

## THE GAELIC SOCIETIES OF NEW YORK

New York can be justly proud of many accomplishments and contributions to the world, but one, so little known and recognized by its citizens in general played a significant part in the struggle for independence of a nation with traditions and heritage many times more ancient than its own. This event was the conception and founding of the Gaelic societies of New York in 1878.

Here in New York, benefiting from a very pleasant mixture of the spirit of American freedom and the tenacity and strength of Irish blood, a dream was conceived to plant a garden in America of Irish culture. Seeds from this garden were gathered by a visitor in New York from Ireland, Dr. Douglas Hyde, and brought back to the green fields of Erin and planted wild among the many flowers of freedom already flourishing there. In 1893, largely due to the efforts of Douglas Hyde, the Gaelic League was founded in Ireland.

To my knowledge no work of an historical nature has yet been written about these Gaelic Societies of New York. What to many may be a great surprise is the fact that five such organizations still exist in this city today. A detailed description of the history, present activity and future hopes of these organizations is overdue. It is with the desire to assist in the beginning of such an endeavor that I have gathered with the assistance of members of these five societies the following few pertinent facts.

The five present organizations are the New York Gaelic Society, (Cumann Na Gaedhilge Nua Eabhraich), located at St. Paul The Apostle School Hall, 124 W60 st. New York, N.Y.; The New York Philo-Celtic Society, Inc., (Cumann Carad na Gaedhilge) 31-74 43rd st., Long Island City; The Bronx Gaelic League, (Connradh Na Gaedhilge) Vasa Hall, 120 E.149 st., Bronx, New York; St. Brendan Gaelic Society, (Cumann Breannan), 111 Willoughby Street, Brooklyn 1, N.Y. and An Fainne-New York Branch, (An Fainne - Gasra Nua Eabhraich), which has no permanent address.

The five societies participate in a Council made of delegates from each society which is called The Council of Gaelic Societies (Comairle na gCumann Gaelilge). A certain degree of standardization has been established in Gaelic Society Activities. Each of the societies, with the exception of An Fainne, meet every Friday to conduct classes in the Irish language and Irish dancing. On a rotating basis each society has reserved a Saturday night of the month on which it holds a ceili, which means merely, "a gathering". The Irish dancing learned and practiced on Friday evenings, however, is the main feature of the ceili. Other programs are held during the year by the various societies, such as lectures, motion pictures or slide projection programs, Dinner-Ceili's, Communion Breakfasts, Drama Presentations, Visits to Hospitals, and until recently Concerts were held. At the end of the season (May usually) the five societies participate in and organize an outdoor gathering of a competitive nature, the Aeriocht. Here the skills and knowledge acquired in all aspects of Irish or Gaelic culture are exercised in friendly competition with others. Many non-member groups and individuals are invited to and do join in these competitions.

Of the five societies the two oldest are the New York Gaelic Society and The New York Philo-Celtic Society which both give their founding date as 1878. The next in order of age is An Fainne which was founded in New York in 1924 by Sean McGarry on the model of the organization of the same name founded in Ireland in 1917.

\* For information concerning the meetings and activities of this society contact its President, Rory O'Flaherty, 1951 Hunt Ave. Bronx, N.Y.

\*\*Information supplied by Joseph Davitt, 384 St. John's Pl., Bkln, N.Y. who has informed me that Sean McGarvey is living presently 222 Lincoln Av. Mineola, L.I.