



Oct. 20 at Woodway Country Club

## Geese to honor Pete Hamill at Celtic Ball

**P**ete Hamill, journalist and author, will be the honoree at the 26th annual Celtic Ball on Oct. 20 at the Woodway Country Club in Darien.

In his more than 40-year career, Hamill, a native of Brooklyn, N.Y., has earned a reputation as one of the nation's foremost Irish-American journalists, novelists and essayists.

Proceeds of the ball this year will go to The Irish American Museum of Washington, D.C. The Wild Geese are playing a leading role in establishing in Washington a museum that will honor the contributions of the Irish to our nation's history and culture over more than four centuries. Those proceeds will be among the first tangible fruits of what will become a nationwide campaign to win support and raise funds for this eminently worthwhile project.

On pages three through seven of this



**Pete Hamill**

*Celtic Ball Honoree 2007*

### 26th Annual Celtic Ball

Saturday, Oct. 20, 2007

Woodway Country Club in Darien  
Cocktails 6:30 p.m., Dinner 8 p.m.  
Dancing to the Celtic Cross Band

issue are articles about interesting aspects of Irish- American history and on page eight is a story about progress in planning the museum.

Hamill has been editor-in-chief of the New York Daily News and the New York Post, and has been a columnist for both those papers as well as New York Newsday, the Village Voice, New York magazine and Esquire.

He is the oldest of seven children of immigrant parents from Belfast in Northern Ireland. He left school at the age of 16 for a job in the Brooklyn Navy Yard as a sheet metal worker. He later served in the U.S. Navy and attended Mexico City College and Pratt Institute.

He worked several years as a graphic designer, then became a reporter for the New York Post. In his journalism

*(Please turn to page 2)*

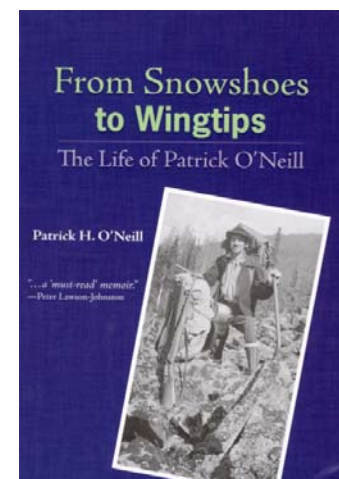
*James Dougherty, president-elect of The Wild Geese, greeted our new executive director, Eileen Heaphy, at a reception held in Stamford on Sunday, Sept. 9.*

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*What does Alaska share with South Boston and Woodside, Queens? They all have a rich Irish-American heritage. One of our members, Patrick O'Neill of New Canaan, is living proof of that.*

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## Ex-foreign service officer is new Geese administrator

**E**ileen Heaphy, a native of Ansonia, a former State Department officer and a member of the Stamford Board of Representatives is the new executive director of The Wild Geese.

She succeeds Lee Cushman who has served as executive director for the past several years. Cushman leaves the post with the heartfelt thanks of the Geese Board of Directors and the general membership.

Heaphy brings a wealth of experience to the post of executive director. Since 2000, she has been executive director of the World Affairs Forum, a non-partisan organization serving Fairfield and Westchester counties. The forum's purpose is to educate the public about international affairs and the role of the United States in the world.

From 1973-1998, Heaphy was a foreign service officer in

the U.S. Department of State. She served in five diplomatic posts abroad and headed three major bilateral affairs offices in the State Department.

She served five administrations from Richard Nixon to Bill Clinton. She specialized in Western Europe and Latin America with a focus on Mexico.

From 1989 to 1992, she was the senior State Department official following United States-Ireland relations and succeeded in getting the administration of President George H.W. Bush to commit to supporting the Ireland Fund.

Heaphy earned her bachelor of arts degree from St. Joseph College in West Hartford and a master of arts degree from American University in Washington, D.C. Since 2003, she has been adjunct professor of international relations at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.

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## Oct. 20 Wild Geese Ball will celebrate Celtic New Year

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career, he covered wars and civil strife in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Lebanon and Northern Ireland, and lived in Mexico City, Dublin, Barcelona, San Juan and Rome.

He covered everything from murders and fires to World Series, championship fights, art, jazz and politics. He witnessed the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, and wrote about them for the Daily News.

Hamill also has written nine novels, two collections of short stories, movie and television scripts, essays and collections of his journalism. His memoir, *A Drinking Life*, was on the New York Times best-seller list for 13 weeks, and his novel, *Snow in August*, made the same list for four months.

Hamill's latest novel is *North River*, a story set in Greenwich Village during the Great Depression of the

1930s. The main character, Jim Delaney, is a doctor whose life is touched by and who touches the lives of the rich and poor and the ethnically diverse residents of one of New York's storied neighborhoods.

Wild Geese members have been sent invitations to the annual celebration in honor of the Celtic New Year. Please respond by Oct. 12. For more information, contact Jim and Sue Dougherty, chairpersons. They can be reached at (203) 661-4865, [jdough1928@aol.com](mailto:jdough1928@aol.com) or [sidough747@aol.com](mailto:sidough747@aol.com).

### Correction

In the summer issue of *The Gander*, we failed to give credit to Dr. Edward T. Krumeich, who took the photograph on page 8 of Wild Geese members attending the talk by cartoonist Mort Walker at the home of Phyllis Donovan. Our apology to Dr. Krumeich

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The Wild Geese is an organization of Irish-Americans providing opportunities for members to enjoy and preserve their Irish heritage and to promote in the larger community an understanding and appreciation of the richness of the Irish tradition.

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## IRISH AMERICA

# Roots of Wild Geese member Patrick O'Neill extend back to Alaskan gold rush of 1897

**I**t is a fairly common misconception that the boundaries of Irish America do not extend much farther than South Boston, Woodside in Queens, the Irish Catskills, Chicago's Bridgeport neighborhood and a few similar enclaves in the larger cities of the United States.

Wild Geese member Patrick O'Neill is living proof that that is a very narrow view of something that is in fact much larger. O'Neill, a resident of New Canaan, is an Irish-American who hails from the very hinterlands of North America — Alaska.

In 1897, his grandfather, William A. O'Neill, left his home in North Dakota to join the gold rush to Alaska and the Yukon. "He carried his supplies up the famous Chilkoot Trail from Dyea, near Skagway, to a mountain pass that lay on the border with Canada," writes Patrick O'Neill in his book about his family and his life, *From Snowshoes to Wingtips*. "The North West Mounted Police required a year's supply of food, roughly 1,000 pounds, for each person entering Canada; each man therefore had to make numerous trips to get his food and supplies to the top and then had many miles to transport it to the headwaters of the Yukon River, where they built boats or rafts to go down the river to Dawson."

William O'Neill was anything but a lone Irishman in the gold rush. In fact, the abundance of Irish prospectors among those hoping to make a fortune was confirmed by a Yukon newspaper columnist who in 1900 wrote, "Here in Dawson, the Irish are as numerous, or more so, than any other race."

In fact, a native of County Antrim, Arthur Francis Sean Harper is credited with being "the pioneer prospector whose efforts directly led to the discovery" of gold in the Yukon and Alaska. In 1872, Harper, with four others including another Antrim man, Frederick Hart, began prospecting in the vast territory of Alaska which had been purchased by the United States in the late 1860s. Harper never became rich,

but his explorations led directly to discoveries of gold in the Klondike and Fairbanks. Ironically, he died in 1897, the very year that the rush to Alaska began.

William O'Neill never struck it rich either, but his son — Patrick's father — Harry Irenaeus O'Neill settled in the town of Cordova on Alaska's southern coast. There he ran a general store that sold groceries alongside clothing and hardware, and with his wife, Florence Anne (Leahy) O'Neill raised a family of 12.

Patrick was the seventh of the brood. In his delightful book, he tells how he came to be named after Ireland's patron saint: "The brother just older than me, Mike, was the sixth in our family. My parents had decided to call him Michael Patrick, but as they were on their way to the church to baptize him, my dad said, 'It's a shame to waste two good names on one kid, let's call this one Michael and save Patrick for the next one.' And they did."

Born in 1915, Patrick O'Neill got a job with a mining company at the tender age of 15 by lying about his age. "I asked Mr. Cramer for a job in his mine," recalls O'Neill, "and he asked how old I was. I said 18 and my dad blinked, but with 12 kids he wasn't sure how old anyone was, and he didn't say anything. So I got the job — 10 hours a day, seven days a week with a bunk in a tent, three good meals and \$5 a day and I have been a miner ever since."

Determined to get an education, O'Neill paid tuition and expenses at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks

by working summers in the mines and winters as a janitor at the university. "I worked," he recalls, "as a laborer, panner on prospect drills, mucker, millman, assayer and engineer in various departments of the U.S. Smelting, Refining and Mining Co. in the Fairbanks area except for one season as helper and the cook on a prospect crew in the Kuskowim. It took me nine years to earn two degrees in mining, but it was



*Patrick O'Neill prospecting in the Goodpaster area of Alaska in 1935.*

# America's northernmost state has its Irish community

(Continued from page 3)

probably my best investment of time ...”

The day after Pearl Harbor, O’Neill entered the Army Air Corps, and began a four-year career as a pilot. Although he attempted on numerous occasions to get an overseas assignment, he remained stateside as an instructor and test pilot for the duration of World War II.

When the war ended, O’Neill considered remaining in the military, but, he says in his book, “I had spent eight years studying mining and only four years in the Air Corps, so going back to mining was really a more logical decision ... I went back to U.S. Smelting, Refining and Mining Company in Fairbanks as exploration engineer at a salary of \$400 per month. This was less than I had been making as a captain on flying pay, but I was not too concerned as I was confident there would be opportunities for advancement in the company.” Opportunities there were, indeed, as O’Neill resumed a career in mining that would take him all over the world and continue up into the 1980s.

In 1953, he became chief engineer and then manager of a gold and platinum dredging operation in Colombia. The company was losing money and Patrick became a moving force in resolving what he perceived to be the major obstacles: “the basic social problems of illiteracy, poverty level wages, inadequate housing, extremely poor medical attention, excess personnel, etc. ... There were an excessive number of workers off sick, wages were so low that workers could not buy enough food for an average family and many workers had two or three common law wives with seven or more children. New York management insisted that it would not consider social problems until there were profits. Fortunately, a new group won out in a proxy fight in New York about the same time and I was transferred to the head office of South American Gold and Platinum Co. as vice president and chief operating officer.”

Under O’Neill’s leadership, the company raised wages, hired social workers to teach domestic skills, secured houses against insects, opened schools, brought in specialists to improve medical care, and built a social hall and a church. The company soon was making a profit and continued to do so for 20 years.

The Colombia venture was just the beginning of mining activities all over the world for the Alaska Irishman. In 1954, O’Neill was named president of South American Placers, a



Patrick O’Neill and his wife, Sandra on their wedding anniversary in 2005.

new company organized to dredge the upper reaches of the Amazon River in Bolivia. He negotiated a contract with the Bolivian government and purchased a dredge that had been used in road construction in New Guinea during World War II to begin the Amazon operations.

The company built a modern camp and an airstrip. Diesel fuel was moved in large rubber bags floated down the Amazon River. The operation was profitable and continued so until 1977 when the company was sold and the dredging operation ended.

In 1961, O’Neill was named a director of Compania Fresnillo S.A. de C.V., the first Mexican mining firm to become 51 percent Mexican owned

under a new Mexican government decree. The Fresnillo mine dated back to the 16th century. After a number of failures in a company drilling program to revive the mine, one final effort struck a high-grade vein and the Fresnillo became, in the late 1960s, the biggest producer of silver in Mexico.

In later years, O’Neill worked as a mining consultant. In New Guinea, he did a feasibility study for a gold dredging project for an Australian group. In Guyana, he assisted a Canadian company in negotiating mining concessions and licenses. In New Zealand, he did a feasibility study on gold dredging. In Borneo, he did an evaluation of alluvial properties for a Canadian group.

In 1967, O’Neill writes in his book, “I had the great good fortune of meeting the woman of my dreams, Sandra Elaine Dorris, on a flight from Mexico City to New York City. She was working for Eastern Airlines, and I was on one of my regular trips to Mexico. She would not give me her telephone number, but I gave her mine and she called me at my office in New York a few days later ... It was a wonderful romance and we were married on Dec. 5, 1967 ... We have had a wonderful, interesting, affectionate, loving, happy time with great respect and concern for each other ... We had two beautiful, intelligent children, Erin Dorris and Kevin Reddy.”

O’Neill, who remains active in The Wild Geese, concludes his book: “I have been most fortunate in having an active, interesting and healthy long life and I have been blessed with wonderful family and friends. For most of my life my last thoughts every night are thanking God for all the days of my life.”

## IRISH AMERICA

# Bridget vindicated

Much maligned and sometimes cruelly caricatured, Irish domestic servants were, in fact, efficient, virtuous, and cherished in the homes of affluent Americans.

**R**anking well up on the list of those mistreated by history is the Irish servant girl who was a fixture in the kitchens and living rooms of so many affluent American homes in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, much praised for her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which castigated the evils of slavery, had no hesitancy about describing Irish servant girls as displaying "all the unreasoning heats and prejudices of the Celtic blood, all the necessary ignorance and rawness ..."

Beecher complained of Irish servants "toiling from daylight to sunset" to complete an amount of work that a New Englander girl would complete before noon. She and others saw the Irish maids as slovenly, uncultivated, disrespectful, overbearing and lacking in gumption.

### Tug-of-War for Maggie

For all of the carping, there is much evidence that more often than not well-to-do Americans got a great bargain in their Irish maids. Take the case, for example, of Maggie Maher of the parish of Fethard and Kilusty in County Tipperary. Maggie came to America apparently in the 1850s, and was so good in domestic service that she became the prize in a tug-of-war between two prominent New England families.

Maggie, along with her sisters, brother and parents, settled in Amherst in western Massachusetts where she was hired by the prominent Boltwood family. Eventually a young member of that family, Lucius Boltwood, moved with his family to Hartford and Maggie went along as their maid.

In 1867 or 1868, Maggie returned to Amherst when her father became seriously ill. Shortly thereafter, her father died and just several weeks later her brother-in-law, Thomas Kelley, was nearly killed when he plunged 30 feet from the roof of a building at a construction site. For a while, it was feared he, too, would die, leaving Maggie's sister a widow with seven young children.

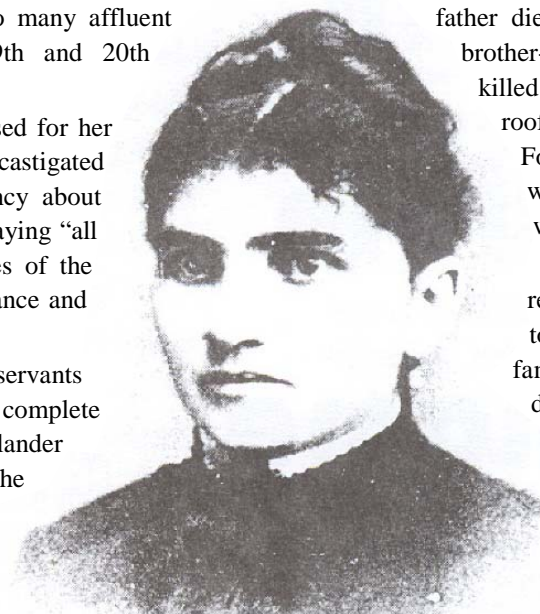
The twin tragedies delayed Maggie's return to Hartford and eventually she took a domestic service job with the family of Edward Dickinson, whose daughter, Emily, was to become a famous poet.

The Boltwoods interpreted Maggie's action as desertion and insisted that she return to Hartford. Maggie pleaded that she didn't feel warranted in leaving Amherst and asked for understanding, writing to the Boltwoods, "I don't want to disappoint any person or brake my word ... If I be poor and working for my living I

will always try to do rite."

"I have tried every way to go to Hartford this summer," she wrote, "but I must stay here for the summer. I tried to get a girl for them (the Dickinsons) but they would not take any one that I would get ... Mr. Dickinson said he would pay me as much more wages sooner than let me go so that I have decided to stay for the present ..."

"I went to Pallmer the day that Mr. Boltwood was up here to get the girl that worked for them before me and she would



*Katy Leary was a respected and beloved maid to America's greatest humorist, Mark Twain, and his family for more than 25 years in their home in Hartford. Katy was the daughter of Irish immigrants who settled in Elmira, N.Y. Another highly esteemed Twain servant was the writer's coachman, Patrick McAleer, who was born in Co. Tyrone.*

# Irish maids given bum rap by detractors

(Continued from page 5)

come, but they would not take her.”

When the Boltwoods made another offer, Maggie refused it, “not for the reason that I did not love you for I always love you and Mrs. B. and the boys and you always was a kind mother to me so kind that I fear that I never could pay you for your care and interest in me ... But I cant lave Sister Mary this winter for she needs me for comfort.”

When Maggie mentioned that she wished to return to Hartford, Edward Dickinson indicated he would be very angry not only with Maggie, but with her family.

His comment was apparently a subtle hint that should Maggie leave the Dickinsons, the job of her niece Margaret, who also worked for them, might be jeopardized. “Poor Maggie,” writes one historian, “found herself in the midst of a furious tug-of-war ... emotionally torn between her loyalty to the Boltwoods and her promise to the Dickinsons.”

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Lucius Boltwood was outraged. In a letter from Hartford, he called Edward Dickinson’s actions “a specimen of the arrogance of the man ... he has no claim to Margaret whatsoever ... It is nothing but impertinence on the part of Mr. Dickinson to try to brow beat and threaten her into staying with him.” Lucius suggested his family in Amherst should inform Maggie “that you have made all your arrangements on her promise to come here in September and that it will be a very great inconvenience to you if she does not now come.”

Both families seemed to have expected an almost feudal obeisance from Maggie. They had no qualms about manipulating her, but took exception when she put her own familial interests first.

In the end, Maggie remained with the Dickinsons. Of her,

Emily Dickinson once wrote, “Maggie is with us still, warm and wild and mighty ...”

## Mark Twain and Katy Leary

During the years he and his family resided in Hartford, 1871 to 1903, America’s most famous humorist, Mark Twain, came to regard his Irish maid, Katy Leary, in the same way. Born in Elmira, N.Y., the hometown of Twain’s wife, Livy Langdon, Katy came to the attention of the Twains because of her skill as a seamstress.

Katy joined the Twain household in Hartford only after two interviews. In the first, Katy was screened by Livy. In the second, Katy’s mother screened Livy and Twain, demanding that her daughter be watched over in Connecticut as if she were one of the family.

When Katy arrived in Hartford, it was said that Twain told his wife, “So you hired that girl ... Well did you notice them wide, thick black eyebrows of hers?” When Livy said she had not noticed, Twain said, “Well, you know, she’s got a terrible fierce temper, I believe. Nothing half way about her. Yes, I think you’ll find she has a temper. She’s Irish.”

There were times when Katy did prove a match for the famous writer. One issue on which they clashed was the care of Twain’s manuscripts. Livy was the only person Twain would trust to dust and arrange the desk where he did his writing in the billiards room. One day Katy suggested to Livy that it was foolish for Livy to spend her time on such a menial chore. They connived a bit and agreed that Katy would begin doing the chore and Livy would tell her husband that Katy just dusted around the manuscripts without actually touching them in any way.

Things went on that way for about a year until Twain caught Katy in the act one day and went into a rage.

## A true daughter of Erin

“**H**ere was a poor Irish housemaid who touched our feelings extremely,” wrote an Englishwoman, Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley, about an encounter in Bridgeport during a tour of America in 1850. “We had watched her with compassion in the pouring rain milking the cows, her gown-skirt over her head, crouched in wet grass. When she came in with our tea, we asked her some questions about her leaving Ireland, and she appeared delighted to talk about the ‘ould country,’ ill off as she had been there. She seemed to think it the most beauteous and charming place on the face of the globe.

“Every time we saw her after that, we had a little talk about ‘the fair Emerald Isle,’ and on our coming away, when I gave her a little gratuity, she fairly burst into tears and thanked me most heartily; but, I verily believe, more for talking to her about the beautiful ‘ould country,’ and displaying interest in her simple history, than for the trifle I presented her with. She sobbed out as we took leave, ‘Och, sure my heart warmed toward ye from the first, when I found ye was from the ould countries,’ thus cordially uniting together the land of the Saxon with her own far-off Erin.”

Eventually, he accepted the arrangement, but in doing so he put a mark on the floor about a foot from his desk and commanded that Katy never cross that line.

Katy ignored that stricture, too, and they had an occasional flare-up over the issue until at length Katy revealed that from the very first day she began rearranging the manuscripts she had retained every seemingly unnecessary scrap of paper in a large bag in the closet should it prove essential after all.

### **A source of laughter and joy**

Twain recognized that Katy Leary was a person to be reckoned with. She not only performed her duties well in good times and bad, but was a constant source of laughter and joy in the Twain home.

Another maid on the Twain staff said that when she began her employment with the family, "It was Katy Leary herself that opened the door. I can see her now as vividly as she stood then — a handsome, smiling, stalwart, unique and very kindly figure. Her flashing black eyes still flashed ... Her thick wavy hair, that must have been in the early days as black as the proverbial raven's wing, was iron-gray ... A fine ruddy color burned in her welcoming face — a face that was firm and round and happy as a girl's."

The same co-worker said that Katy's "quaint sayings and philosophies and funny stories of the family happenings bubbled up like the Fountain of Life, and were an unfailing source of delight to all who heard them ... The Irish wit of her, the Irish quickness of her, the Irish deftness of her, and sometimes when necessary, the Irish blarney of her, was something to think over, something to laugh over, and something sometimes, alas, to weep over!"

### **French novels and Irish dances**

Livy Twain was always concerned about the intellectual life of her servants and she encouraged Katy to read classical works of fiction.

Katy loved to read, but she had a bit of the devil in her and sometimes strayed from the classics. On one occasion, she discovered a copy of a salacious French novel while cleaning the billiards room. She tucked it in a pocket of her maid's outfit and read it in her room, "I took in every word and it explained everything very plain," she later said. "I could understand it, I tell you. It was in English and I could understand it, the bad part, and I enjoyed it, too."

While living in Hartford, Katy maintained links with the city's Irish community. "I dressed myself up for the occasion," she said of one Hibernian ball she attended. "I had a red silk dress covered with black lace ... I thought it looked very nice and was very much pleased with myself ... We danced all them old square dances. I never danced round dances, you know, because the Catholic Church didn't approve ... So we did, well, just lancers and quadrilles ..."

## *'When they are good, there are none better'*

**I**n 1877, the *New York Sun* printed the comments of "the mistress of a Madison Avenue mansion," who was neither Irish nor Catholic, about her Irish maids. She stated, in part:

"With all their faults, the Irish are good servants. When they are good, there are none better. They are faithful through sickness and contagion and I never knew of one who was not kind to her parents in the old country. My cook, Katie, has been with us 13 years. She has been in service since she was eight years old. Another Irish girl, after being with us seven years, having saved money, went back to Ireland to live. But she was not happy. She came to New York again, and is with us now.



"A friend of ours had an Irish girl who had been with them several years, and was perfectly devoted to them. When financial troubles overtook the master of the house, she refused to take her wages, and the money had to be deposited to her credit in a savings bank. ...

"There is a great deal of fault found with Irish servants, but as a rule the mistresses themselves are to blame. They begin by showing the girls that they distrust them, and leave small pieces of money about the rooms to test their honesty. They do not seem to consider that they are women like themselves, and have feelings to be hurt.

"I know a lady who lost an excellent servant, who had been in the family almost from childhood, by writing with her finger on the dust on the mantel shelf, 'dirty girl.' The girl had dusted the shelf, but afterwards the dust had settled there again through the stairs being swept.

"Some mistresses listen at the speaking tubes and dumb waiters to hear what is said in the kitchen, and those mean enough to do that are sure never to hear any good of themselves. Generally there is a great want of consideration for the feelings of servants."

## Visit to Fontenoy where Wild Geese made history

On May 11, 1745, six battalions of Irish Wild Geese troops played a leading role in the French defeat of the British at the Battle of Fontenoy.

The Irish Brigade mounted a ferocious counterattack that checked advancing British troops and after four hours of close combat forced the British to give up the fight.

Earlier this year, Wild Geese board member Frank Browne was among French and Irish dignitaries attending a commemoration at Fontenoy, a hamlet in Belgium near the French border.



*Above, Frank Browne is third from the right in the photo of some of those participating in the commemoration. At right, the painting depicts Comte de Saxe, the French commander at Fontenoy, with troops of the Irish Brigade after the victory.*



## Plans for museum discussed at reception



At a reception at his home in Stamford on Sunday, Sept. 9, Wild Geese President Carl Shanahan outlined progress in planning for establishment of a Museum of Irish America in Washington, D.C.

Shanahan said a non-profit corporation has been organized to lead fund-raising efforts for the museum. He showed an audio-visual presentation that has been prepared for showing to potential donors.

Among the members attending the reception were, left to right, Mary and Peter Mullaney, Joseph Delaney, Michael Shea and Barbara Griffin.