

History's Correction Connections: How a Son of Erin Came to Rule Scottish Castle Called the Tombs

One of the more interesting stories that emerges from tracing history's correction connections is that of the Irish stonecutter's son who grew up to rule a Scottish stone castle called the Tombs and an East River island prison colony whose main industry was quarrying stone. His name: Thomas W. Hynes.

Born in Ireland in the early 1840s, he came to the U.S. as a child brought by his parents, William and Alice, during the Great Famine around 1847. The family had roots in Galway and County Clare. His father was a stonemason. Thomas was educated in Springfield, Ma., where he began as a journalist, most probably reporting Civil War news.

Moving to NY, he started as a straw goods merchant and later manufacturer. His business address was 363 Canal St., within walking distance of the original City Prison whose design, based on an Egyptian mausoleum, contributed to it being called *The Tombs*.

The family itself lived in Brooklyn where he was active in St. John the Baptist parish organizing its St. Vincent de Paul Society.

His leadership was so outstanding that at age of 27, he was chosen in 1870s -- with Bishop Loughlin's approval -- to head the entire Brooklyn Council of parish St. Vincent de Paul Societies, a post he would hold 51 years until advanced age and ill health forced him to retire. Back then, the diocese took in all Long Island.

The lay society dedicated to charitable work was founded 1833-35 by French reformer Frederic Ozanam who engaged in actual direct assistance to the needy and who challenged university Saint-



St. Vincent DePaul.



Correction Commissioner Thomas W. Hynes who opened & oversaw the operation of Scottish baronial castle-style Tombs 2.

Simon Utopian Socialists to do likewise instead just making speeches about helping the poor. His group took as its name that of the church-recognized patron of charitable works, St. Vincent de Paul, the 16th century priest who literally dedicated his life to the poor and founded religious orders to carry on that work.

Hynes and Seth Low, who later became mayor of Brooklyn and then of NYC, first got to know each through their common interest in welfare reform. The latter's grandfather had founded Brooklyn's Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. Thomas and Seth helped found and served as lifetime directors of the Brooklyn Bureau of Charities.

A successful fusion campaign behind Low's second bid to become NYC mayor emerged in 1901 as a result of scandals implicating Tammany-backed Mayor Richard C. Van Wyck's administration. In 1902, Low named to replace Tammany district leader Francis J.

Lantry as Correction Commissioner the widely-respected Hynes. He presided later that year over the opening of the replacement prison for the mausoleum-like structure NYers had aptly tagged *The Tombs*. Despite the fact that the new massive, gray building, with its Scottish Baronial Castle style of architecture, resembled a French chateau, the old nickname stuck.

The odds are excellent that at least some of the stone that went into the Tombs II castle came from the Penitentiary quarry on Blackwells Island, later known as Welfare Island and now called Roosevelt Island. Inmate-quarried stone from the East River island went into many NYC public buildings constructed in that era.

Stone castles are not unusual in the folklore of Hynes clans in Ireland, the most famous being 500-year old Dunguaire Castle on the shores of Galway Bay, now run by



(Continue next page) "Hynes" "Dunguaire."

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Shannon Heritage & Banquets who host medieval banquets twice nightly for tourists. Hynes is known to have returned to his native Ireland at least once. On May 19, 1898, he wrote his son, Edward:

"We returned from Ireland on Tuesday. We spent a week in Killarney and we had, with the exception of the weather, a fine time. Everybody we met treated us in royal style . . . we saw places in Killarney that some of the old natives have not yet seen. . . . While in Tralee, we visited the convents and schools and some of the churches, all of which are in good order. . . On Sunday we met the Bishop of Killarney. . . most delightful gentleman . . . We visited Uncle Thomas Smith on last Monday in Dublin. He is 91 years, yet is one of the most entertaining persons I have met while there. He is without a doubt a fine character . . . He repeatedly kissed Mama. Had he been a young man I would have objected."

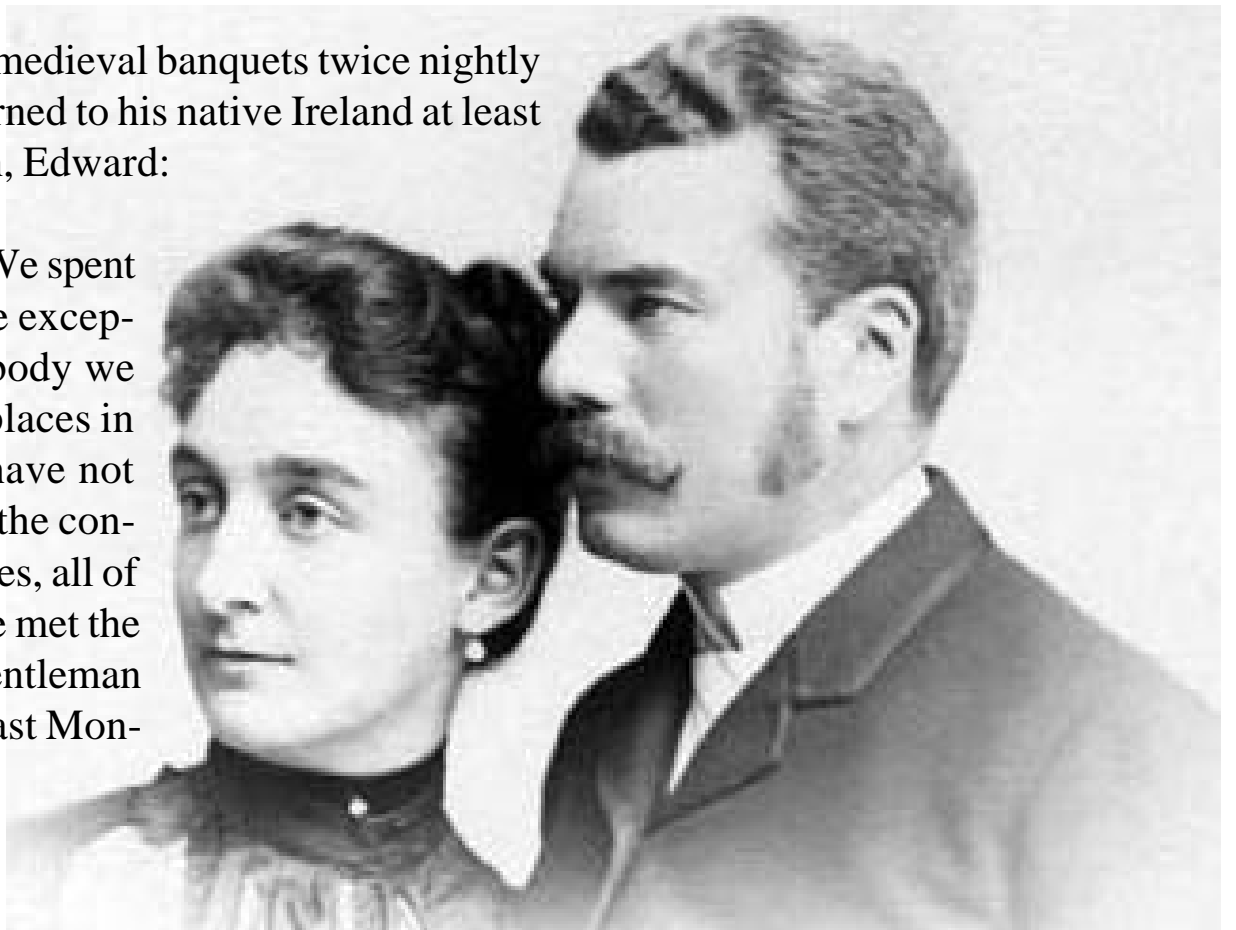
The 1898 visit to Ireland was probably Thomas' belated honeymoon with his second wife, Christine Dwyer. They would have visited with her relatives there as well as his. His first wife, Maria Millet, died of pneumonia in 1883.

In 1901, a year before Hynes became NYC Correction Commissioner, he had already established the Ozanam Home for Friendless Women and Children. This had evolved through Vincentians' work with the courts in various programs to promote rehabilitation of young offenders.

After he became Correction Commissioner, Thomas had his lay Vincentians take on probation work with delinquents. Since the DOC's first facility intended as a youth reformatory opened on Hart Island a year or more before formal authorization was enacted by the state legislature in 1905, the preparatory work in advance of its opening was likely begun in 1903 under Hynes. His governmental service was not confined to the single Low term as mayor. Among duties he performed in his long public career were stints as



Seth Low



Thomas W. and Christine Dwyer Hynes. (NYCHS thanks Hynes kin for help with this article).

- Supervisor of Charitable Institutions for the city Dept. of Finance,
- City Deputy Commissioner of Charities,
- NYC Commissioner to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904 St. Louis World's Fair), and
- Auditor General of Puerto Rico by appointment of President Theodore Roosevelt who also appointed him to investigate Port of NY immigration problems.

Hynes served in the last two years of Democrat Mayor George B. McClellan Jr. administration as a Dept. of Public Charities Deputy Commissioner. He is listed in its 1908 and 1909 annual reports as "Second Deputy Commissioner (in charge of the Brooklyn office)." That office, at No. 327 Schermerhorn St., had responsibility for agency institutions in both Brooklyn and Queens. Hynes' report dated Jan. 2, 1909 focused on the needs of the Home for the Aged and Infirm, Kings County Hospital, Cumberland Street Hospital and the (Brooklyn) Central Office.

Edward Hynes, to whom Thomas had written about Ireland, once thought of joining the Jesuits. They had been his teachers at Xavier High School and at its college from 1888-1893. Instead, Edward transferred to Co-

lumbia College of Physicians and Surgeons about the time Seth Low became Columbia's president. Later Dr. Edward Hynes became chief of obstetrics at Coney Island Hospital. Thomas Hynes, as Public Charities Deputy Commissioner, had presided over the opening of that hospital. Thomas' other activities included service as treasurer of the Brooklyn

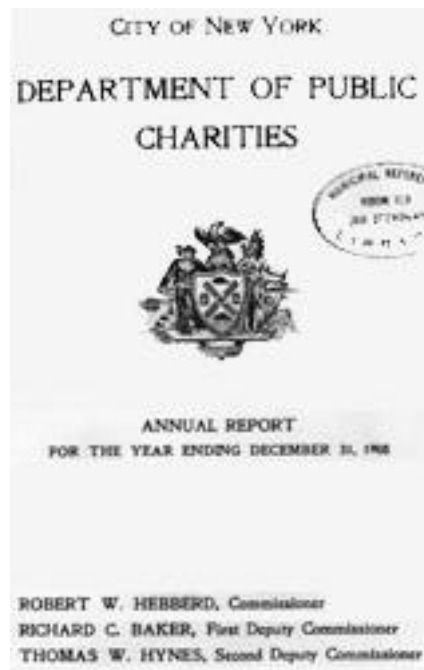
Chapter of the Red Cross and as vice president of the NYS Prison Association. As the father of six children, his private life was full as well.

Upon retirement as Brooklyn St. Vincent de Paul Council president, its members endowed a Hynes Memorial Ward of St. Peter's Hospital for the benefit of poor pa-

tients. The hospital long ago ceased activity. Today it is the Cobble Hill Health Center for more than 500 elderly residents. Pope Pius X formally recognized Hynes' charitable efforts by conferring upon him a Knighthood in the Order of St. Gregory.

Thomas W. Hynes died on Jan. 3, 1926. He was buried in Springfield, Ma.

His grave stone states his age at death as 83.



An Order of St. Gregory medal.