
Dick’s grandfather, Walter Sweetman, emigrated from Ireland to manage the Irish-American Colonization Company, an organization of farming communities established in Minnesota to provide a start for Irish immigrants in the new world. Generally referred to as the Sweetman Colonies, the venture was founded in 1880 by Walter’s cousin, John Sweetman, with the encouragement and help of John Ireland, Archbishop of St. Paul. John was a member of Parliament who worked for Irish Home Rule and, though instrumental in the foundation of the Sinn Fein party, strongly opposed armed insurrection. In Ireland, the families of these first cousins were associated with the Sweetman Breweries, dating to the 18th century, one of which was situated on St. Stephen’s Green, near the present site of the Keough-Naughton Notre Dame Study Centre in Dublin.

The Sweetman Collection began with more than 470 volumes from Richard C. Sweetman’s home, Clohaman, in County Wexford, Ireland. The collection included four manuscript ledgers containing tenants’ accounts from the 1830s to the 1860s, as well as periodicals and books ranging from the 18th to the 19th centuries, including works of history, biography, literature, economics, agriculture, religion, and the sciences.