

Connecticut Clockmakers

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Francis Donovan (Dec. 12)

Thomaston, Conn.

CONNECTICUT CLOCKMAKERS

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Arthur Botsford: -- "My theory is live and let live. That's the way it used to be. Ain't that way any more. Used to be if Irish [came in here, they were treated by the old settlers just like their own. Aaron Thomas gave 'em the land for the Catholic church over across the bridge. Then the Scotch came, and the Germans, and they got a good reception, and then the Russians and the Polacks -- they was all treated well and given jobs. We never had many Italians come in, and only one or two Jew, but they were not dominated, or [discriminated or whatever you want to call it. used in Clockmaker (?)

"And that's what I call democracy. You won't see them days come back. You'll never see 'em again. Look at the way things are goin' in the world today. Jews persecuted everywhere in Europe almost. Mark my words, it'll get worse before it gets better.

"Democracy is goin' down hill. You can see it in everything. A man can't call his soul his own. Taxes on this house used to be \$19 once -- now they're a hundred and thirteen. A man in business, he's got to give an account of every move he makes, got to do like somebody else tells him -- they're taking away the old freedom -- and maybe it's a good thing and maybe it ain't. To my way ot thinkin' it ain't. You got to pay an income tax on a thousand dollars, and if you got money in the bank, they want to know just how much, and how much interest is comin' on it, and everything else. It may be only two dollars, and if you got money in the bank, they want to know just 2 how much, and how much interest is comin' on it, and everything else. It may be only two dollars a year, but you got to declare it. Call that freedom?

"I hate to see too much of that sort of thing, and I hate to see persecution. A man's religion or his politics is his own goddam business, and surely it's little enough to allow people. When they begin takin' that away from us -- when a man can't vote or worship as he pleases -- you might as well be dead. Because you won't be a free man any more -- you'll be a slave. [?] Customs

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“Tell you what it used to mean in this town -- we had a colored feller here one time named Bill Warren, used to play baseball with the town team. They had a good team here, one of the best in the valley at the time, and Warren was a star. His family used to work for the Thomases. At the end of the season they had a big time up in a hotel in Torrington, and lots of folks from town went up to it.

“The waiters, or whoever was in charge up there, they put Bill at a separate table, and I guess the poor feller was a little upset about it, but he didn't let on. Nobody knew quite what to do, but he hadn't been there but a few minutes, when Minnie Thomas -- one of the town's first family mind you -- She got up and took her plate and sat down with him. And before long a couple of others got up and did the same, and Bill's table was full.

“Why they thought a lot of that feller -- he was one of us. I see him make the nicest catch in a game up [and?] Torrington, and a /at (?) 3 perfect throw to home plate to got the man out -- if a ball player did that today they'd never got done talkin' about it on the radio, and writin' about it in the papers. He had to go down almost on his knees to get the ball, and he throw it as he was comin' up -- straight into the catcher's hands for a double play. The crowd just rushed onto the field and picked him up and carried him all around on their shoulder. Old Bill Warren was a hero that day.

“Course I don't know how it would'a been if we'd had a bunch of colored people livin' here. All I know is nobody ever thought of treatin' that family any different from anybody else.

“Would any of the town's big families today do what Minnie Thomas did? I don't know. I know some of them that wouldn't, I'm sure of that. Funny thing, it's usually the people that never had a damn thing when they were young and then come into money that are usually the biggest snobs. You can see some of 'em struttin' around this town today -- they were poorer'n skim milk once , but now they've got a little somethin' they like to put on airs.

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“Real people -- the ones that were born with somethin' and have always been used to it -- they're doin' somethin' for somebody else all the time. Lots of it is never known, like old Aaron Thomas. Many's the family that can thank him for a winter's coal supply or somethin' else they needed bad.

“I started talkin' about the Catholics comin' in, didn't I? Some of the first Irish families used to walk to Waterbury of a Sunday 4 for Mass. Then the first Catholic church services that were held here were conducted down in the old academy building. A priest would come in from another parish. Then they built the church over across the bridge, and they got their own priest. First priest that came here to live was Father McGivney. Either him or his brother was the one started the Knights of Columbus. His funeral was one of the biggest ever held in this town.

“They had a Methodist minister here named Judd, built up the church. He was a well liked man, too. He was just the same to everybody. Didn't make no difference whether they belonged to his congregation or not. And when he come here, the church was awful poor. Had a debt of about \$2,000. He says “By golly, I'm going to raise that debt.’ Aaron Thomas heard of it, and Aaron told him if he could raise a thousand, he (Aaron) would put up the other thousand. And the minister went out and got this thousand dollars and Aaron came through with the other thousand.

“Old Dennie Hogan, up on the Hill, he's 83 years old. His family was one of the first Irish families in this town. There was a piece about him in last Sunday's Republican, maybe you saw it, told how his folks used to walk to Waterbury to church on Sundays.

“I like to read about those things, and I guess everyone else does. Things change -- change so fast it don't seem possible, when you look back on it. There's been a heap of changes in my time, young feller. And I've seen some mighty interestin' things and lived through some mighty interestin' times.

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“By God the kids today don't realize how such variety they've got to pick from for amusement. When I was a youngster we didn't have much. There wasn't even many books. Now they got books and radios and moving pictures and toy autos and airplanes and scooters and God knows what all.

“They didn't even have a library here when I was a boy. Had the first one in the court room, where the old post office used to be. Seth Thomas, down in New York, he donated bookcases for it --long black walnut cases running the length of the room.

“Then Laura Andrews -- she married a Thomas -- donated the money for the public library building. She was a sister to Randal T. Andrews, used to run the little shop up on Grand Street, lemme show you where it was.

Mr. Botsford brings out a large, rolled map of 'Plymouth Hollow', (now Thomaston) dated 1855, and points out the Andrews house.

“There's a story connected with this map. I bought it at the auction of Miles Morsess property. The auctioneer held it up and he says, “How much am I bid?’ Somebody says, ‘Ten cents for the lot --'there was three of them -- ‘and I says, ‘A quarter.’ That finished the bidding and I got the maps.

“Well, a little while after that I gets a letter from George Larimer -- he used to be a lawyer here in town, and he was at that auction. Letter asks could he borrow one of those maps to settle a dispute over land boundaries.

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“I wrote back to him and I says, ‘Mr., Lorimer, you wouldn't bid ten cents higher for those maps at the auction. Now it'll cost you five dollars to buy one -- it'll cost you five dollars

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to even look at one.' I never heard no more from him. I give one of them to the D.A.R. afterwards, and they was tickled to death with it.'”