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May at the Museum!



Bealtaine and Labor History Month.

The first of May has been a particularly important time in Ireland since the pagan era, as it represents the beginning of summer and one of the busiest seasons in farming throughout the countryside. Due to its historic and social importance, a deep folklore tradition has sprung up around May Day, with most practices dating back to the nineteenth century though some could be centuries old. Bealtaine was a time of celebration for many though it also represented fear for farmers, whose very existence depended on their work through the summer and the resulting Autumn harvest - as such, there are a number of interesting piseogs (traditions) that are still observed in some areas today.

May Day involved a number of important practices related to farming as it was believed to be a time when crops and livestock could be easily lost, or when bad luck could be inflicted by ill-wishing neighbors - or the fairies. Bonfires were utilized for the cleansing nature of fire. the very word 'Bealtaine' comes from the Irish words Bel tine - which mean bright fire. For May Day, sometimes two bonfires were lit with herds of cows driven between them in a ritual of uncertain origin. It was believed that doing so would protect the cows, cure them of any ailments

and most importantly, bring luck for the year ahead. Bonfires were lit at the top of locally important hilltops such as Westmeath's Hill of Uisneach.

Many households traditionally left out milk and other offerings for the fairies throughout the year to ensure their good will, but for more fearful families, on May Day fresh milk would be poured across the doorway to bar access to the fairy folk and the more superstitious would bring cows to the local fairy fort and spill their blood as an offering. On May Eve, the hours between midnight and the dawn were believed to be the most dangerous and some farmers would stay up all night to try and protect their land from piseogs.

Bealtaine was the opposite of Samhain which was associated with death. The blossoming of life that came with Summer also made an appearance in many of the practices, with May flowers left on doorsteps in order to ward off evil, and May bushes erected in the front gardens of many houses. Children would be sent to collect flowers in baskets and wreaths and these would be used to decorate the front of houses or given to neighbors and friends as a way of spreading good luck. The Maybush was a decorated bush erected in the gardens of rural houses and the center of many towns. Bushes were decorated to welcome the summer with ribbons, tinsel, leftover painted Easter eggs and sometimes even candles! Carrying on the tradition of the use of fire, sometimes the bushes were burnt.

One of the more prevalent fears in the countryside during this time was the fear of 'milk thieves'. Curses (as much as blessings) have traditionally been taken very seriously in rural Ireland, particularly agricultural communities and it was believed that with the use of a specific curse and ill-intent, the milk of the summer could be stolen from your cows and taken for someone else's. On the first day of May sprigs of rowan and hawthorn (known for protective properties) would be hung above the barn door to prevent this from happening. To ward off bad luck, a red ribbon would be tied to the cow's tail or around her neck.

Piseogs were often associated with certain families and certain parishes, with the piseog being passed from mother to daughter. The female connection was due to women being in charge of butter making and butter was a source of wealth in the old days. Seanchai (storyteller) Eddie Lenihan recalls that "some women would creep onto the neighbor's land and, using a scarf or cloth, would skim the dew off the grass on May Eve. Then she would have the dew of the grass of your land to do her bad work." Another woman notorious for piseogs was reputed to use a dead man's hand for working her magic.

Lastly, it was said that if you bathed your face in the dew at sunrise, you would never age!

LABOR HISTORY MONTH

The Irish played a huge part in transforming labor conditions in the United States, and May has been designated Labor History Month. People like Mother Jones, Peter Maguire, Matthew Maguire, Terence Powderly, Michael Quill, Leonora Barry, Kate Mullany, and Leonora O' Reilly, worked passionately since the 19th century for workers' rights and conditions. Irish labor leaders James Larkin and James Connolly both spent time in New York, campaigning for workers before returning home to lead the movement there. In fact, Larkin became involved in the early communist movement in America, and was jailed in 1920 in the midst of the Red Scare after being found guilty of 'criminal anarchy.' He spent several years at Sing Sing, before he was eventually pardoned by the Governor of New York Al Smith in 1923 and later deported.

The Irish played a major role in the industrialization of the United States by providing much of the unskilled labor involved in creating the new American infrastructure. This month, we will reflect on Irish American involvement in canal building, railroads, domestic work, as well as their experience with child labor, discrimination and prejudice.

I am the little Irish boy
That lives in the shanty
I am four years old today
And shall soon be one and twenty
I shall grow up
And be a great man
And shovel all day
As hard as I can.

Down in the deep cut
Where the men lived

Who made the Railroad

who made the Railroad.
For supper
I have some potato
And sometimes some bread
And then if it's cold
I go right to bed.

I lie on some straw
Under my father's coat

My mother does not cry
And my father does not scold
For I am a little Irish Boy
And I'm four years old.

Henry David Thoreau, "I am the Little Irish Boy."

The poem was written by the famous American philosopher and writer Henry David Thoreau in Concord, Massachusetts in 1850. He wrote it at the height of the Irish refugee crisis, when impoverished Irish refugees fleeing the Irish potato famine built refugee camps called shantytowns on marginal land. The newcomers mostly worked at menial pick-and-shovel jobs, building roads and railways.

The boy's name was Johnny Riordan. Thoreau first mentioned the boy in a journal entry of November 28, 1850, when he penned the poem. A few weeks later, on December 21, 1851, he became upset about the boy's condition:

"This little mass of humanity, this tender gobbet [?] for the fates, cast into a cold world with a torn lichen leaf wrapped about him...I shudder when I think of the fate of innocence."

On February 8, 1852 Thoreau finally acted. "Carried a new cloak to Johnny Riordan," he remarked in his journal.

Upon giving his gift to the boy, he gained entry to the Riordan shanty. He wrote in his journal, favorably if very condescendingly, that "the shanty was warmed by the simple social relations of the Irish...What if there is less fire on the hearth, if there is more in the heart!"

(Thanks to Waterford Tresaures, Eddie Lenihan, and The Yankee Encounter for aspects of these articles.)

Cooking with Harold Qualters: Dublin Coddle

Live on Facebook

Wednesday May 5th 3pm.



Join Harold and Elizabeth in the kitchen for great cooking and plenty of craic as Harold shows us how to make the Irish capital's favorite dish - Dublin coddle!

Dublin Coddle apparently dates back to the first Irish famine in the late 1700s, when people made do with whatever food they had. Coddle is considered food for the working class and Dubliners will tell you it is most delicious when enjoyed with a pint of Guinness and plenty of soda bread to soak up the juices. It was reputedly a favorite dish of the writers Seán O'Casey and Jonathan Swift, and it appears in several references to Dublin, including the works of James Joyce.

The word "Coddle" derives from the French term "Caudle" which means to boil gently, parboil or stew. A hearty coddle is made from leftovers and therefore is without a specific recipe (this of course leads to many debates) and typically consists of roughly cut potatoes, sliced onions, rashers and sausages. A traditional coddle did not use carrots. There will be carrots in Harold's version!

Irish Involvement in American Labor

Terry Golway PhD.

Friday May 7th, 7pm on Zoom/LIVE on FACEBOOK

Labor History with Terry Golway



As part of the museum's celebration of Labor History Month, historian, journalist, and editor, Terry Golway will discuss Irish involvement in labor movements and unions as it relates to the immigrant story. Learn about everything from Mother Jones to Labor Day Parades as this noted raconteur spins yarns about famous labor leaders, disasters, and strikes. You always feel like you have a ringside seat at these historical events when Terry describes the scene!

Please email the museum at info@irish-us.org to get the Zoom link, or watch it live on Facebook. There can be a limited audience in person at the Museum, so call us to reserve your spot.

**Triskele in Concert for Mother's Day/Labor History Month
Saturday May 8th, 7pm on Zoom/LIVE on FACEBOOK**

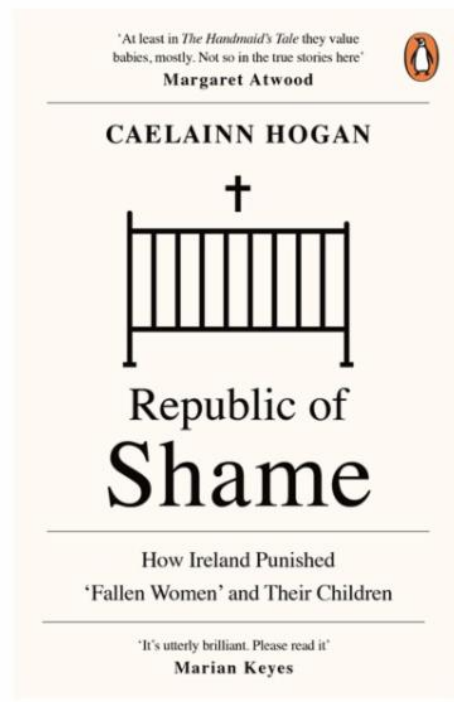




As part of the museum's celebration of Mothers and Labor History Month, Triskele are back! Singing a variety of songs to celebrate women, the band perform with their usual wit and energy. This dynamic trio are not just mistresses of harmony - they are great fun too! Not to be missed. Tickets cost \$10.

Please email the museum at info@irish-us.org to get the Zoom link, or watch it live on Facebook. There can be a limited audience in person at the Museum, so call us to reserve your spot.

**Author Caelainn Hogan discusses Republic of Shame
Wednesday May 12th, 7pm on Zoom/LIVE on FACEBOOK**



Republic of Shame explores and documents the ongoing legacy of the religious-run institutions in Ireland. Until alarmingly recently, the Catholic Church, acting in concert with the Irish state, operated a network of institutions for the concealment, punishment and exploitation of 'fallen women.' Hogan's book interviews people on all sides of the issue, and she writes a moving, often harrowing account of the bravery and struggle of the "penitent" women. This book poses a lot of questions, many of which will probably never be sufficiently answered.

Caelainn Hogan is a writer and journalist from Ireland. Her work has been published in National Geographic, The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker, New Statesman, The Washington Post, Al Jazeera English, Harper's, The Guardian, VICE Magazine, The Dublin Review, and The Irish Times. Her first book, Republic of Shame, is published by Penguin. This event is ONLINE only.

Martin Van Buren and New York's Irish Community.
Elizabeth Stack PhD.
Wednesday May 19th, 7pm on Zoom/LIVE on FACEBOOK



Martin Van Buren's relationship with the Irish community in New York was rather incidental, developing in parallel to the rise of his career. The root of what became a favorable association between the two seems to be an inadvertent outcome grounded in political events that shook Ireland and America beginning in 1798 and continued throughout Van Buren's career/life.

This presentation illuminates how the 1798 Rising of the Society of United Irishmen, America's Quasi-War with France, The War of 1812, Ireland's Great Hunger as well as other significant events that occurred in America and Ireland contributed to the state's history and helped to solidify mutual respect between Martin Van Buren and New York's Irish community.

Maryalice Montaya, a National Park Service Ranger, who has worked in the Historic Interpretation Division at the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site Kinderhook, New York for 3 years will deliver this lecture.

Please email the museum at info@irish-us.org to get the Zoom link, or watch it live on Facebook. There can be a limited audience in person at the Museum, so call us to reserve your spot.

**War of Independence Centenary Series: May 1921.
Elizabeth Stack PhD.
Monday May 24th, 7pm on Zoom/LIVE on FACEBOOK**



AND PADDY WALSH
CAPTURED UNARMED AT THIS BRIDGE
12TH MAY 1921
AND BRUTALLY MURDERED
BY THE BLACK AND TANS
AT GORTAGLANNA
WE REMEMBER ALSO CON DEE
D WAS WOUNDED BUT ESCAPED
TELL THE STORY OF THE
ATROCITY
NORTH KERRY REPUBLICAN
MEMORIAL SOLDIERS
COMMITTEE



The twelfth lecture in our War of Independence Centenary Series continues with an in-depth look at the events of May 1921.

The burning of the Customs House was a famous act of symbolic destruction by the IRA in Dublin, but also a military disaster for the organization. Two elections in Ireland took place in 1921, as a result of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 to establish the House of Commons of Northern Ireland and the House of Commons of Southern Ireland. Attacks, reprisals, and burnings continued throughout the country, while on May 5th, the Ulster Unionist leader, James Craig, and the Sinn Féin leader, Éamon de Valera, met for the first and only time.

Please email the museum at info@irish-us.org to get the Zoom link, or watch it live on Facebook. There can be a limited audience in person at the Museum, so call us to reserve your spot.

Commemoration & Memory in Public History
Peter Moloney, PhD and Elizabeth Stack, PhD
Wednesday May 26th, 7PM ZOOM/LIVE on FACEBOOK

