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A few months into her job as its president of ICC board, Irish-born Martina Curtin continues to take stock of things

The Irish Cultural Centre of New England has elected Irish-born Martina Curtin as its new board president. She took the helm in July as the first woman to lead the agency. She is the founder of CHC Home Care, Inc., a Boston home-care agency whose mission is to allow clients to remain in their homes while receiving skilled medical care. With the help of her husband, Craig Carlson, she has grown her business with a burgeoning group of caregivers that includes basic personal-care assistants, registered nurses, and end-of-life-care specialists. She spoke recently with the Boston Irish contributor Maureen Forry-Sorrell about her new role.

**BI:** Given that the pandemic will remain an issue for some time still, can you give us a glimpse of how things have been going to date?

**MC:** The Cultural Centre has really been impacted by Covid, as you know, because we are all about in-person events. We held a poetry night in conjunction with the Irish Consulate, and we had our golf tournament, which was our biggest one to date. In September, we had our virtual 5K, also our biggest race to date. One of the lifesavers for us was the tents. We were able to have outdoor dining, small concerts, and food that definitely kept us relevant and connected to the community. We hope to have some indoor dining going forward, but that will be based on Covid regulations. The biggest thing for the rest of the year is our Annual Draw, scheduled for Dec. 12. This year we’re doing a 50/50 raffle and we’ve only printed 2,000 tickets.

I do want to acknowledge the support we’ve received from the Consulate; the relationship between the Consulate and the Cultural Centre has never been as strong as it is today.

For more information about the Happenings at the ICC, see its ad in this edition of Boston Irish, or go to IrishCulture.org.

**A family gives thanks via Zoom**

The traditional gatherings for Thanksgiving were only distant memories this year, as the need for enforced isolation was cause for a certain level of melancholy. Although we could not be together on Thanksgiving Day, I was able, thanks to Zoom, to connect with my sisters, Mary, Brenda and Lois, and members of their families, three generations connected by computer screens and smart phone video across the digital divide.

My daughter Maureen set up a Zoom conference and we sent out the word to my sister in Andover, my brother John King in Connecticut, Newton, Brighton, Dorchester, and Andover.

And typically, we didn’t arrive all at once; some were late in checking in. The session began with just two of us, and then a third logged in, and then a fourth, and one by one, as new arrivals logged on, we were seeing them as if they were just showing up at our front door, coming in to join us for a Thanksgiving reunion.

When my Atlanta niece and nephews appeared on screen and were introduced, some of these cousins were meeting each other for the first time. “It really adds so much joy to the day,” said Peg Sheehan.

This remote holiday season is something we hope we’ll never have to live through again. The inability to come together and connect in person with family and friends on the holiday adds an extra strain to the almost nine months that we have been living in our own isolated versions of cocoons. But everyone seemed pleased to make this brief holiday connection, and we resolved to try it all again for Christmas.

**Eire Society honors US Rep. Neal.**

Congressman Richie Neal received the Eire Society’s 2020 Gold Medal during virtual ceremonies on Sat., Oct. The chair of the House Ways & Means Committee, Rep. Neal was reelected to his seat in November. The society will host a virtual Christmas online gathering on Sat., Dec. 19 at 5:30 pm. Register at eireociety.org.

Dorchester’s John King achieved rock star status in Ireland last month, where CNN’s election coverage captured a large audience. King has family roots in Connemara, in Doonloughan, near Ballyconneely, and not far from Clifden. See Larry Donnelly story on Page 5. Appearing on an Irish TV talk show, Brookline native Conan O’Brien told Late Late Show host Ryan Tubridy that he plans to visit Ireland someday soon. “My body immediately responds to being in Ireland because every single cell in my body says, ’Yes, there’s no sun out,’ and my skin says, ’Yes, you are home,’” O’Brien said.

“Let me explain to you,” he added, “that I am living near the Mexican border and it’s killing me. I am not meant for this environment. I have dermatologists who I see every six months and he says to me, ‘Get out of this country, go back home, you are supposed to live in a bog, you idiot.’”
December 15th - 20th

This is one of my favorite times of year as we prepare our Christmas Celtic Sojourn. While we can’t be with you in person this year, we hope you can join us online for one of our special broadcasts this holiday season. We have some of our singers and dancers joining us from various parts of the world including Edinburgh, Sligo, Kerry, Canada and Michigan.

This year we are gathering veterans of shows past to bring you what promises to be a unique edition of A Christmas Celtic Sojourn:

Seamus Egan, Music Director, multi instrumentalist
Maeve Gilchrist, Assistant Music Director, Celtic Harp and Piano
Owen Marshall, Bouzouki and Harmonium
Conor Hearn, Guitar
Fiddlers Jenna Moynihan, Maura Shawn Scanlin
Singers Mairi Campbell, Siobhan Miller, Hannah Rarity, Ellis Kennedy, Cathy Jordan
Dancers Cara Butler, Nic Gareiss
Vocal Harmonies of Windborne
Singer Songwriter Aoife O’Donovan and Cellist Eric Jacobsen

Go to www.christmasceltic.com for details and more information.

BRINGING YOU COMFORT AND JOY THIS DECEMBER
Ireland’s border towns are breathing much easier; their man Biden is taking over in the White House

“...So I’ll sing farewell to Carlingford
And farewell to Greencore
And I’ll think of you both day and night
Until I return once more
Until I return once more”
-Tommy Makem

Every nation has a stake in US presidential elections and no country had more at risk this year than Ireland. Counties and towns along the border of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, whose fragile peace process and economy are threatened by Brexit, were the most exposed. One such town, Carlingford, Co. Louth, on the Cooley Peninsula, is the ancestral home of Joe Biden’s great-grandfather, Owen Finnegan, who emigrated in 1849.

In Owen’s time, many families in Louth raised a small number of pigs to sell at market. In rural Ireland, where the lives and livelihoods of tenant farmer families were precarious and money was always in short supply, pigs could generate cash to cover the lean months of the year. Ancient Gaelic expressions of the area often refer to them. In America, we would describe a winner who “has the world by the tail” or is “on top of the world,” but in Louth, Monaghan, or Armagh, they might say “ar mhuin na muice,” which literally means “to be on the pig’s back.” Biden’s victory clearly put him, and all the people of Louth, on the pig’s back. I will let the reader decide who the pig is.

The history of Louth is the history of Ireland

Louth, known as the “wee County” due to its diminutive size, is located on the Irish Sea, an hour’s drive from both Dublin and Belfast. Carlingford is a medieval town reputed to be one of the oldest in Ireland, the location of St. Patrick’s second landing settlement, and a 12th-century Norman town. Oliver Cromwell’s conquest wrought destruction across Louth in 1649. Catholic churches and abbey ruins were torched and converted into graveyards, and vast swathes of Louth were awarded to Cromwell’s foreign warlords. In 1690, the Battle of the Boyne was fought on the Louth/Meath border. Adopted Bostonian John Boyle O’Reilly was born nearby in 1844. Louth’s long, rich history, which includes conquest, dispossession, landlordism, the great hunger, risings and rebellion, emigration, independence, partition, long simmering sectarian conflict, and economic stagnation tells the story of Ireland in an intense geographic microcosm.

“Meitheal” through the Troubles, and the Good Friday Agreement

According to Seamus Kirk, who served Co. Louth in elective office for 42 years (34 of them in the Dail), including as Minister for Agriculture and as Ceann Comhairle (the equivalent of Speaker of the House) until his retirement in 2016, the rebirth of Louth and Carlingford is due mostly to “meitheal,” an ancient Irish Gaelic word that denotes a cooperative labor system in Ireland. The closest English term is “teamwork” for tasks like bringing in the crops that are best accomplished with collective effort. Put another way, Seamus told me, “The community pulled itself up by its socks” achieving the “Tidy Towns” recognition in 1988, winning a grant from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) in 1992 (the first border town south of the border to receive such a grant), European Heritage Town designation, and a European Destination of Excellence in 2008. In 2009, Carlingford even secured an EU/UK trade deal unfinished at this, the 11th hour. Boris Johnson attempted to undermine the Northern Ireland Protocol by introducing an Internal Markets Bill in the UK to saturate his extreme right Brexiteers. Those of his own ministers with any vestigial integrity or instinct to leap from a sinking ship admitted it was breaking the law and resigned.

Boris was warned. US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Ways and Means Chairman Richie Neal, and presidential candidate Joe Biden all stated that there would be no trade deal if the Good Friday Agreement is jeopardized, but Boris the chancer and bluffer decided to see how the American election played out. Yet he was the first foreign leader to congratulate Biden on his victory. Bullies are always obsequious when the big brother of their victim appears. Like Biff from “Back to the Future,” Boris is now ready to polish his McFlys car. But Biden remembers Boris calling Obama “Kenyan” and, more importantly, Joe knows Irish history and his own family’s origins in Louth, a European Habitat and Protected Species Directive as a protected habitat zone for Leprechauns!

Seamus describes the key turning points in modern Irish history that set the stage for Louth’s and Ireland’s flourishing: “The country secured independence from Britain in the early part of the last century. We became members of the European Economic Community in the latter half of the same century. Our economy has benefited enormously from its membership. Foreign direct investment from the US has been a huge help in stemming the hemorrhage of emigration. In some ways we are closer to Boston than Berlin.”

In recent times, the event that benefited this corner of the Island of Ireland was the Good Friday Agreement, and the outbreak of peace. As a border county, Louth endured more than its share of violence and the economic stagnation that was a consequence of an endless volley of atrocities and reprisals. Says Frances Taylor of Carlingford, who has worked in tourism in Carlingford for many years: “Before the agreement, it would have been thought unsafe to visit, but now they come in their droves.”

International awards along with investments in infrastructure and cultural amenities put Carlingford on the tourism map. The Good Friday Agreement and other open borders moved the town’s location from a liability into an advantage. According to Margaret Harold from the Carlingford Heritage Center, residents of both communities in the North began travelling to Carlingford in large numbers on the weekend of July 12, when annual Orange marches intensify in the North. Protestants and Catholics alike, seeking respite from the antagonism of the marches, “came to Cooley, enjoyed the peace and charm so much that they started visiting regularly.” Margaret herself commuted from Carlingford to Belfast throughout the Troubles and experienced firsthand the difficulty of the cross border commute with car searches, intimidation, and anxiety created by an armed border.

Initiatives championed by activists and political leaders inspired philanthropic, corporate, government investment, and the peace after The Good Friday Agreement opened up tourism, massively transforming Carlingford into a national, and even international, tourism mecca in Ireland’s northeast.

US vote coincides with key moment for Brexit

The UK remains, for the moment, in an “in-between state” like the opposite of purgatory. Purgatory is the “condition” after death where one requires further “purification” before admission to heaven. The Brexit purgatory exists for the benefit of membership, which may look like heaven after the perpetual self-punishment of exiting the EU begins on New Year’s Day.

Tory infighting, Covid-19, and gaming the US election are not the only events weighing on New EU/UK trade deal unfinished at this, the 11th hour. Boris Johnson attempted to undermine the Northern Ireland Protocol by introducing an Internal Markets Bill in the UK to satisfy his extreme right Brexiteers. Boris was warned. US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, House Ways and Means Chairman Richie Neal, and presidential candidate Joe Biden all stated that there would be no trade deal if the Good Friday Agreement is jeopardized, but Boris the chancer and bluffer decided to see how the American election played out. Yet he was the first foreign leader to congratulate Biden on his victory. Bullies are always obsequious when the big brother of their victim appears. Like Biff from “Back to the Future,” Boris is now ready to polish his McFlys car. But Biden remembers Boris calling Obama “Kenyan” and, more importantly, Joe knows Irish history and his own family’s origins in Louth, a European Habitat and Protected Species Directive as a protected habitat zone for Leprechauns!

Biden in Carlingford in 2016 with his new friends Tadhg and Seamus.

Andrea McKevitt in Carlingford celebrating the 2020 election returns.

Seamus Kirk, Co. Louth stalwart.

Joe Biden in Carlingford in 2016 with his new friends Tadhg and Seamus.

(Continued on page 6)
Yes, Dorchester’s John King is Ireland’s newest household name

WICKLOW, Ireland—One of the things that American visitors to Ireland are commonly confounded by is the extent to which people here are steeped in and informed about politics, 3,000 miles away. The transatlantic ties sewn by emigration, family and, increasingly, business are largely responsible. And Irish people love their politics. Over the past four years, it has been with a mixture of disbelieve and horror that they have looked on at the Trump administration.

Accordingly, they weren’t about to stop watching until they knew, for sure, who would be inaugurated on Jan. 20, 2021. A man who is known throughout the US and to people across Massachusetts owing to his lengthy, stellar career at CNN, but who is especially familiar to Dorchester natives and residents because he grew up in St. Mark’s Parish, thus made an extraordinary entrance onto Ireland’s collective radar screen: It is no overstatement to say that John King was the most listened to and trusted individual in this country in the days after Nov. 3.

More on Ireland’s newest celebrity momentarily.

Back in East Milton, where I grew up, it’s fair to say that politics was invariably to the fore in our house. My father, another Larry, was a fount of wisdom about the toughest business of them all. He grew up in and around it. I wish he had stood for office himself.

His brother Brian was a Massachusetts state representative from Dorchester who later spent seven terms in the United States House of Representatives and served as ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago while Bill Clinton was president. Their uncles, Frank and John Kelly, had been Boston city councillors, with Frank later serving as lieutenant governor and attorney general and running unsuccessfully for governor.

It’s in the blood. A related bad habit I picked up from my Dad at a young age was incessantly hollering back at the television and radio when politics and current affairs were being discussed. I’ve frequently thought that “I know better!” and have to get my two cents in.

Then, thanks to satellite technology, a guy who was almost no sleep and buckets of coffee. The “magic” of US presidential elections as they come in on what is usually the first Tuesday in November on RTE, the national broadcaster. Given the time difference, it’s an overnight shift. This year, the coverage was anchored by Caitriona Perry, who reported on American politics brilliantly in her tenure as the network’s Washington correspondent and has written two insightful books on the election of Donald Trump and the influence of Irish America.

We were joined by numerous high profile guests from the US, such as former White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley, former New York Congressman Joe Crowley, and sitting Philadelphia Congressman Brendan Boyle. Our live program wrapped up shortly after 4 a.m., Irish time, when the outcome wasn’t entirely clear, but the key indicators were all pointing to a win for Joe Biden.

In a subsequent interview with the much beloved Miriam O’Callaghan on her Sunday morning radio show, King downplayed the multiple compliments offered by the host and her listeners. Having done his homework, he described Miriam as Ireland’s Oprah. He also spoke movingly about his family, in particular his late father Chris (who, coincidentally, was a Dorchester contemporary and pal of my Dad’s) and his Connemara-born grandparents, as well as the valuable lessons learned in childhood that have remained with him. Like so many Americans before him, King is now planning a visit back “home” to Galway to reunite with his cousins and get a fuller sense of his roots.

He has said that he looks forward to a few pints in Keogh’s in his ancestral village of Ballyconneely – so deep in the west of Ireland that the next stop literally is Boston. He’ll have a tough time buying his own, though.

In his typically expert communication of what actually happened in Election 2020, John King won the rapt attention and sincere admiration of the Irish people. He did his family and the neighborhood that shaped him very proud.

Larry Donnelly is a Boston-born attorney, a Law Lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway and a regular Irish media contributor on politics, current affairs and law on both sides of the Atlantic. He is on Twitter @LarryDonnelly.
Ireland’s border towns are breathing much easier; their man Biden is taking over in the White House

(Continued from page 4)

In 1849, Owen Finnegan walked from Carlingford a few miles west to Newry in Co. Armagh (now in the UK) through the area known as the Narrow Water. This route took about four hours on foot. It is said to be a 25-mile journey. However, it was much more difficult. In the 1980s, at the depth of the Troubles, Newry’s unemployment rate was 28 percent. Eamonn Connolly, the managing director of the Newry Business Improvement District, noted, “A measure of how far the economy’s has advanced in peacetime is that in early 2020, before the Covid crisis, a revitalized Newry was approaching nearly full employment. Brexit imperiled this progress. Adds Connolly: “Whatever Brexit deal is arrived at, and we believe that there will be one, will inevitably lead to more cost and time to business.” A no-deal crash-out favored by right wing Tories would lead almost inevitably to a hard border.

Empathy, knowledge will accompany Biden back into the White House

The great hunger, An Gorta Mor, killed 1 in 8 people in Ireland, even more in Ulster, with a death toll of over 1 million people. The economy was in shambles, and the government was unable to handle the crisis. People were hungry and desperate. In response, the government took steps to address the crisis, including opening food banks and providing aid to those in need. These actions helped to alleviate some of the worst effects of the famine, and they continue to be an important part of Ireland’s efforts to support its population today.

Ireland is not a perfect society, but in general, Irish culture leans to solidarity (“meitheal”), or solidarity. Ireland is not a perfect society, but in general, Irish culture leans to solidarity (“meitheal”), as does her great-grandson, Joe Biden.

Many Americans feel relief at Biden’s win, but that relapse is blended with the historic meaning of this victory. Refusal to concede, and Republican gains in the US House. A friend / activist/ Biden campaign worker in Pennsylvania emailed me her reaction on election day: “My chest feels hollow, caved in. Half of my country actually endorses racism, sexism, classism...2016 was not a fluke after all.”

So, it’s a mixed bag for Americans: Conservatives are angry Trump lost, progressives are gutted that the election was even close after more than 260,000 Covid deaths. Even so, Biden has many fans. The Trump era is over, and there is hope for the future. Biden’s victory is a huge step forward for the country, and it is a clear sign that the American people want change. The Biden administration has already taken steps to address some of the most pressing issues facing the country, including climate change, healthcare, and the economy. The US is on the cusp of a new era, and there is reason to be optimistic about the future.

About timing: The GFA and final Brexit talks

Sometimes timing really is everything. The Good Friday Agreement is a complex and historic document that has been in place since 1998. Altering any element of the GFA without proper consultation could have serious implications for the peace process in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Therefore, any changes to the GFA should be carefully considered and deliberated upon.

Key dates on permanent residence

Q. I have an interview scheduled with USCIS and Immigration Services (USCIS) on my application for permanent residence. Assuming the interview goes well, what happens next?

A. In cases where the interview is successful, the USCIS officer has the authority to grant you permanent residence immediately. Your new status will begin on the very same day as the interview, and for most people no interview is required, a notice of a favorable decision is mailed to the applicant. In both types of cases, the actual card will be sent to the mailing address on record with USCIS, so make sure to inform USCIS if you change your address. The easiest way to report your change of address is online at uscis.gov.

New permanent residents should be aware of the following:

1. “Conditional” permanent residents (those who were granted permanent residence based on marriage to a US citizen) need to file the card expires. The I-751 Petition to Remove Conditions on Residence must be filed within the 90-day period preceding the expiration date. Once the petition is approved, the applicant will receive a new green card valid for 10 years.

2. Once conditional permanent residents have their conditions removed, they are eligible to become naturalized US citizens three years after the date that their first application for permanent residence was approved. Naturalization applications may be filed as early as 90 days before the end of this three-year period.

3. With certain exceptions (involving military service, for example), all other green card holders are eligible to become naturalized US citizens five years after the grant of permanent residence. Again, naturalization applications may be filed as early as 90 days before the five years have expired.

Remember that eligibility for US citizenship involves other criteria in addition to the length of permanent resident status – good moral character, English language proficiency, and physical presence in the US. Rian attorneys are available to provide advice on any immigration matters. Our immigration clinics have been suspended due to COVID-19, but our attorneys are providing free immigration consultations over the phone and will schedule a phone call with you. Please call 617-542-7654 to schedule a phone consultation.
Christmas for the Irish in Boston, then and now
Even in 2020, history offers holiday hope

By Peter F. Stevens
Boston Irish Staff

The word “merry” seems out of place as this year’s Christmas season approaches at the height of the pandemic. Still, hope can be found in the imminent availability of Covid-19 vaccines.

In 1918, the first year of the Spanish Flu pandemic, Boston and its Irish population endured a similarly gloomy holiday season. That was not unusual for men and women with ties to the “old sod” – historically, the early arrivals from Ireland had been banned from celebrating Dec. 25 in the city.

From 1800 to 1850, the Irish could scarcely have picked a worse place than Boston to mark Christmas. The original Boston Puritans had loathed “Popish” Yuletide rituals so much that, in 1659, the Massachusetts General Court had enacted laws against honoring the day. Anyone caught toasting the occasion suffered a five-shilling fine. Above all, for the Mathers and other Puritan luminaries, Christmas celebrations symbolized “Papists” and their church.

In such a climate, Boston’s Irish celebrated the holiday in muted fashion until their political clout swelled in the late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. In Ireland, the holiday had largely revolved around Mass and family, not the raucous celebrations late 1800s. 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At the Church of the Holy Cross, on Franklin Street, and later at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, in the South End, Christmas Masses were held in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, always under suspicion of the local Yankees. As German Catholic immigrants arrived and began attending the local “Irish churches,” the newcomers introduced locals to Christmas trees and greeting cards; a thaw in the region’s traditional, Puritan-steeped Christmas notions was slowly emerging.

The Christmas season of 1887 brought a “holiday” card that inflamed Irish from Dublin to Boston. The card, issued by Angus Thomas and entitled “Ode to the Specials (police),” belittled the largely Irish crowd that had gathered at Trafalgar Square in London on Nov. 13, 1887, to protest the imprisonment of Irish MP William O’Brien. Thrown in jail for having orchestrated riots against landlords, O’Brien had become a hero to his countrymen in both Ireland and Boston not only for his stand against the rent collectors and their agents, but also for his refusal to wear prison clothing and his campaign to wrangle political prisoner status for fellow Irishmen in British cells.

On that Sunday, a throng defying Commissioner of Police Sir Charles Warren’s ban on open-air meetings assembled at Trafalgar “to demand the release of William O’Brien, MP.” Constables, foot guards, and life guards waded into the crowd to clear the square. No shots were fired, but fists, feet, and clubs killed two people. The protesters’ phrase described the tragedy, a term to chill the Irish again and again: “Bloody Sunday.”

Shortly after the melee, Angus Thomas released his vitriolic card, hardly a subject to foster “peace and goodwill to all men.” His “Christmas” theme featured not the images of St. Nick nor a Nativty scene, but a club—a police truncheon. His idea of humor was the following sarcastic line about the weapon swung against O’Brien’s supporters: “To be used with great care.”

By the time of 1887’s “Bloody Sunday,” Boston’s Irish were a genuine community, slowly amassing clout at the ballot box and bucking Yankee strangleholds on business and the courts. If any in the Irish wards ever needed a reminder that as hard as life in Brahmin Boston could be, their countrymen overseas still faced greater obstacles, the Bloody Sunday “Christmas Card” was vivid proof.

Thankfully, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, Boston’s Irish could celebrate Christmas as openly as they wanted, with family parties and dinners, church socials, and midnight Mass turning the Yuletide season into a genuine holiday. As Thomas H. O’Connor writes in “Boston Catholics” – “They participated in a perpetual calendar of familiar religious devotions that…bound them more firmly together as members of their own distinctive parishes.”

During the period of Advent in late November and early December, for example, persons of all ages prepared for the coming of the Christmas season by attending daily Mass. They then enjoyed the celebration of midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, often followed by festive and early morning breakfasts with friends and relatives.

Those scenes would have been unthinkable for Boston’s earliest Irish immigrants living in the city where Puritans banned the holiday and punished transgressors with fines or the stocks. Some 270 years later, through religion, reflection and revelry, Boston’s Irish could finally celebrate Christmas in “grand fashion.”

Today, even though a somber, scaled-down holiday beckons, rarely have the seasonal themes of hope and giving—marked in 2020 by masks, social-distancing, and hygienic common sense—loomed so large. Those practices, as in 1918, are the greatest gift we can give to family, friends, and the community at large.

It’s Our Responsibility to Give Back to the Community

Feeney Brothers Utility Services has donated a large supply of N95 masks and protective supplies to several medical facilities around the city of Boston, as word comes that hospitals, nursing homes and health care facilities are urgently in need of these items during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our COVID-19 Task Force is working with our customers, municipalities, and other stakeholders to ensure our crews continue to complete their work safely and focusing on maintaining the health of our team and community. Because we’re all in this together, we’ve donated almost 2,000 N95 masks and other protective supplies to various medical facilities around Boston in response to the shortage of these items nationwide.

“We have been doing business here for years and we consider that it is part of our reponsibility to give back to the community when we can. We usually place an order once a year for the masks, and they had arrived recently. So we kept enough for what we need in the coming weeks, and were able to donate about 1600 masks to help fill the immediate public health needs.”

Brendan and Greg Feeney

Feeney Brothers Utility Services
103 Clayton Street
Dorchester, MA 02122
A new low for Trump and his enablers

Sedition. That is the legal word for the crime against democracy that Donald Trump and his knock-kneed co-conspirators in Congress appear willing to stage in a desperate grasp at keeping control of the White House.

Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were duly elected last month, as were most Republicans who sought re-election to Congress. But, Trump insists—with no evidence—that the presidential ballot was a fraud and that “illegal” votes must be discarded. The president is engaged in behavior that is beyond reckless and preposterous. It’s dangerous and, if it persists, it is treasonous.

Some—but not enough—high-profile Republicans understand the gravity of the situation. Mitt Romney, the Utah senator who once governed our state, said shortly after the voting that Trump “is wrong to say the election was rigged, corrupt and stolen.” Persisting in such misinformation, Romney said, “damages the cause of freedom here and around the world ... and recklessly inflames destructive and dangerous passions.”

We were pleased to see our current governor, Charlie Baker, make it clear that he, too, is “disgusted” by the president and his cronies’ “baseless claims” of voter fraud. Baker called Trump’s obstinence “wildly inappropriate.”

He added: “I can’t think of a worse time to stall a transition than amid a deadly pandemic that the federal government continues to own primary responsibility for responding to. Orderly transitions of power are good for the country, they’re good for the American people, and there’s simply no question on this. And every campaign season, we hear a lot about doing what’s best for the country. And what this president is doing at this point in time is not in the best interest of this country.”

Even Chris Christie, the former New Jersey governor who caught Covid-19 at the White House while running Trump through debate prep in October, chimed in: “He’s been a friend of mine for 20 years— but friendship doesn’t mean that you’re blind. Friendship means that you’ll listen to somebody, give them their opportunity, and if they don’t come forward with the proof, then it’s time to move on.”

It would be a fitting coda to this farce of a presidency if these handful of Republican leaders were in command of their own party apparatus. Far from it. With precious few exceptions, there is now nothing left of the so-called GOP, the party of Lincoln. It’s gone. It has been taken down, chewed out, disembodied, and re-animated in a familiar, but very different form. The “party” is now nothing more than a subsidiary of Trump, Inc. If by some miracle, the country avoids further harm in the coming weeks, it will be in spite of the majority of Republican leaders, who either cover, or worse, amplify the ravings of Trump and his family. Witness Mike Pompeo, our nation’s top diplomat, sneering at the voters of America as he pledged that “there will be a smooth transition to a second Trump administration.”

Count us among those who genuinely want the nation to come together and heal—to “see each other again” as President-elect Biden said in his magnanimous speech to the nation on Nov. 7. But Trump and his extremist allies have shown us who they truly are too many times for us not to believe their intent. It would be folly to dismiss their public statements and actions as anything other than a concerted effort to dismantle our republic’s foundational stone: the will of the electorate.

This is not mere denial by a pack of sore losers. It represents a revolt, that if it persists, is the gravest threat to our democracy since secessionist slavers attempted to destroy the Union—and nearly did—in 1861. We must be prepared to confront it for what it is: a criminal conspiracy.

—Bill Forry

Press group honors Ed Forry for career in community journalism

By Reporter Staff

The New England Newspaper & Press Association (NENPA) has selected Edward W. Forry, who, with his wife, the late Mary Casey Forry, founded the Dorchester Reporter in 1983 and the Boston Irish Reporter ten years later, as its 2020 honoree in the field of community journalism.

Named after Bob Wallack, a longtime New England journalist and former New England Press Association executive director, the award annually recognizes an individual who has displayed an exceptional record of commitment to community journalism. Past award recipients faithfully served their community and played an active, constructive role in contributing to its quality of life.

Forry received his award during the organization’s annual conference, which was held virtually last month. US Sen. Edward Markey, a longtime friend, offered his congratulations during a pre-taped video.

“Over the last 37 years, you have not only reported history in the Reporter, you have laid a legacy for years to come,” Markey said. “You have set the gold standard in news and created a new generation of award-winning reporters and never lost touch with your Dorchester community. Our Commonwealth owes you a debt of gratitude.

In accepting the honor, Forry said: “The great speaker of US House, Tip O’Neill, once said in his profession ‘all politics is local.’ Well, believe the same is true for our profession. Community journalism is about staying in close touch with the local community and reporting on the events, the activities, and the news that has a direct impact on our neighbors, on the neighborhood, and on the city of Boston.”

The selectors took notice of Ed Forry’s active and meaningful work over the last 37 years doing street-level, urban newspapering in Dorchester, Boston’s largest and most diverse neighborhood in giving him the award. For many who know him and his work, the honoree is a latter-day equivalent of the small-town newspaper editor memorialized in so many movies and histories. Most recently, Ed led the transition of the monthly Boston Irish Reporter into the current version, Boston Irish, a quarterly publication with a robust online presence.

In its award statement, NENPA said: “Ed Forry is always looking ahead. Like those small-town newspaper proprietors, he and his son William have nurtured the future of serious local journalism year after year by providing on-the-beat opportunities for young reporters and writers and interns on the make. Graduates of the Reporter’s newsroom continue to move on to regional and national publications and other news and feature outlets.”

It concluded: “His continuing zeal for telling stories that count for his neighborhood has been edifying; now in his mid-70s, he likes to think that the next story will be his newsroom’s best yet.”
The Pharaoh’s Millennial Daughter

By Thomas O’Grady

Special to Boston Irish

Browsing my bookshelves a few weeks ago, I paused and pulled down “The Coast Road,” a dual-language volume by the Irish-language poet Ailbhe Ni Ghearbhuigh that I first read shortly after its publication by Gallery Books in December of 2016. Comprising translations from thirteen Irish poets, each with her/his distinctive poetic signature in English, it is an engaging gathering from start to finish, and the forty-six poems included in the volume (forty-eight in English, as two of them are translated twice, one of those twice by the same translator) constitute a rich fabric expressing the sensibility of a “millennial” woman poet writing as Gaeltacht. (Ni Ghearbhuigh was born into an Irish-speaking family in Tralee, County Kerry in 1984.)

Revisiting the book almost four years later, I was reminded of how the facing-page translations of Ni Ghearbhuigh’s poems actively invite even a non-Gaeltacht-like myself to pay notice to the poems as they were originally written. One in particular caught my attention by way of translator Justin Quinn’s handling of a specific line. The poem is titled “Filleadh ar an gCathair,” which Quinn translates as “Back to the City.” “Fair enough: my folklore (dictionary) confirms that filleadh translates literally as “return” and cathair as “city.” I was perplexed, though, by Quinn’s decision to translate the phrase “Faoiseamh a gheobhadsa” in the final stanza not literally (“Relief I will take”) but as a highly conspicuous literary borrowing: “And peace comes dropping slow.” Obviously, this phrase is lifted directly from the first line of the second stanza of William Butler Yeats’s iconic poem “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”: “And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow.”

Asking myself what sort of license a translator would do that, I was pleased to discover the answer in Ni Ghearbhuigh’s own translation of the poem she executed when it was named Ireland’s European Union Presidency Poem in 2013. (It was also shortlisted in 2015 for RTE’s “A Poem for Ireland” competition.) In her version in English, which differs line by line from Quinn’s anyway, she actually leaves “Faoiseamh a gheobhadsa” untranslated . . . a decision that led me to learn that the exact phrase is the title, and the first line of a poem by celebrated mid-twentieth-century Irish-language poet Máirtín O’Déarain. Translated into English most recently by Frank Sewell, O’Déarain’s poem appears to be a simple lyric expressing the longing for home of an Aran Islander unhappily transplanted to Dublin:

Peace I’ll find
For a short while
Among my people
On a sea island,
Walking the shore
Morning and evening
Monday to Saturday
Home in the West.

But is Ni Ghearbhuigh’s interpolation of Ó Direáin’s line into her poem as simple as it seems? A quarter-century ago, the Irish-language poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill explained in an essay published in the New York Times Book Review the richness of the linguistic medium she works in: “Irish is a language of enormous elasticity and emotional sensitivity; of quick and hilarious banter and a welter of references both historical and mythological; it is an instrument of imaginative depth and scope, which has been tempered by the community for generations until it can pick up and sing out every hint of emotional modulation that can occur between people.” Indeed, just as Ailbhe Ni Ghearbhuigh herself “referenced” Ó Direáin’s poem, translator Quinn recognizes that Ó Direáin’s poem:

Tonight I’m coming back.
I taste the city’s sweat around me,
And it tastes good.

Ailbhe Ni Ghearbhuigh

THE COAST ROAD

Ailbhe Ni Ghearbhuigh

By the evidence of “The Coast Road,” Ailbhe Ni Ghearbhuigh is too, a status and a stature affirmed by Ní Dhomhnaill is too, a status and a stature affirmed by Ní Dhomhnaill herself in 2017 when she presented to Ni Ghearbhuigh the so-called “Parnell Stick” that Seamus Heaney had presented to her in 1998. (Cut in Avondale Wood by Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1889 or 1890, this ferruled whitethorn walking stick at some point came into the hands of novelist Brinsley MacNamara, who at some point passed it on to poet W. R. Rodgers who relayed it to politician and historian Conor Cruise O’Brien who presented it to Heaney. Someday Ni Ghearbhuigh will recognize another writer in turn by passing that baton, as it were, of honor.) Clearly, Ní Dhomhnaill saw and heard in Ni Ghearbhuigh’s millennial poems that vibrant spirit— that élan vital, perhaps—expressed in “Filleadh ar an gCathair”/“Back to the City”:

But neon signs
Light up the strangest corners of my heart.

And peace comes dropping slow
On the moonlit window ledge,
My ear pulled to the traffic’s song.

Thomas O’Grady was Director of Irish Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston from 1984 to 2019. He is currently Scholar-in-Residence at Saint Mary’s College in Notre Dame, Indiana.
Wherever you’ll be spending Christmas this year, you can enjoy scrumptious Irish food and drink delivered right to your door.

Christmas is a time for a little indulgence and what better way to indulge than with top-notch food and drink from the island of Ireland.

Whether you’re treating yourself or spoiling your friends and family, Irish artisan food makes the perfect ingredient for the Yuletide celebrations.

Chocolate lovers will relish the decadent confectionery of Ireland’s acclaimed chocolatiers, Butlers Chocolates and the novel flavours of Neary Nógs, Northern Ireland’s first bean to bar craft chocolate makers. Their bars are infused with delicate lavender or seaweed or more intense Irish whiskey and orange bitters.

Christmas cheeseboards will be enhanced with creamy Cashel cheese and full-flavoured Ballylisk Triple Rose from County Armagh. Serve with Ballylisk’s spiced pear chutney for a piquant pairing.

With the island of Ireland forging a reputation for excellent craft spirits, this year’s Christmas cheer should include some of the recent arrivals.

Capture the flavour of Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way in a glass of Skellig Six18 Gin, handcrafted on the coast of County Kerry. With ten botanicals, its defining aromatics include locally foraged yarrow, fresh Douglas fir needles and birch sap.

Or sip Boatyard Distillery’s aromatic double gin organically produced on the banks of Lough Erne using Sweet Gale from the family bogland.

Why not sample Ireland’s traditional spirit in the award-winning Bán Poitín, produced from potatoes, malted barley and sugar beet in County Down, or enjoy ‘Christmas in a glass’ with a tipple of Aqua Vitae, recreated from a 700-year-old Kilkenny recipe.

A Christmas hamper packed with gastronomic goodies is the ultimate Yuletide treat.

Ireland’s Artisan Pantry, the first Irish regional food subscription box with a worldwide reach, offers a variety of hampers stuffed with mouth-watering delicacies. Its Merry Christmas Everyone hamper has a unique selection of small batch artisan Irish goodies including biscuits, sweets, teas, coffees, cakes and jams.

The renowned Burren Smokehouse in County Clare is also offering a selection of hampers to gift a taste of Ireland this Christmas. Its Wild Atlantic hamper includes Cold Smoked Irish Organic Salmon with Seaweed, Gubbeen Cheese and Achill Island Smoked Sea Salt.

Or embrace extravagance with its luxury hamper which showcases a multitude of products from the Burren region and includes a bottle of champagne, Galway Crystal champagne flutes and whiskey tumblers, and a bottle of The Banner Blend whiskey.

Condé Nast Traveller magazine’s readers rate Galway, Dublin as Europe’s friendliest

Galway and Dublin top the list of the ‘top ten friendliest cities in Europe’ in the annual reader survey of Condé Nast Traveller, a major travel magazine. Galway is in first position, Dublin in second.

Every year, the magazine asks its readers to decide on their favorite cities around the globe in its Readers’ Choice Awards survey. The magazine recently unveiled the results of its 2020 survey – taken by hundreds of thousands of its readers – including its list of Europe’s friendliest cities.

Welcoming the news, Niall Gibbons, CEO of Tourism Ireland, said: “I am delighted to see that two of our cities feature in the prestigious Condé Nast Traveller Awards 2020. It is another well-deserved accolade for Galway and Dublin. In what has been a devastating year for travel and tourism, this is some good news – reminding people everywhere that, when the time is right, the island of Ireland is a great choice for a holiday.

“Once this crisis is past and Ireland is open again to international visitors, we in Tourism Ireland will be ready to roll out an extensive recovery kick-start program and play our part in delivering a sustainable recovery for the long-term future of our industry.”

The top ten friendliest cities in Europe, according to the survey, are Galway; Dublin; Valletta, Malta; Oporto, Portugal; Lisbon, Portugal; Bologna, Italy; Edinburgh, UK; Reykjavik, Iceland; Athens, Greece; Helsinki, Finland.

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"A Christmas Celtic Sojourn" for an interesting year will bring holiday traditions straight into audience’s homes

Creative minds, talent, technology triumph over space and time

BY SEAN SMITH
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Right from the beginning, the idea behind “A Christmas Celtic Sojourn” was to make audiences feel as if they were enjoying the Celtic-flavored celebration of the holiday season in the comfort of their own home – even if they were sitting inside a theater, such as the Cutler Majestic in Boston.

This year, audiences can literally stay at home and see the show, from Dec. 15-20, as if it were in a theatrical setting. Like so many other live events of the past several months, the annual offering of music, dance, and storytelling from Irish, Scottish, and other Celtic, and occasionally non-Celtic, traditions has switched to a virtual format for this year. But thanks to a whole lot of planning, creative thinking, and technological prowess, “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” 2020 might well seem to defy time and space.

WGHB-FM broadcaster Brian O’Donovan, the “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” creator, host, narrator, and occasional performer, will be joined by an ensemble led by multi-instrumentalist Seamus Egan and harpist/pianist Maeve Gilchrist – the show’s music director and assistant music director, respectively – that will serve as accompanists for song and dance segments and take the lead on instrumental numbers: Jenna Moynihan (fiddle), Owen Marshall (bouzouki, harmonium), Maura Shawn Scanlin (fiddle, vocals), Conor Hearn (guitar, vocals), and Chico Huff (bass).

Also part of the proceedings will be special guests contributing performances from remote locations: singers Cathy Jordan, Ellis Kennedy, Mairi Campbell, Siobhan Miller, Hannah Rarity, the quartet Windborne, as well as O’Donovan’s daughter Aoife and her husband Eric Jacobsen; and dancers Cara Butler and Nic Gareiss.

“Christmas Celtic Sojourn” has cultivated a movable-feast persona over the years, touring elsewhere in Massachusetts and other parts of New England before finishing up at the Cutler Majestic. And that aspect will hold true this year, in both real and symbolic ways that are equally meaningful. Each performance will be presented in collaboration with a “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” partner venue: the VETS in Providence (Dec. 15), the Hanover Theatre in Worcester (Dec. 16), the Zeitner in New Bedford (Dec. 17), the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport – where the 2020 production was recorded – (Dec. 18) and the Cutler Majestic (Dec. 19); all shows will be streamed beginning at 7:30 p.m. The final performance will take place at WGHB, which has provided extensive support for “Christmas Celtic Sojourn,” on Dec. 20 at 4 p.m.

A portion of every ticket purchased – they are available at christmasceltic.com – will go to support a partner venue. Each show will be in real time, and available on demand from Dec. 21 until Jan. 2, especially for those who buy tickets.

For each night of the show’s run, O’Donovan will start off with an introduction that evokes one of these partner venues: “It might be something like ‘Well, here we are at the Zeitner in New Bedford, which has been a beacon of light for so many,’” he explained. “There’ll be local history or local color of some kind mentioned, as if we were indeed right there in that city. Why do this? Because these theaters are all sitting dark, and we want to let them know we’re thinking of them. It’s our way of saying, ‘Here is your Christmas show.’”

As always, “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” will have its share of both new and familiar faces among the cast. The ensemble will have a distinct Boston/New England character: Owen Marshall is a member of the Maine-based quartet The Press Gang and has frequently appeared in many Boston-area musical collaborations; Jenna Moynihan, a member of Laura Cortese & the Dance Cards and in a duo with harpist Mairi Chaimbeul, has been in Boston for more than a decade; Maura Shawn Scanlin and Conor Hearn, also locals, perform as Irish/Scottish/Americana-influenced Rakish and as part of the band Pumpkin Bread. As for the guest performers, Cathy Jordan will be familiar to many as the lead singer of the popular Irish band Dervish and the “Atlantic Fringe” trio The Unwanted. Others have all appeared in “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” before – notably Aoife O’Donovan, who along with her mother Lindsay brought a true family dynamic to the show. Ellis Kennedy is a former LiveIreland.com Female Vocal Album of the Year winner; Hannah Rarity made her solo American debut with the show in 2018, the year she won Young Scottish Traditional Musician of the Year honors; Mairi Campbell has earned acclaim as both a singer and musician (her rendition of “Auld Lang Syne” was featured in an episode of “Sex and the City”);

Siobhan Miller, lead singer in last year’s production, has won the Scots Trad Music “Best Singer” award three times; four-part harmony a cappella group Windborne’s members are veterans of the Boston and New England folk music scene.

Cara Butler, who has toured regularly with The Chieftains and appeared in the show “Dancing on Dangerous Ground,” and Nic Gareiss – known for his unique footwork and joie de vivre – also have been part of “Christmas Celtic Sojourn.”

O’Donovan can remember very well when he had the first inkling this year’s “Christmas Celtic Sojourn” was going to have to be reconceived: Appropriately enough, it was after the performance of the “St. Patrick’s Day Celtic Sojourn” at the Shalin Liu on March 11 – the only show he and the cast ended up doing.

“It really was ‘the night before the world closed down,’” he recalled. “The situation was getting very concerning, of course, but we were able to get in that one show. And that’s when it began to hit me that this... (Continued on page 19)
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The Boston Harbor Bhoys (L-R) Eddie Biggins, Ryan Biggins, Michael Maloney. Lanu Woyda photo puts it on – and then you realize it doesn’t work,” says Eddie, who pursued a career in medical billing (the retired earlier this year). “So I went back to playing what interested me, like The Beatles, and writing songs for myself.”

Though he never graduated from Berklee, Biggins felt he benefited by being exposed to many different kinds of music. On the practical side, he notes, “I developed a legitimate singing voice. I also learned how to breathe properly, so as to protect your voice – that came in very handy later on for doing those three-hour pub gigs.”

Ryan, not surprisingly, feels he “was pre-destined” to be active in music, since his mother as well as his father always sang, and he would often watch Eddie play at open mikes. He began taking violin lessons in fourth grade and, he recalls, “got the hang of it pretty quickly,” so he continued all the way into high school, where he met Maloney, who was a year ahead of him.

For Maloney, who started piano lessons at age eight and sang in a children’s choir, music was not just a pastime or activity, but an emotional and spiritual salve for a nagging hip problem. As he grew older, he did solo performances at nursing homes and senior citizen clubs and began writing his own material, which he found to be “cathartic.”

The prelude to the Boston Harbor Bhoys came in 2007, when Eddie, whose musical theater background enabled him to work part-time running sound for events, got a call from a client whose father needed a guitarist for his Irish band. So began Eddie’s stint in Jug of Punch, which had a regular gig at The Old-Timer – and his immersion in his ancestral music. “My family had come from Ireland and some generations back, and Dad had always listened to lots of Irish music, like the Irish Rovers, John McCormack; my aunt was very interested in it, too. I hadn’t paid much attention to it, but when I began playing with Jug of Punch it felt right.”

Meanwhile, Ryan – who started taking guitar lessons and experimenting with other instruments – and Maloney embarked on a musical partnership as well. “The band really started morphing into what we wanted it to be,” he says. Adds Eddie, “Sometimes, we’d basically be picky to do playing. But there also were times when we’d wing it, try something new out. I loved that we could do that and have it come out decent. The music goes right to the heart as well as the head.”

The Bhoys had all those foundational band experiences, from hours-long marathons on St. Patrick’s Day to nights when they played to a crowd that barely outnumbered them. They also understood, as Eddie puts it, “that the audience isn’t necessarily there to listen to you, but you give them a good time anyway, such as doing familiar singalongs or taking requests. But the main thing for us is just getting together and doing, or else there was hardly any audience at all.”

For the main feature of the Bhoys is their propensity to lark about with their material (“I have a history of messing with lyrics or doing funny stuff on the keyboard,” notes Maloney), and go beyond the Irish/Celtic domain: a “Boston medley” pairing The Standells’ “Dirty Water” with “Shipping Up to Boston,” the Woody Guthrie original that The Dropkick Murphys turned up into an anthem; turning Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven” into a waltz; or covering other pop/rock favorites, from The Band’s “The Weight” to Toto’s “Africa.” “A lot of Irish bands might do country as their other genre,” says Eddie. “We tend to go with pop from the 1960s, 70s, 80s – just feels natural to us.”

There’s a lot about music that feels natural to the Biggines and Maloney, because all three embraced it – as opposed to someone dragged kicking and screaming to it – early in life. Eddie, who grew up in Waltham, “always sang” as a kid, and jokes that he produced his first single at age four: a rendition of “Puff the Magic Dragon” in a make-your-own-record booth at a fair. Meanwhile, Ryan, a self-proclaimed “nerd” and gifted musician in high school’s jazz ensemble, and went on to the Berklee College of Music, where he studied composition and songwriting, and wound up involved in musical theater – even wrote a couple of musicals, including one called “Featurized Attraction” that actually made it on stage.

“The thing about musical theater, though, is that it takes years to write something, and years before someone
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For Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy, their new album ‘Golden’ comes nicely wrapped in a silver lining

By Sean Smith

The New England folk music duo Keith Murphy and Becky Tracy managed a nice bit of symmetry earlier this year: They released their new album, “Golden,” right around their silver wedding anniversary.

Of course, Tracy acknowledges, that’s not how they actually planned it. If things had gone a little differently, “Golden” – their first full-fledged recording as a duo in nearly three decades of playing together – might well have been out in time for their 20th anniversary, perhaps even earlier. But that’s how it is when you are an extremely busy, in-demand musical couple with a full slate of commitments – from New England contra dances to Celtic events, among others – that often pull you in separate directions.

For 18 years, the Brattleboro-based Tracy and Murphy have been the rhythm section behind the band尼古莱, a ground-breaking trio known for its intricate arrangements and driving rhythmic groove in performing Irish, Quebecois, American, and other traditional folk music. But even after the band rang down the curtain in 2011, there was plenty to keep them busy. The fiddle-playing Tracy is a long-time member of the contra dance and concert band Wild Asparagus and frequently appears at the annual Massachusetts Fiddle Hell festival west of Boston, for example, while Murphy – a stellar guitarist, pianist, mandolinist, and singer – has had numerous collaborations and pursuits, including the annual “AST. Patrick’s Day Celtic Sojourn” production in the Boston area.

“We started work on ‘Golden’ several years ago around when we were putting our home studio together,” says Tracy, whose sources of inspiration include Irish musicians like Tommy Peoples, Brendan Mulvihill, and Eugene O’Donnell. “We would block off a week, and we would spend most of the time together planning the structure of the songs we wanted, then figuring out how best to record together. And then suddenly the week would be up, and we’d go off on our individual jobs. So it always seemed to be a case of ‘Where exactly are we with this, anyway?’”

Still, the experience of making “Golden,” however protracted, was entirely enjoyable, says Tracy, who vividly remembers the process. “For Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy, that’s hardly cause for complaint.

As originally recorded by Rogers, “Northwest Passage” has always had a sea chantey feel – sung a cappella with zest (read: ideally, a tankard or bottle in hand) – but Murphy tones things down, imbuing it with a tenderness and contemplativeness befitting a departure: Instead of dipping into his vast collection of songs from the Irish, English, Quebecois and Canadian Maritime traditions, he holds forth on two veritable contemporary folk classics, Stan Rogers’ “Northwest Passage” and Walt Aldrich’s “Ain’t No Ash Will Burn.” But Murphy being Murphy, that’s evident on a track beginning with a march, “Pratt Hall,” that leads to the alternating minor-major key “St. Croix Jig” and then into the exotically stirring “Northwest Reel.”

Another standout is a medley of reels that begins with Murphy’s “Turluette” – the word refers to what might be the French equivalent of Irish lilting, i.e. a syncopated melody with aProposition to gallop – with groover. Aiptus guitar and podorythmie, or foot percussion. Among other tracks, Heaton’s flute enriches a trio of elegant Irish reel reworkings, “Inspector for St/French Shore/Treaty of Paris” as well as the “Sprint/St. Croix” set and – along with Roberts and Hellenberg – adds a kick to the “Corner House” medley.

Murphy’s singing is front and center on three tracks, and taken together they represent something of a departure: Instead of dipping into his vast collection of songs from the Irish, English, Quebecois and Canadian Maritime traditions, he holds forth on two veritable contemporary folk classics, Stan Rogers’ “Northwest Passage” and Walt Aldrich’s “Ain’t No Ash Will Burn.” But Murphy being Murphy, that’s how it is when you are an extremely busy, in-demand musical couple with a full slate of commitments – from New England contra dances to Celtic events, among others – that often pull you in separate directions.

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The SíFiddlers is an ensemble of 13 female fiddlers from different generations, including established performers like Altan co-founder Mairead Ní Mhaonaigh, Liz Doherty, and Brid Harper, and the vanguard of more recent generations such as Claire Friel (of The Friel Sisters), Aisling Drost-Byrne, and Eimear McCollgan, as well as bands such as Tara Connagham, Theresa Kavanagh, Claire Gallagher, Melanie Hutton, Roisin McGrory, Clodagh Warnock, and Denise Boyle. They originally came together at a festival in 2018 – their set climaxing with 40-strong female fiddlers in all – and, more recently, for the broadcast of this year’s virtual-format Fleadh Cheoil.

The raison d’être for The SíFiddlers is straightforward: compelling: Donegal has a time-honored tradition of the classic ceili band or 1920s-era vintage Irish Boys Set, a brisk pair of jigs that includes “Hearty Rambler” and “The Hearty Rambler” (with Clannad’s Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh on vocals). The Donegal fiddle tune canon is well-represented by legendary fiddler Michael Coleman, who upon seeing waves gently lapsing along the shoreline of New York was heard to say “That’s how I like my bow. Carty’s got an ear for words as well as music. His father was a member of a famous London ceilidh band, and his daughter Maggie is an accomplished musician – in fact, Carty’s previous recording was with her – as his son James (he has a solo album, “Hiding Daylight in Dark Corners”), as is quite evident here on “The Wavy Bow Collection.” And as with so much of Carty’s other work, the albums show a pleasing diversity in arrangements, mood, and repertoire, due in no small way to John’s talent on fiddle, banjo, tenor guitar, and mandolin, and James on fiddle.

The duo are aided by some stalwart accompanists, many of whom have been with John Carty for years: Brian McGrath (piano, organ), Shane McGowan (guitar, bass), Michael McCague (bouzouki), James Fromeise (guitar, bouzouki), Matt Griffin (guitar), James Blennerhassett (double bass), and a fellow named Mike McGoldrick on snare drum, rumored to be a pretty good flutist. A special guest is Carty’s brother, James Sr., who plays flute on two tracks: “Corkscrew Hill,” three tunes from Clare Flutist Michael Hynes – including the titular jig at the beginning – and “The Hearty Boys Set,” a brisk pair of jigs that includes “Hearty Boys of Ballymote” from the playing of venerable Sligo fiddler James Morrison.

A couple of tracks have the crisply rhythmic vibe of the classic ceilidh band or 1920s-era vintage Irish orchestra: the “Toss the Feathers” set (“Toss the Feathers” and “Green Mountain”) and the “Drummer Boy” medley of flings – the latter has an infectious, finger-snapping bounce to it. John’s banjo perfectly arrayed with James’ fiddle. Other tracks display a contemporarily curated feel: John leads the quirky, haunting “March of the Crows” (John credits Kevin Burke, who in turn cited Jackie Daly) on banjo, McCague and McGowan softly layering in the accompaniment and tension until James bursts in with “The Cran Man Jig,” with McGrath’s piano propelling things along.

The SíFiddlers sound is exuberant and enthralling, whether it’s only in recent decades that female fiddlers – whether from Donegal or anywhere in Ireland, for that matter – have been recognized and celebrated with any consistency. The women above have this music.

Listeners may or may not appreciate the distinguishing characteristics of Donegal fiddle, such as its commonalities with Scottish tradition, especially in terms of repertoire – strathspeys, Highlands, mazurkas – and frequent use of bowed triplets, derived from the influence of the highland bagpipes. But in any case, the sifiddlers sound is exuberant and enthralling, whether it’s only in recent decades that female fiddlers – whether from Donegal or anywhere in Ireland, for that matter – have been recognized and celebrated with any consistency. The women above have this music.

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Another set begins with Andy Statman’s klezmer composition “The Flatbush Waltz,” famously covered by De Dannan some years ago and lovingly rendered here by John on tenor guitar and mandolin, followed by a pair of reels, “Colonel McBain” (traced to Scottish fiddler Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald) and another by the late Tommy Peoples, “Joe Cassidy’s,” all of which showcase John’s superb touch on tenor guitar for playing melody.

Equally pleasing are the tracks with a sparer, more intimate quality, including a father-son fiddle duet along with McGowan that starts with the impassioned “Lord Galway’s Lamentation” (James’ harmony is outstanding) and concludes with that Dorian masterpiece “Jenny’s Welcome to Charlie.” The Carty-McGowan-McGowan combo also is at the helm on “O’Carolan’s Dream,” with John on tenor guitar; the first pass through, with McGowan’s elegant backing, almost sounds like a harpsichord.

Not so incidentally, “The Wavy Bow Collection” continues Carty’s penchant for off-beat, clever, whimsical, or just plain interesting album titles (e.g. “Settle Out of Court,” “I Will If I Can,” “Yeh, That’s All It Is”). In this case, the title comes from a quote by legendary fiddler Michael Coleman, who upon seeing waves gently lapsing along the shoreline of New York was heard to say “That’s how I like my bow. Carty’s got an ear for words as well as music. But his talent on fiddle, banjo, tenor guitar, and mandolin is well-recognized and celebrated with any consistency. The women above have this music.

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Ministry of Folk Wintery Weekend scheduled virtual style for Dec. 4-6

Matt and Shannon Heaton, Hanneke Cassel, Natalie Haas, and Katie McNally, long-time performers in the Boston-area Irish/Celtic music scene, will be among the artists at the inaugural Wintery Weekend Festival, which will be held in virtual format Dec. 4-6.

The event, which features 10 workshops, 5 online sessions, and 2 concerts, is being organized by the Ministry of Folk [ministryoffolk.com], a Boston-based online initiative launched earlier this year to aid folk and traditional musicians in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other acts in the Wintery Weekend Festival lineup with Boston ties include Eamon Sefton, Louise Bichan, Gaen Fraser, Calum Bell, Alex Cumming, Jenna Moynihan, Mairi Chaimbeul, Eric McDonald, Casey Murray, Maura Shawn Scanlin, and Conor Hearn, as well as Ministry of Folk co-founder Sarah Collins.

They will be joined by notable artists from elsewhere in the US and abroad, among them Brian Ó hAirt, Iona Fyfe, Sam Sweeney, and Andrew Finn Magill.

Festival events begin at 10 a.m. each day and run into the evening. Friday's schedule includes "Tunes for Healing," a workshop featuring McNally, Chaimbeul and Moynihan; a "Burren Irish Session" with Collins, Sefton, Hearn and Scanlin, and "A Fine Winter's Night," a concert – presented in collaboration with Club Passim – of traditional and original music by the Heatons to celebrate the Christmas season.

Saturday will see an "Emmetts Scottish Session," co-led by Bichan and Bell, a "Boston Tea Party" with Cassel, Haas, McNally, and Shannon Heaton, and a "Wintery Songs" showcase, including McDonald and Moynihan.

Haas, McDonald, Hearn, Sefton, and Scanlin will present a "Chord Talk" workshop on Sunday, and the festival concludes with all of the artists participating in an epic finale concert that evening at 7 p.m.

The $50 weekend pass offers access to all festival events. For tickets and other details, go to ministryoffolk.com/wintery-weekend.

The Ministry of Folk maintains a directory for performers/teachers and a calendar of virtual concert or workshop events originating in Greater Boston and elsewhere that feature folk and traditional music. In addition, the website offers links to resources such as financial assistance campaigns for musicians and information related to teaching and performing online. The Ministry’s Facebook page and Instagram, linked from the website, augment its outreach.

—SEAN SMITH

CCE Boston music school goes Zoom

By Sean Smith

Boston Irish Contributor

It has been a year of adjustment and adaptation for the Irish/Celtic scene in Boston, and elsewhere, as musicians, organizations and venues cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among those seeking to move forward is the music school for Boston’s Reynolds-Hanafin-Cooley branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which earlier this month began offering lessons via Zoom.

The school, which opened in 1997 and has held weekly classes at Boston College, Harvard University, Saint Columbkille Partnership School, and, most recently, St. Joseph’s Preparatory School in Brighton, provides instruction for instruments such as fiddle, accordion, flute, whistle, bodhran, and guitar, as well as for sean-nós dance and traditional singing (Irish and English).

Other offerings have included ensemble classes for students interested in playing and performing music together, and free teacher-led sessions for enrolled students. School activities take place over 10-week periods in the fall and spring.

After the pandemic cut short the spring 2020 semester, the school had hoped to resume in-person classes this fall, but when that proved impossible, the CCE Boston and school leadership began discussions with school faculty and surveyed students and branch members on alternatives.

“We felt very strongly that it was important to keep going somehow,” says CCE Chairperson Tara Lynch. “If you stop playing music, especially if you’re a beginner, it can be tough to find the momentum again. There were people who wanted to build on what they know, or try something new. We didn’t want anyone to feel stuck in place.”

Besides classes via Zoom, the options proposed were to have teachers record their lessons or video, or to hold private, one-on-one sessions with pupils. The former arrangement wasn’t desirable because it had no capacity for teacher-student interaction, explained Lynch, while the latter was problematic because of varying costs involved as well as the challenge of scheduling numerous individual appointments.

“Our goal was to have the feel of a class,” she said. “Not only do you have the connection with the teacher, but also with other students: It’s a shared experience you can enjoy together — you can follow up with someone else in the class, like ‘How do you play that phrase?’ or ‘Do you want to try it together?’ and through which you can build relationships.”

Still, going to Zoom was not a decision made lightly, noted Lynch: Some teachers and students were unused to the format, and patience was required to work through the differences in audio and visual quality among the computers in use. Some classes simply couldn’t be converted for Zoom, such as beginning-level flute, which typically requires detailed instruction and assistance to help students master embouchure for the instrument.

Nonetheless, there was plenty of enthusiasm for giving Zoom classes a try – some of it originating from unexpected locales, Lynch said: While in the past the school has drawn students from far-flung areas in Eastern or Central Massachusetts, or even parts of Rhode Island and New Hampshire, its online incarnation attracted musicians in Connecticut and New York.

The school will be keeping a close watch on the Zoom classes while formulating plans for the spring session, said Lynch, who adds that the CCE leadership will seek to use a similar kind of outreach to the branch membership: “It’s been tough these past several months not being able to hold our regular events and programs; we want to keep everyone connected.”

While it’s too soon to tell one way or another, Lynch said there’s a possibility Zoom lessons could become a regular feature of the music school even after in-person classes resume.

“I’m a firm believer that the best method of teaching and learning music is live and in person,” she said. “I also believe that is the overwhelming preference of our teachers and students. But the pandemic has forced us all to look at things differently, and I’m sure we’ll do a lot of thinking and talking about what happens over the next few months.”

For more about the CCE Boston Music School, see bostonirishmusicschool.com.
You haven’t been to Northern Ireland? Well, it deserves a place on your bucket list

By Judy Enright
Special to Boston Irish

If you have traveled through Ireland but haven’t been to Northern Ireland, you are missing a lot. Your next trip should definitely include a tour up to the North, which is absolutely beautiful, with rugged mountains, picturesque harbors, fascinating tourist attractions, lively cities, and comfortable accommodations ranging from B&Bs to cottages, castles, and classic hotels.

Northern Ireland is part of the UK, so the currency there is pounds sterling rather than the euro. But, don’t fear – credit cards are accepted everywhere in case you should happen to get stuck without proper currency – and, of course, there are ATM machines there as well.

THE CITIES

Belfast, a major port on the River Lagan, is the largest city in Northern Ireland as well as that country’s capital. The city was known over the centuries for linen production, rope making, and tobacco processing. But Belfast is perhaps best known by this generation as the home of the Harland and Wolff shipyard where RMS Titanic was built.

The city is served by two airports and today is a magnet for tourists largely because of Titanic Belfast, an attraction that opened in 2012 and has since won numerous awards and annually drawn as many as 800,000 visitors. The exhibit, a series of galleries, function rooms, and facilities on its six stories with 130,000 square feet of floor space, tells the story of the Titanic that hit an iceberg and sank in 1912 during its maiden voyage. Also highlighted there are the Titanic’s sister ships, RMS Olympic and HMHS Britannic.

As with all exhibits and attractions in this age of Covid, be sure to check before visiting since many are closed by order of the government – and that goes for attractions in Northern Ireland as well as the Republic.

And, if you plan to visit this exhibit when it’s safe to do so, plan to go first thing in the morning if you can. Titanic Belfast is so popular that by noon the day we went, people were six deep in front of wall plaques with photos and information about the history of the city and shipbuilding. It was not easy to get the full Titanic experience because of the crowds.

LONDONDERRY

Some call the second largest city in Northern Ireland by its official name of Londonderry while others refer to it as Derry. We read that this old walled city was granted a royal charter by King James I and gained the “London” prefix to reflect the funding of its construction by London’s guilds.

The city straddles the banks of the River Foyle and is accessed by two road bridges and a footbridge. The district is administered by Derry City and Strabane District Council and includes the Londonderry Port (now known as FoylePort) and the regional City of Derry airport.

Because the city is close to the Co. Donegal border, the two would leave food for us on the porch.”

O’Donovan will be eager as anyone to get back to a live “Christmas Celtic Sojourn,” but the experience of creating a virtual version has been a revelation. “The pandemic has forced us to make decisions we wouldn’t have otherwise, and, of course, some of these were unfortunate – not being able to tour and present the show in our partner venues. But lemonade from lemons: The technology we used gave us great opportunities for collaborations, enabling us to bring in people who could never have been able to participate otherwise, and we were able to move in new directions to create art.

“I really see us incorporating the lessons learned this year in future ‘Christmas Celtic Sojourns’ – which we hope and trust will be back on stage.”

The “A Christmas Celtic Sojourn” website, christmass-celtic.com, contains links to this year’s performers. It also includes the “A Christmas Miscellany” section, which invites viewers to become patrons for the show; those who do will have access to exclusive show-related video and audio content, and even holiday-related recipes and crafts.
The SSgt. Joseph W. Beard case file: His family and the US Army connect

The following letter is in response to two articles published recently by the Dorchester Reporter (Sept. 9, Oct. 15) about the missing remains of US Army Staff Sgt. Joseph W. Beard, a native of Dorchester who died in the Philippines in the early days of US involvement in World War II after he was taken off the Bataan “Death March” and brought back to a captured US fort in Manila where he died in June 1942.

To: Tom Mulvoy
I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to thank you for writing your article, “Have they found Sgt. Joseph W. Beard?” in the Sept. 9 Dorchester Reporter. I am SSG Beard’s great nephew and I grew up in Hyde Park, MA. I came upon the article seemingly by chance and frankly was awestruck when I read it. As I am Joseph W. Beard (Joseph W’s nephew), grew up on Everdeen Street in Dorchester; he died last February. While he was sick, he gave me SSG Beard’s Purple Heart Medal to keep safe along with a Memorial book, dedicated in memory of my Great Uncle.

When I showed your article to my brother Tom, he sent me a text back saying that it was my father taking care of unfinished business upstairs. My uncle, Phil Beard, remarkably sent along the same text to me after I sent your article to him. Needless to say, every time I think of those texts and my father, I want to cry.

Finding your article, started a flurry of conversation and activity across FamilySearch, the Sept. 9 Dorchester Reporter, my Aunt Lauren and my Uncles Mike and Phil, along with countless cousins and friends, were connecting again over this story. The fact that an 80-year-old tragedy/mystery could someday be solved is really an amazing thing. We are a family of veterans from Boston, and I thought that someday one of our lost could come home after all of these years is extremely overwhelming and joyful.

Since I read your article, some activity has taken place. I reached out directly to SFC Sean Everette at Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency Public Affairs Office (this lead came from your article!!!!). SFC Everette put me in touch with some other folks at the agency who deal with the cases directly. Yesterday, I spoke for a second time with a wonderful and kind member of the organization. She sent me a copy of SSG Beard’s MIA file, which included copies of a handwritten letter from my great grandmother; likely this is something no one outside of the federal government has ever seen.

I have registered with the agency to give a DNA sample, and additional samples will now be given by other family members in the coming weeks and months. The hope is that someday in the future, likely years from now, this old tragedy/mystery could someday be resolved.

Certifiable figures concerning the Japanese march of American and Filipino POWS on Bataan in April 1942 are hard to come by, as is extensive photographic evidence. Consensus estimates are that of the 75,000 or so POWS forced to traverse the 65-mile route, about 54,000 survived. This Associated Press photo by way of the US Marine Corps was reportedly stolen from the Japanese during their three years of occupation of the Philippines during World War II.

To get this recording done?’” says Tracy. “And he said, ‘We need a deadline.’ So we worked backwards from that, and things fell into place.”

Although unable to perform in public the last several months due to COVID restrictions, Tracy and Murphy have done some livestream concerts via Facebook or other platforms, and while these were “initially daunting,” says Tracy, she and Murphy felt it important to make the effort.

“People need their community, whether it’s folk music or contra dance or something else. And part of the livestream experience is connecting with that community, so we all know we’re hanging in there.”

Meanwhile, Tracy is enthusiastic about a musical partnership of hers, Eloise & Co., she formed a few years ago with accordionist Rachel Bell that sometimes includes guest guitarists such as one-time Boston-area resident Bethany Waickman. Bell recently moved to Brattleboro, although the relocation coincided with the pandemic, but the two have been able to get together occasionally as an “outside pod,” explains Tracy: rehearsing on porches, farms – even in a graveyard.

“It’s been fun working up the material,” she says. “Rachel has a big fondness for French folk music, so this is a new trajectory. Hopefully, things will get back to some degree of normal, and we’ll see where it goes.”

For more about Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy’s music, see blackislemusic.com.

For Becky Tracy and Keith Murphy, their album ‘Golden’ comes nicely wrapped in a silver lining

(Continued from page 16)

Nightingale and now

At some point, Tracy came to realize that music occupied an increasingly larger chunk of her life. “It got to where I felt I couldn’t teach and play music in the way that I wanted to, for either thing.” So she gave up teaching, moved back to Connecticut, and became a full-time musician. This led to a period “where I would play with anyone at just about any distance from me,” she says, and it was during this phase where she first met Murphy, a native of Newfoundland, which had its own thriving folk music and dance scene, and his sophisticated and folk music concert scene – their sophisticated sound worked equally well in either one (for that matter, you could go to one of their contra dances and be perfectly happy just sitting there listening). But other too-good-to-pass-up musical opportunities kept coming along for the trio’s members.

“It wasn’t that we didn’t want to keep going,” says Tracy, who in 2001 released an album, “Evergreen,” with support from Murphy, McLane, and other frequent collaborators. “But we had more and more difficulty creating time for Nightingale. When you can’t meet the standards you set for yourself – and ours were high – you really have to decide whether it might be best to move on.”

As Tracy and Murphy were to find out, their songs they’d put together. As Tracy and Murphy were to find out, their songs they’d put together.

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“Athenry: An odyssey of sacrifice, survival, and love,” by Cathal Dunne was inspired by one of Ireland’s best-known folk songs, The Fields of Athenry. In this novel, besides the husband and wife relationship, ‘love’ also refers to family, friends, and culture. ‘Survival’ refers to several things: famine, oppression, extreme injustice, imprisonment, long, dangerous voyages, and more.

Desperate Irishmen were torn apart from their families, some, because they stole their landlord’s food trying to feed their starving families, and sentenced to the British penal colonies in Australia. The main character in this novel, Liam O’Donoghue, is determined to escape his fate. To say much more, he still had to survive, somehow, during the worst years of the Great Hunger. Dunne’s characters become stronger and smarter, and despite oppression, even more compassionate as they begin to see more shared humanity.

This novel has believable characters, conflicts and plots, and the characters can be recognized as human with real obstacles to overcome. Dunne went beyond the standard novel formula of classic good vs. evil, hero and villain; even his villains have surprising complexity.

The book is a reminder that our common humanity and needs as humans should be more important than our differences, and that all people deserve fair justice, compassion, and opportunities.

From a review by Cecelia Fabos-Beckner. “Athenry” is available on Amazon/Kindle for $8.99.

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In the city's Chinatown, I encountered ethnic and racial diversity for the first time. Similarly, I had never seen gay people holding hands before or looked in on distinctly gay bars. At the cinema, I saw movies like Clockwork Orange that were banned in Ireland.

Emboldened by that Dutch foray, in summer 1975, I traveled to a small island in a Norwegian fjord.

On Halsnøy, I worked and lived with a farm family, good, kind people. Twice a day, I milked their cows, yep, back to another barn. I also rotated the fenc ing around the animals to allow new grass to grow for them and helped with basic chores.

Although I came from a then-rural Ireland, I was a city boy and, while there was too much for them and helped with basic chores.

Thankfully, farmer Jan patiently explained that impure milk sold for less and my approach had to be efficiently clean to ensure quality product and top Krones.

Respecting the cows' space and being soothingly calm to them was key to my improved milking skills. When I discovered that a little light music helped the cause, I played soft classical in the background and the rapport between boy and beasts improved immensely as did the milk quality.

Unlike Amsterdam, where I had my friends, I was solo in Norway and my ten weeks there were more centered around the family’s routine. They even trusted me to keep things ticking when they visited London.

If they went out fishing or visited their holiday cabin, they included me. Through their children, I picked up some Norwegian – basic words and commands but they were multilingual, speaking English to me and German to tourists not to mention having a grasp of Danish and Swedish.

The thing about the fjords is that they are stunning, and, in summer, the days are spectacularly long, bright, and clear. Farm work means constant lifting and movement. I was in rude good health, and after the day’s chores, I flopped into bed contentedly exhausted.

Being outdoors in great weather and having time to sort myself out, especially about my university studies, proved to be a needed tonic, an affirmation of self, not that I understood it in those terms at the time.

In two unknown situations abroad, I didn’t buckle or falter, I held my own. I didn’t know then, but four years away, a bigger unknown awaited me—America.

From Dublin, Martin McGovern lives in Mashpee and is the director of communications at Stonehill College in Easton. An earlier version of this piece appeared last August in the Southport Village Voices newsletter.
**Boston Irish Around Boston Town**

**JFK to step out from behind the trees on the State House lawn**

By Sam Doran

State House News Service

The bronze statue of President John Kennedy on a little-used corner of the State House lawn will soon take a stroll back into the limelight.

Portrayed in mid-stride with one hand at his jacket pocket, Kennedy has stood since 1990 on the plaza in front of the State House’s West Wing entrance. But that entrance was closed after the 2001 terrorist attacks, and with the gate locked and trees branching out along the walkway, passing tourists who might hope to see some memento of Camelot have been moving along Beacon Street without being able to glimpse the 35th president.

The agency that administers state office buildings is now preparing to move the Kennedy statue closer to the street, to the lawn on the left of a disused entrance gate, according to a spokesman.

Former state Rep. James Brett, currently president and CEO of The New England Council, served on the 1985-1990 special commission to build the memorial and applauded the recent decision to return it to public view.

Brett has heard from visitors who want to seek out the statue. “And I’d have to tell them where it was but they wouldn’t be able to locate it, and if they did, it was so far in the back there that they really couldn’t get a picture or anything of it,” he said.

In recent years, a park ranger has sometimes been stationed nearby to offer limited viewing hours, but tourists must navigate the confusing network of corridors under the Golden Dome to locate the right door. Since the State House was closed to the public in March 2020, access has been totally cut off.

Moving Kennedy is part of a broader project on the plaza in front of the State House’s West Wing that involves a “waterproofing system” including new drainage systems, storm drain repairs, and manhole replacements, according to an Executive Office of Administration and Finance spokesman.

Work started in September and will also involve removal and reinstallation of soil and irrigation systems, pavers, balustrades, and granite steps.

A replica of the Liberty Bell will also get a new home.

The 2,080-pound bell is currently on the portico at the top of the front steps, where it is likewise inaccessible to the public. A new location hasn’t been finalized, but possibilities include Ashburton Park or the interior of the State House. The bell was originally displayed in Doric Hall.

As for the replica of John Kennedy, there is significance to seeing the president cast in bronze on the side of Beacon Street. Former Boston Herald columnist Peter Lucas, who attended the statue’s original unveiling, told the News Service this week that it’s appropriate for Kennedy to be depicted on a site just around the corner from the Bowdoin Street apartment where he established district residency before running for Congress in 1946.

Lucas penned several Herald columns in the 1980s and ’90s about the quest for a Kennedy memorial. Ahead of the 1990 unveiling, he wrote that it took 27 years and “several commissions” to finally get one built.

The panel that commissioned the memorial used private funds in what Brett called a “grassroots campaign” and an “example of a project that didn’t cost anything of taxpayers’ money.” Brett recalled that Don Dowd of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company had the idea to engage children across Massachusetts in collecting pennies and nickels for the cause.

“It’s a beautiful statue. But it was always hidden.

And I understand the security concerns after 9/11, but in some respects it was sort of a waste because it’s a beauty, a nice addition and attraction to the State House. So moving it makes an awful lot of sense and hopefully people on the Freedom Trail or going by the State House will be able to see it,” Brett said.

The bronze statue was collection on the State House grounds – including U.S. Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge, US Secretary of State Daniel Webster, and Quaker martyr Mary Dyer – is regularly washed and waxed by a conservator.

During routine maintenance in September, the conservator treated Kennedy with an extra coat of wax to protect the bronze when it is moved, said State House art curator Susan Green dyke Lachevre, who noted that the sculptor, Isabel McIlvain, designed the eight-foot-tall figure to stand on a low pedestal.

“...It will almost look like he’s walking on the lawn.”

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In Ireland, it is traditional to place a candle in the window at Christmas time to light the way for travelers.