

Community celebrates Irish heritage in Maynooth



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By Nate Smelle

More than 40 people gathered at the Hastings Highlands Public Library on the afternoon of Friday, May 3 to take part in a celebration of all things Irish.

The gathering was a musical affair with Parcel of Rogues and several local musicians performing throughout the afternoon. The celebration featured a selection of Irish songs performed by John Foreman, Mary Burbidge, Steve Barker, Leslie and Ron Hysert, Doug Hopkins, Catherine Khan, Rod Moffitt, Denis Richard and former mayor of Hastings Highlands Vivian Bloom.

According to the event's organizer Jim McPherson, transforming the library into a music venue has become the norm every second Friday morning thanks to a dedicated group of 20 musically-talented people. He said the group gets together to jam and perform music in the Irish tradition each week, alternating between the Club 580 in Bancroft and the Hastings Highlands Public Library. McPherson said they are always welcoming new people into the group, and advised any interested musicians to contact either Hastings Highlands Public Library's CEO Rod Moffitt, or North Hastings Public Library CEO Kim McMunn for more information. ?All of the participants are in someway connected to North Hastings either as permanent or seasonal residents,? he said.

?Some were born here and others come from as far away as Belfast Ireland and New Orleans Louisiana.?

Before belting out a heartfelt rendition of the song ?Grace,? one of the performers, Steve Barker explained the significance of the event being held on May 3. They decided to hold the event on this day, he said, in recognition of Joseph Mary Plunkett, one of the original members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who organized the Easter Rebellion in the spring of 1916. During the uprising, Plunkett marched on the General Post Office on O'Connell Street in Dublin and helped to occupy the building in protest of the British occupation of Ireland. After heavy shelling by British forces, the rebels were forced to abandon their headquarters at the General Post Office the rebels surrendered and Plunkett was captured and imprisoned.

Following the surrender, Plunkett was held in Kilmainham Gaol and sentenced to death by firing squad for his involvement in the uprising. Seven hours before his execution on May 3, Plunkett was allowed to marry his lifelong sweetheart, Grace Gifford.

Before Barker began singing, the master of ceremonies for the celebration was, Reverend Bob Hill added ?One of the big mistakes that England made in Ireland was that when the uprising started the people were not really behind it. They thought it was wrong, but then once Britain took their leaders and executed them turned on them and were now for the rebels. If Britain had just tried these people and put them in jail instead of executing them, the troubles may never have started. It was a terrible mistake they made that was a colonial mindset being played out in Ireland.?

After honouring this tragic moment in Irish history, Hill soon had the crowd laughing again with a series of edgy jokes taking aim at everything from religion to the Irish immigrant experience. Stories and poems celebrating the Irish heritage of Maynooth were also shared by Ethyl Ryan, local author Sue Kehoe and Vivian Bloom. Janis Harris, and Marjory McPherson kept the crowd smiling filling their bellies with a delicious light lunch of Irish soda bread and potato soup. Volunteers Eden Guidroz and Harold Harris also

pitched in to help make the event a success.