



# Irish American Heritage Museum

## December Newsletter

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Dear Members,

It is hard to believe we have almost come to the end of 2021 - what a strange two years we have had! The museum is fortunate to have weathered the Covid 19 restrictions for so long, and we have learnt many lessons from this time. Our on-line audience has grown massively as we now livestream all of our talks. Going forward, we hope to have some sort of online component to our exhibitions too, so that people who can not get to the museum in person will be able to enjoy some of our offerings from home. We are still a work in progress and we thank you for your patience and support of us.

If you are receiving this newsletter, it means you are a member, and we are very thankful that you help sustain the museum with your membership. We have invited some famous speakers and performers for 2022, and as members you will receive priority and discounts to certain events, free admission once the permanent exhibition is installed, and we will have members-only talks, so do keep your membership current. You are also encouraged to come to our museum gift shop as you receive a discount there. We have a larger than ever inventory at the moment, with beautiful artwork and clothing from Ireland; new jewelry; Irish food; and a fantastic range of books including many of those from featured speakers at the museum.

We are hard at work on writing some new exhibitions as well as finishing the permanent exhibition. We are very grateful to Assembly members Pat Fahy and John McDonald, who have awarded us funding to install the new and extensive permanent collections which tells the story of the Irish in America. We are working with designers and printers, and hope to reveal it to you all (finally!) in the coming weeks.

As you have seen, we are still holding our 35 for 35 campaign, and our Annual Giving Tuesday Appeal. As a non-profit organization, these fundraisers help fund our general operations and provide the extensive programming that we do. While it is not the same as attending a glamorous event, these campaigns are essential building blocks in our yearly revenue, helping us to continue to share the stories of the Irish in America, and to collaborate with other organizations too to provide a more nuanced look at that story. This year alone, we partnered with *Black and Irish* to celebrate African American History Month and the story of black people in Ireland. We contributed to Albany ProMusica's Celtic Dreams program in March and hosted Ireland's National Famine Museum in September as they collected stories of Irish immigration to the Capital Region. We teamed up with Ten Broeck Mansion and The

Underground Railroad Education Center this summer to give tours about "Freedom and Opportunity in Albany." We hosted Dr. LeAnne Howe of the Choctaw Nation, Albany College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences, RISSE in Albany, and Out Boulder County to deliver diverse panel discussions as part of our involvement with the "Community for Immunity" national vaccine promotion program. Elizabeth was a featured speaker at Olana, discussing Irish servant lives in the Hudson Valley, and made several media appearances and delivered lectures to other organizations. This work is not possible without your support, for which we are very grateful, and we hope that you enjoyed all of these events.

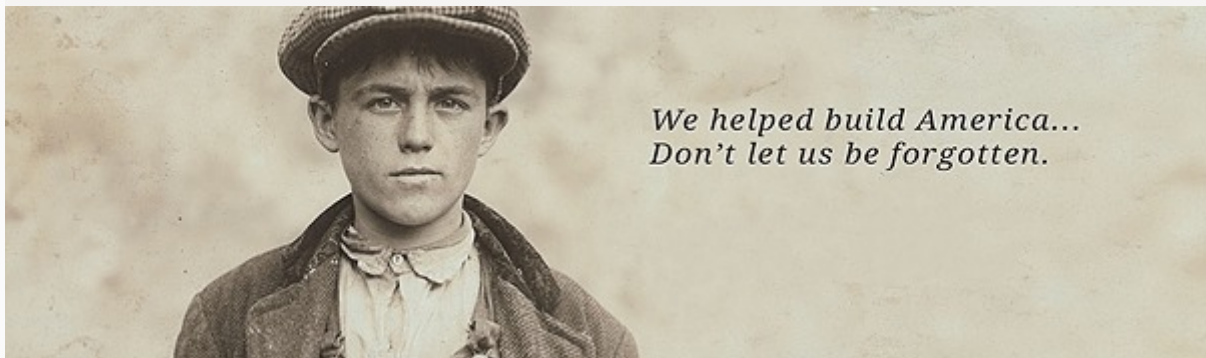
So, stay tuned for an exciting 2022. Our Annual Sweat-er Run and Family Festival will be back in March again as we celebrate Irish American Heritage Month. You have probably noticed that we have been holding more talks than ever before, and that is something we hope to continue doing. We have booked some amazing in-person performances from Ireland's best-known writers and performers who will be touring America and will stop in Albany. We will host a variety of Irish American historians and writers throughout the year, and Film Club will be back, starting in January - better than ever in our own theater. And we will have fantastic exhibitions on display throughout the year. I am truly excited about what the next few years in our new home will bring us, and the quality content that we can offer you. If the last thirty five years of the Museum have interested you - brace yourself for the next thirty five!

Thank you for your continued support and we wish you all the best for the holiday season and a happy and healthy New Year!



Elizabeth Stack, PhD  
Executive Director.

[Giving Tuesday Appeal](#)



*Help us celebrate our 35th anniversary!*

It's our birthday! This fall, the Irish American Heritage Museum will celebrate its 35th anniversary. While 2020 was not the grand re-opening we envisioned, we have a lot on the horizon and think this coming year will be one of the greatest in our history.

We are asking you to help us with "35 for 35," a gift of \$35 in celebration of our 35th anniversary to help us recover from the pandemic so that we can finally celebrate the way only we can—that is, with food, drink, and lots of music! Click the button below to donate.

[Donate Today!](#)

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This month's poem is "The Kerry Christmas Carol," by Sigerson Clifford. Clifford was born in 1913, and grew up in Cahirciveen on the Ring of Kerry. He worked most of his life in Dublin, part of the first generation of Irish civil servants after independence. He was a playwright for the Abbey Theatre and was also prominent in the early days of Irish radio. His verse recreates a time of childhood innocence and celebrates his native Kerry. His book of verse *Ballads of a Bogman* from which this poem is taken, was first released in 1955 and has been in print since.

The poem is an evocation of an old Irish custom in which each household would leave a lighted candle in their window on Christmas night. There was a pious belief that Joseph and Mary and the Child still wandered the roads of the world, looking for a place to rest from the persecution of Herod. That they should show a preference for the roads of rural Ireland was accepted as a given, as was the assurance that they would receive Irish hospitality.



Irish Christmas Window.

## The Kerry Christmas Carol - Sigerson Clifford

Brush the floor and clean the hearth,  
And set the fire to keep,  
For they might visit us tonight  
When all the world's asleep.

Don't blow the tall white candle out  
But leave it burning bright,  
So that they'll know they're welcome here  
This holy Christmas night.

Leave out the bread and meat for them,  
And sweet milk for the Child,  
And they will bless the fire, that baked  
And, too, the hands that toiled.

For Joseph will be travel-tired,  
And Mary pale and wan,  
And they can sleep a little while  
Before they journey on.

They will be weary of the roads,  
And rest will comfort them,  
For it must be many a lonely mile  
From here to Bethlehem.

O long the road they have to go,  
The bad mile with the good,  
Till the journey ends on Calvary  
Beneath a cross of wood.

Leave the door upon the latch,  
And set the fire to keep,  
And pray they'll rest with us tonight  
When all the world's asleep.

## Culture Section



Christmas is a time that is remembered fondly by most Irish and Irish Americans, because many households pass on traditions from generation to generation. The cleaning of the house, the hanging of the holly, the cooking of special meals and breads, the candles in the windows, all are ingrained in our childhood memories. Over the past few years, I have shared with you stories about an Irish

Christmas in the Bronx; the story of Irish American girl Virginia, who was reassured of the existence of Santa; and last year, one of my favorite Irish Christmas stories from my neighbor, John B. Keane. I thought this year, I would take a broader look at how the Irish view Christmas, in reality or fiction.

William Carleton was a writer who recorded many tales about the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle in the 1830's. He recalled a slightly joyful memory of Christmas in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry, 1830 – 33*:

"Christmas-Day passed among the peasantry, as it usually passes in Ireland. Friends met before dinner in their own, in their neighbors,' in shebeens or in public houses, where they drank, sang, or fought, according to their natural dispositions, or the quantity of liquor they had taken. The festivity might be known by the unusual reek of smoke that danced from each chimney, by the number of persons who crowded the roads, by their brand new dresses, – for if a young man or country girl can afford a dress at all, they provide it for Christmas, – and by the striking appearance of those who, having drunk a little too much, were staggering home in the purest happiness, singing, stopping their friends, shaking hands with them, or kissing them, without any regard to sex."

One of the most popular authors in Ireland in recent years is Alice Taylor. Her books about life in Ireland, *To School Through the Fields: An Irish Country Childhood*, originally published by Dingle Books in 1988, were bestsellers. She recounts her life in the 1940s, a time that was filled with bewitchment and fascination.

"Christmas in our house was always magical and for weeks beforehand my toes would tingle at the thought of it. The first inkling of its reality was Santa's picture in the Cork Examiner: we pored over him, loving every wrinkle in his benevolent face. At first his was a small face peeping from an obscure corner, but as Christmas drew nearer his presence became more reassuringly felt as he filled a larger space on the page.

The first step in the preparations in our home was the plucking of the geese, not only for our own family but also for all our relations. A night in early December was set aside for killing and plucking; homework had to be completed quickly after school that day and when the cows had been milked and supper finished the kitchen was cleared for the undertaking. I never witnessed the actual cleaning because my mother performed this ritual away from the eyes of us children, but when she brought the geese still slightly flapping and warm into the kitchen I always felt that she, who was gentle by nature, had been through some sacrificial fire which but for necessity she would have avoided.

A big turnip was cleaned and a hole bored in it for the candle; this was decorated with red berried holly and placed in the window. That night no blinds would be drawn so that the light would shine out to light the way for Joseph and Mary. Before supper the Christmas log was brought in and placed behind the fire in the open hearth. Banked around with sods of turf it soon sent out a glow of warmth to make the toast that was part of our Christmas supper tradition.

Breakfast was always of baked ham, after which the remainder of the family went to the second Mass of the day. Before leaving for Mass my mother placed the stuffed goose in a bastable over the fire with layers of hot coals on the cover. There it slowly roasted, filling the kitchen with a mouth-watering aroma."

Of course, a permanent aspect of Irish life has been emigration, and journalist Finatan O' Toole wrote about how Irish people cope with that at Christmas time. I must admit, this piece spoke to me, as someone who won't be able to spend Christmas with my family this year, and I love that he writes about it from the perspective of those who stayed, while empathizing with those who left:

"Most of us live in two Irelands. One is physical, a latticework of streets and lanes, fields and hills. The other is mental, a nexus of relationships and connections, of love and loss. One exists in space: it resides on solid ground and is bounded by the seas. The other exists in time: it abides in memory and is therefore bounded only by memory's porous and shifting borders. These two Irelands are usually quite separate. The point of Christmas is to bring them together, to make it seem for a few days as if they are not two but one.



It's true of all cultures, of course, that the place people feel beneath their feet is not the one they have in their heads. We all belong (or struggle to belong) in both real and imagined places. But it's true in a special way for migrant cultures, and ours is certainly one of those. We have an intense sense of place and an intense experience of displacement. We're like creatures who evolved to live in one climate but had to learn to live in another.

... But even if we don't go, it's no use. We can't avoid living in two Irelands because even if we stay our children go. Or our brothers and sisters. Or our best friends. You could spend your whole life in your own little Irish parish and yet a part of you will always be living Elsewhere because that's where a bit of your heart is. There's no getting away from your connection to someone who got away.

So we say that Christmas is all about home, but we know that word is not simple. The question "Are you coming home for Christmas?" always has a possible answer: "But I am home." For the child who has left, there are three stages of home. First, it's obviously "back home" – the corner of Ireland that is entangled in the neurons of your brain like wool in briars. Then, you are homeless, drawn between where you are and where you used to be. And finally you are at home again, settled, a part of the new place, the home that is not "back" but forward, not your past but your future.

The moment comes when your child belongs where you are not and it is natural to dread it. But natural to desire it too – if their home is now Elsewhere, it is usually because they have found love there. Why would you not want that for them? There is no straight answer – you do of course and you wish you didn't have to.

So the Irish Christmas is a fiction of home. It is a work of fuss and travel and shopping and making up beds and peeling sprouts and spuds and collecting turkeys and soaking hams. But it's also a work of the imagination. It is a ritual in which we pretend for a few days that there are not two Irelands, that the physical place we inhabit and the people who inhabit our hearts fit together as naturally as family photos in their frames. At Christmas, Ireland looks like what it might be if we were not an emigrant culture, if history had not unsettled us and left with such a complicated relationship between people and place. The Irish Christmas is a kind of alternative history in which everything, and everybody, is at home.

And it's all the more lovely for it. There's a frantic, vulgar, crazy Christmas. But beneath it, there's something fragile and fleeting and, in its very precariousness, rather precious."

May your Christmas be filled with your own memories and celebrations. Nollaig shona daoibh - Merry Christmas to all.

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## Discount for Irish American Heritage Museum members!

Don't forget that you can use the code MUSEUM to receive 15% off the price of tickets to see this show, based on Frank McCourt's writing. It can be redeemed online or over the phone with the Capital Rep box office at 518-346-6204. Elizabeth will be the guest speaker for the Behind the Scenes performance which is scheduled for Sunday, December 12th.

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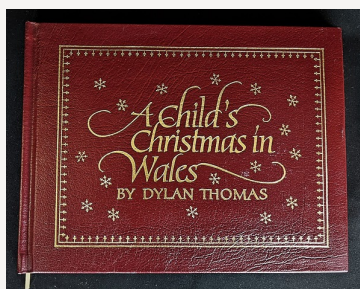
## DECEMBER Events

*Unless otherwise noted, all events can be attended in person at the Museum, or viewed live on YouTube*



**December 4, 10am-4pm: Christmas Market**

Support your community and shop local this year! We are delighted to announce our popular Christmas Market is back - bigger and better than ever! This year we will hold it at Celtic Hall at 430 New Karner Road. There will be over 25 vendors selling a variety of handmade gifts and goods, as well as Irish food, raffles, and live performances by Irish Don Kelly, Rick Bedrosian, Marni Gillard, and An Clar School of Irish Dance. Come out and shop in person for the holidays. Masks are required if you are not vaccinated and recommended for everyone.



**December 8, 7pm: A Child's Christmas In Wales**

Start the holiday season with a reading of the charming story, *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, written by Dylan Thomas. Enjoy holiday music, seasonal treats, and the nostalgia and humor of Thomas's memories of the Christmases of his youth. Share your own holiday stories and sing along with a cast of dramatic readers from the Irish American Heritage Museum. This event will only be held at Celtic Hall.



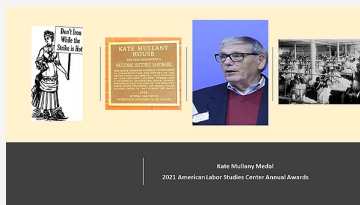
**December 11, 7pm: Triskele Christmas Concert**

Raise your voices, pints, and spirits with Triskele as they ring in the Christmas season with their annual Christmas show at Celtic Hall! You can also pick up their new Christmas CD. Known for their stunning harmonies, singing in the Gaelic language, and for their Irish wit, these ladies perform traditional, original and some modern Celtic/Irish music. Reservations are highly recommended, as this show will sell out. Tickets are \$10 for members, \$15 for non-members.



**December 13, 7pm: Christmas Readings and Songs**

Join us for a family-friendly performance of Christmas stories and songs in the Museum. Bethlehem Traditional School of Dance will also perform. This performance will be live streamed to YouTube.



**December 15, 6pm: Kate Mullany Medal Awards**

Join the American Labor Studies Center as they present the Kate Mullany Medal to State Comptroller, Tom DiNapoli; the New York State Nurses Association; and Dr. Elizabeth Stack. Tickets can be ordered at <https://www.katemullanyrhs.org/>



**December 21, 7pm: War of Independence Centenary Series - December 1921**

The Treaty negotiations were concluded, and the plenipotentiaries signed it on December 6th. It was recommended to the Dáil in a series of very tense debates held in late December, but was rejected by de



Valera and others, splitting Republican opinion. This talk will look at the public and private Dáil debates, as well as the occasional outbreaks of violence still happening in Northern Ireland. This event will be on Zoom or livestreamed to YouTube only.

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Don't forget that you can support the Irish American Heritage Museum when you shop on Amazon Smile by using the link [here](#).

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**Our mailing address is:**

21 Quackenbush Square  
Albany, NY  
12207

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