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THE
Defender Picks

MERCEDI
 (NOV5)

November 6th

My Body Sings Electric
 The Beatnik, 8p.m.
Loveable indie misfits
with opener consider me
dead

Neon Hitch
 The Parish @ House of
 Blues
Bold, free, and...neon.
Join the movement.

Dinky Tao Poetry
 Neutral Ground
 Coffeehouse, 8p.m.
Jacob Dilson hosts poetic
renderings by local
scribes

Walter "Wolfman"
Washington & the
Roadmasters
 d.b.a., 10p.m.
Fiery blues on
Frenchmen every week

7Seconds
 Siberia, 9p.m.
Hardcore Punk legends
 (\$15)

Frank
 Indywood, 9p.m.
Comedy about a young
wannabe musician who
joins a band of
eccentrics

Phantom of the Opera
 The Saenger Theatre,
 7:30p.m.
Starts today and plays
thru Nov 16

NOLA

COUNTY ORLEANS

Weekend Events Remember the Irish Famine

by Jason Raymond

The New Orleans International Irish Famine Commemoration begins Thursday (11.06) and continues through the weekend. The event celebrates the local Irish community and recalls the mid-Nineteenth century European tragedy. Commemoration Board member Joni Muggivan says, "We're really focusing on Irish culture, and we're having an Irish dance competition, we're having Gaelic football matches, we're having an Irish Famine exhibit, we're having genealogy seminars, and Celtic canines."

The government of the Republic of Ireland has been selecting sites to commemorate the Famine since 2009. This weekend marks the first time New Orleans has made the cut. For the New Orleans chapter of the Irish Network, begun just in 2011, the event represents "a big deal" in the words of Treasurer Rich Graham. "People from all over the country will come. We've got international entertainment. Black 47 will be there. The U.S. Ambassador to Ireland and the Irish Ambassador to the U.S. will be there. It's going to be a big deal."

Irish dance school owner Joni Muggivan says, "We have buttons as our admission tickets... Those buttons are handmade by the Irish festival staff, and we're working with local businesses in this city so if you get a button you'll also get discounts around the city from all these Irish organizations." The organizations include many of the city's Irish bars as well as Muggivan's school.

Tulane Professor Dr. Laura Kelley, author of the book *The Irish in New Orleans*, says Irish immigrants came to New Orleans from the city's founding on. Often the immigrants came through France and Spain, traditional enemies of Protestant Great Britain. Kelley says an Irish community was well-established when beginning in 1845 the potato blight (a fungus that came from America) wiped out their primary food crop. "So when the Famine immigrants start to arrive after 1845, there is a community here... and we got a huge influx because New Orleans was the second largest port in America. People forget about that."

At the time of the Famine began, Dr. Kelley says Ireland had about 8.5 million people. Years of death and immigration cut that number to four million by 1910. Ireland still has yet to recapture that population level, currently having six million people. "The ripple effect of the famine wasn't just what happened in the first four, five or even ten years from 1845 to



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1855,” concludes Dr. Kelley, “but was felt to this day.” She points out that Ireland still had plenty of food, but it was kept for the wealthy or exported.

For about 80% of the Irish, the potato was a daily part of their diets. The amount consumed astounds. “You’d be eating 14 pounds of potatoes per day,” insists Dr. Kelley. “It’s been researched and documented, and they don’t make alcohol out of it, and yes, that’s how many they ate.” Mixed with milk, that diet was nutritious and fueled a century-long population spurt. Irish immigration to New Orleans stayed heavy until the Civil War when the Union blockade redirected them to New York and Boston.

Dr. Kelley sits on the boards of both the Irish Famine Commemoration and Irish Network. She says this weekend not only honors Famine immigrants and recognizes their hardships, but pays tribute to the lasting community they created here. “It’s a phenomenal thing when you consider the hardships these famine immigrants went through coming to New Orleans.” That includes building many of the churches and parochial schools still in existence today. “It’s a tremendous amount of drive. It’s a sense of community that they created,” notes Kelley.

Part of honoring that tradition includes events that help community organizations. “Commemorating the Irish Famine, it only made sense to have a non-profit that was dedicated to hunger in New Orleans,” observes Joni Muggivan. “Lace Curtain Night” benefits the Lantern Light Ministry Rebuild Center. Muggivan says, “Sister Vera who heads the non-profit is from Ireland and has been in New Orleans for about 35 years.” Raising funds for the Red Cross, “Footsteps to Fight Famine” Muggivan describes as “a walk that we’re doing from The Irish House to the Kingsley House.” Ending at Kingsley House has meaning for Muggivan, “The first community that it served was the Irish community, so it’s like the perfect place for the festival because it is in the center of the Irish Channel but also The Kingsley House did have such an impact on those that came over at that time.”

People interested in the history of Ireland and Irish immigrants can attend a Tulane symposium held at the St. Alphonsus Art and Cultural Center. Dr. Kelley says of the topics that will be discussed, “I wanted that combination of ‘Yes, we’re going to look at Ireland’ but let’s look at Irish New Orleans too. Let’s look at the Irish down here. So that balance between those two places.” The talks are free and open to the public on Friday.

Part of that balance involved Kelley writing *The Irish in New Orleans*. Kelley describes her book as ten years in the making and one year in production. “I realized being one of the organizers of this International Irish Famine Commemoration that we needed to have a book on hand for visitors,” she says. Beginning on the second at Finn McCool’s Irish Pub and the fifth at The Irish House, she’s doing a series of book signings. “I wanted to have these sort of separate stand-alone chapters so if you were interested in Irish dance, you could pick up and read that chapter. If you were interested in the politics, you could take up and just read that chapter. It’s visually a beautiful book. The photographs - most of which were done by Carrie Lee Pierson Schwartz - capture that vibrancy of the community here.”

Saturday will be “Irish Fest” at Kingsley House with music, food, traditional Irish dancing and music, and even Gaelic football. Joni Muggivan, a championship Irish dancer will oversee a casual dress dance competition. There’s also Celtic canines, where Dr. Kelley hopes to see an “Irish Wolfhound or too”. She says, “This is something that we actually would like to make an annual affair.”



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On Saturday night a black-tie gala occurs at Gallier Hall. Dr Kelley says, "We're having the Irish band called Black 47, which is a direct reference to the Famine. They will be playing at it and this will be one of their very last gigs, as they are breaking up the week afterwards." Tara O'Grady, who combines traditional Irish ballads with New Orleans style music, will perform too.

Once the weekend ends, spiritual sons and daughters of Eire will have future activities through the Irish Network. Treasurer Rich Graham says, "Adrian D'Arcy, our President, was instrumental in starting it here. He's as active as any chapter President in the nation." The New Orleans chapter of the Irish Network not only brings Irish culture into New Orleans, but also sends New Orleans culture into Ireland. Graham says, "Every year we send four to six kids over there for a scholarship program. They get a year over in Ireland that we pay for from all the proceeds of all the charitable activities, including the [Irish] Film Fest. We have an Irish Family Day. We support all the other Irish activities throughout the city with the Ancient Order of Hibernians, with the Irish Channel. It's a close circle at the top with people who discuss things of what to do."

To learn more about the International Irish Famine Commemoration in New Orleans, please visit the [website](#). To know more about The Irish Network, New Orleans Chapter, visit: <http://www.irishnetworkneworleans.org>. For a listing of Dr. Laura Kelley's book signings for The Irish in New Orleans, see: <http://www.ulpres.org/pages/Events.php>.

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Published Daily by

Mincel Media, Inc.

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