

A Notable Tour Of Ireland

By Hannelore Volpe

The Lord Edward Pub in Dublin was not an official concert site for the Men of Note this summer, but the group's visit there certainly marked a special milestone.

A few years before Dave Duggan and Doug Walker formed the male chorus, which is based in Stouffville, they made a stop at the pub while accompanying a group of high school students to Ireland for a series of concerts.

It would be nice, they thought while they were in the pub's cozy confines, to return someday with an adult chorus. That day came one sunny afternoon this past August, when many of the Men of Note visited the pub, near Christ Church Cathedral. There they were finally - 11 years after the founding of the chorus in 1999. It was a time to sing a few songs and have a pint or two, according to newly-elected president Vince Parry.

During the two-week tour, the group of 21 covered about 1,000 miles, saw a lot of amazing sights and performed in seven concerts at places such as St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. Performing in this thousand-year-old cathedral was a dream come true for choir director Margot Rejskind, who accompanied the group with her baby daughter, Audrey. Accompanist Linda Marcinkus also travelled with the group.

There were a lot of early morning starts and catching those 6 a.m. buses soon had its effect. "There was a lot of snoring going on in the bus," Mr. Parry said. "I don't know if we did it in harmony..."

Their bus driver and guide, Liam, turned out to be a fount of knowledge. The group started their trip around 2000 B.C., Mr. Parry said, chuckling, and "by the end of it, he brought us up to date."

He found a very different mood in Northern Ireland from the time he had last visited in the 1970s during the sectarian 'Troubles'. Now the Troubles tend to be looked on historically, he said, something for tourists to learn about.

Almost all concerts were well attended,

although one was a more intimate affair with a couple of dozen people in the audience. But it was a full house and an excited audience when the Men of Note performed in Kylemore Abbey in County Clare. One lady, caught up in the choir's stirring rendition of *Nessun Dorma*, jumped to her feet and shouted "Viva Italia!"

The group came home with plenty of photos and memories. Many of them visited Blarney Castle and kissed the Blarney Stone. Legend has it that those who kiss the stone receive the gift of eloquence. On the southern shore of Galway, some visited a Neolithic grave which resembled a miniature Stonehenge. They saw historic cities and castles, the cliffs and sea surrounding Ireland and the verdant landscapes for which the country is famous.

Some of them toured the Guinness Brewing Company in Dublin and took in the semi-final of the Gaelic Football League between Cork and Dublin, joining some 82,000 other fans. Tour members were struck by the hospitality of the Irish people, which Mr. Parry described as "second to none." He tipped his hat to the Men of Note's Hal Hill, who played a large part in organizing the trip.

This tour was the group's fourth: they travelled to France, England and Wales in 2001, Germany in 2004 and the Maritimes in 2007.

But before another overseas tour happens in couple of years or so, you can hear them live in Stouffville. Their Nov. 14 concert is at Stouffville United Church. The chorus comprises about 40 members, who create a sweet harmonious sound with their collection of tenor, baritone and rich, resonant bass voices. They perform folk songs, spirituals, show tunes, opera, popular tunes, hymns and more.

The Men of Note's Christmas Concert is at Christ Church in Stouffville on Dec. 18 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. For tickets and information visit menofnote.com or call 416-200-7525.



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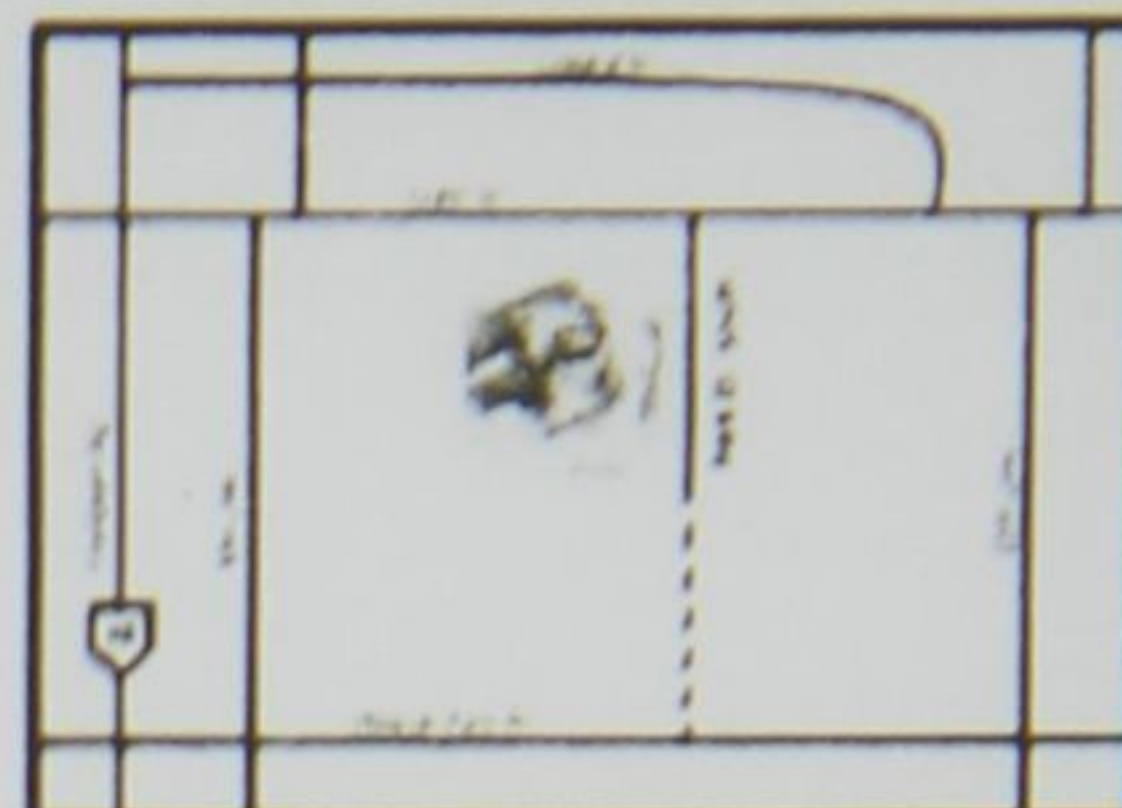
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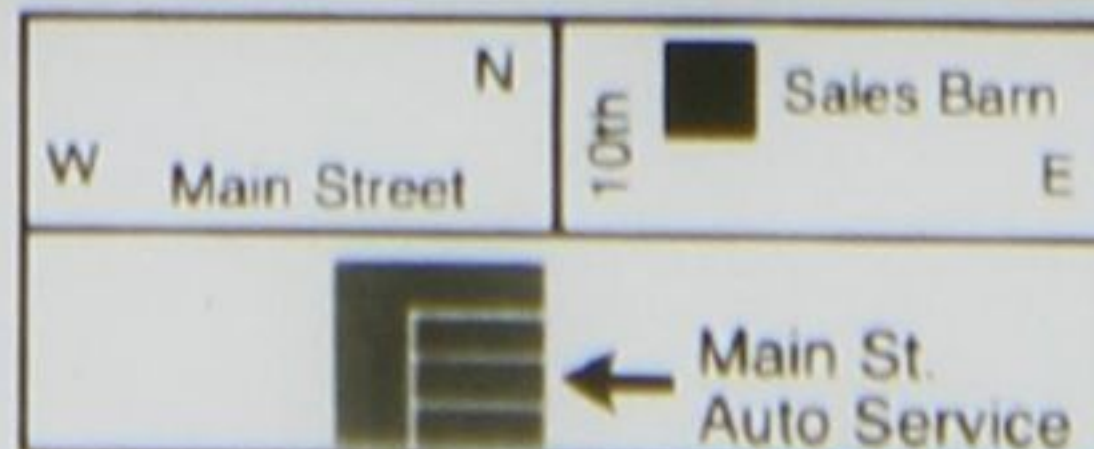
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