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The Dullahan, the Irish Headless Horseman

by Brian Witt

Many can remember the scene in Washington Irving's "The Headless Horseman" where Ichabod Crane was being chased by the spectre when a jack o' lantern was thrown at him. This tale took place in the Dutch occupied Westchester County area of New York, but the creature was definitely Celtic in origin.

The legends of the headless horseman come out of Ireland. There, known as *gan ceann*, (headless), or *Dullahan*, he would take the soul of those who would be ready for death. He often rode a headless black horse, or if it had a head, had flaming eyes and short-cropped ears that outdistanced its body by six meters or more. He used a human spine as a whip, and would take the eyes of those who stared upon him. He had a head and often carried it or attached it. It is said to look like moldy cheese, or yeasty bread, in both patina and texture. He would also toss it about, in a hideous display of ball control that would bring envy to any G.A.A. footballer. The *dullahan* also possessed supernatural sight. He would hold his severed head aloft, and look across vast expanses of the countryside, even in pitch dark, allowing him to look into houses of the dying.

The *dullahan* wasn't just to be found on a horse. If you were unlucky enough, he might be your coachman to the afterlife, in the death coach. In Irish folklore, it is known as the *Cóiste Bodhar*, the silent coach. Six black horses draw this, and the horses and coach traveled so quickly that the bushes on the roadsides were known to have started on fire. The locks on houses and gates would open by themselves, thus affirming that no one is immune from the headless one. The sight or sound of the coach announced the imminent death of oneself or a family member.

The coach was best known in Sligo, Tyrone, and some other areas of Ulster. And across the sea, in Scotland, the coach was often seen on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, gathering up the souls of the dead. In Ireland, in particular, the death coach is seen as a signifier of the inevitability of death, as the belief goes once it has come to Earth it can never return empty. Thus, once the death of an individual has been decided by a greater power, mortals may do nothing to prevent it. And if you opened your door when the coach

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went by, you would end up with buckets of blood splashed upon your face, or be blinded. If one were lucky, they would carry gold upon their person. The sight of gold would send the *dullahan* away, back to the depths of the darkness it came.

Even for the Irish, and the Celts, this is a starkly dark creature. Where did he come from, this headless one? Some people believe that the *Dullahan* grew out of the ancient Celtic god, Crom Dubh, the dark bent man, a god who asked for human sacrifice. Ironically, he was also the fertility god. He was worshiped in Ireland until the sixth century, when Christianity took a stronger hold on the island, and the practice was stopped. Stopping the sacrifices didn't stop the belief, however. He might be referred to as *far dorrocha*, the dark man, or *Crom Cruach*, the bloody crooked man.

Then there is the question of why was he headless? The ancient Celts believed the soul was in the head, and if a foe was a worthy one, their head would be taken, to add to the warrior's prestige. There was also the belief that if they attached the head to a pole near their habitation, the head would scream when the enemy neared. The Celtic headhunters venerated the image of the severed head as a continuing source of spiritual power.

The *dullahan* made his way into literature, folk tales, and modern entertainment. The Green Knight, in the medieval story of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," who is otherworldly, greenish in color, hostile, determined to take Sir Gawain's life and, after Sir Gawain strikes him, headless. W. B. Yeats mentioned the coach and its driver in his book, "Folk Tales of Ireland". In the movie, "Darby O'Gill and the Little People", the death coach was used to summon the daughter to travel to the afterlife.

Why would Washington Irving use the *dullahan* in his tale? Irving's family came from Scotland, so he would have heard of those tales of Celtic faeries and ghouls. His father, William, came to the colonies from the island of Shapinsay in the Orkney Islands. The character of Rip Van Winkle is very similar to that of a drunken fiddler who stumbled onto the burial mound of Salt Knowe adjacent to the Ring of Brodgar on the island. And although the series of stories that included the Headless Horseman and Rip Van Winkle were based in the Catskills, he admitted that he had not visited the area before he wrote them. The jack o'lantern was also a part of Irish and Scots legends, having been carved for centuries from turnips and gourds.

Each October, the Irish New Year, *Samhain*, brings the end of the Irish fall and the beginning of the Celtic winter. The new year rises from the greyness of the season, and the dead walk with their living relatives, and *pucas* and demon brides, and the *far liaths* all come to visit, look out for the *dullahan*. Or, better yet, look away, and carry a piece of gold. One can never be safe enough.

Happy Halloween, and Happy New Year.

South Central Shamrock Club

October News and Interests

Fall Greetings!

October is a wonderful month to take scenic drives through Wisconsin with the apple orchards along the route filled with healthy treats of maple syrup, apples, honey, squash and of course a taffy apple for good measure.

The October Meeting will be held on Sunday, October 19 at the Voyageur Inn, Reedsburg beginning at 4 p.m.

Our very own, Bill and Pat Wilde will share a portion of their collection of documentaries on Ireland. Topic: Immigrants of Ireland.

Harvest Fest in Reedsburg is Oct. 4.

Blue Heron – Grand Opening is Oct. 9.

October birthday wishes to: Allen Sullivan 10/2, Kate Horkan 10/4, Bill Wilde 10/6, Helen Knuth 10/8, Dana Horkan-Gant 10/30.

A bit of History on Irish Rugby Football Union from the website: [irishrugby.com]:

Rugby is as popular as our Football Season.

IRFU History

Irish Rugby Football Union

Dublin University, founded in 1854, was the first organised Rugby Football Club in Ireland. Students at the University had first learnt the game while at English Public Schools. Other clubs which were formed at the time and are still in existence include, Wanderers founded in 1869; Lansdowne (1873); Dungannon (1873); UCC (1874); Co. Carlow (1873); Ballinasloe (1875); NIFC (1868); Queen's University (1869).

Ballinasloe and Athlone amalgamated in 1994 to form Buccaneers.

From 1874 to 1879 there were two Unions. The Irish Football Union had jurisdiction over Clubs in Leinster, Munster and parts of Ulster; the Northern Football Union of Ireland controlled the Belfast area. When the first International was played against England in February 1875, the teams were twenty a side and the Irish team included 12 players from Leinster and eight from Ulster. The first fifteen a side match was in 1877 and the first Munster players were chosen in 1879.

In 1879 the two Unions agreed to amalgamate on the following terms:

- (i) A Union to be known as the Irish Rugby Football Union was to be formed for the whole country.
- (ii) Branches were to be formed in Leinster, Munster and Ulster.
- (iii) The Union was to be run by a Council of eighteen, made up of six from each province.

The Council was to meet annually. The Council of the Union still meets annually, but the day to day affairs are managed by a Committee comprising a President, two Vice-Presidents, the immediate Past President, the Honorary Treasurer and nineteen members. In 1885, 26 Clubs were affiliated to the Union of which ten were in Ulster, nine in Leinster, seven in Munster. The Connacht Branch was formed in 1886. There are presently 60,000 (approx.) players in total in Ireland. Fifty-six clubs are affiliated to the Ulster Branch; 71 to the Leinster Branch: 59 to the Munster Branch and 19 to the Connacht Branch. In addition there are 246 Schools playing rugby, Ulster (107), Leinster (75), Munster (41) and Connacht (23). There is a National League of 50 Senior Clubs.

The Union owns grounds at Lansdowne Road at which International Rugby and Soccer matches are played. The ground is also home to Wanderers and Lansdowne Rugby clubs. Developments in recent years have added greatly to the seating capacity and the ground now holds approx 50,000. The Union also owns Ravenhill Park in Belfast, Thomond Park in Limerick and a number of grounds in provincial areas that have been rented to Clubs.

There is a Branch of the Union in each Province which is managed by a Committee representative of the Clubs in that province. The function of a branch is to regulate the affairs of its Clubs and Schools and to organise Interprovincial matches, Club competitions and Club matches. The Interprovincial series that is played before Christmas each season provides a useful series of trial matches for the Irish Selectors



Photo of Jan Delmore (South Central Shamrock Member) Ann O'Farrell and her husband John outside of Jan and John's home. Ann O'Farrell is one of our favorite Irish authors. Ann and her husband were at Irish Fest in LaCrosse and rang John that they would be happy to hand deliver the two books (Michael and Norah's Children) he ordered. Talk about Luck of the Irish!! What a wonderful experience to have the author deliver her best works to you. Jan and John contacted many of us to join them in meeting Ann and John but due to timing we were unable to join in the literary experience.

Happy Halloween!

**– Dana Horkan-Gant,
South Central Chairperson**

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Milwaukee President's Message

As a lifelong resident of Wisconsin, it's my duty to remind all of you to get outside this month and absorb the beauty of the autumn colors. The wooded areas abound with reds, yellows, golds and oranges to mark the end of one season and the beginning of another. If you find a ride in the country is out of the question, visit one of our parks and get a wee taste of the sights to see. You have to love the leaves while they're on the trees since they do tend to need raking later, and despite the fresh air and exercise, it's a challenge.

If you were one of the lucky persons who bought tickets to Ireland during Irish Fest, you'll find enough to do there in October for all tastes. In Cork alone there's a Guinness-sponsored jazz festival, a beer festival, a film fest, a gourmet food fest, and many others to find. The euro has been stronger than the dollar, and the prices may be steep for food, etc., but the experience is priceless just to be there.

The end of October marks the end of the Celtic calendar, and we have Halloween here. Remind your friends the jack-o-lantern originated in Ireland, and if you delve into Halloween facts, the Irish immigrants used pumpkins in America for carving, and not the turnips they used in Ireland. If the trick or treaters come to your door, they probably have no idea where this all comes from, and would have to Google the history anyway. The celebration of *Samhain* was a three day affair marking the harvest and the end of summer. Halloween is second only to Christmas in America in the purchasing of decorations for the home. Remember, our ancestors can take credit or blame for all this depending on your point of view.

The Shamrock Club was proud to host the Halfway to St. Patrick's Day mass at the ICHC. The board had decided to provide all of you with an opportunity to be in attendance and not worry about getting to the parade, or to volunteer somewhere. It also reflects our decision to enhance St. Patrick with a religious event, and pay respect to our roots. Kris Pluskota was gracious in arranging the traditional breakfast and a continental breakfast. Many people had said they would like to attend the mass, breakfast, and then enjoy the company of friends for a time. Bob and Paula Harrold provided the mass with the kind of sacred music and song we all love to hear. Thanks to Betty Mikush for taking charge of the Eucharistic Ministers, Bob Towne for taking charge of the ushers, and all the volunteers that helped serve the breakfast and then clean up afterwards. The ICHC has been cleaned, polished, and painted, and looks great, as the meeting place of our club, take pride in the building and help keep up the new look. Please let me know if you would like the mass to be continued in the future. I believe it's a fitting tribute and hopefully a new tradition.

The committee working on the 50th anniversary activities continues to meet and we have a new ad hoc committee headed by Vicki Byrne to bring children into the parade in a new and exciting way.

Let us know if you would like to be on a committee, or volunteer in the various events.

On a special note, my great thanks and appreciation to the Glencastle parents and adult dancers for their donation to the club of \$1,000. The money has been set aside to assist in building a nice float for the 50th anniversary. This kind and generous donation was made in the name of Thomas J. Smith, and was a wonderful surprise to me and my family.

So, you will be at the next meeting won't you?

– Julie Smith, President

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AN LEABHAR MÓR: The Great Book of Gaelic Coming to UW-Milwaukee October-December

by Nancy Madden Walczyk

The Center for Celtic Studies at UW-Milwaukee will host the only American exhibition of the Great Book of Gaelic, a traveling art show billed as a 21st century illuminated manuscript. Make plans now to join us in October for the exhibit openings and for other special events related to this exhibit, which is a collaboration among poets, scholars, artists, and calligraphers and is sponsored by arts and government agencies in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. See our website at [www.uwm.edu/Dept/celtic] for the latest information on exhibit times, dates and places, or call Nancy Walczyk at (414) 229-3302, e-mail [nwalczyk@uwm.edu].

What Is the Great Book of Gaelic?

The *Leabhar Mór* ["leabhar" rhymes with "hour" and "mór sounds like "more"] or Great Book exhibit consists of 100 original art works created to celebrate the 1500 year-old unbroken tradition of Gaelic poetry. The Gaelic language has the oldest written literature in Western Europe, predating Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and French works, and remains a living literary tradition to this day. From a little poem scratched in the margin of a manuscript by a 7th century Irish monk to a lament by a Scottish lass whose lover was killed at the Battle of Culloden in 1745 to a poignant contemporary farewell by an emigrant to the land he is leaving, these poems offer an insight into a culture that still extends from Ireland to the Highlands and the Islands of Scotland.

What Is the Art Exhibit About?

This project began in the late 1990s when poets and scholars worked collaboratively to select 100 poems in Irish and Scots Gaelic that best represent the tradition. The chosen poems were then given to teams of many artists and calligraphers, who created a work of art based upon each poem. Each artwork contains the

poem written by a calligrapher in Gaelic that is integrated into the artist's image. Many media were used by the artists: painting, drawings, embroidery, tapestry, and photography are all used to interpret the poems. There is a note accompanying each piece with the English translation and information about the poem's date and author. Each artwork is the same size, so that when the exhibit finishes touring, the art will be unframed and bound in one large volume as a modern illuminated manuscript. This will be the only opportunity to see the individual art works in the United States before they are bound.

Why Is This Exhibit Significant to Irish Culture?

Politically, as part of the movement for using art and literature in the Peace and Reconciliation process in Northern Ireland, this exhibit reminds the viewer that the shared language and literature traditions of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Scotland go back to the earliest writing to come from the Celtic Isles. Historically, the common elements of these societies sometimes have been overshadowed by deliberately provoked social, religious, and political divisiveness. However, there has been a movement in the last 40 years among Gaelic speakers to recognize their common and ancient heritage. One key sponsor of the exhibit is Iomairt Cholm Cille, a foundation that supports work that explores the common culture of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Scotland.

The poetry featured in the exhibit focuses on the common culture, themes, and a shared language, and by noting the work by contemporary poets in all three regions in the Gaelic language, it shows both the historic depths of those traditions and that those shared traditions continue today. Love poems to wives, husbands, and sweethearts; battle cries, nature poetry, laments for the fallen Gaelic heroes and chieftains, bawdy songs?these themes run throughout the collection.

Why Is This Project Called "A Modern Illuminated Manuscript"?

The great early illuminated manuscripts of the Celtic Christian church?the Books of Durrow, Lindisfarne, and Kells? were copies of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were written, in Latin, from the 7th to 9th centuries and were communally produced in monastic scriptoria by calligraphers and illuminators. They form an important part of the shared religious history of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. The Great Book is a continuation of that magnificent artistic tradition.

You can get more information about the book, its art, and its poetry from the website sponsored by Proiseact Nan Ealan, the Gaelic Arts Agency, at [www.leabharmor.com]. But to really appreciate the art, you need to see the originals!

The Center for Celtic Studies thanks the Irish Fest Foundation for its generous grant to support bringing this exhibit to Milwaukee. We also thank the Irish government for its continued support for our programs in the Gaelic language.

EVENTS

Please check our web site to confirm details:

• **Wednesday, October 8:**

Lecture on An Leabhar Mór as part of the Wisconsin Book Festival. 8 p.m. UWM Golda Meir Library. 4th floor Conference Center, 2311 East Hartford Avenue.

• **Friday, October 17:**

Catered reception 5-6 p.m. Lecture on the Great Book at 6 p.m. in UWM Golda Meir Library. 4th floor Conference Center, 2311 East Hartford Avenue. Followed by tours of the galleries.

• **Saturday, October 18:**

Discussion of the Gaelic tradition behind the poems. UWM Golda Meir Library, 4th floor Conference Center. More information will be posted on the Celtic Studies website.

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Color Guard News and Notes

New Orleans was a blast. It was a good place to celebrate a birthday. Now we are back. Just in time for the Halloween decorations and, shudder, the Christmas decorations in all the stores.

October is here, and the fall season means we are wrapping up the year. We will be doing the AOH William Drew Scholarship Mass of Remembrance on October 4 at St. Rose of Lima Church. October 17-19, we will be marching at the Sister Bay Fall Festival in Door County.

We can always use more pipers and drummers, as well as more people to carry our banners. Look for our ad in *Reflections*. College has taken away a number of younger people, so if you know someone who may want to be a part of the group, contact us.

Until November, and after Halloween, my lovelies,

– Noel Tylla, 5th year piper

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Milwaukee Celtic Soccer

The Milwaukee Celtic Soccer Club recently started its fall season. Home games will be played at Uihlein Field on West Good Hope Road. Here is the upcoming remainder of the Celtic's season.

- Oct. 5 – vs. MSC @ Milwaukee Sports Club Field
- Oct. 12 – vs. SA Palermo; Uihlein
- Oct. 19 – vs. Serbians @ Milwaukee Seriban Field
- Oct. 26 – vs. Club Latino; Uihlein

There may be a makeup game, due to the league cancelling the first games of the season.

The Celtics are proud to be playing in the Shamrock Club colors, and are proud to be Shamrock Club members.

We may have a jersey sale in the fall, after the season, if we get enough interest from people. Stay tuned for more details.

– **Mike Simons**

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Celtic Women

The Celtic Women First Friday Lecture Series is held at UWM Greene Hall, 3347 N. Downer Ave. It is wheel-chair accessible. Plenty of street parking at the front door. The public is invited as always. We offer tea and cookies and promise a delightful couple of hours. 5:30 – 7 p.m. with \$7 admission.

October 3, 2008

Topic: “Solas Bhríde”

Speaker: Patsy Grimes Tierney

Also: “Conference Pre-view” Jean Bills

Solas Bhríde (Light of Brigid) is a small Christian centre in Kildare town, County Kildare, Ireland which has as its focus St. Brigid and Celtic Spirituality. Here in Milwaukee a small group of women meet and study about St. Brigid. A representative from Solas Bhríde will speak at the Conference of Celtic Women in a few days. Hear more about the conference from Jean.

– **Jean Bills**

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50th Anniversary Committee

The 50th anniversary committee is looking for ideas for the Shamrock Club’s celebration. If you have any suggestions, or would wish to join the committee, please contact Josh Walton at [joshwalton1@yahoo.com].

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Holiday Folk Fair

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: EARLY AND LATE SHIFTS

The Holiday Folk Fair is open during the following times:

Friday, Nov. 21 – 3–11 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 22 – 10 a.m. – 10 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 23 – 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.

We will need volunteers for the annual Holiday Folk Fair in November. Please offer to help at our Sales, Food, or Cultural booths. If you would like to work a four hour shift at the Holiday Folk Fair, please contact the Shamrock Club's Holiday Folk Fair Chairmen, (Food) Mary Culver at [redheadgardener@hotmail.com]; (Sales) Noreen Barclay at (262) 695-8563, [nabarclay@earthlink.net]; or (Cultural) Heather Majusiak, [aengusiwmommy @ yahoo.com], [heather@kiltedheather.com]. The 2008 Holiday Folk Fair will take place at State Fair Park, 8100 W. Greenfield Ave., in West Allis, Wisconsin.

The Shamrock Club must sell 125 Holiday Folk Fair Tickets

Any unsold tickets must be purchased by the club at full value.

HELP US MEET OUR GOAL!

If you are a teacher, please contact us on advance tickets.

SAVE NOW ON ADVANCE SALE FOLK FAIR TICKETS

Please send me _____ advance sale Holiday Folk Fair Tickets at \$8 each.

Name : _____

Address : _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Make your ticket request to:

MURIEL CROWLEY

1020 Georges Ave.

Brookfield, WI 53045

Your tickets will be sent to you by return mail and are good on any of the three days of Folk Fair: November 21, 22, 23.

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

SHAMROCK CLUB OF WISCONSIN

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Milwaukee Hurling

With the combination of the weather, the Shamrock Club Picnic and two very entertaining playoff matches, Sunday, August 10 turned out to be one heck of an afternoon! First, a great big thank you goes out to the Shamrock Club, who welcomed the Milwaukee Hurling Club to their annual picnic once again, this year

held at Brown Deer Park, coinciding with the matches. Thank you to each and every one of you and the group as a whole. Your support and friendliness are so very much appreciated.

In a thrilling match that took place on the picture perfect afternoon of August 24 at Brown Deer Park, the Wolski's Falcons took home their first MHC Championship with a rousing 4-6 (18) to 2-5 (11) victory over Packy's Dublin Blues. The score was tight at halftime, but Wolski's was able to put a bit of space between the two teams with a couple of timely points in the second half.

The Milwaukee Hurling Club Hurler's Ball was held on Friday, September 5 at the Milwaukee Plaza Hotel. Awards were given out, and it was well attended.

At the North American County Board Finals, the MHC did very well. For the second year in a row, the Junior B team took the championship, with a victory over the Washington, DC Gaels. The Junior C team came in second, but it was a strong showing and they lost to a very good Indianapolis team. Congratulations to both Milwaukee teams and all their supporters who traveled to Boston for the weekend. And a hearty "cheers" to all the teams and individuals who continue to make the NAGAA the organization it is.

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Sunshine Club

Pat Sadowski was recently admitted to a nursing home. Contact information can be obtained at the ICHC.

Mary Hippler and Bob Harrold both recently underwent chemotherapy treatment.

If you have any information about members, please contact me, Joe Donovan, (414) 259-8040.

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Members Doings

Veronica Ceszynski announces that her daughter, Jennie, will marry Carl Dentice in October. Jennie (McGrath) is a member of the Shamrock Club, a Glencastle Dancer, and Poster Coordinator for Irish Fest.

Bill Sherry was recently inducted into the Royal Order of Scotland at a ceremony in Indianapolis.

Will Conroy recently placed 7 of 13 in the solo piping competition at the Wisconsin Highland Games.

Noel Tylla celebrated her 40th birthday in New Orleans.

Wedding bells rang for Richie De Lao and Casey Gutkowski.

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