
MOHAWK VALLEY IRISH CULTURAL EVENTS NEWSLETTER

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Record Crowds Turn Out for 2011 Great American Irish Festival

The bad news is that attendance for most Irish festivals is way down this summer, with some even being cancelled. The good news is that no one told those who make the Great American Irish Festival the centerpiece for their summer celebration. Not only did the crowds turn out for the 8th annual festival, they turned out in record numbers.



Friday's opening day brought what regular GAIF attendees have come to expect: rain, rain and more rain. But with so much of the Herkimer County Fairgrounds under cover and with the improved grounds, the steady downpour didn't keep thousands of hardy souls from coming out for the first night of GAIF, and are they glad they did. The contemporary stage opened with what may be the most unique act ever at GAIF, Coyote Run, whose tribal theater approach to Irish music won them a lot of fans immediately. On the other stage, Goitse, (who were playing their first US festival set ever) was having the same effect in a more traditional vein. GAIF favorites Prodigals followed Coyote Run with a great set, while next up on the traditional stage was the band many came to see and more left talking about, the High Kings. Anyone who saw their huge production PBS special would be forgiven for asking, if they can sound this big, this powerful and this, well, perfect, as a four-piece, why bother with the big production. It was a display of vocal talent rarely witnessed, even in the annals of the talent-heavy GAIF. After a well-received return by old friends Barleyjuice, Enter the Haggis brought the contemporary stage to a screaming close, complete with an encore of The Who's "Baba O'Riley." On the traditional stage, following a dazzling virtuoso performance by the incredible Slide, old friends the Makem and Spain brothers were warmly welcomed back by an appreciated audience that insisted on an encore. And the rain didn't stop any rugby players (like what could?), with Utica Klubs taking Friday's match.

Looking up to the sky on Saturday, many may have been asking what that unfamiliar bright yellow thing was. The answer: a celestial body rarely seen at the Great American Irish Festival, the sun. The Ranger Run 5k kicked off the day as (no surprise here) Frankfort's own Michelle Nizzi kept her streak intact as the only female winner ever at the Ranger Run, with a time of 20:22, barely edging GAIF volunteer Dee Service; while Jeremiah Tylutki of Utica completed the race in 17:23 to top the field of close to 250 runners. By noon the sounds of the EUSPBA Sanctioned Bagpipe Competition were filling the fairgrounds. The highlight of the afternoon was the spectacular massed bagpipe march, featuring all the competing bands joining forces for a parade through the fairgrounds, raising both cheers and goose-bumps. Meanwhile, in a land far far away, Montreal was putting the wraps on their well-earned first place finish in the Men's Gaelic Football Tourney.

Highlights of Saturday's entertainment are far too numerous to mention, but from crowd reaction, the High Kings were once again the band everyone was talking about. Their set brought standing ovations from the overflow crowd right from their first song and it never let up. Kilrush, Emish, the Prodigals, Coyote Run, Barleyjuice and Searson kept the crowd in the packed tent on its feet and, as always, The Elders had the crowd response at an ear-shattering decibel level. The Traditional Stage had its fair share of standout performances as well, with crowd pleasing sets from the Stoutmen, the Blarney Rebel Band, Slide, Goitse, and newcomers Burning Bridget Cleary. The story on Saturday, however, was the crowd. A few years ago, fairground personnel said that one of the days that GAIF was there boasted the largest single crowd ever on the grounds at one time. Well, official figures aren't in yet, but I was there that day and I was there this day: this year's Saturday attendance was way, way over what they had cited as the previous high. Both tents and all buildings were jam-packed, and the overflow at each tent took up most of the remaining fairground space.

Sunday's mass drew its usual huge crowd, with an estimated 3000 in attendance at the service, and once both tents were brought back to "festival readiness" (there is no sight quite like thousands of people in their Sunday best all carrying chairs from one venue to the other!), both tents were filled to capacity. In addition to bands who had appeared the previous day, Sunday's lineup boasted two of GAIF's most popular bands, Hair of the Dog and the legendary Seven Nations. The private post-fest party for the incredible GAIF volunteers, featuring music by the Elders, brought the weekend to a joyous close. The volunteer party also saw the awarding of the Volunteer of the Year Award to volunteer stalwart Janie Bassett. This volunteer party with the Elders (who, incidentally, participated in all of the party festivities after their performance; Flip Cup, anyone?) was only for the 800 or so volunteers, and was, in some ways, a better party than the festival itself. Just something to keep in mind when deciding whether to volunteer next year.

"Overall, the 8th annual GAIF was a smashing success," said Festival Director Matt Sullivan. "The planning, set-up, event itself, and takedown went smoother than ever. Many thanks to all of our hard-working folks that make it happen."

Hunter Mountain "International Celtic Festival" set for August 20-21

On August 20-21, 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 will be Shilelagh Law, Andy Cooney, Barleyjuice, Beautiful Day, Four Celtic Voices, Burning Bridget Cleary, Tartan Terrors, The Moonshiners, Triskele, Mythica, 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 Massed March, as hundreds of pipers and drummers march down the mountain in unison. Tickets for the festival are \$16 for adults (discounted when purchased on line), 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; a convenient half-hour ride from New York State Thruway exits 20 or 21. For more information, check out their [web site](#).



Cortland Celtic Festival to Take Place from Aug 20-21

Mark your calendars now for the 11th annual Cortland Celtic Festival, taking place from August 20-21 in Cortland, NY. This fun filled family event offers something for everyone from toddlers who will enjoy seeing all the Celtic breeds of dogs, to grandparents who will enjoy hearing the traditional music of their childhood. There's a 5K Celtic Run on Sunday at 9, sponsored by the Cortland YMCA, and a "Heavy Athletics" event. The festival boasts a strong lineup of artists, including The Blarney Rebel Band, Doolin O'Dey, bagpiper Charlie Graves, Irish Marty, and the McDonald-Ashford Irish Dancers. For a complete listing, visit the official Celtic Fest web site [here](#).



30th Annual Buffalo Irish Festival to be held on August 26-28

The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds is the site of the 30th annual Buffalo Irish Festival, to be held on August 26-28. Heading up the impressive lineup are Glengarry Bhoys, the Tartan Terrors, Seamus Kennedy, Burning Bridget Cleary, Dady Brothers, Penny Whiskey and many more; plus an original theatrical presentation of "The Rainbow's End," produced by Mary Kate O'Connell. Rounding out the lineup will be Irish dancers, pipe bands, an Irish mass, and much more. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$8 for kids 4-12 and seniors over 60. Anyone attending the "32-County Parade" between 5 and 5:30 PM on Friday gets into the festival for free, as does anyone arriving between 10 and 11 AM for mass on Sunday. For more information, check their [website](#), or contact the festival coordinator at (716) 743-9348. The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds is located at 5600 McKinley Parkway, in Hamburg, NY.



CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival Marks Its 70th Birthday!

The 70th Central New York Scottish Games and Celtic Festival will be held at Long Branch Park on August 13th. Long Branch Park is conveniently located west of Syracuse and a wee stone's throw from the NYS Thruway. The Festival goes from 9 AM until 7:30 PM and will feature solo competitions, band competitions, drum major competitions, athletic events and highland dance competitions. The band competitions are held in a natural amphitheater. There is plenty of shade and the park is absolutely breathtaking. Also performing this year are Rathkeltair, Irish Marty, Ann Johnston's Irish Dance School, A Harmony of Harps and a demonstration of Irish Stick Fighting. Tickets for the festival are \$10 for adults, \$7 for seniors, \$4 for children from 5 to 12, and children under 5 get in free. For more information, visit the CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival web site ([here](#)).



Paul McKenna Band Brings Driving Scottish Rhythms to Central New York

Words such as “breathtaking” and “a voice that many would kill for” describe the lilting music and the driving Celtic rhythms of the Paul McKenna Band, traveling from Scotland to play two special shows in the area this month. Winner of the 2009 Scots Trad award for “Up And Coming Artist Of The Year,” this young Scottish band is centered around Paul McKenna, a talented singer/songwriter with a charismatic voice, with outstanding musical backing provided by award-winning fiddler Ruairidh Macmillan, Ewan Baird (bodhrán), Sean Gray (flute) and David McNee (bouzouki). On August 11th, they'll be giving an 8 PM performance in the Old Songs, Inc. concert venue (37 South Main St. in Voorheesville NY), and on the 13th, they'll take the historic stage of the Earlville Opera House for an 8 PM show. Tickets for the show at the Earlville Opera House (East Main Street in Earlville) are \$13-\$23, and ticket prices for the Old Songs performance are \$20.

“The Patriot Game” – *contributed by Tomás Maol (Tom Malley)*

A novel bearing this name was written by Tom Clancy in 1987 and was made into a movie in 1992, but that was not the first use of this term. I heard a song titled The Patriot Game performed by Liam Clancy on the 1966 LP “Live at Carnegie Hall” by The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem. The song was written in 1959 by Dominic Behan, who also wrote Liverpool Lou, McAlpine's Fusileers, The Merry Ploughboy, Come out You Black and Tans, and others. He was the brother of Brendan Behan, and like his brother, spent time in jail, wrote an autobiography, and also wrote plays. The song is told from the point of view of Fergal O'Hanlon, a young man from County Monahan, who took part in an IRA raid on the Royal Ulster Constabulary barracks on January 1, 1957. The raid did not go well, and O'Hanlon and another man were seriously injured. Apparently the RUC got word of the impending raid, and extra manpower was brought in and the barracks were fortified. This is noted in the line “...the Quislings who sold out the Patriot Game.” Quisling is not an Irish word, but refers to Vidkun Quisling, a Norwegian politician who collaborated with the Nazis in World War II and was considered a traitor.

A song was also written about the other man injured in the raid, “Seán South of Garryowen.” It uses the same tune as “Roddy McCorley,” and appeared in 1957, shortly after the raid. Some poetic license was used in the song, as South, sometimes spelled Sabhat, was actually from nearby Limerick, but that didn't fit the meter.

As to the actual raid, when they saw the raid was going badly, the IRA men retreated toward the border, pursued by the RUC. They stopped at an old cow barn, where they decided that they were being slowed by carrying their two badly injured comrades, O'Hanlon, and Sabhat. They figured that the Brits would give them the necessary care, and so went out the back door and back to the border. According to one source, Sabhat had a serious back injury and may already have died when they reached the barn, and O'Hanlon died in a hospital. An oral tradition says that the IRA men heard two shots from the barn as they fled and assumed the worst.

Book Review:
“The Matchmaker of Kenmare”
By Mark Sisti

In this newsletter’s review of Frank Delaney’s previous novel “Venetia Kelly’s Traveling Show” (Nov 2010; go ahead, I’ll wait) hints were dropped that perhaps we hadn’t heard the last of Delaney’s narrator, young folklorist Ben McCarthy. Now, for those who felt that book, as wonderful as it was, ended abruptly, Delaney is back with a sequel, as Ben goes from one charismatic enchantress to a new one in “The Matchmaker of Kenmare.”

As Ireland maintains its neutrality during World War II, Ben travels the country gathering folk tales and stories for the Ireland Folklore Commission, but in truth he is vainly – and, increasingly without hope – searching for his wife, who mysteriously disappeared over a decade earlier. Seeking stories about the Irish matchmaking process, he meets young Kate Begley, an irrepressible woman who successfully arranges marriages in Kenmare, beginning a complex, multi-layered relationship that dominates much of Ben’s life from that point on. While still alternatively searching for and mourning Venetia, Ben finds himself growing more and more attracted to Kate. Miss Begley, however, falls in love with a U.S. soldier, who in actuality is an American spy. Despite Ben’s feelings towards Kate and her obvious reciprocal affection, the three become inseparable and Charles, the U.S. soldier, convinces them to use their status as neutral Irish citizens to conduct a covert mission in occupied France. Upon their return Kate and Charles quickly marry, but he is off almost immediately on another mission. Before long Kate has the overwhelming belief that he is hurt and needs her to find him, and she enlists Ben to accompany her into the war-ravaged European continent. While there they are told Charles is dead, but Kate steadfastly refuses to believe that and, with Ben in tow, continues into Germany to rescue him.

The pair survives a bombing and massacre in a village where they are staying and are captured by the retreating German army. The order to kill them is given but with the help of a sympathetic soldier they are able to escape. The scenes behind the enemy lines are horrific and powerful, and are made more so by the fact that Delaney never goes for cheap sensationalism, instead using perfect small vignettes to bring his point home.

On a surface level it may be hard to accept that Ben would enter a raging war armed with nothing but Kate’s firm belief that Charles is alive, a belief he doesn’t share. But it must be remembered that Miss Begley (as Ben calls her even after her marriage, in a form of denial) and Ben are clearly meant to serve as mirrors of each other, with Kate’s relentless search for Charles contrasting with Ben’s growing hopelessness about ever finding Venetia again; it is only due to Kate’s faith that Ben may someday come to deal with Venetia’s disappearance. In the midst of the horrors of war, his own tragedy and his strong feelings for Kate, Ben comes to question whether it is even possible to remain neutral, in war or in life, or if neutrality is just a different form of cowardice. They both may or may not get what they seek in the end, but the greater question is, will they want what they get.

This is a quirky novel, at turns, poignant, suspenseful, tragic, hilarious, touching, sweet, and brutal. It is peopled by fascinating characters and is fueled by unusual circumstances. Frank Delaney is a storyteller. As such he understands that the story has to tell itself. He never puts his wants as a writer above the needs of the story. That means it has to unfold at its own pace, that it has to reveal just what it wants when it wants, and it means, sometimes, the story will take you in one direction when you would like it to go in another. Most important, Delaney recognizes the mythic dimensions in everyone’s story. As Ben says at one point, “maybe there are no ordinary people.” Ultimately this is an epic tale of faith, friendship, love, and the redemptive power of sacrifice. While the “Matchmaker of Kenmare” works as a standalone novel, I would strongly advise reading “Venetia Kelly’s Traveling Show” before reading the sequel, partly because it will give a much greater understanding of Ben’s motivations, and, well, also because it’s really, really good. Now if only we could follow the story further... hmmm.

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

This month's recipe... "Nacho Chips and Processed Cheese" *Didja ever find yourself writing an Irish newsletter that's already a week late and it's well into the afternoon and you haven't had a bite to eat all day yet? This recipe may be for you!*

Ingredients:

1 single serving bag Nacho Chips

1 slice Processed Cheese; preferably not greenish

Method:

Open bag of nacho chips. I find starting from the top to be the easiest. Unwrap slice of cheese. Eat chips and piece of cheese, alternating bites if time permits. Go back to newsletter. Serves me right.

RANDOM RAMBLINGS

☘ **"Nuacht as Craobh Dugan"---news from the Dugan Branch** Chris Hoke of Craobh Dugan sent in the following report: "In addition to our regularly scheduled sessions, we have 2 performances in August, for both musicians and dancers. On Aug 11, we play at the Oneida Public Library at 6:30, and at the Waterville Village Green on Aug 31 at 7:00... As you know, we have been hosting 2 monthly sessions for quite some time now. The 1st Tuesday session at The Nail Creek will continue as always. There will still be a session at the Mill in Rome on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, but to encourage more players to join us, we will start at 7:30 with a slow session for 30-45 minutes. This will allow less experienced musicians to learn the tunes at a more moderate pace... Finally, congratulations to Pat Dugan who, along with her late husband Frank, was awarded the Agen-Durr "Spirit of Ireland" award at the GAIF Mass. This is truly a well-deserved honor for a couple who devoted their entire lives to promoting and preserving the Irish culture." The award is named after two local Irish friends, James Agen of Barneveld and Raymond Durr of Boonville, who gave their full support to the Festival, right up to their last days.

☘ **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 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.

☘ **Hornell AOH Irish Festival** Hornell's Sons of Ireland AOH Division #1 will host their Fifth Annual Irish Fest on St. Ann's School grounds, 27 Erie Ave., after 4:30 mass on Saturday, August 20th. The event will feature **Pat Kane**, along with Irish fare, beverage and vendors. Hornell is in southwest New York, roughly 60 miles south of Rochester.

☘ **Irish Classes Rule the Day – Okay, the Night – at MVCC** Following the success of the "Irish Myths and Legends" course last fall, MVCC is expanding its nighttime schedule with the offering of four Irish/Celtic classes starting in September. We'll have more specifics next month, but it's not too early to make plans to register. On Mondays from Sept 26 through Nov 14th, Mark Sisti will be bringing back his popular and entertaining "Irish Myths and Legends" course (who said learning can't be fun and field trips have to go to museums?). On Tuesdays (Sept 20 – Nov 11), Rainer Morgan will present "Wales and the Welsh." Wednesdays from Sept 28th to Nov 16th will find Mark Sisti presenting a new course (suggested in his class last year), "Irish Songs: Their History and Meanings," and on Thursdays, Tom Malley will be bringing in his "Irish Language for Beginners" class, from Sept 29th through Nov 3rd. The cost for any of the three Irish-themed courses is \$59, while \$39 will get you in the Welsh class. Registration is open, either by calling (315) 792-5300 or visiting www.mvcc.edu/cced. Don't be shut out!

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

Aug 6	Pat Kane	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	8:30 PM	Free
Aug 6	The TownPants	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	9:30 PM	Free
Aug 7	Syracuse Irish Session	J. Ryan's Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 8	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 11	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 11	The Young Dubliners	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	9 PM	\$10, res'v recom.
Aug 11	Paul McKenna Band	Old Songs	Voorheesville	8 PM	\$20
Aug 12-13	Rathkeltair	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9:00 PM	Free
Aug 13	Paul McKenna Band	Earlville Opera House	Earlville	8 PM	\$13-\$23
Aug 13	CNY Scottish Games and Celtic Festival	Long Branch Park	Syracuse, NY	9 AM – 7:30 PM	Adults \$10, Srs \$7, Kids 5-12 \$4; under 5 free
Aug 13	Trad Irish Music Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Aug 15	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 17	Traditional Irish Session	The Mill	Rome, NY	7:30 PM	Free
Aug 17	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 18	Donnybrook Fair	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	7 & 9:30 PM	\$20, res'v recom.
Aug 19	Blarney Rebel Band	Piggy Pat's Pickled Pig Pub	Washington Mills	6-9 PM	Free
Aug 19	Neil Emberg	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	9 PM	Free
Aug 20	Hornell AOH Irish Festival	St. Ann's School	Hornell NY	4:30 PM	Free
Aug 20,21	International Celtic Festival	Hunter Mountain	Hunter, NY	12-11 Sat; 11 to 9 Sun	\$16, 12 & under free
Aug 20,21	Cortland Celtic Festival	Courthouse Park	Cortland NY	Check web site	Free (Sat. Blarney Rebel Band concert \$10)
Aug 21	Syracuse Irish Session	Johnston's Bally Bay Pub	Syracuse	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 22	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free
Aug 25	Traditional Irish Session	Marcellus Legion Hall	Marcellus, NY	4-7 PM	Free
Aug 26	The Prodigals	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	9:30 PM	\$10, res'v recom.
Aug 26-28	Buffalo Irish Festival	The Grove at the Hamburg Fairgrounds	Hamburg, NY	Fri 5-11; Sat 12-11; Sun 12-9	\$10 Adults; \$8 kids 4-12 & 60+
Aug 27	Hair of the Dog	Parting Glass	Saratoga Springs	8 PM	\$13; res'v req'd
Aug 27	Trad Irish Music Session	Kitty Hoynes	Syracuse	2-5 PM	Free
Aug 29	Trad Irish Music Session	The Susquehanna Café	Bainbridge NY	5:30-8:30 PM	Free

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. And seriously, we do apologize for the lateness of the newsletter. Mark, Beth and I are all venue chairs at the Great American Irish Festival, and we were ...um...not ready to write a cogent newsletter on August 1st, and you all deserve the best. Yeah, that's it.