



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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## IRISH FAMINE MEMORIAL DEDICATED

Some 500 attended ceremonies for the dedication of the new Irish Famine Memorial on the Providence River Walk, November 17. The memorial was the concept of the Rhode Island Irish Famine Memorial Committee, Inc., established as a non-profit organization in 1997, and lead by Raymond J. McKenna, President. Internationally acclaimed sculptor, Robert Shure, designed and executed the memorial. Many Rhode Islanders from across the State joined together to make this beautiful memorial statue and park a reality.

In a prelude to the dedication, on May 21st, the Irish Famine Memorial Committee presented an original play entitled *A State of Hope* about the experiences of those who suffered the famine. The program material included an essay by Dr. Donald Deignan, Ph.D., entitled "Potato Famines in Irish History". This essay is reprinted with permission on page 2.



Museum file photo

# POTATO FAMINES IN IRISH HISTORY

by Donald D. Deignan

Ireland's "Great Famine" of 1845-1851, the main focus of *A State of Hope*, was remarkable for its longevity, severity and widespread impact throughout the entire country. Most severe in the poorest provinces of Connaught and Munster, in the west and south of the island, respectively, the Great Famine also visited the more prosperous eastern province of Leinster and even descended upon the rapidly industrializing northernmost Province of Ulster, in greater or lesser degrees. Periodic famine was no stranger to Ireland, and the catastrophe of the 1840s was not an isolated historical episode, although it was a particularly terrible one.

Sir Walter Raleigh is generally credited with having introduced potatoes into Ireland from South America in the late 1580s. He found they grew well on the vast estates which he owned in County Cork. Potato cultivation slowly spread across Ireland and, eventually, to the continent of Europe, where, by the eighteenth century, the crop had become a staple element in the diet of many poor people. Nowhere else, however, was dependence on the potato for survival as marked and pervasive a feature of life as it became in Ireland.

Landless laborers and small tenant-farmers, alike, soon discovered that they could grow large quantities of potatoes on small patches of otherwise marginal ground with minimal effort. But partial or complete failures of the annual potato crop occurred fairly frequently, with seasonal hunger or death from outright starvation often being the consequence. During the famine of 1740-1741, "the year of slaughter," an estimated 400,000 people were said to have died of starvation in Ireland. And between 1814 and 1840 the potato harvest failed wholly or in part no less than twenty-two times.

When harvests were good, however, as they often were, Irish peasants found themselves with an abundant and nutritious food supply. The relative sense of economic and psychological security which a usually ample source of food gave them led to the increasingly uneconomical subdivision of land and to marriage at early ages among Ireland's vast and impoverished underclass. As a result of the combination of these powerful economic and social factors, the population of Ireland doubled between 1700 and 1840. In 1841, just before the Great Famine, the Irish population was estimated to be between 8 million and 8.5 million people. Given Ireland's poverty and overpopulation, the Great Famine may be seen as a natural and social disaster waiting to happen. Its baneful effects were tragically and unnecessarily compounded by the incompetence, indifference, and laissez-faire economic policies of the "Liberal" British Government, which ruled the country during most of the Famine of 1845-1851, the worst of many such events in Irish history.

(Donald Deignan earned his M.A. and Ph.D., in History, from Brown University.)

# MICHAEL F. CROWLEY LECTURE SERIES NEWS

**T**he Museum's Michael F. Crowley 2007-2008 Lecture series got off to a fine start on November 8th with a wonderful audio/visual presentation on the life of Michael Collins by Professor William Matthews of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Dr. Matthews used photos, news clippings and film clips to portray the life of this great Irish hero.

The second speaker, on November 29th, was noted photographer and author, Alen MacWeeney. MacWeeney presented his documentary film, *Travellers* based on his work with the traveling people of Ireland in the 1960s, and updated through his recent efforts to locate and again interview and photograph these same individuals. His documentary vividly illustrates how dramatically life has changed for the Travellers over these 40-plus years. MacWeeney discussed how he was able to gain the confidence of the Travellers and take a series of wonderful and poignant photos and transcriptions of their songs and stories of their fast-fading lifestyle. MacWeeney also signed copies of his recently published book, *Irish Travellers, Tinkers No More* (New England College Press, August 2007).

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## RECENT MUSEUM AND LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS

**T**he Museum has purchased the book *The Irish Scots and the Scotch Irish* by the Honorable John C. Linehan, a reprint of the 1902 book (Clearfield Press). Also purchased is the recently published, *The Green Square Mile - The Story of the Charlestown Irish*, by Ed Callahan and Dan Casey. This book comes with a very nice DVD. Finally, the Museum has acquired a signed copy of *Irish Travellers, Tinkers No More*, by Alen MacWeeney .

Please remember that all Library material is available to Museum members. To view the Museum's library holdings, visit the website [www.NewportIrishHistory.org](http://www.NewportIrishHistory.org), then e-mail [vjarnold@cox.net](mailto:vjarnold@cox.net) to arrange a pick up.

A Museum member, Lou Burns, has

contributed a wonderful collection of photos of the monument to Liam Lynch. The monument is located on the slopes of the Knockmealdown Mountains, above Goatenbridge near Newcastle, CO Tipperary, where Lynch was fatally wounded near the end of the Civil War, on April 10, 1923<sup>1</sup>.





Reproduced in this issue are two of the photos. On the previous page is a somber black & white photo showing the 1935 construction of the 60-foot high round tower, erected on the spot spot where Lynch was believed to have fallen. On the right is a recent photograph of the handsome monument. Many historians see Lynch's death as the effective end of the Civil War, as the new IRA chief of staff, Frank Aiken, declared a ceasefire on April 30, 1923, and on May 24, he ordered IRA volunteers to dump their arms and return to their homes.



<sup>1</sup>Liam Lynch was born in County Limerick in 1890. He was the great grandson of a patriot of the 1798 rebellion, and had strong nationalist feelings from boyhood. In 1917 he was active in the organization of the Cork Volunteer Force, and in 1918 fought the British WW I conscription efforts. In 1919 he became commandant of the Cork #2 Brigade, and led successful raids against the British in Fermoy, capturing General Lucas at Mallow Barracks. When the Southern IRA Division was formed in 1921, he was named Commandant and later Chief of Staff of the Republican Army. He died of wounds received in action. (Source: *The Irish Republic*; Dorothy Macardle, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1965)

## WHAT IS A "COAT OF ARMS"?

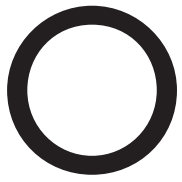
**T**he Museum previously published two newsletters which featured articles about Irish families and their respective coats of arms<sup>2</sup>. We thought it appropriate to discuss the origin of "coats of arms" in this issue. The brief discussion that follows has been compiled from a number of sources.

From the earliest times it was necessary for warrior chieftains to display on the battlefield some emblem distinctive of themselves or of their family or tribe. These insignia were usually arbitrary, changeable at the whim or will of the chief. They were not necessarily symbolic nor were they always hereditary.

However, the introduction of armor in the twelfth century made the bearing of such definite distinguishable marks a military necessity as the helmet usually covered the face, and the body was encased in armor. It became essential for the knight to wear on his shield some appropriate colors or markings by which, in the melee of battle, he might be plainly recognized by friend and foe alike. During a campaign or at the tournament these differentiating emblems often appeared also on the helmet crest and the lance pennon, as well as on the shield. Hence the entire device was referred to as a "crest". Regularly they were woven into the surcoat, a garment worn over the armor on ceremonial occasions, and at times to protect the armor and its wearer from the blazing heat of the sun. This protection gave rise to the term "coat of arms"

<sup>2</sup>The history of the Murphy (O'Murchadha) family and the Murphy family Coat of Arms was featured in the Museum's Summer 2007 newsletter (Volume 21). The Fall/Winter 2006/2007 issue (Volume 19) featured the Sullivan/O'Sullivan family history and its Coat of Arms.

# DINNER THEATER EVENT TO ATTRACT NEW MEMBERS DRAWS 75



Over 75 museum members and new-member guests enjoyed an evening of Irish theater and supper at the Hibernian Hall on September 20.

The event, designed to attract new members, was developed and hosted by the Membership Committee, lead by Shannon Buss.

The New England Theater Training Institute And Newport Celtic Productions, directed by Tom Erb, brought an authentic Irish theater experience to Hibernian Hall with their performance of two short Irish plays: "A Galway Girl", by Geraldine Aron, and "First Confessions" by Frank O'Connor. The plays were wonderfully acted by Deb McGowan and Michael Healey.

Following the plays, attendees were treated to a fine meal by Hibernian chef Alan Tkachuk. Thirty new members joined that evening, and the Membership Committee is considering a "repeat performance" next year.

## IN MEMORIAM

Rhode Island State Representative Paul Crowley died this past September after an 18-month battle against malignant melanoma. Paul was a 'Plank Owner' Life Member of the Museum, and a founder of the Newport Irish Heritage Committee. Paul established the Museum's "Michael F. Crowley Lecture Series", in honor of his late father. He was interested in and dedicated to "all things Irish", from his family roots in Ireland, to all Irish-related activities in Rhode Island and America. He will be remembered for his many years service to the people of Newport and Rhode Island.

## MANY NEW MEMBERS WELCOMED IN 2007

2007 has been a banner year for new memberships in the Museum. A hearty "welcome" to the following new members who joined this fall:

### FROM NEWPORT:

Patti Berquist  
Dave & Jeanne Brown  
William & Mary  
Caine  
Christine Cotsoridis  
Dorothy Hopkins  
Catherine DeSantia  
Dr. & Mrs. Peter  
Eudenbach  
Rosemary & William  
Hekdt  
Catherine Kane  
Johanna & Larry  
Kilroy  
Mary McCarthy

### FROM MIDDLETOWN:

Mary Garrett  
Joan Glasheen  
Kathleen Kelly  
Henry May &  
Catherine Nagle  
Abundio & Dorothy  
Sanchez  
Berry Shea

### FROM PORTSMOUTH:

Tom & Mary Ellen  
Bronson  
Christine McDonald  
Marjorie Linhares

### FROM JAMESTOWN:

Peggy & Dan Crowley  
Robert McCormack

### FROM ELSEWHERE:

Barbara Bigelow,  
Tiverton  
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph  
Hanley, Naugatuck, CT  
Robert Kenahan,  
Westerly  
Buck & Kathy  
Manning, Tiverton  
Susan Parke,  
Barnstable, MA  
Mary Peters, Boston  
Phil Reid, San  
Francisco  
Ruth Rochefort,  
Wakefield

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William Nagle, Treasurer (401) 846-8499  
Pat Murphy, Historian PTKMrphy@Verizon.net  
Shannon Buss, Membership (401) 846-4341

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Check Membership: ☐ Individual (\$10/yr) ☐ Family (\$20/Yr) ☐ Business (\$35/yr)

☐ Individual Life (\$100) ☐ Family Life (\$150)

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Donations are tax deductible—a 501(c)3 organization)

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