

Serope Biman Seropian, Persian Consul to Ireland, 1907-38

Serope Biman Seropian (1864-1938) was Ireland's longest serving diplomat of the 20th century, 1907-38. While his role was more consular agent than diplomat in earlier years, he was one of the few diplomats that had direct dealings with the First Dail's court system and one of the first to recognise the Irish Free State in 1922. With its foundation, he took on more diplomatic duties but his representation never became a full mission staffed by Persian officials and remained a one-man operation. He represents the transition from trade agency to diplomatic mission that began at the end of the 19th century.

The article gives some family history, but mainly deals with his commercial and diplomatic career in Ireland. There are four appendices; Foley family history; Lisaleamey land case, 1920; Ali Ackbar Faraj repatriation case, 1925; and the consulate's logo and Seropian's signature.

Background

The Seropians were a well-off professional Armenian family from Constantinople¹ who settled in USA and the UK² in the late 19th century. Possibly related was Christopher Seropian of Yale, inventor of the green dye used in USA currency, and his son Milton who became USA consul to Persia, 1901-1904, during the Roosevelt Presidency³. A Milton Seropian attended the 1892 wedding and arrived in the USA, 1894⁴; but there may be two.

A Mr Seropian was lecturing on 'Life and Customs in Constantinople' in Connecticut in 1893 ("His descriptions were very vivid and much enjoyed"⁵). Another (or the same) was agent for English

¹ It had a large Armenian community, who from the 17th century, were international merchants and textile manufacturers; many came from Kayseri (Kesaria) *Armenian Kesaria/Kayseri and Cappadocia*, ed. R G Hovannisian, 2013

² According to Bishop Mushegh Seropian, the Armenian settlement of Manchester began when Senekerim Manougian arrived in Constantinople in 1840 from Kayseri at the age of seventeen and began working in trade. He founded his own commercial firm and subsequently sent his cousin Garabed Yeghiazarian to Manchester to establish a branch of the family's firm <https://www.coursehero.com/file/p2qn0gf/26-In-the-nineteenth-century-Kesaria-became-a-center-for-manu-facturing-and/>

³ "Among Armenian materials related to presidents of the United States, (Mark A) Momjian feels that one of the most interesting items in his collection is an appointment from the White House on engraved sheepskin with the Executive seal, appointing Milton Seropian as the vice-consul to Persia. He adds, 'This is a marvellous document signed in the early part of the 20th century. Milton was the son of Christopher Seropian, the Yale graduate who created the dye for the American currency. The reason why this appointment is wonderful is that it is signed by both Theodore Roosevelt and John Hay, previously Lincoln's personal secretary, but secretary of state at the time.'" <http://www.mirrorspectator.com/2010/10/04/legal-eagle-mark-momjian-soars-in-pennsylvania> Hay resigned in 1905 but suffered from serious illness from the previous year

⁴ Arrived in New York, his final destination, on the HMS Etruria, 18/6/1894; aged 26 he was a teacher, native and last resident of Manchester. He embarked from Liverpool, it also stopped at Queenstown http://www.immigrantships.net/v11/1800v11/etruria18940618_07.html#685

⁵ *Young People at Work*, 1893

insurance companies in Constantinople and arrested in 1896 for allegedly assisting the escape of revolutionaries but was soon released through British consular intervention⁶.

Early Life and Marriage

Serope Biman Seropian (SBS) was born in Constantinople eldest son of Charles Dikran Deodat Oliver Seropian MD, 12th June 1864. Subsequently, the family migrated and lived in the UK and USA and naturalised in both⁷. By 1892 both parents were deceased; his father was late of Yale and his unnamed mother 'recently'.

He later migrated to Manchester, UK⁸, where a large Armenian community were involved in textile agencies, particularly cotton. From 233 Upper Brook St, he married, in 1892, Elizabeth Kathleen Foley of Nenagh and 37 Upper Fitzwilliam St, Dublin, daughter of Charles Carrigue Foley⁹, at St. Stephen's Church, Dublin.

The wedding was a grand affair: "The bride, who was given away by her father, was attired in a gown of rich white faille francaise with full court train, on the corner of which was a horseshoe of orange blossoms. The bodice was trimmed with point duchesse lace and she wore a coronet of orange blossoms and long tulle veil, and carried a magnificent bouquet of orchids, gardenias and stephanotis."

The bridesmaids were sisters Margaret M and Jenny Foley: "They wore gowns of pink brocaded bengaline trimmed with leaf green velvet and pink and green feathers and carried baskets of malmaison carnations and white roses and wore gold and pearl bracelets." Attending the groom was Zebel Monoukian, a cousin.

The reception was held at Fitzwilliam Square with wedding cake supplied by Mitchell & Son¹⁰. The main present givers included Mrs Manoukian, Le Chevalier de Gunt and Milton Seropian. They went to the UK and Isle of Wight for their honeymoon and settled in Nenagh for the rest of their lives.

He naturalised in the UK in 1895¹¹ and gave his nationality as USA and address as Nenagh. He set up as an insurance agent for Alliance Assurance Co at 16-17 Castle St, Nenagh. On the death of his father-in-law, 1897, he inherited the emigration agency but the auctioneering business went to Foley and Corneille. From then onwards there are many advertisements in local newspapers regarding the

⁶ Widely reported end September 1896

⁷ Their complicated travel and naturalisation can be reconstructed via subscription genealogy sites

<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=40&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=genfact&gsln=Scharbing&uidh=000>

⁸ There are no Seropian in the 1891 UK census online indexes nor similar names for Manchester

⁹ See appendix for the Foley family

¹⁰ *Nenagh Guardian* 14/9/1892

¹¹ <http://www.bluebirdresearch.com/blog/>

sales and rentals of land and crops, insurance advertisements and emigrant shipping news. In 1903 he became barley-purchasing agent for distilleries¹².

He was an active participant in local affairs and contributor to various causes such as the Barry and Thomas testimonials, Ryan and Prince of Wales funds. In 1899 he was in correspondence with the Great Southern and Western Railway (GSRW), Grand Canal Co and Shannon Development Co on behalf of the Financial Relations Movement and their promotion of a Nenagh to Dromineer light railway. He “has taken great interest in this scheme and spared neither trouble nor expense in the effort which has been made to obtain support for it by public companies”¹³.

1907 Appointment as Persian Consul

In 1907 he was appointed Consul to the Imperial State of Persia (usually called Persian Empire, Iran was introduced in 1935) in Ireland and made a formal visit to the Lord Lieutenant to present his credentials in February 1908¹⁴, then to the Lord Mayor at Mansion House, where he left his card. He opened an office at 3 Westmoreland St and appointed B Cameron Potter as secretary (later replaced by Robert J Kidney ASAA who remained until 1938) and John B Battersby as vice-secretary.

His appointment probably came through the international Armenian merchant network; it seems reasonable to assume that Milton Seropian, USA vice-consul to Persia, was a significant factor. In 1906 the Shah had appointed a government that, with reformist zeal, attempted to modernise the country. Armenians that held important government offices at this time were probably responsible for the push to expand Persian involvement in international trade by using established and trusted family networks. That he was uninvolved in Persian politics is evidenced by the fact that he kept his position after the 1925 Pahlavi coup d'état.

Quite what he did diplomatically is not clear; with one 1925 exception of the repatriation of a Persian juvenile brought illegally to Ireland as a servant, there is little evidence of contact between Persia and the Irish Free State before 1939. His role was more akin to the 19th century consular agent in Irish ports who were merchant intermediaries of international trade rather than government representatives. However, armed with an official appointment, he could attend Vice-Regal levees, diplomatic functions and other public functions¹⁵, but was not a regular on Dublin's social scene.

It is not known who paid for the consulate's rental and office expenses; if he did, and he had the financial resources to do so, then his position was really honorary. There was hardly benefit to the

¹² *Nenagh Guardian* 4/11/1903

¹³ *Nenagh News* 4/11/1899

¹⁴ *Freemans Journal* 6/2/1908

¹⁵ i.e. He was one of 25 diplomats who attended the Phoenix Park Mass, 1929

Persian foreign office to fully finance such a mission but they may have paid some honorarium and they definitely awarded him the Imperial Persian Order of the Lion and the Sun of Persia before 1922.

1907-22

The *Nenagh Guardian* and *Nenagh News* have references to the family exclusive of advertisements; here is a selection

10th April 1909 Auction of household furniture, piano carriages, furniture at Summerhill plus 93 acre mixed farm, grass and tillage subject to terminable annuity of £43/10-.

On 25th May, 1909, he lodged a patent for non-skid detachable tyres for motor cars. It's unknown whether this was his own invention or on behalf of others to establish an Irish presence; no more is reported concerning it¹⁶

11th September 1911: Mrs Seropian wins 2nd prize for eggs at Killaloe & Ballina Show

18th April 1912: Land Commission Court Seropian v Keating

31st August 1912: BSB speaks on behalf of parishioners at Testimonial to Rev A Thomas, Rector, Nenagh

3rd July 1915: 35 acres of heavy upland to let

August 1919: Report of a meeting of TWU Nenagh branch with BSB to discuss wages; he said he "would give them anything they wanted and that he would give a written guarantee that he would not meddle with them". He added that he had no problem if they insist that man victimised from employment for trade union activities be taken back, and furthermore promised that he would not interfere with a man in his place in future without reporting his case to the Employer's association¹⁷

27th December 1919¹⁸ "This morning much amusement was caused when Mr Seropian, who, in addition to being the head of a large business in town led the through the principal streets from the Railway station an ass attached to a cart containing merchandise"

In July 1920 he was involved in a dispute over the sale of his farm at Lisaleamey that was heard by the North Tipperary District Arbitration Court. He was unable to attend as "he was prohibited under international law from giving evidence in any case except in a case of murder without the consent of

¹⁶ *Nenagh Guardian* May 25th 1909, and following refs at relevant dates

¹⁷ 30/8/1919

¹⁸ Quoting from *Daily Herald*, London

his authorities". The case was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties and acclaim of the general public.¹⁹

This is probably the case referred to by Colonel Liam Hoolan, one time Commandant of the North Tipperary Brigade in his record of its activities 1917-21. He adds that Seropian subsequently offered his residence as a safe house but this was apparently never taken up²⁰.

He was assaulted by a drunken ex-soldier in October 1920 but declined to prosecute personally, though he did give evidence²¹.

Persia recognises Ireland, 1922

On the 26th January 1922²² SBS visited City Hall, and, in the name of the Shah of Persia, tendered congratulations to President Arthur Griffith and Government Chairman Michael Collins, "on this glorious epoch of Irish history".

"A dignified and picturesque figure, he attended in his striking official uniform, resplendent with gold brocade. He wore a high Astrakan fez and carried a curved Eastern scimitar, with highly decorated hilt and scabbard. The Consul, in addition to other insignia, wore on his breast the medal and ribbon of the Imperial Persian Order of the Lion and the Sun of Persia and the ribbon and star of the Order of St Stanislaus of Russia²³.

His arrival was pre-announced by a letter from the Consulate saying that he was to convey greetings to Ireland officially on behalf of the Shah and Imperial Government of Persia. He was received both by President Griffith and Michael Collins. In the afternoon he paid a visit to the Dail Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Mansion House.

The following statement was released in the afternoon: "Today the Imperial Persian Consul made an official call on Mr Arthur Griffith, President of Dail Eireann, and Mr Michael Collins, Chairman of the Provisional Government, and conveyed to them a message of congratulations of which the following is the English translation:

"In the name of his Imperial Majesty, the Shah of Persia, and the Imperial Parliament of Persia, I have the honour of offering you their sincere congratulations to you Mr President of Dail Eireann and to you, Mr Collins, Head of the Provisional Government of this Free State of Ireland, on this glorious

¹⁹ *Nenagh Guardian* July 10th 1920 See appendix for synopsis

²⁰(1956) <http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1553.pdf>

²¹ *Nenagh Guardian* and *Nenagh News*, 30th October 1920

²² *Freemans Journal*, 27/1/1922. He was the fourth diplomatic representative to recognise the Irish Free State after France, Italy and the USA by 1st February; the Maltese Government sent a message of congratulations

²³ Awarded to foreigners in recognition of service to the Persian Empire, the second was a common Romanov award also given to foreigners and possibly from either merchant activities when based in Manchester, or, but less likely, in recognition for his role as consul; there are no recorded links with Russia while he lived in Ireland

epoch of Irish history. The grateful thanks of all Irishmen are due to you for what you have achieved. Following with admiration your well-crowned efforts, we hope and pray that Ireland may be one of the happiest and at the same time most progressive countries in the world”.

Mr Griffith and Mr Collins, in reply, asked the Imperial Consul to convey to his Imperial Majesty and the Imperial Parliament the thanks of the Irish people for their kind congratulations. They added: “We assure you we feel very much touched by the message from such an ancient and famous nation as Persia. We hope the future will afford many opportunities for our two nations helping each the other”

What Griffith and Collins privately thought was, alas, not recorded.

1922-1938

He now became less involved in local affairs, probably in recognition that he had to play a more diplomatic role in society. There are more references in local newspapers to his wife winning prizes at agricultural shows than to him. Dublin papers mentioned his occasional attendance at public events. His last recorded diplomatic act was to sign the book of condolences at the Yugoslav consulate on the death of King Alexander, 1934²⁴.

However, his commercial activities continued as before; insurance agent, groceries (associated with Ceylon Tea Co, Barracks, Nenagh, from mid 1930s), agricultural and hardware supplies while his emigration agency became a travel agency for train and liner tickets worldwide. In 1925 Armenians were making Turkish cigarettes in Ballsbridge for Horse Show Week²⁵. If this was a regular occurrence for this and other shows, it is likely he had some involvement in organisation, marketing and sales.

There were also property sales: 24 Summerhill was on the market in late 1936 and his interest in Dromineer bungalow in early 1937. In 1928/9 he made a claim to Irish Distress Committee and Irish Grants Committee²⁶.

His wife, Elizabeth Kathleen, died 24th August 1933 and he appears to have withdrawn from local society as there are very few subsequent references to him in either local or national press; ill-health may have been a factor.

He died 7th June 1938 at the Italian Hospital, London; he had gone to London in early December the previous year²⁷. He attended, with medical fees owing at death, Mr Wuisbury White, 51 Harley St., £23/2/-; Dr L Livingston, 24 Algernon Rd, Hendon, £18/12/6 and Dr Avery, 127 Harley St, £3/3/-.

²⁴ *Evening Herald*, 12/10/34

²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 3/8/1925

²⁶ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C9017734> no 3125

He owed the Italian Hospital, £9; Sister Keating, London, nursing fees, £2/10/-; Hamilton Long, Dublin, drugs £4/6; and Abnian Brothers, Twyford Abbey, London, Board and Residence, £5/2/3. He also had a £50 debt to the Provincial Bank, Nenagh, and an electricity bill of £1/4/1.

Last Will and Testament

His will, made at the Italian Hospital on the 4th, appointed Aram Manoukian, 9 Reynold's Close, London NW 11, Art Dealer, as executor of his estate valued at £163/10/-. This amount appears to have been calculated beforehand since it covered all debts and funeral expenses with a few pounds to spare²⁸; the latter amounted to: transport of coffin to Nenagh, £41/15/3 and Harkness & Co, funeral expenses from Nenagh station to Killodiernan Cemetery, marking grave etc. £5/17/6. William Hodgins was his solicitor in Nenagh.

He left all furniture, except a silver salver and Ekco wireless set, to his daughter Nouna Vera Seropian and all remaining property in England or Ireland to his son Lieutenant-Commander Charles Oliver Foley R.N., O.B.E. (formerly Seropian) absolutely²⁹

He was buried with his wife in Killodiernan cemetery, Johnstown, Co. Tipperary. Mourners weren't listed in the newspaper report of his death but it was presumably well-attended. However, it is unknown if a representative from the Persian Embassy came, which might have indicated if there was an active relationship after 1922 or it was purely symbolic. Whichever it was, it's likely that it came to an end while receiving treatment in London.

Children

They had two children Nounya Vera Kathleen, born 11th June 1897, and Oliver Charles Dikran Deodat, born 15th October 1894.

Nounya Vera Kathleen, a lady of independent means, was an active participant in local affairs and a regular prize winner at the Nenagh Agricultural and other local shows. She never married; she died 5th January 1988 and is buried with her parents.

Oliver Charles Dikran Deodat joined the Royal Navy in August 1914, became lieutenant in 1916 and was awarded, 24th March, 1919, an OBE "for devotion to duty whilst serving in the submarine-

²⁷ *Nenagh Guardian*, 11/12/37

²⁸ In other words his wealth was discreetly distributed, presumably to avoid death duties, beforehand – there is no reference to property in his will. A Manoukian cousin as executor possibly indicates some long-standing financial partnership or other relationship with the family; dissolved on his death

²⁹ Will of Serope Biman Seropian, 1938, National Archives He was entitled to a life interest of his late wife's house at Summerhill but this had been previously sold and proceeds went to pay off its mortgage. Also purported to receive interest of houses on Pound St but these were sold eight years before she died

hunting flotillas of the Northern Area Patrol Force". He retired in 1922 and changed his surname to Charles Oliver Foley by deed-poll in 1923. In 1919 he married Hilda Marian Glanfield³⁰ in England; they divorced in 1927. He married secondly Helen Rosamund Anna Birch in 1928 in Calcutta, India; they divorced in 1947.

During WW2 he served on HMS Daedalus, Lee on Solent, 1942; HMS Edinburgh Castle, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1942-3; Commanding Officer HMS Spurwing, Hastings, Sierra Leone, 1943 and Commanding Officer, no 14 Service Flying Training School, Aylmer, Ontario, HMS Canada. He retired again in April 1946 and died 14th November 1962 in Paddington, London.³¹

The family memorial in Killodiernan Cemetery reads: In/ loving memory of/ our dear mother/ ELIZABETH KATHLEEN SEROPIAN/ of Summerhill, Nenagh/ who died August 24th 1933 aged 67yrs/ Abide with me/ Also our dear father/ SEROPE BIMNAN SEROPIAN/ who died June 7th 1938 aged 73 yrs/ Peace perfect peace/ NOUNYA KATHLEEN/ VERA SEROPIAN died Jan 5th 1988³².

Appendix 1: Foley Family

Elizabeth Kathleen was the youngest daughter of Charles Carrigue Foley Esq. JP Summerhill, Nenagh, and Dublin and Margaret nee Corneille. She had two sisters: Jane Christina, of 53 Brighton Rd, Dublin, who died at a private nursing home, 67 Lower Leeson St, Dublin, 7th March, 1916, aged 52 and was buried in Mount Jerome³³, she never married and Margaret, born 9th April 1863, who married William Wilson, commercial brewery clerk, St Peter's Church of Ireland 17th April 1895, Dublin³⁴; they lived at 1 Kylemore Terrace; he died 1903.

According to a highly laudatory obit in the *Nenagh Guardian*³⁵ Charles Carrigue Foley came from Kerry to Nenagh in the late 1850s and became connected by marriage to the late J B Corneille by marrying Margaret, daughter of Benjamin Corneille, in Nenagh 18th May 1859.

Born c. 1833, he was son of Timothy Foley and Margaret Carrigue; their marriage banns were read for three weeks from 1st October, 1826³⁶; he was a Tralee builder and she came from Annagh. The marriage itself and any children's baptisms are not recorded in surviving Tralee registers but a Charles, son of John and Fanny Foley baptised 17th February 1836, was possibly related. Corneilles are common in Tralee parish so there may have been pre-existing contacts before Nenagh.

³⁰ The Glanfield family are in *Whitaker's Peerage*, 1920

³¹ http://www.unithistories.com/officers/RN_officersF2.html There is no obituary in Irish newspapers

³² <http://www.igp-web.com/IGPArchives/ire/tipperary/photos/tombstones/Iheadstones/killodiernan.txt>

³³ There is no baptism recorded for her. The death was reported by her sister Margaret and her Estate, worth £3,500, was granted to her other sister, Elizabeth Kathleen, on 20th June, at Limerick

³⁴ A witness was a Cornelius Corrigan Foley

³⁵ 13/3/1897 "nearly 40 years ago"

³⁶ Tralee and Annagh Church of Ireland Parish Registers, National Archives, m/f 14

They appear first to have lived in Dublin after 1859 and lived in 13 Harrington St in 1863 and 72 Talbot St in 1864 where two of his three children were baptised³⁷. He inherited³⁸ J B Corneille's wine and spirit business at Castle St, Nenagh, in 1868 and, combined with his Dublin grocery business and land agency, expanded into auctioneering, agricultural and hardware supplier and also ran an emigration agency; he had dual residence in both from at least 1868.

In early 1897, failing health led to him passing the business to a nephew, Benjamin Corneille³⁹ He died at 1 Kylemore Tce⁴⁰ Brighton Rd, Rathgar; on 11th March, 1897, his estate was worth £11,676⁴¹. His funeral in Killodiernan Graveyard was strongly attended by all classes of society; a list of mourners was published in the *Nenagh Guardian*.

Appendix 2: Lisaleamey⁴² Land Dispute, 1920

In June 1920 SBS was involved in a dispute regarding land at Lisaleamey that he was selling to James Kennedy of Bawn for c. £4,000. The case concerned Patrick Collins who wrote in a newspaper letter that his recently widowed mother⁴³ and five children, the eldest was nine years old, were evicted from their farm by W T Trench of Redwood due to rent arrears in 1882, "in the early days of the Land League". The farm became "a sort of commonage, and was known in the district as the 'Land League farm'" but later, when Trench unsuccessfully tried to sell it, Charles Foley, his auctioneer, purchased it and, on his death, the farm passed to his son-in-law.⁴⁴

This claim was somewhat disputed by Kennedy who wrote the following week that, notwithstanding his long friendship and recent meetings with Collins, this was the first he heard of it. He disputed the right of Sinn Fein Executive of North Tipperary to act on the case "without acquainting me or giving me a chance of explanation". He was willing to have the decision made by the District Arbitration Court for North Tipperary but not a parish court as the valuation was over £10. He concluded "I don't want to bring disturbance into a peaceable district, but as there is considerable part of my money involved, I want a just trial, fair treatment, and a speedy and definite decision".⁴⁵

The case was heard by that Court at the Court House, Nenagh, on the 2nd July, "A considerable amount of interest was taken in the proceedings by the general public, with the result that the spacious

³⁷ Listed as Grocer in 1863 and Land Agent in 1864 in Baptismal and Civil registers, latter 1864 only

³⁸ He was also executor

³⁹ He filled most of the offices of St Mary's Church, Nenagh

⁴⁰ Residence of son-in-law, William Wilson

⁴¹ His estate was probated on second attempt in 1899 by a grant to his daughter Jane C Foley

⁴² Lissyleamy is the official townland spelling

⁴³ Mary Collins was aged 50 in 1901 & 75 in 1911, Patrick was 27 & 37, he was a farm labourer
<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Tipperary/Carrickatogher/Lissyleamy/1696975/> &
<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Tipperary/Carrickatogher/Lissyleamy/819819/>

⁴⁴ *Nenagh Guardian* June 19th 1920

⁴⁵ *Nenagh Guardian* June 26th 1920

Record Court was crowded, and many had to be content with standing room”. They heard that the Collin’s farm was originally 26 Irish acres but owing to the death of his father his widow had run up arrears of 12-18 months and was forced to give up most of it when threatened with eviction; only keeping one acre, two haggards and the house. She later had to give up the acre.

It was then taken up by one Meara who was forced to give it up after 11 months due to local agitation. It became local commonage for neighbouring cattle and was then, in 1883, was bought by Foley for £575. Collins stated that his family had only just heard of the sale to Kennedy and believed that he had taken unfair advantage of them. He defended his previous lack of claim to the land as accepting the 1883 sale as a *fait accompli* but now that it was being sold he had a right to it.

The defence noted that for the previous 37 years Foley and now Seropian had an undisputed use of the land as its owners and asked “If a title held for that length of time was now to be disturbed where was security for any man? Obligations had been incurred by people who came in under that title, and if they were to disturb it they would be doing wrong, and a grievous wrong, to absolutely innocent people”.

Seropian handed in a written statement to the effect that due to a ‘great obligation’ he had to the late Dr John Esmonde MP⁴⁶ he had promised him that if he sold this farm he would give first refusal to Kennedy. He had honoured that duty and had no reason to believe it would be disputed. According to one witness the reason the original farm sale advertisement did not list the vendor’s name was because Seropian did not want people to believe he was ‘broke’.

After the lengthy deliberation the arbitration committee decided both that Collins had first right to the land but that Seropian was entitled to a just price for the land that they estimated at £3,150. If Collins decided not to purchase the farm at that price then Kennedy had first refusal. He was given three weeks to decide as there was meadowing on the land that should not be allowed to depreciate. They hoped that Seropian would abide by the decision.

“The decision of the arbitrators was received with applause”; they were Rev J Fogarty, CC Puckane; Messrs William Gleeson, Patrickswell; Rody Clery, MCC, Knigh; P J Dempsey, Nenagh; and Lieutenant Scanlon, Ballina/Birdhill. L G Gleeson appeared for Collins and J O’Brien for Kennedy⁴⁷

By the first week of August it emerged that Seropian bought out Collins’s tenant-right for “a substantial payment” that Collins took to be “just and adequate.” Kennedy retained the farm.

The *Nenagh News* wrote “From the outset we were sure that Mr Seropian, the owner of the farm, would do what he has always done since he came to live in our midst that is what was just and

⁴⁶ John Joseph Esmonde LRCSI (1862-1915) was Irish Nationalist MP, 1910-15

⁴⁷ *Nenagh Guardian* July 3rd & 10th 1920 & *Nenagh News* July 10th 1920

honourable. His attitude while the dispute was on was most gentlemanly and above reproach. In fact the people of Silvermines who took an active part in the dispute have nothing but praise for him. We may say, in all land disputes if the contending parties followed the maxim of give and take as Mr Seropian did it would be instrumental in obviating the bitter feelings that so often bring unhappiness not only to the people intimately concerned but to innocent people as well.”⁴⁸

Fr M Hogan, PP Silvermines, wrote “It is due to Mr Seropian, to say that all through the negotiations for a settlement, his attitude was one of reasonableness and sympathy for the evicted tenant. Throughout the whole proceedings he played the part of a perfect gentleman, and an honourable man” He also included a word of praise for Seropian’s solicitor, Mr Dudley, whose handling of the case “was simply superb, and done with a skill, courtesy and fair-mindedness that could hardly be excelled”.⁴⁹

Appendix 3: Ali Ackbar Feraj⁵⁰ 1920-25

In January 1920 Lieutenant Charles Barrington returned to England⁵¹ with Ali Ackbar Feraj, then aged 15 or 16, native of Baziani, Mahidasht District, Kermanshah Province, as batman/servant and falsely declared that he was an Indian born in Karachi however he later said he was Persian. Around July 1924 he became employed by W K Blake, Bank of Ireland manager, Mullingar and due to problems here with Blake’s housekeeper he contacted Seropian for assistance in August 1925.

Seropian, after satisfying himself that the boy was genuine, contacted the Department of External Affairs in 9th September 1925 to alert them of the case; that he had been in contact with the Persian Legation in London and that, in their opinion, Barrington was fully liable for all repatriation expenses. He stated that “the ignorant and illiterate boy induced by promises and threats to expatriate himself against his wishes to make a false declaration” and subsequently kept him for a pittance without registering him under the Aliens Act. He added that Barrington must make a written statement of the boy’s Persian origin so that he can be issued with a passport and closes with a request that the Irish Free State provide protection, assistance and facilities.

Barrington’s solicitors (French and French) replied 7th September to Seropian claiming that Ackbar came because he wanted to and noted that the married Barrington had no private means and was in receipt of a ‘purely voluntary allowance’ but was willing to contribute £10 for passage money without any admission of liability. After a meeting between them and the DEA they wrote on the 14th that

⁴⁸ August 7th 1920

⁴⁹ *Nenagh Guardian* 10th August 1920

⁵⁰ National Archives DFA GR/595

⁵¹ Departed Bombay 11th December 1919

Barrington said that he always believed that Ackbar was a native of India and wasn't aware of his Persian origin until he returned to England and that he never promised to pay for his return to India.

This letter was copied to Seropian who replied to the Minister on the 29th refuting the claims, saying that it was highly unlikely, in a time of war, that Barrington wasn't aware of Ackbar's nationality, he informed Mr Blake that he was Persian⁵², and in a letter of 18th August didn't deny the nationality and stated that if found liable would make the necessary arrangements contrary to his solicitor's statement that he could only afford £10 as he had no private means.

He added that "The boy bitterly complained to me of the ill treatment that he was subjected to by Mr Barrington – kicked about, dragged out of bed at night and treated like a dog etc etc. I am passing over this for the present but I may state, Monsieur le Ministre, acts like these cannot be tolerated in a highly civilised country like Ireland" and referred to the interview by Departmental Secretary, Mr Murphy, of the boy in Seropian's presence. "Further, Mr Blake informs me that the boy is threatened with consumption if he is to face the winter in this country".

He reiterated that Ackbar was brought to over under false pretences "It seems that Mr Barrington just gave him a British Uniform and told him he was a soldier and must obey orders" He concluded with his Government's opinion that Barrington was fully responsible for the expatriation of the boy and "to take such action as you may think necessary for the repatriation of Ali Ackbar at an early date".

On 19th October Seropian wrote again to the Minister enclosing copies of letters sent by Mr Blake and requested a speedy resolution given the delicate health of the boy and noting that "if this boy died, there will be a most serious and grave responsibility resting on all parties concerned." And concluded "Your kind assurances the other day that I can rely on your best endeavours in the matter has been appreciated"

In the meantime the DEA wrote to the Secretary of High Commissioner, London, 21st October, enclosing copies of the correspondence noting that "there is no means by which Mr Barrington can be forced to pay the expenses of the Journey to Persia" and asks that the Dominions Office be contacted to find out their views and ascertain whether any offence was committed against the Aliens Order. They replied on the 19th November that the State for Home Affairs had no information concerning the boy's arrival in England and therefore no action could be taken against Barrington. The DEA notified Seropian of these findings on the 24th whereupon he responded, 27th, by saying he had passed it on to his government for their consideration.

There was no further correspondence between Seropian and the DEA so it appears that Ali Ackbar Faraj was repatriated independently and it is quite possible that Seropian (and perhaps the London

⁵² Letter from W K Blake to Seropian October 16th stating he and his house keeper were willing to "state on oath" that Barrington informed them that Ackbar was a Persian

Persian Legation) paid for most of the expenses with whatever he was able to extract from Charles Barrington through his solicitors⁵³.

Letter⁵⁴ to S B Seropian 12-14 College Green Dublin 15 August 1925 on headed Band of Ireland notepaper, Mullingar

Dear Sir,

I received yours this morning for which I thank you. I wish I could get to see you I could explain my case much better in person so you know I can't read or write English. However I will do my best to explain.

I met a Lieut Taylor (14th Hussars) in Persia. I tracked through Persia with him. He then brought me to Mesopotamia. He handed me over to another officer named Capt Best (same reg). Those officers were sent home to England. Then I met Mr Barrington (Lieut 13th Hussars). He was then called to England & he wanted to take me with him. He treated me very badly all along. He beat me fired his boots at me several times. I was very young then & I didn't understand the law so I was afraid of him & I had to do as I was told in case he would beat me again.

Then he brought me to India. I had to swear everything he told me in the Police Station (India) as he was taking me with him to England & I thought I wouldn't get through if the Police knew I was a Persian. He made me swear that I was born in Karachi, India, a place I never saw in all my life.

I am enclosing a copy of the form he made me swear to in India. I was then a British soldier Lieut (?) Barrington was paying me. He promised to look after me & send me back home when I wanted to go. 2/6 & 5/= was the way he paid all. I never got a week wages from him until I came to Ireland.

He left the army in Aldershot so he then brought me to Ireland with him he took a flat in 66 Harcourt St Dublin. He then joined the Republican Army. He used to have people with him at all hours of the night & he used to kick & beat me and of my (?) to get food for them. The people in the house where he had the flat can tell you how he treated me, if you want their names I can give them to you if you let me know. He then joined the Free State Army. He ran from the Army after about 8 months, I was at his flat all this time as he was coming and going during this time

He then took the flat he is living in now. Then he got married⁵⁵ & his wife wanted a maid & then he had to get rid of me so he got me the job I have now. While I was with him here as a Bank porter & paid by the Bank of Ireland £2-0-0 per week & feed myself out of it. I suits of clothes every two years an odd overcoat now instead of being bank porter I was valet, cook, painter, porter & more or less

⁵³ There is no death entry for him registered in Ireland's General Registry Office, 1925-35

⁵⁴ As he was illiterate he must have dictated the letter; his signature is in the same handwriting

⁵⁵ No marriage of a Charles Barrington is registered in Ireland's General Registry Office, 1920-25

ladies maid to his housekeeper. I had to darn 24 pairs of stockings for her when I came first & a couple of pair belonging to Mr Blake. In fact I didn't know who was boss. Anything she says goes anyway. It is she who is causing all the trouble. She threatened me that she go to jail for me. I told Mr Blake about her & I said I couldn't stick the way she was treating e, and then he gave me notice

Then I wrote to you & I informed him I was doing so. I suppose that is why he wrote to you too. The next day he asked me to stay on & I said I wouldn't promise him anything until I heard from you.

I had to keep myself respectable in Mullingar & I had to have a smoke & when waiting at table I had to keep clean shirts shoes etc. The wages I was getting didn't allow me to pay cash for the clothes I got in Mullingar & food is very dear here. I took out accounts in a few shops in town so to get things on the bill & pay for them by degrees. That accounts for how I happen to owe money in Mullingar.

I didn't see Mr Blake yet today as he is in Dublin today but when he comes back I will ask him if I can remain in the job until you are able to fix me up.

I don't know what arrangements Mr Blake made with Mr Barrington as I wasn't present at the interview, but the following week Mr Blake told me that Mr Barrington told him he could kick beat & do whatever he liked with me. He knew that if he kicked & beat me I couldn't put on my cap & run home as I was miles & miles away from it. I wish I had never left my own Country. I was brought over under false pretences. I was too young to understand Barrington's mean ways I was very much afraid of him

I have been treated like a dog (?) met him. They say I was very impertinent. That's (?) they want to get out (?). But I consider my work was as good as theirs. If I was so impertinent why did Mr Barrington bring me with him?

I wish to thank you for the interest you are taking in my case & I hope you will do what you can to get me back to my own people and my own Country

Yours Respectfully

(Signed) Ali Ackbar Faraq

Letter from C Barrington 12 Lower Fitzwilliam St Dublin 30/7/24

Dear Akbar,

I am not anxious to know how you spend your two pounds per week but I give you my genial consideration. Let me have 7/6 per week till your debt of three pounds is paid

Your dog impertinence that you will come back to me I note and it is only fair to let you know that your return to me means the workhouse or jail for you.

Remember this & believe it

(Signed) C Barrington

Appendix 4: Letter Heading and Signature

