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# MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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August 2007

## The Bard of Armagh Is Gone

-- by Mark Sisti

Legendary Irish musician and singer Tommy Makem died at his home in New Hampshire on Wednesday, August 1. He was 74 and had been suffering from lung cancer.

"It is with great sadness that I have to report Tommy Makem passed away tonight after a long bout with lung cancer," said a message posted on his web site Wednesday night.

Tommy Makem was synonymous with Irish folk music, the composer of such classics as Gentle Annie and Four Green Fields. Together with the Clancy Brothers, Tommy Makem literally introduced millions of Americans to Irish Music in the early '60s, and Irish Music has never been the same.

Like most Irish-Americans of my generation, I was introduced to Irish Music through Tommy Makem and his then-partners, the Clancy Brothers. At the time I thought Irish music meant "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" or "McNamara's Band," and on that basis was convinced I didn't like Irish music. Then I picked up a copy (vinyl, of course) of "The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem" (featuring what he called his theme song, "The Bard of Armagh") and the course of my musical life was changed.

It is probably not possible to overstate the importance of Tommy Makem's place in the history and pantheon of Irish Music. The son and heir of the legendary singer, Sarah Makem, Tommy was universally regarded as "The Godfather" of Irish music.

Armed with his banjo, tinwhistle, poetry, stagecraft and his magnificent baritone voice, Tommy mesmerized audiences for more than four decades. He expanded and reshaped the boundaries of Irish culture, and infused a pride in that culture in the Irish, and a quest for knowledge of that culture in countless others.

Together with the Clancy Brothers, and later through his solo career, Tommy played to standing room only audiences from New York's Carnegie Hall and London's Royal Albert Hall to every major concert venue in the English-speaking world. For his promotion of Irish music and Irish culture he received, at various times throughout his career, the Gold Medal from the Eire Society of Boston; the Genesis Award from Stonehill College in Massachusetts; a doctoral degree from the University of New Hampshire; the Lifetime Achievement Award from The World Folk Music Association; and election to Irish America Magazine's permanent Hall Of Fame. In addition, Irish American Magazine selected him as the recipient of the first Aer Lingus/Irish America Lifetime Achievement Award and placed him, along with his old partners the Clancys, in its list of The Top 100 Irish Americans Of The Century.

Even while battling cancer, Tommy continued to perform, with gigs listed through this fall. He performed at the Great American Irish Festival two years ago, and, although he appeared tired, he cracked jokes, posed with fans for photos, sang the familiar songs and, in short, held the audience in the palm of his hand. An ailing Tommy Makem returned to Ireland last month to receive an honorary degree and to visit his native Armagh. Ed Ward of the Milwaukee Irish Festival noted that when he spoke with Tommy upon his return to the states, "He said he was very sad when he boarded a plane to leave Ireland - clearly knowing he would not see it again."



TOMMY MAKEM

1932-2007

*But since it falls unto my lot  
That I should rise and you should not  
I'll gently rise and softly call  
Goodnight, and joy be with you all*

# Elders, Ivers Shine at 2007 Great American Irish Festival



After last year's tornado failed to slow the growth of the Great American Irish Festival, festival director Matt Sullivan said, "Imagine what we can do with good weather!" Well, imagine no longer. With the help of Mother Nature, the 2007 Great American Irish Festival cemented its reputation as the fastest growing event of its kind in the world and staked a strong claim on being the best Irish festival in the Northeast, if not the country.

Final numbers are not available yet and a full recap of this year's Great American Irish Festival will be featured in next month's MVICE Newsletter, but this much can be said with certainty: the anticipated attendance goal of 30,000 was not only reached; it was obliterated!

On Friday, the Great American Irish Festival (for a change) missed the brunt of major thunderstorm activity pounding the area. Some arriving entertainers noted that they had to pull over while driving because rains were so heavy they couldn't see the road, but the Herkimer Fairgrounds saw only a steady drizzle, which did nothing to dampen the spirits of the thousands who came to see acts like the Glengarry Bhoys, Greenwich Meantime, Rathkeltair, the Prodigals and the band that (as predicted in this newsletter) quickly became the talk of the festival: The Elders, whose opening night set had the crowd screaming for more.

Despite a few occasional threatening clouds, Saturday was hot and completely rain free (in fact so hot that some in attendance were wishing for a little light rain). The Elders reinforced their status as festival favorites with two sets on Saturday, the second of which produced deafening roars of applause which could probably be heard as far away as Syracuse. There is perhaps only one band that could have followed that set; fortunately, Enter The Haggis, who closed the night on the Time-Warner Stage Saturday, was that band, and their army of fans (known as Haggisheads) let it be known that ETH still ruled the GAIF.

Meanwhile on the Partners Trust stage, Eileen Ivers lived up to her billing as the foremost proponent of Celtic fiddle in the world, putting on a dazzling show that had the crowd on their feet. By the close of festivities on Saturday, both tents were still filled to capacity.

The only downside for the Elders? The demand for their CDs was so great that they completely sold out by Saturday afternoon and had nothing left to sell for the last day and a half of the festival.

Sunday brought another beautiful day and probably the biggest surprise of the festival. The 10:30 mass, which was expected to bring in a few hundred, drew an estimated 2,000 attendees, as traffic was backed up on to Rt. 5. As always, however, the GAIF volunteers (who Elders vocalist Ian Byrne called the best at any event he had ever been to) were up to the task, shuffling chairs from one tent to the other and back again so that all could be accommodated. If Sunday was meant to be a quiet, relaxing close to the festival, those attending had other ideas, as the previous two days had done nothing to diminish their energy. The Elders and Haggis once again had the Time-Warner Stage crowd jumping, but the set of the day probably went the Eileen Ivers, who closed the show with a blistering set on the Partners Trust Stage that was nothing short of electric.

After the festival ended and cleanup was complete, the weekend closed with a party just for the 500-plus volunteers with music provided, appropriately enough, by the Elders, who at one point had a group of as many as 50 volunteers on stage dancing with them. Remember, this closing party was for volunteers only, so if you don't want to miss out next year, mark your calendars now for the last weekend in July, 2008, to volunteer for the Great American Irish Festival's Fifth Anniversary.

*Be sure to visit [www.uticaod.com](http://www.uticaod.com) for the GAIF-related pictures and videos in their Multimedia section... in addition, photos from five Official GAIF photographers have begun to be posted on the GAIF web site, [www.GAIF.us](http://www.GAIF.us).*

## Artists, festival-goers Rave About 2007 Great American Irish Festival

Think we're exaggerating about how well it went? Well, if you don't believe us, how about these people:

"I can't imagine how it could have turned out any better. It seemed like the crowd was with us before we even walked on stage. The electricity was already hummin' and all we had to do was plug in."

-- *Steve Phillips, The Elders*

"This is the best Irish Festival in New York State."

-- *Graham Smith, The Glengarry Bhoys*

"We can't believe how successful GAIF has become in only a few years! We fully encourage the festival to bring in new acts to keep things fresh -- as long as we get to come back year after year!"

-- *Trevor Lewington, Enter the Haggis*

"You have to bring me back next year!"

-- *Eileen Ivers*

"This is lovely. The people are friendly, receptive. It's a lovely location."

-- *Seamus Kennedy*

"This is absolutely one of the best festivals I've ever been to, the volunteers were outstanding, the performers were super nice, the people in attendance were wonderful. It was just absolutely amazing."

-- *Michigan attendee*

"It was a wonderful festival last year, and this year's was even bigger and better."

-- *New Hampshire attendee*

"What a fantastic event -- again! Not only was this a great opportunity to hear some incredibly talented bands play their hearts out, but it was fun to participate in a festival that was well run and that reached out to Irish and non-Irish alike."

-- *Utica Observer-Dispatch Blog*

"You can't beat the quality of music and the low price of admission. This is growing into one of the premier events in Central New York."

-- *Utica Observer-Dispatch Blog*

"GAIF put on a spectacular festival this year! Every year seems to get better and better..."

-- *Enter the Haggis Talkboard*

"WOW!! I don't know what else to say other than that! This year's festival was certainly one to remember."

-- *Festival attendee*

### MVICE Newsletter Makes Its Presence Felt At the 2007 GAIF

Regular readers of the Mohawk Valley Irish Cultural Events Newsletter may have recognized some of the presentations in the Smurfit-Stone Irish Cultural Center at the 2007 Great American Irish Festival.

In keeping with the GAIF theme commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the worst years of the potato famine, the building boasted a display of a series of panels telling the story of the Great Hunger. Alert MVICE readers recognized the article as having been reprinted (with permission, of course) from this newsletter's three-part series carried in the April, May and June '07 issues.

In addition, the kind people putting on the Irish cooking demonstrations printed, distributed and even tried their hands at cooking some of the recipes printed in past issues. No word on whether or not the ones they tried were the ones that included liberal tastings of Guinness and Jameson's.

*Book Review:*  
**“Belfast Diary”**  
*By Mark Sisti*

In describing the troubles in Northern Ireland, John Conroy notes that the prevailing American view is that they find the “conflict incomprehensible and thought the participants irrational.” If you number yourself in that group, you owe it to yourself to read “Belfast Diary – War as a Way of Life,” Conroy’s account of his time spent living in Belfast. For those of you who consider yourself knowledgeable about the Troubles (as I did), I can guarantee you will never look at them the same way again after reading this book.

From 1980-85, Conroy went from Chicago to live in a Catholic district of West Belfast to observe firsthand the conflict in Northern Ireland. The result of those street-level eyewitness experiences is “Belfast Diary,” an engrossing tale as suspenseful, as poignant, as entertaining, and with as colorful a cast of characters as any novel.

The author takes the reader through the turbulent events in Northern Ireland in the early to mid-80’s, beginning with an overview of the situation as it stood when he arrived and culminating in a riveting retelling of the hunger strike of the IRA prisoners and the impact the strike had on Belfast and, ultimately, on all of Ireland. Conroy skillfully intersperses historical background in a way that never comes off dry or stale, but with an immediacy that makes you understand how so much of the present is a consequence of the events of the past. While Conroy is sympathetic to all those caught up in the conflict, he is not afraid to indict those he feels deserve such condemnation, on both sides.

What amazes Conroy at first is how the residents of Belfast have come to accept what should be unacceptable and have become so inured to horrifying and ceaseless tension and violence that they have come to consider it normal. Yet he gives a sense of how this can happen, as he too becomes more and more habituated, and his writing reflects that. Where at first he describes scenes of unrest and violence with a sense of shock, as the book goes on, similar scenes are narrated as if they were ordinary everyday occurrences. One such example is a discussion of “kneecapping” (a punishment that consists of shooting transgressors through the back of the leg) with one of the victims, a discussion that is chilling in its matter-of-fact delivery (and yet amusing in a typically Irish fatalistic fashion). One victim tells Conroy how, when he was kneecapped, he asked a friend to hold his coat, because the coat cost 90 pounds and he didn’t want it ruined.

The book has been criticized in some circles as being pro-Catholic. The author was, after all, raised as a Catholic, and lived among the Catholics in Belfast, so it can be understood if his view was one-sided, but in actuality Conroy makes every effort to present as balanced a viewpoint as possible and for the most part manages to maintain his objectivity. The problem is that there are all too many instances where the British position is simply indefensible. In many cases any accurate recitation of the facts will make the British standpoint untenable.

Conroy does a remarkable job of humanizing the people involved, so that we don’t just see the British soldiers as soldiers, but as frightened young men who didn’t want to be there any more than most of the Irish wanted them there, and we come to see how that fear was a major factor contributing to the volatility and unrest. Similarly, for those of us here who have grown up thinking of either the IRA or the Protestant paramilitary sects as heroes or demons, Conroy manages to dispel such simplistic notions. Such organizations and the violence they espouse, argues Conroy, were the inevitable byproducts of a bleak industrial landscape and a failing economic system coupled with the creation and forcible maintenance of an illegitimate state.

Many of us have followed the recent sweeping and radical changes in Northern Ireland with hopeful anticipation; Conroy is probably not as optimistic. In an afterword added in 1995 following promising peace talks and an IRA ceasefire, he expresses his doubts that the core issues – discrimination, segregation, the Catholic suspicion of the state or the Protestant siege mentality – had been resolved, and he writes, “I can summon the hope that we have seen the last of it. I cannot summon the belief.”

Will “Belfast Diary” make The Troubles make sense to you? Probably not; it’s doubtful any book can do that. But it will put them into perspective and give you an invaluable insight into the conflict. It is required reading for anyone interested in the history of Ireland and, particularly, Northern Ireland.

## Saw Doctors to Headline “Celtic Night” at Albany’s “At the Plaza Summer Series”

On Wednesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, “Ireland’s most exhilarating musical export,” the **Saw Doctors**, heads up a free “Celtic Night” concert at the Empire State Plaza in Albany NY, as part of the 2007 “At The Plaza Summer Series.” Defying conventional description, the Saw Doctors moved one critic to write “So high-spirited is the party vibe, so up-for-it the crowd, repeatedly taking over the vocals in a succession of rafter-shaking, word-perfect choruses, that the songs can almost seem a mere pretext for the mass exchange of goodwill.” Also on the slate are “the kings of jig-punk,” the **Prodigals** (taking the stage at 5:30 PM) and the pride of Glengarry, Ontario, the **Glengarry Bhoys** (starting at 6:45). The “At the Plaza Summer Series” has become the Capital Region’s premier outdoor event venue. Each summer, thousands of visitors and Capital Region residents flock to the Plaza to enjoy a variety of free, quality events and to bask in the splendor of the Capital City. The Empire State Plaza is located at Exit #3A off of I-787 South.

### From the Irish Kitchen (*recipes suitable for clipping*)

**This month’s recipe – “Guinness Stout Brownies”** (*from Peggy Trowbridge Filippone of [About.com: Home Cooking](http://About.com: Home Cooking)*)

The original version of these brownies was developed in Ireland. The malt in the Guinness stout beer intensifies the flavor of the chocolate in these delicious brownies. The texture is an interesting combination of fudge, mousse, candy, and traditional brownies. Although decadently chocolate, they are surprisingly light due to the eggs. You won’t taste the beer at all. Great for St. Patrick’s Day or any day.

#### INGREDIENTS:

1 cup all-purpose flour	4 large eggs, at room temperature
3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder	1 cup superfine or granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt	1-1/4 cups (10 ounces) Guinness Extra Stout beer (see Note below)
6 tablespoons unsalted room temperature butter, cut into cubes	1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
8 ounces dark bittersweet chocolate, chopped	1/8 cup (about) confectioners’ sugar for dusting
3/4 cup white chocolate chips	

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Line a 9 x 13-inch baking pan with nonstick foil. In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa powder, and salt until evenly combined. Set aside. Melt butter, bittersweet chocolate, and white chocolate chips in a double-boiler over very low heat, stirring constantly until melted. Remove from heat. In a large mixing bowl, beat eggs and sugar on high speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add melted chocolate mixture, beating until combined. Beat reserved flour mixture into melted chocolate mixture. Whisk in Guinness stout beer. The batter will seem a bit thin. Drop semisweet chocolate chips evenly on top of batter (some will sink in). Pour into prepared baking pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes on center rack in the oven, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out almost clean. Let brownies cool, uncovered, to room temperature. Dust with confectioners’ sugar before serving. Yield: 36 to 48 brownies, depending on cut size

Note: The Guinness should be at room temperature. (I must admit that I didn’t know Guinness could even get warm, let alone reach room temperature. I thought that was one of those urban myths; like The Hitchhiker by the Cemetery or likable telemarketers). This recipe uses a little less than a standard 12-ounce bottle of Guinness stout beer. Do not include foam in the measurement. Either spoon off the foam or let it rest until the foam subsides.

*If you try this recipe, feel free to share your experience with all of us; and of course, if you have a recipe you’d like to share, please contact Beth Loftis at [bloftis@adelphia.net](mailto:bloftis@adelphia.net).*

## Cortland Celtic Festival to Take Place from Aug 24-26

# Cortland Celtic Festival

Mark your calendars now for the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Cortland Celtic Festival, taking place from August 24-26 in downtown Cortland, NY. This year's fest promises to be the best one yet! This fun filled event offers something for everyone, from toddlers who will enjoy seeing the Celtic breeds of cattle, sheep, dogs and horses, to grandparents who will enjoy hearing the traditional music of their childhood. There's even a Celtic Run on Saturday at 8:30 am, sponsored by the Cortland YMCA (kilts are optional)! The festival boasts a strong lineup of popular artists, including the Vancouver-based band The Town Pants, the ever-popular Enter the Haggis, and one of Cape Breton's finest young musicians, Kimberley Fraser. For a complete listing, visit the official Celtic Fest web site at [www.cortlandcelticfestival.org](http://www.cortlandcelticfestival.org). While you're on the site, why not buy your tickets and save time and money! The Cortland Celtic Festival is sponsored by the Cortland Celtic Cultural Association, the City and County of Cortland, Price Chopper and Guinness beer.

## Hunter Mountain "International Celtic Festival" set for August 18-19

From August 18-19, Hunter Mountain (Hunter, NY) hosts the annual "International Celtic Festival." The International Celtic Festival brings you the sights and sounds of the Emerald Isles. World-class musicians from Ireland and North America perform on three stages, with plenty of variety to suit any taste. Providing the musical entertainment on three stages will be Black 47, Eileen Ivers and Immigrant Soul, Glengarry Bhoys, Andy Cooney, The Barley Boys, Liz McNicholl, Seamus Kennedy, dancers, pipers and much more. On Sunday, dozens of bagpipe bands take part in a pipe band competition. The highlight of the weekend is the Mass March, as hundreds of pipers and drummers march down the mountain in unison. Tickets for the festival are \$12 for adults, with children 12 and under being free. Hunter Mountain is located just over 2 hours north of New York City in the northern Catskill Mountains of New York State. Whether you are coming from the north or the south, Hunter is a convenient half-hour ride from New York State Thruway exits 20 or 21.



## 26th Annual Buffalo Irish Festival to be held

The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds is the site of the 26<sup>th</sup> annual **Buffalo Irish Festival**, to be held on August 24, 25 & 26. Heading up the impressive lineup are Seamus Kennedy, the Dublin City Ramblers, the Glengarry Bhoys and Greenwich Meantime; with Paddy Keenan, Scythian, Barleyjuice, Irish dancers and much more. Admission to the festival is \$10 for adults and \$7 for kids 4-12 and seniors over 60. Tickets are available at the Shannon Pub, Tara Gift Shoppe, Buffalo Brewpub and at the Dublin House. The festival takes place on Friday from 5-11; Saturday 12-11 and Sunday, 12-9. For more information, check out <http://www.shannonpub.com/irishfestival.htm>. The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds is located at 5600 McKinley Parkway, in Hamburg, NY.

## CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival

The Central New York Scottish Games committee invites you to attend the **CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival** at Long Branch Park in Liverpool, NY for an experience you will never forget! Come to Syracuse, NY area and join us in the wee morning hours Saturday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, and allow us to bring Scotland to you. The aroma of Scottish and American Food, the skirl of pipes, the cadence of the drums, the awe of massed bands, the beauty and form of the dancers, the strength of the athletes and the feeling of clanship all contribute to hours of nostalgia and pure enjoyment! Schedule is 9:00 to 6:00 on Saturday the 11th. [from their web site, <http://www.cnyscots.com/frame.html>]

**Celtic Club Calendar** Finally, here's the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for August.

Aug 3	Blarney Rebel Band	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 3-4	Bill Craig	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 5	Syracuse Irish Session	HalfPenny Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 10	Donal O'Shaughnessey	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 10	Cliudan	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 11	CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival	Long Branch Park	Liverpool, NY	9 Am to 6 PM	Adult: \$10, Seniors: \$7 Kids 5-12: \$4; under 5 free
Aug 11	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Aug 11	Pat Kane	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 12	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 16	Greenwich Meantime and Rathkeltair	<a href="#">Alive at Five</a>	Albany Riverfront Park	5:00 PM	Free
Aug 17	Frank Canistra	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 17	Donal O'Shaughnessey	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 18	Seanache	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 18-19	<a href="#">International Celtic Festival</a>	<a href="#">Hunter Mountain</a>	Hunter, NY		
Aug 22	Saw Doctors (w/ the Glengarry Bhoys and the Prodigals)	<a href="#">Empire State Plaza</a>	Albany	5 to 10 PM	Free
Aug 24-26	<a href="#">Cortland Celtic Festival</a>	<a href="#">Cortland County Fairgrounds</a>	Cortland NY	Check <a href="#">web site</a>	Check <a href="#">web site</a>
Aug 24-26	<a href="#">Buffalo Irish Festival</a>	The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds	Hamburg, NY	Friday 5-11; Saturday 12-11; Sunday 12-9	\$10 (Adults); \$7 (ages 4-12 and 60+)
Aug 24	Blarney Rebel Band	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 24	Neil Emberg	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 25	Traditional Irish Session	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Aug 25	Flyin' Column	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 31	Blarney Rebel Band	<a href="#">Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub</a>	Washington Mills	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 31	Emish	<a href="#">Kitty Hoynes</a>	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free

That wraps it up for this month. If you have anything you want to add to this newsletter, feel free to contact us at [sistia@adelphia.net](mailto:sistia@adelphia.net), [bloftis@verizon.net](mailto:bloftis@verizon.net) or [marksisti@adelphia.net](mailto:marksisti@adelphia.net).