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Welcome to the latest edition of the IACI e-news.

Founded in 1962, the IACI is the leading Irish American cultural organization. The IACI is a federally recognized 501(c)(3) not-for-profit national organization devoted to promoting an intelligent appreciation of Ireland and the role and contributions of the Irish in America.

Guest contributors are always welcome! Please note, the IACI is an apolitical, non-sectarian organization and requests that contributors consider that when submitting articles. The IACI reserves the right to refuse or edit submissions. The views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are solely those of the original authors and other contributors. These views and opinions do not necessarily represent those of the IACI or any/all contributors to this site. Please submit articles for consideration to cbuck@iaci-usa.org.

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An Irish Dream in America

by

Raymond D. Aumack

*There's a pretty spot in Ireland * I'll always claim as my land. * Where the fairies and the blarney will never, never die. * It's the land of the shillelagh * My heart goes back there daily * To the girl I left behind me * when kissed and said, goodbye.*

Alas, the broken promises and broken hearts could build a bridge across the Atlantic between Ireland and America. So many women stayed behind to wait for the call that never came. So many beaus came to America to make the fortunes that would ever materialize. They were lost in the vast expanse of the land from ocean to ocean and from Mexico to Canada. Many just became absorbed in the majesty and size of the country.

This Irish-American song describes a longing for a fatherland in which they could not survive. The memories are idyllic, and the reality is considerably less. As time moved on, so many came to the Atlantic shores and made their way to the Pacific shores. They dug ditches, dug and panned for gold, laid railroad tracks, sailed on cargo ships. They dug the tunnels by hand as sandhogs. They built the skyscrapers and the bridges across our rivers walking the high steel and tossing the hot rivets. They became policemen, firemen and the heroes that first responders longed to imitate. They fought with the American military. They became our admirals and generals. They mastered the art of politics and eventually ran the entire country. They opened saloons, wrote poetry, songs, composed music, wrote short stories and novels bringing to their new homeland the spice of the heritage of a now distant past. They started magazines and newspapers and became the crack reporters of their time.

The pretty spot of my thought was not Ireland but in America, and was located in Sea Girt, NJ in a big barn-like palace called, *Jimmy Byrne's Sea Girt Inn*. Ah, but my story begins long before this was even a dream.

The Bayonne Irish

I grew up in Bayonne, NJ in the 1940's and 50's during a mystical, mythical time that will never be duplicated. It was the time before television and the entire city was our playground. The secret to the mystique of the city is that we only had one mandate and that was to socialize. That was how I got to know every kid in town. Sports was the great tool for doing that. We had the camaraderie of the guys and the girls always attended the ball games.

I always knew of Jimmy Byrne because my father was a close friend of his father, Jimmy Senior, who was possibly the best-known Irish musician in New Jersey and New York at the time. In fact, his band provided the music for my parent's wedding. Jimmy Senior was a fiddler and sparks would dance on his strings as he played the most memorable of jigs and reels. When they grew older, the Byrne boys would play in their father's band and became the lead singers.

The Byrne's lived in St. Andrew's Parish and my family lived in St. Mary's Parish with our homes literally seven blocks from each other. I knew Jimmy from playing basketball in the CYO

leagues. Jimmy was tall and thin and towered over most of us. St. Andrews was one of the best with Jimmy and another great friend, Ken Kunzman, who became one of the top lawyers in the state and the face of Irish America. Ken also was good enough to be a starter at Holy Cross. St. Vincent's was the perennial winner of the league and I grew to be friendly with all the players on that team as well. There were eight Catholic Churches in Bayonne. The competition in that league was fierce.

Jimmy Byrne, Entertainer, Entrepreneur

Jimmy Jr. became my friend during high school at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City. He was a year ahead of me. There were about forty guys from Bayonne who attended St. Peter's. Jimmy and I would invariably be on the last bus you could take and still be on time. If there was heavy traffic, we would get off the bus at Jersey Avenue and run the half mile to the school along Grand Street carrying our books and athletic equipment. Jimmy was always in shape for basketball and I was always ready for track and field. Jimmy's senior year team won a State Basketball Championship.

We did play basketball together with the Bayonne Celtics for several years through college. Those were the most fun games ever. We played against teams in the industrial league in New York. Every year we played a team at Sing Sing Prison.

Following in the family business, Jimmy became an outstanding musician and entertainer. At those young teenage dances, sponsored by the St. Andrew's CYO, he had his own band and played both the drums and the piano, not at the same. After college, he became a teacher and supplemented income with his band. In between, he always played the piano for our parties and we grew up with music and song.

At some point, he gave up the day job and became a full-time entertainer. It was here that our paths diverged. Jimmy travelled the country as an itinerant musician. I entered the archdiocesan seminary. My days on the basketball circuit had come to an end.

We reconnected a few times during those years, usually at parties with our long-time friends during the summer and Christmas holidays. I became the unofficial chaplain of the Bayonne Celtics, a position I still proudly hold.

A few years later I had the honor of officiating at the wedding of James Byrne and Frances Boyle of Teaneck, NJ., the love of his life. The wedding Mass was concelebrated with Frs. Leonard Volenski and John Bonner, great friends from our flaming youth. Frances was well-equipped for the family business. She was a champion Irish step-dancer.

I am reminded that she was once teaching me some Irish Step Dance moves. My ankle rolled and the sprain was quite painful. I dared not slow down. Frances was the champion and I thought I would embarrass her by yielding to the pain.

The Sea Girt Inn

I am not sure how the Sea Girt Inn came to be. It probably took more than a year to plan. First, Jimmy had to raise the money required to buy and outfit the place. The floor had to be laid and

the bar had to be built. Security devices had to be installed. Plumbing and electricity had to be brought up to standard. The kitchen had to be installed and outfitted. There were millions of details that required attention. The place was a stand-up bar and a thousand people could fit in the place and did so every night.

Jimmy had a stage built behind the bar for entertainment purposes and across the room there was an organ that was played during the breaks.

Jimmy had to provide the security and there were about five teams of security personnel that discretely strolled the room during the night. After all, with the abundance of drink, hot music, battering the floor dancing, people bumping into each other, and beautiful women, what could possibly go wrong? The obvious answer is, everything. The doorways had to be covered to frustrate underage drinkers. The parking lot had to be big enough to accommodate the crowd and that required continuous security throughout the night. Fortunately, trouble was at a minimum.

Jimmy had a professional size basketball court behind the Inn at the edge of the parking lot. There was a wonderful shore basketball league and many local professional players participated. I always relished my brush with greatness. I missed most of the summers of 1966 and 1967 with summer studies at Notre Dame and the University of Chicago respectively. But I always had the week off at the end of the summer and made the most of it.

The Inn was open from Tuesday to Sunday and there was entertainment every night. On Wednesdays, Jimmy declared family night and Irish Night, though a decent share of Irish music was played every night. Jimmy and his brother, Bob, provided entertainment every night. What made Wednesday different was that the whole family performed. Jim Senior was the featured performer with his magic fiddle. and at least once in every one of the three sets of the evening sang what became his signature song, Paddy McGinty's Goat. Mrs. Byrne did a solo as did Jim's sister Kathleen and his other brothers. Frances did a step dance presentation in each of the three sets as well. Bobby and Jimmy sang their hearts out, Jimmy on the piano and Bobby on a snare drum. The audience always participated with uncharacteristic vigor.

There was always a big crowd of very nice people. It was a gathering spot for the Bayonne Irish and people from as far away as Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania suburbs, New York City, Staten Island, and Long Island. It was the hottest place at the New Jersey Shore though there were rumors of a terrific singer-entertainer in Asbury Park, named Bruce Springstein.

The Sea Girt Inn closed for the winter. However, Jimmy and Bobby did fund-raising gigs, solo and together, for parishes, churches, synagogues, and a wide variety of charities. One of their greatest triumphs was a presentation with their father at Carnegie Hall. I was there that evening and it was a wonderful experience.

Alas, everything changes. New Jersey passed a law making the establishment responsible, if there was an alcohol related accident. The Inn was vulnerable to suit. The insurance costs to cover such an eventuality, with a thousand drinkers every night, was astronomical. The cost of the insurance would have wiped out the profits. The Sea Girt Inn sadly closed after a fantastic run, but the memories will live forever.

Doors Close and Doors Open

In the early 1970s Jimmy had a club in New York City on First Avenue at 79th Street. He had it for a few years, but his heart wasn't in ownership anymore. His son, James Byrne III was born, and family living started to take precedence. He took the gigs that he wanted to play. When his son was older, he would play for the winter in Florida and at Doolan's in Spring Lake and other shore venues.

James Byrne III is making a name for himself in Colorado and several times a year comes back home to sing and play with his dad. Both Jimmy and Bobby are now retired though they still do gigs from time to time. Bobby still runs cruises to Bermuda, the various Caribbean Islands, Ireland, and Nova Scotia. Sadly, Frances died two years ago, leaving a gigantic hole in the Byrne family life.

As our group of friends is aging, Jimmy and Bobby sing at the funeral Masses of our friends. Jimmy has also been very loyal to St. Peter's Prep and at every gathering he can attend, he sings the School anthem. Jimmy and Frances were present on the evening I was elected a Legend of St. Peter's Prep. I sang that night, "You Raise Me Up," as part of my "thank you" speech. Jimmy was kind enough to tell our friends that, "Ray always sang a good song." I'm not sure it is true, but I accepted the compliment anyway. The remark was balanced by a statement from one of my classmates, "Perry Como, you ain't." A group of us hung out until the wee hours of the morning at the Loew's Hotel, the venue for the Legends event. As exciting as the night was for me, it was nice to just relax with the friends who were part of our lives almost from birth.

Friendships

Years later we had what turned out to be the last Celtics' reunion at the Spring Lake Bath and Tennis Club. Jimmy and I were back to back speakers. Jimmy talked about the joy of celebration and I talked about the spirituality of friendship. As I looked around the room that evening, there were more than 300 friends gathered, people who have been as close to me as my own siblings for more than a half century. We had gathered to celebrate our friendship and celebrate we did in song and story, enveloped in the haze of Guinness and spirits. We remembered those who had gone to the Lord before us. We retold the stories of their lives and made them part of the celebration, because that is the blessing of memory. You can always call back those who have left us and make them present once again. It is a very Irish thing.

The scene for that pretty spot in Ireland had shifted to Bayonne. It was our own little island if you count the Morris Canal that ran along the north side of the town. Our parents and grandparents risked everything to get there. Bayonne was an escape for the rich and famous. It was as far away as you could get from New York City by horse and buggy for fresh air, sea breezes, and recreation.

Our families left an Ireland that was impoverished, devastated by famine, and more recently by a revolution and bitter civil war. They came here penniless, with little more than the shirts on their back. They were people with vibrant faith and deep devotion. They were clever and educated themselves. They formed a communal experience and depended on each other. What they did

was build a life that my generation could take and develop further. We became the educated of our era. We became doctors, lawyers, clergymen, and captains of industry. Everyone was poor at one time but none of us knew it. Therefore, we were all rich.

More than anything else, they gave us their faith in God, human values, a spirit of ambition, a thirst for learning, their propensity to celebrate, and their ability to love. That is what cemented the community.

The world has advanced centuries in the blink of an eye. Instant communications, artificial intelligence, telephones that even the imaginers of space odyssey could not conceive, computers that we can carry around in our pockets, the ability to go anywhere in the world in a single day, and the access to unparalleled wealth are part of our everyday lives. *But the fairies and the blarney will never, never die.*

FEBRUARY IRISH HISTORY

1st

1943 - Central Bank of Ireland established.

1982 - Corporal punishment banned from schools in the Republic.

2nd

1880 - Charles Stewart Parnell addresses the United States Congress.

1972 - The British Embassy is burned in response to Bloody Sunday.

3rd

1881 - Michael Davitt is arrested.

1917 - The father of Easter Rising rebel Joseph Plunkett wins a seat at Roscommon North for Sinn Féin.

1919 - Éamon de Valera and two others escape from prison in England.

4th

1933 - De Valera's Fianna Fáil win their first overall majority in the Dáil Éireann.

1992 - On the day Mary Robinson becomes the first President of Ireland to visit Belfast, an off-duty RUC officer in Belfast kills three people in a Sinn Féin office before committing suicide.

5th 1992 - Loyalists kill five Catholics in a betting shop in Belfast.

7th 1991 - The IRA mortar bombs Downing Street.

8th 1929 - De Valera sentenced to one month in jail for illegally entering County Armagh.

9th

1983 - The IRA kidnap a racehorse, Shergar.

1996 - The IRA breaks its ceasefire by bombing Canary Wharf.

10th

1922 - Treaty Bill introduced in the British House of Commons, providing the dissolution of the 'Southern Ireland' parliament and the election of a new parliament for which the Provisional Government will be responsible.

1958 - Trade Unions vote to end a 15-year split, forming the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

1972 - The IRA announce a ceasefire.

11th

1867 - Fenians try and fail to seize Chester Castle.

1925 - A resolution is passed making divorce and remarriage illegal.

1926 - The performance of The Plough and the Stars leads to violence in Dublin.

2000 - Devolution suspended in Northern Ireland.

12th

1939 - The Department of External Affairs recognises the government of General Franco in Spain.

1972 - Ulster Vanguard Movement is launched.

1989 - Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane is shot dead by Loyalists.

13th 1966 - The Bishop of Clonfert complains about the content of The Late Late Show.

14th 1981 - Forty-eight young people die in a fire at the Stardust Ballroom.

15th

1956 - Owen Sheehy-Skeffington calls for an end to the corporal punishment of girls.

1995 - English football hooligans riot at Lansdown Road.

17th

1960 - The Television Bill passes through its final stages in Seanad Éireann.

1978 - Twelve people die in the La Mon restaurant bombing.

18th 1948 - John A. Costello is elected the second Taoiseach of Ireland.

19th

1901 - Thomas O'Donnell is prevented from addressing the British House of Commons in Irish.

1987 - Charles Haughey returns as Taoiseach.

21st

1843 - Dublin Corporation debate on the Repeal of the Act of Union.

1910 - Sir Edward Carson becomes the leader of the Irish Unionists.

22nd

1933 - General Eoin O'Duffy is forced to resign from his post as Commissioner of the Garda Síochána.

1995 - Taoiseach John Bruton and British PM John Major launch a framework document for Northern Ireland.

23rd

1910 - St Patrick's College, Maynooth, becomes part of the National University of Ireland.

1943 - 35 children die in a fire at St. Joseph's orphanage, Cavan.

26th

1852 - The Birkenhead, which has sailed with insufficient lifeboats, founders. Recruits to the British Army who had boarded at Queenstown stand to attention while women and children are placed in the lifeboats.

1934 - Protest by boys at a school in Thurles over classmates wearing blue shirts (in support of the Blueshirt movement).

1992 - Ban lifted on a 14-year-old rape victim in the Republic going to England for an abortion.

27th

1903 - Mansion House meeting welcomes a move to establish St Patrick's Day as a national holiday.

1920 - Text of the Home Rule Bill published, providing for two parliaments in Ireland.

1997 - Law providing for divorce comes into effect in the Republic.

28th

1973 - The National Coalition of Fine Gael and Labour win an election in the Republic

1985 - IRA kill nine RUC officers at Newry.

Irish Trivia

What is the county town of Tipperary, with a name meaning 'honey vale'?	Clonmel
Why is Irish champion sprinter and Olympian Jason Smyth remarkable?	He is legally blind.
What is the name given to the 'stick' used to beat an Irish bodhran drum?	A tipper
For what was Turlough O'Carolan famous?	18th Century Irish harper and composer, who happened to be blind.
Which spirit is commercially distilled in Cork and bears the name of the city?	Gin
Who were the notorious Irish murderers in 1820s Edinburgh who sold corpses to a doctor for his anatomy lectures?	Burke and Hare
Who was the giant of Northern Ireland's Giant's Causeway?	Finn McCool
The appearance or hearing of which Irish spirit is seen as a harbinger of death?	Banshee
Complete this Irish place-name Borris In ?	Ossory
Who was the late Irish actor who starred in 'A Man Called Horse'?	Richard Harris
Naas is the county capital of which K?	Kildare
Which delicate material is Monaghan known for?	Lace
What would Paul Rankin most likely be doing on TV?	Cooking
What is the name given to the female, near identical, version of hurling?	Camogie
Which city has been dubbed 'Titanic Town' due to the ship being built there?	Belfast
The Black Velvet ???? is a folk song set in Belfast.	Band
What are the two drinks that make up a Black Velvet?	Guinness and champagne
Is the town of Wicklow north or south of Dublin?	South
Which saint is said to have proclaimed the arrival of Christianity at Slane Hill in 453	St. Patrick
Which is further north Donegal or Northern Ireland?	Donegal
Which poet WB was born in Co. Sligo?	Yeats



Singer / Musician
Mary Courtney



Fiddler/Singer
Vonnie Quinn



Nollaig Na mBan Team
Member / Actor
Dolores Nolan



Nollaig Na mBan
Team Member / Actor
Nancy Oda

IMBOLG

St. Brigid's Day

Mark the start of Celtic Spring with stories about Brigid – goddess & saint with **Dolores Nolan** & **Nancy Oda**. Weave a St. Brigid's cross with **Dee** & learn a song in the Irish language with **Maura Mulligan**. Listen to the rousing voice of singer/songwriter extraordinaire, **Mary Courtney** & the magical fiddling of **Vonnie Quinn**. Enjoy our festive refreshment table and maybe even try a foot at The Bonfire Dance.

February 1st 2018

Celebration & fundraiser to benefit “The Dwelling Place of New York,” – a transitional residence for homeless women in Midtown Manhattan.

Suggested Donation – \$20

RIPLEY GRIER STUDIOS
520 8th AVENUE, NYC (ROOM 17D)

Time: 6:30 – 9:00 pm.

**Nollaig na mBan Core Group: Deirdre Batson, Karen Daly, Mary Fee,
Margaret McCarthy, Mary McIntyre, Maura Mulligan, Dee Nolan, Nancy Oda**

Bean an Tí / Host –Maura Mulligan – mauramulligan@aol.com Error! Bookmark not defined.



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St. Mary's of the Pines Parish Center
1 Bishop Way • Manahawkin, NJ**

**Irish Mass at 4:00 pm
Doors Open at 5:00 pm • Dinner at 6 pm**

**MUSIC BY DJ JOHN WELCH
& THE CONNELLY CLAN PIPERS**

Corned Beef, Cabbage & all the Fixings!

Catered by Sweet Jenny's

\$35.00 Donation - BYOB - No tickets at door

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