

McGarrity, Joseph

by Francis M. Carroll

McGarrity, Joseph (1874–1940), businessman, poet, and republican, was born 28 March 1874 on a thirty-acre (12 ha) farm at Creggandeveskey, Carrickmore, Co. Tyrone, second youngest among eight children of John McGarrity and Catherine McGarrity (née Bigley). While not well-to-do, John McGarrity was nevertheless able to offer lodging for the local priests, to support at least one son's study for the priesthood, and to send Joseph to the local school. Joseph McGarrity's devotion to Irish nationalism, his knowledge of Gaelic culture, and his love of poetry can be traced back to his schooldays. At age 18 he made his way to Belfast and Liverpool, where he was offered a ticket on the *City of Berlin*, sailing to New York in January 1892. On arrival in the US, McGarrity went immediately to Philadelphia, where he was assisted by a cousin in finding work. After a series of menial jobs, he purchased a public house with the assistance of an aunt and subsequently acquired a wholesale wine and spirit business and several hotels; the first proved initially to be a precarious enterprise, but with the help of his brother John and others he survived and prospered. McGarrity built several fortunes over his lifetime, and his generosity to people and Irish causes became legendary.

In 1893 Joseph McGarrity joined Clan na Gael in Philadelphia, and became more active in Irish-American nationalist activities. By 1904 he was elected district officer for the Philadelphia region, and in September 1912 he was elected to the national executive of the Clan, where he became a colleague of the old Fenian, John Devoy (qv). His vision for Ireland was an independent thirty-two-county republic, and he never wavered from that ideal. Supporting numerous Irish causes, McGarrity also met William Butler Yeats (qv), Douglas Hyde (qv), Constance Markievicz (qv), Bulmer Hobson (qv), Patrick Pearse (qv), Roger Casement (qv), and Patrick McCartan (qv), also from Carrickmore, with whom he had a long friendship and political relationship. He worked to raise about \$20,000 for the Irish Volunteers and the purchase of arms brought into Howth in July 1914, contributing \$1,000 himself. McGarrity was also among those Irish-American nationalists who in 1914 opened discussions with the German ambassador, Count Johann von Bernstorff, about German assistance to Ireland during the Great War. He was one of the organisers of the Friends of Irish Freedom in March 1916, and he led protests in Philadelphia and New York following the suppression of the 1916 rising and the execution of its leaders. After the United States entered the war in 1917, the leading Irish-American newspapers were barred from the mails as seditious; McGarrity founded the *Irish Press* in Philadelphia to keep nationalist views before the public, a project that may have cost him \$60,000; edited by Patrick McCartan, the first issue appeared on 23 March 1918. In the November 1918 elections in the United States, McGarrity ran for congress, largely to split the local vote and defeat the incumbent congressman, Joseph McLaughlin, who had alienated Clan leaders on Irish issues. With the

armistice (November 1918), McGarrity joined others in reasserting public support for an independent Irish republic along the lines of American war aims, and he was actively involved in organising an Irish Race Convention in Philadelphia in January 1919 and instrumental in raising \$1,000,000 for the Irish Victory Fund of the Friends of Irish Freedom.

When Éamon de Valera (qv) arrived in the United States in June 1919 as president of Dáil Éireann, he stayed with and formed an immediate friendship with McGarrity (he became the namesake and godfather of one of the McGarrity children). McGarrity supported de Valera unwaveringly in the growing split in the Irish-American nationalist movement. One of the early manifestations of the split was the opposition of John Devoy, Judge Daniel F. Cohalan (qv), and others to the selling of bonds in the United States to provide revenue for the dáil government. McGarrity obtained legal advice to devise 'bond-certificates' that could be exchanged in the future for gold bonds drawn on the dáil government, and he made arrangements for the New York offices from which to organise the sale across the United States. The campaign successfully sold over \$5 million worth of 'bond-certificates', McGarrity himself buying \$10,000 worth. McGarrity and his *Irish Press* backed de Valera in the split over the Cuban analogy in the *Westminster Gazette* interview, the appearance of de Valera at the national conventions of American political parties in 1920, in the organisational fights within Clan na Gael and the Friends of Irish Freedom, resulting in de Valera's creation of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic, and the expulsion of Devoy and others from the Clan. When de Valera left the United States in December 1920, after his eighteen-month tour, he appointed McGarrity as his representative as a trustee for the dáil loan funds in New York. McGarrity organised the shipment of 495 Thompson sub-machine-guns to Ireland, seized by US customs in Hoboken, New Jersey, on 17 June 1921.

Following the truce in July 1921 McGarrity urged that the dáil negotiators demand recognition of a united, independent, Irish republic. With the first news of the Anglo-Irish treaty (December 1921) McGarrity and the *Irish Press* proclaimed it a 'triumph' for the Irish republic, but as the details became known, and de Valera's opposition became clear, he was increasingly troubled. On the advice of Joseph Connolly (qv), the dáil consul general in Philadelphia, he went to Ireland (February 1922), where he was able to bring together at the Mansion House both de Valera and Michael Collins (qv), then head of the provisional government, and he may have been instrumental in negotiating the election pact that seemed to avert an irreconcilable split between the pro- and anti-treaty factions. McGarrity also gave some \$17,000 to the Irish Republican Army and was confirmed as the leader of the reorganised Clan na Gael by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. However, with the breakdown of the election pact and the beginning of the civil war, and particularly the reemergence of de Valera as the head of the 'republican government', McGarrity came out strongly in opposition to the treaty and the Irish Free State, bringing the Clan executive with him in August 1922. These events in Ireland came at a difficult time for McGarrity: his wholesale wine and liquor business was liquidated by the

introduction of prohibition in the United States in 1920, and the *Irish Press*, which ran at a loss, was closed down in May 1922. Even so, McGarrity refused to accept the declining fortunes of the republican forces and as late as February 1923 provided John T. Ryan with \$41,700 with which to purchase arms in Germany. With the ceasefire announced by de Valera and Frank Aiken (qv) on 24 May 1923, the Clan rallied and raised \$200,000 to sustain the republicans and provide assistance for them in the 27 August 1923 general election in Ireland, but in the aftermath of the civil war the republicans were unable to challenge successfully the several parties that supported the Irish Free State. McGarrity found this hard to accept, a situation made more difficult by the decision of his friend de Valera to form a new political party in April 1926, Fianna Fáil, and eventually (11 August 1927) to take the oath to the king and enter the Free State dáil. From his continued position as chairman of the executive of Clan na Gael, he regarded participation in the Free State dáil as an 'act of treason', and, although he maintained a strained friendship with de Valera, he worked to support the second dáil republicans and the IRA. McGarrity believed that a united republic could be achieved only through physical force, and although willing to give de Valera's new government the benefit of the doubt in 1932, he repudiated de Valera in 1936 when the IRA was proclaimed an illegal organisation. In the face of declining membership in Clan na Gael and splits in the IRA, McGarrity, in collaboration with Seán Russell (qv), urged that Irish republicans should attack British influence in Ireland, initially through military action in Northern Ireland and later through a bombing campaign in England. He remained a constant source of money for Irish republicanism and travelled regularly to Ireland working with republicans, although he was expelled from his old home in Northern Ireland in 1939; he may have consulted with high-level figures in the German government while in Hamburg on his way back to the United States.

McGarrity's financial situation gradually improved in the difficult years of the 1930s. He became a broker in the New York Curb Exchange (later the American Stock Exchange), and although he was drawn into the courts through his partner's defalcations he was subsequently vindicated; with rather more success he also served as the agent for the Irish Hospital Sweepstakes in the United States. He continued to write poetry, publishing *The way of life: a Celtic Rubaiyat* (1934), *To the Virgin and her Son* (1938) and *Celtic moods and memories* (1938), and after his death his collection of over 10,000 Irish and Irish-American books was given to the library of Villanova University in Philadelphia. He died of cancer on 5 August 1940.

On 21 June 1911 McGarrity and Kathryn Hynes were married by the Rev. Peter J. McGarrity, Joseph's younger brother, in the cathedral of SS Peter and Paul, Philadelphia. They had two sons and seven daughters.

Villanova University (Philadelphia), Falvey Memorial Library, McGarrity collection; New York Public Library (New York), Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Margaret McKim Maloney collection; Stanford University (Palo Alto, CA), Cecil H. Gram Library, Department of Special Collections; Clan na Gael (Philadelphia), McGarrity papers; Eamon de Valera papers, UCD, Department of Archives, McGarrity file; Marie Veronica Tarpey, 'Joseph McGarrity, fighter for Irish freedom', *Studia Hib.*, xi (1971), 164–80; Sean Cronin (ed.), *The McGarrity papers* (1972); Marie Veronica Tarpey, *The role of Joseph McGarrity in the struggle for Irish independence* (1978); 'Joseph McGarrity', Michael Glazier (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Irish in America* (1990)

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