
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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High Kings, Slide Headline 2011 Great American Irish Festival



The Mohawk Valley will once again become the center of the Irish Music world for one weekend this summer, as the biggest names in Celtic music converge on the Herkimer County Fairgrounds in Frankfort on Friday, July 29, Saturday, July 30 and Sunday, July 31 for the 8th Annual Great American Irish Festival.

Starting as a one-day festival drawing approximately 6,000 in 2004, GAIF has grown to a three-day event drawing over 50,000 people each year to celebrate Irish culture. The growth is expected to continue this year, with a 2011 lineup that will equal any festival in the nation. Central New York fans of Celtic music may not realize how lucky they are to have such a world-class event in their own backyard.

“I think it’s important to note that this is not just a big local event,” said Festival Director Matthew Sullivan. “The Great American Irish Festival is recognized internationally as one of the top Irish festivals in the world.”

Sure, there will be most of the bands you have come to look forward to at the Great American Irish Festival – Enter the Haggis, The Elders, Hair of the Dog, the Prodigals – but as always, GAIF officials have made it a priority to bring in first-time acts that will quickly join the ranks of your favorite bands.

Headlining the traditional stage at this year’s festival will be an act that has become a cultural phenomenon, Ireland’s Folk Band of the year and winners of Irish Music Award’s Top Traditional Performance Show, the High Kings. Boasting a musical pedigree that few can match, and fresh off record-breaking PBS showings, four musical powerhouses, Finbarr Clancy of the legendary Clancy family, Brian Dunphy, son of well-known singer Sean Dunphy, Martin Furey of the famous Furey family of musicians, and renowned vocalist Darren Holden have come together to create the most exciting Irish ballad group to emerge since The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem electrified the worldwide folk revival of the 1960s.

Also making their first appearance at GAIF will be the undisputed No. 1 traditional act on the Irish festival circuit, Slide, winners of the Arts Council of Ireland’s Young Musicwide Award, a band that successfully combines the qualities of traditional Irish music with contemporary musical ideas, giving their music a grace and power that is unmatched.

Other acts coming in for the first time include Goitse, a young, vibrant band direct from the University of Limerick’s Traditional Music and Dance program; Burning Bridget Cleary, winners of Album of the Year in the 2010 Celtic Radio Music Awards; and the tribal Celtic rock sounds of Coyote Run.

OK, sure, that would be enough for most festivals. But as you’ve learned by now, GAIF is not like most festivals. In addition to those acts, the Great American Irish Festival is bringing back a number of old friends who haven’t been here for a few years, including legendary Celtic rockers Seven Nations; The Makem Brothers with Mickey and Liam Spain, carrying on the tradition of one of the most famous names in Irish music history; GAIF favorites Barleyjuice; Canada’s superstar family of musicians, singers and step-dancers, Searson; and the versatile and energetic Emish.

Adding to the non-stop entertainment will be a variety of other local and regional performers, including Central New York's most popular Irish performers, The Blarney Rebel Band, Rattlin' Bog, Vince Colgan, Pat Kane, Donal O'Shaughnessy, Kilrush, St. James Gate, the Fighting '86's, Triskele, and The Stoutmen, among others. In addition to the non-stop music, merchandise vendors from across the U.S. and Ireland, carefully selected from a list of applicants, will be selling Irish and Celtic merchandise, and a variety of food booths will be providing a taste of the Emerald Isle for festival-goers. Returning again this year will be the 5k run, bagpipe competition with a spectacular massed march, and Irish Mass. Campsites are also available.

Proceeds from the annual festival will be used to help establish an Irish Cultural Center in the Mohawk Valley. Construction has already begun on the site of the former St. Patrick's Church at the corner of Columbia and Varick Streets.

The Herkimer County Fairgrounds is located just off Route 5s in Frankfort NY, just minutes from the New York State Thruway. For directions, tickets or more information, visit the festival web site at www.gaif.us.

Irish Cultural Society Construction: Harvesting the Past, Building the Future

[As most of you know, The Great American Irish Festival was conceived as the primary fund-raising activity for the construction of an Irish cultural building; a collective vision of the John C. Devereux division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Although kept separate by law and function, these three activities are as inexorably linked as a Celtic knot. Construction began this spring on the highly-anticipated center, and we asked its director, Matt Sullivan, for an update for our readers. Here is his response]

What many of us have been eagerly anticipating for many years is finally underway. The Irish Cultural and Historical Society of the Mohawk Valley (quite a mouthful, huh?) is finally under construction. As of the last week of June, there is about 200' of foundation wall poured and the excavation and masonry work continues. Following a well-attended groundbreaking ceremony on St. Patrick's Day, the excavation work commenced and continued through, literally, the wettest April followed by almost the wettest May on record. In case you're wondering, that's not the most ideal of conditions for digging a deep hole on the flats in Utica. But our excavator Terry Horan, assisted by Jack Kelly, pumped water out daily, monitored the situation and things have finally dried out sufficiently. We are at our desired foundation depth and have taken every measure to ensure that it will stay dry and well-drained. The foundation should be complete around festival time. Thanks go out to Material Sand and Gravel for their pricing on what has been many tons of stone, and Clemente-Fane Concrete (owned by a parent company in Dublin, IE) for their pricing assistance.

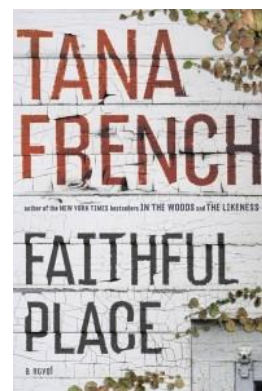
Another aspect that has slowed our progress, albeit intentionally, is the methodical harvesting of the stone foundation from St. Patrick's Church. We have been able to save a huge amount of limestone, other stone and a few artifacts from the church which was rebuilt in 1894. We've spent a great deal of time marveling at the old Irishmen who wrestled some of these enormous stones into place originally. Some of them have strained Terry's huge trackhoe. Jim Sullivan has stopped by routinely and has grand plans for re-using them in our courtyard walls. They will also be utilized for the pub fireplace.

If you have a minute, stop by to view the progress.



Book Review:
“Faithful Place”
By Mark Sisti

One of the most rewarding things about doing these reviews is discovering an author’s debut novel and following his or her growth as a writer through successive books. So far in these pages we’ve done that with Adrian McKinty, Frank Delaney, Declan Hughes, Stuart Neville, and probably a few others I’ve forgotten. Well, add Tana French to this list. Her first in what’s now being called the “Dublin Murder Squad” series, “In The Woods,” featured superb writing but a mystery that, to regular readers of the genre, was a bit below par. Her follow-up effort, “The Likeness,” was a fascinating, if unbelievable story, again, told with a deft touch, but still with enough flaws to keep it from being completely satisfying. The third in the series, “Faithful Place,” completely fulfills the promise of the first two novels. It has the masterful use of language we’ve come to expect, but couples that with a sizzling story, a perfect feel for the setting and a fascinating cast of characters that speak in dialogue so real you’ll wonder what these people are doing when you’re not reading the book.



This series has an interesting twist in that the author features as the protagonist in the current novel someone who was a secondary character in the previous one, and the fact that it works so well is a testament to French’s ability to make each and every character believable. (Part of the fun of this book is trying to figure out who will star in the next one.) This time out we follow Frank Mackey, an undercover detective who first appeared in “The Likeness.” In that novel, we saw Mackey as largely unlikable, acerbic and cynical, but with a sarcastic charm that kept him from being dismissed as one-dimensional. In “Faithful Place” we find out what made Mackey the way he is. Many years earlier – in French’s novels, as in much of Irish fiction, the past constantly impinges on the present – Mackey was set to escape from his dead-end future and his dysfunctional family by eloping with his childhood lover, Rosie Daly, but when the assigned time came, Rosie never showed. A note suggested that she dumped him and left on her own, and a bitter and heartbroken Mackey left town alone and never returned. Many years later he receives a call from the only family member with whom he has stayed in contact, a sister, who tells him that a suitcase was found in the building where he and Rosie were supposed to have met. The need to find out what happened that fateful night overcomes his desire to remain estranged from his abusive family, and, reluctantly, Mackey returns to Faithful Place.

As anyone who has read the first two French novels can attest, these are not mysteries for those who enjoy solving whodunits. As in the previous books, the solution is less interesting than the solving, and even the solving doesn’t put an end to the story. The mystery in this book is far more cohesive than those in her previous novels, although she still wisely avoids tying everything up in a neat little package. But, as before, the mystery takes a back seat to the brilliance of the writing. The depictions of the family dynamics are both funny and heart-wrenching. Mackey is so believable that, as with French’s other protagonists, he will drive you crazy at times with his actions, as if he’s a real person who has a say in what he does, rather than just a character in a book. But the most riveting character is not a person, it is the neighborhood of Faithful Place (a real neighborhood, although not where French places it geographically.) This is working class Dublin at its best and worst. French paints the area and its residents so vividly you can smell the “stale nicotine and stale Guinness,” you can hear the private and not-so-private arguments emanating from each tenement window, you can feel the frustration as they face a hopeless future.

With each successive book, French’s narrative power grows exponentially. The writing is paced and structured so meticulously that, paradoxically, it seems effortless, and she manages to find the perfect cadence for her dialogue depending on which character is speaking, terse and gruff, or lilting and musical. Although classified as a series, each book stands perfectly well on its own, with few references to earlier stories and few returning characters. (One amusing little inside joke involves the pathologist, Cooper, who, each of the three narrators asserts, hates most people but likes them.) Still, while you don’t need to read all three to enjoy them, when they’re all this well-written, why wouldn’t you?

Enter the Haggis to Kick off Festival Weekend at Saranac Thursday

When they booked Great American Irish Festival favorites Enter the Haggis, Fred Matt and John Naegele of the Saranac Brewery said it loud and clear: Let's get this party started! On Thursday, July 28th, Toronto's Enter the Haggis – inarguably one of the most popular bands on the Irish music scene today – kicks off festival weekend with a highly-anticipated performance at one of Utica's *other* great events: Saranac Thursday Night. Trevor, Brian, Craig, Bruce and Mark will be bringing their high-energy show to the brewery parking lot for a 5:30 performance that is sure to rock Varick Street, and will no doubt entice the regular Saranac Thursday crowd who haven't yet been to the Irish festival (yeah, there are some!) to learn what 50,000 people already know. And the cost? A ridiculously low \$5! So why wait until Friday to start enjoying great Irish music? Start your *four*-day celebration on "Festival Eve," at Saranac Thursday Night.

The Catskill Hills are Alive with Irish Music in July

Every July the Irish American hamlet of East Durham, New York becomes the Mecca of traditional Irish Music and Dance in North America for the **Catskills Irish Arts Week**. In its 17th year, the prestigious summer school, which runs from July 10-16 and features over 60 classes in traditional music, song, dance and Celtic crafts, has become the premier event this side of the Atlantic, attracting students from all around the United States and Canada. The largest school of its kind in North America invites the finest teachers from Ireland and the United States, who will be giving workshops and demonstrations in fiddle, concertina, accordion, flute, harp, Irish singing, set dance and step dance, and much, much more. Culminating the week will be the Andy McGann Traditional Irish Music Festival, taking place on Saturday from noon to 7 PM. The Catskills Irish Arts Week is organized by the Michael J. Quill Irish Cultural & Sports Centre, a not for profit organization dedicated to Keeping the Tradition Alive in East Durham. For more info, email irishartsweek@gmail.com.

Craobh Dugan "Tune of the Month" – Pipe on the Hob/Blarney Pilgrim – by Skip Mansur

For your musical entertainment this month, we present a pair of truly Irish sounding modal double jigs.

The Pipe on the Hob is a favorite Irish pipe tune (being in the D Mixolydian mode, it fits grand on the uilleann pipes). This tune is sometimes known as "Piper on the Hob," where a hob is a raised flat shelf on the backside of a fireplace, used for keeping food or utensils warm. One interpretation of the tune's name refers to a cricket (a "musical" piper) resting on the hob of an old style fireplace during a cold night, which was thought to be a sign of good luck.

Many folks have heard the expression "Kissing the Blarney Stone," but lets see a show of hands of how many really know what or where the Blarney stone is? Just northwest of the city of Cork near the southeast shore of Ireland is the village of Blarney and the Castle of Blarney, standing some 90 feet tall, constructed in 1446. The Blarney stone is a block of bluestone built into the battlements at the top of the Castle. Fittingly, many tales surround the stone and its origin. Some say it was Jacob's Pillow, brought to Ireland by the prophet Jeremiah. There it became the Lia Fail or 'Fatal Stone,' used as an oracular throne of Irish kings. It was also said to be the deathbed pillow of St Columba on the island of Iona. Legend says it was then removed to mainland Scotland, where it served as the prophetic power of royal succession, the Stone of Destiny. Others say it may be a stone brought back to Ireland from the Crusades – the 'Stone of Ezel' behind which David hid on Jonathan's advice when he fled from his enemy, Saul. A few claim it was the stone that gushed water when struck by Moses.



Blarney-castle

One story has it that the castle builder, Cormac Laidir MacCarthy, was involved in a lawsuit and pleaded to the goddess Clíodhna, who instructed him to kiss the first stone he saw on his way to court. As a result, he was able to defend his case with great eloquence and won. During the time of Queen Elizabeth I, Dermot MacCarthy, the ruler of the castle, was required to surrender his fortress to the Queen as proof of his loyalty. He said he would be delighted to do so, however, it seemed something always happened at the last moment to prevent his surrender. His excuses became so



Blarney-stone

frequent and indeed so plausible that the official who had been demanding the castle in the name of the Queen became a joke at the Court. Once, when the eloquent excuses of McCarthy were repeated to the Queen, she said "Odds bodikins, more Blarney talk!" The term Blarney has come to mean 'the ability to influence and coax with fair words and soft speech without giving offense.' By the 1600's Blarney had become well known as a Court of Poetry where poets gathered to read their compositions, many of which have survived in the original Irish form (compositions, not the poets...).

Kissing the stone is not an easy task and, prior to the installation of wrought iron safeguards, was done at risk of a Humpty Dumpty style nine story fall, requiring the kisser to bend upside down and backwards over a precipitous opening to perform the kiss. It is said that at least one visitor lacked the gift of a friend with a strong grasp and went plummeting to kiss the ground instead.

In the early 1800's Irish bard Francis Sylvester Mahony wrote:

*'Tis there's the stone that whoever kisses
He never misses to grow eloquent;
'Tis he may clamber to a lady's chamber,
Or become a member of Parliament.*

*"A noble spouter he'll sure turn out, or
An out and outer to be let alone;
Don't try to hinder him, or to bewilder him,
For he is a pilgrim from the Blarney stone."*

And that brings us to our tunes. Pipe on the Hob is a two part D Mixolydian tune (no C# s!), with backing chords in D and C (although there is another different *Am* version of the tune with the same name). The Blarney Pilgrim is a three part jig, and in keeping with its namesake, has spawned a few debates over a pint or two as to the proper key and backing chords. The tune is centered mainly around G and D tone centers and seems to vary between D Mixolydian (A and C parts) and G major (B part), although other interpretations can be found.

Pipe on the Hob

CCE Craobh Dugan
Pipe / Pilgrim Set

Dmix

D C D C D C D

The Blarney Pilgrim

G

G D G C Am D G D G C D

Our local Craobh Dugan group has been playing this set recently, so if you stop by one of our monthly sessions or this month's Great American Irish Festival, you will be likely to hear it. Do bring an instrument and join us...

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

- ✚ **“Nuacht as Craobh Dugan”**---news from the **Dugan Branch** Chris Hoke of Craobh Dugan sent in the following report July is just around the corner, with the 4th of July weekend upon us! June was a fairly busy month with several performances including a concert in Osceola for the Old Time Fiddlers’ Association. Upon finishing our performance, all the musicians were “hounded” for autographs by a group of youngsters. That was a first for us and really very cool! Upcoming Craobh Dugan events: July 5th--Nail Creek Session, Varick St., Utica, 7:30 PM; July 20th--The Mill Session, E. Dominick St., Rome, 7:30 PM; July 29-31--The Great American Irish Festival, performance at noon on Sunday the 31st.
- ✚ **“A Good Walk Spoiled...”** Lest you think we’re all constantly hard at work planning the Great American Irish Festival and saying words like “lest,” you should know that we also like to kick back and enjoy ourselves, or short of that, play golf. If you’d like to join us, mark your calendar for the 3rd annual GAIF Golf Outing, which will be held on Friday August 5th, at Stonebridge Golf and Country Club, 2430 Graffenburg Road, New Hartford NY. More details will be coming in next month’s newsletter, but this is one event, unlike your cousin’s graduation or your wedding, that you don’t want to put off until the last second to sign up. So why wait? Check it out [here](#).
- ✚ **Great American Irish Festival Update** Great American Irish Festival Volunteer Chairperson Claudette Johnson reminds us that she still needs volunteers for the 2011 festival, and invites you to sign up via the web page [even if you’ve volunteered with the festival in the past](#). Several venues could use your help, and of course, volunteering 8 hours of your time over the course of the weekend makes you eligible to get all the great perks that aren’t available to the general public. And if you want to schedule your time around your favorite acts, you can check out the schedule at www.gaif.us. It’s closer than you think!
- ✚ **Shoppes of The Emerald Isle** Need a new kilt? Bagpipes? Celtic jewelry? Or maybe a tattoo (just for the weekend, of course!) Be sure to visit the “Shoppes of The Emerald Isle” in the vendor building at the Great American Irish Festival. Over 30 vendors, with many exciting new shoppes this year! For more information check out the Vendors page from the “At The Festival” drop down menu, at www.gaif.us.
- ✚ **News from the LOAH** Members of the LAOH (Ladies of the Ancient Order of the Hibernians), Oneida County, will be hosting their Tea and Scones booth under the Emerald Society’s Tent at the GAIF. Besides hot/cold tea, there will be hot/cold coffee and of course, scones. Please drop by -- we enjoy seeing old friends and making new ones. We also have our special raffle for the handmade Irish blanket as well as our Irish goodies baskets.”
- ✚ **Oneonta AOH golf** The Oneonta Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) Fighting 69th Division will host the 3rd annual Irish Open Benefit Golf Tournament on Saturday, August 20, at the Colonial Ridge Golf Course in Laurens, NY. Proceeds from this year’s tournament will support the AOH and The Lord’s Table. The Lord’s Table is housed in the St. James Episcopal Church, which is also home to a regional food kitchen. The tournament will be in the popular (especially for new golfers) Captain & Crew format, and costs \$65 per person, which includes 18 holes with cart, contests, dinner and live Celtic entertainment. Prizes will be awarded to 1st, 2nd & 3rd place teams. Please call (607) 434-2144 or e-mail aohdivision1@hotmail.com for directions, questions or registration.
- ✚ **“Irish Night” at Albany’s “Alive at 5”** Alive At Five is Albany’s premiere summer concert series. Every Thursday evening in the summer, distinguished national, regional and local artists bring their best performances to Albany for this popular event. On July 14th, Albany’s Riverfront Park at the Corning Preserve plays host to **Enter the Haggis** and **Carbon Leaf** for their annual “Irish Night.” Enter the Haggis is... well, you know by now. Carbon Leaf’s unique blend of Celtic, folk-rock, Americana, bluegrass, rock and pop keeps audiences around the world clamoring for more.

Celtic Club Calendar Finally, here's the Irish Musical and Cultural calendar for July:

Jul 1	"Mostly Irish" Monthly Jam	Irish American Club	Amsterdam NY	7:30 PM	Free
Jul 3	Syracuse Irish Session	J. Ryan's Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Jul 4	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Jul 5	"Nail Creek Sessions"	Nail Creek Pub	Utica	7:30-10 PM	Free
Jul 6	Hair of the Dog, "Rocking on the River" Series	The Hedley Riverfront District	Troy, NY	6:30 PM	Free
Jul 7	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Jul 8	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Jul 8	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	8:30 PM	Free
Jul 8	Brigid's Cross	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:30 PM	Free
Jul 9	Trad Irish Music Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Jul 10-16	Catskills Irish Arts Week	Michael J. Quill Irish Cultural & Sports Centre	East Durham	Varies	Check site for Tuition
Jul 11	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Jul 14	Alive at Five w/ Enter the Haggis and Carbon Leaf	Riverfront Park at the Corning Preserve	Albany	Duh	Free
Jul 14	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Jul 14	Dady Brothers, Hamilton Concerts on the Green	Hamilton Village Green	Hamilton	7 PM	Free
Jul 17	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Jul 18	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Jul 19	Enter the Haggis	Timber Banks Golf Course	Baldwinsville, NY	6:00 PM	\$15 adv/\$20 door; \$10 w/IPH card
Jul 20	Traditional Irish Session	The Mill	Rome, NY	7:30 PM	Free
Jul 20	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Jul 22	Neil Emberg	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Jul 22	Hair of the Dog	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13; res'v req'd
Jul 23	Trad Irish Music Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Jul 25	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Jul 28	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Jul 29-31	Great American Irish Festival	Herkimer County Fairgrounds	Frankfort NY	5-11 Fri Noon - 11 Sat Noon - 5 Sun	\$10 Fri, \$12 Sat, \$10 Sun; \$25 for weekend

If you have anything you want to share with us, feel free to send it to us (sistia@roadrunner.com, bloftis@ymail.com or marksisti@roadrunner.com), and we'll be happy to include it. As always, while we try to get things – prices, places, genders, etc. -- as accurate as we can, sometimes we make mistakes. It always makes sense to call ahead to confirm some of these further-out trips. Finally, as you enjoy yourself at this year's festival, please make a special point to give a tip o' the cap to anyone wearing a Festival Committee shirt and lanyard. They'll be easy to spot; they'll be the ones with the broad grins and crossed fingers. They've been working their butts off since the close of last year's festival to bring in new features, performers and events, and to make whatever changes needed to be made that really have made the Great American Irish Festival one of the preeminent festivals in the United States. Have a safe 4th of July, and please do take advantage of the standing invitation to pop down to check the progress being made on the Irish Cultural and Historical Society of the Mohawk Valley, should you happen to find yourself on Varick Street. And stay tuned to this newsletter for information on how you can help make the building a reality (financially, I mean; we'd much rather see you pull out your checkbook than a hammer after a night on Varick Street).