



Hibernian News



Volume 8 Issue 5

Gaelic Ossuary: the Tragedy of Grosse Isle

May 2007

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"...the nadir of Ireland's holocaust, a veritable isle of death."

-Padriac O Laighin

On 15 May 1847, the bark *Syria* proceeded up the St. Lawrence River to the quarantine station at Grosse Isle. On board the *Syria* were 232 Irish emigrants, 84 of whom were sick with "fever" or, more specifically, typhus. These passengers were the first of nearly 109,000 who had departed from famine-ravaged Ireland in 1847, seeking salvation in British North America – Canada. By the end of October, 1847, over 5,000 of these men, women and children found their final resting place in a mass grave located on the tiny island located 30 miles down-river from Quebec. The first of the thousands of Irish to die on Grosse Isle perished within hours after the *Syria* disembarked - a four year-old girl named Ellen Keane.

British North America was a popular destination for the victims of 1847 – though not necessarily one of their own selection. Passage to Canada was relatively cheap and unregulated, particularly when compared to passage to the United States and the associated laws regarding immigration. The British government was

anxious to increase the population of Canada and fares could be purchased for as little as 6£ (at a time when a ticket to the United States cost around 21£). In an effort to rid themselves of tenants after the extension of the Irish Poor Law attempted to place the burden of relief on their shoulders, many landlords paid transport fees for the emigrants, selecting the cheaper option of Canada over the United States. Ironically, the majority of Irish undertook the journey with the intent to cross over the border from Canada into the United States upon arrival.

Grosse Isle had been established as a quarantine station as early as 1832. The facilities on the island had been constructed to house approximately 150 patients and the station included a small chapel. At the height of the crisis in 1847, over 2,500 fever-stricken Irish would find themselves on the island in hastily-erected sheds and tents; more sick were awaiting evacuation to the island from over 40 ships waiting in the St. Lawrence - the line of vessels stretched for miles. The infrastructure and staff of the quarantine station were completely overwhelmed. *Cont'd next page*

"Let Us Do the Cooking"

Mother's Day Irish Breakfast

With complementary flowers for all the Mothers!!!

May 13, 2007

An authentic, delicious Irish breakfast is now being served every second Sunday of the month at an unbelievable price of only \$7.00 p/p!

9:30 AM-12:30 pm

Something for the whole family!!!

The traditional breakfast consists of Eggs, Irish Bacon, Irish Sausages, Home-fried Potatoes, Black & White Puddings and the Grilled Tomato...a must! Children's Breakfasts of Pancakes & Sausage are only \$3.00 each. Juice, coffee and tea included.

(The next Irish Breakfast will be held on June 10th)



A Message from the AOH Division 2 President

Dear Brothers and Friends

May 2007

"A wet and windy May fills the barn with corn and hay. "(old Irish proverb) Hopefully the rains and winds will be at a minimum, as our success remains at the maximum that it is! So far , 2007 has been good to AOH Div 2.

Remember to be thankful for it. May 1st is the start of the Celtic summer or Beltaine, as it is called. We have many plans for the summer, starting with our first Friday night barbecue on May 4th. May 13th brings our Early Bird Building Raffle drawing (get your sold tickets in). Please bring any unsold tickets back to the hall, as there are many people who need them. Before the drawing, we will have our Mother's Day Irish Breakfast. Let us do the cooking and you have a wonderful breakfast with MOM! After all, it is her day. Come on down and see what else we have in store. The new addition is becoming a fulfilled dream. Thanks to the members who made this come about. Also, thanks to the new members who stood up to join them. As usual, all of this makes me proud to be a member of AOH Div 2. May is just the warm up. June and the rest of the summer will certainly fill our barn with corn and hay! *Ni heaspa do dith carad.* There is no need like a lack of a friend.

God bless all,
Michael Shannon,
President, AOH Div 2

PS I want to thank all for your concern, help and calls when I needed it. Truly that was the best medicine I was given. See you at the May 16th meeting.

Upcoming Events

(subject to change)

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| May 13 | Mother's Day Irish Breakfast
9:30—12:30. Free flowers for all Mothers. \$7.00 adults—\$3.00 kids |
| May 13 | Building Fund Early Bird Raffle. Hurry and get your tickets in! |
| May 16 | Monthly Meeting - Hall: 7 pm |
| May 20 | Biennial Orange County AOH Convention—Div 1 Hall. 2:00 pm. Members are encouraged to attend. |
| May 26—27 | East Durham Irish Festival—weekend long. Great music. vendors and more. |
| Jun 10 | Irish Breakfast 9:30—12:30. \$7.00 adults—\$3.00 kids |
| Jun 20 | Monthly Meeting - Hall: 7 pm |
| Jun 20 | Biennial AOH-DJW Meeting. Div. 2 Hall—immediately following the division meeting |
| Jun 23 | 26+6=1 Building Fund Raffle Drawing. Div. 2 Hall |

Gaelic Ossuary: the Tragedy of Grosse Isle

(continued from page 1)

Though the staff attempted to provide the necessary care to the thousands on the island, they were unequal to the task in manning or supplies. As a result, the majority of the patients perished under the most horrible of circumstances – heat, insufficient water, infestation and unsanitary conditions brought about by raw sewage and corpses.

The tragedy that unfolded at Grosse Isle had not been entirely unforeseen and, with proper precautions, could have been substantially mitigated. Dr. George M. Douglas, the Medical Superintendent of Grosse Isle, anticipated the crisis of 1847 based upon the number of Irish that had arrived the previous year and the amount of fever-stricken among them. In February of 1847, he alerted the government to the coming danger, clearly articulating in his letter to the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada the nature of the problem and requesting additional assets for the station to adequately provide for the masses he anticipated would arrive. Of the 3,000£ he requested, only 300£ were authorized. This being said, it is highly improbable that the additional 2,700 pounds would have done much to alleviate the situation: the

numbers that actually arrived far exceeded Dr. Douglas' most liberal expectations.

Grosse Isle is the largest Famine burial ground located outside Ireland. On 15 August 1909, the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America erected a memorial to those who died on Grosse Isle in 1847. The 50-foot high, granite Celtic cross bears the following inscription written in Irish:

"Children of the Gael died in their thousands on this island having fled from the laws of the foreign tyrants and an artificial famine in the years 1847-48. God's loyal blessing upon them. Let this monument be a token to their name and honor from the Gaels of America. God Save Ireland."

This article was written by **Ronald J. Bashista**, a member of Division 2 with material gathered from Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger – Ireland 1845-1849*, Harper & Row Publishers, 1962 as well as various internet sources associated with Grosse Isle.

Thanks and More Thanks!

A Very Special Thanks to Pat Finn for agreeing to be the Kitchen Chairman and for helping to cook at the Irish Breakfasts. Also, **Special Thanks** to all of the building extension helpers including Dennis Malone, Greg Kopf and Greg Edwards for their help with the plumbing, air conditioning and venting systems. **More Thanks** to all Kevin Moore Jr., Kevin Moore Sr. along with Bob Morgan and Pat Healey who spent a sweltering day in the sun painting the deck. Thanks guys! **Special Thanks** to Pat Healey, Dennis Malone, Bill Kirnan and John Greehy for all the work they do day in and day out around the hall. We are **Truly Thankful** to our building raffle supporters and Friday night families. It is people like you that keep the hall going through your support and donations. Without you, we could not meet all the expenses involved with running the hall. Finally, a **Big Thanks** to all those who work behind the scenes (so many of you)—your hard work does not go unnoticed. Go raibh maith agaibh—*An Irish Thanks!*

2007 Annual Dues are Now Past Due!

Every member is important to us, so please do not fall through the cracks. Notify us of any change in address either online at www.div2aoh.org or by mail. Send your dues and any updated information to the hall (address on front page) today!

Thanks to all of those who have already paid their 2007 dues.

Dennis Malone
Division 2
Financial Secretary

2007 Building Fund Raffle

The tickets are in the **2007 Building Fund Raffle**. Don't hesitate—contact Pat Healey, Ticket Chairman to get your tickets. This year something new...the drawing and celebration will be held at the Division 2 Hall and surrounding grounds on **Saturday, June 23, 2007**. Donation is \$100 for a chance to win one of 33 great cash prizes. Call Pat for tickets and details at 845-220-7186. Don't forget about the Building Fund Raffle's **Early Bird Drawing** to take place after the Mother's Day Irish Breakfast on **May 13, 2007**. Those who have turned in their paid tickets in will be in the running to win one of 3 additional \$500 prizes. The seller of each winning early bird ticket will win \$100. Hurry, don't miss out—get your tickets now!

Update!!! "All 550 tickets for our 26 + 5 = 1 have been dispersed. If any one is in need of additional tickets, please contact either John Greehy or Pat Healey. Remember, the early bird drawing will be held on May 13th for any tickets that are sold by that date. If you have tickets that are not sold, please return them ASAP so others may get in on the early bird."

AOH-DJW Corporation Meeting & Elections

The Biennial AOH—DJW General Membership Meeting & Election of Officers will be held on **Wednesday, June 20, 2007** immediately following the AOH Division 2 monthly meeting. Members in good standing are invited to attend the meeting and to vote for the building corporation officers for 2007—2008. Members interested in running for a building corporation office can be nominated from the floor the night of the meeting. Please make plans to attend.



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