

Steve Ray Ireland Pilgrimage (August 5th – 14th, 2018)

By Mike Sweeney

Background:

Sue Sweeney, JoAnn Sulak, Mary Hanel, & I decided to go on the 2018 Steve Ray Pilgrimage to Ireland. Deacon Tom & Pat Collier, and Deacon Floyd & Martha Schwartz also signed up to go. With Early Bird & Cash Discounts, the total paid to Corporate Travel Service including roundtrip airfare (Lufthansa) from JFK, New York City to Dublin and back was \$4,299 per person. Southwest Airlines roundtrip airfare from Midland to LaGuardia, New York City was \$427.60 per person. We arrived in New York City 2 days prior to departing for Dublin to see the sights including Trump Tower, a Pedi-Cab tour of Central Park, and Top of The Rock tour on the top floors of Rockefeller Center. Most meals were provided for while in Ireland as part of the Pilgrimage package except that most lunches and a couple of suppers were on us. We spent approximately \$1000 USD while in Ireland on meals, gifts, and souvenirs. Prior to departing Midland, our son Jon Prince sent us a hand carved, hand painted wooden Leprechaun to take on our trip and asked us to send back pictures of the little man. We named him “Paddy”, a good Irish name.



Paddy In New York City

Monday August 6th (Athlone, Clonmacnoise, Claregalway) Steve's Video:

<https://youtu.be/k8rxQ0tZogg>

We arrived at Frankfurt Airport after a 7-1/2 hour Lufthansa flight from JFK. We had a 4-1/2 hour layover before boarding another Lufthansa flight to Dublin which took 2 hours. Note that Frankfurt is 7 hours ahead of Central Time, while Ireland is 6 hours ahead of Central Time. After retrieving our luggage we met up with Steve and Janet Ray, our Irish Guide Deidre Burns, and the rest of the pilgrims assigned to Bus #2 and Driver Dennis (Deidre's brother-in-law). Deidre is a walking encyclopedia and Irish history buff. She kept up informed every step of the way. Bus

#1 had her brother-in-law Irish Guide Batt Burns who Steve regularly uses on his Ireland Pilgrimage, and was quite an entertaining guide and story teller. We loaded up and headed west for the Sheraton Hotel in Athlone, County Athlone (1-1/2 hour drive) for lunch. The countryside was very pretty with patchwork pastures and ripe wheat fields divided by hedgerows. **Athlone** is a small town and we walked around a bit after lunch taking pictures of a hair salon named “Sweeny’s Cuts” and St. Mary’s Catholic Church.



Farming Country On The Way To Clonmacnoise

We drove on to **Clonmacnoise Monastic Site**, County Offaly (1/2 hour drive), founded by St. Ciaran (who died of the plague) in 544 AD, and now managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW). We had a nice tour of the site which includes Clonmacnoise Cathedral, and several other temples. It also includes an active graveyard around the structures and the “Pope’s Shelter” adjacent to the River Shannon. The Shelter was built for John Paul II to celebrate Mass during his visit in 1979. The structures were originally wooden, and later rebuilt with stone. The Cathedral was built in 909 AD. The Visitor’s Center has the original massive sandstone Celtic (pronounced Kel-tic) “Cross of the Scriptures”. A round tower (O’Rourke’s Tower) is intact except for the top which was blasted off by lightning in 1135. The stones were used to build a second tower (McCarthy’s Tower). The round towers in Ireland were typically built for two purposes: 1) Bell tower; 2) Defense against attackers. They had a handful of wooden floors with stairs leading up. The stone arched door was about 10 feet above the ground so that the monks could climb up a ladder, and then pull the ladder up to thwart attackers. Windows were strategically placed so that archers could shoot down at their attackers. James Conlon (born in Sligo, Ireland and now a pastor of St. Francis Parish in Ann Arbor, MI) celebrated Mass for us in the “Pope’s Shelter”.



Cathedral Ruins - Clonmacnoise

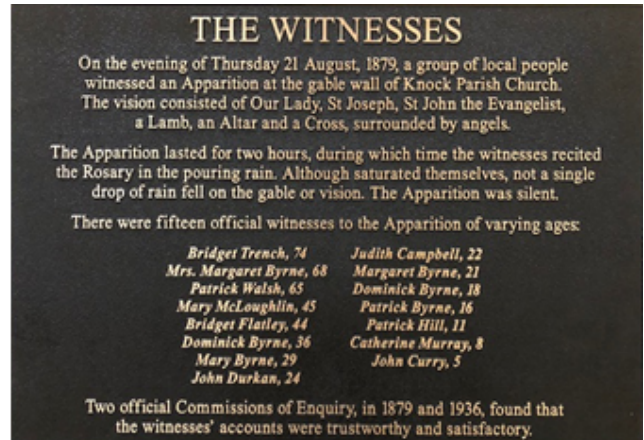
We drove west to **Claregalway**, County Galway (1 hour drive) where we had a nice Welcome Dinner in the restaurant next to our lodging, The Arches Hotel. It seemed that the further west we traveled, the greener the countryside became! I loved the wide open spaces, rolling hills and stone fences separating the green pastures. At dinner, I had my first pint of Guinness from the tap. Guinness is the country's mainstay beverage and is brewed in Dublin. It is a dark stout served cool, and takes some getting used to after drinking cold Michelob Ultra for several years. Earlier, Diane and Joe Pollock saw our name tags and said her brother had done a Genealogy Study in college on her ancestors, the McCaffreys and Sweeneys! We ate dinner with them and exchanged our data (I had brought a 4 page copy of my Irish ancestors compiled by M. Lynch May 19, 1962). We would have many conversations after that night with the Pollocks who were keen on finding out more about their ancestors.

Tuesday August 7th (Knock Shrine, Downtown Galway) Steve's Video:

<https://youtu.be/0BeMbQjxtSc> <https://youtu.be/F6JCWGDVvnE>
<https://youtu.be/8oNjm8gpsxE>

The next morning we had breakfast in the restaurant at The Arches Hotel. This was a recurring theme, having breakfast at our hotel which was very convenient for our daily schedule. It was a typical Irish breakfast: fried eggs, sausage, black sausage (blood sausage patty – we did not eat any!), white sausage (patty made from white pork meat), brown bread, pastries, cereal, & juice. We drove north to the **Our Lady of Knock Shrine**, County Mayo (1 hour drive) where we toured the National Shrine grounds. We were on our own to explore so I visited, the Bookshop, Knock Basilica, and shops in the town (looking for pre-Euro Irish coins – unsuccessful, although I did buy an Our Lady of Knock Prayer coin and was given a coin inscribed with “Cead Mile Failte” – “A Hundred Thousand Welcomes”). On August 21, 1879, 15 people witnessed an apparition of moving figures which appeared on the gabled wall of the parish church. Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. John the Evangelist, a Cross, and a Lamb on an Altar were seen for two hours in a pouring rain. The witnesses (ranging in age from 5-74) prayed the Rosary and were soaked, but not a single drop fell on the Apparition or the gable. Two official Commissions of Enquiry in 1879 & 1936 found that the witnesses' accounts were “trustworthy and satisfactory”. Fr. Conlon celebrated Mass for us in the Apparition Chapel, and afterwards Steve spoke to us outside the Chapel. He

said this Apparition is his favorite because of the complex symbolism involving the many figures. Diane Pollock told me there were 7 Sweeneys buried in the graveyard on the other side of the Knock Shrine grounds. I hustled over there and took a picture of the headstone marking the graves for Norah Sweeney (died April 30, 1943), Michael Sweeney (died June 24, 1955, and their granddaughter Josephine (February 12, 1960 – May 7, 1961).



Our Lady of Knock Shrine – County Mayo

Afterwards, we ate lunch at the Hotel Knock and drove back to **Downtown Galway**. We were dropped next to the River Corrib near the downtown shopping center. Our Bus #2 Group went on a walking tour with Diedre who took us to various sites and explained the town's history. One of the more interesting sites was James Lynch Fitzstephen's house. In 1493, while he was the Mayor of Galway, he hung his own son out of a second story window in his house. His son Walter had murdered a young Spaniard by the name of Gomez in a fit of jealousy over the attraction to the Spaniard by his fiancé, Agnes. Mayor Lynch chose to hang his own son when others were reluctant to carry out the execution for fear of reprisal. This is where we get the term "lynching". After the walking tour, Sue, JoAnn, Mary, & I took Deidre's advice and ate at The Quays Bar & Restaurant located on Quay St. This pub has loads of charm and quaint dining rooms. We went with Diedre's recommendation and had the Fish & Chips which was delicious! Of course, I had a Guinness to complete the experience. And yes, Paddy was our witness!



Fish & Chips – The Quays Pub, Galway

After supper, we window strolled along the busy pedestrian streets lined with small shops and businesses, and then rode the bus back to The Arches Hotel.

Wednesday, August 8th (Bunratty Castle, Trinitarian Church, Sneem) Steve's Video:
<https://youtu.be/zXpMYlqDSTQ>

We checked out of The Arches Hotel, boarded the bus, and headed south to **Bunratty Castle and Folk Park** on the banks of the River Ratty, County Clare near Shannon Town. On the bus, Steve asked us to come up with limericks as we would be driving through Limerick later in the day. I became consumed with limericks from that point forward! Here's one that speaks to my Irish heritage:

*In Sligo was the Sweeney farm,
Where the English inflicted much harm,
When the Blight did appear,
The Sweeneys did hear,
America's call and her charm.*

Bunratty Castle was built in 1425 and restored in 1960. To enter the castle we had to pass under a Murder Hole where invaders would get skewered by a pike from above. Once inside, a presentation was given by a Castle Guide who addressed us in The Main Guard room where the soldiers were quartered. Above the room was a balcony called The Minstrel's Gallery where the commander could address the soldiers without entering the room. We then climbed up one floor to the Great Hall. The Tripping Step was the last step up the spiral stair case and was intentionally made taller so that invaders rushing up would trip and fall. The stair case was tightly spiraled with the inner wall on the right hand side of a person climbing up into the castle. This was designed so that invaders would have to climb up the stairs one person at a time making them easier to pick off and, if right handed, would have a difficult time swinging their weapons.

In the Great Hall we listened to another presentation describing this large room. This room was for men only and the Earl of Thomond gave judgments while sitting on his Chair of the Estate. It was high backed and made of stout wood to prevent being stabbed in the back. The expression, "The walls have ears", was coined because soldiers would watch and listen for plots against the Earl through Spy Holes high up on the walls. Conspirators were led down a dark spiral staircase and given a shove off the 13th and last step into the dark Dungeon far below to deal with bones broken from their fall. The Guide pointed out The Ladies Window into the Great Hall where the Earl's wife could watch proceedings from their bedroom. 10,000 year old elk antlers, preserved and recovered from a bog, hung on the wall above the Earl's chair. The antlers and tapestries were displayed as a show of wealth. There was a small chapel off to the side of the Great Room where Mass could be said for the Earl's family. We climbed up to the top of the towers via several different tight spiral stair cases. Occasionally there would be a wedge shaped recess in the staircase with a slit window so that archers could shoot at attackers below. The views from the towers of the countryside were breathtaking! We strolled through the Folk Park stopping to check out a restored Thatch Roof Home that had an open fire burning, and the Blacksmith's Forge where we heard a presentation about blacksmithing. We ate lunch across the street in the cafeteria and explored the small shops where Sue bought a necklace with Mary on one side and a piece of green Connemara Marble on the other side - very pretty.

We continued by bus to the **Trinitarian Church**, Adare, County Limerick to participate in Mass on the Feast of St. Dominic. Deacon Tom Collier (St. Ann's, Midland, TX) challenged us during his Homily, "To proclaim the kingdom of God" by telling our personal story about Jesus in our lives

to everyone we meet. If we all did that there would be no winter or darkness in the world. We continued on the bus to Sneem with Terry Barber (of Jesse Romero and Terry Barber radio fame) taking Deacon Tom's words to heart by sharing personal stories of his evangelization work. Janet Ray shared a story about St. Charbel Makhlouf (a Lebanese Maronite Monk & Hermit), and his intercession which led to a miraculous infertility cure.

We arrived in **Sneem**, dropped off our bags at the beautiful Sneem Hotel, and headed into town for a group dinner at O'Sullivan's Sacre Coeur Restaurant. I had Hake fish (a very good white flaky fish) with a pint of Guinness and Sue had chicken and ham with a glass of wine. We sat across from a couple from Nebraska and next to Mike & Cindi Lamberti from Glendora, CA. Later on the trip, after hearing about my search for old Irish coins, Mike offered to send me some foreign coins that his Dad had collected while traveling the world. Right after we got home, he sent me a box full of very nice foreign coins from many different countries, including some Irish and Venezuelan coins! They will more than double my existing collection and were most appreciated. We headed back to the Sneem Hotel for a good night's sleep.

Thursday, August 9th (Ring of Kerry, Muckross House, Killarney National Park) Steve's Videos:

<https://youtu.be/YmMkbAgTKnE> <https://youtu.be/ZykuISWZ8NM>

<https://youtu.be/cITJwnlNGxg>

As usual, we had a big Irish breakfast in the Sneem Hotel. This was a huge time saver for us to be able to eat quickly and get on the bus to start our day. We got onto the **Ring of Kerry** road which is on Iveragh Peninsula. The peninsula juts out into the Atlantic Ocean. Buses have to go in a counter-clockwise direction due to the narrow road. We pulled over at Ladies View and took pictures of each other against the stunning mountains and valley below. All of the pilgrims from Texas gathered for a group photo with the Lone Star Flag proudly displayed.



Pilgrims From Texas – Ladies View, Ring of Kerry

Arriving at **Muckross House**, near the town of Killarney, County Kerry, we toured the estate grounds. There are beautiful gardens near the mansion with expansive lawns, a creek, and Muckross Lake on the 11,000 acre estate. The mansion was built in 1843 for Henry Arthur Herbert and his wife Mary Balfour Herbert. Ownership changed hands and in 1932 it was presented to the Irish nation becoming the first National Park in the Republic of Ireland and forming the basis of the larger present day Killarney National Park.



Muckross House – Killarney National Park

We drove into nearby Killarney, a beautiful city, and took a horse (named “Sam”) and carriage ride with several other pilgrims. Known as a “Jaunting Car Ride”, we spent about an hour riding through **Killarney National Park** in a light rain at first that stopped for the remainder of our ride. The driver pointed out wildlife and historical sites along the way. It is a beautiful wooded park with green grass pastures and a small creek. We spotted a Red Deer herd in the distance, a Sika Deer, as well as some all black Kerry Cattle which are endangered. The ruins of the tower house Ross Castle situated on Lough Lean, one of 3 lakes in the Park, were a magnificent view. It was built by O’Donoghue in the 15th century. It was the last stronghold to hold out against Oliver Cromwell and was eventually taken in 1652. We finished our ride through the park and arrived back in the town to join the Colliers, Schwartz’s, Mary Hanel, & JoAnn Sulak for lunch at The Caragh Restaurant. The food was great, with Sue & I splitting a turkey & cranberry panini with our own little basket of French fries. We finished before the others and left for a quick tour of St. Mary’s Cathedral before we had to meet the bus. It turned out that this was the Church of Ireland St. Mary’s (Protestant) and not the Catholic one! Oh well.



Jaunting Car Ride & 15TH Century Ross Castle – Killarney National Park

We continued around the Ring of Kerry with a spectacular view of Dunloe Gap, carved by glaciers during the Ice Age 10,000 years ago. The U-shaped gap is between MacGillycuddy’s Reeks and Purple Mountain. In its valley are 5 lakes connected by the River Loe from which Dunloe Gap gets its name. Dennis pulled the bus over next to the River Caragh, and we got out and stretched our legs. It looked like fly fishing heaven to me, and Sue found a sign on the gate

advertising memberships to the Caragh Bridge Angling Club (Caraghbridgeangling.ie). I researched it in case we come back to Ireland to fly fish. The Club has access to the Lower Caragh (from Lough Caragh to the sea), and annual membership is 40 Euros/adult. Continuing on the Ring of Kerry, the road soon came alongside Dingle Bay. We got out again, climbed over the stone wall and looked over the edge which was a long drop to the bay below. Thick wild blackberries brambles were everywhere and we picked a few of the ripe ones which were small and delicious. We continued on to the small towns of Cahersiveen and Waterville. Waterville was a favorite vacation spot of Charlie Chaplin. At Beenarourke Pass, we pulled into the Ring of Kerry Lookout and Car Park. It is a large parking lot encircling a statue of Mary known as The Lady of the Wayside. The pull-off had a view to the north that included the Loher Stone Fort (the ruins form a ring) and Waterville. To the south was a spectacular view of the Atlantic, including a harbor where many sailboats were anchored. We enjoyed an Irish version of a drumstick from the ice cream truck vendor that was doing a brisk business in the parking lot!

A bit further on the road, we passed Derrynane home of Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic who was also known as "The Liberator". He won an election to Parliament in 1828 and refused to swear an Oath of Supremacy acknowledging the British Monarch as the head of church and state. He was allowed into office without swearing the oath via the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829. We finished our Ring of Kerry tour when we arrived back in Sneem. Upon arriving in town, Diedre brought up Albinia Lucy Broderick (aka Gobnait Ni Bhruadair). Born in England of an English Protestant aristocratic family, she later bought a home near West Cove, Catherdaniel, County Kerry in 1908. She sided with the Irish Republicans during the 1916 Easter Rising to end British rule in Ireland. Though sympathetic to Catholics, she did not convert to the Faith. She is buried in the graveyard of the Anglican Church of Ireland in Sneem. We crossed over the River Sneem on a one lane bridge and arrived at St. Michael's Catholic Church for Mass with Fr. Conlon.

After Mass, we walked back to the Sneem Hotel and Sue and I split a cheeseburger and fries. The burger was good but somewhat different. We then walked back into town to Sneem Tavern for a night of story-telling, music and song, and Irish dancing. The band had a sweet gray haired gal with a great voice playing guitar, a fiddler, an accordionist (Batt's son), a Bodhran drummer, and a sound mixer who also sang "Three Lovely Lassies in Bannion". The old gal "brought tears to me eyes", as they say in Ireland, when she sang "Danny Boy". The Bodhran drummer showed off his skills by using his "Cipin" (small drumstick with knobs on either end) to play a solo on a water bottle cap - amazing! Batt Burns recited a poem and told some funny stories. He talked about the dying art of story-telling in Ireland. But his son the accordionist is carrying on the tradition and told a funny story about a barber giving a priest a shave (drinking was involved!). Four couples performed Irish Set Dances for us which looked to me like a fast Polka step with some square dancing thrown in. Then they invited folks to come forward and Joe Pollock played the guitar (very well I might add) while the band played and sang along. Mary Barber sang 2 solos that were quite moving. Another pilgrim played the guitar and led us in "This Little Light of Mine". We all sang along when the band played, "Country Roads" by John Denver and brought the house down. We crashed at the Sneem Hotel after a full day of sight-seeing and fun.



Sneem Tavern Entertainment

Friday, August 10th (Blarney Castle, Rock of Cashel, Holy Cross Abbey, Clonmel) Steve's Videos:
<https://youtu.be/galfZxTN2fA> <https://youtu.be/FYDppLhhfUc>

We ate the big Irish breakfast in the Sneem Hotel and departed for **Blarney Castle**, County Cork, a two hour drive to the east. We passed through more beautiful country with unbelievably green pastures, rolling hills, lakes, and farms. We arrived at the entrance gate, got our tickets, and hot footed it to the Castle so we could “Kiss the Blarney Stone” and receive the gift of gab! There was a long line and we had a hard deadline of an hour to be back at the bus. I didn’t want to get stranded and suggested we blow off kissing the stone, but Sue was adamant that we try. The line moved painfully slow as we climbed up various steps to reach the top of the castle. It reminded me of waiting for a ride at Disney World! Eventually, we got to the top of the castle tower and waited patiently for our turn. You have to lie on your back after removing everything from your pockets, and grasp a handrail in each hand. Then an attendant helps you arch your back downward so you can kiss the limestone rock implanted on the bottom of a battlement. There is an iron grate a few feet below you to prevent you from falling about 90 feet to your death if the attendant lets go of you! Sue and I took pictures of each other and then walked very fast back to the bus with a smile on our face!



Countryside – County Cork



Sue Kissing The Blarney Stone

We drove about an hour to the northeast arriving at the **Rock of Cashel**, County Tipperary for a tour. A young Irish lady guided us around the ruins including an intact 12th century round tower and a 13th century cruciform cathedral that is missing its roof. The ruins are on a hill looking out over the countryside that is green and gold with pastures and ripe wheat fields. In the graveyard outside, Steve Ray showed me a Sweeney tombstone. It was inscribed with 5 Sweeney names and their date of death. They could be related to me, I will have to research this further.



St. Patrick arrived in Cashel in 432 and converted and baptized King Aengus as Ireland's first Christian ruler. St. Patrick's cross was carved from Drumbane Sandstone in the 12 century and is a Latin style cross. One side depicts Jesus' Crucifixion, the other St. Patrick. The original is weathered and was moved inside to the Hall of the Vicar's Choral to protect it from further deterioration. Other artifacts are kept there as well including a gold chalice. A concrete replica is located outside where the original cross stood. On our way back to the bus, a young girl was Irish step-dancing for tips.

We left Cashel and drove north for ½ hour to **Holycross Abbey** on the River near Thurles, County Tipperary. This abbey was founded in the 12th century by Cistercian monks. The monastery was destroyed by Oliver Cromwell. The ruins were declared a National Monument in 1880, never to be used for religious purposes again. In 1969, that decision was reversed and the Abbey was returned to the Catholic Church. A piece of the True Cross is preserved in the church. Fr. Conlon celebrated Mass for us and, at the end, gave a special blessing to those married couples celebrating anniversaries.

We drove ½ hour south to **Clonmel**, County Tipperary and checked into The Hotel Minella where we had supper. Afterward, Batt Burns put on his Shanachie hat and for an hour told us stories and recited poems. My favorite story was about Moll and her unlicensed Collie! We laughed and laughed and enjoyed ourselves greatly.



Batt Burns – Shanachie (Storyteller)

Saturday, August 11th (Kilkenny, St. Kevin's Monastery, St. Kevin's Church, Dublin) Steve's Video: <https://youtu.be/K0mkeZCf6xl>

After another huge breakfast, we checked out of the Minella Hotel and departed to tour the grounds of **Kilkenny Castle Park**, Kilkenny, County Kilkenny. The massive castle (and adjacent lawns and gardens) was so large it was impossible to capture the entire building in one photo. The original, probably wooden, was built in by Richard de Clare (aka Strongbow) in 1195 on the River Nore. In 1213, the first stone castle was completed. Later in 1391, James Butler bought the castle and it remained in the Butler Family for over 500 years. In 1967 it was sold for 50 pounds and then turned over the State. It was refurbished and is now open to the public.



Kilkenny Castle & River Nore

On our drive to Glendalough, it turned gray and then rainy as we drove through the mountains. We saw lots of heather which is a prickly plant with a pink flower. We also saw forests of pine and spruce and tailings from old abandoned copper and gold mines. We ate lunch in Glendalough ("Glen of the Two Lakes"), County Wicklow and saw a short movie in the Visitor's Center. We took a guided tour of **St. Kevin's Monastery** in the rain. St. Kevin (498 – 618 AD) moved there to live a hermit's life in a cave carved out of the hill 30 feet above the Upper Lake. Disciples moved to Glendalough to be near St. Kevin and soon the place grew to be a seminary of saints and scholars. We entered St. Kevin's Church which was very small. Our entire Bus #2 gang could barely fit inside. The church has a small round tower attached, but the separate Glendalough Tower is much larger and impressive at 33 meters high. We cruised around the monastic site and Sue & I took a selfie of a beautiful creek passing underneath a bridge. I was sure the creek held brown trout!



St. Kevin's Church & Round Tower - Glendalough

We went to Mass at the modern **St. Kevin's Church** in nearby Glendalough village. They had icons of St. Kevin and St. Laurence O'Toole on either side at the front of the church. After Mass I searched the graveyard for Sweeney headstones. A parishioner replacing flowers on a family

grave told me there were no Sweeneys buried there. I did find a McDonald headstone, took a picture of it, and gave it to Mary Hanel as her Irish roots go back to the McDonald Clan.



Icons of St. Kevin & St. Laurence O'Toole – St. Kevin's Church, Glendalough Village

We drove an hour north to the Camden Court Hotel in the middle of **Dublin**. We had the afternoon and evening to explore and eat dinner on our own. I had found a coin store online located in George's Street Arcade, and we walked there hoping to find some pre-Euro Irish coins. We walked north from the hotel on the busy sidewalks of the busy streets. The crowds of people took some getting used to as we had enjoyed the small, less populated Irish towns. Along the way, we found an antique store and bought a few Irish coins minted in 2000, and some old US silver coins including a 1936 silver quarter which I needed for my collection. By the time we got to The Arcade (a large indoor collection of small shops and kiosks), Lir Coins was closed. We wandered around looking for a restaurant and decided on pizza and adult beverages at Caffè Amore. Sue and I shared a Margherita pizza. I drank an Italian beer by the name of Peroni and the ladies had wine. We walked back to the hotel noting souvenir shops we wanted to visit over the next few days.

Sunday, August 12th (Book of Kells, Newman University Church, Merry Ploughboy Pub) Steve's Videos: <https://youtu.be/uvX-6sMLyqY> <https://youtu.be/z2-85-dzld8>

After breakfast, we boarded the bus for a tour of Dublin with Diedre pointing out all the major sites. We drove along the River Liffey past the Samuel Beckett Bridge named after the famous Irish playwright and poet. It is white and built in the shape of a harp, the national symbol of Ireland. We passed the Guinness Brewery and stopped to take a picture of Phoenix Park where they were constructing a small stadium for the upcoming Pope Francis visit to Ireland for the World Meeting of Families. We decided to visit Trinity College and the **Book of Kells** today instead of Monday because Steve heard that two cruise ships were about to arrive in Dublin. All the tourists on board would have made our wait in line too long. As it turned out there was a long line anyways when we got to Trinity College, but we persevered and made it inside just as it started to rain. The Book of Kells is an illuminated manuscript containing the 4 Gospels created around 800 AD d by monks. The illustrations and text are highly ornate, intricate, and beautiful.

The folios are high quality calf vellum and the lettering is written in oak gall ink. Other inks from various sources were used for the many colorful illustrations. Certain folios are on display each day and are rotated periodically. The Book is kept in the Trinity College Library at one end of the ground floor. We left the display to walk through the Long Room which is 65 meters long and houses around 200,000 of the Library's oldest books. I thought of our daughter Melanie and her husband Joshua and their love of books when I was in this massive room with its numerous, two-story, arched alcoves, each containing packed bookshelves. I had a vision of the end of the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark", when they were storing the Ark on a shelf inside the massive Smithsonian Museum storeroom!



Trinity College Library – 200,000 Books!

After our tour of Trinity College we were on our own for a few hours to explore that part of the city, and we ate lunch at a nearby cafeteria. While waiting on our food to arrive I went a few doors down and found a neat Ireland rugby shirt for myself. We headed over to **Newman University Church** (aka Church of Our Lady of Wisdom) for Mass with Fr. Conlon. This 150 year old unique church is located across the street from St. Stephen's Green, a beautiful park in the heart of Dublin. There are arches on either side of the altar, a balcony on the right side, and an old time wooden confessional in the back. We received Holy Eucharist at a Communion Rail, something I haven't done in many, many years. After Mass, we walked back to the hotel.

Steve and Janet had a big evening planned for us, dinner with singing and dancing entertainment at **The Merry Ploughboy** ("The only pub in Ireland owned and managed by Traditional Irish Musicians"). This Public House is in the foothills of the Dublin Mountains and, according to the plaque out front, was established in 1789 and became "A Hotbed of Outlaws and Rebels Against British Imperial Rule". It was fully restored in 2006 by The Merry Ploughboy Band which has been playing together since 1989. We had wonderful bread served to us when we arrived. The first course was our choice of soup or goat cheese, we had the vegetable soup. For the main course we chose the free range Limerick chicken served with broccoli, cauliflower, and mashed potatoes. Dessert was apple pie, everything was delicious!

The band came on stage and from left to right included the following instruments: mandolin, bag pipe/flute, folk guitar/Bodhran drum, bass guitar/folk guitar. They quickly got us in the mood with traditional Irish songs, and we clapped and sang along. During one song, the

audience was asked to clap along at a very precise interval. JoAnn Sulak got pulled up onto the stage for clapping out of turn! We all laughed and she played along with the razzing that the bag piper gave her. It happened to be her 70th birthday, and the band led everyone in singing “Happy Birthday”. For being a great sport, the bag piper gave her a Merry Ploughboy T-Shirt and CD. Then, five very talented Irish Step Dancers came on stage to perform for us. The speed at which they were able to step was amazing! The Merry Ploughboys performed a final set and we ended the night standing, clapping, and singing along to “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary”. We made our way back to the hotel. Sue and I agreed this was the best night of the trip!



JoAnn Sulak & The Merry Ploughboys



The Merry Ploughboys & Irish Step Dancers

Monday, August 13th (St. Mary's Pro Cathedral, St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Teresa's Church)
Steve's Video's: <https://youtu.be/pAGu37iDvLE>

After breakfast, we toured around Dublin and stopped to take a look at **St. Mary's Pro Cathedral**. It was dedicated on November 14, 1825, the feast of St. Laurence O'Toole. It is the Archbishop's Cathedral of the Diocese of Dublin. It has massive columns running on either side of the cathedral and behind the altar. There is a huge dome over the stone altar, the front of which depicts two angels kneeling in adoration of a monstrance holding the Blessed Sacrament. Just outside the church, I found a statue of Margaret Ball and Francis Taylor standing under a

cross. I was moved when I read the plaque which said that both died in prison, Margaret in 1584 and Francis in 1621. She was the Mayoress of Dublin and was arrested during the Celebration of the Mass for giving refuge to priests in her home. He was elected Mayor of Dublin in 1595, and was imprisoned for 7 years without charges or trial. Pope John Paul II declared them Blessed on September 27, 1992, saying they were, ***“Faithful witnesses who remained steadfast in their allegiance to Christ and his Church to the point of extreme hardship and the final sacrifice of their lives... God sustained them in their trials. He comforted them and granted them the crown of victory. May He also sustain those who work for reconciliation and peace in Ireland today.”***



Blesseds Margaret Ball & Francis Taylor – St. Mary's Pro Cathedral

Next, we drove over to tour **St. Patrick's Cathedral**. It was founded in 1191 by John Comyn (Archbishop of Dublin). It is beside St. Patrick's well, where he baptized converts in the early 5th century, on an island between two branches of the River Poddle. It was a Catholic Cathedral for centuries, until it was taken over by Anglicans during the English Reformation in the 16th century. It was briefly repossessed by the Catholic King of England James II, but when his army lost the Battle of the Boyne, it became Anglican again under King William of Orange. The Irish Church Act of 1869 disestablished the Church of Ireland as the state church, and St. Patrick's Cathedral became the National Cathedral of the Church of Ireland (Protestant). Christ Church Cathedral became the Cathedral for the Church of Ireland's Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough.

There are many things to see in the Cathedral including St. Patrick's Stone (discovered in 1901), believed to have covered the well where St. Patrick baptized many converts to Catholicism. Three tall and beautiful, stained glass windows at the rear of the Cathedral depict 39 scenes from St. Patrick's life. At the end of the tour, we shopped in the bookstore and made a few last minute purchases for our children.



St. Patrick's Stone – St. Patrick's Cathedral

We were on our own for the afternoon until Mass at 4 pm. Sue and I split a sandwich and chips at a small restaurant and then headed over to St. George's Arcade. Finally, Lir Coin was open for business and we searched the circulated coins for the oldest ones we could find of each denomination including ½ penny, penny, 3 pence, 6 pence, shilling, 50 pence, florin, and ½ crown. Along with my Venezuelan coins, these will be my favorite foreign coins due to my Venezuelan and Irish roots.



Pre-Euro Irish Coins – Florin & ½ Crown

We met for Mass at **St. Teresa's Carmelite Church** on Clarendon St., founded in 1792 by the Discalced Carmelites of Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. This quiet church is down an alley connected to the bustling Grafton pedestrian street. It has beautiful stain glass windows above and behind the altar. The center window depicts Mary with the infant Jesus giving St. Simon Stock the Brown Scapular. Below the altar is a white marble statue of Christ in the tomb carved by Irish sculptor John Hogan in Rome in 1829. In front of the altar is a beautiful inlaid marble image of hosts and fishes. After Mass, Fr. Conlon blessed and sprinkled our religious souvenirs.



St. Teresa's Church – Dublin

Knowing we had a short night's sleep ahead of us, we grabbed a brick oven baked pizza from a hole in the wall pizzeria that several customers said had "The best pizza in Dublin". We ate it in the hotel lobby, it was quite good. That night we packed our suitcases and went to bed early in order to get a short night of sleep before getting up early for our flight to Frankfurt.

Tuesday, August 14th (Dublin Airport, Frankfurt, JFK Airport – NY) Steve's Video:

<https://youtu.be/O-rhZv-H5H4>

We got up super early for our bus ride to Dublin International Airport. Steve arranged to have breakfast bags ready for us to grab before saying goodbye to him and boarding the bus. Diedre rode with us to the airport to make sure we got to the right terminal for our Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt. We had a bit of a layover there which was a good thing because we had to go through security again after walking across the entire airport! Oh well, that's the Frankfurt Airport for you. The flight to JFK went well and we watched movies to pass the time. After we went through customs and grabbed our luggage, we caught a cab for the Comfort Inn LaGuardia. We were exhausted and laid down for a nap at 3 pm, only to sleep all the way to 6:30 the next morning!

Wednesday, August 15th (Midland):

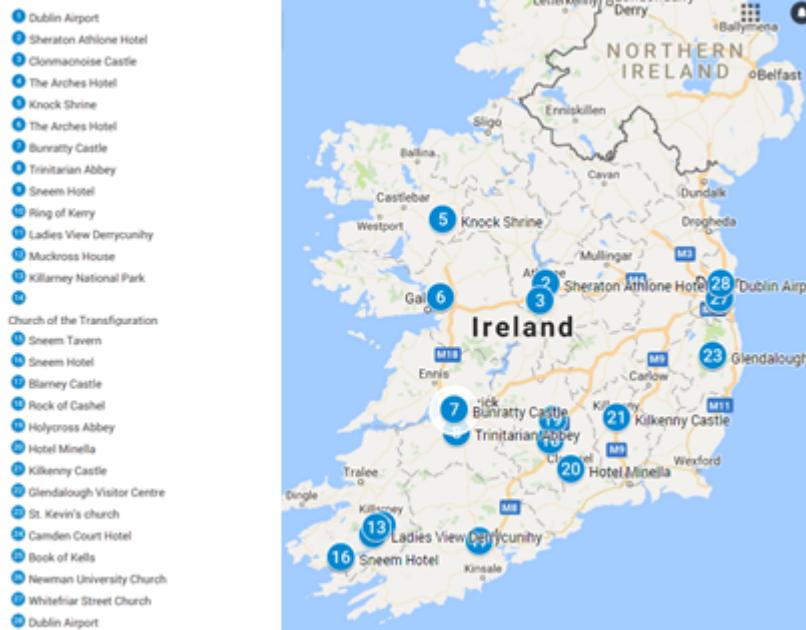
We took the hotel shuttle to nearby LaGuardia Airport and caught our flights to Dallas and on to Midland which were on time. JoAnn Sulak was kind enough to pick us up at the airport (Mary and her flew on to Midland the night before). She reminded us it was the Feast of the Assumption, and we offloaded our bags and headed for 5:30 pm Mass. What a great way to finish our Pilgrimage!

This trip moved me in so many ways. First of all, I was excited to see the homeland of my Sweeney ancestors which I have now traced back 5 generations to County Sligo. And, I am working on my Family Tree with the hope of tracing it back even further. I read a very good book during the trip, "The Everything Irish History & Heritage Book" by Amy Hackney Blackwell and Ryan Hackney. When I learned about the struggles and persecution of Irish Catholics it brought me to tears. The good news is that the situation in Ireland is so much better in our times. The

Irish people are so friendly, charming, and they like Americans! The island is lush and beautiful with so much contrast from one side to the other. Sue and I are already talking about another trip to Ireland next year. We want to concentrate on the western half of the Island, and spend our time moving about the small towns and other sites we did not visit on our Pilgrimage (I'll have to learn to drive on the left side of the road!). This will include visiting County Sligo to research our Sweeney ancestors' records. And, of course we will spend some time fly fishing the beautiful streams and creeks for brown trout!



River Caragh – County Kerry



Map of Ireland Pilgrimage