



muskegon  
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## *Quarterly Newsletter*

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Spring 2009

### **Next Event**



Tuesday, May 12, 2009

House of Chan

5:30pm Social Time, 6:30 pm Dinner

## *Cliff Carlson*

**Cliff Carlson** for many years has been the owner – publisher of the Irish American News of Chicago and the newer Irish American News of Ohio. The monthly readership of his publications exceeds 100,000, and when many print media publications are declining, his continue to thrive. In recent years he initiated his publications' excellent websites: [www.irishamericannews.com](http://www.irishamericannews.com) and [www.ianohio.com](http://www.ianohio.com). He is an expert in integrating print media into the internet. His latest success is his founding of the Irish Book Club, the first internet website devoted solely to Irish books. The website is [www.theirishbookclub.com](http://www.theirishbookclub.com). Cliff is a respected opinion leader in Irish American matters, and he expresses his views forthrightly. Beyond his media work, Cliff has a deep interest in Irish history and culture, and his influence has a big impact. For example, when Cliff saw a reading of the new Irish play called *The Quiet Man Tales*, he was instrumental in having the play produced in Chicago for its world premier, and the play is currently running there. Cliff is a most interesting speaker, and this will be a great evening!

We are also happy that our fellow members **Britta and Roy Portenga** are performing their fiddle and guitar virtuosity for prelude music prior to our dinner.

We are returning to the House of Chan and reservations are not necessary. However, it helps us to better organize this event if we have at least an idea of what our attendance will be. Please call **Kathleen Marek** at **759-7344**. But if you don't call in your reservation, there will still be plenty of room. This is our main educational and cultural event of the year, so don't miss this special program!

## Last Events

On Sunday afternoon, January 25, we had a record attendance at our annual Pub Party at the Harbor Holiday Inn. Our entertainment kicked off with our fellow members, whom we call "The Dynamic Duo," **Kevin Donovan** and **David McIntire** playing and singing some of our favorites. Then the **Conklin Ceili Band** took the stage and it was like old times. As always, they impressed us with their range of vocal and instrumental selections and their unique sound. We were happy to see them return after an absence of the past few years. And that date was also the 500th birthday of the great Scottish poet Robert Burns. Our members and native Scots **Bob and Terri Wright** had planned to present the unique ceremony "Salute to the Haggis," but illness prevented them from attending. However, Muskegon bagpiper **John Tyler** filled in with some Scottish humor and fine piping to commemorate the great anniversary of Bobby Burns' birth. Many thanks to the hotel staff and all who attended to make this a fun afternoon.

During the weekend before St. Patrick's Day, many of us volunteered and were patrons of the **St. Patrick's Fest** sponsored by our own **Michigan Irish Music Festival** at the L.C. Walker Annex. A great time was had by all, and we appreciate the hard work the Festival board and volunteers put into this annual event. By the way, check out the festival news and entertainment line-up for this year at [www.michiganirish.org](http://www.michiganirish.org). You won't be able to stand the wait until September!

On the feast day itself of St. Patrick on March 17, our club held its **36th Annual Flagraising** of the Irish flag in downtown Muskegon. The day was clear and bright, and a tad windy. A loyal band of members watched President **Kevin Donovan** hoist the tricolor up the flagpole in front of L.C. Walker Arena. Participating in the ceremony and doing a reading on the life of **Michael Collins** was **Dan Bonner**, and our fellow member and Muskegon Police Officer and Pipe Band leader **Jerry Dibble** sent the sounds of his highland pipes skyward. He then led Muskegon's shortest parade to Racquets Pub, where one of our newest members, **Pat Flaherty**, stepped up to the old upright piano and soon had the place singing along with classic Irish tunes. This was all captured in photos taken by **Peg** and **Jerry Lafferty**, as you will see on the last page of this newsletter. Be sure to read **Bill Idding's** account of the flagraising at his blog: [http://blog.mlive.com/extra\\_iddings/2009/03/la\\_feile\\_padraig.html#more](http://blog.mlive.com/extra_iddings/2009/03/la_feile_padraig.html#more). Thank you one and all!

## Welcome to Our New Members

Since our last newsletter we have had the good fortune of having these new members join our esteemed organization: **Matt Bradfield** (a fiddle player, too), **Dave Ellis**, **Patrick Flaherty** (plays piano, spoons, and bones), **Karen Kendall**, **Mick Lane** (scholar and leader of Conklin Ceili Band), **Dennis Murphy**, and **Chip and Coleen Venderwier**. Cead Mile Failte! (100,000 welcomes!)

## In Memoriam

In early April our club lost our fellow member **Mike Plummer** at the age of 62. Mike had been an engineer with General Dynamics for some 40 years and was a member of St. Mary's Parish in Spring Lake. We send our deep condolences to Mike's wife Jean, their two daughters, and all of their relatives and friends. Ar dheis De go raibh a anam. (May his soul rest in peace.)

## Dues Now Due

Our club will not be receiving a bailout from the stimulus package, and it is important that our members pay their dues on time to keep our club in the black throughout the year. We operate on a very tight budget and our Board is considering raising our dues in the future. Our dues are the best deal around and forever have been only \$15 per family. If you receive with this newsletter a 2009 dues bill, that means that you have not yet paid them and that you need to do so asap. Thank you!

## New Global Irish Website Launched

Niall O'Dowd, the publisher of the newspaper *The Irish Voice* and *Irish America* magazine, on March 15 opened a world-wide website for all things Irish. O'Dowd has tried to cover every conceivable subject of interest, including news, sports, entertainment, movies, music, theater, books, TV, travel, and genealogy research. There is also a live webcam showing Dublin. The website's web address is [www.irishcentral.com](http://www.irishcentral.com). Have a look and see what you think.

# Henry Ford and Ireland

With the current public debate about the U.S. car industry, it is interesting to recall the role of Michigan's Irish Americans in founding that industry in the early 1900's. Irish Americans were leaders both in management and labor.

Without question, the most influential Irish American auto industry leader in those times was Henry Ford. Henry Ford was proud of his Irish roots, and he invested heavily in Ireland during the first half of the last century. One hundred years ago Henry Ford opened an assembly plant in Cork, which in peak times employed 7,000 workers, making Henry Ford by far the largest employer in Ireland. The plant operated for some seventy years until the 1980's, when its production was moved to another Ford facility in England.

In the 1500's Henry Ford's ancestors arrived in the Irish province of Munster from Somerset, England, as Protestant settlers when Queen Elizabeth I awarded 600,000 acres of confiscated land to "Protestant gentlemen." After then generations of Henry Ford's branch of the family made their home in West Cork near Clonakilty.

Henry Ford's paternal grandfather was John Ford. In 1847 the Great Hunger forced John and his wife, Tomasine Smith Ford, to emigrate with their 21 year old son William, who was to be Henry's father, to the U.S. They departed from Queenstown (now Cobh) for Quebec. Tragically, like so many victims of the coffin ships, Tomasine died on the voyage.

In the 1830's three of John Ford's brothers had immigrated to the Detroit area, when one in seven of Detroit's inhabitants were Irish and Detroit's largest ethnic neighborhood was called Corktown. John Ford made his way to that area, too, and bought some farm land near the town of Dearborn, Michigan. John Ford became a close friend of a neighboring farmer and fellow Cork man, Patrick Ahearn and his wife Margaret. The Aherns had a foster daughter, Mary Litogot, and William Ford's eyes fell upon her. William and Mary married on April 21, 1861, and two years later Henry Ford was born on July 30, 1863.

After their marriage, William, Mary, and later their son Henry, all lived with the Ahearn's on the Ahearn's farm named "Fair Lane," after a street in Cork City. Years later Henry Ford named his own Michigan mansion and estate "Fair Lane," and in the 1960's the Ford Motor Company also named a car model the Fairlane.

Margaret Ahearn acted as a surrogate grandmother to young Henry because his grandmother Tomasine had died on the Atlantic crossing. Sadly, Margaret died when Henry was seven. Even more tragic was the death of Henry's mother just six years later in 1876, when Henry was thirteen years old. Next to his own wife, Clara, Henry was greatly influenced by these two women.

Although William Ford, now twice a widower, had raised Henry to live the farming life, Henry preferred the world of mechanics and machinery. At age sixteen he left home to become a machinist in Detroit.

For the next twenty-six years Henry worked at a number of technical and mechanical jobs, eventually becoming Chief Engineer of the Edison Illuminating Company in 1891. But during many of those years in his spare time Henry worked on developing the internal combustion engine. In 1896 he built his first self-powered vehicle, which he called the Quadricycle. He attracted several investors and formed the Detroit Automobile Company. But the company went broke, and many today do not realize that Henry Ford went bankrupt before he founded a new auto company in 1903, named the Ford Motor Company. Henry was then forty years old.

The Ford Motor Company's big break occurred shortly after when one of Henry's designs called the "999" set a new speed record when driven by Barney Oldfield, who was the Dale Earnhardt of his day. That was a public relations coup which positioned the company well for the introduction of its reasonably priced car for the masses, the legendary Model T. And the rest is history.

Introduced in 1908, by 1918 one-half of the cars on the road in the U.S. were Model T's. When production of the Model T ended in 1927, 16.5 million had been sold, making it still one of the best selling car models in automotive history, behind the Toyota Corolla (32 million) and the Volkswagon Beetle (21 million).

Henry Ford visited Ireland a number of times, and tried to buy his ancestral home. It was not for sale, but he did buy hearthstones from the fireplace that he installed in a fireplace in his Michigan mansion, Fair Lane.

When in Cork in 1917, he announced the start of a Ford tractor plant there. The plant later also produced Model T's. By 1930, when Cork's population was 80,000, the Ford plant employed 7,000, nearly 10% of Cork's population!

Henry Ford's creation of the Cork operation in 1917 was not as easy as it sounds. At that time Cork was a hotbed of Irish nationalism supported mostly by Catholics. Henry Ford was a Protestant and from an English Protestant family, the kind of family deeply despised by many of Cork's people. Henry Ford did not have to build in Cork. He could have put a plant anywhere to make a profit. Cork was certainly not centrally located for the European market. But he built in Cork because he loved his Irish heritage and wanted to help his countrymen. This is a dimension of Henry Ford that is often overlooked.

In 2003 Ireland issued a postage stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Ford Motor Company.



Irish Stamp Issued on 100th Anniversary of Ford Co.

# At Pub Party



Kevin Donovan & David McIntire



Conklin Ceili Band



John & Patty Tyler Fred & Leigh Lewis

# At Flagraising



Photos by Jerry Lafferty