



CIMPN/RCPMI

CANADIAN IRISH MIGRATION  
PRESERVATION NETWORK

PROUDLY PRESENTS

# An Líonra

(THE NETWORK)

#5. SPRING 2026

## Message from the President

As we continue into 2026, I am pleased to share that the momentum we spoke about in January has not only continued – it has grown in exciting and meaningful ways.

### **The Irish Mile™ – A Strong Start**

Since its soft launch on January 27, The Irish Mile has been met with tremendous enthusiasm. Developed as part of our SRQEA-supported initiative, Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec, the project is quickly taking shape as a dynamic and evolving platform.

We are continuing to add new sites, additional categories, and community contributions from across the province. What began as an ambitious idea is now becoming a living, growing map of Irish heritage in Québec.

### **Research & Academic Contributions**

Our Cartographica submission entitled “Grave Matters: Mapping Memories of Irish Burials in the Saint-Colomban Cemetery” has been completed and is currently under review.

In February, CIMPN participated in the symposium “Oral Histories with the Dead” at Concordia University—an engaging and highly successful event that brought together researchers and community voices.

We also took part in the Montreal Irish Monument presentations:

- Goose Village Remembered: History & Archaeology
- The Stories They Left Behind: What Archaeology & DNA Reveal about 14 of 6,000 Anonymous Famine Refugees

## Message from the President (cont.)

### **A Busy and Celebratory March**

March was filled with energy and celebration during the Green Season. CIMPN proudly participated in several St. Patrick's Day parades, beginning in Ottawa, followed by Hudson, Montreal (UIS), and Quebec City.

In Hudson and Montreal, our volunteers collaborated with the Montreal Irish Monument to design and build a float. In Montreal, under the theme "Little Shamrocks, Big Dreams," the float was awarded the JP Feron Trophy for Best Amateur Float—a wonderful recognition of the team's creativity and dedication.

### **More Green Season Activities**

CIMPN supported the Montreal Irish Monument fundraiser in Pointe-Claire with the Underground Divas and the Reel Shambles in early March.

Verdun Mayor Céline Audrey Beauregard and Councillor Sterling Downey invited CIMPN to attend the 5@7 in the "Colours of Ireland" reception held at Verdun City Hall. Fergus Keyes and I attended.

### **Thank You**

To our volunteers, partners, and supporters—thank you for your dedication and continued support. Your contributions make this work possible.

*Kelley O'Rourke*



# In the News

## The CIMPN to Launch Digital Repository

The Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network (CIMPN) is proud to announce the upcoming launch of its Document Library on June 1, 2026.

This new online, searchable resource will provide visitors with easy access to a growing collection of materials exploring the history and culture of Irish migration to North America. Designed as a central hub for genealogists, historians, scholars, students, organizations, and anyone interested in Irish Canadian heritage, the Document Library will bring together a wide range of valuable content in one place.

The platform organizes multiple file types into a single, user-friendly database, allowing users to browse, apply filters, and download resources with ease. From historical events and commemorative sites to family stories, archival collections, ceremonies, and interviews, the Document Library will offer a rich and evolving resource for discovery and research serving as a digital repository.

The Document Library will be available through the CIMPN website, making it easy for users to access this valuable resource online.

Whether you are interested in exploring your ancestry or learning more about the broader Irish Canadian experience, the CIMPN Document Library will be an essential destination.



## THE KNOCK MILE: MAYO

By Debbie Howlett

If you drive far enough into the Gatineau Hills, past the dairy farms along the two-lane road, you eventually hit Mayo, Quebec. It doesn't look like much at first glance. There's a church, a crossroads, a handful of houses, but that's the thing about all these rural Irish towns on the Irish Mile. What looks ordinary now usually started with something extraordinary.

The first Irish families got here in the 1820s, walking and hauling their way north and west from Montreal, following the Ottawa River and then its tributaries, until they found land that reminded them of home. They named it Mayo, after County Mayo in Ireland, because when you're carving a life out of forest and rock, sometimes naming a place is the easiest thing about it.

According to local historians, the migration of Irish people to Mayo began during the Great Famine of 1845-1849, with many families settling there. However, the town had already seen some Irish settlers for about 20 years. Most of the Irish immigrants who wound up in Mayo disembarked in the port town of Thurso, in Lochaber Township, and from there they moved inland, climbing into the Gatineau Hills toward the patch of country that is now the quiet village of Mayo.



The first Irish family to settle in Mayo is thought to be James Casey and his family, who emigrated to Canada around 1825. The Casey farm occupied space across from the cemetery, but, like many early farms in Mayo, today there is little evidence of the backbreaking work Casey and his three sons put into clearing the land. (1)

Their first priest, Father John Brady, came up from Buckingham. He served them for nearly thirty years, long enough to build the first mission church of St. Malachy around 1855. The parishioners buried their dead down in Buckingham at first, and then later in the cemetery beside the church in Mayo. It's quiet there, the kind of quiet that makes you feel like you're trespassing on someone else's memories.

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1. Bougard, Marsha, *From Mayo, Ireland to Mayo, Quebec: The History of the Settlement of Mayo, Quebec*. Bibliocommons, 2014.

Photo Credit: Our Lady of Victory/St. Malachy

The Knock Mile (cont.)....

But the story that makes Mayo different, and the reason people still visit the small village today, starts somewhere else entirely. In August 1879, across the ocean in County Mayo, in the west of Ireland, 18 villagers (or 15 official witnesses, if you want to get official) in a tiny rural town called Knock saw an apparition on the church wall: the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and St. John the Evangelist. (2) Whether you believe it or not, it almost doesn't matter; what matters is what came after. Pilgrims came, and kept coming. Eventually, so did popes. In 1979, Pope John Paul II visited Knock. In 2018, Pope Francis followed in his holy footsteps. Today, an estimated 1.5 million pilgrims from across the globe flock to the shrine every year. (3)

Following the Knock apparition, miraculous cures were reported. Ireland had centuries of holy wells, pilgrimage sites, and saints' shrines associated with healing, and Irish immigrants in Quebec found similar traditions at St. Anne de Beaupré and other Catholic sites. Seeking cures through faith was simply part of their spiritual landscape.

Fast-forward seventy years. It's 1949, and a new priest, Father Clement Braceland, takes over running the parish at St. Malachy's Church in Mayo, Quebec. He goes to Ireland, visits the Knock shrine, and something about it gets under his skin. Maybe it was homesickness on behalf of his parishioners, or the simple fact that a rural Quebec hillside can feel a lot like an Irish one if the light hits it right. Whatever it was, when he came back, he decided to build a version of Knock right in Mayo and called it the Our Lady of Knock Shrine.

And he did. By 1955, there was a local shrine, tucked beside the church, built stone by stone in the same rolling land the Irish settlers once claimed. Since then, every August, people walk the same quiet road in Mayo to St. Malachy for the annual pilgrimage. Hundreds come. Some for faith, some for family history, some because the place feels older than it looks.

Today, the village moves at its own slow pace. The shrine sits exactly where Father Braceland left it. It's all remarkably ordinary, until you remember that it has a connection to an apparition in Ireland, a priest with a big idea, and a small community determined to hold on to its past. That's Mayo. A quiet rural parish that somehow carries a piece of Ireland in its pocket, and after all these years, hasn't let it go.

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2. <http://catholicstrength.com/2023/08/01/the-famous-apparition-in-knock-ireland-was-attested-to-by-fifteen-witnesses/>

3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/ukhttps-northern-ireland-45175164>

# The Irish Mile™ - Featured Interview

## Uncovering the Irish soul of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue with Ryan Young

On a cold and sunny morning this past December 15th, 2025, Samara O’Gorman (CIMPAN Interviewer & Researcher) sat down with Ryan Young (Historian & SADB City Councillor) within the historic stone walls of the Simon Fraser House to explore the deep, layered Irish heritage of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. The pair discussed how the town’s unique position at the merging of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers made it an inevitable crossroads for trade and travel for many different groups, including the Indigenous peoples, long before European arrival. This geographic advantage later turned the village into a bustling outpost for the North West and Hudson’s Bay Companies, where the rugged life of the fur trade met the growing influence of diverse cultural communities, most notably the Irish, whose labour and spirit became foundational to the region’s development.



The conversation took a literary turn as the pair delved into the site’s most famous guest: Thomas Moore, an Irish poet who stayed there in 1804. Moore allegedly composed his celebrated Canadian Boat Song during his visit, inspired by the local rapids and voyageurs. O’Gorman and Young reflected on how the work of the local boatmen and the Ste. Anne’s landscape might have reminded Moore of his homeland, bridging the gap between Canada and Ireland. Today, the Simon Fraser House is vacant, but it used to function as a café, a store, a heritage center, offices and more. It was even home to a Bank of Montreal branch at one time.

Special thanks to Evita-Marie Di Falco (CIMPAN Researcher & Board Member), who filmed and edited the entire interview; it would not have been possible without her help and hard work.

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Coming soon: Please look for the full interview on You Tube and the Irish Mile Virtual map very soon. <https://cimpn-rcpmi.ca/the-irish-mile-interactive-map/>

# Past Events

## Goose Village Remembered

### The Shared Legacy of Irish and Italian Immigrants in Montreal

By Samara O’Gorman

On February 6th, 2026, the Irish community of Montreal gathered at the historic La Maison Forget for "Goose Village Remembered: History and Archaeology." The evening was in collaboration between the Montreal Irish Monument (MIM), and the United Irish Societies (UIS). Co-hosted by MIM Secretary Kelley O’Rourke and MIM President Fergus Keyes, the event honoured the legacy of a neighbourhood deeply intertwined with the city’s industrial and immigrant past. The event was well-attended by members of the community and the CIMPAN team, including Samara O’Gorman, Katherine Diamond and Laurie McKeown.



Photo credit: CIMPAN-RCPMI

The event featured two lectures that bridged the gap between archival memory and physical discovery. Guest speaker Marisa Portolese (MFA) shared insights from her research, offering a look at the immigrant stories of Goose Village. Following her, Dr. Martin Perron, an archaeologist with Hydro-Québec, presented findings and artifacts uncovered from the future commemorative site, providing a tangible connection to the displacement and labour history of the area.

Portolese’s Italian heritage served as a reminder of the shared immigrant experiences that define Montreal’s history. Her research into Goose Village, a neighbourhood once home to a vibrant Italian-Canadian community before its demolition, resonated deeply with the Irish community’s own history of displacement and resilience. This connection underscored the longstanding bond between the Irish and Italian communities in the city; both groups have historically supported one another through shared labour struggles, religious ties, and a mutual commitment to preserving the cultural memory of neighbourhoods that shaped their identities.

By grounding the night in both scholarship and material archaeology, "Goose Village Remembered" illustrated how two heritage groups continue to champion each other's efforts in honouring the past and building a collaborative future.

*To stay connected with the Goose Village project and explore its ongoing research, visit [goosevillage.ca](http://goosevillage.ca)*



## The Stories They Left Behind - How archaeology & DNA are revealing details about anonymous famine refugees

On the evening of Friday, February 27th, history and science collided at the historic Maison Forget. The Montreal Irish Monument (MIM) hosted an update on the DNA and archaeology efforts surrounding the 1847 mass grave of Irish famine victims near the Victoria Bridge. The updates were part of an event titled “The Stories They Left Behind,” which offered a look at how modern technology is restoring dignity to those long relegated to the margins of history.

The night featured a lecture by Dr. Marine Puech, an archaeologist specializing in osteoarchaeology, who presented her findings on the remains of 14 individuals excavated during the construction of the REM. Through a combination of skeletal analysis and emerging ancient DNA research, these individuals, once part of an estimated 6,000 anonymous refugees, are finally beginning to emerge as individuals with stories.

Our CIMPN President, Kelley O’Rourke, who also serves as Chair of the DNA & Archaeology Subcommittee at the MIM, provided remarks on the progress of the recovery efforts. The findings from this project aren’t merely statistics about the Great Famine, but also about the lives and hardships of people whose lives are now being meticulously reconstructed through science.

The success of the evening and the ongoing research was made possible through a broad coalition of partners, including the Quebec Anglo Heritage Network (QAHN), Hydro-Québec, and the City of Montreal. The project also receives vital support from the St. Patrick’s Society of Montreal and both the Government of Canada and the Government of Ireland via the Emigrant Support Programme. CIMPN team members who were present at the event and helped out were Samara O’Gorman, Katherine Diamond, and Evita-Marie Di Falco. As the DNA analysis continues, Montreal moves one step closer to ensuring that the stories that these Irish immigrants left behind are never forgotten again.

# St. Patrick Day Parades

The CIMPN's first parade of Green Season 2026 was celebrated across the provincial border in Ottawa. This was a momentous occasion for the nation's capital, as the March 7<sup>th</sup> event was the first to occur in the city since 2019. The CIMPN was well-represented by a team consisting of four board members and three volunteers, who celebrated alongside iconic Canadian landmarks, such as Parliament Hill and ByWard Market. Though the parade was a new sight for many of the young families lining Wellington Street, the crowds met the CIMPN and the dozens of other parade contingents with great enthusiasm.



On March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026, the CIMPN and the Montreal Irish Monument Foundation (MIM) had the wonderful opportunity to share a float and march in the Hudson Saint Patrick's Day Parade. Graced by the beautiful melodies of Montréal-based trad Irish band Gráinne, our shared float brought a unique, cheerful energy to the parade route, which was bursting at the gills with cheering crowds. The beautiful spring weather perfectly suited the joyful event, which seemed to ring in the season with an air of camaraderie and celebration. The CIMPN extends its profound thanks to the MIM team, the members of Gráinne, and our dedicated volunteers for bringing smiles and Saint Paddy's cheer to the residents of Hudson.



## St. Patrick Day Parades (cont.)

It wouldn't be a Canadian Saint Patrick's Day Celebration without some unexpected weather! Though the March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026 parade in Montréal was chillier and snowier than expected, our volunteers and the spectators alike were happy to wave, cheer, and dance through the spring snowstorm. The CIMPN and the Montréal Irish Monument Foundation (MIM), supported by the musical stylings of Irish trad band Gráinne, shared a float that offered glimpses into the past, present, and future. While Montréal's Irish history has not always been positive, as shown through the solemn recreation of the Point Saint-Charles Black Rock Monument, it is the city's youth- who graced our float in photos and as volunteers- who are carrying Irish culture proudly into the future. The CIMPN and MIM's collaborative effort in constructing the float earned the organizations a shared award for Best Amateur Float from the 2026 Judging Committee. Cheers to another great Montréal parade!



The CIMPN's final parade of the season was unique, as representatives Katherine Diamond, Autumn Darey, and Samara O'Gorman had the great pleasure of marching alongside members of various organizations that belonged to the United Irish Societies of Montréal. This large contingent of parade participants was delighted to close off the month of March in Québec City, where plentiful crowds cheered, danced, and offered high-fives to our team members. With the parade ending in Québec City's historic Old Québec neighbourhood, the CIMPN had the exceptional opportunity to reflect on the massive sociocultural impact Irish immigration has had on the province- and on the country as a whole. The CIMPN thanks the UIS and its fellow cultural organizations for inviting us to join in the parade's festivities.



## The 2026 Green Season Ends with the United Irish Societies of Montreal Awards Banquet

By Laurie McKeown

On April 18, 2026, the United Irish Societies of Montreal (UIS) hosted their annual Dinner and Dance Awards Banquet, a cherished event celebrating the spirit and contributions of Montreal's Irish community. As the proud organizers of the Montreal St. Patrick's Day Parade, the UIS oversee key traditions, including the selection of the Parade Grand Marshal, the Chief Reviewing Officer, and the St. Patrick's Parade Queen and her court, while also supporting numerous charitable initiatives throughout the year.



This year brought special recognition for the Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network, which, in partnership with the Montreal Irish Monument, was awarded the prestigious JP Feron Award (circa 1973) for Best Amateur Float.

The 2026 parade theme, “Little Shamrocks, Big Dreams,” was selected by Parade Grand Marshal Gary McKeown, a dedicated Shriner, and set a joyful and inspiring tone for the celebrations.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes. Their creativity, dedication, and community spirit made the float—and the celebration as a whole—a tremendous success.

We extend our sincere thanks to the United Irish Societies of Montreal for a wonderful celebration marking the close of the green season, and for the honour of being selected as recipients of the JP Feron Award. This recognition is truly appreciated, and we are grateful to be part of such a vibrant and supportive community.

# Upcoming Events

- **June 17-19, 2026:** Canadian Association of Irish Studies Conference in Quebec City at Université Laval
- **June 2026:** Festival Bloomsday Montreal takes place annually around June 16 in Montreal, commemorating the Irish literary heritage of James Joyce
- **May 15, 2026:** Cine Gael Montreal's last film of the 2025-2026 season, "*Blue Road: The Edna O'Brien Story*." To be screened at J.A. DeSève Cinema, Concordia University, 1400 de Maisonneuve West, at 7:15 PM, unless otherwise indicated
- **Friday, June 12, 2026:** *St. Patrick's Society Charitable Golf Tournament* at the Bellevue Golf Club. 880 Boul de Lery, Lery, QC J6N 1B7
- **September 28, 2026:** *Montreal Irish Monument Annual Golf Tournament* at the Kanawaki Golf Club
- **Summer 2026 TBD:** Festival celtique de Québec

# Meet our team...

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The Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network  
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dedicated to the preservation of Irish heritage

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