

The Richmond Claddagh

Newsletter of the Richmond Irish American Society



August 2007

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

www.RichmondIAS.org

September 20 th	IAS Monthly Meeting – Tuckahoe Library – The Book of Kells
September 23 rd	IAS Board Meeting at Gloria Cahen's
September 28 th – 30 th	Williamsburg Celtic Festival www.wsfonline.org
October 15 th	U of R Class - Irish Megalithomania \$29 Fee Call 804-289-3133 for registration info
October 19 th	U of R Class – Great City: Dublin Lecture and Dinner - \$59 fee for class and dinner
October 24 th & 26 th	Irish Tenor Anthony Kearns at St. Bridget's Call 338-5218 for reservations
Oct. 27 th & 28 th	Richmond Highland Games www.richmondceltic.com

From Our New President, Gloria Cahen: This past October, the Irish American Society bravely faced its first real tragedy with the sudden and untimely passing of our beloved President, Chris Garrett. Having worked closely with Chris during his term and a half as President, my wish is to carry on with his goals and visions for the organization. First and foremost, I encourage all inactive members to become more involved by helping out at the IAS tent during the Celtic festivals. These offer a golden opportunity to learn more about our own history and heritage, to become better acquainted with fellow IAS members and also to meet and interact with members of the related Celtic community. These festivals are great fun and events we all look forward to. Seasoned workers are always on hand, so please do not be concerned about lack of experience and knowledge.

I ask that you help your IAS by working with me in achieving Chris's dreams and those of my own. I promise to devote my efforts to implementing these ideas and working to achieve further growth and continued success.

Erin Go Brách, Gloria

Ron & Laura Hendricks

Sadly, we learned that our former IAS president, Ron Hendricks and his wife Laura tragically perished in a house fire on August 2nd. The Richmond IAS was the brainchild of Ron, Pat Burke and Colum Toibin – over 15 years ago and it survives and thrives today because of their hard work and love of all things Irish. Ron was recently honored at the 15th Anniversary Party as one of the "Founding Fathers" and our 2nd IAS President. Today, our hearts are saddened by the loss of these special folks. We send our love, best wishes and prayers to their families, and we hold the memories of Ron & Laura to our hearts, as we enjoy the fruits of their labor and imagination – our IAS Society.

"While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil" ~John Taylor

THE ANNUAL PICNIC – It was another great get-together at the Burke's farm in Amelia. Many thanks to our hosts, Pat and Helen, who make every picnic something special. We were fortunate to have a grand turnout of members this year - a quick headcount suggests around 70 members turned out for the fun. Frank Hardy manned the grilling station and

turned out some pretty tasty burgers and dogs for the group. Greg Sullivan donated some VERY good BBQ and made all mouths water in anticipation of the upcoming opening of his new Irish pub in Ashland. (Watch the newsletter for more on this). Mili & Joe Hollenbeck brought a 'cool' and yummy cake in the shape and colors of the Irish Tricolor. The side dishes supplied by our members filled out a grand spread for the picnic – all in all – a typical Irish yard feast! Our own Mary Smith led the folks in a "Sing-Along" of Irish favorites. Oh, and please.. Forget about "American Idol", we have our own IAS Idols - Jim Bandeleon, Jim Kelly and Bob Morley each took a turn and serenaded us with their own rendition of a Gaelic tune. What fun and they're good too!

The IAS Elections: In the middle of the picnic, our Nominating Committee Chairman, Joyce Blunt announced the results of the election. For the coming term the following IAS officers were elected - President, Gloria Cahen, Vice-President, Dan Begley, Secretary, Lisa Murphy, and Treasurer, Michael Muldowney. Elected Board Members are Sonya Moore, Hutch Hutchinson and Jim Kelly. We wish them all good luck in their new positions.

From Nancy: What a group effort edition of the Claddagh this is – with one literary submission from a member and article reprints submitted by 2 other members! One item from Colum Toibin was written as part of a series called "**Blarney Stoners**" that appeared in some regional Virginia newspapers. (This article is a bit dated 'cuz we all know last year it was my darlin' Chicago Bears that were bested in the Super Bowl. ☹ - sigh)

The 2nd is a reprint article submitted by Kathy Donovan – beautiful in its phrasing and a bit of a bonk on the head for those who might forget the real story behind the beauty of Ireland. The third is an article submitted by Jim Bandeleon – a wake up call for the multitude of new Irish festivals every year.

I offer many thanks to these members for taking the time to share with all our readers. Submissions from IAS members are most welcome and strongly encouraged – but they must have an Irish theme and submitters have to agree that things might be "gently" amended for space, etc. You can mail items to the address on the newsletter or email them to me at bearfan46@verizon.net



BRIAN BORU THE LAST GREAT HIGH KING OF IRELAND

The lines between Irish Legend and Irish Myth have often been blurred, especially as the retelling of heroic deeds has been passed on through generations. Brian Boru was no legend although his life deeds were legendary. He was very much a real man and was in fact the last great High King of Ireland and perhaps the greatest military leader the country has ever known. Brian Boru was born Brian Mac Cennétig. His mother was sister to the mother of Conor, the King of Connaught. His brother, Mahon, had become King of Munster in 951, upon the death of their father, Cennétig. Together they fought against the invading Norsemen, who had imposed taxes in Munster. This struggle eventually led to the murder of Mahon in 975 Mahon by the Ostermen (Norse). Brian avenged his brother's death by killing the King of the Ostermen of Limerick, King Ímar.

From this point onwards Brian held Munster as his own, including the pivotal trade-center of Limerick. He marched into Connaught and Leinster and joined forces with Mael Sechnaill II in 997. Together they divided Ireland between them. The Norse settlers in Dublin especially ranged against Brian but were defeated at Glen Máma where the King of Leinster was captured. The King of Dublin, Sitric Silkenbeard, was soon defeated too.

In 1002 Brian demanded of his comrade Mael Sechnaill that he recognize him as King of Ireland. Mael agreed, partially because many of his own people viewed Brian as a hero who had restored Ireland to greatness after the Viking invasions. The rule of the Uí Néill's was thus at an end as a non-O'Neill was proclaimed as King. The O'Neill's had been rulers for over 600 years.

He earned his name as 'Brian of the Tributes' (Brian Boru) by collecting tributes from the minor rulers of Ireland and he used the monies raised to restore monasteries and libraries that had been destroyed during the invasions.

The Norsemen were not done yet however, and once more waged war on Brian Boru and his followers at Clontarf in Dublin in 1014. The King of Connaught, Tadhg O'Connor refused to ally with Brian against the Ostermen although Uí Fiachrach Aidne and Uí Maine did join with him.

Despite the lack of backing from the men of Connaught, the Munstermen won the day but on April 23rd, they lost Brian Boru in the battle. This battle was a major turning point as it finally subjugated the Norse presence in Ireland henceforth considered subordinate to the Kingships of Ireland. Their military threat had been ended and they retreated to the urban centers of Dublin, Waterford, Limerick, Wexford, and Cork. They eventually became completely hybridized and integrated into Gaelic culture.

After Brian's death on April 23, 1014 and the subsequent death of his son Mael, his remaining sons, Tadhg and Don Chad, were unable to assume the kingship. Mael died in 1022 after which the role of High King of Ireland became more of a position in name only, rather than that of a powerful ruler. Brian Boru therefore, was the last great High King of Ireland.

"This country of ours is no sandbank thrown up by some caprice of earth. It is an ancient land, honored in the archives of civilization, traceable into antiquity by its piety, its valor, and its sufferings. Every great European race has sent its stream to the river of the Irish mind."

(Thomas Davis – 1846)

In Praise of Irish Masters of the Word... and for your reading pleasure and enjoyment - this month we bring you, **William Butler Yeats 1865-1939:**

- The problem with some people is that when they aren't drunk, they're sober.
- Being Irish, he had an abiding sense of tragedy, which sustained him through temporary periods of joy.
- How far away the stars seem, and how far is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart.
- Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire.
- The intellect is forced to choose: Perfection of the life, or of the work.
- A pity beyond all telling is hid in the heart of love.
- Cast your mind on other days that we, in coming days may be still the indomitable Irishry.
- There are no strangers here; Only friends you haven't yet met
- All empty souls tend toward extreme opinions.
- We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric but of the quarrel with ourselves poetry.

Irish Genealogy Help

Are you exploring your family tree? This link takes you to the WebPages of the Irish Embassy in DC. and it has some helpful hints about searching old records in Ireland. Just type one of the web addresses below into your address bar for the Internet and hit enter.

<http://www.irelandemb.org/gene.html>

This is a full page of Genealogy links that might be helpful. www.ancestorhunt.com

Happy Hunting!

The September 20th Meeting - The Book of Kells— If you missed the first presentation by Professor Margaret Duckworth, of Virginia Union - don't fret. She will give a 2nd presentation on *The Book* at the Tuckahoe Library on the 20th, starting at 7:00. There will be a short movie about *The Book*, and Margaret is also bringing a rare copy of the book – on loan for the night from the University of Richmond. Please feel free to bring a guest(s). This is a very special opportunity to view the U of R copy and to learn more about this amazing piece of Irish history. This is one of the most entertaining and educational programs that the IAS has been able to offer to our members. Please mark your calendar now -you won't want to miss this - . Tuckahoe Library 1901 Starling Drive 23229 270-9578 (Off Parham behind Topeka Steak House)

Oct. 24th & 26th Irish Tenor at St. Bridget's Richmond Internationally acclaimed tenor **Anthony Kearns** will perform at St. Bridget Catholic Church, located at 6006 Three Chopt Road, on Wednesday October 24 and Friday October 26 at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Kearns, known worldwide as one of the *Irish Tenors*, will give a solo performance of traditional Irish music, show tunes and classical pieces. Born in Killealy, Ireland, Mr. Kearns was selected as an original member of the *Irish Tenors* at age 27. Critics have compared Mr. Kearns to the great John McCormack and often refer to him as the 'Tenor of our Times' and Ireland's Best Living Tenor. Immediately following the concert, premier ticket holders will have an opportunity to meet Mr. Kearns at an elegant reception in the Church Commons. There will be a selection of fine desserts, cheeses and fruits as well as wine, beer and soft drinks. Coffee and tea will also be served.. To secure tickets, please call **Courtney Karam at (804) 364-0105**, or download the ticket order form at

www.stbridgets.org/events2.htm.

Pricing is: \$100 for admission to the post concert reception and concert seating in Rows 1 through 5. Concert only admission is **\$50** for intermediate seating (Rows 6 through 15). **\$35** for standard seating (Rows 16 through 25).

Silent Auction 2007: Even though we are in the middle of summer, it's time to start planning for the 2nd Annual IAS Silent Auction scheduled for the IAS Christmas Party. Last year, the auction donations from our members raised an impressive \$1,033.00. (Many thanks again to our donors and our buyers!) The proceeds are all used for IAS operating expenses and in particular this year, helped with the cost of our 15th Anniversary party in May and the picnic.

Please start thinking about items that you could donate to the auction. Perhaps, a service you can offer, a book, craft items, painting, or you may know someone who owns a restaurant or other business that might donate certificates for their services or goods. The only limit is your imagination. If you have something to donate or are looking for ideas please contact Ed Mayers - he can be reached at ehm1537@msn.com or 804-379-5577

Get Your IAS Colors Now – IAS Regalia at the Ready!

There's a new feature on the IAS website – Jim Bandeleon created a new logo for our IAS & arranged with CafePress to get it printed on shirts, sweatshirts, cups etc. Go to our IAS website (<http://richmondias.org>) and click on the **IAS Store** link to see all the goodies. The IAS gets a little bit of \$\$ whenever an item is sold, but the good news is we have no money tied up in inventory. Now's your chance to wear our colors proudly – go shopping! (Think Christmas present!!) - If all else fails.. just use this address - <http://www.cafepress.com/finnmccool>

If it's Fall... it must be time for Celtic Festivals!

September 28, 29 & 30th – The Games in Williamsburg. Visit their website at www.wsfonline.org for event listings and admission costs. There is a super line up of Celtic activities and Celtic bands for the evening ceilidhs and for the Games on Saturday the 29th.

October 27th & 28th: The Richmond Highland Games A great weekend of games, vendors, music and just plain Celtic fun. The IAS tent will be up and running and trolling for new members! If you'd like to volunteer an hour or two (or 3 or 4) please call Gloria Cahen (233-2113) to volunteer to help in the tent. These occasions are our best opportunity to meet and greet local and regional Irish folks who are seeking ways to learn about their Irish heritage. All you need to help out in the tent is a friendly disposition, a big smile and perhaps a bit of the blarney. Visit the games website for a complete program of activities. - www.richmondceltic.com

Irish Classes at the University of Richmond

Oct 15th – Irish Megalithomania with Dr. Kenneth Ostrand. Discussion of the Irish megaliths of Newgrange, Knowth, Tara and more: Using photographs, facts and Irish lore to explore the history, the origins and the myths of Ireland's ancient structures - some that predate the Egyptian pyramids. \$29 for class

Oct 19th – Dublin Lecture and Dinner – Dr Ostrand will present an Irish dinner featuring both the old and 'new' cuisine of Ireland. Afterward a "tour" of the city of Dublin and also a bit about the famous 'spots' just outside the city. \$59 for Dinner and lecture.

Both of these sessions sound interesting and we've attended some sessions with Dr. Ostrand. Always fun and interesting. (and others have told us that the dinner classes are truly tasty!)

The Membership Corner: The IAS extends a warm welcome to our newest members:

Stephen Bryant
Kathleen, Jeff, Helen, Max and Liam Kreutzer
Dan and Lucy Simpson
Cynthia Losen
Colleen Kisilewicz & Sam Mattocks

We are all looking forward to seeing you at any of the upcoming events and getting to meet all of you. Please call Nancy at 323-6415 with any questions or for help with directions. We want you to join in the fun!

The Creative Evolution of a Football Fan
From the "Blarney Stoners" by Colum Patrick Toibin.

Now that the Super Bowl is history we can reminisce and "what if" ourselves into hibernation until next year. But what ifs are not for me. In a small way I converted and fine-tuned a foreigner into a model American Football fan. The Super Bowl was seen on overseas TV by millions of sports fans. Most are familiar with soccer and rugby but not too hip on yellow flags, head phones and black and white uniformed officials waving arms and legs indicating rules infractions. Today in some pub in a small Irish town, my convert Brendan X confounds pint drinkers with his fervor and his ability to decipher American Football. Let me explain.

My young Irish kin was visiting us in Richmond. Like most Irish, Brendan is a rabid sports fan regardless of the torture or timidity of the sport. He was sitting casually watching the TV and his first American Football match. "Who are the gladiators with the Indian on their helmets?" asked my visitor from Ireland. "Oh, that's my football team, The Washington Redskins. If you are a loyal fan you get to call them 'the skins' I told Brendan proudly. "I thought all the Indians were out West?" asked Brendan. "True. But the Government here scalps us with income tax so we called them the Redskins, a local designation. Actually Brendan, there is a move to preserve the native American from commercial exploitation such as trivial names like the Chiefies, the Tribe, the Warriors. The Indian tribes learn fast and now control gambling casinos that often scalp the pilgrim's offspring from their cash. Most football teams have symbolic names that link them to their towns. Pittsburgh is a steel town and their team is called 'The Steelers'. Baltimore is a big horse town with many racetracks and their team used to be called 'The Colts'. Minnesota is the inland home of the seafaring Vikings. The Jets get the name from all the supersonic jets landing at New York airports.

"Is football popular?" asked Brendan. "It is so popular that it is played in Canada and a modified compact football is played in Japan. Even the soccer infected Mexicans are responding well to the violence and mayhem. Above all Brendan, it is a huge business. It involves equipment, TV, airlines, radio, hot dog chemists, cheerleaders, orthopedic braces, organic steroids, breweries and gamblers. "I explained. Brendan nodded approvingly and settled back for the kick-off. I knew the Irish were fanatical sports fans but Brendan's curiosity was boundless. "Why does the official keep throwing his yellow hanky down in anger? I thought officials were neutral?" asked Brendan with a little agitation.

I explained that the yellow hanky was a penalty flag. After many calls for spearing, chop blocks, face masking and two ejections for referee assault, the half ended. "Well, what do you think of our national sport?" I asked my visitor. "Cannibalized chess...pure organized brutality and I love it"! Brendan smiled.

As the third quarter ended, I studied Brendan. He sat clenching his fists and muttering at the officials on the replay. At one point he leaped from his chair screaming, "Pass interference". He slumped in his chair as Washington fell three points behind Dallas. He tapped a little Irish jig with his feet as the Skins began a long drive to the Dallas five-yard line. With three minutes left in the final quarter the Skins fumbled on the one-yard line. Brendan groaned in anguish and drove a violent fist onto our antique coffee table, crumbling it to the floor in smithereens. He stormed out the door just as my wife returned home.

"Brendan, how are you? Asked my wife, Maureen. "Awful. Just awful", he hissed. "What happened?" she asked in alarm. "The Redskins fumbled on the one yard line" he moaned and went out to cool off.

"Imagine...that was his first game," I explained with missionary zeal. "Too bad he doesn't live here, he has the making of a great fan", Maureen observed as she pushed the legs of our heirloom coffee table into the fire.

Five Irish "Piles of Rocks" By Pat O'Connor
Submitted by Kathy Donovan

A half-buried circle of jagged boulders punctures the moist Irish turf in front of me. Bouncing gently on the spongy cushion under my feet, I try to imagine the slowly rising tide of moss that will eventually submerge these stones. I look out over this peaceful chunk of rural County Cork and wonder how many other forgotten archeological treasures are buried just below the surface. The people who built this stone ring 3,000 years ago had scrambled from a precarious hunter-gatherer existence into rudimentary farming practices, allowing them to stop wandering and cultivate food in a more efficient way. These early farmers discovered that they now had free time to do more than just survive. They spent this precious time dividend muscling these huge boulders into precise alignments. Their creation was a solar observatory to track the sun, ensuring their ability to plant crops on time and hopefully please their fickle pagan gods. Suddenly, my quiet contemplation is broken as a frazzled tourist drives up. He rolls down his window and briefly glances out at the ancient stone circle. "Another pile of rocks," he mutters to his wife, and speeds off without further consideration. I wonder if he's headed to the Killarney Factory Outlet Mall to haggle a volume discount on a case of Leprechaun dolls.

Ireland's rural charms can be subtle. To avoid an insensitive "ugly American" attitude and get a feel for the historical richness of Irish culture, you have to learn to savor the countryside. Tune in to the immense human effort that went into the once-proud ruins you'll encounter. The people of these times didn't lead couch-potato lives, and only put energy into what they thought was necessary. Each ruin has a human story to tell.



Bill Margeson (of Live Ireland. Com) on “The Music”

Well, Irish Fest in Milwaukee is next month, and we will be doing our usual column highlighting the best acts set for this year, and it IS going to be another winner for the Fest---the biggest in the world, and rightly so.

We've noticed something in America. Now, this is only going to apply to America, and we are specifically removing Milwaukee's Irish Fest from the following. The Fest has done a spectacular job of staying away from the current virus attacking virtually all the festivals in America that we have studied. And, this virus will surely kill off some of these festivals, if it is not treated. There will be tough times in the festival business-and here's why.

Almost all American Festivals are reporting (if they report at all) decreased attendance. This is not by accident and it is not coincidence. Let's stipulate that it is impossible to speak for all festivals. They have multiplied like rabbits. That's the first problem. There are too many of them. Supply and demand is out of whack. Smaller venues think it sounds and looks like a good idea after seeing the crowds at Milwaukee or Columbus, and figure---hey!! ---We can do that, too. Wrong. It was a lot easier to start festival years ago than it is now due to the increased number filling the calendar, and the increased demand on the talent pool. Most new festivals combat this by throwing the main budget at a Celtic rock act of some level of fame, and the rest goes to local groups, many of whom are good, and many of whom are dreadful. More on this later. These Festivals are started by people who love the Celtic culture or Celtic culture, as they perceive it. If---and it is a big if---these festivals start to succeed, more and more committees are added, decisions are farmed out to volunteers, and a certain assumptive arrogance begins to appear covering virtually every facet of the operation. The volunteers start talking only to each other, and seldom check with the public they are supposedly serving.

Now, as this becomes endemic, something interesting happens. Money. No festival has enough money to do the things they want to do. As they expand, if they expand, more people have more ideas on things that should be done. We need to offer this. And that. And, more of this. All this costs money, every single time. Now comes the vicious circle. As they seek to offer more, they spend more, and then need more---to spend more. The fact of whether or not the festivals are getting real value and cultural importance for the additional money spent does not matter. What matters is that they are spending more, and---if they are lucky and do a great job, they start to make a profit. Then, the profit, and its increase, becomes crucial. Make more to spend more. We hasten to add that no individual is getting rich throwing these festivals. That's not the deal. Some entities throw the festivals as part of their larger organization's fund raising efforts.

So, what is constantly looked at is not musical and cultural variety of substance, but---here it is---what sells. What sells most? And, where is this profit? Beer. Yup. Of course, admissions---but beer. Boy oh boy, beer. Now, we are not talking about some couple enjoying one or two glasses during the day. We are talking about BEER. Who

buys these beers? Well, there ARE the occasional middle-aged louts like your writer who will over-indulge with some regularity. But, overwhelmingly, the big beer sales are to men and women aged 21-28. Stop here. Don't give us the pious, politically correct denials here about how it is unfair to stereotype, and all that. We're not. We are stating a marketing fact that is driving a lot of these festivals. Beer sales.

Now, who do you hire to attract the customers in this demographic? Celtic rockers. We are not critical of these acts; in fact we even like some of them. But, let us ask you this. Were you running a festival with a profit imperative, whom would you hire to attract this younger group? Black 47, Gaelic Storm, Brother, The Fenians---or The David Munnely Band, Brock-McGuire, Cathie Ryan and Tommy Fleming? Right. There's your answer.

What has happened is that these festivals haven't been watching much of anything, except the gates and the beer sales. And, while they have been watching that front door, what has left by the back? Yup - Thousands of people 30 and over. Attendance is down, as we mentioned earlier. And, so are vendor sales. At the next festival, ask your favorite Irish/Celtic vendor how their sales have been overall, and if they tell you the truth, they will say down. Why? Remember back to the time when you were in that 21-28 year old demographic. Why would you go to something like an Irish festival? Right. To hear some rock, party, meet women (men), buy beer and try to connect and get lucky. Exactly how much disposable income did you have to go to the vendor areas? Zilch. So, here's the truth. These festivals are hemorrhaging the 30 and over demographic. EXACTLY who they need to have a well-rounded, ongoing successful setup. There is nothing more temporal than the 21-28 year old demographic. Right now, Celtic rock is cool. When something else replaces it, as it will, that crowd will join the over 30's in the fall off, and then who will be left?

Here is a little secret. No festival organizer, vendor or Irish musician of any stature or intelligence will deny what is being said here. They talk about it all the time. Where do you think we heard it? What you now have at festival after festival are the well-meaning volunteers tearing around on their golf carts, talking on their walkie-talkies with great urgency, and driving right past what they should be seeing. Fewer people.

What to do? Milwaukee has the answer. Return next year to a FAR more balanced offering in the acts. The rockification of the Irish festivals must stop if they are to survive. Put the culture back into the festivals. Double the effort. Of course, continue to attract the 21-28's, but quadruple your efforts to re-attract the audience you are losing. The over 30's. Talk to the musicians, the vendors, the agents, the other festival producers, knowledgeable experts on Irish/Celtic culture, writing, history, music, spoken word and---here is a neat idea---talk to your customers!! We have a theory that if your festival does not have a vibrant, active cultural area, your days are numbered. At LEAST as much thought and attention should be paid to the cultural offerings as the music. Keep chasing only THIS year's profit and you will die. Slowly. But surely. (Submitted by Jim Bandeleian)

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