



the freebird

VOLUME I

NOVEMBER 2005

The Freebird is the newsletter of the Irish Fair of 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.

FAIR ACQUIRES VISUAL EMBLEM

By Kathi Jones

Right now, the Fair has nothing physical on the grounds that says it is a celebration of *Irish* culture. In November, the Board approved the purchase of a replica of a traditional Irish high cross, Muiredach's Cross, to place on the grounds each year at the Fair as such a visual beacon.

Muiredach's Cross stands out because it reflects the times in which it was built. For example, one carved panel depicts the arrest of Christ by the Romans on Holy Thursday. As the Romans never invaded Ireland, they were unknown to the natives who would not have related to them as villains. So, to make the arrest of Christ more understandable, the apprehenders in the panel are given long, flowing mustaches: VIKINGS! *Vikings* the Irish understood as consummate villains.

The original 16- foot Muiredach's Cross was erected in the early 900's A.D. at Monasterboice Abbey in County Louth where still stands, visited annually by many pilgrims and tourists. The abbey was founded in the late 5th century and became a prosperous center of



*Original Muiredach's Cross
in County Louth, Ireland*

learning. The abbey's treasures became a lure for repeated Viking raids that carried away valuables and human cargo to be sold as slaves.

As with many High Crosses, it was built for educational purposes, not for decoration. Specifically, the cross was a tool to teach the 3,000 inhabitants living in the area at the time about the Bible through its 62 carvings depicting stories from the Old and New Testament (and to show off the wealth of the person commissioning the cross!). Biblical scenes carved on the crosses became sermons in stone.

Once this cross had been selected, it was pure good fortune to find an artist who just happens to be a vendor of miniature Irish Crosses at Irish Fair, but who also makes the larger crosses. So, our 9- foot, 950 pound replica will be delivered in a few weeks. We plan to erect our cross outside the Pavilion.

There will be a two or three educational talks given at the cross each of the Fair days. And that is the story of our High Cross.

IRISH FAIR STILL ACCEPTING GRANT PROPOSALS

The Fair is still looking for Proposals for grants for initiatives/programs/events from other community organizations and individuals that promote and cultivate Irish Culture, or support new Immigrants communities.

The Fair Board will award this money as grants to nonprofit organizations, individuals and possibly for-profit organizations. Individuals and for-profits organization must partner a non-profit as their fiscal agent.

The Board next meets Jan 10, 2006. They hope to approve several projects by early 2006.

If you have further questions, or would like to receive an application form please feel free to contact Steve Cerkvenik at 651-290-9853 or Steve@GreatNorthernCommunications.com.

Feeling Festive? Kick up Your...TOES with *Some Irish Social Dancing*

Recently I strapped on a pair of my lighter shoes and stepped out to try some **Irish Social Dancing**. I'd tried the stuff a couple times (ONLY!!) at parties and had fun, and was curious to see this facet of living, local Irish culture in action. So I headed over to The Dubliner Pub where fiery-haired, quick-quipping Suin Lowary is *bean an tí* (Irish for "landlady", but it's also used to refer to a woman who organizes a social event such as a ceili.)

Vague notions of shyness were put away in the face of so warm a welcome by the dancers as we lined up for The Haymaker's Jig. No need to come to ceili with a partner—I was quickly matched up with veteran dancer Kathi Jones to be my companion and guide (Thank you! Thank you, Kathi!). Chameleon-like, I quickly adopted an upright posture and neatly turned out toes so as to look like I belonged for at least the *brief moment* before starting, I figured-- and **AWAY WE WENT!**

This rollicking dance, done to syncopated tune in 6/8 time, has some nice patterns that are fiddly enough to be interesting, but aren't too complex for the beginner like me. Suin tells in retrospect me that we did some 'advance and retire', 'two sinking steps', 'right elbow swings', 'ceili spins' and a touch of 'Strip the Willow'.

Geez, the translucent Irish skin does flush up pink a lovely shade with warmth! Over refreshing pints between sets I had a great time chatting with fellow dancers, who came in all sizes, ages, shapes and levels of experience.

Thanks to Paul McCluskey for the following list of where to go in the Twin Cities for Irish Social Dancing. I *highly recommend it* as an invigorating way to, as Suin says, 'widen your social horizons and narrow your hips'.



Wednesday night Irish Ceili Dance Classes

Learn the basic steps, and then join in the dances. All start at 7:00 PM, they run year around, they are open to all ages, and all are free:

Conway Recreation Center - 2090 Conway Street in [Saint Paul](#). This class is held in a park and recreation gym, and is taught by a trio of fine dancers/instructors, Ginny, Becky, and Dan, who will provide plenty of special attention for your particular level of experience.

Dubliner Irish Pub - 2162 University Avenue in [Saint Paul](#). Learn Irish dancing in a genuine Irish Pub with a wooden floor that has known a whole lot of dancing feet. Steps and dances are taught by Suin Lowary, with some dances not commonly done elsewhere. Stay after the regular class and dance to live traditional Irish music at 9:30 provided by the inimitable Tom Dahill and his friends.

Dashen Ethiopian Restaurant & Bar - 2713 East Lake Street in [Minneapolis](#). This is the new spot we've found with a great wooden floor, a very welcoming staff, and it's smoke-free. Steps and dances are taught by the-one-and-only Mike Whelan. The class runs from 7:00 to 9:00, and then dancing continues until 10:00 or so.

Tuesday night Irish set dance classes Set dancing is a particular form of Irish social dancing, done in set of four couples in a square (but you don't have to come in couples! 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, free, September through May, from 7:30 to 9:30.)

The Nickel Joint - 501 Blair Avenue in [Saint Paul](#). The classes are taught by Karen Cieminski.

Monday night Minneapolis Community Education ceili dance class

South High School - 3131 19th Avenue South in [Minneapolis](#). The next class starts on January 23rd. The cost is \$25.00 for a six to eight week class. The time is 7:30 to 9:00. We concentrate on the basic steps and movements in a smaller group, and then learn some of the dances that you can do at the big monthly ceili dances, as well as some of the 4, 6, or 8 person figure dances.

Regular monthly ceili dances

Live music, Each dance is taught by the caller, and there are always plenty of experienced dancers to help newcomers along.

First Saturday Afternoon Ceili - Dubliner Pub, 2162 University Avenue in Saint Paul, from 2:00 to 5:00. This dance is free, but remember to tip the musicians and the bartender. The dances are called by Paul McCluskey.

Third Saturday Night Ceili - Odd Fellows Hall, 2380 Hampden Avenue in Saint Paul, from 7:30 to 10:30. This dance is sponsored by the Loma Mor Irish Dance Club, and costs only \$2.00 per person, and is free to the musicians who join us to provide the tunes. The dances are called by Linda Doran.

KATIE McMAHON'S CELTIC CHRISTMAS TOUR

Katie McMahon, the lead singer from the **Riverdance** show, will be on tour in MN again with her Celtic Christmas show.



Katie, who is well-known for her hauntingly lovely soprano, plays Irish traditional music with a Classical edge. She will be joined again by her talented band (Karen Mueller, Ginna Watson & Michael Bissonnette), singers, and

the Corda Mor Irish dance troupe. Katie's Twin City Performance is:

Saturday, **December 10th**, 2005, 8pm
St. Paul, MN - O'Shaughnessy Auditorium
www.stkate.edu/oshaughnessy

THE FAIR BOARD WELCOMES SARA ARMSTRONG TO THE POSITION OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR.

Sara Armstrong has volunteered to take over the vacant Volunteer Coordinator position. If you don't recognize her by name, you surely will remember her ever-present Irish smile that has graced the front counter at Irish on Grand and the back bar at the Dubliner Pub. Her energy, knowledge of the local Irish community and love of the Fair will serve us well as she tackles the challenges of managing over 300 event volunteers, recruits folks for year-round and all-weekend positions and steps up volunteer activities throughout the year.

As many of you know, the lifeblood of our Irish Fair is the work of the volunteers. Several year-round volunteer positions are open:

- Grassroots Marketing Coordinator
- Market Survey Coordinator
- Parish Outreach Contact (~200 needed)
- Parish Outreach Coordinator
- Sports Coordinator
- Tug of War Competition Coordinator
- Virtual Office Administrator

If one of these sounds intriguing to you, contact Sara at SArmstrong@keystoneservices.org or Steve Cervenik at Info@IrishFair.com for more information.

SOURCES FOR IRISH CHRISTMAS (OR SOLSTICE, CHANUKAH OR KWANZAA, FOR THAT MATTER) GIFTS IN THE TWIN CITIES

Irish on Grand
651-222-5151
www.irishongrand.com

Dublin Walk
Edina
952-925-8753

Irish Indeed!
1-888-547-6673
www.irishindeed.com

Celtic Creative Embroidery
St. Paul
651-488-6840
www.celticcreativeembroidery.com

Terry Flynn Tours (travel)
1-800-678-7848
www.terryflynntours.com

Celtic Journeys (travel)
1-877-361-0518
http://www.celtic-journeys.com/cj_index.html

Irish Books and Media
(800) 229-3505
<http://www.irishbook.com/vIndex.htm>

For a refresher on all our itinerant vendors from the Fair see the marketplace tab on the Irish Fair website:
<http://www.irishfair.com/Vendors.html>



FARE SHARE

Kristen Himsl Hunter writes:

'I was amazed at how much the Fair had to offer this year. I was working for my mother, who was a vendor, but I got a few chances to sneak away and enjoy some activities. It seems to me that someone could spend the entire weekend at the Irish Fair and never do the same thing twice! I have to say that my favorite part was looking out and watching the sheep being herded. They just weaved in and out of the crowds. It was really fun, and it was a good example of how well the Fair was able to integrate all of the different aspects of Irish Culture.'



Kristen comes naturally to her affinity for these beasts as her mother is Fran O'Herron with O'Herron Sweaters, Woolens, and Celtic Goods, a regular in the Fair Marketplace.

From where I stood at the Fair (in the Native Dogs of Ireland Tent) there was in evidence another huddle of avid ovine admirers. Sunday morning saw a flurry of excitement as the shepherdess demonstrating herding with her Border Collie forgot we were there (I guess) and drove the flock through our area. I had 3 dogs up on tables for exhibit myself, still on leads, the Wheaten Terrier dying to herd as her genes demanded and the Irish Water Spaniels *most* eager to mix it up and party with these new friends who looked like fun. Someone held me from going up and over the table, dogs and all, so it made for a good laugh---in distant retrospect!

IRISH FAIR SUMMER SCHOOL BOOK CLUB HOLDS FIRST MEETING

From Club organizer Patrick O'Donnell:

"We launched off last Tuesday with nine participants in a feisty discussion of The Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin. There was a huge enthusiasm for how multi-dimensional any consideration of Irish music is: it is rooted in history, emigration, family history, aesthetics, spirituality & politics."

It's not too late to join the club! Contact Patrick at Patrick.ODonnell@normandale.edu to arrange to get the book & get details *ASAP*. Next meeting: Dec 6th.

IRISH FOLK TRADITIONS COURSE

In the Twin Cities, you can learn more about how the Irish have traditionally approached holidays the year round by signing up for an "Irish Folk Traditions" course, offered through St. Paul Community Education., January 30 through March 6, 7-8 p.m. at Central High. Register with Community Education, class #4543EA. You can get registration forms from the course catalog mailed to all St. Paul residents, by visiting their site at <http://www.commed.spps.org>, or call them at 651-293-8811. (You don't have to live in St. Paul to take their classes or get their catalogue.)

AN GHAELIGE

Courtesy of Gaeltacht Minnesota
<http://www.gaelminn.org/index.htm>

An áit a bhfuil do chroí is ann a thabharfas do chosa thú.

"Your feet will bring you to where your heart is."

**MAY YOU BE WITH THOSE YOU LOVE
OVER THE HOLIDAYS.**

*Until next month,
Best Regards from the*
**IRISH FAIR OF
MINNESOTA**