

Seanchaí Cois Fharráige

THE SEASIDE SEANACHIE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IRISH AMERICAN CULTURAL SOCIETY OF
SOUTH JERSEY

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IRISH AND
IRISH-AMERICAN
HISTORY WITH
SONG

JUNE 10, 2014

AMERICAN
LEGION HALL

MILL AND NEW
JERSEY AVES
ABSECON

7:30

POSITIVE SIDE
OF EXECUTIVE
BOARD

WE ALWAYS GET
COMPETENT
PEOPLE TO
SERVE

Last June, Mike Plunkett, skillfully and in a most entertaining fashion blended American Civil war history with its music. On June 10, he will do the same for portions of Irish history and music. He plans some background of life in Ireland in the 18th and 19th century before the famine, including folktales and songs. There will be songs and stories from the time of the Famine and the mass exodus from Ireland. His program will then follow the life of the Irish immigrants to America, examined in songs and stories from his family history especially the Pennsylvania Irish railroad workers and the Delaware Irish in the DuPont Powder Mills. He will wrap up demonstrating how Irish traditional music influenced American folk music, including Capt. Francis O'Neill's role in the collection of Irish traditional music in Chicago. A great way to learn your history, with a musical accompaniment. The social and Executive Board election follows. Bring a friend who might enjoy the blend.

You would think with a paid up membership hovering around 200, finding six people willing to serve on the Executive Board would be easy. After all, the work load isn't that much, one extra meeting a month along with minor responsibilities of the job (like keeping the roster, the dues, the finances, etc). But it always seems to be a struggle. However, on the positive side, we always seem to find a complete and competent slate to propose in May and to vote on in June. And such is the case for 2014-15. At the June meeting, we will elect and swear in Rich O'Brien as President, Celeste Noble, Vice President, Pat DeLuca, Treasurer, Sandy Dierolf, Recording Secretary, Brian Lawlor, Vice President, Membership and Helen Riso Corresponding Secretary. Come exercise your democratic right and thank the candidates for their willingness to serve.

ACTING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Quite a privilege I have here to write the message at the end of our 2013 – 2014 year. From September's picnic to an impressive St. Patrick's Mass, from the enriching programs that we have enjoyed to the educational & entertaining programs that we sponsored - this has been a banner year for the Irish American Cultural Society of South Jersey. But it's not magic, it takes enough money and good people. I am grateful for good people like you who do your share to support our raffle which provides our resources. When you sell your envelope of books and/or staff our table at a festival, you make the mission a reality: "to advance the knowledge and awareness of Irish culture". You deserve our thanks for your dedication. (Making new friends and sharing some laughs at the table is just your bonus!). I also want to offer our thanks to these good people who lent their time and talents, sometimes behind the scenes, to help make IACS 2013 – 2014 the success that it was: Ginny A. for organizing the snacks at the meeting, Charlie and Eileen M. for supplying the beer and soda, Kay N. for providing for the wine, Walt C. for our web site, Walt M. for our Public Relations and Publicity, Linda C. for leading our Phone Tree, Laurie C. for managing the Scholarship process along with her team, Joe W., Linda C., and Kathy A., Dick N. for Programs, raffle coordination and the Seanachie, Marie K for the Piper, Jim G. for the Ceili report and Ed Q. for steering the South Jersey Irish Dancers ... and of course your 2013-2014 Board, especially our retired members – Dan L., Kathy B., and Bill G. Thank you all for your service. Without you this wouldn't be possible. (If I've forgotten anybody, let me know – the Seanachie has promised to do a feature on them in the September's issue.) Again, it's a real privilege to write the message at the end of such a terrific year; I am so proud to be part of this Club. Have a safe and happy summer, hope you enjoy some "mighty craic" along the way and come back in September with stories to tell!

Celeste Noble

IACS HITS
THE JACKPOT
AT SMITHVILLE
RENAISSANCE
FAIRE
SALES TOTAL
\$777

The Village Green in the Historic Smithville looked a lot like the Middle Ages with its annual Renaissance Faire. And the IACS was there to take advantage of the crowds and weather. Final total: \$777, which on a slot machine would be the jackpot. And the club agrees it was a jackpot. Last year, bad weather saw us take in \$252, so the improvement is dramatic. It takes a lot of people to cover both sides of Smithville but we had them. There were Mickey O'Brien, Jeff Hawarden, Bob and Oneida Broughton, Ed and Ann Triggs, Doris Lopez, Laurie Crowell, Dick and Kay Noble, Jim and Dolores Logue, Pat Scully, Joan Sweeney, Kathleen Wilkins, Jeanette Minio, Pat Deluca and Mark Holloway.

NEW IRISH
FESTIVAL AND
IT'S FREE!

Watch for the Irish weekend at the new Mercator Market at the Atlantic City Race track. We will have a raffle sales table there June 21 and 22. Check your local papers for opening times (they may be revising them) and updates.

MAYFEST'S
BALANCED
SALES
AT BOTH
LOCATIONS,
BOTH DAYS
PROVIDE \$900

AND FOOD FOR
THOUGHT

WHILE WE
THINK,

THANKS

FIRST ATTEMPT
FOR
IRISH FAMILY
FESTIVAL
AT THE
SANDCASTLE
SUCCESSFULLY
FILLS A NEED

...

Mayfest was another winner! For the second straight Smithville selling event, the weather was terrific and the crowds were present. The result was a \$900 take for the two days, about \$50 less than last year, but most welcomed indeed. However, we use so many people, 24 exactly, we feel we must streamline the best we can. The big question is whether we could get by with one table instead of two, thereby cutting our personnel requirements in half. But which one should we cut—at Mayfest the Out of Ireland table produced \$ 457, over the two days while the Village Green table sold \$443. Would we still sell the same amount if we consolidated? So as we ponder with Octoberfest and Smithville Irishfest ahead, we wanted you to know we truly appreciate the volunteers who give up their weekend time, and want you to know, we are trying to reduce your workload without jeopardizing sales. Thanks to Kay and Dick Noble, Bob and Oneida Broughton, Gigi Brannigan Mary Curry, Joe and Ginney Dominic, Sandy Dierolf, Ginny Atkinson, Rich O'Brien, Sally Picardo, Linda Carson, Jeanette Minio, Celeste Noble, Pat Deluca, Mike Farrell, John Corry, Isabel Gallagher, Mike McBride, Manus McGettigan, and Rick Noble. Special appreciation goes to Ginny Atkinson and Celeste Noble who pulled double shifts over the weekend.

Club member, the Rt. Rev. William Hodge saw a need for an Irish Family Festival in Atlantic City and so he filled it. Boy did he ever! The Sandcastle Stadium was the ideal location. It was weather proof—though other than a chilly winds, that wasn't a problem. There was plenty of free parking and entrance was also free. The entertainment was non stop and featured the AC Sandpipers Bagpipe Band and the world renowned Seamus Kennedy. There were dancers and other bands and singers. And the crowds responded. There were vendors and of course, we were there to sell raffle tickets. Not sure what to expect for a first event, we were more than pleasantly surprised when our sales teams sold \$541. Many thanks to John Slonieski, Tom and Ann Carol Mullins, Walt Murphy, and Jim and Dolores Logue. Pat and Tom Gilligan stopped by to help with the close down. Since we had no such festival last year, the \$541 is a real bonus. Jim Logue saw a bunch of members supporting Msgr—that's great.



THE PIPER

JUNE 2014

SEAN NOS

It's evening time in a pub in the West of Ireland. Silence descends when a man stands up to sing a slow unaccompanied Gaelic folksong in the 'old style' or sean-nos. It's full of vocal ornamentations; his voice twirls its way through the words. The somber atmosphere is disturbed, only slightly, by the odd cough or the crackle of wood in the fire

Perhaps you've been lucky enough to catch a few traditional music sessions while in Ireland, so you might have stumbled upon this type of sean-nos singing. If you have, you'll know how different it is from traditional ballad singing. It is always sung in Gaelic and has a distinct rhythm. It can be lamentably slow or fast-paced, but always with very few stops, apart from breaths.

(The Piper once asked a waiter in a pub in Galway where one could find some traditional music and was directed to a very inelegant union hall "down the street and upstairs" from the pub. We were privileged to hear several of the Grand Champions of sean-nos and instrumental music who had just competed in the *fleadh coiel* in Sligo. An unforgettable night!)

Essentially, these are folksongs recited from memory. There can be ten or more verses, and it's admirable that these old songs can be recited spontaneously. They are the narrative for hundreds of years of Irish lives touched by history, emigration and daily life. Sean-nos is actually a blanket term for not only old-style folk singing but also for a form of Irish dancing which is very similar modern day tap dancing. It's most likely the basis for the original Irish jig.

Sean-nos singing could be one of the oldest indigenous traditions in the world, and it's an oral tradition, one that is passed from generation to generation to this day. Many of the older songs were not written down properly until the 1800s. The songs may be simple or long and melodically complex. Some are sung in duets or even in groups but generally they are sung by individuals and without

musical accompaniment. If there is a lively repetitive chorus, the audience can join in but will fade away to allow the main singer to continue with the verses.

The style of singing varies hugely from region to region. Donegal sean-nos singing is influenced by Scots Gaelic due to their geographical proximity and events like the Jacobean war. The style of Galway sean-nos is highly ornamented and is considered very vocally complex. The isolated Gaeltacht An Rinn in County Waterford developed a distinct lilted style.

Irish sean-nos folksongs were sung everywhere—at weddings, funerals, working, or by the fire. Some are still reserved for religious occasions like *The Lament of the Three Marys*, which is sung only on Good Friday. Sean-nos songs have a multitude of themes from lullabies to tragic love songs, emigration to historical monuments. A very simple lullaby, *Oh My Little One, My Love* is a sweet testament to a child.

The love song *Fair-haired Una* was composed in the 1600s by Thomas Costello, describing his great love for Una McDermott. Thomas and Una fell in love and wished to marry, but her father who was a powerful Chieftain in County Roscommon would not allow the marriage because he believed Thomas was not good enough for his daughter. He banished Thomas from the area. Una was confined in a castle, and as the legend goes, she died of grief. Even though the song was written so long ago, the lovesick theme is still very poignant.

*Oh fair Una, you were like a rose in a garden,
And you were a golden candlestick on the queen's table;
You were a melody, and musical, when you walked the road before me,
'Tis my sorrowful loss of the morning that you were not married to me.*

The song *Johnny Joyce* from the famine period in Connemara is a historical testament of the years from 1845-1852 when one million people perished from hunger and another million emigrated, the start of the great Irish diaspora. It includes sad verses like this:

*For I was left with my children out in the dew;
I am tired, lashed, frozen, upset,
And lacerated from all the walking,
And Mister Joyce, the workhouse is full
And they won't accept anyone else inside.*

Many sean-nos songs mention a young, beautiful woman who is actually a symbol of Ireland, a dream of her delivered from bondage. The song *Aisling Gael* is about a young man's dream of a beautiful girl who signifies Ireland.

In many ethnic communities around the world, folk songs fade and traditions die. Thankfully, sean-nos is not presently in danger of that. The upcoming

generations are making a concerted effort to learn the craft and document the stories, keeping the 'old style' very much alive.