

February at the Museum!





February 1st is the Feast of St. Brigid, Ireland's other Patron Saint.

The Feast of St. Brigid occurs on Imbolc, the old Celtic fire festival which celebrated the return of Spring. Brigid is a very popular saint in Ireland and is also called Mary of the Gael.

The most common custom associated with St. Brigid's Eve was the making of the 'Cros Bride' or 'Bogha Bride,' which was hung in homes and often in the byre (cowshed) also. Tradition states that crosses were made for protection against fire and lightning as well as illness and epidemic disease could be held at bay. If the cross was hung by the door, evil spirits couldn't enter.

Many young people went from house to house with a symbol of the saint, 'The Brideóg.' This was an effigy supposed to represent St. Brigid and made according to the local custom. It was usually a straw doll, dressed to portray a human figure. Often small children went to the neighbor's houses and were given money. In some areas unmarried girls carried the effigy bestowing Brigid's blessing on the house, often they handed out crosses to the head of the houses they visited. It was accepted that the girl who carried the effigy was the most beautiful and modest of all. In other regions no effigy was used, the girl dressed in white and carried a locally made cross to represent the saint. Those who carried the 'brideog' were called 'brideóga', 'biddies' or 'bidy-boys'.

The 'Brat Bride' consisted of a silk ribbon or piece of linen placed on the window sill at night to honor St. Brigid. The general belief was that on the eve of her feast, the saint went around the country and touched the cloth, endowing it with healing powers. Some said it's healing power was strongest after seven years. It was said to help women in childbirth, to ward off magic, the evil eye and fairies. If a farm animal became ill the sign of the cross was made with the brat over it which was then laid on the animals back to ensure the saint's intervention on its behalf. It helped animals to give birth and have a plentiful supply of milk.

Marriage divination was practiced. Imitation ladders and spinning wheels were woven from the rushes. The men would sleep with the spinning wheels under their pillow and the girl would sleep with the ladder under hers. They would see their future partner spinning the wheel or at the top of the ladder. Later the man and woman exchanged them as tokens and if they dreamed of each other they were sure to marry. If the lark or linnet should sing on Brigid's Day then it was a sign of a good spring. The dandelion was known as St. Brigid's flower as it is one of the first wild flowers to bloom after her festival. It has medicinal value and forms the base of a potent wine. The saint entertained in a regal way and was known for home-made ales which she gave to all visitors. Others gathered hoare-frost from grass on the morning of St. Brigid's day as an infallible cure for headache. Many people got water from a well dedicated to Brigid and sprinkled water on their fields, livestock and homes to invoke the blessing of the saint. There are still many sacred trees and wells devoted to St. Brigid in Ireland, and people often tie a little ribbon or some offering there so that their prayer will be answered.

Saint Brigid was born Brigit and shares a name with a Celtic goddess from whom many legends and folk customs are associated. There is much debate over her birthparents, but it is widely believed her mother was Brocca, a Christian baptized by Saint Patrick, and her father was Dubthach, a Leinster chieftain. Brocca was a slave, therefore Brigid was born into slavery.

When Dubthach's wife discovered Brocca was pregnant, she was sold to a Druid landowner. It is not clear if Brocca was unable to produce milk or was not present to care for Brigid, but legend states Brigid vomited any food the druid attempted to feed her, as he was impure, so a white cow with red ears sustained her instead.

Many stories of Brigid's purity followed her childhood. She was unable to keep from feeding the poor and healing them. One story says Brigid once gave her mother's entire store of butter, that was later replenished after Brigid prayed. When she was about ten-years-old, Brigid was returned to her father's home, as he was her legal master. Her charity did not end when she left her mother, and she donated his possessions to anyone who asked.

Eventually, Dubthach became tired of her charitable nature and took her to the king of Leinster, with the intention of selling her. As he spoke to the king, Brigid gave his jeweled sword to a beggar so he could barter it for food for his family. When the king, who was a Christian, saw this, he recognized her heart and convinced Dubthach to grant her freedom by saying, "Her merit before God is greater than ours."

After being freed, Brigid returned to the Druid and her mother, who was in charge of the Druid's dairy. Brigid took over and often gave away milk, but the dairy prospered despite the charitable practice, and the Druid eventually freed Brocca. Brigid then returned to Dubthach, who had arranged for her to marry a bard. She refused and made a vow to always be chaste. Legend has it Brigid prayed that her beauty be taken so no one would want to marry her, and the prayer was granted. It was not until after she made her final vows that her beauty was restored.

Another tale says that when Saint Patrick heard her final vows, he accidentally used the form for ordaining priests. When the error was brought to his attention, he simply replied, "So be it, my son, she is destined for great things."

Little is known about Saint Brigid's life after she entered the Church, but in 40 she founded a monastery in Kildare, called the Church of the Oak. It was built above a pagan shrine to the Celtic goddess Brigid, which was beneath a large oak tree. Brigid and seven friends organized communal consecrated religious life for women in Ireland and she founded two monastic institutions, one for men and one for women. Brigid invited a hermit called Conleth to help her in Kildare as a spiritual pastor.

Her biographer reported that Brigid chose Saint Conleth "to govern the church along with herself."

She later founded a school of art that included metalwork and illumination, which Conleth led as

well. It was at this school that the Book of Kildare, which the Gerald of Wales praised as "the work of angelic, and not human skill," was beautifully illuminated, but was lost three centuries ago.

There is evidence that Brigid was a good friend of Saint Patrick's and that the Trias Thaumaturga claimed, "Between St. Patrick and Brigid, the pillars of the Irish people, there was so great a friendship of charity that they had but one heart and one mind. Through him and through her Christ performed many great works."

Saint Brigid helped many people in her lifetime, but on February 1 525, she passed away of natural causes. Her body was initially kept to the right of the high altar of Kildare Cathedral, with a tomb "adorned with gems and precious stones and crowns of gold and silver," but in 878, during the Scandinavian raids, her relics were moved to the tomb of Patrick and Columba.

In 1185, John de Courcy had her remains relocated in Down Cathedral. Today, Saint Brigid's skull can be found in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Lumiar, Portugal. The tomb in which it is kept bears the inscription, "Here in these three tombs lie the three Irish knights who brought the head of St. Brigid, Virgin, a native of Ireland, whose relic is preserved in this chapel. In memory of which, the officials of the Altar of the same Saint caused this to be done in January AD 1283." A portion of the skull was relocated to St. Bridget's Church and another was sent to the Bishop of Lisbon in St. Brigid's church in Killester.

Saint Brigid's likeness is often depicted holding a reed cross, a crozier, or a lamp.

Carroll Lecture Series - The Role of Sport in Irish Identity

Tuesday February 5th 7pm.

Siena College, Roger Bacon Hall, Room 202.

The popular series on modern Ireland continues. Peter will discuss the role of sport in modern Irish, including the cultural importance of the GAA as well as its parochial structure. The popularity of and reaction to other sports was often at odds with GAA culture, as he will outline. The urban/rural differences will also be explored as will gender roles.



The 2018-2019

Carroll Lecture Series

6 lectures, 4 colleges, 1 museum

Contemporary Ireland

Peter Moloney, PhD

EU scholar, writer, and professor



Lecture #5:

“The Role of Sport in Modern Irish Identity”

7pm, Tues., Feb. 5, 2019

Roger Bacon Hall, Room 202

Siena College

Presented by

The Irish American
Heritage Museum

in partnership with



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**Traditional Music in the Rambling House at the Museum with
Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann
Thursday February 7th 7pm. Donations Appreciated.**

Join us at the museum for our own rambling house and an informal music and song session by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (the Irish Musicians' Association). This is a monthly event at the museum and very popular. Bring your party piece or instrument! Audience participation

welcome and encouraged by our friendly group. Hear traditional Irish music, and old songs, stories and poems in a traditional format that still happens in many Irish homes (and bars) today.

The motto of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is "ceol agus gaol" (music and kinship). Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, headquartered in Ireland, is the primary Irish organization dedicated to the promotion of the music, song, dance and the language of Ireland. There are branches of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann all over the world.

Light refreshments will be provided.



Andrew Finn Magill and Flynn Cohen
Saturday February 9th 7pm. \$15 members, \$20 non-members.
Celtic Hall, 430 New Karner Road, Colonie, Albany 12205.

This is an exciting opportunity to see one of the most sought-after traditional Irish-American musicians of today. Andrew and Flynn are a must-see act and we are delighted to be able to bring them to the Capital Region. Andrew Finn Magill grew up immersed in music, and by age 16, he was a two-time finalist at the All-Ireland Championships. He is equally proficient in several American folk idioms such as old-time and bluegrass. He has toured France with the popular Celtic music & dance revue, Celtic Dances, under the musical direction of Liz Knowles & Kieran O'Hare. Andrew had been hailed by many of Ireland's most famous writers and musicians as a musician to watch.

"This is a fully authentic representation of the tradition that could just as easily have come from Co. Clare or Sligo except that it's all the way from Asheville, North Carolina. This bodes well for the future of Irish music". - Martin Hayes

Please call the museum at 518 427 1916 for tickets. Tickets cost \$15 for members, and \$20 for non-members. Celtic Hall serves food and drink.



Irish Genealogy Lecture Series at the Irish American Heritage Museum: Session II Advanced Irish Genealogy Tuesday February 12th, 6.30pm.

Family History is back at the museum. This three-part series with our Genealogist-in-Residence Lisa Dougherty will help you discover ways to determine your ancestors' specific place of Irish origin, records to use in Ireland to add details to your family tree, and the meaning behind those ethnicity estimates given with DNA tests! Attendees will have the opportunity to register to win an Ancestry DNA kit, given away at the last session on March 12! Parking on city streets is FREE after 5pm, you do not need to register to attend. Note: any announcements regarding rescheduling due to inclement weather will be posted on our Facebook page.

Tuesday, January 8, 6:30pm: Irish Genealogy for Beginners

Once you know where in Ireland your ancestors came from, where do you go from there? Is it necessary to go all the way to Dublin to do research? Join instructor and professional genealogist Lisa Dougherty for a workshop that will acquaint you with Irish records you can use for research, how to access them, and their effective use to find out more about your ancestor's life in Ireland before emigrating to the United States.

Next Session:

Tuesday, March 12, 6:30pm Your Irish DNA



Irish Film Club: The Irish Pub
Wednesday February 13th at 7pm. \$5 members, \$8 non-members.

This is a charming and touching documentary about some of the more traditional pubs in Ireland and the role they play in local community. It focuses on the friendships and "craic" provided in these pubs and the lives of the families who run them - often for generations - in a changing Ireland.

The Irish Pub, a lovingly laid-back documentary about the charms, liquid and otherwise, of the traditional Irish watering hole."

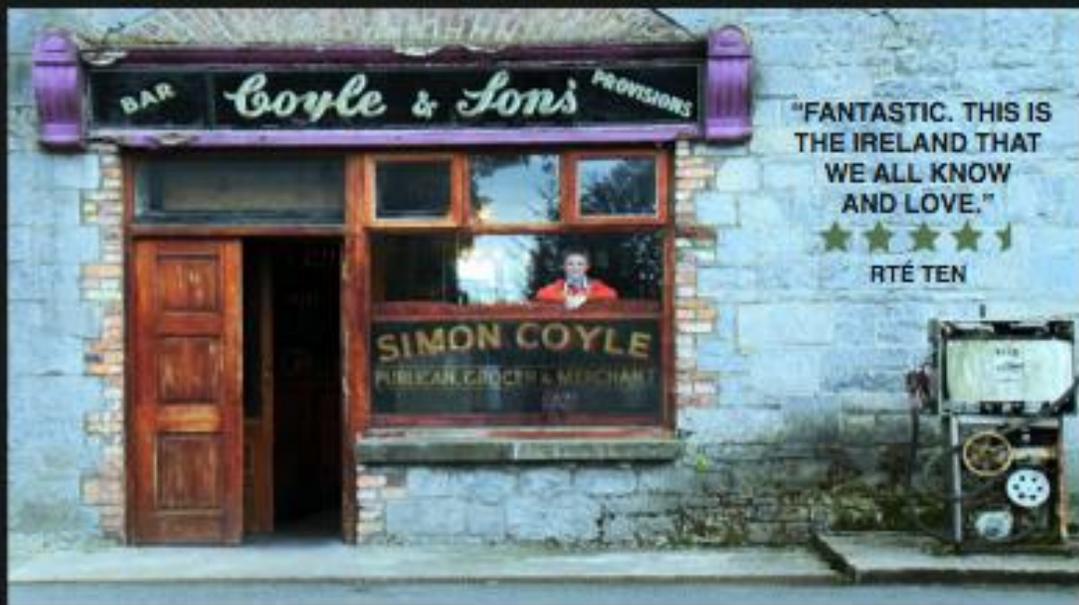
The Washington Post

"If you love Ireland or if you love pubs, and I'm guessing that covers just about everyone, you're going to want to see Alex Fegan's disarmingly modest documentary "The Irish Pub."

The Boston Herald

"The Irish Pub is a picturesque yet realistic documentary about life in Ireland's drinking establishments." "...might bring a tear to your eye." The Boston Globe

THE IRISH PUB



EVENING ECHO

"DELIGHTFUL"

THE IRISH TIMES



RTÉ GUIDE



Readings about love from Irish writers. Friday February 15th 7.00 pm. Donations Appreciated.

The perfect date-night or Galentine's activity! Or perhaps a good way to meet someone! Join the Museum Ensemble for an evening of poetry, prose, and song celebrating some of the greatest love stories - with maybe one or two about heartbreak - as only the Irish could have described it. St. Valentine is buried in Ireland, so he has probably inspired some of the world's most popular love poems.

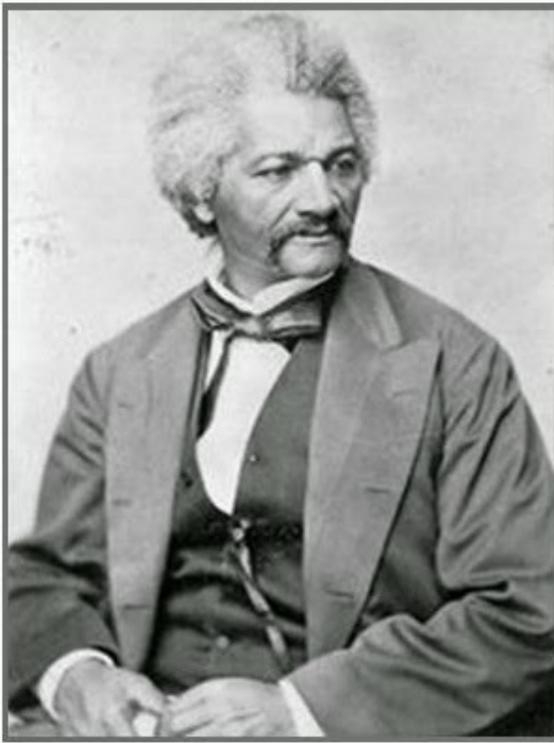


**Frederick Douglass and Daniel O' Connell
Lecture to observe African-American History Month
Thursday February 21st, 7pm**

In spring 1845, Douglass published his first book 'Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave.' The memoir stirred fresh hostilities. To avoid physical harm or being forcibly returned (by bounty-hungry "slave-catchers") to his bondage in Maryland, it was decided that, until things cooled down, he would leave the United States for a while, for a hastily and incompletely planned lecture tour of the British Isles.

The journey would transform the young man. Its impact upon him, particularly in Ireland, which was just experiencing the first year of the famine, would be dramatic, lasting and, in the end, liberating. Put another way, in Ireland, Douglass found his own voice. "I can truly say," he wrote home as he completed his travels there, "I have spent some of the happiest moments of my life since landing in this country, I seem to have undergone a transformation. I live a new life." While in Ireland, he met with Daniel O' Connell, the Liberator, who had secured Catholic Emancipation for the Irish at home, and Dr. Theobald Mathew, a temperance reformer.

There will be an accompanying new exhibit, chronicling the trip and the lives of these outstanding leaders.



**Ray O' Connor - Book Signing "She Called Him Raymond."
Thursday February 28th 7.00 pm. Donations Appreciated.**

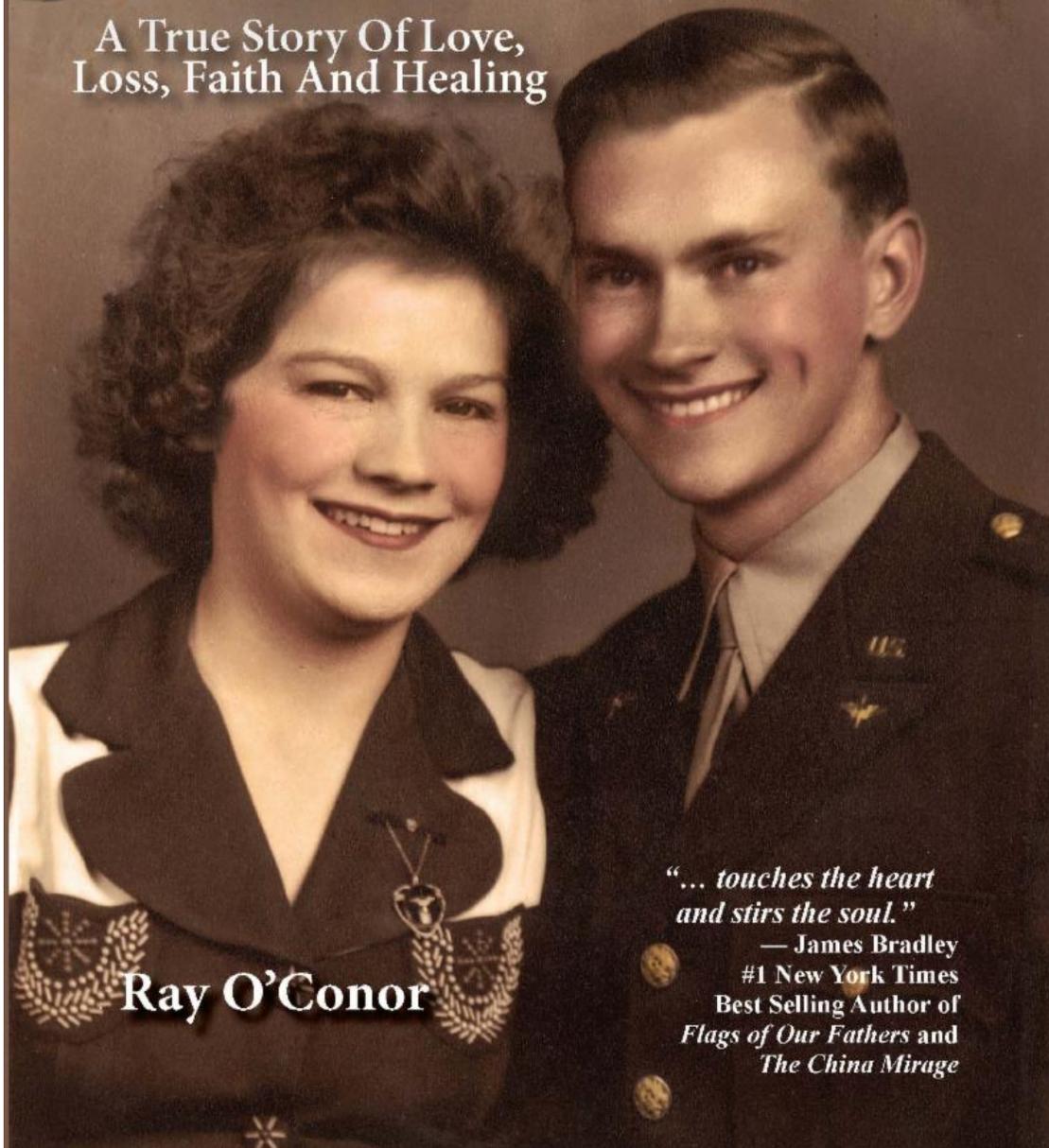
A letter penned in 1944 uncovers the powerful and heartfelt story of Helen Gregg, the daughter of Irish immigrant parents who grew up in the miseries of Hell's Kitchen during the Great Depression, and Clarence Raymond Stephenson, a young aspiring B-17 pilot raised in the small, struggling city of Ironton, Ohio. Fate brings them together in New York's Central Park in 1942 and from the moment their eyes first meet, they know their lives will never be the same. This captivating and poignant story of their struggles and romance, his exploits as a highly decorated B-17 pilot during World War II, and the tragedy that tears them apart, inspires while tugging at your heart. A screenplay adaptation of the book is in development.

Ray O'Connor has been a newspaper columnist and written articles and opinion pieces published in several newspapers and magazines. Ray left his position as a bank CEO and senior officer of a publicly traded company to pursue his writing career. He also served in the past as a Special Agent with the United States Department of Defense. Ray has a lifetime of involvement with many charitable causes. Among other recognitions, he was named a General Mills' "Wheaties Everyday Champion," is the recipient of the Distinguished Leadership Award by the National Association for Community Leadership, the American Bar Association's Liberty Bell Award, the Centennial Good Scout Award from the Boy Scouts of America and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Community Action Award.

She Called Him Raymond



A True Story Of Love,
Loss, Faith And Healing



Ray O'Connor

*"... touches the heart
and stirs the soul."*

— James Bradley
#1 New York Times
Best Selling Author of
Flags of Our Fathers and
The China Mirage

**Museum Trip to the Irish Repertory Theater, Manhattan
Juno and the Paycock by Sean O' Casey, Saturday March 30th 3pm
Tickets, including bus travel, \$90.**

Please call or email the museum to reserve seats. They are limited!

It's 1920, and the Irish War of Independence rages on the streets of Dublin as Irish revolutionaries clash with British auxiliary forces. Aspiring poet Donal Davoren tries to avoid the conflict, but when Donal learns of a rumor that he is a gunman on the run, he cannot resist the curiosity it stirs in beautiful young Minnie Powers ... and he cannot escape the attention of his other neighbors. As the rumor grows, the war outside moves closer to home with tragic

consequences.

The Shadow of a Gunman premiered at The Abbey Theatre in 1923 to immediate success, selling out tickets for the first time in Abbey history, and establishing Sean O'Casey's career as a playwright at age 43. The first of The Dublin Plays, this two-act work is written in O'Casey's characteristic tragicomic style. Although it is widely considered a masterpiece, it is lesser-known than the later two Dublin Plays. Irish Rep is proud to open the O'Casey Season with this compelling work, last seen in the Irish Rep theater in 1999.



Irish American Heritage Museum | 518-427-1916 | info@irish-us.org | www.irish-us.org