



# ECHOES OF IRISH HISTORY

by  
Mike McCormack

SECOND PRINTING 1968

Printed by  
Clover Graphics Inc.  
40 Oser Avenue  
Hauppauge, N.Y. 11788  
(516) 273-6240

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	ii
Tales of the Bards .....	1
Irish Music .....	2
Irish Dancing .....	4
The Irish Dancing Master .....	6
The Rapparees .....	8
The Claddagh Ring .....	10
Dan Donnelly .....	12
Mayor Lynch of Galway .....	14
The Ark .....	16
James Stephens .....	18
John Devoy .....	20
The Catalpa Rescue .....	22
Cathleen ni Houlihan .....	24
Commodore John Barry .....	26
Boycott .....	29
The Celtic Calendar .....	30



## PREFACE

Irish history is a fascinating subject and it has long been my goal to interest others in its grandeur and scope; its drama and adventure; its joy and sorrow. For that reason I began condensing and presenting short, single-subject writings on selected phases of that history. Each was chosen to stand on its own as a story without requiring the reader to be familiar with the subject; yet each had to be interesting enough to entice the audience to further reading.

Ancient manuscripts have their place in museums and translations of those manuscripts have their place in research facilities, but the grammar and form is too cumbersome to make them popular as everyday reading. Further, historians have become so engrossed with out-doing one another in facts and details that for years they have really been writing for each other; again the result is tedious reading. Is it any wonder then, that popular interest in Irish history has waned. Similarly, tales of ordinary people, who have not had a significant impact on world history, are usually forgotten or their stories are discarded as irrelevant when, in reality, they are still interesting reading. It was therefore, my intention to write short '*popular histories*' on a '*people*' level; to eliminate the ritualistic foot-noting as well as the archaic grammatical form; and to select stories based strictly on their appeal - in short, to present not Irish History but *Echoes of Irish History* in order to tempt people to seek the source of the echo.

As Historian of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, I had prepared writings in that fashion for eight years and even read a few over the air on a local radio program hosted by Pat Keane, when popular entertainer, Noel Kingston, invited me to broadcast a short Irish History spot on his weekly "*Noel Kingston Irish Hour*" in New York City. The reaction to those broadcast messages was most rewarding: people listened, they enjoyed, and they asked for more. As a result of requests from the radio audience, the AOH audience, and Noel Kingston, who have all been so kind in encouraging this writer, a selected number of the weekly radio spots have come to print.

These *Echoes of Irish History* are not intended to compete with the detailed offerings of learned historians in the field. They are rather, stories of people, things, events, and places that show the variety and depth of Irish history. They are not fabricated but are taken from the ancient, near-ancient, and contemporary writings that it has been my pleasure to read. Some are light and some are serious, but all are true to the purpose for which they are intended; to show that Irish history can be a worthwhile and interesting pastime.

My sincere thanks to all whose encouragement made this book possible: to the A.O.H. for recognizing the true value of the subject, to Pat Keane for the first chance, to Noel Kingston for the opportunity to further promote the stories, and mostly to my wife, Tena, for understanding when Irish history took precedence over chores that had to be done and to my sons, Kevin and Sean, who did the chores so that their father could bury himself in books.

To each and all this effort is dedicated.



## TALES OF THE BARDS

There are many references to our Celtic heritage and Celtic tradition, but what do we know about the remarkable men who kept that heritage alive so that we could know of it and carry it on. The word, by the way, is pronounced 'Keltic', not 'Seltic' for, even though the letter 'c' can be pronounced as a 'k' or an 's' in the English language, in the Celtic languages like Gaelic, the 's' is soft and the 'c' is hard so there's no need for a 'k' and you'll find none in the ancient Irish alphabet.

What we know of that remarkable race comes from legend, historical writings, and archeological evidence. The ancient Irish manuscripts provide most of our legendary information about the Celts who settled Ireland, but legend is not a fair name for it implies fairy tales and folk tales more imagination than fact. Yet, it was applied because the Celtic tradition of recording history was an oral tradition. Historic tales were passed down in poetry and prose from generation to generation by the Bards - learned men, trained as genealogists and historians, whose task it was to preserve the histories accurately, without modification, for future generations. With the coming of Christianity and the Roman alphabet, scribes began to commit the oral histories of the Bards to writing. However, since they were written so long after the fact and no physical evidence remained to confirm their accuracy, they were relegated to the category of legend - totally unfair to the efforts of those learned men who studied and memorized their histories just so they would be preserved.

Time however, is on the side of the Bards. As one example, the Book of Invasions, which documents the Bardic account of the colonization of Ireland, mentions an early settlement by the followers of a Chieftain named Partholan along the Bann River in County Antrim at about 7000 BC - one thousand years before the scientific community believed man to have been in Ireland. The absence of hard evidence made historians totally reject the bardic account of Partholan and his people in Ireland but a startling discovery has changed all that. One of Ireland's newest archeological finds is the remains of a mesolithic settlement, consisting of a number of huts and a variety of utensils and tools, at Mount Sandal near the banks of the Bann River. The settlement has been dated at about 7000 BC.

Archeological research in the twentieth century has uncovered a number of items and sites that are confirming the accuracy of the old bardic histories. The August, 1981, issue of Scientific American carries the story and photos of the Mount Sandal excavations and two others as well. All of this is renewing confidence in the ancient tales of the Bards, which are being read and studied by a greater number of people seeking answers to the antiquity of the Celtic people.....and in the land of life after death known to the ancient Celts as *Tir na nOg*, the Bards are smiling.

## IRISH MUSIC

The music of Ireland has a long history; it is mentioned as far back as the earliest settlers of the land. The tales of the Tuatha de Danann, who arrived in Ireland around 1750 BC, include such characters as a musician who possessed a magical harp and an unjust Chieftain who failed to provide musicians for the entertainment of his guests. There are many other stories that have been handed down by the Bards concerning the importance of music as a method of preserving historical information in song, as a vehicle for praise, or as a weapon of condemnation. Nor was the music of Ireland primitive and simple for it is recorded that the Monks of St. Columba in the sixth century even sang in counterpoint.

The harp was, and still is, the favorite of all Celtic instruments; in later times, the fiddle, flute, accordian, bodhran and pipes developed a uniquely Irish sound through the application of Celtic musical patterns and rhythms, giving rise to a great tradition of Irish country or folk music. Today, these are considered Irish traditional instruments and they can be found in competition at many modern Irish Feisanna. Modern Irish entertainers have introduced such instruments as guitars, banjos, organs, and drums but it will generally be found that the type of music that they play was developed on an instrument considered traditionally Irish. Some of the tunes were even developed from old clan or war marches: the popular '*Carry Me Up to Carlow*', for example, was written to the tune of the war march of Fiach McHugh O'Byrne and was originally played on the great Irish Warpipes.

The first serious attempt at collecting Irish tunes was made by Edward Bunting (1773 - 1843) who devoted his life to this great work. The great Belfast Harpers Festival of 1792 provided the incentive when Bunting won First Prize for his playing of the ancient air, *The Coulin*. After this achievement, he made many friends among the Irish harpers whose traditional tunes he wrote down for posterity. The Irish Folk Song Society, founded in London in 1904, also collected and preserved many of the lovely songs which were fading from living memory. The Society published a journal from 1904 to 1925 which contained many of these tunes and was edited from 1920 by Donal O'Sullivan, who eventually published the vast Bunting collection. Other dedicated individuals, like the late Seamus Ennis, have devoted a lifetime to collecting the music of the Irish people and left a tremendous legacy for such modern organizations as Comhaltas Ceoltori Eireann who carry on the work, not only of collecting and publishing, but of promoting concerts and schools where the traditional music is kept alive.

In spite of all the efforts, what exists today is only a small part of what

was; every now and then, another melody is discovered that adds to the collection but the library will never be completed for gone are the magical, musical Celts of Ireland. Yet we are grateful for those who labored to save what is known today because without it we would not even have a glimpse of that inspiring tradition.





## IRISH DANCING

There are no modern books on the subject of Irish dancing and, with the exception of an occasional article in an Irish publication, only scattered references to that subject can be found. Yet, it is one of the most significant signs of our culture that exists today. The oppressed state of Ireland during the Penal times, when all things Irish were banned or destroyed, is mostly responsible for the gap in written records but, before that time, Irish music and dance were much admired on the continent. Strange as it may seem, most of what we know today about our early national dances comes from English sources, for scholars like Joyce, O'Curry, and Stokes have searched Gaelic literature in vain.

In a 1569 letter from Ireland to Queen Elizabeth, Sir Henry Sidney spoke enthusiastically of the jigs danced by the ladies of Galway who, he wrote, "*are very beautiful, magnificently dressed, and first class dancers*". In the time of Charles I, it is recorded that the gentlemen at the English Court were inclined to "*dance with the fair ladies of the Court in the fashion of the Hey and the Fada - two Irish country dances*". The term, Hey, is properly applied to a couples movement as in such dances as the High Caul Cap, while the Fada refers to the Rince Fada, or Long Dance, where dancers lined up in a row. These are the two oldest forms of Irish dancing.

Peadar O'Rafferty, the founder of the Lambeg Irish Folk Dance Society, believes that a definite connection exists between these forms and ancient ceremonies. For example, on the great Celtic feast of Beltaine on the eve of May 1, livestock were guided between two huge bonfires to be purified by the smoke and preserved from disease for the coming year. It doesn't take much imagination to picture people moving in a line on either side of the animals urging them between the fires and, alternately, toward the smoke of either fire. Such ceremonial line movements have developed into folk dances in many countries and Ireland is no different. Since nothing dies harder than tradition, the dances continued as an art form long after their significance was forgotten.

Fynes Morrison in his 17th century book, *'The Manners and Customs of the Irish'*, wrote that, "*The Irish delight much in dancing of which they have some pleasant to behold such as the Whip of Dunboyne. They dance commonly about a fire in the center of a room holding twigs in their hands and by certain strains draw one another closer to the fire*". An old description of the Fada was, "*Three abreast each holding the ends of a handkerchief, they moved a few paces forward to slow music, the rest following in pairs, a handkerchief held between them. Then the dance began. The music changed to a brisk time, the dancers passed*

*with quickstep under the handkerchief of the three in front, wheeled round in semi circles, formed a variety of pleasing revolutions interspersed with cuts, united, and fell again into their original places behind the first three".*

If that description sounds familiar, then you are fortunate to have seen Irish dancing. If not, then you should make every effort to look into an art form that was old before most civilizations were new and is considered by many to be the most distinctive of Ireland's cultural inheritances - the formal set dances, figure dances, and ceili dances of Ireland.



## THE IRISH DANCING MASTER

The central figures of 18th century Irish dancing were the travelling Dance Masters - an elite group schooled in their craft and dedicated to pass it on to future generations, improving existing steps and creating new ones using traditional guidelines. Some taught at schools dedicated to the art form of which we know at least three by the year 1800 - one each at Kerry, Cork, and Limerick. Unfortunately, after the Penal times and the great potato crop failure in the mid-1800's, the preservation of traditional dance forms seemed less important than the everyday fight for survival and it suffered a marked decline - in fact, many dances were totally forgotten as was the travelling Dance Master and his vocation.

Fortunately, in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Gaelic Revival was responsible for renewed interest in early traditional dance forms and a good number were re-introduced with the revival of one of Ireland's oldest national functions - The Feis. First held in pre-Christian times as part of annual festivals and holidays, modern Feisanna sponsor competitions in a variety of traditional art forms including dancing, with such dances as jigs, reels, hornpipes, and set dances most prominent. Interest has grown to such a degree that today, schools of Irish Dance exist in every hemisphere.

Another type of Irish dance is the Ceili Dance - the less formal group dance in round, long, or square pattern; some of which have their origins in historical events. As an example we can look at the story of Enniskillen - the age old fort of the Maguire, Chieftains of Fermanagh. Enniskillen occupied a very strategic plain alongside Lough Erne and it guarded an area known as the Pass of the North. It was the gateway to Ulster and a key position to both the Irish and English forces in their struggle for the control of Ulster during the Elizabethan Wars. On February 2, 1594, the English attacked Enniskillen and the Irish clan of Hugh Maguire were driven out. Maguire, with the aid of Red Hugh O'Donnell, counterattacked and defeated the English at the Battle of the Ford of the Biscuits (so called because biscuits littered the ford after the fleeing English dropped their rations with which they hoped to provision the fort) and Enniskillen was once again in Irish hands. The English recaptured the prized fort only to lose it once again in a siege in 1595. Because of its strategic location, siege followed siege and the fort of Enniskillen continued to change hands up to 1649 when Cromwell's forces finally secured it.

When the popular ceili dance, The Siege of Ennis, forms up, rows of dancers face rows of dancers. The rows dance toward each other as if in a siege and then manoeuvre left and right as if seeking a more advantageous position. Then, they pair off with a facing person from the opposing row



and swing wildly as if in a battle after which the rows separate and one row dances under the upstretched arms of the other, turns and takes the position of the former. Finally, they return and repeat the sequence allowing the former to return under their upstretched arms. Analyzing the movements of the dance, it is very easy to see them as representing a seige, a battle, and a continuous changing of position. Since no Irish town with the prefix Ennis in its name has ever changed hands as often as Enniskillen, could it be that the Seige of Ennis was originally choreographed as a historical record, a monument to an exciting part of his nations's history, by a very clever dancing master? And, if so, what about that lovely ceili dance, The Walls of Limerick.



## THE RAPPAREES

After the tragic death of the Irish leader, Owen Roe O'Neill, by English hands in 1649, Oliver Cromwell's Puritan army overpowered all resistance in Ireland and left the land so desolated that wolves wandered into towns in search of food. Into the midst of this destruction was introduced the Cromwellian Settlement. The English government had incurred enormous debts in waging their war in Ireland and the creditors sought settlement of their claims. Cromwell decided to make Ireland the payment and declared that all lands owned by Catholics were to be forfeited to the government and their estates would be handed over to satisfy the debts. The displaced Catholics were given the choice of going *'to Hell or to Connaught'*, the western and least productive portion of the island. Over 40,000 Irish disappeared beyond the Shannon by the end of 1654; those who didn't were hunted down and press-ganged into the English Navy or sold as indentured servants to the Barbadoes and Virginia colonies.

Some however, refused to leave and hid in the hills and glens near their ancestral homes raiding the new settlers on the lands of their clans. Bitter, they led an outlaw existence and were termed Rapparees after the short shillelaghs or *'rappers'* that they carried beneath their cloaks. They would be a constant concern to the English for the next 200 years. One of the earliest was Redmond O'Hanlon. The O'Hanlon's of Armagh were typical of the northern clans who fought on the side of Owen Roe O'Neill; those not executed as rebels were ordered west of the Shannon. In 1671, the legendary Redmond O'Hanlon took to the Slieve Gullion of south Armagh and, for the next 10 years, swept down with his band on English settlers in Monaghan, Tyrone, and Armagh until he was murdered in 1681.

By the time William of Orange was invited by the Protestant English Parliament, in 1688, to take the throne from the Catholic King, James II, there were many Rapparees in Ireland. When James turned to the Catholic Irish to assist him in regaining his throne, a number of Rapparees joined the struggle. After William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, King James II fled to the continent leaving his Irish supporters in the field. Patrick Sarsfield took command of the Irish ranks and withdrew to the Shannon to defend the only remaining Gaelic land in Ireland, the area to which the Irish had been forced by the Cromwellian Settlement 36 years earlier; in hot pursuit was King William's vastly superior army. Sarsfield decided to make his stand at Limerick but he needed time to strengthen the walled city against the coming assault and turned to the Rapparees.

There were at least five different bands of Rapparees controlling the wild glens and mountains around Limerick but the man who was to ride into history with Sarsfield was Michael 'Galloping' Hogan who controlled the

Tipperary mountains southwest of Nenagh. Sarsfield, with Galloping Hogan and his band of Rapparees guiding the way, led his troops north on the western side of the Shannon, crossed the river after dark near the town of Killaloe, and, sweeping south again, fell on King William's troops and supply train heading for Limerick destroying their fearful siege guns and artillery. The successful raid gave the Irish the needed time to strengthen their city and provision for the siege to come.

There were many other famous Rapparees, like Sean O'Dwyer of the Glen and the White Sergeant, called for the white cockade of the Stuarts worn in his hat to show his support for the Catholic King James, but after the capitulation of Limerick on October 3, 1691, when Sarsfield accepted the terms offered by the English, all who supported King James were deported to France. Fourteen thousand Irish left and among them were many Rapparees. The *Flight of the Wild Geese* had begun.

A few Rapparee riders remained to harass the English settlers and among the more notable was Edmund O'Ryan better known as Eamonn an Chnuic, or Ned of the Hill, for his north Tipperary hideout on the mountain behind Cappaph White. A member of Galloping Hogan's band who had rallied to the call of Sarsfield, he took to the hills after the fall of Limerick and raided English settlements until he was finally betrayed in 1702 for a 200 Pound reward. Captain Freney was another who stayed to carry on the fight in the Cratloe woods of south Clare.

To the English, these men were little more than murdering outlaws; to the Irish, they personified the spirit of resistance. Outlaw, Highwayman, or Rapparee, they were a class that never would have existed, were it not for the treachery of the English, and although they were never quite numerous enough to unite and threaten England's rule, they did cause considerable damage. When future generations gave birth to secret vigilante societies such as the Ribbonmen, the Whiteboys, and the Moonlighters, they were carrying on a tradition that had its roots and its inspiration in those superb horsemen and early guerilla fighters - the Rapparees.





## THE CLADDAGH RING

The Claddagh Ring, designed and worn in Ireland since the late 1600's, has enjoyed a growing popularity with Irish exiles the world over. The modern Galway Jeweller, Stephen Fallon Ltd, notes, *"The use of joined hands to denote friendship and the human heart to denote charity is common enough in forms of art which use highly conventionalized symbolism"* and *"rings of this general type, known as fidelity rings are not excessively uncommon."* However, when referring to the crowned heart supported by two hands, it is stated that *"this particular style is most definitely the Claddagh Ring and nothing else."*

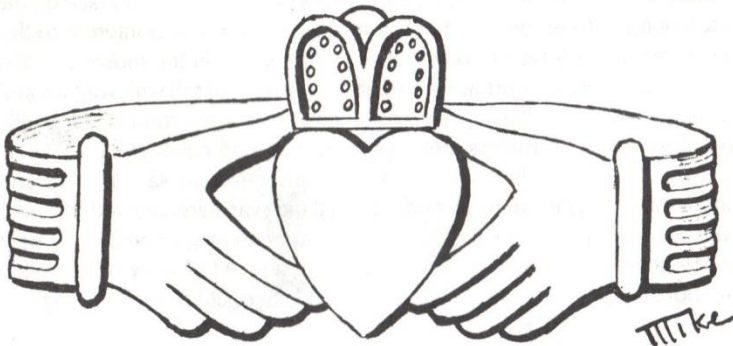
It has been generally concluded that the earliest maker of this particular design was a Galway goldsmith named Joyce who had learned his craft in a rather remarkable way. When he was still a young man, Joyce was taken by Algerian pirates and spent a number of years of captivity in Tunis where he was indentured to a jeweller and became a skilled craftsman in precious metals. When William III acceded to the throne of England in 1689, he concluded an agreement whereby all of his subjects who were held in captivity by the Moors were to be allowed to return to their homes. Joyce returned to the town of Claddagh, County Galway and pursued a career with his new-found skills. There he prospered as a worker of gold and silver until about 1730 and several examples of his ecclesiastical works are still in existence. Shortly after his return home, about 1690, Joyce created the special design that in time became known as the Claddagh Ring. The rings became popular around the town of Claddagh and soon their popularity spread across the whole of County Galway. They were kept as heirlooms with great pride and were passed from generation to generation, often used as wedding rings. Even people of limited means were prepared to exert themselves to make enough money to purchase a good example of the ring. The popularity of the ring continued to spread and, even after Joyce's death, the demand continued to rise. The tradition was carried on by the Robinson family who became the principle makers of the ring throughout the 18th century.

As to the meaning of the symbols on the ring, many stories have been handed down but the one most universally accepted has to do with the history of the time and seems the most likely. During England's attempted conquest of Ireland, each generation of Irishmen resisted the cruel yoke of slavery forced upon them. In 600 years of English intrusion into Ireland, there were no less than 14 resistance movements - 11 of which were armed rebellions! It was after one of these aborted rebellions - the Nine Years War of O'Neill and O'Donnell against the Crown - that the English

decided to end the threat of the northern clans forever. In 1607, charges of treason were fabricated against the Chieftains of Tyrone, Tirconnell, and Fermanagh and those noble Irish leaders were forced to flee Ireland in what became known as *the Flight of the Earls*. After the Flight of the Earls, the Irish again found themselves victims of oppression and, in desperation, the next generation aligned themselves against the Crown in the Williamite War. In 1691, when the last bastion of Irish resistance in that war fell with the capitulation of Limerick, the English pressed their advantage. The remaining Gaelic aristocracy was either destroyed or forced into exile in what became known as *the Flight of the Wild Geese*. In exile, the Gaelic Princes and their followers lamented the loss of their beloved Erin and preserved their love for Ireland in song and story.

When the Claddagh Ring was designed, the Flight of the Earls was recent memory and the Fall of Limerick and the Flight of the Wild Geese was a current event. Joyce, who was well aware of the heartbreak of a forced exile from Ireland, is reported to have fashioned the Claddagh Ring as a reminder to all Irishmen of the ties that bound them to their heritage. The ring - two hands grasping a heart topped with a crown - symbolized the embrace of mother Ireland on the hearts of Gaelic royalty and was cast in gold as a reminder of the riches of Erin stolen by the Saxon invader. It received its name from the little town of Claddagh near the beach around Galway Bay where Joyce first introduced his creation.

This is the fact and the legend of the Claddagh Ring. It is very likely that Joyce, having known the pain of an exile, had the Flight of the Earls and the Flight of the Wild Geese in mind when he designed the crest however, since he never left a record of his reasoning, several other explanations have been offered. As is the case with most stories, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle - between the fact and the legend that have combined in the legacy of the Claddagh Ring.



## DAN DONNELLY

The art of Prizefighting has had many Irishmen among its heroes but possibly the greatest Irish boxer of all time is remembered by very few because of his short career. His name was Dan Donnelly and he has been compared to the great John L. Sullivan himself in strength and ability even though, amazingly, he was never trained as a professional boxer. In fact, one of the most notable boxing matches in pugilistic history took place between Dan and the English Champion, George Cooper, on the Curragh of Kildare in 1815, but that's getting ahead of our story.

Born in Dublin in 1788, Donnelly was a carpenter by trade and a man of extraordinary strength, locally known for his amateur boxing ability and well liked as a man of good temper. In 1814, when Dan was 26 years old, a top fighter from England named Thomas Hall made an exhibition tour of Ireland. Everywhere Hall went he was preceded by an arrogantly-worded challenge to all Irishmen. Insulted by the wording of the challenge, Dan accepted and the resulting bout gained national attention. The two men met on the Curragh on September 14, 1814, before an assembled crowd of over 30,000 people who cheered both men as they entered the ring - though few thought that Dan would stand a chance against the experience of the English fighter. The fight was fair and Donnelly overpowered the Englishman who failed to make a single point or effectively stop one of Donnelly's blows.

When news of Donnelly's victory was received in England, a challenge was issued by the English Champion, George Cooper. Cooper had beaten all the leading contenders in England at the time and English hopes rested on his terrible hitting power. Dan accepted the challenge and the finest boxer in England came over to fight the man now acclaimed as the Irish Champion. The two men met on the Curragh of Kildare on the same spot that saw Donnelly's victory over Hall. The place was named then, and will probably be called forever, *Donnelly's Hollow*. The bout took place on the afternoon of December 13, 1815, and the excitement was intense; to this day it remains a topic of conversation in the area. On the morning of the bout, all roads to the Curragh were jammed to a stand still with wagons and carriages of every description. After eleven stormy rounds, Donnelly knocked Cooper senseless amid wild cheering and celebrating.

It was now the Irishman's turn to travel and Donnelly sailed to England and issued a challenge to all comers. England was hard-pressed to find a suitable opponent for the Irishman and it was becoming an embarrassment to the government for here was a man from a race that they had labelled inferior and he was beating the best that England could muster. At length, a



strong and able contender named Oliver took up the challenge. All Europe was alive with discussions over the outcome of this match and it was said that over One Hundred Thousand Pounds Sterling had been wagered on the contest; any man in Ireland with a Pound to spare bet it on Donnelly while the nobility and gentry backed Oliver. It was shaping up as more than a mere battle of strength, it became a battle of ideologies with a champion on each side battling for a cause. Emotions ran extremely high. The battle took place on July 21, 1819, within 30 miles of London; it was a brave and desperate contest. Finally, after the 34th round, Donnelly cross-counteracted Oliver, whirled him over the ring, and left him to be carried off unconscious. Donnelly emerged from the bout scarcely marked, dressed, and went off to see another bout. It is believed that after the bout Donnelly was knighted by the Prince Regent (later George IV); at any rate, he was ever after called 'Sir Dan'.

On February 18, 1820, with a promising career in front of him, Sir Dan Donnelly was forced into an untimely match with the only opponent he could not conquer - the grim reaper. He succumbed to a fever he had contracted several days before and went to his eternal reward just one month short of his thirty-second birthday.



## **MAYOR LYNCH OF GALWAY**

In Galway, the name Lynch appears as Judge or Mayor no less than 95 times between 1274 and 1654. They were a family known for their devotion to the law and its honest application; yet, as a slang expression, to lynch means to hang. The story of how the name became so associated is a tragic one.

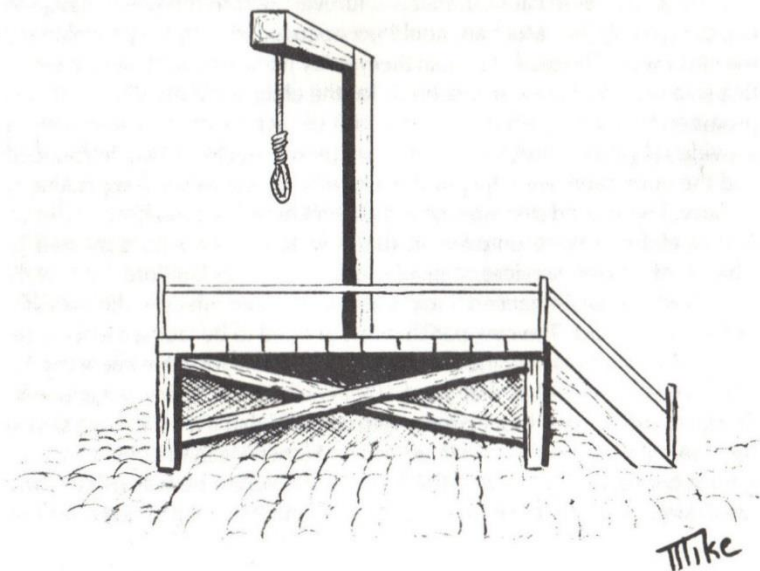
One member of this family, James Lynch Fitzstephan, a merchant by trade, was elected Mayor of Galway in 1493. (The name Fitzstephan was most likely an accommodation to the Normans with whom James Lynch, son of Stephan Lynch, traded although he continued to be known locally by the surname of Lynch.) He had sent his son, Walter, on a voyage to Spain to purchase a shipment of wine. Young Lynch, however, spent the money entrusted to him and was forced to obtain credit from a Spanish merchant to complete his mission. The merchant agreed to allow his own nephew to accompany young Lynch, on board Lynch's ship, back to Ireland to receive payment. As the ship approached Ireland, young Lynch decided to conceal his indiscretion and he intimidated the ship's crew into silence. The Spanish youth was then seized and thrown overboard to drown. Unaware of the murder, young Lynch's father and friends, delighted with the success of the mission, received him with joy. In the space of a few years, young Lynch became a successful merchant just like his father, secure in the thought that his crime was forgotten.

With all seemingly in his favor, young Lynch was about to be married to the daughter of a wealthy family. Just before the wedding however, one of the seamen on the original voyage became deathly ill and called for the senior Lynch to make a deathbed confession. He recounted the terrible crimes of the Mayor's only son. As Mayor, the elder Lynch was also the Chief Magistrate of the City and his respect for the law was paramount. He bound his only son over for arrest and presided at the trial in which his son was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Young Lynch had many friends and family who felt that, for the sake of the family name, he should not be allowed to die such a shameful death in spite of his father's conviction that no man was above the law. The Mayor's own wife, failing in her exertions to save her only son, went to the heads of her family and demanded his rescue for the honor of the clan.

On the day appointed for the execution, young Lynch walked with a noose around his neck, between his father and a priest, toward the door to the jail yard in which stood the scaffold of death. Upon opening the door, they were confronted by an armed and angry mob demanding the young prisoner's release. Such a confrontation would have shaken the nerves of

any less firm than the Mayor of Galway. He ordered the crowd to yield submission to the laws of their country, but to no avail. Determined that justice would not be cheated, he retreated inside with the prisoner, secured the door, and led his son up a flight of stone steps to an arched window overlooking the crowd. There, in full view of those below, he secured the end of the rope to an iron peg that projected from the wall. Tearfully, he embraced his only son for the last time and pushed him out the window to eternity. The broken-hearted Mayor would have welcomed death at the hands of the angry mob but, shocked at his action and stunned by his obvious grief, they slowly dispersed.

This tragic defender of the law that he had sworn to uphold secluded himself, for the remainder of his unhappy life, from all but his family. His name has come down through history synonymous with hanging and to the memory of his deed an inscription in black marble can be seen in the old jail in Galway to this day. Beneath a skull and crossbones the words read: *"This memorial of the stern and unbending justice of the Chief Magistrate of this city, James Lynch Fitzstephan, elected Mayor A.D. 1493, who condemned and executed his own guilty son, Walter, on this spot".* His house still stands on Lombard Street which is locally known by the name of *Dead Man's Lane*.





## THE ARK

In the Church at Moneen in the parish of Kilballyowen on the western end of County Clare, stands a small wooden structure that is one of the most cherished possessions of the people of that historic parish. Its story is an inspiring one.

In the 1800's, Ireland was owned by English landlords and the native Irish worked the land as tenant farmers for which they were allowed a small plot of land on which to grow a small garden to live on. Potatoes, which offer the highest yield per square yard of any crop, became the staple diet of the Irish poor. In 1845 through 1848, a blight hit the potato crop and the only nourishment available to the tenant was wiped out. To the landlords, unwilling to share the bountiful crops harvested each year, the tenant was now a liability and as the need for their services ended, they were evicted and their humble cabins demolished. Homeless and hungry, thousands wandered the roads. Even after the potato blight passed, these conditions prevailed throughout Ireland in general, and in the west of Co. Clare in particular. The district, from the borders of Kilkee and Kilrush to the Atlantic Ocean, formed one parish with its center at Carrigaholt. The landlords of the district, Westby and Burton, were in the worst tradition of their class. Four Thousand had died in the parish as a result of the potato failure and eviction when the parish priest, Father Duggan, died in 1849.

This set the stage for a contemptible effort by the Church of Ireland Mission Society to eradicate Catholicism forever. Before the newly assigned parish priest, Father Meehan, could get acquainted with his parishioners, the effort would be made to wean them away from their Catholic faith. The first step was to provide free schools for the children of the district. It was promised that the parish priest could visit the schools once each week to provide religious instruction but soon, a new catechism was introduced and the youngsters were taught that Catholic practices were superstitious idolatry. The second step was the establishment of free food kitchens for all whose children were enrolled in the new school or who appeared at Church of Ireland services regularly. Backed by the landlords, the well-organized and well-financed Society also distributed bibles to the Irish as a prerequisite to aid. The new parish priest seemed to be facing a lost cause, but Father Meehan knew the unshakable faith of the Irish. He knew that he could keep his flock but that Sunday Mass was a necessary requirement. The landlords knew it too. Farmers were warned that if a Mass were said in their home, they would be evicted. When Father Meehan bought two adjoining homes and converted them into one Church, he was evicted and the Church, such as it was, was torn down. The following Sunday, he said

Mass on a board spread between two carts but that was no good for the rough west Clare winters. He even tried erecting a tent, but that too failed. Finally it came to him! With his last remaining 10 Pound note, he went to Owen Collins, a carpenter in Carrigaholt, with plans for a large box. It was to be approximately five feet wide by five feet deep and eight feet tall with three walls and a pointed roof. It was to be on wheels so that it could be moved into concealment with a small ladder leading up to the open side. This would be his new Church. When finished, it was carried in triumphant procession from Carrigaholt to Kilbaha and concealed until Sunday when it was carried to the shore at low tide. No longer could the landlord evict him; no longer could they stop his Mass; for no longer would he even stand on their property. He and his Ark - as it became known - would be seen each Sunday on the shore, between the high and low tide marks, for this land belonged to no man. He could turn the Ark to provide shelter from the biting winds while the faithful assembled before the open front to watch their beloved priest at the wooden altar stretched across the back of the tall box as he said the Mass.

The little Ark served the parish for years as the faithful gathered for Mass in all kinds of weather while the Protestants jeered from the shelter of a nearby house. By degrees, the story of the Ark spread. Visitors came to marvel at the loyal parishioners who would rather worship in hardship than yield to the threats and bribes of powerful landlord urging a different, though more comfortable, religion. Donations came which were added to monies raised by the parishioners until ground was eventually purchased for a real site. In October of 1888, a new Church was dedicated at Moneen but the Ark was not forgotten. It was brought to the Church grounds where a small house had been erected for it. It was later moved into the Church and, in more recent times, into a place of honor in the new Church built on the same spot, and there it remains.

Father Meehan never lived to see the honor bestowed upon this relic of a people's dedication to the faith of their fathers, for this holy man passed away on January 25, 1878. He was buried at the scene of his labors, but first his remains were taken to the spot on the shore where the Ark had stood and then to the Moneen Church. Today, a visitor can stand in the Church at Moneen and view the Ark in the special alcove built for it. Near the altar rails, a few yards to the right of his beloved Ark, lie the mortal remains of Father Meehan; through the window to the left of the Ark, one can see all that remains of landlordism in Kilbaha - the ruins of the home of Westby and Burton's agent, Marcus Keane. Between them stands the Ark, weather-beaten and worm-holed though it may be, it stands as a relic of a desperate struggle, a symbol of the unshakeable faith of the Irish Catholic, and one of the most sacred structures in the Irish Church.

## JAMES STEPHENS

At midnight on the rainy night of November 24, 1865, there was hardly a soul to be seen on the streets of Dublin. Policemen on duty took shelter in doorways, blowing on their fingers to warm them in the bitter cold. Not far away and colder than the policemen were six men, soaked to the skin, waiting outside Richmond Prison. As they spoke, they spoke in whispers and watched the high wall of the prison for a signal. In a cell within the prison, a man paced back and forth. He too awaited a signal for he knew, that unless plans miscarried, this was the night he was to be rescued. His name was James Stephens but he was referred to by many as *'The Wandering Hawk'*.

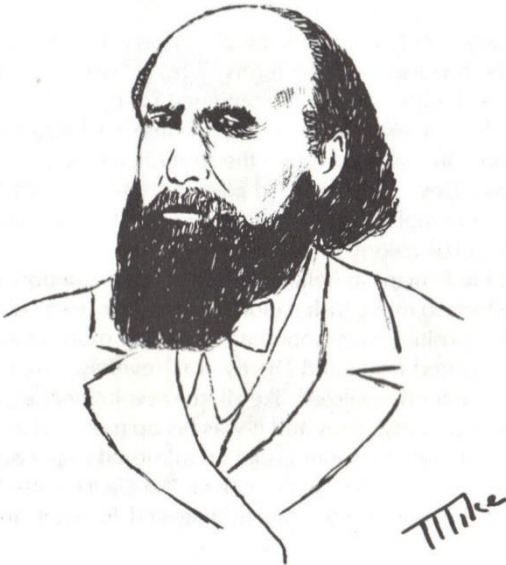
Stephens was the Chief of the fearless Fenian movement that sought to free Ireland of British domination; a hypnotic leader, the very mention of whose name would bring an instant hush over any Irish gathering. He was the biggest prize that the British Secret Police in Dublin Castle had captured in many a day. A few weeks earlier, he had been arrested at Sandymount and conveyed before a magistrate where he sat as cool as if on a park bench. When one of his letters was introduced in evidence, in which he declared that this would be the year for action against the Crown, Stephens loudly proclaimed, *"and so it yet may be!"* His closing statement to the tribunal bespoke his disdain for the court. *"I have employed no solicitor (lawyer) in this case"*, he stated, *"because making a defense of any kind would be recognizing British Law in Ireland...I deliberately and conscientiously repudiate the existence of that law"*. He was then taken to Richmond Prison under heavy guard where high walls and iron doors would keep him secure until his sentencing on November 27. The British officials in Dublin Castle slept secure knowing that the Wandering Hawk was safely caged, but they had underestimated Fenian ingenuity and daring. One of the Prison guards, Dan Byrne, was a sworn member of the Brotherhood and the Superintendent of the Prison Hospital, John Breslin, was a sympathizer. With these two insiders, the Fenian leaders John Devoy and Colonel Kelly swiftly arranged a rescue.

The night of November 24 came, the warden went on his final round of inspection, the city clock struck one, and Stephens heard a gentle tapping on his cell door as it quietly opened revealing Breslin and Kelly brandishing revolvers. Not more than a nod was exchanged and Stephens followed the two along a corridor, down stone steps, and into the prison yard. A ladder was placed against the wall and the Wandering Hawk was on the loose again. In the morning, panic swept the official circles of Dublin: cavalry scoured the countryside, squads of police and detectives were every-



where, gunboats put to sea to search fishing vessels, and posters offering a reward of 1,000 Pounds Sterling appeared across the country. While the massive search was on, Stephens lay secure in the home of a woman named Butler right under their noses. Though she was poor, the Chief was perfectly safe even had the reward been ten times as great.

Seven months later, on a sunny afternoon in the month of June, a handsome open carriage drove leisurely through the streets of Dublin carrying a Coachman, four Footmen in the customary uniform of male servants of the day, and two well-dressed gentlemen in silk hats reclining at ease on the cushioned seats inside. As the carriage drove by a local police station, a Constable on duty stood to attention and courteously saluted the gentlemen taking the air - assuming them to be magistrates, at least. Once out of the city, the driver whipped up the horses and they sped toward Malahyde and the sea. Some miles from Balbriggan, the carriage halted, one of the passengers got out, bid farewell and walked to a waiting boat. He was rowed out to a waiting ship, the sails were set, and the ship sailed down the channel bound for France. This time the Wandering Hawk had spread his wings in earnest. The Coachman and Footmen returned to the carriage and quietly drove back to Dublin. They were all hand-picked members of the Fenian Irish Republican Brotherhood and armed to the teeth.



## JOHN DEVOY

John Devoy, who was called the greatest of the Fenians by Padraic Pearse, was born near Johnstown, Co. Kildare, on Sept 3, 1842. When still a small boy, his family moved to Dublin where they enjoyed a modest prosperity. Devoy's father had been an active nationalist in the 1840's and John naturally turned to nationalism as well, but of a more advanced kind.

He joined the Fenian revolutionary society known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which had been established in 1858. Seeking military experience, the 19-year old youth joined the French Foreign Legion. After his return to Ireland in 1865, he was made a Fenian organizer with the important and dangerous assignment of recruiting among the Irish serving in the British Army. Constantly risking arrest, his success was nevertheless considerable. Devoy believed that the Fenians should rise in arms against the Crown while the organization was at its strongest but his opinion was not acted upon until it was too late and the rising which did occur, in 1867, was put down before it really began.

In 1865, the British took action against the Fenians and, through spies and informers, identified and arrested many of the leaders. In November, 1865, Devoy led a group which successfully arranged the escape of James Stephens, head of the Fenian organization, from a Dublin jail. Early in 1866, Devoy himself was betrayed and arrested. He was sentenced to 15 years penal servitude and, while in prison, he learned of the failure of the rising of 1867.

Freed in January, 1871, under a general amnesty, he sailed to America into an exile which was one of the terms of his release. Devoy made his home in the United States where he continued his fight for Irish independence. Living in New York, apart from a short time in Chicago, he became the dominant force in Clann na Gael - the American branch of the Fenian movement. It was Devoy who helped plan the 1876 voyage of the ship *Catalpa*, which accomplished the daring rescue of six Fenian prisoners from the British penal colony in Australia.

Devoy urged the Fenians in Ireland and America to support Parnell and Davitt in their efforts to move Irish nationalism into the arena of Parliamentary debate. This position was unpopular with the more militant faction who favored an armed rising and Devoy was severely criticized. Yet he stuck to his position for he realized, like all true revolutionaries, that tactics must change with circumstances and it was his opinion that in a shrinking world the support of other nations could be mustered to pressure England into terms. He operated a newspaper called *The Gaelic American* which advocated his cause and, unfortunately, engaged in bitter and personal

controversies with critics and opponents of his policy within the nationalist camp. He remained however, committed to nationalist principles. Through his close friend, Tom Clarke - the veteran Fenian and 1916 leader, John Devoy was closely involved with the revival of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Ireland in the early 1900's and did much to secure world and American support for the nationalists before and after the Easter Rising of 1916.

Devoy lived long enough to finally see the establishment of an Irish state although he regarded the treaty of 1921-22 as not the end of a struggle but merely another step on the road to total freedom. He visited Ireland for the last time in 1924. On September 30, 1928, he died in Atlantic City, New Jersey. His body now rests in Irish soil in Glasnevin cemetery, Dublin. His life of struggle, prison, and exile had but one purpose: freedom for the Irish people and his native land. In pursuit of these goals he became one of the most notable revolutionaries in a century of revolution.





## THE CATALPA RESCUE

The Fenian brotherhood was founded to work for the independence of Ireland, and Britain declared that membership in that organization was a crime punishable by deportation to her penal colony in western Australia. Seldom in history can one find a story to rival the adventure that brought embarrassment to England and freedom to six Fenians who had been sentenced to that harsh penal colony for life.

It all began in 1871, when John Devoy, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, and other Fenians were released on a general amnesty which was forced by public pressure after the Devon Commission authenticated the prisoner's claims of cruelty and torture. Under the terms of the amnesty however, the released Fenians were banished from Ireland; so they headed for America. Once in America, they contacted Clann na Gael, the American branch of the Fenian movement, and began working toward freeing other Fenian prisoners. Devoy and Thomas McCarthy Fennell presented a plan to the Clann in 1873 and, at a Baltimore convention the following year, the plan was accepted and fund-raising initiated. As funds trickled in, Devoy and John Boyle O'Reilly secured a sailing vessel named Catalpa at New Bedford, Mass. and outfitted her as a whaler bound for a cruise that would take her to western Australia. On April 27, 1875, the ship set sail with only one Fenian on board. The remainder of the rescue party sailed from San Francisco on September 13 of that year and arrived in Freemantle, Australia on November 16. Posing as Government officials on a tour of inspection, the Fenian leaders were given VIP treatment and taken on a complete tour of the prison facility by the Superintendent. It was on this tour that they made contact with the Fenian prisoners and arranged the escape.

The Catalpa arrived early in 1876 but the scheduled rescue had to be postponed because of the arrival of new prisoners aboard a British gunboat. The Catalpa was put in for minor repairs, in order to justify her delay in port, and the rescue was rescheduled for Easter Monday morning, April 17, 1876. On that morning, two rescue parties, each with horse and cart, left the city in different directions but bound for a prearranged rendezvous. The prisoners put their plan in motion: prisoner Robert Granston approached a guard with a note from the Superintendent requesting prisoners James Wilson and Michael Harrington for a work detail at the Governor's House. They were released and headed for the rendezvous. Prisoners Thomas Hassett and Thomas Darragh headed in the same direction as if they were going to work. They were joined by prisoner Martin Hogan who had made an excuse for a temporary absence to the guard in charge of his work detail.

The good behavior of these men had given them a trustee status and this fact, coupled with the fact that escape from this isolated prison was considered all but impossible, accounted for the lack of security. Not long after the prisoners had fled the confines of the prison property, their escape was discovered and the race was on to flee the pursuing authorities. At 10:30 AM, the prisoners met the rescue party, got into waiting whale boats and rowed out toward the Catalpa which had not been allowed to sail near the prison. When only two miles off shore, they spotted mounted police ride up to the spot where they had disembarked and take the horses and carts used by the rescue party. The pursuit was on. The Fenians continued rowing at a back-breaking pace for seven hours until heavy seas blew up about 5:30 PM - they were still almost 15 miles from the Catalpa. They rode out the storm until morning when they spotted the British ship, *Georgette*, steaming out of Freemantle toward the Catalpa. The authorities on the *Georgette* did not spot the prisoners as they lay silently in the water but they ordered the Catalpa on her way. As the *Georgette* steamed back to Freemantle, the prisoners leaped to action and struggled off in the wake of the Catalpa. Fearing that the Catalpa was unaware of their presence the prisoners decided to risk discovery and waved to signal the Catalpa before she sailed out of sight. The gamble worked for the Catalpa suddenly altered her course and headed for the whaleboats but, at the same time, a police cutter had spotted the prisoners and steamed toward them as well. The game was up and it was only a question of who would reach them first. The Catalpa won the race and the prisoners and their rescue party scrambled aboard. The police cutter signalled the *Georgette* which returned flying a man-of-war flag. The Captain of the Catalpa, knowing his ship was no match for the speed and armament of the British vessel, raised the American flag and waited. After a night of accusation and denial, threat and counterthreat, the *Georgette* fired across the bow of the Catalpa at 8:30 AM on the morning of April 19. The Captain of the Catalpa shouted to the *Georgette*, "If you fire on this ship, you fire on the American flag" and ordered his crew to ready themselves for a fight to the finish. The Captain of the *Georgette*, fearing an international incident, lingered awhile and slowly steamed away.

In August, 1876, almost 10 years after their conviction as Fenians, six patriotic Irishmen stepped ashore on American soil as free men as a result of Irish daring and Yankee grit.

### CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

During the Gaelic Revival in the early 1900's in Ireland, many dedicated themselves to reviving Ireland's national heritage. Old songs and stories were reproduced; studies in the Irish language were revived; her ancient history and heroes were reintroduced and a rich heritage, nearly forgotten, was reborn. In conjunction with this rebirth, many new works on old nationalist themes were written. One of the foremost authors to contribute in this vein was William Butler Yeats whose most stirring patriotic work was a play entitled Cathleen Ni Houlihan - a name used to represent Ireland when it was forbidden to publicly praise her name.

The play was set in a small cottage in County Mayo, overlooking Killala Bay, in the year 1798 - the historic year that a French fleet landed to assist the Irish fight for independence. The family in the cottage was preparing for the wedding of the oldest son, Michael, when wild cheering was heard from the direction of town and Michael's younger brother, Patrick, ran out to investigate. As Patrick left, a tired old lady came to the door. She was a stranger but was invited in for a cup of tea and, as she took a place by the fire, she told of wandering far in search of aid. Once, she said, she had four beautiful fields but strangers had come and stolen them from her. She told of brave men who lost their lives trying to reclaim her fields and Michael, listening attentively, asked what brought those men to their deaths. "*They died for love of me*" the old woman replied, "*and many yet shall die for love of me*". Then she told stories of those who had died naming patriot leaders of Ireland's past. Her tale finished, the old woman rose to leave saying that she had to be on her way to greet those who were assembling to help her in yet another attempt to put the strangers out of her house. Michael asked if he could join her and, as the old woman turned and walked out the door singing a song of Ireland, Michael's mother restrained him and called to the father to help her. The father stared after the old woman remarking that he recalled a woman very much like that from his own youth but the memory was not clear and, sure, it couldn't be the same old woman. As Michael stared after the old woman, the cheering in the town became louder and young Patrick burst in the door followed by Michael's fiance with the news that a French fleet had landed in Killala. Exited and emotional, he related that all the young men in the neighboring areas were racing to join them in a fight to free Ireland. Michael stood at the open door with his mother and fiance pleading with him not to leave when the voice of the old woman was heard raised in song. Michael broke away and rushed after her. The father, who was still pondering over the recollections stirred by the old woman's story, asked Patrick if he had



passed an old woman going down the path. Patrick replied that he had passed no one but a beautiful young girl, and she had the walk of a queen!

Cathleen ni Houlihan was laced with metaphoric references to Ireland's heroic past from the portrayal of Ireland's four provinces as four beautiful fields to the old woman's naming of Ireland's martyrs for freedom as those who died for love of her. It was one of the most popular plays of the period and did much to fuel the nationalist fire that led to the Easter Rising of 1916. It is still worth reading as a background to understanding the feeling of the time as well as for the sheer enjoyment of Yeats. The story became the theme for a successful song written by Tommy Makem entitled 'Four Green Fields'.



## COMMODORE JOHN BARRY

On September 13, the Ancient Order of Hibernians celebrate one of the three main holidays of their Order - Commodore John Barry Day. It is not a day unique to that Order, for it has been commemorated on the American national calendar more than once. There were even statues erected in his honor back in the days when Americans remembered with gratitude the contributions of this dedicated man. Today, how many remember his deeds? The American Heritage dictionary doesn't even list his name and his statue which stands in front of Independence Hall, Philadelphia, serves as a platform for pigeons unnoticed by passers-by. It is truly unfortunate that so few remember because, during his lifetime, Barry gave so much to America at a time when she needed it most. It has even been said that had it not been for John Barry, the American Revolution would have been lost. Dr. Benjamin Rush said in his eulogy at Barry's graveside, *"He was born in Ireland, but America was the object of his devotion and the theater of his usefulness."*

Yes, Commodore John Barry was born in Ireland; in Tacumshane, Co. Wexford to be specific, in the year 1745. He grew up with a great love for the sea and while still a young man, he emigrated to the Crown colonies in America. By 1760, he was employed in a shipbuilding firm in Philadelphia and in 1766, at the age of 21, he went to sea as Captain of the ship, *The Barbadoes*. The young Irishman seemed destined for a prosperous career in the colonies, but his integrity and sense of justice led him to risk all in a dangerous venture.

In 1775, years of smouldering unrest erupted in open rebellion as the American colonies finally declared their independence from the Crown. As England prepared to regain control of the situation, the colonies formed the Second Continental Congress to establish a military force and defend their recently declared independence; but experienced men were hard to find. Captain John Barry, an early champion of the patriot cause, promptly volunteered his service. With nine years experience as a sea-going Captain and five successful commands to his credit, the young Irishman was quite warmly welcomed and given command of a ship under the authority of the Continental Congress. On Dec 7, 1775, eight months after the first shots were fired at Lexington, Captain John Barry took the helm of a new 14-gun vessel aptly named, *The Lexington*. He quickly trained a crew and began the task of supplying and supporting Washington's ground forces.

On April 7, 1776, just four months after taking command, Barry provided a necessary boost to the moral of the continental forces just as he would do so many times when it was needed most: he captured the British

ship, *The Edward*, and her cargo - the first American war prize. On June 6, he was given command of the new cruiser, *The Effingham*, and captured two more British ships. In spite of Barry's successes, the war was not going well for the Americans: Philadelphia was in the hands of the British; the British Navy had bottled up the Delaware River; General Benedict Arnold had betrayed West Point and gone over to fight for the British; and Washington's troops were in dire need. A victory was essential to boost their sagging moral. Barry captured an armed British vessel when ammunition was scarce and a supply ship when food was at a premium, then he came to Washington's aid when the leader was planning to cross the Delaware. He organized seamen and joined the land forces which crossed the river in boats supplied by Barry's friend, Patrick Colvin.

Barry was held in such high esteem that, after the Delaware crossing and the subsequent victories at Trenton and Princeton in which he served as an aide to Washington, Lord Howe made a flattering offer to Barry to desert the patriot cause. "*Not the value or command of the whole British fleet*", Barry replied, "*can lure me from the cause of my country which is liberty and freedom*". On January 5, 1778, while the Delaware was occupied by the British fleet, Barry organized the famous '*Battle of the Kegs*' in which small kegs loaded with explosives were sent floating down the river at the British ships and fired upon, exploding them and throwing the British into a panic.

In addition to commanding naval operations for the Continental Congress, Barry supervised the building of their ships. In command of one of those ships in 1781, when Washington was again in need, Barry captured four important British vessels. Washington personally thanked him for the boost it provided and sent his fearless Captain back into the fray. During a confrontation on May 28, 1781, Barry was wounded and taken below. Subsequently, his First Officer informed him that the battle was going against them and Barry ordered that he be carried back on deck. When the British demanded his surrender, Barry defiantly refused and sparked his crew to victory. The wounded Captain returned with yet another prize. The last sea battle of the American Revolution took place on March 10, 1783, as Barry was returning with a shipload of bullion from Havana and was set upon by three British ships. The resourceful Captain engaged and destroyed one and outdistanced the other two returning with the precious cargo which was used to establish a National Bank for the new nation. Even after the war, this tireless seaman assisted America by transporting Virginia tobacco to Holland to repay America's war debts. Far from the sea and war, Barry also assisted at the Federal Convention held in 1787 to adopt the new constitution. It seems that there were a minority who were



opposed to the adoption and absented themselves from the convention, preventing a quorum from being formed. Barry organized a group called 'The Compellers' and physically forced enough of the seceding members back to form a quorum; the vote was taken and the constitution was finally approved. People cheered and church bells rang as Barry scored another victory - this time over indifference. In recognition of his vast experience and dedication, Washington demonstrated Barry's immense value to the new nation when, on June 14, 1794, he asked the popular naval hero to form and train a class of midshipmen who would then be commissioned as Ensigns and form the nucleus of the new American Navy. Barry himself was named the ranking officer and granted Commission number one.

Commodore John Barry had many firsts to his credit from being the first to fly the new American flag in battle to escorting America's famous ally, General Lafayette, back to France, but the first that he should always be remembered for is his position as Father of the American Navy.



## **BOYCOTT**

In 1881, a new word was added to our vocabulary and here's how it happened. The time was only thirty years after the horrible failure of the potato crop in Ireland and the native Irish who had not fled the land or died of starvation and disease were totally destitute. Most of the fertile land of Ireland was under the domination of absentee landlords and the native Irish were reduced to the status of tenant farmers governed by the landlord's agent, whose sole task was to minimize the landlord's expenses and maximize his profit. The methods employed to this end were oppressive and the Irish tenant suffered high tithe rates and rents, no rights, and the constant fear that he and his family would be dispossessed at the pleasure of the landlord's agent. Hope was born with the foundation of the Land League, a group that organized the farmers and dealt with the landlord's agents on their behalf. In County Mayo, after one agent had dismissed his tenants in a dispute over rents, the Land League decided it was time to try a new tactic and show their strength. When the agent sought to replace the dispossessed tenants, he found that, as needy as the people of the area were, no replacements applied. The angry agent sought people to act as process servers and serve indictments on the original tenants for non-payment of rent but could find no one who would accept pay as a process server. He soon found the Blacksmith too busy to shoe his horse, stores ran out of supplies when he placed an order, postmen overlooked him on their rounds, and, as the crops ripened, there was no one to pick them. He had never experienced such unified opposition but he vowed that the crops would be harvested.

As the harvest approached, the agent called on the government for help and 50 northern Orangemen and 2,000 British soldiers arrived to assist in the harvest. To their dismay, they found no horses nor carriages available as transportation and they had to walk the full 15 miles from the town of Claremorris to Lough Mask House in the rain. With no provisions for their sustenance, the Orangemen reasoned that if they could do the landlord's work, they could eat his food. They ate their fill of his turkeys, pigs, ducks, and whatever else they fancied. The harvesters and soldiers gorged themselves each evening and inflicted severe losses to the landlord; further, it cost the British Army 10 Pounds for every pound of crop harvested.

The agent was defeated. The tactic worked so well that it was employed over and over with great success. It was imitated on a world-wide scale and a new word entered the language to define it. The name of the landlord's agent, against whom the tactic was first employed, was used. His name was Captain Boycott and boycotting has been applied on local, on national, and on international levels ever since it was first applied in County Mayo, Ireland, on September 23, 1880.

## THE CELTIC CALENDAR

The four major feast days of the ancient Celtic calendar divided the year into even quarters. Each quarter was associated with the growing of crops and was welcomed by a festival commemorating a legend. The festivals consisted of fairs, feasting, sports and games, as well as solemn religious observances. The feasts survived the coming of Christianity by the simple expedient of changing their meaning and transforming them into Christian holidays; it is far easier to change the meaning of a celebration than to eliminate it. The four major feasts occurred on February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1 and they corresponded with the beginning of the planting season, growing season, harvest season, and winter.

On February 1, *The Feast of Imbolc* honored the Celtic Goddess, Brigit. She was the Goddess of Poetry and associated with fertility rituals. This feast introduced the season of livestock propagation and preparation for planting.

On May 1, *The Feast of Beltaine* commemorated the powerful God, Belanos, a pastoral God associated with the growth of cattle and crops. It was celebrated by the lighting of bonfires between which livestock were driven to purify them from disease. Ceremonial movements around these fires eventually became dances and the early traditional Irish ring dances derive their form from this custom.

On August 1, *The Feast of Lughnasa* commemorated the all powerful God, Lugh, and was associated with the harvest. The feast was supposedly instituted by the God himself to honor his foster-mother, Tailtiu, who died on this day. The feast began 15 days before and lasted 15 days after the First of August.

On November 1, *The Feast of Samhain* was celebrated. This was the most important feast on the ancient calendar and marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. Bonfires were again in order, this time to encourage the waning power of the sun in the coming winter months. The night of October 31 was considered to be a time of great personal danger, when the barriers between the natural world and the supernatural world were lowered, the creatures of the otherworld became visible to mankind, and supernatural forces were let loose. In order to confuse and frighten the visiting spirits, people donned animal skins and made loud noises. There was happy celebration when the dawn of November 1 ushered in the new year. In Christian times, the 31 of October became All Souls Day and was declared a hallowed evening. The tradition never died however and, although the Christian term of hallowed evening gave its name, the modern feast of Halloween is very much Celtic and is the only true Celtic holiday still celebrated in modern times.



*During a visit to Mike McCormack's home, I stood in line to wait my turn to visit the scribe's library. When my number was called, I anxiously filed into the den of literature that is the source of so much interesting historical information for so many of us. I browsed in awe at the myriad of reference books obviously much perused - no dust on these books. Moving on, I reverently sat in the chair that supports one of our foremost and most conscientious Irish historians as he gleans, from the oft-thumbed pages, the days, dates, and actions relating to so many Irish events of yore. I could not help but think of the many hours of labor, yet love, that Mike has spent putting together historical essays to deliver at Communion Breakfasts and meetings of various Irish organizations, or just trying to find the answers to the many questions posed by his ever-growing list of admirers. My thoughts drifted to the hours he has spent preparing historical minutes for my radio programs and how popular these segments have become with the listening audience. Pages, chapters, and volumes are all cleverly condensed to mere minutes of information which cover the most important elements of the event - the listener's attention never deviates from the subject at hand.*

The foregoing is an over-dramatized account of a visit to the McCormack household for dinner. No, I did not have to stand in line or take a number, but the rest is absolutely true!

Noel Kingston

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike McCormack is perhaps best known to Irish-Americans for his column in the influential *Irish Echo*. Some know him as a past Director of the New York State Ancient Order of Hibernians, others remember his insightful articles in the monthly *Shamrock*, and still more will recall that he is no stranger to the prestigious pages of the *Irish Literary Supplement*. Ironically, the many contributions of this remarkable man may have overshadowed the fact that he is a serious and scholarly student of Irish history.

The first time I met Mike, we crossed verbal swords over an obscure point of Irish history, my supposed specialty. To my chagrin, this modest man made me feel as if I had joined the intellectual lists without weaponry. Mike was - and is - a veritable treasure-trove of the Irish arcane. He is also a man who makes the forgotten art of listening an absolute delight. To my everlasting joy, I lost the debate...and gained a treasured friend.

I would learn afterwards that Mike's twenty years of research into Irish history are not exactly a secret. For example, in the space of three years, the AOH National Board awarded this Irish-American of County Cavan lineage a bronze, a silver, and a gold *National Historians Medal*, an unprecedented honor. Just this year, Mike was named Historian of the New York State AOH. In 1981 he began appearing occasionally on *The Noel Kingston Irish Hour* over WHBI (New York City) discussing little known facts of the Irish past. Enthusiastic listener response made his *Echoes of Irish History* a regular part of the show by the time it expanded to WLIM (Suffolk County, Long Island) in early 1983.

When asked to select a few vignettes from his popular radio spot for this publication, Mike carefully chose these sixteen stories as representative of the fascinating 'slighter' side of the Irish past. For those of you who recoil in polite horror at the tedious Names/Places/Dates motif of most Irish histories - and are rightfully weary with those of us who write them - Mike McCormack here gives you a chance to glimpse fascinating events that otherwise might disappear between the lines of the Irish historian's prose.

Turlough Faolain, author of  
*Blood on the Harp*,  
*Irish Rebel History in Ballad*