

August at the Museum!



Celebrate the Festival of Lughnasa.



**Tailtiu
Great One of the Earth**



Lugh the Long Arm

As the summer comes to a close, we reflect on the ancient festival of Lughnasa.

The period of Lughnasa begins on August 1, and marks the start of the harvest season, which includes the months of August, September and October. This season ends with the great festival of Samhain, or Halloween, on November 1.

Lughnasa is identified with the fruition and completion of the agricultural year and as such, may also be identified with the same period in a person's life, and an opportunity to pause, ponder, and reflect on the years of productivity and consequent fruition.

Lughnasa is named after the Irish god Lugh, whose name means light or bright one. He established the harvest festival and funeral games, Áenach Tailteann, in honor of his foster mother Tailtiu, who died of exhaustion after clearing the plains of Ireland for agriculture. This fair

used to take place in Tailtu (Teltown, Co. Meath) and was famous in bygone days. The crowds were so great in 1168 that the Annals of the Four Masters recorded the line of horses and vehicles was six miles long.

Lughnasa is a time for celebration, because traditionally farmers hoped to have the first crops ready for harvesting by this time. These crops included oats, potatoes, and fresh fruit, and the festive meal was prepared from these foods. In bygone days it was also a time for community gatherings and excursions to hills and lakes, and often included hill climbing on the first Sunday in August or last Sunday in July. The annual Puck fair in Killorglin, Co. Kerry, commences on August 10 and is a good example of the Lughnasa tradition of celebrating the start of the harvest season with music, dance, drink, and play, as well as the trading of goods and livestock. This fair also involves the crowning of a male goat by a young girl, which some scholars think is a pagan fertility symbol. If so, it suggests that even in the midst of the harvest and fruition of one year's crops, there is already the acknowledgement that the fruitful cycle will begin again.

Folklorist Máire McNeill identified 78 hills that were used for these large community occasions and pilgrimages, the most famous being the annual pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, in Co. Mayo, which occurs on Reek Sunday, the last Sunday of July. This pilgrimage has been taking place for well over a thousand years with 15 to 30 thousand pilgrims making the ascent on that day. The mountain is 764 meters in height and the climb takes about two hours. Some pilgrims undertake the climb in their bare feet over sharp stone and shale sliding underfoot.

In bygone days, courtships initiated at this time culminated in marriage on "Runaway Sunday" or "Galloping Tuesday," which were the vernacular names for the last Sunday and last Tuesday before the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday.

Lughnasa belongs to that third stage of a person's life, where it is time to reflect on what has been achieved and to realize that climbing new hills with the agility of youth is no longer possible.

Lughnasa is therefore a time for reflection, thanksgiving and recognition of achievement. It is a time to give thanks for past abundance and to recognize that a new period of life is beginning to unfold. Just as the farmer stores the grain, and the housewife processes the garden produce, it is a time to consider the achievements of life so that they may sustain us through this season of life.

The Lughnasa period of our lives is also an opportunity to appreciate the next generation as they climb the hilltops and we can calmly observe them from the foothills without envy or regret, glad that we have reached this time of year, and appreciative of its bounty both in nature and in ourselves.

With thanks to Rosari Kingston from Irish America Magazine.

Greg Montgomery at the Museum August 14th @ 7.00p.m.

Greg Montgomery received his formal art training at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where he studied painting and lithography, and at the College of St. Rose in Albany, New York where he studied

seriography. Recently, Greg has taken watercolor master classes in Europe with the Australian watercolorist David K. Taylor.

His clean colors, dynamic form, and unusual use of white space make his work unparalleled in the field of equestrian, sporting, and poster art. Greg's series of posters for the Travers Stakes race in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. is the longest running series by a single artist for a single event in racing history.

Over the years, Greg's bold and striking images of the racing scene have steadily increased in popularity. Today, his posters and prints hang in public and private collections worldwide and in the permanent collection of the Library of Congress.

The museum is currently displaying Greg's iconic Saratoga series through August. Greg will discuss his work at a reception on August 14th at the museum.



THE
TRAVERS
149th Running
Saratoga 2018

**Celebrate Irish
American Day
at the Track,
August 22nd
(Travers Week)
from 11a.m. to
5p.m.**

SARATOGA
IRISH-AMERICAN DAY
Wednesday, August 22
GATES OPEN: 11AM | FIRST POST: 1:30PM
Celebrate all things Irish with traditional food,
dancers, musicians, kids activities and more!
NYRA.COM

Bring racing fans extra luck with a day-long celebration of Irish culture and heritage featuring traditional Irish

music, dance, food and entertainment at the Saratoga Pavilion. Musical acts include Spanchill and the Grafton Street Trio. Don't forget to pick up some of Chef Harold Qualter's world-famous soda bread! March is a long way off!!

**The Irish
Connection at
Saratoga.**

One of the more dynamic characters of his time, John "Old Smoke" Morrissey made his way from undefeated

bare-knuckle boxer to establish the Saratoga Race Course and win elections to Congress and the New York State Senate. A poor, uneducated Irish immigrant, Morrissey became a leader in the Dead Rabbits street gang. He won fame and fortune as the operator of a



string of successful gambling houses. He then took Saratoga Springs by storm. He improbably resurrected thoroughbred racing during the Civil War and opened his famous Club House, the most glamorous casino the country had ever seen.

A scant month after the Confederate Army was pushed back at Gettysburg, the "swells" holidaying in Saratoga Springs, New York, flocked to the first thoroughbred race meet contested on the Union Avenue trotting track. It was August 1863 and the meet lasted four days. One hundred and fifty-five years later, hundreds of thousands of fans trek annually to the peerless Saratoga Race Course, across the road from the site of those first races, for six weeks of the finest racing in America.

John Morrissey would be proud. That first, seminal meeting of thoroughbreds in 1863 was his brainchild that he organized, financed, operated and leveraged to immediate success. Charging \$1 admission, Morrissey not only earned back his operating costs, he caught the interest of the men who would join him to form the Saratoga Association.

When John Morrissey was born in 1831 in Templemore, County Tipperary, the likelihood that in 32 years he would be running an elite race meet in upstate New York was as implausible as a Jules Verne adventure. In 1833, Timothy and Julia Morrissey, emigrated with their many daughters and only son, John. Eventually landing in Troy, New York, Timothy was a day-laborer providing a bare-bones existence for his family.

At 12, young Morrissey went to work in the mills of Troy. His earnings were needed by his family, and he was uninspired in the classroom. As he grew and physically matured, Morrissey worked in Troy's iron works, becoming strong and impervious to physical stress. In his off-hours, Morrissey knocked about Troy and environs, leading a gang and learning the ways of street fighting. In fact, his prowess with his fists led to work as a bouncer and security for any number of illicit enterprises. The docks and wharves along Troy's riverfront offered larcenous, pugilistic, and romantic opportunities.

Working on the docks and as a steamboat deckhand, Morrissey's horizons were expanding. He met Susie Smith, the daughter of steamboat captain Levi Smith, fancied her and realized he would need to step up in life to contend for her hand in marriage.

Morrissey was ambitious. He taught himself to read and write in his teens. After a two-month stint in the lock-up for an assault charge, and his relationship with Smith on the rocks, Morrissey decamped from Troy to base himself in New York City. He had won fight after fight in Troy and sought professional fighting opportunities in New York. When he arrived in the city, however, he received a gang-beating so severe it took him weeks to recover. He vowed revenge upon his assailants and systematically found each of them and took his retribution.

Morrissey's size, skill and determination were noticed by Tammany Hall leaders, and he was engaged as an immigrant runner. As boats from Ireland docked at the wharves, Morrissey would meet the disembarking families and direct them to tenement housing. Soon enough, the new arrivals would be naturalized and become voters for Tammany politicians. Staying close to his fighting roots, Morrissey was also a "shoulder-thumper," a Tammany enforcer. This was the brutal era so accurately portrayed in the Martin Scorsese film, *The Gangs of New York*.

It was during this period that Morrissey fought Tom McCann for the right to court Kate Ridgely. The brawlers overturned a woodstove, Morrissey was pinned to the coals and his clothes smoldered, giving him the sobriquet, "Old Smoke."

Morrissey had never gotten over Susie Smith, his first love, and when the couple got back together and married in 1854, Morrissey promised to give up fighting. His bride was a graduate of what is now the Emma Willard School in Troy. She demanded better from John and he complied. Throughout their marriage, the affection and devotion between the pair never paled.

The summer of 1861 saw Susie and John Morrissey visit Saratoga Springs. Morrissey was casing out the town to set up a casino - the place was perfect, it was full of well-heeled vacationers with time and money. Morrissey opened a gambling house conveniently near the train station.

Morrissey's casino operated during the evening and night hours. To keep his clients and their wives happy, they needed more diversions than the mineral springs during the day. This is where founding and running the Saratoga Race Course comes in. It gave people something fun to do. Going to the races was a means of daytime gambling and kept visitors in town so they could frequent Morrissey's casino at night. Later, needing another daytime diversion, Morrissey also founded and ran regattas on Saratoga Lake. Perfect!

As he grew wealthier, Morrissey wielded considerable influence in politics and government circles. Still loosely affiliated with Tammany, he ran for Congress in New York's 5th District in 1867 and won. Finally, he had a job that was legal and something he could proudly present to his son. Morrissey was easily re-elected to a second term. At last, tiring of the corruption rampant in Tammany Hall, he split to join the reformers in the Young Democracy in 1870. He did not seek re-election to Congress for a third term.

In 1871 Morrissey opened his chef d'oeuvre, the Club House. Designed, built, and outfitted to be a gambling palace, the Club House drew the movers and shakers of the day. To keep peace in Saratoga Springs, Morrissey did not allow locals nor women to gamble there, and he was generous to local philanthropies and causes. He endowed schools, rescued homes from foreclosure, and donated to churches. His charity was wide reaching. There is a record of a donation of \$500 to build the Cathedral of the Assumption in Thurles, Tipperary.

Like a dog with a bone, Morrissey could not give up politics. He ran for New York State Senate in 1875 and won on an anti-Tammany platform. He ran from another district and won in 1877.

By this time, despite all his success, Morrissey had experienced his greatest loss. His son John, Jr. died of Bright's Disease on Jan. 1, 1877. It was a blow, hard to recover from for his parents.

During a hard fought 1877 campaign for office, Morrissey's health began to fail. After the election he went south for the winter, returning to New York in the spring no better. Morrissey wanted to return to Saratoga, for better or worse. He, Susie and a retinue of friends and family retainers stayed at the Adelphi Hotel. He died there on May 1, 1878, holding the hand of a priest.

The citizens of Saratoga paid their respects. Morrissey's remains were taken to Troy where thousands of people streamed past the casket on view at his mother-in-law's Troy manse. From there, to the church to the cemetery, the streets were lined with the working people that John Morrissey championed, who treasured him in return.

The bond between the Irish and horses transcends generations. Irish emigrants to the United States and Irish Americans alike, have always been drawn to horses and at Saratoga you will find them all. Some are owners, jockeys and trainers, and others are there simply for fun, to place a wager and enjoy the style.

"Morrissey's story is that of the Irish immigrant writ large," says Ed Collins, Chairman Emeritus of the Irish American Heritage Museum. "Anyone who needs to be reminded about the lives of our Irish immigrant ancestors who struggled to help make America what it is today, need only spend a few hours tracing the footprints of Morrissey."

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2018 Celtic Cruise



August 29

6.30pm Boarding for a 7pm Sailing until 10pm
\$35 in advance; \$45 on the day of the cruise
Includes light fare and cash bar.
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&
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Celtic Cruise with Dutch Apple Tours, August 29th. Boarding at 6.30p.m.

Join us for a sunset cruise to round out the summer before "Back to School time!" The United Irish Societies of the Capital District and the Museum invite you to enjoy a leisurely sunset cruise, light snacks, and music provided by Rick Bedrosian. Rick is the leader of two world renowned bands- Hair Of The Dog (Irish) and Hey Jude (Beatlemania). You can expect to hear fun Celtic and Beatles songs, many sing alongs

by other artists, original tunes and wonderful stories from his five decade career in the music business. There will be a cash bar on board. Please visit the Dutch Apple website to purchase tickets in advance for \$35, or \$45 on the day.