



The Ceilíer

A Publication of the Pittsburgh Ceili Club

"All The News We Want To Print"

Summer 2026

Getting to Know... Joyce Rothermel and Michael Drohan

As I began my interview with two of the earliest members of the Pittsburgh Ceili Club, they told me right up front that they wanted to tell their story their way, and that they wanted to emphasize how their marriage is intertwined with both Irish music and dance and with social justice. I knew right away that this interview was going to be very interesting, and different from any that I've done in the past.

Michael grew up doing ceili dancing from the age of nine or ten. In those days in Ireland, the dances were held in people's houses or at parish halls, always with live music. Michael's friend's uncle, Jimmy Kennedy, played the accordion. At that time, the Church in Ireland frowned on set dancing, but allowed ceili dancing. What's the difference, you may ask (I did). Michael explained that set dancing had its origins in French and Spanish quadrilles. Irish men serving in the British army in the nineteenth century learned these dances and brought them back to Ireland. So, the Church in Ireland saw that kind of dancing as foreign. Ceili dancing was approved because it was native to Ireland. Set dancing wasn't revived until about 1990.

Dancing was important to Michael and Joyce from the beginning of their marriage in 1990. They lived in Garfield at that time and were among the early PCC dancers at the Penn Café, along with Pete Shovlin, Liz Shovlin, Rusty Petro, Nan Pischke, Maureen Strotmeyer, the Nagel's, the Kaniecki's, the McHugh's and others. Our club is still very dear to them, to quote Michael "as much as family as a dance club." They used to go to the



Nevele Lodge in the Catskills in New York for a dance workshop every fall. There would be as many as 30 sets on the dance floor and many of the bands played until 3 a.m.! Michael and Joyce also fondly recalled dancing the North Kerry Set together in Black Mountain, NC, their first set dance together.

Michael shared a dance anecdote with me that I loved. One year on Labor Day weekend, they attended an Irish Festival in Washington, D.C. Timmy McCarthy from Ballavourney offered a dance workshop, and Michael

has never forgotten what Timmy said: "Set dancing isn't about figures and bodies and steps. It's about making music with your feet." Think about that next time you're out on the dance floor. Or, on second thought, don't think about it; just let it happen.

The couple also shared a passion for service and social justice. Both had a strong Catholic upbringing. Joyce lost her mother at age six, and Michael lost his father when he was nine. Both felt supported and uplifted by their faith communities as they were growing up, and that inspired in each of them a lifelong commitment to helping others.

Michael became a priest with the Holy Ghost Fathers, an order that focuses on the environment, the economy, peace and justice. He worked in Africa on these issues with a group of youth activists serving as chaplain to the Young Christian Students. Joyce followed a similar path, joining the Sisters of the Humility of Mary. She confessed that she was well into her twenties before she felt like an adult, or had a sense of direction and purpose. In the early 70s, the order sent her to Pittsburgh to teach at Our

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WHAT IS A PITTSBURGH PUCA?

Glad you asked! In case you are not aware, Pittsburgh has its own Irish Hurling Club, called the Pittsburgh Pucas. Begun in 2007, they now have 25 active members. You may have seen them in the St Patrick's Day Parade, or not. I don't know anyone who has attended one of their games, which I would like to change by going to one myself. But alas, their only 2 home games of 2026 were earlier in June. Now they are on the road to play at various other cities. Maybe next year.



camogie, named Na Laochra here in the 'burgh. Both teams have won championships in the past several years. They compete in regional, national and international tournaments.

And what is a Puca? It's a creature of Irish folklore, impacting rural and marine communities especially. They are bringers of good or bad fortune. They are shape changers, appearing as black horses, goats or rabbits. Through human speech, they may confuse, terrify or even give advice to humans. They are generally considered

benevolent.

But what is Hurling? It's the oldest field sport in the world, played for the past 3,000 years from ancient Ireland to present day. It involves features of soccer, baseball and hockey with football goals. Players use a wooden stick (hurley) and a small ball (sliotar) to score points. The Pucas are an adult team that plays on weekends and evenings. A women's team is called a

You can check out more about this sport here in our fair city on line. I hope to see them play at some point. It would be great if we could have a PCC presence at one of their games.

By SueAnne Hogan

MEET THE NEW PCC BOARD

The annual meeting of the Pittsburgh Ceili Club on June 16 was well-attended. We had beautiful weather, yummy snacks and a great slate of candidates this year. Evan Adcock and Craig Connelly are staying on the board. Newly-elected members are Amy Bennett, Colleen Rumble, Maureen Strotmeyer, Ellen Johnson and Heather Ward. Heather and Amy had previously been serving out the terms of board members who had resigned. Congratulations to the new PCC Board!

Officers:

President Craig Connelly
Vice Pres Colleen Rumble
Secretary Amy Bennett
Treasurer Evan Adcock

Pictured are Evan, Maureen, Craig, Colleen and Amy.

Not shown: Ellen and Heather.



THANKS FOR READING

I'm transcribing my old journals, starting with eighth grade. It's fun meeting my younger self and realizing that I'm still pretty much the same person. I loved books, I loved dancing, and I loved, loved, loved being with my friends, talking to my friends and talking about my friends. In school, was the girl who was always in trouble for talking in class. When one of my friends ran for class president, he said I could be his Secretary of Communication and Gossip. If anyone had told me that someday I'd get to write a newsletter that is all about my friends, and that people would actually read it, that would have been my idea of winning at life. So, thanks for reading! (The picture is me on class day with my high school besties. I'm the adorable one in the middle with the stupid hat.)



This is a very busy time of year. Trees and bushes in full leaf. Spring flowers and shrubs are already finished. The plants you have put into the ground should be showing flowers. Keeping up with the weeds is an ongoing pain! If you waver for a week, they have taken over that area. And the bugs...! Constant struggle against them! I try to watch what I use so the bees and other pollinators are not harmed. Mosquitoes on the other hand! I can't do much late afternoon. Those devils are swarming around me even when I spray myself.

Some folks like their tomato plants to just grow on the ground. That works if you have a large area to plant and let them roam. I prefer to tie the plants up because I can grow a few extra plants. If you tie up tomato plants there are clips, rubber coated wire, roll of plastic ties that you can use. There are tomato cages and 3 pole supports that I have used. I got back to the single plastic-coated stakes and plastic ties. Tomatoes are appearing on the plants. Unless you have the early ripening varieties you are still wishing for the wonderful taste of fresh tomatoes.

My dahlias are growing fast and the side branching needs tied up. I use the same plastic tie to keep the branching in check. Once dahlias have 4 sets of leaves it is recommended that the top be pinched off. That allows the plant to send out new shoots from the leaf axels. Giving more flowers. As the buds start to develop there are usually 3 buds. Dahlia growers pinch off the 2 smaller side buds. That will make the dahlia flowers bigger.

Make a list of what worked and what didn't. I try new plants and varieties and although they should do well, they don't have the effect I want. This year I planted gray annual poppies that looked beautiful in the picture in the greenhouse. I like bold colors so not sure how I will like them by the end of the season!

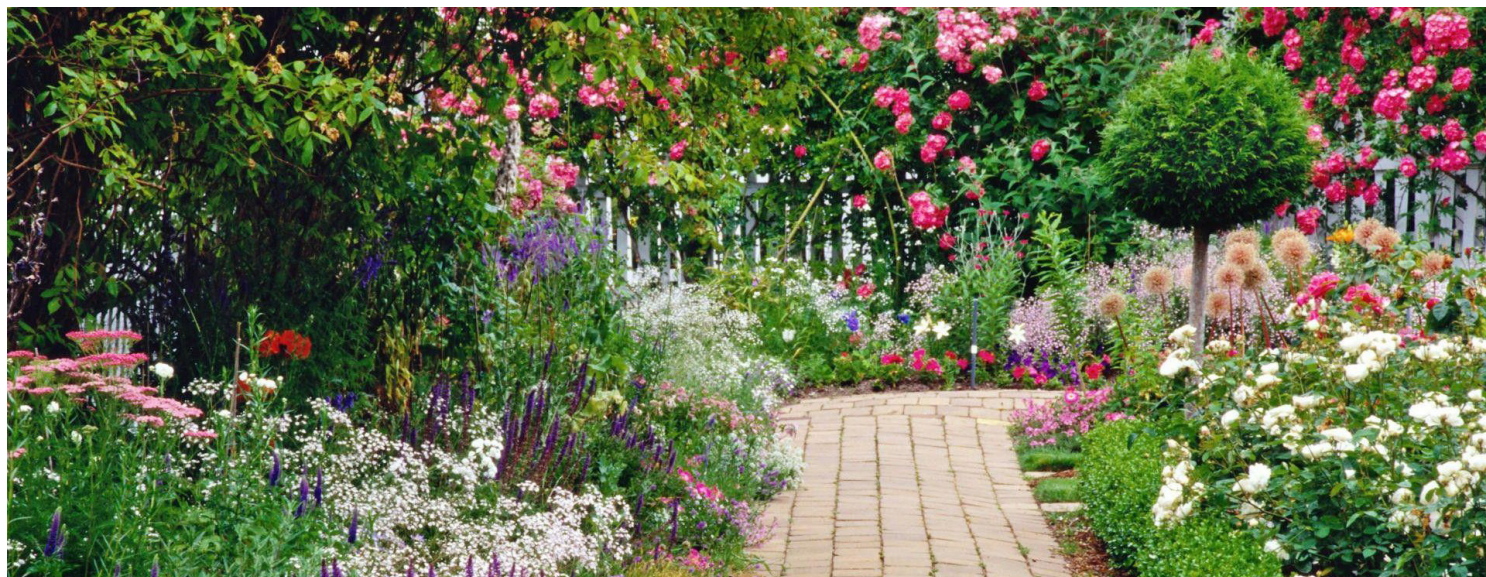
Keeping up with weeds is a never-ending struggle or they will take over and stunt the growth of the annuals. Hand weeding can be overwhelming if not done frequently. There are some tools that can help. Some have short handle with claw like tines and there are a few that have a short blade that works by cutting weeds off at the ground level or just below. There are a couple of the plants that I planted years ago I just can't seem to get rid of. I am carefully spraying them with poison ivy and tuff brush spray. They keep sending up new growth. Trumpet vine and wisteria are a constant struggle. I have never been able to get wisteria or trumpet vines to bloom and can't get them to stop sending out new growth all over the space where I plant other flowers and vegetables. Be careful what you plant. Some perennials and shrubs take over and hard to eliminate if you change your mind!

Bugs eating plants are a constant problem, crawlers, fliers and walkers (I had a golden retriever who would eat cucumbers and tomatoes off the vines.) I have a friend who ordered live Ladybugs to get rid of the aphids on her tomato plants from Amazon! It worked! There are many products in garden departments that are helpful BUT be careful. They can be harmful to your pet or pollinators. There are a few organic products such as Dead Bug Brew that are promised to not harm the pollinators. Beer in saucers for slugs.

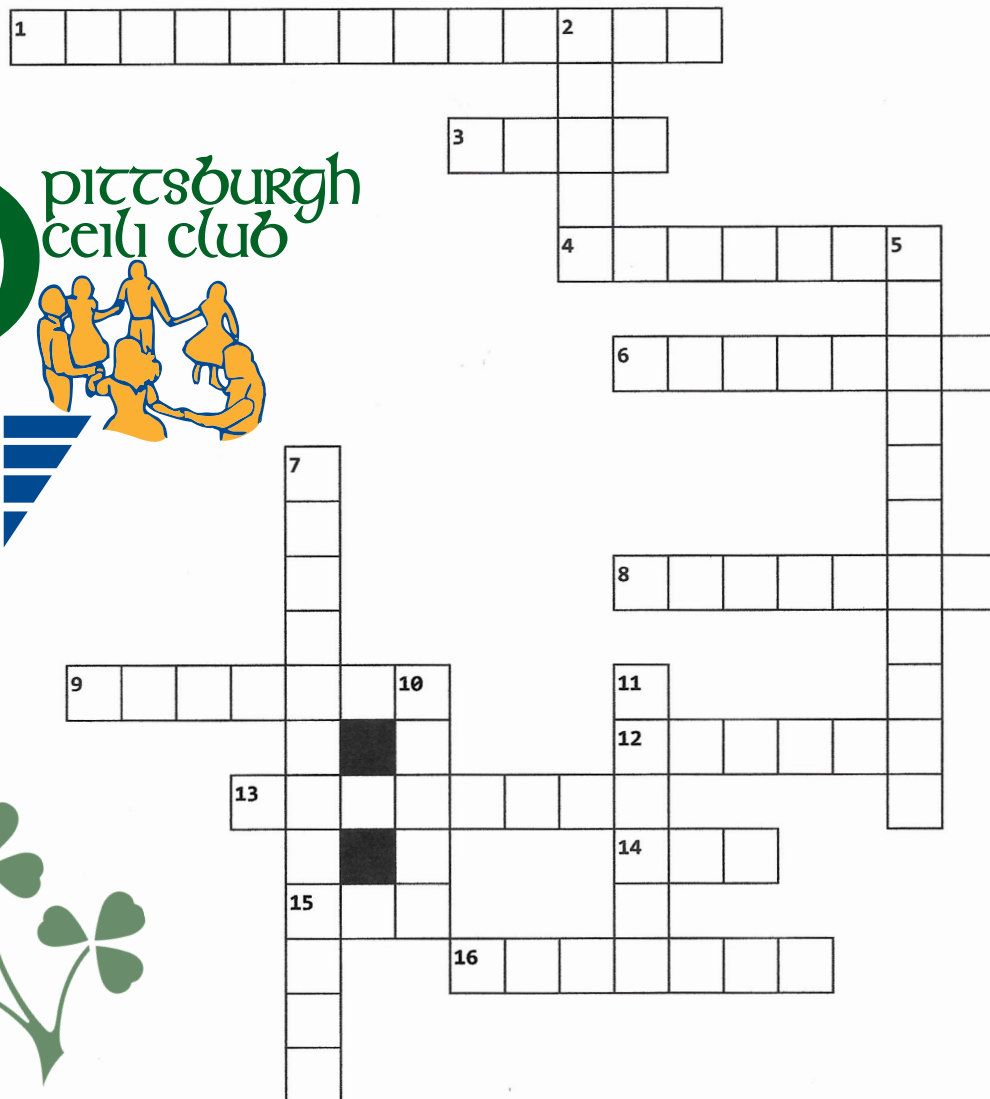
Grass...ugh...growing fast and needing to be mowed frequently. I replanted some areas that were damaged by my dogs. Those areas look good and need to be mowed now too.

Enjoy your garden whether you garden for vegetables or just flowers. Hopefully you planted some surprises that become part of your annual plantings.

By Carolyn Bolton



The First Official PCC Crossword Puzzle!



Across

1. A dance you can wear
3. Kelsey's man
4. Traditional quaff at the Harp
6. A founder and frequent president
8. Our most recent groom
9. He plays the flute
12. Our most recent bride
13. One of our most creative dancers
14. Who sends out the dances each month
15. She awlays wears black, too
16. Joyce's man

Down

2. Our current president
5. Good-tasting spring dance
7. A favorite jig set
10. Echoes of Erin host
11. She always wears black



Getting to Know... con't.

Lady of Grace Catholic School in the South Hills. While there, she was introduced to Catholic Social Teachings and made them a major focus in her Master's in Education Program at the University of Dayton over the summers. She departed the HM community in 1980 and embraced a new community of social justice advocates at the Thomas Merton Center, a ministry for justice and peace. There she worked with others in the founding of the Jubilee Soup Kitchen in the Hill District and soon later, the Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (which later became the Gr. Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, now in Duquesne).

In 1984, Michael came to Pittsburgh to work as research director at the Institute for World Concerns at Duquesne University. He had also become involved with the Merton Center. At a Christmas Mass at Carlow College, organized by the Center, Joyce was preaching (since women weren't officially allowed to preach, they called it "giving the reflection"). Michael described his reaction in one word: "Wow!" In the mid-80's, the two were both living in a community house with five others, who were all connected to the Merton Center. They married in 1990.

Joyce continued her work with the Merton Center, while serving as weekend coordinator at the Jubilee Soup Kitchen. In 1987, she began 24 years of service as director of the Gr. Pittsburgh Community Food Bank.

Michael served as an active member of the Merton Center, writing occasionally for its monthly publication "The New People", participating in several social justice and peace efforts, and eventually was president of the

Center's board. He later taught Economics at Penn State McKeesport and then Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Michael taught in China for a semester, where Joyce joined him for the last three weeks.

I asked them what they felt inspired their passion for social justice and the environment. Both referred back to their early losses and the support that they received from their families and faith communities. They also both noted that they grew up in natural settings: Joyce in rural Ohio, and Michael in rural Ireland, an environment he described as "enchanted." Michael has been a vegetarian for the past twenty years because he believes that we dehumanize ourselves by killing and eating animals.

I did get a chance to ask a few of my usual questions...

How Irish are you? Michael 100%. Joyce is 100% German! She got her interest in Irish dance and culture from Michael.

What's your philosophy of life in 10 words or less?

Michael: "Being for others is our life's aspiration."

Joyce: "We are all one."

Siblings?

Joyce had six siblings in a combined "his, hers, and ours" family. She is the oldest.

Michael had four brothers and four sisters. He is the second youngest.

When I asked if they had any regrets, they both said that they can do nothing about the past and the future is unknown. They try to live in the present moment to make the world a better place for all to live. They have certainly done that!

With Edits from Joyce and Michael

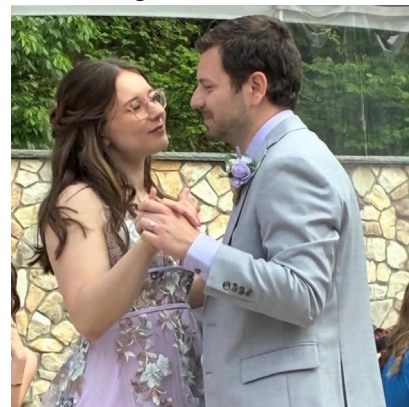
LIFE EVENTS

We gladly welcomed Bill Jamison, Joyce Rothermel and Michael Drohan back from wintering in Florida.

Brandon Messinio and Alica Loy got married on May 23 at the Stables at Hartwood. The weather was perfect, and members of the Pittsburgh Ceili Club were, unsurprisingly, very predominant on the dance floor. We even did some Irish dancing! Congratulations to the newly married couple!



Isabella and Scott Szymansky are expecting a baby in December – the same week that she will complete her testing for her Masters Degree. Congratulations to the prospective parents and let's all pray those dates work out!



During the Iron Age and beyond, Celtic women were distinct in the ancient world for the liberty and rights they enjoyed and the position they held in society. One historian described them 'as nearly as tall as the men whom they rivaled in courage. A whole handful of foreigners will be unable to capture a Gael in a fight if he calls his wife, stronger than he and with flashing eyes when she swells her neck and grinds her teeth and inflicts terrible blows mingled with kicks.' No, she was not to be pushed around!

In ancient Ireland, women held a good position and in social and property rights they were equal to men. Husband and wife continued to hold respective shares they brought to the marriage, such as land, flocks, household goods, etc. the man retaining his part and the woman hers. There are records of women taking legal proceedings on their own account against outsiders independently of their husbands in defense of their property.

It is from the Brehon Laws (7th Century AD) that we get the explanation of rights of women. Brehons originally were traveling lawyers who were held in high regard. These laws were written down in poetic verse and memorized carefully and transcribed on vellum by monks. But the general popular idea of the position of women came from the old romantic tales and legends. We read of great female physicians and lawyers (brehons) such as Brigh whose decisions were followed as precedents for centuries after her death. That the husband and wife were on equal terms is clear from the provisions laid down in cases of separation. If it was mutual consent, the woman

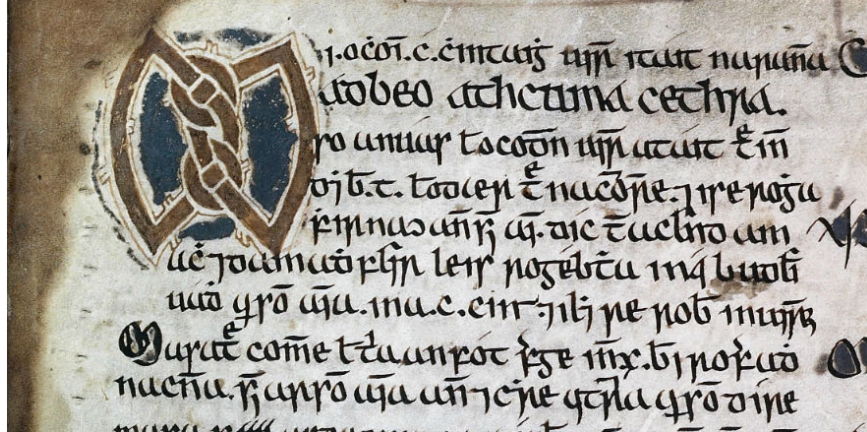
was awarded what ever she brought to the marriage. Husband and wife stood on equal grounds in a Brehon court, so if the husband gave evidence against his wife, then she could bring evidence against him. Brehon Law also set the conditions for divorce. A wife could divorce her husband if he failed to support her, if he spread false rumors against her, or if he tricked her into marriage. If he was sterile, impotent or unable to perform the marriage act because he was too fat. If he repudiated her for another, she could choose to divorce him or stay along with the secondary wife.

A husband could hit his wife to correct her but she was permitted to divorce him if the blow left a mark. A husband could divorce her for unfaithfulness, persistent thieving, inducing an abortion on herself, bringing shame on his honor and smothering her child. A wife had the

right to be consulted on every subject. She could choose who she wished to marry and was never considered to be their father's or husband's property. A woman could attain higher education and develop skills and be eligible to join any of the professions. We know that there were female druids, brehons, poets, musicians and doctors.

One of the customs, along with others, that survived Ireland's conversion to Christianity, was divorce. This advanced legal system guided people's lives until 1603 when the great Gaelic chiefs were defeated by the English and the English conquest was complete, imposing their rules on Ireland. Divorce in Ireland was then forbidden until 1995.

Sources: Brehon Law Library;; Library of Ireland; shamrockcraic.com; wikipedia
(Originally published Summer 2021)



WHY DO YOU DANCE?

A lot of us already know that aging is associated with a decline of mental and physical ability. The role of physical exercise in maintaining physical and mental fitness is well-acknowledged. Dance, in addition to physical ability, combines emotions, social interaction, sensory stimulation, motor coordination and music, thereby creating enriched environmental conditions. A study done by "Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience" demonstrated the impact of amateur dancing in a group of subjects (65-84yrs) comparing them in education and gender and matched them to control groups having no record of dancing or sporting activities. Posture, balance, reaction time, motor behavior and cognitive performance were all tested. The dancing group did not show poor performance but it was frequently observed in the non-dancing group. The study concluded that maintaining a regular schedule of dancing into old age can preserve cognitive, motor and perceptual abilities and prevent them from degradation. The far reaching beneficial effects found in the amateur dancers beyond balance and posture makes dancing a prime candidate for the preservation of everyday life competence of elderly individuals.

A TERRIBLE BEAUTY

Poetry had a long history of living underground in the Gaelic tradition, so it was little wonder that three young poets, Pearse, MacDonagh and Plunkett were among those who walked out on Easter Monday, 1916 to set their country free. It was in poetry and in song, that the rebel, the subversive, the dispossessed found expression for dreams of nationhood and freedom. Pearse's poem, 'The Rebel', has the power of the consummate leader who longed to see his country freed:

*I am come of the seed of the people,
the people that sorrow,
That have no treasure but hope,
No riches laid up but a memory
Of an Ancient glory.*

The early days of the 20th century were for the young and idealistic and these threemen were devoted to

saving and promoting Irish culture. They wrote plays, founded theatres, edited newspapers and organized cultural events. The execution of the leaders and the dumping of their bodies generated an outpouring of poetry. James Stephens' beautiful elegy 'Spring in Ireland 1916' is a tribute to those whose lives were so abruptly ended:

*Be green upon their graves,
O happy Spring,
For they were young and
eager who are dead;
Of all things that are
young and quivering
With eager life be they remembered!*

Thomas MacDonagh, of whom Yeats wrote in Easter 1916:

*He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought*

wrote this to his newborn son:

*God to you may give the sight
And the clear, undoubting strength
Wars to knit for single right,
Freedom's war to knit at length
And to win, through wrath and strife,
To the sequel of my life.*



Patrick Pearse



Thomas MacDonagh



Joseph Plunkett
(Originally published Summer 2016)

What the Heck is a 'Caul'?

(as in 'The High Caul Cap', otherwise known as 'I Have Two Yellow Goats')

A caul or veil is a thin, filmy membrane, the remnants of the amniotic sac that covers or partly covers a baby's face at birth. It is harmless and easily removed. A child born in this manner is known as a 'caulbearer'.

In medieval times, the caul was seen as a sign of good luck. It was an omen that the child was destined for greatness (Alexander the Great was such a child). Gathering the caul onto paper was an important tradition and this was presented to the mother as an heirloom. Over the course of European history, a legend developed that possession of a caul would give its bearer good luck and protect that person from drowning. So they were highly prized by sailors and women sometimes sold them for large sums to sailors. Caulbearers were also thought to have psychic abilities (the famous psychic, Sylvia Browne was a caulbearer). Also, they are often found to have ability

in finding water underground, knowing when weather patterns change and predicting when fish would become plentiful. Many are great natural healers manifested by the laying on of hands. Many are considered to have great ability in judgement and ruling matters and in many cultures were considered to be 'Kings by Right' due to their leadership abilities. Even today, certain Buddhist groups seek out caulbearers to be brought up to be Dalai Lamas. In ancient Rome the senators wore cauls over their chests because they believed it would help them in their work.

So, What is a high caul cap? It is a style of thin, close fitting head covering worn by women to shield their hair and was popular during the Renaissance period. Where the other name for the popular ceili dance came from ('I Have Two Yellow Goats') I don't have a clue.

(Originally published Summer 2011)



High Cauled Cap



Beaded Caul



Woman with Net Caul



Wired Cap with Caul

Upcoming Local Irish Events

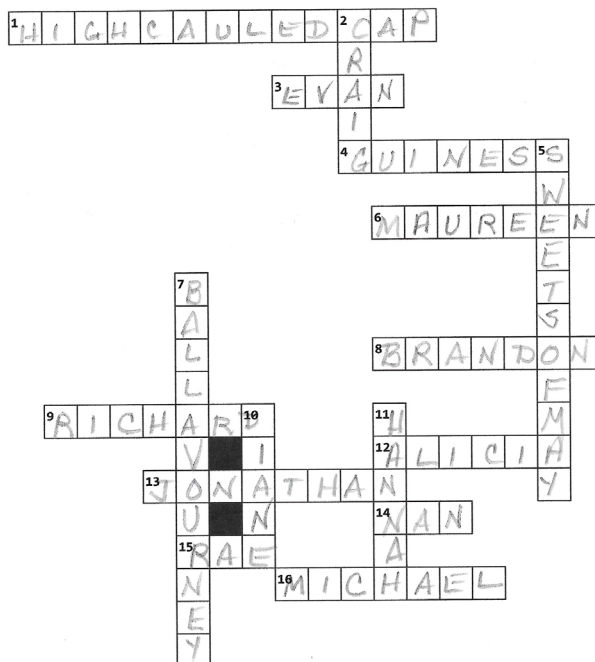
What	When	Where	Contact & Information
Waltz dance	7/26/26, 12-1 p.m.	Avonworth Community Park, 498 Camp Horne Rd.	
Contra dance	7/26/26, 2-4:30 p.m.	Avonworth Community Park, 498 Camp Horne Rd.	
West Coast swing dance	7/26/26, 7-9:30 p.m.	Avonworth Community Park, 498 Camp Horne Rd.	
Pittsburgh Folk Festival	8/1/26, 11a-7p	Our Lady of Victory Church, 1000 Tropical Ave.	Ondrejana Zatek, 412-719-1713, https://pittsburghfolkfestival.org/
45th Anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strikes	8/22/26, 4:30 p.m.	St Patricks Church, Strip District	Mary Ellen Myers 412-389-8486
Irish Festival	9/11-13/26	801 Carrie Furnace Blvd.	www.pghirishfest.org
LAOH Div 11 bus trip to Elizabeth Seton shrine	9/18/26	Emmitsburg, MD	kathy.schulz@outlook.com. or call Marlea Gallagher at 412.418.4360 /Email Marleagallagher@yahoo.com.

As always, thank you to Diane Byrnes for most of this information. Listen to Echoes of Erin on WEDO 810 AM and 93.3 FM at 12:30 every Sunday

If you know about upcoming Irish-themed events, please email kbashaar@gmail.com.



Answers



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If you have an article of Irish interest that you would like to place in The Ceilier- email kbashaar@gmail.com.