

Seanchaí Cois Fharráige

THE SEASIDE SEANACHIE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IRISH AMERICAN CULTURAL SOCIETY OF
SOUTH JERSEY

P.O. Box 195, Absecon N.J. 08201

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JANUARY'S LOSS
ONLY
TEMPORARY

TOM BRETT
SINGS
IRISH PUB
SONGS
TUESDAY
MAY 20, 2014
7:30

LOTS ELSE
GOING ON

DON'T MISS THIS
MEETING

MEMBER PICK UP
OF RAFFLE
TICKETS
CONTINUES

GET YOURS AT
THE MAY
MEETING

SAVE THE CLUB
A BUCK OR SO

Cold weather and a snowstorm forced the postponement of the January meeting and what turns out to be the case, the temporary loss of the talents of Tom Brett, outstanding Irish balladeer. But the threat of weather shouldn't impact Tom's return to provide our program, May 20, 2014 beginning at 7:30 at the American Legion, Mill and New Jersey Aves. Absecon. Tom is a well known and highly regarded singer of Irish songs who performs at local pubs all over South Jersey including the Dubliner on Jimmie Leeds Road. That appearance is only once a month and the others are scattered over the southern part of the state, so for your convenience we will bring him to the Legion. He will sing and tell us about some of our favorite songs, and introduce us to some traditional ballads we might not be as familiar with. Tom also conducts an annual musical pub crawl to Ireland and will regale us with stories of past tours and about the up coming one. Have a friend who enjoys good music and stories? Bring them along. We will follow Tom's presentation with the usual social and an important business meeting—see subsequent articles.

Thirty-nine members picked up their raffle tickets at the April meeting—that was outstanding. With postage over a dollar per mailing, you can see how much you saved the club. We still have a box full left to distribute, so if you didn't make it to the April meeting, be sure you pick up yours at the May meeting. Our plan is to have the leftovers available again in June, before we start the expensive process of mailing them out. You can save us the money as well as get an early start on selling your books. For those of you who will be selling at Smithville and other locations, don't bring your books and mingle them with those at the site, it messes up the essential book keeping.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

For six full years, this part of the newsletter was written by Bill Gottshall, making him the longest serving president in the history of the club. Bill most often used this space to push his central message, indeed his platform: actively participate in the club's activities. And he walked the talk. When you think of September, you think picnic and the chief barbequer. When you think off site raffle sales, you have to include Bill, who frequently set up the sites for the sales and then pulled a shift—too many times to count. And when we had our usual problems with the Absecon clerk's office, it was Bill who somehow got the paperwork approved. Yes, he was an active participant and the club is deeply in debt to him. We say goodbye as a job opportunity takes him from us. Perhaps our best thanks for his six years of service to us would be to honor his wish and become an "active" participant. Come to the meetings, donate food and clothing for the less fortunate. How about some goodies for the social hour? Sell your personal chance books, maybe ask for more. Give us a hand at the raffle sales at Smithville and Ship Bottom, or wherever we sell. Volunteer for a committee (like the phone) or the Executive Board. That is the way we should honor and thank Bill Gottshall—after all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

NEW START TIME
FOR CEILI
WORKS

BUT

WE MAY HAVE
SEEN THE LAST
CEILI OF THIS
SEASON

Jim Gillon reports: The April Ceili almost went off on the earlier start time (7:30). We are a happy group, no longer intimidated by the clock and more motivated by the need of a good start of a joyous occasion. We lost in the competition for the use of the VFW Hall in May to a wedding party. At press time of the Seanachie, no alternatives have been defined, other than enjoy your summer, vacation time and the beach. Ed. note: Ed Quigley has the final say on all things ceili. He probably will search for alternative venues. You might give him a call at 398-8636 towards the end of May and of June.

FOR THOSE OF
YOU WHO LIKE
STATISTICS,
HERE ARE A FEW
TO MAKE YOU
PROUD

HOWEVER,

Do the math. 1847 (the height of the Great Hunger in Ireland) plus 150 years equals 1997, the year we started to collect food at our meetings in memory of that grave event. $2014 - 1997 = 17$ years, the number of years we have been doing it. 17×7 , the amount of times each year we collect non perishables, equals 112 donations to date. Don't forget to add in the annual collection from the St. Patrick's Liturgy. What you come up with is a marvelous outpouring that matches the historical Great Hunger with the legendary generosity of our culture. Assuredly, you can take pride in what you have done. But for that poor family in our area, your pride doesn't help when sitting down to dinner this week. Remember to bring your non-perishables and gently used clothing to the May meeting. Whatever you bring, it surely adds up.

TOUGH JOB
FOR
SCHOLARSHIP
COMMITTEE

TEN STRONG
CANDIDATES
FOR TWO
AWARDS

SJ CEILI BAND
AND
JERSEY SHORE
DANCERS

BRING
IRISH CULTURE

TO OUR AREA
WITH MANY
APPEARANCES IN
MARCH

ALERT ALERT

MARK YOUR
CALENDAR FOR
JUNE 10, 2014

EARTH DAY

GREAT START TO
THE RAFFLE
SALES SEASON

One of those important items for the business meeting which was mentioned on the first page will be the announcement of this year's scholarship winners. We had ten applications which made the deadline, so the scholarship committee of Kathy Arleth, Linda Carson, and Joe Walsh had a rich pool to choose from. They get to pick the top two for the \$2000 scholarships named in honor of a founding member, Marie Gubbins, and a past president, Harry Savage. You will probably enjoy seeing where \$4000 of the club's money is going—unless you are one of the eight sponsors of non-selectees. But recall, they can resubmit next year.

We didn't have space in the April issue to cover the many activities of the club in March. The South Jersey Ceili Band and the Jersey Shore Dancers were their usual busy selves demonstrating Irish set and ceili dances to the senior group at Resurrection Church, Marmora, Margate Seniors, Masons at the Deauville Inn in Strathmere. Wesley Manor, Ocean City, Our Lady's Residence, Pleasantville and at the Irish Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows, Linwood. In addition, the band played at the Ocean Heights Presbyterian Church, Egg Harbor Township. Band members include Mike Garvin, Tim , Johnston, Dorothy Sutherland, Jean McNaughton, Jim Gillon, Joe McGonigle, Bob Galbraith, Val Armstrong, and Roberta Beckler, Dancing at the various locations were Kathy Byrnes, Diana De Venuto, Margaret Gillon, Bob and Fran Knorr, Barbara Lang, Eleanor Lang, Kathy and Joe McDevitt, Rich O'Brien, Bonnie and Ed Quigley, and Linda Sweeney.

It is our custom to start our summer vacations early. To do this, we move our last meeting before the summer to the second Tuesday in June, this year, June 10. Last June's smash singer/storyteller on the Irish in the Civil War, Mike Plunkett, will return with a whole new program of Irish songs and stories. Mark your calendar now to prevent confusion over the change.

Earth Day was a brilliant success for the ACUA which had its largest program and largest crowds in years. We benefited from that, selling \$307 worth of raffle tickets to kick off our season on a high note. Thanks go to Ginny Atkinson, Pat Deluca, Pat Creegan, John and Kay Connelly and Dick and Kay Noble.

THE HARVEST IS
PLENTY BUT THE
LABORERS ARE
FEW

TELL THE LORD
OF THE HARVEST
YOU ARE
WILLING

WANT TO BE A
BEST SELLER?

DRESS FOR
SUCCESS

DUO WHO
DAZZLED AT THE
CLUB, OFFERS
NEW PROGRAM
SATURDAY,
MAY 10, 2 PM

FIRST ANNUAL
IRISH FAMILY
FESTIVAL
COMES TO
SANDCASTLE
STADIUM,

MAY 24, 10-6

It goes without saying how important raffle sales are to the club's essentials, like meetings, speakers, scholarships. During the period between Earth Day (April 27) and May 24, we could be selling every weekend except Mother's Day. By the time you read this, we will have completed Earth Day and Smithville Renaissance Faire, calling on you to fill those 30 slots. We take a short breather, and then we go in search of 30 more, 24 for Smithville Mayfest and then six for Msgr. Hodge's Irish Festival at Bader Field. We desperately need more of you to step forward and give a couple of hours of your time. Perhaps you are new, and we don't know to call you. Perhaps this is the year you will say, "I can do that". You can't wait until the meeting, Mayfest will already be over. Call Dick at 652-1679 and see how you can help.

Dress for Success was a popular best seller a while back. With our raffle sales season in full swing, we are looking for success and if dressing the part will help, we support the concept. Consider our logoed golf shirt (\$20) and baseball cap (\$10) as appropriate gear for selling. Let Pat Deluca know your wishes either at the meeting or by phone 641-2979. However, don't let your lack of club gear keep you from selling, we need you.

If you are kicking around on May 10 at 2 PM without anything better to do, Val Armstrong and Roberta Beckler are doing another fiddle and flute program at the Absecon Historical Society, on New Jersey Avenue. They will be doing Celtic tunes and maybe mix in a few American ones as well. They promise a different program than the one they did at our meeting which you should recall was brilliant.

Member Monsignor Hodge, his St Nicholas of Tolentine Parish, the City of Atlantic City and the AOH will sponsor the first ever Irish Family Festival, May 24 from 10-6 at Sandcastle Stadium. Admission is free. The festival promises live Irish music, including pipe bands, as well as Irish dancing. There will be rides for the children and a wide variety of food, beverage, and Irish imports. The day will climax at 6 PM with a Celtic liturgy celebrated by Msgr. Hodge that meets the Sunday requirement. Proceeds will benefit St. Nicholas's restoration fund and the AOH. This will be a big event that we will want to support to insure the second annual Irish family Festival in 2015.



THE PIPER THE BLASKET ISLANDS

MAY 2014

The Blaskets are a group of islands off the west coast of Ireland, forming part of County Kerry. They were inhabited until 1953 by a completely Irish-speaking population and today are part of the Gaeltacht. The inhabitants were evacuated to the mainland on November 17, 1953. Many of the descendants emigrated to America, but some former residents still live on the Dingle Peninsula within sight of their former home.

Mike Carney, who was born on Great Blasket Island in 1920, is the oldest living islander. He left the Island in 1937 to seek a better life in Dublin and then joined the millions who emigrated to the USA where he now lives. Below is his description of the event that "broke the will" of the islanders.

My younger brother Sean died on January 9, 1947 at the age of just twenty-four. His death signaled the end for the island. Sean got sick just before Christmas in 1946. There was very bad weather on the island, with gale-force winds and high waves. He was sick for only a couple of weeks. I got a note in Dublin from my sister Cait that Sean had the flu. But in reality he had something much more serious: meningitis.

The weather worsened, and they could not get him to the mainland to see the doctor, and the doctor could not get to the island to see him. The battery-operated telephone provided by the government was not working at the time—again. It had been out for about a week.

Sean had a really bad headache. Cait put a heated sack of flour on his head to try to ward off the temperature, but it did no good. He started to vomit, too. After being sick for over two weeks, Sean's condition got worse. Then one day, Cait found him dead in bed in our house. Since there was no priest, she whispered an Act of Contrition in his ear in case he was still alive. Then she had to tell my father. It was devastating. When I arrived home, Sean's body was still in our house on the island, the poor man. He could not be buried in the small graveyard on the island because it was not blessed. And there was no coffin on the island anyway. We needed to get his body to the mainland. Three young, strong and brave islanders fought the fierce ocean to go and fetch a coffin from

the mainland. They were the best boatmen on the island at the time. The conditions were such that they could easily have drowned. Their great courage was very much appreciated by my family.

After landing at Dunquin, they got a coffin from Dingle, but they could not get it back across to the island. The water was just too rough, and the weight of the coffin made navigating a *naomhog* too much of a risk. We had to take the coffin from Dunquin to Dingle so it could be brought to the island by lifeboat.

When we got to the island, poor Sean, I couldn't look at him. He was lying dead on the bed in my father's bedroom. Everybody was crying. We put Sean in the coffin and nailed the lid shut. There was no wake; there was no time. The lifeboat was waiting. We went back to Dingle on the lifeboat with Sean's body in the coffin. It was a heartbreaking thing. When we got to Dingle, the medical people said they had to determine the cause of death. My father told them to write down that the government killed him. He was very angry and so was I. We felt that the government should have installed a better radio system or provided a motorboat—anything to improve the safety of the people living on the island. It was the kind of situation we feared would happen.

The funeral and burial was the next day, four days after Sean died. I was a pallbearer, and he was buried next to our mother in the old cemetery next to the church. It was all so sad. After the burial we went to my aunt's house in Coumeenole. During the trip there, I told my father I had written to my uncle about emigrating to America. I think my father had seen it coming. He said, "Mike, I don't blame you. You do whatever you think is right. And, whatever you say and whatever you do, make sure you do it right." I suppose it was his standard farewell advice. He was highly intelligent in how to lead you and encourage you to do the right thing.

That was the toughest winter they remembered having on the island. And my brother's death was the toughest thing that had happened as far back as people remembered. It all seemed so senseless. The islanders came to the conclusion that it was no place for them to live. Essentially Sean's death and the circumstances broke the will of the islanders to continue living on the Blaskets. It was time to move on.

All my brothers eventually emigrated to America. My sister Cait asked my father to move to her house on the mainland, and he really had no choice as he was too old to function alone on the island. It was crowded in Cait's small house, so my father built a one-room addition for himself with money from the sale of his flock of sheep. In the end, my father wasn't sorry to leave the island either. He just packed up everything, left the family home and moved to the mainland, the last member of our family to leave. For sentimental reasons, he would visit the island for a month or so during the summer with Cait's husband and their son Sean.