

The Shannon Legacy

Chapter 2 Thomas Francis Delaney Shannon III's Childhood

Welcome back to the second installment of the Shannon Legacy Project by Generation Co. I'm so thrilled you're here.

In Chapter 1, I presented the research objectives for this project: understanding the life and legacy of, first, Thomas Francis Shannon III; and, second, that of his wife Frances Marie Veronica Forrest. We read a letter Frances received after her husband, Tom, passed away in 1951, which shows us a bit about Tom's life on Pacific Street; however, there is more to learn. Today, we will explore the childhood and young adulthood of Thomas Francis Shannon IV, in Brooklyn, NY.

I also mentioned last week that the impetus for beginning the Shannon Legacy Project was the arrival of Phoebe Sonnad in New York. As part of this project, Phoebe and I spent an entire Sunday afternoon exploring the Brooklyn neighborhood in which Tom III, and his wife Frances, grew up.

As I have said before, we start at the beginning... Thomas Francis Delaney Shannon III (yes, his name really was that long) was born on October 27th, 1891 in Manhattan; 302 West Houston Street to be exact. His parents, Lieut. Thomas Francis Shannon II and Mary Catherine Delaney, welcomed Tom III into the world at the ages of 32 and 31, respectively.

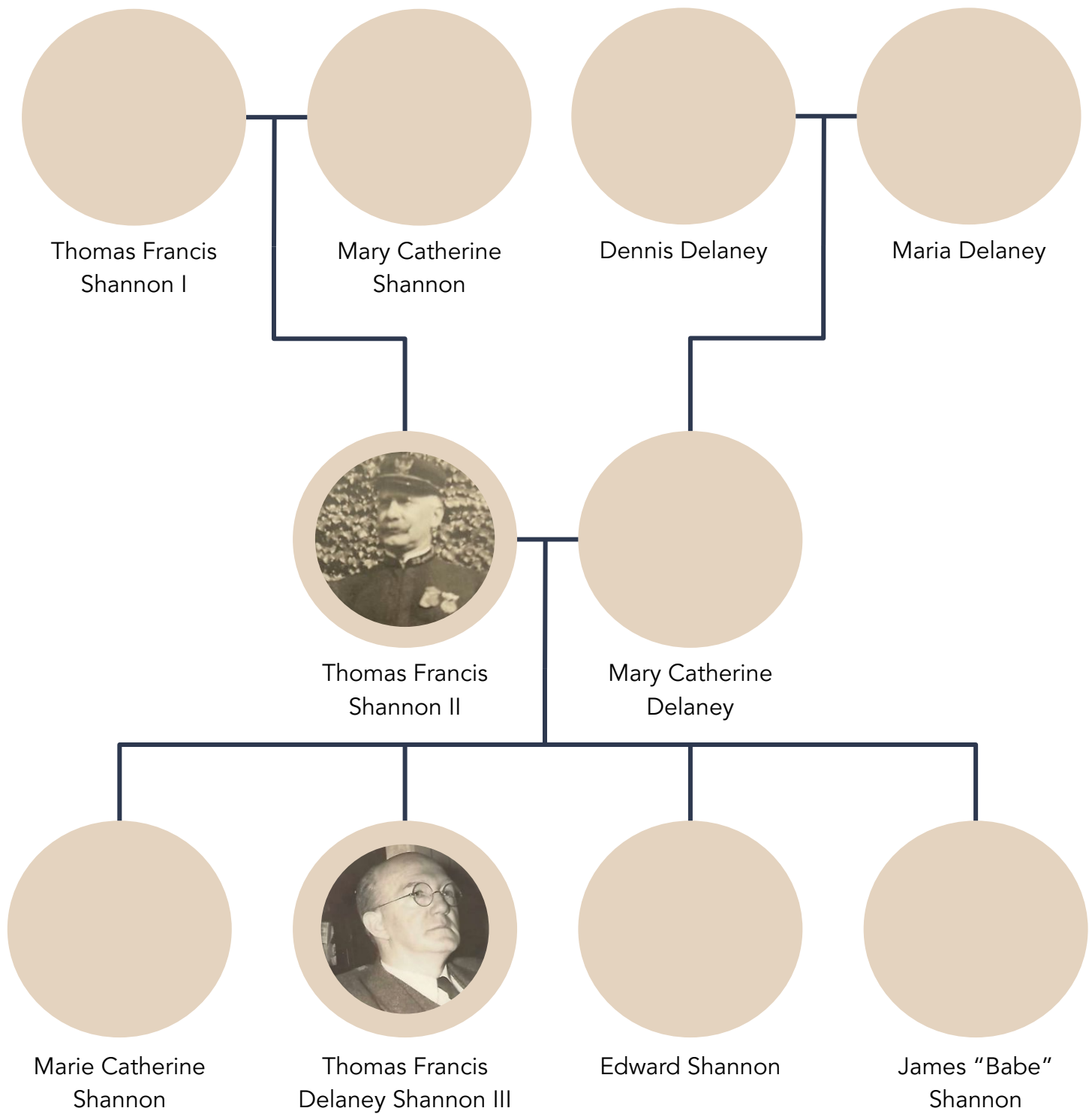
Lieut. Tom II had been born in New Jersey, whereas his wife grew up in New York City. Both Lieut. Tom II and Mary Catherine were raised by Irish immigrant parents, working to provide a better future for their children than they had experienced in the Irish countryside.



*(left) Tom
Shannon III
as an adult*



*(above) Tom Shannon II, dressed in his Bandmaster
attire; father of Thomas Francis Shannon III*



COUNTY OF NEW YORK, CITY OF NEW YORK. STATE OF NEW YORK. RECEIVED AND BUREAU OF RECORDS, HEALTH DEPARTMENT. NOV 5 1891 Name of Child, <i>Thomas Francis Shannon</i> Name and address of person making this report, <i>John P. Delaney</i> Signature, <i>[Signature]</i> Residence, <i>571 Rutherford St</i> DATE OF REPORT, <i>189</i>		No. of Certificate, <i>39078</i> 39078	
Name.	<i>Thomas Francis Delaney</i>	Sex.	<i>Male</i>
Color.	<i>White</i>	Date of Birth.	<i>October 27th/891</i>
Place of Birth.	<i>302 West Horsetown St.</i>	Father's Name.	<i>Thomas F. Shannon</i>
Residence.	<i>302 West Horsetown</i>	Birthplace.	<i>New Jersey</i>
Age.	<i>32</i>	Occupation.	<i>Musician</i>
Mother's Name.	<i>Mary Catharine</i>	Mother's Name before Marriage.	<i>Delaney</i>
Residence.	<i>302 W Horsetown St</i>	Birthplace.	<i>New York</i>
Age.	<i>31</i>	Number of previous Children.	<i>1</i>
How many now living (in all).	<i>2</i>	Date of Record.	<i>NOV 5 1891</i>

Birth Certificate for Thomas Francis Delaney Shannon III



Tom III as an adolescent; Earliest known photograph of him in the Shannon collection

Tom III was the couple's second child; the eldest, Marie Catherine Shannon, had been born in 1890, and by 1895, the family of four lived at 664 Decatur Street in Brooklyn. The 1895 New York City Directory lists Lieut. Tom II as a "musician;" but more specifically, Lieut. Tom was known across Brooklyn for leading "Shannon's Twenty-third Regiment Band;" "which was regarded as the leading musical organization of Brooklyn and played for many years at the Emerald Ball and always opened the Brooklyn baseball season with a concert at the Dodgers' park," as was mentioned in Tom III's published obituary.



664 Decatur Street, Brooklyn

In 1900, the Shannon family still lived at 664 Decatur Street, and the home was most definitely full. Marie, ten years old at the time, and Tom III (age 6) lived a fun and disciplined childhood, attending school by day and playing in the streets of Brooklyn in the afternoons, while keeping an eye on their two younger siblings: Edward, who would be called "Ed" had been born in 1897, and by the summer of 1900, James (later known as "Babe") wasn't yet one year old.

The Shannon family lived in an owned home in Brooklyn, filled to the brim with family. In addition to the nuclear family of six; the home included Mary's parents, Dennis and Maria Delaney. Dennis had retired as a grocer dealer some months before summer; and he and Maria now helped care for their four grandchildren running around the Decatur Street home. Additionally, 75 year old housekeeper and Irish immigrant, Catherine Blarney helped care for the home and children.

By the summer of 1905, Tom II and Mary (both 40 years old) had moved their family to 1461 Pacific Street – a keystone setting in our family story. As the Shannon family settled into their new home, the older children rushed to the street, in search of new friends.



1461 Pacific Street, Brooklyn

As 14 year old Tom III ran outside, he was greeted by the neighbor across the street: Bill Lamm, another 14-year old boy who would also begin secondary school that fall. As it happened, both boys would study at Commercial High School, just a few blocks away; and they would become lifelong friends.

The other Shannon children explored the neighborhood as well: Marie was fifteen that summer, Ed was nine and James only seven. They made friends, attended school, and were subject to experiences their parents had never been afforded.

Setting the Scene: A Day in the Life at the Shannon Home on Pacific Street (1905)

It was a Monday morning in early April, and the Shannon household on Pacific Street was bustling with activity. Mary Catherine, the mother of the family, was up early preparing breakfast in the kitchen. She had already cooked up some bacon and eggs, and was in the process of making a pot of strong coffee. The smell of breakfast wafted throughout the house, waking up the rest of the family.



NYPL Records, Photograph of Commercial High School, c. 1929



Commercial High School, Spring 2023

Lieutenant Thomas Shannon, the bandmaster of the twenty-third regiment players in Brooklyn, emerged from his bedroom. He had already dressed in his uniform and was ready to leave for his morning band practice. As Lieut. Tom came down the stairs, he could hear the sounds of his younger boys, Ed and Jim, still in their bedroom upstairs. Meanwhile, Marie, the eldest Shannon child, was getting ready for school. She had already picked out her outfit for the day - a plaid skirt and white blouse - and was putting on her stockings. As she applied some light makeup, she heard her little brothers roughhousing in the next room.

Tom III, the second oldest Shannon child, was already dressed and waiting for his best friend and neighbor, Bill, to arrive for breakfast. The two boys attended Commercial High School together, and always walked to school in the mornings.

Downstairs in the kitchen, Mary set the table with plates, silverware, and napkins. She poured glasses of orange juice and set out a plate of toast. Soon after, Bill burst into the house, his leather satchel slung over one shoulder. "Good morning, Mrs. Shannon!" he called out cheerfully as he entered the kitchen. Catherine greeted him warmly and instructed him to take a seat at the table. She brought out a large platter of bacon and eggs, and poured coffee for everyone.

Eventually, the table was full - four Shannon children and a few neighbor friends busily scarfing down fuel for their day. As they ate, Tom and Bill discussed their plans for the day and caught up on the latest gossip from school. After breakfast, Marie headed off to school while the younger boys got ready for their own classes.

As Tom and Bill began their brief, five minute walk to school, Catherine began cleaning up the breakfast dishes. She thought about what to make for dinner that night - perhaps a traditional Irish meal of corned beef and cabbage, or maybe a pot roast.

Overall, life on Pacific Street was busy but full of love and warmth. The Shannon family was close-knit and enjoyed spending time together, whether it was over a meal, at a music performance, or just playing games in the backyard. Despite the challenges and struggles that came with living in Brooklyn in the early 1900s, they were grateful for each other and the life they had built.

By 1910, the Shannon family's household on Pacific Street had changed a bit. Lieut. Tom, Mary and their four children lived in the home as a family of six. Mary's parents were no longer in the home; additionally, the Shannon's servant, Caroline, had been replaced with Bridget McDonald, a 60-year old Irish-English immigrant who had come to New York in 1875.

Marie (20), Tom III (18), Ed (13), and James (11) were all enrolled in school in 1910. It is important to note their ages – Specifically, Marie and Thomas. Both were old enough to have finished their formal education; however, they each pursued secondary education. Tom III – now attending Fordham Law School – had graduated from Commercial High School in 1909, alongside his life-long friend, Bill Lamm.

In their later adult years, Tom III and Bill kept correspondence; a testament to their lifelong-friendship. When Tom III's brother Ed died in 1943, Bill wrote to Tom expressing his condolences, as well as some memories from their years living on Pacific Street, and attending Commercial High School.

Date: Around 1943
Subject: Letter from Bill Lamm to Thomas
 Francis Shannon III

Dear Grandpa,

Thanks for the note about your family, but I was very sorry indeed to learning about Ed's death and Marie's illness. I shall write the latter one of these days.

You didn't mention Babe. I trust that he hasn't also passed away.

As I told you, I looked for you at the Commercial Reunion and was much disappointed that you could not make it. You were the closest friend of my young manhood and your family was the finest family I have ever known.

My sister's boy, Buddie, is off with his wife and two children in Japan, he being an interpreter on MacArthur's staff. Think of it! Here is a lad who never got a decent mark in a language course in his life and yet the government employs him as an official interpreter. Of course, he never studied while in high school or during his brief stay in college.



Lizzy and Phoebe in front of their great-grandfather's High School

I remember Ed's rivalry with Chapin Weed for Ethel's affections while all of them were about 14. Ed said that while Chapin could supply ice cream during the summer, he could take Ethel to his father's band concerts during the winter. Poor Ethel. She had eight years of arthritis, desertion by her husband, and final death by fire.

As you know, Jack McCooey died three or four years ago from a heart attack. Everett now sings occasionally at the Dodger games.

So long Tom. It was great hearing from you again. I send my best to you and Marie and to your sister, the other Marie.

Bill.

This simple letter, typed on the scraps of Rutgers University note paper, gives us significant insight into Tom III's teenage years – specifically about his brothers and the Shannon family's nicknames. It seems Bill's nickname for Tom III was "Grandpa;" while James Shannon, Tom III's youngest brother, went by "Babe." This nickname makes sense, as my Nana recalled in 2012 that "Jim had played baseball in Brooklyn." Bill also notes that Tom III's wife, Frances Marie Veronica Forrest, went by "Marie" – another logical nickname, as she shared the name Frances with her mother.

Bill recalls Ed's affection for a neighborhood girl named "Ethel," – attempting to court her with band concert tickets. Presumably, the Shannon siblings had music as a central aspect to their childhood, with their father's multiple regiment band concerts and local fame.

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

The State University of New Jersey

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
September first

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

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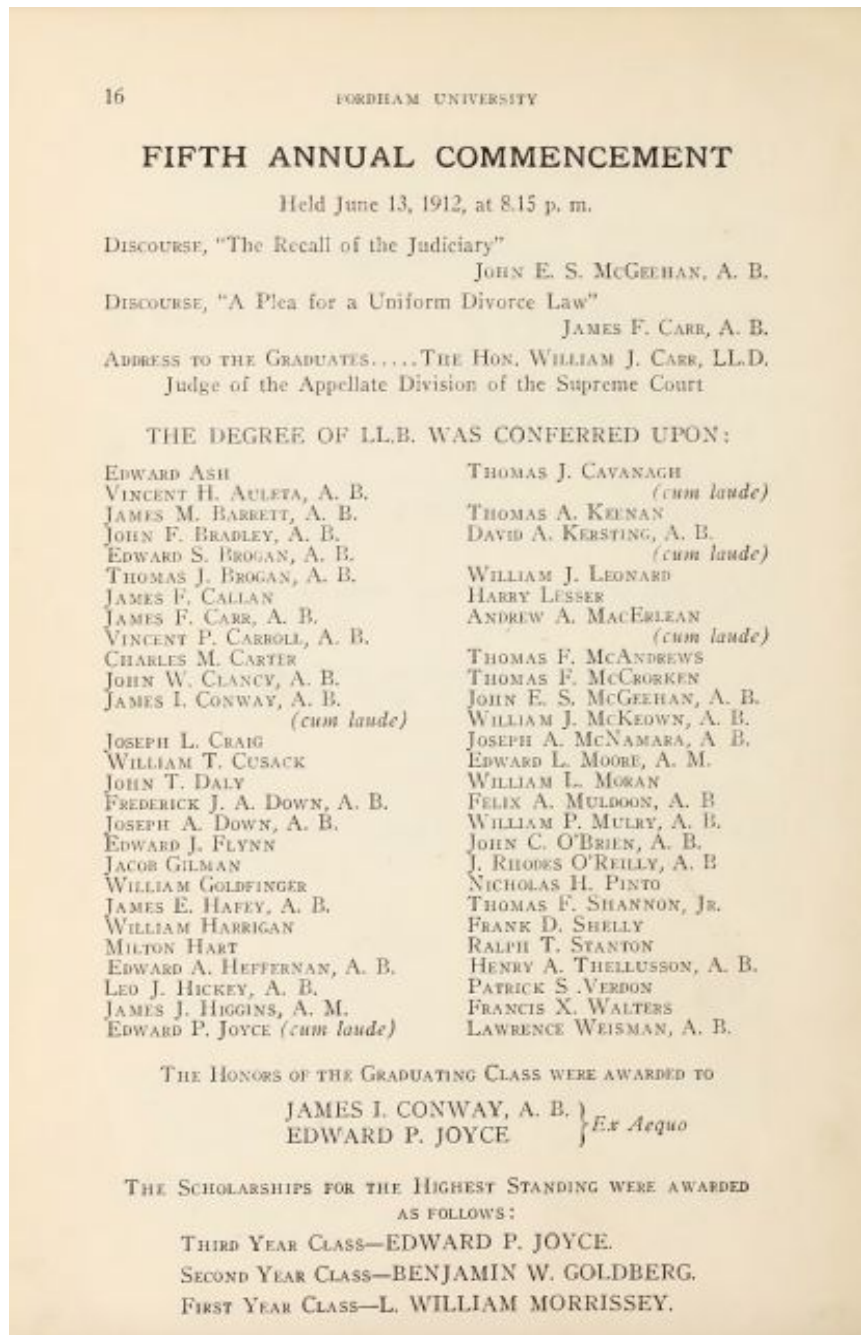
So long Tom. It was grand hearing from you again. I send my best to you and Marie and to your sister, the other Marie.

Letter from Bill Lamm to Tom Shannon III, c. 1943

After graduating from Commercial High School, Tom III attended Fordham Law School, where he graduated in 1912. Fordham's School of Law was authorized to open in 1904, holding the first law class in October of 1905. The registration increased rapidly in each successive year until it reached a total of two hundred and seventy-eight (278) for the year 1912–1913."

At the time of Tom's law school experience, Fordham accepted students eighteen years or older, with a four year high school degree. There was no need for a separate, undergraduate degree prior to law school; instead, students completed four years of dedicated law study. A student automatically failed if they missed more than 10% of attendance for a class.

My Nana was very proud of her father, Tom III; she spoke of him often, and regularly told stories of their time together. Now, as I think back, I'm not sure when I learned that great-grandfather Tom III attended Fordham Law School. I have always known he was a lawyer – it was a central aspect to the many stories Nana shared about her father, as was his role working for the Pennsylvania Railroad.



Fordham Law Pamphlet, 1913-1914

There's one story from Nana about her father's law work, in particular, that I remember clearly. As I sorted through old interviews and conversations with Nana, I stumbled upon a few lines of notes from 2015. The interview with my Nana reads:

"My Father worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad as a lawyer. Sometimes, on Saturdays, he let me go with him to his office in the city. We would walk down the street to the train station, and wait. My Father always knew when the train was coming, even before he saw it. He said he could feel it in his bones. He would lift me onto the first step of the train car, since it was too high for me to reach by myself. After twenty minutes or so, when the train pulled into Philadelphia, my Father would hold my hand real tight so we didn't get separated. We then walked right over to his office; sometimes he even let me hold his bag. When we reached his office my Father would put his bag on his desk, which was covered with papers - and sometimes a couple of the papers would slip off. He would spend all day signing those papers and then I got to blot the ink and put the letters in envelopes. It was a very important job. If I didn't do it, the mail would never leave his desk!"



Patricia (left) and Eileen (right) walk through Philadelphia with their father Tom III (center); perhaps on their way to the law offices; c. 1940

A few years after his Law School graduation, in 1915, Tom III fell asleep for the last time in his childhood home on Pacific Street. Tomorrow, he would marry the love of his life, and they would begin their own journey as a family together.