

## Traveling to Ireland and searching for roots by Kathy Gallivan

Although my dad always instilled unending pride of being “Irish” in our household, it wasn’t until I was older that I wanted to know more about where my family came from and why they made that long journey from Ireland to Holyoke. Unfortunately, this burning desire to learn more didn’t peak until I reached my mid 30’s when dad and his brothers were no longer around to ask. Why didn’t I take the time to ask more questions? Why didn’t I pay more attention to dad’s stories? We were a very small family, not like the typical large Irish families that you hear about. My grandfather came to this country when he was a young boy with his widowed mother and younger brother. My dad was the “baby” son of three with a ten and twelve year difference in age from his older brothers. His mother died when he was only in his teens and his dad died when my father was in his mid-twenties—one year after he married mom and two years before I was born. So much of the history of our family and the stories that would have been handed down from the memories that dad and his older brothers might have had—are now gone.

I longed to travel to Ireland, to my ancestral home, to search for those roots and it wasn’t until the summer of 2001 that my wish came true. A tour was being offered through a local church and they were actually going to stay in the very town my grandfather was from—Killarney. Fortunately, before our departure, I was able to find my grandfather’s original baptismal certificate that said he was baptized in St. Mary’s Cathedral in Killarney. The Irish Cultural Center was newly formed at that time and I happened to catch a notice in the newspaper that they were

offering a talk on Irish Genealogy given by my John O’Connor from the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum in Springfield. Shortly after, I signed up for another of John’s classes in Springfield and with his help was able to find a name and address of a priest to write to at the cathedral and ask for help. The funny part is that my letter reached the church but followed the priest, Fr. T. Egan, to a retirement home. When he received my letter he graciously sent me a lovely note telling me he retired many years ago but was forwarding my request to the church in Killarney and asking the sacristan to help me out. I, in turn, received a wonderful response from the sacristan confirming the birth dates of both my grandfather and his brother and the township where they lived—AND the name of a possible relative to contact when I arrived in Killarney.

My arrival in Killarney reaped more than I ever expected. I was able to meet a “possible” relative who helped me continue my search and actually, on a subsequent trip, he and his wife drove me out to where my family homestead was once located. As I looked around the beautiful landscape I kept asking myself why they left, why did they want to leave such a lovely place—a place known as “heaven’s reflex.” I will continue my search for those answers—I want to know more--it is something I must do.



(St. Mary’s Cathedral\*)

The most unforgettable moment of that visit was when I visited St. Mary’s Cathedral for the first time. As I walked to the other end of Killarney I saw this most amazingly beautiful cathedral (designed by the famous Pugin). There were people lined up all the way down the street, three and four deep, waiting to enter the church. I was told that it would be a busy weekend because the relics of St. Theresa of Lisieux were supposed to be there that week. I was going there for two reasons—to see the church where my grandfather was baptized and also to thank the sacristan who helped me. My timing was a little off, as I missed the sacristan by only a few minutes—he was off to the races in Galway! Another big event in Ireland! But what I wasn’t prepared for was the overwhelming spiritual feeling I had when I entered the Cathedral. You see, St. Theresa is also the patron saint of my own church at home—even to this day, just thinking about this beautiful, unexpected experience moves me emotionally. I wasn’t able to meet the sacristan that day but another man from the church embraced me and gave me a tour along with some interesting stories and showed me the old baptismal font that would have been used for my grandfather’s baptism in 1876. I couldn’t have been happier or have asked for more.

It was a beautiful sunny day as I took my time to walk back to my hotel in the center of town. I wanted to savor this moment--I was filled with the feeling that I was finally home—the feeling that only comes from a place that makes you feel like you belong.

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# Save the date!

**The Irish Cultural Center**  
celebrates its



**10th Anniversary**  
**1999-2009**



**Friday—Sunday, October 9-11, 2009**

Friday, October 9:

Vincent Crotty art exhibit opening with music  
Evening Music Session

Saturday, October 10:

Day-long workshops and films  
Makem and Spain Brothers concert

Sunday, October 11:

Liturgy in Our Lady's Chapel  
Brunch with speaker, Peter Quinn  
(novelist, essayist, Chairman of the Irish Echo)

*Join us in the celebration*

## Connecting with Ireland and the Irish through visits and art

We are fortunate in having a wonderful connection with Ireland and the Irish, fostered by our initial impetus from the Blasket documentary. One of our special supporters is Michael de Mordha, director of the Blasket Center in Dunquin. He lists us as such on the Blasket brochure.

Many of our members are Irish immigrants or first or second generation Irish Americans. Typical of these is Tom Moriarty, who is a first generation Irish American, and with relatives in Ireland, had an interest first in Irish history. Later he became involved in the Irish language. He has played an integral part in forging relationships with those who live across the pond. As the first director, he made many contacts. Ann-Gerard Flynn, the second director also had many connections, having lived in Ireland for six months.

At the opening of the Center a group from the Dingle Peninsula came to celebrate the new organization. They continue to be our friends: Michael de Mordha, Father Pat Fenton, Patrick Lynch, John Moriarty of Lord Baker's, Maura Sheehy who is director at the

Museum in Ballyferriter (and later through her, her husband, Danny Sheehy, poet, historian, language enthusiast), Diarmaid O Daláigh of Disear, Fionnán ) hOgáin of Colaiste Ide.

Since 2000 a group of Dingle merchants have brought a bit of Ireland to the Big E in West Springfield at the annual Fair in the Young Building, housed in the replica of an Irish cottage with thatched roof. Here many of us have become involved with our Irish Cultural Center and Elms College exhibit, promoting our events and programs. Here we have made friends with so many people who return year after year: Mazz O'Flaherty, Mike O'Hare, Fran Ryan and the Brian de Staic merchants. Mags Riordan also brings her story of the work she is doing in Malawi, Africa with the Billy Riordan Memorial Trust she established in memory of her son who drowned in 1999 in the lake in the place he called "Paradise."

Another important factor is the travel to Ireland we have hosted since 2004. A key piece of the Jour-

ney of the Soul has been a visit to Dingle where we have renewed friendships and made new friends with so many. A group has just returned from the fourth trip we have offered.

Tim Allen who served as president for many years, also had connections with many Irish because of his frequent travels to the home of his ancestry, and he introduced them to the groups who joined him on a tour. We have hosted art exhibits in the Borgia Gallery almost every year since our founding. In October we will bring the art work of Vincent Crotty to the Borgia Gallery. He had shown a Blasket Island collection recently, but this artist from Kanturk, County Cork has also focused on other areas of Ireland, and he will display paintings from all of his work. He joins other artists and photographers who have displayed their work: artists Mary McSweeney, Mazz O'Flaherty, Olwen Dowling, and photographers Carol Shea and R. Todd Felton. Kathleen Walsh Buchanan displayed her prints of the Great Blasket Island in 2006.

Please register me for the National Archives Bus trip on Saturday, May 16, 2009

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Member: \$40 \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Member: \$45 \_\_\_\_\_

Sandwich Choice: (choose one)

Turkey \_\_\_\_\_ Ham \_\_\_\_\_ Tuna \_\_\_\_\_ Roast Beef \_\_\_\_\_

(Special request for Vegetarian)

Please make checks out to the Irish Cultural Center at Elms College and mail to 291 Springfield Street, Chicopee, MA 01013

**Full Payment must be received to reserve your space  
NO later than May 7, 2009**

*(Reservations are on a first-come, first-served basis)*

## The Amherst group spends a day in Dingle

by Tim Allen

The night at Lord Baker's Restaurant had been special. People from both countries visiting and eating together, great music and company and food, topped off by the gift to the people of Malawi. It was a better night than I had conceptualized – this group of people add the right touch to everything they do.

The next day was a full day in Dingle – unplanned. People were on their own to do as they chose. After the miserable rainy day on Tuesday, we were skeptical about Wednesday's weather for the planned hike up Mt. Brandon. But the weather in Ireland is as fickle as it is here in New England. We woke up to an absolutely glorious day.

A few took a freshwater fishing excursion. Some had shopping to do, or walking around the town, or lunch plans among family and friends. Some had visits to the Dingle library or golf. Would anyone go see Fungi, the Dingle Dolphin?

The day was perfect for hiking and I dropped off several hikers at the base of Mt. Brandon. Danny Sheehy had lent me his car. I believe seven of our crew joined Danny and Danny's sister for the hike. It was a difficult decision to not go with them, but I



### Dingle visit

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**'Stunning beauty.'**  
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**'Great views.'**  
**'Perfect day.'**

felt some degree of responsibility and also great interest in taking care of the drop off and pick up, and spending time with Mary, and with Danny's mother Maire. I had lunch at Lord Baker's with Maire and with Fr. Pat and Mary. It was a great time.

In mid-afternoon I received a call from Danny that they would be hiking down on the Brandon Creek side. They did a point-to-point hike instead of a loop. I met them at Brandon Creek and got them back to the cars and back to Dingle. 'Unbelievable.' 'Awesome.' 'Stunning beauty.' 'Incredible.' 'Great views.' 'Perfect day.'

The descriptions were all superlatives. The hike had been 'off the charts'. But my favorite description was the one from Terry Aldrich, he who lives in Middlebury, Vermont and had lived in Alaska – both paradises for hikers. He described the experience, "That was the best hike of my life." Terry knows. On a perfect day in Ireland, with the mountains around you and the sea so close by and in full view, hiking is incredible. There are no trees to block your view. It's all yours. Needless to say, the hikers had a



good day. And so did everyone else. We topped off the day with a trip to Tralee to see a production by Siamsa Tire, the National Folk Theater of Ireland. The show that night was Oilean, which means 'island' in Irish. It was about the Blaskets, which we had not been able to visit due to the rains the day before. But we had visited the Blasket Center and the play illuminated the story of the people living on, and then, leaving of the island.

The next day we had to leave Dingle. Nobody really wanted to. Most of this group of travelers had never been to Dingle before but it had woven its magic. The whole visit to Dingle had been great – from staying at Benner's to eating at Lord Baker's to the gift to Malawi, the hike, the shopping, the whole deal.

After three days and nights in Dingle, we hopped on the bus mid-day on Thursday for the trip to Killarney for the last couple days of our trip. As we pulled out of town and Dingle was in our rear view mirror, so many had thoughts going through their mind. My favorite was expressed by Paige Diamond. "I'm coming back."

**Pictured above: Dingle Town from the Pier; to the left: one of the children in the Siamsa Tire performance**