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Painting created for Boston Irish by Vincent Crotty

VERY MUCH AT HOME – Vincent Crotty in his studio with the tools of his art.
Ed Forry photo

Supporting the arts – and the artists – during the crisis

By Ed Forry
Boston Irish Publisher

This terrible pandemic has caused havoc in everyone's lives. People don't go to the office anymore. Children don't go to school. Six months into the crisis, many small businesses remain closed and too many have gone forever.

Sunday Masses are populated by fewer and fewer folks, with social distancing the norm. At our church, every other pew is cordoned off and the faithful who can get there sit socially distanced, away from each other – brother from sister, parents from children, husband from wife. Persons of a certain age are advised by their pastor and church leadership that they have been dispensed from the obligation of Sunday Mass, and told to exercise an abundance of caution about whether they go to church - or not.

One sector of society that has been devastated during the length of this siege is the field of arts and artists. With venues shuttered, musicians, dancers, singers, comics— performers of all sorts —are left without an audience, a place to perform, and with no connected community of fellow artists to collaborate with. No theatre, no stage plays, no concerts, no venues, and, alas, no Irish *seisiuns*.

Some have found ways to sustain a virtual connection, with regular internet-connected productions over Zoom, Facebook, and the like. But because so many rely on the "gig economy," performers are uniquely affected because, without regular employment as an anchor, they were not eligible for the special government unemployment checks that benefited other workers

Given all that, *Boston Irish* has a unique opportunity to be helpful. We have expanded our coverage of the arts, featuring Sean Smith's comprehensive reporting of the Irish and Celtic arts scene here in Boston and across New England. His in-depth coverage of performers and their art and his reviews of their recorded music is on display in each printed issue, and on our website, BostonIrish.com.

And with this autumn issue, we're pleased to display an original painting by the wonderful Cork-born artist Vincent Crotty, whom we have commissioned to create cover pieces around the general theme of Boston in a time of social distancing. His first piece was published in our summer issue, depicting an Irish seisiun 2020-style: a group of individual performers, all gathered together electronically, making their own virtual connections.

Vincent lives with his wife, the dancer Kieran Jordan, in a home in Lower Mills. And in the backyard, he has developed his own studio where he works on his creative art day in and day out. One morning recently, I spoke with him by phone, but he had little time to chat as he was about to do a one-hour yoga class, and later he would teach his own class in artistic technique to a student he has not met personally.

Both events – his yoga and his art class – are virtual events carried out online. Since the pandemic settled in, Vincent the artist has had to become Vincent the technician, figuring out how to make Zoom video-casts work for him, one by one.

As the deadline for our issue approached, he told me his artwork would soon be completed. Early one Monday morning in mid-September, he went to Copley Square, set up his easel, and captured the scene that graces this issue.

A careful view of the work will note that Vincent shows himself, in a nod to Norman Rockwell, all alone in the scene— the artist painting a portrait of a quiet, empty public square in the midst of a great pandemic.

He texted to me: "It's dawn on Monday. Copley area. I'll tweak it more today but maybe the changes will be small now. Thanks for everything Ed! I feel like Norman Rockwell, without the talent."

We have to disagree on that point. Vincent is a great talent and we're pleased to showcase his latest work on our cover.

John Hume used courage, audacity to deliver peace

By Robert P. Connolly
Special to the Reporter

John Hume visited the Reporter's office in 1992. The newspaper was then located on Neponset Avenue. *Ed Forry photo*

During the years that I spent traveling to Northern Ireland writing about the bitter and violent Troubles and the peacemaking efforts aimed at bringing it all to an end, people would often theorize that time spent there must have been filled with angst and unease.

Wasn't it scary to be in Northern Ireland? The short answer is no, although there is an episode that comes to mind.

The year was 1993, the place was Derry, and John Hume was at the wheel, conducting a breakneck tour of the city, showing an American reporter the places where US companies like Fruit of the Loom and Seagate were already operating, and sites that other firms should be eyeing.

Hurtling down bumpy streets in a very small car, we are taking turns that we shouldn't be taking, advancing where we should be yielding, and generally seeming to be throwing caution to the damp Derry wind.

Ever afraid in Northern Ireland? Well, maybe.

To be fair, it also has to be understood that the driver – a member of the British and European parliaments, with decades into peacemaking efforts that in five years would bring him the Nobel Peace Prize, who probably engaged in back-channel talks with Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, and the IRA – probably had a lot on his mind.

While it may seem bizarre that the man named "Ireland's Greatest" person in a 2010 poll was intent about giving an American reporter an "open for business" tour of his beloved Derry, if you step back, it makes perfect sense.

As much as he was a peacemaker and, in the words of The Guardian newspaper, a "secular saint," John Hume, who died on Aug. 3 at 83, was a pragmatist, a local MP who was all about stoking the economy and creating jobs.

Many of his most memorable aphorisms, key points from his "single transferable speech," made the connection between the economy and peace.

John Hume delivered few major speeches without noting the time when his father, watching unionists and nationalists in a flag-waving duel, had warned him: "Don't you get involved in that stuff, son."

In an interview conducted for the Nobel Foundation, Hume picks up the story: "I say, 'Why not, dad?' and he says, 'You can't eat a flag.' In other words, what he was saying is real politics is about the living standards, about social and economic development. It's not about waving flags at one another."

The former leader of Northern Ireland's Social Democratic and Labor Party also frequently spoke about the desirability of reaching the point where "we can leave aside our quarrel while we work together in our common interest, spilling our sweat and not our blood."

As was widely noted in the tributes and media reports following his death, John Hume was the architect of the Northern Ireland peace process. He was the father of the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement that essentially brought the North's long-running Troubles to an end.

His concept of a grand compromise, of a power-sharing government, of an outcome where no one would win but no one would lose, essentially emerged in the 1970s, and he voiced his ideas for the next 20-plus years. The core concepts never changed – he just needed everyone else to catch up.

"I am a teacher," he once noted, referring to the profession he entered after graduating from college. "You keep saying the same things over and over. Then you know you're getting through when someone in a pub gives you back your own words."

There's something else to think of when you consider John Hume: Courage. As in incredible, raw courage.

Another time, another car, but the place is still Derry.

I had arrived a few minutes early for an interview, so I parked in front of his home and was chilled by what I saw: a simple house on a crowded, middle-class street – no gate, no guard, but big windows and the front door just footsteps away.

Given that this was the home of a man whose views at times had antagonized paramilitaries on both sides of Northern Ireland's sectarian divide, a man who often traveled on his own and almost always without security, the scene seemed horrifyingly dangerous.

Then I realized that beneath John Hume's shy, school-teacher exterior there was an undercarriage of steel, and what he was saying was: Everyone knows what I think; here's where I live; I am willing to risk it all for peace.

This man of courage and audacity delivered peace – at no small cost to himself, with the past 20 years being a time of physical and cognitive decline. Many people are alive today because of him. Northern Ireland has hope because of him.

In reflecting on his accomplishments, a Derry woman born the year after the Good Friday agreement was signed said that John Hume gave the young people of the North "a future we could look forward to."

Isn't that what he was always aiming to do? Wouldn't those words make John Hume smile?

Robert Connolly is the writer and co-director of "The Road to Reconciliation," a Northern Ireland-based documentary that aired nationally on public television.

Color and flowers in Ireland: Let us count the hues

By Judy Enright
Special to the BIR

If you could pick just one word to describe Ireland, what would it be? For me, the word would be "color!" We have all heard about the green fields of Ireland, but colors that run across this island country are so much more plentiful, and represent every hue in the rainbow and more.

FLOWERS

Ireland's vast array of wild flowers features many colors, ranging from soft pastels of sea pinks and heather to vibrant red and pink fuchsia, bright yellow gorse and orange montbretia. And, of course, there are many shades in between from bright to subtle.

The island's rocky Burren, for instance, is alive with flowers – if you look down between the rocks. Many of the flowers are classified as orchids and their colors are in sharp contrast to the dull, gray, rocky landscape.

Irish gardeners grow many varieties of colorful flowering plants, bushes, and trees in their yards and in their neighborhoods.

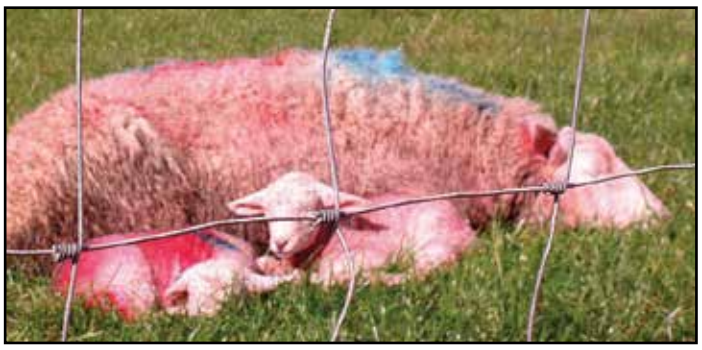
And, if flower colors aren't enough to dazzle you, down on the Beara Peninsula, buildings are painted in spectacular colors that can vie with any flower anywhere.

Sheep, too, carry through the Irish color scheme, with farmers choosing and registering color choices and locations where the colorful marking will be located on the animal. The marking helps identify whose sheep are whose when they are free ranging on Ireland's hills and in the valleys. I once saw sheep in Mayo marked with funky purple and orange! Quite a sight.

It's hard to travel around Ireland and be down and depressed. If you are, the brightness of the landscape is sure to cheer you up. It's a lovely place to spend time.

Travel is restricted these days due to Covid-19, but do plan to enjoy Ireland's brilliant colors and award-winning hotels when we are all able to return.

Brilliant yellow fields of rapeseed color the Irish Midlands. *Judy Enright photos*



This ewe and her lambs are marked with waterproof red paint to indicate ownership.

Bright orange montbretia add a spark of late summer color.

Bushes of fuchsia add to the greenery of Ireland.

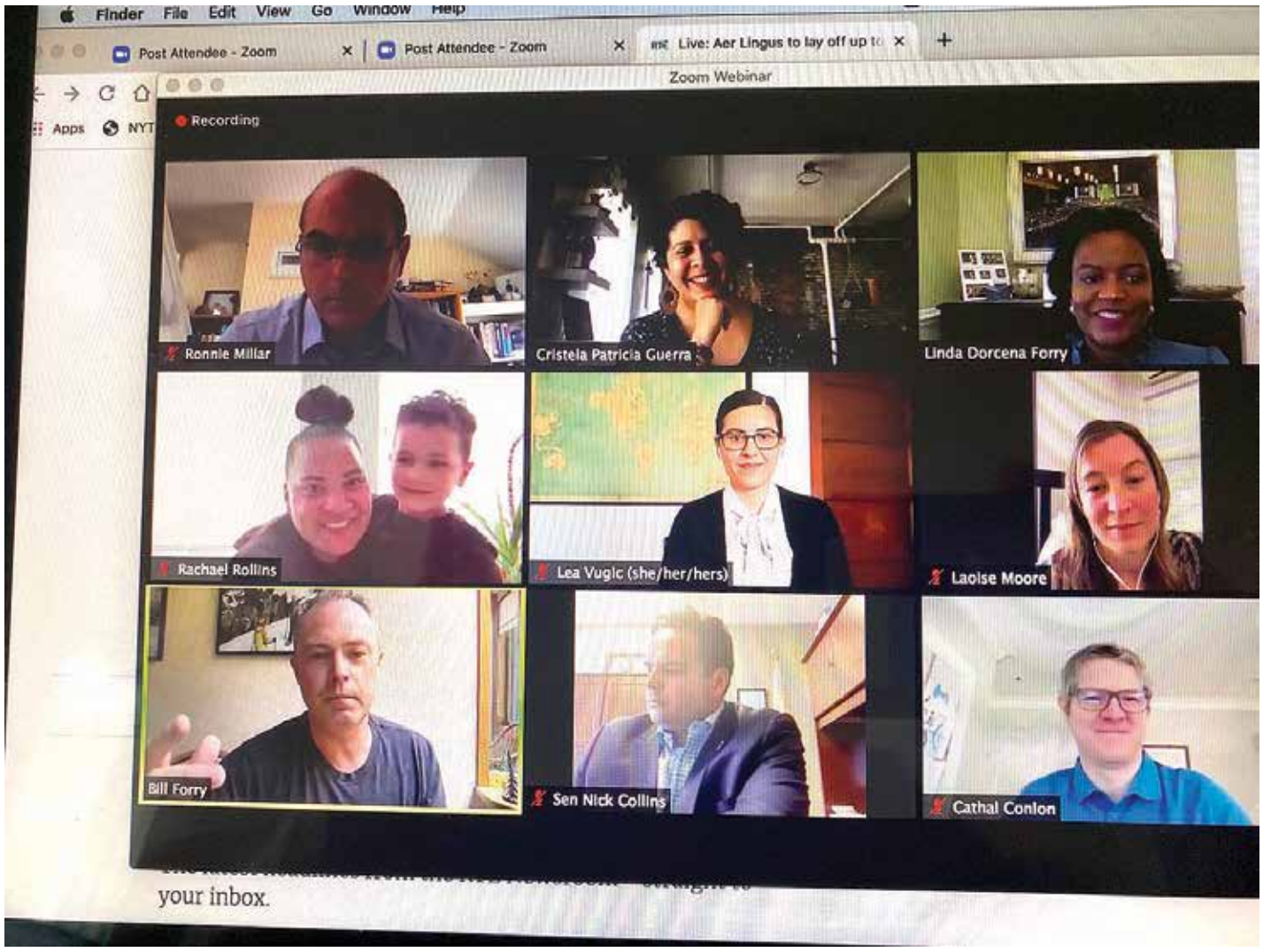
The Irish community engages with Black Lives Matter

On June 19, the Rian Immigrant Center partnered with Boston Irish and Irish Network Boston to virtually host a vital community discussion on Black Lives Matter. The event was an opportunity for the Irish and Irish American community in Boston to engage and to reflect and explore ways to stand up and take an active role in dismantling systemic racism. We had a big response to this event, with 200 people joining us. We received much feedback from attendees after the event, asking us to continue the conversation and to provide more tangible ways in which to instill this change at home, at work, and in the local community. Our organizations listened, and a follow up three-part webinar series was created!

This series focused on parenting, racism and anti-racism, advancing anti-racism in the workplace, and anti-racism work currently happening in Ireland. On Aug. 12, we kicked off the series with a session on Parenting, Racism, and Anti-Racism. We were joined by panelists Tanya Nixon-Silberg, Founder, Little Uprisings; Brian O' Donovan, WGBH; Bill Forry, Editor/Publisher, Boston Irish; and Dawn Morrissey, Executive Director, Irish Film Festival, Boston. The session was facilitated by Lea Vugic, the Director of Wellness Services at Rian Immigrant Center.

After a very open, honest and constructive discussion about parenting, racism, white privilege, and the challenges faced everyday by BIPOC children, Tanya closed out the event by providing a framework for parents to talk to their children about racism/anti-racism and provided strategies on having these tough conversations.

On Sept. 10, we hosted the second event in the series which focused on Advancing Anti-Racism in the workplace. Once again, we were joined by an amazing group of panelists, Kathryn Horgan, Chief of Human Resources and Corporate Citizenship Officer, State Street Corporation; John Donohue, President and CEO, Arbella Insurance Group; John Clogan, Senior Project Manager, Irish Construction Network, Faithful+Gould; and Dr. Christal Morris, Founder, CLM and Associates. Nancy Joyce, US Head PDT Global, and Rian Board Member facilitated the session. During this session, our insightful panelists explored racial injustice in the U.S and provided concrete strategies and policies for promoting anti-racism in the workplace.



The conversations about Black Lives Matter were captured on Zoom technology.

On Sept. 16, we wrapped up the series with a session on: Anti-Racism Work in Ireland. We were joined by panelists Lorraine Maher, Founder, IamIrish; Michaela Rafferty, Community Youth Worker, Belfast/London; and Shane O' Curry, Director, INAR (Irish Network Against Racism). The event was facilitated by Ryan McCollum, Advisory Board Member, Rian Immigrant Center.

Over 500 people joined us over this three-part webinar series. The Rian Immigrant Center, Boston Irish, and Irish Network Boston are committed to continuing anti-racism work and to engaging the Irish community in reflection and activism to disrupt racist policies. Thank you to all our wonderful panelists for taking the time to join and contribute to these vital and timely conversations, to all our individual event facilitators, and to our community for tuning in and engaging in this dialogue. If you missed these conversations, you can watch the recordings here:

https://vimeo.com/user118230022

Q&A: What happens after you receive your green card?

Q. *I have just been granted permanent resident status in the US. Can you give a summary of my rights and responsibilities regarding such issues as travel abroad, reentering the US, losing my green card, and registering for service in the armed forces?*

A. With your permanent resident status (green card), you can live and work legally anywhere in the US. You can petition US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for green cards for your spouse and unmarried children. Generally, after living here for four years and nine months (two years and nine months if your status is based on the fact that your spouse is a US citizen and you are still living in marital union with him/her), you can apply to become a US citizen.

You can travel outside the US whenever you like. You must have your green card, along with a valid foreign passport, with you to present to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) when you reenter the US. You should keep a record of the dates each time you leave and return (backed up if possible with travel documents such as airline tickets and boarding cards), and it is important always to reenter the US legally by using a CBP border checkpoint, including brief trips over the border to Canada and Mexico.

When you travel abroad you must be careful not to "abandon" your residence in the US. If you want to leave for more than 12 months, you must get a "reentry permit" from USCIS before you leave or CBP will presume that you have abandoned your status and may not readmit you. A reentry permit is granted at the discretion of USCIS for specific purposes, for example, going abroad to attend university, or going to your original home country to take care of an elderly or ill parent. Also, if you leave for more than six months but less than a year, you are not automatically presumed to have abandoned your US permanent residence, but you can face scrutiny on this issue from CBP when you return. It is important to consult with us at IIIC or with your immigration lawyer before taking a trip out of the US lasting more than six months.

Even if you have a green card, the immigration authorities can prevent you from reentering the US, or deport you if you are in this country if you are convicted of certain crimes. Certain offenses that may not seem very serious could be viewed as grounds for deportation, or they could keep you from being readmitted if you leave the US, or from obtaining US citizenship. If you are charged with a crime, it is ***essential*** that you consult an immigration lawyer as well as a lawyer specializing in criminal cases, as the law involving the consequences of criminal convictions on a person's immigration status is extremely complex.

If you are a male at least 18 years old and under 26 at the time when you got your green card, your responsibilities include registering with Selective Service (even though there is no military conscription in effect in the US at this time). If you do not register, you may be subject to criminal prosecution. If convicted, you could be deported. Failing to register may also prevent or delay you from becoming a US citizen. You can get the necessary form at any post office, or you can register online at sss.gov.

Your green card does not entitle you to vote in US elections or serve on juries – you must be a US citizen for that.

Rian attorneys are available to provide advice on any immigration matters. Our walk-in immigration clinics have been suspended due to COVID-19, but our attorneys are providing free immigration consultations over the phone and will be happy to speak with you. Please call 617-542-7654 to schedule a phone consultation.

The Rian Immigrant Center (formerly the Irish International Immigrant Center) presents the 2020 Global Solas Awards

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2020
6:30PM EASTERN TIME

REGISTER ONLINE: RIANCENTER.ORG
Register for free, donations are appreciated

Please join us for a special, global and virtual Solas Awards Celebration. From the comfort of your home, we invite you to come together to support immigrant families on the path to new beginnings. Honoring leaders who bring hope to our communities.

HONORING: Des Mac Intyre, Atsuko and Larry Fish, Ngozi Okoye & Iuventa 10
HOSTED BY: Honorable Linda Dorcena Forry and Brian O'Donovan

Rian Immigrant Center, 1 State St. Boston, MA 02458, 617-542-7654, riancenter.org

Irish Americans: Follow the light of Biden's lantern out of the darkness

History says, Don't hope
On this side of the grave,
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme
– Seamus Heaney

By Tim Kirk
Special to Boston Irish

DUBLIN – Joe Biden, the working-class kid from Scranton, PA, who traces his Irish family roots to counties Louth and Mayo, quoted Seamus Heaney and appealed to his fellow citizens to change course in his DNC acceptance speech. Prior to the speech, a moving video showed the former vice president helping a young man overcome his stutter by reading the poetry of Yeats aloud. These Irish poetic flourishes were played, and replayed, widely in Ireland as Joe laid out the case against Trump – "Trump has cloaked our country in darkness" and offered an alternative: "light, hope and love."

"In a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."
– George Orwell

Joe is a compassionate centrist, a leader whom Irish people can understand. Ireland is a nation born of rebellion, a war of independence, civil war, and partition, but since its founding, the main political parties (Fianna Fail and Fine Gael) have stayed in the center. Biden's record and vision are not as progressive as many Democrats would like, but he represents a chance to bring the USA back into the community of nations. Doing so is not assured and will require winning Irish-American support, the perennial wild card in American politics that tipped the scales for JFK but also for Ronald Reagan. The appearance of Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York at the RNC's renomination of Donald Trump, whose cruel policy explicitly called for the separation of migrant children from their parents and incarceration, is a vivid illustration of the importance of Irish Catholics to both parties. The Irish in America have strong emotional ties to their ancestral Erin and should study Ireland's recent history, position, and example.

Ireland is situated between two Anglo Saxon democracies, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and so has a unique perspective and insight into both. As their economic hegemonies waned in different eras, the UK and USA have responded in surprisingly similar, and now simultaneous, manners. Both have withdrawn from the world community, botched their responses to the pandemic, elected vain, pathologically dishonest leaders with studiously unkempt hair in the UK and studiously coiffed hair in the US, and stoked racial division to drive major electoral decisions. The political symmetry between the UK and the USA goes back further and informs the present and future.

Now and Then – The US-UK connection highlighted many iterations. Two of the most notable ones: Donald Trump and Boris Johnson and Ronald Reagan and Margareet Thatcher.

Let's consider the current elected leaders of the UK and the USA, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. In February 2016, after the date was set for the Brexit referendum, Boris Johnson wrote two opinion pieces for the *Daily Telegraph,* one a passionate defense of the EU for the "Remain" cause, and the other a scathing critique of the EU and a call to arms to leave the EU. He slept on it, published the "Leave" piece, and joined that campaign, shocking his Oxford classmate and rival, David Cameron who, as prime minister, had called the referendum.

The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power, pure power...We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end.
- George Orwell, in "1984"

Born in Manhattan, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson spent his post-Oxford career writing lazily researched and often entirely made up pieces from Brussels for the *Daily Telegraph's* British audience that eagerly consumed his Euroskeptic articles comparing EU regulations – like restricting the use of toxic preservatives in prawn chips– as attacks on British sovereignty equal to the Nazi blitz. Likening packaging requirements for frozen fish to the battles of Hastings, Agincourt, Waterloo, Trafalgar, and Dunkirk was all in fun and his readership lapped it up. Everyone knew he was lying about both the facts and the major concepts, but he delivered it with the posh accent, the occasionally drôle quip, and a punchable smirk that only an Eton and Oxford "red-trousers fellow" can master. It was all a joke over a few jars. Johnson lies so often about big and small issues, they are no longer a news story. His position on EU membership has changed many times over many years and it is accepted that he has no ideology other than the pursuit of power. His capacity for "Doublethink" is rivaled only by Trump.

The serial mendacity of the thrice-married, failed casino developer, and reality TV host, Donald Trump is known to all. His ability to attack women of color, insult Elizabeth Warren with a racial slur, pardon Susan B. Anthony, praise and demean women, even within the same speech or sentence, is astonishing in its multiple layers of contradiction. After four years of his lies and 7 months of pandemic and economic collapse, the American people are either nauseated or mesmerized, left deeply disorientated and confused.

"It was miraculous. It was almost no trick at all, he saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice. Anybody could do it; it required no brains at all. It merely required no character."
–Joseph Heller, in "Catch 22"

The similarity between the two once-dominant republics that trumpet "British Exceptionalism" to the east and "American Exceptionalism" to the west is easier to see from Ireland. Inside the USA, America feels like Britain's antithesis, but stuck between them, the parallels are obvious to the Irish.

The similarity is not confined to the current leadership. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, David Cameron and Barack Obama all share striking parallels. Busting the unions, confronting the Russians, loosening financial regulations, and projecting a bellicose image internationally were similar platforms for Thatcher and Reagan. Blair and Clinton were center left politicians who both crafted a "third way" – governing from the middle. Cameron and Obama were young, stylish policy wonks from their respective countries' elite universities with young families. They looked like reformers, but reinforced neoliberal economic policies that doubled down on capitalist orthodoxy.

The most tragic resemblance is the one between Boris and Donald and it is not just the goofy hairstyles. They are inveterate and unrepentant liars who seek power for power's sake. Boris Johnson's convincing win even after the Brexit calamity does not bode well for November in the USA.

In the 1870s, the British Empire had 23 percent of the world's population as subjects, 24 percent of the planet's land mass, and 38 percent of the global GDP. The UK now accounts for 2.2 percent of global GDP, and 12 percent of EU GDP. It is a rump state that no longer 'rules the waves' or 'waves the rules.' With three of its remaining four provinces (Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) considering leaving the United Kingdom to remain in the EU, the United Kingdom looks shakier than ever. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland need look no farther than the island of Ireland to decide whether being in the EU would be better than the UK. At the time of the sectarian partition of Ireland 100 years ago, per capita income in Northern Ireland was twice that of the Republic of Ireland. Now the per capita income in the Republic is twice that of the North, according to the economist David McWilliams. Same people, same island. The only difference is that Northern Ireland has stayed under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom.

The EU did not want Britain to leave the EU. Brexit is like a broken arm that needs medical care. If it were the only issue in 2020, it would likely have the EU's undivided attention and would give the UK more leverage to negotiate a trade deal closer to what the British want by the Dec. 31 deadline. But the EU has "d'autres chats à fouetter" ("other cats to whip," i.e., "bigger fish to fry"). The pandemic, economic crisis and climate change, are like multiple organ failure. The "broken arm" is serious, but it can wait. Any hard bargain leverage Britain thought it had, has been swept aside by the pandemic.

In a similar way, America's economy is still huge, but it is no longer hegemonic.

(Continued on page 20)

Without its pubs, Ireland is a very different place

By Larry Donnelly
Special to Boston Irish

WICKLOW, Ireland – There have been a lot of strange sights in Ireland since the outbreak of Covid-19. In the early days of March, April, and May, perhaps the most outstanding one was school-aged children running around on the streets on weekday mornings. And their parents, many of whom were desperately trying to do their jobs from home, spent too much time chasing them forlornly and shouting "social distance!"

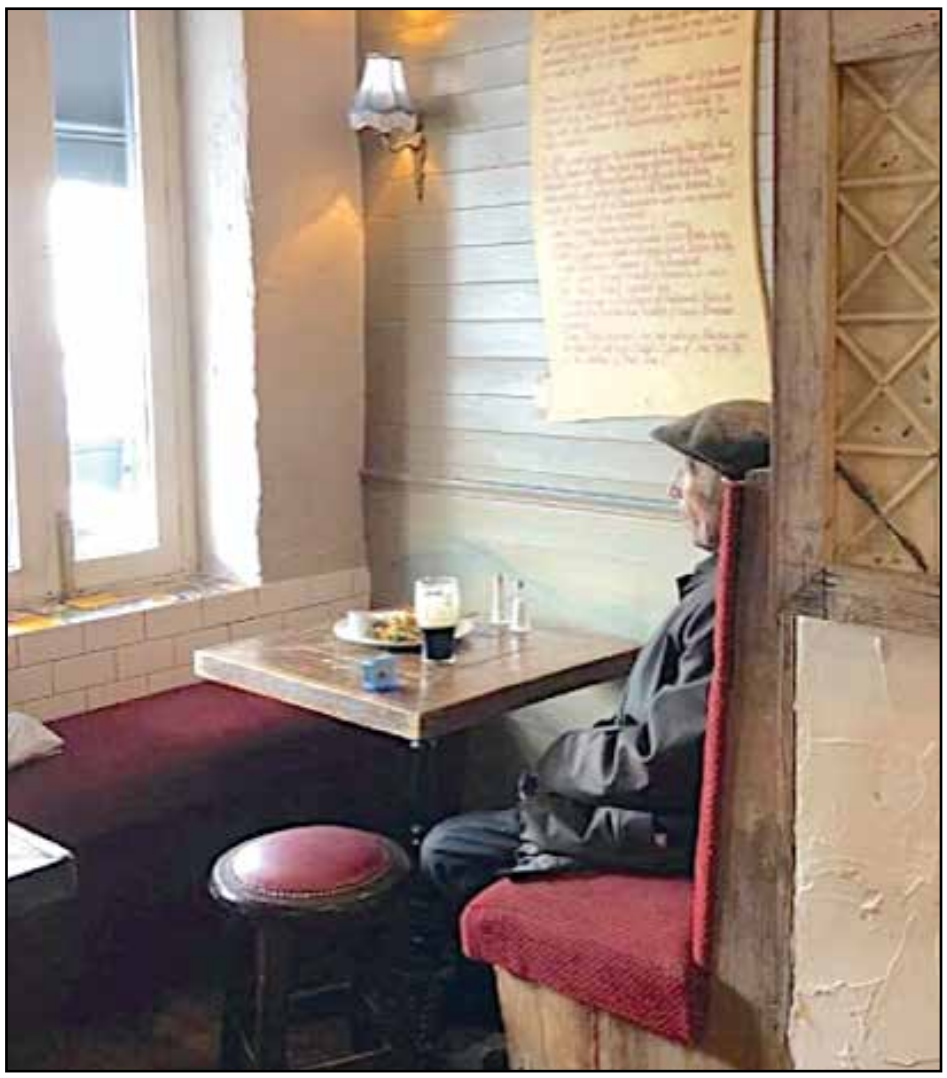
I was among the defeated soldiers and was positively delighted to leave my seven-year-old son, Larry Óg, at the school gate a couple of weeks ago. He was less pleased. For all sorts of reasons, I and other parents pray the schools can stay open.

Another particularly odd vista has been the darkened pubs throughout urban and rural Ireland. Until the 29th of June, all venues with licenses to sell alcohol and food on the premises were locked up tight. From that date onward, restaurants and pubs that offer food were allowed to open and to sell alcohol, so long as a meal costing at least 9 euro was purchased, social distancing measures were strictly implemented, and patrons stayed in situ for no longer than 105 minutes.

Here in Wicklow Town, which is something of a microcosm of small-to mid-sized towns in Ireland, two gastro-pubs, The Brass Fox and The Bridge Tavern, re-opened in late June. Local residents who can afford to do so, as well as visitors from other parts of the country, have made a concerted effort to support these important businesses. Yet their trade has been down appreciably from what they would ordinarily anticipate in high summer with foreign tourists milling around.

Meanwhile, those of us who are members of Wicklow Golf Club have been able to enjoy food and drink in the comfort and safety of the clubhouse with stunning views from a cliff top above the Irish Sea.

In the past three months, the horrible term "wet pub" – rated by Irish people as one of the most annoying new expressions to emerge from the current period of crisis, together with what they regard as an awful Americanism: "staycation" – has been applied to pubs that do not serve food, hence remained shuttered. Many have asked what possible distinction can be drawn between them and pubs that have kitchens.



John Joe Quinn at McGinn's Hop House in Galway, Ireland, this week.
Fergus McGinn photo

An independent Kerry TD, Michael Healy-Rae, put the question starkly to the government: "What is the difference between a person inside a public house with a pint of Guinness in this hand and a toasted cheese sandwich in this hand and a person inside another pub with a pint of Guinness and no toasted cheese sandwich?"

His is a cogent point and is amplified by the financial struggles faced by those who own or work at small, often rural pubs that have been forbidden from operating since mid-March. It has been disheartening every time to pass by my own local pub in Wicklow, Fitzpatrick's, and read the unchanged sign in the window: "Closed from 7 PM on 15th March." But in response, expert officials repeatedly assert that the virus loves alcohol and how it lowers peoples' inhibitions when it comes to close physical contact and claim that this sacrifice has been absolutely necessary in the name of public health.

And some scoff at the notion that there should have been any rush to prioritize pubs in light of Ireland's well-documented relationship with alcohol that is accurately described as unhealthy. This is a valid observation to an extent, yet it overlooks the unique role Irish pubs play in the countryside and in the cities, where they are typically community hubs to which young and old gather more for company and conversation than for drink. Indeed, the vital function that the pub continues to play in Irish society has helped make it an institution duplicated around the world.

Much of this was encapsulated recently in a photo taken in a Galway pub of an elderly gentleman on his own with a plate of finished food and a half-consumed pint of Guinness in front of him. The man also had a clock on the table.

The picture was taken by a good pal of mine, Fergus McGinn. Fergus is well known among the Boston Irish both for having previously been the proprietor of two popular Galway establishments – Richardson's of Eyre Square and Monroe's in the city's rebranded "west end" – and for having many friends in Massachusetts's sizable community of emigrants and further removed descendants from the west of Ireland.

Insofar as it captured the poignancy of an old man by himself and the unfortunate realities for many of living in isolation during a global pandemic, it is no surprise that the photo went viral and was ultimately the subject of an article in the *New York Times*. The story behind the photo was, as usual, more complicated. The man in it, John Joe Quinn, had brought the clock in order to ensure he would get home on schedule for the 6.1 evening news on RTÉ. Contrary to some claims, John Joe did give his approval for the photo to be taken and shared on social media and got a kick out of becoming an internet sensation.

The photo portrayed an undeniable truth about Irish pubs, however. As Fergus McGinn said subsequently about his eponymous establishment tucked in the relatively quiet Woodquay section of bustling Galway City: "Most of our customers here would be retired. Men of that generation used pubs for socializing. It's not like now when people use their phones to socialize. Take that away and what are they left with?" Precious little, I'm afraid, is the answer. And it's not older men alone who would be bereft.

Here's hoping that as many Irish pubs weather this brutal storm as possible. I am a big fan of going to the pub. And I know plenty of people back in Boston – both those who love their pints and others who aren't especially interested in drinking – who agree completely. For most of them, invariably entertaining visits to welcoming watering holes are a cherished aspect of their trips to Ireland.

Coronavirus has had countless devastating consequences. To be fair, hastening the decline of Irish pub culture is far from the worst of them. But it's still sad to see.

Larry Donnelly, a Boston born attorney, has lived in Ireland since 2001 and is a Law Lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway. He is also a regular media contributor on politics, current affairs and law in Ireland and the US. Follow him on Twitter: @LarryPDonnelly.

An image of a time receding

The limit is 90 minutes. You can only stay in the pub for 90 minutes. If a single photo can capture the zeitgeist of a nation, [see above on this page], this might be it. It caused a lump in my throat and for a wide variety of reasons, wrote Brian O'Donovan on Facebook recently.

"This is from a pub in Galway taken last week, and has already gone viral, so you might see it in lots of places," he wrote. "Subsequently, after becoming famous on the 'net, the man involved said that he always brings the clock with him to get home for the evening news, but it is easy to see why this photo initially caught the imagination.

"In Ireland, only pubs that serve food can be open. Because of Covid, there is a 90-minute time limit per customer. This man is from a different world, it seems.

"I'm 63 and consciously avoid the use of words like old, older, or elderly. This man with the cap is probably not that much older than me, but everything about this scene is from a different era, what I call the "old Ireland." A time receding.

"There is a gentility to it. A rhythm. A serenity bordering on insouciance, and yet, his quiet acquiescence to the reality of pandemic life today in Galway.

"The food has been dutifully ordered but barely picked at. Food is not the reason he is there. The pint is being savored. The solitary position, deliberately chosen. But it is the little alarm clock, the one this very morning that was next to his bed, and will be again tonight. No iPhones here. No Apple watches. This is his way of timing what should never be timed, WAS never in Irish history timed before. The delicious, contemplative, lost-in-thought, late-afternoon-ticking-clock consumption of a couple of pints in a quiet pub in this City of the Tribes. 90 minutes.

"The man is 'sitting in the wizen daylight....' and my own thoughts are of passings, and ghosts, and mortality 'as shadows vanish....through archways of forgotten Spain.'

Trump's accelerating assault on democracy

We have not wasted much ink in this space detailing the day-to-day outrages, depravities, and lies of the Trump administration over the last 44 months. Such an exercise would leave precious little room for the steady diet of local coverage to which our readers are accustomed.

But lest anyone labor under any misapprehension: This unhinged presidency is loathsome to us in every way. It must be brought to an end by the power of our votes.

Each minute of this sustained national nightmare that is the Trump presidency has brought further descent into lunacy, criminality, and misinformation.

Now, as the campaign season lurches toward its climactic fall chapter, the Trump-Pence strategy is clear: Stoke discord and ferment violence on the streets of American cities and, in a desperate flail, appeal to the most vile fears of their malcontented base. In the meantime, the back plan: Sow the most poisonous of crops— doubt in the fundamental lifeblood of our republic— throughout the land. What bitter harvest will their wickedness reap come November?

Last week, the Trump-Pence ticket shamelessly misused the White House and other federal property to stage the Republican convention, a flagrant violation of federal law. And yet, on went the show, as even left-wing media —eager to appear even-handed in their coverage— aired the proceedings with only passing references to the abuse of power.

This week has brought even more grotesque behavior. The president's well-documented affinity for white nationalist killers was once again torch-lit by a teen vigilante, Kyle Rittenhouse, charged by Wisconsin authorities with murdering two men and grievously wounding a third on the streets of Kenosha last weekend amid protests set off by yet another police shooting of an unarmed Black man.

In his patented double-speak, Trump on Monday seemed to defend Rittenhouse's actions as self-defense, suggesting the AR-15 wielding 17 year old "probably would have been killed" had he not let loose a barrage of bullets at unarmed protestors.

Not since the aftermath of the bloody neo-Nazi riot in Charlottesville had the Republican nominee for president come so close to inciting and justifying white supremacist vigilantism.

His opponent, former Vice President Biden, meanwhile, has been unequivocal in denouncing any form of violence amid the protests in cities like Portland and Kenosha. Biden is spot-on when he notes that it is Trump who brings "toxicity" along with him wherever he rolls.

"Fires are burning and we have a president who fans the flames rather than fighting the flames," Biden said. "Donald Trump looks at this violence and he sees a political lifeline."

It's even more sinister than that. On Tuesday, ignoring appeals of state and local officials to stay away, Trump descended on Kenosha, a small city still reeling from the aftermath of murder and days of unrest. It would, of course, be too much to ask this particular politician to pass up an opportunity to enflame his red-capped brigade.

Meanwhile, yesterday in Massachusetts, still in the midst of a disruptive and deadly pandemic, people exercised their civic duty in strong numbers. Whether casting ballots in person— as my family did, with no hardship, in Lower Mills— or sending it along through the mail, the voting was done with great confidence that our sacred right, our franchise, is fully intact.

We have a president who intends to undermine that right. We must not let him succeed. **– Bill Forry**

Neal, Keating warn UK on Brexit moves

By Bill Forry
Boston Irish

Amid reports that Boris Johnson's government might invalidate last year's agreement for a "no-border" Brexit deal, US Reps. Richard Neal and William Keating joined two other colleagues in a stern message to Johnson on Sept. 15 that prompted a Tweet from Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden the next day. 16.

"We can't allow the Good Friday Agreement that brought peace to Northern Ireland to become a casualty of Brexit," wrote Biden, in a Tweet that included a copy of the Neal letter to Johnson. "Any trade deal between the US and UK must be contingent upon respect for the Agreement and preventing the return of a hard border. Period."

The letter from Neal and Keating was co-signed by Rep. Eliot Engel, a Democrat who chairs the House Foreign Relations Committee, and by Peter T. King, a Republican from New York. In it, they warn that Congress "will not support any free trade agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom if the [UK] fails to preserve the gains of the Good Friday Agreement and broader peace process."

They continued: "… we therefore urge you to abandon any and all legally questionable and unfair efforts to flout the Northern Ireland protocol of the [Brexit] agreement." An Ireland "divided by a hard border risks inflaming old tensions that very much still fester today," they wrote.

Johnson has suggested that his government might override parts of the Brexit deal as it negotiates a settlement with the EU that is supposed to be resolved by Oct. 15. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab visited Washington in September for meetings with Congressional leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has warned that Britain won't secure a much sought-after trade deal with the United States — which would require congressional approval — if it undermines the peace accord.

Raab insisted the U.K. has an "absolute" commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. He described Britain's planned law as "precautionary" and "proportionate."

Associated Press reports contributed to this story.

Irish Honors Postponed

The 2020 Boston Irish Honors luncheon, originally scheduled for Oct. 29 at the Seaport Boston Hotel, has been postponed until further notice due to the ongoing Covid-19 emergency.

We plan to re-convene in 2021 when we can all gather together— in person— for a proper celebration. Please look for announcements about timing and honorees at bostonirish.com.

— Ed Forry

Pay heed and listen up: a cautionary tale

By James W. Dolan
Reporter Columnist

Once upon a time there was a far distant land where people enjoyed periods of relative strife and harmony. For the most part, the citizens were able to adapt to the variables so much a part of a diverse country. They acknowledged life's imperfections and understood that flawed human beings required a stability that could only be achieved through understanding, restraint and compromise.

James W. Dolan

Progress was slow, but things seemed to be moving steadily forward despite the fits and starts normally associated with the complex and often divergent demands of identifying and achieving the "common good." They recognized the need for an ordered society because only then could progress be assured. Power had to be ceded to government and other institutions formed to promote the critical balancing of competing interests.

The entire structure depended upon the good will of citizens; their capacity to disagree, debate, and compromise without rancor. Absent shared common values of truth, compassion, understanding, fairness, and humility, the structure would atrophy and eventually collapse. Instead of shared responsibility, the "common good" would be undermined by a distorted conception of reality and, finally, by power seized by an autocrat.

That's exactly what happened when a larger-than-life showman arrived on the scene promising greatness if only the people would follow him. Despite a sordid past, he was able to convince large numbers of disgruntled citizens that politicians cannot be trusted, so why not give him a try. Many agreed that a leader so outspoken and confident, even one so blatantly lacking in character and fundamental values, would be a breath of fresh air.

They accepted false equivalence: Since all politicians are crooked, they decided, why not take a chance on a complete charlatan. They might not want him as a son-in-law but what harm can he do as president. Character was sacrificed on the altar of expediency.

The outcome was predictable. Pursuit of the "common good" was no longer a goal. Partisanship prevailed and the fundamental underpinnings of democracy eroded. Respect, integrity, restraint, and decency were replaced by acrimony, distrust, and recrimination. There was unrest in the land and the residents of neighboring countries wondered what had gone wrong. It's one thing to recognize human weakness by building safeguards to manage it. But embrace it at your peril.

In the end, a once prosperous and stable country turned on itself. Anger, suspicion, and bitterness undermined trust, understanding, respect, and accommodation. Governing became unintelligible, "full of sound and fury signifying nothing." The country slipped from authoritarianism into anarchy and eventually collapsed. History shows how empires have self-destructed. It has happened again and again and again.

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my works ye Mighty and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of the Colossal Wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.
Percy Bysshe Shelly

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Once-busy executive cooks up his dream: His own restaurant

Mike Sheehan

By Ed Forry
Boston Irish

Mike Sheehan found himself in a quandary a few years back. As he approached his 60th year, still able-bodied and holding a resume packed with major-league accomplishments, he was unemployed and at sixes and sevens as to what to do next. Not used to that experience, he says, his goal was never to stop working, but instead to find a new challenge in his work life.

A Weymouth native, he had filled out that resume by moving around more than a bit: A semester at Annapolis, some time at Northeastern University before earning a degree from Saint Anselm College, then jobs as: a nightside reporter at the *Patriot Ledger* in Quincy, a dayside worker at a small ad agency, then the head position at one of Boston's leading ad agencies, Hill Holliday, where he spent ten years, before signing on for a time as CEO of *The Boston Globe,* his last stop on the job train until now.

Over those years, he found time to help out as a board member with non-profits, including Catholic Charities, American Repertory Theater, and his alma mater Thayer Academy.

How to top that portfolio? Well, the peripatetic Mr. Sheehan had this lifelong dream: Building and operating his own restaurant in his home town of Norwell. He had a theory for the case: In a town with no active go-to center, there was no close-by place to go out for a good meal. Why don't I take care of that problem?

So that's what he did. Despite no restaurant experience, and the economic and health safety issues brought on by the pandemic, Sheehan went full speed ahead, and in July he opened Cheever Tavern, a contemporary American restaurant at 33 West Street in the center of Norwell.

"When I got here in 2006, I read the master plan of the town and it mentioned the importance of creating a town center. So I read that as kind of interesting. I grew up in Weymouth. I lived in Hingham. But I love Norwell because it's more of a rural town."I moved here in 2006 a month before my oldest daughter was born. One thing that struck me about the town was the lack of restaurants, and the lack of a real 'downtown area.' There was a town center, but [it was described] as a place you drive through, you don't drive to. So you tend to go from Hanover from Route 53 to Scituate on 123 and you might stop at the general store and there's an Irish pub, but other than that, you stopped to get gas. But it isn't a town center.

"And then one night I walked into a tavern, a bar. it was kind of dark and I remember walking out and I was thinking to myself, this would be a great place for a restaurant someday. And so that was probably 2008. Then I had my second child in 2008 and was busy with that kind of busy work. And so it was a concept, but I could visualize clearly in my head what I wanted this to be. It was a crystal clear vision.

Mike Sheehan's new Cheever Tavern features a 44-seat outdoor patio with a fire pit that's "booked two weeks out," he says. Below: Caitlyn Healy (server), Pulitzer Prize winner and Globe columnist Tom Farragher, and Caroline Healy (hostess). *Cheever Tavern photos*

"Around 2013, I finished up my 10 years at Hill, so then I did the Globe thing for three years, which was a lot of fun, you know;, it was a good challenge. And then I started doing more consulting work, which kind of leaves some time to think of other things. And I kept driving by the site and saying go myself, 'I want to do this.'

"I know nothing about restaurants. I am a Dunkin Donuts franchisee in Vermont, but that's a different thing. I don't really know restaurants, so it would be a great learning experience. And I know to my core that there's a market need for restaurant in this location."

When the bar at the site closed, the property owner, Paul Gallagher, reached out to Sheehan. "Paul called me up and said, 'The grill is going to be leaving. And I know you've talked about this. Come down and take a look.' And it was a pretty grim site. The demo had taken place but I knew it was going to take a lot to get it back to, you know, match my vision."

He sought advice from friends with restaurant and food service expertise, among them Mike Conlon, Steve Coyle, Joe O'Donnell, and his old Hill Holliday friend and mentor Jack Connors

"I think the single best piece of advice that I got came from Jack Connors, who owns the Marshside down in Dennis. He called and said, 'You have been in thousands of restaurants in your life. You know what a good restaurant is.

Trust your instincts and make it what you would like.'"

So Sheehan struck a deal with Gallagher, and hired architect Robert Stansell. "Robert's with Emporium design, which does a lot of New York restaurants. He grew up in Cohasset, lives in Hingham. And so he knows this area. and he absolutely got my vision. And Nicole Carroll did the interior design, and we just put a team together that, I got to tell you, was really, really good. And they went beyond my expectations of what I thought the place was going to look and feel like."

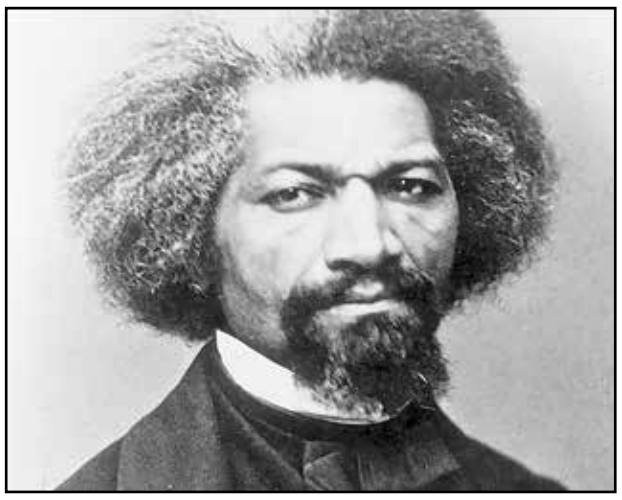
Sheehan put together a management team that includes Executive Chef Joseph Ethier, General Manager Stefania Healey, and Assistant GM Paul Sylvia. A posting at cheevertavern.com explains:

"Cheever Tavern is named for Pulitzer Prize winner John Cheever, one of America's premier authors of the 20th century. Cheever was born in Quincy, and he attended Thayer Academy. His first published short story, 'Expelled,' was based on his experience at Thayer. He passed away on June 18, 1982. His funeral was held across the street at the First Parish Unitarian Church, with his eulogy delivered by John Updike. He is buried next to his parents, a few feet from the front door of Cheever Tavern."

Sheehan says he wanted the best burger on the South Shore, and in a nod to Cheever's award winning career, he calls it the Pulitzer Shortrib Burger. "It's free to anyone who has won a Pulitzer prize. So far Tom Farragher [of the Boston Globe] is the only one who has taken advantage of it. I get to name names. Some items are after my father (Papa's Lobster Roll), my daughter (Catherine's Pappardelle Bolognese) and my son (Michael's Fish and Chips.) And, you know, it's kind of fun to do something where you can control it."

It was pointed out to him that although he's been a CEO or top manager in his previous jobs, owning and operating this restaurant is the first time he's worked for himself. He thought about that for a few moments, then said:

"Yeah, you're right. You know it's a different kind of responsibility. It's funny … but there is an extra, it's a healthy burden, but a burden that comes with the fact that you can't look up and blame anyone when something goes wrong."



In time, Douglass would often be referred to, sometime by himself, as the "Black O'Connell." Dr. Kinealy notes: "However, the real significance of this phrase is what it reveals about Douglass's appeal for black people to take responsibility for their own liberation."

Frederick Douglass and Daniel O'Connell meet briefly in Ireland – an account

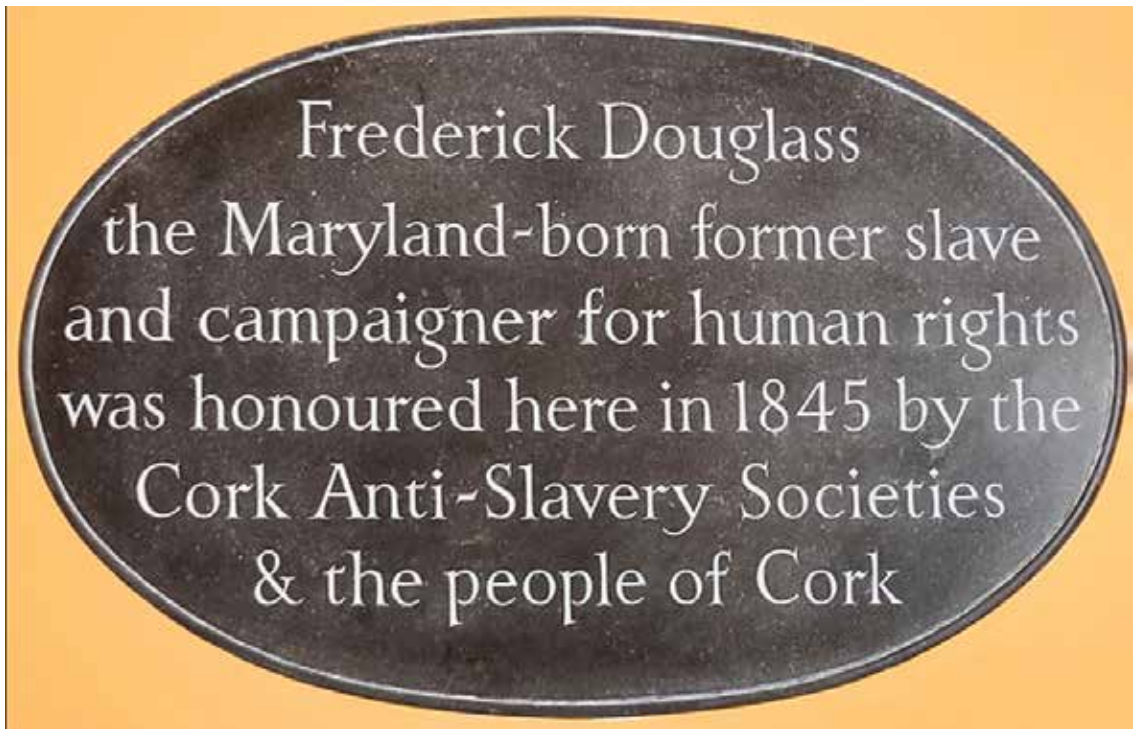
By Peter F. Stevens
Boston Irish Staff

The brief meeting was one of titans. One was a Black abolitionist and escaped slave on the rise, the other an aging, legendary statesman dubbed Ireland's "Liberator." A mythic description of the moment that Frederick Douglass and Daniel O'Connell crossed paths in Dublin would sprout up; however, the encounter proved to be hardly as dramatic as admirers of both men would have it. Still, the impact of that moment was profound for Douglass, shaping in several key ways his determination to remove the shackles of slavery in the United States.

In 1818, Frederick Augustus Douglass was born a slave in Maryland in 1818, his father a white man. He would only see his mother a handful of times. Douglass was also that rarity of the Antebellum South, illegally taught to read and write by his owner's wife.

Perhaps fittingly, it was a local pair of Irish laborers who planted the idea of escaping to the North in the young slave. He did just that at the age of 20, knowing full well he could be seized by slave-catchers at any point and dragged back south. A gifted speaker and writer, he soon garnered widespread attention and acclaim by abolitionists for his eloquent jeremiads about the evils of slavery. His public star ascended even further when William Lloyd Garrison, one of the foremost abolitionists of the era, enlisted the brilliant former slave to hit the lecture circuit.

Douglass published his autobiography, "The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave," in 1845, and while it earned him fame coast to coast, the publicity also unleashed incessant threats to his life, as well as the grim prospect of being seized by slave-catchers, and led to a momentous decision by Douglass and his supporters. He boarded a ship to Ireland and landed on Aug. 31, 1845, to meet with abolitionists there and in England.



As the eminent historian and author Dr. Christine Kinealy notes in her expert studies of O'Connell and Douglass, the relief in the fugitive slave's own words upon his arrival in Ireland was palpable: "I am now safe in old Ireland, in the beautiful city of Dublin." The well-known abolitionist Richard Webb, hoping to publish Douglass's autobiography for an Irish readership, persuaded him to remain longer in the city than he had planned.

Douglass made a splash in the city, the newspapers and locals captivated by his striking appearance and eloquence. There was at the time another noted orator in the city who was world-renowned as an ardent foe of slavery, poverty, and inhumanity of every ilk. His name was Daniel O'Connell.

In any Hollywood script, a memorable, highly charged meeting between the young lion of abolition and the old lion of human rights would have to unfold. After all, O'Connell had organized mass protests of Ireland's impoverished Catholic masses into "monster" rallies that had struck terror in Britain's Parliament. The architect of "Catholic Emancipation," he had also played a pivotal role in finally ending slavery in in every corner of the British Empire and was still futilely fighting for Repeal of the Union between Britain and Ireland. His spellbinding speeches were virtually unrivaled by any other statesmen of the century. Garrison described O'Connell as "the distinguished advocate of universal emancipation, and the mightiest champion of prostrate but not conquered Ireland."

Fifty years later, after Douglass's death, a friend of his would claim that the fugitive slave, then 27, and O'Connell, 70, had met as follows at the Irishman's home, in Merrion Square: "Douglass had a letter of introduction from Charles Sumner, but when O'Connell's servant announced that there was a colored man at the door, the great Irish-man rushed out and clasping Douglass in a warm embrace, said: 'Fred Douglass, the American slave, needs no letter of introduction to me.'"

As dramatic and stirring as the account was, and is, there is no other evidence to support the claim. The only corroborated meeting between the two men is quite different.

Douglass himself said that even as a slave he had heard about O'Connell as a fierce opponent of slavery, and in Dublin, he took the opportunity to attend a "Repeal" meeting at Conciliation Hall in hopes of hearing the Liberator speak. He managed to work his way through the gathered throng and into the building. What he heard, he said, changed the arc of his career: "I have heard many speakers within the last four years – speakers of the first order; but I confess, I have never heard one by whom I was more completely captivated than by Mr. O'Connell. . . . It seems to me that the voice of O'Connell is enough to calm the most violent passion. . . . There is a sweet persuasiveness in it, beyond any voice I ever heard. His power over an audience is perfect."

As the event ended, Douglass was introduced to O'Connell, and only a few words were exchanged. Asked to deliver remarks from the podium to the thinning crowd, Douglass said, "The poor trampled slave of Carolina had heard the name of the Liberator with joy and hope, and he himself had heard the wish that some black O'Connell would yet rise up among his countrymen and cry 'Agitate, agitate, agitate!'"

In time, Douglass would often be referred to, sometime by himself, as the "Black O'Connell." Dr. Kinealy notes: "However, the real significance of this phrase is what it reveals about Douglass's appeal for black people to take responsibility for their own liberation."

O'Connell, who died some two years after the short encounter with Douglass and as the Great Famine gutted any lingering hopes of Repeal, surely would have marveled at the impact that the American had on the bloody struggle toward the ever-elusive "more perfect union." Both titans preached the gospel of peaceful protest and unrelenting commitment to human rights. Today, in the United States, politicians and the populace would do well to consider the Liberator's following words: "Nothing is politically right, which is morally wrong…"

(For further reading, this writer strongly recommends "Frederick Douglass and Ireland: In His Own Words," and "Daniel O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement," both works by Dr. Christine Kinealy and available on Amazon)

Cara Dillon and Sam Lakeman succumb to the lure of art with 'Live at Cooper Hall' concert film

By Sean Smith
For Boston Irish

The concert film that Irish singer Cara Dillon and her husband and musical partner Sam Lakeman debuted online on Aug. 13 represented more than the culmination of a project. It was catharsis.

Like many, Dillon and Lakeman have endured frustrations and setbacks resulting from the Covid-19 lockdown: in their case, having to stop work on a new album and drop plans for a tour of the US — including a possible long-awaited return to the Boston area.

But the pandemic presented more compelling concerns for the couple as well, like the safety of their three children and the health risks for Dillon herself, who has Type 1 diabetes.

So, Dillon, Lakeman, and their kids hunkered down in their home, located in Frome, Somerset, UK, and largely put music aside. This is no easy thing to do when, as a duo, you've put out seven albums – although they're credited to Dillon, Lakeman has played an integral part as accompanist (on guitar and piano), arranger, and producer – and, in Dillon's case, received numerous honors and award nominations from BBC Radio 2 and others.

Human nature being what it is, though, the couple could not long withstand the itch to create, and when offered the use of Cooper Hall – a performance and exhibition venue located on the grounds of an old manor in Frome where the pair recorded their 2017 album "Wanderer" – they jumped at the chance to recreate a concert event. The result is "Live at Cooper Hall," a 72-minute film featuring 14 songs culled from two decades of the Dillon-Lakeman partnership. The film can be accessed via Dillon's website, caradillon.uk.co, for free; viewers have the option to make a donation.

Interviewed the day after the film was made available via YouTube and Facebook, Dillon and Lakeman were heartened at the response: no fewer than 3,000 viewers for the premiere from start to finish, more than 150,000 viewings on Facebook alone in less than 24 hours from almost 90 countries. But metrics couldn't measure the elation the two felt at the opportunity to perform, even if the audience consisted of several camera operators and a sound crew. The experience was in many ways an affirmation of the musical life Dillon and Lakeman chose to lead — a life with challenges, to be sure, but one that has treated them quite well.

"It was such a pleasure to do a concert, to be immersed in the music and let yourself get lost in the moment," said Dillon, a Co. Derry native who began singing at age 10 and at 14 was an All-Ireland champion. "I know it's a cliché, but it's true: I had taken it so for granted. I realize how important that is now.

"As much as we've missed performing, we know people miss being able to get out and enjoy live music," she added.

Cara Dillon and husband Sam Lakeman during their performance, filmed in July at Cooper Hall, near their home in England. "It was such a pleasure to do a concert, to be immersed in the music and let yourself get lost in the moment," says Dillon.

"So we wanted to capture the whole experience of our duo concerts – not just the music, but the atmosphere, the sound of the room, the staging and lighting. You just can't do that at home."

Live on film

During the pandemic, many musicians have turned to social media as a performance and creative outlet, whether the livestream-from-my-living-room format with one stationary camera, or artistically inclined videos of high ambition and production quality. With "Live at Cooper Hall," Dillon and Lakeman opted for a sensible middle route. The film is set up as a concert in real time, complete with Dillon providing stage patter between songs while Lakeman switches instruments. But the multiple cameras serve to further engage the viewer, zeroing in on Dillon to accentuate the intensity or quietude of a particular passage, and on Lakeman's hands as they flit across the piano keys or pound out a robust rhythm on guitar.

"What we *didn't* want was to sanitize that strange awkwardness and nervousness you sometimes feel at a gig, where it seems like the audience is terrified to cough or sneeze or shuffle in their seats," said Lakeman, who grew up in Devon, UK, and while a teenager began playing gigs with brothers Seth and Sean, leading to the formation of pioneering folk-rock band Equation – which Dillon eventually joined. "We feed off that; those have been some of our best gigs, in fact. So when we recorded the concert [in July], we played first song to last song in one go, about an hour and 25 minutes – and it was pin-drop quiet."

Dillon has long championed the song tradition of Northern Ireland, Derry in particular, and "Live from Cooper Hall" reflects this, with selections like "Streets of Derry," "Blackwater Side," "Banks of the Foyle" and "Faughan Side." Setting the tone for the film right at the start is "I Am a Youth That Is Inclined to Ramble," published in Sam Henry's foundational collection of Northern Irish traditional songs and ballads and famously arranged and popularized by Paul Brady. An immigrant's farewell to his lover, "Youth" has a melody that soars stratospherically mid-verse, lyrics equally passionate and gracious, and Dillon imbues it with a perfect gradation of drama, quietly supported by the pensive, steady presence of Lakeman's piano.

"That is such a powerful song – it really does take you places," said Dillon. "I see the whole story in my head so clearly. And it has a whole new meaning to me now, because I haven't been able to go home, to Derry, for six months. So when I was singing it, and some of the other songs from Derry, I was getting quite emotional: I used to sing it and think, 'Well, I'll be going to Derry in a few weeks,' but now you get the idea of how it feels to not be able to go back home."

Dillon gives a reflective, spacious feel to "Faughan Side," with Lakeman's light, delicate guitar backing; it's another farewell song, but more low-key and nostalgic. "I used to hear this song back in my hometown of Dungiven from a couple, Ann and Francie Brolly – Francie died in February – so it has a very personal association for me," she said.

Songs about leaving, and longing for home, are a major component of Dillon's repertoire – and are complemented by Lakeman's empathic piano style – so no surprise they would be featured in this context. But the duo go in for up-tempo, upbeat stuff, too, as Dillon shows her adeptness at singing in Gaelic with "Éirigh Suas a Stóirín (Rise Up My Darling)" and at the end of the song, some considerable skill on whistle, as she plays the slide "Dinny Delaney's" to Lakeman's pulsating guitar.

Their songwriting abilities come to the fore with their bracing joint composition "Bold Jamie" (Lakeman's syncopated, muted strokes on guitar ratchet up the story's suspense), and Dillon's tender "The Leaving Song," inspired by her mother's recollections of "loving wakes" – send-offs for friends or family members bound for faraway places from which they were unlikely to return.

In an age where immigration has become a politically charged subject, Dillon said, it can be easy to lose sight of how wrenching the act of uprooting and leaving one's home can be, and the impact on those left behind. "The Leaving Song" is an attempt to convey this, drawing on the vast subset of immigration songs to be found in the Irish tradition – and traditions around the world.

"The story never changes, does it?" she said. "Human nature never changes. We're always going to want to sing songs about home, immigration, unrequited

(Continued on page 16)

Anadama releases full-length album that offers a lot more than "stickers and koozies'

By Sean Smith
For Boston Irish

There are bands that can hardly wait to make an album. The ink is barely dry on their business cards, the official website is freshly uploaded, they've only just worked out a practice schedule, and they're already making the rounds of recording studios to start laying down tracks.

Then there's Anadama.

The New England trio with strong Boston connections formed back in 2007, but only released its first album, "Way Back When," this past spring. "After more than 10 years together," the band proclaimed, "Anadama is pleased to finally offer more than stickers and koozies to our dear fans."

There are understandable reasons why it took Amelia Mason (fiddle), Emily Troll (accordion, fiddle) and Bethany Waickman (guitar) so long to make a full-fledged recording: things like going off to college, figuring out what to do after graduation – and where would be the best place to do it – and then the whole business of settling into work and life. It also has to do with Anadama's focus on the contra dance scene, that uniquely New England social dance tradition with Anglo-Celtic roots for which Greater Boston has been a generations-long mainstay.

"The skills it takes to play for contra dances are different than the skills it takes to record an album," explains Mason, the trio's Boston representative. "You don't need an album to get contra dance gigs, so we never really devoted a lot of time to preparing for one – and because of work and other things going on, we only have so many opportunities to get together."

But for more than a decade, the three have made the most of those opportunities, and over the past year were finally able to get themselves into a studio and record 10 tracks.

"We're a very committed band," says Waickman, who along with Troll resides in Portland, Me., "but on a part-time basis."

Anadama: (L-R) Amelia Mason, Emily Troll and Bethany Waickman.

Contra indications

Much like Irish, Scottish, and Cape Breton music and dance, contra dance has its own distinctive community in Greater Boston and elsewhere in New England, and beyond. For decades, contra dancers of all ages have gathered regularly at venues like the Scout House in Concord, the Masonic Temple in Porter Square and First Church in Jamaica Plain or at annual events such as the New England Folk Festival Association; the Country Dance and Song Society (CDSS) summer programs at the Pinewoods camp in Plymouth also have been a key source of contra dance continuity.

Contra dance music has historically drawn on an amalgam of traditions, notably Irish and Scottish, as well as Cape Breton and others in the Canadian Maritimes, Quebecois, old-timey and Appalachian. And like those traditions, the music has over time integrated fresh influences and innovations: incorporating contemporarily written tunes; broadening the scope of music traditions to include, among others, Scandinavian, French/Breton, even klezmer; grouping tunes in medleys; and creating arrangements that add varieties of tone and intensity. (Recent years also have seen the rise of "cross-over contra," utilizing hip-hop, techno and other modern forms of music.)

On "Way Back When," Anadama's sound reflects these various changes in contra dance music but also pays homage to the tradition, mixing "classic" contra tunes with those of a more recent vintage (including their own compositions). There are also nods to musicians who have been leading figures in the contra dance scene, some of whom have been personal mentors to the trio's members. Mason's versatile fiddling, equally proficient with Irish jigs, French bourées, Cape Breton reels as well as homegrown New England tunes, is supported by Waickman's percussive, enthralling guitar strums that drive the melody without running it over; Troll's masterful piano accordion is the connective tissue, capable of taking the lead, harmonizing with Mason, supplying rhythm, or holding a few notes to add some texture.

The power in this combination, and the wonderful polyglot nature of contra dance music, is evident on such tracks as the pairing of reels "Flying Home to Shelley" – a solid part of the contra dance canon written by Paul Gitlitz of Washington state – and "Exile of Erin," a D-mixolydian corker composed by Tony Sullivan, an Irish banjo player from England. Another medley brings together a traditional Irish reel, "The Coalminer," "Salvation," written by Scotsman Simon Bradley, and the venerable "Brenda Stubbert's" by Cape Breton fiddle legend (and Brockton native) Jerry Holland.

Not everything is blazingly up-tempo. There's the bewitching "Dream Waltz," by Cliff Stapleton, a member of the inimitable Anglo-French ensemble Blowzabella; "Da Lounge Bar," a laid-back jig composed by Norwegian hardanger fiddle player Annlaug Børsheim; and a gorgeous pair of French tunes, "Le Canal en Octobre" and "En Flandres," by accordionist Frédéric Paris.

The New England contra dance pedigree is manifested in "The Fading Light" by Keith Murphy (more about him later on), the middle of a particularly well-crafted jig medley flanked by a namesake piece by Irish flutist Michael McGoldrick and a classic Irish trad number, "The High Part of the Road." And the album's last track is perhaps the most quintessentially New England of them all, encompassing "Master of the Dance" by western Massachusetts musician David Kaynor and "Kennedy's Reel" by the late New Hampshire pianist/accordionist Bob McQuillen – an enduring and much-loved figure in the contra dance scene – as well as "Moneymusk," an archetypal contra dance if ever there was one.

It bears mentioning that Anadama offers its own contribution to contra dance music on "Way Back When"; Waickman's "Washington Street" and a piece written by Mason and Troll in celebration of Sudbury resident Tom Kruskal, a leading light in English traditional dance.

While Mason, Troll, and Waickman enjoyed putting together "Way Back When," they acknowledge that Anadama in a recording studio is quite different than Anadama playing for a contra dance. The difference has to do with the spontaneity and vibe of a contra dance, they explain: conferring with the dance caller on what tunes he or she feels will work for the next dance (jigs with a lot of lift? high-energy reels?), then figuring out among themselves the specific tunes and the order in which to play them; settling into a groove once the dance is under way, and watching the dancers move and feeding off their energy.

"With contra dances, there's a lot of improvising and being in the moment," says Troll, who grew up in Wakefield, "and I love that."

That love came early for Anadama's members, who grew up in families with a strong interest in folk music and dance, including contra. Mason's grand-uncle, Dudley Laufman, is a National Heritage Fellowship-winning caller and musician whose involvement in New England contra goes back seven decades; her mother (Laufman's niece), fiddler Cathy Mason, played with Laufman during the contra dance resurgence of the 1970s and '80s. "There was no pressure to play fiddle or folk music," says Mason, "but it's not surprising that's what I did, since I was surrounded by it."

Troll's parents introduced her to contra dance when she was a youngster ("I immediately became more fanatic than either of them," she says), and also involved her in music improvisation workshops, which proved foundational. She, along with Mason, were part of a highly visible young generation of musicians and dancers – now well into adulthood – that energized Greater Boston's folk and traditional music scene during the late 20th and early 21st century.

Waickman, who grew up near Saranac Lake in upstate New York, had siblings as well as parents to make music with – and in a big house and home-school environment to boot – and the family became a band playing for contra and English country dances as well as performing concerts.

Another common denominator for Anadama is the influence of folk music camps, which provide an instant community to encourage and inspire one's musical development. A music teacher of Waickman's co-founded one, Meadowlark, further expanding opportunities to explore her interests, while Mason and Troll were regulars at the CDSS Pinewood camp. Waickman made her way to Pinewoods in the summer of 2006, where she met Mason, but it wasn't until the next summer, when all three were Pinewoods crew members, that proved to be the beginning of Anadama.

"It's like any festival, or any experi-

(Continued on page 14)

RIP, Joe Forry, the Music Man

By Ed Forry

How do I begin to tell you about our family's loss last month? When my brother Joe succumbed to the cancer that had overtaken him since the spring, it was the end of a glorious life story that began right here in Dorchester.

Joe Forry was born Aug. 4, 1938 at St Margaret's Hospital. He was my parents' fourth child and in many ways the gem of the family. He went to grammar school at St. Gregory's in Lower Mills where the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur taught him how to play the piano. Joe mastered the keyboard as World War II raged in the world outside the school on Dorchester Avenue.

I joined the family on his sixth birthday and soon began a cherished, lifelong friendship with this wonderful guy. While still in grammar school, he sang and played the piano at St. Greg's Christmas pageants. By the time he was 18 and just getting out of BC High, he was playing gigs at places like the Beachcomber on Wollaston Beach and the Pony Lounge at Neponset Circle.

And during school vacations, he was never without summer work, finding gigs on Cape Cod in P-Town, Craigville Beach, and for three memorable summers, in North Falmouth, playing a Steinway Concert Grand at Coonamesset Corner. At Boston College, he was the lead tenor in the glee club.

Joe was gifted, a trained singer who could croon like Eddie Fisher and sing opera like Enrico Caruso. As a pianist, he could pick up any tune by ear and accompany even the most discordant songsters at those mid-century versions of today's karaoke.

At home in the long ago, the Forry family gathered regularly around the old upright in the front hall and sang our hearts out, accompanied by Joe's dazzling piano playing. "Heart of My Hearts" … "Those Wedding Bells" … "If You Knew Susie" … "Mick McGilligan's Ball," and on and on. That was the soundtrack of our family home day in, day out.

But beyond the melodies, Joe was a reader, a thinker, a gentle and faith-filled man. Most of all, he was a romantic.

After Boston College, he chose a career in public service, and on his very first day at work in the US State Department's New York passport office, he met the love of his life, Lois Rizoli, also on her first day on the job in their new careers. She told me she remembers that their first date was on Valentine's Day 1962. He took her to "My Fair Lady" on Broadway.

Joe spent ten years in the diplomatic corps, serving as vice consul at American embassies in London, Norway, and Trinidad and Tobago. When diplomatic receptions turned stuffy, Joe would find a piano and sit down to play, eventually luring the guests from their chit chat to gather around for a good old-fashioned sing-a-long.

Joe and Lois settled in McLean, VA and raised two daughters, Mria (cq) and Elizabeth. After the State Department, he held jobs in the Energy and Army departments, but those were just ways to meet the mortgage and help pay the bills. His music was his passion, and he soon became the featured cocktail pianist at several popular night spots in suburban Virginia. Later, they relocated to Gainesville, GA to be near their daughters and six grandchildren.

Recently, when they found a new home in a nearby assisted living community, Joe negotiated a deal to give his grand piano to the complex on the condition that he could play it whenever he wanted. Management installed it just outside the dining area, and Joe gave regular performances for a growing number of residents, who became his latest fans.

I was privileged to be among his first fans, and to consider him my alter ego, really my best friend for all these many years.

Anadama releases full-length album that offers a lot more than "stickers and koozies'

(Continued from page 13)

ence with community where you spend a lot of time," says Mason of Pinewoods. "When you're on crew at Pinewoods, you work a lot, but when you have free time, there's not a lot to do – you're in the woods, and back then there was no Netflix. So you stay up late, you find a place to get together, get a little crazy and just play music."

Mason and Troll were familiar enough with each other's musicality, but playing with Waickman was a revelation – enough so that, according to Troll, at the end of the summer Mason proclaimed, "I'm making this band, and I'm playing fiddle, and Bethany's going to play guitar, and I want you to play accordion."

Faves and raves

One dynamic of any band how it integrates the assorted musical influences and backgrounds – especially one that plays contra dance music, with its embrace of multiple traditions and styles. Just to follow the Irish music threads through Anadama, for example, makes for some interesting cross stitches. Mason briefly took lessons from the great Donegal fiddler Tommy Peoples while he lived in the Boston area; she doesn't regard him as a key influence, but is grateful to have had the opportunity. Troll evinces an admiration for Irish fiddlers like Martin Hayes and Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, and the work of Solas, while also praising Boston/New England Irish musicians like Heather Cole-Mullen, Owen Marshall, and Max Newman. Waickman has an ongoing Irish indulgence as a member of the trio Fódhla along with Boston-area fiddler Ellery Klein and Portland flute player Nicole Rabata.

The now-defunct Vermont trio Nightingale – fiddler Becky Tracy; guitarist/mandolinist/pianist/foot percussionist Keith Murphy; accordionist/pianist Jeremiah McLane – has been a chief wellspring of inspiration for Anadama, individually and collectively. Nightingale, which formed while Mason, Troll, and Waickman were around elementary-school age, brought a performative quality to contra dance music, incorporating a sophisticated approach to arrangements while maintaining a self-described "obsession with rhythmic integrity."

Anadama: (L-R) Amelia Mason, Emily Troll and Bethany Waickman.

Anadama displays similar attributes – including instrumentation, obviously, but also the awareness of how this combination of instruments can be deployed creatively while maintaining the pulse so integral to the dance. There also is the individual respect Anadama's members have for those of Nightingale. Troll, for example, has long appreciated McLane's expression and presence: "When he plays, every fiber of his being is in that music, being given to the audience," she says. "I aspire to play with such hearts and guts."

For Waickman, Murphy was not just teacher and mentor, but the spark for her to start playing guitar in the first place. Hearing Murphy and Tracy (who are spouses as well as musical partners) in concert, she was intrigued by Murphy's use of DADGAD tuning and his propulsive strumming. After exploring the basics on her own, she took lessons from Murphy and gained a deeper insight into his distinctive rhythmic style. Waickman went on to become a regular accompanist for Lissa Schneckenburger, a New England fiddler-vocalist who also has played for contra dances, including in the Boston area.

"It's rare that you don't hear, or feel, every eighth note that's going by," she says, describing Murphy's style. "I think that nearly constant contact pushes things along. A lot of those subdivisions might be a 'thump,' or a 'chink,' or just a hint of an upstroke. But that hummy/whirring/unrelenting drive comes from the constant up-down, up-down, up-down never really disappearing. And yet there's *so* much subtlety that can be built into that basic principle."

However much it may reflect the innovations in contra dance, though, Anadama feels perfectly comfortable staying close to the roots.

"We've never been worried about being 'trendy,'" says Waickman, citing the final track of the album as an indication of the band's mindset. "That New England set is intentionally old-school, but it's not far off from what we sound like."

"I think we've been pretty consistent in terms of what we play and how we play it," says Mason. "We have an assured aesthetic, we have similar if not exact tastes, and that's why we're still together."

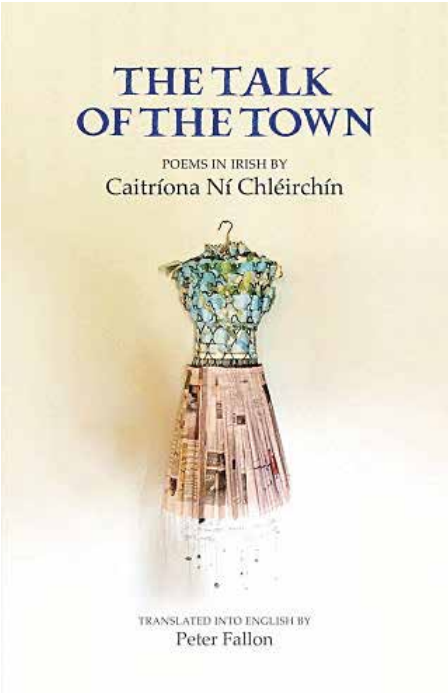
The contra dance scene is, like most everything in the universe, on hold for the foreseeable future. How quickly it will rebound, and what it might look like once that happens, is a matter of conjecture and not a little concern. As Waickman points out, contra dances tend to draw on an older, and therefore more at-risk, population. Mason notes, however, that contra dances themselves are not a for-profit entity: As long as they can pay musicians, and for use of the hall, they'll be OK.

"I try not to think about it, because it makes me really sad," says Troll. "There is no greater joy for me than playing with a really tight band for a huge group of dancers who are happy and really in synch. And I just think it's going to be a really long time before we get back to that."

"It could be a while," agrees Waickman, "but I'm sure we'll at least find a way to see each other before the next contra dance gig."

For more about Anadama, and to order or listen to "Way Back When," go to anadamamusic.com.

A Rare Bird Singing in Monaghan



By Thomas O'Grady
Special to Boston Irish

Outside of the larger-than-life figure of Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967), Co. Monaghan has produced only a handful of poets whose work is known and read widely. The most notable of these include Mary O'Donnell and Aidan Rooney. Also a prolific writer of novels and short stories, O'Donnell has published a half-dozen books of poems. Rooney, who teaches at Thayer Academy in Braintree just south of Boston, has just published his third book, "Go There," with Massachusetts-based MadHat Press.

Caitríona Ní Chléirchín is thus a *rara avis* in more ways than one. First of all, she is Monaghan born and bred. More precisely, she hails from Gortmoney, a townland of Emyvale, a village of about 700 residents located on the N2 about halfway between Monaghan Town and Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone. The village's previous claim to literary fame is as the setting for "The Fair of Emyvale," a melodramatic short story published by Tyrone native William Carleton in *The Illustrated London Magazine* in 1853. (Carleton lived in the vicinity of Emyvale between 1814 and 1816. Residing with relatives in Derrygola in the parish of Donagh, he passed what he remembers as "the most delightful period of my youth" while attending a "classical school" conducted by his cousin in Glennon in the neighboring parish of Truagh.) Adding to those distinctions, Ní Chléirchín writes in Irish.

The author of two books of poems published as *"Gaeilge – Crithloinnir" An Bhrídeach Sí"* (2014), she recently launched with The Gallery Press a facing-page dual-language volume, "The Talk of the Town." Translated by Gallery publisher Peter Fallon, the thirty-five-poem selection introduces to English-language readers a poetic voice that is both engaging and intriguing. As the title poem makes clear, Ní Chléirchín writes as a "millennial" woman. Titled *"Corgarnach"* in Irish, which means "whispering," the poem laments the plight of a woman—everywoman—who is constantly being scrutinized, evaluated, objectified:

> From time to time I just
> get tired of being a woman,
> the cuts to the chase I've to put
> up with, and then inattention.

Made to feel self-conscious by the gaze of others (perhaps not just the male gaze), and by the whispering, too, she becomes the object of even her own harsh judgment:

> I'm tired of how my face
> feels, and my fingertips,
> my hair, my waist,
> my very hips.

Yet Ní Chléirchín also shows how poetry with a contemporary sensibility can still stand on the shoulders of a long tradition of poetry written in Irish. That tradition includes *dánta grádha*—love poems—and there are love poems *go leor* in "The Talk of the Town" – poems of lost love and longing, of abandoned love and regret, of new love and of love renewed. Tellingly, the very titles of many of these poems resonate with the spirit of Douglas Hyde's famous dual-language compilation of *dánta grádha* originally published in 1893, *Love Songs of Connacht*: "Drumshark (The Ridge of Love)," "My Man of the Sea," "When You Go From Me," "I Went Out to Find You." Inevitably some of them even deploy tropes that recur in the poems translated by Hyde: in *"Tar Liom, a Ghrá,"* for example, translated as "Come Away with Me, Darling," Ní Chléirchín locates the emotion of the poem in a bucolic landscape steeped deep in the pastoral romantic conventions of an earlier time:

> Come away with me, darling,
> out into the fields, into spring
> pasture. We'll make a reed bed
> in a hollow and lie there a while
> under a sky loud with birds' singing.

In contrast, in *"Taom"*/"Swell" the speaker is unambiguously contemporary in her dismissal of a former love interest:

> Don't come within a mile
> of me, nor lay
> a hand near me. Don't say
> a single word to me.
> Don't cry out.
> Don't even throw an eye my way.

Ní Chléirchín also includes several poems centered on the loss of her beloved mother, Vonnie. The most overt of these is *"Capall Bán"*/"The Old Grey Mare," in which she engages myth in giving her dying mother permission to "cross / the threshold, for to cross / the threshold you're fated":

> That's the all of it, my dearest,
> and the old grey will transport you well
> when you go to those Elysian Fields
> where a tear has yet to fall.

Her mother is also present in the six-poem sequence titled *"Trasnú na Teorann"*/"Border Crossing" which reflects the proximity of Emyvale to the border with Northern Ireland where she was born. Many readers will recognize the poet's nod toward Seamus Heaney in Peter Fallon's literal translation of the opening lines of the first poem: "Whatever you say / say…" Describing her mother as "a huddle of worry, a bundle of bother, / and struggling to banish the dread // of the 'Big Shed' at the border," Ní Chléirchín expresses, like Heaney before her, the sense of personal violation that the checkpoint represents. For the poet and her family it is, moreover, a site of cultural violation: "That was no place for laughter, or Irish music or— / indeed—Irish itself. The sweetest sound was silence."

In some ways stylistically anomalous in the overall collection, Ní Chléirchín's poem remembering a ceremonial reading of poems at the grave of Patrick Kavanagh in Inniskeen actually invites the reader to pay heed to how so many poems in "The Talk of the Town" are, like Kavanagh's, grounded in Monaghan, the "land of the little hills." The Irish name for Emyvale is *Scairbh na gCaorach*; for Gortmoney it is *Gort na Móna*. Kavanagh once wrote: "Naming . . . is the love-act and its pledge." In a single poem, Ní Chléirchín names—actually incants—townlands and villages and parishes intimately familiar to her as she searches for a lost love: Derrygassan, Derryshillagh, Derryhee, Dernashallog, Ternaneill, Blue Bridge, Ballyoisin, Inishdevlin, Donagh, Castle Leslie, Lisboy, Coracrin, Cornacrieve. The reader is with her every loving step of the way.

Not surprisingly, Ní Chléirchín's writing in Irish has earned significant recognition: *"Crithloinnir"* won first prize in the Oireachtas competition for new writers in 2010, and *"An Bhrídeach Sí"* was joint winner of the prestigious Michael Hartnett Poetry Award in 2014. Affirming "a poet with a mature confident voice," the judges' citation for the Hartnett Award noted: "Her mastery of Irish and sense of being at home in both tradition and modernity is evident throughout the book, in poems set in the seventeenth century, poems framed by Gaelic mythology and in intensely personal lyrics. The poems are full of passion and also quiet reflection on life and love and death." All of this rings true to the rich gathering of poems translated in "The Talk of the Town."

Thomas O'Grady is Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Boston, where he was Director of Irish Studies from 1984 to 2019.

Katie Conboy takes helm at St. Mary's College

Boston Irish Staff

Dr. Katie Conboy, late of Milton, has spent the summer settling in at Saint Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana, where, on June 1, she took office as the institution's 14th president.

In a letter to the college community welcoming her, Gretchen Flicker, Chair of the Saint Mary's College Board of Trustees, wrote: "The champion our search committee sought was discovered in Dr. Katie Conboy. An academic thought-leader with a knack for meeting the needs of today's student. A change agent with a combined 33 years at Holy Cross and all-women's institutions."

Most recently, Conboy, at right, was provost and senior vice president at Simmons University, positions she had held since 2013. Prior to Simmons, she was at Stonehill College, a Holy Cross institution in North Easton, Massachusetts, where she served first as a professor of English literature and then as provost.

When asked how she feels about becoming the 14th president of the College, Conboy replied, "I am so excited to become part of a college that shares so many of my values and priorities: educating the whole person, promoting an open-hearted and inclusive community, and advancing women. I believe Saint Mary's is a place that changes lives — and can therefore change the world, one person at a time. I want to be part of that transformational mission.

Conboy is married to Dr. Thomas O'Grady, who recently retired after a 35-year career on the faculty at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, where he was a professor of English and Director of the Irish Studies program. They have three grown daughters: Mairéad, Caitríona, and Siobhán.

By Sean Smith

Hannah Harris, "Tea for Tunes" • A native and resident of Michigan who – you may have heard this one before – started out as a classical violinist but became enamored of Irish fiddling enough to make it the focus of her music. She wound up at University College Cork, where she got a master's degree in ethnomusicology and, as you might expect, got to know the local traditional music community. While she describes her style as a cross between Kevin Burke and Denis Murphy, Harris by no means confines herself to the repertoire or qualities of Sligo and Sliabh Luachra, or for that matter, purely traditional tunes – on this album, she incorporates compositions from Liz Carroll, Brendan Callaghan, and David Doocey, as well as from friends and acquaintances, and her own pen. Fiddle isn't her only talent: She's an accomplished singer.

As a result, "Tea for Tunes" is a thoroughly enjoyable listening experience: intimate, with spare instrumentation, but shrewdly arranged to bring some variety to the proceedings. There's absolutely no hint of any "I'm-an-American-playing-Irish-music!" self-consciousness; Harris comes across as someone for whom the Irish tradition is a starting point, not a destination.

There are some fine medleys, such as the three reels which open the album: "The Flooded Road to Glenties" (Jimmy McHugh), "Martin Wynne's No. 2" and "Joe Tom" (John Faulkner); her bowing on the lower strings on "Martin Wynne's" in particular is a thing of beauty. A trio of jigs – "Hughie's" (Hughie Kennedy), the traditional "Sliabh Russell" and "Raspberry Ice Cream" (Derry Akin) – is similarly well constructed, especially the transition from the A-dorian intensity of "Sliabh Russell" to the affability of "Raspberry Ice Cream." Another Akin creation, "Fresh Out of the Clouds" – replete with infectious accents and syncopations – caps off a reel medley that includes "Lord Ramsay's" and Liz Carroll's "Potato at the Door." Harris's Sliabh Luachra background comes to the fore on a smattering of polkas, "Glen Cottage No. 1/Cutting Bracken/Little Diamond," while her bowing takes on a distinctly American character for yet another Akin tune "Tuesday Night," before heading into Sean Ryan's "Glen Aherlow" and "Sweater Weather" by another Harris associate, Stephanie Cope.

Accompanying Harris on most of the tracks is guitarist John Warstler, who clearly knows his way around traditional or "in-the-tradition" tunes; his pass chords on the A part of "Joe Tom" inject a nifty bit of tension alongside Harris on the melody. Harris varies the sound by having the aforementioned Cope join her on piano for "Stephanie's Waltz" (also written by Cope) and on fiddle for a Harris original, "Peeling Potatoes" – Cope goes back and forth between melody, harmony, and rhythm, and it's often quite mesmerizing – which ventures into David Doocey's "Man from Dunblane," Cope switching over to bodhran.

Harris displays a soft yet limber voice for the album's four songs: John Spillane's haunting "Passage West," graced by Warstler's sensitive guitar and harmony vocals; the traditional "Banks of the Lee" (which old Silly Wizard fans will likely appreciate), perhaps a little faster-paced than it needs to be; and two unaccompanied numbers, "Lough Erne's Shore," associated with the legendary Paddy Tunney, and "Carraig Aonair," on which she demonstrates a considerable command of the sean-nos style.

"Tea for Tunes" is what the title suggests: an easy-going, warm indulgence that you'll find easy to accept – even if you usually prefer coffee. [hannahharrisceol.com]

Dan Houghton, "Borderpipe Personality Disorder" • Houghton is a tall, well-traveled gent residing in the wilds of southwestern Vermont who, along with a sly sense of humor, possesses a multiplicity of talents for Celtic music. For one thing, he plays enough instruments – and all very well, too – to be simultaneously his own pipe band and folk ensemble: Highland bagpipes, border pipes, small pipes, flute, whistle, guitar and bouzouki. He also is deft at arranging these instruments, and others played by various friends, in quite inventive and ambitious ways. Among his various collaborations over the years, he's been part of Cantrip, Salsa Celtica, and Boston-based Parcel of Rogues. Oh yeah, he sings, too – in Scots Gaelic as well as English.

"Borderpipe Personality Disorder" is Houghton's first full-length recording in 10 years, and while a pandemic may not seem the best circumstances for an album release, the sheer energy, creativity, and boldness evidenced here is a veritable tonic for the times. Most of the 11 tracks are like mini-suites, some lasting anywhere from six to upwards of nine minutes.

For instance, there's "All Strathspeys All the Time," as grand a showcase as any for that eminently Scottish dance rhythm, climaxed by not one but two iterations of "Moneymusk," in different keys; Gloucester native Emerald Rae's fiddle helps raise the goosebumps. "The Rejected Suitor and his Skinny Legs" set features some classic Scottish tunes, like "Rejected Suitor," "Jenny's Picking Cockels" and – following a rocking bouzouki intro (not a sentence you might be used to reading) – "The Swallow's Tail," with Houghton starting out on whistle and adding Highland pipes for further enlivenment; the early part of the track includes an outstanding small pipes duet between Houghton and Iain MacHarg. Houghton's fretted-string dexterity is in the spotlight at the outset of "The Horny Grey Goat," as he plays melody as well as rhythm on bouzouki (on separate tracks, of course) for "Boc Liath nan Gobhar is E ag Iarraidh Mnà (The Grey Buck Goat)."

(Continued on page 19)

Cara Dillon and Sam Lakeman succumb to the lure of art with 'Live at Cooper Hall' concert film

(Continued from page 13)

love – all those things apply to every generation."

The set list for "Live from Cooper Hall" included songs that have been especially popular with their audiences, and "The Parting Glass" – which closes out the film – was one in particular. "We just knew a lot of people would want to hear that one," said Dillon. "It seemed like the perfect way to end the show."

Music "a great teacher"

Dillon and Lakeman have sought to maintain a sense of perspective in the pandemic age. Her vulnerability due to diabetes is a concerning matter, but they are grateful for the support and understanding they've received from their children's schools. They were able to afford the investment in the film, but are keenly aware that many folk musicians – and, for that matter, many audience members – are enduring considerable hardships, hence the couple's decision to make "Live from Cooper Hall" free.

"I think folk music, more so than most any music genre, has such a sense of community about it," said Lakeman. "On the one hand, that's been reassuring, but also troubling. Covid pulled the rug out from underneath everything and people didn't know what to do. They couldn't just get together and sort it out, because nobody could get together. And the heart and soul of our folk music is all about getting together, being at a folk club, a gig, a festival, and sorting out problems. So we're faced with these extraordinary obstacles."

"We were fortunate, because the people at Cooper Hall were so generous and said, 'This hall needs to be used. This piano needs to be played. Go for it,'" said Dillon. "But how many other musicians are going to be as lucky?"

In an alternate universe where the coronavirus didn't exist, Dillon and Lakeman might have just finished up an extensive American tour, something they had long envisioned but had been difficult to accomplish with young kids.

"Before the lockdown, we were talking about traveling in the States again – get some concerts scheduled for a whole summer, bring the kids with us, hire an RV and just go for it," said Dillon. "The kids are at an age now where they're good to travel with, they still like being with us, so that would have been perfect."

This tour would almost certainly have included a stop in the Boston area, where they performed in 2008 at the ICONS Festival (which ran for a couple of years at the Irish Cultural Centre of New England in Canton) and later that same year as part of "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn"; a year or two later, they returned for a gig at Club Passim in Harvard Square.

And, in this alternate universe, Dillon and Lakeman might have had a new album in progress, one significantly different than the rest in their portfolio. They've been writing their own material for some years, and have long had an interest in going beyond traditional and folk/acoustic music. This, according to Lakeman, was to be the focus of their envisioned project.

"We've always recorded little melodies or snippets here and there that didn't fit in anywhere else, and just held onto them," he explained. "Last year, we began exploring them, did some experimenting and got a band together to flesh them out. By early this year, we had six tracks rehearsed, and it was just brilliant. We recorded some proper demos in a studio, which was quite an investment. And literally two days later, while I was editing some of the tracks, we decided we needed to take our kids out of school; this was two or three weeks before the UK went into lockdown."

The project may have been shelved for now, but not forgotten. Every now and then, when the family goes out for a drive, the children ask to hear "the new stuff," said Dillon. "They love it. I figure if two 13-year-olds and a nine-year-old think it's good, there must be something there to work with. Hopefully, we'll be able to get back to it at some point."

Chiming in, Lakeman said, "We've never felt confined to doing any particular type of music," pointing to the intense interest Taylor Swift's "Folklore" album has attracted as an example of an artist working on his or her own terms. "We choose to play the music we do because it feels right to us, not because we feel like it's expected of us."

"If you're serious about music, you have to be open-minded and see what comes next," Dillon said. "Music is a great teacher and it will take you on wonderful journeys. That's the way I've always looked at it. This new, self-penned stuff might take us on a whole other turn, and it could be very exciting."

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– – – –

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SATURDAY, SEPT 26: Joey Abarta & Nathan Gurley @5pm | SLAINTE at 6:30pm
SUNDAY, SEPT 27: JOSHUA TREE @3 pm – doors open at 2pm

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FRIDAY, OCT 2: Friday Night Group Irish Music Session @6pm
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BCs Gaelic Roots Series goes virtual

'Lunchtime Series' to debut on Oct. 22

Boston College's acclaimed Gaelic Roots Series will take on a different format this semester while continuing its mission of presenting accomplished performers and experts in Irish, Scottish, American, and related folk music traditions, according to the universiorty's Communications office.

Instead of in-person events held in campus venues, Gaelic Roots will offer a virtual "Lunchtime Series" incorporating real-time presentations by noted musicians with pre-recorded performances. These will be livestreamed via the Gaelic Roots Facebook page and YouTube, then made available through the BC Irish Studies Program web page [bc.edu/irish].

Two Lunchtime Series events are scheduled thus far, involving two distinguished musician-scholars who are veterans of the Irish music scene: On Oct. 22, Manus McGuire will speak on and illustrate the various regional styles found in Irish fiddling, such as those of Sligo, Donegal, and Clare; on Nov. 5, Gerry O'Connor will discuss and showcase his research on the traditional dance music found in South Ulster, which he published in the book "The Rose in the Gap: Dance Music from the Oriel Region." Both events will begin at noon.

Irish Studies faculty member and Gaelic Roots Director Sheila Falls Keohane said the Lunchtime Series format resulted from an extensive exploration of online-event options, after it became clear that in-person concerts and lectures would be impossible to stage because of the pandemic.

"I had to learn a lot on the fly," she said. "I found the sound quality uneven for some of the 'live' performances I watched online, where it was difficult to really hear what the instruments were doing. And some platforms had limitations I didn't think would work very well for us."

Keohane said she was most impressed by events that were a hybrid of a real-time presentation and pre-recorded segments. For the latter, she explained, it was possible to establish a set of standards—for lighting, sound, picture, equipment—for performers to follow in producing the videos so each would have a professional quality.

"But I also wanted to have the feature of someone interacting with an audience, because that gives the event a more intimate, organic feel," Keohane added. "So the livestream will enable people to pose questions and make comments to which the performer can respond."

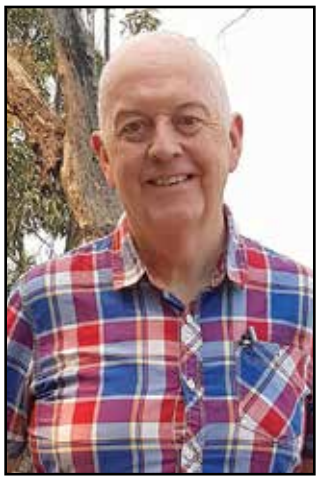
Even without pandemic-related travel limitations, tightened visa restrictions of recent years have made it increasingly difficult for some musicians from Ireland, Scotland, and elsewhere to tour in the United States. The Lunchtime Series thus offers a means for Gaelic Roots to host, albeit virtually, eminent traditional music performers it might not otherwise—and in a format that approximates the small-hall setting for which it's known, said Keohane.

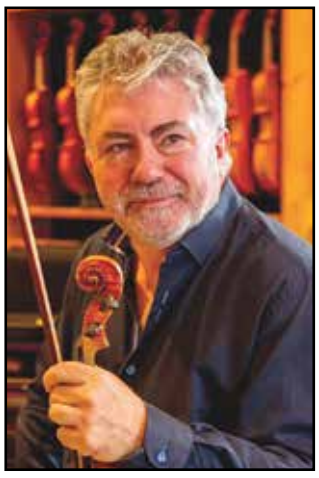
"It's a way for us to honor these artists by giving them this special opportunity to share their music in a very personal way," she said. "At the same time, we're also continuing to give our Gaelic Roots community the chance to experience, and gain insights from, these outstanding performers."

McGuire has long championed Irish music and its many historical and social links with the US. He won the prestigious Fiddler of Dooney national fiddle competition at age 14, and has recorded 14 albums, including three solo fiddle CDs. He's also performed and recorded as part of the band Buttons and Bows; their recording of "Inisheer" was used in the film "The Good Mother." In addition to performing, McGuire has taught in the US, including at the annual Swannanoa Gathering, one of America's largest folk and traditional music programs.

O'Connor comes from a family with a strong musical legacy, having been taught by his mother, Rose, a descendant of three generations of fiddle players. He co-founded the well-regarded bands Skylark, Lá Lugh, and Oirialla, and has made 14 recordings; he's also collaborated with other leading Irish music performers including members of The Chieftains, Planxty, The Bothy Band, and other groups. In addition to "The Rose in the Gap," O'Connor compiled and published "I Have Travelled This Country," a collection of songs by Cathal McConnell, a much-loved traditional singer from County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland.

For links to Gaelic Roots and the Lunchtime Series, go to events.bc.edu/group/gaelic_roots_series.





Manus McGuire, above, will discuss regional styles in Irish fiddle on the Gaelic Roots "Lunchtime Series" livestream. Below, Gaelic Roots will feature a talk by Gerry O'Connor about his research on South Ulster music.

Merciful reading in troubling times

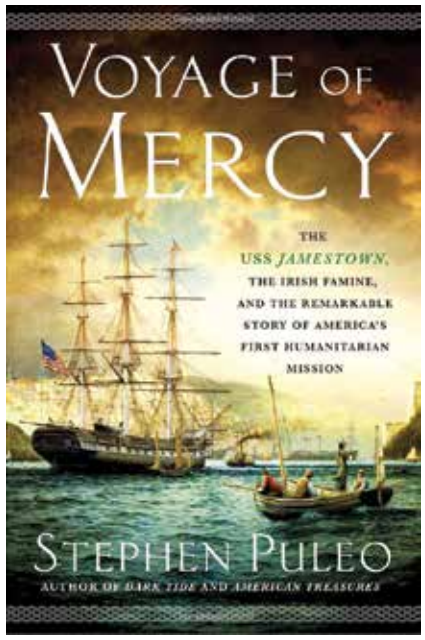
Stephen Puleo
Voyage of Mercy
St. Martin's Press
303 pages

By John Duff

A disease appears and quickly wreaks havoc on all it reaches. Governments situated to respond to the plight of their citizens do so slowly and ineffectively. News of the plight spreads around the world. And while distant people lament the catastrophe's toll, their governments seem ill-equipped to provide assistance. While this may sound like one of the frequent scourges that shows up in headlines, quickly fading from our 2020 attention span, it is the context of a story that unfolded in the mid-nineteenth century and that would have inflicted even more death and devastation but for the efforts of a handful of people who garnered the necessary resources, inspired an outpouring of compassion and generosity, and put the world on notice that a deadly disaster could be mitigated with a combination of imagination, bravery, and an outpouring of philanthropy born of mercy.

The malady, a furiously spreading fungus that blighted Ireland's potato crops, swept across the island in the late 1840s, starving approximately a million people and setting in motion a diaspora of a million desperate emigrants. Those who survived carried the tragedy with them seared in their memories. Succeeding generations in Ireland have been schooled in the devastation that carries various names – the Great Hunger or the Great Starvation. And the generations succeeding those who emigrated can likely recount stories handed down explaining how their families fled the tragedy.

Far fewer know the story of the people who fashioned a trans-oceanic mission to save so many who could not escape. In "Voyage of Mercy," Boston-area author Stephen Puleo shines a light on the efforts of Robert Bennet Forbes to forge a philanthropic effort that would touch the hearts of millions, gather food from across one continent, and deliver it to a starving population an ocean way.



Forbes, a seasoned mariner and then merchant, had made and lost a fortune by the time he was in his early thirties. After spending the better part of two decades engaged in perilous shipping enterprises and starting a family but losing his wealth, Forbes decided to risk everything he had left, familial and financial. He made one last trip to China to restore his family's wealth and succeeded by engaging in the shadowy opium trade.

Still in his thirties, Captain Forbes could now afford to attend to a family stricken with its own painful losses and provide them with a husband, father, and newly gained wherewithal to pursue a peaceful life together. But just as Forbes's life was finding comfort and freedom of want, the people of Ireland were plunging into a national plight bringing starvation and death.

Potato blights had stricken Ireland before, but the one that wiped out the harvest of 1846 was unparalleled. The government responses by the ruling class in England failed to stem, and in some ways exacerbated, the Great Hunger. Puleo relates the efforts of a second critical character, Father Theobald Mathew, a Catholic priest who had been devoting his time and energy to the temperance movement. Situated in one of the hardest hit regions of hunger, Mathew's worked shifted from an endeavor to save the world from the scourge of drink to a monumental effort to secure food for an increasing number of starving souls. He also led an effort to inform and implore English officials to provide basic resources to stem the starvation.

Puleo's first two chapters focus on Mathew's important, albeit limited, success in securing food at the local level and the more dismal results from governing officials in Ireland and England.

Transatlantic communication, limited to the speed of sailing ships, slowed even further in winter months, and little information about the plight reached the United States as it played out in 1846.

But in late January 1847, a ship arrived in Bennet's home port of Boston that would ignite his passion and imagination, not for wealth, but for an opportunity to plan and execute the eponymous title of Puleo's book. The Hibernia arrived from England bringing with it news of the horrific hunger ravaging Ireland. At that pivotal moment, notes Puleo, "for the Forbes family, as well as the rest of America, everything changed." The change, he writes, was born of "the stories … of unparalleled suffering, of disease and death, of hopelessness and utter despair among men, women, and, most gruesome of all, children."

And with that turning moment, Puleo takes the reader on a voyage through a compelling story filled with misfortune and misery, unnecessary death and devastation, and incompetent or uncaring public officials. The story shifts, however, as the author shines a light on the work of Mathew and Forbes who employ their respective indomitable wills to bring together the people and resources to stop the catastrophe before it might run even more rampant.

Father Mathew's daily efforts in and around Cork may inspire some readers and exhaust others (this reader experienced both feelings). Forbes's myriad skills in shipping, logistics, and business acumen that he transforms into domestic political diplomacy will fascinate. And Puleo's weaving together of these two men's tales evokes hope that might transcend time if today's readers realize that "Voyage of Mercy" can serve as a reminder that even philanthropy and sympathy need champions who can navigate shoals of cynicism and bureaucracy to allow the best of collective humanity to respond graciously to help those in need. One of Forbess' many challenges in launching a mission of mercy was to persuade the US Congress to refit loan him a US Navy ship, the *Jamestown*, to deliver food to Ireland.

Puleo also touches briefly on quandaries that each of the two main figures face. His brief reference to Forbes's ultimate fortune from the opium trade might pose a dilemma for a reader wondering if they can ascribe the captain with the purity of heart suggested by the bulk of the book. He also provides a few pages to the problem faced by Mathew when he visits the United States to relate his thanks for the extraordinary efforts that saved so many of his people and to continue his temperance ministry.

Upon arriving in America, Mathew is quickly pushed to use his profile to advocate for the abolition of slavery, something he believed in and had publicly expressed earlier but that he refrained from repeating as he focused on temperance issues throughout the United States where a statement on abolition would lose a large portion of his prospective temperance audience. It may be that Puleo faced his own quandary in the amount he would relate about each of his main characters' character. The author decides to focus on the hunger and the heroic mission to mitigate it.

Puleo's impeccable research and deft writing (disclosure – Puleo has taught at UMass Boston though we've never met) turns our attention to the bright rays of sunlight, in the form of human generosity, that can ultimately penetrate even the most turbulent of times. These days a tale of mercy, as the one that plays out in this book, serves as both a worthwhile read and an important reminder that charity serves us all.

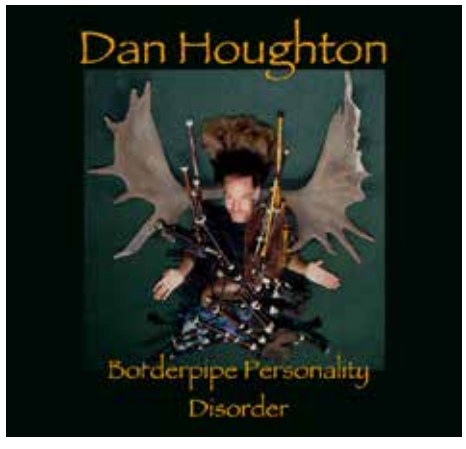
John Duff is a professor of Environmental Law and Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Boston Irish CD Reviews

(Continued from page 16)

The instrumental piece de resistance could easily be "Fuaim man Tonn," which begins with a pibroch – sometimes described as Scottish bagpipes' version of classical music – on double-tracked Highland pipes, segues into the march "Campbell's Caprice" (Houghton on small pipes) and hits the accelerator for "Colonel MacLeod" and "Duntroon Castle."

Houghton's deep, somewhat granular singing voice is particularly well suited for Robert Burns' historical Jacobite ballad "The Battle of Sheriffmuir," the centerpiece a triptych that starts with his Highland pipes solo on the march "Alba Bheadarach (Beloved Scotland)" associated with the battle and concludes with "Théid Mi Dhachaigh Chrò Chinn t-Sàile (I Will Go Home to Kintail)," a



post-battle lament that Houghton sings to the accompaniment of the great pipes – a very potent production overall.

He does an equally imaginative turn on "Mad Tom of Bedlam" (also known as "Bedlam Boys"), a vivid, disturbing depiction of madness first published in the 17th century and famously associated with Steeleye Span's 1971 recording. Amidst the verses, Houghton interpolates a Breton tune, "La Danse des Condamnés (Dance of the Condemned)," on pipes and bouzouki along with Dan Frank's electric bass, evoking Alan Stivell's pioneering Celtic French folk-rock.

Archie Fisher's much-covered comely but bittersweet love song "Dark Eyed Molly" gets a new luster as well. Houghton maintains the recurring riff from Fisher's original – based on a Basque tune Fisher used for the melody – but mixes in a suitably melancholy Phil Cunningham tune, "Findlay MacRae." And with "Blackbird" (the original title is "Bury the Blackbird Here") Houghton pays tribute to late New England poet Judith "J.B." Goodenough, a frequent collaborator with Maine singer Gordon Bok; as a complement, Houghton plays the Irish hornpipe of the same name.

As noted, Houghton doesn't do this completely on his own. In addition to Rae, MacHarg, and Frank, there are appearances by Tristan Henderson, whose jaw harp makes for an intriguing companion for Houghton's bagpipes on "Drink, Debauchery and 200 Pounds," and Rachel Clement, with a lovely harp backing for Houghton's Gaelic singing on "Uaimh an Oir (The Cave of Gold)." But whether produced on his own or with accompanists, Houghton's albums certainly do not lack for fullness, and strength, of sound. [pipingtool.co.uk]

Irish Americans: Follow the light of Biden's lantern out of the darkness

(Continued from page 6)

After World War II, the US economy accounted for greater than 50 percent of global GDP and had 80 percent of the world's hard currency reserves, which gave it the power to dictate the rules of global trade. The US now accounts for less than 15 percent of global GDP, still important but not "indispensable." Europe is a larger market in aggregate and China is set to surpass the USA as well. The days of economic dominance are over in an increasingly multipolar world.

In response, Trump has taken his marbles and gone home, abandoning the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris climate accord, the WHO, threatening to leave NATO, launching a trade war with China, and multiple trade skirmishes with individual EU countries. The world does not want the US to abandon the world community, but just like the effect of the UK leaving the EU, America's isolating itself further would be mostly self-harm. One important difference is that while the UK lost both its global economic reach and its military power, the US military has grown massively as its economic power has diminished. As the economist Jeffrey Sachs has noted, the US has doubled down on the military with 800 major bases around the world and 14 shooting wars currently. No country wants to get on the bad side of the bully, but acquiescence does not necessarily mean agreement, and obedience should not be confused with leadership.

As the November election in the United States approaches, we should take no comfort from what has happened in the UK over the course of the last four years. Immediately after the Brexit vote, many who had voted for "Leave" in the simplistic and poorly conceived referendum fueled by nativist, anti- immigrant sentiment said that they regretted the vote and wanted a "do over." The currency was pummeled and companies like Bank of America publicly announced plans to leave London for Dublin, Frankfurt, Berlin, or Paris. Manufacturers like Honda decided to relocate plants and jobs. The negative effects on Britain are already significant, but after the grace period, will get worse. Failure to conclude a trade agreement with the EU by the end of the year will be devastating to the UK. This fact did not stop Boris Johnson from endangering these negotiations by announcing plans on September 8th to break international law by introducing domestic legislation that would vacate the Northern Ireland Protocol signed less than a year by Johnson himself. The arm of 'Perfidious Albion' might just get amputated.

After the Brexit vote it was clear that it was a con job that would hurt the very people who voted for it, and that it was heavily influenced by a Russian/Steve Bannon disinformation campaign and Cambridge Analytica. And yet the people of Britain (mostly England) voted convincingly for Boris Johnson whose slogan, "Get Brexit Done," was about as inspiring as scheduling a colonoscopy.

A mural depicting former VP Joe Biden was unveiled in Ballina, County Mayo last month. The mural in the town's Market Square was created by artists Smiler Mitchell and Leslie Lackey. Biden's great, great, great grandfather, Edward Blewitt, emigrated to the US from Ballina over 160 years ago, according to Midwest Radio.

Image courtesy Ireland's Midwest Radio 96.1FM

In the USA, in the days after the 2016 election, many expressed similar regret for voting for Donald Trump or for not voting at all. He was a laughable candidate but with a combination of racism, Russian assistance, and greed from our moneyed classes, he became an accidental president. In 2020 he is not a laughable candidate; he is a laughable but malevolent president, and a president, laughable or not, has tremendous power to shape events.

In Steve Martin's 1979 classic movie, "The Jerk," there is a memorable scene when Navin Johnon (Martin) loses all of his new-found wealth when a side effect in his Optigrab invention (crossing people's eyes) is discovered. Suddenly re-impoverished, his wife Marie, played by Bernadette Peters, laments:

"We've hit bottom," to which Martin's character replies, "No! Maybe you've hit bottom, but I haven't hit bottom yet! I've got a ways to go. And I am going to bounce back! And when I do, I am going to buy you a diamond so big it's gonna make you puke."

This is mindful of the conversation between Democrats and Republicans this year. Trump's 90 percent-plus approval rating among Republicans indicates that his supporters "have not hit bottom yet. They have a way to go."

Both Irish and American

The Irish came in great numbers to the United states in the mid-19th century spreading across the country, making their way in communities dominated by the established cultures of the original British colonies. Unwelcome, the Irish "found shelter in each other," and in their faith. With growing numbers and influence, William Henry O'Connell, the first Cardinal Archbishop of Boston, built his archdiocese in the image of the triumphant Catholic Church he witnessed in his years of study in Rome, famously saying, "The Puritan is gone, and the Catholic remains." While true, the cultural foundations laid by the Puritans in Boston are as strong as ever. Immigration did make New England more Irish, but the Irish were also deeply imprinted by the host culture and became New Englanders.

At John F. Kennedy's inauguration, the poet Robert Frost privately and enigmatically advised the new president: "You're something of Irish and something of Harvard. Let me advise you, be more Irish than Harvard." What Frost meant has long been debated, but maybe he wanted the new President to approach his job with the humility, compassion, and humor of the Irish in addition to the striving for excellence and erudition that a Harvard education conferred.

Kennedy spoke of the 'shining city upon a hill' with as much fervor as the Puritan John Winthrop, who coined the term, and John Adams, who used it. It is a particularly Puritan expression, connoting an exacting, competitive spirit, a striving for excellence, and also the unmistakable British sense of exclusivity. In Ireland, where wealth and power are viewed with suspicion, the Irish might envision a "tidy welcoming village in a valley" as the ideal society, but many Irish Bostonians eventually adopted the exclusive and exacting "shining city."

Over time, America's achievements obscured the similarity between politics in the United Kingdom and the United States and, growing up in the Boston area with an Irish-American sensibility, I resisted the coupling of the two as Anglo-Saxon countries as a misreading of history. The anachronistic UK had a silly royal family and a steep downward trajectory since the loss of an empire built upon looted lives and resources. England's history of brutalizing the people they colonized, pitting local factions against each other in their dominions (Hindus against Muslims in India, Protestants against Catholics in Ireland, Sunni against Shia in the Middle East) to maintain their privileged position at the top of the pecking order was contrasted by the USA's becoming a nation of immigrants, a multicultural, multiethnic, multi-religious society forging a nation based not on ethnicity and class but on ideas, with no one above or below the law. Everyone enjoyed the freedoms and obligations of citizenship in this new experiment.

Well, not quite everyone. Women, Native Americans and African slaves were excluded but for the late 18th century, the American experiment was a remarkable achievement with great promise. Some 150 years later, two world wars had exhausted and dismembered the British Empire and the "special relationship" had evolved into the UK's becoming a dependent of her rebellious and innovative colonial child. Still, America's history and foundational culture are more similar to Britain's than is immediately apparent or comfortable for Americans to accept. The dispossession of the Native Americans, enslavement of Africans, and the pitting of ethnic groups against each other are all methods of maintaining power taken from the British textbook on exploitation honed over hundreds of years.

Irish America: Still an electoral wild card

The political links in the Irish diaspora between Ireland, the UK, and America, are evident, particularly in the labor movement's animated push for progressive causes over generations, oftentimes with Ireland leading the way. The Irish encouraged their American cousins to ally themselves with abolitionists. The Proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916 asserted, and ultimately secured, suffrage for both Irishwomen and Irishmen. Marriage equality and women's reproductive rights were secured in the courts in the USA, while in recent years they were won by popular referenda in Ireland.

"When power leads man to arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of this existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses."

JFK

In 2020 Irish America remains the wild card in American politics and has the power to shape our future. Joe Biden's simple message proves the Irish economist David McWilliams's observation that "what's complicated is rarely important, and what's important is rarely complicated." Irish America should look to Ireland's example and elect Joe Biden, a centrist Democrat and practicing Catholic who quotes Irish poets to vote for hope over fear, light over darkness, and love over hatred.

Tim Kirk is a software professional who left Needham, Massachusetts, last year and settled permanently in Dublin.

Scituate's Irish community dedicated a monument to Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising, engraved with the complete words of the Easter Proclamation of 1916 (Forógra na Poblachta), the document proclaiming Ireland;s independence. Ireland Consul General Laoise Moore delivered historical remarks, with brief remarks by Karen Canfield, chair of the town select board, and John Sullivan, committee chair. The granite monument, standing six feet high and weighing 4000 pounds, was produced by Mary Ellen Mulligan, owner of Milton Monument company of Randolph. The event had been postponed from April, 2020 due to the pandemic, and the group plans to stage a larger event in April 2021.

To cheers, Florian Hall re-opens dining room with expanded hours

By Daniel Sheehan
Reporter Staff

Florian Hall, the iconic multipurpose union hall and event space on Hallet Street, welcomed customers back to its restaurant last week for the first time since last March. The building is home to the Boston Firefighter's Union Local 718 and serves as a gathering space for other unions based in the neighborhood.

Locals know it as a polling station, as a site of countless fundraiser "times," and as a reliable lunch spot for favorites like baked scrod and chicken parm. But with large gatherings on hold for the foreseeable future, a part of the hall's identity has been stripped away.

"It's been a big impact because our main source of revenue is those big events," said Mary Ellen Strum, Florian's banquet/function manager. "Christenings, birthday parties, funerals, office Christmas parties, political fundraisers, annual banquets — any function you can think of, we host it here."

For now, Florian is pivoting to food service full time, expanding its normal lunchtime-only hours to an 11:30-8 p.m. window. Restaurant regulars rejoiced when, after months of checking in by phone and email, and knocking on the doors hopefully, they received word that Florian would be serving food once again.

"We have a very loyal customer base," said Steve MacDonald, Local 718 executive assistant. "We get a lot of regulars coming from the Keystone Apartments just across the street, as well as active and retired firefighters. The [firefighters] credit union is right across the street, too, so a lot of fire, police, and EMS workers do their banking over there and then come here for lunch."

A few safety-driven changes have somewhat altered the dining experience: there's no bar service, tables have been spaced out, patrons must wear masks until seated, and customers' names are taken down upon entry for contact tracing measures. Some larger round tables, which can seat up to 10, have also been removed, prompting some regular groups of retirees to split up into two parties.

But so far, said Strum, business has been "very steady. News got around pretty quickly by word of mouth, and a lot of people have been coming in saying, 'We're so glad you're back!' Plus we have KENO, which is a big draw." Last Friday around lunchtime, only two or three tables in the dining hall were empty.

Joanne Scialdone, who said she's been coming to Florian for "many years," didn't mince words about finally getting to dine again with her friends at her favorite restaurant: "It's the best thing that's ever happened!"

Tim O'Brien, of Dublin, working on a graduate visa, tells of his time in US in pandemic mode, and thanks Rian staff

My name's Tim O'Brien. I'm 23 years old and I'm from Dublin. I studied Commerce at University College Dublin, and I graduated in 2019. I had applied for a number of graduate positions based in Dublin during my final year, but I always knew that I wanted to take part in the J1 graduate visa programme because I've always wanted to work and live in the United States.

I knew a good few people who had gone on the Graduate Visa the year before me, so I reached out to them for tips for moving over to the US. The most important question for me was which company they'd used to process their visa. I obtained several J-1 programmes in the past with another company and I didn't have the greatest of experiences with them. So I asked numerous people if they had knew of other sponsors and they all recommended Rian Immigrant Center, both for cost effectiveness and also the amount of effort they put into their interns.

I moved over to New York at the start of February and was anxious to find work as soon as possible because New York is expensive to live in, so my savings quickly started to dwindle as soon as I got over. I had no problem getting interviews for internships because at the time the economy was good and there was a huge amount of work out there. I was looking to secure a role in Business Development specifically in the Tech industry.

I managed to get a lot of interviews via LinkedIn in my first few weeks over here with some fairly large companies, however the main stumbling block in my efforts was the visa. Most companies were looking for individuals with visas that could be renewed, or that could potentially be extended, which my visa could not. The process was frustrating enough as it was, even before Covid hit, and then it seemed like all the jobs just disappeared. When New York City locked down, many people went back home but my roommate (also on the visa with Rian) and I were adamant to wait it out. As the pandemic hit and everywhere began to shut down, Rian was very helpful, in particular Paul Pelan. He would organize weekly Zoom calls for all the unemployed J-1 students and also check in individually with us, too, which was a great resource.

I was lucky enough to find a job with a tech company in Manhattan in April, having been unemployed for two months, but the start date kept getting pushed back because of the lockdown. Eventually this position fell through and I was back to square one again in May, but fortunately I had been given a contact in a food business by Rian which I reached out to in May. They offered me a working from home sales role, which started off as a trial period. Since then I've been taken on full-time by Legally Addictive Foods and have been working in sales and also in other areas of the business as it is a really small food start-up.

This was not the role or industry I had imagined I would be working in here in the US, but I've really enjoyed working in the food business and also for a smaller company as you get experience in all areas of the company.

My internship experience has been bizarre to say the least. It was also a strange experience to start a new job from my apartment, with no one around. Thankfully it was very straightforward to get into the swing of things and I was able to Zoom my boss whenever I needed to. Things in

New York have started to become more normal over the past couple of months as the lockdown lifted, and now I have the choice to work from home or in the office. Also the fact that I'm now working 40 hours a week, it has given me more opportunities to travel and experience the North East.

My overall experience has been a positive one and I've learned a lot in the 7 months that I've been here. My internship so far has highlighted my interest in the food business, and also has given me the idea that I'd like to run my own small business back home, which is something I might not have realized had I not chosen to take part in the graduate visa with Rian Immigrant Center.

Thanks to everyone at Rian Immigrant Center for all their help.

My unlikely college guides: Uncles Mick, Johnny, Leo, and Kiernie

By Martin McGovern
Special to Boston Irish

My father was a carpenter and my mother a secretary. Neither had any experience of university other than they believed in higher education and encouraged me to grab the opportunity. And so, I did, starting in 1974 upon entering University College Dublin where I spent five rewarding years earning two degrees, an undergraduate one in history, and a graduate one in political science. But when navigating the experience, I was on my own.

For a working-class student like me in a more middle-class environment, that meant a lot of trial and error. In addition, back then, student services were, to put it mildly, modest.

And, in fairness, I wouldn't have had the sense to think in those *asking for help* terms. On many occasions, I stumbled and missed chances. Connecting the dots proved challenging, and I wasn't a genius.

That said, I loved my subjects – history, political science and economics – and the professors who taught them. Immersing myself in my studies spurred me on and helped me grow in confidence. The grounding they gave me has been life lasting.

However, there was an external factor that made a huge difference in my ability to persist at university and not get frustrated or lose hope. I had four uncles who were relatively young and smart but without any university education.

Working class themselves, they were, however, interested in books, ideas, music, the meaning of life, and were good, informed conversationalists. A week rarely went by when I did not connect with one or the other of them. They inevitably asked about my courses, exams, assignments, grades, and projects.

Those conversations, many of which took place over Friday night pints in local pubs, kept me on track and pushed me to apply myself even more.

My uncles never set foot on the grounds of University College Dublin, yet they were integral to me completing university successfully and on time. I was fortunate—what the university did not provide, or I couldn't access, my extended family did.

Without training or formal education, Uncles Mick, Johnny, Leo, and Kiernie had my back. I will always be grateful to them for their encouragement, mentorship, and great good humor.

Martin McGovern lives in Mashpee and is the director of Communications and Media Relations at Stonehill College.

UNDER THE IMPRESSION
by Kyle Darcy

Under the Impression is the second novel from bestselling author, Kyle Darcy. The story begins in the waning days of World War II as a group of Nazi elite escapes to South America. The gripping and fast paced narrative weaves through decades and continents into the worlds of drug cartels, terror organizations and intelligence communities. Once again, as in Under Curren Conditions, Boston plays a pivotal role. ISBN: 9781734626704 / LCCN: 2020907802 Kyle Darcy was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. In 1989, the sectarian conflict was the main reason for him leaving to begin a new life in Boston.