



John Foley, President of IGHMF
Welcomed by Lá Gaeilge Day Group at the
Gaelic-American Club October 1st

Dia dhaoibh go léir. Go raibh maith agaibh go léir as fáilte a chur romham anseo inniú.



Originally my associate, Amy O'Shea was scheduled to speak here today, but she had a family emergency, so she asked me to step in. Amy is a local and Vice President of Ireland's Great Hunger Museum of Fairfield. Now, it's one thing to have an Irish American speak in an Irish language event, and quite another, to have a Kerryman speak. One may not be expected to speak in the native tongue, the other might get a kick in the arse if he didn't try! So here I am today before you, and I'm sure the shadow of my old Irish teacher is looming with the rye smile, and an auld Sally Rod ready for my knuckles.

Sin a bhfuil.

Cúpla blianta ó shin chuaigh mé abhaile go Chiarraí le mo bheirt iníonacha, thug siad faoi dheara laithreach athrú i mo bhealach mar a dhéanann siad i gconaí. D'fhiafraigh duine amháin acu, "A dhaid, cad é an rud is fear faoi bheith sa bhaile?" Shíl me ar feadh tamaillín, agus d'fheager mé, "An rud is fear ná is feidir liom mo teanga a ligean saor in aisce! Ní gá dom moillliú chun go dtuigfí mé!"

Anois, as bearla.

A few years ago, I went home to Kerry with my two daughters, and they noticed immediately the change in my demeanor, as they always do. One of them asked me, "Dad, what's the best thing about being home?" I thought for a while, and I answered, the best thing is that I can let my tongue go free, and I do not have to slow down to be understood!

Now I may have been talking about my accent, because Irish was not widely spoken in my part of Kerry, but the sentiment is the same. There is something comforting about the way we speak, and the way we are understood. The familiarity of spoken and unspoken understanding. This is what the Irish language touches within you when spoken, it touches something ancient in your soul.

Thankfully, the Irish language is experiencing a renaissance thanks in no small part to people like you, who work hard to keep it alive.

Studies have shown that world languages are dying every day. There are many theories as to why this is the case. Globalization is the easy answer, but I disagree. In order for language, just like any other tradition to survive, it must be passed on from one generation to the next. It takes work, it takes sacrifice. You must want it, in order to instill it in the next generation.

This is the reason why organizations like the Gaelic American Club have not only survived, but thrived over the past 75 years. Each generation has worked to ensure that these traditions are passed on. But there is a warning here also. it's easy to get complacent, it's easy to just go on autopilot when things are going well. It's easy to relax and assume it will just carry on and

go from strength to strength. That's not how it works. If you do not continue to get involved, if you do not continue to educate, you will look around someday, and there won't be a next generation to continue the tradition.

This is why initiatives like building the Great Hunger Museum in Fairfield, dedicated to the telling of our story, is vital. The museum will work with the local schools and universities to provide education through art. We will teach all who come through our doors why they are connected to Ireland and by default why they need to be connected to organizations like yours and the Gaelic American Club.

What we are doing is not easy, but that does not mean impossible. Like parents passing the traditions down to their children it's our responsibility to pass our traditions to the next generation.

“Chun ár dtodhchail a chinntiú, ar dtús ní mór dúinn omós a thabhairt dár stair.:

“In order to secure our future, we must first honor our past.”

This is why we must support initiatives like the great hunger museum in Fairfield. The enthusiasm of the current exhibit proves it will be welcome here in Fairfield. I know we have many challenges in our mission to bring the collection here, but we've also come a long way so far, and we are determined to succeed.

We are growing and garnering support from more who are passionate about our history. We continue to add experts to our committees, with backgrounds in museums, education, fundraising, public relations, and more. This is not just a group of random people. These are well-strange professionals, looking to create something special.

Our vision is simple, Quinnipiac will not reopen in Hamden, and no amount of outside force will change their minds. But there are some who continue to push this narrative. To what end? Their continued agitation is now becoming the greatest danger to the collection. Quinnipiac is at the table and they are listening. The path to saving the collection has been cleared. It's story can be told. So what if the story is told in a new location? The Irish reinvented themselves in new surroundings in America, let the collection do the same right here in Fairfield. Yes, it will take time, but it will take longer without all of your support! A special message to the local Irish media, you have the power to make this project easy, please be mindful of this.

I've seen the power of this collection these past few weeks. I've seen how it moves people, and this is only a fraction of what's to come. I want you all to be a part of the story.

A dhaoine úisle, ar son ár sínsir a fuair bháis, agus mé féin mar shliocht marthóir, táim ag lorg aontacht. Tá obair le déanamh againn.

My friends, on behalf of ancestors, who perished, and as a descendant of the survivors, I again called for unity. We have work to do!

Go raibh míle maith agaibh!

John Foley
President, IGHMF