



The Richmond Claddagh <http://richmondias.org/>

Newsletter of the Greater Richmond Irish American Society

December 2008

Christmas Party – It won't be long now! And the goodies are piling up for the Silent Auction. A week in that wonderful cottage in the Shenandoah Valley and also one in Ireland will both be prominent items offered for bidding. Some of the other donations to date include a beautiful Celtic throw, a Celtic knot necklace with an Amber insert and an illuminated Irish Christmas ornament. There are some great Irish books and many more items to tempt. So please call Gloria (804-233-2113) with a description of that great little piece of Irish memorabilia that you have decided to donate for the auction. C'mon - it's a good thing to do! Gloria will have all the bid sheets made up for the Auction and it's a great fun way to help the IAS with operating expenses.

Don't forget – the Party/Auction is at St. Edwards Catholic Church/School located at the intersection of 2700 Dolfield and Huguenot Road in Richmond. It's easy to get to and there's tons of close parking. We'll be ready to start the party at 6:45, – UNLESS you are part of the IAS, Scottish Society or St. Andrew's volunteers that are helping to set up. please don't arrive earlier – that way we'll give the Saturday night Mass folks time to get out of the parking lot. You volunteers from the **3 groups** - please Karon Bell at 517-3249 so that she has a count of workers – **Dan & Dick** – please remind your volunteers. The party is in the school basement and everyone is to **Bring a dish to share, (appetizer or dessert) and your favorite beverage(s).** Note – this is a correction to The Scottish Society newsletter – **there is no cash bar –this is a BYOB party.** However the Scottish Society has generously offered to supply the mixers –(but bring yours if you prefer something special.)

Besides all the fun at the party, The 2008 Winner of the Irish American Society Most Valuable Person will be announced. Press Gang will be providing entertainment, and the finest folks in the IAS will be waiting to party with you! So honestly, you just can't miss this - the party of the year. (I'll be taking names you know)

If you can, please plan stay to a little after the party and help with clean up – so that the deposit is refunded and also so that all can get out at a good hour. Thanks!

PBS Telethon: Karon Bell is still accepting names for the PBS Telethon night, Dec 10th at the PBS station on Sesame Street in Chesterfield County for their telethon.

On 12/10 – arrive by 6:45 and work all/some of the 7 – 10 shift. Its fun work and it puts the IAS out in front of the public. So we hope you can help us out. Please call Karon Bell at 804-517-3249. The show that night, is “Celtic Women” I think...

December 15th - Please refer to the Events calendar at the end of the newsletter for information on a Free Concert with Irish Soprano, Anne O'Byrne followed by a free luncheon at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Richmond

News from the Program Chairman: Dan Begley has set the January IAS meeting for the 15th at 7:00 at the Bon Air Library. The presentation will be a short movie on the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland in 1963. (This is the 45th Anniversary of that visit. Highlights will include the people and places included in his tour. Dan is also trying to arrange a surprise guest speaker. Mark your calendars!

More News from the Program Chairman: Starting in April – Denis Maguire has again graciously offered to start up the Gaelic lessons for IAS members. Please call Dan Begley 804-740-5631 if you are interested in being added to the classes. More information will be available after the first of the year.

“Milis an teanga an Ghaeilge
(Sweet is the Irish Language) M. J. Costelloe

Meet your new Board Members – Sally Gordon and Denis Maguire have both agreed to serve the remainder of the terms for Board members Ed Mayers and Hutch Hutchinson who both found it necessary to resign from their duties. Many thanks to both Sally and Denis for stepping forward to fill the vacancies on the Board and to Joan Finnegan who will be taking over the fun job of “Pub Mistress!” At the same time, our sincere appreciation to Ed and Hutch for their long time service to and support of the IAS. -----



IAS Christmas Party '07

We just recently learned that long time IAS member & our friend, Hutch Hutchinson, recently suffered some very serious health issues. If you would like to send a card - Hutch is at - Beth Shalom Life Care Room 117, Unit 3, 1600 John Rolfe Pkwy, Richmond VA 23238. At this time we are not sure if visitors are allowed, so please call first - (804) 750-2183. And do keep Hutch in your thoughts and prayers.

IRISH CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS Ireland, like most countries, has a number of Christmas traditions that are all of its own. Many of these customs have their root in the time when the Gaelic culture and religion of the country were being suppressed and it is perhaps because of that they have survived into modern times.

The Candle in the Window: The placing of a lighted candle in the window of a house on Christmas Eve is still practiced today. It has a number of purposes but primarily it was a symbol of welcome to Mary and Joseph as they traveled looking for shelter. The candle also indicated a safe place for priests to perform mass as, during Penal Times this was not allowed. A further element of the tradition is that the candle should be lit by the youngest member of the household and only be extinguished by a girl bearing the name 'Mary'.

The Laden Table -After evening meal on Christmas Eve the kitchen table was again set and on it were placed a loaf of bread filled with caraway seeds and raisins, a pitcher of milk and a large lit candle. The door to the house was left unlatched so that Mary and Joseph, or any wandering traveler, could avail of the welcome.

A Mince Pie and a Bottle of Guinness left out on Christmas Eve was once a popular tradition in Ireland. It was meant to be a snack for Santa Claus.

The Wren Boy Procession: During Penal Times there was once a plot in a village against the local soldiers. They were surrounded and were about to be ambushed when a group of wrens pecked on their drums and awakened the soldiers. The plot failed and the wren became known as 'The Devil's bird'. On St. Stephens's day – December 26th a procession takes place where a pole with a holly bush is carried from house to house and families dress up in old clothes and with blackened faces. In olden times an actual wren would be killed and placed on top of the pole. This custom has to a large degree disappeared but the tradition of visiting from house to house on St. Stephens Day has survived and is very much part of Christmas.

The Mistletoe: Ancient Celts believed that mistletoe had tremendous healing powers. Christians saw it as such a strong symbol of paganism, in fact, that they banned it until the so-called “revival of Christmas” in the Victorian era.

Decorations Before Christmas Trees: Having an evergreen-type Christmas tree is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. Years ago, whole families went out to find holly bushes and ivy to decorate the mantelpiece and other parts of the house. Finding a holly bush with lots of berries was considered a harbinger of good luck in the coming year. Holly was also used because it allowed poor people to decorate their homes in the same way as those who were better off. The bush was so common in Ireland in winter there was plenty for everyone. The placing of a ring of Holly on doors originated in Ireland because Holly was one of the main plants that flourished at Christmas time and that gave even the poor ample means with which to decorate their dwellings. All decorations are traditionally taken down

on Little Christmas (January 6th.) and it is considered to be bad luck to take them down beforehand.

A Christmas Whitewashing Around Christmastime, you'll still find the odd farm building out in the Irish countryside that looks like it's just been whitewashed. Long ago, farm families cleaned and then whitewashed every building on the farm in December. They were all covered in white paint or lime-wash, to symbolically purify them for the coming of the savior. The tradition traces back thousands of years, not just through Celtic culture but through other Central European cultures.

The Traditional Gaelic greeting for 'Merry Christmas' is: 'Nollaig Shona Duit'-.pronounced as 'null-ig hun-a dit'.

And finally, a Christmas wish to our Irish American Society members/friends:

*An Irish Christmas Blessing To Each of You
The light of the Christmas star to you
The warmth of home and hearth to you
The cheer and good will of friends to you
The hope of a childlike heart to you
The joy of a thousand angels to you
The love of the Son and God's peace to you*



Some of you may be considering a Christmas gift of a Claddagh ring. Today, many - from tiny tots learning the lovely art of Irish Step Dancing to those who have visited the Emerald Isle, wear The Claddagh Ring. But what does it symbolize?

According to one tale (and oh yes, the Irish are great story tellers!) a man named Richard Joyce was taken away from his fishing village and put into slavery. In time he became a master goldsmith and won his freedom. When he returned to Ireland and the place called Claddagh he was able to create the symbol of love and friendship we have come to know as the Claddagh Ring. The two hands represent friendship, the crown - loyalty and the heart - love.

Now the above was probably one of many tales and the following is also disputed so you may have heard other versions – but I like this one –Nan)

The Correct Way to Wear the Claddagh Ring: For someone who is spoken for - the heart should be closest to their own heart and therefore points up the arm. For those seeking their one true love and want the world to know they are available the crown should point up the arm, showing that the heart is available for that special someone.

Please enjoy a little Christmas present from the Claddagh – with these “traditional” Irish recipes that I found on the web. I hope you try them and let me know how they turned out.

Society for the Preservation of Irish Soda Bread – This is a great site that I found on the web that is dedicated to Irish Soda Bread. I give you a “taste” of some of the fun information from the site - you can check it out yourselves and won't someone please send me their Soda Bread recipe too? <http://www.sodabread.us/index.htm>

It shocks some people to learn that St. Patrick wasn't holding a slice of Irish Soda Bread in one hand while he drove the snakes out of Ireland with the other. Irish Soda Bread wasn't introduced to Ireland until around the mid 1840's when bicarbonate of soda (Bread soda) as a leavening agent was used in Ireland to work with the "soft" wheat grown there.

The other shock to Irish-Americans is that Irish ancestors who left Ireland during the Famine years did not bring over a recipe for Irish Soda Bread. Irish soda bread became popular in Ireland after the Famine years. If your Irish ancestors left Ireland for America during the Famine years, they never learned about making soda bread in Ireland.

If your "soda bread" has raisins in it, it's not "soda bread," it's called "Spotted Dog" or "Railway Cake"! If it contains raisins, eggs, baking powder, sugar or shortening, it's called "cake", not "bread." Here are a few absolutes - Traditional Irish Soda bread does not contain:

- "Zest" orange or any other kind
- Irish Whiskey.
- Honey (*substitute for sugar*)
- Sugar (see definition of "cake")
- Eggs (see definition of "cake")
- Garlic (not common in English/Irish dishes unless your ancestor was named O'Gionanni)
- Shortening (hydrogenated vegetable oil - Crisco introduced to US in 1911. Not around in the 19th century.)
- Heavy Cream (British term for whipping cream but a little thicker. Not much chance Irish peasants would be using this.)
- Sour Cream (traditional in East European dishes. Became popular in US and European kitchens during the past 50 years, not 150 years ago)
- Yogurt (prior to 1900 a staple in Central Europe and Asia and introduced to America after WWII by Isaac Carasso who started Dannon in NY City. Not a 19th century Irish baking item.)
- Chocolate
- Chiles/Jalapenos (*Ireland is not known for its use of Jalapeños in its traditional food!! Por Favor!*)
- Fruit (*Only in Christmas or Easter cakes*)

..And just about anything else one can think of. (Note: all of the above ingredients can be found in "Irish soda bread" recipes somewhere - Interesting, but definitely not traditional

Irish Soda Bread. All are tasty, but not traditional Irish Soda Bread!

Here is a recipe for Farls, which is popular in Ulster.

Heat a 9-inch iron skillet over low flame on the stove. Lightly dust with flour.

Measure 2 cups sifted flour, 1-teaspoon baking soda and 1 teaspoon salt -Make a well in the above and add 1 cup of buttermilk. Thoroughly mix until dough leaves side of bowl.

Flour a breadboard - put dough on board (sprinkle with a little extra flour - and gently knead 3 or 4 times.

Pat dough into a circle the size of the skillet. Cut into farls (fourths) and place on skillet. Cook about 10 minutes on each side.

Wrap bread in a tea towel when it is done. This absorbs the baking soda taste and keeps the bread fresh. Eat that day or fry in bacon fat the next morning as part of an Ulster fry. (You can also use 1/2 whole-wheat flour and 1/2 white flour.)

Irish Caraway Seed Cake: Serves 4

Ingredients

- 12 tablespoons [butter](#)
- 1cup [granulated sugar](#)
- 3 [eggs](#)
- 2cups [flour](#)
- 1tablespoon [ground almonds](#)(optional)
- ¼ teaspoon [baking powder](#)
- 1 ½ tablespoons [caraway seeds](#), plus
- [caraway seed](#), for garnish

Directions: Preheat oven to 350F degrees.

- Grease and line a 7-inch round cake pan with parchment paper.
- Cream butter and sugar together until very soft and light. Beat eggs and gradually add into creamed butter mixture, beating constantly.
- Sift flour and baking powder together; add almonds (if using) and caraway seed.
- Add gradually into creamed mixture, beating constantly.
- Turn mixture into prepared pan.
- Scatter a few more caraway seeds on top.
- Bake for 50 to 60 minutes.
- Turn out of baking pan, remove paper and cool on a wire rack.
- This cake keeps well in airtight container.

That's it for this issue of "The Claddagh" and with that – I send you an old Irish wish –

Peace and plenty for many a Christmas to come.

Nancy

MARK YOUR CALENDARS – Click on links in calendar and you can hear song selections from the artists
And ALWAYS click the link directly below to get the latest updates on upcoming events

<http://richmondias.org/events.php> or for a full month calendar of current events click here. [IAS Calendar](#)

December 13th 7:00 – 11:30	<u>IAS Annual Christmas Party and Silent Auction</u> – This year at St. Edwards Catholic Church (*School building) located at the intersection of 2700 Dolfield and Huguenot Road Dr. Richmond. Sharing the Christmas Spirit with the IAS will be the Scottish Society and St. Andrew’s Society. Press Gang will be singing at the party (IAS member Jeff Beatman). Be searching items to donate for the Silent Auction. Admission Fee- One Dish to Share and BYOB.
Monday, Dec. 15 th 11:00 am	Christmas Concert, Sacred Heart Cathedral will present a FREE one-hour Concert of Holiday Music , featuring vocal soloists from The Cathedral Choir & VCU Music Department and Lisa Edwards Burrs, Father Michael Renninger, & Anne O’Byrne , - Irish Soprano - with Pianist Patrick Carlin. Following the concert a FREE LUNCH will be served. Reservations for the FREE Lunch are NOT required. On-street parking is available. 18 N. Laurel Street Richmond, VA
Thursday, December 18th	<u>HOLIDAYS WITH THE CROSSROADS IRISH DANCE TROUPE</u> - Acceptable for all ages. This dance troupe prides itself on combining an exciting blend of both traditional Irish step and the present-day "Riverdance" style! The Henrico Theater is located in Highland Springs at 305 E. Nine Mile Road. Henrico County purchased the Theatre, Two Shows –5:30 & 7:30 The Henrico Theater - FREE ADMISSION
Friday, December 19 th 6:30 pm .	<u>THE HUNT FAMILY FIDDLERS</u> For all ages. Come see Virginia's own Hunt Family Fiddlers! This holiday show keeps everyone entertained with great diversity featuring fiery Celtic dancing and fast fiddling. Song selections include themed music from The Nutcracker, a special Trans-Siberian Orchestra tribute, and other popular Christmas traditionals - a miniature Elvis even shows up to sing Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree! The Henrico Theater FREE ADMISSION
Saturday Dec. 20 th 7:00 to 9:30 pm	<u>The Press Gang</u> – IAS’s own Jeff Beatman and his two singing cohorts –Chris Craig and Keith Southall - sing at Brickhouse Run for Christmas - 407 - 409 Cockade Alley, Old Towne Petersburg, Virginia (804) 862 – 1815. The IAS has been down to Brickhouse in the past and it was a fun place to be and a good place for supper. (Look out! Those PressGang fellas love to drag the unsuspecting onto the stage with them!)
December 27th - 8:00 pm	<u>Richmond Folk Music presents -Winter Revels! Songs and Tunes from the Celtic Traditions - Moch Pryderi</u> is based in Fredericksburg, Virginia and their specialty is the traditional music of Wales and Brittany, but they also draw upon Irish, Scottish and Appalachian sources. A lively celebration featuring Celtic songs and tunes! Click here for Richmond Folk Music Congregation Or Ami, 9400 West Huguenot Road, Richmond, Virginia. Tickets \$12.00 in advance/\$15.00 at the door. Phone: 804-647-7856
January 11 th	Board meeting – 7:00 at President Gloria Cahen’s home. All IAS members are welcome to attend any Board meeting. Please call 804-233-2113 for directions or with any questions.
January 15 th	Monthly Meeting at the Bon Air Library. The presentation will be a short movie on the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland in 1963. (This is the 45 th Anniversary of that visit. Highlights will include the people and places included in his tour. Dan is also trying to arrange a surprise guest speaker. Mark your calendars! 9103 Rattlesnake Rd Richmond, VA 23235(804) 320-2461 (Just off Buford Road
January 20 th Celtic Crossroads	<u>Celtic Crossroads - Tuesday, January 20, 7pm. Tickets: \$25</u> - an emerging group of traditional Irish musicians Incorporating seven world-class musicians, playing over twenty instruments on stage. (Senior citizen (65+) discount: \$2 off ticket price – Discount for Groups of 20 & over.) Box Office: 804-261-ARTS (2787) The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen , 2880 Mountain Road, Glen Allen, VA 23060. (Located in northern Henrico County between Staples Mill Road and Woodman Road, just south of 295). http://www.artsglenallen.com/ca_directions.htm
January 31, 2008 – 8 pm	Phil Cooper and Margaret Nelson describe what they do as "Strong Old Music" and sometimes as "songs of love, sex, greed, betrayal, death, revenge and more death". - The result is a lively and entertaining concert with something for everyone. They have a planned tribute to Robert Burns and also a heavy helping of Irish tunes. You can visit Phil and Margaret's Myspace Page to listen to samples of their music. Richmond Folk Music at the Congregation Or Ami, 9400 West Huguenot Road, Richmond, Virginia. Tickets \$12.00 in Advance \$15.00 at door Phone: 804-647-7856