

Brief History - Amherst Irish Association/Cumann Gaelach Amherst

Established in 2014, we are a community-based initiative formed in the wake of drunken student riots in Amherst around St. Patrick's Day that received national and international media coverage. Our mission is to provide a different set of associations to Ireland and matters Irish in our beautiful town. Members of the association's Core Committee are: Sam Hannigan & Íde B. O'Carroll (Co-Chairs), Tim Goodhind (Treasurer/Web). Other members of the wider organising committee include: Seanachán Ó Cinneide and Amanda Bernhard (An Gaeilge/Irish Language & Lé Chéile, music), Kim McGuire (Members' email), and Annie Rogers (Tea & Scones). Other founding members include - Derek Pyle (Hampshire College Alum), Antonia Moore (UMass, Amherst, Alum), Jim Wald (Town Selectman), Rosemary Caine (Musician/Composer), Anna Mundow (Journalist/Book Reviewer).

Our aim is to host events that explore aspects of Ireland's diaspora experience, language, culture, history and society. At our monthly events, presenters, often from our own community, share their knowledge and perspectives on Irish topics. Membership has grown to 45 in 2017 (\$10 Student, \$25 individual, \$100 Corporate).

Between 2014 and May 2017, we hosted a total of 18 events on topics as diverse as the Anglo-Normans in Ireland; Irish servants in the Dickinson household; Irish ancestry tools; the writings of James Joyce and Lady Wilde; Irish-US migration and being Jewish in Ireland. We advertised in the local news print media (Amherst Bulletin, Gazette, The Advocate) and on local radio (WRSI The River, and WFCR/NPR). On average, about 40 people attended each event.

In our relatively short existence as an association, we have learned some important lessons:

- There is **enormous goodwill within our community** in support of our aim
- **Advertising boosts attendance** at events and promotes a positive message re our association & aim
- Time for **post-presentation conversation/discussion enhances the experience** for all
- We need to **strategically target undergraduates** to ensure their involvement (the reason for an essay competition for the Margaret Maher Award, 2017)

We are gradually establishing a positive public Irish presence in our community, fostering a vibrant sense of Irish community and identity in Amherst and in the Pioneer Valley area, home to over 15 colleges. We measure this change by the extent to which our audiences provide positive feedback on our efforts and support our events, by presenters' willingness to participate on a voluntary basis, by the ongoing commitment of our volunteers, by the diversity of our audiences, and by our growing membership. We were invited and duly attended the Daley & Halligan memorial (Executed 1806. Exonerated 1984, Northampton, MA); the UMass Annual Community Breakfast; Elms College's *Lá na Gaeilge*, and have been asked to co-host a MoonFish Theatre (Galway) performance in October 2017 at the Fine Arts Center, UMass.

Amherst Irish Association/Cumann Gaelach Amherst is run by volunteers, who host events in a beautiful venue, the Unitarian Social Room, in downtown Amherst. After each presentation we facilitate ongoing conversations during our "Tea & Tunes" segment when we provide complementary tea and scones, and our resident musicians, Le Chéile, perform Irish music. Our very existence and sustainability is a positive counterpoint to the negativity of the "Blarney Blowout" drinking spree that targets students in Amherst around St. Patrick's Day each year.

Our local coalition building activities include - partnering with the **Town of Amherst, Select Board, Town Leaders** (re. Town Proclamation, Amherst Irish Day, 2015, 2016, 2017); the **Emily Dickinson Museum** (as a sponsor, Margaret Maher Award 2017 - MM was Irish servant who worked at the homestead for 30 years); **Daley & Halligan Memorial Committee**, Northampton (Judge Mike Ryan and Wm. O'Riordan); **Fine Arts Center, UMass** (co-host of discussion of Irish emigration history following a performance by Moonfish Theatre, Galway in October 2017); Annual Community Breakfast at **UMass, Amherst**; participation in and promotion of **Elms College's, Lá na Gaeilge** etc. In addition, we have established links with **AIA Ambassadors** at each of the following: Hampshire College (Prof. Annie G. Rogers, AIA volunteer and Prof. Jim Wald, AIA advisor/Amherst Town Selectman); Smith College (Prof. Róisín O'Sullivan, AIA member/presenter 2015); Mount Holyoke College (Prof. Amy

Martin, AIA presenter 2015); Elms College & Holyoke Community College (Chip Costello, muinteoir, An Gaeilge); UMass Amherst (Prof. Lee Badgett, AIA presenter 2015, Prof. Patricia O'Gorman, Prof. Leah Wing, AIA presenter 2018); Belchertown High School (Seanachán Ó Cinnéide, AIA Committee, Le Chéile, agus muinteoir, An Gaeilge - Belchertown HS, MA is the only high school in the state currently offering Irish Language to this age group as part of its core curriculum).

We are extremely grateful to our volunteers, our members, our presenters, our musicians, to the Select Board of the Town of Amherst for its support (each year it issues a town proclamation declaring February 1st Irish Day), and in particular to the Irish government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Emigrant Support Program) and the Consulate General of Ireland in Boston for generous grant funding towards our advertising costs in 2016 and 2017.

Event Series, Spring 2015 - Spring 2017 (18 events)
Amherst Irish Association/Cumann Gaelach Amherst
 (www.amherstirish.org, Facebook-Amherst Irish Assn., Twitter @amherstirishMA)

Spring 2015
<i>Feb. 1</i> - Event Series Launch by Kevin Cullen, Boston Globe and UMass Amherst Alum. His topic: <i>Irish Matters, A Journalist's Journey: Evolution of an Irish Pol.</i> Intro. Íde B. O'Carroll, Co-Chair
<i>March 15</i> - Antonia Moore, UMass Amherst Alum descendant of Kerry immigrants. Her topic: <i>From the Blasket Islands to Hungry Hill, Springfield, MA.</i> Intro Sam Hannigan, Co-Chair, AIA
<i>April 19</i> - Derek Pyle, Hampshire College Alum. His topic: <i>Recreating James Joyce's Finnegans Wake: A Global Audio Project - www.waywordsandmeansigns.com</i> Intro **Anna Mundow, Reviewer
<i>May 5</i> - Róisín O'Sullivan, Dept. Economics, Smith College , member of Irish government's Fiscal Council. Her topic: <i>The Irish Economy: Putting an End to the Roller Coaster Ride.</i> Intro by - Breandán Ó Caollaí, Consul General, Boston.
Fall 2015
<i>Sept. 27</i> - Lee Badgett, Prof. Economics, UMass , author <i>When Gay People Get Married</i> (2009). <i>Conversation on a Changed Ireland: Why did Ireland Vote 'Yes' to Marriage Equality in May 2015?</i> w/ Íde B. O'Carroll, AIA, author, <i>Marriage Equality, Ire., Case Study</i> (2010, Atlantic Philanthropies.)
<i>Oct. 25</i> - Amy Martin, Prof. English, Mount Holyoke College. Her topic: <i>Lady Wilde's Famine Poetry and Irish Writing about Global Food Scarcity.</i>
<i>Nov. 11</i> - Rosemary Caine , Composer/Musician and her troupe. <i>The Wilde Irish Women of James Joyce: A Spoken and Musical Narrative.</i>
<i>Dec. 6</i> - Anna Mundow , Reviewer, Barnes & Noble Review. <i>Emily Dickinson's Irish Servants: The Poet and The Maids</i>
Spring 2016
<i>Jan. 31</i> - Jonathan Kennedy and Amanda Bernhard (www.comhralecheile.net), AIA Committee. <i>Learning the Irish Language: An Innovative Online Program.</i>
<i>March 6</i> - Mise Éire - The 1916 Rising, special screening to mark the 100th anniversary of Ireland's Easter Rising. Facilitator: Sam Hannigan, Co-Chair AIA

<i>April 10 - Mark "Harpo" Power, Amherst. The Anglo-Normans: Who Were Those Guys Anyway?</i>
<i>May 1 - Tim Goodhind, Treasurer/Web AIA. Tracing Your Irish Ancestors: A How-To Session</i>
Fall 2016
<i>Sept. 18 - Céilí with music by our resident musicians, Le Chéile.</i>
<i>Oct. 16 - Jonathan Kennedy and Amanda Bernhard (www.comhralecheile.net), AIA Committee. Ceardlann na Gaeilge: Irish Language Workshop</i>
<i>Nov. 13 - Don Gallagher, Storyteller & Singer. Growing Up Irish in Springfield.</i>
Spring 2017
<i>Feb. 5 - Íde B. O'Carroll, Co-Chair AIA and Ireland House, NYU. A Different Story, Now: Irish-US Migration (from forthcoming book, Fall 2017, Cork Uni. Press, <i>Irish Transatlantics, 1980-2015</i>).</i>
<i>March 5 - Rabbi Ben Weiner, Jewish Community of Amherst. Being Jewish in Ireland</i>
<i>April 23 - Cathal Stephens & Dónal O'Sullivan, Joycespring: An Intro to Works of James Joyce</i>
SUMMER 2017
<i>May - August - Inaugural undergraduate essay competition for the Margaret Maher Award. Topic: <i>Considering Ireland - What interests me and why</i></i>

KEY MILESTONES

- **October 21, 2014** friends Íde B. O'Carroll & Sam Hannigan convene a **first meeting** South Amherst attended by Derek Pyle, Jim Wald, Anna Mundow, Pam Tinto and Rosemary Caine.
- **December 2014, Core Committee**, Sam, Íde, Derek and Antonia Moore met weekly to plan the program, flyers, venue etc.
- Derek organized a successful online fundraiser via Indigogo.
- **February 1st, 2015, Launch** - Brigid's Day/Lá le Bríde, Boston Globe columnist, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and UMass Amherst alum, **Kevin Cullen, launches** the Amherst Irish Association and its Event Series. Harpist **Rosie Caine** and dancers **Emma Conrad-Rooney and Delia Mahoney** of Celtic Heels Dance School perform. Tim Goodhind greeted guests while Annie Rogers and Rosie Caine scalded the pot for tea and scones.
- May 21, 2015 - **Consul General of Ireland, Boston, Breandán Ó Caollaí** visits the association to introduce presenter Róisín O'Sullivan, Prof. Economics, Smith College and member Ireland's Fiscal Council.
- June 2015 - Íde represents the Amherst Irish Association at the **first Global Diaspora Civic Forum, Dublin Castle**, meets Minister for Diaspora Affairs, Jimmy Deenihan, TD and President Michael Higgins at Áras an Úachtarán.
- September 2015 - We are awarded a **Mission Grant** from Consul General of Ireland in support of our activities.
- July 2016 - We are awarded a grant from Ireland's Minister Joe McHugh, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, under the **Emigrant Support Program**.
- April 2017 - We've delivered a total of **18 events since our inception**.
- April 2017 - We announce the **Margaret Maher Award**, an essay competition for undergraduates attending the Pioneer Valley colleges.

Íde B. O'Carroll, dd. April 21, 2017