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October at the Museum!



The Spiritual Renewal of Samhain

Dear members and friends,

We have certainly had a strange few months, and I have been thinking a lot lately about loss, renewal, change, and silver linings. Covid 19 has left such destruction in its wake - the deaths of loved ones; the uncertainty of school and business re-openings; and worry about the future. I am naturally concerned with how cultural and educational institutions are coping. The Metropolitan Opera in NYC have cancelled their season in 2021, Broadway is still dark, and many museums in our state and across the country have not reopened. Many might never. We here in the Irish American Heritage Museum are lucky that we re-opened in August and are slowly adjusting to the new normal. We are working hard to improve our ability to offer the museum experience on-line, and to connect with our members virtually if people can not attend events in person.

But so much loss and change and isolation has inspired me to look at Samhain, the Celtic festival now known as Hallowe'en, with new eyes.

Samhain was the final harvest festival of the season, celebrated at the exact point between the Fall Equinox, and Winter Solstice, making it the opposite of Bealtaine, the May/Spring equinox. In ancient times, Samhain marked the end of the growing season, the entrance into winter months, and was a powerful turning point in the year representing the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. This is the time when trees shed their leaves, animals go into hibernation, and the days grow short and cold. Samhain was a celebration of the ending or death of a cycle, and entrance into the inwardly focused period of rest, and stillness that is winter.

In ancient Ireland the High King inaugurated the year on Samhain for his household (and, symbolically, for all the people of Ireland) with the famous ritual of Tara, but in nearby Uisneach, the sacred center held by the druids in complementary opposition to Tara, it was on Bealtaine that the main ritual cycle was begun. In both cases sacred fires were extinguished and re-lit, though this happened at sunset on Samhain and at dawn on Bealtaine. Bealtaine was a time of opening and expansion, Samhain a time of gathering-in and shutting. For herd-owners like the Celts, this was expressed with particular vividness by the release of cattle into upland pastures on Bealtaine and their return to the safety of the byres on Samhain.

The rituals of Samhain, however, involved a more intense bonding with the dead, through the communal feast. Sharing food in a solemn context ("in the sight of gods and mortals") placed common and mutual responsibilities on all participants. Inviting the dead to such a feast encouraged the living to remember and honor their ancestors, while the dead in return were encouraged to have an interest in the welfare of their living kin.

Other offerings had to be made to the Land-spirits to reward them for their cooperation during the harvest period, and to replenish their creative energy as they prepared to enter into a new cycle. With Samhain, the period of harvest that had begun on Lughnasa was officially ended, and the fruits of the soil (especially wild crops) could no longer be harvested with impunity. Well within living memory, children in Irish communities were warned not to eat the late berries that might still be ripening on roadside bushes, because "the fairies" or "the devil" had made them dangerous to consume. Having enabled the human community to survive by making the crops grow and by standing aside to let the harvest take place, the powers of the fairy realm were now entitled to a gift of life-renewing blood; and Samhain was the season when the cattle that would not be kept through the winter were slaughtered. As late as the 1830's, when Amhlaibh Ó Súilleabháin discussed some of these customs in his famous diary, the occasion was understood as a ritual "shedding of blood", and other sources show that during the same period blood sacrifices could even still be held indoors, to protect a house from malignant "fairy" influences by sprinkling an offering of blood at each corner.

Renewing social links with the dead and feeding the Land-spirits were both ritual means of ensuring a safe future. While Samhain (and the phenomenon of death which it celebrated) was obviously the end of a cycle, it was more importantly the start of a new one. The ancient Celts tapped into this energy with rituals to celebrate death, to honor those in the afterlife, and to gain insight into the darker hidden realms of existence. Their belief was that in integrating and accepting the darkness, the knowledge and power of the light is also renewed.

With the growth and spread of Christianity as the dominant religion throughout Europe, Samhain took on Christian names and guises. All Saints' Day or All Hallows on November 1 commemorated Christian saints and martyrs. All Souls' Day on November 2 was a remembrance for all souls of the dead. Halloween, short for All Hallows' Eve, is celebrated on October 31st. In contemporary America and elsewhere, Hallowe'en is a secular folk holiday. Like its cousin, Thanksgiving, it is widely and publicly celebrated in homes, schools, and communities, large and small, by people of many paths, ethnic heritages, and worldviews. Furthermore, Halloween has evolved to be a family-oriented children's holiday where they can engage in make-believe and fantasy through costumes, trick-or-treating, storytelling, play-acting, pranks, cathartic scary place visits, and parties.

The Celts and early Christian Irish believed that at Samhain, the veil is thin between the world of the living and the realm of the Dead, and this facilitates contact and communication. For those who have lost loved ones in the past year, Samhain rituals can be an opportunity to bring closure to grieving and to further adjust to their being in the Otherworld by spiritually communing with them.

Samhain provides us with an opportunity to release what is no longer needed, to create a better pattern and

Samhain provides us with an opportunity to release what is no longer needed, to create a better pattern and celebrate renewal and transformation. This has given me new hope in the face of this surreal year we have had. Perhaps not all change is to be feared, and the night is darkest just before the dawn.

I am sharing two prayer-poems by John O' Donohue which illustrate this idea better than I ever could! I hope they give you comfort and solace.

May you know that absence is alive with hidden presence,
That nothing is ever lost or forgotten.
May the absences in your life grow full of eternal echo.
May you sense around you the secret Elsewhere,
Where the presences that have left you dwell.
May you be generous in your embrace of loss.
May the sore well of grief turn into a seamless flow of presence.
May your compassion reach out to the ones we never hear from.
May you have the courage to speak for the excluded ones.
May you become the gracious and passionate subject of your own life.
May you not disrespect your mystery through brittle words or false belonging.
May you be embraced by God in whom dawn and twilight are one.
May your longing inhabit it's dreams within the Great Belonging.

"A Blessing For Absence," from To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings by John O'Donohue

This is the time to be slow
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes

Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.

"This Is the Time to Be Slow." To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings by John O' Donohue.

I hope we all find peace with the past this Samhain, and move forward contentedly and positively to our future.

Lecture Series: First Responders Then and Now.
The 1918 Flu Pandemic: The Importance of a Coordinated Response.
Monday October 5th, 7pm




HUMANITIES
NEW YORK

The 1918 Spanish Flu: The Importance of a Coordinated Response

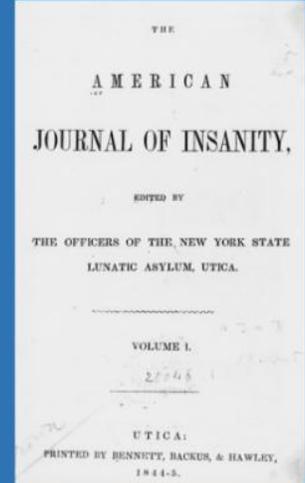
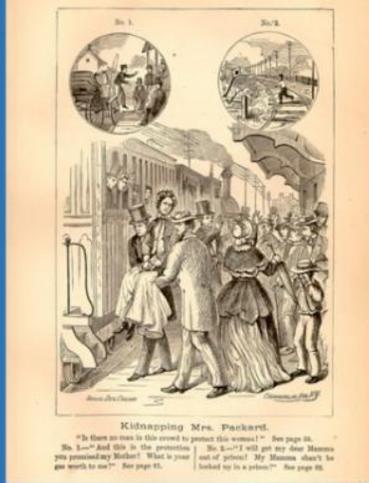
Monday October 5th 7pm

The 1918 Pandemic lasted just 15 months but was the deadliest disease outbreak in human history, killing between 50 million and 100 million people worldwide and 670,000 Americans. When the US entered World War I in 1917, government posters and advertisements urged people to report to the Justice Department anyone “who spreads pessimistic stories ... cries for peace, or belittles our effort to win the war.” This was the background then that influenza began to bleed into American life, and public health officials, determined to keep morale up, began to lie.

Each day the disease accelerated. Each day newspapers assured readers that influenza posed no danger. Philadelphia's public health director, Wilmer Krusen, declared in September 1918 that he would “nip the epidemic in the bud.” As various cities responded differently to the threat, the death toll would reflect the uncoordinated response.

This is the third lecture in a series entitled First Responders: Then and Now, which will investigate the intersection between health crises, immigrants, and personal freedom at various points in US history. This series has been funded in part by Humanities New York, with the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Lecture: The Line(s) Between Faith and Madness
Alexandra Prince PhD, Thursday October 8th 7pm.



The Line(s) Between Faith and Madness

Dr. Alexandra Prince, Thursday October 8th 7pm



How do we discern between genuine religiosity and mental pathology? This talk explores the muddled waters of debate regarding this question in the context 19th and turn of the century America. I will discuss the ways in which gender impacted medical and popular interpretations of new religious movements (ie. evangelical revivalism, Spiritualism, Pentecostalism and Christian Science) as indicators of insanity and causes of asylum admissions. This talk will be of interest to those curious about currents within American religious history, historical interpretations of mental illness and proto-tabloid debates.

Alexandra Prince holds a PhD in History from The University at Buffalo (SUNY) and is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Center for Disability Studies. Their research concerns the intersection of the history of insanity in the United States and the history of new religious movements. They are currently working on a book manuscript that explores this subject over the long 19th century.

**Lecture Series: First Responders Then and Now
Refugees and Illness Today: How Vulnerable Populations Are Still
Othered**

Rifat Filkins, Wednesday October 14th, 7pm

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Consider a gift in honor of your family, cherished friend, or organization. Give at www.risse-albany.org/donate or at [facebook.com/risse-albany](https://www.facebook.com/risse-albany). You can also donate using USDC Advance #8021057, through the United Way, and with SEFA #50-0029 if you are a state employee. Call 518-421-1041 for more information. Thank you!

VOLUNTEER
RISSE is seeking volunteers for daily homework help in our after-school program, for one-on-one help in our Adult English Language program, in our office, or special projects. RISSE also has general internships available. Email volunteer@risse-albany.org or call 518-421-1041 for more information.

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Lecture Four in the First Responders Series, evoking memories of the 19th century Great Hunger refugees, modern refugees fleeing deadly conditions in their country, are experiencing the Covid Pandemic on a different level. Facing health crises as they wait while their paperwork is processed, how can refugees navigate the current health crisis? Recently arrived families have the problems of acculturation and settling in, compounded by this crisis. Being a stranger in a strange land is no easier now than it was in the 19th century, and Covid 19 presents challenges which should remind us of our own ancestors' struggles.

RISSE Albany is a family-based center with the mission to equip refugees and recent immigrants to build sustainable, independent lives by offering language and literacy instruction, as well as support with life skills and integration into U.S. culture and community. RISSE works in partnership with the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), which services refugees and immigrants for their first 90 days in the U.S. RISSE also continues to enjoy thriving partnerships with The College of Saint Rose and Emmaus UMC.

Rifat Filkins is Executive Director of RISSE in Albany and has Masters degrees in Art History and in Education.

**Lecture Series: The War of Independence: The Role of Women.
Elizabeth Stack, PhD, Monday, October 19th, 7pm**

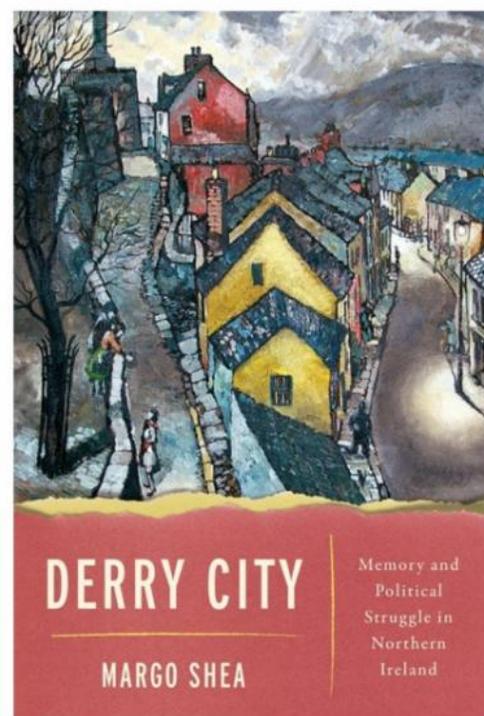
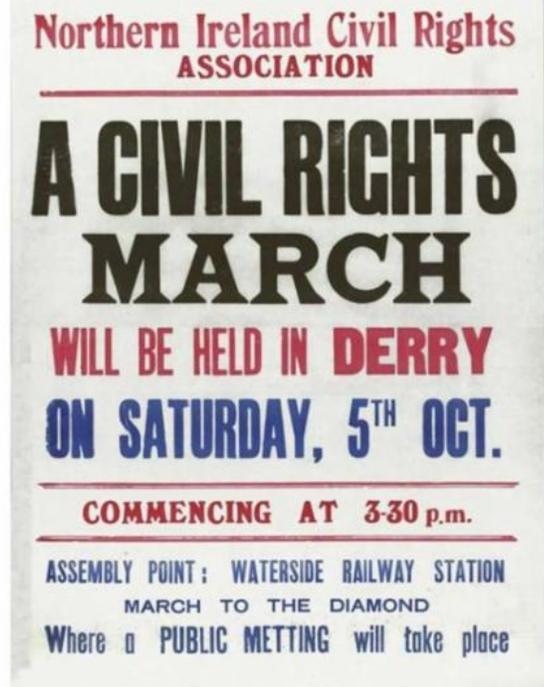


Women in the War of Independence

Their role has often been minimized, but women activists were involved in procuring and smuggling arms, visiting prisons (bringing in messages) and the dangerous work of espionage, which in the report of the Cumann an mBan convention (1921) members were complimented as being “the eyes and ears” of the conflict. Women also provided safe houses, distributed the “dependents’ fund” and monies from the White Cross. Fifty women were arrested during this period, but beyond this, it has been difficult to ascertain the extent of the contribution of women without complete contemporary or retrospective statistics of numbers of women active 1919-1921. Recent opening of the pension records allow for the first time a more complete survey of women’s role. Furthermore, women were targeted by all sides and in all parts of the country for acts of sexual violence. The attacks reveal a pattern which was opportunistic rather than pre-meditated and are not uncommon. Women in their homes were targeted by armed bands of men from all sides of the conflicts, who took their anger and their frustration out on them when they could not find their brothers, husbands and fathers who were on the run or in hiding.

This is the fifth lecture in our Centenary Series about the War of Independence.

Lecture: Memory and Meaning in Derry
Margo Shea PhD, Thursday October 22nd 7pm



October 22nd, 7pm. Irish American Heritage Museum

In Derry, Northern Ireland, the presence of the past is everywhere — in the stories, in the songs, in the streets. While Derry is known for its role in the Northern Ireland civil rights movement and as the site of Bloody Sunday, its longer history is just as fascinating and helps us understand how communities maintain their identity in the face of turmoil.

Join historian Margo Shea to explore Derry during the decades before the Troubles and learn how people, without much in the way of financial resources or political power, made their mark and held their own by drawing on the past. Memory was crucial to Derry's Catholic residents. Expressions of memory did much more than simply explain the past. They illuminated a way forward. Drawing on the past was a strategy for Derry Catholics to sustain their communities, to reflect their experiences, and to change their fortunes in the face of a partitioned Ireland and the many changes that came with it after 1921, when they found themselves on the “wrong” side of the Irish border. With Margo, consider the civil rights movement in Derry as an extension of the nationalist community's history instead of as a major break from it.

Lecture: Haunted Ireland: A Land of Ghosts and Banshees **Elizabeth Stack PhD, Monday October 26th 7pm**





Haunted Ireland: A Land of Ghosts and Banshees



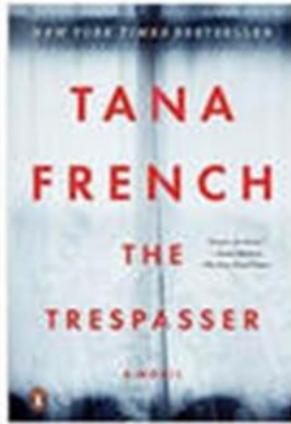
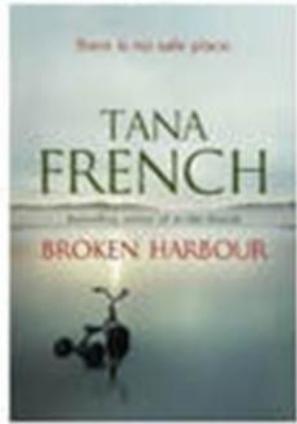
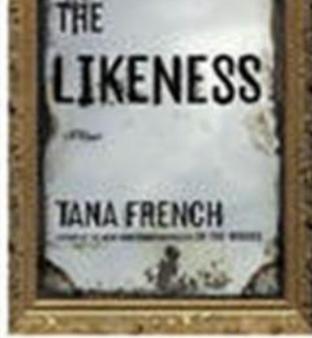
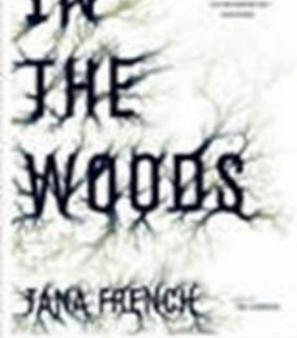
The Irish imagination has long held a deep fascination with macabre stories of ghosts, changelings and other supernatural manifestations. It is a legacy that can be traced back to the mythology and folklore of pagan times, and in some cases — such as the legends of the Banshee and the Dullahan — have been maintained in wives' tales and superstitions right through to the present day.

Join Elizabeth as she will describe the evolution of Irish horror from folklore traditions, continuing on to the rise of vampire fiction in the nineteenth century, and finishing with more recent stories of fairies, ghosts and hauntings. She will tell you some of the spine-chilling tales and about the places where things go bump in the night!

Lecture: The Uncanny in Tana French

Margaret Lasch Carroll PhD, Wednesday October 28th 7pm





Tana French took both the literary and popular fiction worlds by storm with her first novel, *In the Woods*, in 2008, an Irish police procedural that delves as much into the psyches of the troubled investigators as it does the solving of a murder. Since then she has published six more novels, five of which are told through the eyes of different investigators in the Dublin murder squad. All French's novels have met with international acclaim, and she has attracted a loyal and ever-expanding readership. In October, she'll be releasing her eighth novel, *The Searcher*.

Irish literature often hints at the supernatural, the unnatural, and the preternatural, and Tana French's fiction is no exception. She mingles elements of crime, murders, and mysteries with a smattering of the inexplicable. In her lecture, Meg Carroll will discuss French's use of the uncanny. What better time to poke around in the bizarre, than Hallowe'en?

There will be a chance to join in a discussion of French's fiction during the lecture.

Good News!: Heifer born to rare breed Kerry Cow!





Kerry cattle are most probably the descendants of the Celtic Shorthorn, brought to Ireland as long ago as 2000 B.C. They are still found grazing in the marginal pastures of the hill districts of southwestern Ireland. Kerries were imported to the United States beginning in 1818 and the breed prospered through the early 20th century. But by the 1930's, Kerries had disappeared from North America however in the mid 1970's Dr Russell Scott imported eleven Kerries into Canada that are the foundation Kerry stock of today's Kerry population in Canada and United States. Today there are very few Kerries in the United States and Canada less than 75 breeding females and only a few small herds are being bred to pure Kerry bulls.

The Kerry is a small-sized, fine-boned dairy breed, mostly black in color and can have a small amount of white on the udder. Cows weigh between 780-1000 pounds and are horned. Milk production averages 7000-8000 pounds, but can occasionally exceed 10,000 pounds, with over 4% butterfat. Kerries are hardy and long-lived, often still calving at 14-15 years of age.

By 1983 the world population of pedigreed Kerries had dropped to around 200. The Irish Department of Agriculture has since taken steps to support the maintenance of the breed and numbers are again creeping upwards. Here in the USA and Canada Kerry numbers have drop to less than 75 breeding cows and not all are being bred to pure to Kerry bulls.

The Kerry Cow marched with us in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in 2018.

Irish American Heritage Museum

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