AN INTERVIEW WITH MRS. CHRISTINE ARCHAMBAULT
IRISH IMMIGRANT
ETHNIC HERITAGE PROJECT
BY SUSAN DION
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DION: To start could you tell me where you came from in Ireland? What kind of community it was?

ARCHAMBAULT: Kilarney. It is a small town. It is larger now, because after all, 52 years, did I saw 52 or 53 years, which makes a difference. It is a tourist community. All the lakes are there, of Curry, the Lakes of Kilarney. You've probably heard of the Lakes od Kilarney. It is a very beautiful place. My sister was supposed to come over here. My granduncle was bringing her over. He came to Ireland to visit. He arrived in Haverill, Mass. in the 1860's, I guess. He was the eldest son and he didn't want to stay and operate the farm so he got. Have you ever heard about the way they do things over there. The oldest son gets the farm. If he doesn't want it. Then when the next son marries, the dowry that she brings, the oldest son gets. That's the way they use to do it. So he took the money and arrived in Haverill, Mass. and bought a leather factory and operated it. He did very well. And in those days it wasn't Haverill. It wasn't a very large city. He bought a lot of property and he did quite well. And he married an American girl or Irish descent. They had 5 children and they all went on to college. One is a lawyer, one was a lawyer. I better put it in the past tense, now. He bought a drug store for one. I'm telling you this because it will tie into my story later. He bought a drugstore for another son. And then another son was, well, he went to school all of the time. He was a druggist.
Then he decided if he was a druggist, he wanted to be a physician. So he went on to medical school. And there is where I met my husband. See he was going to Tufts University where my husband went. And I met him through there and then my husband worked in the drugstore summers. And I saw him. Now you want me to go back to Kilarney. When my sister didn't want to come, I was 16 so I came.

DION: By yourself?
ARCHAMBAULT: By myself, yes. Well, my uncle had been there but then he had to come back. And in those days there were quotas. And I had to wait for the quota. And I had quite an experience. The ship that I was suppose to get had a collision on the English channel before it arrived in Ireland. Well, I got another ship and when that came into New York, the quota was all filled and we couldn't land, all those immigrants that were with me couldn't land. So that we had a choice of going back to England, making a round trip. Go to England, Ireland and then come back into Boston under the next quota which I did. And I had a grand time. So it took about 6 weeks to get over. But at 16 you don't mind those things.

DION: So you landed in Boston?
ARCHAMBAULT: I landed in Boston, which made it easier for my relatives because they could meet me in Boston that much easier than meeting me in New York.

DION: What was it like when you first landed? What did you have to go through in the customs?
ARCHAMBAULT: Well, I didn't have any problems at all. We just, you know, they said "Can you read English?" They handed me something "Read". And of course in Ireland, even in those days, you have to go to school until you are 16. I guess in this country it was 14 though in those days. In the British Isles, and Ireland was still under British rule in those days, they... We had no problems at all, just walk in and they said "Can you
read this? Of course after 12 years of schooling, why I was able to read English with a British accent.

DION: Did you say your family farmed back in Ireland?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, my granduncle. He was my grandmother's brother. My mother's people owned a hotel, owned and operated a hotel. Of course, today it is a very small hotel in comparison, and 50 years ago it was considered a fairly good sized one. But I just wanted to come and I did.

DION: What made you want to come beforehand? What were your reasons? Was there something that you thought would be better here?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, it was just what so many 16 year old girls want to do if they have an opportunity to go somewhere. A number of my friends went to England to train for nursing. They took nursing courses in England. And of course you know in Ireland, don't know if you realize this, the greatest prestige is to say "We have no relatives in the U.S. or Canada or Australia". It's like the people here saying "My people came over on the Mayflower". That's hard to believe but that's the way they, some of them feel. Some of course are more adventurous than others. And they leave.

DION: When you first came did you start working right away?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, I took, I went, I took a course in highschool. Then I went to work. I went to work as a telephone operator.

DION: Was that in Massachusetts.

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes., in Haverill.

DION: And you stayed with your uncle?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes.

DION: What kind of community did he live in? Was it an Irish community?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, no. As I say he had a little money so he bought all this nice property and he built in the nice community. There were all kinds of people living in the community. It was an area say like this. It was
50 years ago. It wasn't built up like it is today.

DION: When you went to school, did you find it different, coming to an American school, being an Irish girl?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, yes. It was different. I've forgotten how though. It was so long ago.

DION: Did everybody mix in well?

ARCHAMBAULT: Oh, yes. And of course I had an accent so some of the things I said and the way I expressed myself, they'd smile or they'd laugh.

DION: Did religion play an important part in your life here when you came?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, yes and no. My granduncle was, made sure, and grandaunt, that they boys I dated, they would have preferred that they were Irish boys or Irish Americans. But as I married a French American. As long as he was Catholic. That was the important thing.

DION: Did you and your granduncle have much to do with the church as far as social life.? Did their lives revolve more around the church?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, not necessarily, no. They went to mass every Sunday and Holy days and things like that. I belong to the Children of Mary Church and I would go evenings when they had meetings but not anymore than any ox of the Irish American girls that I chummed around with, The Yankee girls that were in the neighborhood.

DION: When you went looking for your first job what was it like?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, I had only the one and only job with the train company. I had no trouble. My relatives were well-known so that I didn't have any problems at all.

DION: Did any more of your family come over after you came?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, they wouldn't. They never did.

DION: When did you become a citizen?

ARCHAMBAULT: I got married 5 years after I came over and because we left Mass. and we came to A Connecticut I had to wait a certain length of time. I think
it was 2 years. After all the people that vouch for you have to know you. We were living at the time. And they had to know me before they could say that they knew me.

DION: What was the process like?

ARCHAMBAULT: It wasn't very much as I remember. I went down to the city hall and they just asked me how long I'd been in this country and how long I intended to stay and so forth. I said "I hope the rest of my life". I guess that was all that was to it.

DION: Did you vote the next time?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes.

DION: Did you find it important to have a vote?

ARCHAMBAULT: Oh, yes. I voted every election since. And not always did my man win. But I vote.

DION: You lived 5 years in Massachusetts? And then you moved here?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes. My husband graduated from medical school and interned in Waterbury. We were in Waterbury for 2 years and then came here to Oh, yes, I started to apply for citizenship in Waterbury but my 2 years, I wasn't there 2 years so I had to wait 2 more years when we came here. So that the 2 men, I remember one of them... Would it be 2 men or was it a man and a woman? It must be on my papers someplace. But they are in the safe deposit box.

DION: In raising your children did you find that, well, you were both Catholics right? Did you try to show them some of your traditions?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes. We tried to bring in both and I have one daughter. I have 4 daughters and a boy. The 4th one, she wants to know everything about our Irish family so she wrote to my sister who was quite a gal. She was a legal secretary over in Ireland. She knew the history of the Cortney family and the Kiel family dating back to the 16th century. So Priscilla has the whole
thing.

DION: Did you uncle in his family like keep traditions, Irish food?

ARCHAMBAULT: No. They didn't. He married, as I said, an Irish American but, no. You must remember he was my granduncle so I was 16 but they were about 60, 65 so that there was a great deal of difference in our ages there. But they were Catholic. They just went to church. They both died, my granduncle before we got married and my grandaunt right after.

DION: Was your husband from the community?

ARCHAMBAULT: In Haverhill, yes. His family are all still up there. We are the only ones that are down here. And then we brought Collin's mother. She came down to work in the office. And then she met Collins father and stayed here.

DION: Did your greatuncle belong to any volunteer associations? A lot of immigrant peoples belonged to benefit societies or to help each other, to help other people come over.

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, I don't quite remember. It seems to me that he belonged to the Ancient Order of Hibernians and I know that he used to bank through an Irish American bank that had a branch- bank in Haverhill. It was out of Boston. Because I know he made me put my money, all the money that I could save in this bank. You don't know anything about Boston, do you?

DION: Not too much.

ARCHAMBAULT: I'd forgotten too. After all, it's 47 years since we've been out of there.

DION: When your greatuncle moved here did his children all stay around the same area?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes, all around Haverhill, in that area, Haverhill, Lawrence. They all stayed up there.
DION: Were they all in businesses, is that what you said?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, one was a lawyer. One of the girls married a doctor. Another was the druggist. And then the... he had 4-2 boys and 2 girls- and the youngest girl was a schoolteacher.

DION: Did your uncle have much to do with politics?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, but his son did. He ran for some office in Haverhill. Now whether it was the mayor or one of the officials up there. He lost one time and I know he won the next. We had left by this time. See we were down here. And it was just after the elections were all over. But this cousin that I tell you about, he was the greatest one for going to school. He was the one that was a druggist. The older one was a druggist and he practiced. But the second one, the younger one, he went to be a druggist. Then he decided he wanted to be an MD and he went to Tufts. He didn't graduate from there but he did go on to law school and graduated as a lawyer. He spent I don't know how many years in college. He never knew really exactly what he wanted but politics.

DION: Was there a big Irish population in Haverhill?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, a good size, yes.

DION: Did they celebrate holidays, like St. Patrick's Day?

ARCHAMBAULT: Oh, no. Haverhill was more or less, well, you would call it a Yankee city more than you would an Irish or a French or a Greek. There were some of each of those but it was mostly very, very Yankee, Yankee, if you know what I mean.

DION: What were your impressions of Americans when you first came here?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, they were very, very cordial. They were very kind and very nice. They would invite me, make sure I went to the parties that they were having, the birthday parties and the Halloween parties and all those kind of parties. So that it was a very nice.
DION: Did you find it much different from the type of community in Ireland?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, in Ireland, of course, there wasn't... A young girl of 16 is not supposed to go out very much. She goes to church and things like that. But very little social life.

DION: They let you do a lot more of that here?

ARCHAMBAULT: Oh, yes. Way back in those days anyway. Maybe today it's a little different. Today they all have cars. They go here and they go there like they go everywhere else.

DION: Before you met your husband did you mostly go out with Irish boys?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, some. My granduncle preferred that I go out with Irish boys. But after all it was my cousin that brought my husband around so they liked him. When he started going with me they gave him a job again the next year and the next year until he graduated.

DION: What about your job. If you had stayed in Ireland, what do you think you would have done there?

ARCHAMBAULT: Probably a legal secretary like my sister. One of our relatives over there had a law firm. Well, in those days the only law firm, what they called solicitors over there. Those of the relatives that, my cousins that went to work... Over there they really don't have jobs or go to work. They usually wait and then they get married.

DION: What did you think of working in an office like that? Did you find that you were discriminated against in any way, different feelings against you because you were new here? Or did you find it just the opposite?

ARCHAMBAULT: No, they, at least if they did feel that way, they didn't show it. And I didn't realize it. No, they were very cordial, very kind as I say. I have very pleasant memories of my 5 years in Haverhill.

DION: Have you continued through the years to have meetings with other Irish people or do you belong to any Irish type societies now?
ARCHAMBAULT: No. The Sons of St. Patricks have a big affair here in Norwich. In fact there having a week from tomorrow night they are having a big ball. We go. Of course my husband qualified seeing he is married to an Irish girl. But he doesn't belong because he has too much to do.

DION: Do you keep much contact with your family back in Ireland? Have you been there.

ARCHAMBAULT: Oh, yes. We have been there 17 times. So we have gone back.

DION: What were their feelings toward you when you left. You said there was a lot of feeling there, that they wanted to keep the family in Ireland? Do you think you were braver than the rest.

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, no. They're are sad when a person leaves but they are not... I kept in contact. My mother died in 1972 and I wrote every week. Now there were a few times during the summer months that I might not get around to it every week because with 5 children we would go to the beach. We had a cottage at Groton, Long Point. And some weekends I'd have as many as 17, 18, 19, 20 for the weekend. I was inclined to be busy. But I tried. Sometimes I didn't write a very long letter. But I did write.

DION: Did they think that when you left, that you would stay here, that things would work out for you? Or did they kind of expect you to come back?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, some do go back. But I have a cousin, well, a cousin again. It was mostly my mother's first cousins, her generation that came over. She had a cousin the same age as she and she went to Boston, she and her husband and they lived in Boston. And they worked for some very nice people. And he died and she had quite a bit of money and decided to go back. She went back and bought a very nice home over there. We told her, she came to visit us and we told her. "You won't like it. You won't be able to live." Well, of course she thought on her money she could live very comfortably over there, that after all she could have a servant and
live like a lady. She stayed a year and came back. And when she came back she told us "You were right". We tried to tell her once you get use to this country, your use to the central heating, your'e use to all of the comforts and you can't go back. And still they think over there that their life is wonderful. Oh, they wouldn't want to have to run around the way we do over here. They live longer over there, I'll grant you that. But I couldn't go back and live there. Now this cousin of mine was older too and when she left there. But she couldn't... She had no children so she didn't have to worry about that.

DION: So most people that you know that moved here stayed?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes. Very few of them, I'd say maybe one percent.

DION: Most of the people you know that came over, have they done well?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes.

DION: And their children have done probably better?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes.

DION: Coming across on the ship you said you had a very long trip. Did you get to find out other people's reasons for leaving?

ARCHAMBAULT: No.

DION: What was it like, the actual trip?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, it was fun as I remember. There was one other girl, 17, and she and I chummed around together on the ship. She went out to Chicago but I kept in contact for a year or so, but then lost contact with her so I don't know. All I remember was she was a beautiful redhead. But that's thinking back all those years. So what happened to her I don't know.

DION: What kind of conditions were on the boat? Was it very crowded?

ARCHAMBAULT: Yes, there were a lot of immigrants on that. There were a lot of Americans too. You know, Irish Americans that had gone over for the summer. In those days people didn't do as we do today, go over for a week. They went over
for the 3 months. Weekend or one week trips weren't... Well, it took 7 days on the ship each way. So you just couldn't go for a few days.

DION: What did you bring with you, just clothes?

ARCHAMBAULT: As I remember, see my sister was coming and I was able to fit into her clothes so I took her clothes. And then after I was over here...

DION: She just decided at last minute not to come?

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, a week before. No, it must have been 2 weeks before. Because after all I had to get a passport and I remember we had to really rush around to get a passport in that length of time. And, also, I had to let my relatives know. There was no airmail in those days. I had to send a letter. I got one back saying it would be fine if I came in her place.

DION: Did your uncle accept you more as just another member of the family? He wanted you to go to school. You didn't come to work for them or anything like that?

ARCHAMBAULT: No.

DION: Could you describe how your situation was probably different from other people because you came over and didn't have to work.

ARCHAMBAULT: Well, I didn't have to and I didn't have to pay back the money that my uncle spent for the passage because he didn't need the money. And I kept the money that I earned. Some I sent, half I put in the bank and half I sent to my mother. She put it in the bank over in Ireland and then bought the house she was living in with my sister and brother. It was a big estate owned by He has a family name but I've forgotten that, too. Then when my sister died I said I didn't want the house but she insisted because I was the one that paid for some of it. So she left it to my young daughter, Priscilla. Well, it makes it very nice because Priscilla thinks it's great to own an Irish estate. And they are in the
process now of settling up the estate because she died last February. Of course, Priscilla's husband is an entomologist and they lived in Paris for about 6 years and they had been to Ireland a number of times. And I think this is funny. The one thing that Dick would like in the house is an old black stove that they had. And I said "How would you ever bring that over here." But that is an antique. "I'd love that". But I don't think that they will bring it over. Now I got off the subject there didn't I?

DION: That's ok. Thank you very much.