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2014 FARRELL LECTURE

James F. Kenney on Early Irish History as a Field for Research by American Students*

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ABSTRACT

On the last day of 1930, James F. Kenney (author of the famous *Sources for the Early History of Ireland*) issued a clarion call to scholars in America to take up the study of early Irish history, and presented an agenda of projects that he thought would be most appropriate to them. This talk examines the background to that lecture and surveys how the work done since then has answered Kenney's call.

On the last day of the year 1930, at the eleventh meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association, in Boston, Massachusetts, James F. Kenney gave a talk entitled "Early Irish Church History as a field for research by American students."¹ This was no ordinary lecture, delivered by an ordinary speaker. From the opening months of that same year, 1930, Kenney had been basking in the well-deserved glory of his great book, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland, vol. 1: Ecclesiastical*, which had been published in December 1929 in Columbia University's *Records of Civilisation* series. It still ranks today as one of the finest and most important books ever published in the field, and it caused a sensation when it first appeared.²

The book was as awe-inspiring as it was unexpected. "He has taken our breath away," was the reaction of Eoin Mac Neill, doyen of early Irish historical studies at the time, who was on a speaking tour of the United States in the spring of 1930.³ "Designed as an introduction and guide to sources, complete with commentary and notes, the book was a masterly achievement, both in scope and in scholarship. Reviewers were virtually unanimous in their praise of the book, and were impressed with Kenney's erudition and literary skills, his general freedom from prejudice, the invaluable synthesis of Irish history and

* This is the annotated text of the annual Robert T. Farrell Lecture of the American Association of Irish Medieval Studies, delivered at the 49th International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Kalamazoo, May 8-11, 2014. I have tried to retain the anecdotal style of the talk as delivered. My thanks are due to Lahney Preston-Matto and Mary Valante for their kind invitation to give the talk.

¹ Published subsequently in the *Catholic Historical Review* 17.1 (April 1931): 1-9.

² See the valuable biographical study by Glenn T. Wright, "James F. Kenney (1884-1946)," *Peritia* 3 (1984): 517-34.

³ Wright, "James F. Kenney," 517 (citing the *Gaelic American* newspaper of 12 Apr. 1930). For Kenney's Canadian career, see: Wright, "James Francis Kenney, 1884-1946: Founder of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association," *CCHA Study Sessions* 50 (1983): 11-45.

James F. Kenney on Early Irish History

records in the first chapter, and the detailed, exhaustive bibliographies. In Ireland, publication of *Sources* attracted considerable publicity in the popular press as well, where reviewers were especially enthusiastic about Kenney's book."⁴

How had Kenney emerged as such an authority on early Irish history? Who was James Kenney, and how did he come to write such an important book? And why did he address his December 1930 talk to an American audience? A brief diversion into his background will explain. Though thought by many (then and now) to have been an American, Kenney was, in fact, born on 6 December, 1884, in a small town in Ontario, Canada.⁵ An only child, he received his earliest education in a one-room schoolhouse near his home, but for his secondary education, he moved with his family to Belville College, eighteen miles away from his birthplace. From there he went with an entrance scholarship to the University of Toronto (St. Michael's College) in September 1903, and graduated with a B.A. degree in 1907, having obtained first-class honors throughout his four years there in English and history, with second-class honors in Classics. With the encouragement of his history Professor, George M. Wrong (1860-1948), Kenney took a particular interest in medieval history, with special attention in his final year devoted to the early history of Ireland.

Doubtless, Kenney had acquired his initial interest in Irish history from the Catholic Irish background in his community growing up, but his first serious encounter with the "New Ireland" of the early 1900s came when he heard a talk by Douglas Hyde, President of the Gaelic League, on 17 May, 1906. Hyde was in the midst of an extensive tour of North America to drum up support for a campaign to force the British administration in Ireland to accept the Irish language as a matriculation subject in the schools. Initially skeptical about the merits of speaking in Toronto, "amongst people who are not favorable to anything Irish," Hyde addressed an enthusiastic audience of about 1,200 people in a large concert hall, and Kenney was clearly moved by Hyde's oratory. He was also swept away by the Gaelic League ideal and subsequently wrote a lengthy account of the evening's events in his diary:

[Hyde] began by giving a few moments talk in Irish, which was vociferously applauded by the few who were fortunate enough to understand it. Then he went on . . . in English to tell the mission of the Gaelic League, the situation it was facing, the work it had done, the aims it entertained. Its object was the de-anglicisation of Ireland, to make Ireland

⁴ Wright, "James F. Kenney," 517. The lack of enthusiasm for the book in one particular quarter in Ireland will be explained later.

⁵ I am indebted for what follows to Glenn Wright's splendid *Peritia* article, cited above, n. 2.

Irish, Irish in language, Irish in thought, Irish in aspirations, Irish in its past-times, Irish in its industry. The struggle was for the preservation of the national identity of the Irish people.⁶

The lecture was a tremendous success and, following it, a Toronto branch of the Gaelic League was established, which Kenney immediately joined. From that point on, he began to involve himself in all things Irish, starting to teach himself Irish and immersing himself in Irish culture, literature, and folklore. A few months later, Kenney wrote that “the creation of a new Irish people is a noble aim, and one which corresponds with what I hold.”⁷ The Irish nation deserved independence, he believed, “and I think it my duty to prepare myself for rendering her all possible assistance should that day ever come.”⁸ By the time of his graduation from the University of Toronto in 1907, he was set in his ambition and well equipped to realize it. However, with no Canadian university offering graduate studies in history, Kenney was forced to look farther afield; eventually, he chose the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he submitted a master’s thesis titled “The decline of the Celtic Church in Ireland, 795-1152,” and was awarded his degree in June 1908. He was thus firmly established on the course of research that would eventually lead to the publication of his great *Sources* eleven years later.

Kenney opened his December 1930 address to the American Catholic Historical Association with an amusing anecdote:

During my undergraduate days one of my fellow classmen was a student whose curriculum studies were, if I remember rightly, chiefly in the department of Political Science. He had, however, a special abhorrence of specialisation, and outside of class his interests were divided between athletics, literature, philosophy and comparative religion. On graduation day we walked together to Convocation Hall, and lost ourselves at the university garden-party, not to meet again for ten years or more. Then, one day, I encountered him by chance in our old university rotunda. What had he been doing during these years? My recollection of his reply is that he entered the faculty of medicine in the autumn of our graduation, had proceeded to the degree of M.D., had done post-graduate work in Johns Hopkins and in Europe, and was at the time providing himself with still further preparation for his life-work by service in one of the large New York hospitals. And what of myself? I

⁶ Cited in Wright, “James F. Kenney,” 521; see: Douglas Hyde, *Mo thuras go hAmeice* [*My trip to America*] (Dublin: Oifig Dóilta Foillseacháin Rialtais, 1937), 157.

⁷ Cited Wright, “James F. Kenney,” 522.

⁸ Cited Wright, “James F. Kenney,” 522.

James F. Kenney on Early Irish History

told him that I had taken professional training for research work in history. "Is that so?" — he always prided himself on being absolutely honest and absolutely frank — "I did not know that there was any research still to be done in history."⁹

As Kenney remarked, "the shock to me was perhaps even more severe than it would have been to the majority of the disciples of Herodotus," but he took his friend's remark in good spirits. However, his Boston talk did have an earnest purpose: why [he asked] was there not the same widespread interest in early Irish history as there had been in the previous two or three generations in every other field of historical research? What Kenney termed "the mass-production of historical studies" in America and in Europe had passed Ireland by. "Why not include Ireland in this extension movement?" Nor was he concerned only with university placements and job opportunities (though these were not to be scoffed at). He had something more fundamental in mind: "In Irish history the big things and the fundamental things are, in large measure, still to be done."¹⁰ "Except [he continued] for the achievements of a few men who have been working almost without assistance, history in Ireland — that is, the historical interpretation of the available records — stands little in advance of the position in which Petrie, O'Donovan, O'Curry, Todd and Reeves left it some sixty or eighty years ago. That is to say, all that wonderful scientific development which since the days of Ranke has revolutionized historical study in Europe and America, and has made famous the names of scores of scholars on both continents, is, as regards Ireland, still to receive its local application and expansion."¹¹ And he added further: "It is not to the credit, though it may not be the fault, of the Irish race that less scientific work has been done on Ireland's records than on those of any other country of its size and historical importance in Europe."¹²

What, then, were those areas of research in 1930 that American scholars, particularly, could make their own? Kenney listed off the essential tools that would be required for any serious modern study of early Irish history (including Church history): catalogues of manuscripts, lists of antiquities, and bibliographies. He welcomed the establishment (in 1928) of the Irish Manuscripts Commission (an initiative of Mac Neill's), an enterprise that is still ongoing.¹³ The principal purpose of the Commission was to arrange and supervise

⁹ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 1.

¹⁰ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 2.

¹¹ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 2.

¹² Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 4–5.

¹³ See: Michael Kennedy and Deirdre McMahon, *Reconstructing Ireland's Past: A History of the Irish Manuscripts Commission* (Dublin: Studia Hibernica, 2008). The author is currently a Member of the IMC.

the publication of sources relating to the history of Ireland (medieval and modern). But Kenney also singled out “a crying need ... for a critical catalogue of the early Irish manuscripts preserved on the continent of Europe.”¹⁴ This is a desideratum that has only been met in the last twelve months! Another suggested project was “a study of Irish paleography, supplementing and expanding what has been done by Ludwig Traube, W.M. Lindsay and Luigi Schiaparelli.”¹⁵ A more readily feasible project for scholars based in North America, however, would be to tackle “that problem in which the whole world of historical scholarship is interested: To what extent and in what way did Ireland transmit classical learning and literature to medieval Europe?”¹⁶ With that aim, he added, the examination of Irish manuscripts would require “a study of them not merely as dead vehicles carrying such and such texts, but as themselves living witnesses for the age from which they sprang” — a very enlightened approach, it must be said.¹⁷

In that regard, at least, American scholars have indeed taken up Kenney’s challenge and met it with considerable success; one thinks, in particular, of the work of John Contreni (Purdue, Indiana),¹⁸ Michael Herren (Toronto),¹⁹ and Dean Simpson (Richmond, Virginia)²⁰ in our own time, and before them an earlier generation of American scholars that is best represented by the Harvard classicist, Edward Kennard Rand.²¹ Kenney even anticipated the later popularizing efforts of

¹⁴ See the NUI Galway-based *Foundations of Irish Culture* project: <http://foundationirishculture.ie>. The work was carried out under the direction of the author.

¹⁵ Reference was to Ludwig Traube, “O Roma nobilis! Philologische Untersuchungen aus dem Mittelalter,” *Abhandlungen d. kgl. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss.*, 1. Kl. 19.2 (Munich, 1892): 299–395 and “Perrona Scottorum: Ein Beitrag zur Überlieferungsgeschichte und zur Palögraphie des Mittelalters,” *Sitzungsber. d. kgl. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss.*, hist. Kl. 4 (Munich, 1900): 469–538; repr. in Franz Boll, ed., *Ludwig Traube, Vorlesungen und Abhandlungen*, 3 vols. (Munich, 1909–20), 3:95–119. Lindsay’s landmark publications were his *Early Irish Minuscule Script*, St. Andrew’s University Publications 6 (Oxford: James Parker and Company, 1910) and *Notae Latinae. An Account of Abbreviations in Latin Manuscripts of the Early Minuscule Period (c. 700–850)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914). Luigi Schiaparelli, “Note paleografiche intorno all’ origine e ad alcuni caratteri della scrittura e del sistema abbreviativo irlandese,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, anno LXXIV, disp. 3a, 4a, 1916 (Florence, 1917), 2:3–126.

¹⁶ Kenney, “Early Irish Church History,” 4–5.

¹⁷ Kenney, “Early Irish Church History,” 4–5.

¹⁸ See esp. his exemplary study, *The Cathedral School of Laon from 850 to 950, Its Manuscripts and Masters*, Münchner Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung 29 (Munich, 1978).

¹⁹ See esp. his exemplary edition of the *Hisperica Famina*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Studies and Texts 31 and 85 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999).

²⁰ See his edition of Sedulius Scottus’s *Collectaneum Miscellaneum, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis* 67 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1988).

²¹ It was Rand who proposed Helen Waddell, author of the famous book, *The Wandering Scholars* (London: Constable, 1927) for Membership of the Medieval Academy of America.

James F. Kenney on Early Irish History

Thomas Cahill (whose famous book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, was one of the publishing sensations of our time), when he remarked: "A noteworthy feature of the history of the early middle ages is the way in which almost every movement of importance in western Europe had its influence on the fortunes of Ireland or of Irishmen."²²

Kenney quoted with approval Kuno Meyer's statement of twenty years previously, that "slowly the fact is becoming recognised in ever wider circles that the vernacular literature of ancient Ireland is the most primitive and original among the literatures of Western Europe ... Whatever may be its intrinsic merit, its importance as the earliest voice from the dawn of West European civilisation cannot be denied."²³ He further noted that "our linguistic knowledge should now have reached the stage where the critical restoration of the original texts might be attempted."²⁴

Kenney realized full well, however, that the most important work of his time lay in the preparation and publication of proper, modern scientific editions of the primary texts. "After catalogues and bibliographies come editions of the sources." Noting that "a comparatively small body of material dating intrinsically from the period prior to the Anglo-Norman invasion awaits original publication, but a very large amount now in print demands re-editing."²⁵ He had in mind the Irish annals, of which Mac Neill had said: "At first sight the pages of our native chroniclers appear as a sort of trackless morass to the inquirer after Irish history."²⁶ Some progress has been made and the older editions (in a few cases, at any rate) have been replaced by modern ones; an American scholar, Joan Radner (American University, Washington, DC) played her part, with her edition of the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin 1978). The work of editing (or re-editing) the principal collections of Irish annalistic materials was begun by native Irish scholars (Seán Mac Airt in particular); however, much still remains to be done (e.g., with the *Annals of Tigernach*, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, and the *Chronicum Scottorum*).²⁷

²² Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 6. Note the way in which Kenney phrased the remark!

²³ Kuno Meyer, *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry* (London: Constable and Company, 1911): vii; Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 3-4.

²⁴ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 3-4.

²⁵ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 6-7.

²⁶ Eoin Mac Neill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, Ltd., 1919), 178.

²⁷ For the melancholy modern history of annalistic studies in Ireland, see: Daniel McCarthy, "The Contributions of Armagh Scholarship to the Annals of Ulster," *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* 25 (2014): 63-83; Kenney noted, "Early Irish church history," 7 n. 4, that R.I. Best was, at time of writing, engaged on an edition of the Annals of Inisfallen; see the facsimile edited (by him & Mac Neill) and published by the Irish Manuscripts Commission in 1933. For a modern, critical edition however, we had to wait another twenty years, till 1951: Seán Mac Airt, ed. and trans., *The Annals of*

Another vital area of early Irish studies that Kenney mentioned (only in passing) was the field of genealogy, and here, it may be remarked, the contribution of one American scholar in particular has been significant. Prof. John V. Kelleher's many contributions to Irish Studies generally (including early Irish history) have been recognized most recently in the collection of his essays published in 2002.²⁸ His most significant contribution, however, is still, for the most part, unpublished. I refer to the massive work that he carried out, throughout the course of his career as professor at Harvard, piecing together and elucidating the seemingly endless lines of Irish genealogical materials. Some inkling of what he had achieved can be deduced from his essay on "The pre-Norman Irish genealogies"²⁹ and his introductory preface to the second edition of Michael O'Brien's famous *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae*.³⁰ These two studies, however, were only the tip of the iceberg. I had the great privilege, when I first came to the United States (in 1978), of being entertained (perhaps "enthralled" would be a better word) by Prof. Kelleher when I paid a "courtesy-call" on him in his Harvard office. He showed me on that occasion the vast collection of genealogical charts that he had made out by hand, illustrating the seemingly endless inter-connections between the various families and dynasties whose bare names are listed in the manuscripts (those "tribes and kings in all directions, with their far and near connections" that were the subject of T.D. Sullivan's witty verse). The charts were a revelation, but, alas, they were never published. But we have seen enough, however, to know that Kenney's insight of 1930 can still be realized: "Little attention," he remarked, "has hitherto been given to the genealogies, but the synchronizing of their *data* with that furnished by the annals and other sources — here is a task open to future cis-Atlantic enthusiasts — promises us much illumination."³¹ It is greatly to be hoped that today, with the huge advances that have been made in the area of database creation, some enterprising (American?) scholar(s)

Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B 503) (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951). For a very useful, brief survey of the subject, see: Gearóid Mac Niocaill, *The Medieval Irish Annals*, Dublin Historical Association Medieval Irish History Series 3 (Dublin: Historical Association, 1975).

²⁸ Charles Fanning, ed., *Selected writings of John V. Kelleher on Ireland and Irish America* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); the collection includes five of his most significant academic studies on "Early Irish and Pseudo-History" (159-72); "The Rise of the Dál Cais" (173-86); "Humor in the Ulster saga" (187-204); "The *Táin* and the Annals" (205-28), and "The Battle of Móin Mhóir" (229-45).

²⁹ *Irish Historical Studies* 16.62 (1972): 138-53. It is a pity that this paper was not included in his *Selected writings*.

³⁰ Michael O'Brien, *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae*, vol. 1 (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1962; 2nd ed. 1976), ix-xvi.

³¹ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 8.

will find a way to bring these priceless charts to publication.³² In the meantime, if they read nothing else from his pen, every student of early Irish history (and not just Americans!) should memorize Kelleher's wonderful translation of the obituary verses entered into the annals (AD 747) marking the passing of the Iona scholar, Cú Chuimne,³³ and they should at least be aware of his magnificent epic poem, *A Dig at Tara, or the Proper Appreciation of Glory*.³⁴

If John Kelleher could be said to have established the discipline of Irish Studies (including Early Irish Studies) as a serious academic pursuit in America, then the same might be claimed for Fred Norris Robinson in the cognate field of Celtic Studies. "A Brief History of Celtic Studies in North America" was the title of a talk given by Stanford-based Roland Blenner-Hassett, published in 1954,³⁵ recounting how Robinson, almost single-handedly, and in time stolen from his "Day-Job" as Professor of English at Harvard, first established and then arranged to have continued, instruction in the Celtic languages on a regular basis. Robinson himself had studied with the great Rudolf Thurneysen in Freiburg im Breisgau, and, on his return to Harvard in 1896 (he was then twenty-five), he began to give instruction in all the principal Celtic languages (Irish, Welsh, Breton, Scots Gaelic, and Manx), and continued to do so until his retirement in 1939. He arranged the appointment of Kenneth Jackson as Associate Professor in Celtic, who was followed in turn by Vernam Hull. From this base, and from Madison, Wisconsin, where Myles Dillon was a Professor of Celtic Studies (he later moved to Chicago, where he was followed by Prof. Eric Hamp, a student of Jackson's at Harvard), the foundations of Celtic Studies as a linguistic discipline in the United States were firmly laid and have since been carried on by such great scholars as the late Calvert Watkins.³⁶

³² I was not the only one who succumbed to Kelleher's charm; see, e.g., the interview with Donald Harmon Akenson, in the *British Association for Irish Studies Newsletter* 17 (Jan. 1999): 2-5, in which Akenson remarked: "John Kelleher, more than anybody else, created Irish Studies in North America" (2). For his influence in Harvard, see: Roger Rosenblatt, *Coming Apart: A Memoir of the Harvard Wars of 1969* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1997), 44, 48, 64, 70, 78-79, 89, 122-23, 139, 141, 152, 159, 160, 166-67, 178, 214, 224. "In him," remarked Rosenblatt, "I found the man I wanted to attach myself to at Harvard. He was the wisest and most complete teacher and dedicated scholar I had ever seen" (70). See also: John T. Galvin, *The Gentleman Mr. Shattuck. A Biography of Henry Lee Shattuck, 1879-1971* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1996), 68, 288-90, 314, 339-41. I am grateful to Prof. Seán Ó Coileáin (Cork) for the generous loan of these books, and for making available to me several unpublished biographical materials about Kelleher.

³³ Reprinted in Fanning, *Selected Writings*, 252.

³⁴ In Kelleher, *Too Small for Stovewood, Too Big for Kindling* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970), 42-47 (not reprinted in the *Selected Writings*, unfortunately).

³⁵ *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America* 69:4.2 (Sept. 1954): 3-21.

³⁶ See: Lisi Oliver, ed., *Calvert Watkins, Selected Writings*, Innsbrücker Beiträge

As Blenner-Hassett remarked, however, “Celtic studies [— with the exceptions of the names just mentioned —] are largely, as they have always been in this country, conducted on a part-time basis by members of departments of English, Romance Languages, or Comparative Philology.”³⁷ Such individuals, however, could still occasionally make exciting discoveries in the field of early Irish history. I mention here only one whom I had the privilege to know personally, the great Bedan scholar, Charles W. Jones (Berkeley), who, in one of his studies of Bede’s works “On Time,” published a remarkable list of archaic Irish names for the days of the week; unfortunately, the discovery went unnoticed by Celtic scholars until our own time!³⁸ Jones, however, did more than trip over that archaic list of weekdays; by his researches into the background of the Venerable Bede’s writings on chronology, he revived a discipline that had lain dormant in Ireland since the time of that great pioneering scholar, Bartholomew Mac Carthy (1843-1904),³⁹ and uncovered an almost totally unknown world of early Irish scientific study (computistics) that revolutionized the field and brought to the fore, for the first time, the seminal role of medieval Irish scholars in the establishment of that most important medieval discipline.⁴⁰

But to return once more to Kenney’s call to arms, if the generation after his was slow to take up the task — at least insofar as it related to early Irish history, rather than the linguistic aspects of Celtic Studies — then the same cannot be said for the generation following that again. Led, doubtless, by the example of Kelleher, modern American scholars, in the last half-century, have contributed in significant ways to the study of early Irish society, its politics and social structure, its laws and institutions, and to the relations Ireland enjoyed with the wider world, particularly in the Viking Age and after. It would be invidious to run through a list of names, but special mention should be

zur Sprachwissenschaft, vol 80 (Innsbrück: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1994) and vol. 129 (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 2008).

³⁷ Blenner-Hassett, “Celtic Studies in North America,” 10.

³⁸ See: Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, “The oldest Irish names for the days of the week?,” *Ériu* 32 (1981): 95-114. The list was published by Jones in *Beda opera de temporibus*, Medieval Academy of America Publications 41 (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1943), 40-41. Neither Jones nor I was aware that the names had actually been published previously, by the great 16th-century antiquarian, John Leland, in his *Collectanea de rebus Britannicis*, ed. Thomas Hearne, (London, 1715), 4:99.

³⁹ See his *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus No. 830*. RIA Todd Lecture Series 3 (Dublin 1892): 343-89, and his introduction to vol. 4 of W.M. Hennessy & B. Mac Carthy, eds. and trans., *Annála Ulladh: Annals of Ulster, Other Wise Annála Senait, Annals of Sennat: A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, 431-1131, 1155-1541*. 4 vols. (Dublin 1887-1901).

⁴⁰ See: Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Early Irish History and Chronology* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 1-5, and Immo Warntjes, “Seventh-century Ireland: The Cradle of Medieval Science?,” in *Music and the Stars: Mathematics in Medieval Ireland*, ed. Mary Kelly and Charles Doherty (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), 44-72.

made of Nerys Patterson's book, *Cattle Lords and Clansmen: The Social Structure of Early Ireland* (Notre Dame 1994), which combines—in a unique way—the insights of an anthropologist and a Celtic scholar.⁴¹ Closely related in subject-matter, but utilizing the skills of the historian and the linguist, are the two magnificent studies by Robin Stacey Chapman, *The Road to Judgement: From Custom to Court in Medieval Ireland and Wales* (Philadelphia 1994) and *Dark Speech: The Performance of Law in Early Ireland* (Philadelphia 2007). The latter book, in particular, represents a striking and truly original contribution to the study of early Irish history. All three of those studies (and Charlene Eska's more recent book, *Cáin Lánamna: An Old Irish tract on marriage and divorce law* [2009]) demonstrate emphatically how American scholars of the present day have taken another of Kenney's suggestions to heart. "As for the so-called 'Brehon Laws,'" he stated in his 1930 talk, "probably no more important contribution could be made to-day to the study of early society in Europe than the production of trustworthy texts and intelligible translations of these ancient technical treatises of Ireland."⁴²

And since Kenney's talk was titled "Early Irish Church History as a Field for Research by American Students," it would be remiss of me to pass over the contributions by Dorothy Africa,⁴³ Lisa Bitel,⁴⁴ and Dorothy Bray⁴⁵ to that field. Kenney remarked that "an investigation of the literary relationship of the Irish *acta sanctorum* might be inaugurated," and those three scholars have done just that in a significant way.

Kenney remarked that, "in general, the primary work of research—study of manuscripts or field-work in archaeology—must be done, in Irish as in other European history, by the men who are on the spot."⁴⁶ That said, however, a generation of young American archaeologists—led, as it happens, by our honorand, Bob Farrell—has been engaged on exciting field-work in Ireland (especially in the field of *crannóg*-studies), and the results have been very impressive.⁴⁷ Parallel to their researches

⁴¹ Nerys Patterson, "Brehon Law in Late Medieval Ireland: 'Antiquarian and Obsolete' or 'Traditional and Functional,'" *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 17 (Summer 1989): 43-63, is also a valuable study of the transmission and use of Brehon Law materials in Late Medieval and Early Modern Ireland.

⁴² Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 8.

⁴³ See, e.g., "St. Malachy the Irishman: kinship, clan, and Reform," *Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 5 (1985): 103-127, which is a particularly interesting contribution.

⁴⁴ See, e.g., her most recent book, *Landscape with Two saints: How Genovefa of Paris and Brigit of Kildare Built Christianity in Barbarian Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., her book, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints* (Montréal: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1993).

⁴⁶ Kenney, "Early Irish Church History," 8.

⁴⁷ Robert Farrell, "The *Crannóg* Archaeological Project (CAP): Archaeological field research in the lakes of the West Midlands in Ireland," in *Studies in Irish Art and Architecture*, ed. Catherine Karkov and Robert Farrell, *American Early Medieval Studies* 1 (Oxford, Ohio: American Early Medieval Studies, 1991), 99-110.

have been the island studies of Walter Horn and his colleague, Jenny White Marshall. Better known, perhaps, for his great study (with Ernest Born) of the famous “Plan of Saint Gall,”⁴⁸ Walter Horn’s excavations on the Skelligs have produced magnificent results, and similar spectacular discoveries have been made on High Island.⁴⁹

In the field of Irish historical studies in the Viking and post-Viking periods, two contemporary American scholars have made outstanding contributions: Ben Hudson, by his numerous essays on Scottish and Scandinavian history and especially his *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes: Dynasty, Religion and Empire in the North Atlantic* (Oxford 2005), has done much to expand the horizons of “native” Irish scholars, by widening the perspective of Irish historians and reminding them of the Atlantic purview of our island history in the period up to and after AD 1000. In the same way, Mary Valante’s book, *The Vikings in Ireland: Settlement, Trade and Urbanization* (Dublin 2008) brought together the evidence for the positive Viking contribution to Irish political and social development in the same period. Both these books were valuable contributions to the re-evaluation of Irish history that took place in the years leading up to the recent centenary “celebrations” (the so-called “Decade of Centenaries” that began with 2010) to commemorate the Battle of Clontarf in 1014.

Where, then, does all this leave Kenney’s 1930 program for early Irish history, and the role that American scholars might play in it? It is one of the ironies of modern Irish history that Kenney, so formative (as we have seen) in the way that he shaped the course of Irish historical studies in the United States, almost came to take on that role in Ireland as well. On 19 June, 1940, a bill to establish the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies was signed into law by the President of Ireland, Douglas Hyde. Modeled on the famous Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, the Irish institution was home to a School of Cosmic Physics, a School of Theoretical Physics, and a School of Celtic Studies.⁵⁰ The first Director of the School of Theoretical Physics was the redoubtable Erwin Schrödinger, winner (with Paul Dirac) of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1933 for his theory of wave mechanics.⁵¹ It is not widely known, however, that the Institute’s founder, Eamon De

⁴⁸ Walter Horn, *Plan of Saint Gall*, 3 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1979).

⁴⁹ For a riveting account of Walter Horn’s experiences at the end of the Second World War, see: Sidney D. Kirkpatrick, *Hitler’s Holy Relics* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2010); described — not without justice, it must be said! — as “part Indiana Jones and part *Da Vinci Code*,” it offers a much more interesting story than the more widely publicized *Monuments Men*.

⁵⁰ See: Máirtín Ó Murchú, *Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies Fiftieth Anniversary Report 1940-1990* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990), 3-47.

⁵¹ On Schrödinger’s involvement with the Institute, see: Walter Moore, *Schrödinger, Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 352-454.

James F. Kenney on Early Irish History

Valera, also had in mind to establish a School of Historical Studies, and the first Director of that School was to have been none other than James F. Kenney.⁵² However, due to the machinations and intrigues of vested interests in the universities (and the opposition especially of “The Learned Jesuit Trinity” of University College Dublin, Professors John Ryan and Aubrey Gwynn in History, and Francis Shaw in Old Irish), the plan came to nothing.⁵³ “Advanced Study” in History is still the preserve of the universities (in Ireland, at any rate).

It is tantalizing to speculate about what might have been had De Valera’s original scheme for a School of History at the Dublin Institute actually come about. A generation of young historians, fashioned in Dublin according to the rigorous methods practiced by Kenney — rather than in the Institute of Historical Studies of the University of London, as latterly trumpeted by a very different “school” of modern Irish historians — might have revolutionized the scientific study of early Irish history in the generation after 1940. And what a remarkable turn of events it would have been had Kenney — so deeply inspired by the words of Douglas Hyde in Toronto in 1906 — come to Ireland to take up a position in the Institute for Advanced Studies that Hyde had signed into existence in 1940! Alas, it was not to be. Kenney passed away in 1946, but not before he had left an indelible mark on the study of early Irish history in North America. The work of the *American Society of Irish Medieval Studies* is proof of that lasting legacy.

⁵² For the acrimony between the professors (*achrann ollamh*) in the Institute, see: Éamonn Mac Giolla Iasachta, *Leathanaigh ó mo dhialann [Pages from my diary]* (Dublin: Na Clodhanna Teoranta, 1978): 75 (reporting a conversation with De Valera on the subject). The plan to propose Kenney as Director of the School of History was confirmed to me by a former colleague of mine, Prof. Thomas P. O’Neill, who was a biographer of De Valera’s. The story does not feature in the official history of the Institute, School of Celtic Studies; see Ó Murchú, *DIAS Anniversary Report* [n. 50 above].

⁵³ The almost invariably critical comments on Kenney’s *Sources* in Aubrey Gwynn’s various publications are indicative of a professional jealousy that seems to have come to a head in 1940, with the mooting of the School of History for the DIAS; “here Kenney is at fault”; “Kenney, writing in 1929, is wholly dependent on Warren’s edition of 1879”; “Kenney’s failure to note and criticise this evidence must be counted a serious defect”; “Kenney, as a bibliographer, had a duty to his readers”; “Kenney, who should have known better”; “Kenney’s failure to notice”; “Kenney printed his *Sources* without any index to the many manuscripts which he cites so constantly”; “another point in which Kenney’s *Sources* needs correction”; “Kenney has accepted Lawlor’s judgement on this point without further question”; see: Gerard O’Brien, ed., *Aubrey Gwynn, SJ, The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th centuries* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992): 18, 32, 34-5, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 91.