism**

### “THE NATIONALIST POET”



Michael McGovern left Ireland at a time when Fenian sentiment was on the march and Irish America was providing much of the funding and the “force of arms” strategizing behind plans for yet one more armed rebellion back home in Ireland against the “old English oppressor”.

Carrying all of the bitterness of the Famine “holocaust” and of previous failed armed rebellions across the Atlantic with them men like John O’Mahoney and Michael Doheny were soon fueling Irish American sentiment and organizations like The Fenian Brotherhood, Clann na nGael and The Irish Republican Brotherhood were raising funds to buy the guns and explosives that they hoped would, at last, see “Ireland free”.

When Michael was leaving Ireland the Fenian Movement was still in its infancy although its thinking and its “force of arms” philosophy was beginning to fuel and feed into the nascent Nationalism of the time. And he would almost certainly have been conscious of its growth during his years in England. In the United States Michael became a member of The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) and a supporter of Clann na nGael (The Family of the Gaels).

The Clan was a radical republican organization one of whose greatest publicity coups was to organize the so called “Catalpa Rescue” of six Fenian prisoners from a penal colony in Western Australia in 1875. The Clann hired a three masted whaling ship for \$5,500 dollars in New Bedford, Massachusetts, sailed it to the Australia coast near Perth and managed to get the six prisoners (who had escaped) on board. However the “Catalpa” was immediately pursued by a British gunship the “Georgette” which fired upon it and attempted to arrest it. But the demand to the Catalpa’s captain to surrender was responded to by the gesture that would become part of Irish folk history. Capt. George Smith Anthony raised the Stars and Stripes, pointed out that his ship was in territorial waters, and warned that an attack on the “Catalpa” would be considered an act of war against the United States of America. He then proceeded to set full sail and sailed all the way across the globe, arriving four months later to “thunderous, tumultuous reception” in New York Harbour on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1875. He, the “Catalpa” and the freed Fenian prisoners became instant celebrities. For Clann na Gael it was a huge international publicity coup. The dramatic rescue is celebrated in many traditional ballads.



**On the seventeenth of April last the Stars and Stripes did fly  
On board the bark Catalpa, waving proudly to the sky;  
She showed the green above the red as she did calmly lay  
Prepared to take the Fenian boys in safety o'er the sea.**

Michael McGovern was clearly a man who had immense respect for the “Stars and Stripes” of the United States; for Ireland’s tricolour and for the “Clan na Gael” flag. He pays his own homage to the Clan-na-Gael flag in the last but one of the poems in his “Labour Lyrics and Other Poems” ...In this verse patriotism, nationalism and egalitarianism are fused under what he describes as “The Banner of Ireland and Right”.

#### THE CLAN-NA-GAEL MAN TO HIS FLAG.

Our flag is the banner of Ireland and right,  
We'll lend it for nothing but liberty's fight,  
We'll trust it with none but with patriots bold,  
Who scorning half measures by enemies doled,  
Shall proudly uphold it and blend not its name  
With things that reflect on our national fame,  
And none who would fail to defend it should screen  
Their cowardice under our banner of green.

## “THE PATRIOT POET”

The patriotic and the bellicose McGovern takes on an even more strident tone when he rattles his sabre and rallies to the cause of The United States during the complex 1898 Spanish- American War. This was to be the United States first foray into 19<sup>th</sup> century politico- military expansionism and adventurism. What began as “local Caribbean” war with the US supporting Cuban rebels who were seeking to achieve independence from Spain quickly escalated into a global conflict when the US also seized the Spanish owned Philippine Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico and later annexed Hawaii. Historically the US “bought” the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million dollars after it sued for peace having been heavily defeated militarily

“The Puddler Poet” became a cheerleader for the war effort, as Youngstown’s young men shouldered arms and went marching off to “liberate” Cuba. . His blood curdling poem “*The Rifles Gone to War*” could well have earned him the title “The Patriot Poet”.



One of the triggers for that war was the sinking/mining/ blowing up of the U.S. battleship “The Maine” in Havana Harbour on the night of February

15<sup>th</sup> 1898. An explosion which ripped through the ship killed 250 of “The Maine’s” 355 man crew. An enraged American public, fuelled by lurid stories in Hearst newspapers bayed for revenge. Michael McGovern weighed into the debate; he couldn’t have known at the time that the explosion that sank “The Maine” was almost certainly caused not by a Spanish mine but by a coal bunker fire next to the ship’s magazine.



### THE RIFLES GONE TO WAR.

The city bells were ringing and  
The whistles loudly blew  
A lengthy “call to arms,” which all  
The boys in waiting knew;  
And with a sympathetic will  
The young, the old and grey,  
In thousands thronged the streets to see  
The Rifles going away.

The game of war which Spaniards played  
While conquering Peru,  
When Cortez with his cut-throat bands  
The Aztecs overthrew,  
Must not by Spanish treachery  
Upon the Yanks be tried,  
While in the van of battle march  
The men of Riverside.

By good old Montezuma’s bones,  
We’ll all swoop down on Spain;  
We’ll wipe her from the world’s map  
And call the country “Maine.”  
The swamping of Atlantis will  
Be nothing viewed beside  
The shock to Spain delivered by  
The men of Riverside.



What “The Puddler Poet” may - or may not - have known when he was denouncing “Spain’s treachery” in “*The Rifles Gone to War*” is that his cousin Sgt Major Thomas Flynn (left) , a marine veteran had actually gone to war and was in action with Teddy Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders” in Cuba and later Puerto Rico. Tom – who also service during the Boxer Rebellion (1900) - was born at Coarsefield (Williamstown). His aunt Bridget Flynn, of Coarsefield, was Michael McGovern’s mother.

Tom emigrated to America as a young man; first prospected for gold in the Yukon and later joined the U.S. Army in Florida. “*While serving as a marine he lost three fingers of one hand and two of another*”, were according to his grandson, John Flynn.



In US, Tom Flynn met his next door neighbour from Ireland, Nora O Connor, (left).,She worked as a nanny to John Foster Dulles, who went on to become John F Kennedy’s Secretary of State. They married and returned to Ireland circa 1913. They sold the original Flynn home in Coarsefield where he, his father and Michael McGovern’s mother, Bridget Flynn, were born. When Tom



and Nora returned to Ireland they bought a house and farm next door to

McGoverns in Castlefield. It had previously been owned by a Collins family. Today there is no trace of the old Flynn homestead in Coarsefield. A magnificent sycamore tree stands in the field where it was located.

## “THE EGALITARIAN POET”

Michael McGovern was probably what would be described today as a Christian Socialist. In almost everything, campaigning, he wrote there was a burning passion for what he called “True Equality”. There are lyrical poems and love poems and nostalgic poems in his collected work and scattered throughout the newspapers and magazines he wrote for but time and time again he returns to the subject of the rights and the dignity of the working man (and woman) which he saw as being assailed on all sides – especially by those whom he describes as plutocrats (people whose power derived from their wealth) and self-seeking, corrupt and corruptible politicians.

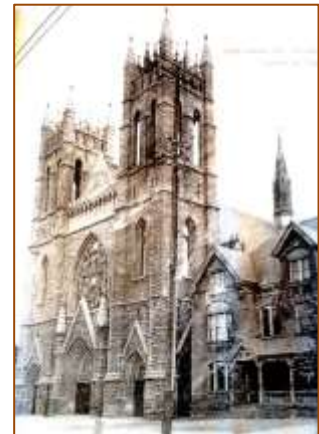
He was a dedicated churchgoer through his life; being particularly associated with St Columba’s Church in Youngstown. He was a parishioner of the first St Columba’s (built c. 1860 by the pioneering Roscommon born priest Fr Eugene O’Callaghan) and the second built (c. 1903).

Michael McGovern portrays himself as a man who was as much at home in what he calls “The Socialist Church”, whose dome was the stars of The Milky Way and its single pew, the Earth, as he was when he went to Mass or to pray in St Columba’s.

### THE SOCIALIST’S CHURCH.

The church in which I always pray  
Was built by God’s own hand ;  
Its dome is in the milky way,  
’Midst stars its pillars stand.  
The sunshine is its arc of light,  
The earth its one great pew ;  
And looking down its aisles at night,  
God’s wondrous works I view.

Having introduced us to his “Socialist” egalitarian church, Michael McGovern then goes on to describe what he sees as “True Equality”- a synthesis of early Christianity and evolving 19<sup>th</sup> century egalitarian socialism.



“True Equality,”

The motto, "True Equality,"  
Is posted everywhere  
Upon its walls—on land and sea.  
In sunshine and in air.  
'Twas writ by God himself for all  
To see. Yet men deny  
His truths, and in their greed will call  
My church's creed a lie.

The poem then goes on:

My church accepts the teachings of  
The “Nazarene” of old ;  
It places social truths above  
Men’s lusts and greed for gold.

It ends with the author telling us that “in this world-wide church of his, he loves to pray and view its God-lit candles shine out in the Milky Way. It’s here he says he feels he is “before his God whose power is without end”, a power which he avers “he a small created, mortal clod may never comprehend”.

Many of “The Puddler Poet’s” poems carry this ideology forward through a world populated by “plutocrats and lords and men forced to toil for below a slave’s reward”

**1894-1910: THE PUDDLER, ST. PATRICK'S DAY AND THE SCATTERED IRISH RACE**

St Patrick's Day and events surrounding St Patrick's Day - including "the wearing of the green", "sporting the shamrock", attending church services, organising "celebrations", concerts and family parties - marking the day as a statement of Irish nationhood and nationalism were it appears an important aspect of Michael McGovern's life in America. We don't know how involved he was in St Patrick's Day activities in Pennsylvania when he was living in Allentown but he certainly was a central figure in St Patrick's Day events when he came to live in Youngstown, Ohio. And for many years from the 1890s onwards he marked St Patrick's Day with specially written poems and a constant stream of letters to local newspapers.



Many of these letters were written to draw attention to the importance of St Patrick's Day to Irish emigrants in America and to a newer generation of Irish-Americans to whom the tradition was being passed on. Others were a scathing indictment of the not too gently caricaturing of Irish people which seemed to take place in the U.S. media – including in the Youngstown daily newspapers "The Vindicator" and "The Telegram" around St Patrick's Day. Some of Michael McGovern's most trenchant attacks were made in the early 1900s on lampooning St Patrick's Day post cards!

**Youngstown Vindicator**  
[March 16<sup>th</sup> 1894]

**ST. PATRICK'S**  
Day Will Be Fittingly Celebrated To-morrow.  
INTERESTING ORDER OF EXERCISES  
Which Will Be Observed in the Ancient Order of Hibernians' Hall.

St. Patrick's Day is to be right royally celebrated to-morrow night in the hall of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, over Weil & Hiney's store.

An entertainment committee have been busy this week arranging a program for the occasion. This list will be subject to perhaps a few changes, but in its entirety there is very good talent and a merry evening is promised by the entertainment committee to all those attending.

Today St Patrick's Day parades have become a global phenomenon...but the first Patrick's Day parades weren't held in Ireland; they took place in America. Boston claims to be the first Boston city to have organised a St Patrick's Day "Celebration" in 1737; New York's first parade took place in 1762. Everywhere Irish emigrants went they organised St Patrick's Day "celebrations". Philadelphia, PA., joined in in 1771 and Ohio's first Patrick's Day parade took place in 1842. There would have been no St Patrick's Day parades in Ireland when Michael McGovern was born in 1847 or when he left to go to work in England in c.1865-1867. But there would certainly have been, initially, St. Patrick's Day "celebrations" and later parades in Pennsylvania and Ohio when he worked there in the 1880s.

Song.....	Martin Maloney
Recitation.....	M. McGovern
Song.....	M. O. Conno's
Select Reading.....	Frank Byrnes

When Michael McGovern first became involved in organising Patrick's Day celebrations in Youngstown we don't yet know but by 1894 he was among those performing at the Ancient Order of Hibernians Patrick's Day concert there. The "Youngstown Vindicator" of March 16<sup>th</sup> 1894 published a long list of those who would provide music, sing, dance, recite poems, make speeches, give recitations, and take part in "dialogues" during the "merry evening of entertainment and fitting celebrations". Among them is Michael McGovern who is scheduled to give a "recitation".

"The Vindicator" report also tells us that the programme for the night in the AOH Hall over the Weil & Hiney Store will also include "an evolutionary exhibition of manual exercise drill by armed members of the Hibernian Rifle Company.

## 1898: A PUDDLER'S FIRST ST PATRICK'S DAY POEM

Four years later in 1898, Michael – who was then a Committee Member of the Youngstown Chapter of the AOH - was writing poetry about St Patrick and St Patrick's Day celebrations ...something he would continue to do for the next 20 years; sometimes glorying in the epic scale of Patrick's achievements, other times justifying the decision of those in Youngstown who chose not to wear a sprig of Shamrock on St Patrick's Day.

In 1898, the year before he published his collected poems "Labor Lyrics and Other Verse", "The Puddler Poet" wrote a poem simply titled: **St Patrick's Day**. It was carried in the "The Daily Youngstown Vindicator" of March 16th 1898.

The poem follows an Irish emigrant's journey from the "shamrocked hills" of his homeland (the auld country) to his "new adopted country", the United States of America, under whose banner he is now prepared to stand and if necessary bear arms for.



### St Patrick's Day

Again arrives that holy day,  
As Earth its yearly circuit makes;  
That much revered St Patrick's Day  
That day of days which e'er awakes  
Within each heart of Irish race.  
A Christian thought- a loving thrill:  
When kindled memories fondly trace  
Some verdant vale; some shamrocked hill,  
From which the thinker had to roam  
Upon this rugged earth's highway  
That day of days for Irishmen  
With blessed traditions comes again.  
All Hail! St Patrick's Day.

As Michael McGovern's 1894 "St Patrick's Day" poem unfolds he writes of the pride of Irishmen in Patrick's faith (and Ireland's name); Patrick supplanting pagan gods in a moral fight with ancient druids, armed only with kindness, truth and prayer unlike "despots and their conquering hosts", clearly a thinly veiled reference to Ireland's "old enemy-England" and the centuries of conquest St Patrick's Isle had endured. For Michael McGovern, St Patrick's Day was an occasion of great national pride. Here, in this verse, his imagery traverses from gentle Irish faith beliefs to highly charged Irish nationalism.

His mission was not that of those  
Who with a conquering force invade  
The happy homes of peaceful men  
And slaughter them 'midst battle's  
din.  
His force was not the reeking blade  
Which robbers use to heighten woes,  
He simply triumphed over foes  
By proving that supreme 'bove all  
Druidic rites and gods of Raal,  
There reigned a God whose trinity  
He likened to a shamrock spray.

And by the end of his poem Michael McG. has transversed the Atlantic and transversed from his Irish nationalism to full blooded American patriotism.

And while our Irish thoughts today  
Are focused on our native land-  
Each thought a fleeting love-lit ray,  
We're ever ready to obey,  
Our new adopted country's call,  
And neath its banner take our stand  
And 'gainst its foes if need be fall  
Upon St. Patrick's day.  
—MICHAEL MCGOVERN.

[Saturday, March 17 1900]

**SHAMROCK**

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**Very Much in Evidence To-  
day Throughout Queen's  
Dominions.**

---

**SPORTED BY EVERYONE,**

---

**Special Prominence Being Given it by  
Royalty and Nobility and by  
Irish Soldiers.**

London, March 17.—Shamrock day  
promises to vie with Primrose day in  
the hearts of the people, judging from

just day later]

**1900: "THE SHAMROCK EMBLEM OF SEMI-DISLOYALTY TURNED INTO A BADGE OF HONOUR BY A WORD FROM HER MAJESTY"**

Michael McGovern probably read the "Youngstown Vindicator" every day he had an opportunity to; he wrote for it and its rival the "Youngstown Telegram" almost every week for 30 or more years.

One can only imagine his reaction on picking up the Saturday Evening, March 17<sup>th</sup> 1900, edition of the "Vindicator" – sometime towards the end of the first St Patrick's Day of the new millennium; a day which he was most likely to have been deeply involved in organising a series of civic and religious celebrations and ceremonies.

Unusually the paper didn't have a single splash headline—rather it featured two stories on the Boer War, which was still raging in South Africa, and its main (centred) Page One headline read:

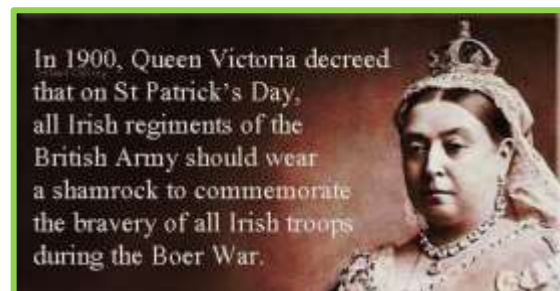
**SHAMROCK**  
**Very Much in Evidence Today**  
**Throughout Queen's Dominions.**  
**SPORTED BY EVERYONE**  
**Special Prominence Being Given it by Royalty**  
**and Nobility and by Irish Soldiers**

What followed by way of a syndicated "St Patrick's Day" report from an unnamed London based news agency is a startling example of how Irish affairs were reported to American newspaper readers in 1900. [And which as we shall see had Michael McGovern in a near apoplectic state

*London, March 17<sup>th</sup> – Shamrock day promises to vie with Primrose day in the hearts of the people judging from the enthusiasm with which for the first time in the history of the nation loyalists all over the United Kingdom are celebrating and everywhere the green is conspicuous.*

*From Windsor Castle where the Queen observed the day by wearing a genuine sprig of four leafed shamrock to the east end of the slums of London where the ragged urchin glories in his morsel of green weed nearly everyone sports something in the shape of a green favour. A word from Her Majesty has turned the emblem of semi disloyalty into a badge of honour that has made the shamrock the most prized plant in all of the British Isle.*

The report goes on to tell us that: By order of Her Majesty [Queen Victoria] the bells in Windsor Tower pealed for St Patrick's Day; in Aldershot the Grenadier Band played Irish airs, and in all garrison towns the shamrock was donned by all of those privileged to wear Irish soldiers and sailors showing special pride in wearing the national emblem. Across London it was reported that street vendors were doing a roaring trade in flags, buttons and green ribbons and the supply of genuine shamrocks was so scarce that half a dozen leaves sold readily for half a crown. And everywhere houses and stores had lavish displays of green flags and bunting.



In this extraordinary moment on St Patrick's Day 1900 was born the tradition that Irish soldiers serving in the British Army would henceforth, by order of Queen Victoria, mark each St Patrick's Day by the "wearing of the green" – the sporting of sprigs of shamrock on their uniforms. This illustration from the famous London illustrated newspaper "The Graphic" of March 1900 shows a street vendor placing a sprig of shamrock on the cap of an Irish enlisted soldier. Underneath is a caption "The Queen's Tribute to the Gallantry of Her Irish Soldiers" and a verse from the poet Rudyard Kipling:

"From Bloemfontein to Ballyhack,  
 'Tis ordered by the Queen  
 We've won our right in open fight,  
 The wearing o'the Green."



It was a sentiment echoed in the "Youngstown Vindicator" report of March 17<sup>th</sup> 1900, which picked up on the same theme, recording that in London on that St Patrick's Day praise was being heaped by British Royalty, nobility, politicians and clergymen on Irish soldiers for their bravery in the Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa.

who remarked that both friend and foe were unstintedly "praising Irish bravery, heroism and generalship, just now, so conspicuous on the battlefield," and the "wearing of the shamrock, the emblem of Irish nationality and catholicity had become, by the gracious act of our most revered sovereign, an acknowledgement of the heroism and valor of their Irish sons of the war."

However within days it was to draw the ire, in Youngstown, of Michael McGovern who – responding to Kipling - was himself composing a trenchant poem rejecting Queen Victoria patronising of the Irish people and the shamrock and her "legitimising" of the wearing of the "emblem of semi disloyalty to the Empire".

### Youngstown Vindicator.

**IRISHMEN**

Are Supposed to Tell in a  
 Poem Why They Did Not  
 Wear the Green

**LAST ST. PATRICK'S DAY.**

The Spirited Composition From the  
 Prolific Pen of Michael  
 McGovern.

To the Editor of the Sunday Vindicator.  
 Dear Sir:—There were Irishmen in  
 Youngstown who did not wear a sham-  
 rock on last St. Patrick's day. The fol-  
 lowing poem gives part of their expla-  
 nations:

The April 1<sup>st</sup> 1900 edition of the "Vindicator" carried his new poem under a headline which explains why some Irishmen in Youngstown might not have worn the shamrock on that St Patrick's Day and denouncing the "hypocrisy of England's Queen" in hijacking the shamrock and the wearing of the green to her own ends.

Hypocrisy, to what extent  
 You play your part today  
 Is seen when even England's queen  
 A shamrock will display:  
 Because her Irish soldiers at  
 The front have slaughtered been  
 She'd celebrate the carnage by  
 The wearing of the green.

On Patrick's Day, in future, when  
 We wear upon our cape  
 The shamrock green, let it be set  
 In mourning folds of crape,  
 In memory of Irishmen  
 Who fought for Ireland's green,  
 And not for "Irish fusiliers,"  
 Who fought for England's queen.  
 —MICHAEL MCGOVERN.

There poem which recalls "the hanging (through centuries) of men and women for the wearing of the green" is one of the first of the unrelenting attacks on England which McGovern will make in his poems and letters over the next 20 or more years.



**1906-1910: “A CATHPENNY ST PATRICK’S DAY INSULT TO THE IRISH RACE AND THE IRISH FLAG” - McGOVERN**

A few years later in 1906 it was this caricaturing St Patrick’s Day post card printed in New York but circulating in Youngstown that was exercising the “Puddler Poet”. Michael was enraged at the portrayal of Irishmen marching on St Patrick’s Day as “drunken monkeys”. The postcard survives in the archives of Youngstown’s Ancient Order of Hibernians. It is filed as “A Humiliating Caricaturing Depicting The Irish People -1906”.



The postcard was one of a series produced by the New York firm of Arthur Livingston. The company printed a wide range of postcards between 1897 and 1907. Most showed New York and other U.S. city scenes. It also created a range of comic cards. The St Patrick’s Day caricature (and other offensive postcards) had been circulating in Youngstown since 1906 but by 1910 – McGovern finally lost his patience and wrote a blistering letter to the “Youngstown Daily Vindicator” on Wed March 16th 1910. It was published under the headline:

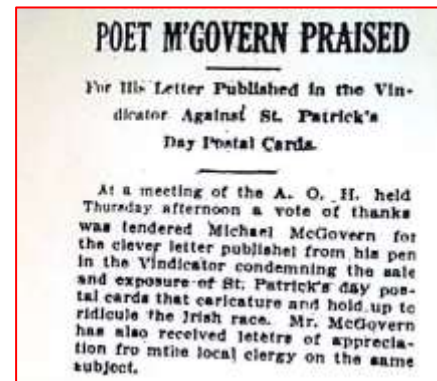
**“A PROTEST – Against Catchpenny Postal Cards That Burlesque the Irish Race”.**  
**“Michael McGovern Tells Why the Monstrous Cards Are Not Appropriate to St Patrick’s Day.”**

The letter say: “Most of the catchpenny post cards that are being sold on the approach of St Patrick’s Day are an agglomeration of silliness, mischievous ridicule and unwarranted libel against Ireland, St Patrick, Irish Nationalism, religion and Irishmen....”



“Irish nationality is burlesqued in these cards on which may be found the green flag with harp and shamrock ornamented with pipes, pigs and clubs and when an Irish man is pictured as we see the English stage Irishman in outlandish costume which is as foreign to Ireland as is the costume and manners of the Red Indian.

“There is a law forbidding the desecration of the American flag but America can enforce that law while Ireland cannot prevent the desecration of hers. The men of Ireland love both flags and they resent the trampled banner of Ireland being subjected to petty insult as they would resent insult to the Stars and Stripes”.



There has been no public protest against these cards in Youngstown as there has been in other cities, but noticing the large stock of these insulting, caricaturing cards bearing most offensive to Irishmen that lie unpurchased on the stalls where they are on sale shows that their sale is resented by even other than Irishmen. Pure un hurtful humor is to be appreciated, but the ridiculous humor that is intended as an insult to a race of people that has no need to bow their heads as being inferior to any race on earth deserves resentment and condemnation.  
 Yours respectfully,  
**MICHAEL MCGOVERN.**



It was ten years since Michael McGovern had first been exercised by the exploitative way Britain’s Empire Queen, Victoria, had used St Patrick’s Day during the Boer War; now in 1910 it was American racial lampooning that was fuelling his anger at the way Ireland and St Patrick’s Day was being portrayed to the world

**ST PATRICK'S DAY 1910: A TON OF THE "OULD SOD" FROM THE HILL OF TARA SHIPPED TO CHICAGO FOR PRESIDENT TAFT TO STAND ON**

Whatever about the mood in Youngstown, and Michael McGovern's anger, St Patrick's Day 1910 was celebrated with gusto in East coast and Midwest cities. And one gets a sense of the political significance of the day in the U.S. when the evening edition of "The Youngstown Daily Vindicator" reports on March 17<sup>th</sup> that Republican President William Howard Taft travelled to Chicago to take part in what was described as "the biggest St Patrick's Day celebrations the city has ever known". The headline ran.

"HARP AND SHAMROCK BURY CHICAGO UNDER A RIOT OF SPRING COLOUR AND CHEER. IRISH SOCIETIES GREET PRESIDENT IN BIGGEST ST. PATRICK'S CELEBRATION IN CITY'S HISTORY".



The "Chicago Daily Tribune" picks up the story under the headline: **TAFT HERE TODAY AS GUEST OF ERIN**

telling us that President Taft arrived by special train... was met by a National Guard regiment and a large reception committee.... there was hardly a building or individual that wasn't decorated in green banners and bunting.... the President swung into the line of a St Patrick's Day parade which marched through Michigan Avenue and escorted him to the La Salle Hotel.

President Taft came to Chicago as the guest of the Irish Fellowship Club and the St Patrick's Day event was reported in newspapers across the US from New York to San Francisco. The entire day was packed with events from his arrival until his departure for Rochester, N.Y. at 11p.m. During the day eighteen Irish organisations were involved in organising a series of receptions and a banquet and St Patrick's Day gala ball

The organisers had arranged for "50 square feet of sod to be brought from Ireland and placed on the floor of the banqueting hall for President Taft to stand on while he addressed the vast Irish-American audience". The "Chicago Daily Tribune" of Friday March 11<sup>th</sup> carried a sweeping, front page story on how the 3,000 pounds (1 and a 1/4 tons) of sod dug from the Hill of Tara was packed in two massive crates and one monster box; placed on the deck of the steamship "St Louis" and brought to New York under the personal supervision of Captain W.J. Roberts. The box contained "the choicest sections of the old sod covered in shamrocks."

Captain Roberts told reporters who boarded his ship in New York (such was the interest generated by the "ould sod" story) that the sod had travelled as "a distinguished passenger". It had been decided not to stow this precious bit of cargo in a "dark or stifling hold". It would sail on the deck where it would have air and be watered frequently. "It must have air and attention or the blades of grass might wilt or the shamrocks droop."

On arrival in New York the Collector of the Port, Mr Loeb, as a courtesy, had arranged a special permit for the sod clearing it through customs and quarantine and at 8pm it was placed on board a wagon of the United States Express Company to begin its journey overland to Chicago.

*"The reverential way in which the longshore men, many of whom were Irishmen, handled the sod was remarked (on). Had the contents of the boxes been priceless gems more consideration could not have been shown them."*

*"The reverential way in which the longshore men, many of whom were Irishmen, handled the sod was remarked (on). Had the contents of the boxes been priceless gems more consideration could not have been shown them."*



News of the “ould sod” from the legendary Hill of Tara in Ireland being shipped across the Atlantic to the United States was carried coast to coast by dozens of mainstream daily newspapers.

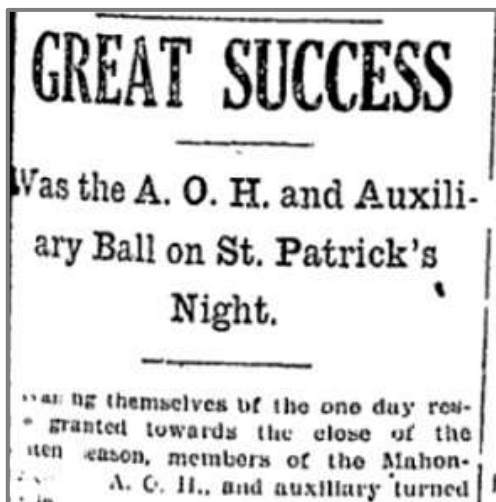
The Telluride (Colorado) Daily Journal carried more lampooning front page cartoon of a cudgel twirling; shamrock waist coated President Taft dancing a jig on the famous sod.

The caption reads “Bit of Old Sod from Ireland” - The Irish Societies of Chicago will entertain President Taft today. He will stand on a bit of soil brought over for the purpose”. Behind him another feckless character is telling us “His eyes are blue and he is Irish thru and thru”. It was part of a week of Patrick’s Day reportage stateside.



The 1910 Patrick’s Day celebrations in the U.S., according to Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair authors of the book “The Wearing of the Green – A History of St Patricks Day”, were *“of considerable historic importance as they reflected the sense of self-importance Irish Americans had within the United States in the pre-World War I years and the fact that President Taft marked St Patricks Day in the way he did addressing the Chicago gathering was a clear indication of the important the day had become for Irish Americans and for elected officials who wanted to court the Irish American electorate”*.

Cronin and Adair also writing of the President Taft visit to Chicago on that St Patrick’s Day in 1910 go on to humorously tell us that while the AOH had gone to great trouble *“to import a piece of the ould sod from Ireland for President Taft to stand on while he made his address such was the excitement among Irish expatriates in the days before that many couldn’t resist carrying off some of the soil with them with the result that on the day there was none left for the President to stand on”* !



In Youngstown in 1910 it appears that there were “St Patrick’s Day “celebrations” rather than a parade. The Vindicator reports on one of the biggest of these, described as “an entertainment”, organised by the Ancient Order of Hibernians and held in the Diamond Hall. The occasion was “the largest of its kind”. Over 200 couples took part and the AOH parlours were totally inadequate to cater for the crowds. The event presented a wonderful scene as the great throng danced to “Come Back to Erin”; “My Wild Irish Rose” and “The Wearing of the Green”. The day went off without a hitch and will be long remembered by those who attended.” The Vindicator in its Social Columns also reports on many other St Patrick’s Day parties thrown by leading citizens and on a performance of “Robert Emmet” (“a Fine Play”) which was staged by the Sacred Heart Congregation.

A chilling sense of what else was taking place in the United States on St Patrick’s Day 1910 or early the following morning emerges from a brief report on “The Vindicator” of March 18<sup>th</sup>. The headline reads:

**DOUBLE LYNCHING  
Negroes charged with aiding jail delivery, victims subject of mob law.**

“Marion, ARK – March 18<sup>th</sup>: Bob Austin and Charles Richardson, negroes, were lynched early today in the Courthouse Square by a mob of 300 men. The victims were charged with aiding and abetting a jail delivery hero on Monday night.

Richardson was arrested in Memphis yesterday and was brought here last night. He confessed to complicity in aiding the escape of prisoners and implicated Bob Austin who was soon apprehended.”



## WALKING ON IRISH SOIL IN YOUNGSTOWN IN 1908

President Taft may or may not have walked on Irish soil during the 1910 St Patrick's Day celebrations in Chicago but if he did he stepping onto Irish soil two years after the people of Youngstown had done so in 1908 and 13 years after the people of New York had in 1897. It appears that it had become something of a fad in turn of the century Irish-America.

Across America in the late 1800s towns and cities began to organise "homecoming festivals" which became known as "Old Home Weeks"; each town and city sending out invitations to former residents to "come home" for a week or a week-end end of reunion and festivities; exhibitions, parades, parties, official functions and historical tours and talks.

Youngstown staged its first "Old Home Week" in June 1908 and Michael McGovern played a leading role in organising the special Irish Exhibition which was mounted as part of the citywide event.



In the months leading up to the "Old Home Week" residents were encouraged to write to family members living in other parts of the U.S and invite them to return home for family re-unions and to take part in the civic events which were being planned. Letters and postcards were p used to spread the message and entice the "home-commers" to come back to see the old folks and the old town. "*Nobody would be an outsider during Old Home Week*" was one of the marketing slogans.

This postcard for Youngstown's "Old Home Week Celebration" promised "Three Days of Good Old Fashioned Time" from Tuesday June 9<sup>th</sup> to Thursday June 11<sup>th</sup> 1908 with Old Folks Reunions; Family Reunions, Special Reunions, "*Everybody will see Everybody, a Celebration of Old Time Memories, a Meeting of Old Time Friends, They will all be Here.*"

It would be Open House in Youngstown for all with grand street parades, brilliant street illuminations and beautiful decorations. There would be a Grand Band Concert on the Public Square daily, "*Throw aside all cares and business and be one of the thousands who will be here and enjoy this hearthsome re-union.*"

Old Folks Reunion and Ball, June 10<sup>th</sup>. Newspaper Writers and Artists Reunion, June 11<sup>th</sup>

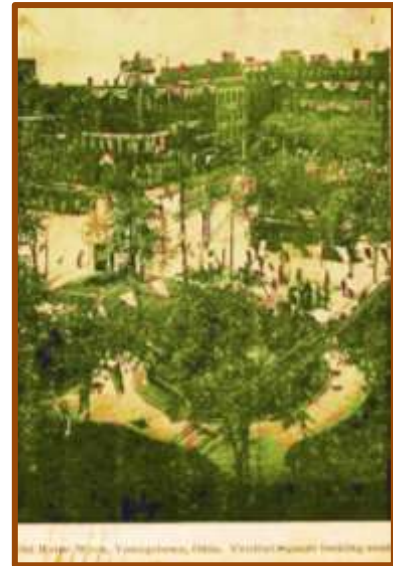
And Youngstown's Irish community wasn't going to let the occasion pass without throwing its own party and extending a very special "*Cead Mile Failte ar Ais*" (One Hundred Thousand Welcomes- Back Home) to everybody and anybody with Irish roots who had ever lived in or passed through the town. The May 27<sup>th</sup> edition of the "Youngstown Telegram" carried news of what was being planned.



And once again during "Youngstown's Old Home Week" the city's Irish community, and its community organisations, would show a real sense of imagination, creative flair and still deep emotional attachment to the "Old Country" with what it was planning. And Michael McGovern would be the man responsible for a curious exhibit which would see hundreds of Irish emigrants walk on Irish soil for the first time in years.

**THE OLD WOMAN STOOD ON THE SOIL  
OF FERMANAGH  
SANK ON HER KNEES AND BEGAN TO PRAY**

Eleven years before the “Youngstown Old Home Week” festival of 1908, a huge Irish Fair had been staged in New York in 1897. This postcard (right) was issued on the occasion of the Youngstown Old Home Week and shows the Central Square en fete for the occasion.



The earlier New York Irish Fair was a gigantic Irish Expo which saw an Irish Village being created on the site of what is now Grand Central Station in Midtown New York. The Fair was organised by a coalition of Irish societies in New York, including the United Irish Catholic Societies of New York; The Irish Volunteer Regiment and Clan na Gael. It has scores of pavilions and booths displaying Irish manufactured goods, arts and crafts and foodstuffs; historical artefacts and models of famous Irish landmarks, including Blarney Castle as well as jaunting carts, spinning wheels and antique Irish furniture, Belleek pottery, Irish linen, hand won turf and even a parchment copy of Robert Emmet’s Speech from the Dock in 1803. But one of the most extraordinary exhibits at the fair was a Map of Ireland, each county being created by soil which had been collected in that county, and taken to New York to be assembled into a topographical map which covered a large section of the floor of the exhibition hall. And for 10 cents visitors to the Fair could walk across the soil of Ireland and in stand on the soil which had been taken from their own home county of the home county of an ancestor.

When the Youngstown Old Home Week was being planned its “Irish Village” committee decided that they would get the famous New York “Soil of Ireland Map” and include it as a centre piece of the Irish expo. And Michael McGovern was one of a three member sub-committee given charge of organising the relocation of the Irish Map to Youngstown.

When the map was put on display in New York it attracted international media interest with newspapers from the U.S. to New Zealand reporting on reaction to it from Irish emigrants. The “New York Tribune” described it as “a geographic miniature of the Green Isle covering nearly the whole of the central floor.” “The Irish World” tells us “the Map is entered by five columned archways, surmounted by a huge green shamrock, each of thirty two county spaces, cast in the exact form of the Irish county it represents”

A “New Zealand Tablet” reporter watched Fermanagh born Kitty Murphy (80) “enter the Fair and make haste to go to her old county. The old woman stood for a moment on the soil and lifted up her face in devotion. Then she sank on her knees and began to pray. When she finally stepped off the Irish soil she sighed sadly and kept looking backward as she walked away, as if bidding a long farewell”.

**ACTIVE COMMITTEES.**  
Chairman Will Gillen has named the following active committees in connection with the Irish fair:  
Motion Pictures—James Birmingham and Michael Burka  
Irish Map—Will Gillen, Michael McGovern and J. C. Birmingham.

**DONNYBROOK FAIR.**  
For the special entertainment of the Irish visitors an old-fashioned Donnybrook fair has been arranged. Will Gillen, chairman of the committee in charge, has secured as a special feature the famous map of Ireland that was used in a national exhibition in Madison Square Garden, New York. This map is made from real Irish soil taken from the various counties represented. The fair will include a museum of Old Home relics, Irish jig dancing contest with Irish pipers, sweet colleens, miniature cottages and an exhibition of Irish life motion pictures. The reception committee appointed at a meeting held Tuesday evening includes representative Irish-American residents of the Mahoning Valley.

So far we have been unable to locate a report of how the people of Youngstown re-acted to the famous soil Map of Ireland and its counties.

## 1900: “SHOULDER TO SHOULDER” UNION MAN

Even though he lived in the United States for many years and was deeply involved with the early East-coast labor/trade union movement and the many campaigns which were being waged for worker’s right in the late 1800s, he appears never to have forgotten his Irish roots. He contributed regular articles to the periodical of The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers “The Amalgamated Journal” and also wrote for the New York based “The Gaelic American” magazine of the Robert Emmet Literary Association. The association was an offshoot of Clan-na-Gael and like the Clan and the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) it provided another focal point for Irish-American discussion and activism. So far the records of the Robert Emmet Literary Association’s haven’t been located but many newspaper articles refer to McGovern’s close links with it



The archives of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Youngstown contain many articles and poems written by Michael McGovern in the early 1900s. Michael McGovern was an active AOH member joining the Division 2 of 6 divisions in the city. Richard Quinn (right) is the current historian of The Joseph T. Nalley, Division 6, Youngstown AOH. One of the articles in his files shows how actively involved McGovern was in supporting AOH and union members in their bid for public office and offices. In 1900, long before he himself decided to put his name forward for electoral office, McGovern threw his weight behind a bid by a leading Democrat AOH man James “Pap” Quinn in his bid to become Youngstown’s Infirmary Director. In the U.S., unlike Ireland, most city officials are voted into office.



James Quinn had joined the AOH at the age of 16 and became President of AOH Division 5 and eventually County AOH President. “Pap” Quinn was Richard Quinn’s grandfather.

In September 1900 “The Puddler Poet” wrote strong endorsement of James Quinn’s bid to become Infirmary Director for the *Pittsburgh Amalgamated Journal* which was picked up by the “Youngstown Vindicator”

McGovern says that “*as the days of our quadrennial excitement are upon us, Messrs Editors, I will mention the name of as good a union man as there is in the ranks of the A.A. (The Amalgamated Union) and who is a candidate for Infirmary Director on the Democratic ticket here. His name is Brother James Quinn a sheet mill heater in the Valley Mill. Brother Quinn is also the leader of the East End band which is affiliated to the Musicians Union. Therefore he is a union man on the double and if being a good union man be a credential for standing good in the opinion of good union voters, surely Brother James Quinn deserves our support in Youngstown*”.

James Quinn was successful and also became Safety Director of the Police and Fire Departments and was instrumental in Youngstown fire dept. becoming the first city in the United States to become motorised.



Youngstown genealogist, Jen Giblin, pictured here with Richard Quinn in the Youngstown AOH offices is a distant relation of Michael McGovern. She has been doing extensive research into the “Puddler Poet’s” family tree and his writings. On St Patrick’s Day 2017, she made an emotional visit to Michael McGovern’s grave at Calvary Cemetery and laid a bunch of shamrock which had been sent to her from his native Williamstown by Eileen Finnegan.

## 1904: WELCOME MEN OF IRISH BLOOD

The largest, most powerful and most influential Irish American organisation in the United States when Michael McGovern arrived there in the 1880 was the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Founded, simultaneously in the coal mining districts of Pennsylvania and in New York City, in 1836 its primary purpose was to support and protect Catholic Irish immigrants from a wave of anti-Catholic violence which began in as early as the 1850s. Prejudice against Catholics was particularly virulent in New York but extended to many of the nearby coal and iron mining states. By the 1880s the AOH (Motto-*Friendship, Unity and Christian Charity*) has 125,000 members across almost every state in the union. Today it is still the largest Irish American fraternal society in the world with a membership of 80,000 in the US, Canada and across the globe. From its inauguration in 1836 the AOH supported the fight for Irish freedom; today its twin constitutional goals are support for the re-unification of Ireland and the promotion of Catholic values.



The Youngstown Division of the AOH was founded in 1869 and Michael McGovern was to become "very active in the AOH in Youngstown", according to Richard Quinn, historian of The Joseph T. Nalley, Division 6, Youngstown AOH.

The AOH archive in Youngstown give us a fascinating glimpse into McGovern's involvement with the organisation as unofficial poet laureate; event organiser, sometime entertainment director, convention greeter and general fund raiser. Its files contain many newspaper articles covering the period 1904 to 1913 when McGovern was attending AOH conventions and helping organise fund raising events.

In 1904 the AOH Ohio State Convention was held in Youngstown on August 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> and Michael McGovern was something of a poetic convention greeter. His poem "Welcome A.O.H. Men" written to welcome delegates to the convention has a rousing, declamatory clarion call about it invoking the spirit of Irish Nationhood and referencing Ireland's many triumphs and glories, woes and wrongs and betrayals as it bids a "Ceud Mile Failte" to the delegates.

### "WELCOME A.O.H. MEN"

*Welcome men of Irish blood,  
With open arms we meet you  
In the name of Irish Nationhood  
And faith we hospitably greet you.  
We welcome you with all the love  
And friendship men shroud owe each other,  
And hope each grasp we give may prove  
The honest pressure of a Brother.*

*For Ireland's triumphs and her woes;  
For virtues that enhance her glory;  
For wrongs inflicted by her foes  
That go to make the blackest story.  
For love of Freedom, — always her's;  
Which love, may yet its crown accord her  
Ceud Mile failte — Visitors —  
True members of her "Ancient Order"  
- Michael McGovern*

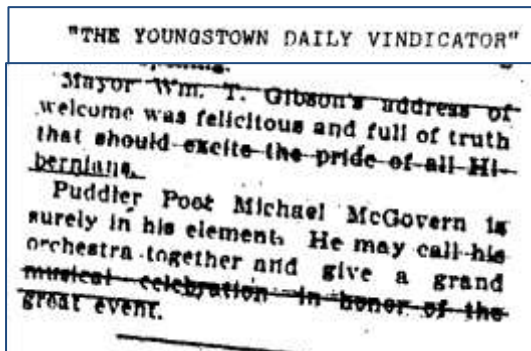


## THE “PUDDLEY POET” IS IN HIS ELEMENT AT 1904 AOH CONVENTION

When Michael McGovern was living in Youngstown there were 6 divisions of the AOH in the city; currently (2017) there is just one. Michael belonged to Division 2 which was one of two divisions associated with his local church, St.

Columba's. Historically the AOH, at its foundation in 1836, saw itself as the inheritor of the Whiteboys, Defenders and Ribbonmen traditions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when these secret underground societies fought to resist the extension of English rule in Ireland and the bid to replace its predominantly Catholic religion with Protestantism.

Throughout its existence the AOH has been closely associated with Nationalist and Republican movements in Northern Ireland; sometimes openly, sometimes covertly; sometimes supporting “constitutional” nationalism, other times militant republicanism. Throughout its long history in the US, in Ireland and across the globe the AOH has been an unwavering supporter of conservative Catholicism and has been a generous benefactor of many educational, social and charitable projects and foundations. It has had a long and distinguished list of members from the Young Irelander and US Army Brigadier General Thomas Francis Meagher, who gave Ireland its first ever tricolour, to President John F. Kennedy.

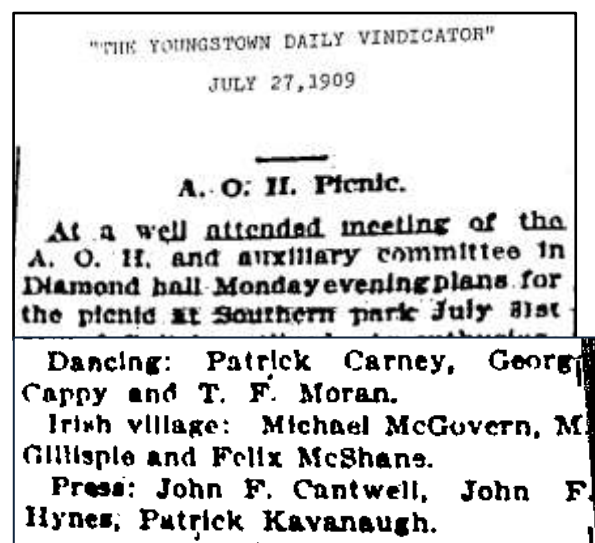


The staging of the 1904 AOH Ohio State Convention in Youngstown was a very significant event for local divisional members and Michael McGovern was involved in much of the organisational preparation. A report in the “Youngstown Vindicator” refers to him by yet another title - the “*Puddley Poet*”. In an article on the Convention many of the leading members of the organising committee are listed and recognised for their particular contribution to its success.

The Mayor of Youngstown, William Gibson is praised for his address of welcome that was “*felicitous and full of truth that should excite the pride of all Hibernians*”. There's praise for the many “enthusiastic workers” who have made the event such a success including Landlord William Dempsey, of The Old American House; Robert Fitzgerald who had “*profusely decorated his premises with the Green Flag Banner*”; the state AOH treasurer Mary Blakely, Reception Committee members Mrs RH McAndrews and Mrs TJ Brennan and “Puddley Poet”, Michael McGovern, *who “is surely in his element. He may call his orchestra together and give a grand musical celebration in honor of the great event”*,

Five years later, in 1909, Michael McGovern is back on AOH duty taking charge of the “Irish Village”, which presumably was an exhibition highlighting Irish history and culture, at a fund raising AOH Picnic in Youngstown. The Youngstown Vindicator carries a report in its July 27<sup>th</sup> edition of a meeting to make preparations for the picnic which was due to take place a few days later on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

The party would have music, dancing, poetry and entertainment – Michael and two others M Gillespie and Felix McShane being responsible for the “Irish Village”.





## 1901: ONE HUNDRED YEARS ON, McGOVERN SEES A GLIMSE OF FREEDOM IN ROBERT EMMET'S COURAGE

One of the Irish patriots whom Michael McGovern appeared to particularly admire was Robert Emmet leader of the ill-fated 1803 Rebellion. Emmet (1778 – 1803) who came from a wealthy Anglo-Irish Protestant family sympathised with oppressed Irish Catholics and was strongly influenced by French and American revolutionary politics and military action.

He wanted to end British rule in Ireland but the rebellion he planned was betrayed by spies; undermined by lack of adequate preparation and collapsed in days as he and the other leaders were rounded up and hanged.

Emmet's famous speech from the dock was to inspire later generations of Irish nationalists and republicans. *"Let no man write my epitaph for no man who knows my motives dare now vindicate them. Let my tomb remain uninscribed, my memory in oblivion, until other times and other men can do justice to my character. When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth then and not till then let my epitaph be written".*



And so on March 10<sup>th</sup> 1901, to mark the 123<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Robert Emmet's birth, poet and Irish historian Michael McGovern delivered a powerful address on the life and times of the patriot universally known as "The Bold Robert Emmet" to the Youngstown branch of the Robert Emmet Literary Society. McGovern had been a long time member of the society. The "Youngstown Vindicator" reporting on the Emmet Commemoration describes McGovern's lecture as "**Touching and Eloquent**" – "**An Able Paper Relative to the Irish Patriot and the Country He Revered**". The evening also included the reading of Emmet's speech from the dock, recitations, speeches and songs. *Michael McGovern then read one of the ablest and most eloquent tributes to the undying memory of Ireland's young patriot.*

In the course of his very lengthy address, McGovern tells his readers that *"there are few countries that cannot boast of their heroes.... not the heroes of gilded power but the heroes of the people who have given their lives for the emancipation of their humble compatriots from haughty and oppressive rule".*

*"Ireland has had such patriots by the hundred and amongst the most noble and unselfish was the young patriot Robert Emmet. There were many noble Irish patriots during the past seven hundred years who fought English rule and the conquest of Ireland by treachery".*

Robert Emmet, he tells us, was just 20 when the terrible slaughter of 1798 was going on in Ireland. The horrors which were perpetrated on his countrymen caused his soul to burn with hatred of the oppressors; he decided that he wanted to lead another rebellion, went to France to seek support and believed there were men in 19 counties ready to answer the call and the cause. However, divisions, confusion, treachery and perfidy dogged his efforts. His bid to capture Dublin Castle was betrayed, he was captured, tried, hanged and beheaded for his role in the abortive rebellion.

To McGovern, Robert Emmet was a noble, heroic Irishman who in 1901, almost 100 years after he perished on a gibbet in Dublin, where the dogs of Thomas Street lapped his blood, was a patriot who still inspired generations of Irishmen in their efforts to "redeem and liberate" their country.



## HOW ROBERT EMMET'S "SHORTENED DAYS" CONTINUES TO INSPIRES OUR PATRIOTISM, YET

McGovern's "scholarly" address to the Youngstown branch of the Robert Emmet Society in March 1901 took his audience through several centuries of Irish struggle to regain national sovereignty and break the link with England.

Quoting the Young Irelander, John Mitchell; the 1798 rebel leaders Michael O'Dwyer and Myles Byrne (later a Brigadier General in Napoleon's Irish Brigade) the poet Tom Moore, "The Puddler Poet" added his own voice to their in marking the role Emmet played in re-igniting the spirit of Irish nationalism after the horror of the failed 1798 Rebellion.

Of Emmet, McGovern said *"To me he seems as a meteor that entered the darkened political sky of Ireland, the clouds of which sky were reddened with the shadows from the blood of the people. He blazed his brief course across it, then vanished leaving a bright trail behind as a guide for the hopes of other men who shall ever treasure him as a mind picture, the original of which has been blotted out."*

McGovern then quotes from Tom Moore famous ballad

### Oh! Breathe Not His Name

"Oh breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade  
Where cold and unhonoured his relics are laid  
Sad, silent and dark be the tears that we shed  
As the nightdew that falls on the grass 'ore his head".

And the "Puddler Poet" shares with his audience verses of his own in which he likens Emmet to a brilliant star that quickly rose and quickly set in the firmament of

To me he seems as a meteor that entered the darkened political sky of Ireland, the clouds of which sky were reddened with the shadows from the blood of the people. He blazed his brief course across it and then vanished, leaving a bright trail behind as a guide for the hopes of other men who shall ever treasure him as a mind-picture, the original of which has been blotted out.

Irish history.

"In Ireland's darkness a star he rose  
In brilliancy and quickly set;  
The scorn he flashed on his country's foes  
Inspires our patriotism yet.  
A light that glimmers and fades away  
Yet leaves it picture in Freedom's eye  
Was Emmet's life in its shortened day  
In which he showed how when he stood at bay  
A patriot can with honour die".

Though Irishmen have good reason to admire him, those who would see Ireland free of British rule must never forget that the cause is greater than the man; that Robert Emmet has but played his noble part in the cause of Ireland, which cause was and is greater than he; that while revering his memory they must never turn aside from that great purpose to make Ireland independent. Then Emmet's name can be remembered in monuments raised by a free people, thereby fulfilling his last dying wish: "When my country takes its place amongst the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, shall my epitaph be written."  
MICHAEL MCGOVERN.

He ends his address, which is printed in full in "The Vindicator", with a full-blooded reiteration of his commitment to seeing Ireland free one day "Irishmen must never forget that great purpose to make Ireland independent". Signed Michael McGovern.

To the Editor of the  
Gaelic American.

At a large and enthusiastic meeting of the Robert Emmet Society, of Youngstown, Ohio, held April 10th, 1927, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

# One of the more interesting documents in the Irish National Library in Dublin is a 1927 letter from the Robert Emmet Society (Youngstown, Ohio) to the old Fenian/Clan na Gael/Editor of the Gaelic American

newspaper, John Devoy, backing his plans for the establishment of an "Irish Building" in New York.

## “COME BACK TO ERIN...AND PARTY”

**1904:** Michael McGovern appears to have made two trips “home” to Ireland while he was living the United States. We know he made the first visit in the autumn of 1904 when he was about 55 years of age. He was living and working as a steel mill rolling man in Youngstown at the time. There isn’t a record of his journey from the U.S’ to Ireland but there is a record of his return journey from Queenstown (Cork) to New York. On Saturday October 15<sup>th</sup> 1904 he boarded the S.S. Celtic for the 8 day journey across the Atlantic. The White Star Line “Celtic”, built at the famous Belfast Harland and Wolff yard in Belfast, was the world’s largest ship from 1901 to 1903. It could carry 2857 passengers.



We know from the “Youngstown Vindicator” (a 1933 report) that Michael made a “return trip to Ireland about 25 years ago”... and that it spiralled into a near non-stop party that eventually forced him to “flee back to America”. The report would suggest that the trip was made c. 1908. In fact it occurred in September- October 1904.

We don’t know how Michael got to Ireland; presumably he sailed from New York to Queenstown on another White Star liner. While the trip is recorded in his “hometown” Youngstown daily newspaper there doesn’t appear to be any record of it in any of the local newspapers in Co. Galway – either the Tuam Herald or the Connacht Tribune. What we do know from Williamstown local historian Tommy Scally is that he visited his old home and called on some of his neighbours. By 1904 both his mother and father were dead. Presumably he met his sister Catherine Grady and other relations.

**Youngstown Vindicator**

very modest. About 25 years ago, he returned to visit his native Ireland, intending to stay three months. In six weeks he was home, somewhat displeased. “All they did was have parties for me,” he complained. “I didn’t get a chance to see the country.”

ANGERS FOR THE U. S. IMMIGRATION OFFICER AT PORT OF ARR

ited States, under Act of Congress approved March 3, 1903, to be delivered to the U. S. Immigration Officer b  
 at having such passengers on board upon arrival at a port in the United States.

1904 Arriving at Port of NEW YORK. OCT 20 1904

20 Michael McGovern 55

Cork Youngstown Self \$1000

Wife Mrs. McGovern 35

North West Europe Youngstown

The SS “Celtic’s” manifest tells us that the ship sailed from Liverpool on October 15<sup>th</sup> 1904 where it had picked up the majority of its 2,800 passengers. Many of them from Sweden and Eastern Europe. It arrived in Queenstown (Cork) on the following day where the remainder of the passengers embarked. The majority of the Irish passengers were young men and women aged between 18 and 30 whose occupations were listed as labourers, servants, grooms and farmers.

Michael like most of the Irish passenger’s was travelling “steerage”. However unlike most of those who boarded the “Celtic” in Cork he was carrying \$1,000! Most of the passengers declared having sums of between \$10 and \$40. Michael was the only one carrying a very large amount of money as he returned to the US. Perhaps he had intended to spend it during the planned three months holiday in Ireland and didn’t get around to doing that as he left after six weeks of partying. The manifest tells us that Michael was returning to his home in Youngstown where he and his wife “Mrs. McGovern” lived at 135 North West Avenue. Michael said he was 55 years of age when he made the trip. But this would have meant he was born in 1849 or possibly 1848. For now 1847 seems a more likely date of birth for “The Puddler Poet”. **Michael appears to have made a second trip to Ireland in 1928.**

While it is less clear that Michael made a second visit to Ireland, because no ships manifest has been found to confirm the trip, it is nevertheless referred to in an article written in the "Youngstown Vindicator" in 1992. The article by Vindicator staff reporter Joe Gorman appears in the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1992 edition of the paper. It is based on an interview with The "Puddler Poet's" grandson William McGuire. The headline on the feature article is entitled "Famous poet writes of steel mills in the Valley". And almost 60 years after Michael McGovern's death in 1933 journalist Joe Gorman sets out to remind a new generation in Youngstown of the significance of the "Puddler Poet's" work in the era of turbulent confrontation between iron and steel mill bosses and their workers in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



As with most biographical articles on Michael McGovern, this one begins with a line from one of his well-known poems:

*"The idle rich their hours may while*

*In sleep and luxury.*

*The happy rest that follows toil*

*Is Luxury to me".*

And it repeats the claim that "McGovern was born in Castlerea, County Roscommon".

A nostalgic visit "home" to Ireland by Michael McGovern is also referred to in this 1992 article. But rather than placing that visit in 1904, the article in "The Vindicator" says it took place "*Just before the Depression*". The Great Depression began with the Wall Street crash of October 1929 so the suggestion here is that McGovern made the journey to Ireland (and presumably to Williamstown) sometime in 1928 or early 1929.

The article says that "*McGovern longed to return to Ireland before he died and all the families took a collection to send him there*".

And once again "The Vindicator" repeats the story that first cropped up in the paper in 1904 that McGovern "couldn't wait to home get (to the U.S.) as all the Irish did was party".

The same article tells us that his grandson William McGuire still had the poet's desk along with a collection of his poems in "*his original handwriting*".

<b>Famous poet writes of steel</b>		
<p>By <b>JOE GORMAN</b> Staff Reporter</p> <p><i>The idle rich their hours may while In sleep and luxury</i></p>	<p><i>The happy rest that follows toil Is luxury for me</i> Michael McGovern "The Philosophical Puddler"</p> <p>The above words were writ-</p>	<p>ten by Michael McGovern, "The Puddler Poet," whose writings give us a glimpse into the Youngstown of the past and life at work in the mills. McGovern was born in Castlerea County, Roscommon</p>

### Article in Vindicator, 28 February 1992.

McGovern's great granddaughter is Maureen McGovern, the singer from Boardman.

McGovern died on April 9, 1933. The story of his death was front page news in both city newspapers. "Puddlers Die Like Other Men" read the headline in the Telegram, echoing a line from one of his poems. McGuire and his brother served the funeral mass.

McGuire still has the desk he wrote at, along with McGovern's poems in his original handwriting. McGuire said he might do something with them someday, but the papers

they are on are very brittle, and he is afraid they will be damaged if they leave his home.

In his final years, McGovern was saddened by the deaths of old friends and of 9 of his 13 children. In a letter to his granddaughter, Alice McGuire, he wrote a poem called "Old Man's Dirge," in which he wrote: "I stand alone, a gnarled tree, upon life's plain; For death cut down those near to me, and I remain; Sweet hope reminds me I may join, in spheres afar, In spirit life those friends of mine, Where'er they are."

## McGovern

Continued from page 7

Mahoning County Courthouse but has since vanished.

McGovern wrote of his native Ireland, and longed to return there before he died.

"Just before the Depression, all the families took a collection to send him there," McGuire said. "But he couldn't wait to come home. He said all those stories about Ireland are true." McGovern reported that all the Irish did was party, McGuire said.

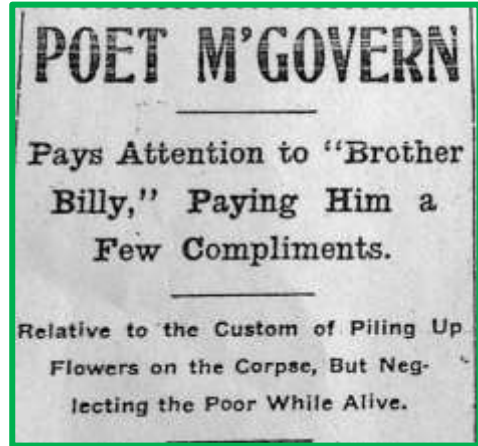
He hinted that he might "*do something with them one day*" but he was concerned because the paper they were written on was very brittle.

So did Michael McGovern make that second journey to Ireland? We don't yet know. **We do know that he did visit in 1904 and that he called to see Tommy Scally's mother during that visit.** There is no reference to either visit in any of the local newspapers.

**1905: "A \$10 BILL MAKES BUT BRIEF VISITS TO A WORKINGMAN; HE MAY DIE OF STARVATION WHILE IT NESTLES IN THE POCKET OF A HYPOCRITE WHO HAS ROBBED HIM".**



In December 1905, just two weeks before Christmas, Michael McGovern took up his pen again to launch a blistering attack on what he saw as the hypocrisy of misplaced and costly obeisance to the dead in a world where the living must grapple with poverty, penury and hunger. "The custom of putting a new suit and piling up flowers on a corpse while, at the same time, neglecting the poor all around, including (perhaps) the dead man himself while he lived," set the "Puddler Poet" to vituperating against the inequity of everyday life in turn of the century U.S.A.



In a letter to the editor of the "Youngstown Daily Vindicator" of December 10<sup>th</sup> he launched a blistering attack on another contributor "Brother Billy" who had written "a theoretical soliloquy, worthy (says McGovern) of Aristotle, on the allegorical journey of a \$10 bill through the hands of men and women rich and poor on a passage through the realms of charity, pity, love and other virtues".

McGovern's reaction to Brother Billy's essay is blunt. To the Editor of The Vindicator,  
Sir-

*"Who in the name of philosophy is" Brother Billy"? Were a ten dollar bill to become gifted with human life and reason its journey amidst wealth and poverty and the insights it might obtain while being used in traffic between right and wrong, good and bad would enable it to tell many tales of human nature, its hypocrisy and virtues. A ten dollar bill makes but brief visits to a workingman; he may die of starvation while it nestles in the pocket of a hypocrite who has robbed him while living. Had it visited a poor man more often his life might have been prolonged; such visits would be better than flowers on his coffin".*

**Sympathy Wasted.**  
 Alas, Billy Brown, you are dead;  
 Your ailment was offered no cure;  
 You starved, and none bothered his head  
 About you because you were poor.  
 Your life was a journey of woe;  
 Of sickness and toll ev'ry day,  
 Yet no one was troubled to know  
 What help you might need on your way.

The Puddler then homes in on what he sees as the hypocrisy of spending money on the "waking" of a dead man; putting a new suit or flowers on his corpse instead of having given him that \$10 bill while he lived. A new poem "Sympathy Wasted", which accompanies his Letter to The Editor of the Vindicator" flames with guttering anger; fastens on the custom of "buying a good suit for the corpse of a down and out neighbour" and rounds on the misplaced charity of such pointless spending.

But now Billy Brown, that you're gone,  
 The neighbors surround your death-bed,  
 And as you've no clothes to put on  
 They want you, to look nice, now you're dead.  
 They wash you and shave you and dress  
 You neatly with flow'rs on your breast,  
 And freed from your earthly distress .  
 They leave you forever at rest.

But, oh, if your neighbors would strive  
 To render some comfort and aid  
 To you, Billy Brown, while alive  
 Your death might be somewhat de-  
 lay'd.  
 While living, a good suit of clothes  
 Would suit you much better than  
 now—  
 A meal for the live 'fore a rose  
 To place by a corpse clanny brow.  
**MICHAEL M'GOVERN.**  
 December 7, 1905.



## WELL I'LL BE DOGGONE "AGALLAMH BEIRTE, LE MADA"

The "Puddler Poet" often mixed humour, irony and scathing satire in poems directed at the U.S. political establishment; at politicians whom he often portrayed as being "in the vest pockets of business and industrial tycoons".

In a rollicking ballad like poem entitled "The Marvelous Story of The Puddler and his Dog" he mines a Kafkaesque vein of humour, drollery and ultimately

pathos. With the deftness of an old Irish "seanachai" (story-teller) he sets the tale of Benjamin F. Butler's ill-fated bid for the U.S. Presidency in 1884 on the canvas of a dialogue between a chicken slaughtering dog and its new master, The Puddler.

And what is particularly interesting about this lengthy poem is that it uses an arcane, quasi juridical poetic form, peculiar to Ireland and interestingly to the Inuit people of Kalaallit Nunaat (formerly Greenland). In Ireland it is known as the "Agallamh Beirte", "The Dialogue of The Two"; in Greenland "The Song Dual". In both protagonists set about each other (on stage) with alternating mocking, visceral rhymes and verses. The audience decides the winner on the basis of who has shown the greater poetic firepower and ingenuity of argument.

In this case the argument, vicariously about Benjamin Butler, is between The Puddler and His Dog.



Benjamin Butler was founder of the short-lived Anti-Monopoly Party. His bid for presidency failed abysmally. McGovern was an enthusiastic supporter. The dog of the poem, originally "Czar" but re-named "Ben" by The Puddler, shares Benjamin Butler's fate in the jolting way an Irish short story master might have crafted it to its startling finish - shafted with humour but pierced with a wrenching pathos

### THE MARVELOUS STORY OF THE PUDDLER AND HIS DOG.

TIME: THE SUMMER OF 1884.

The "puddler's dog" was a costly specimen of the Russian terrier species, secured by a dog fancier just returned from that country. It was stolen from the dog fancier by a rambling Irish bag-piper, and was stolen afterwards from the piper by the puddler.

The Dramatis Personae in this Verse Dual are The Puddler and His Dog; a dog who has acquired some notoriety in the locality. By way of prologue The Puddler, we are told, is "an uncompromising populist or laborite in politics, and has changed the name of the oft-stolen dog from "Czar" to that of "Ben," after his favorite Ben Butler, the anti-monopolist candidate for president. The dog killed all the chickens in the neighborhood, hence he was famous too.

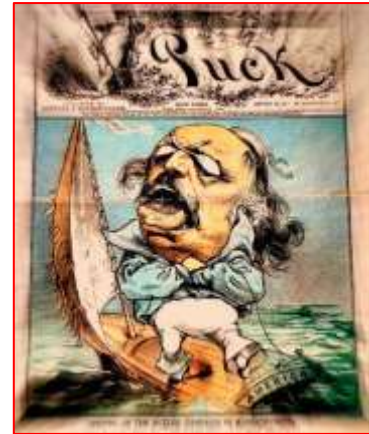
The story begins bucolically with the Puddler and his newly acquired and newly re-named dog taking a stroll along a cliff top path, above a wide river, to reach a favourite summertime rendezvous point known as "The Rock".

"One breathless day in August time when mercury arose  
To ninety-nine, augmenting much the weight of mortals' woes;  
When e'en the faintest silvery streak of cloud forbared to crown  
The summits of the hazy hills o'erlooking "Stumpertown";  
There sauntered through the shady ways along the gloomy woods  
A man and dog, unmindful of these chirping multitudes,

## A STORY THAT RUNS OUT OF TELLING TIME

Michael McGovern sets “The Marvellous Story... in the hill-encircled town of “Stumpertown”; an imaginary place where politicians are on the “stump” for perhaps a single election or alternatively in a perpetual round of canvassing, campaigning and promise making to gullible voters.

This “Puck” cartoon from the edition of August 13<sup>th</sup> 1879 marked the launch of Ben Butler’s campaign in Massachusetts. The Puddler McGovern’s friend was bidding to become Governor of Massachusetts; he failed twice but was elected on his third attempt in 1882. He is remembered as the Governor who appointed the state’s first Irish-American and African-American judges.



Returning to “The Marvellous Story”, by the time the Puddler and “Ben” reached the shade of “The Rock”, the weapons of wit and satire; lampoon and insult had been blooded. The Puddler berating “Ben” for lack of gratitude at his deliverance from totalitarian “Czarist Russian” to “The Land of The Free.”

Some heard the queer discussion 'tween the grisly dog and man,

**“The puddler proudly boasted  
of this great republic, which  
Makes laws to guard the  
poorest tramp as strictly as the rich”.**

**“Insulting man,” the dog replied,  
“why hurt my feelings so?  
I am no foreign pauper who  
with labor's worth compete”.**

**“I tried to Yankeeize you and  
vouchsafed to call you 'Ben,'  
In honor of my candidate,  
the friend of workingmen...  
But, oh! my work is useless.”**

**“Still boast you of this country  
in which miners delve away.  
Producing wealth and starving  
upon sixty cents a day...  
Where gold bugs may sit down  
and sneer at poverty's distress.”**

And thus in this jousting fashion “Ben” the Dog and his new Master chivvy each other with inverted persiflage. The Puddler, with mocking irony, standing by the “*great republic where each possessed a vote in the quadrennial (election) campaign*”; “Ben” scorning his master allegories reminding him that life in his “*toilers land*” would next day see him “*earn a beggar’s pittance while standing before the scorching furnace fire*”. And then comes the confounding denouement of the “The Marvellous Story of The Puddler and his Dog”. As if the story itself had run out of telling time.

## 1910 THE PUDDLER POET: A POLISHED AND PREGNANT WRITER IS “LAID UP” AT HOME

“The Mahoning Dispatch” was an interesting weekly newspaper published in Cranfield, Mahoning County, from 1877 to 1986. Cranfield had been the county seat of Mahoning County but was superseded by the rapidly expanding industrial city of Youngstown, ten miles away, in 1876. The move alarmed people in Cranfield who felt that its rural hinterland would be politically neglected. To counteract this local man Henry Manning Fowler launched the “Mahoning Dispatch” to give the voice a continuing, strong voice. Fowler declared that the “Dispatch” would be an independent, non-partisan journal and the organ of no political faction or religious sect”. It became the longest continuously published family run newspaper in the county. “Catering to all the local villages, townships, and crossroads of Mahoning County, the Dispatch maintained a rural and folksy demeanour in sharp contrast to the modern industrial complex in Youngstown a few miles away”.



The “Dispatch” reported on political, social and cultural events in Washington; across Ohio and especially in Mahoning County. A prominent two column, front page feature “Youngstown Yawnlettes” carried a cascading, stream of consciousness sequence of human interest stories each week.

*YOUNGSTOWN YAWNLETES: Our County Seat Correspondent Writes In Entertaining Style About People and Things*



“The Dispatch” carried (in its jaunty, succinct style) two interesting stories on Michael McGovern in 1910 and 1911. The first appeared in its November 4<sup>th</sup> 1910 edition.

Michael McGovern, the well-known and versatile Puddler Poet, is laid up in his home with painful illness. There are few workmen more accomplished than Mr. McGovern and may be none, for he is not only a polished and pregnant writer, but a quite clever artist and a musician. In addition he is a Gaelic scholar. He is also a forcible speaker, but is not an eloquent or impassioned one, but makes up in aptness and logic what he lacks in the Ciceronian and Ingersoll in his utterance. There are very many here who hope to hear of his speedy complete recovery.

*“Michael McGovern the well-known and versatile Puddler Poet is laid up in his home with a painful illness. There are few workmen more accomplished than Mr McGovern and may be none for he is not only a polished and pregnant writer but a quite clever artist and a musician. In addition he is a Gaelic scholar. He is also a forcible speaker but is not an eloquent or impassioned one but makes up in aptness and logic what he lacks in the Ciceronian and Ingersoll in his utterance. There are very many here who hope to hear of his speedy, complete recovery”.*

\* Marcus Tullius Cicero (106BC- 43BC) statesman, lawyer, scholar, and writer is considered one of Rome's greatest orators and prose stylists. He tried vainly to uphold republican principles in the final civil wars that destroyed the Roman Republic.

\* Robert Green "Bob" Ingersoll (1833 – 1899) was an American lawyer, Civil War veteran and politician, regarded as one of the most powerful orators of his time. He advocated freethought and humanism and often ridiculed religious belief, especially the belief in Hell.



## 1911-MICHAEL McGOVERN IS WRITING “CONSIDERABLE POETRY”

In the summer of 1911 Michael McGovern is back on the front page of “The Mahoning Dispatch”. *The Independent Family Journal Devoted to the Interests of all Classes and Nationalities* is still prioritising the minutiae of local happenings over the big political events of the day. The first two columns of its front page are given over to a swathe of local news from the village of Washingtonville, 10 miles south of Cranfield. Peter Herold, one of the paper’s legendary journalists, prefaces his weekly “Washingtonville Write-Ups” with a pepper-canister of poetry quotations. The Friday July 14<sup>th</sup> 1911 edition begins with Alexander Pope and

William Cowper

*“They never taste who always drink; They always talk who never think”* - Pope

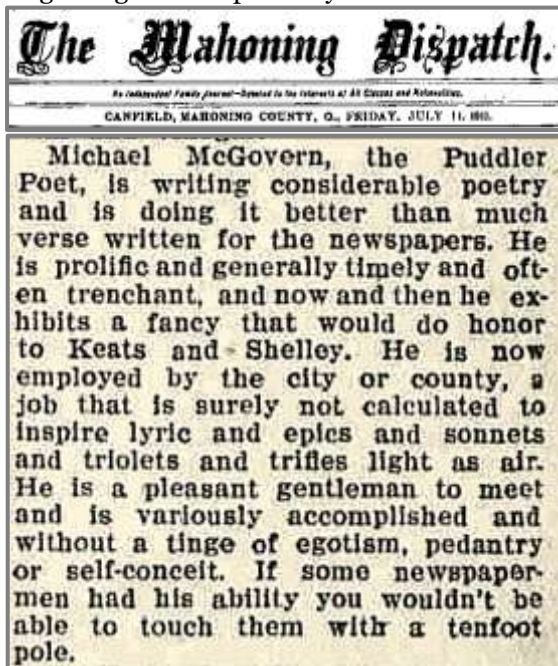
*“Absence of occupation is not rest; A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed”* – Cowper.



The article continues with scores of one-line observations:

- *Paul Senheiser has been bedfast with fever the past week.*
- *Harry Hartzell shipped 729 bushels of strawberries this season*
- *Joseph Candle has beautified his residence on Union Street with paint and trimmings.*
- *A good refreshing rain visited this village Monday causing all nature to smile.*
- *This village is in good sanitary condition and the citizens should help keep it so.*

The Youngstown Local News Column “from our County Seat Correspondent who writes in *Entertaining Style about People and Things*” returns to the poetry of Michael McGovern and heaps praise on the continuing “timely and trenchant” output of “The Puddler Poet” comparing him to Keats and Shelly. He also tells his readers that McGovern is a “pleasant, accomplished gentleman without a tinge of egotism or pedantry.



Michael McGovern the Puddler Poet is writing considerable poetry and is doing it better than much verse written for the newspapers He is prolific and generally timely and often trenchant and now and then he exhibits a fancy that would do honor to Keats and Shelley. He is now employed by the city or county a job that is surely not calculated to inspire lyric and epics and sonnets and triolets and trifles light as air He is a pleasant gentleman to meet and is variously accomplished and without a tinge of egotism pedantry or self-conceit. If some newspaper men had his ability you wouldn't be able to touch them with a ten foot pole.

It's now almost 12 years since Michael McGovern published his “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” and clearly his work which is being published in local papers and labor journals is gaining an ever widening audience.

**1913 - "IF YOU WILL FAVOUR ME WITH ELECTION"  
THE POET WHO WOULD BE THE DEPUTY CITY MAYOR**

Michael McGovern's place in 19<sup>th</sup> century American labor and literary life rests on the power of his poetry, his song poems and his writing – but for a moment at least, at the age of 66, the poet gambled with the idea of putting down his pen and writing paper and putting his name on a ballot paper.

In 1913 "The Puddler Poet" decided to seek election to the office of President of Youngstown City Council. The President of the Council was effectively the Deputy Mayor. For years he had been commenting on the politics of his hometown and of the United States in his weekly newspaper columns and in his poems.



**THE WORKINGMAN'S SONG.**

"The wealth I toil for goes away  
To plutocrat and lord.  
While I but get starvation pay.  
Below a slave's reward.  
Of mansions capped with spire and dome  
By Hudson, Thames and Rhine.  
The poorhouse is the only home  
Which I may claim as mine".

TO LABOR, WHICH CELEBRATES THE MEMORY OF  
ITS STOLEN FREEDOM.

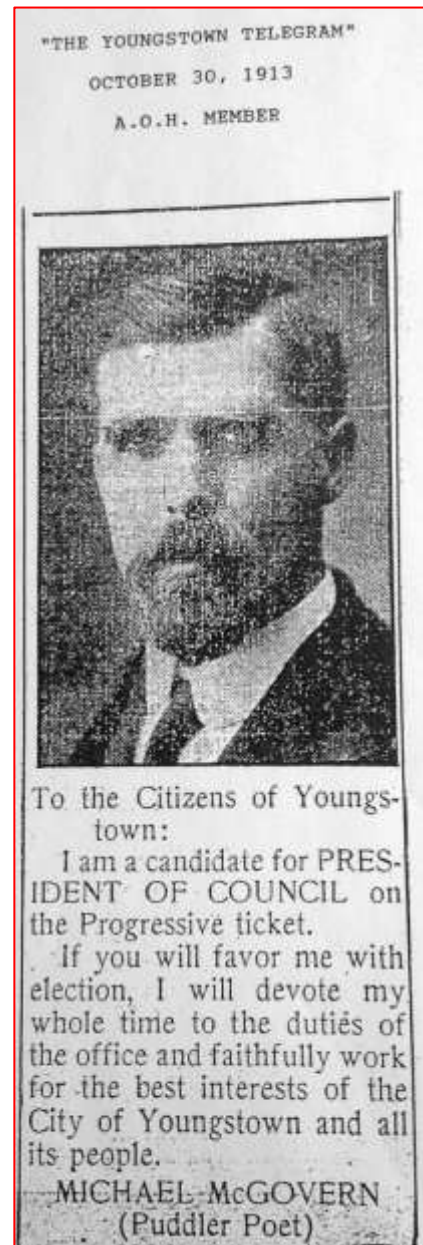
O! toilers, who cheer for the systems that rule you,  
Come forth, and your forefathers' deeds emulate,  
By voting against the old parties that fool you—  
For plutocrats will not 'gainst plutes legislate.  
Recapture the flag—in plutocracy's keeping—  
No toiler oppressed 'neath "Old Glory" should sigh;  
Then liberty will not sit shackled and weeping  
While liberty's myth "keeps" the Fourth of July.

In the autumn of 1913 Michael McGovern decided to throw his hat into the ring and seek election as President of the Council of Youngstown. He was standing on the Progressive ticket.

The Progressive Party of 1912 was an American "third party". It was formed by former President Theodore Roosevelt, after he lost the nomination of the Republican Party to his former protégé, President William Howard Taft. The new party was known for "taking advanced positions on progressive reforms, and attracting some leading reformers". Roosevelt did not win the presidential election and beset by factionalism and failure to win many offices, the party went into rapid decline by 1914. In 1916, Roosevelt abandoned the party and told his supporters to vote for the Republican Party, effectively ending the Progressive Party.

The Progressive party was nicknamed the "Bull Moose Party" after journalists quoted Roosevelt saying that he felt "fit as a bull moose"

Michael McGovern did not get elected to the office of President of the Council. The election, which was held on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, was won by Joseph N Higley who held the office until 1920, according to the official Council register.



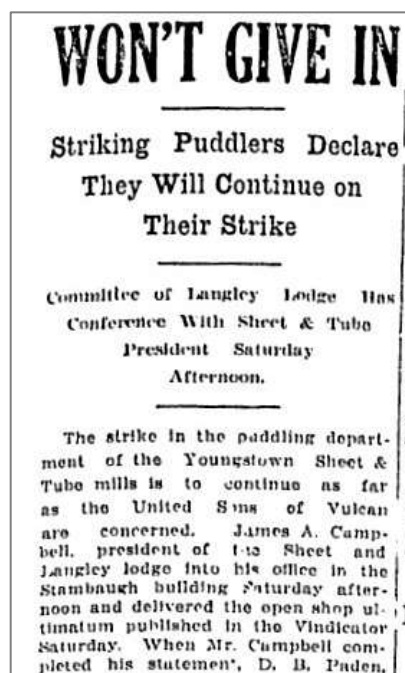
**1913: THE YEAR OF “THE GREAT FLOOD”;  
A PUDDLER STRIKE AND A PUDDLER CANDIDATE**

1913 is probably best remembered in Youngstown as “**The Year of The Great Flood**”. Easter Sunday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> saw torrential rain starting to fall all across Ohio. “For four days and nights the Mahoning Valley was inundated by unceasing rains, something akin to the biblical deluge” according to contemporary reports. City streets, homes, businesses and factories were flooded to depths of five feet; hundreds of townspeople were made homeless; had to be rescued and put up in temporary accommodation including hastily converted street cars. Three bridges were swept away; electric power cut and up to 25,000 workers were temporarily unemployed until the flood waters receded.



The Youngstown Vindicator press room was among the many premises which were flooded and on Wednesday March 26<sup>th</sup> the paper printed a series of 6 x8 bulletins or pamphlets during the day “to keep and eventuy a two page edition of the Vindicator.

1913 was also the year of one more bitter and protracted “Puddler” strike; a strike Michael McGovern would have be very familiar with . In East Youngstown, “puddlers” at the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Mill went on strike on June 30<sup>th</sup> demanding a flat rate of \$7 for puddling a ton of wrought iron; they were still on strike five months later .On Sunday November 2<sup>nd</sup> - two days before the City Council elections in which McGovern was standing as a Progressive candidate - the Vindicator carried the headline “**WON’T GIVE IN**” **Striking Puddlers Declare They Will Continue on Their Strike**”. The report tells us that the strike was undertaken by members of the militant United Sons of Vulcan Union, which would later become merged - and later still unmerged - with McGovern’s union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (A.A.). The early 1900s saw bitter rivalry between the Sons of Vulcan and the A.A. and the Youngstown dispute was one of those which ultimately contributed to the decline of both the A.A. and the Sons of Vulcan. In the 1870s the Sons of Vulcan was described as “one of the strongest unions in the United States”; by October 1913 puddlers who disagreed with the militancy of Vulcan union officials described the union’s demands as “out of all reason”. And at steel plant after steel plant the power of both unions was diminished and eventually broken. The conflict is well described in “Brother Against Brother: The Amalgamated and Sons of Vulcan at the A.M. Byers Company, 1907-1913” by Michael W. Santos, of Lynchburg College, VA <https://journals.psu.edu/pmhb/article/viewFile/44208/43929>.



It was against this backdrop that Michael McGovern decided to enter politics sometime in the middle of the year 1913. Why he did we have no idea, at this time. He was 65/66 years of age and had been long retired as a puddler and probably from his later employment as an oil company inspector and a forman the Youngstown Street Department.



## ELECTION CAMPAIGN: ODDS STACKED AGAINST PUDDLER McGOVERN

The summer of 1913 saw Youngstown gripped in the sound and fury of politics. Throughout June and July arguments raged over plans to introduce a new form of balloting to elect members of the city council; in August and September the city was at the centre of barnstorming “primaries” which

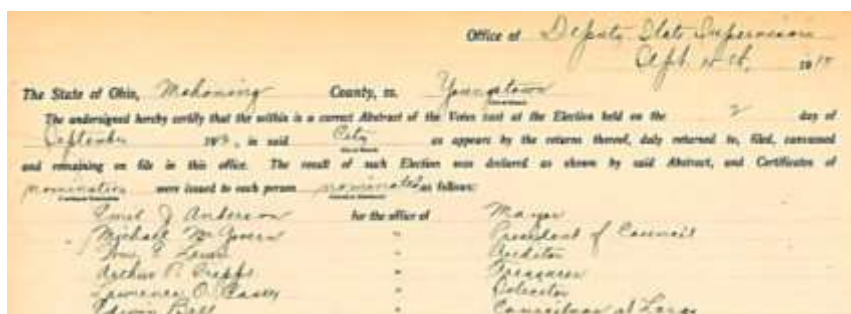
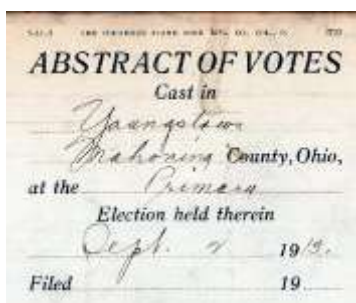
saw party candidates –Republicans, Democrats, Progressives and Socialists. October was the month when the serious campaigning – for a range of elected offices ranging from mayor to municipal judge - got underway. Election Day was Tuesday, November 4th.

On the eve of the July 21st referendum on the proposed introduction of what was known as, The Charter, to change the way city councillors and officials were to be elected “The Vindicator” found it caught up in a gigantic legal defamation action which it warned its readers could put it out of business. The paper because of its opposition to the changes was being sued for \$200,000. “We are fighting for our Life”, its editorial thundered. The Charter was the Vindicator reported the following day “Overwhelmingly Rejected” and “A Free Press and a Free Citizenship win a Triumph” August saw the 1913 City Council primaries get under way – candidates placing “political advertisements” in the papers, promising - like James Ring, Progressive Party-, to see that “if elected every man will get a fair deal no matter what his nationality or where he comes from”. So far none of McGovern’s election literature or campaign material has been located but it is clear that he had to engage in the kind of canvassing and mobilising supporters that was part and parcel of every election at the time. September 2nd 1913 was “primaries” election day.



**MAHONING COUNTY**  
**BOARD OF ELECTIONS**  
*Your vote counts!*

The records of that 1913 primary are held in the offices of the Mahoning County Board of Elections at 345 Oak Hill Ave., Youngstown. Director Joyce Kale-Pesta has located the original Abstract which gives details of the nomination of the various candidates and the votes cast for each



Michael McGovern’s main rival for the office of President of the Council was Joseph Nelson Higley whose old New England colonial family had long been associated with political life in Ohio and earlier in Connecticut. In challenging Higley, whose ancestor Capt. John Higley had settled in Connecticut in 1647 McGovern was up against a very powerful opponent.



## LIGHTNING STRUCK BUT NOT FOR MICHAEL McG.

According to the “Abstract of Votes Cast in Youngstown, Mahoning County, Ohio, at the Primary Election held therein on September 2nd 1913, there were four candidates for the office of President of the Council.

- Jerry Sullivan
- Jos. N Higley
- Michael McGovern
- Thomas Williams.

Joseph Nelson Higley came to the contest with a long political peerage, the descendant of “an old colonial family” whose roots have been traced to Elizabethan England. His “first American ancestor” the colourful John Highley was born the little village of Frimley, in Surrey 1649. Tradition has it that he was apprenticed at the age of 15 to “a severe and overbearing master” to learn the trade of glove making treatment. But when faced with a Monday morning flogging for failing to perform a proscribed amount of work he ran away and away and jumped on a ship that was about to sail for America. It took him up the Connecticut River to Windsor the oldest settlement in the Colony of Connecticut, 57 miles from coastline. He eventually became a magistrate, the captain of a militia company and a member of the legislature.

John N Higley’s, father Brainard Spenser Higley, was twice Mayor of Youngstown in the 1860s. John N qualified as a lawyer, practiced for a brief period before becoming a journalist and associate editor of the “Youngstown Telegram”. Later he worked as Publicity Manager of the First National Bank and of the Dollar Savings and Trust Company.

Pres. of Council			
Jerry Sullivan	J. N. Higley	Michael McGovern	Thomas Williams
28	129	6	1
44	101	9	4
24	81	4	29
39	66	4	4
39	108	5	6
24	103	5	3
28	77	5	9
28	107	6	8
64	40	10	10
40	26	8	2
37	60	8	8

The handwritten record of the Primary results show that Higley was a clear winner.

Sullivan	Higley	McGovern	Williams
39	265	260	689
1283			

Michael McGovern did reasonably well in a number of the polling booths but as the votes tumbled out of the ballot boxes it was clear that Higley was the clear winner.

He eventually polled 5,260 to McGovern’s 687.

The Council election took place on Tuesday November 4th. McGovern made his pitch to voters in an advertisement Thursday Oct 30<sup>th</sup>. An editorial in The Vindicator on Polling Day set the scene:

*“It is on election days such as this one, and the day after such as tomorrow will be, that this great American democracy of our best justified itself to the world - in which it most satisfies its citizens. Yesterday we were all clamoring for this party or that, for this candidate or that, for this measure or that, but today we all walk quietly to the polls, the argument and dispute wholly at an end and in perfect pence and good humour register the choice of freemen. And tomorrow, we are perfectly sure that all over this land the majority will just as quietly accept the result and go about its daily tasks wishing for an hour perhaps that I were otherwise but with a thought of disputing the result. It is the noblest exhibition the world ever saw of an intelligent self restrained law-loving, law-abiding ....and the microfilm record excludes the last word! Perhaps it was “achievement”*”

From a report in the Vindicator on Wednesday November 5<sup>th</sup> it would also appear that Youngstown was hit by lightning storms on Election Day. For Michael McGovern, the “Puddler Poet”, the door also closed on his hopes of becoming a politician and the city’s Deputy Mayor.



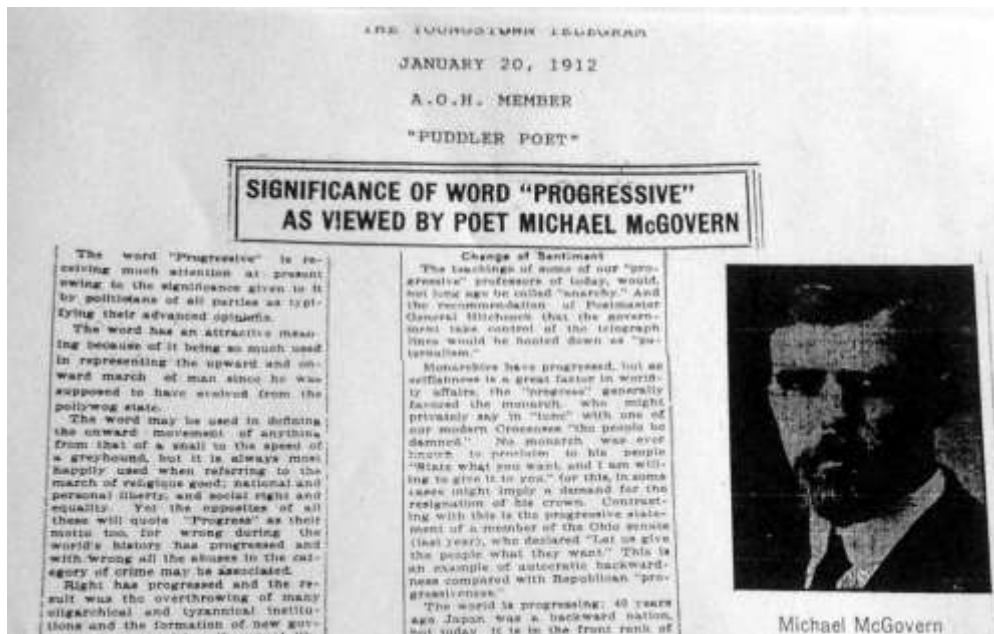
**THE WINDS OF PROGRESS:  
 “EVERY AGE HAS THE RIGHT TO GOVERN ITSELF  
 AND NOT BE BOUND BY THE BACKWARD IDEAS  
 OF MEN LONG DEAD”.**

**- Michael McGovern 1912**



In 1912, the year before he decided to stand on the newly formed Teddy Roosevelt “Progressive Party” ticket for election to the City Council and launch a bid to become the city’s first “Progressive” President, Michael McGovern had been writing about “Progress” in the U.S.

In what would today be called an OpEd (an Opinion Editorial) column in the “Youngstown Telegram” (January 20<sup>th</sup> 1912) McGovern sets out a powerfully argued case for “honest progress”, the kind of societal change which viewed from the standpoint of 1912 would “*thirty years ago have been considered as high treason by our institutions*”. In support of his demands for radical, progressive change in U.S. politics, business and life he adds: “*The teachings of some of our progressive professors of today would not long ago be called anarchy*”. And in support of his arguments he goes on “*And the recommendation of Postmaster General Hitchcock that the Government take control of the telegraph lines would be hooted down as paternalism*”



McGovern wrote many similar trenchant articles for the “Telegram” in the early 1900s. In this one he coins the phrase “**Monderful Progress**” and engages in a discourse on the completing claims of what progress means to many different and competing sections of U.S.

Society in 1912 – the year before he himself decided throw his weight behind Roosevelt’s fledgling (but short lived) Progressive Party. He writes under the headline:

**SIGNIFICANCE OF WORD PROGRESSIVE AS VIEWED BY POET MICHAEL MCGOVERN**

“The word may be used in defining the onward movement of anything from that of a snail to the speed of a greyhound but is always most happily used when referring to the march of religious good, national and personal liberty and social rights and equality. Yet the opposite of all of these will quote “progress” as their motto too”

“*Right had progressed*”, he asserts, “*overthrowing many oligarchical and tyrannical institutions...but evil too has progressed in spite of all efforts in the promotion of good*”.

And he then goes on to cast a hopeful but still cautious eye across a global landscape.

## NO LONGER NOT DARING TO DEMAND

According to Michael McGovern the political and social commentator, writing in the "Telegraph" in 1912:

"Monarchies have progressed but as selfishness is a great factor in worldly affairs, the "progress" generally favoured the monarch, who might privately say in *tune* with one of our modern day Crocuses "*the people be damned*".

[The reference to Crocuses is unclear. It may be a newspaper misprint or it may be that McGovern was drawing on an ancient Greek myth.

According to legend Crocus was a Greek noble who fell deeply in love with a beautiful shepherdess, Smilax; however the Gods forbade their marriage, Crocus killed himself and Smilax, broken hearted, could not for a moment stop crying. The Goddess Flora moved by the tragedy turned Crocus into the beautiful Crocus Spring flower and Smilax into a vine.]



As he circumnavigated the "Progressive" world of his day Michael continued, in his article, to chart what he saw as the forward trend of politics in "previously backward and superstitious nations" like Japan and China.

He wasn't in a position to anticipate the cataclysmic historical convulsions (not all of the "progressive") which both countries would experience in the next 50 years.

But he remained hugely optimistic for the future drawing attention to the fact that "*the United States had made the greatest progressive stride in the history of nations*".

But he warned that "*many generations must to die before old traditions and customs can be completely eliminated... that wrongs still slyly progress under many guises... that there was still much to be done in every country ... and that in the matter of progress each generation needs something which the previous ones did not think about of if they did might not dare demand*".

The world is progressing; 40 years ago Japan was a backward nation, but today it is in the front rank of nations. Though its progress may not in every respect bear the stamp of right. A few years ago, no one would think that the backward superstitious Chinese would suddenly bound to the front with an idea of western progress and go the Japanese "one better" by establishing a republic. So progress in its various phases is not to be wondered at.

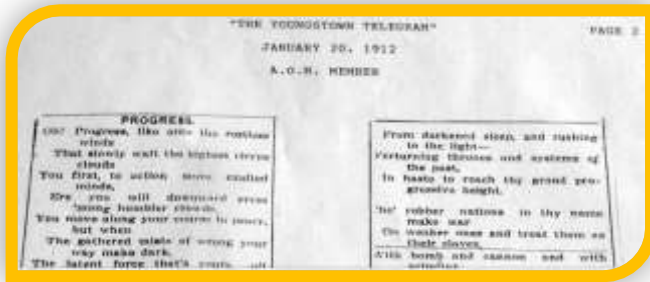
might not dare demand.

The Puddler Poet then goes on to tell his "Telegram" readers – and perhaps with an eye to later generations who might stumble on his words – that "Every age has a right to govern itself and not be bound by the backward ideas of men long dead. These are but a few of the straws indicative of the direction of the winds of change."

the people of the present. Every age has a right to govern itself and not be bound by the backward ideas of men long dead. These are but a few straws indicative of the direction of the winds of change.



**PROGRESSIVE YOUNG MINDS INVITE YOU TO COME AND SHED YOUR LIGHT ON....**



Having unburdened himself of his thoughts on the state of “progressive” thought and political movement in the world of 1912 in his prose essay OpEd., Michael McGovern then went on to write a long poem which was also published in the same edition of the “Youngstown Telegram” (Jan 20<sup>th</sup>).

Here again he addresses himself to the idea of “progress” in a poem simply called “PROGRESS”.

He appeals to Progress to raise its lamp, to let its light fall on tyranny and corruption, to show the way to the oppressed of the world and to walk at the side of the human race where it finds itself hardest pressed.



*“You have travelled close beside the human race  
From where it first evolved and led it on;  
E'er moving with increasing bolder pace  
From Darkness up to where your beacon shone.  
Tho' ignorance and superstition oft  
Have blocked your way, you ne'er vouchsafed to veer  
From off your course, but held your torch aloft—  
The ages, struggling in the dark, to cheer.  
March on. Oh Progress up to the greater heights  
The more your beacon lights are trimmed, the more  
They'll show the nakedness of wrongs and rights  
Which law should crush and what it should restore.*”

Progressiveness, young minds invite  
you come  
And shed your light on old abusive  
wrong  
Til shackles of the past be stricken  
from  
The world of men who have been  
cheated long—  
Til empires, creeds and parties shall  
be purged  
Of evils which duplicity enforced;  
Til wrong upon your pillory be  
scourged,  
Continue on your every upward  
march  
Until the world, its systems will  
improve;  
Til round it shall be one great Heav-  
enly arch  
Composed of Peace, Prosperity and  
Love.  
MICHAEL MCGOVERN.  
Youngstown, Jan. 18, 1912.

Another year would see Michel McG, as he sometimes called himself, slugging it out; on the stump, in a very different battle for the hearts and minds of the voters of his very own Strumpertown



## 1913 THE PUDDLER, THE PASTOR AND THE WORLD PEACE FLAG

In 1913, on the eve of the outbreak of World War I, Michael McGovern played an intriguing cameo role, in a bid by a Youngstown Methodist minister to create a “World Peace Flag”- which was, in a sense, a pre-cursor of the later flag of the United Nations. Rev. James William Van Kirk (1858-1946) was the first pastor of the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church at Warren, Youngstown.

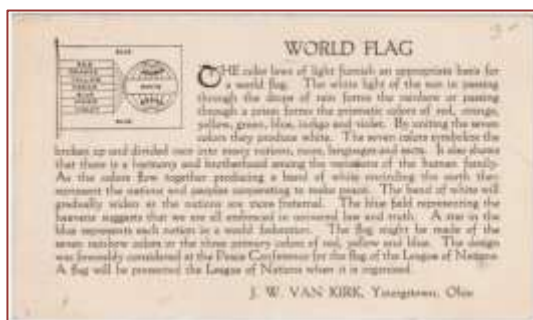
He was one of the leading international pacifists of his time. While working in Youngstown he designed the first ever “World Peace Flag” using rainbow stripes, stars and a globe and twice travelled around the world with it to spread his peace idea. He made his globe encircling trips in 1913 and 1925 to promote what he described as “The Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God”. He said he felt “his life’s mission to make the design known to nations and give it to mankind as a sign from God”



He wrote that the design came to him as a revelation from God, its colours symbolising the world’s many nations, races, languages and sects. The stars represented nations and the blue field the heavens suggesting we are all embraced in universal law and truth. The 20<sup>th</sup> Universal Peace Congress in The Hague in 1913 formally adopted the flag as its World Peace Flag. The American Peace Society as well as other international groups also adopted Van Kirk’s flag.

The captions on this 1913 postcard read: “This design has been favourably received at the Peace Palace at the Hague and also

by the Twentieth International Peace Conference and by the Peace Conference at Paris. These seven colors of the Rainbow represent the natural unity in the variations of the race and in human interests. As these shades flow together they produce white, which is an emblem of truth, brotherhood, harmony and peace. The stars stand for the nations of the earth”. Designed by Rev. J. W. Van Kirk Youngstown Ohio USA.”



This card which Van Kirk produced as part of his campaign outlines the thinking behind the design of the flag telling us that the color laws of light furnish an appropriate basis for a world flag. The design, he says, was favourable considered at the Peace Conference as the flag for the flag of the League of Nations. *A flag will be presented to the League of Nations when it is organised.*

However the League of Nations, when it was formed in 1920, couldn’t agree on a flag. In 1929 an international competition was held to try to find an acceptable flag but it failed dismally. Member states rejected all of the designs but eventually the semi-official two five pointed stars on a blue ground flag emerged as the emblem most used by the League of Nations. The five pointed stars representing the five continents. This flag was flown on the New York World Exposition Pavilion from 1939 to 1941. Four years later in 1945 the United Nations adopted its flag created by a design team lead by US industrial designer Oliver Lincoln



Lundquist. Pastor Van Kirk’s World Peace Flag had failed to become the global peace flag he had hoped it would be. But for many years it remained linked in folk memory to “The Puddler Poet”.

**MICHAEL THE IRISHMAN; D. RHYS THE WELSHMAN, JAMES WILLIAM THE DUTCHMAN AND THAT FLAG**

Michael McGovern enters the Rev James William Van Kirk's World Peace Flag story in early 1913 when Van Kirk starts a fund raising drive to finance his first trip to The Hague where he intends to present his flag to a gathering of international diplomats. The photograph shows Van Kirk (on the right) displaying his flag "at an unknown location."

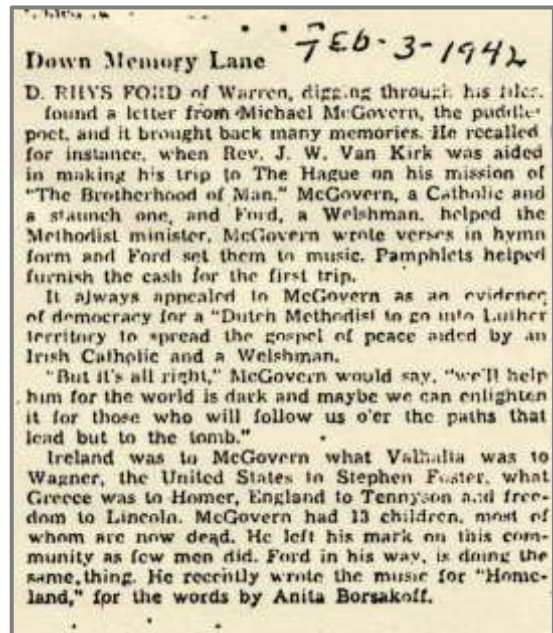


The story is recalled in an article in (what appears to be) The Youngstown Telegram of February 3rd 1942. In its "Down Memory Lane" column it explained that a letter written by Michael McGovern, 'The Puddler Poet', to a musician and composer friend D. Rhys Ford Snr., who lived in Warren, had just turned up. "Rhys Ford was digging through his files and found a letter from Michael McGovern that brought back many memories of how he and The Puddler Poet" came to Van Kirk's assistance when he was preparing to make his first trip to The Hague".

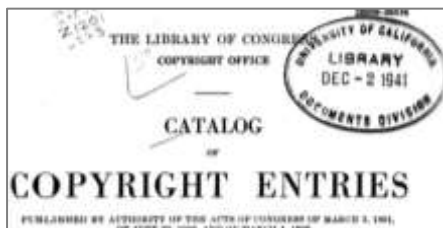
Van Kirk, having created his flag, was determined to take it to The Hague Peace Conference – but he needed money to fund his trip. And the report somewhat gleefully tells us that "McGovern, a Catholic and a staunch one, and Ford, a Welshman, helped the Methodist minister on his mission of taking The Brotherhood of Man campaign to The Hague.

*McGovern (the poet) wrote verses in hymn form; Ford (the composer) set them to music and the pamphlets they produced helped furnish the cash for the first trip (to The Hague).*

The column goes on "It always appealed to McGovern as evidence of democracy for a Dutch Methodist to go into Luther's territory to spread the gospel of peace aided by an Irish Catholic and a Welshman". "But it's all right," McGovern would say, "we'll help him for the world is dark and maybe we can enlighten it for those who will follow us o'er the path that lead but to the tomb".



And revealingly it adds: "Ireland was to McGovern what Valhalla was to Wagner; the United States to Steven Foster, what Greece was to Homer, England to Tennyson and freedom to Lincoln. McGovern had 13 children, most of whom are now dead. He left his mark on this community as few men did. Ford in his way is doing the same thing. He recently wrote the music for "Homeland" for the world of Anita Borsakoff".



Homeland; by Noble Cain; orch. pts.  
 © June 3, 1941; E pub. 95262; Harold Flammer, inc, New York. 27843  
 — w Anita Borsakoff, m D. Rhys Ford, sr. © May 20, 1941; E pub. 95085; Melrose music co., Warren, O. 27844

\* The Library of Congress Copyright Office records the copywriting of "Homeland", words by Anita Borsakoff

and music by D Rhys Ford Snr., on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1941.



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**IRELAND IS LOYAL NOT TO ENGLAND'S WAR MACHINE BUT TO HER DREAM OF A LITTLE GREEN ISLE - McGovern**

**1914:** By November 1914 war was raging in Europe; a war in which 18 million people would die. Michael McGovern had been to Ireland just 10 years earlier and in America he was a constant campaigner and advocate for Irish independence and the end of British rule in Ireland. August 1914 had seen the British Parliament granting "Home Rule" to Ireland but a month later this was "suspended" because of the growing war crisis. The Government of Ireland Act 1914 would have given Ireland a limited degree of Independence but McGovern was entirely sceptical of what was being offered and in one of the many letters to "The Youngstown Vindicator" he raged against any

**IRELAND IS LOYAL,**  
 Not to England to Join Her War,  
 But Still for the Little  
 Green Isle.

To the Editor of the Vindicator.  
 Sir: The article in the Sunday Vindicator of Nov. 1, by F. H. Cullen, entitled "Little Ireland Playing a Big Part in European War of Nations," was not a very reliable selection. It would seem to be the random effusion of one of England's well-paid special writers. I make a few quotations from it which are not true. He commences it with the invasion of Strongbow and gives much flattering taffy to the military qualifications of the Irish, but now the "political estrangement between Ireland and her sister country is happily wiped out forever by the grant of Home Rule." This is not true, for neither

suggestion that *"the (long) political estrangement between Ireland and her sister country is happily wiped out forever by the grant of Home Rule"*.

This was a claim made in an article published to "The Sunday Vindicator" of November 1st under the headline **"Little Ireland Playing a Big Part in European War of Nations"**; its author F.H. Cullen urging Irishmen to join the British Army and "strike a blow for Ireland's honour". The article claimed that up to 200,000 members of John Redmond's , recently gun-running armed, Irish Volunteers would soon be fighting on England's side in the Great War against the brutal German enemy. McGovern says the writer knows nothing of Irish national feeling.... that the Home Rule Bill was nothing more than a "worthless mess of ragweed pottage"... and that Redmond had been dismissed by the Irish people as *"a mere recruiting officer for the British Army"*. He says the article is an attempt to mislead American public opinion and is "an insult to the Irish race who know different".



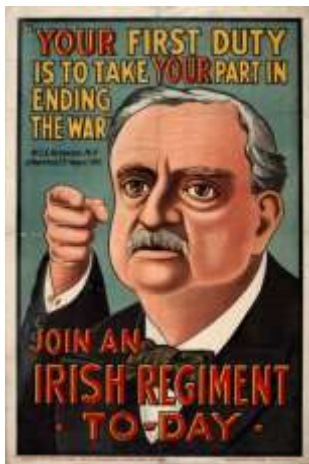
On August 25th 1914 invading German troops had sacked the ancient Belgium university town of Louvain, where a famous Irish college had been founded in 1607 by exiled Franciscan priests fleeing from English persecution. Louvain had played a historic role in educating Irish priests and brothers during the so called Penal times in Ireland when Catholic seminaries were banned and priests hunted and killed. McGovern was particularly incensed by fact that the "Youngstown Sunday

says: "Nowhere in the world was there such thrill of horror at the destruction of Louvain as in Ireland." This is characteristic of England's hypocritical method of exciting religious fanaticism. But Irishmen will no more take such bait or be duped by religious bigotry. They know that England was an arch persecutor of Catholicity in Ireland where there are many "Louvains," for scattered through every county may be seen the skeleton ruins of Catholic churches and abbeys which England destroyed. And those that were spared were converted to Protestant use. Irishmen sympathize with Louvain in this horrible war but their sympathy does not take the character of wild fanaticism impelling them to do England's fighting in revenge.

Vindicator" article claimed that the sack of Louvain and the so called "Rape of Belgium" was something which had enraged Irish people and would impel tens of thousands of Irishmen to join the British Army and avenge the destruction of Louvain, a city which occupied such an emotional place in the Irish consciousness. He excoriated what he saw as England's attempt to exploit Irish sentiment and reminded his American readers of how Irish churches and monasteries had for hundreds of year been suppressed, razed and plundered by English colonists and armies of occupation.

**“LEST WE FORGET SHAUN O’NEILL AND IRELAND’S SLAUGHTERED DEAD”.**

The edition of the Youngstown Vindicator (Nov 6<sup>th</sup> 1914) in which Michael McGovern launched yet another excoriating attack on England is full of grim front page war news from all over Europe. News agency reports from Petrograd (Russia), Constantinople (Turkey), London, Paris all contain graphic reports of the blowing up and sinking of ships; battlefield slaughter and the capture of towns and prisoners. McGovern has taken it on himself to argue that this is not Ireland’s war; that Ireland has been the victim of centuries of English oppression and should not be rushing to send its manhood to fill the ranks of British armies fighting all across the European theatre of war.



McGovern launched a scathing attack on John Redmond, Leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party in Westminster who has been urging men who had enlisted in the paramilitary Irish Volunteers to join Irish regiments in the British Army to fight for the “freedom of small nations” such as recently invaded Belgium.

John Redmond, he writes, is not what the article claims “a beloved Irish chieftain who can supply England with 200,000 soldiers”; rather was he “a dethroned leader who had been rejected by the Irish people; condemned by Irish societies, denounced by the Ancient Order of Hibernians and renounced by the Irish World newspaper which had originally supported his agitation”.

McGovern is vituperative in quoting extensively from the “Irish World” which denounces John Redmond or anybody else who would suggest that Irishmen should join the British Army.

“An Irishman who would advise his countryman to join the British Army is a thing which only deserved to be spat upon”, according to the “Irish World”. McGovern in the course of his lengthy letter, analysing the state of Anglo-Irish relations in 1914, says that England “would hypocritically wish to make the world believe that she had pacified Ireland by granting her a measure of justice and would make the menacing boast for her foes to notice that because of this Irishmen are rushing to her standard. But this was a total falsehood”.

Kipling in his prayers to England's gods makes use of the words "Lest we forget, Lest we forget," but the spirit of Ireland's patriotic past and of her slaughtered dead from Shaun O'Neill to those lately shot in Dublin keep reminding Irishmen "Should we forget, Should we forget."

Of all the lies which England has heaped upon Ireland this is the meanest one, to assert that we forget our wrongs and are loyally rushing to the aid of an empire that has robbed us of our nationhood.

**MICHAEL MCGOVERN.**  
City, Nov. 3, 1914.

His letter concludes with his borrowing the memorable line “Lest we forget, lest we forget” from the English poet Rudyard Kipling’s 1897 poem “Recessional” ironically composed to mark Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee.

“The Puddler Poet” draws the attention of his American readers to some of the darker chapters in Irish history. He singles out the assassination of “Shaun O’Neill” or, Shane “The Proud” O’Neill (1530 -1567) Chief of the O’Neill Clan, as an example of English perfidy; although the powerful and controversial head of the O’Neills was in fact butchered by Scotch-Irish enemies at the bidding of the local English military commander. His assassination took place at Cushendun on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1567. The Irish annals tell us that “Captain Piers, Governor of

Carrickfergus, by whose device the tragedy was practised, succeeded in getting hold of Shane’s head and sent it ‘pickled in a pimpkin’ to Sir Henry Sidney, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, who placed it on a pole over Dublin Castle in 1567”. McGovern clearly knew his Irish history and used it to bolster his arguments and his nationalistic writings over very many years in the United States.

## THE YOUNGSTOWN “MASSACRE” SOLDIERS SHOOT STRIKERS

1916 was a tumultuous year in Irish history...but four months before the Easter Rising in Dublin, the town of East Youngstown, a suburb of Youngstown City, was convulsed by violent rioting during one of the bitterest labor disputes of the time.

Thousands of steel workers had taken strike action for better wages and years of simmering discontent exploded into days and night of rioting, shooting and killings. The events, which came to a convulsing climax with three people being shot dead and scores more injured, became known as “The Youngstown Massacre”.

They would have a significant impact on the life and work of Michael McGovern.

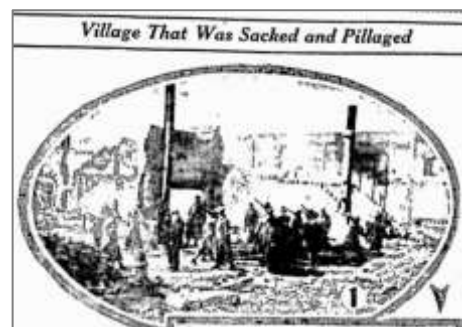


By 1916 Youngstown was one of the powerhouses of the American steel industry as the mills worked round the clock to meet the insatiable wartime demand for steel for ships and armaments. Thousands of immigrants from all over Eastern Europe worked in the mills of the Republic Iron and Steel Company’s tube mill in Youngstown, lived in shantytown slums and struggled to make ends meet on the lowest of wages. On December 28<sup>th</sup> 500 mill workers went on strike, with no union backing, seeking to have their wages increased from 19½ cents an hour to 25 cents an hour, time and a half for overtime, 48 hour working weeks, and improved safety. Their demands were flatly rejected and soon 16,000 workers from steel mills were on strike.

Frustrated with the stalemate, 1,000 of the striking workers and supporters marched to the gates of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Mill on the evening of January 7<sup>th</sup> 1916 to prevent scabs entering. What happened next is disputed but as the strikers and their wives and children pressed forward company security guards opened fire “pouring volley after volley into the crowd of unarmed, men women and children”.

### *East Youngstown Is But Skeleton Of a Village After Reign of Terror.*

Another name was added to the East Youngstown fatality list Monday night when Dan Montan, aged 27, died at the City hospital. Montan was shot under the heart in the first fusillade of shots at East Youngstown Friday afternoon which signalled the opening of a carnival of anarchy attended by death, injury, and ruthless destruction of property the like of which has few parallels in the history of the entire United States.



In the hours and days that followed the strikers and rioters went on a rampage of destruction burning down four blocks of East Youngstown. Eventually 1,000 National Guardsmen were called in to restore order; martial law was imposed and hundreds were arrested and jailed.

The fact that 3 were shot dead, 27 sustained gunshot wounds and many more were injured inflamed passions and made headlines across the U.S.



By the time of the January 2016 Youngstown steel workers strike and rioting, Michael McGovern would have been 68/69 years of age. He had been campaigning on behalf of steel workers for more than 30 years. Three years earlier in 1913 he had unsuccessfully stood for election as President of Youngstown City Council. Newspaper reports said he had left the steel industry during a strike; it is likely that it was an earlier strike.



## 1916-1921 THAT PEN RAISED IN IRELAND'S CAUSE

As Ireland struck, once more, for its freedom in 1916 a worldwide propaganda campaign was waged by Irish poets, writers and journalists – at home and abroad - in support of its cause and the ending of British rule. This was an attempt to counter the almost entirely pro-British news agency reports which were being wired to newspapers all over the world. Press Association reports informed readers of papers from Alaska to Australia that “rebels” had taken over the center of Dublin; had caused enormous destruction and that many people were killed on the streets of the city. The headline in the “New York Evening World” on Saturday April 29<sup>th</sup> 1916 [ the day of the surrender] carried “*first news of the Irish revolt direct from Dublin*” and showed pictures of the damage to city center buildings including the “rebel HQ” on O’Connell Street.



A week later the “Youngstown Vindicator” carried reports of the execution of the first of the leaders of the Rising and a picture of “An Irish President for Five Days [Padraic Pearse] is Court Martialed and Executed”. He and the others were the men of whom Yeats wrote:



**For all that is done and said,  
We know their dream; enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead;  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?  
I write it out in a verse—  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.**

- “Easter 1916”

“The Vindicator” even had a report of the Rising in County Galway, Michael McGovern’s own home county. This was also supplied by The Press Association. The Rising in Galway was described in unflattering detail. The report was datelined “Galway, Ireland May 1 – via London, May 3 – *The disorders here are over. About 100 men of the Sinn Fein who led a fugitive existence outside Galway for a few days have been scattering to their homes since Friday and are now being brought in and lodged in jail.*”

The report goes on to describe the Rising in Galway as “serious”; involving 1,200 rebels who were shelled by a naval vessel when they got to within three miles of Galway City. On the following day they were forced to retreat and in encounters with police there were a number of casualties and more arrests.

[The only casualty of the Rising in Co. Galway was RIC Constable Patrick Whelan who was shot dead at Carnmore]

As the War of Independence and the Black and Tan War developed into a bloody conflict “The Youngstown Vindicator” like many other American papers began to carry reports of the fighting and soon there were heated exchanges in Letters to the Editor from pro-British and pro-Irish residents of Youngstown – at the forefront of the campaign supporting Ireland’s bid to for independence was Michael McGovern.



Galway, Ireland, Monday May 1—via London, May 3.—The disorders here are over. About 100 men of the Sinn Fein who led a fugitive existence outside Galway for a few days have been scattering to their homes since Friday and are now being brought in and lodged in jail.

**Galway Revolt Center.**  
Dublin, via London, May 3.—The situation in Galway resulting from the Irish revolt, has been serious according to advices just received. On Tuesday, April 25, 1200 rebels, approaching from Oranmore, were within three miles of Galway when a naval vessel shelled them from Galway Bay, compelling them to retire to Moyard Castle at Athenry.

On the following day another naval vessel landed 100 soldiers who forced other rebels to retire towardg that castle. Encounters between the rebels and small bands of police resulted in a number of casualties. Among those arrested were Professors Steinberger, Walsh and McEnri, all of the Unlversity of Galway.





## THAT DOLLAR SENT TO PURCHASE GUNS

Michael McGovern, like many Irish-Americans, had been shocked by the barbarity of the “Black and Tan” campaign in Ireland (1920-1921) and was a constant critic of the atrocities these World War I battle hardened British soldiers (officially police special reservists) were committing throughout Ireland.

THE PUBLISHERS AT THE ONLY PAPER IN YOUNGSTOWN RECEIVING THE DISPATCHES OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### Youngstown Vindicator

**Why Ireland Now Distrusts England**  
**To the Editor of the Vindicator.**  
 Sir:—  
**Historical reminders grimly rise**  
**Like ghosts that tell of England's**  
**cruel acts**  
**'Gainst Ireland's freedom, which**  
**should warn the wise**  
**To place no trust in Britain's writ-**  
**ten pacts.**  
**The broken treaties of the past now**  
**serve**  
**As warning to the cheated Irish**  
**race,**  
**To not from off the path of duty**  
**swerve,**  
**Nor confidence in Britain's prom-**  
**ise place.**



**ACTION VS. PRAYERS.**  
 According to the prominence given to illustrations, depicting Irish men and women, knelt in prayer on the streets in London while Eamonn De Valera and Lloyd George were in private conference, it would seem to be inferred that the Irish place more trust in prayer than in fighting.  
**This is Not So.**  
**'Tis good to pray. It shows that man**  
**Has faith and Christian belief.**  
**But Ireland knows that prayers can**  
**From Britain bring her no relief.**  
**A tyrant robber sneers at prayers;**  
**'Tis only when the brave and bold**  
**With force assert the right that's**  
**theirs**  
**And strike him that he'll lose his**  
**hold.**

for. "They have inaugurated a reign of terror" — he should have

1921 was a particularly critical year in Irish history as the guerrilla fought War of Independence/“Black and Tan” War reached a peak of viciousness and bloodshed. By July the IRA and the “Tans” had fought themselves into a dogged stalemate. A truce was declared and negotiations between Irish “Government” representatives, including Michael Collins, opened in London. Prime Minister Lloyd George, dubbed “The Welsh Wizard” for his deft and check-mating negotiating skills backed the Irish delegation into a corner threatening “immediate and terrible war” unless it accepted the partition of Ireland giving 26 counties Free State status with 6 of the remaining Ulster counties being designated Northern Ireland and continuing to be ruled from London.

In Youngstown, Ohio (as the truce talks continued between Dublin and London) “The Puddler Poet, entirely sceptical of Britain’s intentions, warned – in a series of letters and poems – that Ireland was on the verge, once again, of being “duped, tricked and betrayed”.

All through 1921, Michael McGovern in his weekly columns and poems re-acted to unfolding events in Dublin and London. In July Eamon De Valera travelled to London to meet Lloyd George. On Thursday July 14<sup>th</sup> the first of four meetings took place. While the talks were in progress Irish women (& men) gathered outside Downing Street, knelt on the footpath and prayed for the success of the Treaty negotiations. They held two tricolours aloft. This historic photograph (taken at 17.30 on that day) was carried in newspapers across the globe. A week after that prayer vigil it appeared in “The Youngstown Vindicator”. It immediately drew the ire of “The Puddler Poet”. And his poem “This Is Not So” left Irish America in no doubt about how he

**Pray on, you friends, but don't forget**  
**That dollars sent to purchase guns**  
**Have more effect than pray'rs—you**  
**bet!**  
**In aiding Ireland's fighting sons.**  
**To Collins' and Mulcahy's blows**  
**Delivered by their gallant men**  
**And not to prayers, Ireland owes**  
**The prospect that her rights she'll**  
**win.**

believed Irish freedom would be achieved. It appeared in the “Vindicator” the following week under the heading “Action versus Prayers”.

**HE SENT THE BLACK AND TANS TO PLAY HELL THERE**

The Youngstown Vindicator” took almost all of its coverage of events in Ireland, during “The Black and Tan “War, from London news agencies. Very few of their wired dispatched included details of the atrocities being carried out in Ireland. They would only emerge much later. The report on the burning of Middletown by “The Black and Tans” in December 1920 was one of the exceptions. Seven houses in town were burned in

reprisal for an IRA attack on a joint RIC-British Army patrol on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1920. Sixteen members of the local “Flying Colum” ambushed the patrol on the town’s Main Street. Three members of the joint RIC/ Black and Tan unit were killed. In London

“The Times” newspaper was one of the first to draw attention to the excess of the British response. The Vindicator carried a lengthy report quoting “The Times” & “The Associated Press” saying that *“Public opinion received a shock when the details of the burning of the Irish town of Middleton were made public yesterday. The shock was particularly felt in quarters where it was believed the introduction of Martial Law would put an end to such excesses”*



The 1920 Middleton Ambush- Battle on the Main Street

**Youngstown Vindicator**

**LONDON ROUSED  
OVER BURNING  
OF IRISH TOWN**

Reprisal Ordered by Military  
Commander as Punishment  
for Ambush

But one man who wasn’t at all shocked and who had been writing in the “Vindicator” of the Black and Tan excesses was Michael McGovern. He frequently launched blistering attacks on British Prime Minister Lloyd George for “unleashing” the Black and Tans on Ireland.

The tone of the reports being carried in his hometown newspaper “The Vindicator” may well have concerned “The Puddler Poet”.

And as the Treaty Talks in London moved towards a conclusion he would almost certainly have been aware of an extraordinarily offensive cartoon carried on the front page of the “Vindicator” on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1921.

He sends his “Black and Tans” to try to anchor the “Little bit o’ heaven’ from drifting America-wards, but they are, instead, playing hell there. With excuses for trespassing at such length I am yours, sincerely,  
**MICHAEL MCGOVERN,**  
April 4, 1921.

Its main headline “**CANDIDATES ENDING BITTER WAR**” related to Youngstown’s upcoming Mayoral election and a bitter struggle within the Republican Party between two opposing candidates for the office, outgoing Mayor Fred J Warnock and his challenger for the party ticket Gus A. Doeright.

The double story second headline read:

**British to Free Last Irish Captive - Liner Sinks 12 Dead, 30 Missing.**

The latter story related to the sinking of the “SS Alaska” off the Californian coast. The earlier to what was being regarded as significant progress in the “Treaty Talks” in London and the release of the last remaining Sinn Fein prisoners.

But it was the dominant Page 1 cartoon that would have outraged a man like Michael McGovern and Irish people everywhere had they seen it.

## A SIMIAN FREE STATE

The cartoon, that would have betrayed an unexpected crassness and insensitivity in “The Vindicator’s” editorial policy, may have been supplied from London or may have been created by one of its own staff. Either way it reveals a tone and an implication similar to that of the early days of the British satirical magazine “Punch”, often accused of naked racism when it came to Ireland and Irish Affairs.

When “Punch” set out to characterise an Irishman, especially in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, he was usually portrayed as a “creature with simian-like features, stupid, feckless, bloated and garrulous, dressed in tattered knee britches, an incongruous battered top hat and invariably carrying a cudgel or a swag bag”.

On August 8<sup>th</sup> 1921 when it appeared there was a hope of an early agreement on British agreement to Home Rule or the creation of a Free State in Ireland, the “Vindicator” carried this cartoon under the heading “**Breaking Home Ties**”.

The central characters are a stout, matronly looking, aproned woman, of indeterminate age, with a somewhat wistful look on her face, although the detail is rather faint. She is wearing a bonnet with the inscription “Britannia”.

Britannia has her arms placed firmly on the shoulder of a frock-coated, knee- britchened, buckle brogued, rakish, raffish fecklessly dishevelled younger man who stands in front of her at a jaunty, jocular angle with a look of bewildered and devil may carelessness on his grinning face. He is carrying the (for the time - politically and culturally loaded) cudgel and a swag bag. His thrown back, tousled head he wears a hat inscribed “Ireland”. Behind him stands an even more simian character (presumably a friend or relation) peak-capped, waist coated and probably dishevelled frock-coated with a “ready to go” trunk and large portmanteau in each hand .Behind him is a third man wearing the favoured Irish nationalist slouch (or Boer) hat of the period with two startled looking young children in his care. They are standing in a doorway apparently ready to make their exit. The room has the appearance of a recent disturbance with broken crockery, upturned laundry basket and the broken leg of a chair as well as a dog a bandaged head and an Andrews cross of sticking plaster on his back .

The conversation bubble above the head of the (Irish) man with the suitcase and the portmanteau says:

**“COME ON LET’S HURRY BEFORE ANYBODY CHANGES THEIR MIND”.**

The inference being “Let’s get this Treaty business finished and take what we can before Lloyd George and the English change their minds and we have to return to war with them”. We know that Michael McGovern was strongly opposed to the direction the Treaty talks were going in 1921; that he was a regular contributor to the debate in “The Vindicator” but whether or not he protested about this cartoon, we do not yet know.



## THE GIFTED ARTIST WHO NEVER HAD ANY TRAINING IN PAINTING

Painting was one of Michael McGovern other great delights. Many newspaper articles describe him as “a gifted artist”. Michael had “no formal training but over the years he produced many attractive paintings, mostly landscapes”, according to the “Youngstown Vindicator” (1933). Some of these were hung in public places; others given to family and friends. The whereabouts of the paintings today isn’t clear but several are believed to be in the possession of family members.

Although Mr. McGovern was known most widely for his lyric talents, he was gifted also as an artist. He had never had any training in painting, but nevertheless produced many attractive paintings, mostly landscapes. Within the last few weeks he sent a sketch and some verses on the California earthquake to a friend on the coast.

In an 1992 interview McGovern’s grandson, William McGuire, recalled that as well as being a “prodigious writer, Michael McGovern was also an accomplished painter”. McGuire was being interviewed for the Youngstown State University student newspaper “Jambar” by Joe O’Gorman. In the article which appeared in the February 29<sup>th</sup> edition of “Jambar” William McGuire said he had two McGovern’s paintings- one of them showing the Old Mill in Mill Creek Park. He recalled that one of his paintings had hung in the Mahoning County Courthouse and another in the Youngstown Club, at the “old Harber’s Furniture Store, downtown”. According to William McGuire’s son Jimmy two of McGovern’s paintings hung in the Youngstown Club.



The “venerable” Youngstown Club was where the city’s leading industrialists and businessmen met to socialise. It had been formed in 1902 as the city revelled in its explosive industrial expansion and new found steel milling prosperity. The club was located on the eight floor of the Dollar Savings and Trust building. It was limited to 15 members; all white men, most of them enormously wealthy. The fact that McGovern’s paintings, believed to be landscapes, hung in the Club had more than a touch of irony about it as its members in its early days would have been the very “plutocrats” Michael had regularly excoriated in his poems. Jimmy McGuire thinks McGovern would have been either “wryly amused or perhaps even uncomfortable” that his pictures were displayed in the club.



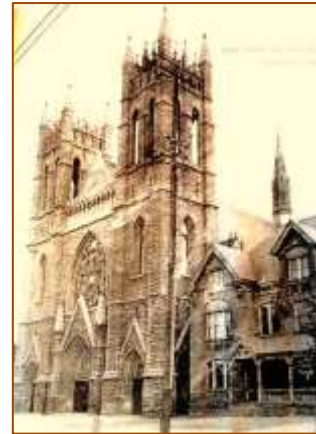
The Youngstown Club has been unable to throw any light on what might have happened to the McGovern paintings. In Sept 2017 its President, Justin Mistovich, explained that it doesn’t have a historical archive and efforts to find any information on the McGovern works had been unsuccessful; neither did The Youngstown Art Museum have any record of McGovern paintings



- The California earthquake which Michael McG wrote “some verses on” and painted a picture of occurred in the Los Angeles suburb of Long Beach, on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1933. More than 100 people were killed and 4,000 injured in the 6.4 magnitude tremor which ripped through the resort. It is not clear what became of the painting or the poem .

## THE POPE, THE PUDDLER, RELIGION AND AN ENIGMATIC CELTIC REVIVAL SKETCH-PAINTING

Religion was important to Michael McGovern; he was a staunch Catholic. His long association with St Columba's Church in Youngstown is referred to in many biographical articles. On theological issues the Catholic Church in the U.S., in Michael McGovern's time, was largely conservative and traditional but in the 1890s the Vatican became alarmed by what it saw as the "Americanism of the Catholic Church". "Americanism", as seen from Rome, was a too tolerant and liberal acceptance by American Catholics of the total separation of church and state in Pope Leo was particularly concerned that Irish Catholic leaders in the U.S., bishops like John Keane and John Ireland and Catholic newspapers like the "Catholic World" were part of this trend and weren't taking a sufficiently robust stand against what he called the "divorce" of church and state on a wide range of social issues. He shot off a series of encyclicals - "Longinqua oceani" (Wide Expanse of the Ocean) 1895 and "Testem benevolentiae" (Witness to Our Benevolence) 1899 - denouncing the liberalisation of attitudes in the US and effectively "whipped" the burgeoning liberal wing of the church back into line.



Where Michael McGovern stood the U.S. which then Pope, Leo XIII, wanted to reverse. on this transatlantic spat we don't know but an interesting picture which he painted/sketched about this time obliquely suggests that he shared and may have been an enthusiast of some of the view and teachings of Pope Leo XIII.



The picture, which is in the possession of Michael's great great grandson Jimmy McGuire, is a highly illustrated copy of the Lords Prayer and the Hail Mary. It has the feel and the design of the illustrated addresses and manuscripts which were being produced extensively in the Ireland of the Celtic Revival, late 1800s- early 1900s. It contains images and motifs representing Heaven and Earth; life and death, temptation and evil. There are birds and butterflies and corn filled fields and colourful sketches of two churches.

The one on the left is clearly St Columba's in Youngstown; the one of the right is an image of a ruined Irish church or abbey which hasn't yet been identified. Historian Eileen



Finnegan has eliminated the possibility of it being Michael McGovern's old parish church in Williamstown but it may be based on an as yet unidentified church or ruined abbey in the area he lived in, in County Galway.

The other image which jumps off the drawing is the Papal coat of arms of Pope Leo XVIII. (right)



Pope Leo's most famous encyclical, eclipsing his later spats with American bishops, was his seminal 1891 "Rerum Novarum" ("Of the New Things" often incorrectly translated as "Of Revolutionary Change") which promoted the rights of workers to a fair wage, safe working conditions and the right to form labor unions. The encyclical also affirmed the rights of property and free enterprise, opposing both Atheistic Marxism and laissez-faire capitalism. Pope Leo's championing of the rights of workers and the inherent dignity of both labor and laborer would almost certainly have resonated with the Puddler Poet. It is reasonable to assume that his incusion of Leo's coat of arms in his "Our Father" painting reflected this.

**WRITING AT HIS DESK AND STILL WORKING ON HIS POETRY DURING HIS LAST WEEKS**

Michael McGovern died at his home 376 Grace Street Youngstown on Sunday April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1933, after a short illness. He had been working as usual “at his desk, writing and reading” up to a short time before his death. The Youngstown Vindicator tells us that “even in his last weeks he spend his days at his desk (hand) writing his latest verse in a script that was still firm and neat. He was still working on his poems when he became ill”.

He had been seeing his doctor for about three weeks before his death. His death certificate says the doctor, whose name is difficult to decipher, says he had been attending him from March 10<sup>th</sup> to April 1<sup>st</sup>. Michael died from a heart attack at 6am on April 2<sup>nd</sup>

The image shows a handwritten death certificate for Michael McGovern. The form is titled "DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF DEATH" and is from Mahoning County, Youngstown, Ohio. The deceased's name is Michael McGovern, and he died on April 2, 1933, at the age of 78 years, 5 months, and 29 days. His birth date is listed as October 3, 1854, and his birthplace is Ireland. He is described as a steel worker. The certificate is signed by a doctor and a registrar.

Confusingly the certificate says he was aged 78 years 5 months and 29 days. His date of birth is given as October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1854. The writing is very difficult to read. Clearly the details of his birthdate and age are incorrect. The information is supplied by his son John who is living at Belmont Avenue. It tells us that Michael was born in County Galway, Ireland, his father was John McGovern; his mother’s maiden name and birthplace is recorded as “don’t know”. Michael is described as being a steel worker with Carnegie Steel and that he last worked in this occupation in 1924?

Michael McGovern was in fact 85 years of age when he died.

The old McGovern homestead at 376 Grace Street– where Michael wrote much of his poetry - no longer stands.

**PUDDLERS DIE LIKE OTHER MEN**

Michael McGovern death on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1933, at the age of 85, was front page news in Youngstown. Both of the city's daily papers "The Vindicator" and "The Telegraph" carried extensive reports on the life of "The Puddler Poet". Both put pictures of Michael on their front pages and carried extracts from his poetry.



In Ireland Michael McGovern's death was recorded in three newspapers the "Irish Independent", Ireland's largest circulation daily newspaper; its sister paper the "Evening Herald" and one weekly paper "The Strabane Chronicle" which circulated in counties Donegal and Tyrone. These three papers reported on Michael McGovern's death a month after he had passed away. Somewhat surprisingly none of the local papers which would have circulated in Michael's hometown of Williamstown "The Tuam Herald", "The Connacht Tribune", the "Roscommon Champion" and the "Roscommon Herald" appear to have recorded his death.

In Ohio, "The Youngstown Telegram", the paper with which the "Puddler Poet" had the longest and closest association, headlined his death and creatively broke the news with a top of Page One verse from one of his most famous poems:

**"Puddlers Die Like Other Men"  
So Michael McGovern, "Puddler Poet" Is Dead At 85**

The "Telegram" then goes on to quote from the poem.

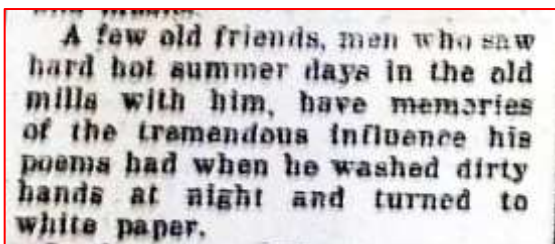
**PUDDLERS DIE LIKE OTHER MEN.**

"The puddler when he spends his strength  
Is "bounced" and pushed aside  
And so the young and strong alone  
Can in the mills abide;  
But ere he's called to join his sires  
Some other trade he plies.  
And hence "No puddlers' funerals"—  
The puddler never dies."

It then begins its Page One obituary and tribute to the city's most famous poet:

"Michael J McGovern, the "Puddler Poet" who wrote "Puddlers Die Like Other Men" is dead after 85 years of life among the mill workers. A heart attack on Sunday at his home at 376 Grace proved fatal to the former Youngstown steel worker known among his fellows across the nation".

Across two pages "The Telegram" traces Michael McGovern's life and labours in the rolling mills; the impact his poetry had on working men "the nation over", the affection they held him and the impact his writing was then, in 1933, having on "a younger generation". It tells us that he had written "thousands of poems which had been published in newspapers, magazines and labour publications".



The "Telegram" (in marking his passing) spoke to many those who had worked with Michael McGovern "old friends, men who saw hard hot summer days in the old mills with him, (who) have memories of the tremendous influences his poems had when he washed dirty hands at night and turned to white paper".

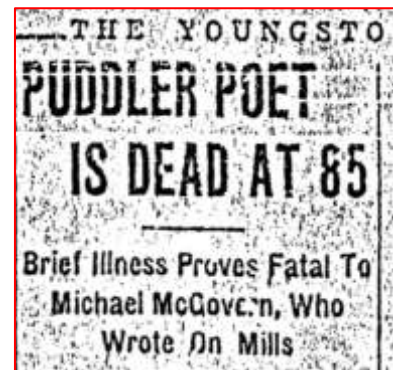
## **“EVERYTHING HE DID WAS WORTHY OF A POEM”**

“In those days” (the early 1800s when Michael first came to Youngstown) another of his old friends Elias Jenkins (63), of Princeton, tell the “Telegram” that “McGovern’s poems had the heat of the mills in them”

The recalls in detail the impact McGovern’s poetry had on mill owners; how they feared his verses as much as militant marches and strikes and how mill works passed around copies of his poems until they were almost no longer legible from constant wear and tear (“blackened and thumbed into tatters”).

The paper traces Michael’s youth in Ireland “where he escaped from life as a shoemaker, the trade to which his father tried to apprentice him”; his time as a steel worker in England, his marriage to Ann Elizabeth Murphy in Sheffield, England, and his decision to come to America. The “Telegram” article tells us that Michael’s decision to leave England was fuelled by the fact that there “he still laboured under the narrow influence of his early training which he wanted to escape from”. It’s a rather enigmatic line.

The “Telegram” quotes many more extracts from Michael’s poems says that as well as excoriating mill owners his pen could also drip with honey; that he could be both sweet and satirical in his verse but he was a man who never made “permanent enemies”; old friends recalling him as “a man without an enemy”. It refers to his close links with his parish church, St. Columba’s; the Robert Emmet Literary Society and The Ancient Order of Hibernians.



“‘Mike,’ as I called him, knew everything,” Mr. Prindle said of the poet. “We didn’t need an encyclopedia with Mike in the block. Whenever we got tangled up in anything we just asked ‘Mike’ and he always had the answers. I like to play cards and ‘Mike’ used to chide me for wasting my time on card playing. ‘He’d say to me, ‘Prindle you ought to read more.’ And of late years I have been taking his advice. He was always busy doing something.”

There is a particularly engaging reference to Michael McGovern’s role and lifestyle in his later years as a leading member of the so called “Front Porch Club”, the coterie of old friends who gathered each evenings for conversation in each other’s front porches “to set the world to rights” !

“They spent many a long summer evening in recent years on one another’s porches settling the affairs of the community and the world. The last surviving members of that club were Mike McGovern (85), Paddy Golden and William Pringle (75). Paddy Golden died a short time before Mike McGovern and it was left to William

Pringle to tell the “Telegram” about the “Front Porch Club” and to leave us with one of the more memorable vignettes of the end of Michael McGovern’s days in Youngstown.

**“Everything he did, everything  
he had was worthy of a poem.”**

His reminiscences on the life of his dear friend “Mike” finishes:

“He used to have the best vegetable garden on the street and rejoiced in being the first to have ripe tomatoes or green onions. He’d always take some to his best friends and sympathise with them that their gardens weren’t speedy.

Last summer with his son he had a magnificent flower garden and we termed it “McGovern Park”.

Everything he did, everything he had was worthy of a poem. He’s write it with scrolls at the top and his name signed in a firm clear hand. I’ll miss Mike and so will all the rest of the folks on the street. He was a good neighbour.”



**POET, PHILOSOPHER  
SELF TAUGHT ARTIST, MUSICIAN**

Youngstown's other daily newspaper, the "Vindicator", also gave front page coverage to Michael McGovern's death. April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1933 was a day on which newly elected President "Teddy" Roosevelt was attempting to get banks and finance companies to cut mortgage rates. Roosevelt came to office a month earlier in March 1933. The paper was also reporting on the appointment of a new "Prohibition Chief" to step up the bid to "stamp out the illicit traffic in hard liquor"; pension cuts for war veterans, murder trails and a string of other local and national news stories.

But at the centre of Page One the familiar oval shaped photograph of Michael McGovern "Poet of the Mills" is accompanied by the headline:



**Michael McGovern, "Puddler Poet" Is Taken by Death" Heart Attack Fatal to Aged Mill Worker – Was Known Throughout Country.**

"Michael McGovern, aged 85, "puddler poet and philosopher, self-taught artist and musician, known to thousands in the Mahoning Valley and to iron workers throughout the country, died of a heart attack at six o'clock yesterday morning at his home 376 Grace St. Mr. McGovern had been ailing for a few months, but had been in bed only a few days, and his death came suddenly".

"Modest and soft spoken in person, Mr. McGovern was nationally known thought his writings for 40 years as the "puddler poet". His lyrics of the iron mills some of them please for the workingmen were published in the local newspapers and in trade and union periodicals for many years."

The paper then goes on to state that Michael McGovern was born in Castlerea, County Roscommon, Ireland and was the son of the late James and Bridget O'Flynn McGovern. Both claims are incorrect. Michael McGovern was born in Castlefield, Williamstown, Co. Galway and his father was John not James McGovern. James McGovern (originally Govern) was his brother.

The "Vindicator" tells us that Michael McGovern "fled to England" from his home in Ireland because the shoemaker he was apprenticed to "was not teaching him his trade"; that having worked and married in England for some time he emigrated to the United States and eventually made his home in Youngstown. And in Youngstown having worked for many years as a puddler in the Cartwright-McCurdy mill, "he finally left the steel industry during a strike in the mill" All through his time in the mill we are told that "he wrote countless poems about what happened in the mills but also wrote other lyrics about love, patriotism, Irish legends and humorous subjects besides scores of verses concerning events in the city and the world."

**POET OF THE MILLS  
“A GNARLED TREE UPON LIFE’S PLAIN”**

The “Vindicator” traces Michael McGovern’s working life in the U.S. where he initially “went to work in the rolling mills in Allentown, PA., before bringing his family to Youngstown “about 45 years ago”. He then “worked for many years as a puddler in the old “Siberia Mill” of the Cartwright-McCurdy plant”. It recalls that “all through his life McGovern had been writing verse much of it concerned with the mills and that his last published poem “The Banker and the Mortgage” had appeared in the March 30<sup>th</sup> issue of the labour/union periodical the “Amalgamated Journal”. Michael would die within weeks of submitting it to the periodical.

and the Gaelic American. His last published poem, “The Banker and the Mortgage,” appears in the March 30 issue of the Amalgamated Journal.



Michael McGovern was also remembered as a talented self-taught painter. *“Although Mr. McGovern was known most widely for his lyric talents he was gifted also as an artist. He had never had any training in painting but nevertheless produced many attractive paintings, mostly landscapes. Within the last few weeks he had sent a sketch and some verses on the California earthquake to a friend on the coast.”*

The “Vindicator” also records McGovern’s long established links with The Ancient Order of Hibernians, The Robert Emmet Literary Society and the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers Union (the AA) and its President Michael Tighe who was a long-time admirer of McGovern’s song poems.

When Michael died in 1933 he was survived by his wife Ann Elizabeth Murphy and just four of their thirteen children - John Patrick; Patrick James, Martin P and Mrs James P McGuire. There were 21 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The “Vindicator” ends its obituary with a poem which Michael wrote some time before he died to one of his grand-daughters, Alice McGuire. It explains that “although his faculties remained keen until his death Mr. McGovern had been saddened for the past few years (the late 1920s-early 1930s) by the deaths of his friends and several children.”

“A poem sent to his grand-daughter Miss Alice McGuire, while she was a student at We Reserve University, expresses his sorrow at seeing younger ones die while he continued to live.”

He called it “Old Man’s Dirge” and wrote:

“A sense of loneliness has spread  
Its spell upon  
My world, for those I loved are dead  
My friends are gone”...  
I stand alone, a gnarled tree  
Upon life’s plain  
For death cut down those near to me  
And I remain.

“A sense of loneliness has spread  
Its spell upon  
My world, for those I loved are dead:  
My friends are gone.  
\* \* \*

“My tears are falling as they did  
When loved ones fell  
Upon the way, who had to bid  
Young life farewell.  
\* \* \*

“I stand alone, a gnarled tree  
Upon life’s plain  
For death cut down those near to me  
And I remain.  
\* \* \*

“Sweet hope reminds me I may join  
In spheres afar  
In spirit life those friends of mine  
Where’er they are.  
God grant it may a heaven be:—  
A world of bliss,  
Where kindred souls may welcome me  
On leaving this.”

## A POET OF PROTEST; A CRUSADER AGAINST WRONG AND INJUSTICE

“The Vindicator”, continuing its extensive coverage of Michael McGovern’s death on its inside pages tells us that “The Puddler Poet” was its oldest contributor who had begun sending it poems for publication before the turn of the century, in other words long before his first collection of poems was published.

Other contributors came and went, it tells us, but:

- He exemplified the inexhaustible richness of the Irish culture.
- He possessed true poetic feeling.
- He saw poetry all around him.
- And could not if he tried refrain from putting the everyday life of his friends and his city into verse.

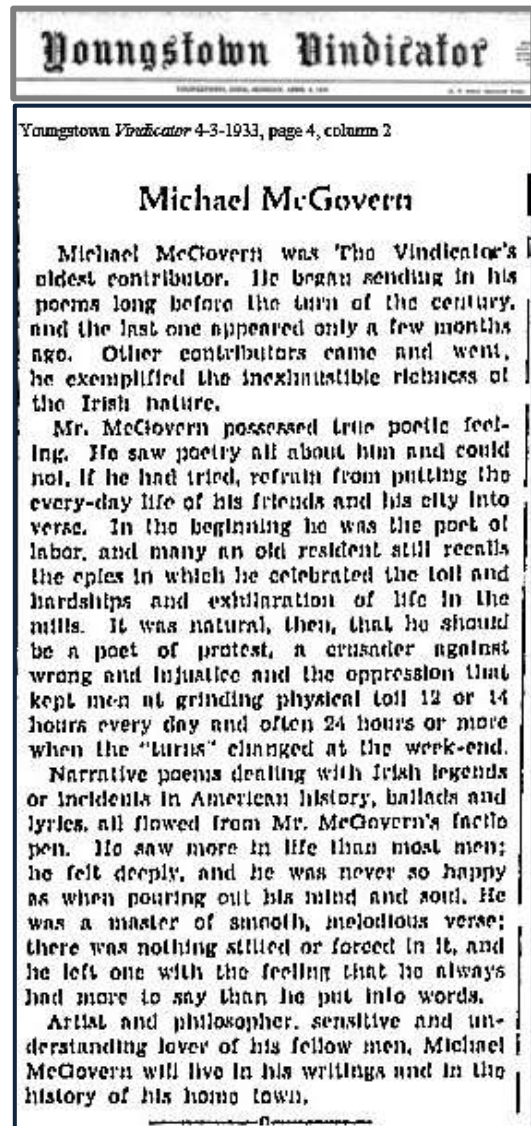
It again places him among the poets of protest of the day and a crusader against wrong and injustice which forced steel mill workers to toil for 12 to 14 hours a day and often to even be forced to work non-stop for an entire 24 hours in the blistering, sapping heat of the mill furnaces.

To the Editor of the Vindicator, Michael McGovern was that enormously important voice in his community and in America “a man who saw more in life than most men, who felt deeply and was never so happy as when he was pouring out his mind and soul....”

“Michael McGovern will live in his writings and in the history of his home town”.

Other reports repeat the story that Michael McGovern was working on having a second collection of his poems published in the weeks and months before his death. He had collected another group of poems from the thousands he had written over the years and was hoping to have them published in 1933.

We know from the “Vindicator” and other sources that Michael wrote all his poems longhand in a “near and firm script” and that he had carefully stacked “piles of manuscripts” of his verses on his big writing desk. Sadly his second book of poems was never published



Mr. McGovern had collected another group of his poems with the intention of having them published, and still was working on them when he became ill.

It would be hopeless to try to enumerate his verses, for he sent them to friends in letters or holiday greetings, besides the many that were published or remain in manuscript form in neat piles in his desk or files. Even in the last weeks, he spent his days at his desk, reading or writing. His latest verses are written in script that still is firm and neat.

**AS A GOOD WORKMAN TAKES CARE OF HIS TOOLS, SO DID MICHAEL McGOVERN TAKE CARE OF HIS WORK**

On the Sunday following his death [April 9<sup>th</sup> 1933], "The Youngstown Vindicator" carried a very extensive assessment of Michael McGovern's life and work. It also gives us a fascinating insight into how "The Puddler Poet" approached his writing; his fastidious re-working of poems (the carefully preserved hand written originals showing many corrections and revisions) and the respect he had for his original manuscripts which he "had carefully bound into books sewed together with string or thread and completely indexed".

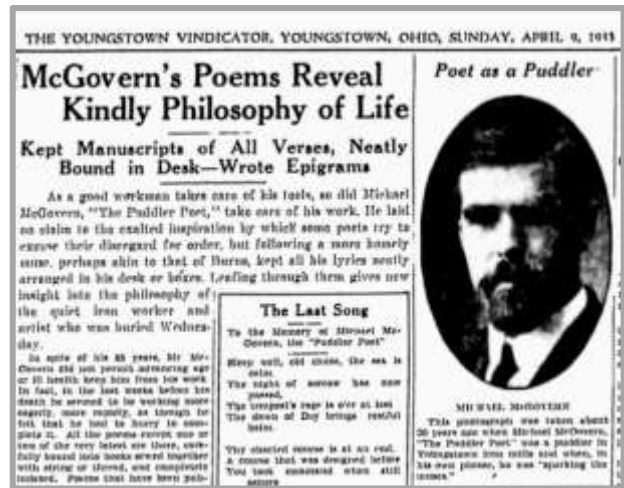
"Poems that have been published are there in manuscript with a clipping of the publication neatly pasted to them".

The article begins:

"As a good workman takes care of his tools, so did Michael McGovern, "The Puddler Poet", take care of his work. He laid no claim to the exalted inspiration by which some poets try to excuse their disregard for order but following a more homely muse, perhaps akin to that of Burns, kept all his lyrics neatly arranged in his desk or boxes. Leafing through them gives new insights into the philosophy of the quiet iron worker and artist who was buried Wednesday".

It goes on to say that in spite of his 85 years, Mr. McGovern did not permit his advancing age or ill health to keep him from his work. In fact in the last weeks before his death he seemed to be working more eagerly, more rapidly as though he felt he had to hurry to finish it. The manuscripts were all there with their revisions and corrections "as if the aged writer had from time to time gone over his work always trying to improve it".

It then launches into a detailed analysis of "The Puddler Poet's" work fuelled (as it saw it) by "an unmerciful striking out" against unjust employers and "selfish" bosses... McGovern's "love of liberty finding a fiery tongue in poems of his native Ireland and in bitter denunciation of what he saw as hypocrisy".



**Fought Injustice**  
**Soft-spoken, gentle, whimsical, Mr. McGovern quarrelled only with injustice and oppression. In the labor verse for which he is best known, he struck out unmercifully against unjust employers and selfish "bosses." His love of liberty found fiery tongue in poems of his native Ireland, and in bitter denunciation of what he termed the "hypocrisy" of prohibition. His peaceful temperament is shown in these lines, written on his 84th birthday:**

"I thank the Lord I have led a life  
 That had no bad effect,  
 I o'er avoided needless strife  
 For peace I had respect."

A large part of his writings, however, voice his indignation at unfair treatment of workers. His verses protesting such injustice mount into the hundreds. They range from the first poems he wrote, while still a puddler, down to his very last verses. But while his denunciation was bitter, it generally took the form of warning to those at the head of industry that they must be more fair to their men. So when ZANGARA tried, a few months ago, to shoot President Roosevelt, Mr. McGovern wrote:

"I've written rhymes which would suggest  
 To those who read my contribution,  
 To papers that I'd do my best  
 To bring about a revolution

"This is my aim: I'd change the laws  
 To suit the country's population  
 And hang Zangaras—all; because  
 They should not live in any nation!"

\* Giuseppe "Joe" Zangara (1900 –1933) an Italian anarchist who shot Chicago Mayor, Anton Cermak and four others in Miami in 1933 during a speech by President Franklin D Roosevelt who may have been his intended target.

## FDR, HITLER, VIRGIL, HOMER, DANTE, SHAKESPEARE AND THE PUDDLER



The Sunday edition of the “The Youngstown Vindicator” [April 9<sup>th</sup> 1933] which carried an extensive biography of Michael McGovern

provides an interesting snapshot of the world and the US on the week of his death. Globally efforts to head off a second World War were continuing as the spectre of Adolph Hitler was beginning to cast its first, long shadows across the globe. Newly elected President FD Roosevelt was attempting to “take the lead in world affairs” but a sub heading on the paper’s front page and a story datelined Berlin read: “Jews Ousted from Office. Hitler decides only Aryans shall govern Germany. Thousands hit by new Order”. The paper also tells us that “Hitler may visit Pope to effect peace between the Nazis and the Holy See”. There are reports too on the tax bonanza which was rolling in following the ending of Prohibition; the trial of nine “Negros” charged with attacking white two girls who were facing “death or a prison sentence” and a spat between the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw and the American writer and political activist Helen Keller.

Mr. McGovern made no pretense of education, but he was well-read. His bookcases at home are filled with good books. Although he wrote a little poem to former Mayor Joseph I. Heffernan, explaining he was not familiar with Virgil or Homer, his writings show an acquaintance with Dante, Shakespeare and less widely read authors, such as Schiller.

Prose Philosophy

Mr. McGovern was best known for his poems, but in his desk is one book of “Philosophical Sievings,” epigrammatic bits of prose that match his poetry.

“Recreation,” says one paragraph. “Is not the banker’s motto, but recreation is often insipid without the banker’s merchandise.

“Never mention your enemy’s name will be avenged.

“The man who will daub you with flattery might not scruple to paint you will vilification.

“If your girl in her sulks gives you ‘the mit’ and in your anger you make a resolution to never ‘make it up’ with her, go immediately and propose to another girl and she may save you from breaking your resolution.”

Among his poems, Mr. McGovern voiced his wishes for a simple funeral. In “When I am Dead,” he wrote:

“You must not undergo expense  
With flowers around me when I die  
Though you be a lover without pretense.  
A prayer is better than a sigh.

“My living friends will money save  
When it is not unwisely spent  
By having placed above my grave  
A high and costly monument.

“Just place a rock right over me  
And chisel there, that all may know it:  
Here lie the bones of M. McG —  
Whom people called ‘The Puddler Poet.’”

In its engaging biographical critique of Michael McGovern, The Vindicator pushes open a glimpsing window into the poet’s head and hearthland; into M. McG’s questing for that loadstone that would lead him from an initially unrealised place to one that vaguely realised itself westwards and in which he found his direction, his voice and his fame.

“Michael McGovern made no pretense of education”, the article says, “but he was well read. His bookcases at home are filled with good books. Although he wrote a little poem to former Mayor Joseph L Heffernan, explaining he was not familiar with Virgil or Homer, his writings show an acquaintance with Dante, Shakespeare and less widely read authors such as Schiller”. Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759 – 1805) is regarded as one of Germany’s greatest classical writers.

We are also told tantalisingly that while Mr. McGovern was best known for his poems, the unbylined journalist who wrote the article also saw lying on his desk a book of “epigrammatic bit of prose that match his poetry which McGovern named as “Philosophical Sievings”

McGovern obviously allowed the journalist to look at the book as he quotes one saying from it: “Recreation is not the banker’s motto but recreation is often insipid without the banker’s merchandise”.

The whereabouts of this book (and whether or it has survived) is unknown at present.

## "A LAST SONG" FROM AN OLD FRIEND TO A SONG POET

In the days following Michael McGovern's death one of the first to pen a poem in his memory was his old friend from the 1913 "World Peace Flag" campaign, the musician and composer D Rhys Ford Snr., who lived in Warren, Youngstown.

Rhys Ford had been involved with McGovern in helping raise funds to send the designer of the first ever "World Peace Flag", Methodist minister, the Rev. J.W. Van Kirk, on his first world tour in 1913. Now he remembered "The Puddler Poet" in a poem called "**The Last Song**" which he dedicated to "the Memory of Michael McGovern, the Puddler Poet" In it, Michael McG. is bid farewell (formally and jocundly) as would the captain of a ship which had completed its last and final voyage with great honour and glory.

"Sleep well old chum, the sea is calm  
The night of sorrow has now passed  
The tempest's rage is o'er at last  
The dawn of day brings restful balm"

"You kept your craft's head to wind  
Distaining troughs of angry waves..."

"Farewell old bard- your verse and prose,  
Your Log of Life is finished- closed"

Signed - D Rhys Ford, Warren, Ohio.

The poem was published in the Sunday April 9<sup>th</sup> 1933 edition of, "The Youngstown Vindicator" as part of an extensive tribute obituary for Michael McGovern.

### The Last Song

To the Memory of Michael McGovern, the "Puddler Poet"

Sleep well, old chum, the sea is calm.  
The night of sorrow has now passed,  
The tempest's rage is o'er at last  
The dawn of Day brings restful balm.

Thy charted course is at an end.  
A course that was designed before  
You took command when still ashore  
Too young to reason with life's trend.

You kept your craft's head to the wind  
Disdaining troughs of angry waves,  
Defying billows—the treacherous kind  
That had engulfed some lesser braves.

Farewell, old bard—your verse and prose,  
Your Log of Life is finished—closed.

D. RHYB FORD,  
Warren, Ohio.

In Ireland Michael McGovern's death was first reported in the "Irish Independent" of Monday May 1st 1933 – a full month after he had died in Youngstown. The brief two paragraph report was headed;

**IRISH POET'S DEATH IN U.S.A.**

**It said that Mr. Michael McGovern, aged 85, a native of Castlerea had died in Youngstown, Ohio.**  
**"He was nationally known through his writing for 40 years as the "puddler poet". His lyrics were published in the local newspapers and in trade union periodicals."**  
**"He went to the U.S.A. as a young man and for many years worked as a "puddler". During a strike he left the steel industry and later became State Oil Inspector. All through life he had been writing verse dealing with love patriotism, Irish legends and humorous subjects. A book of his poems Labour Lyrics has been published and another group of his verses was in preparations."**

**IRISH POET'S DEATH IN U.S.A.**

Mr. Michael McGovern, who died at Youngstown, Ohio, aged 85, was a native of Castlerea. He was nationally known through his writing for 40 years as the "puddler poet." His lyrics were published in the local newspapers and in trade union periodicals.

He went to U.S.A. as a young man, and for many years worked as a "puddler." During a strike he left the steel industry, and later became State Oil Inspector. All through life he had been writing verse dealing with love, patriotism, Irish legends and humorous subjects. A book of his poems "Labour Lyrics" has been published, and another group of his verses was in preparation.

The report had either been picked up from an American newspaper or was perhaps syndicated by a wire news agency.

It was tucked into a corner of Page 6 of the paper surrounded by reports of "Falling Numbers of Travellers on Omnibus Services in the Provinces"; A Sinn Fein Commemoration at Glasnevin Cemetery for 1916 Rising Leader Commandant Austin Stack Republican Minister for Home Affairs (1921-1922) and a mysterious fire at the English home of a former Irish Free State Senator Lt. Colonel Sir William Hutcheson. The



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**IRISH ARTISTS' GOOD WORK**

**SOME FINE STUDIES**

**EXHIBITION OF WATER COLOUR SOCIETY**

**ICE CREAM FOR BIG PROFITS**

**FRIGIDAIRE**

**CONMEMORATION OF AUSTIN STACK**

**TRAVELLING BY OMNIBUS**

entire page dominated by large advertisements for "Jacobs Goldgrain Biscuits", "Boland's Best Irish Milled Flour Bread" and "Shell Oils" new Summer Shell Petrol "seasonally blended to give the best results in the prevailing climatic conditions". The "Irish Independent" didn't carry news reports on its front page at the time. On the May 1st edition the entire front page was given over to an advertisement for Essolube 5 Star Motor Oils.



**Five Sight Like the Eagle**  
E. J. KEENEY

# EVENING HERALD

INCORPORATING THE "EVENING TELEGRAPH."  
PUBLISHED DAILY, DUBLIN, IRELAND.  
No. 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000



**THE FINAL**



**Opticians**  
**DIXON & HEMPENSTALL**  
12, SUFFOLK ST.

## Government Releases Hunger-Striking Prisoner

**SEQUEL TO JUDGE'S COMMENT**

**CONNOLLY HOUSE RIOTS**

**"THE THING APPEARS FANTASTIC"**

**FRENCH NUN DECLARED "BLESSED"**

**RIDDLED WITH BULLETS**

REPORT THAT MR. SCALA IS

Later on the same day (May 1<sup>st</sup> 1933) the "Irish Independent's" sister paper the "Evening Herald" carried the same report of Michael McGovern's death. The "Evening Herald" was carrying news stories on its front page at the time and the edition which reported the "Puddler Poet's" death gave a sense of the main news events of the day in Ireland and across the world.

The main story concerned the release of hunger striking prisoner John O'Connor, of Tralee, who had been arrested for "possession of arms"; an anti-communist demonstration which ended in rioting in Dublin, ceremonies in Rome to mark the beatification of French nun Sister Marie de Ste Euphrase Pelletier who founded the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Order who sisters care for "fallen women" at its 300 houses worldwide and the assassination of the President of Peru Luiz Sanchez Cerro. He was "riddled with bullets" and died a short time later in hospital.

Once again the brief report on Michael McGovern's death in Youngstown is tucked in at the bottom of Page 6 of the "Herald" surrounded reports of a distant relation of "The Liberator" Daniel O'Connell being appointed Chairman of the Bank of Ireland; celebrations in Dublin to mark the feast days of St Catherine of Siena and St Paul of The Cross, founder of the Passionist Order, a violin concert in Belfast and news that the Earl of Listowel is to wed to Miss Judith Marffy- Mantuano , daughter of M. Raol de Marffy- Mantuano, a Hungarian diplomat.

And news of the passing of the famous "Puddler Poet" finds itself book ended in the 7 column page between an advertisement for the permanent relief of "Backache" by Kruschen Salts at 7/6 a jar and the paper's popular Crossword.



**Backache**

It never fails to bring relief, especially in cases of rheumatism, neuralgia, sciatica, etc. It is a powerful muscle relaxant and pain killer. It is a powerful muscle relaxant and pain killer. It is a powerful muscle relaxant and pain killer.

**Law Mr. William H. Anthony.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**Hitler's Bank Chairman.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**Dublin Poet's Death in U.S.A.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**Dublin Ceremonies.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**Feast of St. Catherine of Siena.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**Violin Concert.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**Earl of Listowel's Wedding.**

The name of Mr. William H. Anthony, who was in Dublin, was mentioned in the Herald of the 29th inst. in connection with the death of Mr. Anthony.

**"HERALD" CROSSWORD**



**Across:**

1. Best looking
2. Country in Turkey
3. City in India
4. City in India
5. City in India
6. City in India
7. City in India
8. City in India
9. City in India
10. City in India

**Down:**

1. In the North
2. In the North
3. In the North
4. In the North
5. In the North
6. In the North
7. In the North
8. In the North
9. In the North
10. In the North

**Solution to Saturday's Puzzle.**

1. A. B. C. D. E. F. G. H. I. J. K. L. M. N. O. P. Q. R. S. T. U. V. W. X. Y. Z.



<p><b>LOWRY'S</b> THE SELECTED SEEDS OF <b>VEGETABLE &amp; FLOWER SEEDS</b> ARE MOST RELIABLE AND OF SUPERIOR QUALITY. OPEN ALL KINDS AND VARIETIES TO SELECT FROM. <b>A. &amp; J. LOWRY,</b> THE NEWBORN, STRABANE, DUBLIN STREET, STRABANE.</p>	<p><b>THE</b> <b>Strabane Chronicle</b> <b>AND TYRONE AND DONEGAL ADVERTISER.</b></p>	<p><b>SADDLERY AND HARNESS</b> Saddlery Makers. SADDLERY, ATTACHE CASES, AND FANCY GOODS IN REAL LEATHER. HEREBULLER TOTTING REEVES SPECIAL PERSONAL ATTENTION TO ALL KINDS OF MILLING SEWING AND LAMING. 11/12 <b>QUINN BROS.</b> STRABANE.</p>
No. 8,100.	SATURDAY, MAY 6, 1933.	PRICE ONE PENNY. ENGLISH & SCOTTISH EDITIONS. 1/6.

The only report of Michael McGovern's death in Ireland's 100 or more weekly newspapers appears to have been in the County Tyrone based "Strabane Chronicle". The paper published in Strabane served counties Tyrone and Donegal. It carried the same report as the "Irish Independent" and the "Evening Herald". It simply changed the headline to:

**Irish Poet's Death in America**

It was published on May 6<sup>th</sup> 1933, a week after it first appeared in the two Dublin daily newspapers. That week's edition of the "Strabane Chronicle" was headlining Page One stories on a police raid on an illegal "poteen" (moonshine) distilling operation near Stranorlar; a court action by a Newtown Stewart man to suspend an order sending him to jail for not paying maintenance to his wife and alleged financial irregularities in the accounts of the Strabane Urban Council.

**Irish Poet's Death in America.**  
Mr. Michael M'Govern, who died at Youngstown, N. Y., 22nd Oct. 1932, was a native of Castlereagh. He was nationally known through his writings for 40 years as the "puddler poet." His lyrics were published in the local newspapers and in trade union periodicals. He went to U.S.A., as a young man, and for many years worked as a "puddler." During a strike he left the steel industry, and later became State Oil Inspector. All through life he had been writing verse dealing with love, patriotism, Irish legends and humorous subjects. A book of his poems "Labour Lyrics" has been published, and another group of his verses was in preparation.

The syndicated report on the "Puddler Poet's" death appeared at the bottom of Page 3 of "The Chronicle".

Curiously there appears to have been no report of Michael McGovern's death in any of the local newspapers circulating in counties Galway or Roscommon.

**MANY VETERAN IRON WORKERS AND OTHER OLD FRIENDS ATTEND McGOVERN FUNERAL**

Michael McGovern's funeral took place on Wednesday, April 5<sup>th</sup> 1933. The Youngstown Vindicator reports that "a large number of veteran iron workers and other friends attended the funeral service at St Columba's Church". The church had played a large part in the life of "The Puddler Poet". The Youngstown Telegram tells us that the Requiem Mass took place at 9 am.

The report doesn't name the celebrant of the Mass but the pall bearers are named as M.F. Hyland, James Brislane, Martin Conroy, Felix McShane, James P. McNicholas and Thomas Gillespie.

Michael McGovern was buried in Calvary Cemetery Belle Vista Avenue, Youngstown. His grave is located in Section 3; Row EH, Lot 159. The grave is numbered 9. These pictures were taken on St Patrick's Day 2017 by Youngstown historical researcher and distant "Puddler" relation, Jen Giblin.



**Youngstown Vindicator**

**Many Attend McGovern Rites**

A large number of veteran iron workers and other friends attended funeral services for Michael McGovern, "the puddler poet," this morning at St. Columba's Church. Burial was in Calvary Cemetery.

The pall-bearers were M. F. Hyland, James Brislane, Martin Conroy, Felix McShane, James P. McNicholas and Thomas Gillespie.

CALVARY CEMETERY  
248 S. Belle Vista Ave.  
Youngstown, OH 44509  
330-792-4721

**Interment** Inter Number 160

Name McGOVERN, MICHAEL Property Style  
Address 376 Grace St. Burial Lot  
City State Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Interment Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Time \_\_\_\_\_ Church \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Death 4/2/1933 Place of Death \_\_\_\_\_  
Age 85 Sex Male Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Birth Place Ireland  
Marital Status  Married  Single  Wid.  Div.  Unkn.  
Auth. Rec?  Yes  No Auth. By \_\_\_\_\_

Section	Block	Row	Lot	Grave
3		EH	159	9

The funeral undertakers were Edward J. Fox & Sons. The firm established in 1919 by Edward Fox and is still in business today.

Michael was survived by his wife Ann and just four of their thirteen children –Patrick James, John Patrick, Mary (Mrs James McGuire) and Martin.

Michael McGovern's wife, Ann, died on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1935 – just two years after his death. She was aged 83. She and Michael had been married for 66 years. Mrs McGovern had continued to live at the family home at 376 Grace Street. Like her husband Michael, she also died as a result of a heart attack.

She was survived by three sons John Patrick, Patrick James and Martin J. and her daughter Mary, Mrs James P. McGuire; 21 grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Her funeral service was also held at St. Columba's Church and she was buried alongside Michael in Calvary Cemetery in Youngstown.

The Youngstown Daily Vindicator  
Youngstown, Ohio  
Friday, January 4, 1935  
Page 26 Column 1

## MRS. M'GOVERN TAKEN BY DEATH

Widow of "Puddler Poet"  
Succumbs to Heart  
Disease

Mrs. Michael McGovern, aged 83, widow of Michael McGovern, widely known as the "puddler poet," died at her home at 376 Grace St., at 2:40 a. m. today, of heart disease. Mr. McGovern died in April, 1933.

Mrs. McGovern was born in Yorkshire, England, and came to America 50 years ago. She had lived in Youngstown 45 years, coming here from Allentown, Pa. She had been married for 66 years.

Mrs. McGovern was a member of St. Columba's Church, L. C. B. A., Altar and Rosary Society and St. Monica's Guild.

She leaves three sons, John P., Patrick J., and Martin J., and one daughter, Mrs. James P. McGuire, 21 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

The body will remain at the Gillen-Naughton Funeral Home until the time of the funeral, which is to be held Monday at St. Columba's Church with interment in Calvary Cemetery.



MRS. MICHAEL M'GOVERN

**LAI D TO REST BESIDE A GENERATION OF UNKNOWN IRISH FAMINE VICTIMS**

Calvary Cemetery where Michael and Ann McGovern are buried was established by the Catholic Diocese of Youngstown in 1885. It is one of the largest and oldest in the tri-county area. It is the last resting place for many of Michael McGovern’s countrymen.

Even though it was only officially opened in 1885, many Irish-Americans who died long before that time are interred there. Remains from two of Youngstown’s older cemeteries – the Old Catholic Cemetery, known as Rose Hill, and the German Catholic Cemetery, known as St Joseph’s Church Cemetery, – were transferred and re-buried there.



A striking limestone Celtic cross remembers the Irish Famine dead; nameless men and women of Michael McGovern’s generation who arrived in Youngstown in the first wave of mass immigration from Ireland. It was erected in 1999 and stands a short distance from Michael’s own grave. The inscription reads



In Memory of the Irish Famine Victims 1845-1850.

Erected by the Ancient Order of Hibernians,  
Division No. 6 and Friends.

An Gorta Mor (The Great Famine)

Dedicated by Bishop Thomas Tobin

September 18 1999



It appears that Michael McGovern’s grave remained unmarked for a number of years after his death; although his great- great grandson Jimmy McGuire thinks he designed or sketched his own gravestone. *“The gravestone is of a blast furnace. He designed it himself. It is truly beautiful”*.

The erection of the headstone memorial to Michael McGovern was undertaken – three years after his death – by a group of admirers who formed The Michael McGovern Memorial Association to raise money for “a fitting stone grave marker”. The group eventually extended its efforts into “seven states” and raised enough money to erect the impressive headstone over

“The Puddler Poet’s” grave. The records at Calvary Cemetery record the burials of Michael McGovern and five of his children in the plot.

Lot 159 East Half		Lot Owner - Michael McGovern	
Monument	<b>McGovern, Michael</b> 1848 - 1933 (2 April) A tribute from friends in seven states Just place a rock right over me, and chisel there that all may know it. Here lies the bones of M. McG. Whom people called 'The Puddler Poet.' Michael McGovern There is a carving of a blast furnace on the monument.		
These are the known burials without markers:			
McGovern, Anna	29 November 1901	20 yrs.	McGovern, William J. 3 March 1919 34 yrs.
McGovern, Ann	4 January 1935	82 yrs.	McGovern, Margaret 11 March 1892 4 yrs.
McGovern, Agnes	4 November 1928	42 yrs.	

The monument is described as “A Tribute from Friends in Seven States”. The headstone gives 1848 as the year of Michael McGovern birth. It also records the burial there of his children Anna, Ann, Agnes, William and Margaret. And it faithfully carries a memorial verse which Michael had earlier

included in one of his last poem, directing how he should be remembered.

## “WHEN I AM DEAD” THE UNPUBLISHED POEM – A PRAYER, A SIGH, A ROCK

Michael McGovern had in fact vicariously orchestrated the way in which he might be remembered after his death. The March 20<sup>th</sup> 1936 edition of the “Youngstown Telegram” tells the story of the verse which would be placed on any headstone erected over his grave. And it sets out the background to the establishment of the Michael McGovern Memorial Association.

It tells us that the association was set up “to provide the way and means for (erecting) a suitable memorial to be paid for out of voluntary subscriptions over the last resting of Youngstown’s far famed Puddler Poet”.

The memorial “would be in keeping with the place he is held in the hearts of this community and in the hearts of iron workers wherever they may be”.

The article goes on to tell us that “the writings of Michael McGovern who died on April 2 1933 are treasured in the scrap-books of many people connected with the iron and steel industry because “The Puddler Poet” spoke and sang a language they understood”.

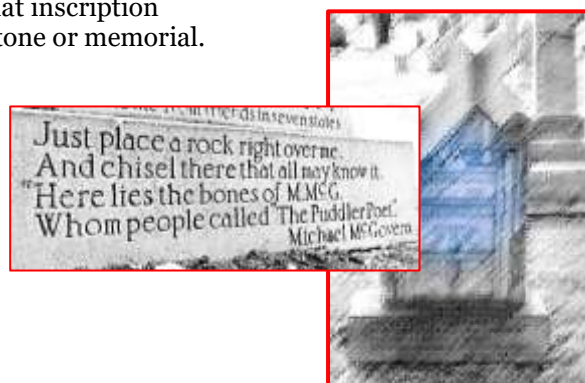
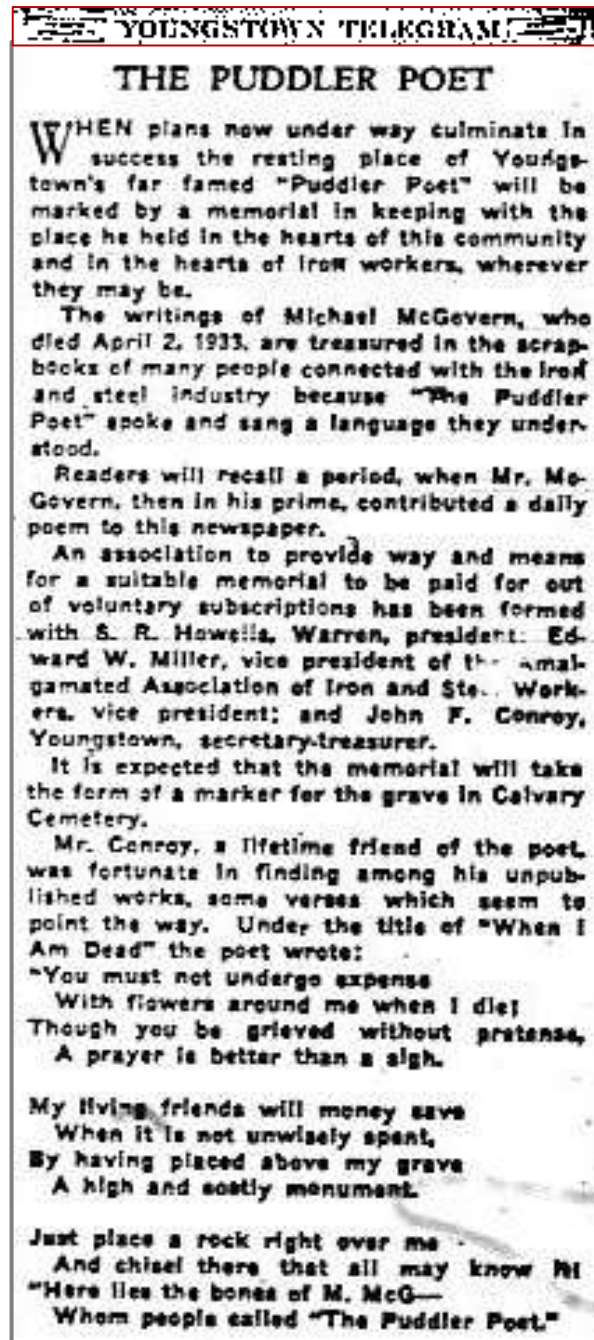
It then lists the officers of the McGovern Association as: President, S.R. Howells; Vice President, Edward D. Miller, vice president of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, Secretary-Treasurer, John F. Conroy.

John F Conroy is described as “a lifelong friend of the poet” and sometime after Michael McGovern’s death he appears to have had an opportunity to examine some of his unpublished work; the poems “The Puddler” had carefully bound together, indexed and boxed.

Among these he stumbled on an unpublished poem entitled “**When I Am Dead**” which restated McGovern’s attitude to extravagant and excessive spending on funerals [“*You must not undergo expense, with flowers around me when I die*”]and proffered an ready solution to the question of what inscription should be placed on a Michael McGovern headstone or memorial.

“Just place a rock right over me,  
And chisel there that all may know it  
‘Here lies the bones of M. McG,  
Whom people called the Puddler Poet.”

--Michael McGovern



**“SINCE HIS DEATH THE AMALGAMATED JOURNAL HAS CARRIED AT LEAST ONE OF HIS POEMS IN ALMOST EVERY ISSUE”**

During 1936 the fund raising drive to finance the planned Michael McGovern memorial in Youngstown's Calvary Cemetery continued across Ohio and nearby states. Local papers continued to report on the progress of the quest for contributions.

This report, which appears to be from The Youngstown Telegram (Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 1936) tells us additionally that “The Amalgamated Journal” (1899-1942) the official publication of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, was continuing to publish poems by the “Puddler Poet”.

*“McGovern had attained a considerable reputation as a poet before his death and since his death the Amalgamated Journal has carried at least one of his poems in almost every issue.”*

**It also puts on record that “McGovern was born in Castlefield, County Galway, Ireland but lived in the Mahoning Valley most of his life”**

This 1936 report, three year's after McGovern's death, tells us that one of his poems “The Rolling Mills” was published recently; presumably republished in the Amalgamated Journal as it had originally be included in “Labor Lyrics and Other Poems” which had been published in 1899.

It then includes some verses:

*I love to see the rays of light  
That from the furnace flow,  
Like Phantoms in the arms of night  
Quarrelling as they go  
Parading o'er the valley when  
The slumbering town is still  
Oh, then I think there's beauty is  
The shadows from the mill*

By early September “The Vindicator” was reporting that the fund had reached \$300 with “contributions coming from many of the states of the Union; from steel workers, steel executives and high church officials”.

November saw the fund reaching \$330 – among the donors named were the city's former Mayor, Joseph L Heffernan and Billy Radcliffe described as “old time hotel proprietor here who now resides in Cleveland”.

- The Memorial was erected over McGovern's grave in mid September 1937 – 4 1/2 years after his death.

A Michael McGovern Memorial Association has been organized with S. R. Howells, of Warren, president; John F. Conroy, of Youngstown, secretary and treasurer, and Edward W. Miller, vice president of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel & Tin Workers, as vice president.

The purpose is to raise funds by voluntary subscription to erect a memorial to McGovern, known as the “puddler poet”

McGovern died April 2, 1933, and is buried in Calvary Cemetery, Youngstown. He attained considerable reputation as a poet before his death, and since his death The Amalgamated Journal has carried at least one of his poems in almost every issue.

McGovern was born in Castlefield, County Galway, Ireland, but lived in the Mahoning Valley most of his life. His poems are chiefly about the mills and the working men of the Mahoning Valley.

One of his poems, “The Rolling Mill,” was published recently. A verse follows:

*I love to see the rays of light  
That from the furnace flow,  
Like Phantoms in the arms of night,  
Quarrelling as they go  
Parading o'er the valley when  
The slumbering town is still.  
Oh, then I think there's beauty in  
The shadows from the mill!*

Source: Youngstown Vindicator 9-1-1936, page 26, column 8.

**Raise \$300 for Memorial For Noted Puddler-Poet**

More than \$300 has been raised in the fund campaign for a memorial for Michael McGovern, the puddler poet. John F. Conroy, secretary of the McGovern Association, announced today.

Contributions have come from many of the states of the union, from steel workers, steel executives and high church officials.

Source: Youngstown Vindicator 11-12-1936, page 36, column 1

**McGovern Memorial Fund Donations Reach \$330**

The McGovern Memorial Fund has increased to \$330 during the last week, John F. Conroy, secretary, announced today.

Among the recent contributors to the fund for a memorial for the “puddler poet” are Joseph L. Heffernan, former mayor; Billy Radcliffe, old-time hotel proprietor here who now resides in Cleveland; and George J. Carow.

**A WORLD STEELING ITSELF FOR WAR . AN OLD STEEL WORKER-POET REMEMBERED IN STONE**



The world found itself lurching ominously towards yet another global war when the publicly subscribed memorial to “The Puddler Poet” was erected in Calvary Cemetery in September 1937.

Page One of the “ Sunday Youngstown Vindicator” of September 29<sup>th</sup> 1937 carried banner headlines over reports of the opening salvos of the Sino-Japanese (1937-1945) war that would ultimately become merged into the maelstrom of other conflicts that became World War II. On that fourth Sunday in September Japan has launched a “rain of death” on the Chinese city of Nanking; 80 bombers reportedly killing 7,000 men women and children during what was described as “a devastating attack”.

The same edition of The Vindicator carried a chilling headline: “Nazis Cheer as Il Duce, Hitler Meet”. The meeting between Italy’s Il Duce (Benito Mussolini) and Germany’s Führer, Adolph Hitler, their first in three years, took place in Munich” where “10,000 crack troops marched past reviewing stand”.

Page 5 of the paper carried a report on the ceremony which took place during the previous week when the McGovern memorial was erected.

**Memorial Is Valley’s Tribute to Its Puddler Poet**

“The stone monument shown above has just been erected over the grave of Michael McGovern, the puddler poet, in Calvary Cemetery, Youngstown. The stone was erected by the McGovern Memorial Committee of which John F Conroy is secretary. Funds were contributed by many who knew and loved McGovern as well as his poetry. Steel executives, high church officials and union leaders were among contributors, although McGovern’s poetry had a decidedly liberal “smack”.

The front of the memorial represents a puddling furnace at which McGovern worked for many years. Even nuts and bolts showing where the furnace was repaired are depicted in the stone. The bottom of the stone carried one of McGovern’s verses. McGovern was born in 1848 in Castlefield, County Galway, Ireland. He lived in the Mahoning Valley most of his life and died in April, 1933.



- **Source: Youngstown Vindicator 9-26-1937, page A5, column 2**







Youngstown University Student Newspaper February 1992

**Famous poet writes of steel mills in the valley**

By JOE GORMAN Staff Reporter  
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Dead Poets Society: The final resting place of famous poet Michael McGovern located at Calvary Cemetery.

ten by Michael McGovern, "The Puddler Poet," whose writings give us a glimpse into the Youngstown of the past and life at work in the mills.

McGovern was born in Castlereagh County, Roscommon Ireland, in 1848. After living in England for a short time, he moved to the United States with his wife Ann, first settling in Allentown, Pa. He moved to Youngstown in 1853, working for the Ohio Works of the Carnegie Steel Co. between Steel Street and Briar Hill.

McGovern's main work, a poetry book called *Labor Lyrics and Other Poems*, was published by the Vindicator Press in 1899. But McGovern also wrote countless poems to his friends and family which were never published.

While most of his poems were about working in the mills, he also wrote poems about politics, Ireland and love. He even

wrote philosophy.

McGovern contributed poems to the *Vindicator* and *Youngstown Telegram*. He was also a regular writer for *The Amalgamated Journal*, a paper for iron, steel and tin workers.

McGovern's mill poetry vividly described the working conditions in the mills at the time, from the searing heat and danger to the exhaustion that followed. They also describe the satisfaction and pride of making steel.

Most of McGovern's poems are pro-labor and viciously anti-establishment. "Plutocrats" he called the bosses.

"He wasn't a management-type guy," his grandson, William McGuire said. "And Carnegie, people like that, he wrote them, he told them just what he thought of them."

It was said in the *Telegram* that during strikes, his poetry was more feared by the bosses

than violence by the strikers. At a labor rally in Beaver Falls in 1880, he was the most popular speaker.

Puddling was an old way of making steel. A "puddler" and his helper would take a ball of wrought iron attached to the end of a rod and put it into a furnace, working the iron until it became a ball. It was then rolled into rails and other types of steel.

"It was like cooking soup with a spoon," McGuire said.

For a prodigious writer, McGovern was a man with very little formal education.

"He was just born with that talent," McGuire said. "I think his formal education would be about five or six years. He was a great reader. He read the encyclopedia."

McGovern also was an accomplished painter. One of his paintings used to hang in the See McGovern, page 8

**McGovern**

Continued from page 7

Mahoning County Courthouse but has since vanished.

McGovern wrote of his native Ireland, and longed to return there before he died.

"Just before the Depression, all the families took a collection to send him there," McGuire said. "But he couldn't wait to come home. He said all those stories about Ireland are true." McGovern reported that all the Irish did was party, McGuire said.

McGovern's great granddaughter is Maureen McGovern, the singer from Boardman.

McGovern died on April 2, 1933. The story of his death was front page news in both city newspapers. "Puddlers Die Like Other Men" read the headline in the *Telegram*, echoing a line from one of his poems. McGuire and his brother served the funeral mass.

McGuire still has the desk he wrote at, along with McGovern's poems in his original handwriting. McGuire said he might do something with them someday, but the papers

they are on are very brittle, and he is afraid they will be damaged if they leave his home.

In his final years, McGovern was saddened by the deaths of old friends and of 9 of his 13 children. In a letter to his granddaughter, Alice McGuire, he wrote a poem called "Old Man's Dirge," in which he wrote: "I stand alone, a gnarled tree, upon life's plain; For death cut down those near to me, and I remain; Sweet hope reminds me I may join, in spheres afar; In spirit life those friends of mine, Where'er they are."

