



Our readers write

Mountains full of history

Again this year, Catherine Graham has sent to the Free Press a contribution for St. Patrick's Day.

by Catherine Graham
Mourne where I was born was famous for its blue granite taken from the Mourne mountains. You cannot walk far in the Mourne, without encountering some of these hard-working, skillful tradesmen. They are usually placid and unhurried men, as working with stone takes great patience. Every Mourne man had in him something of the fisherman, farmer, and stoneman. Before their forebears could till the soil, they had to clear the ground of the countless boulders that impeded the spade and the plough. The unique stone dishes are a splendid memorial to their industry and skill. In olden days much of the stonework was in fashioning square sets for city streets. (those were the horse and buggy days) and making kerbing. A football farmer would in the good weather ascend the slopes, with some of his sons to do this work. Thus most of the Mourne boys grew up with the hammer and chisel in their hands. In those days it was piece work; today like all other industries an hourly wage is paid. This craft was handed down from one generation to another as a rule in the same families, amongst these people, can still be found the

names, Smith, Burden, Higgins, McCartan, Trainor, Pughs, McDowell, McConnell and Heaney. The same can be said of the merchants that employed them, here you find the names, Linton, Gordon, Robinson, and Hamilton.

In pre-war days many Mourne men put their skill with granite to good use in the Eastern part of the U.S.A., cutting kerb for city streets.

In talking about granite, one must not forget about the beautiful headstones (tombstones) that were found all over in the cemeteries there. I was admiring some of them in our local cemetery on my last visit. They are not going in for these elaborate tombstones anymore. They are too costly these days. I will close with a few lines from Percy French's poem The Mountains of Mourne.

O Mary, this London is a wonderful sight
Where people are digging both day and night.
They don't grow potatoes or barley or wheat,
But there is gangs of them digging for gold on the street.
At least when I asked them that's what I was told,
So I just took a hunt in the digging for gold.
But all I found there, I might as well be,
Where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea.

A St. Patrick's Day memory

by Jean Whiting
I had a new boyfriend that I was eager to impress. He was going to take me out on the evening of Saint Patrick's Day, to a club in downtown London, England. Being very young, I had no idea what to wear but I wanted to look chic and feminine. I had purchased a new spring outfit which included the most glamorous hat that I'd ever seen—full blown pink roses and violets—enormous—I just loved that hat!
When my "date" called for me that evening, his face grimaced as he met the hat. Instead of diplomatically telling me that I was far too overdressed for where we were going, he managed to aggravate the "Libber" in me by saying that he'd never take me out in a hat like that!
Well that did it! I was determined to wear the hat now. I told him that it was either me and the hat or neither—over. After a little thought, he begrudgingly decided to take me and hat out, but to teach me a lesson, before we went to the club, he stopped off at a very questionable pub in Hammersmith, London for a quick drink (and a quick smirk—so he thought!) The pub was full of celebrating Irishmen. It was a real "shady" place and even had sawdust on the floors.
I "rose" to the challenge and majestically

took myself over to the bar to buy our drinks. The whole pub stared at me! Everything went quiet! They even stopped playing their darts game to look at the walking flower garden!

One Irishman that was sitting close to me, eventually came and sat right next to me openly staring at my hat. Hoping that my embarrassment wouldn't show—I gave him my most beaming smile.

By this time my date had come to rescue me and sat down beside me putting our drinks on the table and staring back at the Irishman.

The man tilted back his cap off his forehead to get a better look and said in the most beautiful Irish accent "sure now—if yer don't radiate spring and sunshine into this dreadful place—and yer smile is brighter than the roses on yer lovely hat! Yer've made my day and I'd be obliged if yer'd let me buy you and yer man a drink."

I could have hugged him! We accepted the drink and a game of darts. The hat had to come off for the dart game as I couldn't see the dartboard for the rose leaves!

Incidentally I married that "date" and I still have him but the hat vanished mysteriously many years ago. But I still have that memory of my favourite hat and my best St. Patrick's Day.

Love, legends and laughter

Ireland
Is a land of love, legends and laughter
by Helen Steiner Rice
There are many, many legends
About St. Patrick's Day,
About the Shamrock and the Blarney.
And the leprechauns at play.

And that most delightful story
That God blessed the Emerald Isle
With the beauty of his goodness
And the sunshine of His smile.

And how a dear beloved saint
Taught the Irish about God.
Just by showing them a shamrock
That was grown on Erin's sod.

He told them of the Trinity
The living three in one.

The Holy Ghost, the Father,
And His beloved Son.

And all these lovely legends
Of a well-loved Irish race
Has given every Irish man
A very special place.

Not only just in history
But in everybody's heart.
For of this old world laughter
The dearest-finest part.

Is made of "Smiling Irish eyes"
And mirth-filled Irish jokes
Oh, what a dull world this would be
Without God's Irish folks!

Elizabeth O'Rourke
Rockwood

Cheers and think green

Box 125, Tara,
Mar. 6, 1978.

Acton Free Press,
Dear Editor:

With March 17th rapidly approaching and women's lib seeming to have been relegated somewhat to the background, perhaps some of my childhood memories regarding Ireland may be of interest.

I will never forget the remarkable courage of my mother and father who left Northern Ireland, and landed at Halifax on May 14, 1924. They left behind friends and relatives after, I am sure, much soul-searching. I was only three years old, my older sister, six and brother only 14 months old. I could add, too, we didn't travel first-class either, but what a wonderful and marvelous gift our parents gave us! A new and beautiful country where there would be opportunity for all who wanted to work, no class distinction or religious prejudices.

Only a person who has lived in that kind of environment can really and truly appreciate what we have here. When we were old enough to ask Dad why he left Ireland his answer was "My mother and I wanted you kids to have the chance we never would have." Of course it was a long time before I really could appreciate his statement. He and Mum never lost their love for Ireland, and often regaled us with stories of ghosts, banshees, Irish wakes and that wonderful world of the leprechauns. But, he always emphasized that Canada was our country. Our little sister was born here and we used to tease her about that. Yet, one of the happiest days of my life came last June 10th, 1977, when my husband and I received our Canadian citizenship certificates.

Many of the so-called Irish songs were Tin Alley American style, i.e. When Irish Eyes are Smiling, My Wild Irish Rose, etc. and do you know, I never in all my life heard a real Irishman say "bejabbers"? My one big disappointment was finding out that "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen" was written by an American living there

and writing this in honor of his wife — on holiday — in America!

Incidentally, Danny Boy is not a love song but the lament, sung by a father to his son going off to war.

Back to childhood memories! What neighbors we had, after we came to Acton. The three Bralda families, friends for life. I can close my eyes and still hear Mrs. Abel Bralda singing so beautifully in Italian to one of her children.

Mrs. "Silly" and Mrs. "Gene", ah what wonderful people they have been! The Paddy McCristalla, Paddy who helped my dad on the farm, and what a help he was, and Catharine, who to my long memory, never had a bad word or gossip about anyone. The MacDonaldis, Fields, Lawsons, Wilsons, Withers, Wilds, Coleman's; those were the days when true neighborliness really counted! And never to be forgotten dear Mrs. Grindell, who fed my insatiable appetite for literature, and the greatly beloved "Dean" Gibbons. God bless them all!

What originally started out as a St. Patrick's day letter, seems to have got sort of side-tracked, but one of life's greatest gifts is memory, something that is incorruptible.

In later years, while indulging in some of my (in) famous letters with the tannery, my dear dad would laugh and say "you're not remembering how often tannery pay put bread in your mouth". My invariable answer to him would be "Maybe if they'd put less in my mouth, I'd have a heck of a lot less on my lips!"

To end on a more serious note I have, although not having the poetic expertise of George Graham put together a poem about "the troubles" that beset N. Ireland.

What a wonderful gift my parents gave our family when they brought us from there to our beautiful Canada.

Cheers, and think green!
Sheila O'Rourke.

Northern Ireland 1978
There's terror here on St. Pat's day
The bombs go off in Belfast, and blow the folk away

The guilty and the innocent are caught up in the spell
Of hate and fear, and violence, the awful stench of hell.

Down the street, behind barbed wire, a British soldier fires
And cuts in two, a lad of twelve, and breaks right down and cries

He longs to be back home again, in England's happier clime
But here he stays, against his will, to serve out all his time.

A little house, a wee ways down, opens to a knock.
A man is blown apart, his wife falls down in shock.

Their little child, asleep, content, is heedless of the deed
And rests in quiet comfort, until he wakes to feed.

The flow of blood runs thick and fast
Three more souls have breathed their last
And terror stalks again this night
While good folk shudder with their fright.

Oh, gentle Patrick, where once you trod
This sacred island, blessed by God
Here men, once brothers, in senseless hate
Now raze their land with awful waste

Men and boys, held fast in jail
Kept like dogs, no hope of bail
Their women weep in sad disarray,
And on their knees, they sob and pray.

If you could come to show the way
Oh, Patrick, on this special day,
To put an end to this sad strife
When Irishmen could bless their life

Could you not bring us back again
To where we called each other friend,
And let us stand, once more in peace.
God bless us all, let this war cease!

Sheila O'Rourke.

The 17th of Ireland

Town of Halton Hills
Recreation & Parks Dept.
36 Main Street, South,
Halton Hills (Georgetown),
Ontario L7G 4X1

is accepting applications for the position of part-time caretaker at Esqueving (Stewarttown) Community Centre.

Duties include unlocking and locking the building for scheduled users and light house-keeping. Must have own transportation. Deadline for applications: Tuesday, March 28th, 1978.

Library board shocked

It could cost as much as \$1200 to replace a broken window in the Acton library, a figure which shocked members of the Halton Hills Library Board meeting last Wednesday.

Librarian Betsy Cornwell explained the window, an expensive thermopane, was built into the building making it more costly to fix.

Members of the board instructed Mrs. Cornwell to get estimates from local window business places before going ahead with repairs.

Librarians have been unable to trace those responsible for damage to the window although they suspected it was an accident rather than vandalism.

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