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June/July 2009

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## THE OTHER EMERALD ISLE

One place that you forgot to mention in your Global Irish issue – *Hawaii*.

Predating statehood, the annual St. Patrick's Day Parade in Waikiki has been presented by the Hawaii chapter of the Society of the Friends of St. Patrick (formerly the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick) since March 17, 1956, on the first anniversary of the Society's charter.

Through the course of the year a number of the members of the Society worked to organize the event, but Jim Murphy was the man in charge on parade day. Early on, things seemed to be a bit chaotic but everything came together and at 12:00 noon the parade began.

"Somehow, we pulled order out of chaos and were able to slot every group in where they belonged and then, under the flawless direction of Chuck Wall, merge the marching bands as they streamed by the staging area. We also owe a lot to the Honolulu Police Department," Murphy said.

A little after one o'clock the parade arrived at its terminus, Kapiolani Beach Park, after which participants and spectators, alike repaired to their favorite pub for a pint or two and some great Irish music.

Almost every town has at least one Irish pub. In Honolulu, halfway around the world from the other Emerald Isle, you'll find six – Kelly O'Neil's, the Irish Rose, O'Toole's, Murphy's, J.J. Dolan's and Ferguson's, and St. Paddy's Day is the biggest, most important day of the year for the pubs and their patrons.

We went first to Kelly O'Neil's in Waikiki for corned beef and Guinness and then went on downtown for the St. Patrick's Day block party on Nuuananu Avenue. At 5:00 it was crowded. By 10:00, when I left, you could hardly make your way through the throngs. Thousands turned out for the parade and for the block party – the majority of them decked out in emerald green. For it doesn't matter your last name or your ancestry, on St. Patrick's Day we're all Irish.

Along with the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the Society of the Friends of St. Patrick also holds its annual Emerald



Celebrating St. Patrick's Day in Hawaii.

COURTESY MICHAEL KERRIGAN

Ball a week or so prior to the day of the parade. The Ball is a fundraiser for the Society's education fund, which awards scholarships to high school students.

Information regarding the Society, as well as a slide show of the 2009 St. Patrick's Day events can be found at the website: [www.irishclubhawaii.com](http://www.irishclubhawaii.com)

*Michael D. Kerrigan  
Kane'ohe, Hawaii*

## PARADE NUMBERS

Can you tell me how many marchers and spectators were there in this year's St. Patrick's Day parades in New York City, Boston and Chicago?

I'm a German student and I need the numbers for my M.A. thesis "Being Irish for one day: Irish cultural heritage in the United States and Great Britain."

*Janine Hamann  
Received by e-mail*

**Editor's Note:** Typically the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade attracts around two million spectators and over 150,000 marchers. Chicago's parade had 400,000 spectators this year. Boston normally draws about one million viewers. The South Boston parade, one of several smaller parades in Boston, held on March 15 this year, normally draws a crowd of somewhere between 400,000 and 900,000.

## WIGS ON THE GREEN

Please tell me where, why, or who started the custom, the awful custom, of Irish dancers wearing those ugly and ridiculous-looking wigs! I grew up in Ireland and did Irish dancing, but I was never ever subjected to wearing a wig! I had my own hair, and I know all of the dancers I've seen over the years are not bald – so why the wigs?

My two granddaughters took Irish dancing for five years, and their mother (my daughter) stopped them dancing because of the horrendous wigs! I wonder if anyone out there agrees with me.

I love my *Irish America* magazine and look forward to every issue.

*Jean Burns  
Hammond, Indiana*

**Editor's Note:** The editor agrees that wigs, costumes, glitter and fake tans are turning our beloved Irish dancing festivals into something verging on the ridiculous. Let's hear from the readers.

## THE GLOBAL IRISH

The April/May "Global Irish" issue is beautifully done – like a buffet. I found myself going back time and again to read ones I had skipped over, and each time I was glad to have done so. The great range of Irish success is truly impressive, especially the gracious stretch in the case of Falmouth Kearney. Could you please tell how your staff discovered [that Falmouth was President Obama's third great-grandfather]? For the past ten years I have tried to find out more about my own great-great-great-grandfather. The Celtic Cross monument that marks his grave in Baltimore's Sacred Heart Cemetery simply says: "Patrick Michael Conway, native Westport, Co. Mayo, born 1832, died March 13, 1892."

I do know that he came to Baltimore in 1852 and records show he had a wife, Bridget, and a saloon by 1862, several children and a second saloon by 1872, and also a grocery store by 1882.

How do I find out who his parents were and where he was born?

*Carroll F.X. Conway  
Parkville, Maryland*

**Editor's Note:** Megan Smolenyak, who researched President Obama's Irish roots, says that she "doesn't have the luxury of taking on individual clients." There are many good resources online, including [www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie) – which holds a wide variety of records relevant to Irish genealogy and local history. **IA**

**Send letters to:** Irish America, 875 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 2100, NY NY 10001. Or E-mail [irishamag@aol.com](mailto:irishamag@aol.com). Please include name, address, and phone number. Letters will be edited for length and clarity.

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875 SIXTH AVENUE,  
SUITE 2100, N.Y., NY 10001

TEL: 212-725-2993

FAX: 212-244-3344

E-MAIL: irishmag@aol.com

WEB: <http://www.irishamerica.com>

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**Founding Publisher:**

Niall O'Dowd

**Co-Founder/Editor-in-Chief:**

Patricia Harty

**Vice President of Marketing:**

Turlough McConnell

**Art Director:**

Marian Fairweather

**Assistant Editors:**

Tara Dougherty

Kara Rota

**Copy Editor:**

John Anderson

**Advertising &  
Events Coordinator:**

Kathleen Overbeck

**Financial Controller:**

Kevin M. Mangan

**Writer at Large:**

Bridget English

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**MARK AXELROD**

is a professor and former Chair of English and Comparative Literature at Chapman University, California, and a multiple award winner for his screen-writing and fiction.



**TARA DOUGHERTY**

is currently pursuing a B.A. in English Literature with focuses on Creative Writing and Irish Studies at NYU. A native New Yorker, Tara is a second-generation Irish-American who traces her Irish roots to counties Roscommon, Galway and Kerry.

**MARIAN BETANCOURT**

is a freelance writer living in New York. She has published many books and articles and previously wrote about the Moran Tugs for *Irish America*.



**PATRICK GRIFFIN**

is the Madden Hennebry chair in history at the University of Notre Dame. He has written books on Irish migration to the American colonies and the American Revolution in its Atlantic context. He is currently working on a biography of Sir William Johnson, an Irish Catholic who was adopted by the Mohawk.

**SHARON NÍ CHONCHÚIR**

is a regular contributor to *Irish America*. She lives and works in West Kerry, Ireland, and much of her writing is concerned with the changing face of modern Irish culture.



**CAHIR O'DOHERTY** is arts editor of *The Irish Voice*. Born in Derry, he's a graduate of the University of Ulster and



Yale University. Irish arts, culture, music and politics are his abiding passions. He hopes you'll be a regular "commenter" on his blog on IrishCentral.com.



**KARA ROTA** received her B.A. in May from Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York, and is thrilled to sign on as a new member of *Irish America's* editorial staff.

# Celebrating Irish Heritage in Holyoke



PHOTO: KIT DE FEVER

“For generations, the Irish, along with so many other immigrant and ethnic groups, came to America equipped often with nothing but their faith and an unbending belief that success was possible for all who were willing to work for it.”  
– Barack Obama, speaking at The White House on St. Patrick’s Day.

I wasn’t at the White House on St. Patrick’s Day. Despite lobbying all the muckety-mucks I knew, I never managed to procure an invitation. (I guess I better start courting the Chicago Irish – Hello? – didn’t you read that feature on the history of the Irish in Chicago just a couple of issues ago?)

In truth, I enjoyed being in New York on the big day. I caught the Sisters of Charity 700-strong contingent walking up Fifth Avenue (that was me shouting out to you, Sister Peggy), and that was something. The more I learn of the history of the Irish in America, the more respect I have for the nuns who hauled the children of those early Irish immigrants up on the first rung of the ladder and sent them on the road to success.

I also traveled to Holyoke, Massachusetts, where I received an award on behalf of *Irish America* and joined in the St. Patrick celebrations on March 22. That too was a wonderful experience.

I’m one of the lucky ones. As editor, I get to explore the grand history of the Irish in this country every day, but it was nice to connect the experience to a place. And if there is a quintessential place called Irish America, Holyoke would be it.

The story of the Irish in America – the long hours in the

mills, the dangerous work digging the canals, the tenacity of ancestors whose refusal to quit forged a stepping stone for future generations – all took place here in Holyoke. And today, though it is now home to the largest population of Puerto Ricans outside Puerto Rico, it’s still Irish in its heart. And it has one of the grandest parades in the country.

Holyoke’s hardscrabble roots made me think that our grand parades grew out of a desire to thumb our noses at the muckety-mucks. Separately we didn’t have much but together we were a force. So we washed our faces, put on our best suits and put on a show because that’s what gave us the courage to go on.

We are at our best when our knowledge of our own story gives us understanding and empathy for others, and one of the things I liked about Holyoke was the diversity of the parade – the French Canadians, Latinos, and Shriners that marched. For though we have our own wonderful and unique experience, we know that others do too.

I also truly appreciated all of you readers who lined the parade route, and gave a shout out, especially the couple who held up the Go Tipp[erary] sign.” Thank you for making me feel appreciated.

I love bringing the story of Irish America to you, but in truth, sometimes I feel like I’m just channeling the ancestors.

This time around it was Thomas “Meagher of the Sword.” As we were readying a piece for this issue on a bas-relief in Waterford honoring the great Fenian, Civil War General, and Governor of Montana, publisher Niall O’Dowd called from Notre Dame (by the way, Notre Dame’s “Fight Song” was composed in Holyoke!) to say he’d found Meagher’s sword (see Pg. 54), and, as we were going to press, I received a call from Montana about plans to unveil a memorial to General Meagher on June 28.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I enjoyed putting it together. Thanks, Carroll Conway, for calling the Global Irish issue (Apr./May) a buffet that you can return to again and again (Letters Page). I too feel that a good magazine is like a good meal, easy to prepare when you have all the right ingredients – and in the story of Irish America, those fixings are never in short supply.

God bless.



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Senator John F. Kennedy and Jackie riding in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1958.



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By Frank Shouldice

## Government Faces Backlash at Polls

**T**HE government is facing a severe backlash at the polls with the local authority and European parliament elections taking place in June. Fianna Fáil's popularity has continued to plummet amid a steadily worsening economic situation. The government – made up of Fianna Fáil and its Green Party coalition partners – has also attracted additional criticism by clumsy handling of a number of sensitive issues.

A serious drop in tax revenue has created a critical shortfall in state finances, prompting the government to introduce a so-called supplementary budget in March. Workers were hit by additional taxes, aimed at bringing in much-needed revenue as well as impressing the European Central Bank that Ireland is trying to steady its rapidly ailing finances.

Public reaction was predictably unfavorable, with particular anger aroused by the scrapping of double welfare payments traditionally paid at Christmas. Government departments also announced cutbacks across the board, with education and health services also hit. According to Finance Minister Brian Lenihan, every major state capital investment project is under review as the economic situation deteriorates.

Taoiseach Brian Cowen was also under strong pressure to cut the number of junior ministers in his cabinet. He finally caved in by reducing that complement from 20 to 15, but each junior minister demoted received a redundancy payoff worth about 50,000 euros, eliminating any cost saving.

In a time of widespread job losses, the government's willingness to reward itself so generously has sparked public fury. In his budget speech Minister Lenihan also promised to discontinue a series of financial bonuses awarded to long-serving TDs (parliamentary deputies). However, cutting these perks – which amount to 3,100

euros annual increments to TDs serving more than seven years – has since stalled on legal argument on whether existing arrangements can be revoked for TDs already in receipt of those increments.

And so a symbolic demonstration of elected representatives sharing the recessionary pain backfired into another shameful display of politicians simply looking after themselves in a time of national emergency. The electorate has



Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Minister Brian Lenihan.

taken notice, and candidates for the local and European elections are under intense fire over this issue.

Green Party leader John Gormley added to dissension within the coalition by suggesting that TDs should voluntarily give up the bonus. He was joined by fellow Green, Minister for Energy Eamon Ryan, but senior Fianna Fáil TDs rejected the call for voluntary cuts and the political stalemate continues.

While the virtual collapse in state revenue – estimated at a loss of some 8 billion euros this year in tax returns – has forced the government's hand, the worldwide crisis in financial markets has affected Irish banks as much as, if not worse than, seen everywhere else.

Irish banks have left themselves exposed to a series of huge property-based loans gone bad in the economic downturn. The state has provided billions to recapitalize the banks – going further in the case of Anglo-Irish Bank by actually

nationalizing it.

However, the astronomically expensive recapitalization move has failed to restore confidence in the banking sector. In a further measure, the government announced it would set up the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to try to bring banking debts under state control. "The whole purpose here is to provide better market stability and transparency in relation to the level of debts that are in the banks," Taoiseach Cowen told reporters.

It is intended that NAMA will quarantine the toxic debts of banks – estimated at almost 90 billion euros – and administer those bad loans at a premium to the banks that issued them in the first place.

It remains to be explained just how NAMA will operate, but the proposed agency has drawn serious criticism from many respected economists. An article in the *Irish Times* co-signed by 20 leading commentators said NAMA was

the wrong option. The article suggested that the government should instead be moving to nationalize Ireland's biggest banks, the Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Bank.

In response, economist Alan Ahearn, an advisor to the Finance Minister, countered that nationalizing the banks would be seen in the markets "as a sign that a bank has failed completely." He told a conference that NAMA would "help repair banks' balance sheets (and) get on with their everyday business" of lending so that setting it up means "the government is on the right track."

However, the obstacles are increasing weekly, if not daily. Based on current figures the IMF estimates it will cost about 24 billion euros to stabilize the Irish banks. This would amount to almost 14 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which would make it the largest-scale bailout among 19 developed economies under study.



PHOTO:AP

Ireland's Brian O'Driscoll holds aloft the Six Nations' trophy after his team beat Wales 17-15. At right are Prince William and President Mary McAleese.

## Irish Rugby Claims Famous Victory

**I**RELAND'S rugby team clinched its first Grand Slam in 61 years with a pulsating victory in Cardiff to achieve five wins in a row in the Six Nations championship. The Grand Slam, which for Ireland means beating Wales, England, Scotland, France and Italy in one season, seemed an unlikely ambition for coach Declan Kidney who took over at the end of 2008. Kidney discovered team morale at a very low ebb after serious underachievement in the World Cup, followed by championship performances far short of the potential promised under his predecessor Eddie O'Sullivan.

However, O'Sullivan's departure and Kidney's low-key managerial approach proved inspirational. The team gelled with Munster and Leinster players showing more pride and unity in an Irish jersey than they had displayed for some time.

The historic victory in Wales was a

monumental effort, although it took a very late drop-goal by out-half Ronan O'Gara to give Ireland a 17-15 lead. The drama didn't end there, however, and Wales almost denied a historic day with an injury-time penalty from near the halfway line. Stephen Jones' penalty dropped just short of the posts and the final whistle sounded to the delight of Irish players and fans, including Ulster out-half Jackie Kyle, a veteran of the 1948 team that last pulled off a Grand Slam.

Capping a magnificent season for Irish rugby, Munster talisman Paul O'Connell was named captain of the British and Irish Lions to tour South Africa this summer. O'Connell succeeds Brian O'Driscoll as the Lions leader. It was in recognition of Ireland's Grand Slam achievement that a record 14 Irish players were named to the 37-man Lions touring squad. Wales provided 13 players, England eight and Scotland two.

## Irishman Killed in Bolivian Shootout

**D**IPLOMATIC relations between Dublin and La Paz were strained following a shootout in the city of Santa Cruz in which an Irish citizen named Michael Dwyer was killed. It remains unclear what the 25-year-old Tipperary man was doing in Bolivia, but he was found in the company of a group of men described by the Bolivian authorities as "a band of terrorist mercenaries."

According to Bolivian security forces, the three men killed were part of a group plotting an assassination of President Evo Morales. A joint police/army operation centered on a hotel in Santa Cruz, and in a violent 30-minute shootout three men, including Dwyer, were killed. Two other men were arrested, and a cache of captured weapons was put on display afterwards.

News of Michael Dwyer's death was met with disbelief by his family in the village of Ballinderry, Co. Tipperary. His parents have demanded explanations for exactly what happened, but the Bolivian authorities objected to inquiries made by the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin. The authorities also resisted inquiries by the Croatian and Hungarian consulates about the other two fatalities. A post-mortem was conducted in Dublin when Dwyer's body was flown home. It was revealed that he died from a single gunshot wound to the chest but otherwise the autopsy was inconclusive.

"They have no authority to ask for an investigation," retorted President Morales. "It is very serious. I could think that they [Ireland, Croatia and Hungary] are the ones who sent them [the mercenaries] here to attack democracy."

## News In Short



Roy Keane, former captain of the Irish international soccer team.

• **ROY KEANE, former captain of the Irish international soccer team**, returned to club management with a surprise takeover of English club Ipswich Town. Keane, whose international career ended with a fractious split with Irish boss Mick McCarthy prior to the 2002 World Cup, first stepped into club management with former international teammate Niall Quinn at Sunderland. After a very successful start he controversially quit the club after clashing with the new owner. Having spent five months away from the limelight, he has returned to the fray, announcing he would try to take Ipswich into the top league next season. . . .

• **IRELAND'S brief flirtation with electronic voting officially came to an end** when Minister for the Environment John Gormley announced that the electronic system purchased by the government would be scrapped. The e-voting software, which was deemed too unreliable to introduce at national level, has cost the taxpayer more than 51 million euros. "If you find at the end of the day that you cannot use machines, you clearly have to classify that as waste of money," said the Minister. "Frankly, I did not create this particular difficulty. I came into office and I had to deal with this problem and now I am dealing with it." . . .

• **SEVERANCE payments are expected to reach almost one billion pounds sterling** for police officers who quit service prior to the establishment of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Under the Patten Commission a key proposal in setting up the 7,500-strong PSNI was an effort to recruit a greater number of Catholic officers to the police force. Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers were offered generous terms to quit, and some 350 full-time officers and over 500 part-time officers accepted the terms. DUP member Ian Paisley Jnr. hit out at what he saw as a severe drain on resources. "We have gaps in terms of prison service, courts service, youth justice and policing which amounts to over 600 million pounds and yet in the next year and a half we will have to pay almost half of that in severance payments to get rid of skilled police officers."

## Cunningham Sentenced to 10 Years

**C**ORK businessman Ted Cunningham was sentenced to 10 years on charges of laundering over 3 million euros of the 26-million-pound Northern Bank haul. The audacious robbery of the Northern Bank in Belfast in December 2004 was one of the largest bank raids ever to have taken place in either Britain or Ireland. The scale of the haul prompted the Northern Bank to withdraw from circulation all its banknotes — valued at 300 million pounds — and replace them with new legal tender. It was a costly response, but it made the bulk of the stolen money traceable and virtually useless.

The Provisional IRA was suspected of carrying out the heist to provide a type of pension for former IRA activists who had gone along with Sinn Féin's cease-fire strategy. The robbery even threatened the peace process in Northern Ireland, with unionists demanding proof that Sinn Féin was not involved. However, the ringleaders behind the raid were never caught and the peace process, though weakened, survived the controversy.

Gardai (Irish police) monitored the financial markets for Northern Bank cash surfacing south of the border. As they mounted surveillance they discovered bundles of suspect cash being burnt by one individual who feared being caught in possession of stolen money. A garda raid on Cunningham's house in Farran, Co. Cork then uncovered over 3 million euros stashed around the property.

Cunningham, 60, was duly arrested and faced trial at the Cork Circuit Criminal Court. After a hearing that lasted 45 days he was convicted on all counts by majority verdicts. Jurors did not accept Cunningham's explanation that the money was part of a deposit paid by Bulgarians for a sand pit in Co. Offaly. His son Timothy Cunningham, 33, pleaded guilty to a single count of money laundering and received a suspended three-year sentence.

IA





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# The White House on St. Patrick's Day

Remarks by the President and the Vice President at the St. Patrick's Day Reception, held in The East Room, 7.30 p.m. March 17, 2009.

**THE VICE PRESIDENT:** Mr. President, Michelle Obama, my wife Jill, Prime Minister [Brian Cowen] and his wife Mary – all of you, welcome to the White House. It's an honor to be here with two great leaders and to welcome the Taoiseach to celebrate the friendship between our two great nations.

There's an old Irish proverb – and you have heard a million of them. And you know we Irish make them up when there's really not one [laughter] that says, "There's no strength without unity." Today we celebrate the strength derived from the unity of Irish and American people that we've shared for centuries – actually, since the very beginning.

We all know the importance of St. Paddy's Day in Irish history, but today is a pretty significant day in American history. It was on March 17, 1776, that British forces, under the leadership of Sir William Howe, evacuated Boston during the Revolutionary War [applause] – something we Irish and Americans share in common – and paving the way for the future victory of the Revolutionary War.

What some of you may know and many of you may not know, is that the password of the day at General Washington's encampment was "St. Patrick."

St. Patrick's Day has been entwined in American history from our beginning, from our birth. So when Americans are all done up in Kelly green – and they're engaging in revelry tonight – it's likely the result of a keen desire to know a great deal more about the American Revolution – or

maybe not. [Laughter.] Maybe not.

For me, of course, St. Patrick's Day and the Irishness it celebrates is inextricably tied to my character and to my personal history. My mother, Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden, who I went to see last night late in the hospital, was doing better today and said, "Joey, why are you here? Aren't you supposed to be at the White House?" And as I left her bedside, Mr. President, she said, "Joey, where is your green?" [Laughter.]

She taught me and everyone who came through our door to believe that bravery lives in every one of our hearts, and we should expect it to be summoned someday.

She taught us that failure at some point is inevitable in everyone's life, but giving up is absolutely unforgivable.

It's funny, I think she might have been tutoring Barack Obama on the side during this period [laughter] because he shares precisely that same ethic. It's an ethic that isn't unique to us Irish, although he has Irish blood, but it's one we fully embrace as a people.

It's an ethic of toughness and compassion, intellect and humor, deep honor and a deeper commitment to those around us. And that's the definition of my working with President Barack Obama. That's who he is. Come to think of it, maybe he should put, as was said today, an apostrophe after the "O" in his name. [Laughter.]

We were kidding inside about how I would occasionally [do that] – and Michelle even once introduced Jill as Jill O'Biden. [Laughter.]

Seriously, though, there's another old Irish proverb, and you know this one: "A friend's eye is a good mirror."

I hope this one is true, because when I look in the President's eye, I sure like what I see reflecting back.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's my honor to introduce the President of the United States of America, my friend Barack Obama. [Applause.]



Vice President Joe Biden pictured with his mother Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden at the Democratic Convention, 2008.

RON EDWARDS/AP

Now, they got me up at 2:30 a.m. in the morning to go see her, and she wondered why I didn't have my green on! Well, Mom, I got my green on tonight.

You know, the fact of the matter is, **I think my mother, like all of our mothers, is the soul, spirit and essence of what it means to be an Irish-American. She's spiritual, she's romantic, she honors tradition and understands that the thickest of all substances is blood, and the greatest of all virtues is courage.**



President Barack Obama and Taoiseach Brian Cowen on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, March 17.

**THE PRESIDENT:** Well, good evening, everybody. And welcome to St. Patrick's Day at the White House. [Applause.] I notice that the Boston crowd is a little rambunctious tonight. [Applause.] How about Chicago? [Applause.] That's what I'm talking about. [Laughter.]

It seems particularly fitting that we gather tonight in a house that was, after all, designed and built by an Irish architect.

We've had a wonderful day that began by meeting with a strong friend of the United States, Taoiseach Brian Cowen, who presented us with a gift of shamrocks from the people of Ireland – a symbol of the enduring ties between our nations, and a reminder of the everlasting promise of spring. And I'm so glad that we've gotten a chance to know him and his lovely wife Mary, who've just been entirely gracious today. And we're very grateful to them. As it turns out, the Taoiseach and I have something in common – I've mentioned this in previous speeches – both he and my great-great-great grandfather on my mother's side hail from County Offaly.

And I've also had the pleasure of meeting First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Northern Ireland, two men who have stood together to chart a historic path towards peace. They are with us tonight and deserve an extraordinary round of applause. [Applause.]

And I've just met with Sir Hugh Orde, the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland's Police Service, who is leading the efforts to bring those responsible for the recent

States of America will always stand with those who are working towards peace, and after seeing former adversaries mourning and praying and working together, I have never been more confident that this peace will prevail.

**Today serves as a solid reminder of just how deeply woven the ties between our two nations are. Irish signatures are on the founding documents; Irish blood has been spilled on our battlefields; Irish sweat went into the building of our greatest cities. Tens of millions of Americans now trace their roots back to that little island that has made such a large impact on America and on the world.**

For generations, the Irish, along with so many other immigrant and ethnic groups, came to America equipped often with nothing but their faith and an unbending belief that success was possible for all who were willing to work for it. That, after all, may be the reason that Americans identify so strongly with the story of St. Patrick. It's the story of believing in the unseen – and of making that belief a reality.

That's what the Irish did. They struggled to create a place for themselves in a distant land, and with a commitment to faith and family and hard work, they transformed that land in the process. And even after all the generations of becoming and being Americans, their descendants have never lost that enduring spirit that insists they proclaim themselves Irish still.

That same pride was embodied by a

man who once occupied this very house – a man who was only three generations removed from Ireland.

In the third year of his presidency, John F. Kennedy decided to make a trip to his ancestral home. One of his aides advised against it, telling the President, "You've got all the Irish votes in the country that you'll ever get." [Laughter.] "If you go to Ireland, people will say it's just a pleasure trip."

And President Kennedy replied, "That's exactly what I want, a pleasure trip to Ireland." [Laughter.]

And while there, he visited the port from which his great-grandfather embarked for America. And in an address to the Irish parliament and Ireland's American-born president, he reflected, as we all have from time to time, on the role chance plays over the generations in determining who we become.

I want to read a quote from him. "If this nation had achieved its present political and economic stature a century ago, my great-grandfather might never have left New Ross, and I might, if fortunate, be sitting down there with you," Kennedy said. "Of course, if your own President had never left Brooklyn [Eamon de Valera, Ireland's first president, was born in Brooklyn], he might be standing up here instead of me." [Laughter.]

It bears saying that if Patrick Kennedy hadn't left County Wexford, or if Thomas Fitzgerald hadn't left County Limerick, the American people might also have been denied one of the finest public servants of this or any age – Sir Edward M. Kennedy. [Applause.] Teddy Kennedy wishes he could be here tonight, but I guarantee this much: The very thought of all of you gathered here has his eyes smiling, and he expects you to party. [Laughter.]

He has, as much as anyone, reminded us of what it means to be Irish – that no matter what hardships may come, there is always joy to be found in this life; and that through hard work, tomorrow can be better than any day; that comfort is found amidst faith and family, love and laughter, poetry and song.

And tonight, in this room with all of you, I'm reminded of the words of my favorite poet, Yeats: "There are no strangers here – only friends you haven't met yet."

Happy St. Patrick's Day, everybody. God bless you. [Applause.] **IA**

# Irish eye on hollywood

By Tom Deignan

Dublin native **Colin Farrell** is teaming up with Irish-American screenwriter **William Monahan** for a new film, which seems to be an homage to a classic.

Farrell – who will be seen later this year subbing for Heath Ledger in the dead actor's final movie *The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus* – will star in *London Boulevard*. The film, which also features Anna Friel and Keira Knightley, begs to be compared to the Hollywood classic *Sunset Boulevard*, and not just because of the similar titles. In the 1950 classic, a down-and-out writer takes up with a former Hollywood star. In *London Boulevard*, Farrell falls for Knightley, who plays a similarly reclusive, though presumably younger, actress. Farrell's character is slightly different from the one portrayed in *Sunset* by William Holden. Farrell's character is an ex-con, while Holden was an aspiring screenwriter.

*London Boulevard* will be directed by William Monahan, who won an Oscar for his screenplay of the Boston Irish film *The Departed* starring Jack Nicholson. Monahan will make his directorial debut with *London Boulevard*, which should hit theaters in 2010.

One of the most inspirational true-life Irish-American stories is coming to the big screen later this year.

Back in 2001, just before St. Patrick's Day, a woman by the name of Betty Anne Waters was thrust into the limelight when her brother, Kenneth, had been declared innocent of a gruesome crime for which he had been serving jail time.

It was Betty Anne, however, whose role in the saga was most fascinating. Though Betty Anne, at one point, had dropped out of high school, she was so convinced of her brother's innocence that she worked her way through law school earning a degree so that

Right: Hilary Swank will star in a film about how Kenneth Waters, pictured below with his sister Betty Anne, was unjustly imprisoned, and how Betty Anne helped to free him.



Above: Colin Farrell, left, will star in *London Boulevard*, a remake of the classic *Sunset Boulevard*, which will be directed by William Monahan, right.

Also starring are **Melissa Leo**, who earned an Oscar nomination for her role in last year's indie immigration drama *Frozen River*. The role of Kenneth Waters will be played by **Sam Rockwell**.

After Kenneth was freed, Betty Anne gave many interviews and talked at length about her Irish background (both brother and sister were interviewed by *Irish America*).

This is not the first time Hilary Swank (a two-time Oscar winner in 1999 and 2004) has been linked to an Irish film project. She played spunky boxer Maggie Fitzgerald in Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* and also starred in *P.S., I Love You*, based on the novel by Irish writer (and Bertie's daughter) Cecelia Ahern.

The Tribeca Film Festival recently swept into New York City once again. The fest's opening film was *The Eclipse*, the latest project from prolific Irish scribe **Conor McPherson**. Best known for writing plays such as *The Weir* and *The Seafarer*, McPherson is also an accomplished filmmaker. His screenwriting/directing credits include *I Went Down*, *Endgame* and *The Actors*.

*The Eclipse* (directed and written by McPherson and Irish writer Billy Roche) is about a widower who has begun seeing mysterious things in his house. Things only get stranger when he meets two authors who become involved in his life.

The film, which stars Irish veteran **Ciaran Hinds** as well as Irish American **Aidan Quinn**, is certainly generating buzz. Right before the film screened at Tribeca, *Variety* magazine said that *The Eclipse* is "a film of such seductive grace, humor and startling side trips into buttocks-clenching ghastriness that [audiences] won't know what to make of it (although it won't keep them from wanting to visit Ireland immediately). ... Ciaran Hinds and Aidan Quinn are as good here as they've ever been."

No word yet on when *The Eclipse* will hit U.S. theaters.





A scene from director J.T. Petty's *The Burrowers*.

Speaking of **Aidan Quinn**, he was a busy man at Tribeca. The Irish American – who has appeared in dozens of movies including *Michael Collins* and *This Is My Father* – also starred in another Tribeca film, *Handsome Harry*, alongside **Steve Buscemi** and **Campbell Scott**.

*Handsome Harry* is about a seemingly content man whose best friend becomes ill, forcing both to confront uncomfortable questions about their past. *Handsome Harry* should be in theaters later this year.

**Liam Neeson**, who is mourning the sudden loss of his wife Natasha Richardson following a skiing accident in March, must be hoping that work will help the healing process.

Neeson has agreed to star, alongside **Ralph Fiennes**, in *Clash of the Titans*, which will begin shooting soon in the United Kingdom.

Just as with the 1981 version of *Clash of the Titans* (which featured acting legends Laurence Olivier, Claire Bloom and Maggie Smith, alongside Harry Hamlin and Burgess Meredith), this new *Clash of the Titans* will be about famous warring gods of mythology. Early word is that Neeson will play Zeus to Fiennes' Hades.

Another actor struggling with loss, **John Travolta** – whose son Jett died earlier this year following what is believed to be a seizure – will star alongside Irish heartthrob **Jonathan Rhys Meyers** in *From Paris With Love*, set to be released early next year.

The thriller, to be directed by Pierre Morel, is about a young embassy worker (Meyers) and a U.S. secret agent who are sent to Paris and can't seem to stay out of each other's way.

It is not director Morel's first thriller starring an Irishman. He also directed Liam Neeson's smash hit *Taken*.

On to cable TV news. One of the major cable networks is expected to pick up a provocative, 10-hour mini-series about the Kennedy family being produced by one of the creators of the smash TV hit *24*.

Simply entitled *The Kennedys*, the mini-series is the brainchild of Joel Surnow, an outspoken Hollywood conservative who has decided to put his own twist on one of America's most famous liberal families.

According to publicity materials: "*The Kennedys* takes an inside look behind the secret doors of the White House, [and] the soiled and crooked steps it took to get there. It also tells the historical stories that are associated with the Kennedy era – the Bay of Pigs, the Missile Crisis, the civil rights struggle, the

mob connection – each one told in the context of personal, Kennedy-family dramas."

Another producer, Michael Prupas, tried to play down the notion that this would be some kind of hit job on Irish America's royal family.

"This will be the most interesting family saga to be brought to the screen in a very long time," Prupas said. "It will be surprising, arresting and truthful ... with human drama at its core. The series is neither a hatchet job nor a valentine."

It is not often that the Irish immigrant experience finds its way into a slasher/horror flick. But that's just what happens in director J.T. Petty's *The Burrowers*, which is out on DVD now.

Set on the western U.S. frontier of the 1870s, the film follows a group of settlers who are trying to simply survive. Among them is Irish immigrant Fergus Coffey (played by Irish actor **Karl Geary**), whose wife is presumed to have been murdered by Native Americans. As men ride out to seek revenge, only to vanish, it seems there may be something supernatural and very deadly at work.



Gabriel Byrne narrated *Butte, America*

Finally, two new Irish documentaries are making the rounds at festivals. *Scenes from a Parish*, by documentary filmmaker James Rutenbeck, recently premiered at the Massachusetts Museum of Fine Arts. The film, produced over four years at Saint Patrick parish in Lawrence, Massachusetts, explores how a reliably Irish Catholic parish transforms as more and more Hispanics move in.

Meanwhile, *Butte, America* recently played close to home at Montana's Emerson Center for the Performing Arts and Culture. The documentary (narrated by **Gabriel Byrne**) explores how the Irish and other immigrant families worked the mines in the Montana town that gives the film its name.

*Butte, America* was produced and directed by Pam Roberts, a Montana native who spent nearly a decade making the film. Butte native Edwin Dobb, a descendant of Irish copper miners, co-wrote the script with Academy Award nominee Eugene Corr. Watch out for further screenings, including one at Glucksman Ireland House at NYU.

IA

# How the Irish Took Over Cable TV

By Tom Deignan

It's been 10 years now since HBO took a chance on a little drama called *The Sopranos* and changed the face of television. When *The Sopranos* hit the airwaves in 1999, no one could have predicted that this offbeat drama about the mob and psychoanalysis would have been the first of many great cable dramas to win prestigious awards and earn huge ratings.

But here's another thing few people would have predicted: that the Irish would come to dominate critically acclaimed drama all over the cable landscape.

Think about the best of the recent crop of dramas on cable: *In Treatment*, *Rescue Me*, *Brotherhood*, *The Tudors*, even *The Wire*, which ended its glorious run last year.

All have Irish actors or deal explicitly with Irish-American characters or themes.

Perhaps most importantly, there is little in the way of shallow or stereotypical Irishness in these shows. In some ways, the 2000s have been a high point in the exploration of Irishness in pop culture.

That might have seemed unlikely a few years back when *Rescue Me* and *The Wire* hit FX and HBO respectively. These two shows feature classic Irish-American male characters – the firefighter (Denis Leary as Tommy Gavin) and the cop (Dominic West as Jimmy McNulty).

Furthermore, both Gavin and McNulty have time-tested Irish flaws – bad tempers, drinking problems, lapsed-Catholic guilt.

However, once these shows started gathering steam, they explored the dark, complex sides of the Irish experience in big cities, in a way that seemed appropriate for the 21st century. For Tommy Gavin, it was dealing with life after so many of his fellow firefighters (many Irish-American) died on 9/11. For McNulty, it was the difficulties of patrolling a city (Baltimore) where the Irish no longer rule the streets or the government.

But the crusading McNulty kept the spirit of the Irish cop alive. Among other things, whenever a cop retired (or died), all the cops would retire to a bar, get roaring drunk and sing. But they would not sing “Danny Boy.” Nope. They would sing Shane MacGowan and The Pogues’ “Body of an American,” about a raucous Irish wake.

“There was uncles giving lectures / On ancient Irish history. / The men all started telling jokes. / And the women they



Dominic West



Brotherhood



Edie Falco

got frisky. / At five o'clock in the evening / Every b\*\*\*\*rd there was piskey.”

Fittingly, the stars of *Rescue Me* – which is on FX Tuesday at 10 p.m. – and *The Wire* knew a thing or two about the Irish experience in real life: both Leary and West are the sons of immigrant parents.

If *The Wire* and *Rescue Me* played with classic Irish-American stereotypes, Showtime's *Brotherhood* (Sundays at 8 p.m.) dug far and deep into the conflicts inherent in the Irish-American psyche: in the show, one brother is a politician, the other a criminal. Both must contend with one of the towering female characters in TV history, the boys' mother, brilliantly played by Fionnula Flanagan.

Of course, the lines between right and wrong, family and foe, are blurry. Like *The Wire* (not to mention Edwin O'Connor's novel of 50 years earlier *The Last Hurrah*), *Brotherhood* explores the waning days of Irish-American influence, and the lengths to which the Irish will go to cling to whatever slice of power they continue holding on to. The fact that *Brotherhood* also has the whiff of real life (the Bulger brothers of Boston come to mind) gives the show even wider resonance.

Once *Rescue Me*, *The Wire* and *Brotherhood* proved that great drama could be made about characters who were not named Tony Soprano, executives began turning to Irish-born talent. Gabriel Byrne took on the challenging role of psychoanalyst Paul Weston in HBO's *In Treatment*. Based on an Israeli drama, the show's ambitious first season aired every night of the week, showcasing Dr. Weston's five patients. The show now airs Sunday at 9 p.m.

At the same time, but over on Showtime, Jonathan Rhys Meyers stars as King Henry VIII in the third season of *The Tudors*, which shows just how contemporary the trials and tribulations of a 16th-century royal family can be.

Interestingly, in June, yet another strong Irish-American character will show up on cable. Edie Falco will star in Showtime's *Nurse Jackie*, about a nurse coping with adversity at work and home. Initially, Falco's name in the show was Jackie O'Hurley. Producers played up her tough Irish girl image. But reports now suggest the character's name has been changed to Jackie Peyton.

Is the great Irish moment of cable over? Time will tell. Either way, it has produced some of the greatest moments of TV drama ever.

# Treading the Boards

With *The Cambria*, Irish playwright and actor Donal O’Kelly’s recent play at The Irish Arts Center in Manhattan, he has stepped to the front line of contemporary Irish playwrights. In fact, in terms of theatrical skill and thematic ambition, he already has most of his contemporaries beaten.

O’Kelly’s subtle play about the African-American ex-slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass’s voyage to Ireland in 1845, starring Sorcha Fox, could easily have been a deadly dull sermon about the need to protect universal human rights. But in O’Kelly’s hands it becomes something rich and strange, an absorbing meditation on what makes us human, what connects us to each other and what tears us apart.

The production, directed by Raymond Keane, is nimble and evocative, conjuring a ship on the open seas and all the male and female passengers who populate it. Fox is especially good at these transformations between roles, playing male and female characters so convincingly that you’re swept up by the storyline from start to finish.

The year is 1845, and the 30-year-old famed abolitionist Douglass is sailing for Europe aboard a ship called *The Cambria*, fleeing the hostile forces in the United States determined to halt his call for the end of slavery in the Southern states.

A former slave himself, Douglass knew the fate that awaited him in America and decided to take his abolitionist message to Europe to enlist its help. Visiting Ireland for the first time, he was astonished to receive a hero’s welcome from vast crowds of sympathetic, long-suffering Irish Catholics familiar with his career and his recently published autobiography.

Daniel O’Connell himself arrives in Cork – then known as Queenstown – to welcome Douglass at the dock. O’Kelly is aware of the potent overlaps between various strains of racial and religious oppression, but he does not belabor his points, he simply lets them emerge, to often devastating theatrical effect.

2009 seems to be the year for prodigiously gifted Irish actresses (after Maxine Linehan’s turn in Irish playwright Jacqueline McCarrick’s *The Mushroom Pickers* in February comes Fox’s turn in *The Cambria*). Fox’s concentration, her physical poise and her pitch-perfect accent make her one of the most impressive Irish actors this reviewer has ever seen.

Meanwhile, if Manhattan’s Irish Repertory Theatre never stages another production they should still be garlanded in olive leaves and paraded down Broadway for having the artistic stamina to bring us what they are understatedly calling the Yeats Project, a month-long

any doubt about it.

The fact is that his hard-hitting play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* is about as incendiary a piece of theater as you’ll ever witness, and in the Irish Rep’s spirited new production Fiana Toibin is so captivating in the title role that she’ll have you reaching for your pitchforks before she’s taken her final bow.

There’s no denying the beauty of Yeats’s language or the richness of his themes and characterizations. In fact, his skills as a writer and dramatist are so self-evident and multifaceted that at times the only response they generate is near speechless awe.

In the utterly electrifying *A Full Moon*



Left to right: Donal O’Kelly and Sorcha Fox in a scene from *The Cambria* at The Irish Arts Center. Patrick Fitzgerald and Terry Donnelly in *The Pot of Broth* by W.B. Yeats at The Irish Rep’s Yeats Project. Maxine Linehan stars in *Who Am I?: A Tribute To Petula Clarke*.

festival of all 26 rarely performed plays written by Ireland’s greatest poet, William Butler Yeats.

Between them, directors Charlotte Moore and Ciaran O’Reilly have staged no less than eight full productions of Yeats plays on the same stage in the same month with the same actors. “Project” is much too academic a word to describe their achievement with this series of plays, lectures and readings.

Featuring haunting original scores by *Riverdance* composer Bill Whelan, and boasting spellbinding choreography by Barry McNabb, all of the new productions are thrilling to look at and have been brought vividly to life.

“Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?” wondered Yeats toward the end of his long life. He was contemplating the politically galvanizing response to one of his most famous plays and it says a lot about Yeats’s worldview that he was still in

*in March*, Amanda Quaid (last seen opposite Daniel Radcliffe in *Equus* on Broadway) gives a performance of immense power as the Irish Queen who calls for the head of the swineherd who has insulted her. Quaid’s work is accompanied by music played and sung by William Ward, Amanda Sprecher and Justin Stoney, in a performance that is never less than magical.

In *The Pot of Broth*, Terry Donnelly matches the always-excellent Patrick Fitzgerald head for head in this lively Irish folk tale that looks as if it could have been written before Saint Patrick first made landfall in Ireland. Donnelly’s instincts as a performer are matchless, and Fitzgerald is perfectly cast as her foil.

You can next catch Maxine Linehan channeling Petula Clark in her one-woman show *Who Am I? A Tribute to Petula Clark* at The Laurie Beechman Theater on 42 Street every Thursday in May at 7 p.m. —By Cahir O’Doherty



Irish American of the Year Dr. Kevin Cahill is presented a Waterford Crystal bowl by *Irish America* founding publisher Niall O'Dowd, Taoiseach Brian Cowen and editor-in-chief Patricia Harty.



Irish Minister Mícheál Martin, philanthropist Chuck Feeney, Taoiseach Brian Cowen and Helga Feeney.



Actress Vanessa Redgrave and *Irish America's* Vice President of Marketing, Turlough McConnell.

# A Historic Evening

Celebrating the Global Irish  
and the launch of IrishCentral.com

Photos by Jimmy Poster and Nuala Purcell

Saluting the global Irish was the theme of *Irish America's* annual celebration, which this year was held at the American Irish Historical Society in New York on March 15. It was a night of stars, including Irish Taoiseach Brian Cowen, Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, actresses Vanessa Redgrave and Roma Downey, and such notables as philanthropist Chuck Feeney, Grand Marshal Mike Gibbons, and writers Maureen Dowd and Thomas Cahill. All were on hand to applaud Irish American of the Year, Kevin Cahill, the renowned doctor who also served as American Irish Historical Society president, and to witness the launch of IrishCentral.com by *Irish America's* sister company. Irish-born actress Roma Downey received this year's Spirit of Ireland Award for her work with Operation Smile.



Writer Maureen Dowd with Ciaran Staunton and *Irish America* publisher Niall O'Dowd.



Taoiseach Brian Cowen, Niall O'Dowd, IrishCentral's director of operations, Joe Pennisi, and *Irish America's* co-founder and editor Patricia Harty watch as the Taoiseach presses the button to launch IrishCentral.com.



Publisher Niall O'Dowd and Martin McGuinness, Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister, present the Spirit of Ireland Award to Irish actress Roma Downey for her work with Operation Smile.



The American Irish Historical Society building on Fifth Avenue, New York.



Chris Cahill, director of the AIHS, Ambassador Elizabeth Frawley Begley and Taoiseach Brian Cowen.



Robert O'Connell, son of Emmett.



Mary O'Connor, sustainability consultant.



ABOVE: Patricia Harty pictured with Mike Gibbons and his wife Cynthia. Mike, who recently retired from Estee Lauder after a long career, served as Grand Marshal, New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade, 2009. He is president of the Ireland U.S. Council.

RIGHT: Emmett O'Connell, the Bronx-born oilman and explorer.



TOP: Niall O'Dowd, his daughter Alanna and Senator Chuck Schumer.

RIGHT: Mark Burnett, his wife Roma Downey, Amb. Elizabeth Frawley and Operation Smile founders Dr. William and Kathy Magee



Attracta Lyndon, head of the Irish Business Organization, and U.S. operations for Dan Dooley Rent-a-Car, with Taoiseach Brian Cowen.



Actress Vanessa Redgrave and Dr. Kevin Cahill, Irish American of the Year and the longtime president of the American Irish Historical Society.



The Washington Square Harp and Shamrock Orchestra. Left to right: Daniel Neely, Gail Neely, Linda Hood and Scott Spencer. Not pictured: Liz Kennedy, Liz Hanley and Suzanne Grossman.



Kieran, Eloise, and Irish America's comptroller Kevin Mangan.

Brian Stack, Managing Director, CIE Tours, Anne Marie Stack, Geraldine and Joe Byrne, head of Tourism Ireland North America.

# The Kentucky Derby Winner Has an Irish Ancestor

Mine That Bird has roots that go back to a famous Irish racehorse.

**K**entucky Derby winner Mine That Bird has a famous Irish ancestor or two. He also has an Irish Disney connection, which means that when the movie is made – and you know there’s going to be a movie – perhaps we will see it on the Disney Channel. Here’s the story:

Going on the theory that every good horse has Irish bloodlines, I did a little investigation (okay, a lot of “mining”) into Mine That Bird’s, and sure enough found that “the Bird” is not just any little horse, but is the descendant of a famous Irish ancestor called Birdcatcher.

Birdcatcher, known universally as Irish Birdcatcher, a chestnut colt, was born on the Curragh in 1833, in the Brownstown stud owned by Irish breeder George Knox. His sire was Sir Hercules, an Irish-bred stallion, and his dam was a small mare named Guiccioli.

While Birdcatcher is considered to be Guiccioli and Sir Hercules’s most important son, his full brother, stallion Faugh-a-Ballach, and sister Gramachree (1844) were no slackers when it came to racing and passing on the bloodline. Gramachree’s grandson Selim became the first winner of the Irish Derby in 1866, while Faugh-a-Ballagh (“Faugh a Ballagh” is an Irish/Gaelic battle cry meaning “clear the way” which was famously used by the Irish Brigade in the American Civil War) became the first Irish-bred winner of an English classic when he won the St. Leger of 1844.

More important in terms of American racing, Faugh-A-Ballagh, was sire to Leamington, who in turn became the leading sire in America, and whose son Iroquois was the first American-bred winner of an English classic when he won the Derby and St. Leger Stakes in 1881.

Birdcatcher, meanwhile, got off to a shaky start. He almost died of a respiratory illness as a yearling, but he recovered and went on to a stellar racing career in Ireland and England.

He was also quite a stud. His sons and daughters produced a line of horses whose offspring are still winning races today, not least of all,



Mine That Bird.

Chief among Birdcatcher’s sons was The Baron (1842), known as “the slim and savage” due to his terrible temperament.

The Baron, a great racer, was an even better sire.

He fathered Stockwell and Rataplan out of the great mare Pocahontas, before being shipped to France where he sired three winners of the Prix de Diane, including the filly La Toucques (1860), who also won the French St. Leger Stakes, the Prix du Jockey Club, and the Grosser Preis von Baden.

Stockwell won the Newmarket Stakes, Great Yorkshire Stakes, St. Leger Stakes, Grand Duke Michael Stakes, Newmarket St. Leger, and the Whip but it was as a sire that Stockwell truly found his calling.

He became known as The Emperor of Stallions, and sons, including Doncaster and the sire Bend Or, were great producers, as were his daughters. Some of the well-known descendants of Stockwell are the legendary Man o’ War, Phalaris, Northern Dancer and Nasrullah. According to some racing reports, over 70 percent of stakes winning horses in the late 1990s descend from Phalaris, through Northern Dancer (Mine that Bird’s great-great-grandfather), Nasrullah, Turn-To, and Raise a Native.

The story goes back to Ireland in 1978, when Storm Bird, the Canadian-bred horse sired by Northern Dancer, was brought back to Ireland to be trained by Vincent O’Brien. Storm Bird who became a champion in Ireland and England like his Irish ancestors, also went on to sire a daughter, Dear Birdy, who became Kentucky’s Broodmare of the Year (2004) having already given birth to Birdstone (2001), who in turn sired Mine That Bird (2006.)

And there you have it . . . From Birdcatcher to Mine That Bird, and one of the most exciting races in the history of the Kentucky Derby, when a 50-1 horse considered so not in the running that Tom Durkin, probably the only time in his career, missed the call as Mine That Bird under jockey Calvin “Bo-Rail” Borel streaked along on the inside in a gallant ride to win by 6 3/4 lengths.

Oh, wait — the Disney connection!

Birdcatcher came into the ownership of William Disney, whose Lark Lodge was adjacent to Knox’s Brownstown Stud. (Perhaps George Knox thought the sickly yearling didn’t have a future.) William Disney (not a very common name in Ireland) may, or may not, have been related to Arundel Elias Disney (b.1801), great-grandfather of Walt Disney, who left Ireland for America in 1834.

IA

– Patricia Harty

#### FROM BIRDCATCHER TO MINE THAT BIRD:

- Birdcatcher (Born: 1833)
- The Baron (1842)
- Stockwell (1849)
- Doncaster (1870)
- Bend Or (1877)
- Bona Vista (1889)
- Cyllene (1895)
- Polmelus (1902)
- Phalaris (1913)
- Pharos (1920)
- Nearco (1935)
- Nearctic (1954)
- Northern Dancer (1961)
- Storm Bird (1978)
- Dear Birdy (1987)
- Birdstone (2001)
- Mine That Bird (2006)

NOTE: I “mined” this story from many sources on the web; chief among them was TBheritage.com

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# For Susan Boyle, A Private Tragedy Has Finally Led To Success

Close friends of the overnight singing sensation Susan Boyle have revealed the tragedy behind her TV success — and pleaded with the British media to stop making her new life a nightmare.

Irishman Fred O'Neil, who has known Boyle for 15 years, told *Irish America* in an exclusive interview that Susan quit singing after the death of her Irish immigrant mother Bridget in 2007.

"She would come on the phone to me in terrible tears and sobbing and say 'I can't sing any more, I don't want to sing, there's nothing to sing for.' It was a tragic time for her. She didn't have a lot financially either; she was living a very basic life. So her whole life now has been turned around in a minute and a half," he said.

"When I watched her performance on *Britain's Got Talent* and saw her smiling I thought she deserves this because the death of her mother just devastated her. When you're not married and you're the youngest child — her sisters and brothers had all moved away from home — really it was desperately hard for her."

O'Neil has begged the tabloid press in Britain to leave his friend alone. "The reason I'm talking to you is because here in Britain the press is following this other line now," O'Neil told *Irish America*.

"They're kind of making a fool of her. They seem to be going out of their way to print unflattering photos of Susan. But that's not the artist that Susan is. Many of the photos I've seen don't even look like her. There's no point in catapulting her into stardom if all she's going to be is an object of derision.

"I think we should let the real Susan emerge, not the tabloid version. If we do that we'll see that she's a gifted singer."

O'Neil, who was born in Northern Ireland and now lives in Scotland, is a voice coach and first began working with Susan in 1996. "I feel that she's getting



Susan Boyle, who wowed audiences when she sang on *Britain's Got Talent*.

pushed and pulled so much and they're foisting a false image on her. Susan will feel very, very crushed by it and it would be tragic if she had to take some time out to recover herself. But it's a lot to weigh on somebody. Obviously her family is there to support her but she doesn't have a lot of close friends. I know this. That is a concern.

"I have worked with thousands of singers in my career but I very rarely meet female singers who are kind to other singers. That's not usually what happens. She's a very generous person to her fellow performers. To this day if she compliments me for one of my own performances I know that she's 100 percent sincere," he said.

Boyle, the youngest of nine in a family of Irish immigrants who now live in Scotland, has spent many years develop-

ing her talent far from the public eye. And although her rise now looks unstoppable, the truth is Susan comes from a humble working-class background in Blackburn, Scotland.

The world's media are now camped outside her door, but the unemployed, unmarried (and unknissed) Boyle still lives in the same small house where she grew up and where she still sleeps in the same room as when she was a girl.

Says O'Neil: "The underdog quality of the story captures your imagination. But the woman I know — and I'm saying this strongly — is a sensitive, quiet and intelligent person who has a lot to give the world. When she gets her hands on fame I think she won't let go of it too easily."

— By Cahir O'Doherty

# The World of Irish Dance

The second week of April certainly brought some confusion to Philadelphia residents as thousands of young girls in bouncy wigs and vendors with everything from Celtic t-shirts to Irish sweets descended on the Kimmel Centre of Performing Arts. The 39th Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne, World Irish Dance Championships, was held for the first time in North America at the Kimmel Centre and the Marriott Hotel in downtown Philadelphia.

Over 6,000 dancers came to compete, all of whom qualified after winning top places in regional and national competitions. Dancers from Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, United States, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Germany, Poland, Russia, and South Africa arrived to dance in a variety of categories of competition including solo dances, team dances which included upwards of eight dancers per team, and drama which utilizes dance as a storytelling tool. The dancers competed in several styles based on the pace of the music classified as reels, hornpipes, jigs, slip jigs and traditional dances.

The event attracted over 20,000 fans in addition to dancers. Fans included friends, family and teachers but also a vast number of vendors who sold endless amounts of Irish-themed commodities.

The opening ceremonies on April 5th included a parade of flags representing all countries registered with An Coimisiún le Rinci Gaelacha (CLRG), the commission which organizes the competition. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter was in attendance.

The World Irish Dance Championships commenced in 1970 in Colaiste Mhuire, Dublin. This year marked the first departure to North America for the competition. The primary sponsor of the event was Chicago native Michael Flatley, who in 1975 became the first American to secure a World Irish Dance title.

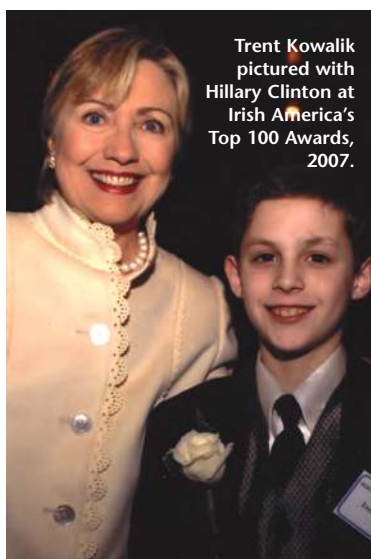
—Tara Dougherty



World champion Heather Carr from County Mayo with Michael Flatley.

PHOTO: APRIL DREW

## Billy Scores 15 Tony Nominations



Trent Kowalik pictured with Hillary Clinton at Irish America's Top 100 Awards, 2007.

**B**illy *Eliot*, *The Musical* tops lists of Tony Award frontrunners with fifteen nominations, tying with 2001's *The Producers* for a record number. The show's nominations include best musical, best original score, best performance by a featured actor and actress in a musical, best direction, best choreography, best orchestrations, and best scenic, costume, lighting and sound design. Based on the 2000 British film, the musical boasts a new score with music by Sir Elton John and book and lyrics by the film's screenplay writer, Lee Hall. The three young actors who share the onstage role of Billy Elliot, including *Irish America's* Top 100 honoree Trent Kowalik, also share a nomination for this year's award for best performance by a leading actor in a musical. Kowalik, 14, who is a champion Irish dancer, told *CBS News*, "This is where I want to be . . . It's really inspiring for all the kids out there who want to start dancing." The Tony Award winners will be announced June 7.

—Kara Rota

For more coverage of the World Championships go to [www.irishcentral.com](http://www.irishcentral.com)

# Shakespeare Portrait in Irish Collection

The only painting of Shakespeare done during his lifetime belongs to an Irishman.

**F**or centuries, the commonly accepted illustration of William Shakespeare has been one of a balding, stern and rather lifeless subject, based on a black-and-white woodcut by Martin Droeshout and a marble bust which both emerged posthumously in the early 1620s and until now were considered his most authentic images.

All that changed when Alec Cobbe, Irish art restorer and heir to the Cobbe family's art collection, visited the National Portrait Gallery in London in 2006 and saw a painting that was accepted as a portrait done during Shakespeare's life until it was debunked about 70 years ago. Cobbe recognized it as a copy of a portrait in the collection he had inherited in the 1980s, depicting a handsome and lifelike figure that had previously never been identified as Shakespeare. The Cobbe original portrait, by an unknown artist, has now been dated at around 1610, six years before Shakespeare's death in 1616.

Mark Broch, curator of the Cobbe Collection, who has conducted comprehensive research on the painting over the past three years, said, "We feel especially convinced that the portrait is Shakespeare because it seems to have been the source for the engraving of 1623 by Martin Droeshout, which was published in the *First Folio* by people who actually knew Shakespeare, which is why [the portrait] is such a fascinating discovery."

The Cobbe family came into possession of the painting through a cousin's marriage to the great-granddaughter of Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton. The Earl, Shakespeare's only literary patron, is believed to have commissioned the portrait.

In an interview with *Irish America*, Broch talked about Charles Cobbe (1686-1765), who emigrated from Hampshire to Ireland in the beginning of the 18th century to pursue a career in the church and eventually became the Archbishop of Dublin.

Dr. Cobbe built Newbridge House, an elegant Georgian mansion just north of the city, where his descendants remain today, though the house itself was acquired by the Irish state in 1985.

"There are many works by Irish artists in the collection, particularly portraits by artists such as James Latham, and landscapes by painters such as George Barrett," said Broch, who went on to explain why part of the collection had been sold off. "In 1839, Charles Cobbe, then owner of the house, sold valuable landscapes by Meindert Hobbema [now in the National Gallery



REPRODUCED BY AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SHAKESPEARE BIRTHPLACE TRUST AND THE COPYRIGHT HOLDERS

of Art, Washington, D.C.] and Gaspard Dughet, in order to be able to build stone cottages for his tenants."

Some skeptics have proposed that the Cobbe portrait might be of Sir Thomas Overbury, English poet and essayist who was alive in the late 16th and early 17th century. Broch disputes this claim, saying that "all the evidence points to Shakespeare."

Boasting a youthful and ruddy complexion, fine and glamorous clothes and flattering auburn beard, the figure in the Cobbe portrait is described by Professor Stanley Wells, chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, as a "pinup." Indeed, this new representation of the bard has more in common with Ralph Fiennes' dreamy portrayal in 1998's *Shakespeare in Love* than it does with the 1620's depictions.

And what might this new portrait tell us about Shakespeare's life and the mysteries of his legacy?

Broch proposes that "the new portrait changes the general perception of Shakespeare, because it shows him as a friendly, attentive, successful and quite wealthy man, which is slightly different from the general idea of Shakespeare as a rather romantic, poor playwright. In fact the new portrait fits very well with what we actually know about Shakespeare: he was a rich man, his father had been a mayor of Stratford-upon-Avon, and Shakespeare owned the second largest house in town and land; his will is that of a present-day millionaire."

The Cobbe portrait went on display for the public at The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-Upon-Avon on April 23, Shakespeare's birthday, and continues through September 6, in the exhibit "Shakespeare Found: A Life Portrait."

IA

– Kara Rota

# Lincoln's Watch Holds Message from Irishman

**T**he Smithsonian's National Museum of American History opened Abraham Lincoln's pocket watch this past March, and discovered a secretly engraved message that turned an unsubstantiated family story into a confirmed historical event.

Jonathan Dillon, a watchmaker who immigrated to Washington, D.C. from Waterford, Ireland, repaired Lincoln's gold watch in 1861 and engraved the following words on the underside of the watch movement:

*Jonathan Dillon April 13- 1861 Fort Sumpter was attacked by the rebels on the above date.*

*J Dillon.*

*April 13-1861 Washington thank God we have a government.*

*Jonth Dillon.*

Dillon passed down the story of engraving his pro-Union sentiments in Lincoln's timepiece to his descendants, and his great-great-grandson Douglas Stiles, a lawyer from Illinois, recently discovered an article in *The New York Times* from April 1906 in which the story is recounted.

Then 84, Dillon told of writing the inscription after the owner of M.W. Galt & Company, the Pennsylvania Avenue watch shop in Washington, D.C., rushed upstairs to announce that the first shot had been fired and the war was underway. "At the moment I had in my hand Abraham Lincoln's watch, which I had been repairing," Dillon recounted.

The watch was bequeathed to the Smithsonian by a great-grandson of Lincoln's in 1958, but after Stiles brought the curators' attention to the 1906 article, the museum enlisted the help of George Thomas, a master watchmaker from Maryland, who opened the watch using magnifying glasses, a strong light and minuscule instruments in an event open to the public. "It's a moment of discovery, and you can only discover things once. We wanted to share it," said



**TOP:** Dillon's message revealed. **CENTER:** Douglas Stiles examines his great-great-grandfather's engraving in Lincoln's watch. **ABOVE:** Jonathan Dillon (far right) at a family wedding.

Harry Rubenstein, curator of the Smithsonian's "Abraham Lincoln: An Extraordinary Life" exhibition.

In the 1906 article, Dillon recalled his inscription as reading, "The first gun is fired. Slavery is dead. Thank God we

have a President who at least will try." This description was not entirely accurate, but museum director Brent D. Glass was unsurprised that Dillon did not mention slavery in the actual engraving.

"In 1861 the preservation of the union was the key issue, and the abolition of slavery came later," said Glass. Dillon's inscription also misdates the opening shot of the Civil War, which was actually fired on April 12, and misspells Sumter. Still, the message is clear.

"It has that hopeful sound that the union will hold together, the country will go on,"

said Rubenstein. "That Lincoln carried this hopeful message in his pocket unbeknownst to him – it casts you back."

Two other inscriptions were also found on the back of the watch movement. One reads "LE Grofs Sept 1864 Wash DC" and was probably added by another watchmaker doing a repair. The other, "Jeff Davis," may have been intended as a rejoinder to Dillon's pro-Union inscriptions, as Jefferson Davis was the president of the rebel Confederacy.

According to Thomas, the timepiece was made in Liverpool but the case was crafted in America. He said that the watch, reportedly the only watch that Lincoln owned, was in perfect condition and looked as if it had not been worn very much. While the watch is unable to be wound after hundreds of years of no use, it will be reassembled and available for viewing at the museum with a photograph and transcription of the engraving.

Stiles claimed that the story of Dillon's "graffitti" had been told to him in the 1970's by a great-uncle, and his attention returned to it last year when an Irish cousin recounted the story as well. The revelation of the inscription lends a new credibility to generational tales and emphasizes the importance of oral history, persistent as it is in the Irish-American tradition.

IA

– Kara Rota

## THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

# Still Special After All These Years

St. Patrick's Day is always an important day for the Irish in New York and the 2009 St. Patrick's Day Parade was a very special one for the Sisters of Charity. Not only was it the first time that they marched in their own congregational contingent, but the 248th parade was dedicated to the Sisters in recognition of their "200 years of dedicated service to the Poor of New York City."

It's a description that encapsulates the enormous impact and profound effect that the Sisters of Charity missions have had on so many lives.

For two centuries, four thousand Sisters have served Irish and other immigrants and their descendants, caring for orphans and the elderly, teaching young people, and providing job training to the poor. Their missions have supported families, nursed the sick, educated leaders, and always nurtured the Catholic faith.

It all began in 1809 when Elizabeth Ann Seton, a New York

widow and convert, founded the Sisters of Charity in Emmetsburg, Maryland. The Sisters of Charity's mission in New York began in 1817, when Mother Seton sent three Sisters to care for orphaned immigrant children in St. Patrick's Orphan Asylum.

Since then the Sisters of Charity have established over 286 foundations, from New York State, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, North Carolina to the Bahamas and Guatemala.

"When planning started for the St. Patrick's Day event," explains Christine Haggerty, the Director of External

Communications, whose idea of the Sisters marching behind their own banner was presented to the parade officials by Bill Hurley, director of development, "the goal was to find 200 willing to march behind the Sisters' banner – one person for each year since the founding of the Sisters of Charity. On the big day, over 700 turned out!"

After joining NYC's Mayor Michael Bloomberg for a 7:00 a.m. breakfast, Sister Dorothy Metz, President of the Congregation, and Sister Donna Dodge, her assistant, joined other Sisters at St. Patrick's Cathedral for the 8:30 Liturgy, where Cardinal Edward Egan was the principal celebrant.

"Then it was down to 44th Street where the Sisters of Charity contingent formed to march up Fifth Avenue," describes Christine. "The block was full of Sisters and their associates, family members and friends." Colleagues from health and child care and housing ministries also attended.

"Our community also invited other congregations in the Sisters of Charity Federation as well as the Daughters of Charity of Albany, New York, and even some Sisters out of Leavenworth, Kansas, and Greensburg, Pennsylvania, who wanted to be part of this unique event."

Three teams of Sisters took turns carrying the 10-foot banner, one of whom was Sister Peggy McEntee,

who has been immortalized on stage and screen by the playwright and screenwriter John Patrick Shanley when he dedicated his 2005 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Doubt: A Parable*, to her. He wrote in the *Playbill*, "This play is dedicated to the many orders of Catholic nuns who devoted their lives to serving others in hospitals, schools and retirement homes. Though they have been much maligned and ridiculed, who among us has been so generous?"

Such words of conviction and sincerity on behalf of the Bronx-born playwright came from personal experience: Shanley had never forgotten his first-grade teacher, Sister James (now Sister Peggy), a Sister of Charity, who had strongly influenced him by her attentive kindness and generous spirit.

He not only based a character of his



COURTESY OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

TOP: Three teams of Sisters took turns carrying the 10-foot wide banner during the parade. Pictured here, Sisters Carol Barnes, Mary Ann Daly, Kathryn Byrnes and Karen Helfenstein who took the first shift. ABOVE: Kathleen Skinner, and Sister Peggy McEntee.



COURTESY OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY

Sisters Dominica Rocchio, Alice Darragh and Jane Iannucelli dressed in the traditional habit, representing the first three Sisters sent to New York in 1817 by Mother Seton to care for orphans: Sisters Felicité Brady, Cecilia O'Conway and Rose White.

play on his former teacher, he also hired her to consult on the movie version of *Doubt* when they were filming on location at the College of Mount St. Vincent in the Bronx, one of the many institutions founded by the Sisters of Charity. Amy Adams won an Oscar nomination

for her performance as Sister James.

"I loved marching in the parade," recalls Sister Peggy, who had just returned from Hollywood where she represented John Patrick in accepting the award for *Doubt* as best picture from the Catholic in Media Association. "I made

it to the end," she said cheerfully. "It made me feel young."

Three other Sisters had the honor of representing the first three Sisters of Charity who were sent by Mother Seton to New York in 1817. Wearing the traditional habit, Sisters Dominica Rocchio, Alice Darragh and Jane Iannucelli all marched in a row behind the banner, pleased to represent those pioneer Sisters Felicité Brady, Cecilia O'Conway and Rose White.

"As they passed the Cathedral, Cardinal Egan and other bishops came into Fifth Avenue to greet the Sisters," describes Christine Haggerty. "During the day the Cardinal told Catholic New York, 'Nothing could have made me happier than to learn that the St. Patrick's Day Mass and Parade would honor, in a very special way, our beloved Sisters of Charity. The work they have done is nothing short of heroic, and we could never thank them enough.'" **IA**

– Marilyn Cole Lownes

## THOSE WE LOST

### Justice Daniel J. O'Hern

New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Daniel J. O'Hern died at age 78 on April 1. His family cited the cause as metastatic melanoma of the brain. O'Hern was an associate justice of the court from 1981 to 2000, including 14 years serving under Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz. The Wilentz court received acclaim and criticism for their groundbreaking and often liberal rulings. Justice O'Hern authored 231 majority opinions that played integral roles in defining state policies on issues including homelessness, law enforcement and the death penalty. O'Hern graduated from Fordham College in 1951, then spent three years serving in the U.S. Navy. After his graduation from Harvard Law School in 1957, O'Hern spent time as a clerk for Justice William J. Brennan Jr. of the United States Supreme Court, and was a councilman and mayor of his hometown, Red Bank, New Jersey. O'Hern was appointed commissioner of New Jersey's Environmental Protection Department in 1978 and named to the state's Supreme Court in 1981. He is survived by his wife of 50 years, Barbara, three sons, two daughters, two sisters, a brother and eight grandchildren.

### Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly

Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly died March 27 of a heart attack on the way to a hospital near her home in an Ursuline convent in New Rochelle, New York. She was 79. Born in the Bronx in 1929, Sister Dorothy Ann was the president of the



Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly (left) and Sister Regina Kehoe pictured at a National Committee on American Foreign Policy dinner with William Flynn.

College of New Rochelle from 1972 to 1997, during which time the college transformed from the small first Catholic school for women in New York into a college with seven branches in the New York area and over 6,500 students. Sister Dorothy Ann was instrumental in opening

the College of New Rochelle's School of New Resources, which provides night and weekend classes to meet the needs of working people in the New York area. The college also added a graduate school and a nursing school during her presidency. Aside from her momentous impact on the College of New Rochelle, Sister Dorothy Ann made history as the first woman to head the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities in 1978 and the first woman to lead the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in 1987. A 1951 graduate of the College of New Rochelle, she became a history professor there after joining the Ursuline Order. She graduated with a master's degree from the Catholic University of America in 1958 and earned a doctorate from the University of Notre Dame in 1970. She worked to bring peace to Northern Ireland during her service as U.S. director of the Peace People. Sister Dorothy Ann is survived by her brother, Walter.

– Kara Rota

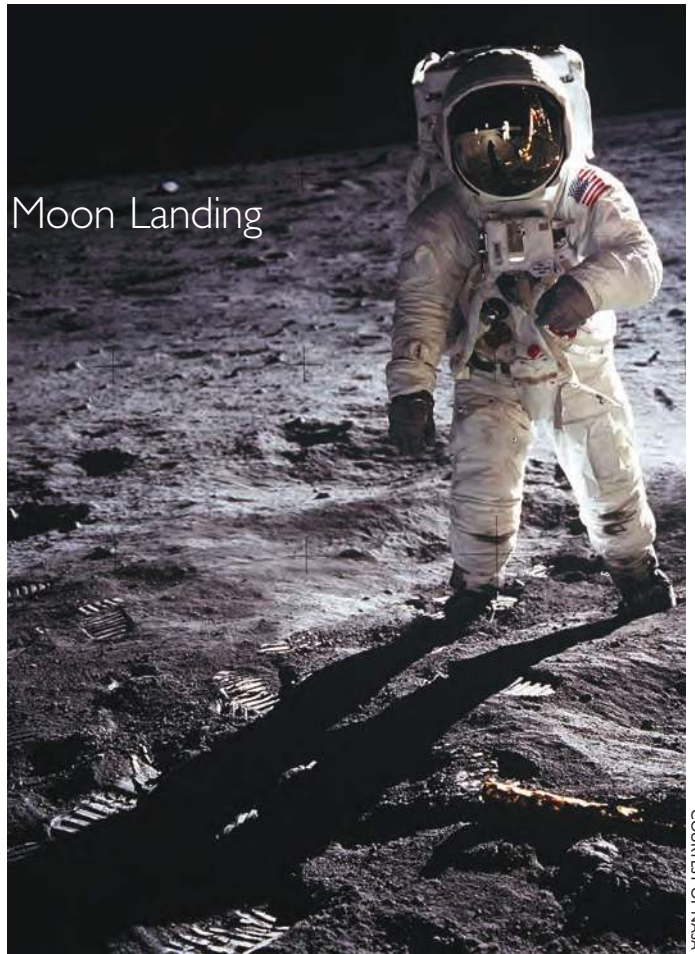
# Moon Shot

Exhibition Marks 40th Anniversary of Moon Landing

**I**n 1961, President Kennedy challenged the nation to land a man on the Moon and return him safely to earth before the end of the decade. Appealing to the spirit of adventure, to patriotic pride and to the cause of freedom, his words ignited one of the greatest technological mobilizations in U.S. history. Eight years later, on July 20, 1969, two American astronauts landed on the Moon's surface.

The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Museum in Boston opened its new exhibit Moon Shot – JFK and Space Exploration on May 16 to mark the 40th anniversary of the realization of John F. Kennedy's presidential dream. Open until the spring of 2010, Moon Shot includes original documents, images and artifacts from the first successful moon landing, achieved by Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, Jr. Drawing on the collections of the National Archives – Southwest Region, the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center, the Kennedy Presidential Library and NASA, the exhibit features a Mercury space suit, President Kennedy's original one-page memo to Vice President Johnson in 1961 that led to the launch of the lunar mission, and three NASA prototype drawings of gear that have never been visible to the public until now. Also on display are pages from President Kennedy's 1961 address to Congress, in which he requested funds for the space exploration mission with the words, "in a very real sense, it will not be one man going to the moon – if we make this judgment affirmatively, it will be an entire nation. For all of us must work to put him there."

– Kara Rota



COURTESY OF NASA

Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin on the moon, July 20, 1969, photograph by Neil Armstrong.



Cape Canaveral, Florida, February 20, 1962: President Kennedy inspects the Mercury launch vehicle (above), and the Mercury capsule (right) with Astronaut Col. John Glenn, the first American to orbit the earth.



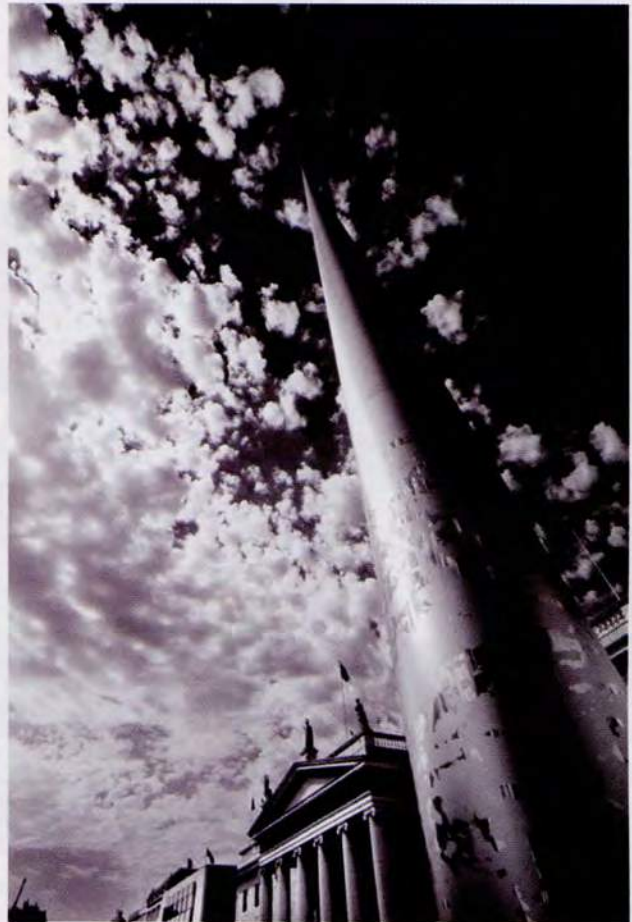
PHOTO BY CECIL STOUGHTON, COURTESY OF THE JFK PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM, BOSTON

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# Quote Unquote

“It was kind of brave for him to say what everybody’s been thinking. It’s interesting that he said it as he’s leaving.”

Rev. Thomas J. Reese, a Jesuit author commenting on New York’s Cardinal Edward Egan’s comments that the celibacy issue “has to be looked at.”  
– *The New York Times*

“I’m just a meat and potatoes kind of guy. I’m just a little Irish boy. Meat and potatoes, every meal.”

Matt Ryan, quarterback of the Atlanta Falcons. The 23-year-old Philadelphia-area native signed a \$72 million contract with the team.  
– *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

“I think we’re done here. I’d like to see you back here in six months for a cleaning.”

David Letterman told Fox’s Bill O’Reilly he thinks of him “as a goon,” on *The Late Show* March 31. The two squared off on politics, the Fox network and much more, but ended in laughs. – *The Daily News*



PHOTO: AP

“I inwardly replied to Him: ‘Go away, Lord. I’m not your man. My Spanish is lousy and my English not much better. ... The Yankees and Mets over the Cardinals and Brewers? Forget it!’ Yet He had his sandal in the door and would not let me shut Him out as I heard the whisper of the one who says, ‘Timothy, be not afraid. My grace is sufficient. Never do I invite one to a task without giving him/her the strength to do it.’”

Archbishop Timothy Dolan speaking of his appointment to the New York Archdiocese at St. Patrick’s Cathedral on April 14th. – *Catholic News Service*

“We are hollowed out – all of us – by greed and by people who pursued short termism – people who thought they could get huge return on money with no productivity... We had a banking and a financial culture that we know now had a value system that actually stood in stark contrast to the value systems of the Irish people... They are the people who, like everything else in life, they’ve been left to pick up the pieces...”

President Mary McAleese speaking about the downturn in the Irish economy on *The Today Show* on St. Patrick’s Day.

“American by birth.  
Irish by the grace  
of God.”

Courtney Kennedy, daughter of Robert and Ethel Kennedy, became the first recent Kennedy to receive her Irish citizenship since her forefather Patrick Kennedy left Wexford in the 1840s. On the phone to *Irish America*, she recalled the above inscription that her husband Paul Hill wrote in her copy of his book, *Stolen Years*. Courtney and Paul’s American-born daughter, Saoirse, also holds dual citizenship, which means she could run for President in either country. “That means I could vote for her in both countries,” laughed Courtney.

“... for I know that the family is the answer as we pray for Ireland and we pray for our own nation at a time of serious and unexpected difficulties and challenges. May we find our way outside of the current troubles the way the Irish did, with faith and family and courage.”

Cardinal Edward Egan addressing the faithful on St. Patrick’s Day at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York City.

## WEDDING

### Ethel's First Grandchild Weds

Maeve Kennedy Townsend, 29-year-old granddaughter of Ethel and Robert F. Kennedy and daughter of Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, was wed March 21 to law student and judicial clerk David McKean, 27. Their flirtation began in 2003, when McKean took a summer internship at California Democrat Dianne Feinstein's office where Townsend worked. A year later, on the urging of McKean's mother, the pair went to a baseball game together and their relationship escalated to a romance soon after. Sharing a keen commitment to social justice and a love of travel (Townsend, who spent a year in Ireland studying at Trinity College, joined the Peace Corps and worked in Mozambique after graduating from college), Townsend and McKean spent time together in Southeast Asia when McKean taught English in China in 2004. Their endearing website maeveanddave.com relates the story of their trip to Tiffany's to go ring shopping last March, with no particular engagement date in mind. Trying on the ring in the parking lot, Townsend ran away with it, entreating McKean to "Just ask me now!" He did.

The wedding took place at the Women's National Democratic Club in Washington, D.C. Tables were adorned with green apples for centerpieces, Cat Stevens was on the soundtrack, and Ethel Kennedy declared that she was "thrilled" about the union. Kennedy family friend and Massachusetts District Court judge James H. Wexler officiated. Townsend matched her gown, an Italian-designed strapless silk and organza number, with sparkling sneakers. On the maeveanddave.com "What to Wear" guide, guests were advised that "sequins probably shouldn't be your go-to outfit" but "skinny ties are still in." —Kara Rota



COURTESY OF DENIS REGGIE

Derry man told the audience he was "unusually blessed" in his life and was indebted to poetry as a means of interpreting and articulating life's experience.

"We should keep our feet on the ground to signify that nothing is beneath us," he said. "But we should also lift up our eyes to say nothing is beyond us." RTE, the national broadcaster, also marked the occasion with a series of recordings of Heaney's works over the Easter weekend. — Frank Shouldice

## BIRTH

### Gunnar Price Conboy

It's a boy for Carolina Hurricanes player Tim Conboy and his wife Sheena. The couple welcomed son Gunnar Price Conboy on Thursday, April 3rd at 8:20 p.m. — while his dad's team was beating the New York Rangers 4-2! Gunnar weighed in at 9 lbs., 2 oz. Tim, 27, explains that both he and Sheena are of Irish descent and that Gunnar means "bold warrior." "A little bit like I play, kind of," he joked.



## PASSING



Natasha Richardson, her husband, Liam Neeson, and editor Patricia Harty pictured at *Irish America's* Top 100 Awards, 1996.

### Farewell, Natasha

The world mourned Natasha Richardson, wife of Liam Neeson and mother to his sons, twins Liam and Michael, 13, and Daniel, 12. Natasha, who died on March 18, of a brain injury received while skiing in Canada, was waked at the American Irish Historical Society building in New York City, where her husband is a member of the board.

Vanessa Redgrave, the actress's mother, attended *Irish America's* launch of its Global Irish issue and website IrishCentral.com at the A.I.H.S. building on March 15. In a sad irony, IrishCentral broke the news of her daughter's accident the following evening.

There are no words to offer at a time like this — only the hope the family found some small consolation in that place that holds so much of our history, and in the knowledge that we come from a people who know how to pick themselves up and keep on keeping on. — Patricia Harty

## GRADUATION

### Liz Leaves Harvard

Liz Murray, inspirational speaker whose story was made into a movie starring Thora Birch in 2003, graduates this June with a degree in psychology from Harvard University. Born in the Bronx, New York to parents who were both addicts, Murray became homeless at age 15 after her mother died of AIDS and her father moved into a homeless shelter. After graduating from the Humanities Preparatory Academy in Manhattan in only two years despite the lack of a stable home and her responsibilities supporting her sister, Murray won a scholarship from *The New York Times* and began attending Harvard in the fall of 2000. In 2003, she took a leave of absence to take care of her father, who passed away in 2006 after battling AIDS. Murray returned to Harvard in May 2008 and hopes after her graduation this summer to make films, publish a memoir and perhaps attend graduate school.

## BIRTHDAY

### Heaney Celebrates

Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney celebrated his 70th birthday with a public ceremony in Dublin at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. The modest





# Coco

Irish Canadian Coco Rocha is bringing back self-esteem, DIY makeup and the allure of the American supermodel.

**By Kara Rota**

# Rocks the Runway



She looks, if possible, even more modelesque in person, although this might have something to do with the high-heeled lace-up Balenciaga boots she's wearing (along with an Urban Outfitters top, Marni belt, vintage gold lamé purse and a skirt that once belonged to her mother). When I sit down with Irish Canadian Coco Rocha, who has taken the fashion world by storm before turning twenty-one with an unforgettable face, modish look and vivid persona, I'm struck by her openness and eloquence.

Discovered at the young age of fourteen by agent Charles Stuart, Coco (born Mikhaila Rocha on September 10, 1988) had never considered modeling or fashion as particular interests before Stuart approached her after seeing her perform in an Irish dance competition. She initially told him that she wasn't interested, but Stuart, whose daughter also did Irish dance, persisted. "He would come to every competition, or he would have some lady come up to me and say, you know, 'He is legit, try it!'" So a year later I decided to do it, see what it was like — and now here I am today. If it weren't for my Irish dancing, I wouldn't be modeling." Coco can attribute both her dancing, which she practiced for twelve years, and her looks to her Irish ancestry. "My mom's half Irish and my dad's half Irish. We don't know much about my mom's side but my dad's mom came from Belfast and married my grandfather, who was from Wales." Her grandparents later moved their family to Canada.

Born in Toronto, Ontario, Coco grew up in Richmond, British Columbia. She has two siblings, and her parents are both in the airline industry. Coco says her parents are supportive of her career, if a bit out of touch. "For the longest time my dad didn't quite understand. He's like, 'So what are you doing? Are you known?' I'm like, 'Yes, I'm modeling now, people know what I do.' He's still a little bit, 'What's going on?' My mom, though, she's here a lot so she sees it all firsthand."

Her lack of fluency in high-end designers before modeling has helped Coco to create a unique personal style, especially indebted to a great love of vintage clothes. "I didn't know anything about fashion. You would see me in the biggest sweater with jeans or the tightest elastic pants. Not nice clothes. My mom took me a lot to consignment stores when I was younger and I never really got to go to fancy high-class stores so ... vintage was like a step up. You can always find one thing that no one else has, which is nice. To wear things from the 1800s to the 20s and 30s is kind of amazing."

The breakthrough moment of her career took place during Jean Paul Gaultier's fall 2007 show inspired by the Scottish Highlands, which Coco opened and closed by Irish dancing down the runway. *Vogue* called it the "Coco moment," and suggested that it marked her status as a genuine supermodel. "It was exciting. When you usually dance, you dance in front of a



Coco, who famously performed an Irish dance on regularly on *Vogue* covers around the world. She has also modeled for Chanel, among other top designers.

crowd that has no clue who you are, so you can mess up, fall down, be exhausted and no one will really know in the end what you did. But [at the Gaultier show,] I was really nervous because everyone knew what my name was, and if I fell over and everyone was laughing, it definitely would have hit everyone's radar. ... I don't think I'll ever have a peak like that in a show. My grandma went nuts. I mean, at shows usually, all you have to do is walk, so I don't get nervous, but that was a bit maddening."

Besides setting herself apart through fashion and Irish dance, Coco has earned a reputation as an outspoken model that isn't afraid to let her personality shine underneath the clothes. "In the industry now, models are [expected] to be seen and not heard, and I think there's a few of us that are kind of wanting to push the envelope a little bit more and trying to get models back to what they used to be. We want to be out there so people know models are also role models too. It's not just the singers, the actresses, the dancers, et cetera. Models can be people too. But the only way to do that is to kind of step up and keep doing new things that no one has thought of, from new websites to new blogs, a newscast, doing speeches, talking to kids, it kind of opens a new headline every time: 'Oh, a model hasn't done this before, a model hasn't done that before.' So I think it's always being the new fresh person, which is hard because everything's been done before. It's just redoing it in a different way." Lately Coco has been speaking at schools about issues including body image and self-esteem, and is making a

trip to Canada to help with a cousin's cancer charity. In the past, parents and teachers have been wary of spokesmodels who seem to preach self-esteem in empty language without addressing the consequences of their industry's focus on physical appearance, but it's obvious that



Left: Coco has been dancing for years with *Eire Born*, a dance group from her native Canada.

this is an issue genuinely important to Coco. "I think models have that huge say on self-esteem, because we were the girls that were nobodies in school and now have become the models. I think that every girl has a really sad story: nobody liked her, everybody hated her, and then once you do become a model, how things change."

Speaking about the pressure to be thin in this industry, Coco expresses concern about models that resort to any and all methods of maintaining low body weight, but also emphasizes that not every designer wants the anorexic look. "When you start off you have to have a certain body type. I mean, that's why we get [recruited] so young. Your body hasn't even gotten to that peak yet. So when you start aging and your body is changing, people want it to stop, they don't want that happening. ... You can't please everyone. If Client A and Client B want two different girls, are you somehow going to get both of them? No. If you don't want me today, someone will want me tomorrow."

For the last few years, it seems everyone has wanted Coco: she has done advertising campaigns with Balenciaga, Calvin Klein, Lanvin, Dolce & Gabbana and The Gap, and appeared on the covers of *Vogue* and *Elle*, among others. With a consistent and star-studded six-year career, Coco is a bit of a throwback at a time when America is introduced to their newest "Top Model" each season on reality television. Says Coco on this phenomenon



of disposable models, “I think to be a supermodel is to stay in your own genre, to be 100 percent in everything in that specific area. If you need TV and all that to make you great — then it tells you right there how good of a model you probably are. But for the Heidi Klums and the Tyra Bankses, who have shows, those were girls who were already born and bred as supermodels and then went into new things. But girls of my generation, who aren’t really successful and then go off and become these huge things — I would say it’s more a celebrity model in the aspect of TV than a supermodel.”

Coco herself has plenty of plans for when and if she decides to retire from modeling. “I love the arts — drawing, acting, performing, dancing, all that sort of thing. Because I’ve been so lucky to be in this industry, I kind of have a back door to everything. Everything is at my disposal right now. I don’t need to go to school for arts and fashion, I’ve learned it. So I would like to stay in the industry — if that means photography, styling, editing, I don’t know. Right now this is my chance to kind of broaden out and feel everything and see what it’s like, and then we’ll see. I never plan tomorrow because I don’t even know what I’m doing today.” She has planned minimally for the near future, including a trip to



Above and left: For two days in October, Coco shared her love of dance with students at Children’s Aid’s Mirabal Sisters Campus and East Harlem Center. She is pictured here with Eire Born, the Canadian dance group, who demonstrated two dances for the children.

Australia and a first visit to Ireland this summer. “I might see family that I’ve never met, and I’m very outdoorsy and sporty so I want to actually bike along one of the coasts.”

For now, Coco is busy with New York events and updating her new blog, [ohso-coco.blogspot.com](http://ohso-coco.blogspot.com), whose content ranges from updates on her friend’s cat to musings about returning to an era where models did their own hair and makeup. “We learn all the tricks, things to do with our hair, what looks best. You see a lot of girls backstage getting their hair and makeup done, and then you see them go in a corner and fix their makeup because

they don’t like something about their eyes or whatever. You know your [own] face better than anyone. I notice more and more that the makeup artists will let some girls do their makeup. It’s kind of funny to watch that come back seeping, but maybe one day.”

“As for the blog, I know sometimes it’s a little —” she pauses, laughs, and decides to be blunt, “a lot about me, but I think people don’t realize that we do things. People are like, ‘What, you play soccer? What, you go to Home Depot?’ I don’t know. They’re like, ‘Why would you? Why aren’t you sitting on a pedestal?’ Like, we live a life too. It’s not all glam.” She is so personable and so real that for a minute I believe her, but then she’s off to Isaac Mizrahi, where there will be interviewers waiting for her to choose a dress for the next week’s Met Ball and trying to soak up some of Coco’s captivating magnetism as she floats ten miles (or at least a few inches) above the world. IA

“If it weren’t for my **Irish dancing**, I wouldn’t be **modeling**.”



**Maggie Revis**, the female lead in Michael Flatley's *The Lord of the Dance*, talks to Tara Dougherty

Lady

*of the*

Dance

Maggie Revis, native to Putnam Valley, New York, took to the stage in Belgium this past winter for her debut as the female lead dancer in Michael Flatley's *The Lord of the Dance*. Born into a family of competitive dancers, Maggie began her dance career at the age of three and secured her first win at the Mid-Atlantic American Oireachtas (Regional) Dance Competition in Philadelphia by the age of six. She continued to compete until 2004 when she traveled to England fresh out of college to begin rehearsals as a dancer in Flatley's *Celtic Tiger*. Now five years into her professional career, Maggie shines as the star in *Lord of the Dance*, which since its premiere performance in 1996 has enjoyed the highest success rate of any professional Irish dance touring company. The thrillingly dramatic show filled with Irish dance and music, based on a folklore story of good and evil, was created by Michael Flatley to follow up the *Riverdance* phenomenon. The initial inspiration for the show was an a cappella dance Flatley envisioned during his time with *Riverdance* which would later become the new show's finale "Planet Ireland."

*Irish America* sat down with Maggie in her hometown in Putnam County, after just wrapping up her European tour. In a house complete with an array of Celtic music and a practice stage in the basement, courtesy of Maggie's father, Fred of German descent, the Revises' Irish step-dancing roots are undeniable. Maggie's mother, Cathy, started her own dance school at a young age which would be Maggie's second home and her introduction into the world of step-dancing.

"My mother growing up was an incredible Irish dancer, and when she became a dancing teacher and judge it was only natural for her kids to follow in her footsteps. ... People who have watched me dance say I have her same style and stage presence," Maggie said.

Growing up in her mother's dance school, Maggie, her sister Katie, and

brother Freddy (though he may deny it now) embraced step-dancing immediately. "My sister and I were always very active and loved Irish music, so we would just come to class and dance about with the other kids." When Cathy sold her school to focus on a nursing career, Maggie's training fell into the hands of Kevin Broesler, who took over the school. "That was when I started to compete. It became my after-school sport. Some people played soccer, I danced every day."



**TOP:** *Lord of the Dance* lead dancers Adam McSharry, Cherie Butler, and Don McCarron pictured backstage with Maggie on her first night dancing as Saoirse. **RIGHT:** Maggie with her grandmother Nellie Spencer and her mother Cathy. Both women were influential in Maggie's career choice.



Kevin Broesler described Maggie as "an inspiration" in his Irish dance classes. "She was a great competitor and an enjoyable student. All the dancers in my class looked up to her." Maggie danced for Kevin's school throughout her competitive career.

Tracing her Irish roots back to County Galway, the second-generation Irish-

American made her first trip to Ireland at the age of twelve when she competed for the first of many times in the All-Ireland and World Championships.

"In those early days of trips to Ireland, it was not just about going to compete. It was about meeting our relatives, eating tons of the amazing ice cream, and exploring the castles and ruins that we would pass along the road." Since those early years, Maggie has continued to visit Ireland to see family and friends, and while she has become very familiar

with the sites and the people, she will not get behind the wheel on Irish roads. "I will never feel comfortable driving on the narrow roads or on the roundabouts ever again. I still won't rent a car!"

Maggie's grandmother, Nellie Spencer, now 92 years old, was born in Galway and immigrated to the United States bringing with her a passion for Irish culture which she made

sure to instill in her daughter and grandchildren. "They didn't have competitive Irish dancing when [my grandmother] was young," Maggie said. "It was just mandatory that they learned basic steps and ceilis. Even now I don't think my grandmother at ninety-two could dance a full, choreographed step but she knows the basic posture and rhythms, and her

“It is truly a blessing to be able to say that I reached the epitome of an Irish dancing career. My mother still looks at the pictures from that first performance every day.”

gracefulness in dancing is something I would like to say she passed down through her daughter. She saw me perform with Michael Flatley at Madison Square Garden and she tearfully bragged about how she ‘started it all,’ and she is so right.”

While her older sister Katie eventually left Irish dance for a career in competitive gymnastics and her brothers Freddy and Danny focused their energy on soccer, Maggie continued to pursue dance competitively for close to two decades. In 2003, she reclaimed the title she held at six years old at the Oireachtas Regional Dance Competition in the senior ladies category. It was the following year when Maggie would achieve her career goal and win the North American Championship.

“I was just graduating from college at the time and finding the space, time and discipline to practice was difficult. But I made a promise to myself that I would not retire from competitive dancing until I claimed that title, and I did it,” Maggie said. “I think by that time, after competing for so many years, I knew that dancing was something that I genuinely loved to do, and when you love to do something that much, you perform better.”

Not long after her success at the North American Championship, Maggie retired from competitive dance but found she was not quite ready to hang up her shoes. “You realize that it’s a part of who you are. I think that’s what really started my thinking about going professional.”

After graduating from Loyola University in Baltimore, Maggie went to England to begin rehearsals for Michael Flatley’s production *Celtic Tiger*, inspired by the economic boom in Ireland. Touring with the show brought Maggie to unfamiliar places, performing everywhere from Budapest to London and also reunited her with some familiar faces. The cast included dancers from all over the world whom Maggie had encountered in various competitions early in her career. With the new adventure of touring and the competitive heat behind them, the cast was able to bond and form a family.

“I like the fact that I am now good friends with so many dancers that I used



Touring with *Lord of the Dance* has allowed Maggie, pictured here on safari in South Africa, to see the world.

to watch in competition,” Maggie said.

After a successful run with *Celtic Tiger*, Maggie joined the touring troupe for *Lord of the Dance*. “I first started dancing with *Lord of the Dance* two years ago and I made it a career goal to audition for lead. I did not stop smiling during the audition, which I think helped me a lot.” Surpassing the goal of just auditioning, Maggie landed the coveted part of Saoirse. She shares the role with three other dancers, Tracey Smith McCarron, Siobhan Connolly and Louise Hayden, and plays opposite the male lead, a role played rotationally by Ciaran Connolly, Jason Gorman and Don McCarron. Newest to the role of Saoirse, Maggie will dance primarily in matinee performances in the upcoming North American tour.

“It was a dream come true, cheesy as it may sound. I worked really hard leading up to the audition, and my cast mates were so helpful and supportive throughout the whole process.”

While competitive Irish step-dancing involves its fair share of theatrics, bouncy wigs and intricate costumes included, Flatley’s shows utilize an entirely new style, unnatural at first for most competitive dancers. “For a long time my dance

captains had to remind me to loosen up and perform for the audience more. It took me a while to get used to moving my arms and my upper body while dancing, something which traditional Irish dancing forbids.” After years of posture training and frozen arms, the dancers in *Lord of the Dance* have to embrace a new skill of maintaining their lightning-fast footwork and high leaps with upper body choreography. “I like to think I am better at it now, but there is always room for improvement.”

“I was on cloud nine the whole day of the first performance. I love the music I danced my solos to, I love the costumes I got to wear, and I love the other lead performers that I danced with. It is truly a blessing to be able to say that I reached the epitome of an Irish dancing career. My mother still looks at the pictures from that first performance every day.”

Performing as Saoirse for the first time on the European leg of her troupe’s tour, Maggie was unable to share that experience with her family back in the States. She looks forward to her upcoming North American tour which will provide her the opportunity to perform throughout the United States this spring. IA

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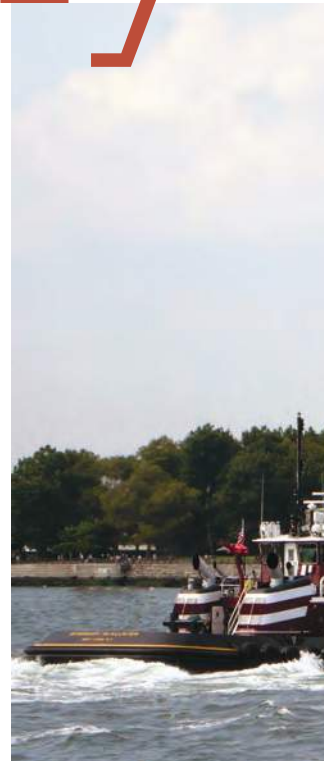
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# Tug o' My



A.J. McAllister III, with his wife Vicky, son A.J. IV, and daughter Brooklyn christen a new tug in his daughter's honor in October 1999. Captain Brian McAllister looks on.

**W**hen Brian McAllister was coming of age in the 1950s all he cared about was playing basketball and chasing girls. However, over the years, he became the heart and soul of the business his Irish ancestors built and he fought hard to keep it from sinking out of the hands of future generations. Today McAllister Towing and Transportation Co., Inc. is one of the nation's largest towing companies with operations in ports all over the East Coast and Puerto Rico. Captain Brian McAllister, now 76, directs the action from his corner office at the tip of Manhattan overlooking the harbor where so much of his family's history happened. Working with him are two sons and three nephews steering future generations along in the family trade.

## The First Generation

**T**he story began in 1864 when James McAllister left Cushendall, County Antrim, to come to New York, then the largest Irish city in the world. His brothers Daniel and William soon joined him. Along with many other Irish families, such as the Morans, they found their calling in the water traffic of New York Harbor. Indeed there were so many tug boats in New York Harbor, they were known collectively as the Irish Navy. James began with a single-sail lighter (a vessel that moves cargo between pier and ship) and called it Greenpoint Lighterage Company after the Brooklyn neighborhood where he had settled. Expanding into towing, McAllister's first tug boat began operating in 1876 while the Brooklyn Bridge was being built.

James had four sons and six daughters

in his first marriage and all the sons grew up working in the business, along with an assortment of cousins and other relatives. One day in 1899, his oldest son, James P. (known as Captain Jim) stormed out of Greenpoint Lighterage to go into business for himself around the corner from his father and uncles, but the family soon reunited to form McAllister Brothers and move to new offices at South Street along Manhattan's East River waterfront. In 1909 they acquired the Starin fleet of excursion steamboats with regular runs to Coney Island, the Statue of Liberty and Bear Mountain. When James died in 1916 he left the towing and lighter business to his sons from his first marriage and the steamboat business to his two brothers. After James's first wife died, he remarried and had three more children, though none of them became involved in the business.

Captain Jim, who was Brian's grandfa-

By Marian Betancourt

# Heart

## MCALLISTER TOWING CARRIES FAMILY BUSINESS INTO THIRD CENTURY



The first "double" christening of McAllister tugs Andrew and Rosemary took place in October 2008 at the South Street Seaport.



A family photo taken in the early 1940s shows Brian McAllister at right in the first row next to his brothers Donal and Bruce. From left in middle row: Anthony, J. Jr., Marjorie (mom), Anthony J. Sr. (dad) holding Michael. From left in top row are Eileen, Patrice, and Marjorie.

ther, was always finding ways to promote the company and in 1914 offered the tug *JP McAllister* to Harry Houdini. The famous escape artist had himself handcuffed and sealed into a packing case and tossed into the harbor near the Battery. Miraculously, a few minutes later, he surfaced, free of the packing crate and his handcuffs.

Another story that has gone down in family lore is the visit of Eamon de Valera to New York. It began in 1922, when New York's mayor Jimmy Walker called Captain Jim to see if he could pick up de Valera who had arrived by steamer in Hoboken to do some fund raising in Manhattan for the Irish cause. The captain sent his son Anthony, then 22, along to escort de Valera. More than 30 years later when Anthony and his wife passed by Parliament House on a visit to Dublin, he asked the guard to extend his compliments to the prime

minister. To his astonishment, de Valera remembered him and asked McAllister and his wife to come around later for a visit.

During World War I, Captain Jim fitted out tugs for crossing the Atlantic during the war and was put in charge of the United States Army's floating equipment. (During World War II, McAllister transported all the Army's explosives through New York Harbor.) Captain Jim was described by one family member as the sparkplug who kept the company expanding into new ventures. He lived to see the business triple in size and then get hit so hard by the Great Depression they were down to only one running tug. In 1935 Captain Jim died at 66. When Brian asked what caused his grandfather to die so young, his father told him he died of a broken heart.

Fortunately, all of the McAllisters had large families. Captain Jim had 10

children including three sons, Anthony J. (Brian's father), James P. II, and Gerard, who, along with a few cousins, kept the business afloat. Although some daughters did work in the company offices from time to time, they were not given ownership. By the end of World War II, Brian's dad and his two uncles had 35 tugs running, even though they were mostly worn out wooden steam tugs. They got through the Depression but at that time, Brian recalled, there was not enough work for everybody so only the smartest and hardest workers survived. The family built the company back up in the 40s and 50s and were operating 50 tugs in six ports. "After World War II, Moran had sealed up 70 percent of the ship business in the harbor. That was enormous," Brian said. "McAllister had maybe 15 percent." He said they were all highly competitive and engaged in price wars.

Photos courtesy of McAllister Towing



LEFT: James McAllister. RIGHT: The fourth, fifth and sixth generations of McAllisters pose for a family photo at the double christening of the Rosemary and the Andrew in 2008.

## The Fourth Generation on the Brink

**B**rian was born on Christmas Day in 1932, one of eight children, and grew up in his grandfather's house on Albemarle Road, near Prospect Park in Brooklyn. His father Anthony would take all the boys to the shipyard. "I was scared to death on the boats," Brian said. When he was 12 or 13, and working as a summer deckhand on a tug, he recalls his fright watching the very tricky task of maneuvering one ship from a line of three and then moving another ship into the same slot. He told the pilot he was scared and was sent to the engine room. "I was happier down there," he said, because he didn't have to watch what was going on. Despite Brian's alleged lack of interest in learning, he graduated from the State University of New York (SUNY) Maritime College at Fort Schuyler in 1956 with a bachelor's degree in maritime engineering, but the family business was not calling him yet.

"The third generation had an agreement that only two sons from each branch of the family could work in the business, so I went into the Navy for two years." He came out in 1958 as a Lieutenant JG and got a job with the American Express Isbrandtsen Line, making a lot of money. "I loved it," he said, but by then also realized he was spending too much time away and asked his father for a job on the tugs. Anthony was able to get Brian a job as tug captain

and eventually pilot. By the mid-1960s Brian had extensive seagoing experience and was promoted to the office.

## Keeping It All in the Family

**B**y the 1970s, Brian said his dad was not in good health and only three of the eight kids (Brian, Anthony, Jr., and Bruce) were in the business. "My uncles didn't have all their kids in the business," he added. (There are now close to one thousand descendants from the original James McAllister, but

most of them drifted away from the family business into other areas. Those in the business today are descended from Captain Jim and his sons.)

Brian realized his father was getting close to selling the business for \$20 million, part of which was stock in a Canadian company. "I was a fairly aggressive guy, although I didn't know much about finance," he admitted. Nevertheless, he convinced his brothers and cousins to put up \$3,000 each and form a corporation to buy the company. "My father said, 'You'll never make it. You have no reserves to fall back on.'" It took four years to close the deal, but in



Buckley McAllister and his wife Beth with daughter Janet christen the Janet McAllister in 2001. A few months later, the Janet and the entire McAllister fleet joined all the tugs in New York Harbor to rescue people escaping from downtown New York on September 11th.



LEFT: The tug Rowan helps bring the Intrepid Sea Air and Space Museum back to its berth on the Hudson after repair work in Staten Island. TOP RIGHT: The William McAllister. BOTTOM RIGHT: Brian in the wheelhouse.

1974 the fourth generation bought the domestic company from the third generation for \$15 million. Other pieces of the business went to various siblings and cousins. Brian invited a Harvard MBA to help with the financial arrangements and come aboard as a partner. The company expanded into the oil business. The outside partner wanted to sell the tug business, but Brian wanted to hold onto the company's heritage. This resulted in a lawsuit for control and in 1998 the company was divided with the partner taking the oil business and Brian keeping the towing and ferry business. The settlement was made one day before the com-

pany was to be auctioned off. "My sons helped put a settlement together," Brian said, "and the partner gave in."

With Brian at the helm as owner and president of McAllister Towing, and five members of the fifth generation at work in the company, the family is keeping the business on track. Brian "Buckley" McAllister, 41, Brian's oldest son, is vice president and general counsel. He is a graduate of the University of California's Hastings College of Law. Eric, 39, graduated from New York University with a degree in economics and is the vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer. Their combined knowledge and

expertise in finance and law helped Brian hang onto the business. Anthony J. (A.J.) McAllister III, 52, the son of Brian's brother Anthony, Jr., is vice president of sales. He, like Brian, graduated from SUNY Maritime at Fort Schuyler and is a licensed tug master and docking pilot. Andrew McAllister, 36, is the son of Brian's younger brother Michael. He has an MBA from New York University and is vice president. He also leads the company's information technology department. Jeffrey McAllister, 53, son of Brian's cousin James, is the company's senior docking pilot in New York Harbor.

Although he doesn't play basketball anymore, Brian is a vigorous man who plays golf and tennis whenever he can. He also likes to walk to work from the Manhattan apartment he shares with his wife of 42 years, the former Rosemary Owens, who taught math at the United Nations International School in New York. They met at a birthday party for Brian's father. Rosemary was his younger brother's date!

Today, nearly 150 years after James arrived from Cushendall, McAllister is still not as big as Moran Towing Company, but unlike Moran, the company is still in the family. Will the sixth generation carry on the family trade? It's too soon to tell, but if it's any incentive, they all have had tug-boats named for them.

IA



A painting by Oswald Brett depicts South Street around the time James McAllister went into business.

*Marian Betancourt has written about the Moran Towing Company for Irish America.*



# SEA FEVER: An Irish Surf Odyssey

Ireland, with 3,000 miles of open Atlantic to the West, offers some of the best surf conditions in the world. *Sea Fever*, a documentary, covers the history of Irish surfing from the early 1960s to the present.

Story by Sharon Ní Chonchúir.

**S**urfing. The very word brings to mind golden sunsets over tropical locations. The palm trees of Hawaii. The warm seas and roaring waves of Australia and California. Certainly not the cold and choppy waters of the Irish Atlantic.

And yet Ireland is now emerging as one of the new frontiers of the surfing world. This island perched at the edge of Europe, one of the first land masses to be pummeled by the turbulent Atlantic, has a growing community of surfers who extol what Ireland has to offer.

“People are surprised to learn that there is surfing in Ireland,” laughs Easkey Britton, the Irish and British surfing champion who hails from Donegal. “They think the water is full of icebergs.”

Ian Johnson, a South African surfer and surfboard shaper who now lives in County Clare, couldn’t agree more. “There’s such a difference between Ireland and South Africa,” he says. “It’s easy to get into surfing in South Africa. Here you freeze your proverbials off!”

Despite these obvious disadvantages to surfing in Ireland, these surfers – both of whom have spent time surfing in well-known hotspots such as Tahiti and

Hawaii – choose to live and surf in Ireland. Why is this?

The answer to this question is at the heart of a fascinating documentary called *Sea Fever: An Irish Surf Odyssey*. Filmed over the course of two years by first-time filmmaker Ken O’Sullivan, it captures Irish surfing throughout the seasons and chronicles the development of a surfing culture in Ireland over the past 40 years.

Ken, who is originally from Clare, had worked abroad for many years. When he moved back to Lahinch six years ago, he was taken aback by the changes that had been wrought on the area.



PHOTO: MICKY SMITH

“I was more aware of my environment when I came back,” he remembers. “I was struck by the beauty of the place and amazed by the boom in surfing. The passion of the surfers interested me too. They live to surf and build their lives around it. They surf every day and constantly push themselves to ride new

*Sea Fever*  
documents the  
history of  
Aileen’s wave  
and the  
enthusiasm of  
those who surf it.  
It also travels  
back in time to  
explore the  
development  
of surfing in  
Ireland, a culture  
that is merely a  
few decades old.

waves.”

He started to film some of Irish surfing’s biggest risk takers – the surfers who ride Ireland’s most famous big wave, Aileen’s just off the Cliffs of Moher. This wave was first discovered by photographer Mickey Smith and a group of Australian bodyboarders in 2004 and was first surfed the following year.

“Many people who visit the Cliffs of Moher are unaware of what happens there,” says Ken O’Sullivan. His film captures the action as it unfolds. Aileen’s, one of the world’s most formidable waves, starts to roll in from the Atlantic. As the swells approach Ireland, they hit a narrow shelf of land. The wave rears up to 50 foot in height and offers surfers a challenging ride right up to the dramatic 700-foot-high cliffs.

Easkey Britton, the first woman to surf the wave, describes it as “addictive. With the cliffs rising up in front of you and a big mountain of white water coming up behind you, you just want to do it again and agin”.

*Sea Fever* documents the history of this wave and the enthusiasm of those who surf it. It also travels back in time to explore the development of surfing in Ireland, a culture that is merely a few decades old.

Rod Bennett, who has been living in Ireland for 21 years, first visited the country in 1973. “Friends told me about the surfing and the Guinness so I came to try it for myself,” he recalls. “I spent three weeks traveling from Waterford to Clare, surfing along the way. I didn’t meet one single surfer.”

Unbeknownst to Rod, there were some surfing enthusiasts in Ireland at that time. The young Kevin Cavey had seen a picture of a surfer in *Reader’s Digest* and was inspired to try it for himself. He ordered a board from Cornwall, placed an ad in the *Irish Independent* asking others if they were interested and in 1965 organized a “surfari” to the west of Ireland.

The safari included stops in Sligo and Donegal, where the surfers met the Britton brothers. Together, they started off a tradition of surfing in the North West of Ireland.

The film has archival footage which

Above: Catching a wave off  
The Cliffs of Moher, Co. Clare



PHOTO: KEN O’SULLIVAN

expresses the pioneering spirit of the time. Viewers are shown images of young men racing joyfully into the sea, lugging rudimentary surfboards.

Easkey Britton is the second generation of the Britton family to become passionate about surfing. In the film, she recounts how her father and his brothers learned to surf.

Her grandmother brought back surfboards from California, intending to use them as decorations in her Donegal guesthouse. "My dad and his brothers paddled on them when they were young," says Easkey. "But it wasn't until they saw a visitor stand on them that they realized what they were really for. Before long, they were up on the boards and it all progressed from there. My nana probably regrets it now. We've got salty blood because of her."

So salty that Easkey was named after her parents' favorite surf break off the West Coast of Ireland. The name derives from the Irish word for fish (*iasc*), making it particularly apt for a surfing champion.

Within a few years, Kevin Cavey and the Britton brothers were competing in European surfing competitions. This brought Ireland to the attention of the international surfing community and in 1972, it was chosen as the host country for the European Surfing Championship.

Unfortunately, the surf was disappointing on the day of the championship. The waves were small. The swells were calm. There was no challenge. It wasn't until the day after that surfers got the opportunity to experience the thrills of surfing Irish style.

"It was epic," says Mike Wingfield, a member of the English Surf Squad of the time. "It was overhead, glassy and perfect. Nobody could get out of the water."

That year could be seen as a turning point in Irish surfing. Ireland was now a feature on the international surfing map. However, the number of surfers remained low – a mere two to three thousand people – until the boom of recent years.

Ian Johnson has surfed every day for decades. Until five or six years ago, he was usually alone on the ocean. "Now, I can't even get parking close to the beach," he says with a smile.

The Irish Surfing Association claims that at least 70,000 people have surfed in Ireland once or more. It's this jump that



The cold choppy waters of the Atlantic are not for the weak-hearted.

PHOTO: KEN O'SULLIVAN

prompted Ken O'Sullivan to make his documentary.

It's also what pushed the most enthusiastic surfers to conquer Aileen's. Traditional surfing spots were becoming crowded. They had to discover new frontiers.

John McCarthy, another Irish surfing champion, was the first to surf Aileen's, along with Dave Blunt. They were part of a group that developed a new technique whereby a jet ski pulls the surfer who is on a specially adapted board. The speed of the jet ski allows the surfer to get ahead of the swell. He then lets go of the tow rope and slides across the wave.

Saul Harvey, a local surfer, initially thought Aileen's surfers were mad. "You look at the huge cliffs and the powerful wave and you think they haven't a hope," he says.

He has since been won over and even surfed the wave himself. He describes it as like "standing in an elevator when all of a sudden, the floor drops from underneath you."

Aileen's wave is but one example of the many challenges Ireland has to offer surfers. As John McCarthy, the first to surf Aileen's, says, "the best thing about traveling is coming back to Ireland with the skills to surf better waves and realizing that the waves in Ireland are some of the best in the world".

Surfers are now visiting Ireland from other countries, surfers such as the seven-time world champion Kelly Slater who has spent time here conquering our waves. And surfers such as the people

interviewed for this documentary, whose lives are dictated by weather charts, ocean swells and the next wave.

"Our only problem is the Irish weather," says Ian Johnson. "It's diabolical. It doesn't stay the same for ten minutes."

In typically optimistic surfer fashion, he can also see the positive side of this. "Ireland is small and its weather is variable so you can usually travel to find the perfect offshore waves," he says. "Bundoran, Lahinch and Kerry can be three completely different worlds."

No matter what the weather, Irish surfers will always surf. In fact, the worse the weather, the more of them take to the waves. In 2006, thousands traveled to the West Coast to catch the frenzied waves that resulted from Hurricane Gordon wreaking havoc over the Atlantic.

This is what Irish surfing is all about. As Mickey Smith says, "Friendships, experiences and the opportunities to push myself and my surfing. I'll always be grateful to the Emerald Isle for that."

Or perhaps it's how pioneer Kevin Cavey explains it. "You're tingling with the forces of nature when you emerge from the sea. Surfing brings us back to our roots. That's why it's catching on."

With enthusiasts such as the characters captured in this film, Irish surfing looks set to grow and grow. "Our secret is finally out," says director Ken O'Sullivan. **IA**

For more information, visit  
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# Holyoke's Irish Heart

PATRICIA HARTY was honored at the St. Patrick's Day festivities in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and decided that if there is a place called Irish America, this could be it.

**A**t its heart, Holyoke, Massachusetts, is still Ireland Parish, which is what it was known as back in the 1800s when immigrants, mainly from the Irish-speaking area of Dingle, Co. Kerry, settled there and found employment working on the dam and canal system, in the paper manufacturing plants and textile mills.

It was a tough existence but they survived, and today in this area of Massachusetts on the banks of the Connecticut River, their descendants are more likely to be judges, politicians, teachers and doctors than blue-collar workers. But the struggle of those early immigrants is not forgotten, and the pride that Holyokers hold in their Irish roots is evident, especially on St. Patrick's Day.

Depending on the weather, and who is doing the talking, the parade status varies between being number one or two worldwide. According to some, the city of 40,000 people draws upwards of 350,000 spectators from Boston, the neighboring townlands of Springfield and Chicopee, and as far away as Chicago.

This year's parade took place on Sunday, March 22. The weather was crisp and sunny and a sense of fun prevailed. Families held parties on sloping front yards and cheers rang out from porches and sidewalks to the marchers along the 2.6-mile route. The feeling is a little more Mardi Gras than Hibernian with some 40 marching bands and as many floats taking part. This year, for instance, the Grand Colleen float featured giant ice cream cones and a chocolate box, and the Hawthorne Caballeros led off the parade with pulsing music and Latin-inspired costumes – a nod, perhaps, to the large Puerto Rican population that now call Holyoke home.

The parade is nothing if not inclusive. The Philadelphia Mummers with their brilliant costumes and accordion and banjo music liven up the crowd, while the Second Marine Aircraft Wing Band strike a reflective note as they call to mind the tradition of Irish-Americans in the Armed Forces, and today's young men and women who are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Canadians, Poles, and Puerto Ricans all immigrated to Holyoke in large numbers, but none so large as the original Irish settlers who are still prominent in the running of the city and the

parade. The celebrations run over several days and keep the 250-strong Parade Committee busy all year planning events such as the Colleen Pageant, 10k Road Race, Bishop's Mass, J.F.K. Award Dinner (John F. Kennedy and his wife Jackie were guests of honor at the 1958 inaugural dinner), and the Mayor's Breakfast, at which yours truly was presented with this year's Ambassador Award.

I first heard of Holyoke from the late, great Eoin McKiernan, who penned The Last Word column for *Irish America* for many years. Eoin was the first Ambassador Award recipient in 1992 and became an ardent fan of Holyoke, promoting the parade whenever he could. But it was at the urging of Ciaran O'Reilly and Charlotte Moore, founders of New York's Irish Repertory Theatre who served as last year's Ambassadors, that I finally made the trip. I'm glad I did.

I arrived in Holyoke, three and a half hours north of New York City, at noon-time on Saturday, just as the 10k road race was ending. I had barely put a foot down when I was met by a welcoming party of Fred Sullivan and Jack O'Neill, who soon had me off and running to a whirlwind of engagements.

As we went along, Fred, a labor lawyer with offices in New York and Holyoke, and Jack, a pharmacist of long standing, filled me in on the city's colorful history.

## IRELAND PARISH

Holyoke was known as Ireland Parish back in the 1800s, when it was a way station on the road between Springfield and Northampton – a place for weary travelers to refresh themselves at one of the taverns in the area. The first post office, called "Ireland," was established on June 3, 1822. Another post office called Ireland Depot was opened on February 26, 1847.

By that time, Boston entrepreneurs had seen the potential of the broad plain and the 57-foot drop in the Connecticut River at South Hadley Falls, and devised a plan to dam the river and turn the area into America's first planned industrial city.

Irish workers began construction on the dam, which was completed on November 16, 1848. (There's an old saying, "To build a canal all you need is a pick, a shovel, a wheelbarrow and an



Sgt. Daniel M. Clark, former United States Marine, known as "The Singing Trooper," is joined by Patricia Harty for a verse of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."





Left: Aran sweaters and red-haired children, a common sight along the parade route. Above: Grand Colleen Ashley Tucker and her court (Caitlin O'Neil, Alexandra Grass, Bridget O'Leary Sullivan and Kaleigh Clark) are pictured with J.F.K Award recipient and Holyoke native, Joseph Loughrey. Below: A young colleen takes in the parade. Bottom: Deborah Loughrey.  
PHOTOS: IRENE McLAUGHLIN NARISSI

Irishman.") The wooden structure proved no match for the mighty river and less than a day after it opened the dam was swept away to the famous words, "Dam gone to hell by way of Willimansett." Undeterred, construction began on a second dam. This time engineers put an apron in place for support, and the dam held.

One of the laborers on the dam was Irish immigrant Daniel O'Connell who died soon afterwards in a cholera epidemic. His son, also Daniel, a water boy on the same river project, became the family's sole support. Daniel went on to found Daniel O'Connell & Sons Contractors which is still in operation today.

"Of course, lives were lost," Bob Loughrey, uncle of Joe Loughrey, J.F.K. Award recipient, said of the building of the dam and the four and a half miles of canals that followed.

Bob's grandmother, Margaret Friel from Bunrana, Donegal, was fourteen when she arrived in Holyoke in 1878. She found work in the mills, which sprang up once the dam was in place, and later as a domestic in the house of William Skinner whose Skinner Silk Mills had thousands of workers. A woman of great fortitude and family loyalty, Margaret saved her money, returned to Ireland, collected her parents, her four brothers and sisters, a new husband, Constantine Loughrey, and brought them all back to Holyoke.

## LIVING CONDITIONS

The new opportunities in Holyoke soon began to attract other immigrant groups, particularly French Canadians and Polish workers. The mill owners provided housing close to their factories "so that there would be no excuse for them being late for their twelve-hour shifts," Bob says.

The tenements and row houses provided were often small and crowded. According to one 1875 report by the state's Bureau of Statistics of Labor: "Holyoke has more and worse large tenement



houses than any manufacturing town of textile fabrics in the state. One large block, four stories high, has 18 tenements with 90 rooms, occupied by nearly two hundred people; and yet there are only two, three-foot doorways on the front, and none on the back. Our agents visited some tenements having bedrooms into which neither air nor light could penetrate, as there were no windows and no means of ventilation."

Not only were the living conditions harsh, but the wages were poor – many families were in such dire straits that young children were forced into the workforce. The census of 1880 shows "only" 700 minors between the ages of 10 and 16 years employed in the mills. The following year that figure rose to 1,501.

## DILLON'S BLOCK

In 1875, work began on a new building, a huge complex at Maple and Hampden streets, and when it was completed many of the Irish moved there. Built by two brothers from Ballyduff, Co. Kerry, "Dillon's Block" was often referred to as "Dillon's Baby Factory" because so many of Holyoke's new citizens were born there.

One of those citizens was Joseph Loughrey, the eldest of Margaret and Constantine's twelve children. "My father and two of his sisters were born in Dillon's Block, and then the family moved to a house. He was one of twelve, one died in infancy and two died with flu when they were three and four," Bob says.

He tells me that his father, Joseph, had wanted to go to college but the family situation didn't allow for it. "He was very good at mathematics and he wanted to complete his schooling but his mother asked him to get a job so that he could help out. He agreed, but made her promise that with his help his four sisters would get an education and she kept that promise."

Joseph became a successful businessman and made sure that his own children went to college. Bob became a schoolteacher, another brother became a college professor, another had a



Clockwise: Keeping an eye on the parade; a young Mummer, Honora Harty, and Jack O'Neill; Mayor Mike Sullivan presents Patricia Harty with a citation at the Ambassador's Breakfast; Kateri and Dan Walsh and their seven children: Front row: Kateri, Marylee, Laura and Daniel IV. Back row: Michael's wife Jessica, Michael, Christopher, and Bennett with their parents.



successful career as a salesman. His sisters also had careers. The belief in education and also some of the grit and determination of Margaret Friel carried down to her great-grandson, also called Joe, who received this year's J.F.K. Award. The oldest of eight children, Joe (one of *Irish America's* Business 100) recently retired as Vice Chairman of Cummins, the world's largest independent diesel engine manufacturer, after a 35-year career.

## CHURCH & SCHOOL

It was hard not to think of Margaret Friel and that generation of immigrants as we assembled in St. Jerome's Church for the Bishop's Mass on the eve of the parade. St. Jerome's was the rock on which the future of those young Irish pioneers was built.

Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell, a Bronx man, con-celebrated Mass with Father Francis Sullivan, parish priest, and Father Cullen, a Welsh priest of Irish stock who came to Holyoke on a visit a few years ago and decided that he had found his calling.

Back in the day, it was Father Patrick Harkins who for 44 years not only looked after his community's spiritual needs but saw that the children were educated as well.

In 1868, Harkins invited the Sisters of Notre Dame to open a school for girls. Nineteen Sisters took care of 509 students. In 1872, Father Harkins opened a school for boys. The Sisters of Providence took charge of the school in 1876, and also, at Father Harkins' urging, established an institution of charity, a hospital and an Orphans' Home in Holyoke.

Harkins, the good nuns and other clergy saw to it that the children of immigrants were well prepared to take their place as citizens of America – good Catholic citizens.

"On my father's side, he had three first cousins who were

priests – Father Sullivan, Father George Friel, and Father Charles Friel. On my mother's side, six were priests and three were nuns. And even in my generation you had a huge amount of Irish that became priests and nuns," Bob Loughrey says.

Education and the church became the stepping stones to future success for the Irish in Holyoke and in other places across America. "At least 80 percent of elementary school teachers in Holyoke were Irish girls. My aunt Florence and Ellen Walsh were schoolteachers. The school door was open to them where other places were not," Bob says.

That tradition continues. The Irish still have a presence in the school system, as they do in the political life of Holyoke. This year's parade grand marshal Chris Patton Zacoc, an educator in Holyoke's public schools for 35 years, was the subject of *Amongst Schoolchildren*, a bestselling book by Tracy Kidder, who spent a year monitoring Patton in her classroom.



Judge Anne Gibbons, who was the Parade Grand Marshal in 2008.

## THE HUMOR

At the mass, the bishop can barely contain himself when the organ acts up and every beautifully sung hymn ends on a long mournful note because of trapped air in the pipes. Grinning, he thanks the choir "and the leprechaun in the organ."

At the J.F.K. Award dinner, humor abounds as Mayor Mike Sullivan, who in an alternative universe would be a stand-up comedian, gives a good old-fashioned ribbing to honoree Joe Loughrey, a boyhood pal. Meanwhile, my sister Honora, friend Irene, and I enjoy sitting around the dinner table with Kateri Walsh, who chairs the Ambassador Committee, her husband Dan, a former Marine, and sons Chris, Daniel and Bennett.

Chris regales us with stories of his trip to Ireland as Daniel tries to get a word in on the finer points of Irish culture, and

Bennett, a lieutenant colonel, just back from his third tour in Iraq, tells us what the Shannon stop-off means to the American troops coming and going to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Kateri, who was honored with this year's George E. O'Connell Award for her parade committee work, says she is "never happier" than when she has all her seven children together. They would all join her the following morning at the Mayor's Breakfast and later on the parade route.

## THE MAYOR & THE AWARD

The Mayor's Breakfast, where I receive my Ambassador's Award, is at the Yankee Peddler, which despite its name has a distinct Southern feel. The main dining hall is a beautiful room with a magnificent chandelier from the old Metropolitan Hotel in New York City, and a balcony where the Grand Colleen Ashley Tucker and her entourage hang out. The Mumpers entertain, the Marine band plays, and Sgt. Dan Clark sings "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," just for me.

I was welcomed by David Pinsky who represents Tighe & Bond, sponsors of the Ambassador Award (James Tighe was an Irish immigrant to Holyoke who worked on the Hydroelectric dam which replaced the wooden structure in 1900. Tighe went on to become city engineer in 1911). I received several citations from city and state representatives, and numerous gifts, and I am moved by the experience and at the same time worried about what I will say when my turn comes to speak.

Luckily, Mayor Mike Sullivan does the introductions. A native son, who has been mayor for 10 years, Sullivan is passionate about Holyoke and prized for his sense of humor. He has everyone laughing so hard that I begin to relax. I realize, not for the first time, that in Holyoke, I am amongst my own. And so, I proudly accept the Ambassador's Award on behalf of all the Irish immigrants who went before me.

The mayor has Kerry and Mayo roots: "My grandmother Bridget Kennedy was from Sleah Head, and my grandfather Michael Sullivan was from Brandon Mountain. On my mother's side, my grandmother Una Lavelle was from Belmullet, Co. Mayo, and my grandfather Nicholas O'Neill was from Cahirciven, Co. Kerry," he writes in response to a follow-up e-mail I sent requesting more information on his family background. "As a second-generation Irishman, I loved sitting off to the side when I was young to hear stories of glory, tragedy and opinion spun with thick brogues that were only translated through tumbler's of Four Feathers or Seagram's Seven.

"My Nana Sullivan was the only one I knew who was sweet and fierce with equal measure in all matters. She would approach the local butcher with praise, asking about his family, his wife, his new car and then when he would reveal the price of hamburger she would use all that against him in an instant. 'No wonder your flock are going to college and you are driving a new car - with the price of meat in this store it's a wonder you don't have a chauffeeeur,' she would exclaim. It was a great lesson in

politics. She also cared for me and my youngest sister while my mother was at work. I ended up having to go to speech class when I began elementary school because I would say 'ba-a-ll' and 'ca-a-ll' instead of ball and call, or 'windell' for window, or, as everyone in Holyoke still says, 'pa-day-da' for potato. The therapy broke my brogue."



A sign attesting to my Tipperary roots. I was delighted by the many call-outs along the parade route from Irish America readers.



A historic photo of the dam construction in 1847.

## Window to the Past

"Patrick Garvey, son of Daniel and Ellen (Moran) Garvey, was born in County Kerry, Ireland, and there resided until the year 1847, when he emigrated to the United States and located in Holyoke, Massachusetts where he spent the remainder of his days. He assisted in building the first dam and during that period acquired the title 'Bully' not for any pugnacious tendencies displayed by him. He was a man of large build and great strength, and upon seeing two men fail in placing a large stone in its proper place he went to the rescue and unaided placed it on the scaffolding. The man in charge of the work said, 'Bully for you' and Mr. Garvey was ever afterward known by that appellation. He was a man of genial disposition, always ready to assist a neighbor and friend, and was honored and respected accordingly. His wife, Elizabeth (Donnelly) Garvey, bore him seven children: Mary, Ellen, John, Daniel, Patrick H., Thomas J., Michael."

—The Encyclopedia of Biography

## THE GIFTS

Holyokers really take phrase "Irish hospitality" to new heights. Prized among the many gifts I received are a tartan scarf (Holyoke has its own tartan designed by Gerald Healy), a shillelagh, an Irish shawl from Cooper's, and an autographed picture of Don Larsen's perfect game.

I don't know if Don Larsen, the Yankee pitcher who threw the no-hitter in 1956 World Series between the New York Yankees and Brooklyn Dodgers, had any Irish roots, but his autographed photo, given to me by Dan Walsh, now has pride of place in my office. It is a reminder that sometimes miracles do happen, or maybe, in the case of those Irish immigrants to Holyoke, miracles didn't so much happen as they were made.

IA

# The Sword

AND THE

# Flag

Irish-American history  
is uncovered at Notre Dame

BY PATRICK GRIFFIN

**N**otre Dame is a wonderful place to teach Irish-American history. The topic fascinates students, many of whom take great pride in their Irish heritage. The place also stands as a living monument to the rags-to-riches narrative that animates much of Irish-American identity. For many Irish-Americans, the nickname “the Fighting Irish” epitomizes the mythic story that many believe defines the group. Once a term of derision, “fighting Irish” now resonates as a point of pride.

Notre Dame also holds surprises. When I was preparing a lecture on Eamon De Valera’s visit to the university during his 1919 American tour, I discovered that on the stop he viewed the Civil War sword of Thomas Francis Meagher. Known as a leader of the failed Young Irelander rising of 1848, Meagher championed a republican movement that sought to free Ireland by any means necessary. For his efforts, “Meagher of the Sword,” as he is remembered in Ireland, escaped the hangman’s noose only to be exiled in Van Diemen’s Land. Eventually, he was smuggled on board a ship, reaching San Francisco to a tumultuous welcome, before making his way to New York. Here, in the wake of Bull Run, he would found the famous Irish Brigade.



Above: General Thomas Francis Meagher, who was known as “Meagher of the Sword.”

Left: Bertie Ahern, on his farewell visit as Taoiseach in 2007, presents one of Meagher’s swords to the Congressional “Friends of Ireland,” on Capitol Hill. Pictured are Senator Edward Kennedy and Congressman Richie Neal.

Meagher saw no contradiction in fighting for the Stars and Stripes and fighting for Ireland. He believed, as did famine immigrants, that the cause of American freedom was Ireland’s as well. Like the United Irish émigrés who flocked to American cities in the 1790s, Meagher believed that the true republican was at home in both nations. After the war, General Meagher became first territorial governor of Montana, a place awash in Irish immigrants. Senator Thomas Walsh of Montana presented the sword to the university in 1914.

So when De Valera laid eyes on that sword at Notre Dame a little more than fifty years after Meagher had brandished it in battle, he was gesturing toward what he regarded as a vital relationship between Irish and American freedom,

one that the American-born De Valera epitomized. When he visited places like Notre Dame, he was traveling as President of the Irish Republic fighting for its freedom. But he was also journeying through his homeland – a different country, to be sure, but one that Irishmen and women had fought for. In many ways, as he was touring the country to raise funds and the visibility of the Irish cause for independence, he came looking for America to repay a debt for freedom that the United States owed to Ireland. Americans were happy to pay, none more so than the jubilant students at Notre Dame. So moved was he by his time at Notre Dame that De Valera considered it the high point of his American tour. Although no one knows the exact origins of the nickname “the Fighting Irish” –



perhaps newspapermen coined the term, maybe anti-Catholic bigots, or students themselves in reference to Meagher's men and the Fighting 69th of World War I – it is no mere coincidence that the term gained general currency in the 1919 football season in the wake of De Valera's visit. He was, after all, the most celebrated fighting Irishman in America at the time.

I was astonished to learn that Notre Dame owned the sword of "Meagher of the Sword." But I could not find it. Eventually I did. It lay stored in a gray box on the sixth floor of the library's archives. Archivists were not to be blamed; rather, it seemed the significance of the sword had somehow gone missing. Notre Dame, after all, was more Irish-American – with an emphasis on American – than Irish by the turn of the twenty-first century. I found more. Notre Dame also owned a flag of the famed Irish Brigade.

Like the sword, the flag was nowhere to be found. I later discovered that it had been exhibited from time to time but was held for the moment in an off-campus storage facility. The flag, referred to as the Second Irish Colors, was made by Tiffany and Co. in 1862 and presented to Meagher by a group of merchants from New York. On it is emblazoned the name of one of the regiments of the Irish Brigade: the New York 63rd. Along with the famed 69th, which would gain further renown in the First World War as "the Fighting Irish," the brigade comprised New York's 88th, as well as regiments from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. By the time the Second Colors were commissioned, the first flag had been shredded but never surrendered in some of the bloodiest fighting of the Civil War. The Irish Brigade had distinguished itself in the Peninsula Campaign, and the green flag came to be feared by rebels. In fact, after only a few months, Meagher's men earned the reputation as the shock troops of the Army of the Potomac, leading Abraham Lincoln to visit Meagher's camp and kiss the Second Colors.

The brigade went on to win fame – and court death – at Antietam and Fredericksburg. Here, on one afternoon it lost almost two-thirds of its men. By the time the brigade fought on the second day at Gettysburg in the Wheatfield, it was a shell of itself.

The flag of the 63rd was to be used for ceremonial purposes, such as when the remnants of the brigade marched in the Grand Review in Washington following the North's victory in the war and in New York during St. Patrick's Day.

Father William Corby, Holy Cross priest, chaplain to the Irish Brigade, and eventually President of the University of Notre Dame, secured the flag for the university. He hoped all the flags of the brigade would find a home at Notre Dame because of its connection to the brigade, its central location, and its growing stature within Irish America. De Valera also viewed this flag as he toured Notre Dame.

Like the sword, the flag also speaks to

eager to recount. He knew that one third of the Continental Army under Washington was Irish, leading a British commander to lament "we have lost America through the Irish." Kennedy also knew of the exploits of the Irish Brigade.

In his address to the Dail, he regaled TDs with the role Meagher had played in American history. He also talked of an ideal of "freedom" that united Ireland, America, and the Western world. Visiting Ireland just after he made his trip to Berlin, where he famously announced "Ich bin ein Berliner," Kennedy declared that the people behind the wall should remember the "Boys of Wexford," who had fought for freedom in 1798.

The bonds that both the flag and sword



**General Thomas Francis Meagher, known as Meagher of the Sword. He was a Fenian, a Civil War General and later, Governor of Montana.**

the real and durable connections between Ireland and America. In June 1963, when John F. Kennedy made his triumphal tour of Ireland – where he was first welcomed by President De Valera – he formally addressed the Dail in Leinster House. Here, he presented the Irish Parliament with the Second Irish (Tiffany) colors of the Fighting 69th. An exact replica of Notre Dame's flag, the colors Kennedy presented adorn the walls of Leinster House to this day. Kennedy gave the flag to the Irish in grateful recognition for all they had done for the cause of American freedom, a history that Kennedy was

represented were not lost on Kennedy. The great-grandson of eight famine immigrants, Kennedy joked that if Ireland had not had to fight for its freedom, he – if lucky – might be sitting with his audience in the Dail, and if De Valera had never left New York, he – not Kennedy – might be addressing the Dail as president of the United States. Like De Valera had a generation earlier, Kennedy had traveled the ocean as a self-proclaimed apostle of liberty. The flag, then, suggested the continuing significance of the bonds between Ireland and America, nations that had helped each other become free and that now, according

# General Meagher Returns Home



Waterford City Council Councillors with the bronze bust of Meagher at the Waterford Museum of Treasures. Below: Eamon de Valera on a visit to Notre Dame in 1919.



COURTESY NOTRE DAME

to Kennedy, faced a common Communist threat.

The story does not end here. Last year, as the outgoing Taoiseach Bertie Ahern made his farewell trip to Washington, he presented the Congressional "Friends of Ireland" cohort with one of Meagher's Irish swords. This sword belonged to the city of Waterford, Meagher's hometown. Ahern handed the sword first to Senator Ted Kennedy. In doing so he was recognizing the role Kennedy had played in the peace process as well as Notre Dame's Fighting Irish history. Without American support, Ahern argued, the Good Friday Agreement would have never come to be. Just as they had in the days of De Valera's trip, Americans had once more come to the aid of the Irish. But Ahern also pointed to the past when Ted's brother had presented the Irish with one of his nation's treasures.

Ahern saw the presentation as closing an historical circle. An American flag decorated with Irish symbols would hang in Ireland's Leinster House. And an Irish sword with American echoes would grace the halls of the American capitol. Ahern's gift restored balance to the past, ending a chapter. His gesture, of course, says a great deal more. It also speaks to the continuing and evolving significance of Ireland in the American story and of America in the Irish story, a transatlantic experience defined by the gift-giving of presidents and taoiseachs, the sacrifices of ordinary men and women, and the viability of Irish-American history at places like Notre Dame. **LA**

**C**ivil War General Thomas Francis Meagher, Irish nationalist, lawyer, and recruiter of Irish immigrants whose fiery public speeches earned him the title "Meagher of the Sword," recently returned to his birthplace of Waterford City, Ireland in the form of a bronze bas-relief bust, donated by the Hibernians in the U.S. and installed on the exterior wall of the famous Waterford Museum of Treasures on Merchants Quay.

General Meagher was born in Waterford in 1823 and joined the Young Ireland Movement, which was dedicated to securing Irish independence by armed insurrection. As a result of his involvement in the 1848 rebellion, Meagher and other rebel leaders were sentenced to death, but Queen Victoria commuted the sentences to life in exile in the Australian penal colony in Tasmania. In 1855, after a daring escape, Meagher traveled to New York City and enjoyed a hero's welcome. There he became a lawyer and a popular public speaker and established newspapers for the Irish immigrant community.

At the start of the Civil War, Meagher recruited Irish immigrants for New York's Fighting 69th, the nucleus of the Irish Brigade, and was made a general by President Lincoln. In September 1862, Meagher was leading a fierce charge against Confederate forces in the Battle of Antietam at Bloody Lane when his horse was shot from beneath him. Three months later, he was wounded in the Battle of Fredericksburg. The Irish Brigade was largely decimated, but Meagher survived the war.

When the Civil War ended, President Andrew Johnson sent Meagher to serve as the acting Governor of Montana Territory. In the summer of 1867, at age 44, Governor Thomas Meagher fell from a riverboat and drowned in the Missouri river. His body was never found. Many claim he was murdered due to his outspoken tendencies, either by Montana political enemies, a Confederate soldier from the war, or Native Americans.

In 1997, the Irish Cultural Society erected the Civil War Irish Brigade Monument at Antietam National Battlefield. Waterford City officials asked the Society to make a replica of the monument's bust, featuring General Meagher, to remain in Waterford. Sculptor Ron Tunison created a bronze duplicate of the bas-relief bust from the original mold of the Antietam monument, shipped by Air Lingus to Ireland and installed at the Waterford Museum of Treasures.

Jack O'Brien, president of the Irish Cultural Society and Historian for the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Washington, D.C., explained that the bust "will be the beginning point of the Meagher Trail, which will take visitors to various places in Waterford City associated with the life of this Irish patriot and American hero." The trail will pass Meagher's birthplace, the house where he was arrested by the British in July 1848, and the Wolf Tone Club where he flew the Irish tricolor flag for the first time after returning home with it from France where he had served as a delegate for the Young Irelanders. The tricolor was adopted as Ireland's national flag upon independence in 1921.

"Everyone who has seen the bust has been absolutely amazed at how impressive a piece of sculpture it is," wrote Museum Director Eamonn McEaney. "It is a real work of art and will be a most handsome addition to his native city that he loved so well." Down the street, a new equestrian statue of Thomas Francis Meagher proudly stands in tribute to this noble Irish and American patriot, revolutionary, orator, journalist, general, and politician, a proud son of Ireland. A formal dedication ceremony of the Waterford monument will be held in 2010. Meanwhile, as we went to press, we received news that on June 28, another original bronze monument to Meagher by artist Ron Herron will be unveiled and dedicated by the Helena Hibernians in Fort Benton, Montana, where Meagher served as governor and later boarded the riverboat on which he died. **- K.R.**



SOURCES FOR THIS ESSAY: PETER LYSY, BLUE FOR THE UNION AND GREEN FOR IRELAND (SOUTH BEND, IN, 2001); MURRAY SPERBER, SHAKE DOWN THE THUNDER: THE CREATION OF NOTRE DAME FOOTBALL (BLOOMINGTON, IN, 2002); DAVE HANNIGAN, DEVALERA IN AMERICA: THE REBEL PRESIDENT'S 1919 CAMPAIGN (OXFORD, 2000); DAVID CALLAGHAN, THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER AND THE IRISH BRIGADE (LONDON, 2006); AND MAURICE HENNESSY, I'LL COME BACK IN THE SPRINGTIME: JOHN F. KENNEDY AND THE IRISH (LONDON, 1967). ON BERTIE AHERN'S VISIT, SEE IRISH INDEPENDENT, 4 MAY 2008.

# Presidents & First Ladies

## of Irish Ancestry

*There's as much  
of the old sod in the  
White House as  
there is on its south  
lawn, as Carl  
Sferrazza Anthony  
found out.*

The backgrounds of America's First Families are diverse: Nancy Reagan and Lady Bird Johnson have Spanish forebears; Herbert Hoover was Swiss and Canadian; Mamie Eisenhower was part Swedish while Ike was German; Martin Van Buren and the Roosevelts were Dutch; James Garfield had a royal strain of French; Eliza Johnson's parents were immigrant Scottish sandal-makers; both Calvin Coolidge and Edith Wilson had American Indian blood—she being a direct descendant of Pocahontas.

Yet it is the Irish American who represents the largest majority of

those who have been President or First Lady.

Our current President Bill Clinton's Irish ancestry through his maternal great-grandfather has already been reported. He represents a long heritage at the White House.

When Dutchman Franklin Delano Roosevelt told an uncomfortable audience of the Daughters of the American Revolution that "we are all immigrants," he was not far off course regarding several of his predecessors' parents. Seven presidents were first generation Americans, and three of them had parents who arrived directly from Ireland. James Buchanan's father, James, was born in Ramelton, County Donegal and came to America thirty years before the president was born. Chester Arthur's father, William, was born at The Draen (The Place of Thorns) near Ballymena, County Antrim. Arthur's father's birthplace was never a political issue, but the son's was, for it was claimed, and never disproved, that the president was born on the Canadian side of

*Dolley Madison,  
a practical hostess,  
having assisted  
widower Thomas  
Jefferson before  
becoming First  
Lady herself,*



*became a legend.  
Well-loved and  
respected, she set a  
standard her suc-  
cessors were hard  
put to match.*

the Vermont border, in direct violation of the law stating that presidents must be American-born only.

Both of Andrew Jackson's parents came from Carrickfergus in County Antrim and arrived in the States just two years before Jackson was born. The red-haired "Old Hickory" had a legendary temper that was particularly riled in his hatred for the British, which he displayed after a childhood during which a redcoat struck him and his brother with a sword.

Another Anglophobe was Welshman Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, several sources claim, also had Irish blood from Galway, but the true origins of his family, which immigrated first to the West Indies and then to Antigua before coming to Virginia, are not absolutely certain. It is interesting to note that on St. Patrick's Day, 1802, during Jefferson's presidency, the "Sons of Hibernia" marched in front of the White House, with shamrocks stuck in their hats.

Andrew Johnson's grandfather, also called Andrew, came from Mounthill, Larne, County Antrim.



The 17th President, born, the son of a janitor, in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1808, married a shoemaker's daughter who taught him to write.

William McKinley was the great-great-grandson of James McKinley who emigrated from Conagher near Ballymoney, County Antrim, in about 1743.

Ulysses Simpson Grant was the great-grandson of John Simpson who was born in 1738 at Dergina, near Dungannon, County Tyrone. Grant visited the North of Ireland in 1878.

Other Presidents were further removed from the old country. James Polk's great-great-grandfather William was born in Donegal, Ireland, and his great-great-great-grandmother Magdalen Tasker was born in Moneen, near Strabane, County Tyrone.

Grover Cleveland's Irish ancestry came through his mother, Anne Neal, whose father Abner came from County Antrim to America in the 18th century.

Benjamin Harrison's mother Elizabeth Irwin was descended from two great-grandfathers from the province of Ulster: James Irwin and

*President Reagan in Ballyporeen, Ireland. Photo: Reagan Library.*

William McDowell, who emigrated in the early 1700s. Theodore Roosevelt's mother Martha Bulloch's Huguenot ancestors came from Larne in County Antrim.

Woodrow Wilson's grandfather James, encouraged by his neighbor and friend John Dunlap who printed the Declaration of Independence, emigrated from Strabane, County Tyrone in 1807. Dunlap wrote to James: "The young men of Ireland who wish to be free and happy should leave it and come here as quickly as possible. There is

no place in the world where a man meets so rich a reward for conduct and industry as in America."

**M**any of America's most famous First Ladies boast Irish blood. Dolley Payne Madison's mother, Mary Coles, was Irish. It was Dolley's maternal grandfather William Coles who came to America from Enniscorthy, Ireland and settled in Richmond, amassing a fortune. Widower President Chester Arthur's sister, Mary McElroy, who served as his First Lady, was said to have derived positive attributes from

*Pat Ryan Nixon and President Nixon visit the graveyard of his Milhous ancestors in Timahoe, Co. Kildare. Photo: Nixon Library.*



her Irish blood. In 1888, one writer noted of Mary: "Like Mrs. Madison and Miss Lane [bachelor President James Buchanan's niece and First Lady], she is of Irish and American blood, which so often produces beautiful women. She has the rare combination of very dark hair and eyes and a most delicate complexion. . . and high-bred airs."

Eleanor Roosevelt, like her immediate predecessor Lou Hoover, was also Irish. Though her most prominent ancestor was Edward Livingston, who swore George Washington in as president, and was descended from very old colonial Dutch and English New York families, Eleanor's maternal great-grandfather, Valentine Hall, was an Irish immigrant who settled in Brooklyn. His "remarkable business ability" in commercial trading afforded him the chance to buy large chunks of New York real estate, and he retired before he was fifty. Eleanor Roosevelt humorously recalled that when Hall's son, her grandfather, needed money to finish his manse on the Hudson, he went to his mother, Mrs. Hall Sr., who "would go to the wardrobe and rummage around," then come out "with a few thousand dollars." Mrs. Roosevelt said this went back to her great-grandmother's Irish

immigrant habits, "because in Ireland it would be perfectly normal to keep your belongings in whatever was the most secret place in your little house. . . my great-grandmother evidently had carried [the habit] into the new world and proceeded to do so."

Eleanor was married to her distant cousin Franklin Roosevelt on St. Patrick's Day, 1905, her mother Anna Hall's birthday. Eleanor's uncle, President Theodore Roosevelt gave her away at the ceremony, being in New York because he was reviewing the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Outside of the house where the Roosevelts were married, little boys waited to see the president, and carrying American and Irish flags, greeted the wedding guests. Later in the day, Teddy Roosevelt spoke before the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick at Delmonico's restaurant. He told them, "American is not a matter of creed, or birthplace, or descent. That man is the best American who looks beyond the accidents of occupation or so-



Andrew Jackson

place, or descent. That man is the best American who looks beyond the accidents of occupation or so-



*The annual Easter Monday egg roll party held on the White House Lawn, open to all children, was started by Lucy Hayes. Here Eleanor Roosevelt joins her young guests at the party held in 1936.*

cial condition, and hails each of his fellow citizens as his brother, asking nothing save that each shall treat the other on his own worth as a man. . ."

Bess Truman was angry when, as her daughter Margaret set sail for a tour of Europe including Ireland, rumors were revived that her grandfather, David Wallace, was an Irish immigrant. The first lady asked that Margaret hold a press conference in Dublin clearing up newspaper reports that the president's daughter was going to be greeted by her Irish Wallace relatives when she arrived. "I want it settled, once and for all," Mrs. Truman wrote her daughter. "The original Wallace family did come from Ireland in 1684. . . The current story is that I am the daughter of 'Robert' and that he still lives somewhere in Ireland. I'm sick and tired of it."

Most think of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy as French, because of her father's distinguished Gallic family and her own study of French culture and art. Through her late mother Janet Lee's family, however, Jacqueline Kennedy is of Irish ancestry. James Thomas Lee, Jacqueline's paternal grandfather, was the grandson of Irish immigrants who came to America at the same time the Kennedy and Fitzgerald families did, during the potato famine of the 1840's. Lee worked his way through Columbia University where he earned his M.A. and law degree. After practicing as an attorney, he succeeded in real estate and was vice president of Chase Manhattan Bank, and later president of New York Central Savings Bank. His wife, Margaret Merritt, was also Irish, her parents immigrating to America a generation later than the Lees.

Her birthname was Thelma Catherine, but from the day she was born, the fiercely independent youth was known as Pat. Her father, Will Ryan, was the adventurous son of Irish Catholic immigrant parents from County Mayo. Copper miner Ryan, returning home to his miner's shack in the mountains of east Nevada was so ecstatic that his daughter was



*Left: Bachelor President Buchanan and the Prince of Wales honor George Washington at his tomb. Harriet Lane, the President's niece (here holding a parasol), served as her uncle's hostess.*

born close to midnight on March 16, he decided "Pat's" birthday would be celebrated on St. Patrick's day. "Well," he explained, "she was there in the morning, my St. Patrick's babe in the morning." It was after he died that she began officially calling herself Patricia, after Ireland's patron saint. Her birthdate and ancestry even became a political issue when her husband delivered his famous Checkers speech in 1952. "I am not a quitter. And Pat's not a quitter. After all, her name was Patricia Ryan, and she was born on St. Patrick's Day, and you know the Irish never quit."

But Pat Nixon, according to daughter Julie, never seemed comfortable being labeled Irish and German (her mother had immigrated from Germany). She thought of herself as an American. Though she was proud to be Irish and never denied it, the first lady was initially displeased to learn in 1971 that plans were underway for a scheduled reunion between her and Ryan relatives in County Mayo because it would smack of artificiality. There was trouble, however, in even locating her husband, President Richard Milhous Nixon's

*Sarah and James Polk functioned as a unique political couple. She helped him with his speeches, correspondence, read and sifted through the newspapers and gave him advice— but always quietly behind the scenes.*



Irish relatives.

The Nixon Irish family originated in Timahoe, and the president even named his Irish setter King Timahoe. Julie Eisenhower wrote of an American Embassy in Dublin report of "scouring the Irish countryside for distant cousins. . . ." Richard Nixon's mother Hannah was descended from the Milhous family, Irish Quakers from Kildare, Ireland, who came to William Penn's Quaker colony of Pennsylvania. The original Nixon ancestor, James, came from Ireland to Delaware in 1731. After the quiet visit to Timahoe, President Nixon stopped the official motorcade along a quiet roadside, where he greeted curious Irishmen on horseback and took in the serene open land about him. As it turns out, however, the Ryan family reunion was the most memorable moment of the October trip.

In Ballinrobe, County Mayo, Pat Nixon had a friendly and private luncheon at Ashford Castle with thirty relatives, and was afforded an opportunity to speak personally with many of her cousins. Her daughter recalled one cousin in particular, John Fahey, 96, who took the First Lady through the ancient burial grounds of their family. With tears in his eyes over the meeting, Pat Nixon warmly embraced him with an arm around his shoulder. "You're spry," she said, "and mighty nice, Mr. Fahey."

Ronald Reagan's simple, two paragraph letter to Don Regan when the latter resigned as White House Chief of Staff on February 27, 1987 revealed his own proud ancestry. Reagan recalled the words of "our forefathers" by writing "may the sun shine warm upon your face, the wind be always at your back, and may God hold you in the hollow of His

hand." The forefathers Reagan referred to weren't Mayflower pilgrims or pioneers crossing the Great Divide. They were Irishmen.

Reagan's father Jack was a tall, black Irishman with a sardonic wit. A Democrat and a Catholic, he was a minority in the small town of Dixon, Illinois who defended the rights of minorities like blacks and Jews. His son Ronald, though raised a Protestant like his mother, inherited Jack's ability to swap jokes and blessings. In June 1984, while attending the London Economic Summit, Reagan made a side trip to visit the town of Ballyporeen, Ireland, the home of his great-grandfather who came to America.

Of all the presidents, however, the one who most proudly celebrated his Irish heritage was John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The Fitzgerald and Kennedy family saga from rags-to-riches, from poor potato famine immigrants to Boston politicians is perhaps the most famous of any presidential family. The Kennedys came from Dunganstown, County Wexford, and the first in America was Patrick, who arrived in Boston in 1848. The Fitzgeralds came from the same county, but had a longer and more distinguished history. They were originally Italian, and as the Gherardini family of Venice were awarded a castle and title by William the Conqueror for their help in the invasion of England. They immigrated from Italy to Ireland where the name was transformed. Centuries later, JFK quipped that he had never "had the courage to make that claim, but I will make it now, on Columbus Day in this state of New Jersey."

Kennedy was the first president to make an unabashedly sentiment-



Andrew Johnson



Ulysses Simpson Grant

tal trip to the emerald land of his ancestors, in June of 1963. There, he had a simple lunch of salmon and tea with relatives in the home of his cousin, Mary Ryan, a matriarch who took control of the day. "You haven't shown your face at this door for twenty years," she pointedly told one visiting relative, "and now you're horning in here because President Kennedy is coming!" The president laughed at all the uproar in the small town and assured his cousin, "we will come only once every ten years. . . Many people are under the impression that all the Kennedys are in Washington, but I am happy to see so many present who missed the boat."

When he spoke before the Irish Parliament in Leinster House, he noted that some of its architectural features were said to be copied in the White House design by

its Irish architect, James Hoban. "I have no doubt," Kennedy wryly noted, "that he believed. . . he would make it more homelike for any President of Irish descent. It was a long wait, but I appreciate his efforts." When he received honorary degrees from Ireland's Catholic

Trinity College and Protestant National University, he said he'd "cheer for Trinity and pray for National." In Cork, he introduced the Irish born Monsignor O'Mahoney as "the pastor of a poor, humble flock in Palm Beach, Florida." In his ancestral home, he joined a chorus of "We Are the Boys of Wexford," prompted by a nun. In a Dublin castle, he joined a group of gathered girls in singing "Danny Boy."

But Ireland seemed to give him a pensive and peaceful frame of mind after his grueling European tour. He soft-



Chester Alan Arthur



William McKinley

*Margaret Truman sings a duet with opera star Ezio Pinza. A singing career was derailed by the glare of press scrutiny.*



*President Kennedy surrounded by relatives at the home of his cousin Mary Ryan in County Wexford.*

ly repeated the writings, poetry, and lyrics of Gaelic writers. He quoted Shaw in saying, "Other people see things, and say why. But I dream things that never were, and I say, why not?" On his last night, President Kennedy repeated the lines of a famous song, before a hushed crowd. "Come back to Erin, Mavoureen, Mavoureen,



come back aroon to the land of my birth, come with the shamrock in the springtime, Mavoureen." And continued, "This is not the land of my birth, but it is the land for which I hold the greatest affection, and I will certainly come back in the springtime."

At Shannon Airport, before he departed, President Kennedy repeated another poem to a small gathered crowd. Then, before turning to board Air Force One, he told them his thoughts on leaving.

"Well, I am going to come back and see Old Shannon's face again, and I am taking, as I go back to America, all of you with me." **IA**

# The End of It, the End: A Last Meeting with Beckett

## Mark Axelrod recalls a poignant final lunch with Samuel Beckett.

**W**ith the recent publication of the first volume of Beckett's letters I started to recall the last time I met Beckett in Paris in 1988. We first met in April, 1985. It had been three years since our meeting at the café in the Hotel PLM. At noon. Noon being the time he had suggested. The suggested hour. At the time, there was the usual feeling one gets upon meeting one's hero. Of sorts. Heroes coming in all sorts of sizes. Genres. Modes of discourse. Our first meeting was all that I hadn't expected it to be: chatty, informal, with an air of melodious, yet melancholy, music to it. Yet, in its own way, it was sacrosanct. And so I looked forward to our next meeting, our last meeting. At the café of his choice, the PLM; at the time of his choice, noon.

I had primed myself by seeing *En Attendant Godot* several nights earlier in case one needed priming for such a meeting since my anxieties were much less pronounced than they were three years earlier. By now we had corresponded, almost called each other by first names, knew where each other lived. He had even consented to reading some blather I had written even though he couldn't read much by then. Blather is all it was. Can't remember what I had sent him.

I was early. Always early. One waits for Beckett, if one respects time. If one respects Beckett. It is also a kindness afforded to greatness. My time seemed expendable. I started to smooth my hair, tapped my fingers on the marble table, would have smoked had I allowed myself to do it. In between still another hair stroke, still another tapping finger, I saw him walk in and begin to look around. Gone were the grey greatcoat and the blue sweater now replaced with a knee-length, navy blue coat and an orange stocking cap. Tennies.

I walked across the room and tapped his shoulder.

"Mr. Beckett."

"Mr. Axelrod," he said as he turned.

Beckett had chosen a booth, in a corner of the café, away from the window, beneath a coat rack. He removed a small, yellow cigar box and placed it on the table. Weathered hands, bent from the fabric of so many rigid pens. What I noticed this time that I hadn't noticed three years earlier were the lines in his face. The creases, deep, curvilinear, like furrows that had swallowed certain secrets and kept them irretrievably harbored.

"The weather's been so bad," I said, "How do

you manage? Morocco?"

A place he said he visited, at times, when Paris got too cold. "My cottage," he said, some miles outside Paris. In what direction he didn't say. A reclusive habitat, no doubt. Doubt needed for reclusion. We ordered coffees: a café noir for him, a café crème for me. He seemed much thinner to me. Not a sickly thin, but an aged one, one that seemed to brook the onset of deliquescence. Deathlike, it seemed to me. I quickly discounted the idea.

"How's the writing going?" I asked. A legitimate question of one writer to another regardless of the legitimate disparity in our talents.

Not well, he said, as he fiddled with his cigars.

"Writer's block," I said as a jest to me, to him, but he answered that it had never lasted so long. Then he looked at me with a smile that masqueraded nothing. A realization that the Muse was finally eluding him and he said, all things come to an end. And I realized that anything I said or did after that comment would never alter the fabric of that day, nor my life, nor his, nor any other life that had been or is or will be touched by his prose, by the supple salience of his prose which breathes across the page. I had often thought of myself as fairly facile in conversation. Able to pick up and move in any direction. But I suddenly found myself unable to think of anything to say that would liquidate the vacuum of the moment. Fortunately, the coffees came. A caffeineated respite.

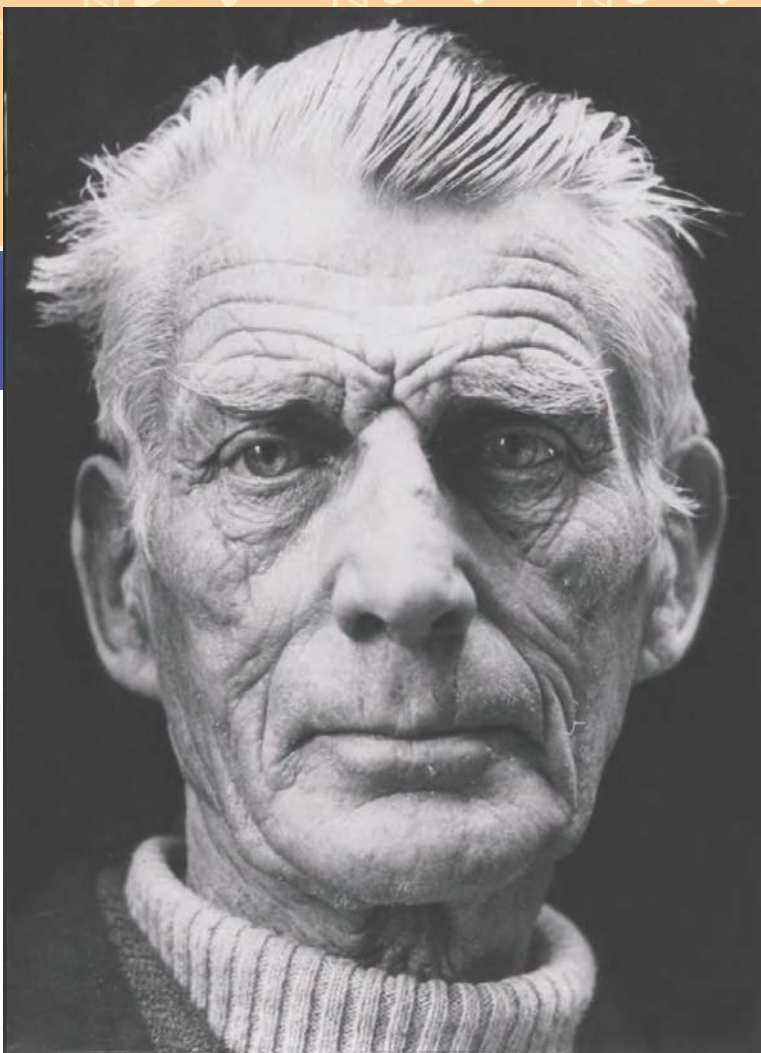
I remembered reading, that morning, on the Metro, an article in the now defunct Paris magazine, *Passion*, titled "Les 100 Poids Lourds Des Lettres" with a picture of a certain Regine Deforges, a writer unknown to me, on the cover. The blurb beneath the title read "'Un hit-parade des 100 personnes-editeurs, écrivains, et...poètes-qui constituent le Tout-Paris des lettres.'" The article certainly piqued my interest since I wondered in what category they had ensconced Beckett since such natives as Michel Butor and Maurice Blanchot and Claude Simon and Nathalie Sarraute were included as were exiles such as Milan Kundera. But though I looked and looked and looked again, Beckett was missing. Some poseurs were there, yes; some Beckett, was not. And so I said to him, "You've been living in Paris for all these many years and yet they haven't included you among their 'dinosaures des lettres Francaises.' You live in France, you speak and write in French, yet they didn't include you. Why do you think they did that?"

At first he looked puzzled by the exclusion, but then, with another smile, merely said, it's okay, I forgive them. Maybe it was because he still thought of himself as Irish even after living fifty years in France or maybe it was because the redacteur en chef hadn't edited the copy or perhaps the staff had thought him dead. At any rate, I didn't forgive them.

"But when were you last in Ireland?" I asked.



Mark Axelrod



Sixty-eight, he said, for a funeral. And then in a transition that wouldn't have been a stain upon his craft, he said his mother was dead, and his brother was dead, and Blin was dead and so was Jack Yeats. And one could see the furrowed frown in his forehead as he held his hand to his head, thinking, perhaps repeating thoughts, or losing them, within the confines of time, time in the Vaucluse, Rousillon, with his wife, with others, time with Watt. The furrowed frown. Through some set of verbal perambulations he came to talk of his early work, how he couldn't make it as a teacher since he felt he knew no more than his students. A last ditch writer, he called himself. No one took his work, no one looked at it. No one till Lindon, till Jérôme Lindon took his work. Without reservations. How fortunate he was, he said, to have found him, and how lucky he was to have found Roger Blin. And John Calder. How lucky I was, he repeated. How lucky he was. How lucky they were I thought, but he would have never said that. Never.

It's somewhat difficult to reconstruct the scene, seen so many years ago now, two decades on, now after his centenary. I tend to think of how that meeting ended. Of what things I took away with me the last time I met Beckett. And I vividly remember two moments: first was his response to my simple-minded question: "What are you planning to write next?" acknowledged with the sublimely succinct answer, "All things come to an end." With that statement there was nothing more to be said, nothing less. No symbols where none intended. It was over. One needed no redacteur to understand that, and yet hearing the words come from him rendered me depressed and sullen, ren-

dered the day depressed and sullen. At the end of that chat, I suggested that, perhaps, he needed to go, to leave, to do whatever he needed to do since I didn't want to take up any more of his time. He nodded, picked up his glasses, paid for the coffees and we both headed for the door.

The other moment was more sanguine. I recalled from our first meeting that he smoked Dutch cigars. Small ones. Small ones that came in a yellow cardboard box the brand of which escapes me. Holland stokjes or something of the sort. The ones he placed on the table when he arrived. As it was nearing his birthday, I had bought several boxes of those cigars to give to him as a present, as a gift and before he walked out of the café I told him I had something for him. I removed the crudely wrapped cigars from my leather bag, crudely wrapped as only I could crudely wrap them and handed the cigars to Beckett. He unwrapped the paper and when he saw they were the same cigars he smoked he looked at me with a look that was both perplexing and grateful, a look that would have suggested that what I had given him was a gift beyond all

measure, a gift that was speechlessly invaluable. He asked me how I knew; I said I merely remembered.

And so they stayed a little while, Mr. Beckett and Mr. Axelrod looking at each other with Mr. Beckett's hand on Mr. Axelrod's shoulder, looking straight before him, at nothing in particular, and then Mr. Beckett thanked Mr. Axelrod, stuffed the boxes in his coat, bid Mr. Axelrod a safe trip home, shook his hand and left. A left turn, a right turn and he was gone though the sky, falling to the buildings, and the buildings falling to the river, made as pretty a picture, in the afternoon light, as a man could hope to meet with, on a waning day in April.

But the day wasn't over for me. What I could not fathom was the line "All things come to an end." Depressed and sullen discourse. One fathoms such a line from a dictionary of well-worn phrases perhaps, but not in the context of someone of Beckett's literary station.

I recall I left the café, ambled, turning down aleatory alleys until I eventually found myself walking along the Seine, somewhere along the Seine, perhaps near the Hotel Lauzun, perhaps not, it didn't really matter, repeating the line, the same line he spoke not that long ago, "All things come to an end." The wind picked up. I couldn't light my Dutch cigars. "No symbols where none intended." How prescient he was. Fewer than two years later he was gone. IA

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*Mark Axelrod is a professor and former Chair of English and Comparative Literature at Chapman University, California. He is a multiple award winner for his work.*

# Reviving Beckett

As the end of this year will bring the 20th anniversary of Samuel Beckett's death, the literary and theater world has come together to pay homage to the late writer, making 2009 a year of remembrance for the author. **By Tara Dougherty**

In April, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett: 1929-1940*, the first of a promised three volumes of personal writings from the literary giant was published. It includes a wide collection from Beckett's letters which trace his development as a writer, ultimately leading to his leadership in the modernist and later postmodernist movements. In this work the writer is discovered to not only live up to his witty and irreverent reputation but also reveals his somewhat obliging air.

writers, calling T.S. Eliot a "nice man" and a "bad poet." The letters leave readers with a secure sense of Beckett's voice and an enlightened look into his process and development as a writer.

Joseph O'Neill, author of *Netherland* who recently reviewed the book for *The New York Times*, valued the complexity these letters lent to the character of Beckett. "He

is packed with additional information provided by editors Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck.

The letters are presented with contextual notes with detailed introductions and explanations which grant readers further insight into the playwright and novelist.

O'Neil concluded in his review, "The knowledge of what lay ahead for Beckett — the writing of the plays and the great prose fiction — makes one very impatient for the further volumes of letters, almost as if Beckett were in actual correspondence with

oneself."

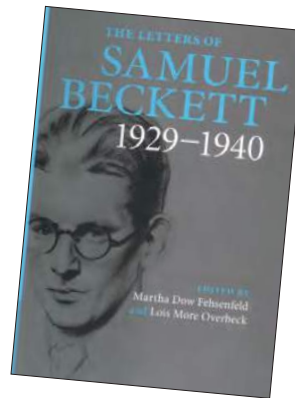
In a lovely coincidence, Beckett is being remembered on Broadway with a revival of *Waiting for Godot* by the Roundabout Theater Company at Studio 54 in New York. The production attracted heavy-hitters of the acting world Nathan Lane, John Glover, Bill Irwin and John Goodman.

It has been over 50 years since the play premiered in New York to confused audiences and disappointing reviews. The play had previously struggled to find a place in London after grappling with censorship.

Beckett told Peter Woodthorpe in 1994 of *Godot*, "My play wasn't written for this box. My play was written for small men locked in a big space. Here you're all too big for the place."

*Waiting for Godot* only lasted 59 performances during its first run 53 years ago in New York. It was revived the following year for less than a week. Yet, it has survived the test of time in the literary world and is enthralling audiences on Broadway today. Directed by Anthony Page, the play will run through July 5.

These two revivals of the voice of Beckett coinciding with one another are serendipitous for followers of the writer. Each grant readers and theatergoers with an even more detailed glance into the Beckett who was born in Foxrock, Dublin, traveled the world, and settled in Paris, where his voice would transform modernist literature. **IA**



Bill Irwin, John Goodman and Nathan Lane, and John Glover (far left) in *Waiting for Godot*.

Through the trials of post-World War I Europe and the imminent Nazi invasion, Beckett's writings from Paris explore the mindset of a man unafraid of dooms of the modern world.

Beckett's letters will delight fans eager for more of his unbridled opinions on a broad range of topics. He is unforgiving in his criticism of established

alternates between self-laceration and cockiness. He is profoundly alienated, not least because he inhabits a world of rejection slips, indefinite longings, extreme aesthetic sensitivity and (in the words of a friend) 'passionate nihilism.'

Filled with historical notes and chronological clarifications, the volume



Photo: Liam Burke, Press 22

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# Wilde on Show

An exhibition at the **Morgan Library** attracts Oscar Wilde enthusiasts.

By Cahir O'Doherty

**E**xpensively dressed, impeccably mannered and gifted with a voice so beguiling his contemporaries marveled at him, Oscar (Fingal O'Flaherty Wills) Wilde was also one of the wittiest men of his age. Even today, just to hear his name is to anticipate delight. That's why his cult, which began in his own lifetime, shows no signs of ever diminishing.

This month, in an exhibition that seems calculated to attract every Oscar Wilde enthusiast in America, the Morgan Library and Museum in Manhattan will exhibit a selection of the Irish writer's most important manuscripts and letters. But this isn't just another stuffy museum piece featuring a more than usually compelling Irish writer. This time the Morgan can boast of a dramatic first: the whereabouts of this beautifully bound collection was unknown to scholars for over half a century.

Bequeathed to the library in December 2008, the current collection comprises nine manuscripts of Wilde's poems and prose pieces and featuring four important letters that illuminate the life and work of the dramatist, aesthete, wit, and self-proclaimed "lord of language," making the exhibition one of the most important illustrations of the breath and scope of Wilde's artistic achievements to be seen in America this decade.

The Morgan Library, one of the most beautiful private libraries in the world, is the perfect venue to appreciate Wilde's art and life. Totalling at just over fifty handwritten pages, the expertly crafted red-leather-bound volume of some of Wilde's most important manuscripts and letters went on public exhibition on April 17, 2009 and can be seen until to August 9, 2009, as part of the Morgan's exhibition Recent Acquisitions, which will highlight important additions to the institution's holdings in the last five years.

Why does Wilde still matter? Because the sheer force of Wilde's all-electric personality jolted Victorian society out of its complacency, a remarkable achievement, and each time they thought they had the measure of him he increased the voltage. Wilde was a depth charge, a modernist dressed like a romantic in a faux romantic age. The Morgan's exhibition will demon-



strate that there's much more to Wilde's legacy than fancy knee-britches and verbal pyrotechnics.

Of special note in the new exhibition is the earliest surviving letter from Wilde to his aristocratic lover Lord Alfred Douglas, known as "Bosie." Written in Wilde's distinctive rounded lettering, it shows how smitten he really was with the whey-faced, flaxen haired youth. "I should awfully like to go with you somewhere where it is hot and colored," Wilde writes, in a blatant attempt to arouse Douglas, but for a modern reader it produces a burst of knowing laughter. The overheated prose demonstrates Wilde's growing obsession; it is also a kind of unknowing dress rehearsal for what was to follow - Wilde set out to conquer but was himself harpooned.

It's harder from our own standpoint in time to remember this, but Wilde's improbable affair with the English upper crust was once thoroughly required. Physically exotic to look at (one

observer once compared him an Aztec), hailing from an unfashionable colonial backwater and yet somehow a better speaker than all of his contemporaries, Wilde had an emigrant's skill of beating the locals at their own game. An outsider who became the ultimate insider, he dined with royalty and male prostitutes in the same evening, until Victorian society asked him to choose, and when he refused to, they pounced.

But Wilde was modern in a way that London society had never seen. He made the Prince of Wales laugh, he delighted rent boys; he knew every palace and quite a few of the back alleys of Victorian London and he saw no distinction between them. "It is absurd to divide people into good and bad," he once wrote. "People are either charming or tedious." That was precisely the sort of crack calculated to enrage the moral scolds who had disapproved of him going all the way back to his college days in Oxford. But it also betrayed Wilde's democratic spirit, because for all his social climbing, he was never a snob.

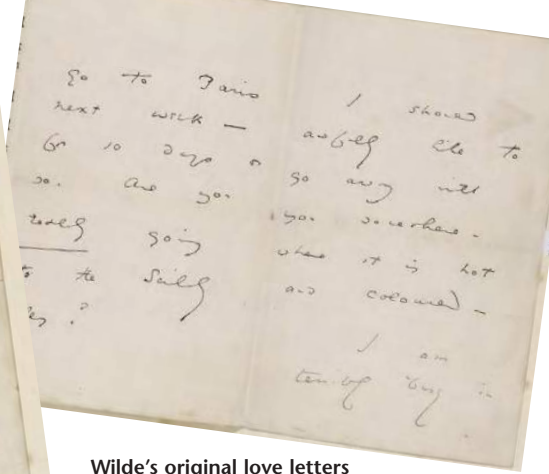
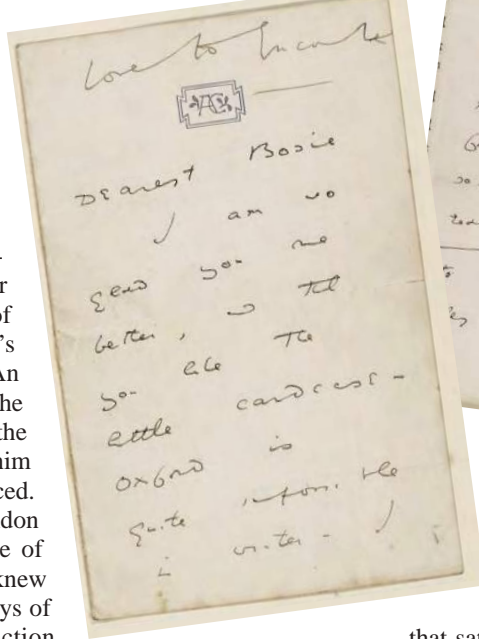
In a marvelous letter on display in the current exhibition Wilde writes to one admiring reader, a Mr. Bernulf Clegg, who has asked him to outline his philosophy of art. Wilde's answer is so indulgent and delightful you can almost hear him responding in his own voice:

"My Dear Sir, art is useless because its aim is only to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct or to influence action in any way. A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blooms for its own joy. We gain a moment of joy by looking at it. That is all that there is to be said about our relation to flowers."

Like James Joyce, who understood Wilde's challenge to his contemporaries much better than most, Wilde held his own (brightly polished) mirror up to the cruelty lurking behind the throne of the British Empire, frequently enraging the people he most wanted to court. And the greatest tragedy of his all too short life is that Wilde was not given time to reconcile his own warring impulses in his art.

For proof of his conflicted attitude toward the Victorians you just have to look at the larger-than-life names he gave most of his characters: Algernon Moncrieff, Gwendolyn Fairfax, Miss Laetitia Prism, Lady Augusta Bracknell, Lord Henry Wotton, Basil Hallward, Dorian Gray. This is the writer-as-costume-maker, because for Wilde the lords and ladies of English society were as unreal and exotic as the caliphs of Baghdad. His gently mocking stage names are part of a consistent pattern in his art, a satirical undermusic, a Celtic note that is rarely remarked upon, because like so many of his best jokes they only register with those who can actually hear them.

All his life Wilde's suspicion of authority, and his half playful half serious desire to unmask hypocrisy, particularly when it came wrapped in the garb of English imperialism, keeps breaking out, even when he



Wilde's original love letters to his aristocratic lover Lord Alfred Douglas, known as "Bosie."

knows it would be wiser to say nothing. It's a distinctly Irish reflex, that satirical feint and jab, and Wilde couldn't help himself; his own divided nature was overwhelming, he genuinely wanted to trounce the thing he loved.

As he had already powerfully demonstrated in plays like *A Woman of No Importance* and the poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, the man who achieved lasting fame as a sort of high brow humorist was also on his way to becoming a tragedian of real stature, but his trailblazing path was cut short when Edward Carson's shadow fell across it.

There's a terrible clanging irony in the fact that it was Edward Carson, of all people, who sealed Wilde's fate. At Trinity College Dublin, where they were exact contemporaries, Carson was continually runner up to Wilde's first prize in every academic contest the two entered. Wilde was the son of the fiery Irish nationalist poet Speranza (Lady Jane Wilde). Carson was raised in a staunch Presbyterian home and would later sign the famous so-called blood covenant that would divide Ireland as it moved toward Home Rule. Wilde was an artistic genius, Carson was a shrewd prosecutor.

Wilde died penniless and alone in a third rate Paris hotel in 1900, and in May of that same year Carson was appointed Solicitor-General for England and received a knighthood. England has always rewarded its gate keepers: Carson is one of the few non-royals to have been given a state funeral by the United Kingdom, the funeral taking place at St. Anne's Cathedral in Belfast in 1935.

In America, where another version of the same Puritan legacy that Wilde pushed back against in his art and life still rules, he has been continually misprized by writers and academics who should know better. But to this day there many here who are still tempted to see his reputation as a wit as a sort of proof of his light weight achievements. That's why Declan Kiely, the curator of the current exhibition at the Morgan, and an Irish Studies scholar, should be thanked for his sensitivity and insight in programming this unmissable show. The business of rescuing Wilde from the short sighted and clumsy hands he fell into (including Bosie's, who destroyed most of his letters) is still ongoing. IA



*The Morgan Library and Museum is located at 225 Madison Avenue in New York City.*

# Laughter, Tears and Unexpected Screams

A new film by two Irish playwrights is the hit of the Tribeca Film Festival.

**Cahir O'Doherty reports.**

**T**he *Eclipse*, a new film based on a creative collaboration between Irish playwrights Billy Roche and Conor McPherson, had its premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival in April. McPherson, 39, adapted the screenplay from a short story originally written by Roche, adding his own trademark supernatural elements and also directing the finished script.

The resulting film is a singular work. Among its considerable strengths are its intimate sense of place (the film is set at a literary festival in Cobh, County Cork) and the luminous camera work, which evokes the verdant beauty of the Irish landscape in frame after frame.

But there are other aspects of the film that, it has to be said, startled the premiere audience. It's unusual for a film that explores how the shadow of grief can haunt a family, to have a hissing black-eyed corpse turn up out of nowhere to attack the protagonist. These unexpected and increasingly disturbing horror scenes had the audience jumping out of their seats, then giggling nervously, then wondering if that was the point.

McPherson's previous ventures into filmmaking – a format he obviously loves – have not met with universal acclaim, and indeed the process of getting them made led him to wonder if they were ultimately worth the effort. Particularly when you contrast their cool reception with the plaudits he regularly wins on Broadway.

"Because of my previous experiences I

was not sure if I would ever make another film, to be honest," he recently told *Irish America*. "So I took a long time to decide what one I wanted to do. I decided if I were ever going to, it would be something I put my

Conor McPherson, playwright, scenewriter, and director, whose film *The Eclipse* was the hit of Tribeca.



soul into and could absolutely stand over. That's really where I am now with *The Eclipse*."

*The Eclipse* was a labor of love for all involved, he says. With a paltry two million euros budget, which in film funding is less than nothing, and with its top-flight Irish cast (including Ciaran Hinds,

Jim Norton and Aidan Quinn) participating for very little, it still took McPherson and Roche five years to get from the first draft to the shooting stage.

"The reason it took so long was because first of all we were filming in Ireland, and that's just not that interesting to the big money people in London and Hollywood. They want to know who's starring in it, and so if you're not really part of that commercial world and you don't want to be, it can get tricky. But the great advantage for me, because we were completely under the radar, was that we had total freedom."

McPherson's last foray into filmmaking was what he calls "a sort of Hollywood experience." The 2003 film *The Actors*, starring Michael Caine, "got developed through DreamWorks and then ended up at Miramax and it took an awful lot of time to get through the people who have to be responsible because they're paying for it. I realized that's not the way I work best. I'm not great at the big committee meetings. You can very easily get knocked off course."

The immediacy of playwriting had spoiled McPherson. He had no patience for the nonstop distractions that accompany trying to get a new script financed and filmed. "Plays are very much a writer's medium and if you're a good writer you can get your play on and it will

Iben Hjejle and Ciaran Hinds in a scene from *The Eclipse*.



happen. It's not such a huge financial big deal trying to get the money to do it. When I first started doing plays we started performing them in rooms over pubs, you know? I always had that very kind of can-do attitude, you know? So what if the Abbey Theatre doesn't want to do my play, we'll do my play, you know? That was always the way it was."

Although the plot of *The Eclipse* was conceived by Roche, the supernatural elements that give the new film its occasionally eerie atmosphere were introduced by McPherson. Based in and around an Irish literary festival, the film follows Michael (Ciaran Hinds), a widowed teacher who works as a volunteer. To his surprise he finds himself becoming increasingly obsessed with a woman writer participating in the festival.

Says McPherson: "I introduced a supernatural element into *The Eclipse* because that's where I felt I would comfortably know where the heart of the film was. In a way it was a mixture of our two writing worlds colliding in a nice way."

The final edit of the film was completed just in time for the debut screening at Tribeca, as the anxious playwright and director told the festival audience before it unspooled. But McPherson needn't have worried, the majority of the audience members were already familiar with his stage work and *The Eclipse* was one of the

most anticipated new films at the festival.

Featuring a sad-eyed and deeply affecting central performance from Ciaran Hinds (which confirms he's one of the most intuitive and gifted Irish actors of his generation), McPherson's story takes its time to unravel, and for once that's one of the film's greatest strengths. Atmosphere and finely observed character details create a surprising degree of reality, helping us to root for Hinds' character, a recently widowed father of two.

The tenderness with which McPherson addresses issues of parental love, inexpressible grief, and the fledgling hope that life could one day get better again are so remarkable that when the supernatural elements are introduced they become so jarring that you're left reeling.

It's as if a very highbrow version of *Terms of Endearment* had been acciden-

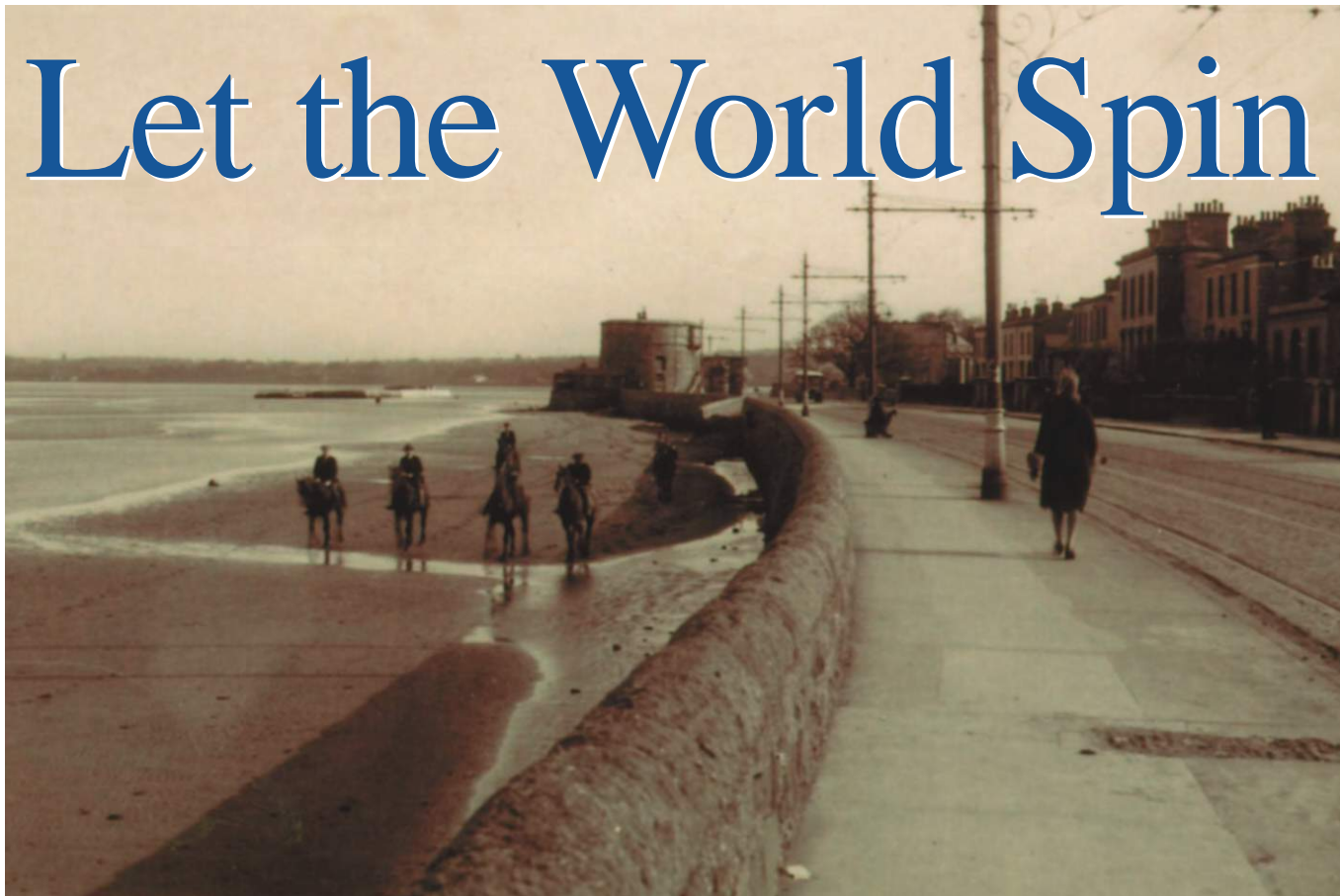
tally cross edited with scenes from *Night of the Living Dead*, with all the laughs and cathartic screams that implies. For example, we see very little of Jim Norton's character for most of the film (the man who later becomes a terrifying zombie) except to learn that he lives in a rest home and that he's aggrieved that Ciaran Hinds's character has forgotten to bring him to the literary festival to hear a reading. So when Norton returns as a particularly terrifying undead ghoul, we're left wondering why he's scaring the wits out of Hinds (and of course, us). Ghostly hands reach out of wardrobes and even from the ground to hold and horrify. But all the while we're wondering why, and no satisfactory answer is ever forthcoming.

It's hard, in the end, to classify which genre *The Eclipse* actually falls into. It's been described as a supernatural thriller, but it's not really suspenseful; nor is it a comedy, nor is it a love story, exactly, nor is it a horror film – but it does have elements of each. For those reasons it may be a tough sell to the American public, but distributors at the festival were jostling to land the rights to release the film later this year, and you have to admire the tenacity with which McPherson holds on to his own artistic vision. **IA**



Widower Michael Farr (Hinds), who, in an effort to find solace over the death of his wife, befriends Lena Morelle (Hjejle), a writer who specializes in the supernatural, during a literary festival.

# Let the World Spin



Colum McCann's new book *Let the Great World Spin* (Random House; publication date: June 30, 2009) weaves an array of stories and voices bound together by a tightrope walker, inspired by Phillippe Petit's real-life tightrope walk between the Twin Towers in 1974. The following excerpt explores the early life of two brothers in Dublin.

**O**n weekend mornings we strolled with our mother, ankle-deep in the low tide and looked back to see the row of houses, the tower and the little scarves of smoke coming up from the chimneys. Two enormous red and white power station chimneys broke the horizon to the east, but the rest was a gentle curve, with gulls on the air, the mailboats out of Dun Laoghaire, the scud of clouds on the horizon. When the tide was out, the stretch of sand was corrugated and sometimes it was possible to walk a quarter-mile amongst isolated water-pools and bits of old refuse, long shaver shells, bedstead pipes.

Dublin Bay was a slow heaving thing,

Photo above: Sandymount Strand, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin in the 1950s.  
Right: Colum McCann and his new book.

like the city it horseshoed, but it could turn without warning. Every now and then the water smashed up against the wall in a storm. The sea, having arrived, stayed. Salt crusted the windows of our house. The knocker on the door was rusted red.

When the weather blew foul, we sat on the stairs, Corrigan and I. Our father, a physicist, had left us years before. A cheque, postmarked in London, arrived through the letterbox once a week. Never a note, just a cheque drawn on a bank in Oxford. It spun in the air as it fell. We ran to bring it to our mother. She slipped the envelope under a flowerpot on the kitchen windowsill and the next day it was gone. Nothing more was ever said.

The only other sign of our father was a wardrobe full of his old suits and trousers in our mother's bedroom. Corrigan drew the door open. In the darkness we sat

with our backs against the rough wooden panels and slipped our feet in our father's shoes, let his sleeves touch our ears, felt the cold of his cuff buttons. Our mother found us one afternoon, dressed in his grey suits, the sleeves rolled up and the trousers held in place with elastic bands. We were marching around in the over-size brogues when she came and froze in the doorway, the room so quiet we could hear the radiator tick.

"Well," she said, as she knelt to the ground in front of us. Her face spread out in a grin that seemed to pain her. "Come here." She kissed us both on the cheek, tapped our bottoms. "Now run along." We slipped out of our father's old clothes, left them puddled on the floor.

Later that night we heard the clang of the coat hangers as she hung and re-hung the suits.

Over the years there were the usual tantrums and bloody noses and broken rocking horse heads, and our mother had to deal with the whispers of the neighbours, sometimes even the attentions of local widowers, but for the most part things stretched comfortably in front of us: calm, open, a sweep of sandy grey.

Corrigan and I shared a bedroom that

looked out to the water. Quietly it happened, I still don't recall how: he, the younger one by two years, took control of the top bunk. He slept on his stomach with a view out the window to the dark, reciting his prayers – he called them his slumber verses – in quick sharp rhythms. They were his own incantations, mostly indecipherable to me, with odd little cackles of laughter and long sighs. The closer he got to sleep the more rhythmic the prayers got, a sort of jazz, though sometimes in the middle of it all I could hear him curse, and they'd be lifted away from the sacred. I knew the Catholic hit parade – the Our Father, the Hail Mary – but that was all. I was a raw, quiet child, and God was already a bore to me. I kicked the bottom of Corrigan's bed and he fell silent a while, but then started up again. Sometimes I woke in the morning and he was alongside me, arm draped over my shoulder, his chest rising and falling as he whispered his prayers.

I'd turn to him: "Ah Jesus, Corr, shut up."

My brother was light-skinned, dark-haired, blue-eyed. He was the type of child everyone smiled at. He could look at you and draw you out. People fell for him. On the street, women ruffled his hair. Working men punched him gently on the shoulder. He had no idea that his presence sustained people, made them happy, drew out their improbable yearnings – he just ploughed along, oblivious.

I woke one night, when I was eleven, to a cold blast of air moving over me. I stumbled to the window but it was closed. I reached for the light and the room burned quickly yellow. A shape was bent over in the middle of the room.

"Corr?"

The weather still rolled off his body. His cheeks were red. A little damp mist lay on his hair. He smelled of cigarettes. He put a finger to his lips for hush and climbed back up the wooden ladder.

"Go to sleep," he whispered from above. The smell of tobacco still lingered in the air.

In the morning he jumped down from the bed, wearing his heavy anorak over his pajamas. Shivering, he opened the

window and tapped the sand from his shoes off the sill, into the garden below.

"Where'd you go?"

"Just along by the water," he said.

"Were you smoking?"

He looked away, rubbed his arms warm: "No."

"You're not supposed to smoke, y'know."



PHOTO BY BRENDAN BOURKE

"I didn't smoke," he said.

Later that morning our mother walked us to school, our leather satchels slung over our shoulders. An icy breeze cut along the streets. Down by the school gates she went to one knee, put her arms around us, adjusted our scarves and kissed us, one after the other. When she stood to leave, her gaze was caught by something on the other side of the road, by the railings of the church: a dark form wrapped in a large red blanket. The man raised a hand in salute. Corrigan waved back. There were plenty of old drunks in around Ringsend, but my mother seemed taken by the sight and for a moment it struck me that there might be some secret there.

"Who's that, Mum?" I asked.

"Run along," she said. "We'll sort it out after school."

My brother walked beside me, silent.

"Who is it, Corrie?" I thumped him: "Who is it?"

He disappeared towards his classroom. All day I sat at my wooden desk, gnaw-

ing my pencil, wondering — visions of a forgotten uncle, or our father somehow returned but broken. Nothing, in those days, was beyond the realm of the possible. The clock was at the rear of the room but there was an old freckled mirror over the classroom sink and, at the right angle, I could watch the hands go backwards. When the bell struck I was out the gate, but Corrigan took the long road back, short mincing steps through the housing estates, past the palm trees, along the seawall.

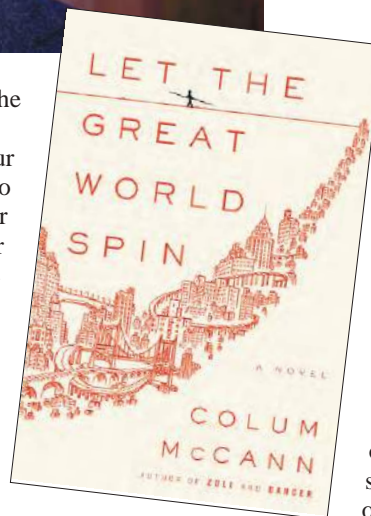
There was a soft brown paper package waiting for Corrigan on the top bunk. I shoved it at him. He shrugged and ran his finger along the twine, pulled it tentatively. Inside was another blanket, a soft blue Foxford. He unfolded it, let it fall lengthways, looked up at our mother and nodded.

She touched his face with the back of her fingers and said: "Never again, understand?"

Nothing else was mentioned, until two years later he gave that blanket away too, to another homeless drunk, on another freezing night, up by the canal on one of his late-night walks when he tiptoed down the stairs and went out into the dark. It was a simple equation to him – others needed the blankets more than he, and he was

prepared to take the punishment if it came his way. It was my earliest lesson of what my brother would become, and what I'd later see amongst the cast-offs of New York – the whores, the hustlers, the hopeless – all of those who were hanging on to him like he was some bright hallelujah in the shitbox of what the world really was.

IA



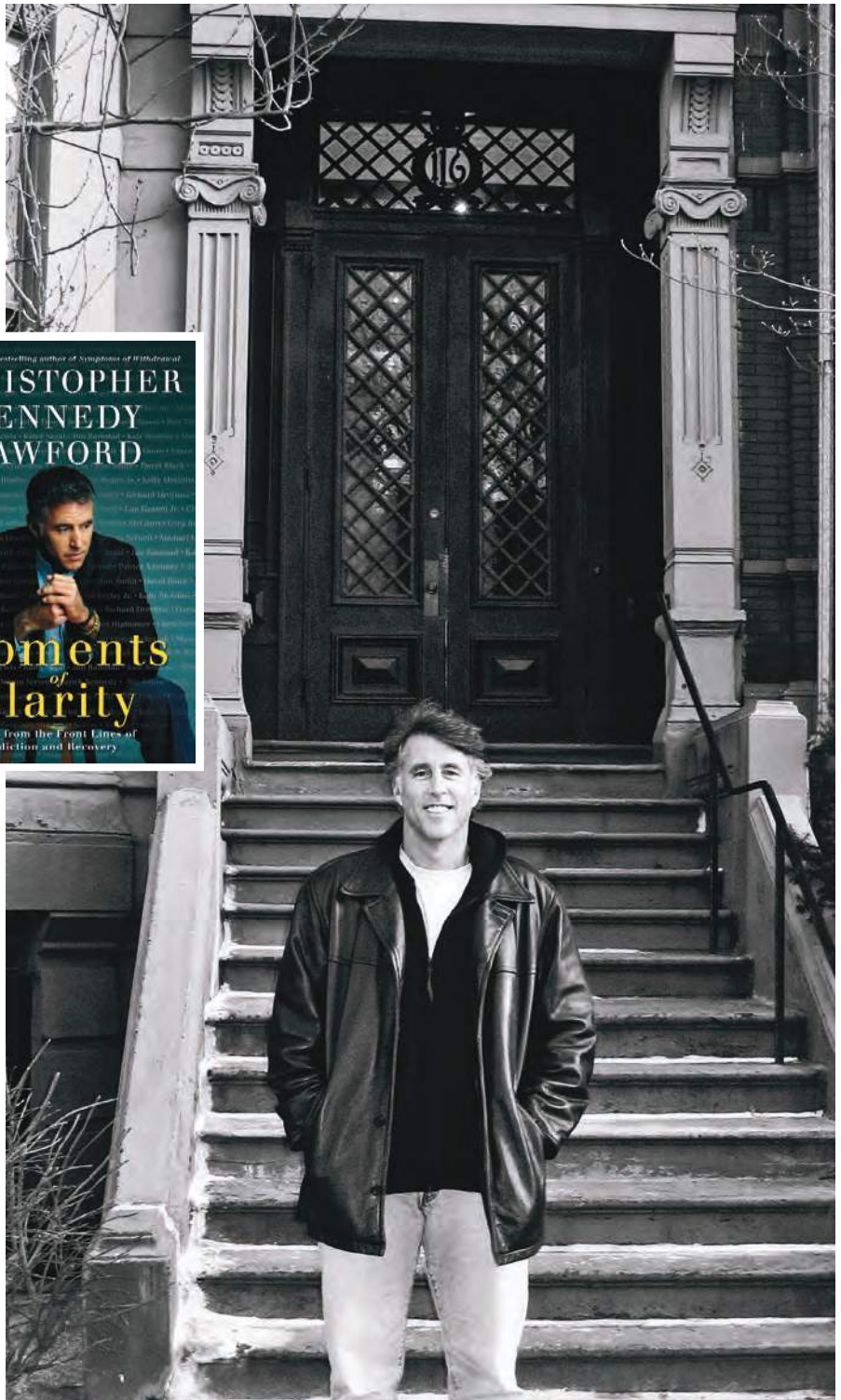
*Colum McCann is the bestselling author of the novels Zoli, Dancer, This Side of Brightness, and Songdogs, as well as two critically acclaimed short story collections. A contributor to The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, The Atlantic Monthly, GQ, and The Paris Review, he lives in New York City.*

# Voices of Clarity:

**C**hristopher Kennedy Lawford really did not want to write this book. *Moments of Clarity*, unlike Lawford's 2005 memoir *Symptoms of Withdrawal*, is not his own story but rather an anthology of narratives, drawn from interviews Lawford conducted with actors, musicians, TV stars, community organizers, and others about the moment (or moments) when they realized they were going to begin the process of recovery from alcoholism or other addictions.

"Look," says Lawford, in his friendly California drawl, "I'm fifty-something years old. I don't need to go and ask people for anything, really, anymore. I make enough money to support myself. And I had to go to people I knew and say, 'Would you give me something of great value to you and trust me to do something good with it?'" Reading the book is an intimate experience, due to the genuine respect with which Lawford treats each of his interviewees in introducing them as well as the humility, humor and honesty of every participant's unique chronicle. "I will tell you this," he says, "every time I sat down with every one of these people, I thanked God I was doing this book. Because what these people said to me was so amazing, I could listen to this stuff all day long. It was that powerful to me and that meaningful to me."

The first-born son of Patricia Kennedy and actor Peter Lawford and the nephew of President John F. Kennedy, Lawford experienced firsthand the temptations and tribulations of growing up famous in America, culminating in the battle through heroin addiction to recovery that he shares in *Symptoms of Withdrawal*. Now, he wants to illuminate the destructive impact of addiction on any life. "I think that the idea of where we really look at addiction in terms of our culture,



# CHRISTOPHER KENNEDY LAWFORD AND HIS INTERVIEWEES

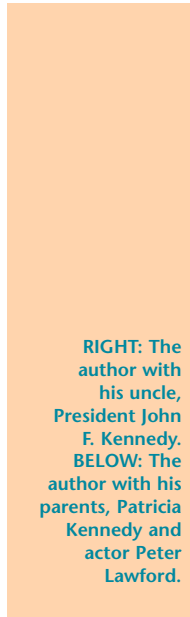
## SPEAK OUT ABOUT ADDICTION AND RECOVERY. By Kara Rota

that it's some sort of product of celebrity and that there are all these celebrities that are drug and alcohol users, it's kind of nonsense," Lawford says. "This is a disease that affects twenty-six million Americans, so they're people in the inner city, they're people working in auto plants, they're people working in hospitals, they're people working in Hollywood, and they're people working in Washington, that have this thing."

Nevertheless, he is open about his own hand in the media-driven fixation on celebrities in turmoil. "I'm guilty of it too. I did a book about moments of clarity and 70 percent of the people in it are people that you've heard of, so I know as well as anybody that people with notoriety sell books, and without them in it this book probably wouldn't have been published." But for Lawford, the publicity of his own addiction and recovery as well as that of his interviewees are a way to raise awareness about the science of alcoholism and emerging research studies on the disease.

"To me, those are the interesting explorations, and the more the media chooses to focus on [alcoholism] as an illness and some of the more hopeful aspects of that, the better off we'll be in terms of changing society's attitude about this illness, which is what I'm interested in. That's the reason I do what I do. There's so much stigma and misinformation out there — that's the only reason to be public about this thing, because the more people like me talk about it, the more people understand what it is."

Lawford has dedicated himself in the past years to doing just that. This May, he has another book entitled *Healing Hepatitis C* coming out in collaboration with Diana Sylvestre, executive director of the O.A.S.I.S. clinic in Oakland, California and a leading medical expert on Hepatitis C, which Lawford was treat-



RIGHT: The author with his uncle, President John F. Kennedy. BELOW: The author with his parents, Patricia Kennedy and actor Peter Lawford.



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

ed for in 2001. He also serves as a Public Advocacy Consultant for Caron Drug & Alcohol Treatment Centers, a non-profit treatment provider utilizing clinical research and innovative programs for individuals and families struggling with addiction. Caron played an important role in several of the stories of recovery included in *Moments of Clarity*.

For Lawford, his work as a vocal supporter of treatment based in research is an integral part of changing assumptions about alcoholism and addiction. "I'm hopeful that the more we talk about it, the more this is understood, and the more we understand, the better the treatment gets, and as the brain science is getting better and better, this country will begin to start focusing more of its efforts on treatment and prevention and

education instead of interdiction."

Next for Lawford is a foray into fiction, a pursuit that will undoubtedly be informed by his experience writing memoir. "I'm working on a novel that I was working on when I got hijacked into *Moments of Clarity*, which is a novel about a guy trying to figure out his relationship with women, about sex and love and all of that stuff, so it could take me a while, but it's an interesting subject. All fiction, I guess, comes out of nonfiction to a degree, so there's a lot of my experience in terms of what I've seen in the world in this novel, but it is definitely a novel." Actor, author, activist, and more than 22 years sober, Christopher Kennedy Lawford continues to lend his voice to public service. *Moments of Clarity* became a New York Times best-seller in January 2009. **IA**

# {review of books}

Tom Deignan reviews a selection of recently published books of Irish and Irish-American interest.

## Recommended

Over the last decade or so, Brooklyn has gone from a byword for gritty urban life – the place where Pete Hamill and Spike Lee told their stories – to a punch line referring to the chic hipsters who have flocked to the borough.

Colm Toibin might seem an unlikely candidate to add a fascinating new chapter to Brooklyn's literary life. After all, his novels, such as *The Blackwater Lightship*, have explored life in Ireland, while his most recent novel, *The Master*, was a fictional take on the life of great novelist Henry James.

His non-fiction books, meanwhile, have also ranged far and wide, from explorations of Catholic Europe to gay artists.

But Toibin explores mid-century Brooklyn, the era of *The Honeymooners* and *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, in his new novel, which is entitled, simply enough, *Brooklyn*.

The novel revolves around Eilis Lacey, who grew up in rural Ireland in the 1940s. A victim of the sagging Irish economy, Eilis goes to America and settles in Brooklyn, which one person promises is “just like Ireland.”

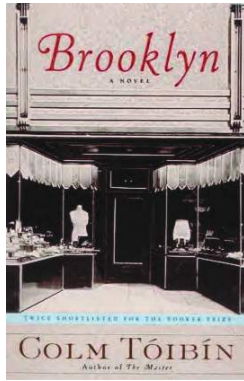
At first, this seems true enough. Eilis looks at the women around her at one point and thinks: “All of them [are] older than me, some with faint American accents but all of Irish origin.”

But, of course, 1950s Brooklyn is a buzzing, multi-cultural borough. Fittingly, Eilis falls in love with an Italian American – only to learn about bad news from back home in Ireland, where her sickly mother and sister still live.

Toibin's book is an insightful look at the immigrant experience in New York, not to mention something of a love letter to old Brooklyn. We are taken to Coney Island as well as beloved Ebbets Field, where the Brooklyn Dodgers used to play.

Toibin renders Eilis' life with all of the uncertainty and wonder inherent in both the immigrant and the New York City experience. He also takes on characters and environments which have been the

subject of plenty of stereotyping, and breathes much-needed new life into them. **(\$25 / 262 pages / Scribner)**



## Fiction

In her first novel *The Walking People*, Mary Beth Keane covers some of the same territory as Colm Toibin. The book opens with a detailed description of Irish immigrant Michael Ward's last day of work as a New York City sandhog – a laborer who digs water tunnels deep under the earth.

But then *The Walking People* travels back to 1950s Ireland, and we learn about Ward's youth, as well as the life of the woman who would ultimately become his wife.

Keane has produced a highly impressive debut, spanning 50 years of family tragedies, triumphs and secrets. Never



sentimental or shocking, *The Walking People* is an intricate rendering of complicated lives, filled with suppressed desires and glimmers of hope. Particularly interesting are the sections in which Keane explores the electrification of rural Ireland in the 1960s. Meanwhile, as fascinating as Keane's characters are, her research is also impressive. The details of *The Walking People* – from the labors of sandhogs to the traditions of the Irish travelers – ring true. Overall, *The Walking People* shows Mary Beth Keane to be a writer to watch.

**(\$25 / 392 pages / Houghton Mifflin)**

In her novel *The Swan Maiden*, Jules Watson tells the famous Irish story of Deirdre, who some call the Helen of Troy of Ulster. Deirdre is the woman

whose beauty may bring ruin to the kingdom of Ulster and its ruler, Conor. Watson, an acclaimed Celtic historian, renders Deirdre's coming-of-age as a process of liberation. She is a child of nature who rebels when she is treated as a possession. This fierce spirit, combined with her beauty, ultimately unleashes warfare as if it were fated by the gods. At times a bit overblown, *The Swan Maiden* is nevertheless a fine updating of this timeless tale.

**(\$12 / 540 pages / Bantam Spectra)**

Keith Donohue's first novel, *The Stolen Child*, was a surprise best-seller. His follow-up, *Angels of Destruction*, opens at the home of an elderly Irish-American woman named Margaret Quinn, who lives with the fact that her child ran away from home years ago to join a radical group.

One night, when there is a knock at Margaret's door, an old hope – that her daughter has returned – is revived. But instead, it is a nine-year-old girl at the door – who just might be Margaret's granddaughter.

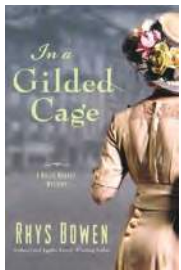
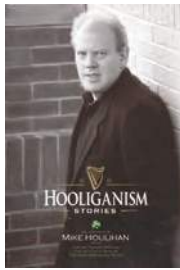
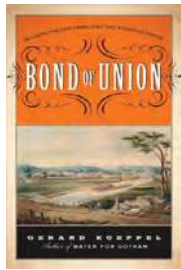
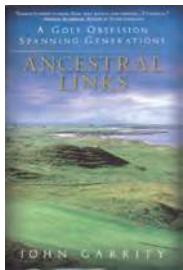
Donohue (who recently wrote an Introduction to a new edition of writings by Flann O'Brien) constructs a fascinating story about fantasy and reality, politics and history, with *Angels of Destruction*.

**(\$24 / 368 pages / Shaye Areheart Books)**

## Non Fiction

On the heels of *A Course Called Ireland* (reviewed in the last issue of *Irish America*) comes another book about Ireland, Irish-Americans and golf: *Ancestral Links: A Golf Obsession Spanning Generations* by John Garrity. Garrity, who writes for *Sports Illustrated*, travels to Ireland to see where his great-grandfather came from. The ancestral home site is now, it turns out, home to a new golf course. Garrity also goes to Scotland, where some of his mother's ancestors came from.

In the end, Garrity explores how his family – as well as Ireland – was literal-



ly and metaphorically shaped by the game of golf.

**(\$24.95 / 292 pages / New American Library)**

**F**or those who loved *Touched by an Angel* (or even the current CBS show *The Ghost Whisperer*), *Angels in My Hair* by Lorna Byrne will probably be a fascinating read.

The author says she has seen angels since she was a young child growing up poor in Ireland. Not surprisingly, many people believed young Lorna had mental problems.

These days, however, people seek her out for guidance or comfort, or to even see if they can contact a deceased loved one.

Along the way we also learn that Lorna, despite being poor and ostracized, found the love of her life, a blessing which was ultimately ended by tragedy.

Suffice to say, *Angels in my Hair* is not for everyone. Some may find the mystical qualities of the book hard to take. But if you miss Roma Downey as an angel, Lorna Byrne might just make a fine substitute.

**(\$24.95 / 303 pages / Doubleday)**

**T**he Irish role in one of early America's most important and ambitious construction projects is explored in *Bond of Union: Building the Erie Canal and The American Empire* by Gerard Koepfel. There was once a saying – you need four things to build a canal: a pick, a shovel, a wheelbarrow and an Irishman.

All in all, it is believed that as many as 5,000 Irish immigrants helped build the

Erie Canal, which linked New York City and the Atlantic Ocean with the interior United States. The leading champion of the canal was New York governor DeWitt Clinton, the product of a famous Scotch Irish political dynasty. For a while, as the canal project dragged on, it was called “Clinton’s folly.” But once completed, commercial activity exploded, helping make young America a powerful nation.

**(\$28 / 480 pages / DaCapo)**

**C**hicago *Tribune Magazine* writer Mike Houlihan has released a collection of his work from the magazine, as well as work which has appeared in *The Irish American News* and on Chicago Public Radio.

The product of a large Irish Catholic family from Chicago's south side, Houlihan is perhaps best known for the *Hooliganism* column he wrote for *The Irish American News*. These yarns, all gathered in this collection (fittingly titled *Hooliganism*), venture from Houlihan's days as an actor and bar owner in Rockaway Beach, New York, to his experiences as a father and husband. Filled with his trademark wit, *Hooliganism* is a fine collection from a classic Irish-American raconteur.

**(\$25 / 216 pages / Dog Ear Publishing)**

## Mystery

**T**he Irish-American queen of murder mystery is back. *Just Take My Heart* is a new thriller by Mary Higgins Clark, and dabbles in the sci-fi notion of personality changes springing from

donated organs.

Clark's story begins with two struggling theater actresses, Natalie and Jamie, the latter of whom once had an affair with a married man.

Years later, Natalie is found dead – following a chance meeting with the married man.

It is up to Emily Wallace, a young prosecutor, to sort through the suspects and motives when Natalie's estranged husband is accused of the murder.

But Wallace herself becomes endangered when, as she's researching for the trial, she becomes too trusting of a neighbor. We also find out that she is a donor recipient, which may or may not explain some of her strange recent behavior. Once again, Clark, whose books have sold over 85 million copies in the U.S. alone, has produced a satisfying mystery.

**(\$25.95 / 322 pages / Simon & Schuster)**

**M**eanwhile, Carol Higgins Clark – Mary's daughter – also has a new book out – *Cursed*, a Regan Reilly mystery.

Reilly, a private investigator, has moved to New York City from L.A. to be with her husband, the head of the New York Police Department's Major Case Squad. Soon enough, Regan is drawn back to the West Coast. A friend calls and tells Regan she believes that her entire life is “cursed.” (The friend was born on Friday the 13th, after all.)

It is a lover who “borrowed” \$100,000 from the cursed woman, which drags Regan back into the L.A. underworld – and may also get Regan herself hurt.

**(\$25 / 242 pages / Scribner)**

**F**inally, don't miss Rhys Bowen's latest Molly Murphy mystery *In A Gilded Cage*. Once again, Bowen sets a thrilling plot amidst the history of early 20th-century New York, when women were fighting for the vote and the automobile was just beginning to clog the streets of Manhattan.

**(\$24.95 / 276 pages / Minotaur)**

## Memoir

Joe Queenan's at times hilarious, at times wrenching memoir *Closing Time* explores his painful Irish Catholic upbringing in Philadelphia, during which his father often abused young Joe and his siblings so severely they eventually wanted him to die. Queenan also explores how he gravitated to the writer's life, in this memoir, which deftly balances life's beauty and horror.

**(\$26.95 / 352 pages / Viking)**



# The Fureys and More

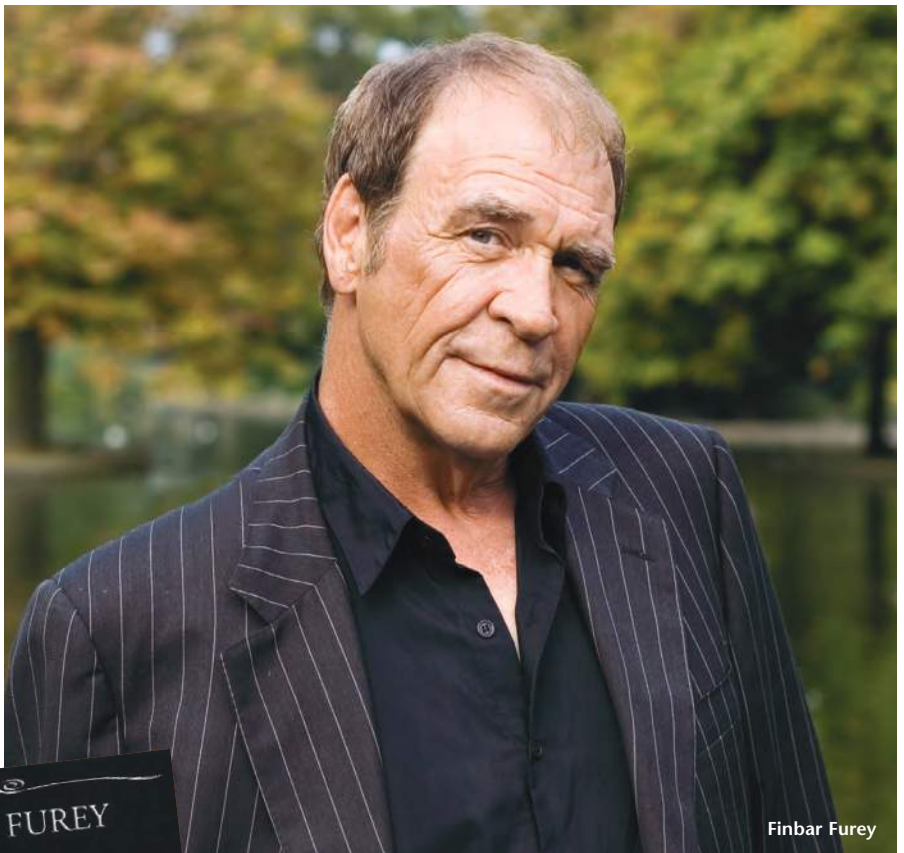
THE LATEST OFFERINGS IN THE WORLD OF TRAD/FOLK MUSIC.

**T**here's a lot of great new music this month from Irish artists with decades of experience and those just starting out. The first up is from legendary family The Fureys. Well worth a shout for the name alone, Finbar Furey has his first CD release in the U.S. in six years, and it's a gem. As lead singer and uilleann pipe player for The Furey Brothers, a band he shared with brothers Eddie, George and the late Paul, Finbar's multi-instrumentalism and haunting vocals were a standout part of the Irish music diaspora of the 1970's. The group's breakthrough came as the opening act to the Clancy Brothers tour of the U.S. in 1969, and from then on they became headliners, being voted "Act of the Year" by England's hugely influential DJ John Peel in 1972.

The Fureys' innovative sound of pipes and guitar was in fact initially barred from Ewan McCall's folk club

in London as it was not traditional to combine those two instruments, an example of the great McCall occasionally having an English stick up his backside (no letters please, I'm English). The sound, of course, was subsequently taken up all around, from Planxty to *Riverdance*. And as with so many great players I've mentioned in the past, the Fureys come from an all-embracing musical family.

"Our parents started us off in music when we were very young — my father



Finbar Furey



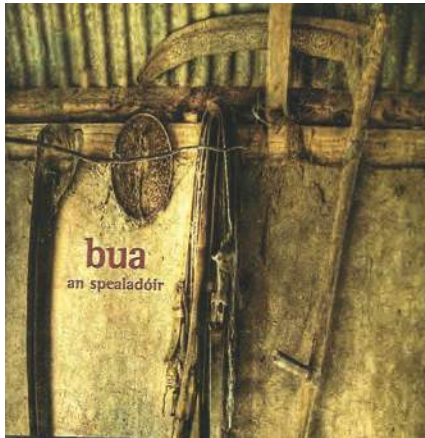
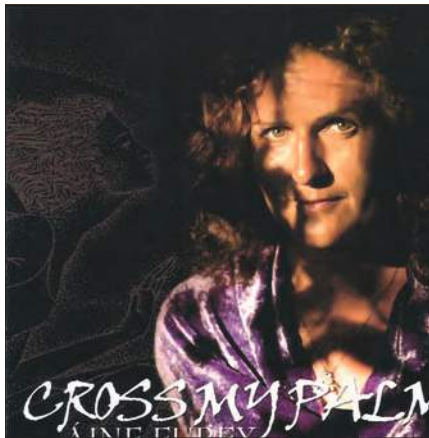
(Ted) played the fiddle and the pipes; my mother played melodeon and five-string banjo. She was a wonderful singer as well. We lived and breathed music," Finbar writes in the intro-

duction to his new CD *Finbar Furey* on Cosmic Trigger records.

By way of introducing the collection of songs on the CD, he says, "This collection of songs are memories from

things I've seen, places I've been, people I've spoken to, laughed with, cried with, drunk with, played music with. [They are about] life, love, deceit, loneliness, joy and happiness, and I hope they bring back memories to you and that we can share that moment in time."

The songs, old and new, are a powerhouse of singing that contains echoes of Johnny Cash and even the later Bob Dylan, but as much as anything, they are the soul mate of another Irish treasure, Sean Tyrrell, in that they have a depth and passion only those singers that know their native land inside out can achieve.



With musical accompaniment from the likes of Frankie Gavin on fiddle and all the Fureys on guitars, this is essential listening.

In 2003, Finbar's song "New York Girls" was chosen for the soundtrack of *Gangs of New York* – look for Finbar with a handlebar mustache in a cameo appearance singing the song.

With the passing of the baton, Finbar's daughter Áine offers up her first U.S. solo release, *Cross My Palm*, also on Cosmic Trigger records.

From the opening track "Sligo Fair" we are in the presence of something very special here, an achingly beautiful voice with supreme control. Áine moves effortlessly from dark to light ballads, accompanied by strings or acoustic guitars, percussion and bass, always tastefully arranged, with minimal reverb. From traditional to the contemporary likes of John Prine's "Hello in There" and Edie Brickell's "Circle," Áine recalls the likes of Judy Collins, Nanci Griffith, Linda Thompson and, keeping it in the Irish family, Mary Black.

Speaking of family, Áine's brother Martin has a couple of delicate and harmonious compositions here in "Walk Gently" and "Water's Edge." Martin Furey currently performs with the highly successful High Kings, a quartet of virtuoso performers and singers, and also, with Áine, makes up the duo Bohinta, whose albums have enjoyed great acclaim. I'm guessing a large part of the overall sound of *Cross My Palm* is due to the producing talents of Barry O'Briain. Indeed, much of the subtle layering and sound quality is created by Barry's own multi-instrumental playing of guitars, mandocello and keyboards. His own album, *Carolan's Dream* on Gael Linn

Records, is a masterpiece.

Between Barry's production, Martin's compositions, some fine string players and of course Áine, *Cross My Palm* is one of the great surprises and treasures this year. Áine is hoping to tour the East Coast of the U.S. soon – look out for her!

Another example of production values all wrapped up with musical talent, is guitar virtuoso John Doyle who is often mentioned in various forms of adulation in these pages. His latest offering is a new CD with master fiddler Liz Carroll. Entitled *Double Play*, this is the second from this duo, following *In Play*. When I reviewed *In Play* a couple of years ago, I noted a somewhat difficult "listening curve" in absorbing the complex Carroll compositions.

With *Double Play*, the pair have overcome any such difficulties, with much more textured accompaniments (organ provided by Compass's resident keyboard genius John R. Burr) and varied set list. Indeed, there are some great new tunes from Liz; one truly great set includes a tune titled "Lament for Tommy Makem" in honor of the late Tommy. John contributes fine instrumental compositions, but also adds his voice, with three tracks that include the powerful Ed Pickford song "A Pound a Week Raise." John admits to being drawn to songs of oppression and injustice, as his two solo albums will attest. I've no doubt that the production gang at Compass Records, led by John and Liz, quite deliberately set out to make a more accessible album and they have more than managed that in this brilliant release. Congrats also to the pair for their recent performance at President Obama's St. Patrick's Day reception. And while we're at it, congratulations also to Alison

Brown, co-founder, with her husband Garry West, of Compass Records. Compass celebrates its 15th year in the business this year, no mean feat for an independent label, and brings us the likes of Solas, Lúnasa, Martin Hayes and of course all things John Doyle. Alison is also a famed banjo player, and her latest CD *The Company You Keep* debuted at number eight on the Billboard bluegrass chart this month, so a great year so far for her and Compass records.

In the last few months the occasional batch of CDs has landed on my desk from a new label, Mad River Records. Its an eclectic mix of World music that includes a lot of Irish/Celtic. The label was founded and is headed up by Chris Teskey, an 18-year chief operating officer alumnus of Green Linnet Records. His musical know-how has attracted a lot of international talent in a short space of time, and one of his tenets is that downloads needn't be in competition with CDs, there's plenty of room for both. As a result, all of his artists are available not only on CD but also instant download at the website: [www.madriverrecords.com](http://www.madriverrecords.com). There's Malinki, a Scottish/Celtic band whose album *Flower & Iron* I reviewed in the last IA issue, along with accordion firebrand David Munnally; the stunning Irish-language singing Aoife Ni Fhearraigh has re-recorded and released *Loinneog Cheoil* on the label, and American-Irish band Bua offers *An Spealadóir*, a rousing mix of songs and tunes from all-Americans who sound like they've whiled away many Irish sessions here and abroad. Indeed, the sleeve-notes are by Liz Carroll, wishing Irish-music lovers everywhere the pleasure of hearing Bua. Instantly! What a great note to end on. IA

# A Tuneful of Tradition

After a very busy St. Patrick's Day season, **Daniel Neely** and **Don Meade** of the Washington Square Harp and Shamrock Orchestra sit down with *Irish America* to tell us about the band, their method, and their conflicting opinions of the Clancy Brothers.

By **Kate Overbeck**

**F**or a traditional Irish music band, the Washington Square Harp and Shamrock Orchestra [WSHSO] is anything but traditional. Faithful to authentic Irish tunes in method and melody, this eclectic group brings an undoubtedly American element to their music by harkening back to the forgotten sounds of Irish dance bands of New York in the 1920s and 30s. With the vibrant tones of the fiddle, banjo and piccolo, the WSHSO brings the heart of the Irish-American urban immigrant experience to modern ears.

The band was in high demand over the St. Patrick's Day season, performing at *Irish America's* Global 100 reception as well as the consul general's residence and St. Patrick's Cathedral. In fact, they are the only band ever to play at both the old St. Patrick's on Mulberry Street and new St. Patrick's on Fifth Avenue within a twenty-four hour period.

Led by Mick Moloney, accomplished musician and musicologist and Global Distinguished Professor at New York University, the band was first formed in

the year 2000. It has since grown as a student group, with current members ranging from piano player Brendan Dolan, a pioneer of the Glucksman Ireland House Master's Program, to flutist Gail Neely, who, in 2004, picked up her flute again for the first time since high school after seeing what fun her husband Daniel was having playing with the band. With varied educational backgrounds and degrees of Irish ancestry among them, the fourteen or so rotating members are united by their admiration of the sounds and soul of Irish music.

With a mixed Irish and Scottish background, Don admits, "I'm not exactly purebred Irish American. My father had a record of The Clancy Brothers back in

lished series of Irish traditional music concerts and sessions. The concert series operates out of Glucksman Ireland House and attracts an impressive list of today's top musicians in the genre, including Kevin Burke and Martin Hayes. A tenor banjo, fiddle and harmonica player, Don and friends also congregate every Monday night in the back room of the Landmark Tavern for music sessions.

A tenor banjo player with a background in ska (he played in a band called Skavoovie and the Epitones in the late 1990s) and a Ph.D. in Jamaican music from New York University, original member and current leader Daniel Neely was once resistant to some kinds of Irish music.

Daniel notes, "I grew up in Boston. My family is sort of nominally Irish. Growing up, my folks had Clancy Brothers records and uh, I really didn't like them. It would be more correct to say I really, really didn't like them."

Despite this early disdain, Daniel was soon to be converted. In 2001, a friend in a Boston punk rock band gave him a tenor banjo. It didn't take long for him to master the instrument and bring it into the WSHSO.

The integration of the banjo, a descendant of African instruments, into traditional Irish music illustrates how America's cultural variation has influenced the genre. The WSHSO draws inspiration from old Irish dance bands from all over the United States, including Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band in Boston, the Pat Roche Shamrock Orchestra out of Chicago, and the Four Provinces Orchestra from Philadelphia.



The WSHSO logo, created by Scott Spencer

the early 60s and I just really loved that stuff. So pretty much my whole life I've been listening to Irish music and started really getting into it when I moved to New York in 1976."

A veteran of the Irish traditional band scene in New York, Don became involved in the WSHSO through his connection with the NYU Glucksman Ireland House. For years now Don has run Blarney Star Productions, an estab-



PHOTO: ANDREW CAREY

Outside Old St. Patrick's, after the Irish-language Mass. From left to right: Lisa Farber (flute), Liz Hanley (fiddle), Dan Milner (bodhran, vocals), Gail Neely (flute), Donie Carroll (guitar, vocals), Linda Hood (flute), Sam Sullivan (mandolin), Daniel Neely (banjo), Louise Sullivan (observed, fiddle), Tony Horswill (fiddle), Don Meade (fiddle), Liz Kennedy (fiddle). Not pictured: Suzanne Grossman (fiddle), Brendan Dolan (piano), Mick Moloney (banjo).

It is in these hubs of immigration that Irish traditional music has evolved.

Meade explains, "All the centers of Irish immigration had dance bands. The lineup would be a little different than in Ireland, in that you're in a big ballroom, so you had to make some noise. So they'd have saxophone players, they'd have piccolo players . . . and we take that to heart too. We now have a piccolo in the band!"

"It was funny," Daniel Neely adds, "we have a woman, Kate Bowerman who's playing flute for us now. And we're putting together an arrangement of a song that was recorded for Edison Records in 1906 and recorded again by the Dan Sullivan Shamrock band in 1928 or '29. And sitting there, I go, 'wouldn't it be great if we had a piccolo in this?' And she pulls one out of her bag!"

Improvisation is fundamental to the spirit of their music, as is maintaining its oral tradition. Instead of using written music, they learn by ear tunes from some of today's greatest traditional Irish musical artists, including Tim Collins, Ivan Goff and Billy McComiskey. Striving for musical synergy over uniformity, the



Donie Carroll and Mick Moloney

PHOTO: DANIEL NEELY

WSHSO embraces the variations that each player brings to their melodies. The result is a performance that is both ever-dynamic and rarely the same.

"Normally, we get together once a week," says Daniel. "We go into rehearsal and whoever knows a new tune – usually Mick – will play it slowly, and everybody will sort of pick it up. Hopefully by the end of rehearsal everybody remembers it and can play it through. We record new tunes and send them around to everybody so they can practice at home. We build our repertory that way.

Aside from the distinctive rhythms and melodies, Daniel and Don agree that the heart of what makes Irish traditional music so magnetic and unique is the communal dimension.

"I like it as a way of being social with other people," explains Daniel. "You know, I really like making music and I've done it for a long time, but I like being able to go in with other people who I might not even know and share something with them."

Don replies, "I forgot how basic that is. If you play some other kind of music in New York City

and you want to play with other people, you have to make a real effort to find like-minded [musicians] to get together and become a band or something. Where, if you play traditional Irish music, there are a dozen places you can go to every week where you can sit down with people, share tunes and play."

Whether playing in a pub or a music hall, their aim is not just to perform, but to contribute. Ranking among their most memorable shows is the Irish Musicians for the Mercy Centre charity concert at the Peter Norton Symphony Space on Broadway, where the WSHSO were part of an all-star lineup of respected Irish artists, which included the Green Fields of America and Cherish the Ladies.

The Washington Square Harp and Shamrock Orchestra channels the sounds of the past to celebrate the present, bringing an exquisite element to any occasion. With plans to record their first album this year, the band remains true to their simple purpose – to "sit down with people, share tunes and play."

IA

*For more on the Washington Square Harp and Shamrock Orchestra and their upcoming performances, go to <http://www.myspace.com/wshso>. For information on Blarney Star Productions, go to [www.blarneystar.com](http://www.blarneystar.com)*

# The O'Doherty Clan

## The history of the clan of Niall of the Nine Hostages

By Tara Dougherty

Originating around 880 A.D., O'Doherty is one of the oldest surviving surnames in Europe. Existing in a huge number of variations including the original Gaelic O'Docartaigh as well as (O) Daugherty, Dougherty, Doharty and Docherty, the O'Doherty clan was among the most powerful in the north of Ireland through the 17th century. Descendant of one of the sons of Niall of the Nine Hostages, who ruled at Tara in the 5th century, the great-grandson of the Prince of Tyrconnell, called Donal, is said to hold the origins of this name. His famed feats in battle earned Donal the title "Dochartaig," interpreted by some to mean the "destroyer" though others argue its true meaning is "obstructive." Still others trace the meaning of the surname to unsettling Gaelic roots in the words "unlucky" or "hurtful."

From the 8th to the 17th centuries, the clans in Donegal were engaged in a constant power struggle. Cunningly, the O'Doherty clan kept on good terms with the English after their invasion and were able to maintain power for some time. By the 14th century, the clan of O'Doherty had extended their rule throughout Co. Donegal and came to be Lords of Inishowen, the peninsula lying between Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle. Later, the failed rebellion of Sir Cahir O'Doherty (1557-1608) would strip the clan of its power in the 1600s.

**Sir Cahir O'Doherty** was son of Shane Og O'Doherty and Lord of Inishowen. Unlike many in the clan at the time, O'Doherty sided with the English and was made admiral of Derry. His relationship with the Governor would disintegrate due to land disputes and accusations of treason. O'Doherty would then make a fatal decision to attack and burn

Derry. Following this short period of rebellion, O'Doherty was executed by the English army. The confiscation of the clan's land shortly thereafter caused the clan, which had until then been dominant almost exclusively in the North, to resettle in Counties Mayo and Kerry.

Some traveled throughout Europe after the fall from power. Eleventh in line from the Lords of Inishowen is Dr.

faced high unemployment rates and poverty. Doherty has penned books on the subject and continues his community work there.

A famed court case and a prison escape have earned **Joe Doherty** of New Lodge, Belfast, his fair share of fame throughout Ireland and New York. Doherty, an IRA volunteer, was charged with the killing of a Special Air Service member in 1980, after which he and seven other prisoners escaped from their cells in Crumlin Road Jail, Belfast. He was later convicted in absentia for his crime, while hiding out in New York. He worked as a bartender in Clancy's Bar, Manhattan and lived with his American girlfriend in Brooklyn before his arrest by the FBI on June 28, 1983. Doherty's deportation trial became the subject of controversy and debate. Claiming that his crime was a "political offence," he fought to maintain asylum status. He remained in custody in the Metropolitan Correctional Center for nine years (a street corner near the Center was named for Doherty in 1990), but despite gaining the support of over 130 Congressmen and Cardinal John O'Connor, Doherty was returned to Crumlin Road Jail in 1992. He was released six years later in accordance with the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, and began a career in community work.

In a different sect of the political world, **John Doherty** (1783-1850) had a long and successful career in justice, eventually reaching the eminence of Chief Justice of Ireland. He gained a reputation in the House of Commons for his fairness and wit. Though he lost his career to an ill-fated investment in the railways, Doherty is still revered for his work toward Catholic emancipation and his dedication to the justice system.



**Ramon Salvador O'Doherty** who lives in Cadiz, Spain. In July 1990, he was ceremonially inaugurated as the 37th O'Doherty chieftain.

There are a great number of prominent Dohertys in public service, art and literature. Covering both literature and public service is **Paddy "Bogside" Doherty** who earned his nickname for his fervent support of revitalizing the Bogside area in the city of Derry. Chief Executive of the Inner City Trust, Doherty has been committed to reviving the Bogside, a Catholic working-class area that endured discrimination under unionist rule and



**LEFT: The Mamas and the Papas, 60s folk sensation, pictured (front) Michelle Phillips and Denny Doherty and (back) John Phillips and Cassandra Elliot. BELOW: Jack Dougherty pictured in the early 1950s walking with daughter Mary, holding son Jack in his arms.**



has gained a reputation not only for his songwriting contributions to the English punk scene but also for his party lifestyle and prolonged rocky romance with model Kate Moss. **Chris Daughtry** is a successful singer whose career was launched on *American Idol*. Though he did not make it to the final rounds of the competition, Daughtry is among the most successful *Idol* alums on the music scene today.

**Jack Dougherty**, my grandfather, was a prominent patent attorney at IBM. He raised a family in Crestwood, New York working full time, attending law school classes at night at Fordham University where he graduated second in his class, all the while coaching his five sons' Little League teams. He died of brain cancer in 1975 and is survived by his sister Margaret Mary, his wife, Roscommon native Ann McDermott, six children and sixteen grandchildren. Scholarships exist now at Iona Preparatory School in New York in his honor as well as awards in the Crestwood Little League Association where he is still remembered fondly. **IA**

An alum of *Irish America's* Top 100 list, **Pat Doherty** checks 'peacemaker' on the list of accomplishments for the Doherty clan. Then a newcomer to the New York City comptroller's office, Doherty took on the MacBride Principles as his first major assignment. The son of an Irish immigrant from Derry, Doherty began his research into employment discrimination in Northern Ireland. He contacted various organizations involved in the Irish question and eventually assisted in drafting the MacBride Principles, a set of fair employment guidelines for firms in Northern Ireland. A long legal battle awaited the Principles, which were finally signed into law by President Clinton in 1998. Doherty continues to work for the office of New York City comptroller.

In business, **Pat Doherty** is a Donegal man who has set his sights on creating the biggest tourism attraction yet to be seen in Belfast. Doherty's company is developing the Titanic Quarter in the very same spot where the infamous *Titanic* was launched on its ill-fated journey. In this Quarter, *Titanic*-themed galleries and museums will attempt to recreate a piece of Victorian Belfast in the biggest riverside regeneration project in Europe. It is set to open in 2012. Owners hope the anticipated success of the project will assist in pulling Northern Ireland out of its recession.

In the early 20th century, two Doherty brothers, **Hugh Lawrence "Laurie"** and **Reginald "Reggie,"** entered the world of competitive tennis in a hope to combat respiratory problems. Natives of

Wimbledon, Surrey, the brothers both had long successful careers in tennis which would lead them to collaboratively pen the book *R.F. and H.L. Doherty on Lawn Tennis*, an instructional guide. Laurie played at Wimbledon where he won the singles championship five years in a row, and became an Olympic gold medalist in the sport. Reggie won Wimbledon singles four times, and together the brothers won the doubles championship an astounding seven years in a row. Each racked up an impressive number of championships internationally in Paris as well as the U.S.

The Mamas and the Papas rose from the 60s Greenwich Village folk scene and grew to epitomize the sweet California pop sound that paved the way for the Woodstock era. A founding member of the four-piece band was **Denny Doherty** of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Though the Mamas and Papas would dissolve in a series of love affairs and personal unrest, Doherty continued pursuing music after the band's break-up in 1968. He released some solo work and joined a reconstitution of the Mamas and the Papas in 1982. Doherty also provided the voice for Theodore Tugboat on a popular Canadian children's show. He passed away at his home in Mississauga, Ontario in January 2007.

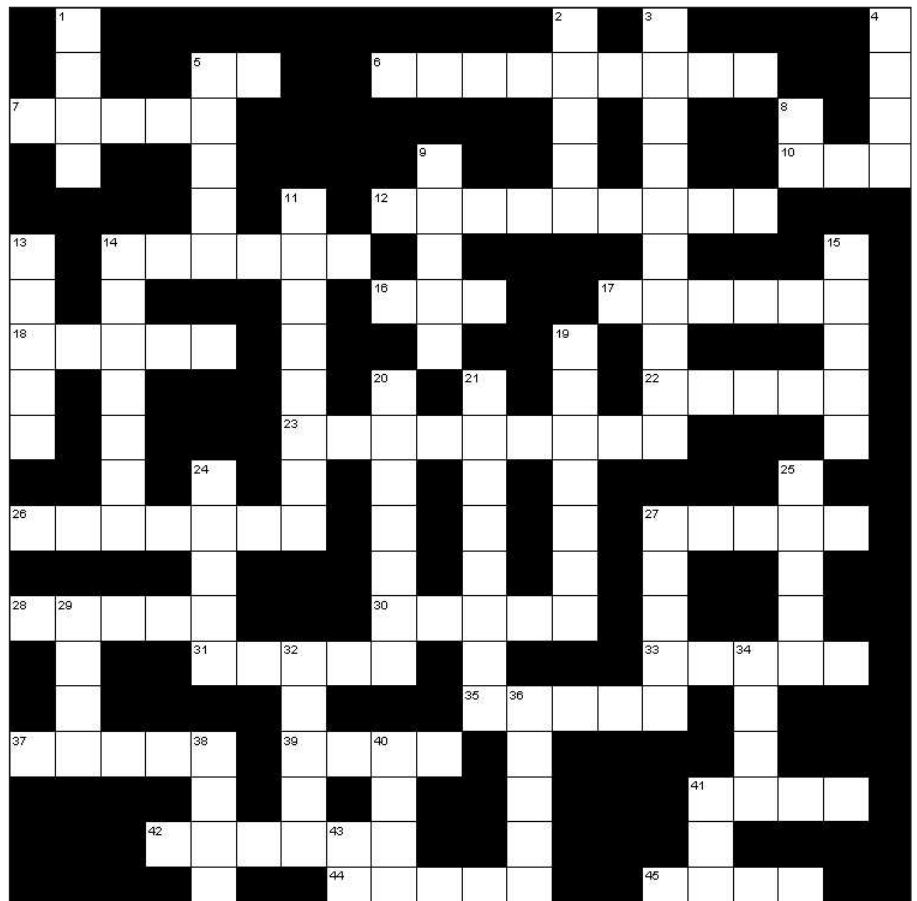
In the arts, even more Dohertys have made their mark on film, music and television. Actress **Shannen Doherty** is known for her television roles as the villain on the very successful *Beverly Hills: 90210* and as one of three witch sisters on *Charmed*. English rocker **Pete Doherty**

## ACROSS

- 5** White House puppy (2)
- 6** Ireland's answer to McDonald's (9)
- 7** Iconic fashion mag (5)
- 10** Jewel (3)
- 12** Hugh Jackman is \_\_\_\_ (9)
- 14** See 38 down (6)
- 16** See 18 across (3)
- 17** Balladeer Percy \_\_\_\_ (6)
- 18** (& 16 across) Latest pandemic, originating in Mexico (5)
- 22** Ubiquitous NYC breakfast staple (5)
- 23** Pirate Queen (9)
- 26** An Irish cookie (7)
- 27** (& 25 down) Bree's husband in *Desperate Housewives* (5)
- 28** (& 34 down) Irish king who died at the Battle of Clontarf (5)
- 30** Actively respond (5)
- 31** Traveler (5)
- 33** Ireland's national theater (5)
- 35** (& 24 down) Actor and godfather to Liam Neeson's son Danny (5)
- 37** North Mayo area of great archaeological importance (5)
- 39** Hitchcock's window (4)
- 41** (& 11 down) Late *Slaughterhouse Five* writer (4)
- 42** See 37 across (6)
- 44** (& 27 down, & 29 down). This sea event hits Galway in June (5)
- 45** See 41 down (4)

## DOWN

- 1** The cow jumped over the what, according to the nursery rhyme? (4)
- 2** Erin go \_\_\_\_, said this *NY Times* article (5)
- 3** Mayo town where bull ran through a grocery store, as seen on YouTube (10)
- 4** Ode (3)
- 5** Short for Elizabeth (5)
- 8** (& 20 down) Late science fiction author (1, 1)
- 9** See 13 down (5)



- 11** See 41 across (8)
- 13** (& 9 down) Everybody's been talking about this *Britain's Got Talent* singing sensation (5)
- 14** Cream liqueur, good in coffee (7)
- 15** Oil exploration company at center of Mayo controversy (5)
- 19** Sport at the heart of Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland* (7)
- 20** See 8 down (7)
- 21** Where the dancing took place in this 1998 film (8)
- 24** See 35 across (5)
- 25** See 27 across (5)
- 27** See 44 across (5)
- 29** See 44 across (4)
- 32** Wall decoration (5)
- 34** See 28 across (4)
- 36** Eskimo house (5)
- 38** (& 14 across) Iconic children's author, creator of the Famous Five (4)
- 40** As well (4)
- 41** (& 45 across) U.S. Poet Laureate 2008 (3)
- 43** Latin abbreviation for 'God willing' (1, 1)

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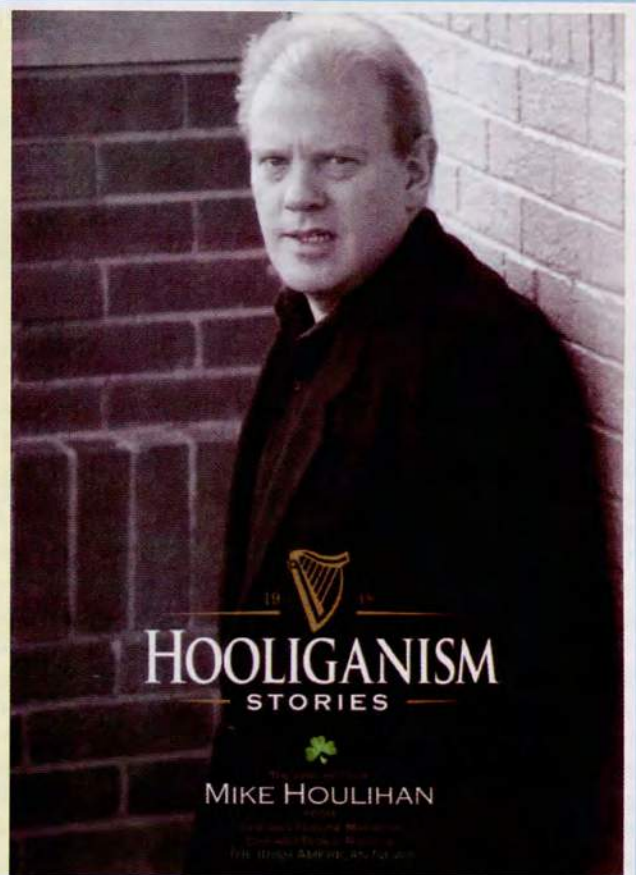
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# Irish Wedding Traditions

Just when I think I have my dad all figured out, a new snippet of info comes to light, and June always finds me thinking more about him than usual. It's Father's Day month, his birthday was the 3rd, and my parents were married on June 16th, now celebrated globally as Bloomsday, the day Leopold Bloom wandered through Dublin in *Ulysses* by James Joyce, Dad's favorite author. June is also the prime month for weddings, and Dad was a wedding photographer. He used to say he'd like to write a book about his wedding adventures titled *I Shot the Bride with a 4-5*, meaning his trusty 4x5 press camera.

Almost immediately on beginning the research for this article on Irish wedding traditions, I chanced upon some eye-opening Irish marriage advice: "Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday the best day of all, Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, and Saturday no day at all." Another Dad revelation! For the year my parents were married, June 16, occurred on a Wednesday, and why they chose a mid-week nuptial instead of the usual Saturday had always mystified me.

Finding a life partner to love and cherish, for richer or poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health is certainly the best reason to marry. It appears that my father was taking no chances and picked an auspicious Irish traditional day to tie the knot.

For centuries, most Irish marriages were arranged to benefit the families involved with increased land holdings, power or wealth. A daughter who was not pretty could be made beautiful with a handsome dowry. Love came later, if at all.

Producing healthy offspring was what



The Irish boys and the Italian girls: Ambrose Burns, George Burns, Edythe Musacchio, and Matilda Musacchio. George and Edythe are the writer's parents, who married on June 16, 1937.

## AN IRISH WEDDING PROVERB

Don't walk in front of me, for I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, for I may not lead. Walk beside me and always be my friend.

brought the sexes together. In pre-Christian times, people believed that breeding healthy children was the only way to persuade nature to provide abundant crops and wells that would not run dry. Sterility was a social disgrace and an economic tragedy, and testing a prospective partner's fertility by trial marriage or bed sharing ("bundling") was widely accepted.

These practices faded during the Famine years, but charms and rituals continued being employed to assure a couple's fertility. Though the phrase tying the knot now means uniting two people with marriage vows, folk once

believed the bride could be made sterile by anyone who tied knots in a string during the marriage ceremony. A protective ritual involved tying a hen that was about to lay an egg to the newlyweds' bedpost.

Whiskey played a part at every stage of the nuptials. In *A Historical and Statistical Account of the Barony of Upper Fews in the County of Armagh, 1838*, J. Donaldson described a country wedding. "The male brings the female to his relations' house, and the girl's relatives follow to negotiate the match. When the couple's families agree on a mutually acceptable bride-price, an agreement bottle of whiskey is shared,

## A FEW IRISH WEDDING TRADITIONS

- A fine day means good luck, especially if the sun shines on the bride.
- Those who marry during harvest will spend all their lives gathering.
- A man should always be the first to wish joy to the bride, never a woman.
- Salt and pepper shakers are a lucky wedding gift.
- No one in the wedding party should wear green, the color of envy.
- The newlyweds should always take the longest road home from the church.
- It is bad luck if a glass or cup is broken on the wedding day.
- The bride shouldn't put on her own veil; a happily married woman should do the honors.
- It's lucky to marry during a 'growing moon and a flowing tide.'
- When leaving the church, someone must throw an old shoe over the bride's head so she will have good luck.
- If the bride's mother-in-law breaks a piece of wedding cake on the bride's head, they will be friends for life.
- A horseshoe nailed over the newlyweds' door (pointing up like the letter 'U') will ensure the couple's life together will be lucky.
- A bride and groom should never wash their hands in the same sink at the same time – it's courting disaster if they do.

## RECIPE

### Irish Wedding Cake

COOKING TIME: 4 ½-5 ½ hours NOTE: cake will done when a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean. AGING TIME: 2-4 weeks

Currants 1 lb. 12 oz.	Mixed spice 2½ tsp.
Golden raisins 1 lb.	Butter 1 lb.
Raisins 9 oz.	Brown sugar 1lb.
Shredded almonds 7 oz.	Molasses 2 tbsp.
Glace cherries 7 oz.	Orange and lemon zest 1½ tsp. each
Candied orange & lemon peel, cut, mixed 7 oz.	Eggs 8 large.
Flour 11b 3 oz.	Vanilla extract 1½ tsp.
Salt 1 teaspoon.	Brandy 4 tbsp.
	plus extra for aging purposes.

Grease a 12-inch (30 cm) tin and line it with three layers of greaseproof paper, extending about 2" above the top of the tin. Then tie a thick band of folded newspaper around the outside of the tin to protect the edge of the cake from overcooking, and have a suitable sized piece of brown paper to put over the cake if it is in danger of over-browning.

Mix dried fruit with halved cherries and the peel with a tablespoon or two of the flour in a bowl. In another bowl, sift flour, salt and the spices.

In a third bowl, cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add molasses, zests and vanilla. To this mixture, add the eggs, one by one with a tablespoon full of flour with each and beat well. Fold in the fruit and remaining flour plus the brandy. Mix well.

Turn mixture into the prepared tin and smooth down with tablespoon making a slight hollow in the center. You may leave the cake overnight or till ready to bake.

Pre-heat oven to 300 degrees, bake cake in center of the oven for 1-1/2 hours. Reduce heat to 275 degrees F, (40 degrees C, Gas mark 1) for the remaining baking time (3 to 4 hours) or until the top of cake feels firm to the touch and toothpick comes out clean and dry. Watch cake as it bakes. Cover if it looks like it might over-brown.

Cool cooked cake in tin then remove paper and turn upside down onto a board. Make small holes into the cake with skewers and pour on some extra brandy (approx. 1/4 cup).

When brandy is absorbed wrap cake in double layer of waxed paper and then a layer of foil. Store in airtight container and place in a cool place. Cake should be finished at least two weeks prior to the wedding so flavors will mellow. The day before serving, ice with Royal Icing or Fondant Icing.

*Recipe: [www.irelandforvisitors.com](http://www.irelandforvisitors.com)*

whereupon the bride returns home to prepare for her marriage. On the wedding day, the groom's party rides to the bride's home, where they are met by the bridal party. Before leaving her home, the couple take three mouthfuls from a plate of oatmeal and salt to ward off the evil eye. Then all ride to the priest's residence. After the nuptial blessing, everyone retires to an ale-house for the bride's drink, from whence they gallop to the bride's house in a race for the bottle. The first person to arrive at the bride's house receives the bottle, returns to the wedding party, and gives the whiskey to the bridegroom, who drinks then hands it to his bride, who also partakes. The bottle is passed round until nearly empty, at which point the bridegroom flings it and its dregs away. They return to the bride's home, where a cake is broken over the bride's head while young people scramble for bits to place under their pillows so they may dream of their future mates."

Since ancient times, a couple's marriage contract has been sealed with a ring, the symbol of eternity. During Ireland's medieval period it was often a three-part ring of two hands clasped over two hearts. One each of the three parts was kept by the girl, her suitor and the priest, and all sections were united at the marriage ceremony. The design is very much like today's popular Claddagh ring.

The highlight of every wedding dates from ancient Rome. To signify their willingness to share all things, Roman brides and grooms shared a piece of cake. The rest of the cake was crumbled over the bride's head to guarantee she would produce many children. By the time Christianity arrived in Ireland, one cake had evolved into many thin wheaten biscuits. They were still broken over the bride's head, and guests scrambled for "lucky" crumbs that fell to the floor. During the Tudor period, the biscuits evolved into buns made with spices and currants. One bun was crumbled over the bride's head, some were given to the poor and the rest stacked in a centerpiece, over which the couple kissed for luck.

In the 17th century, English royalists who had fled to France to escape Puritanism returned home bringing French pastry cooks with them. On some obscure wedding day, an inspired French chef frosted all the little fruitcakes with white sugar icing so they would stick

## AN IRISH WEDDING TOAST

May you both live as long  
as you want, and never want as  
long as you live.


together in a tiered mound. But they kept the tradition of dropping the cake on the poor bride's head.

By the mid-1800's, the cake-dropping custom was replaced by the brilliant concept of cutting the cake in slices. At about the same time, milling techniques produced fine white flour, and a new cake appeared on the scene. The rich golden pound cake became the "bride's cake," while the spicy fruit cake, liberally laced with whiskey and wrapped in marzipan, became the "groom's cake."

Eventually the two cakes were combined into a tiered masterpiece. The bottom pound cake layer was sliced and dis-

tributed to all attending. The upper fruitcake layer was kept until the birth of the first child. In some cases, a third fruitcake layer was saved for the couple's 25th wedding anniversary celebration! Regular whiskey drenching allowed it to age as gracefully as the couple themselves.

Any way you cut it, the cake is still the high point of every wedding feast. Surrounded by family and friends, the bride and groom ceremoniously feed each other the first piece, just as newly married couples have done since antiquity. The ancient ritual of sharing a small piece of cake symbolizes the new life the happy couple will share, and the promise of prosperity and fruitfulness their future holds.

Over the many years that Dad shot his brides, he captured some classic images of the wedding couple cutting the cake and feeding each other that first piece. And he always brought home a piece for me. Slainte! 

# The Girl with the Ribbon



From left to right: Frank Dugan, Joseph Dugan, Mary Dugan McAneny, Gerald Dugan, Isabelle Burns Dugan, and Daniel Dugan. Taken at their home in Creek Locks, New York (Ulster County) around May of 1914.

**T**he girl with the ribbon in the center of the photo is my grandmother, Mary “Mae” Dugan McAneny. We had a big reunion of the family to celebrate her birthday when she turned 95 in 2001. At that time she was still in excellent health and living in her own home in Vero Beach, Florida. She vividly recalled her grandfather, Thomas Burns, who lived with her family when she was a little girl. Thomas came to the small town of Rosendale, New York from County Galway around 1850. She recalled him speaking Gaelic and reading his Bible. Her parents, also pictured in the photo, were both the children of Irish immigrants. Mae’s mother Isabelle Burns was the youngest of 10 children and her

father Daniel Dugan was the oldest of 10 children.

Mae passed away in 2004 at age 98. She is missed by all who knew her. She was a great lady. Her Irish cousins still live near Lough Rea in County Galway and she visited them in the mid-1950s. I visited the same cousins in 1997. Her grandfather, Thomas Burns b. 1828 (who was a twin) was raised in the nearby village of Cuppanagh. The twin remained in Ireland while Thomas came to America where he settled in Rosendale, New York. Mae fondly recalled her grandfather speaking Gaelic and getting an Irish newspaper.

– Submitted by  
Mark A. O’Neill Jr., Chevy Chase, MD.

*Please send photographs along with your name, address, phone number, and a brief description, to Kara Rota at Irish America, 875 Sixth Avenue, Suite 2100, New York, NY 10001. If photos are irreplaceable, then please send a good quality reproduction or e-mail the picture at 300 dpi resolution to Irishmag@aol.com. No photocopies, please.*

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