

# Boston Irish

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## BOSTON IRISH HONORS LUNCHEON

# A time to celebrate our abiding heritage

By MAUREEN FORRY-SORRELL

*Boston Irish Associate Publisher Maureen Forry-Sorrell made the following remarks made at the 13th annual Boston Irish Honors luncheon on Oct. 27.*

Good afternoon friends and thank you for joining us today. I hope you all enjoyed your meals. It is truly an honor to be in the presence of so many who share a deep connection to the Emerald Isle, whether through heritage, love for Irish arts, or an appreciation for the enduring spirit of the Irish people. In this vibrant city of Boston, the Irish heritage has not only survived but also thrived. Our shared history, traditions, and the enduring sense of community are the reasons why we come together today. Before we proceed any further, I would like to take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to the incredible musicians who have graced us with their exceptional talents today. The music we have heard, the melodies that have filled this space, are a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Ireland



**Aoife Griffin won two Delta Airline tickets to Dublin at the Oct 27 Boston Irish Honors luncheon. She is pictured with Delta's Charle Schewe and Maureen Forry-Sorrell of Boston Irish Magazine. More photos, Pages 11 and 12.**

that has been passed down through generations, and it's one that these musicians have shared with us so generously. Please join me in giving these remarkable performers, Sean Smith and Cliodhna Field, a well-deserved round of applause.

Tourism Ireland's impact goes well beyond tourism. It fosters connections between

nations, promotes cultural exchange, and supports communities. It's a testament to the power of shared experiences, to the idea that by immersing ourselves in the wonders of another culture, we can better understand, appreciate, and connect with one another. My husband Aaron and I were delighted to bring our children, Nate and Lianna, to Ireland

last year. Lianna is a person with several disabilities. I was delighted to write about our travels as a disability family, which you can read on our website at Boston Irish Travelability. Traveling with a disabled child can indeed be a challenging and nerve-wracking experience, but the unwavering hospitality of the Irish people, combined with the information and support

provided by Tourism Ireland, made our trip an incredible adventure. It's not just the stunning sites and experiences that we remember but also the sense of belonging, the warmth of the people we encountered, and the feeling that Ireland had opened its arms to us. To Tourism Ireland - thank you for being a steadfast and treasured friend of Boston Irish!

And thanks to the generous support of Delta Airlines, we have the incredible opportunity today to give away two air tickets to Ireland. However, there's an important detail to remember: You must be present to win. So, make sure you stay with us until the very end, as we'll be drawing the lucky winners from among our enthusiastic attendees. This is a fantastic opportunity, and we extend our sincere appreciation to Delta Airlines for making this possible. So, stay tuned, and enjoy the rest of our program. Good luck to all and thank you for being here with us today."

## 'Who knows how tea will mingle with saltwater?'

### Recalling a Irish patriot's role in the Boston Tea Party

By PETER F. STEVENS  
BOSTON IRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Near 6 p.m. on Dec. 16, 1773, thousands of people spilled from Boston's Old South Meetinghouse into the frigid early evening air and onto rain-slicked cobblestones. At least 116 of them, likely many more, had draped themselves in blankets and darkened their faces with soot to disguise themselves as "Native Americans." They streamed to Griffin's Wharf, where three merchant ships - the Dartmouth, the Eleanor, and the Beaver - swayed and creaked at anchor, their holds bulging to the brim with 342 chests of East India Company tea.

As the crowd surged onto the wharf, the "Native Americans," armed with axes, hatchets, and braces of pistols, surged aboard the Dartmouth, smashed open the casks, and began dumping their contents into Boston Harbor. Notably, at least one of the raiders protesting the British Parliament's tax on tea hailed from Ireland.

Kilkenny born and raised Thomas White struck a blow against the Crown that night 250 years ago come Dec. 16, 2023. In the looming American Revolution, one would be hard-pressed to find a more fervent soldier in the cause of independence than the Irishman.

He was born on March 19, 1739, and at age 31 crossed the Atlantic to Philadelphia. A tailor by trade, he married Elizabeth Jones, who was 15 years younger than him. They moved to Boston shortly after their nuptials.

In their new city, White was caught up in the rising opposition to the Crown embodied by the Sons of Liberty. He was reputed to be a Freemason and member of St. Andrew's Lodge, a hotbed of rebels. He climbed aboard the three merchant ships during the fateful three or so hours of the Tea Party and helped heave

### BOSTON IRISH HISTORY

the 46 tons of tea into the harbor, cheered on by the thousands of onlookers clotting the dock.

White joined George Washington's Continental Army when the Revolution erupted in 1775 and fought in the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment until he was mustered out in 1781 or 1782 at the rebellion's end, having survived the dreadful winter encampment at Valley Forge and numerous battles against the British Army.

After the war, he and his family moved back to Pennsylvania, where he became a farmer in the rural town of Robertsdale. Three of his sons served in the War of 1812, one perishing on duty and another dying of dysentery after capture by the British. Thomas and Elizabeth had 21 children, with several of them perishing at an early age.

White died on September 13, 1820, at the age of 81 and was buried at Evans Cemetery, in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. Elizabeth lived nearly 25 years longer.

On the 4th of July 1899, a monument was dedicated at his gravesite in front of a throng gathered to honor the Kilkenny soldier, an event-poster inviting attendees to "do honor to the memory of the brave and patriotic hero of the Boston Tea Party and Revolutionary fame." The "Thomas White Historical Association" placed a highway marker near the cemetery in 1973, the 200th anniversary of the Tea Party.

White's native home, Kilkenny, commemorated him at the historic Rothe House and Garden in September 2023 as local dignitaries planted a white rose bush in his honor and dedicated a plaque. Wearing Colonial garb, Josiah George, assistant creative director of the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum, played the role of the honoree.

On December 16 of this year, taking a moment to remember the Kilkenny man who dumped tea into Boston Harbor and fought valiantly in the cause of



**Nathaniel Currier, print depicting the Boston Tea Party (1846).**  
*Wikimedia Commons*

American Independence would be fitting on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Mary C. Forry, President (1983-2004)  
Edward W. Forry, Publisher  
Maureen Forry-Sorrell, Associate Publisher  
William P. Forry, Editor  
Thomas F. Mulvoy Jr., Managing Editor  
Jack Conboy, Sales Manager  
News Room: (617) 436-1222  
Ads: (617) 436-1222  
Fax: (617) 825-5516 news@bostonirish.com

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# History struts its stuff along the Liffey

**Ormond Quay, Dublin** – We live off Ormond Quay on Dublin’s Northside and it occurred to me recently that I did not know who this Ormond was. History is written in the place names around Dublin. Just as Boston renamed King and Queen Streets to State and Congress after the American Revolution, Dublin has changed the names of streets, bridges, and quays to reflect the changing tides of history. Between the Four Courts and the Custom House, the River Liffey is traversed by several stately and renamed bridges. Ormond Bridge became O’Donovan Rossa for the Fenian leader in 1923. The Essex Bridge became the Grattan, for Irish Patriot Henry Grattan in 1875, and the Carlisle Bridge became the O’Connell for the Great Liberator in 1882. Many Irish people still consider Dublin an English city, a world apart from the Ireland of their farms, townlands, parishes, and market towns of their homeplaces. The process of Ireland taking full possession of their capital city is ongoing.

The view of buildings along the quays is one of Dublin’s trademark images, the public face of the city. During the rare moments when the wind is calm and the tidal river’s waters are as still as glass, the reflection of the buildings and sky is magical, as if there is a duplicate city under the water. For this view, we have the Duke of Ormond to thank.

So, who was he? Born in London 1610 as James FitzThomas Butler, he was heir to the earldom of the Catholic Butler Anglo-Irish dynasty. The Butlers are a Norman family and were part of the 12th century English conquest of Ireland. His father died in a shipwreck when James was just 9 years old, and with his Catholic father’s property under sequestration and his grandfather in prison, Butler was placed under the care of the Archbishop of Canterbury to be raised as a Protestant. When his grandfather was released from prison, Butler went to live with him, but the grandfather did not interfere with his Protestant upbringing. Butler married his cousin Elizabeth, who was also a rare Protestant from the Catholic Desmond dynasty of Munster. The marriage of Protestants united these dynasties’ lands and titles. In Ireland, even now, it’s “all about the land.” James inherited the title of Earl at his grandfather’s death in 1634.

The Lord Deputy of Ireland at the time was Thomas Wentworth, who befriended Ormond and made him commander of royal forces in Ireland. With Ormond’s help, Wentworth implemented a policy of large-scale confiscation of the lands and property of the Catholic gentry, including Ormond’s cousins and in-laws. In 1641 Wentworth was accused of treason by the Parliament and was recalled to London. He was initially acquitted of Parliament’s charges but after more skullduggery, he was beheaded at the order of a reluctant King Charles I. Sensing the oncoming chaos in England, the Irish Catholic Confederation launched a broad rebellion in 1641 at the news of Wentworth’s execution. As commander



Looking over the River Liffey at Ormond Quay in Dublin.

of English forces in Ireland, Ormond drove the Confederates from the Pale around Dublin and Drogheda, but by 1645, the Confederation held two thirds of the Island and had established its own government in Kilkenny.

Meanwhile in England, the civil wars had broken out in 1642 between the Royalists loyal to Catholic King Charles I and the Parliamentarians ultimately led by the Puritan Oliver Cromwell. In Ireland, Ormond negotiated a ceasefire between the Confederates and his Royalist forces. When the war in England turned in favor of the Parliamentarians, Ormond surrendered Dublin to Parliamentarian troops in 1647, and retreated west. In 1649, Charles was executed by Cromwell, who immediately turned his attention to the reconquest and punishment of Ireland. After the king’s execution, and in the expectation that Cromwell would come to Ireland, Ormond transitioned the ceasefire to an alliance between his English Royalist forces and the Irish Catholic Confederation, his former adversaries, family members, and in-laws. Cromwell landed in Dublin in 1649. When Ormond was routed at Rathmines in his attempt to capture Dublin, his English Protestant Royalist troops mutinied and joined the Cromwellians, and his Catholic Confederation soldiers, who did not trust him, ousted him as leader. In 1650 he fled to France.

The English Civil War (s) are complicated, filled with palace intrigue, most of which we will skip. The big picture is that the war resulted in the deaths of 3.7 percent of the population of England and 6 percent of the population of Scotland, totaling approximately 80,000 dead in Britain, an enormous loss of life.

The death toll in Ireland was dramatically worse. At least 41 percent of the native Irish population (618,000 of the

estimated 1.5 million total inhabitants) were killed by Cromwell’s armies (in battle, mass executions, by starvation and disease). Food supplies were destroyed, water befouled. The war sparked a famine that was worsened by an outbreak of bubonic plague. In addition to those killed, Cromwell shipped tens of thousands of Irish to Barbados as slaves. The exact number is debated but 50,000 is the accepted modern estimate. Most other survivors were driven into reservations “west of Shannon” in the poorest land of Connacht while Protestant settlers from Britain arrived in the east. Today, 365 years after his death, Cromwell remains the most reviled man in Irish history and his threat “To Hell or Connacht!” survives in collective memory. By modern standards, the punishment of civilians for the 1641 Irish rebellion by massacres, starvation, disease, and enslavement would be classified as ethnic cleansing at a minimum. Academics still debate whether Cromwell’s actions were a genocide.

The criteria for what constitutes genocide were established by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, an international treaty that criminalizes genocide and obligates state parties to enforce its prohibition. It was the first legal instrument to codify genocide as a crime, and the first human rights treaty unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The Convention defines genocide as any of five “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” These five acts were: killing members of the group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group, preventing births, and forcibly

transferring children out of the group. Cromwell’s vengeful destruction of the Irish people fits all or most of the criteria for genocide and his motto, “Peace Through War,” is eerily similar to that of some leaders today.

Boston played a minor role in Cromwell’s 12 years of Puritan rule. During his reign, as many as half the graduating classes per year from Harvard College traveled to England to fight on Cromwell’s side or to serve in his ‘Protectorate.’ The Puritans’ virulent anti-Catholicism was a harbinger of what sort of welcome the “famine Irish” would receive when they arrived in great numbers in Boston two centuries later.

• • •

Getting back to the view of the Liffey, James Butler, now the Earl of Ormond but stripped of property by Cromwell and flat broke, had fled to Paris where he passed his exile in the constant company of Charles II, the king in waiting. Back in England, Cromwell had died of typhoid in 1658. His son Richard proved an unworthy successor, so Parliament installed Charles II to the throne in the Stuart Restoration of 1660. In 1661, Charles II had Cromwell’s body exhumed for posthumous execution on the same day that Cromwell had executed his father, Charles I in 1649. Cromwell’s corpse was hanged, beheaded, drawn, and quartered. His severed head was mounted on a pike at Westminster Abbey where it remained until 1685 when a storm blew it to the ground. A guard took it home as a souvenir, hiding the skull in his chimney. It passed into the possession of several individual collectors until it was finally buried secretly by his descendants in 1960 in a plot at his Cambridge College.

King Charles II elevated Butler to the Irish peerage as the Duke of Ormond for



his loyal service as a failed commander, reliable companion, and sometime spy. Ormond was penniless but because he was a Protestant, his Irish property was restored, and he was able to expand his holdings and rents from the surviving Catholic Irish.

The Duke’s decade in Paris strolling along the Seine River made a big impression on him. He admired the elegant buildings that face the Seine, the arched bridges that cross it, and the quays that line it. At the time, Dublin buildings built along the river turned their back on the Liffey whose marshy banks and docks were used for loading and unloading ships and as a dumping ground. Ormond used his restored power and influence to reorient development of buildings in Dublin to face the river and to develop the quays and wide bridges that cross the river in the Dublin we know today. Ormond Quay still bears his name and learning the history behind the name puts current events into perspective.

Ireland’s fortunes have changed dramatically especially in the last one hundred years. Born of unspeakable tragedies, Ireland’s large and powerful diaspora in the US has exerted economic and political power on Ireland’s behalf time and again. Other peoples and cultures around the world are not so lucky. There are no Palestinian Tip O’Neills, Ted Kennedys, or Joe Bidens using American influence to address injustice in their ancestral homeland.

Israel and Palestine

The current crisis in the Middle ast continues to dominate Irish politics. The reasons run deep. In the eyes of the Pal- estinian civilians incarcerated in Gaza under bombardment, deprived of food and water, the Irish see their ancestors who were victims of Cromwell and An Gorta Mor. Images of military intimidat- ion and humiliation at checkpoints in the West Bank trigger living memories of the North of Ireland when Catholics were burned out of their homes and deprived of political representation. The Irish identify viscerally with those who have been dispossessed, denigrated, killed, and left to starve. The frustration that thousands of Irish protesters on the streets of Dublin express, week after week, is an emotion beyond anger; it is an anguished, wretched disbelief: don’t you see what we see?

Ireland has no military power, but it



The most reviled man in Irish history

This statue of Oliver Cromwell stands outside the House of Commons in London, where recently it has been targeted by some for removal to another place. The English Civil War period was chaotic and rife with death and intrigue, and the death count in Ireland by Cromwell’s armies – by mass executions and starvation and disease has been out at 41 percent of the native Irish population, or some 618,000 of the estimated 1.5 million total inhabitants. In addition to those killed, Cromwell shipped tens of thousands of Irish to Barbados as slaves. Today, 365 years after his death, Cromwell remains the most reviled man in Irish history and his threat “To

Hell or Connacht!” survives in collective memory as academics still debate whether his actions constituted a genocide.

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Boston played a minor role in Cromwell’s 12 years of Puritan rule over England in the mid-17th century. During his reign, as many as half the graduating classes per year from Harvard College traveled to England to fight on Cromwell’s side or to serve in his ‘Protectorate.’ The Puritans’ virulent anti-Catholicism was a harbinger of what sort of welcome the “famine Irish” would receive when they arrived in great numbers in Boston two centuries later.

does have hard-earned moral authority, a cultural temerity to speak the truth and a history of supporting struggles for justice, in South Africa, South America, the United States, and elsewhere. Irish President Michael D. Higgins called for a ceasefire after the Hamas attacks, initial Israeli bombing, and the public threat by Israeli generals to cut off food, water, and fuel to Gaza. The Israeli ambassador accused the Irish President

of “repeating misinformation,” an extraordinary accusation to level at a sitting head of state. Irish leaders across the political spectrum abhor the Hamas attack. They also condemn the ongoing siege of Gaza as collective punishment. Even the conservative Taoiseach Varadkar has called the ongoing assault “revenge.” An Israeli cabinet member of an ultra-rightwing party in Israel was quoted by the *Times of Israel* as saying

that the Palestinian people “can go to Ireland or deserts,” adding that those who wave a Palestinian flag “shouldn’t continue living on the face of the earth.” The phrase “To Ireland or deserts” sounds to Irish ears like “To Hell or Connacht.” The Palestinian flags flying during large peace marches in Dublin these days are proof that the Irish will not be intimidated.



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# Ireland and the US: Poles apart on the Middle East

I previously ventured in this space that public attitudes toward and consequent government policy to combat climate change might represent the single biggest difference in the worldviews of Americans and Europeans. I withdraw that. For since the horrific exploits of a demonic band of Hamas terrorists against 1,400 Israeli men, women and children on Oct 7, it has become clear that how we perceive the age-old conflict between Israel and Palestine is where the greatest divergence lies.

And it is in Ireland – not in larger nations such as the United Kingdom or Germany – that anti-Israel and pro-Palestine sentiment is strongest. Albeit anecdotal, RTÉ journalist Paul Cunningham reported from Tel Aviv that numerous people he encountered, upon hearing that he was Irish, abruptly informed him: “You are not with us.”

Their suspicions are understandable, given that in the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7, and prior to any retaliation from Israel, leftist activists here voiced full-throated backing for the Palestinians and festooned their social media profiles with the Palestinian flag.

Notably for Irish Americans who are enamoured of Sinn Féin, many of its elected officials have done the voicing – regardless of the massive dissonance between their stance on this vexed subject and how it is seen in New York and in other traditional strongholds across the Atlantic for the former political wing of the IRA. Indeed, Sinn Féin endorsed a move to expel Israel’s Ambassador to Ireland, which did not garner a majority in Dáil Éireann (the lower house of Irish parliament).

A letter to the editor published in *The Irish Times* and signed by approximately 800 academics at Irish universities described what transpired on this occasion as follows: “The incursion by Palestinian armed groups on Oct. 7

included criminal attacks against civilians.” Speaking personally, I was disappointed that colleagues, plenty of whom I have the utmost respect for, could affix their names to a grotesquely understated portrayal of what was a barbaric slaughter of innocents.

The Irish government has condemned the Israeli response to Hamas’s massacre in language that would perhaps be associated with Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib and the relatively minuscule group of elected officials of her ilk stateside. Taoiseach [Prime Minister] Leo Varadkar has proffered that Israel’s attack on the Gaza Strip “isn’t just self-defence” and instead “resembles something more approaching revenge.” Minister Simon Harris has argued that Israel is a country “blinded by rage waging a war on children.”

It may be controversial to say it in the US, yet Varadkar and Harris are not wrong. By any objective measure, Israel’s reaction has been grossly disproportionate. Thousands more Palestinians have been killed than Israelis were on Oct. 7. Much of the physical infrastructure in a crowded territory has been razed to the ground, with no exceptions made for hospitals or educational institutions. Despite the increasingly vocal pleas of the international community, the scandal-plagued Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had allowed only minimal “humanitarian pauses” in the onslaught before recent ad hoc ceasefires were held.

President Joe Biden and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, though it is likely that the two men privately wish for an immediate halt to the fighting and killing, will not call upon America’s staunch ally to stop it altogether. Part of this is real politick; notwithstanding the oft-touted shift in the mindset of young people, who tend to be more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, the majority of the electorate still

instinctively favours Israel and recent polls reflect it.

The America Israel Political Action Committee continues to wield outsized influence on Capitol Hill. It plans to spend \$100 million to defeat Congresswoman Tlaib and her liberal colleagues in the “Squad.” Arab Americans are not as well organized. There has been slippage in their support for President Biden lately in the key state of Michigan. But the Democrats’ dispassionate wager on this front has to be that they are hardly going to defect to the GOP, which they deem blindly pro-Israel.

Since Oct. 7, I have been continually asked by friends here and back in Boston to explain why views are so diametrically opposed in the US and in Ireland. Without wanting to be simplistic, glib or quasi-historical, some of the reasons for the gulf in perspective are apparent. That is not to say they are entirely straightforward.

In the US, we are taught – explicitly and implicitly – that Israel is our friend, that we are inextricably linked to this stable democracy in an otherwise distressed region. Its citizenry and culture are akin to ours. They are extremely security-conscious because they have to be. They are surrounded by implacable foes who reject democracy, who are not like us and them, and who are prone to despising us and them and to sympathising with those culpable for lethal aggression against us and them.

In Ireland, even if it is not a wholly valid or meritorious comparison, there is a sense that, similar to the English occupying a substantial chunk of this island, the creation of the modern state of Israel in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust displaced very many. Ever since, a state actor has perpetuated discrimination and violence in order to maintain authority over a location that it lacks a legitimate claim to. That engendered armed resistance from the IRA and Hamas et al, but there

is no moral equivalence between the misdeeds they have committed out of desperation and what the vastly more wealthy and powerful state actors did or have done habitually to copper-fasten their control.

Of course, musings as to why this troubled spot in the Middle East divides opinion significantly in Ireland and America are decidedly secondary at the moment. The world collectively hopes and prays for an end to war and a path to peace, even as they seem implausible in the midst of devastating human suffering.

It would be good, however, if external observers who identify uncompromisingly with either protagonist would acknowledge that abundant fault can be found on both sides – and do so without attempting to prevaricate, contextualize or excuse.

...

On a lighter note, the visit of my brother, sister-in-law, and nephew has alleviated my annual November hankering to be in my native East Milton celebrating Thanksgiving with family and dear friends. As I write, we are enjoying the glorious sights and sounds of Wicklow, eagerly anticipating a weekend in the fabulous city of Edinburgh and gearing up for a special Thanksgiving 3,000 miles away with turkey, ham and all the fixings.

I highly recommend that Boston Irish readers with loved ones here imagine an Irish Thanksgiving. They would love to have you; they will spoil you with food, drink, and fun; it won’t cost you as many vacation days; and the flights are a lot cheaper than they are in August! Worth planning for 2024...?

*Larry Donnelly is a Boston born and educated attorney, a Law Lecturer at the University of Galway, and a regular media contributor on politics, law and current affairs in Ireland and the US. @LarryPDonnelly*

## Recalling Seamus Heaney: The Poet and His Legacy

On the first of November, the Charitable Irish Society of Boston and the Eire Society of Boston, with the help of funding by an Emigrant Support Programme grant from the Irish government, hosted an evening of remembrance of Seamus Heaney, whom both Irish American Societies had honored over the years.

The event at the Boston Harbor Hotel was warm and congenial in a manner that reflected the personality of the Nobel Prize-winning poet, friend, and colleague whom we were there to remember.

Guests came from all walks of life and included many academics who knew Heaney through their work as students and teachers.

The warmth emanated not just from the poems that guests were invited to share, but also from personal stories woven around the poems that guests recited. The stories about Seamus Heaney really brought out his generosity,



**Charitable Irish Society and Eire Society members gathered in November at Boston Harbor Hotel for a remembrance of the late Irish Nobel poet Seamus Heaney.**

*Charitable Irish Society photo*

goodness, and great sense of humor, and the stories were so enjoyable!

We were honored to have Consul General Sighle Fitzgerald among us and grateful to her for her poem reading

and remarks.

Chris Duggan, a former president of the Charitable Irish Society, was the master of ceremonies. The Here Comes Everybody Players, Cahal

Stephens, Donal O’Sullivan and Steve Dooner offered a dramatic reading from Seamus’s acclaimed translation from Old English of Beowulf, and Patrick Hutchinson, a uilleann piper, offered a lovely soundtrack to part of the evening, adding the special tone that only these pipes can.

Past presidents from both The Eire Society and The Charitable Irish Society Tom Carty, Catherine Shannon, and Margaret Flagg also did readings and shared thoughts.

Catherine read a letter of fond Boston memories from the poet’s wife Marie. Margaret related how the phrase “flaggy shore” in Heaney’s poem, “Postscript” gives a nod to Margaret and her husband Jeff’s home on Cape Cod. Tom Carty drew tears from some, closing the evening with Heaney’s autobiographical “Digging.”

*Submitted by Kathleen M. Williams, president of The Charitable Irish Society.*



# UPDATES FROM THE PASTORAL CENTRE



## A Christmas Message from the IPC:

In this season of giving, our thoughts turn gracefully to you with warm appreciation. Your support inspires us and is the cornerstone of our mission to:

**"Welcome the Stranger Among Us"**

*May you be blessed with the spirit of Christmas,  
which is peace,  
The gladness of Christmas,  
which is hope,  
And the heart of Christmas,  
which is love.*



The IPC will be closed:

Mon December 25th

Tues December 26th

Mon January 1st



## IPC ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT

A huge thank you to all of our sponsors, donors, volunteers and players who all contributed to the success of this year's Irish Community Golf Classic in memory of IPC friend and volunteer Jimmy Wall.



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ANSEO LE CHÉILE -  
HERE TOGETHER

A large, stylized illustration of a gift card with a white ribbon bow.

### Leaving No One Behind at Christmas

The IPC is launching a Christmas Groceries Gift Card Fund to support those amongst us who are most in need.

If you can help by donating, or if you know of a family or someone in need, please call the IPC at (617) 265-5300 or email Fr. Dan at [danfinn@ipcboston.org](mailto:danfinn@ipcboston.org).

Please know that requests will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

GIFT CARD

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A vertical illustration of a Christmas tree decorated with lights and ornaments.

### Nollaig Shona agus Achóhlain faoi Mhaise Daoibh.

In this season of giving, our thoughts turn gracefully to you with warm appreciation.

Your support inspires us and is the cornerstone of our mission to "welcome the stranger among us"

Go raibh Maith agat

May you be blessed with the spirit of Christmas,  
which is peace,  
The gladness of Christmas,  
which is hope,  
And the heart of Christmas,  
which is love.

## IPC CHRISTMAS CRAFTS FAIR



Congratulations to the Bumble Bee Knitting Club for the Christmas Craft Fair on Saturday December 2nd. There was a fantastic crowd that brought festive cheer, quality crafts and exciting raffles! Special thanks to IPC Board Member Della Costello.



# BRIAN O'DONOVAN: AN APPRECIATION

By SEAN SMITH

BOSTONIRISH CONTRIBUTOR

The tributes have been constant and numerous since Brian O'Donovan died in October, as well they should be. He did so much to make Boston a fertile environment for folk and acoustic music, Irish/Celtic in particular, through his WGBH "Celtic Sojourn" radio show – and the stage productions it inspired – as well as the various festivals and concerts he organized or co-organized over the years.

Appropriately, the slate of high-quality, well-loved and equally well-attended slate of concerts that he put together and emceed for so many years at the Burren Backroom will now live on as the Brian O'Donovan Legacy Series.

Brian's resume need not be cited here. Suffice it to say, he was one of the more ubiquitous figures in the city's arts and culture scene, and in our collective mind's eye we will always see him holding forth on a stage, somewhere, looking dapper in a tasteful blazer or a comfy, festive sweater, as was the case for "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn."

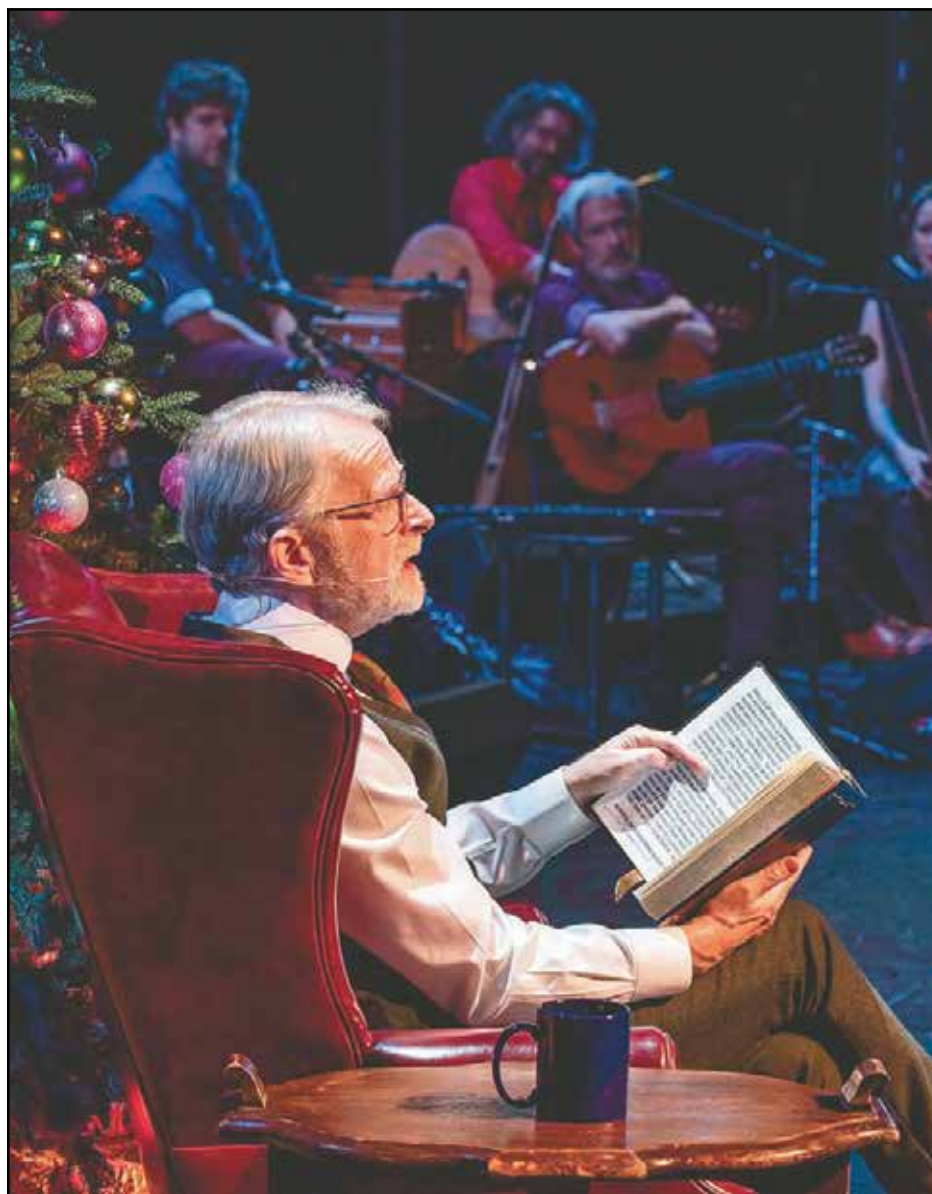
But I also see Brian in a Sullivan Stadium windbreaker with matching utility belt and walkie-talkie.

I was fortunate enough not just to know Brian but to experience him in a variety of milieus. He was a friend, a neighbor, a fellow school community parent. We sang together. I interviewed him, he interviewed me. I worked with him, and worked for him, formally and informally. In fact, once I even drove two of his family members through a nasty ice storm – with only one working windshield wiper – from the Boston Theater District to Newton. If that's not love, I don't know what is.

My relationship with Brian was hardly unique. Many people got to see these different sides to him, and there were ample opportunities to do so, because that's who he was. Yes, he had a private life, a family life, but he was constantly willing to widen the circle to include others.

I may have run into Brian during my initial sojourn in Boston (I arrived in 1981, about a year after him), but I honestly don't remember. Instead, my first impression came – as it did for a lot of us – via the airwaves, after I'd moved to Worcester for what would be a two-year stint at my first job. His show on WERS was a must-listen event, broadening and enriching my familiarity with Celtic music and helping inspire my own musical activities, which led to my first encounter with Brian.

In 1984, Brian booked my trio to play at the first of three annual festivals he ran at Sullivan Stadium. We understood that we were not a "featured" act, which was fine with us. We were perfectly happy just getting the gig, and being part of an event that included The Chieftains, the Tannahill Weavers, Stockton's Wing, and Seamus Connolly, among many others. So, early on the appointed day, we trekked to Foxborough, made our way into the stadium and found Brian's command post, where he warmly greeted us (I



Brian O'Donovan in performance at a "Christmas Celtic Sojourn" event.

vaguely remember thinking "Gee, he's not as tall as I imagined, but he looks my age").

Brian spelled out what he wanted us to do: Move around to different areas of the festival, away from the main stages, find a good spot where people are going by, hang out and play for a while, take a little break, then find someplace else. And after we kept it up for a few hours, we were welcome to stay and take in the rest of the performances (nota bene, we also got paid). It was a pretty hot day, but we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

This "strolling minstrels" concept was a staple of many of the festivals and large-scale events Brian was involved with and, I feel, goes to a key facet of his philosophy as a promoter and organizer. Putting performers on a stage was all very well and good, but Brian also wanted the audience to experience the music and dance intimately, spontaneously, with as little distance or implied barriers as possible. And it was equally an invitation to the musicians and dancers to engage with the audience in a direct, up-close-and-personal manner.

Similarly, Brian could wax enthusiastically about modern, even avant-garde explorations of Celtic music – those blending rock, jazz or classical, for instance, or music of other ethnic cultures – but he was steadfast in his admiration for the immediacy

of "pure-drop trad," played on a solo instrument or sung unaccompanied as it had been for generations. And then he could turn around and channel the more sentimental, even schmaltzy side of Irish music, bursting into "A Mother's Love Is a Blessing" without any hint of irony or scorn.

He loved it all.

Seven years after that festival, during which time I had gotten married and had kids, my family and I moved to Newton, and were pleased to discover the O'Donovans lived a few blocks away from us. Now, for me, Brian was not simply a fellow Celtic music enthusiast but also a fellow parent and local resident. Our conversations weren't just about music anymore, but what we liked (or didn't) about our children's school, as well as the local playgrounds and parks and other features of our neighborhood.

One of the highlights of this period was when Brian emceed a benefit concert I co-organized to help send my older daughter's high school-age folk dance group to a festival in England. Besides my daughter, Brian knew a lot of the kids through Revels and other local folk music and dance activities, so he was for all intents and purposes a member of the group's extended family. Of course he was the perfect choice to emcee, and of course he was at his best: giving the audience an orientation in

the particular style of dance with brief overviews and an on-stage interview or two, and delivering his trademark introductions – he described one of the group's performance teams as "the New England Patriots of rapper-sword dance" (which, yes, was a compliment back then).

For a few years, I had the chance to do some behind-the-scenes work with Brian on what would eventually be called the ICONS Festival. Here, again, was another window on Brian, as the head of an enormous enterprise that involved several dozen people across multiple areas of administration, planning and operations.

We would gather at regular meetings, where Brian asked representatives from various working groups to give updates; he believed it was important for us to have a holistic sense of the scale of the operation, and all the effort involved – from sanitation to promotions/marketing to food services. Brian would offer praise and encouragement so we all felt valued, while at the same time remind us of the challenges ahead. Once, Brian noted that an area media outlet was potentially interested in giving the festival some coverage, but it might be a tough sell: "What they're looking for is young, hot and sexy."

"Brian," chimed a voice from the back, "it can't always be about you, you know."

The entire room burst into laughter, Brian included.

There are many questions I would've liked to ask Brian, and one is this: When did you realize you were good at this kind of thing – at organizing, directing, marshaling, nudging people to buy into an idea (maybe not every time, but certainly a lot of the time)? Did you consider this a gift or a dubious personality trait? Would you have traded it for, say, a proficiency in gauging the stock market? Somehow, I think the answer to that last question would've been a deadpan "Not really," accompanied by the sly O'Donovan smile.

I also did a little volunteering for the early years of "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn," which of his many pursuits may have been the closest to his heart, reflecting his great respect for the centrality of music, dance and the sung or spoken word to home and hearth, and the importance of tradition, ritual and ceremony in our lives. As those who saw it know, the show had a real multigenerational character to it, from elementary school-age dancers to performers well into their golden years. And at the center was Brian, the guiding light and connective tissue.

Brian took great joy in the fact that many people considered "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn" a part of their holiday tradition. That was certainly the case for me, but there was an added dimension, a tradition within the tradition: Every year for well more than a decade, I did a "Christmas Celtic Sojourn" preview for Boston Irish Reporter/BostonIrish.com, which meant an interview with Brian, so he could talk about the featured performers and other aspects



of the show (a nice bit of symmetry because I was on the organizing committee for Boston Celtic Music Fest, and some years Brian would interview me about the festival on his radio show).

So, each mid-November, I would look forward to a conversation with Brian – by phone, sometimes in person – about the upcoming show. While the artists’ biographies were certainly useful in putting the story together, having Brian offer his personal insights on that musician or that singer was invaluable. And if the show involved traditions not typically associated with “Celtic” – Quebecois, Scandinavian, Sephardic – Brian was happy to explain how these fit into the show’s dynamic. Invariably, these interviews turned into conversations, not just about music but family and mutual friends and acquaintances.

Brian had shared the news of his illness publicly by the time of our “Celtic Sojourn” interview last fall. I asked him how he wanted to proceed: It seemed foolish to pretend that everything was normal, but I knew he didn’t want to make his situation the focus of the story. His response was characteristically Brian:

“We’re looking at someplace in the middle. This is our 20th anniversary; that is a big deal and something very much worth celebrating. But ‘A Christmas Celtic Sojourn’ is very much a family show, one that brings us together during a special time of year and allows us to think on our lives – the joys and pleasures, certainly, and also the challenges we face.”

He also praised the team behind “Sojourn,” saying they would “step up in whatever way is needed.”

“As for me,” he added, “I plan to be on stage similar to the way it’s always been – but with perhaps certain extra meaningfulness.”

With our interview nearing the end, I couldn’t help but wonder: Is this the last time I talk to Brian? I felt I had to say something to him that wouldn’t come off so obviously, and awkwardly, as a final farewell, yet would get across what I felt about our friendship. I was able to tell him – truthfully – that in the wake of some painful experiences of recent years, I’d been reflecting on relationships I valued and cherished, and ours was one of them. This sparked some brief reminiscences on both our parts, and shortly thereafter I said goodbye. This turned out not to be our last conversation, but I felt – and still feel – gratified to have had it.

To conclude, let me go back to Sullivan Stadium: It’s the fall of 1985, and I’m on assignment for my newspaper covering the Eastern Massachusetts high school football championships being held there. Feeling peckish, I go to the press box, where a luncheon spread for all the sportswriters awaits (one of the first things they teach you in journalism is to go where there’s free food). As I’m putting a sandwich together, I hear behind me, in a friendly Cork accent: “Hey, man! How ya doin’?”

I turn around, and there’s Brian, in the aforementioned Sullivan Stadium windbreaker with matching utility belt and walkie-talkie, and a big smile on his face.

I’m a bit surprised, and actually quite pleased, that he remembers me from the festival more than a year ago. But Brian has an astonishingly good memory for

people and faces, as I will come to find out about six years later, when he becomes my neighbor.

At that moment, we’re in a different context to one another: I either didn’t know, or had forgotten, that Brian worked for event management at the stadium, and I’m not sure if Brian knew I had a day job as a newspaper reporter.

Ultimately, of course, it really doesn’t matter how and why the two of us have come to be in the Sullivan Stadium press box that day. We greet each other warmly and spend a few minutes catching up, he goes on his rounds, while I finish my sandwich, grab my notebook and pen, and head back down to the field.

That vignette set the tone for our friendship. We’d go months, even years, without seeing one another (although there might be an email exchange at least), caught up in our own personal, familial or occupational pursuits. But when we did cross paths, by accident or design, it was as if we’d only sat down for a drink and a chat just the other day.

Multiply my experience by thousands – maybe tens of thousands – and you get a sense of the impact Brian O’Donovan had, and why so many of us feel keenly his loss.



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BOSTON IRISH HONORS LUNCHEON

Gov. Healey, Rooney clan, ‘arts-power-couple’ Crotty are lauded at ‘Irish Honors’

More than 300 guests packed the Boston Seaport Hotel’s ballroom on Fri., Oct. 27, for the 13th annual Boston Irish Honors luncheon, which highlights men, women, and families of Irish ancestry who “embody the best qualities of the Irish.” The event is organized by Boston Irish Magazine and BostonIrish.com.

Gov. Maura Healey became the first sitting chief executive of the Commonwealth to accept the award, which was presented to her by past recipient and honorary co-chairman of the Irish Honors event, US Sen. Edward Markey. Healey was joined at the event by four members of her family, including her mother, Catherine Tracy Healey, who is the daughter of Irish immigrants. Healey has visited Ireland several times, including a trip as governor earlier this year to commemorate the 60th anniversary of President Kennedy’s 1963 visit to his family’s ancestral home.

The Rooney family, rooted in South Boston but with members living in Dorchester – including Jim and Millie Rooney – were honored for their family’s many contributions to the city and the region over multiple generations. Tom Tinlin, who co-hosted the luncheon with former state Sen. Linda Dorcena Forry, presented the award to Jim Rooney and his ten brothers. Jim, who leads the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, offered moving remarks about his family’s experience, with a particular focus on his mom, Margaret ‘Peggy’ Rooney, who is the daughter of Irish immigrants from Co. Mayo.

The husband-and-wife duo of Vincent Crotty and Kieran Jordan accepted the Boston Irish Honor for their contributions to arts and culture in the community. The couple live in the Lower Mills neighborhood in Dorchester. Crotty, born in Kanturk, Co. Cork, Ireland, is a highly regarded portrait and landscape painter who emigrated to Boston in the 1980s. Jordan is a Philadelphia native who has devoted her life’s work to teaching Irish dance, particularly the traditional sean nos style. They each offered poignant remarks about their close friend and mentor, the late Brian O’Donovan, a leader in the Boston Irish community who died on Oct. 6.

Others who played a role in the event include: Rev. Tom Kennedy, who delivered the opening benediction; Rev. Jack Ahern of St. Gregory’s parish in Dorchester, who offered a closing prayer; William Kennedy of Dorchester, a past honoree who served as the event’s co-chair, along with longtime Dorchester business leader and past honoree Brendan Feeney; Maureen Forry-Sorrell, who

leads the Boston Irish effort with her father, Ed Forry; and Hon. James T. Brett, a past honoree and event committee member.

The program culminated in two special drawings: a pair of Delta Airline tickets to Ireland, won by Aoife Griffin of the Irish Cultural Centre, and four seats atop the Green Monster for a game in 2024 along with a private tour of Fenway Park, donated by the Boston Red Sox, won by Michael Kineavy of South Boston.



Governor Maura Healey spoke warmly at the Boston Irish Honors luncheon of her visits with cousins in Ireland over the years. Chris Lovett photo

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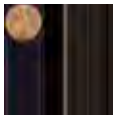
# Scenes from the 15th Annual Boston Irish Honors luncheon



From top, awards were made to: The Rooney Family of South Boston; Governor Maura Healey, pictured with her mother, stepfather, and sisters Tara and Caitlyn; Vincent Crotty and Kieran Jordan, pictured with Kieran’s mother Dolores and other family members. Clockwise from left: US Sen. Ed Markey and former state Sen. Linda Dorcena Forry presented the award to Gov. Healey; Former Boston Irish honoree and former US Sen. Paul Kirk, second from right, gathered with, from left, Bill Cleary Jr., his wife Jo, and Kirk nieces Mikaela McDermott and Beth McDermott; Luncheon co-chairs Brendan Feeney, William Kennedy, and BI Magazine publisher Ed Forry.

Margaret Brett Hastings photos





## The Boston Irish Honors 2023 Excellence in Visual and Performing Arts

# Kieran Jordan and Vincent Crotty find callings, and love, in Boston's art scene

BY SEAN SMITH

Theirs is a Boston love story of non-Boston natives, one that started in the check-out line of a Morrissey Boulevard supermarket and continues to flourish in Dorchester.

But Kieran Jordan and Vincent Crotty – who celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary this year – not only found each other in coming to Boston, but they also arguably found themselves as artists and, in doing so, found their calling.

Jordan, born in Philadelphia, is an internationally renowned Irish dance performer, choreographer, and teacher who has worked with countless notable artists in Irish traditional music, and has taught at major summer festivals including Willie Clancy Summer School, Catskills Irish Arts Week, Acadia Festival of Traditional Music and Dance. Her credits also include roles as director, choreographer, and performer for Brian O'Donovan's productions of "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn" and "A St. Patrick's Day Celtic Sojourn," and for the US touring show "Atlantic Steps," with the group Childsplay. She has been the recipient of two Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Fellowships and two Master Artist teaching grants in the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship program.

Crotty, from Kanturk, Co. Cork, has been acclaimed for his landscapes, seascapes, nocturnes, and figurative paintings, using a plein air approach marked by fluid and vigorous brushstrokes and balanced by sensitive color. His paintings – conveying vivid moods and evocative depictions of time and place – have been displayed at gallery shows in Ireland and throughout the US, and recognized with awards from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the John Stobart Foundation, Plein Air Magazine, and plein air competitions internationally. His work also has been featured as set designs for theater companies and touring productions including the Huntington Theater Company and "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn"; four of his paintings were used on the film set in the 2003 Clint Eastwood movie "Mystic River."

Two artists, two very different paths converging in one city.

...

Crotty has vivid memories – going back to early childhood – of being fascinated by the interplay of light and color: "I'd be sitting in my stroller watching the sunshine make patterns of light on the kitchen wall." His parents



Vincent Crotty and Kieran Jordan relaxing, and at work. *Family photos*

recognized their son's artistic bent. When he was seven, his mother ordered books of artwork by prominent masters like Renoir, Rembrandt, and Constable, and Crotty browsed them eagerly.

"These books filled me with awe and wonder," he says. "I didn't know people like that existed. I'd lie down on my carpet and copy the pictures from the books."

As he grew older, his parents continued encouraging Crotty to explore art as a career, and told him not to worry about whether it was lucrative. "My mother used to say, 'If you have a bag of potatoes, you'll be all right.'" Although he didn't take formal art classes, during

wanted you to succeed. You learned the proper way to control a pencil and a paintbrush, how to use various paint techniques, all the ins and outs of decoration – including Celtic lettering."

A few years later, in 1990, came another turning point, when he decided to follow his then-girlfriend to Boston. The relationship didn't last, but his attachment to Boston did: He took art classes and met other artists and was wowed by the art supplies stores.

"I learned so much in just six months," he says, "and felt the only way I could learn more was to stay."

Over time, Crotty put down roots in Boston, thanks in great part to Fr. Dan Finn, the former pastor of St. Mark's Church in Dorchester and a Kanturk native himself ("He really watched out for me," says Crotty). The priest gave him studio space in a convent and brought him to various events so that he could form ties with the wider Irish community, which helped him to build a business in commercial art.

But Crotty also continued to work on his own, more personal art. He found several mentors, including Hull artist John Kilroy, and New Mexico landscape painter Kevin MacPherson. On one trip he took to Ireland with MacPherson, Crotty did as many as seven paintings a day – and came back "a different person" who felt confident about his style and approach.

"A huge part of the process in becoming a painter is becoming informed," says Crotty. "You do that by seeing what art is out there, whether going to a gallery or by looking at pictures in art books. When you see what other artists do, it puts into context your own art, and helps you think about what you do."

Essentially, Crotty refined his childhood fascination with light and color into a lens that enabled him to evoke people, places, and objects in such a way as to invite the viewer to be a participant in the artistic experience.

"I want the person to finish the painting in their imagination," he explains. "To me, a landscape doesn't require every blade of grass and a portrait doesn't need every freckle on a cheek for the image to resonate with someone. Perhaps you'll see, and maybe feel, something that no one else does."

...

Jordan's Irish roots come via her father's side, notably her great-grandfather, Thomas McDonald, a native of Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny. McDonald

(Continued next page)





## The Boston Irish Honors 2023

represented the Irish government at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, where he promoted Irish artists and musicians, among them the celebrated tenor John McCormack. During his life, McDonald accumulated an impressive collection of 78s featuring Irish music, one of which made its way to the Jordan household.

"My father always took pride in his Irish heritage, and that definitely was in my identity," she says.

When she was five, Jordan was captivated by the Irish dancers she saw performing as part of the Philadelphia St. Patrick's Day parade and begged to take lessons. Her parents found a teacher for her through the local parish, and a few years later, her younger sister started dancing, too. Soon the Jordans became a paradigmatic Irish dance "feis family" – which meant often having to turn down invitations for birthday parties and other social activities on weekends, she recalls, "but it was worth it."

As she continued, Jordan found that Irish dance competitions weren't as fulfilling as the performances: "Those would really light me up." Around age 12, she met Mick Moloney, one of the foremost figures in the modern Irish music revival, which ultimately resulted in gig opportunities at local festivals and concerts.

"That was the beginning of my passion for working with live music," she says. "I was able to create steps of my own. I also got to observe the leading dancers at that time – Jean Butler, Donny Golden, Liam Harney – and just witness all those exciting collaborations."

Looking ahead to college, Jordan became taken with the idea of exploring Irish Studies, along with a Jesuit education, and there was only one place she knew of where she could do that: Boston College, whose Irish Studies program was considered among the best in the country. She pursued a bachelor's degree as an English major and Irish Studies minor at the Heights and studied journalism as well; she also hosted an Irish music show, "Toss the Feathers," on the university's radio station WZBC.

Jordan's arrival at BC came around the same time that legendary fiddler Seamus Connolly joined the university as its director of Irish music programs. He founded the Gaelic Roots summer school and festival (now a concert/lecture series) hosted by BC, and he always encouraged Jordan in her dancing and dance research in Irish Studies.

By the time Jordan graduated in 1996, the popularity of "Riverdance" had made Irish dance a world-wide phenomenon, a pop culture reference in movies and on TV, and, more importantly, an activity of increasing interest for many youngsters who in turn swelled the ranks of Irish dance schools.



Kieran Jordan, far left in front row, in the Philadelphia St. Patrick's Day parade in 1981.

While Jordan praises the innovation and creativity of "Riverdance," and the role it played in bringing Irish dance to a wider audience, she feels that the show ushered in a trend toward "more is more" theatricality and spectacle which overshadowed the subtler and "earthier" aspects of the dance tradition. It represented a step – literally – in a different direction than the creative path she saw evolving for herself.

Jordan spent her junior year of college at University College, Cork, where she studied with old-style dance master Joe O'Donovan. From that experience in particular, she became increasingly drawn to the older, "close to the ground" Irish dance styles, where the focus is less on high kicks and grand leaps, and more on being attuned to the unique rhythmic qualities of each tune.

"I really liked the energy, the musicality in sean-nós dancing in particular," explains Jordan. "You could tell the dancer wasn't doing a scripted, pre-choreographed performance, but closely following the tune being played; and because it's improvised, there is that sense of being on the edge of free-falling. Most of all, to me sean-nós carries a strong feeling of engagement with the musician and the audience."

...

Nobody can accuse BostonIrish publisher Ed Forry of playing Cupid, exactly, but he does bear at least some responsibility for the beginning of the Jordan-Crotty love story.

Jordan got to know Forry through her work at WZBC, and when he offered her a job in 1996 as music columnist, and later, as arts editor for the Boston Irish Reporter, she happily accepted. "Ed was wonderful: He always took me to

luncheons and other functions around town, and helped introduce me to the Boston Irish scene."

Returning from one such event, the two stopped off at the then-brand-new Star Market on Morrissey Boulevard, where they happened to encounter Crotty – with whom Forry also was acquainted – while waiting in the check-out line. When Crotty mentioned that he had an exhibit coming up, Jordan recalls, "Ed pointed at me and said, 'Talk to KJ. She's my arts editor.'"

Not long afterward, Crotty came to the BIR office for an interview with Jordan, bringing photos of his art so she could scan them to run with the article. It wasn't a big story, but the conversation was engaging enough, certainly for Crotty, who soon after asked her out – though not without calling his mother first ("I was terrified. I told her, 'I need a pep talk.'")

Jordan was delighted by the invitation, for more than a few reasons. "You have to understand: My social life the past few years had been in college. You didn't get guys actually asking you out to dinner," she quips.

Crotty took Jordan to Tasca in Brighton, but not just for the food or the atmosphere: He had designed the interior, including the wall colors, the lighting, and a large collection of murals and paintings that adorned the restaurant. More than a dinner date, this was a way to show the other dimensions of his art. "It was very romantic," says Jordan.

"We had a great conversation that first night – I loved her depth, her intelligence," says Crotty. "I'd lost a few girlfriends who'd been waiting for me to put all this art to the side and make

a 'proper living.' But Kieran was so supportive of what I do and willing to put up with me."

Having become a couple – they would marry six years later – Crotty and Jordan together made the rounds of Irish music and cultural events in the city, as well as Somerville, Cambridge, and elsewhere in Greater Boston, while each supported the other's dance performances and art shows. As she became increasingly familiar with the local Irish music community, it struck Jordan that for all the Irish dance schools in and around Boston, non-competitive and sean-nós dance had no presence locally at that time. She felt there was a space she could fill, not just in the community but inside herself.

"I knew I was being pulled more and more into dance as the center of my life," she says. "And here, the fact that Vincent was self-employed and doing art for himself made a big impression on me. I felt inspired to follow my heart, so I quit the newspaper job to become a full-time dance performer and teacher." Jordan founded her company, Kieran Jordan Dance, in 2001, offering classes in non-competitive Irish dance specifically for adult students. Her teaching and performing projects have inspired beginners through professional dancers over the years, in a creative and welcoming community.

...

While Crotty and Jordan move in their respective spheres of art, over time they've had the opportunity for shared or collaborative experiences. As someone who has her own visual interests, such as photography as well as costume and lighting design for performances, Jordan

(Continued next page)



# A Gallery Vincent Crotty the artist



A portrait of Kieran



Cork City above, Kinvara below



## They found their callings, and love, in Boston

says she appreciates “Vincent’s work with light and the natural world.” Crotty has done paintings based on some of her photos and has also created theatrical backdrops for her shows.

One highlight for the couple came in 2007 when they were both hired for the Catskills Irish Arts Week festival. For Crotty, who had not grown up with much of a connection to traditional Irish music, that week was something of a revelation: “I was just immersed in this music, and it made an impression on me. So, I wound up painting Kieran’s world. That was my way of expressing it.”

Then came a life-changing ordeal. In 2018, after almost a full year of sickness, Jordan was diagnosed with Lyme disease, which by then had already taken a significant toll on her health, energy, and work. Jordan had to navigate a health care system that she found severely inadequate in dealing with Lyme, and

although she kept teaching, she was unable to travel and had to cut back on many performances and projects. In time, she did find a naturopathic doctor in Maine to help her, and after many months, she was gradually able to return to something approaching a normal workload (although the Covid-19 pandemic brought its own share of complications to dance teaching and performing work).

Seeing your loved one struggle with an illness is hard enough, even more so when it threatens not just her livelihood but her self-identity as an artist of movement. “I learned the true meaning of the word ‘inconsolable,’” says Crotty. “It’s just so hard to know what to do; you can only say so much.”

“Vincent was simply amazing,” says Jordan. “He picked up all the slack and was there for me 100 percent.”

A critical source of support, say Jordan

and Crotty, has been the Irish music and dance community. Friends set up a GoFundMe – health insurance doesn’t cover many tests and treatments for Lyme – that received robust contributions. Combined with various offers of assistance from family and friends, the “love and strength we’ve received has been incredible,” says Jordan. In recent years, she has studied and taken up a practice in Polarity Therapy, a form of energy healing that also helped her through the struggles of Lyme.

...

Jordan and Crotty are comfortably ensconced in the Lower Mills neighborhood of Dorchester, living in a house they bought 16 years ago, with space enough for their various activities (Crotty has a separate studio in the backyard). They’re within reasonable distance of the Burren and other familiar local gathering places for Irish music, but there also are plenty

of attractions close to home.

“I love all the parks and woods nearby, and being near the water; you can smell the ocean with the right breeze,” says Jordan. “I don’t know if either one of us imagined years ago that this is where we would be, but this part of Boston is definitely our home.”

Sean Smith writes on Irish/Celtic music and dance for the BostonIrish website and its quarterly magazine. A musician and singer himself, Smith has been active in the local Irish/Celtic music community for many years as a performer and organizer, as well as a habitué of various sessions. He also recently published his first novel, “Transformation Summer.” See [seansmithwriter.com](http://seansmithwriter.com) for more details.

For more about Kieran Jordan and Vincent Crotty, see their websites at [kieranjordan.com](http://kieranjordan.com) and [vincentcrotty.com](http://vincentcrotty.com).



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# ‘A commitment to always doing better’

BY BOSTONIRISH STAFF

“I cherish my Irish roots, and I’m grateful to the brave Irish women and men who made my life possible. I’m grateful for this gift, and I’m awed by the fact that ours is just one of millions of emigrant stories that helped build Massachusetts and America. Especially in Massachusetts, where by ancestry, culture, and proximity, we claim the closest ties.”

– Gov. Maura Healey in Dublin,  
June 28, 2022

...

When Gov. Maura Healey visited Ireland last spring, her first foreign trip as the chief executive of the Commonwealth, she was welcomed widely as a “hero and a trailblazer” in her ancestral country. She returned the goodwill in emotional fashion in an address to Seanad Éireann, the Irish Senate:

“It means the world to me that leaders in the land of my grandparents and great-grandparents were watching and cheering me on. The first messages to reach me from Ireland came from family – my cousins Kitty and John Duke in Ballinasloe, County Galway. Along with millions of Americans, including President Biden and Ambassador Claire Cronin, I cherish my Irish roots, and I’m grateful to the brave Irish women and men who made my life possible.”

“Today I’m thinking of my late father Jerry Healey, and his parents, Jeremiah Healey (Kilgarvan, Co. Kerry) and Margaret (nee Riordan of Macroom, Co. Cork), who emigrated from Kerry and Cork. I’m also thinking of my maternal great-grandmother, Katherine Tracey. Katherine left Ballinasloe in 1912, at age 16, after her mother died and her father was left to care for five children on their small farm. She arrived in New York by herself, with no one to meet her, and somehow made her way up to Boston to find family members. After working hard in other people’s houses for years, she met my great-grandfather, settled down in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and won over her Yankee in-laws with her warmth and kindness.

“She was a gentle and well-read woman, proud but in a humble way, and quick with a story about life back in Ireland. She lived to be 96 years old. My mother Catherine Tracy Beattie is with us today; she was given Katherine’s name and passed it on to me as my middle name. We hold our memories of my great-grandmother deep in our hearts. She taught us to love Ireland and inspired us to keep close contact with our family – to the point where a dozen of us came over for the wedding



Gov.-elect Maura Healey on the night of her election: Nov. 8, 2022.

of Tommy and Clare Boyle in Newry.

“In 1999, I visited Ballinasloe with my mother and grandmother. My uncle Joe Tracey showed us around the old farmstead, where only the foundation was left standing. I picked up a loose stone, and held onto it; and I’ve kept it with me wherever I’ve lived since, to remind of my foundations.

“Our Irish ancestors left behind everything they knew and worked hard to give us all we would need. I was raised with the values they passed on – taking care of your family; taking responsibility for the welfare of your community; and looking out for those who need a helping hand or a friend to speak up for them.

Together they are threads, woven together by time, that form a powerful fabric binding our nations together across an ocean and through history.

“Massachusetts and Ireland both have taken long journeys toward freedom and equality for all our people, but we have come to be known for our commitment to always doing better and showing

a way forward for others. I want to recognize the leadership of this chamber, along with all those who have worked to make Ireland a better place for its citizens by addressing the injustices of the past, securing reproductive rights, and advancing climate action, Travellers’ rights, and migrant safety – to name just a few of the issues you have led on. The cause of human rights is woven through our shared history and draws us ever closer today.”

...

Maura Tracy Healey grew up the oldest of five siblings in an old farm house in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire. They were raised by their mother, Catherine Tracy Healey, who worked as a nurse at the local elementary school. Her father Jerome Jeremiah Healey served in the US Public Health Service and later worked for the federal EPA. Her stepdad, Edward Beattie, was a teacher, a local union president, and the coach of her high school basketball team, giving her a lifelong love of the game. She has

been known to say that “I owe him a great deal in particular.”

In a panel discussion at the JFK Library in Dorchester after she was first elected state attorney general in 2014, she spoke about her roots post-the Ould Sod:

“I was actually born at Bethesda Naval Hospital down in Maryland, but had I think all of about nine months there before my folks headed back this way. (The governor’s sister Tara offers this anecdote in that regard: “Our maternal grandmother brought some soil to the hospital in Baltimore when her daughter was about to deliver – “so that Maura would be born over good New England soil”).

“They’re from Newburyport on the North Shore. And we settled just over the border in a small town, Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, about five miles in the shadows of Hampton Beach and the Seabrook nuclear station. I remember when I was growing up as a kid, there were protestors parading through our streets, and I think camping out even on our property, members of the Clamshell Alliance. So, I saw social protest in action from an early age.

“But as the oldest of five children - (her siblings are Terence Titcomb Healey, Jeremy Cole Healey, Caitlin Anne Healey, and Tara Elizabeth Porter Healey) - growing up in this small town, I think we all learned a lot about values and principles from them. They were really engaged in their community, involved in their community. And they impressed upon us, without saying so directly, that it was important to pay attention. It was important to be engaged. It was important to be involved in your community. And that didn’t

(Continued next page)



A day at the beach: Maura and Tracy Healey-Beattie (Maura’s mother) sitting on the rocks with Galway Bay in the background.  
Family photo



# An ‘incredibly moving’ visit to the family’s ancestral home

## Connecting with the Kennedys

BY AOIFE MOORE

DUBLIN, June 28, 2023 – The link between Ireland and Massachusetts was proclaimed as “stronger than ever” at a special event here today commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of President John F. Kennedy’s visit to his ancestral homeland, where Gov. Healey was joined on stage alongside US Ambassador to Ireland Claire Cronin, Ireland’s deputy leader Micheál Martin, and the late president’s nephew, Stephen Kennedy Smith.

Almost six decades to the day since Kennedy did the same, the governor addressed the Irish Senate, describing the experience as “incredibly moving ... really, really poignant to be in that chamber and have the opportunity to speak there. When the president spoke, she said, he talked about freedom and making the case for democracy. “That was in the time of Cold War and the threats of totalitarianism. We’re still confronted with some of that. Making the case for freedom and democracy is something that the Irish and America have always had as a shared value and commitment. It was incredibly moving.”

In her final speech, the governor called the visit “remarkable.”

“I’m leaving here just fueled with the warmth and the generosity of spirit of the Irish people,” she said. “The goodwill, respecting one another and the fundamental decency of the Irish people has not changed. But to see what’s happened in terms of development, in terms of the economic engine and growth and opportunity, all the while not for closing opportunity for others, is really inspiring and something I take back with me.”

matter if it was everything from being on a conservation commission, to serving as a selectman, to starting our Troop 374. I remember being seven years old and I wanted to be a Brownie. And I asked my mom about these Brownies. And our town didn’t have a Brownie troop, so she up and started the Brownies.”

•••

When Maura Healey defeated the Republican Geoff Diehl for the Massachusetts’ governorship in November 2022, she made history as the state’s first woman and first openly gay candidate elected to the office and delivered the office to the Democrats after eight years out of the Corner Office at the State House.

During the campaign, Healey promised that she would expand job training programs, make childcare more affordable, and modernize schools. She also



Gov. Maura Healey, second from left, with US Ambassador to Ireland Claire Cronin to her left, participated in a discussion of John F. Kennedy’s 1963 trip to Ireland at EPIC, The Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin last June. Also pictured: Ireland’s Taniste (deputy leader), second at right, moderator Dearbhail McDonald, far right, and JFK’s nephew Stephen Kennedy Smith, far left.

Photo from US Ambassador Claire Cronin via Twitter

The chair of the Irish Senate, Jerry Buttimer, welcomed the governor and hailed Healey as “a person of firsts,” noting her position in history as the first woman elected governor of Massachusetts, the first member of the LGBTQI+ community elected as governor, and the first governor of Massachusetts to address the Irish Senate.

Buttimer, himself a member of the LGBTQI+ community, noted that legislation decriminalizing homosexuality was passed in Ireland 30 years ago this week.

“I’m personally delighted that Governor Healey is here today to mark that historic occasion in our civil rights journey,” Buttimer said. “Your presence reminds us all and should remind every boy and girl watching at home or in Boston or in Provincetown, or all over the world, that no matter who you are, what your background is, what’s your

sexual orientation, your aspirations, you can possess the power to be whoever you want to be.”

Buttimer bade a “welcome home” to Healey, her mother, and her grandparents, who emigrated from counties Cork, Kerry, and Galway and congratulated her on her pronunciation during her opening remarks, which she delivered in Ireland’s native language (Gaelige).

He labeled her speech a “home run which would have Fenway Park cheering.”

Aoife Moore is a reporter covered the event for State House News Service. She was named Irish Journalist of the Year in 2021 for her investigative work.

•••

In addition to a substantial contingent of individuals who could also make the case for increased Massachusetts-Ireland trade ties, wrote GBH political reporter Adam Reilly, the governor was also

accompanied in Ireland by her mother, Tracy Healey-Battie.

Afterward, with her mother at her side, Healey spoke briefly about the significance of having her mother join her for a trade mission in a country where they still have extended family.

“I’m delighted that my mom was able to join me, because we’ve visited Ireland together many times over the years — visiting cousins, coming back for weddings, different events — and so it was really special to be here with her,” she said.

Her mother echoed that sentiment. “Obviously, it has been a unique experience for me,” Healey-Battie said. “I can’t help but use the word privilege. Maura and I have shared a great deal over the years, especially when she was becoming attorney, general, but ... this is different. It’s very difficult to describe. It has been a highly emotional experience.”

said she would protect “access to safe and legal abortion in Massachusetts” in the wake of the US Supreme Court’s decision overturning Roe v Wade.

During her two terms as state attorney general, she claimed progress in alerting the Commonwealth to issues like the protection of students and homeowners from predatory lenders, how ExxonMobil may have misled investors and the public about its knowledge of the climate crisis, and the effect of Purdue Pharma’s OxyContin on the country.

Her terms featured bitter political battles being fought in Congress over immigration reform, and she made it her business to look after the rights of immigrants in Massachusetts.

“I know there are a lot of Irish who are laborers, carpenters, electricians and it is really important that they are not taken advantage of on the job, there are a lot

of people working in an underground economy, who are really vulnerable, they are really afraid to come forward because they may not have a documented status.”

Upon her election as governor, Healey hailed her victory as a sign of hope for many LGBTQ people. “We might be the first, but we won’t be the last,” she wrote on Twitter. “To every little girl out there, we want you to know — there’s no ceiling you can’t break.”

Similarly, when addressing her supporters in Boston, she said that her victory was for “every little girl and every young LGBTQ person out there. I hope tonight shows you that you can be whatever, whoever you want to be. And nothing and no one can ever get in your way except your own imagination, and that’s not going to happen.”

•••

The roster of the Winnacunnet High

School’s varsity team in Hampton Falls, NH, in 1987 listed Maura Tracy Healey as a 5-foot-6 guard who was heading to Harvard the following year to play on the Crimson squad.

As a junior, she helped her team win the Ivy League title in 1990–91, and as a senior the following year, her 150 assists were the second-most in a season in program history at the time, and she was named the team’s best defensive player. After her time at Cambridge, Healey went overseas and played professionally for Austria’s UBBC Wustenrot Salzburg.

“She got as much out of and gave as much to the program as any player in the history of Harvard basketball,” teammate Erin Maher, a junior at the time, told the Harvard Crimson. “She led by example.”

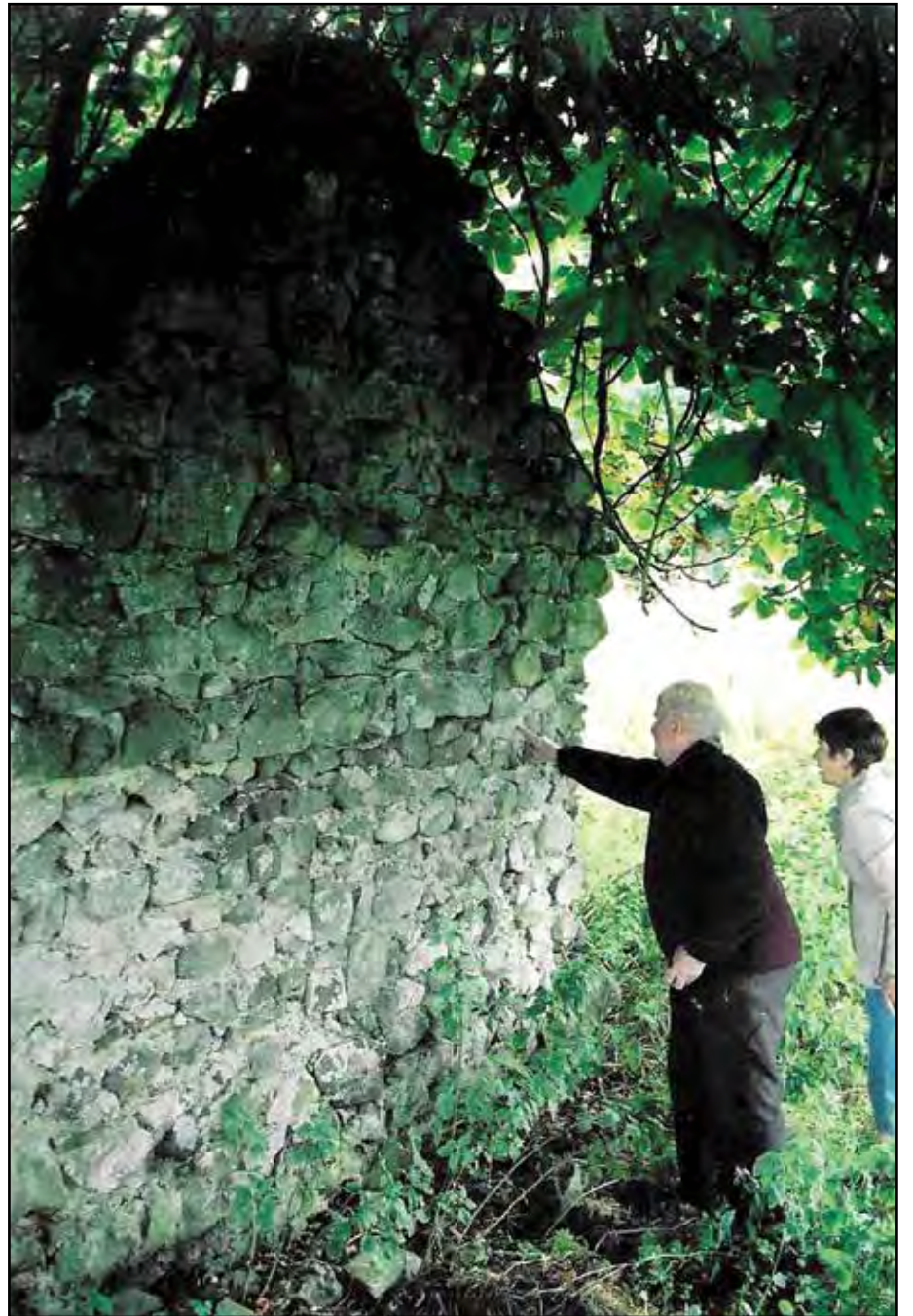
“I was pretty good with the ball from the time I was little,” Healey told the Globe’s Stan Grossfeld just before her



## A Healey Family Album



Three generations: Katherine Tracey Porter (Maura's maternal great-grandmother) and Tracy Healey-Beattie (Maura's mother) and Dorothy Porter Burton (Maura's maternal grandmother) in 1969.



This is the wall of the original homestead in Ballinasloe, County Galway where Katherine Tracey Porter (Maura's maternal great-grandmother) was born.



Russell and Dorothy Burton (Maura's maternal grandparents) with Maura as they arrive in County Galway.

election last November. "We had a hoop behind the house and it was just dirt and gravel and we played as we could. It was probably good to learn to dribble on gravel.

"I became a good ballplayer because every night I would do fingertip pushups in my bedroom upstairs because I was told if you had strong fingertips, you'd be a great ball handler. And my hands are small, obviously, so I needed to try to find whatever advantage I could."

Her grandfather put up a hoop in their barn in Hampton Falls, N.H., and Healey would play there at night, amid the sheep, listening to the radio and shooting baskets in the cold.

She has worn No. 14 since junior high school. "I wanted to wear the number of the best point guard ever," she says, "and I just chose Bob Cousy." They became friends. "We talk about basketball," she says. "About everything."

...

On her return at Massachusetts, she went to work on her career, earning a law degree from Northeastern University and then setting out to change the world in succeeding roles as chief of the Civil Rights Division in the attorney general's office, where she led the first state challenge to the Defense of Marriage Act and held banks and lending companies accountable after the 2008 financial crisis, attorney general in 2014, and governor in 2022. She lives with her partner Joanna Lydgate, in Arlington.



"I was pretty good with the ball from the time I was little," says the onetime Harvard point guard who is now the governor of Massachusetts. She wore No. 14 through her playing days because she "wanted to wear the number of the best point guard ever, and I chose Bob Cousy," who is shown with her above. They became friends. "We talk about basketball, about everything," Healey says.





- 2/1/2024 - St.Brigid's Day Celebration - Boston  
3/5/2024 - St.Patrick's Day Gathering - Boston  
3/16/2024 - St.Patrick's Day Festival - Canton  
3/17/2024 - St.Patrick's Day Festival - Canton  
3/30/2024 - Family Easter Egg Hunt - Canton  
6/8/2024 - The ICC Championships Feis - Canton  
6/28/2024 - ICC Golf Tournament - Brookmeadow, Canton  
7/11/2024 - The O'Neills CYC Championships Weekend - Canton  
7/27/2024 - ICC Galway Races Gala - Canton  
8/03/2024 - GAA Semi Finals Weekend - Canton  
8/10/2024 - GAA Finals Weekend - Canton  
9/15/2024 - ICC 5K Road Race - Canton  
9/19/2024 - The 2nd Annual Brian J.Donnelly Award - Boston  
10/5/2024 - The Inaugural ICC Trip To Ireland - Ireland  
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2/6/2024 - Annual Tree Lighting - Canton  
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# The Boston Irish Honors 2023

## Family Values, Legacy, Tradition



A gathering of the Rooney family for the wedding of Michael Rooney, Jim Rooney's son, on July 14, 2017. The 11 Rooney brothers are pictured here with their late father, Fred Rooney (sitting) and their mother, 'Hon'. The brothers are (L-R) Michael, Larry, Paul, Jackie, Chris, Jimmy, Tommy, Buddy, Mark, Jay, and Joe.

## A Southie story: 'Hon' and her boys

BY SETH DANIEL

The Ancestry DNA test Jim Rooney received as a gift a few years back predictably pointed to a heritage that was 100 percent western Ireland. But despite that data and a notable career at some of Boston's major institutions, the ancestors and relatives behind the Rooneys' Irish roots remained a mystery.

By the time he received the genealogical information, Jim and his family were well-known and successful in Boston. He attended Harvard University, held high-ranking posts in city government, and led major agencies like the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA) and the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

But what was certain about the Rooneys in Boston was uncertain to the Rooneys in Ireland.

In a quest to find his family's background in the Old Country, Jim, the South Boston native, one of 11 brothers strong, asked around in pubs throughout County Mayo and knocked on doors in the town of Claremorris looking for his kin. Eventually, the Rooney name pinged.

"I did it the old-fashioned way because I only had a name and a village," said the 66-year-old Rooney. "I eventually found someone who did know them and was able to help me locate a cousin. The first reaction from a woman at my cousin's

home was, 'Are you one of the 11?' So, they really knew of us, and I was a bit surprised by it all."

Jim Rooney and his family are honorees at this year's Irish Honors celebration. The gathering of the siblings and their extended families is anchored by their mother, their grandmother, and their great-grandmother, Margaret 'Peggy' Rooney (known in the family as "Hon") and the memory of her late husband, Fred Michael Rooney Sr. Given the family's strong Irish American ethic, any recognition for Jim Rooney constitutes an award for the entire family, including those long-lost relatives in Claremorris, who originally hailed from the remote Mayo village of Knock, now known the world over for its Marian shrine.

### A landing in Southie

The Rooney boys' maternal grandmother, Delia Waldron, left Knock in 1901 at the age of 13 and made her way to South Boston via Ellis Island (where her first name was changed from Bridget to Delia). Sponsored by her sister, Julia, she was one of 13 siblings. She, Julia, and a brother known as "The Pole" (because he was 6-foot-5) were the only ones who left Ireland.

On arrival, Delia found a job working as a maid for a Jewish family in Brookline. Later, when she was set on marrying Michael Corliss, the family loved her so

much that they helped pay for the wedding in Brookline's St. Lawrence Church.

The happy couple settled on 5th Street in Southie, and later relocated to Gates Street, a Lower End dwelling that is still the center of Rooney family life.

"That's where my mother grew up," said Jim. "My mother was the youngest of her siblings and they lived there with my grandmother in the house and later bought it from her. We all grew up in the house my mother grew up in and my mother is still there on Gates Street now."

Their grandmother, known in the household as "Ma," stayed in the house after their grandfather died, and helped raise the boys while their parents were off at work. The brothers recall her waking up every morning wearing her black stockings and her house coat while sweeping the sidewalk and sipping her tea afterward, just like in Co. Mayo. Every month she dutifully sent \$10 from her Social Security check over to Ireland, but she never wanted to go back for a visit.

"She was very quiet about it," recalled Buddy Rooney, the oldest sibling and unofficial family historian. "I would often ask her if she was interested in going to Ireland on a trip. She said she wouldn't go unless they built a bridge, which gives you an idea of how bad the ride over must have been."

Added Jim, "Ma lived with us until she died in 1976. It was nice having a live-in

grandmother who helped my mom and was part of our upbringing."

The Rooney side of the family believes their forebears left from the Galway area, settling in Nova Scotia and Vermont, before migrating to Boston, where their great-grandfather, Fred Michael Rooney, became a Boston Police officer. In fact, said Buddy, "When they had the great police strike in the early 1900s [1919], he crossed the picket line."

Their grandfather, Fred William, was a truck driver in Rhode Island providing the impetus for starting the Rooney Trucking Co. in Somerville afterward. The Rooneys have a knack for driving trucks well. Fred William won six out of seven "truck rodeos" staged at the Boston Garden, and one of his sons, Fred Michael Sr., was skilled enough to drive semi-trucks through the narrow streets of South Boston on family business.

### Family motto: 'All hands on deck'

'Ma' and Fred William Rooney had 12 children, one of whom, Charlie, died as an infant but is never forgotten within the family. They were raised by their father, and mother, their grandmother, coaches, neighbors, and the rest of the community. "All hands on deck," they all remarked.

The South Boston of the Rooney brothers' childhood days was a kid-centered

(Continued next page)





# The Boston Irish Honors 2023

town that featured large families. It was a tough neighborhood of working-class people with sad stories of broken homes, alcoholism – there was a bar room on every corner, it seemed – drug problems, and criminal behavior.

Jim recalls reading an article in U.S. News & World Report, that listed South Boston as the toughest and poorest urban white neighborhood in America – with Gates Street at the center of the accompanying map.

“That was the Southie we grew up in,” said Jim. “It wasn’t a very wealthy place ... I like to say we thought we were tough but didn’t know we were poor.”

Over a period of 20 years, Fred and Peggy steered 11 children to adulthood: Buddy, Jim, Michael, Tommy, Jackie, Paul, Mark, Larry, Joe, Jay, and Chris. All but the oldest two were born in St. Margaret’s Hospital in Dorchester (the boys joke that their mother was there so often the hospital eventually gave her a job).

“At one point we thought Larry was the grand finale of our siblings, but six years later that all changed,” noted Buddy. “I was 19 years old, and Hon told me she needed a ride to St. Margaret’s Hospital in Dorchester. We were driving back on Savin Hill Avenue, and she tapped me on the shoulder and put up two fingers and said, ‘Two.’ I asked her what she meant by ‘two.’ She said she was having twins. I couldn’t believe it. I almost crashed the car.”

Those twins were Joe and Jay, followed 20 months later by Chris.

The family could easily go through 20 gallons of milk a week, and numerous loaves of bread – with frequent bike trips to Cumberland Farms for “three gallons of milk and two loaves of bread,” the boys recalled.

To make ends meet, Fred and Peggy worked much of the time. “In hindsight, we know they sacrificed a lot for us,” said Jim.

Fred worked for the family trucking company, and later for other private trucking companies while earning a degree in logistics from Northeastern University in 1962. He also did odd jobs like home repairs, bartending, and working on the docks as a longshoreman.

Peggy’s vocation was “mother,” her boys note, but she also worked nights in Columbia Point at a digital check processing facility. That experience led her to a job at the State House, where she spent 30 years as the director of Legislative Data Processing.

Still, there were always “side hustles.” The family ran a newspaper sales and circulation delivery business and put their sons at work on circulation sales. They touted the big Sunday editions outside St. Augustine’s Church after each of the six jam-packed Masses and sold papers



Several of the grandchildren giving Peggy ‘Hon’ Rooney a group hug in 2012 at the Gates Street home’s kitchen.

outside the Wonderland Dog Track in Revere on Saturday nights, when first editions were available for those leaving the track.

“We were often there on Saturday night selling papers until 11 p.m.,” said Jim. “We were underage, but we also knew how to get a bet in [at the track]. My brother Michael went to Don Bosco [High School] and actually won his tuition one night on a bet at Wonderland. It really was ‘all hands on deck’ in those days.”

Each brother recalled their mother often saying, “We’ll find a way,” and they always did.

“The 11 of us would all say we feel like we hit the parent lottery with my parents. They successfully raised 11 boys in South Boston through the ‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s, ‘80s, and ended in the ‘90s,” said Jim.

The boys said that despite their parents’ tireless work schedules, they never felt deprived and woke up every day for school at St. Augustine’s Elementary to find their clothes neatly laid out for them.

After a fire ravaged the family home

**Jim Rooney, at right, notes that the family has outgrown the Gates Street home when it comes to holiday gatherings, often choosing instead a function room in Southie for Christmas for the more than 40 grandchildren and great-grandchildren. “When we say immediate family, it’s still close to 100 people. It’s good fun,” he adds with a laugh.**

• A family album is on Page 16

on Gates Street in January 1991, the boys-turned-adults showed that appreciation. Tommy, a successful carpenter and construction superintendent, took charge as project manager. Buddy did all the electrical work in the rebuild, and Larry recalled coming home from Providence College to learn how to use a jackhammer and break up the cellar floor. Each of them pitched in and the team took the home from disaster to restoration in 10 months.

“We put it back together more for our parents... We should have knocked the house down, but if my mother had seen an empty lot, she’d have died,” said Tommy.

It takes a community

The family dynamic was one of all involved pulling their weight, mentoring younger brothers, and doing it under the watchful eyes of parents and neighbors while Southie’s great institutions changed their lives.

“The Boys & Girls Club was always a



home away from home for all of us,” said Larry. “It was either there or the Murphy Rink or Moakley Park. If we weren’t at home, we were in one of those three places playing sports and doing things with others focused on education and friendship and staying away from the vices of life.”

Sports energized the family dynamic, with Fred Sr. coaching Little League for many years and Peggy “never missing a game.” Their sons as a group excelled in hockey, track and field, baseball, and football. And they learned about athletic scholarships.

Said Jim: “Some of my brothers were able to take advantage of that and go to prep schools in New England and play hockey and football. We thought it was a good deal and a good formula.”

They landed at private high schools like Thayer Academy, Buckingham, Brown & Nichols, Salisbury School, and Tabor Academy, and colleges – three went to Harvard, one to Columbia, and others at St. Anselm’s, Providence, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Larry was a standout in hockey at Providence (he was drafted by the Buffalo Sabres of the National Hockey League in 1986).

Even as the older brothers found successes, they were still called to help with the younger ones.

“At my end, I grew up watching Jim and Michael,” said Jay. “They had accomplished a lot already and we saw it was attainable to do what they did. If they had gone to Walpole State Prison, it would have been a different story.”

Noted Larry, who was in the middle of the pecking order: “I’d go out to play street hockey or whiffle ball with Mark and drag the three little ones in a carriage and diapers with us. That’s the way it was when your mother and father were off at work, and you were trying to help.”

Said Jay with a laugh: “If us younger ones got in trouble in school, the older brothers would go down and talk to the teacher and that was when they were like 17.”

On to Cambridge

When the letter from Harvard, offering acceptance and a scholarship, arrived during Jim Rooney’s senior year at Boston Latin School, where he was the president of the class and a track standout, the mood in the Rooney home was one of both celebration and concern.

While the tuition was covered, families were expected to give a minimum contribution of \$600, and that was a steep hill to climb for the Rooneys.

“That was a lot of money then. My mother’s reaction to that letter was, ‘We’ll find a way.’ I remember that vividly. And they did find a way,” Jim said.

With his clothes stuffed in a green trash

(Continued on page 17)



# A Rooney Family Album



A Christmas party gathering of the Rooney family in 2017 during the annual family Christmas party at Seapoint in South Boston. At that time, there were 34 grandchildren and great grandchildren, though today that number has grown to 42.



Dad and 'Hon' Rooney in 2017 and Delia. The Rooney brothers enjoyed having a "live-in grandmother" for most of their lives. Below, Delia (Waldron) Corliss, who passed in 1976, lived at the home on Gates Street most of her life after immigrating from Knock, Ireland at the age of 13. At right, her husband Michael Corliss.



Fred and 'Hon' heading to the mound at Fenway Park to throw out the first pitch ahead of a 2009 Red Sox game.





# A Q&A: Getting a US passport after naturalization

**Q.** I recently became a US citizen through naturalization and want to obtain a passport to travel. How do I go about acquiring one, and what if I have a family situation back home that requires me to travel on short notice?

**A.** While USCIS gives you a Certificate of Naturalization to prove your US citizenship after you naturalize, that document does not permit you to travel. You must obtain a US passport through the State Department, and for first time applicants, you must apply in-person at a passport acceptance facility, usually your nearby US Postal Service office.

Logistically, the passport application is relatively straightforward. You must fill out the form (DS-11); make a photocopy of your Certificate of Naturalization as proof of your citizenship; and a photocopy of proof of identification, which can be a valid foreign passport, or valid driver's license. The passport

application fee for an adult currently costs \$130, and you must pay a separate \$35 fee for them to execute your request. These fees should be paid separately by check or by money order payable to the US Department of State. You will bring all of these materials, along with the original documents and a passport-style photograph of yourself to the location where you will submit your application.

The easiest place to apply for your passport is your local US Post Office. The Post Office requires you to schedule an appointment, which you can do online at [usps.com/international/passports.htm](https://usps.com/international/passports.htm). Some post offices will also take your photo for you at the time of the appointments, but you should check to ensure that you do not need to get one ahead of time.

According to the State Department, routine processing times require six to nine weeks for them to mail you the

passport. However, you can pay an additional \$60 for them to expedite the processing such that it will take between three to five weeks. These estimates do not include mailing times, so in actuality your passport is likely to take between nine to eleven weeks, or four to six weeks if expedited.

What about for individuals with pressing travel needs, for example a family member suddenly suffers a terrible accident? In these circumstances where you have urgent international travel within fourteen days, you must call 1-877-487-2778 to schedule an appointment at the Boston Passport Agency. The State Department offers two types of appointments: Life-or-Death Emergency Service and Urgent Travel Service.

If you need your foreign passport to return to your home country, you lack any valid passports, including from your

country of birth, and you urgently need to leave the US and return at a later date, then you should consult the website of your country's department of foreign affairs, its embassy, or its consulate in the US. Those representatives will be able to provide additional information on emergency passport issuance. Irish citizens can contact the Consulate-General of Ireland, Boston at 617-267-9330 or [consulategeneralofirelandboston.org](https://consulategeneralofirelandboston.org).

Disclaimer: These articles are published to inform the general public, not to advise in individual cases. All law, including immigration law, is always subject to change. If you seek legal advice you can contact Rian's immigration legal staff at 617-984-6542.

Rian Immigrant Center  
One State Street, Suite 800  
Boston, MA 02109  
Telephone (617) 542-7654  
Website: [riancenter.org](https://riancenter.org)

## From Dublin to Brooklyn: A resilient J-1 intern's story about her professional development in the Big Apple

For many young graduates, the J-1 Irish Work and Travel visa is a ticket to new experiences and professional growth. Emma Collins, an ambitious Dublin City University graduate, embarked on this adventure to pursue an internship in the heart of the Big Apple – New York City. Her journey has been marked by a desire to try something new, explore a different work culture, and gain invaluable international work experience.

One of Emma's primary goals in undertaking the J-1 visa program was to break away from the familiar and try something new. The internship she secured in NYC provided her with the opportunity to step outside her comfort zone and embrace a fresh and dynamic work environment. The allure of a younger workplace appealed to Emma, who was eager to be part of a vibrant and innovative team and keen to delve into the work culture of New York City, a place renowned for its fast-paced and dynamic professional landscape.

Her internship not only exposed her to the intricacies of the city's Public Relations world but also offered insights into the diversity and inclusivity that define NYC's workplaces. Every day brought a new challenge and a chance to learn, contributing to her understanding of how work is approached in this bustling metropolis.

What Emma cherishes most about her everyday life in the US is the unpredictability of each day. Some may be glamorous, while others are more routine, but the constant variety keeps her engaged and excited. The people at her workplace have played a significant role in making her experience memorable, with their enthusiasm and support fostering a sense of camaraderie.

Emma emphasizes the fantastic opportunities for personal development that have unfolded during her time in



Emma and friends celebrating a 25th birthday in New York City

New York. The learning experiences she has gained, both professionally and personally, have been numerous. Notably, she points out that these experiences are unique and distinct from what she might have encountered in Ireland. The combination of a stimulating work environment and the chance to explore the city has enriched her journey.

Living in the city that never sleeps has had a profound impact on Emma. The "always on" vibe of New York City has proven to be electric and motivating, propelling her toward new heights in her personal and professional life. Contrary to expectations, she has discovered a strong sense of community, further enhancing her enjoyment of her time in the city. For Emma, the ticking clock in the city that never sleeps seemed to

move at an accelerated pace. The vibrant energy and myriad opportunities in NYC made each day pass swiftly, prompting her to embrace the adage that time is a precious commodity.

She encourages fellow J-1 participants to soak up every piece of joy the city, and the US as a whole, has to offer while they can, recognizing that the experience is fleeting. Outside of New York, Emma also hopes to traverse the diverse terrains of Alaska, the cultural hubs of Austin and New Orleans, the charm of New England, and the scenic beauty of Minnesota.

Beyond the professional realm, Emma discovered the significance of community and leading a fulfilling life. Her time in NYC allowed her to forge connections that transcended the

workplace, emphasizing the importance of relationships and shared experiences. The challenges she faced acted as catalysts for personal and professional growth, instilling skills that will resonate throughout her career. Emma reflects on the hurdles she encountered during her time in the US, recognizing them as opportunities for growth, both professionally and emotionally. These challenges, she believes, have equipped her with transferable skills that will prove invaluable in the years to come. Emma's journey exemplifies the resilience required to navigate unfamiliar territories and emerge stronger on the other side.

Offering sage advice to current and future J-1 participants, Emma underscores the priceless value of a simple cup of coffee with someone in your field. In a city teeming with possibilities, she emphasizes the unpredictable nature of opportunity and encourages reaching out wherever possible. Networking, according to Emma, is a cornerstone of success in a foreign professional landscape. Throughout her journey, Emma found unwavering support from the Rian Immigrant Center, with special mention to its manager of Intern Placements on the Learning Exchange Programs team. The assistance provided proved to be invaluable, solidifying the importance of robust support networks for international individuals navigating career paths in the United States.

Emma Collins's time as a participant on the J-1 Irish Work and Travel visa is a testament to the resilience, adaptability, and sense of adventure that define those who seek to make their mark in the global professional arena. As she looks ahead to new horizons and endeavors, Emma's story serves as inspiration for others navigating the vibrant tapestry of opportunities in the United States.



# Keep the Season Bright, with Holiday Entertainment

By R. J. Donovan  
Special to Boston Irish

*With the smell of fresh evergreen in the air, holiday entertainment abounds throughout the city. The choices below offer something for everyone.*



## A Very Darren Christmas Dec. 7, Emerson Colonial

It's beginning to look a lot like CHRISTMAS. Emmy and Golden Globe Award winner Darren Criss kicks off the holiday season with an eclectic collection of Christmas classics, novelty tunes, and modern-day folk-pop ballads. The concert is based on his best-selling holiday album of the same name. You'll be Glee-filled! (emersoncolonialtheatre.com)

## The Illusionists: Magic for the Holidays Dec 8 - 10, Emerson Colonial

Celebrate the season with this mind-blowing showcase featuring some of the world's most incredible illusionists. They've shattered box office records with a powerful mix of outrageous artistry and sophisticated magic. (emersoncolonialtheatre.com)



## All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914 Dec 8 - 23, Greater Boston Stage Company

It's Christmas, 1914, on the Western Front. In this award-winning production, a German soldier steps into No Man's Land, singing "Stille Nacht," initiating an extraordinary night of unity, music, and peace among enemies. This remarkable, true story is told through the words and songs of the men who experienced it, delivering a touching testament to the resilience of the human spirit. Sleep in heavenly peace. (greaterbostonstage.org)



## ChristmasTime at Reagle Music Theatre Through Dec 10, Robinson Theatre

Reagle's beloved Christmas extravaganza returns in a production designed to transport the entire family into a world of more than 100 performers, a full orchestra, precision dancers, a living nativity, a visit to the North Pole, and a glimpse of Victorian Christmas in Boston. Let it snow! (reaglemusictheatre.org)



## Boston's Big Band Christmas Dec. 12, City Winery Boston

The 19-piece Compaq Big Band is back with vocalist Alexandra Grace for a Big Band Christmas show. Their exhilarating show will be filled with seasonal favorites running from traditional swing and very untraditional jazz, to rock, ballad, and jazzy waltz tunes – all with high-energy arrangements. It's exciting, inspirational and just plain fun. Even the biggest Grinch will be tapping his toes. (citywinery.com).



## Christmas with The Back Bay Ringers Dec 15, Union Church

Join the Back Bay Ringers for a retrospective concert featuring both classical and contemporary favorites, brought to life on a dazzling array of handbells, chimes, and other percussion pieces. This year's program will include everything from "All I Want For Christmas Is You" to "Silver Bells," "Change Ring Prelude on Divinum Mysterium" and "Stille Nacht." (backbayringers.org)



## A Boston Christmas: Bright Star Dec. 15 - 16, Old South Church

Inspired by the 300th anniversary of Bach's arrival at the Thomaskirche, "A Boston Christmas: Bright Star" features The Back Bay Chorale in three musical "scenes" – beginning in Leipzig, 1723, moving on to the Harlem Renaissance, and ending with music from the present day to bring the fanfare to a close. Enjoy Holiday music from around the world. (bbcboston.org)



## Midwinter Revels: The Feast of Fools Dec 15 - 28, Sanders Theatre

This year's 53rd annual Midwinter Revels transports audiences to Medieval England and the colorful Feast of Fools where everything is topsy-turvy by design. Enjoy charming dance, carols, comedy, and storytelling as Revels celebrates the winter solstice at Harvard University's historic Sanders Theatre. Sing in exaltation. (revels.org)



## Langston Hughes' Black Nativity Through Dec 17, Emerson Paramount Theatre

"Black Nativity" presents the traditional Christmas story as a narrative of common people receiving the divine gifts of joy and hope. With a swell of energetic, gospel music performed by children and adults, the Christ Child arrives amid dramatic dance propelled by African drums. Written by Langston Hughes, "Black Nativity" is a gift from Boston's black community to people of goodwill from all cultures and spiritual traditions. With tidings of comfort and joy! (emersontheatres.org)

## Christmas at Emmanuel Dec. 17, Emmanuel Church

With mistletoe hung, Emmanuel Music will join Cambridge Common Voices and the Boston Children's Chorus for an opulent celebration of the holidays, centered around Benjamin Britten's dramatic cantata "Saint Nicolas," inspired by Saint Nicholas' legendary care for the poor and oppressed. Set against the lush horns and arias of Bach's cantata, "Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen," BWV 65, the evening links holiday traditions old and new with a newly commissioned motet by Jonathan Woody. (emmanuelmusic.org).



## A Christmas Carol: A Musical Ghost Story Through Dec. 23,

## North Shore Music Theatre

This original adaptation based on Dickens's classic novella has been seen by more than one million North Shore theater-goers since its debut in 1989. The award-winning musical follows miserly Ebenezer Scrooge on a magical journey of redemption where he ultimately discovers the true spirit of the season. David Coffee returns for his 29th season as Scrooge in a delightful evening of song, dance, and sparkling special effects. (nsmt.org)



## Holiday at Pops Through Dec. 24, Symphony Hall

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of New England's most popular Christmastime traditions, as Keith Lockhart, The Boston Pops, and the Tanglewood Festival Chorus offer 39 concerts showcasing holiday favorites, as well as exciting new arrangements of seasonal classics. Plus there's an annual visit from St. Nick himself. Just hear those sleigh bells jinglin.' (bso.org)



## Boston Ballet's The Nutcracker Through Dec 31, Citizens Bank Opera House

Mikko Nissinen's "The Nutcracker" returns to the Opera House with beloved characters, glittering sets, and dancing to lift your spirits. Join young Clara as she gazes in wonder at waltzing flowers, a magical dancing bear, her handsome Prince, sugar plum fairies, and the gently falling snow in Tchaikovsky's beloved ballet. Share the joy of dance. (bostonballet.org)

## Blue Man Group Ongoing, Charles Playhouse

The famous men in blue have just reimagined their antics with new high-tech delights and a finale meant to send audiences soaring into the New Year. They're bald, they're blue, and they're the perfect holiday gift experience. Plus no assembly required. (blueman.com/boston)

*And to all, a good night!*



# Boston Irish Arts Calendar December 2023

BY SEAN SMITH

BOSTONIRISH CONTRIBUTOR

Not surprisingly, holiday-themed events are plentiful this month in the local Irish/Celtic music scene. But here's one non-conforming concert that deserves notice: Natick-based fiddler **Leland Martin** will celebrate the official release of his album "Moonlighter" in Harvard Square's Club Passim on Dec. 14. Martin grew up playing music from Irish, Scottish, and other traditions, and along the way became particularly enamored of the Cape Breton style. While most of the material on "Moonlighter" is by Martin or other contemporary composers in those aforementioned traditions, there's a very New England feel to it – part of the reason being that Martin has been highly influenced by "Ryan's Mammoth Collection," a public-domain collection of more than 1,000 fiddle tunes from the New England folk scene in the 19th century. The album also includes collaborations with Conor Hearn, McKinley James, Neil Pearlman, and Katie McNally, so one would hope for a guest appearance or two.

As for the seasonal fare at Passim, a cappella close-harmony quartet **Windborne** will present "Music of Midwinter" on Dec. 19. Long-time mainstays of the New England folk and traditional music community Lynn Mahoney Rowan, Will Thomas Rowan, Lauren Breunig, and Jeremy Carter-Gordon are as much folklorists as folk singers: conversant in the origins of the songs and the cultures from which these emerged. The four have appeared in "A Christmas Celtic Sojourn," and at the Blackstone River Theatre, Caffé Lena, and the Folk Song Society of Greater Boston.

Perhaps there is some definitive metric that constitutes a "tradition," but the **Scottish Fish** holiday show at Passim – which takes place on Dec. 22 – surely qualifies by now. The Boston-based fiddle and cello (with occasional keyboard) quintet of Ava Montesi, Caroline Dressler, Julia Homa, Maggie MacPhail, and Giulia Haible has brought its renditions of Scottish and Cape Breton reels, jigs, strathspeys, and the like to greet the season since 2018, and in 2019 released the holiday-themed CD EP "Tidings." Whether it's traditional or contemporary tunes or their own material, the



Boston-area band Connacht will appear at the Fallout Shelter in Norwood on December 8.

five play all with imaginative, engaging, and downright fun arrangements.

**Ainé Minogue** will once again offer her take on seasonal music with two shows, at 5 and 7:30 p.m., on Dec. 23. A native of Tipperary, Minogue is widely recognized as a premier Irish harpist and singer who conveys the lyricism and richness of Irish music, mythology, and poetry, and is attuned to the traditions, rituals, and celebrations associated with the ancient Celtic world. In addition to having released numerous holiday season albums, Minogue won a New England Emmy Best Producer nomination for the "A Winter's Place" TV special. She will present music of the winter solstice and Christmas, with tunes and carols that have roots in ancient traditions of the British Isles.

For tickets and information on all Passim shows, see [passim.org](http://passim.org). **NOTE:** Minogue also will perform on Dec. 18 at the Peabody Institute Library [[peabodylibrary.org](http://peabodylibrary.org)]

• Cape Breton trad power couple **Natalie MacMaster and Donnell Leahy** come to the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Rockport for "A Celtic Family Christmas" on Dec. 14. Hailing from two legendary family music traditions, fiddlers and step dancers MacMaster and Leahy have now started one of their very own: Their children will join in for a concert of powerful, up-tempo instrumentals as well as intimate, heartfelt melodies.

See [rockportmusic.org/natalie-macmaster](http://rockportmusic.org/natalie-macmaster) for details.

• Also making its customary holiday season stop in Greater Boston will be **Lúnasa** and its layered, harmonically sophisticated, and quite modern treatment of Irish traditional music, marked by precise and polished arrangements yet full of passion and power. They'll be at the Shalin Liu (Dec. 10, at 3 and 7 p.m., [rockportmusic.org](http://rockportmusic.org)), the Brian O'Donovan Legacy Series in the Burren Backroom (Dec. 13, 6 p.m., [burren.com/music.html](http://burren.com/music.html)) and the Spire Center for Performing Arts in Plymouth (Dec. 16, 8

p.m., [spirecenter.org](http://spirecenter.org)).

• The Brian O'Donovan Legacy Series also features Nova Scotian sisters **Cassie and Maggie MacDonald** on Dec. 20 for their "Very Very Cassie and Maggie Christmas" show. Originally more of an instrumental act in presenting their home island's distinctive fiddle and stepdance tradition, the pair went in a new direction for their 2016 album "The Willow Collection," exploring various archives for both Celtic and American folk songs built around themes and symbolism of the willow. Among their honors are Live Ireland Radio Vocalists of the Year, multiple Canadian Folk Music Awards, and the *Chicago Irish-American* Emerging Artist Recording of the Year.

For tickets and details, go to [burren.com/music.html](http://burren.com/music.html).

• Boston-area quartet **Connacht** – with guest singers and dancers – is at the Fallout Shelter in Norwood on Dec. 8. The band of Michael McDonagh, Johnny Coe, Wynter Pingel, and Stuart Peak represents a mix of play-

ing and performing experience that ranges from pure-drop traditional to ceili band to rock and contemporary folk.

Details and tickets available through [extendedplaysessions.com](http://extendedplaysessions.com).

• Going strong for almost four decades now, **Cherish the Ladies** will appear on Dec. 14 at the Bull Run Restaurant in Shirley ([bullrunrestaurant.com](http://bullrunrestaurant.com)) and Dec. 15 at the Spire Center for the Performing Arts in Plymouth ([spirecenter.org](http://spirecenter.org)). The groundbreaking band – co-founders Joannie Madden and Mary Coogan, along with Nollaig Casey, Mirella Murray, and Kathleen Boyle – has earned a Grammy nomination as well as such honors as Best Musical Group of the Year (BBC) and Top North American Celtic Group (Irish Music Awards), and to top it off, have a street named for them on the Grand Concourse in Bronx, NY.

• The Irish Cultural Centre of Greater Boston in Canton hosts some accomplished entertainers as part of their holiday activities this month. On Dec. 9 at 7 p.m., long-time Celtic Woman member **Chloë Agnew** – who has five solo recordings, including "Love Is Christmas," to her credit – and assorted friends offer up their annual musical Christmas celebration. Dec. 17 at 4:30 p.m. will be "An Irish Christmas Day" with **Ishna**, which is headed up by husband-wife duo Ciaran Nagle and Tara Novak (both of "Riverdance" and The Three Irish Tenors).

Tickets and other information available via [irishculture.org](http://irishculture.org).

• Down on the Cape, the Chatham Fiddle Company will present "A Celtic Christmas Concert" with **Rose Clancy, Gene Clancy, Max Cohen, John Alden, and Clayton March** on Dec. 16 at 8 p.m. at Chatham Drama Guild. Rose Clancy runs the Chatham Fiddle Company, a locus for traditional music lessons, instrument sales and other activities.

See [chathamfiddlecompany.com](http://chathamfiddlecompany.com) for tickets and details.

• **The Irish Tenors** are at Plymouth Memorial Hall on Dec. 15. Declan Kelly, Anthony Kearns, and Ronan Tynan all have individually accomplished careers that have taken them far and wide, and as a trio have 10 best-selling CDs and are a perennial favorite for many PBS viewers. This past year saw them mark their 25th anniversary with a 50-date world tour. [[memorialhall.com](http://memorialhall.com)].



# Two Legends, Two Thursdays, One Place

Boston College recently featured concerts by fiddlers Frankie Gavin and Kevin Burke

By SEAN SMITH

BOSTONIRISH CONTRIBUTOR

It wasn't actually planned that way, but last month in the space of a week, Boston College's Gaelic Roots series hosted two of the most celebrated Irish fiddle players of the past five decades. On Nov. 2, Frankie Gavin and accompanist Catherine McHugh performed in BC's Connolly House, and then on Nov. 9, Kevin Burke played solo in the very same place.

Gavin's appearance had been postponed twice from earlier in the fall due to visa-related problems, so apply an asterisk if need be. Nonetheless, the confluence of concerts underscored yet again the bountiful richness of Greater Boston's Irish/Celtic scene, where seemingly every day of a given week offers opportunities to watch celebrated performers hold forth.

Both Gavin and Burke have resumé's that include some of the foundational bands of the modern Irish music revival and a bevy of other memorable collaborations and projects. Gavin, who famously holds the Guinness Book of World Records honor as "the world's fastest fiddle player," co-founded De Dannan and he has played and recorded with Stéphane Grappelli, Andy Irvine, Yehudi Menuhin, the Rolling Stones, and Elvis Costello, among others. He has also explored different routes Irish traditional music has taken down through time, notably in 1920s America, hence his founding of the Roaring Twenties Irish Orchestra.

Burke was a member of the Bothy Band – he also formed a longstanding partnership with the group's guitarist Mícheál Ó Domhnaill – had stints with Patrick Street, the Celtic Fiddle Festival and Open House, and has worked with accordionist Jackie Daly and film composer Cal Scott. Winner of a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts, Burke founded his own record company, Loftus Music; one of the company's releases, "Sligo Made," features Burke and other musicians influenced by the Sligo tradition. He recently launched a new video series, "Music from an Irish Cottage," with assorted guests.

The Gaelic Roots events provided an occasion to catch up with the two icons, who chatted for several minutes in the cozy Connolly House library prior to their respective shows.

## Lifting hearts

Frankie Gavin gives the very strong impression of a man who's making up for lost time.

Like so many musicians, he saw a lot of plans waylaid by the pandemic. But in early 2022, just as some degree of normalcy began to emerge, Gavin was diagnosed with stage 3 esophageal cancer, which necessitated challenging and quite expensive treatment. A GoFundMe page set up by his son Julian brought forth a tremendous response from friends and fans, however, and



Frankie Gavin and Catherine McHugh performing at Boston College's Gaelic Roots series November 2.

Sean Smith photo

he was able to get the surgery. Within months, Gavin was back playing music.

"I'm feeling absolutely great, and my scans are clear," he declares. "Really just putting it all in the past."

One bit of unfinished business that was particularly satisfying for Gavin to settle was to perform the symphonic suite that he and pianist Carl Hession composed in honor of Grace Kelly, the daughter of Irish immigrants who became a movie star, then Princess of Monaco and a worldwide activist for children's rights. The work had been scheduled to premiere in Monaco in early 2020 with Grace's son Prince Albert – an Irish fiddle aficionado and friend of Gavin – in attendance, but the prince became ill with Covid.

The premiere finally took place in September 2022, with Gavin and fiddler Ciara O'Brien playing with the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra; De Dannan opened the show, and Prince Albert was able to attend.

"We're hoping to present the suite in the US – preferably in Philadelphia, which was Grace's hometown," says Gavin.

Gavin also is happy to be out touring "Port Éireann," the album he and McHugh released at the beginning of 2022, recorded during the lockdown ("It was nice to be able to achieve something," says Gavin). The 18 tracks are full of classic fiddle tunes, such as "Lord McDonald's," "Ballinasloe Fair," "The Gold Ring," "Sligo Maid" and "Sailor on the Rock." There's also a Gavin original, "The Burren Barndance," and a nod to the late accordionist Joe Burke with the jig "Currants for Cakes and Raisins for Everything," written by Burke's wife Ann Conroy Burke.

The duo's performance at BC included many of the tunes and sets from "Port Éireann," and showed that Gavin hasn't lost a thing: The speed is still there, as is his mastery of ornamentation and variation, and an unapologetic penchant for flair and showmanship to keep everyone on their toes. Oh, and he also served a reminder that he plays one mean flute, too. McHugh, who has toured with Cherish the Ladies, was by no means overmatched by Gavin, nor did her piano accompaniment rein in his fiddling.

"We met through different music circles and just found our playing was very compatible," says Gavin. "Catherine's a great fiddle player herself, so she knows fiddle music inside and out, and understands the way accompaniment can work. Instead of the 'oom-chuck, oom-chuck' approach, she colors in the picture of the music very well." (McHugh, asked about her fiddling, demurs with a smile: "That's just a rumor")

Deciding to skip an intermission, Gavin and McHugh went through a goodly number of sets, at least 15 or more. But Gavin also took some time to demonstrate his stage patter, describing in hilarious detail the series of mishaps and disasters that almost ruined this latest attempt at getting to the US – he made it, only to discover he'd left his wallet back home. Later on in the evening, he introduced a medley as "three reels from the skip," explaining that he'd learned the tunes from a cassette tape that had almost wound up in a landfill.

Any event or conversation with Gavin invariably brings up De Dannan – the official band name now is "Frankie Gavin and De Dannan" – which recently

unveiled a new line-up that, along with Gavin, McHugh, and Kaitlin Cullen-Verhauz (vocals, cello) now includes Ian Kinsella (guitar) and Diarmuid Ó Meachair (melodeon).

De Dannan was a revelation right from the start, with its blistering tempos on instrumental sets, solid traditional repertoire and tight ensemble playing that had at its core Gavin's fiddle and the inimitable accompaniment of Alec Finn on six-string bouzouki, mixing chords, melody, counter melody, and other complementary notes. Those qualities, in turn, were enhanced by their arrangements, often transitioning between full-band-on-hand and smaller combinations.

One of the best examples is the opening track of their "Selected Jigs, Reels and Songs" album, with Finn playing swift arpeggios as Gavin roars into "Tom Billy's Jig," followed by a transition into "Ryan's Jig" with Charlie Piggott's tenor banjo atop not one but two bouzoukis, one of which (played by Johnny Moynihan) contributes a mesmerizingly bassy drone; and then, Gavin seamlessly segues into the first of two reels, and it's during this juncture that we make the acquaintance of Johnny "Ringo" McDonagh, first playing rhythmic bones and then his signature bodhran on the pulsating "Flowers of Red Hill" (in the course of which Gavin switches between octaves) that winds things up.

"I just think our sound was unique from the word 'go,'" says Gavin. "Fiddle, banjo, bodhran, accordion, and then there was Alec's bouzouki – his style just gave it a unique blend. It was all so organic, and so grand to have that come together the way it did." (Finn



died in 2018.)

As De Dannan devotees know, the band has never been one for straitjacketing itself by expectations based on previous works. So, while they might have some of the Irish music revival's finest vocalists in their ranks at one time or another – Moynihan, Dolores Keane, Maura O'Connell, Mary Black, Tommy Fleming – they could also invite singers from the tradition, Sean Ó Conaire and Tom Pháidín Tom, to record with them, as was the case on the "Mist Covered Mountain" album. And even as they explore the breadth of Irish tradition, they also do instrumental covers of The Beatles' "Hey Jude" and Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (renamed "Hibernian Rhapsody") – not to mention a Bach number – or evoke 1920s Irish-American music as the "De Danann All Stars" on "The Star Spangled Molly."

Gavin, for his part, has always relished these excursions into the 1920s. He's more than happy to rhapsodize about the Flanagan Brothers, Dan Sullivan's Shamrock Band, James Morrison, and other denizens of those days. Whatever the other sources of inspiration he's drawn on for his music through the years, it's clear Gavin is sure of his roots.

"The Irish music of that era was such a huge influence for me – I've always felt like I should've lived back then. You listen to the recordings of that time, and there was such great energy, and great accuracy in the way it was played.

"The music just really captured the imagination of the public, and more importantly, it really lifted hearts. That's what I've always tried to do. In fact, if anyone asks me for advice, I say 'Just listen to the old players.'"

## 'It was all just tremendous'

There have been many memorable stays in the Boston area for Kevin Burke, including concerts at the Somerville Theater, Sanders Theater and, of course, The Burren, where he played the week following his performance at Gaelic Roots.

And then there was "a less salubrious occasion," as Burke puts it, in 1980 at a venue he prefers not to name when the organizer (whose name he also prefers to keep anonymous) tried to promote the show as a performance by the Bothy Band.

Problem was that the evening's roster included only Burke, Mícheál Ó Domhnaill and accordionist Máirtín O'Connor. "Sure, Mícheál and I had been in the band, but not Máirtín. It wasn't even close. We told the guy there was just no way, and he got increasingly unhappy about it. But we didn't change our minds."

The larger issue with labeling the trio as the Bothy Band was that, by then, the Bothy Band had broken up. There had never been a formal announcement about it, exactly, but the group had played its last gig the previous year, at the 1979 Ballisodare Festival.

"Well, actually," says Burke, a grin forming, "it's more accurate to say that was the Bothy Band's last concert of the 1970s."

Yes, the Band is back.

Right around the time Burke's recent US tour was underway, Celtic Connections in Scotland announced there will be a Bothy Band reunion concert at its festival in January. Burke will join Donal Lunny,



Kevin Burke during his Gaelic Roots concert on November 9 in BC's Connolly House. Sean Smith photo

Triona Ní Dhomhnaill, Matt Molloy, Paddy Keenan, and Paddy Glackin, the group's original fiddler who left before it formally started up, and was succeeded by Tommy Peoples – yes, Burke was actually the third Bothy fiddler – along with special guest guitarist Sean Óg Graham at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. (Ó Domhnaill died in 2006, Peoples in 2018.)

The announcement wasn't a complete surprise, since photos of the Bothies and Graham had surfaced on social media a few weeks earlier when the group gathered for a special performance that is part of a forthcoming documentary about the band.

"It was all just tremendous," says Burke, adding that that performance "has spawned lots of offers." Concerts in Switzerland and Brittany also are planned thus far during 2024.

Any year that includes a reintroduction to the Bothy Band holds promise – even if it's an election year. Part of what made the Bothies so remarkable was the group's fairly brief existence, about five years, which they nonetheless packed with critically and publicly acclaimed work, including three studio albums and one live recording. A powerhouse of a melody trio – Burke's fiddle, Keenan's pipes/whistle, Molly's flute/whistle – aligned perfectly with an equally dynamic rhythm trinity – Lunny's bouzouki/bodhran, Ó Domhnaill's guitar, Ní Dhomhnaill's keyboards.

The group's arrangements were one master stroke after another, from the first album's opening medley with the rousing guitar and bouzouki intro to "The Kesh Jig," to the full-throttle majesty of "The Hag at the Churn" (including Burke's complementary fiddle part), to the interlaced exquisiteness for "The Butterfly." Not to be overlooked, of course, were the vocals of siblings Ó Domhnaill and Ní Dhomhnaill (Lunny's fine harmony singing also deserves praise), especially on the songs in Gaelic, like "Tíochfaid An Samhradh"; it's worth remembering that Gaelic singing with band accompaniment was still a pretty new thing back then.

Pleased as he is with the Bothy Band Mk. II, Burke has been engrossed in another project quite close to his heart, and literally, his home – a video series, "Music from an Irish Cottage." The premise is straightforward: Burke invites two musicians to join him at his cottage in Mayo (his full-time residence is still Portland, Ore., where he has lived for more than 30 years), where they play and discuss tunes but also talk about friends and acquaintances and share anecdotes. Guests have included Sharon Shannon, Sean Smyth, Josephine Marsh, Nuala Kennedy, and Seamie O'Dowd.

"I'd bought the cottage just before the pandemic, and I was thinking how I'd spent a lot of time in a place like this," says Burke. "As a teenager, I often went around without

my parents to this or that cottage, hoping the musicians there wouldn't kick me out. Remember, back then there wasn't a lot of recorded Irish music, so you really had to go out and find people who played it if you wanted to learn. I remember how much I enjoyed the whole experience: It wasn't just listening to or playing the music, it was the small talk, the gossip, the conversations about other musicians.

"People don't learn music like that anymore. The interactions that go on between the tunes mean a lot, but people who only see Irish music performed on a stage or via TV or film productions don't get that, and so they're missing out on an important element of Irish music. I thought it would be nice to recreate that kind of evening, where musicians sit around and talk about music and, well, just about anything."

It's a tight fit in the cabin, so instead of having a swarm of guests, Burke has used what he calls "the Noah's Ark method – two by two" for each episode. Of course, the space is all the more tighter because of the filming/audio crew, but Burke compliments them "for doing their job, which was to be invisible."

Sometimes, he notes, guests have felt a bit self-conscious, even intimidated, by the idea of being casual and spontaneous in a setting that makes such a thing difficult. But Burke has been resolute in having the episodes be unscripted and unrehearsed: "If somebody says, 'Can I just warm up and practice for five or 10 minutes?' I'll say, 'Well, that's what we're going to be filming, then.' The whole point is, this isn't a 'show' – it's what we get up to when no one is watching.

"Mister Scorsese," he adds, "has nothing to worry about."

At his BC concert, Burke essentially turned Connolly House into his cabin and invited the audience to be his guests – and, of course, to buy one of his CDs. "I'm offering a special deal: If you don't like my CD, send it back to me," he said, "and I'll send you a CD that I don't like." For part of the evening, he narrated a musical tour across parts of Ireland, noting some of the outstanding fiddlers like Michael Coleman (from Burke's native Sligo), Bobby Casey (Clare) and Lucy Farr (Galway), and playing tunes associated with them and in the style of their particular region.

But Burke is one well-traveled fellow when it comes to music and geography, as he demonstrated in the second half, when he performed a waltz by Cal Scott, a Quebecois set that included "Mouth of the Tobique," "Evening Prayer Blues" by bluegrass king Bill Monroe, and even Simon Jeffé's "Tune for a Found Harmonium," a quirky chameleon of a composition that had its pop culture moment as part of the soundtrack for the movie "Napoleon Dynamite" ("It's not a traditional tune, and it's not an Irish tune," said Burke. "It's barely a tune"). For the grand finale, however, he returned to his Sligo roots, playing two stalwart reels popularized by Michael Coleman, "Bonnie Kate" and "Jenny's Chickens."

While Burke was in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, that evening, he seemed just as at home as if he were some 3,000 miles east, in that little Mayo cottage.

For recordings and other information related to Frankie Gavin or Kevin Burke, see their websites: Gavin ([frankiegavin-dedannan.irish](http://frankiegavin-dedannan.irish)); Burke ([www.kevinburke.com](http://www.kevinburke.com))



# For this Boston College Burns Scholar, romanticism and water mix very well

Claire Connolly brings unique blend of research interests to her work

Technically, Claire Connolly may be a “visiting scholar” at Boston College, but she already knows the place quite well.

The Burns Visiting Scholar in Irish Studies for 2023-2024, Connolly spent 2002-2003 as a visiting associate professor at BC, and has spoken on campus several times over the years. She also collaborated with Associate Professor of English Marjorie Howes, a member of the BC Irish Studies faculty, as editor of the six-volume *Irish Literature in Transition, 177-2020*.

“There is just a great community of scholars here, across the disciplines,” said Connolly, professor of modern English at University College Cork (UCC) and author of *“A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790-1829,”* which won the American Conference for Irish Studies Donald J. Murphy Prize for Distinguished First Monograph.

“The students, undergraduate or graduate, are wonderful people to speak with, whether in the context of a class or one-on-one. And then there are the amazing resources of the Burns and O’Neill libraries. So, I was very pleased and excited to have the opportunity to come to BC again for an entire academic year.”

A collaboration between the Center for Irish Programs and University Libraries, the Burns Scholar program brings outstanding academics, writers, journalists, librarians, and other notable figures to the University to teach courses, offer public lectures, and work with the resources of the Burns Library in their ongoing research, writing, and creative endeavors related to Irish history, art, and culture.

Connolly—a native of Clonmel in County Tipperary—shared insights from her unique perspective on 18th- and 19th-century Irish culture on Dec. 6 at BC when she presented the fall Burns Scholar Lecture, “Watery Romanticism: Crossing the Irish Sea with Keats.” She also will give a lecture during the spring semester.

“Watery Romanticism” represents a confluence of two of Connolly’s scholarly pursuits. She has long researched and written about Romanticism, the artistic and intellectual movement that accentuated emotion and individualism, in large part through veneration of the past and the natural world—a response to the Age of Enlightenment and, in particular, the scientific interpretation of nature. Among its leading figures was the English poet John Keats, tragic author of works such as “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (“Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all/ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”), whose travels in his short life included a walking tour of England’s Lake District and Scotland that involved a brief trip to Ireland.

Prior to beginning that odyssey, Keats became one of countless individuals to make the crossing between Scotland and



In recent years, Connolly has led the interdisciplinary environmental and public humanities projects “Deep Maps: West Cork Coastal Cultures” and “Ports, Past and Present,” analyzing the extensive, often complex relationship over hundreds of years between Irish people and the coastal and marine areas they have inhabited, explored, utilized, and exploited. For her lecture, she used findings from this work as a lens to analyze the Irish and Scottish letters of John Keats, at right, and discuss the limits imposed upon the creative imaginative by the teeming, dismal scenes of pre-famine Ireland.

Ireland via the Irish Sea. Such journeys were commonplace, even mundane, but also held great cultural significance for Ireland, notes Connolly.

“Seas and coasts were part of everyday Irish life in the Romantic era,” she explained. “Authors, soldiers, landlords, migrant workers, students and members of Parliament moved between the islands and across the British Empire along with books, letters, wine, food, weapons, and cattle.”

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“Keats had yet to write his most well-known poems before the trip to Ireland, so it’s interesting to get a sense of what he encountered,” Connolly said. “He hadn’t really envisioned a ‘tour’; he just got on the ferry and was in Ireland. His writing from that time doesn’t have a tourist’s perspective: Among other

things, he saw a rapidly developing Belfast, ravaged with disease, and was unimpressed: He remarked that Belfast was more expensive than Covent Garden.”

Environmental humanities is a highly effective means by which to view Irish history and culture more comprehensively, said Connolly. “The late 18th and 19th century was a very intense period where the relationship between people, land, environment, along with justice, was intertwined in ways not always fully appreciated. As records indicate, there was certainly a legacy of extraction and exploitation—the colonial government seeking to ‘improve’ the land through draining bogs and harvesting seaweed, for instance—but also one of conservation and attention to biodiversity.

“So, how do we assess the impressions of a Romantic like Keats in the context of what scientific findings, official documentation, and other evidence tells us? What might it say about Romanticism and its place in Irish history and culture, and about criticism of Romanticism, such as during the early years of the Irish Free State?”

Having grown up “at the bottom of a valley with no TV reception,” Connolly said, she was always a keen reader. She came of age in the 1980s, a period marked by the continuing turmoil of the Troubles but also referenda on abortion



and divorce that finally led to some important societal changes in Ireland. After earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees from UCC, Connolly emigrated to Wales, earning a doctorate at Cardiff University and serving on its faculty. She returned to Ireland in 2012.

Connolly has edited or co-edited 10 books and authored dozens of book chapters and articles, and has been O’Brien Professor at Concordia University in Montreal and Parnell Fellow in Irish Studies at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Her affiliations include membership in the Royal Irish Academy, the board of the Irish Research Council and Council of the Royal Irish Academy, and the Cambridge Studies in Romanticism editorial board; she also is a Fellow of the Learned Society of Wales and a Corresponding Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Information about the Burns Scholar program and related events can be found via the Boston College Irish Studies website at [bc.edu/irish](http://bc.edu/irish).



# Wrap yourself in a winter break in dynamic Dublin

From music and markets to theatre, art, fabulous food and cosy pubs, Dublin has everything you need for an amazing winter break. Here is a taste of what's on offer:

**A night at the theatre:** There's always lots of great theatre in Dublin. Winter highlights include the Abbey Theatre's modern take on Brendan Behan's "The Quare Fellow," featuring a cast of all female and non-binary actors playing the male roles, while over at the Gate Theatre there's a chance to see Roddy Doyle's reimagining of "Peter Pan."

**Wonderful lights:** Ireland's largest-ever light show returns to Malahide Castle with the gardens and woodland glowing with huge installations. This year's Wonderlights theme is The Magic of Winter with new displays spread

along the 1.8km walking trail. And over at Dublin Zoo, Wild Lights, a nighttime spectacular takes you into a land of magical creatures.

**Awesome art:** Art lovers will be spoiled for choice. The Hugh Lane Gallery is hosting Ireland's biggest ever Andy Warhol exhibition, Andy Warhol Three Times Out while the National Gallery of Ireland's winter exhibitions include Lavery. On Location, a tribute to the internationally renowned Irish painter.

**Great gigs:** Dublin's 3Arena will host performances by top artists including Anne Marie, Ice Cube and Hozier as well as a sensational Viennese Christmas Gala Concert. And at Bord Gáis Theatre musical delights will include Puccini's "La Bohème" and the musical Charlie

and The Chocolate Factory. Elsewhere, live music abounds; check out Whelan's and Vicar Street for an eclectic programme of gigs.

**Literary insights:** On the first Friday of every month, the Museum of Literature Ireland stays open late for an evening of readings, discussions and whiskey tastings, alongside the usual exhibits. At the National Library of Ireland you can explore the work of two Nobel Laureates Seamus Heaney and WB Yeats. Or why not experience an enchanting music-filled tour of St Patrick's Cathedral and discover the legacy of Jonathan Swift.

**Christmas magic:** Bustling markets, streets lit by fairy lights, angelic choirs and festive fun make Dublin a great Christmas destination. Why not enjoy

a Celtic Nights Christmas show full of good food, Irish music and dance or hop on board a Christmas Twinkling Lights Vintage Tea trip where you can savour a festive afternoon tea on a bus ride through the city.

**New Year Festival:** Dublin's four-day New Year Festival is a great reason to visit the city. Ring in the New Year at the countdown concert, just one of the festival's many live music concerts taking place in three of the city's landmark locations - Dublin Castle, the National Museum of Ireland: Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks and Meeting House Square. There will also be street entertainment, pyrotechnics, light displays parades and more.

Ireland.com

## Replace those winter blues with Dublin's joyful Tradfest

Tradfest showcases the best of established and emerging musical talent in over 50 performances across Dublin over a five-day period stretching from Jan. 24 to Jan. 28.

From Irish harpists, Galician bagpipers and bluegrass banjoists to fusions of trad with hip-hop, New Orleans jazz and mambo, the programme promises to deliver some of the best and freshest trad and folk performances on the planet.

This year's highlights include a celebration of singer/songwriter Ralph McTell who turns 80 in 2024.

To mark his special year, he will perform with some of Ireland's finest artists in a unique collaboration that affirms his connection with and love for the music and culture of Ireland.

- "Janis Ian - A Life Between the Lines" will honor the life and work of the legendary singer/songwriter who will discuss her life and career and introduce performances of her work by friends and colleagues.

- Women of Note will feature a coming together of Irish



and international artists from diverse backgrounds and culture, while the Pride Gélí will fly the flag for the LGBTQ+ community in an evening of music, dance and craic.

- There will performances from long-established artists like Altan, a leading force in traditional Irish music for nearly 40 years, alongside newcomers like Alannah Thornburgh, an

award-winning instrumentalist and composer from the west of Ireland.

Tradfest also champions artists who are redefining Irish trad music, such as Limerick rapper

Strange Boy, and WeAreGriot, a collection of Nigerian-Irish poets and storytellers who will perform Shtory, an intertwining of words, visuals, and music.

With its roots in the vibrant setting of Dublin's Temple Bar area, Tradfest now stretches across the city with live music events in a number of landmark buildings and performance arenas.

This year's headline venues include historic Dublin Castle, atmospheric Pepper Canister Church, and the splendidly gothic St Patrick's Cathedral. Some of the city's most important heritage buildings will also host concerts, including Collins Barracks, which is a National Museum of Ireland site, and the GPO, famously used in the 1916 Easter Rising.

Beyond the ticketed events there will be planned and impromptu sessions in pubs across Dublin, together with a programme of fringe events, enabling everyone to join in this joyful celebration of Irish music and culture.

Ireland.com







Killarney, County Kerry

May you be blessed with the spirit of the season, which is peace,  
The gladness of the season, which is hope,  
And the heart of the season, which is love.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays from all of us here on the  
island of Ireland. We look forward to welcoming you home in 2024!

**Ireland.com**