

The Freebird

Volume IV

August 2008

The Freebird is the newsletter of the **Irish Fair of Minnesota August 8-10, 2008 at Harriet Island in St Paul, Minnesota.** Its purpose is to keep us connected,

provide updates, celebrate successes and share our

stories, and to support the mission of the Irish Fair by promoting and cultivating Irish culture.



See You at the Fair!!!



Mooncoin Irish Dancers

Join us on the banks of the Mississippi River for a three-day celebration of

Irish heritage with music, dance, family activities and good *craic*. Since 2001, beautiful Harriet Island Regional Park in downtown St. Paul has hosted the Irish Fair of Minnesota. The festival is recognized as one of the most family-friendly events in the Twin Cities, one of the most authentic Irish festivals nationwide and an amazingly great time by the nearly 100,000 people who attended last year's festival. **Irish Dance**



St Paul Irish Dancers

performance is a key part of the Fair experience. A very rich local fervor for Irish dance has generated at least 10 Irish dance schools that now teach nearly 1000 kids and adults jigs, reels, hornpipes and much more. At least five adults groups are regularly performing throughout the state. [The Holiday Dance Stage](#) (*click link to see schedule*) is the place to go to **watch** dancers ranging from wee ones learning their first steps to accomplished dancers who compete internationally.

To sample learning traditional **Irish social dancing**, **The Dubliner Pub Dance Floor at the Crossroads Tent** will be open for *craic* (fun, good times) again for its third year. Free classes will be taught in both set and



Irish set dancing is popular the world round. Come learn it at the Dubliner Pub Dance Floor at the Crossroads Tent at the Fair!

ceili dancing, the two most popular forms of Irish social dancing, culminating with a dance each evening and one on Saturday afternoon. Classes are designed to accommodate everyone, from experienced dancers to those who are trying it for the first time, and will run throughout the day, each day of the Fair. Check out the [social dance schedule](#) for opportunities to join a group lesson, or to attend an afternoon or evening ceili or set dance.

Our guest social dance teacher this year is Ger Butler of County Roscommon, Ireland. In 2006, Ger was a big hit as our first guest teacher at the Dubliner Dance Floor in the Crossroads Tent. A brilliant dancer and engaging teacher, Ger brings great enthusiasm to all his classes and workshops.

New this year is the **Children's Dance Floor**, provided to let those too small to really follow a whole dance join in the fun There will also be information table that will direct you to the whole world of Irish social dance opportunities in the Twin Cities so you can continue to build on the steps you learn at the Fair!



Love of **Irish Music** is the biggest draw to the Fair for many. There will be a true wealth of bands on the several stages at all times; this is one of the richest musical events of the year in the Twin Cities, including not only the headliner bands like Flogging Molly, The Elders, Scythian and the Fuchsia Band (*at left*), but also showcasing eminent talent from among the world-famous artists who happen to reside in the area such as Dáithí Sproule, MacKenzie & Miller, The Eddies, St. Dominic's Trio, Ring of Kerry, and The HiBs. You will also see

emerging talents like Lost in Harbour---and, of course, our as- yet- to- be discovered **2008 Irish Idol Contest Winner**.

On our Croagh Park field, sports fans can get their fill of traditional **Irish sports**, including exhibition games and lessons in hurling, rugby, Gaelic football and more.

And don't forget the annual **Tug of War**. Get a few friends together or come as an individual and we'll get you on a team. You don't need to be big ... strength and tenacity and team spirit are what counts here.



The straight up good fellas of Eastside Banshee Rugby with exhibit their skills on the Croagh Park Sports area of the Fair



Delicious traditional Irish food can also be found at the Fair, to sustain you through a full day of events, and also to be relished for its own sake. Fare on offer includes savory meat pies, lamb stew, hamburgers, fish and chips, corned beef, cheese- and- onion pies for the vegetarians among you—and, of course, you'll want the pint or two to wash it down!!!

Soft drinks, tea, soda bread, the famous Maggie's Irish Cookies and scones will also be available.



Stroll through the over 60 merchandise vendor/exhibitors at the ***Marketplace of Irish Fair of Minnesota*** on a journey of adventure. At the Marketplace, you can find the perfect Irish gift, Irish foodstuffs to take home, exquisite jewelry, fine art photos of Ireland, capes, kilts and other crafts from our artisans, as well as beautiful Celtic print bedspreads, t-shirts and the like from general retailers. It's also a great opportunity to look for your favorite Irish music CDs, and get information on traveling to Ireland.

In the ***Children's Area*** of the Fair, there is a line up of activities specially for kids at the Fair such as storytelling, crafts projects, sing-alongs, dance lesson for the small set and miniature golf. There are sessions as well in the sports area for kids, boy and girls, alike, to try out some Irish field sports. Kids may also enjoy watching Reilly Sheep Herding, where incredibly clever, avid Border Collies provide structure for wayward hoofstock.

You'll want to visit ***The Native Dogs of Ireland*** tent as well, ***THE*** place to go to meet the mutts that traditionally herded sheep, hunted rats, wolves or game birds--- or even helped poach on the lord-of-the-manor's land when needed! In addition to our tent, where visitors



young and old are welcome to pet the dogs and chat with owners, we also do a brief stage show each day when we introduce each breed & talk about their role in traditional Ireland.

The highly... unceremonious Native Dogs of Ireland Parade, which precedes the stage each day, shows off the wide variability of Irish dogs in action, from the busy terriers, bounding, bouncing hunting dogs, to the loping, lolly-gagging Wolfhounds.

RAFFLE RAFFLE RAFFLE !!!

Lastly, don't forget to buy your Raffle Tickets at the Fair. The raffle helps subsidize the Fair to keep it free and to keep all the great entertainment coming. Last year's Grand Prize Winner, Allyson Wegwerth won the trip to Ireland. Allyson comments: "The B&B's were gorgeous and ***all the people were so nice!*** Some of my favorite stops were in Cork at the Blarney Castle, Alewee Cave, the Dingle Peninsula, the Cliffs of Moher, the town of Cobh (where the Titanic last stopped), the small town of Bunratty, and the Waterford Crystal!... and the weather was beautiful! We were told the weather was nicer than it was back here in Minnesota." Raffle locations are throughout the Fair and at the entrances. For details, ask at the information booth.



Come by, listen to the music, watch the dancers and even enjoy a pint or two! All the activities and events at the Fair are completely FREE !

New Fair Exhibit Evokes Ireland of the Famine Years



This drawing, commissioned from artist Lynn Maderich, illustrates the Famine Ship exhibit.

A new exhibit in the Pavilion commemorates **The Great Famine and subsequent mass migration of Irish to the US.** The exhibit is a life-size replica of a section of steerage quarters in a real Famine ship, the ‘Dunbrody’.

The Great Famine started in Ireland in 1845 and lasted until 1852. The Famine started with the failure of staple crop, the potato, and was deeply exacerbated by the deep-going failure of the British government, then in possession of Ireland, to respond. Indeed, per gov’t policy Ireland was a net exporter of food during the famine, with food leaving the island under armed guards so that absentee landlords could profit. The famine was a watershed event in the history of Ireland. It led to the death of approximately one million people through starvation and disease. A further million emigrated as a result of the famine, out of a total population of just 6.5 million souls.

A large majority of these starving emigrants came to North America. Most sailed in wretched conditions aboard converted slave and cargo ships. Hundreds were crammed together in dank steerage quarters where there was absolutely no privacy. Food and water were strictly rationed and often became tainted. Disease was rampant with some ships reporting 40% in passenger deaths, such that they became known as Coffin ships. Many of today’s Irish-Americans are descendants of emigrants who survived the 4 to 8 week crossing in steerage.

Those ancestors profoundly changed the landscape of their adopted home. By 1850, the Irish made up a quarter of the population in Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Irish populations became prevalent in some American mining communities and, of course, on the railroads.

Kathi Jones, the bountifully creative force behind several other exhibits in the Pavilion in the cultural area of the Fair (such as the Traditional Wake tableau and the Sacred Well), has created a new exhibit to commemorate this watershed event in Irish and Irish-American history. “This exhibit intends to depict the conditions under which our ancestors showed so much strength and courage in staying alive to build new lives in America” says Kathi.

Visit this life-size replica of a steerage section and imagine it as it would have been, crammed with as many as eight hungry families. Times are posted for brief talks, and for costumed interpreters who will tell their stories. There will be an area of the exhibit where fairgoers can write accounts of family stories handed down about their *own* ancestors coming to America.



In August, Kip's Pub will raise money for **The Legacy Fund**, a group dedicated to deepen Minnesota's Irish community's sense of identity and connection and promote Irish heritage. \$1 will be donated to the fund for each Fish 'n' Chips purchase during the month of August. Stop down to Kips on Wayzata Boulevard in St Louis Park this month, this month and enjoy some authentic Irish cuisine to help a great Minnesota cause! See <http://www.kipspub.com/>