



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

Preserving Tradition: The Remarkable Journey Of Irish American Halls In San Francisco

by Liam Reidy, President, United Irish Cultural Center, (lreidy@irishcentersf.org)

IN THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970s, a resolute and passionate group of Irish individuals within our city embarked on an ambitious mission—the establishment of an Irish American hall in the Sunset District. While the dream of having their own Irish Center was eventually realized in March of 1975, it wasn't the first time the Irish in San Francisco had undertaken such a project, as it followed in the footsteps of several earlier Irish gathering places that had made indelible marks on the city's history.

Irish American Halls

As far back as 1860, the Irish American Benevolent Society had erected the Irish American Hall, a place dedicated to the welfare of its members and the dignified burial of those who could not afford it. The imposing structure once stood at the corner of Howard Court, though it no longer graces our city's map. Nevertheless, it remains a testament to the determination and hard work of the early Irish immigrants. Over the years, other iconic and lively Irish gathering spots emerged, including Hibernia Hall at 120 Ninth Street, and later at 16th and Valencia, as well as the Knights of the Red Branch (KRB) at 1133 Mission Street.

Memories of the Homeland: Nurturing a Cultural Bond

These visionary individuals drew inspiration from cherished memories of dancing in Irish halls and the bonds formed through socializing in Ireland. Their aim was to recreate a slice of Ireland in San Francisco, offering a taste of home in a foreign land. For any immigrant who undertook the journey from Ireland



Irish American Hall at 818 Howard Court, San Francisco circa 1869.

to America, thoughts of their homeland often occupied their daily musings. The profound connection they felt could be attributed to nostalgia, a yearning for family left behind, or a deeply rooted sense of heritage. In today's interconnected world, true disconnection is a rarity, yet the yearning for one's origins remains an enduring and powerful sentiment.

Movement Westward: Shaping the Future

As the popularity of the KRB, affectionately referred to as the Ballroom of Romance, soared to its zenith, it became apparent that the venue could no longer adequately accommodate the burgeoning Irish community in the City. Furthermore, its limitations as a single-purpose facility no longer aligned with the diverse needs and desires of the membership. This challenge coincided with a noticeable shift in the geographic center of the local Irish population, which

was steadily moving westward, away from the downtown areas. **Dreams into Reality: Then and Now**

Back in the early 1970s, when news of the ambitious project at the corner of 45th Avenue and Wawona first reached the ears of the community, skepticism abounded. Many believed it would never come to fruition. However, the community and the building committee remained resolute in their determination. To support this visionary project, the building committee offered memberships, and as word spread about their serious intentions, people rallied to their cause. Between 1972 and 1973, the membership roster swelled from 400 to 800 individuals. Although the committee had set an ambitious goal of 1,000 members for the groundbreaking day, they broke ground on November 11, 1973, and never looked back. Today, our community boasts more than 1,200 active members dedi-

cated to the Center's success. As we approach the final stages of the planning phase for the new building, there's a growing excitement about its redevelopment. Now, we are calling on individuals to step forward and contribute in any way they can. **Liam, how can I help?**

This is a question I'm frequently asked, and my response is straightforward. Are you a member? If not, consider joining as one. If you are already a member, fantastic! Let's discuss how you can take your support to the next level. We often use the words "Time, Talent, and Treasure" to describe the ways people can assist us. All three are invaluable, especially now as we prepare to launch the capital campaign needed to fund the Irish Center's reconstruction.

Join our Team!

Join us in what can only be described as a once-in-a-generation movement to revitalize the United Irish Cultural Center. Sign up as a new member, renew a lapsed membership, or engage with the building committee or fundraising team; the time to engage is now! It's been an incredible journey so far, and your help will propel us to the next level. Together, we are preserving tradition and ensuring that the Irish spirit continues to thrive in San Francisco for generations to come.

New Board Member

Welcome to Paige O'Keeffe, who has joined the Board with a wealth of experience in the nonprofit and private enterprise spheres focusing on marketing, communications, and team building. Paige is married to Corkman Dennis O'Keeffe, and they reside in Sonoma, CA. **Emigrant Support Program**

We had some good news

with our grant applications to the Irish government for funding this year. We secured a total of \$137,300 to be allocated towards a Development Officer, cultural programming, and the Keepers of the Steps exhibition.

Emerald Society Dance

The Emerald Society Annual Dinner Dance is at the Center on Saturday, October 21. Award winners this year include: Officer of the Year Sean Cody, SFPD Mission Station; Citizen of the Year, Kathy Grogan; and Lifetime Achievement award to Inspector John Keane, SFPD SVU. Contact John Hallissy for tickets at (415) 618-9388.

Irish Movie Night

The Irish Film Institute has gifted two Irish movies to the Irish Center for a screening on Thursday, October 12, starting at 7:00pm. We will show "The Quiet Girl" and the Oscar winning "An Irish Goodbye" as a double feature. Ticket registration is available on the Irish Center website; there is no cost for this event.

Children's Book Club

On the morning of Saturday, October 14, the Library will be open from 10:15am to 10:45am for Children's Storytime with Ms Nancy.

Arán agus Im SOLD OUT

Both Manchán Magan's Arán agus Im (Bread and Butter) shows are sold out. Arán & Im is a theatrical performance in which Manchán bakes sourdough bread for 70 minutes while offering insights into the wonders of the Irish language—exploring potent words of landscape, terms of intuition and insight, and the many phrases that bring to life the mysterious glory of our natural world. The show runs for two nights on October 5 and 6 here at the Center.

A Mad And Beautiful Mad Hatter Tea Party

ON SEPTEMBER 10, the annual Mad Hatter Tea Party took place at the Center. Thanks to all who attended and supported our 13th annual fundraiser for the Dowling Library. What a delightful afternoon of tea, tasty treats, festive hats, and fine company! A big thank you to Espostos Catering, Creightons Bakery, Sweet Passion Bakery and the United Irish Cultural Center!

A big 'Thank You' to our bartenders: Ed Carew,

Dan Trecroci and Mitch Stoltz and "bar manager" Gerald Cassidy A big 'Thank You' to all volunteers that had a hand in making this the best Mad Hatter Tea Party! Jerry Cassidy was missed this year but not forgotten!

A big 'Thank You' to our donors and sponsors. We are grateful for their support and generosity.

Sponsors: Annie Galvin—3 Fish Studios, Artist Jerry Daly, Beverly Colquhoun, Coleen Dowling, Cecilia

lia Dowling Marania, Kathleen Dowling McDonough, Kathy Flanders, Jennifer Gauthier, Mrs. Maureen Dowling, Mary Ann Maguire, Oceana Market Cheese Manager Liz DeNatale, Patricia Dowling, Peggy Flanders, Rebel Cork Benevolent Association, Roche Winery, San Francisco Bay Area Law Enforcement Emerald Society, San Francisco Giants, San Francisco Irish Film Festival, San Francisco Symphony and the UICC.



Back row: Aine Gavney, Maureen Kiely, Tara Carolan Minagh. Front Row: Julia Howard and Anne Lordan.



Annie McBride, Frances McAtasney and Claire McBride.



Cathy Mibach and Connie Lynch.



Josephine Brogan, Jeanne Connolly, Aileen Dulohery.



Patty and Colleen Dowling, Cecilia Dowling Marania and Kathleen McDonough.

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Halfway To St Patrick's Day Celebration

THERE WAS LOTS TO CELEBRATE on this Halfway to St Patrick's Day on September 17. It also coincided with International Irish Dance Day as well as the launch of the theme for the 2024 St Patrick's Day Parade—Unite SF! We enjoyed a marketplace of community partners from a Pop-Up Consulate, United Irish Societies, and the Irish Immigration Pastoral Center, as well as fun shopping options from Treasure Ireland, Irish Castle Gifts, The Celtic Tea Shoppe, and the Irish Center Shoppe. Keepers of the Steps and the Dowling Library took over the back of the tent with plenty of treasures to take a look at, and it was the final

day of the special Jerry Daly Art exhibit. Fabulous entertainment thanks to the Whelan Academy of Irish Dance, the Irish Pipe Band, and Anthony Arya. Mayor London Breed paid a visit to lend her support to next year's parade plans as well as our 2025 Building Project. President Liam Reidy presented Mayor Breed with an Honorary Lifetime Membership to the Irish Center—an Irish Center first, and something by which she seemed truly touched. Thanks to everyone who came out and enjoyed an afternoon in Wawona Gates and to all our volunteers who worked tirelessly to make the day possible.



UniteSF organizers; Patrick Masterson with Bonnie and James Quinn.



Micheál Smith, Irish Consul General with Celine Kennelly, IIPC.



The Whelan dancers.



Irish pipers: Alex Lentz, Maggie Baglin and Emma Penny.



President Liam presents Mayor London Breed with an Honorary Life Membership of the United Irish Cultural Center for her unwavering support of all things Irish in the community since she became Mayor in 2018.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
BEST LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM

an irish goodbye

IRISH FILM NIGHT
Double Feature
10.12.23

ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINEE
BEST INTERNATIONAL FEATURE FILM

"A JEWEL.
DEEPLY MOVING TALE OF RURAL IRELAND
ALREADY FEELS LIKE A GLASSIC."
★★★★★
THE GUARDIAN

The Quiet Girl
An Cealla Ceán
A FILM BY COLM BAIRD

THURS.
OCT. 12, 2023

DOORS @ 6:30
1ST FILM @ 7 PM

NO COVER/MUST REGISTER

IrishCenterSF.org



Irish Film Institute



Cultúr Éireann
Culture Ireland



arts council
funding the art of film

IRISH CENTER SF
in The Sunset
2700 45TH AVE.
between Sloat
& Wawona

Just One More Year For The Century!

HAPPY BELATED BIRTHDAY to Peggy Mylett, who was recently spotted at St Cecilia's. Peggy celebrated her 99th birthday in July. Did you know that the government of Ireland give those that reach

the century mark in age €100! In the United States, centurions usually receive a letter of congratulations from the United States President to mark their longevity. Peggy spent many years working at the UICC.

Rebel Cork Club Turns 140 Years Old This Year

TIM MURPHY informs me that the Rebel Cork Benevolent Association have announced that their annual Dinner dance will take place at the UICC on Saturday, December 9, 2023. The RCBA celebrates the 140th year since the establishment of the fraternal organization back in 1883. What a great achievement to trace your club's hosts back over three centuries. Congratulations to the Rebel Corkmen! Comhghairdeas leis na Corcáin-aigh reibiliúnach!



LONG TIME IRISH CENTER supporter Tom McGarvey was spotted out and about along Ocean Ave at Ambrosia Bakery recently. Tom enquired as to how everything was going at the Center—I said "Swell!" Tom is available each day from 9am to 11am at the Bakery to chat if you have time or to answer all of life's questions!

Irish Pipers Always Deliver!

BRENDAN O'LEARY participated in the Halfway to St Patrick's celebration at Wawona Gates on September 17 last. Brendan tells me that 2024 will be a big year for the Irish Pipers as they plan to host a big fundraiser for new equipment and uniforms. The last time the Irish pipers held a fundraiser was about 25 years ago! Brendan and his brother

Joe O'Leary have been part of the Pipers since 1968. Brendan plays the base drum while nephew Ben plays the tenor drum, while Ben's daughter Roisín has started on the bagpipes. The Irish pipers have several new recruits under 12 years old currently under the watchful eye of pipe instructors John Carlin, Tommy Harvey, and Mike Bowler.



UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER of SAN FRANCISCO

Children's Storytime with Ms. Nancy

Saturday, Oct. 14, 2023
10:15 - 10:45 AM

Enjoy an in-person read aloud with volunteer Ms. Nancy in the Dowling Library. Coloring sheets, stickers, activity pages, plus short stories read aloud from our collection.

