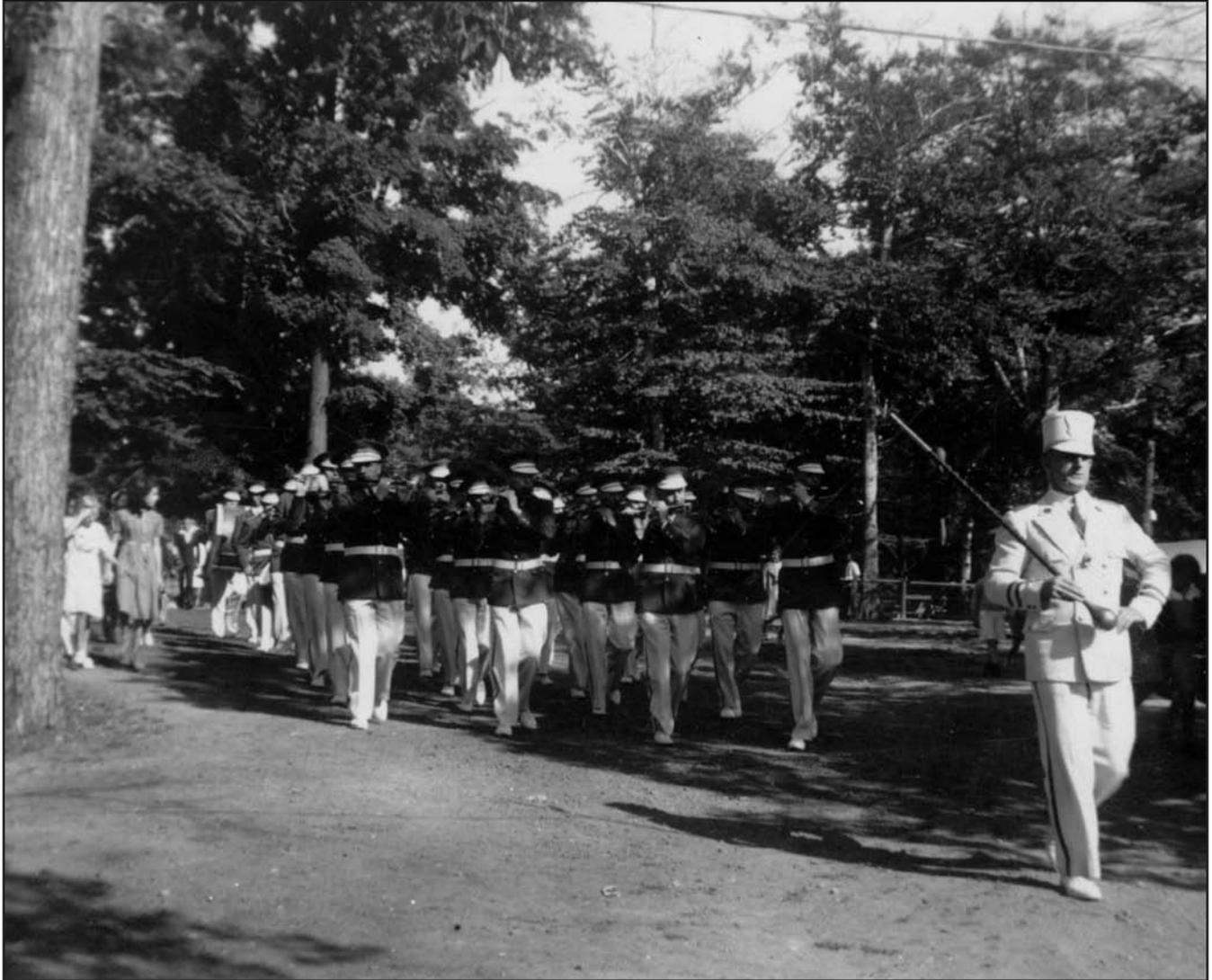


Volunteers

The first 75 years of the West Side Irish American Club



Martin M. Patton of Lawn Avenue leads the Sr. Fife and Drum Corps in the 1930's

By Judge Sean C. Gallagher

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The first 75 years of the West Side Irish American Club

By Judge Sean C. Gallagher

The only “true” historians of events are those who were actually present. Unfortunately, participants rarely memorialize events and much is lost with the passage of time. The history of The West Side Irish American Club is no exception.

What follows is an effort to chronicle the history of the WSIA as an institution. It is not designed or intended to serve as a personal history of individuals, either living or dead, whose contributions made the WSIA the success it is today. To praise and recognize all the individuals who contributed over the past 75 years would require a major publication that this space does not permit. While some individuals are named, many who justly deserve praise and recognition are not. To that end, an expanded and revised version of this writing, containing the greater record of anyone not named here, will be completed and made available to members in the future through the WSIA library.

Volunteers...

Ask any gathering of Irish Americans in Cleveland about the origins of the West Side Irish American Club (“WSIA”), and you’re likely to get countless separate and distinct explanations. This does not mean that the versions advanced are inaccurate; rather, it reflects the fact that there is no single event that, or person who, can fully explain the Club’s origin.

The West Side Irish American Club, like many other ethnic clubs, was the product of individuals who sought to identify with the culture and traditions of their native land. What is remarkable and distinctive about the WSIA¹ is its longevity. While many other ethnic clubs and organizations, both Irish and non-Irish alike, passed into memory, the WSIA persevered and grew. Formed at the height of the Great Depression, the resilience of the Club and its members over the course of seventy-five years is remarkable. This attribute is characterized by the single entity that best defines the WSIA: *the volunteer*.

The notion of the volunteer is embedded in Irish tradition and history. Those who fought or struggled for Irish independence were often characterized by the term “volunteer.” The same sense of spirit and dedication that helped much of Ireland achieve independence can also be seen in the commitment of those who founded, and then sustained, the WSIA as a cultural institution. Whether they gave time, money, talent, or knowledge, they were all volunteers, and they contributed to the creation and growth of a great cultural organization.

Origins...

If the WSIA had a predecessor, it was likely *The Irish American Social and Welfare Club*, which records indicate was formed on December 19, 1919. The first constitution of this club was found among early WSIA records. Many of the principles outlined in this group’s constitution were later embraced by the WSIA. One such concept was the early group’s goal of “promoting the social and moral welfare and to render aid to distressed members.” This tradition would be embraced and followed by the WSIA in the coming years.² Interestingly, *The Irish American Social and Welfare Club* was both nonpartisan and nonsectarian and expressly precluded discussions of religion or politics at its meetings.³

¹ The reference “WSIA” is an acronym for the “West Side Irish American” Club.

² From the postwar era of 1945 through the late 1970’s, most events involving the WSIA were arguably “benefits” that assisted members in need or individuals or organizations seeking the preservation or promotion of Irish culture or interests.

³ *The Irish American Social and Welfare Club* continued to exist into the 1930’s, but this writer is unaware of when the club ceased to be an active Irish organization.

Previously recorded historical summaries indicate the WSIA was formed in October 1931; however, at least one summary references the year 1930. Oral histories suggest the Club's formation was a gradual process, or a series of dates and events, as opposed to a single defining moment. These versions appear to have credibility based on the sheer number of individuals involved in the Club's early formation.⁴ The oral histories, some of which have been passed down through three generations, reference a series of meetings over time, including informal gatherings around picnic tables at Edgewater Park. Because of the progression of these gatherings, it is probable that any number of dates could have been declared the official starting point. Unfortunately, because no formal records or minutes of the Club exist prior to 1936, these early interactions are lost to history.

Understanding the reasons for the formation of the WSIA requires insight into the Irish-American community that existed at the time. The Irish uprising of 1916 and the resulting Irish Civil War of the early 1920's dominated the Irish-American landscape. Most American-based Irish organizations of the period were focused on defining the character of Irish independence in the Republican and "Fenian" traditions. While certainly social in character, they were far more focused on, and concerned with, the "struggle" for independence rather than the preservation of Irish culture in an adopted land. The many Clan-na-Gael⁵ organizations in existence during this period epitomized this focus.

For those seeking identification with and the promotion of Irish culture, the WSIA provided an important outlet that partnered seamlessly with organizations focused on independence. As the passion for revolution by some subsided in the 1930's, the focus on cultural traditions increased. This had a significant impact on the early growth of the WSIA.

The formative years...

Early WSIA meetings were often held wherever free space was available. In addition to the previously referenced gatherings at Edgewater Park, some initial meetings were held at the old Kilbane Funeral Home at West 89th and Detroit Avenue. Other meetings were held in many of the Irish-American homes clustered along the cross streets with Herman Avenue between West 65th and West 69th north of Detroit Ave. This was the area where many of the early WSIA members and their families resided. This predominately Irish enclave would eventually give way to Italian immigrants who would form Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish.



Eventually the WSIA gravitated to a location that was "ground zero" for many Irish organizations of the era, the Irish American Hall at 6415 Detroit Avenue. The Irish American Hall was the true "first" home of the WSIA. The two-story structure featured a large dance hall with an adjacent smaller room and bar on the second floor.⁶ Various businesses occupied the ground floor area. The hall was occupied by the O'Laughlin Dance studio in 1926, which later moved to West 34th and Lorain. Its departure paved the way for many of the Irish organizations of the era to move in and use the upstairs facility.⁷

⁴ In 1958, the Club held a "burning of the mortgage dinner" for the 9613 Madison Ave. property. The program from that event contained a listing of sixty-one original charter members. Some veteran members indicate that this list may be incomplete and the number is likely higher.

⁵ The Clan-na-Gael were a revolutionary Irish organization founded in New York City in 1867. Members were often referred to as "Fenians." The word Fenian came to be applied collectively to cover various groups that, like the Clan-na-Gael, shared the goal of an independent Ireland that would be achieved, if necessary, by force of arms. In addition to the Clan-na-Gael, there were several distinct secret organizations characterized by the term "Fenian." These included the Fenians, founded in New York in 1858 and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, (the forerunner of the PIRA), founded in Dublin in 1858.

⁶ There is considerable uncertainty about the layout of the 6415 Detroit Ave. location. While it is clear the hall was upstairs, the use of the downstairs area is unclear. Minutes from the 1940's suggest there was a smaller hall and bar downstairs that was used by The MacSwiney Club, but nothing is formally documented.

⁷ The location is not lost to history. Today the upstairs hall portion serves as part of the Cleveland Public Theatre Complex, while the downstairs location is occupied by a bookstore.

The previously referenced *Irish American Social and Welfare Club* shared space at 6415 Detroit Avenue with another Clan-na-Gael organization that would develop an almost “symbiotic” relationship with the fledgling WSIA. If the WSIA had a “sister” at the time of its formation, it was The Terence MacSwiney Club.⁸ The MacSwiney Club was a Clan-na-Gael organization that shared many of the same members with the early WSIA. One such example was William F. Chambers of the Chambers Funeral Home, who was an early WSIA member and an officer of the MacSwiney Club.

Initially, the MacSwiney Club, which was also known as the “Men’s Club,” was the dominant Irish group at 6415 Detroit Ave. The MacSwiney Club used the bar area for meetings, while the WSIA took advantage of the larger hall area for dances and, later, for band and marching practices. The MacSwiney Club charged the WSIA \$10 per month in rent for the hall, but this fee was often waived or reduced. The WSIA would hold weekly “socials,” which essentially were dances with Irish or American music that was usually played by a small orchestra. Early Club members were active dealing with decorating, selling advance tickets and handling the door, the coat check room and the bar area, as well as cleaning up and determining if a profit was made. These early activities were held weekly, generally on Friday nights, and provided members of the Irish community a regular chance to meet and interact in a comfortable setting.

While the early WSIA was a place for the promotion and preservation of all things Irish, it was also very much a melting pot for both the Irish and American cultures. The Americans got the chance to experience a bit of the “real” Ireland, while the Irish could reminisce about home. The interaction often helped the Irish deal with questions about their newly adopted land. Although the terms are derogatory to some, the so-called “narrowbacks” and “greenhorns”⁹ were thrust together in a climate of mutual identification and interest. While this process would continue at the WSIA through the late 1980’s, it was a particularly new experience for a young organization coming to terms with itself in the early 1930’s. The Americans seemed determined to try to find their past identity, while the Irish were equally determined not to lose theirs. For the most part, the mixture worked. Nevertheless, as with anything, there were differences that would arise from time to time. Sometimes it could be as simple as a dispute over what type of music (*Irish or American*) there should be at a dance. Despite these occasional disagreements, everything worked, because both camps had mutual interests. While in succeeding years it would seem that Irish immigrants dominated most of the WSIA leadership positions, many of the early founders of the WSIA were, in fact, American- born.

The first President of the WSIA was William “Wiggs” Broderick. After serving only a short period of time, some indicate weeks, he resigned the position because of a conflict with his regularly scheduled plumbers’ union meetings. Broderick was married to Edith Salabnk. His mother, Mary, was a Masterson. She died in 1929. He had two daughters, Mary Rita Hacket and Bernice Hubbard, and nine grandchildren. Broderick lived at 1324 West 67th Street. Broderick died on July 22, 1972, and is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery. Because of his commitment to his union, he had limited contact with the Club after resigning the Presidency.

There are no original records detailing the transition of officers in the first few years. Nevertheless, there were many families and individuals who gave a great deal to the formation of the Club, including the great P. J. O’Malley,¹⁰ James “Popsy” Kilbane, Colletta Masterson (Jablonski),¹¹ Edward “Ned” Gallagher, Thomas McIntyre, “Smokey” Joe Kilbane, Helen (Hinkle) Machat, Anthony McGinty, Anna Rita (Dever) Kilbane, James “Lonnie” Fay, Art McChrystal, John T. English, Thomas J. Hastings, Joseph Lyons, John Patton, Julia Patton, Martin Patton, Nellie Patton, Edward “Tubbs” Cooney, Thomas Masterson, Patrick Gallagher, John Gallagher, Peter Gallagher, Thomas O’Donnell, John Cooney, John Roddy, Martin McLaughlin, Betty Woods, Thomas “Bumpy” Kilbane, Peter J. Foley and, of course, Patrick T. Lynch, to name just a few.¹²

⁸ “It is not those who can inflict the most, but those that can suffer the most who will conquer” —Terence MacSwiney. Although often misspelled as “McSweeney” in America, MacSwiney (1879-1920), a writer and accountant, was the Lord Mayor of Cork, who was jailed by the British in 1920 and charged with making a “seditious” speech against their occupation of Ireland. MacSwiney immediately commenced a hunger strike for 74 days and died on the 25th of October, 1920. His was the longest hunger strike in Irish political history. Following his death, many Irish-American Clan-Na-Gael organizations took his name in honor of his sacrifice.

⁹ A “narrowback” generally refers to a first-generation American-born individual with one or both parents born in Ireland. A “greenhorn” refers to an individual born in Ireland who immigrated to America.

Patrick T. Lynch...



Patrick T. Lynch is today a mythic figure to most Club members under the age of 50. Most have heard something about him, but few had any actual contact with him. While Lynch was controversial to some, his significant role in the Club's history cannot be denied. It is difficult to write about the first 40 years of the WSIA's history without focusing repeatedly on Lynch. He cast a very large shadow across the historic landscape of the WSIA.

It is believed that Lynch replaced Broderick as President in 1931, but at least one account has James B. Crilly assuming the presidency for a brief period before Lynch took over. In either case, Lynch assumed control of the Club in its infancy and would come to define its existence for the next thirty-five years and beyond.

Born in Polranny, Ireland in County Mayo in 1896, he was one of the eight children of Thomas and Margaret (nee McCafferty) Lynch. Pat Lynch was active in Cleveland's Irish community from the moment of his arrival in 1915. He served in the American Army with the Allied Expeditionary Force in France in World War I, where he was awarded a Purple Heart after being wounded.¹³ Upon returning to America, he immersed himself in Irish activities. Lynch was president of the Gaelic Athletic Association for many years. He was also an accomplished athlete who played with Cleveland's Shamrock Soccer Club that won a championship in 1925. Also on that team were Art McChrystal and Martin McLaughlin, both of whom, along with Lynch, were founding members of the WSIA.

Lynch was a strong supporter of Irish priests and Irish organizations involved in mission work across the globe. He often raised money to ensure the work of the missions could be accomplished. A bachelor all his life, it was often said that "*Pat Lynch's wife and children are the WSIA.*" He wasn't the only volunteer or contributor of his era, but since he had few outside interests or commitments, his sole focus was on the WSIA. To say that Lynch lived and breathed the WSIA would be an understatement. In many ways, in those early years, Pat Lynch *was* the WSIA.

Although single, Lynch did have family in Cleveland. His brother Neil and his sister, Mary English, were both Cleveland-area residents. Pat Lynch lived at 6510 Colgate Avenue, a short distance from the early WSIA locations. He worked as a deputy sheriff for seventeen years and as a sidewalk inspector for the city of Cleveland for thirteen years.

¹⁰ Patrick O'Malley (1903-1983) was a leader of the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO. He was born in County Mayo, Ireland, to Charles and Anna (McGinty) O'Malley. He came to Cleveland in 1924, and initially worked at White Motors. When the CIO organized White Motors in 1932, he became a member and eventually held every position in the local. Eventually he became president of the Cleveland Industrial Union Council and was named a UAW regional director in 1949. He later served as the president of the Cleveland Federation of Labor. O'Malley was a founding WSIA member and longtime officer. He was the Club's first Honorary Trustee. Sensitive to struggles in Ireland, he led the "Freedom for Ireland" supporters who confronted Prince Charles when the Prince dedicated the Cleveland State University Law School in 1977. O'Malley married Mary Masterson in 1928; they had 2 children, Patricia (Rattay) and Nancy (McNamara).

¹¹ Colletta Masterson is arguably the "first lady" of the WSIA. She founded not only the Ladies Drill Team, but also, years later, founded the Forever Young group. In addition, she was the Club's regular recording secretary for many years. Masterson was the youngest of the four children of Patrick "Rocky" Masterson and Mary Agnes Masterson (nee Gorman). Her older sister was Mary Masterson, who was married to P.J. O'Malley. For years she worked in the court system with the Cleveland Police. She was married to Felix Jablonski, a police officer, who is now deceased. She has been a fixture at the WSIA for all 75 years of its existence.

¹² Many of these early members were related. For example, Betty Woods was P.J. O'Malley's sister, and Colletta Masterson's sister, Mary Masterson, was married to P.J. O'Malley.

¹³ There are countless stories and vignettes about Lynch that are too numerous, controversial, or unverifiable, to document here. Nevertheless, one such story about Lynch involves his service in France. It was often said that although England was technically an ally of the United States, it was no ally of Pat Lynch. Lynch reportedly sought out English soldiers and challenged them to fight whenever the opportunity arose. To put these events in context, it is important to note that Lynch's contact with the British came in close proximity to the failed Irish uprising of 1916.



Lynch spent countless hours at the Club, even when there were no scheduled activities taking place. His involvement was significant enough that on February 24, 1959, he was named business manager of the Club and assigned a salary of \$75 per week. He often turned this money back over to the Club or spent it on Club-related activities or needs.

By the 1950's, Lynch was often stationed at the doorway between the bar and the main hall at the old 9613 Madison Avenue location. He was a large and powerful man at more than 6 feet 3 inches tall and nearly 200 pounds. One of the best descriptions of Lynch was outlined in the Club's 50th Anniversary book where the author described him, quite accurately, through of all things, his *hands*.

"They were paradoxical hands, equally capable of delivering a grasp of friendship to an acquaintance, a pat of reassurance to a bereaved widow, a tap of reproach to an errant youngster, a wave of authority to whatever group he happened to be leading somewhere, a spectacular save in the net of the old Cleveland Shamrock's Soccer Club, a rousing rendition of "O'Donnell Abu" on his fife, or –when the occasion demanded – a telling blow that would have done John L. Sullivan proud."

It was this last reference that made Lynch a controversial figure to some of his contemporaries. He did not always run the Club in a diplomatic fashion. He could be very tough on those he viewed as disruptive, even when the individual rightly felt that characterization was unfair. Nevertheless, Lynch, in many ways, reflected the era in which he served. As one Club veteran said: *"He was a tough man, for a tough time."*

It was no easy task to serve as President during these formative years. New arrivals from Ireland came at a steady pace. The economic challenges of the Great Depression on the Club were constant. Further, the demands in the 1940's and the Second World War on membership saw many social clubs of the era fade out of existence. Lastly, the prosperity of the 1950's and 1960's, with many Americans discarding their ethnic heritage in favor of modern "Americanism," created new competition for ethnic based social groups like the WSIA. Through it all, Lynch persevered and the Club, *his Club*, prospered.

The supporters of Lynch thought so much of him that members at one point purchased him a new car. Lynch was presented with a Ford Fairlane for his service as President. The vehicle, by no coincidence, was green. Lynch was very active in the Club's acquisition of the old Madison Theatre at 9613 Madison Ave. as the Club's new home in the early 1950's. He remained steadfastly loyal to the city of Cleveland, often insisting throughout his life that the Club remain in Cleveland. In 1963 he was honored as the Grand Marshal of the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the only time on record where he did not actually march with the WSIA at the parade. He was also adamant that the WSIA should always march on St. Patrick's Day regardless of the weather.



Assuming Lynch became President in 1931, he served part, or all, of thirty-six years as Club President. The only interruption in his service occurred in 1947, because he made a motion in 1946 that no officer should serve more than two consecutive years in the same office. That rule was amended in 1948 by members so they could return him to the presidency.¹⁴ Lynch stepped down as President in 1967, and a testimonial dinner was held in his honor on October 22, 1967. Lynch downplayed his contribution in the program booklet, yet to those in attendance his leadership could never be denied. After stepping down as President, Lynch spent a considerable amount of time back in Ireland. When in Cleveland, he did sponsor some vacation tours back to Ireland. He left Cleveland for his home in Ireland for the last time in October 1971.

Although strong and tough, Lynch had health problems later in life, including the loss of some of his eyesight. He died on January 22, 1972 in Ireland.¹⁵ He is buried near the top row of the old portion of Polranny Cemetery just east of Achill Sound.¹⁶

¹⁴ James B. Crilly served as Club President in 1947.

¹⁵ The 50th Anniversary program and the "Encyclopedia of Cleveland History" incorrectly lists his year of death as 1975.

¹⁶ This cemetery is often referred to as "Achill Sound Cemetery," but it is actually in Polranny. Not surprisingly, Pat Lynch's gravestone is marked with a reference to Cleveland, Ohio, and also contains his true last name in Gaelic, "Lynchehaun."

Presidential leadership...

Pat Lynch wasn't the only leader in WSIA history. While it is important to recognize his efforts, it is equally important to keep his contributions in context. Many others served in elected positions and were also committed to the long-term success of the WSIA as an institution. Historically, it has always been the President who set the agenda and provided the direction for the organization. In addition to Broderick and Lynch, the WSIA has had an impressive list of presidential leaders.

James B. Crilly was either the second or third WSIA President, depending on whether one subscribes to the view that he served briefly as President immediately following Broderick's resignation. In any event, he served as Club President in 1947, during Lynch's one-year absence. Crilly was from Northern Ireland. He was the son of James and Bridget Crilly (nee Brennan). He had a brother, Leonard, who died in 1930, and a sister, Eileen, who was married to Peter O'Donnell. Crilly was very active in the Club as an officer and a trustee for many years. He died on December 23, 1974, and is buried in Calvary Cemetery.



When Lynch announced he would no longer seek the presidency, Stephen L. Mulloy was elected President of the WSIA on June 23, 1967. Mulloy initially served two one-year terms before stepping aside in 1969. He then returned to serve three additional terms with his re-election on December 28, 1979. Mulloy was born in Keel, Achill Island, County Mayo, Ireland. Mulloy was the youngest of seven children. His parents were Anthony J. and Elizabeth Mulloy (nee White). He came to Cleveland in 1954 where he married Anne O'Donnell, of Dooagh, Achill Island County Mayo. They had ten children. Mulloy worked for the gas company for two years and with Local 310 for thirty-eight years. As President, Mulloy strove to bring the various factions of the WSIA together.

On June 27, 1969, Michael "Gerry" Lavelle was elected Club President. Lavelle was born in the village of Pollagh on Achill Island in County Mayo, Ireland. He was one of the nine children of Michael (Red) Lavelle and Bridget (nee Weir). His parents were actually married at St. Malachi's in Cleveland, but returned to Ireland during the Depression. Lavelle came to Cleveland in 1963 and worked in the construction trades. By 1977 he was the personnel chief of the Cuyahoga County Engineer's Office. His first wife, Mary (nee Chambers), was an I.A. Queen in 1973. They had five children. After her death, he married Patricia Ann Coleman. Lavelle served a total of five years as Club President. After his first two elections in 1969 and 1970, he was reelected on July 19, 1972 after Terry Joyce decided not to run. He returned as President with the election of December 28, 1973 after Bob Devlin served an abbreviated term following a Club constitutional change. He was elected to his last term on December 27, 1974. Tragically, Lavelle died at the age of 46 after an eighteen-month battle with cancer, in May of 1986.

Terry Joyce was elected President of the WSIA on June 25, 1971. He would serve one year in that position, but several seminal events involving the Club occurred during his term. First, the Club rewrote the constitution that resulted in the present "end of the year" election format now used for officers and trustees. Second, and more significant, the Club acquired the Olmsted Township grounds that are now the home of the Club. Last, and most significant, with the assistance of Bob Devlin, the Irish American Charitable and Educational Trust Fund was created. This fund generated well over \$300,000 in revenue for the Club. Joyce was born in Currane, County Mayo, Ireland. He was one of the eight children of Michael and Mary Joyce (nee Gallagher). Joyce came to America in 1957. He married Bridie (nee Jennings) from Galway and they had three children. Joyce worked with Laborers Local 310 for 26 years and served as the union's business agent for many years. Joyce identified honesty and commitment as the cornerstones of his Presidency.

In June 1973, Robert C. Devlin was elected Club President for a six-month term created as a result of the constitutional change he helped create. He was the first, and to date only, attorney to serve in the position. Devlin did so much work behind the scenes involving legal matters that impacted the Club and its members, it is difficult to give his service the true recognition it deserves. One of his key contributions was working with his predecessor, Terry Joyce, to rewrite the Club's Constitution. The format he devised is still in use today. Devlin's interest in all

things Irish was shown in the names of his three sons: Sean, Seamus and Padraig. Devlin never charged the Club anything for his legal services. He was a top-notch attorney, who also was able to organize an entity known as the Irish American Charitable and Educational Fund, a tax exempt 501(C) (3) creation, that the Club used to raise funds for the new grounds in Olmsted Township. By May of 1982, the fund created by Devlin had been able to send more than \$70,000 to the WSIA. That figure would eventually grow to more than \$300,000. In addition to his involvement with the WSIA, Devlin was active with the Lakewood Elks Club. Devlin died on November 22, 2002.

On December 23, 1977, Rodger Fallon was elected President. Fallon was born in Castlebar in County Mayo, Ireland. Fallon married Ellen Teresa (nee O'Malley) in June 1957. They had two sons Rodger and Michael. Fallon was a union painting contractor. He served two consecutive terms as President. Fallon worked hard to stabilize the WSIA in the late 1970's and was always striving to improve conditions at the Madison location. Nevertheless, Fallon was a vocal advocate of initiating the steps necessary to move the Club off Madison Avenue.

The WSIA made history on December 17, 1983 when Helen Malloy was elected WSIA President. She was the first woman elected President in Club history and, arguably, the first woman in the U.S. to hold that distinction in a longstanding established Irish Club. Malloy is the younger of two children of Patrick and Catherine Malloy (nee Prendergast). Her older brother Patrick is known to many as "Bill." Her father was born in Mulranny, and her mother was from just outside Clairemorris, near Knock Shrine in County Mayo, Ireland. Her father came to Cleveland in 1924 and her mother arrived in 1926. They were married in Cleveland. Helen worked for thirty-eight years with the East Ohio Gas Company. She was President at the time of great change at the WSIA and presided over the Club's successful move from the Madison Avenue location to the present site in Olmsted Township.

Eddie Campbell was elected Club President on December 26, 1975 succeeding "Gerry" Lavelle, who had just concluded his fifth and final term. Campbell is a native of Ballycroy, County Mayo, Ireland. Campbell came to Cleveland in 1949. He worked for twenty-five years as an engineer at C. Schmidt and Sons Inc. He was a captain and right fullback on the Cleveland Shamrock Football Club when they won three consecutive championships in the 1950's. Campbell and his wife, Maeve, had two children Thomas and Mary Catherine. Campbell always had Maeve, by his side. She played a roll in establishing the library, which is now the Kathleen McNeeley Library.

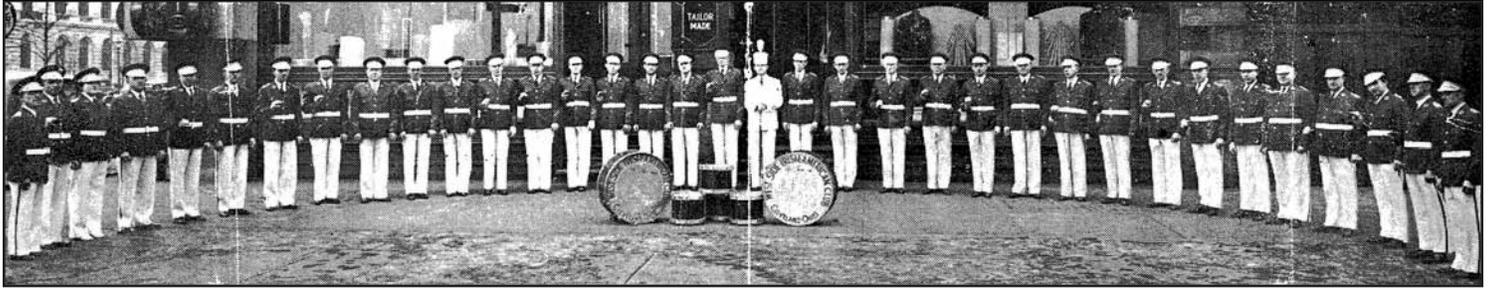
The current President, John O'Brien, was born in Kiltoom just outside Athlone in County Roscommon, Ireland. O'Brien is the youngest of five children of John and Kitty (nee Murray). O'Brien arrived in Canada in 1956 and then came to Cleveland in 1963. He was a member of the 1951 Roscommon Team that won the All Ireland Minor championship. O'Brien was elected President in 1995. He is married to Eileen, who hails from Montreal, Canada, and they have four children. During O'Brien's term, several major improvements to the Club grounds were made, including the new storage shed, the gazebo and the remodeled hall.

The WSIA in the 1930's...

In addition to their political focus, the Clan-na-Gael organizations were concerned with Irish culture. One major event sponsored by Clan-na-Gael was the annual Irish Reunion and Field Day Picnic, held on the 4th of July, which traced its origins to the year 1900. The MacSwiney Club was one of the Clan-na-Gael clubs that was very active in this event. Eventually, the WSIA would partner with the Clan-na-Gael to present this annual event. The festivities included a complete sports program with a variety of competitions, as well as marching units and bands focusing on Irish culture and independence. Many of these early events were held at the former Puritas Springs Park. A surviving souvenir program booklet from the 1922 event, held while Ireland was immersed in its tragic Civil War, demonstrates how radical and revolutionary the Clan-na-Gael organizations were at the time. The cause of Irish independence was at the forefront of all Irish-American social activities at the time.

The WSIA struggled financially in these early years. Trying to start and develop a social club during the height of the Depression was no small task. The limited early records bear this out. Weekly dances were with admission set at 25 cents each. At times, if the entertainment warranted, the admission price would increase to 50 cents. In addition, "ad sheets" for dances were created where advertisers could buy spots and these sheets would then be distributed at

the dance. Raffle ticket books featuring a wide range of donated prizes were also printed and distributed. These books contained 20 tickets at 15 cents each. In many instances, the profit for a dance would be less than \$15. Nevertheless, while these efforts had limited individual success, collectively they enabled the Club to sustain itself and eventually grow.



Since the entire focus of the young WSIA was on promoting Irish culture and events, the decision was eventually made to form a marching band. In 1934, the Fife and Drum Corps was formed by Thomas Hastings and Marty M. Patton. The early band featured not only fifes and drums, but also the traditional bagpipes.



From Left to Right: Mary Moran, Betty Campbell, Peggy O'Donnell, Helen Machat, Margaret Conway, Julia Paton, Betty Woods, Ann McGary, Betty Kilbane, Patricia Nolan, Lillian Washington, Kathleen O'Malley, Mary Gallagher, Bridget Kilbane, Clara O'Donnell, Lucy Lynch, Catherine McGary, Mary O'Malley, Beatrice Reilly, Eileen Reilly, Marie Kilbane, Rosemary Reilly, Captain Colletta Masterson. Not Present When Photo was Taken: Margaret Gallagher Kilbane, Margaret Cooney Kilbane, Ann Cooney Kilbane, Molly Cooney Sweeney, Marie Patton Corrigan and Guliana O'Boyle O'Toole.

The following year, in 1935, the Ladies Auxiliary Unit, or “Drill Team,” was formed under the direction of Colletta Masterson (Jablonski). Mary Barrett was Colletta’s number one assistant in these early years. These units showcased the Club at events across the city and beyond. They gave the Club a unique identity that distinguished it from other Irish groups.

The first downtown parade for the WSIA occurred in 1935.¹⁷ At that parade there were a reported 3,500 marchers and 47,000 spectators. Later, more than 700 Irish attended a downtown banquet at the Carter Hotel sponsored by the Irish Civic Association and attended by Governor Martin L. Davey and Mayor Harry L. Davis. While that event was taking place downtown, many of the WSIA members returned to the Club, where dancing and music ensued. This tradition continues to this day.

In these early years, Mass was held either at St. Patrick’s on Bridge Avenue or at St. Colman’s on West 65th.¹⁸ Following Mass, the units assembled and marched from West 65th and Detroit all the way to the location of the start of the downtown parade at East 22nd and Euclid. In other years, they would march to West 25th and then board buses to go to the starting location for the Euclid Ave. parade. In effect, there was either one extremely long parade, or two parades, for the WSIA on St. Patrick’s Day. This made for a very challenging day, particularly with inclement weather.

⁷ Contrary to popular belief, there was no formal downtown St. Patrick’s Day parade for 22 years, from 1913 through 1934. The downtown parade was restarted in 1935. (See *The Plain Dealer*; March 17, 1935, Section A 26:5.)

¹⁸ Prior to the tradition of attending Mass at St. Colman’s, St. Patrick’s on Bridge Avenue was the home parish for many WSIA members. Many members regularly attended Mass there on St. Patrick’s Day. There is some debate regarding whether the marching units ever appeared at St. Patrick’s Church. While the marches on Madison Ave. to West 65th and St. Colman’s are well documented, some members remember appearing in uniform at St. Patrick’s Church on Bridge Avenue.



The existence of the marching units strengthened the relationship between the young WSIA and the MacSwiney Club. The WSIA's units would often appear at MacSwiney events and would play a few tunes. These contacts fostered the partnership at the Detroit Avenue location that initially resulted in the two groups informally sharing expenses. In one instance, following Prohibition, the MacSwiney Club donated a half-barrel of beer and a cache of whiskey for a WSIA event. In exchange, the WSIA Fife and Drum Corps appeared and played "three or five" tunes at a MacSwiney Club event.

While today the focus is marching on St. Patrick's Day, in the 1930's the marching season was year-round. In addition to St. Patrick's Day, the units marched at countless events, including the Sisters of the Incarnate Word celebrations, the Irish Cultural Garden events on Liberty Blvd., The Irish Field Day and Reunion Picnic with the Clan-na-Gael, Flag Day parades, Loyalty Day parades, the Barry Day Parade, Memorial Day events, Moose Club events, church, police and firefighter service-related activities and parades, as well as events held out of town in Kent, Dayton, and Cedar Point, to name just a few. There was no res for the weary in these early years, and members had to keep up a vigorous practice schedule. Practices were often held on Friday nights in preparation for weekend events, and at times the drummers would appear outside on Detroit Avenue going over what was called the "street beat."

The limited income of the Club in these early years resulted in members searching far and wide for band equipment. Early on, the Club borrowed drums from the Knights of Columbus band. Later, several Club founders traveled all the way to Sandusky, Ohio, in an unsuccessful effort to secure musical instruments. One of the earliest purchases was a bass drum that was bought for \$3.61. This was followed by the expense to have the Club logo painted on the drum at a cost of \$2.41. Snare drum skins were \$1 each, while bass drum skins were \$2. This was no small sum during the Depression. In addition, the Club paid \$562.40 for a set of 32 marching uniforms in the 1930's. These costs were considerable in light of the fact that the Club treasury generally had less than \$300 on hand at any given time in the 1930's.

In addition to the assistance provided by the MacSwiney Club, Cannon Tailors was a "Godsend" to the early WSIA. William Cannon, from Cannon Tailors, was able to provide Club members with uniforms at a greatly reduced cost. Further, Cannon often stepped in to provide repairs, cleaning and storage of uniforms, often not even covering his own costs. The uniforms provided by Cannon were some of the most distinctive of the era, resulting in the WSIA units being able to stand out at parades and events. The WSIA marching units would not have existed in the form they did in the early years but for William Cannon and the Cannon family. The Club thought so much of the relationship with Cannon that they had photos of the units taken outside of Cannon Tailors in the 1930's. So much attention to detail involving marching uniforms was given, that by 1938 the Club acquired a logo from New York for the men's hats that featured a shamrock and a harp over the American and Irish flags.



Early observers of the "Men's unit" would see the band led by a man in a white suit. This was a tradition in the early years. Two early leaders were Martin M. Patton¹⁹, from Lawn Ave., and Thomas C. Corrigan, who would go on to become Reverend Monsignor Thomas C. Corrigan. The sense of uniform and style often did not end with the marching units in these early years. In 1938 the Club decided to purchase 200 hats and canes for the St. Patrick's Day Parade to sell to members at 25 cents a set, or 15 cents each. There was a concerted effort to promote and distinguish the Club at virtually every opportunity. In succeeding years hats and canes were routinely sold to members at a nominal fee, with extras being sold downtown on the parade route to other marchers.

¹⁹ Martin M. Patton and Thomas Hastings founded the Sr. Fife and Drum Corp in 1934. Patton was the Club's initial drum major. His distinctive uniform gave the unit a very unique look. One of Patton's sons is Reverend James Patton, who has been active in Irish affairs for many years. Martin M. Patton died in May 1965 and is buried in Calvary Cemetery.



Initially, the Ladies Drill Team was referred to as the Ladies “Auxiliary” Unit. The term “auxiliary”²⁰ was eventually dropped, and the women quickly achieved equal status with the Fife and Drum Corps. The ladies were trained to march by a man named Bill Dvorak who, although not Irish, used his continental European background to teach them military steps. Dvorak was an accomplished trainer, and his expertise showed. He was a U.S. military veteran. The ladies were as consistent and professional as any group in the area. Another early contributor

to the quality of the early Men’s Fife and Drum Corps was John Lincoln, who, like Dvorak, was reportedly not Irish, but nevertheless contributed a great deal by teaching and improving the overall musicianship of the band.²¹

It is important to note that the Ladies Drill Team Unit symbolized an important feature of the early WSIA. Unlike many other organizations of the time, the WSIA was fairly progressive. Women were fully involved and active in Club events, unlike many other organizations of this era. Women often took on leadership roles and were never precluded from holding office or taking the initiative in Club activities

As the 1930’s progressed, the stature and viability of the WSIA increased. On February 7, 1938 the WSIA decided to enter into a formal partnership with the MacSwiney Club on the use and costs associated with the Irish American Hall at 6415 Detroit. This virtual merger demonstrated how the WSIA had grown and was now gradually overshadowing the more senior MacSwiney Club. The hall at 6415 Detroit Avenue was owned by the Cleveland Trust Bank, which set the rent at \$150 per month. The MacSwiney Club controlled that relationship. The MacSwiney bar generated approximately \$70 in profit toward the hall rental each month and it was decided that the two clubs would make up the \$80 balance through a fifty-fifty split. Further, the two clubs agreed to equally split any and all profits on all dances and social functions held at the hall. Patrick Patton was the MacSwiney representative from that club who dealt with the WSIA.²²

By the late 1930’s, the WSIA was established as one of the leading Irish institutions in Cleveland. The Club election results for 1936 were published in *The Plain Dealer* on July 10, 1936. The creation of the Board of Directors, or Board of Trustees, is traced to a meeting on May 14, 1937, when it was recommended the Club have a board. On June 3rd the Board, selected by Lynch, was announced as Nellie Patton, Helen Machat, Agnes Burke, Mary Moran, Julia O’Boyle, P.J. O’Malley, J.G. Patton, Tom Kilbane, John Keating, Mary O’Malley, Margaret Gallagher (Edward’s wife), and Miss Molly Cooney. Although there were only 400 official members, there were few Irish immigrants who didn’t find their way to the doors of the WSIA. Likewise, the American Irish saw the Club as a place of direct connection to their ancestral past.

It was in this era that an almost innocuous event occurred that best captures both the spirit of the members and the necessity of the times. At a 1938 meeting, a Club member announced “*he received a call from a Jewish man named Gross,*” who was associated with the old City Hospital. Mr. Gross informed the member that a “*young Irish lad*” named O’Donnell had died at the hospital and had no family here or anyone to claim the body. Mr. Gross indicated he did not want the body to go unclaimed. He offered to donate some money if the Irish club or the member knew someone who would claim it and give the young man a proper burial. At that point, the funeral director, James “Popsy” Kilbane, indicated he had already claimed the body and arranged a proper burial and he would do so at his own cost with no donations needed from anyone. This simple, dignified act embodied the spirit of the early founders and members that helped cement the positive reputation of the WSIA in the eyes of not only the Irish, but also of other ethnic groups as well.²³

²⁰ The term was revived for a time in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

²¹ Another individual who contributed to the musicianship of the Fife and Drum Corps was a Scotsman named Freddy Sangster, who helped to train many of the drummers in later years.

²² Not surprisingly, Patrick Patton was also a longtime WSIA member.

²³ There is little doubt this act of kindness was repeated on many occasions by not only Kilbane, but also the Berry, Chambers, Gallagher, Corrigan and McGorray funeral homes, to name just a few.

James Edward “Popsy” Kilbane was symbolic of the type of Irish American who was involved with the WSIA. Although his funeral home at 8909 Detroit Ave. is long gone, it was, along with the original Chambers Funeral Home at 8602 Madison Avenue and the original Berry’s Funeral Home on West 65th (to name just two), a place where the Irish would often gather. Kilbane was the son of Patrick and Ellen Kilbane and was married to Catherine Chambers. He had five children. He died on May 30, 1952 and is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery.

During this same period, members decided to secure a charter for the Club. While a formal charter was still two years away, as part of this discussion, the members actually voted on March 3, 1938 to change the name of the Club from the West Side Irish American Club to the Irish American Club, because many members were from the east side. It was probably the most meaningless vote in history, however, as the Club continued to be known and continued to conduct its business as the West Side Irish American Club.²⁴

The late 1930’s also saw the Club adopt several traditions that would remain in place for years to come. The weekly dances were moved to Sunday night, and while other dances were routinely held, Sunday night dances became a regular event. The price for admission to these dances went to 50 cents. Later the Club would focus on one Sunday night dance per month to ensure good attendance. In addition, the Club started the tradition of having a Halloween dance and a New Year’s Eve dance. The Mickey Mayfair Orchestra played at the 1938 New Year’s Eve dance. They were paid \$45. The dance made a profit of \$102, which was split equally between the WSIA and the MacSwiney Club. In January of 1939, the Club treasury showed a balance of \$480.75, with all bills paid.



In late 1938 and early 1939, the Club got involved in a project to create the Irish Cultural Garden in Rockefeller Park. Pat Lynch was the Club’s representative at a series of meetings among Irish groups in Cleveland. The Club pledged and raised \$500 for this effort. The Irish Garden was created in the form of a Celtic cross. The Garden was officially dedicated on October 29, 1939. Music was provided in part by the Fife and Drum Corps of the West Side Irish American Club. Originally, Irish Prime Minister Eamon De Valera was expected to be present, but because of the war in Europe, he was unable to attend. The dedication speech was offered by Maurice J. Tobin, Mayor of Boston.

The growth of the WSIA was evident by the end of the decade. At the 1939 St. Patrick’s evening dance, 703 tickets were sold at the door. The cost of Irish music for the evening was \$12 while the American music was \$27. In the end, the WSIA and the MacSwiney Club each received approximately \$153.50 as their respective share of the profits.

While the WSIA was nonpolitical from its inception, on occasion it did address political issues when the subject involved Ireland. One such circumstance occurred in April 1939 when Sean Russell²⁵ was detained in Detroit while Britain’s King George VI was visiting America. The WSIA leadership sent a telegram to President Roosevelt and to Congressman Martin L. Sweeney objecting to the detention. Sweeney was a long-term supporter of Irish affairs in Washington. Russell was eventually released, but not before seventy-six members of Congress of Irish descent threatened to boycott a reception for the King in Washington. Further, when two IRA members, Richard Barnes and Jason Richards, were executed in Birmingham, England, in 1940, the WSIA was initially going to send a letter of protest, but after reflecting that the act was done, decided to have a Mass said for the two dead men.

²⁴ In later years, longtime member John Cooney would reveal the reason for the failure of the name change. When Cooney went to file the charter in Columbus, he discovered another, apparently defunct, group laid claim to the name “Irish American Club,” so he was unable to file under that name. Thus, we have remained the West Side Irish American Club for the past 75 years.

²⁵ Seán Russell (1893-1940) was an Irish republican and a chief of staff of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Russell traveled to the United States in 1939 to “show the flag” and place himself in the public mind as the leader of militant Irish nationalism. He was a controversial figure because of his association with Germany before America entered the war. Russell died aboard a German submarine (the U-65) on his way to Ireland in 1940, more than one year before America entered the war.

The early 40's and the war years...

While Europe entered the new decade at war, America and social clubs like the WSIA focused on events at home. The WSIA entered the 1940's in a state of transition. The marching units were strong and extremely popular, and they began to travel out of town to perform. In 1940, they traveled by train and attended the All Ohio Irish Picnic at Cedar Point, with the cost of a ticket being \$1.25 for adults and 65 cents for children. Other trips were planned or made to places as far away as Dayton.

In May of 1940, the treasury had \$1,250.27 on hand. The Club was solvent. Nevertheless, the leaders were concerned about the Club's location. The Cleveland Trust Company was contacted in September 1940 about the prospect of entering into a year-long lease for the premises at 6415 Detroit Avenue. The WSIA and the MacSwiney Club were renting the hall on a month-to-month basis. In a letter to the Club, dated September 21, 1940, Cleveland Trust declined to enter into a year-long lease with the WSIA and instead decided to continue the relationship on the month-to-month basis. As a result of this decision, the WSIA, on October 3, 1940, decided to start a building fund to explore future options. Members pointed to the Knights of Columbus hall in Kent, Ohio, a place they had recently visited, as a good illustration for a future Club.

A watershed event in Club history occurred on September 20, 1940, when the Club's Articles of Incorporation were finally filed with the Ohio Secretary of State. By formally filing its charter, the Club incorporated itself under Ohio law as a legal organization. This was no small feat. The articles, or charter, outlined the structure of the Club as an institution. The filing was a testament to the efforts of the founding members, while giving focus and direction to those who would follow in the Club's future.

Although the WSIA was not the owner or leaseholder at 6415 Detroit Ave., it took on the responsibility of "keeping up" the Club location. In one instance, the Club worked with the Sunrise Brewery to repair the front steps leading up to the hall. The repairs were necessary for beer deliveries. The total cost was approximately \$60. The relationship of the WSIA to suppliers was shown in this repair. Sunrise reportedly agreed to contribute between \$35 and \$50 toward this repair. It was in their interest to keep the relationship strong, and they needed the steps to deliver beer. In addition, repairs involved the WSIA and the MacSwiney Club sharing costs. In one instance, the downstairs location was repaired with MacSwiney paying two-thirds of the cost, while the WSIA contributed the remaining one-third of a \$47.45 bill.

In 1940, the Halloween dance featured both Irish and American music. Discussions leading to these dances often centered on how long each group would play. For Halloween, the admission was set at 35 cents with an additional 5 cents for coat check. Members took musicians seriously, often arranging rehearsals for prospective bands to be certain the bands were of the quality the Club expected. "Publicity committees" were set up to get the word out. The Club held its annual New Year's Eve Dance, with tickets costing 50 cents. The band played from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. at a cost of \$40. At year's end, the treasury had a \$1,350.89 balance.

In early 1941, the Club leaders were concerned about members who failed to renew their membership. While the Club membership was close to 400, there were a reported 200 members who had failed to renew over the past two years. A committee was formed to contact these members and get them to renew their memberships. At the time, the cost of a yearly membership was \$1.

From 1935 to 1941 and after the Second World War up to the creation of the United Irish Societies in 1958, the St. Patrick's Day Parade was conducted under the auspices of the Irish Civic Association. The Irish Civic Association was an organization that depended on the loose collaboration of an array of Irish clubs and groups. The I.C.A., as it was called, was regarded as a "downtown" group, generally associated with civic, business and government officials of Irish descent.²⁶ The I.C.A. had a major annual event on St. Patrick's night, which featured a prominent speaker and dinner at a downtown hotel. Between the years 1935 and 1941, funding for the parade was done in part through the sale of raffle tickets. Irish clubs like the WSIA often sold these tickets with the proceeds going to offset the parade cost.

²⁶ The I.C.A. still exists. Today, it organizes an honor guard comprised of members of the local judiciary to lead the annual downtown St. Patrick's Day Parade.

On May 1, 1941, Colletta Masterson declined the nomination to serve as the recording secretary. A founding member, she was already head of the Ladies Drill Team. Helen Machat then assumed the recording secretary duties. Kathleen McNeeley subsequently became the recording secretary in 1946.

During these years the Club, leading up to St. Patrick's Day, would often attempt to have the Fife and Drum Corps appear on the radio to promote both the parade and Club. The WSIA was equally supportive of other Irish groups and individuals preparing for St. Patrick's Day. In 1941, the Club donated \$5 to the "Boys of the Angle" for their parade float.

The 1941 St. Patrick's Day Dance showed a profit of \$256.50. St. Patrick's Day events were followed up by the Club's annual participation in the Sisters of the Incarnate Word celebrations. The Ladies Drill Team arranged a Mass and breakfast on Mother's Day attended by Monsignor Smith. The annual Irish Field Day and Reunion Picnic was held on July 4, and the Mayor of Cleveland attended. The Club split a \$600 profit with the MacSwiney Club from the 4th of July event. The WSIA then held its annual picnic at the Regnatz picnic grounds on August 3, where the Club paid \$50 to rent the grounds.

A few weeks later, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and the world changed for ordinary Americans and for social clubs like the WSIA. Suddenly, members or their families were off to war with the uncertainty of whether they would survive and return. Often the soldiers from the WSIA were Irish immigrants or first generation Irish with no real history of military service in America. Nevertheless, many answered the call.²⁷

The WSIA, like most other social clubs at the time, was decimated by World War II. Members were gone overseas in service, and others, particularly women, had to take on other duties that limited their time and commitment to the Club. The demands on the WSIA were not unique, as countless social organizations closed or disbanded in response to the demands of a world war.

On February 9, 1942, the decision to cancel the 1942 St. Patrick's Day Parade and the accompanying downtown celebrations was announced. With the temporary demise of the parade, it is known that the WSIA channeled its energy into supporting the war effort by purchasing liberty bonds. The Club did hold the annual "May Dance" in 1942 and a picnic later that same year at the Sokol Hall at 4314 Clark Avenue. The Club had \$2,182.87 in the treasury in March 1942. Over the summer of 1942, executive meetings were held at "Popsy" Kilbane's Funeral Home. The Saturday Night Socials were also held throughout the year, but there is little known about the attendance or the entertainment offered.

By 1943, there is little documentation of Club activities for the duration of the war. Typed minutes for the period 1943-1945 do not exist. There are a few shorthand notes that reflect the Club held meetings at the Catholic Club at St. Patrick's on Bridge Avenue and at the old Ward 3 Republican Club at W. 87th and Detroit. In 1943, it is documented that the Club, under the direction of Pat Lynch, was sending cigarettes to the troops overseas. In addition, a St. Patrick's Day dance was held in 1943 and a profit of \$389.50 was made.

One documented event that was an amazing success in 1943 was a boxing show sponsored by the Club at a location identified as "Moore Hall," located at 1000 Walnut Avenue. The Club made a whopping profit of \$1,107.07 on the event. Unfortunately, little else is detailed or documented about Club activities in this period.

The postwar 1940's...

With the end of the Second World War, the WSIA was reinvigorated. The returning servicemen and their families once again immersed themselves in Club activities. The dances and parades returned. One nagging question that

²⁷ In one instance, six Gallagher brothers, all Irish immigrants from Achillbeg Island in County Mayo who lived at 6110 Ellen Ave. near St. Colman's, volunteered and served simultaneously in the U.S. armed forces. They were featured in a front page story in the *Cleveland Press* on March 17, 1942. Unlike the tragic Sullivan Brothers, all survived the war and were active members of the WSIA at some point in their lives.

remained, however, was the search for a permanent Club location. Although there are no documents detailing why the Club was no longer using the Irish American Hall at 6415 Detroit Ave., apparently something happened during the war to end the Club's association with that location.²⁸ While there would be occasional Irish events there, circumstances changed. Speculation includes a change in the rental agreement with the bank or the downsizing of the MacSwiney Club as an active organization because of the war. Whatever the actual cause, it remains undocumented to date. The only certain fact was that the Club had moved on. The regular meetings were now being held at the Catholic Club on Bridge Avenue that was connected to St. Patrick's Church. Occasional meetings were also held at the old Ward 3 Republican headquarters at 8701 Detroit Avenue.

In 1946, there was considerable discussion and debate about the WSIA acquiring a facility to hold bingo games as a means of offsetting Club costs. One such referenced location was 10717 Detroit Avenue. James Carney Sr., the real estate developer, provided the Club with details on how to set up a legal bingo operation. Carney often assisted the Club in business-related matters. The original plan was to have a private operation run the bingo games on predetermined nights. The profits would pay the Club costs, and members would then be able to use the hall for dances or practices on non-bingo nights. There was at least some opposition to this plan, fearing that Catholic churches in the area would be offended or hurt economically. Because there are limited records in this period, it is unknown what the Club specifically decided or did with the bingo game proposal. Nevertheless, the economic condition of the Club by late 1946 was excellent. The Club now had \$12,538 in cash on hand. The money, in large part, was due to the returning members and increased activities associated with the Club.

One unusual proposal for a new home in the immediate post-World War II era was offered by a member who suggested the Club acquire a Quonset hut to hold meetings and practice. These structures were well known to former members of the military, but the suggestion went nowhere. The Club determined the cost of acquiring, moving and refurbishing a "hut" was far more than the cost of a new structure. During this period members often suggested various locations they heard were available or would make a good location, but there was no unanimity of opinion. Lynch largely supported those searching for alternative sites, but he was strongly in support of remaining in the city of Cleveland.

Finally, on October 11, 1946, Michael Kilbane suggested the Club look at Mitchell Hall, which was located at 1974 West 74th Street just north of Madison Avenue, as a possible Club location. A committee was formed, and while it would take some time, the Club would eventually move to this location. In the interim, a number of other locations were examined, including the Gordon Square Theatre, but nothing suitable was found. In late 1946, the parish priest at St. Patrick's on Bridge Avenue formally gave the Club permission to use the church hall for practice and dances until a suitable location could be found.

Events at the postwar WSIA took on a familiar ring. The Club marched in regularly scheduled events, reaffirmed old traditions and established new ones as well. The annual picnic continued as a Club event, and the Club initiated a downtown St. Patrick's Day dance at Public Auditorium. It is unclear specifically when this downtown event was started, but tickets were \$1.00 and it resulted in large crowds attending. Further, in late 1946, the WSIA began to partner with St. Patrick's Church to hold joint Saturday night dances and socials. The Club split the proceeds with the church, which was profitable for both, as often more than 300 people would be in attendance.

In the late 1940's, WSIA events were handled through assorted committees. There was a building committee, a hall committee, and a dance committee, as well as a decorating committee, to name just a few. Often, as today, it would fall on a few, or in some cases one, member to perform the "lion's share" of the work. This was essentially how events and tasks were handled. If a committee didn't exist for something that needed to be done, it was simply formed and volunteers assigned. One interesting side note of this period is the time regular meetings would commence. Often, meetings did not start until well after 9:00 p.m. and sometimes even after 10:00 p.m. Explanations offered

²⁸ While there is no specific document or event explaining the Club's departure, a reference in the minutes in 1947 indicates the Club had previously "*publicly cut all ties to that location.*" Apparently, Club members were upset the current operators of the 6415 Detroit location were still referring to it as the Irish American Hall in 1947.

indicate members were waiting for a quorum to appear, while others indicate the membership was in no big hurry to get started. In 1946 the constitution was amended to provide, effective with the election of 1947, that no officer could hold the same office for two successive years. Thus, Pat Lynch did not run for President in 1947. Lynch, however, served as Vice President that year. During this period, the Board of Trustees would meet, and the Vice President would serve as Chairman of the Board. Thus, the terms “Chairman” and “Vice President” were often interchangeable. As Vice President, Lynch still ran the Board of Trustees. The “one term” rule was amended in 1948 to allow Lynch to return to the office of President.

On February 18, 1947, Jim Crilly advised the Club that a lot was available for sale at West 143rd and Lorain. The Club had \$13,111.03 in the treasury at the time, and the decision was made to purchase the lot for the lowest price possible. The Club believed it could construct a new hall on the site for approximately \$40,000. On April 1, 1947, the Club formally received the deed for this property, which it was able to purchase for a reported \$2,700.

On March 16, 1947, the WSIA Fife and Drum Corps accompanied by four bagpipes played on a half-hour radio program that featured the Club. All reports were that the performance went well as a lead-in to St. Patrick’s Day.



The Club picnic was held on the Incarnate Word grounds on July 27 of that year and featured an outdoor dance platform. The picnic afforded the WSIA the chance to bring together many priests from the area who had aided the Club, in some way, over the past year. Some of the priests of this era invited were the legendary Father Liam Kitt, who arguably was the historic spiritual advisor of the Club, and Fathers Thomas C. Corrigan, Thomas H. Corrigan, John Lyons and Patrick O’Shaughnessy. During this era, the picnic was a very successful Club event. In 1947, the gross proceeds were \$1,432.19.

By late 1948 and early 1949, the Club worked out the details of renting Mitchell Hall on West 74th just north of Madison Avenue. The long and narrow hall, while not perfect, was close to the Club’s original location and the homes of many members. The Club finally had a new location it could call home. While everyone knew the location was not permanent, and there were limitations on its use, the marching units could practice and meetings and dances could be held at an established location.

For reasons unrelated to Club activities, 1948 was also a significant event for WSIA history. The year 1948 brought a massive wave of Irish immigrants to the United States and, not surprisingly, many of those were from County Mayo and the Achill region. These new arrivals bolstered the ranks of the WSIA and gave the Club its distinctive “Irish” flavor.

The Club was more than just some “memorial” of past Irish connections. It was, in fact, a living, breathing support system necessary for new arrivals. Many would not have made the transition to America without the WSIA.

The immigrants fostered the strong connection between County Mayo and the WSIA. While this unique connection at times is lost on some of the younger American-born members, it gave the Club a very distinctive flavor. Invariably, everyone, whether from Mayo or another part of Ireland, found a home and some solace at the WSIA. The American members were the one great constant, and as the Irish immigrants began to start families, inevitably, the character and personality of the WSIA evolved and changed.



The 1950's...

With the arrival of the 1950's, Club members immersed themselves in a number of activities. In February, members presented a concert at St. John's College Auditorium that was supposed to feature Emmett O'Toole, but because of illness, he was replaced by Seamus O'Doherty and Josephine Smith. Tickets cost \$1.00. The regular Saturday dances and socials continued and preparations for the annual dance on St. Patrick's night at Public Auditorium were underway. On May 7 the Club's marching units participated in the opening of the Holy Rosary Shrine at Incarnate Word. In October, a Halloween social was held that included square dancing led by Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Doyle. Throughout the year, many members were actively working and supporting events with the Gaelic Athletic Association and ensuring WSIA events and GAA events did not conflict.

The Club was in sound financial shape, with \$34,625.80 in total assets at the start of the decade. One ongoing, and seemingly never-ending issue, was the Club's use of Mitchell Hall. The hall was owned by the Mitchell family, who rented it to the Club on a monthly basis subject to certain limitations. The Club was not permitted to use Mitchell Hall for non-Club activities such as weddings, showers or parties. The Club was purportedly operating bingo games to generate revenue, but it was limited. Art McChrystal was attempting to work with the Mitchell family to either buy the hall outright or sign a more permanent lease. Because of deaths in the Mitchell family, McChrystal was unable to get a definitive answer, and the search for a permanent location continued.

For years there was considerable debate at the Club over whether the Club should have a bagpipe band in addition to the Fife and Drum Corps and the Ladies Drill Team. Some leaders did not consider bagpipes appropriate. Others felt they should be included. Although bagpipes were part of the original Club band, their presence ended sometime in the early 1940's. By 1948, there was a concerted effort to create a bagpipe band. Joe O'Malley and John McFadden were responsible for this movement. Eventually, O'Malley and McFadden formed a pipe band called The Shamrock Pipe Band. Although made up of many WSIA members, this band was not part of the Club. Eventually the Club formed a separate pipe band under the WSIA banner led by Michael Cafferkey in the 1950's. The Club even approved the purchase of kilts for the band members. Michael Cafferkey was at the forefront of organizing and sustaining the Club's bagpipe band. By 1957, the WSIA pipe band had twenty members.

The Club's recurring involvement in Irish politics came to the forefront with the Club's seeking permission to carry an Anti-Partition banner in the 1950 St. Patrick's Day Parade. John Ryan handled the request on behalf of the Club and the request was approved. John Ryan was a member of the Anti-Partition League²⁹ who attended many so-called anti-partition events in America and reported back regularly to the Club on these activities.

In 1951 the Club's constitution went through some formal changes. The office of financial secretary, which was generally concerned with membership dues, was formally created. The Club's first formal financial secretary was Art McChrystal.

On June 26, 1950, the Club members voted to enter a \$50,000 bid for the Ohio Tool Company building located at 3141 West 110th Street. John Feighan from Cleveland Trust pledged the bank would provide financing if necessary. In addition, they were looking at a storefront location in Lakewood at 13346-48 Madison Avenue, as well as vacant lots at West 117th and Western Avenue. None of these efforts, however, was successful, and the Club continued to search for the best possible location.

²⁹ The official name was actually "The American League for an Undivided Ireland." In addition to John Ryan, Michael Comer, Michael Cafferkey, Mary McNeeley and James Ginley, to name just a few, were also active. In one instance, the Club's anti-partition members sent a letter to radio and TV host Dorothy Fuldheim protesting her position on legislation involving Irish unity. The Club spent a considerable amount of time supporting this movement's cause in the early 1950's. A formal report on the group's activities was given to the Club by Kathleen McNeeley, as secretary, on January 26, 1952, and is part of the Club's official minutes. The group, through the support of the WSIA, was successful in having a clause inserted in both the Republican and Democratic 'platforms' in 1952 supporting Irish unity and opposing partition.

In February 1951, the Club learned that the original Madison Theatre at 9613 Madison Avenue was available for sale at a reduced price. The theater had moved across the street to a new location at 9410 Madison Avenue.³⁰ The Club initially bid \$32,500 for the property, but the owners claimed they would not sell it for less than \$35,000. On April 26, 1951, the WSIA rescinded its initial bid and, for the moment, it seemed any deal was unreachable. The Club still owned the property at West 143rd and Lorain, but it was not deemed suitable for a new hall. On May 25, 1951, it was announced by John Cooney that indeed the WSIA had purchased the former Madison Avenue Theatre for the original offer price of \$32,500. Theater management reconsidered its position and decided to sell. Club members were enthusiastic. After title changed hands, an initial inspection of the property was completed by the members on July 1, 1951.

Renovations on the former theater began in earnest. Pat Lynch suggested that some members “loan” the Club \$100 each to be repaid in the future with interest, as a means of funding the remodeling, and many responded. By October 1951, \$3,600 was pledged to the remodeling fund by members. These loans were eventually repaid with 4% interest. In an effort to finish the project by year’s end, the Club was able to secure an additional bank loan of up to \$15,000. Later, an additional \$5,000 loan was secured. Much of the remodeling involved the installation of a new floor that would become one of the finest dance floors anywhere. Even long after departing this location, many members would lament the loss of the dance floor that was installed during this remodeling period.

On Friday, December 28, 1951, the Club held its last formal meeting at Mitchell Hall. Although the new Madison Avenue location was not fully completed, the decision was made to hold a New Year’s Eve dance, featuring both Irish and American music, there. The price for admission was \$1.00. The Club made a profit of \$448 at this first event.



With the new hall in place, many new ideas and suggestions were offered to make the Club more viable. In an unusual approach, following a suggestion by P.J. O’Malley, Lynch appointed a group of individuals, including John Kearney, Edward Campbell, Owen Kilbane, John McCafferty, Francis Sloan, Colletta Masterson, Grace Kilbane and Patricia McGinty, to serve as what only can be described as the “*suggestions, ideas and new thoughts committee.*” The WSIA was demonstrating it could be a progressive organization.

Events at the WSIA were undergoing a transformation. Traditional events such as the St. Patrick’s Day Parade and evening dance at the Public Auditorium, as well as participating in the May Incarnate Word celebrations and the summer picnic, all remained. In addition, Saturday night dances and socials continued. The units had their regular marches at events such as the Barry Day Parade³¹ and Loyalty Day Parade.³² Nevertheless, some new ideas were introduced. Square dancing was tried under the concept of a “barn” dance, and a so-called “style show” was also attempted. The Club started holding an Easter “Ball” or Easter dance. In addition, the Club began to show films, some of which included “The Republic of Ireland,” “Promenade All,” “Irish Children,” “The Rising of the Moon,” and “The Hills of Ireland.”

In the summer of 1952, the Club attempted to mortgage the West 143rd lot in an effort to obtain a loan to build a bar at the new Madison Ave. location. In the end, the Club took out a \$3,000 “chattel” mortgage from the Bank of Ohio to fund the bar construction.

One interesting aspect of the WSIA in the early 1950’s was the “benefit” dance. If a Club member, or the family of

³⁰ The structure at 9410 Madison Ave. is now part of Cleveland Lumber.

³¹ John Barry (1745-1803) was born in Ireland in 1745, went to sea as a young boy, and in 1760 adopted Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as his permanent residence. He fought with distinction against the British in the Revolutionary War. In 1794 he was appointed the senior Captain of the newly established United States Navy. He is considered the father of the U.S. Navy. For years an annual parade was held in his honor, in September at the Cultural Gardens.

³² During the time of the Cold War, “May Day” was viewed a communist celebration. To counteract this, “May Day” was often referred to as “Loyalty Day” in the United States.

a Club member, was in need, a committee would be formed and a dance, or series of dances, held to raise funds. There are countless instances reflected in the minutes when the Club raised well over \$1,000 at dances for needy families or individuals. In addition, the clergy often benefited from these events. In one example, the Club held a dance for Father Earl McManamon's Brazilian mission, which raised \$1,943. The WSIA was far more than just a social club; it was part of the fabric of the Irish community. Throughout the 1950's, there were sometimes up to ten benefit dances per year for worthy causes or individuals.

On Thursday, March 12, 1953, at 7:00 p.m., the Fife and Drum Corps appeared on a fifteen-minute television show on WNBK.³³ The Club regularly sought out radio spots to play in proximity to St. Patrick's Day when public interest was high, but this was a rare opportunity when the Club's Fife and Drum Unit appeared on television. During this period, the Club was also visited by Mr. and Mrs. H. R. Howard, who told Club members of their recent visit to Ireland. Howard was very friendly to the Club, and the minutes occasionally reflect his association with the Club.³⁴

In April of 1953, the Club received a \$300 contribution from the Terence MacSwiney Club to help equip a new kitchen. Although the clubs were now at separate locations, the ties remained strong. Little is known or documented about the activities of the MacSwiney Club after the Second World War. It is believed the club never really recovered from the war years when so many members were away. Further, after the WSIA left the Irish American Hall, the MacSwiney Club could no longer partner with the WSIA on events or expenses. Nevertheless, the contribution demonstrated that the relationship was not forgotten.³⁵ In addition to this contribution, the WSIA also conducted a raffle to help defray the kitchen costs. The prize was a \$100 savings bond. Ticket prices were as follows: A book of twelve for \$1.00; three for 25 cents; or one for 10 cents. Despite absorbing some debt brought on by the purchase and remodeling of the new hall, the Club was still in good financial shape in 1953. In June, the treasury showed a balance of \$2,360.22, and would increase to nearly \$10,000 by year's end.



The annual picnic in the 1950's was a well-attended event. Pat Lynch was in charge of securing candy for the children, while Thomas Masterson would obtain a "tug-of-war" rope. "Big" Mike Chambers would often be called on to "get the rope" in later years. In addition, there was an egg-throwing contest, and Eddie Campbell would handle the sports programs. The picnic often included its own raffle and it was, by and large, a very profitable event. In the 1950's, the picnic was regularly held on the grounds of Incarnate Word. An "ad booklet" was generally printed for the annual picnic.

In October 1953, membership dues were raised to \$2.00 per person annually. It was also approved that new members would have to pay a \$1.00 initiation fee. The constitution was also amended to require members to be in good standing in order to vote in Club elections. This was done to prevent people from signing up on election night to simply affect an election result. Both measures were approved.

³³ WNBK-TV, an NBC-owned and -operated station, began broadcasting in Cleveland on October 31, 1948, from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Originally on channel 4, its name was later changed to WKYC (TV-3), when it moved to Channel 3 because of a signal change. This author is unaware if any original WNBK footage survives.

³⁴ Nathaniel Richardson Howard (1898-1980), was the last editor of the *Cleveland News*. Howard was the editor of the *News* from 1937 until the *News* ceased publication in 1960. Howard married Marjorie Norton in 1918. After her death in 1928, he married Edith Moriarty in 1930. He had two daughters, Mary Anne Amsbary and Marjorie Johnson. He supported Irish affairs and often featured Irish-related stories in the *News*.

³⁵ Although the MacSwiney Club no longer exists, the legacy lives on. When the WSIA was attempting to raise funds for construction at the Olmsted location, William F. Chambers Jr., one of the last officers of the MacSwiney Club, turned over the remaining MacSwiney funds to the WSIA. By the time the funds were needed for the Olmsted grounds, they had grown to \$10,000. Although it is virtually an unknown fact, the office at the Olmsted location is named after the Terence MacSwiney Club as a result of this contribution.

In 1954, Father Donald O'Callaghan, the Chaplain of the American Society of Our Lady of Knock Shrine, visited the Club. Father O'Callaghan had appeared in Cleveland in January to give a speech on the partition of Ireland and was so impressed by the support of Club members that he decided to return for the Club's July picnic.

On November 24, 1953, Thomas Campbell's³⁶ painting of Blarney Castle on one of the walls of the hall was formally presented to the members by Lynch. Thomas Campbell would paint a series of paintings on the walls of the Madison Avenue location that were instantly recognizable to veteran Club members.

For the balance of the 1950's, the WSIA focused on its traditional dances, but also sponsored events at other locations. Some of these included the "Little Gaelic Singers" from County Derry and the Irish Festival Singers, who held a concert at the new Lakewood Public Auditorium. Eventually, after some negotiations, the Dublin Players would also appear in Cleveland. Receipts for the Dublin Players show were approximately \$2,000.

One of the most interesting additions to the Club in this period was the creation of a "Boxing Club" that was announced on October 28, 1955. The Club funded the first \$100 for equipment, and eventually a ring was set up in the upstairs portion of the Club. "Big" Mike Chambers was delegated by Lynch to be the chairman of the Boxing Club.

On January 12, 1956, Pat Lynch announced the Club would no longer sponsor the annual St. Patrick's Day dance downtown at Public Auditorium. During the preceding several years, the Club was holding a dance at the Club, as well as the dance downtown. In light of the fact that records indicate that as many as 1,000 people would pass through the Club dance on St. Patrick's night, it was determined that it was too much to also be responsible for the downtown dance, which also attracted large crowds. The decision was made to turn control of the downtown dance over to the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League. This enabled the Club to concentrate its resources on the Club dance.

On February 24, 1956, Frank Sloan suggested that the Club consider purchasing land where the annual picnic could be held. The Incarnate Word grounds were not always available. In 1955 the picnic was moved to the grounds of Parmadale, while from 1956-1959 the Club used the Berea Fairgrounds, at a cost of \$125 in 1958. The picnic was considered such an important and successful event that the members felt acquisition of a permanent Club picnic grounds was justified. Less than a year earlier, on July 12 1955, the Club decided to sell the lot at West 143rd and Lorain, which at one time was considered the site for the future Club home. The lot was sold to a developer for \$4,342.60 on a structured payment plan.

In April 1956, the Club moved to formally obtain a liquor license. This was necessary because outside groups were increasingly seeking to rent the Club hall, and the leadership was concerned about the legal sale of liquor to both members and nonmembers alike. The general cost of hall rental in the late 1950's was \$40, but often this fee was adjusted or waived for other Irish organizations like the GAA. The acquisition of a liquor license would take some time, and an announcement indicating it had been obtained was not made until November 22, 1957.

On June 15 and 16, 1956, on the recommendation of Hugh Curtin, the Club held two dances to benefit the dependents of Irish prisoners held in English or Northern Ireland jails. This was another example of how, although not political, when the issue involved Ireland or Irish politics, the Club was often at the forefront of events. In another instance, the Club invited Mary O'Donnell of Ursuline College to come and speak to the members about the partition of Ireland.

³⁶ Thomas Campbell would go on to paint a series of paintings on the walls of the old Madison Avenue building, one of which included a rendition of the "Giant's Causeway" in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, these paintings were painted over after the original Madison Avenue location was sold. Nevertheless, one enterprising Club member realized their importance and took a snapshot of each painting before the Club left the building. These snapshots survive to this day for posterity. Thankfully, Tom Campbell replicated his painting feats on canvas at the new hall in Olmsted Township, capturing a new series of thoughtful images.

In 1956, the Ladies Drill Team traveled to Chicago, where they were warmly received. On August 12, 1956, the Club sponsored a championship Irish football game at West Tech field between New England and the Midwestern States.

On January 21, 1958, Pat Lynch announced that the Irish Civic Association would no longer sponsor the St. Patrick's Day Parade. For the first time since the war, the annual parade was in doubt. Lynch, P.J. O'Malley, Art McChrystal and Rip Reilly, to name just a few, stepped forward at a meeting of Irish organizations to ensure the parade would continue. Lynch promised the WSIA would help fund one-fifth of the parade cost. This led to the creation in 1958 of the United Irish Societies, which has served as the umbrella organization for the parade since that time. In many ways, it was the leadership of the WSIA that ensured the UIS was created and that the parade was continued. Without the formation of the UIS, the parade could have faded away or become hopelessly splintered among factions or divisive groups.

A new event was initiated on March 22, 1957, when Dan Chambers proposed that the Club hold an annual Communion Breakfast at St. Colman's Church, followed by a breakfast in the Club hall. The Fife and Drum Corps appeared in uniform at this first Mass, and more than 200 tickets were sold for the breakfast. Another new activity in the late 1950's involved Irish step dancing lessons that were offered at the Club by Kevin Shanahan.

The late 1950's were an active time for the weekly dances. They were extremely well attended and a financial success. One very popular band of this era was the "Pat Butler Band." In some months, the dances were averaging more than \$2,000 in profits. This enabled the Club to pay down the mortgage, install benches along the walls of the dance hall, purchase new chairs, install a new sidewalk and complete other required improvements. Volunteers were always at the forefront of these efforts. In the 1950's, two men would take turns each month covering the door. A pool of twelve bartenders rotated to ensure the bar was covered at each event. The ever-present Lynch was there to ensure there was no trouble and that individuals were members and their dues were paid.

The Club continued to branch out and try new activities. In 1958, the Cleveland Feis³⁷ was organized. The first official Feis in Cleveland was held on July 27, 1958 with two hundred and fifty competitors participating at the Berea Fairgrounds. The idea was developed loosely around the Irish American Picnic, which was a summertime gathering of Irish organizations. Art McChrystal³⁸ was the first Feis Chairman. Jack Mullally,³⁹ Kathleen McNeeley and Maeve Campbell worked tirelessly to ensure the event was organized. An even bigger Feis followed the next year at the Berea Fairgrounds on July 19, 1959, and was preceded the night before by a dance at the Club that was well attended.

Another new endeavor for the Club in 1959 was the formal decision to have a float entered in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. This was an addition to the units that would march. Eddie Campbell took the lead and secured a garage bay at the Standard Brewery to build the float. The brewery, run by the Feighan family, also allowed Eddie the use of a truck to tow the float. It was the start of what would be a great tradition that continues to this day. Tom Campbell would then design the float often around the UIS parade theme. In later years, a May Company garage was used to house the float.

The defining event of the late 1950's was the "burning of the mortgage" dinner held on October 26, 1958. The Club was repainted, and new drapes were installed for the occasion. More than 300 people attended the banquet. The Club was now twenty-seven years old. Pat Lynch stated he could not believe what members had accomplished in a

³⁷ A Féis (Irish Gaelic: f??, "fesh") is a traditional Gaelic arts and culture festival.

³⁸ Other than Pat Lynch, and possibly P.J. O'Malley, there was probably no one in the first fifty years of the Club more synonymous with the WSIA than Art McChrystal. McChrystal (1888-1989) was born in Desertmartin, County Derry, in what would later become part of Northern Ireland. He first arrived in Philadelphia as a young man, where he worked as a steelworker. He later worked in the Pennsylvania coal mines. He arrived in Cleveland in 1917 and began working as a laborer. He married Elizabeth Flannery in 1921. Later, he worked for 40 years for the City as an asphalt paving foreman. McChrystal was the Club's financial secretary for 40 years and was a Club trustee for more than fifty years. He played on the 1925 Cleveland Shamrock Football championship team. He was active with the GAA for many years. He was Grand Marshal of the St. Patrick's Day Parade in 1965. He died at age 100, leaving behind a daughter, Elizabeth Neforos, and a son, Arthur Jr. Art McChrystal lived at 8610 Franklin Blvd., Apt. 7E, in Cleveland.

³⁹ Jack Mullally also taught Gaelic at the WSIA.

Club, as the treasury had \$8,000 in a savings account and another \$5,133 in a checking account. The future looked bright.

The 1960's and a New Frontier...

In 1960, America woke to the realization that an Irish Catholic might be elected President of the United States. The significance of the Irish contribution to America was finally taking hold. While John F. Kennedy started his campaign, the WSIA leaders voted to have another Feis and named Art McChrystal as the chairman for 1960. In an effort to promote Irish culture, the 1960 Feis featured an essay contest for students.

On January 19, 1960, it was announced that Genevieve Fields and Kathleen McNeeley had acquired a piano for the Club at a cost of \$509.85. The members decided in January to also buy or build a trophy case to house the awards the units won at various competitions. In 1960, Lynch set the price for the St. Patrick's Evening Dance at \$2.00 per ticket. The Club also donated \$400 to offset the cost of the parade. John T. English,⁴⁰ a founding Club member, was named Grand Marshal of the 1960 St. Patrick's Day Parade. The Club's financial condition was strong, with a combined balance of \$17,059.14 in the checking and savings accounts.

In 1960, the Club once again participated in the annual opening of the Incarnate Word Shrine. The Fife and Drum Corps and the Ladies Drill Team traveled to the Chicago Feis in the summer, and the Fife and Drum Corps won first prize for the best band. In May and June of 1960, the Club voted to donate \$25 each to several newly ordained priests. They were identified as Fathers Monaghan, Flynn, Gilmore, Chambers, Elliot and Fergus. Club members closely identified with their Catholic faith. The Club continued the tradition of holding fundraisers for Catholic priests and missionaries. For years, the Club held an annual fundraiser for the Columban Fathers. In another instance, the Club sponsored the "Irish Singers" to benefit the Franciscan Fathers. These benefit concerts and dances were a regular part of the WSIA schedule. Other priests, such as Father Peter Quinn, were given fundraisers for any number of reasons. The Club was so supportive of the Catholic faith that the minutes reflect it held a fundraiser for "Sister Brendan" just so she could return home to Ireland. These fundraisers were almost always in the form of a dance, with an occasional raffle thrown in for good measure. They were almost universally profitable.

In an effort to bolster entertainment at the weekly dances, Terry Joyce recommended the Club hire Johnny Ritz, whose band played American music, for a trial period of three months. Ritz's six-piece band was paid \$75 per week for the period. For many years Joyce would engage bands to play at the Club. Ritz would be a regular fixture in the early 1960's. Other bands that appeared in this period were the "*Fitzgerald's*," *Pat Butler*, "*The Stardusters*," "*The Telstars*," "*The Randy Lewis Band*," and "*Clipper Carlton*."

Rear Admiral Joseph Murphy of the U.S. Navy spoke at the Club's banquet in honor of "Barry Day" on September 11, 1960, following the afternoon ceremonies in the Cultural Gardens. Barry Day was still an important annual event to the WSIA in the early 1960's, but unfortunately, over time, the commemoration of the event would end. In September 1961, the Club inquired about the Barry Day plans and learned that nothing was scheduled. Mary Ellen Murphy of the Irish Cultural Society informed the Club that it was "unable to handle the Barry Day ceremonies." On October 27, 1961, the Club decided to try to take over the commemoration, but without the support of the Cultural Gardens or other organizations, it was a difficult challenge. Over the next few years, the Club would repeatedly inquire into the possibility of reviving the event, but the efforts were unsuccessful. In one instance, after the assassination of President Kennedy, a combined "Barry" and "Kennedy" memorial dance was suggested. It would have honored the fact that both men shared a common relationship to both the U.S. Navy and Ireland, but it was never scheduled. .

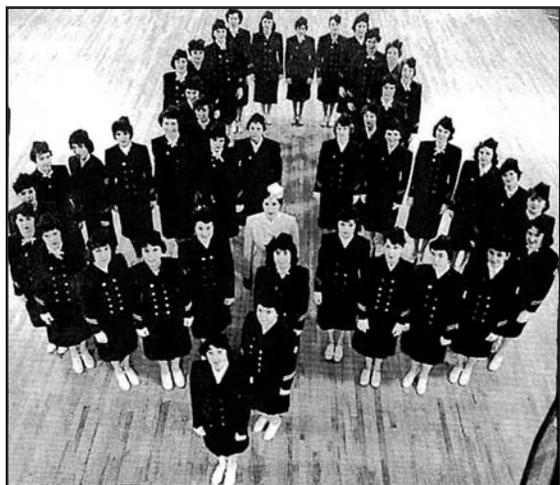
⁴⁰ English (1884-1971) was born in Dooagh on Achill Island, County Mayo, Ireland. He was a bridge operator in Cleveland for more than forty years and also sold insurance. He came to Cleveland in 1905. He was a founding member of the WSIA and was a very active member. He was also a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians for sixty-seven years. He was named Grand Marshal of the St. Patrick's Day Parade in 1960. He lived at 12829 Lorain Avenue, and died in 1971.

On September 25, 1960, the Ladies Drill Team was afforded the honor of participating in the John F. Kennedy motorcade that came through Cleveland on a campaign stop. The ladies had to be ready to go at the Club at 9:00 a.m., then go to Burke Lakefront Airport and finally on to Euclid Beach in the motorcade. In 1963, the Ladies Drill Team won first prize in the Loyalty Day Parade.

As a sign of the times in 1960, there was considerable discussion over, of all things, the cigarette machine in the bar and its limited capacity. Lynch informed members that the bartenders could not sell extra packs over the counter, and unfortunately the vendor was not available on weekends. As a resolution, it was suggested that “*people carry a(n) extra pack of their favorite brand.*” The Club was acquiring new technology as well. In the early 1960’s, the Club purchased a mimeograph machine from the A.B. Dick Corporation, and a jukebox was installed in the bar. Club members also approved the addition of a revolving mirrored ball and new lights and fixtures for the hall in 1960. The dance floor was refinished that year at a cost of \$280. By early 1961, the new trophy case and bulletin board were installed at the Club. The Club also acquired an American flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol Building from Congressman Feighan. By 1963, the Club was regularly producing a monthly bulletin for members, but there were difficulties in getting it out with timely information and the cost was high. The Club adopted a new “self mailer” system from the Davies-Post Company. A “one sided” sheet would be preprinted with standard Club information. The blank side would then be updated with new information each month. The piece would then be folded in three parts and addressed automatically then mailed. The reported costs were \$100 per year for 15,000 of the one-sided preprinted pieces and \$25 each month to fill in the blank side with current information, address each piece and mail. This was a significant savings over the cost of producing the bulletin that was running \$366 per month under the old system. The Club also struggled with improving the quality of the Club’s amplification system.

The children’s Christmas party continued into the 1960’s and was always a success. In one instance, 240 toys were purchased and distributed to members’ children. Martin Murphy was often involved in this endeavor. In addition, the Halloween dances were a regular event. The Club even held a series of masquerade balls. The Club was even able to initiate a series of clambakes. The annual Communion breakfasts, originally initiated by Dan Chambers Sr., continued. The breakfast followed Mass and often featured a guest speaker from the Irish community involved in public service. In 1963, the guest speaker was the well-respected jurist Judge John McMahon.

Six hundred fifty tickets were sold for the 1961 St. Patrick’s night dance, and the following day a photo of the WSIA Drill Team appeared in the *Cleveland Press*. The parade that year was considered an overwhelming success, with many new units participating. The Club paid Cleveland Transit System \$90 for the use of chartered buses on St. Patrick’s Day for the units and members. The overall cost of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade to the UIS in the early 1960’s was reportedly \$1,800. This figure did not always include all the hidden costs. The WSIA was one of the biggest parade supporters, annually pledging \$400 or more to offset the total parade cost.



The 1962 WSIA parade float featured a ten-foot-tall map of Ireland with four young ladies holding streamers representing the four provinces of Ireland. The Club received a request from Mike Douglas, of the Mike Douglas TV show, to ride on the Club’s float on St. Patrick’s Day that year. Mike Douglas felt that he would increase his exposure and that his presence would promote both the Club and the parade. In the end, Mike Douglas rode in a car with Club members. In 1963, the Club float featured a 14-foot-tall statute of St. Patrick with a bed of shamrocks and roses. In 1964, the float featured a tribute to President Kennedy. Each year, Eddie Campbell and his cousin, Tom Campbell, would design and build the float with a crew of volunteers at the Standard Brewery Company. By the early 1960’s, the annual float had become, like the marching units, a WSIA institution.

A decision was made in March 1961 not to have the Club sponsor the annual Feis. The problem was that many members associated with the Feis were planning to be in Ireland at the scheduled time. It was also felt that it was extremely costly to find a location and pay for out-of-town musicians and judges to make the event work. While the

WSIA would attempt to hold or sponsor a Feis each year, over time the Feis would be placed in the hands of an independent “Feis Committee”, similar to the UIS structure with the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. In this way, the committee could be comprised of members from a variety of local Irish organizations. Nevertheless, the Cleveland Feis continued to be a WSIA event for several years, when it was determined that it was feasible for the Club to support the event. Bob Devlin did a considerable amount of work in the mid-1960’s to keep the Feis alive. By the mid-1960’s, it was universally accepted that the WSIA started and sustained the Feis concept in Cleveland. Because of these early WSIA efforts, the annual Feis is a fixture today on the local Irish scene and has become a statewide or regional event.

On June 4, 1961, the Fife and Drum Corps and the Ladies Drill Team traveled to Dayton for a Feis held in that city. They were treated to a barbeque chicken dinner during their stay. The club paid \$262.68 for a chartered bus for the Dayton Feis. That same year, the Ladies Drill Team won a trophy for “best marching unit” in the Loyalty Day parade.

In 1961 Father Liam Kitt, then of Ascension Parish, organized a trip back to Ireland under the Club name. Father Kitt was the “de facto” spiritual advisor of the Club for many years. The Club thought so much of his efforts that members of the Fife and Drum Corps suggested they go out to the airport to see Father Kitt and his group off. Upon his return, Father Kitt showed Club members the home movies he made of his Irish trips. Father Kitt often chartered trips back to Ireland under the banner of the WSIA with the full support of the Club. He often directed members and other affiliated groups back to Ireland.

In 1961, the Club’s annual picnic at the Berea Fairgrounds took on a different look when Eamon D’arcy and George O’Malley of the Gaelic Football Club organized a series of football games involving players from seven different cities. Charles Dewine was the chairperson of the picnic. The picnic that year also featured a 12-horse merry-go-round and a fish pond. During this period Eamon D’arcy and Mike McHugh were involved in bringing in the County Down All-Stars for an Irish football match in the city on May 30, 1962 at Lakewood Stadium. This was a major event, with more than 3,500 tickets in circulation. In 1963, over the Labor Day weekend, the County Mayo football team visited Cleveland and played a game vs. the Midwest All-Stars at St. Edward High School. The Club’s marching units appeared at the game and gave a pre-game performance that was well received.

Paddy Noonan and his band played the Club hall for the first time at the Thanksgiving dance in November 1961. Noonan remarked about the WSIA that “...*he, (and his band), had never been in a place where they were made to feel so welcome and that they (would) come back to play the Club anytime they can.*” Noonan would soon be a regularly featured act for many years at the Club. His presence at the Club’s 75th Anniversary is a testament to this fact.

On November 22, 1963, the American public was shocked by news of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In the 1960’s, the regular meetings were held on Friday nights. The meeting that night began with the traditional Lord’s Prayer, but surprisingly, no formal reference to the assassination was recorded in the Club’s minutes. In a subsequent meeting, Eddie Campbell suggested the Club obtain a color picture of President Kennedy that could hang in the Club and replace the existing smaller black-and-white photo. In 1964, the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Memorial Trophy for the most outstanding unit was added to the St. Patrick’s Day Parade awards.⁴¹

Later, the Club supported the creation of a Kennedy Memorial Library Committee to raise funds for the Kennedy Library in Boston. On April 24, 1964, in the Club hall after the regular meeting ended, Michael Jo Gallagher showed films of the late President’s trip to Germany.

In the mid-1960’s, the Club was in sound financial shape. In January 1965 the Club had \$2,400.18 in a checking account and \$13,820.38 in a savings account, for a total of \$16,220.56. Improvements to the Club continued and included an updated sound system. In 1965, founding member Art McChrystal was selected as the Grand Marshal for the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Mrs. Agnes Chambers was selected as the Mother of the Year. In 1965, the weather was so bad on St. Patrick’s Day that many thought the parade would be cancelled at the last minute. Despite the weather, the parade went on as planned.

By the late 1960's, the Club focused on ways to improve attendance at weekly dances. There were so many events and meetings that one could easily have spent every evening at the Club, and many did. Since other Irish organizations used the Club hall for meetings and events, there was always a full schedule. The sheer number of events and benefit dances would sometimes hurt attendance at the weekly dances, but they continued. At times attendance was bolstered by bringing in outside entertainment, such as "The Royal Blues Show band" from County Mayo, Ireland. Another band that was popular and successful at the Club was the "Dixie Landers." A regular dance committee was eventually formed that discussed a wide range of ways to change or improve entertainment at the Club.

On August 27, 1965, in a sign of changing times and after much discussion, John Togher made a motion that a committee be formed to look into the possibility of finding a new Club location. While many members were pleased with the Madison Ave. location, some felt the neighborhood was deteriorating, maintenance costs were increasing, and there was insufficient parking. Lynch appointed a "New Location Committee" that was initially comprised of Joe Kilbane, Terry Joyce, Mike Kilbane, John Togher, Joe Boland, John Roddy, Tom Masterson, Joe Rochford, Patrick J. O'Malley, Joe McFadden, Mary McNeeley, Genevieve Fields, Dan Chambers Sr., Gerry Lavelle, Mike Joyce, Con Mangan and Charles Dewine. On October 19, 1965, a recommendation was made to increase the dues to \$3.00 per year. The motion eventually carried, and dues were raised in 1966. By 1969, dues would increase to \$5.00 per year.

Women continued to assert themselves as leaders in Club activities in the 1960's. Some contributors were Laura Fox, Genevieve Fields, Eileen McGuirk, Mary Ann O'Malley, Bridie Joyce, Helen Malloy, Jane Simmons, Celia Gallagher and Carol McGinty.

On April 17, 1966, many Club members, under the direction of Gus Boland, participated in a commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the 1916 Irish uprising. Mass was held at St. John's Cathedral followed by a breakfast at the Statler Hotel. The guest speaker was the Midwest Irish Consul General.

The end of an era and the late 1960's...

On May 26, 1967, Pat Lynch announced he would not seek reelection as Club President. In a statement, he indicated he had served for many years and had fulfilled his duties to the best of his ability and that he was not ashamed of anything he had done. Steve Mulloy asked Lynch to reconsider his position during nominations, but Lynch declined.

The first post-Lynch election was held on June 23, 1967. Steve Mulloy was elected President, and Mike McHugh was selected as the First Vice President. Charles Dewine was the Second Vice President, and Joe Kilbane was selected as the Third Vice President. Helen Malloy was the Club's Secretary, and Art McChrystal remained the Financial Secretary. The Club Treasurer was John Campbell, and the Sgt. at Arms was Mike Roddy while the Membership Secretary was Jane Simmons. Mulloy assumed the duties of President under the banner "unity brings success."

The biggest event of 1967 was the testimonial dinner for Pat Lynch held at the Club on October 22, 1967. The dignitaries in attendance formed a list of Cleveland's "Who's Who." An oil-finish color portrait of Lynch was obtained at a cost of \$40. Lynch was given an engraved gavel and a gold membership card embossed with the title "Honorary President."

The traditional WSIA event schedule continued in the late 1960's. The Club held its annual picnic on June 25, 1967 at the Sally West Grove site on West 130th Street. By the late 1960's, Club members had regular chartered flights going back to Ireland. In 1967 one round-trip flight on Aer Lingus was \$307 per person and another on Air Canada was \$309 per person. In some instances the Club could get these fares lowered to \$275, or less, if they sold out in a set period of time. Over the next several years, regular summer charter trips back to Ireland were arranged and announced at Club meetings. Even Pat Lynch sponsored charters back to Ireland in this period. In a change of pace for Club events, thirty-eight members of the WSIA took in the Notre Dame vs. Pittsburgh football game in Pittsburgh on November 11, 1967. This would become a tradition for the Club over the next few years, with 76 members attending in 1969. The Thanksgiving dances were also held and the Christmas Party for the children continued.

The theme for the 1967 and 1968 parades was “Irish Entertainers.” The Club float in 1968 honored movie director John Ford. In 1968 the Club sponsored a “Miss Cleveland Irish American” contest. This event would foreshadow the WSIA naming a “Queen” in the 1970’s. The contest involved fifteen girls selected in groups of five at three WSIA dances leading up to St. Patrick’s Day. In the end, Maureen Bradley was crowned “Miss Cleveland Irish America.”

In 1968 the Ladies Drill Team decided to wear boots, which the forty members purchased with their own funds. There were twenty girls in the majorettes, and approximately sixteen boys in the “drum classes.” This group, over time, would evolve into the unit later formally known as the Jr. Fife and Drum Corps. The tradition of returning to the Club for sandwiches after the parade continued. In 1968 Pat Lynch purchased sixty pounds of ham for sandwiches that were served by ladies to the units after they returned to the Club from the parade.

By the spring of 1969, the Catholic Civil Rights protests in Northern Ireland had caught the attention of Club members. Art McChrystal and Charles Dewine were keeping Club members informed. McChrystal wanted to put pressure on Washington politicians to take the case of Catholics in the North to the United Nations. On August 22, 1969, upon the motion of P. J. O’Malley and the WSIA Executive Board, it was recommended that the WSIA call for a special meeting of all local Irish organizations to address the problems in Northern Ireland. After the meeting was held at the WSIA, telegrams were sent to all local elected officials in Washington urging action. P. J. O’Malley was appointed chairman of a committee to address the situation. Gerry Lavelle and Terry Joyce were named as delegates.

On May 18, 1969, Steve Mulloy announced he would not be a candidate for Club President. The election on June 27, 1969 saw Gerry Lavelle elected President. The officers elected were President, Michael “Gerry” Lavelle; 1st VP, Clem Bennett; 2nd VP, James Ginley; 3rd VP, Celia Gallagher; Secretary, Helen Malloy; Treasurer, John Campbell; Financial Secretary, Art McChrystal; Membership, Jane Simmons and Sgt. at Arms, Mike Roddy.

The new leadership faced a small early crisis when a serious summer storm came through the Cleveland area on July 4, 1969. The club roof was damaged and the ceiling in the hall collapsed at approximately 4:30 p.m. Fortunately, no one was injured. The Club filed an insurance claim, as the storm caused an estimated \$1,300 in damages.

The Club ended the decade on a somber note when on Monday, November 24, 1969, the Club was burglarized. The proceeds of a concert, the bar, juke box, cigarette machine money and the liquor stock were all stolen. The Club’s financial records and some other Club records were also taken.

The Club concluded the year and the decade on a happier note with the annual Thanksgiving dance with Paddy Noonan and a Christmas dance on December 20, 1969.

The 1970’s...

As the WSIA entered a new decade, the problems in Northern Ireland remained at the forefront of the Irish-American psyche. Although the vast majority of members traced their ancestry to County Mayo, the plight of the Catholic population in the North was a major concern. The Provisional IRA and the British Army were locked in a titanic struggle that often, for the American Irish, even overshadowed America’s involvement in Vietnam.

In the early 1970’s, the Club featured a wide range of entertainment. The Paddy Noonan Trio was a popular and frequent guest at the Club. Other entertainers included Mike Joyce and Rambling Gallwaymen, Sandy Hain and the Clansman and “The Bachelor Showband,” “The Jackets Green” and “The Raindrops,” from Chicago. The Club also had regular teenage dances and sing-along “*sing songs*.” Increasingly, Club members began to schedule “25” card game events.

On May 22, 1970, the Club had 1,010 official members. The Ladies Drill Team had 48 members in 1970. It held a raffle and beef dinner as a fundraiser and at one point in 1972 turned over \$700 to the Club.

Surprisingly, however, it was the affiliated groups and clubs associated with the WSIA that seemed to dominate the Club’s event schedule. Irish Northern Aid held regular fundraising dances. The GAA held dances and sponsored matches between local and visiting teams. The Cleveland Feis, with its origins dating back to the Club in 1958, was now handled through the Feis Committee that often met at the Club location.

The Club continued to be concerned about the Madison Avenue property. On May 29, 1970, the Board authorized Jackie Kilbane and Mike Sweeney to check on the prospect of purchasing property to the east of the existing club for \$8,800. The Club offered \$6,000, but the bid was rejected for the 45- by 130-foot lot.

On June 20, 1970 a testimonial dinner was held honoring Art McChrystal. Like Lynch before him, Art was given a gold plated membership card.

On August 12, 1971, a crowd of more than 300 attended a meeting at the hall over the conditions in Northern Ireland. A committee was appointed, headed by Hugh McConnell as chairman, to raise funds and obtain clothing that would be given to the Red Cross. The goal of the committee was to put pressure on local and national leaders to help alleviate Catholic suffering in Northern Ireland. At one of the first benefit dances, more than \$2,000 was raised. In the early 1970's, regular fundraisers and dances were held to raise funds for Northern Ireland. In September 1971 a rally was held with Paddy Kennedy at which more than \$1,000 was raised. By September 1971, in just over a month, more than \$4,300 was raised and sent to Ireland.

The Club leadership was also concerned about immigration and improving the prospects of allowing more Irish to come legally to America. Club members were seeking an amendment to the Immigration Act of 1965, which set immigration levels for each country with individuals seeking admission into the United States. This would be an ongoing issue at the Club that would remain unresolved even with the implementation of the so-called "Morrison" visas. The Irish long felt that they should be able to use the portions of quotas not used by other nations.

On August 28, 1971, the annual Cleveland Feis was held at the Berea Fairgrounds. The Feis had become a huge financial and cultural success. Pat Mackin was chairman of the annual Feis dance traditionally held at the WSIA the night before the actual Feis.

In late 1971 the WSIA constitution was amended through the efforts of Terry Joyce and Bob Devlin. The new constitution required fifteen trustees to be elected with staggered terms. Five were for 3-year terms, five for 2-year terms and the last five for 1-year terms.⁴² Devlin did a complete review of the WSIA constitution and rewrote or changed many other provisions in the constitution. Devlin was a lawyer who gave countless hours to the Club and aided many members with private legal concerns. Devlin's efforts resulted in the Club publishing a small green constitution handbook that was made available to members; 1,100 of the small booklets were printed and distributed. One of the biggest changes that resulted from this review was that in 1975 the election cycle was moved to the end of the year.

On October 10, 1971, Terry Joyce informed the board that Pat Lynch was returning to Ireland for good. Joyce determined the Club should have a farewell gathering for Pat Lynch even though it was on short notice. On Friday, October 15, 1971, the WSIA said goodbye to its venerable leader. Many Club members still revered Lynch, and as a parting gift he was given \$300. A few months later, at the January 28, 1972 general meeting, Terry Joyce announced the death of Pat Lynch in Ireland. The Club sent a telegram and a flower arrangement and decided the 1972 St. Patrick's Day Mass would be in his memory. Unfortunately, the flowers did not arrive, so the Club decided to have a vestment purchased for Father Liam Kitt in Pat Lynch's name. It was also decided to sponsor a precision drill trophy for the parade in Pat Lynch's honor.⁴³ The St. Patrick's Day Mass was held in honor of Lynch that year. The WSIA invited sixty-four priests to the Mass, and Father James O'Donnell took care of having Mass cards printed with Pat Lynch's photo on the cards.

The year 1971 was a challenging, but successful, year for the Club. The Club had \$50,521 in expenses and \$53,262 in receipts. The profit for the year was \$3,259, with \$21,000 in a savings account and additional money in a checking account. This was remarkable considering all the additional non-WSIA fundraising that went on in this period involving the GAA and Northern Aid, to name just two.

⁴³ At the same time the Club presented a trophy to the UIS in Pat Lynch's name, the Club also presented a trophy to honor longtime Board member John "Doc" McCafferty.

On January 8, 1972, the WSIA held its pre-St. Patrick's Day Ball at the UAW Hall.⁴⁴ More than 500 attended throughout the evening, and more than \$1,700 was raised. The 1972 St. Patrick's Eve Dance was held on March 16 at the UAW hall and featured the Paddy Noonan Trio. The program booklet was a full 72 pages that generated nearly \$2,000 in income.

In late 1971 and early 1972, the Club and members of the Irish community in Cleveland faced a very confusing scenario. Terry Joyce reported that the Emerald Society had taken out a 1972 St. Patrick's Day Parade permit. Traditionally it was the UIS that handled the parade. The community was faced with the prospect of having two downtown St. Patrick's Day parades on the same day. By November 1971, the situation looked bleak. The Emerald Society, which had a permit to march at 3:00 p.m., did not invite the WSIA to march. The WSIA then took out its own permit for 1:00 p.m. with the provision that if the UIS decided to march, the WSIA would turn their permit over to the UIS. This problem had been brewing for the past three years. By December the Emerald Society was attempting to have the 1972 WSIA/UIS parade permit revoked.



The Club Banner carried by Joe Patten, Mike McGinty, Eamon Lynch, Bill O'Malley and Pat O'Malley, followed by the uniformed Honor Guard, Club President Gerry Lavelle, Vice President Terry Joyce and Kathleen Lavelle Kloos leads the Drill Team.

On January 28, 1972 an agreement was finally reached between the UIS and the Emerald Society. One clear reality from the experience was that the WSIA had protected the UIS status as the official organization responsible for the parade. Had the WSIA not acted and the UIS not formally marched, the UIS might have forfeited the right to hold a parade, or at least its role in being the lead organization in the traditional parade. By taking the initiative, the WSIA forged a compromise so the UIS would continue to run the parade, and the potential problem associated with having two rival parades was avoided.

Olmsted Township...

Terry Joyce continued to investigate the purchase of land on behalf of the Club. Over the course of several years, countless properties were examined. Finally, on November 19, 1971, it was announced that the Club had purchased nearly twenty-seven acres of land in Olmsted Township, subject to a rezoning request and the Club securing financing. The deal was tentative, but the members were excited about the prospects. The problems associated with the acquisition of this land were significant. The area was zoned for single-family residences, which required a zoning change. The WSIA needed a majority of the four-person zoning board (three out of four votes) to approve the

⁴⁴ In later years, John Lally would assemble a group of volunteers who would prepare the hall for use each year.

zoning change. Failing that, the Club would need all three township trustees in Olmsted Township to approve the change if the zoning board refused. On March 24, 1972 it was announced that the zoning board turned down the WSIA request for rezoning, so the matter was forwarded to the Township Trustees for a vote. On April 16, 1972, the Trustees voted 3-0 to approve the zoning change, giving the WSIA the green light to acquire the property provided financing was in place. Terry Joyce thanked Bob Devlin for his efforts. As an attorney, Devlin was able to wade through the legal challenges of rezoning and ensure that the WSIA had a chance to acquire the property. Marty Murphy also provided considerable assistance. On April 28, 1972, by secret ballot, per the constitutional requirements, the purchase of the 27 acres in Olmsted Township was approved by the membership present by a vote of 101-9. A financial committee, initially chaired by Bob Devlin and later chaired by Rip Reilly, was immediately put in place by Terry Joyce.

On May 16, 1972, the Club officially acquired the Olmsted grounds. The Club took \$12,500 from its savings account and then secured a \$10,000 loan from Cleveland Trust Bank. The grounds were surveyed, and Gus Boland was named to head land development. The grounds needed a lot of filling and clearing, but the Club was optimistic it might hold an event there in the fall.



On July 19, 1972, Joyce informed the board he would not seek reelection to the position of President. Joyce had been chairperson of the search for a site for several years and wanted to focus on the new property's development. His term in office would be remembered not only for the acquisition of this property, but also for leading the efforts to save the St. Patrick's Day Parade in the format Clevelanders had come to expect since 1935.

The challenge of the new property was now at the forefront of the WSIA agenda. Terry Joyce was the general chairperson, while Rip Reilly became the administrative chairperson concerned with fundraising. Judge John T. Patton, Gerry Lavelle and P. J. O'Malley also served as chairpersons in various capacities related to gifts and solicitations.

The goal announced on July 23, 1972 was to raise \$500,000 in three years under the banner "*Drive for '75.*" This was a massive fundraising effort by the Club. The plan was set in phases. The committee would contact certain potential large donors in the first phase, followed by a general solicitation of regular members in a second phase. A third phase would involve soliciting businesses and professionals.

Somewhat ahead of its time, the initial proposal for "Drive for '75" included the ambitious sale of naming rights for a new hall, with an initial price tag of \$250,000. Twenty years later, many professional sports franchises would use this same approach to fund new stadiums. For the general Club member, the approach offered one of three options: Benefactor, \$500; Patron, \$300; and Sponsor, \$100. The pledges could be paid in installments over the three years leading up to 1975. A brochure explaining the program and the Club's goals was produced in conjunction with the effort.

On August 19, 1973, the Club held its "groundbreaking event" at the new grounds in Olmsted Township.⁴⁵ The annual picnic, chaired by Dan Chambers Sr., featured a Mass celebrated by Father James Patton, whose father once led the Sr. Fife and Drum Corps in a white suit. Featured at the picnic were two of the Club's founders, Art McChrystal, age 84, and Nellie Patton, age 94. While a final move to this site would not occur for more than fifteen years, the event was attended by a reported 2,000 individuals. The turnout, for many, symbolized the Club's future at this site.

During the next ten years, the grounds at Olmsted Township would slowly start to be developed. While many provided help and assistance, one individual gave an incredible amount of time and effort to the project. John Togher spent many days and nights tirelessly working and seeking help to get the Olmsted grounds in shape so they could be utilized by the Club. On September 26, 1986 John Togher stepped down as the "new grounds" chairman. The Club thought so much of his efforts over thirteen years that when the new pavilion was constructed, it was named in his honor. Another individual who worked on the Olmsted grounds and on the property in Medina was John Adams. Like John Togher, Adams committed many long hours to see both properties developed to their potential.

⁴⁵ This was not the first event held on the grounds in Olmsted Township. In the fall of 1972, the Club's annual clambake was held on the Olmsted grounds, making it the first Club event at that location.

The new traditions...

The 1970's brought not only a new property, but also a series of new traditions that have come to define the present WSIA. On January 4, 1970, the Club's St. Patrick's Day Committee met and decided to recommend that the WSIA designate a Man of the Year and an I.A. Queen each year by popular vote of the membership. On January 11, 1970, the Executive Board formally approved the process to bestow the honors on two selected Club members. The selection of the I.A. Queen was originally done by a process of selecting finalists, married or single, at a series of dances leading up to St. Patrick's Day. Five members of the Ladies Drill Team were automatically considered finalists. Ballots were printed in the monthly bulletin. A final vote of the membership would then determine the winner.



The Man of the Year selection was also done by popular vote. On February 28, 1970, the first Man of the Year and I.A. Queen were selected. Art McChrystal was the Man of the Year and Kay Moran Nolan was the I.A. Queen. The queen was provided a cape and crown, and a "court" of close friends and fellow WSIA members attended to her needs. The initial winners were very deserving, but over time, it was decided to have the membership recommend the finalists and allow the Executive Board to select the winners to ensure that those who really helped and participated in the Club were formally recognized.

By 1975, in an effort to promote fairness and equality, it was decided to add the honor of "Woman of the Year." Mary McCluskey, who had led the Ladies Drill Team for most of her adult life, was the first woman selected.⁴⁶ These honors have continued to this day and are now a key focal point of the Club's activities on St. Patrick's Day.

Another new tradition was established on February 16, 1971 when the Club decided to have an annual Mass on St. Patrick's Day in the Club hall. In previous years, many Club members attended Mass at one of several west side churches. Members usually attended either St. Patrick's on Bridge Avenue or St. Colman's on West 65th Street. St. Ignatius at West Blvd. and Lorain, and St. Patrick's in West Park were also favored by some. The leadership decided that a special Mass would be held at the Club with all marching units in attendance. The first Mass was led by Father Liam Kitt, but Fathers O'Donnell, Sullivan, Kline and Kenny were also present. The next year the Mass was moved to St. Colman's because of the overflow crowd that appeared at the Club in 1971. In 1973 the Club held the Mass at St. Ignatius at Lorain and West Blvd., but by 1974 the Mass was back at St. Colman's, where the tradition continues to this day.



HELEN MALLOY – 1971 Queen

Court: Ann Campbell, Mary B. Lavelle, Celia Gallagher, Margaret Mary O'Malley.

Gerry Lavelle was nominated without opposition to replace Terry Joyce as Club President in July 1972. The new President and the board were immersed in details involving the new property and the fundraising goal. By late July 1972, a temporary pavilion had been constructed on the grounds and plans were already made to hold both the annual picnic and the clambake at the new location.

The Club was still dealing with the maintenance at the Madison Ave. location while trying to develop the new grounds. In one instance, Terry Joyce managed to secure a donated two-year-old roof air-conditioner valued at \$7,000. Meanwhile, many members, particularly those associated with the trades, like Andy Dever, to name just one, were volunteering their time and equipment to help clear and develop the Olmsted grounds.⁴⁷ Originally, the first scheduled event at the new location was supposed to be the

⁴⁶ Although Mary McCluskey had already been leading the Ladies Drill Team, she was not formally appointed the leader until October 27, 1975. This was simply an oversight that was finally corrected.

⁴⁷ It is impossible, in this limited space, to credit every worker and contractor that assisted in clearing the Olmsted grounds.

annual picnic set for August 27; however, the grounds were not ready. As previously noted, the first actual event held in Olmsted Township was the 1972 clambake.

On November 15, 1972 the Executive Board decided to formally allow Irish clubs associated with the WSIA to have the hall rent-free for their meetings. The only limitations were that no dates would conflict with WSIA events and the associated groups had to pay a \$25 refundable clean-up fee in advance. The groups identified were The GAA,⁴⁸ The Gaelic Society, the United Irish Societies, The Cleveland Feis and Irish Northern Aid.

In 1973, Bob Devlin was elected President of the Club. Devlin was the first, and to date only, lawyer ever elected to the position. Devlin had many professional commitments, and advised the Club of such, but he was elected unanimously without opposition. Devlin had done a great deal behind the scenes to ensure the WSIA, as an organization, was legally protected. His selection as president was a true recognition of his personal efforts on behalf of the Club as an institution. Although Devlin was not the only lawyer associated with the Club, he made a significant contribution through his legal knowledge and training which averted many problems for the Club. Devlin deserves high praise for creating the Irish American Charitable and Educational Fund. The fund generated well over \$300,000 for the Club tax-free. The Club might not have the beautiful facilities it enjoys in Olmsted Township today if not for the efforts of Bob Devlin.

In the 1970's, the Club began selling raffle tickets as a fundraising tool leading up to St. Patrick's Day. The tickets, which usually had a first prize of a paid trip to Ireland, numbered 400 and generally raised the Club approximately \$3,400.

Our other marchers...

The 1970's was a time of transition for the WSIA marching units. While the Fife and Drum Corps and Ladies Drill Team remained the "flagships of the fleet," they gradually curtailed their marching to the one significant Irish event of the year, The St. Patrick's Day Parade. Barry Day, Memorial Day, Loyalty Day, Incarnate Word and Labor Day, slowly, one by one, fell off the Club's list of annual activities. This wasn't an automatic or immediate change. It was gradual and reflected, in many ways, the changing nature of the WSIA membership. The units invariably became more "Americanized." There were diverse interests and responsibilities involving both family and employment that limited participation. Even the Irish immigrant found the time constraints challenging.

This is not to suggest that interest in the units themselves was subsiding; on the contrary, it was at an all-time high. Membership in the Majorettes was at capacity. Gerry Lavelle proposed creation of the *pom pom* unit in November 1973, because there were too many majorettes. The *pom pom* unit would come to be known as "Ireland's 32."

The Majorettes were a huge attraction that traced their origins to the postwar era of the late 1940's.

The founder, and perhaps greatest, majorette in WSIA history, was the incomparable Betty James. By many accounts, she wasn't even Irish, but it was undeniable that she was the greatest baton-twirling master of her era. James was, in effect, a professional majorette, who was essentially "recruited" to train and lead the WSIA Majorettes in parades. She came to the WSIA through Bill Dvorak, who knew of her accomplishments from his experiences as a marcher and trainer. James would march in a one-piece "rhinestone" outfit in front of the Majorette Unit and would dazzle spectators with her "twirling" ability. It is believed James led the Majorettes from their creation in 1947 through the late 1950's. Unfortunately, there are few references in the minutes and no written records involving James or the Majorettes. During this period, the Majorettes were often older and often were professionally trained.⁴⁹ Some of those who marched with James in the 1950's included Mary Yanta and Jeanne Gallagher of West High, Libby O'Connor from John Carroll, and Nancy Sheehan, who at one time was the head majorette at West Tech High School.

⁴⁸ The Gaelic Athletic Association (The GAA) is focused on promoting Gaelic games; that is, Irish sports, such as hurling and Gaelic football. The GAA also promotes Irish music and dance, and the Irish language as an integral part of its objectives. The organization is structured, in terms of competition, on the traditional parishes and counties of Ireland.

⁴⁹ Nancy Sheehan recalls taking a bus to E. 55th and Broadway to the Hruby Conservatory of Music, where she took lessons from Betty James on how to twirl the baton.

The Kilbane sisters, Nancy and Maurita, both were active and in later years led the Majorette Unit for virtually all of the 1960's. For a time in the mid-1960's, there was a group referred to as the "little majorettes," which showed the trend toward younger marchers in this unit. By 1971, Mary Colletta Mackin assumed control of the Majorettes. Later, Bridget O'Donnell, Margaret McIntyre and Mary B. Kish prepared the Majorettes.



Like that of the Majorettes, the origins of the "Jr. Fife and Drum Corps" are somewhat shrouded in history. Most point to 1967 as the formal starting point for the Jr. Fife and Drum Corps as an official unit. Mrs. Mary Hayes, whose six sons⁵⁰ marched with the WSIA, remembers two of her sons marching at a UIS event downtown as a "Jr. Unit" representing the WSIA in 1967. There was a clear focus on getting the youth involved in the late 1960's. In 1969, Art McChrystal was working with a group of sixteen young drummers, trying to get them ready to march. Prior to the creation of the "Jr. Unit," young drummers and fifers who displayed the required skills were simply incorporated into the "Sr." unit, provided the Club had a uniform for them that would fit.

In recent years the modern Jr. Fife and Drum Corps has been led by the incomparable Anthony "Tony" Mulloy, who along with many Sr. Fife and Drum Corps members, works tirelessly with the children each year. Doreen Dever Papajcik, who marches in the Sr. Unit, also works with the children along with members of the Hayes and Togher families. Bridie Joyce also worked for several years organizing the junior units.

Today, all the junior units are under the direction of Eileen Stull, who organizes the units with a group of volunteers beginning in January each year. She has been handling the "Jr. Units" for over fifteen years. The record number of young members is a testament to her efforts.



Row 3: Brian McNamara, Mike Hayes, John McDonough, Frank Chambers, Marty Whalen, Kevin Gallagher, Mike Weir
 Row 2: Jim Kilbane, John McLaughlin, Pat Kelly, Bill Hayes, John Hayes, Tom Mackin
 Row 1: Mike Keenan, Jack Gallagher, John Reilly, Director Jack McDonough, Eddie Nageotte, Pat Hayes, Kevin Keenan

⁵⁰ Kevin, Jim, Pat, John, Mike and Bill were featured in a photo in the February 1994 WSIA bulletin.

Perhaps the most distinctive marching unit ever associated with the WSIA was the “Colonial Boys.” On August 22, 1975, Rip Reilly suggested something should be done in anticipation of the American bicentennial celebrations that were scheduled to begin in 1976. Reilly felt that the Fife and Drum Corps, being the only one of its kind in the area, could bring publicity to the Club and possibly generate money as well. Like Reilly, Jack McDonough also believed the “fifers” could create something unique and special.

In 1976, The Colonial Boys, in their Revolutionary War dress of 1776, were established. They came to symbolize the Irish connection to America and the Club’s support and patriotism for the “new” land.⁵¹

The Colonial Boys were led by John “Jack” McDonough and were considered the elite individuals from the Jr. Fife and Drum Corps unit. Originally numbering twenty, they were initially selected from a large group of members of the Jr. Corps.⁵² Not surprisingly, their popularity was so great they continued to march well into the 1990’s as a WSIA unit.

The Medina Grounds...

The most significant event of the late 1970’s was the Club’s acquisition of the so-called “Medina Grounds” in Lafayette Township in Medina County. The grounds contained forty-two acres on West Smith Road that included a two-acre spring-fed lake, a house, a picnic shelter, campsites and two barns. The Club leadership announced its intention to purchase the grounds at the general meeting held on August 26, 1977. The price was \$125,000. The Club decided to purchase the Medina grounds because development of the Olmsted Township grounds had been slow. There were reported E.P.A. and sewer problems associated with the grounds in Olmsted Township that made many members wonder whether those grounds would ever be ready for regular use either as the new Club location or as a permanent picnic location. In Medina, the leadership felt that they had a ready-to-use picnic facility and also a valuable piece of property that would appreciate over time as a sound investment. The Club’s general members in attendance approved the purchase by a 74-4 vote.

The Medina property was utilized by the WSIA for more than a decade. The Club employed a caretaker on the grounds, Jim O’Malley, to care for the property. There were many great events held at Medina, and many members used the property on weekends, creating many fond memories. Regular picnics and steak roasts were common, and the Club would also rent the property to other groups. For some, the grounds were too far away, but, all in all, the acquisition of these grounds was a very positive step. Nevertheless, by the late 1980’s, the Club was looking to sell the Medina property so it could focus its attention back on Olmsted Township, or an alternative site, for a new hall.⁵³

As the Club concentrated on the move to Olmsted Township and the construction of the new hall, the Medina grounds were placed on the “backburner.” The Club was trying to find a buyer, but interest was minimal as the so-called “Medina building boom” was still a few years off. Finally, on January 24, 1992, the Club signed a purchase agreement with a Medina developer, Kenneth Thornburg, who ran a business called Caprice Homes Inc. Unfortunately, a lawsuit resulted, and a judgment was rendered against the WSIA. In the end, the case was settled and the WSIA moved on.

⁵¹ The Colonial Boys were an outstanding success and brought a great deal of attention and support to the Club. Nevertheless, some Club members disliked the outfits because they appeared to be too “British.” The reality, however, was that the outfits were modeled after the American Revolutionary Army that fought against British control. The patterns for the uniforms were obtained from “Minnesota Fabric” that had the original designs.

⁵² In time, they would also include women. Two such members were Karen Lavelle and Kathy Gallagher. They would also have Sr. Fife & Drum members by virtue of the group’s longevity that extended over fifteen years before the group disbanded.

⁵³ For many years, despite the ongoing improvements, the Olmsted site was not considered “ideal” as a new location. The site began to show real promise when I-480 was finished and the Stearns Rd. exit became a reality, making the location easily accessible for most west side members.

The end of the 1970's...



On September 23, 1977, the members discussed obtaining new uniforms for the Ladies Drill Team. The uniforms had been in continuous use since the founding of the team in 1935. Many veteran members acknowledged the contributions of the Cannon family of Cannon Tailors, who designed and produced the original uniforms at almost no cost to the general members. On December 23, 1977 Rodger Fallon was elected President and Celia Gallagher was elected Vice President. Fallon set two immediate goals upon being elected. First, he wanted to increase the treasury and, significantly, he wanted the Club to move from Madison Avenue. While it would still take a few years, the leadership under Fallon, was now committed to a move and was actively seeking a new location.

The parade in 1979 featured 94 units and was one of the largest to date. As the decade ended, the Club was in sound financial shape. In 1979 the Club took in \$97,992.11 in cash during the year and spent \$94,096.03 for an ending profit of \$3,896.08. When one considers that the Club owned the Madison Avenue property free and clear and had the Olmsted property and the Medina property as assets, the Club was in remarkable shape as it entered yet another new decade.

The move to Olmsted...

For many years, ongoing discussions were held about finding a new location for the Club. Terry Joyce, with others, had been surveying various properties around the Cleveland area. Joyce chaired a relocation committee in search of a new Club location. Some locations that were considered included the old Washington School near Kamm's Corners, "Crystal Springs" campgrounds on Bagley Rd., a party center in North Olmsted, a series of school buildings in Brookpark, the former "Goal Post" bar on W. 117th and the former Willis Appliance site, also on West 117th. Many members wanted to stay on Madison Avenue, or at a minimum, remain in the city of Cleveland on the west side. Others wanted to move out farther because of the migration of the Irish to the western suburbs. The difficulty in finding a suitable location for a reasonable price is outlined over a ten-year period in the Club minutes.

These minutes reflect that Maeve Campbell was one person who really wanted the Club to try to develop the Olmsted Township grounds as the permanent home. Over time, it was economics that began to move the issue. At a meeting on July 23, 1982, the financial condition of the Club was discussed. The Club had lost nearly \$8,000 in the second quarter of 1982. While there were some big expenses at the time, many felt the revenue was down because many people did not want to come down to Madison Avenue. The fact that the Club was burglarized on several occasions in the early 1980's made many members feel it was time to sell the property and move on.

On November 13, 1985, Helen Malloy advised the members that a feasibility study was being completed on the Olmsted site. Other properties were still under consideration, but the Club was now weighing the costs of developing the Olmsted Township grounds over having to remodel an existing facility it would buy. The Club had been looking at a small 1.6 acre site in North Olmsted. It was clear that the cost of rehabilitating that small piece of land was as much as or more than the cost of preparing the entire 26-acre parcel in Olmsted Township, a short distance away. In addition, I-480 and the Stearns Road exit had become a reality, making the grounds more accessible. On July 9, 1986, Terry Joyce informed the Club that the E.P.A. had approved the Olmsted site for building. The issue now before the membership was how to fund construction and when they could start building. Norm Fox, an engineer, helped the Club in dealing with the E.P.A., and the architects, Teckishon and Snyder, got down to work. A site sketch had previously been completed. Finally, on Friday August 22, 1986, the membership was advised that the board had met and voted to approve the decision to build at Olmsted Township. An easement to adjoining property had been secured from James Carney. Fred Kelly served as the construction manager for

purposes of the early construction.⁵⁴

The Madison Ave. hall was sold for \$65,000 in July 1987. The Carney family, who initially gave \$20,000 in 1973 to help acquire the Olmsted grounds, gave an additional \$20,000 in 1987 to help fund construction. Later the Carney family gave an additional \$25,000 to fund construction of the finished parking lot. In appreciation for the Carney contributions, the main hall at the Olmsted location is named after James and John Carney's mother, Mrs. Cecilia Carney.⁵⁵ Her likeness is captured in a painting by Tom Campbell that now hangs in the main hall. Likewise, the "McFaul Gardens" that honor the family of Sheriff Gerald T. McFaul, was constructed near the main hall entrance. McFaul helped raise more than \$100,000 for the building fund. John and Catherine Gallagher of Arrow International also made a generous donation.

Construction began in earnest in late 1987 and early 1988. First, the Club had to address the sewer concerns raised by the E.P.A. Second, a well had to be dug on the property for water. Once these principal improvements were in, the new pavilion was constructed followed by the main hall building. By 1989, the full cost of the project was coming into focus. The projected cost was estimated at \$1,025,000. The Club had a bank loan for \$300,000 toward this amount. In addition, members had loaned the Club an additional \$141,000. The Club had paid approximately \$825,000 of the total cost by May 1989, and it was estimated that volunteer labor from skilled trades' members saved the Club approximately \$350,000.

The new paintings...

While many traditions continued after the various location moves, many believed the wall paintings from the Madison Avenue hall would never be replaced. Thankfully, the original Madison Ave. artist, Thomas Campbell, responded to create a new series of paintings that now adorn the Olmsted Township location. Beautiful individually, they collectively capture the spirit of Ireland and its people and are a true representation of the Club's origins.

Thomas Campbell is a unique individual, whose story would be of great interest even if he had never completed the WSIA paintings. Tom is a first cousin of past Club President Eddie Campbell. Like Eddie, Tom's family hails from Ballycroy in County Mayo, Ireland. Tom served in the U.S. military in WW II. He landed at Normandy on the second day of invasion, on June 7, 1944. He surveyed towns and land sites for the Allied advance through France and into Germany. Upon returning to America, he was a sign painter for thirty years, in an era when billboards were hand-painted. His skill clearly shows in the great paintings that now adorn the Olmsted facility.

Tom tried to capture the spirit of Ireland and its people in his paintings. Individuals, both young and old, are depicted in the artwork. The depiction of "Crogh Patrick" on the main stage is instantly recognized by visitors to the Club. The image of the two young girls in the corner by the thatched cottage of the painting gives the landscape scene a sense of personality.⁵⁶

The 1980's...

The 1980's were a time of transition for the Club. The general meetings were held on Friday nights. The biggest concerns always centered on relocation options. The Club was constantly reviewing potential sites while dealing with issues involving maintenance, parking and security at the existing Madison Ave. location.

⁵⁴ Kelly was a construction consultant who donated all of his time to the Club.

⁵⁵ Initially, the new hall was often referred to as "*The Great Hall*."

⁵⁶ Many have speculated on the identities of the two young girls depicted in the painting. Tom Campbell informed this writer that he was looking to add two young girls to a painting because girls were not depicted in any of the other paintings at the hall. He already had two young boys depicted in an earlier painting. The girls depicted are real, and their names are known, but it is best at this stage to leave their identities to history. As part of the 75th Anniversary, the names will be included in a time capsule to be opened on the 100th Anniversary in 2031. The capsule will contain the names of the girls and how they were selected.

Nevertheless, entertainment remained the focus of Club events. Entertainers who appeared in the 1980's included the Pat and Kris Spicer Group, Jim and Carol Brock, Alec and Mary, Jimmy Carton, John Connors and the Irish Express Showband, Brendan Shine and Irene and the Irishmen. Members learned about Club events not only from the Club bulletin, but also from the "Echoes of Erin" radio program.⁵⁷

1983 signaled the first year for "breakfast with the Easter bunny." Over the years this tradition was always a great event for young families and a means of acquainting the children of members with the Club. For many, their first early memory of the WSIA would evolve around the Easter bunny. In later years, the Fox-Stefancin families would ensure this tradition continued.

In the 1980's the monthly bulletins were handled by Jim Caffrey and Pat (Patton) Yarchow. Both put in long hours with the help of many volunteers to ensure the bulletins were out in a timely manner. It was not easy in the days preceding the modern computer mailing systems of today. Jim was also a supporter of craft shows at the Club. The first "arts and crafts" show was held at the WSIA on September 23, 1984.⁵⁸

On July 31, 1983 the burning of the Medina mortgage was held at a picnic at the Medina grounds. The Club managed to pay off the debt in a little over five short years. 1983 also featured a Mass for deceased members. Another tradition started in 1983 was the "ham and cabbage" dinner that would go on to be a recurring event. While the event was not held every year, when held, it gave everyone a taste of a "real" Irish meal.

The 1980's were also a time the Club reached out to attract young members. In 1984 the WSIA offered students a break in their membership dues by reducing them to \$10 when the student showed a college ID. Various bands with a rock-n-roll Irish sound were also featured, such as "The Bogtrotters." The mid-1980's also featured regularly scheduled "young adult dances," and in 1984 a "Youth Committee" was formed to identify events and activities that might draw younger members.

On March 11, 1984, in a change of pace, the WSIA marching units traveled to Boardman, Ohio, to participate in that city's St. Patrick's Parade. The weather was brutally cold with a -10° wind chill factor. Despite the hardship, the Ladies Drill Team won best unit in the parade. That same year the Club held its first "hobo" dinner. These dinners would be held from time to time, and eventually the theme evolved into the pig roast in the early 1990's.

In January 1985 the Club tried a new approach to raise funds for a possible new location. The Club initiated the "Blarney Ring 300 Club." The goal was to raise money through a series of monthly drawings in which a limited number of ticket purchasers would be eligible to win \$300 a month and, possibly, a \$3,000 prize at year's end. Even the seller of the winning ticket received a prize. The drawings were a big success. The first drawing was held on January 11, 1985, and the first winner was Martin Healy. After the death of Gerry Lavelle, who was one of the drawing organizers, the name of the drawing was changed in July 1986 to the "Gerry Lavelle \$300 Club" in his memory. The successful drawing continues to this day at the conclusion of every monthly meeting.

In what was a highly unusual event for the WSIA, the Club sponsored a professional wrestling match at the Club on October 11, 1985. Nothing is formally recorded about the participants or the audience, but on its face, it was an unusual event for a club like the WSIA. The following week, on October 18, 1985, the Ladies Drill Team held its first reverse raffle to raise funds for both the unit and the club. The event was a sellout and a huge success that would be repeated over the coming years.

⁵⁷ Longtime Club members Mike and Mary Comer operated an Irish radio program out of their home on Normandy Avenue in Cleveland. This program was a critical source for information involving the Irish community to WSIA members. Today, the Gerry Quinn radio program provides a similar outlet.

⁵⁸ It is difficult, in this limited space, to detail all the activities and events Jim Caffrey has been involved in at the WSIA over the years. In addition to his duties as an officer, he initiated the annual Catskills trips in the 1980's, managed the "pig roasts," organized the "hobo" dinners and sponsored the annual super bowl parties to name just a few.

In 1986, in the tenth year of their existence, the Colonial Boys won first prize at the St. Patrick's Day Parade for best precision drill unit. On June 22, 1986 the Club held a retirement party for Father Liam Kitt, who was stepping down and returning to Ireland. Despite numerous parish changes, Father Kitt always maintained his ties to the WSIA.

In August 1989, the Club announced the first annual Thanksgiving Day raffle with a grand prize of \$10,000. Prizes of \$2,500 and \$1,000 were also offered. Tickets were \$20 each. Tom Fox was the initial chairman of this drive. A number of individuals, including Bill Chambers and Gerald McFaul, provided their assistance. On a snowy November 23, 1989, two hundred people assembled at the Club for a Mass celebrated by Father Clarence Chambers and the drawing. The first winners, who split the \$10,000 prize, were identified only as "Vince and Tony." The raffle was very successful. In 1991 Tom Fox turned over \$33,000 to the Club in that year alone. This money would help to pay down the outstanding Club mortgage. A number of others would later serve to chair the annual drive, including Maureen Joyce and Helen Malloy. Today, the raffle is handled by Mickey and Mary Grealis.

The Club closed out the decade with a grand New Year's Eve Party at the new hall featuring "The Rutherfords." More than 365 attended the event organized by Kay Hough, which featured a prime rib dinner. The Club was now ready to enter its first truly modern decade.

A new beginning...

The 1990's began what can best be described as the "modern era" of the Club. The new grounds and facility gave members the opportunity for a fresh start. While many traditions continued, many new approaches and ideas were implemented. With the exception of the legal issues arising out of the previously discussed Medina grounds, the 1990's provided the Club a period of stability and growth. No longer did the leadership have to worry about relocation or maintenance costs on an old building. The only concern now was funding all the new construction and improvements. While this task was daunting, the WSIA members showed they were more than capable of addressing this challenge. The Irish Charitable and Education Fund continued to serve as the principal vehicle for funding the development. While raising money, the members also were redefining the events held in the past, while introducing new options for Irish culture and entertainment for the future.

One of the first new activities held in 1990 was a "25" card game tournament held on February 2 and chaired by Mike Holian.⁵⁹ "Boxy"⁶⁰ and Irish sausage were served. Angela Murphy and Sean Fox were the first champions. The card game "25" has always been a regular and recurring event at the Club, even when played informally by members. In later years these games and tournaments would be arranged by Tom and Kathleen Egan. The "25" games and tournaments have become a staple event at the Club throughout the 1990's and into the 2000's.

The traditional marching season was underway in 1990 with John Adams⁶¹ leading the Sr. Fife and Drummers, Mary McCluskey in charge of the Ladies Drill Team, Eileen Chambers and Colleen Hannan handling the Majorettes and Patti Hanrahan taking charge of the "pom pom" unit. The Jr. Fifers were again under the direction of Tony Malloy. The Colonial Boys were still in place and were under the direction of Jack McDonough.

The most celebrated event of 1990 was the Grand Opening celebration involving the new hall held July 1 through July 8, 1990. Events included a parade and ribbon-cutting ceremony, as well as a Mass celebrated by Bishop Anthony Pilla. These initial activities were held on Sunday, July 1. There was something for everyone over the course of the week-long schedule of events. Even a teen night was held in appreciation of the younger family members. President

⁵⁹ Mike Holian is a volunteer, who like "Curly" Pat O'Malley and his wife, Mary Ann O'Malley and individuals like Kathleen McCready and Alice Kilbane always worked to improve the Club. O'Malley was an operating engineer who often ran heavy equipment at the Club. Mary Ann O'Malley sold tickets at the WSIA for a generation of events. If you needed a ticket for anything in the 1970's, 80's or 90's, you invariably found your way to Mary Ann O'Malley. Likewise, McCready was one of many who regularly worked the fish fries while Alice Killbane was behind the bar for over fifteen years. In addition, Jim and Kay Hough have been on-going club volunteers. Recent volunteers who have also given a great deal are Bill Gannon and Bill Rohlke.

⁶⁰ "Boxy" is a potato pancake made with grated potatoes, flour, eggs, baking powder and salt that is then fried on a griddle.

⁶¹ John Adams is the celebrated bass drummer heard at Cleveland Indians' games for many years at both Municipal Stadium and Jacobs Field.

Helen Malloy had successfully presided over a dramatic move that transformed the WSIA into a modern cultural organization in five short years.

Entertainment at the new Club continued to be of the highest quality. Brendan Boyer and the Royal Irish Showband played the new hall on March 3, 1990. Cahal Dunne made an appearance on October 26, 1990, and the legendary Wolf Tones appeared on November 7, 1990. The Club closed out the year with a New Year's Eve dance featuring the Rutherfords, who were frequent guests of the Club during this period.

The year 1991 got off to a fast start with John Connor and the Irish Express appearing at the hall on January 13. The Club held its first "Danny Boy" contest on February 23, 1991. Contestants in different categories were required to sing the song "Danny Boy" and one other Irish tune of their choice. Winners then participated in a final contest at a local Marriott hotel on St. Patrick's Day. The money raised benefited the St. Malachi hunger center.

On St. Patrick's Day the WSIA *pom pom* unit won first prize for the best precision drill unit in the entire parade. The Club celebrated to the sounds of Sandy Hain and the Clansman at the hall following the parade.



1991 offered another watershed event for the Club. Since 1985, a number of veteran Club members had been making an annual bus pilgrimage to the Catskill Mountains for fun and entertainment. Many close bonds and friendships resulted. In 1990, after Colletta Masterson Jablonski was named "Woman of the Year," she began to lament the fact that often people came to meetings or events and stayed only a short time and left. Something was missing. She missed the old spirit and vitality of the Club, where people depended on other members for fun and interaction. While some of that old spirit was present during the Catskills events, she wanted to rekindle it on a regular basis. Slowly, a group led by Colletta began to loosely congregate at the hall to socialize. Pat Dougan was also involved. Over time, they would evolve into a group known as "Forever Young." Their signature phrase, "*We may be in the autumn of our lives, but have you seen the spring in our step?*" would

come to define their purpose. These members began to meet monthly for lunch with a guest speaker, and they planned regular outings to a variety of locations. Eventually, they would have an official membership and a recording secretary, and by 1991 they became a very welcomed "*Club within a Club.*" "Forever Young" kept many veteran members active in the Club. By July 1991, the WSIA had more than 1,900 paid members. Many of them would join "Forever Young".

Likewise, in the late 1990's, another WSIA branch organization, similar to "Forever Young," was created. Erie Og, or "Young Ireland," was a sort of "youth wing" for young adults at the WSIA. Similar in structure to Forever Young, this group held socials and attended sporting events, or held bus trips for members. The members held many successful happy hour celebrations at various locations around Cleveland. They continued on into the early 2000's with successful events.

In 1992, Tom Campbell's efforts again paid off as the WSIA float won first prize at the St. Patrick's Day Parade. With the new grounds and hall, interest in the WSIA marching units was at an all time high. The ranks of all the units began to swell.

Ohio Irish Festival...

That same year, the Club initiated one of the most endearing events that, at least for the balance of the 1990's, would showcase the Club. Helen Malloy and a small core of Club supporters met in the Club kitchen and decided to hold a festival to help the Club. These supporters advanced their own money to get the event started and to ensure the Club would not be hurt financially.

The first Ohio Irish Festival was held over the last weekend in June 1992 on the Club grounds. The primary goal of having a festival was to raise funds to reduce the Club's mortgage, which was approximately \$600,000 in early 1992. An added benefit of the festival would be the ability to showcase the grounds and the Club hall to those who

previously had not visited the site. Since the lands adjacent to the Club were still undeveloped, festival organizers were able to secure them from the Carney and Gilbert families for parking. The first chairman was Bill Chambers, who, along with Kathleen Cooney, serving as vice chair, organized numerous chairpersons for various committees, including Tom and Kathleen Egan, Jim Goggin, and Gerry Quinn to name just a few, who then organized nearly three hundred volunteers. Later, Jim Kilbane, Marilyn Madigan, Helen Malloy, Kevin McGinty and others would co-chair the event. The first festival featured the legendary Clancy Brothers along with Carmel Quinn and the Mike Corbett dance band. The first festival made a profit of more than \$40,000.

Throughout the year, the Club would prepare for the Festival. Even a series of “Night at the Races” events was held to help initial funding. The number of individuals who volunteered and gave their time and expertise was staggering. In the end, the efforts paid off.

The Ohio Irish Festival was an annual event at the Club until it unfortunately became a victim of its own success. As the size of the event grew and development encroached on the available parking, the festival was forced to move. Organizers tried to keep the Club location, using a bus shuttle system for parking, but unfortunately, attendance suffered. Organizers then decided to move the festival downtown in an effort to attract larger crowds while retaining the core of Club supporters. Initially, the move was an outstanding success. The first site behind Tower City, used in 2002, was ideal. Unfortunately, the site was not available for a three-day event in the subsequent year, and the Club was forced to again move the event. The change proved unsuccessful. The lack of a suitable annual location resulted in the Club discontinuing the event after the 2003 festival.

Despite its ending, the Ohio Irish Festival was an outstanding historical success. It raised more than \$100,000.00 for the Club and was one of the primary factors in ending the Club’s Olmsted mortgage debt.

The rest of the decade...

In 1992 the Club continued to reach out to a younger crowd by hosting a “Back to College” party in the pavilion on July 31, 1992, featuring The Kilroys. These occasional youth-related events were often a great success, even when some of the older members were unaware they were taking place. The important thing was the Club leadership was always trying to reach out to a younger crowd and provide them the opportunity to use the Club grounds for their enjoyment.

On October 18, 1992 another annual event was initiated with the “First Annual Pig Roast.” While the Club had sponsored pig roasts in the past or had them as part of the previous annual picnics, this was a successful effort to feature the roast as an annual event. Like the annual clambake and steak roast,⁶² the pig roast would give members a chance to socialize and enjoy the pavilion in a relaxed environment.

In late 1992 many Club members became involved in a Cleveland-Achill Parish reunion event held in Cleveland over the weekend of October 2 to 4, 1992. Michael Murray served as the Chairperson. Al O’Leary with a group of Irish musicians, Alec and Darby Folk and “The Kilroys” all provided the weekend musical entertainment. In addition to two Masses, a Gaelic football game was held on Sunday. These events served to reaffirm the Club’s ties to the Parish of Achill and would be a precursor to Steve Mulloy’s later efforts to complete the formal twinning between Cleveland and Achill in 2003.

With the new location in Olmsted came a new look that has endured to the present. The Club began selling sweatshirts, jackets and tee-shirts with an instantly recognizable logo of the Club similar to the “Claddagh” ring symbol. Maureen Lavelle helped develop the “I.A. store,” which featured a range of items with the Club logo. These were a huge success at the annual Ohio Irish Festivals in the 1990’s.

⁶² Most Club records indicate the annual “steak roast” concept was started in 1979, although the Club often held steak roasts in conjunction with other events. While there are some conflicting records, the first “official” WSIA clambake, following the current tradition, was held in 1963.

Another new activity at the Club in the 1990's was the start of a dart tournament handled by Jim Hayes. These tournaments continued and brought some new faces out to the Club. Similarly, a bowling league was initiated under the direction of Joyce Toth. Bowling on the Club's newly acquired machine became increasingly popular. It gave the Club pub the feel of an old-style neighborhood bar. The early 1990's also saw the beginning of the now legendary WSIA fish fries. Once the Club installed new deep fryers in the hall kitchen, the fish fries took off. Over time, the volunteers working these fries would be known as the "McDonough Brigade" after Kevin McDonough who took charge of many of the volunteer fries and dinners associated with the Club. McDonough and his crew would refine the menu and, eventually, even feature mussels and shrimp as part the "fry" season. It is impossible in this short space to recognize everyone who worked in the kitchen at either a fish fry or special events such as the clambake, steak roast or pig roast. These volunteers, however, made these events successful and gave individuals a reason to come out and patronize the Club. A full listing of McDonough's crew appeared in the May 1999 Club bulletin.

The year 1994 saw some new entertainment at the Club with the Macken Brothers & Brian Sullivan appearing, as well as "The Six Priests of Ireland." Also appearing were "The Ray Lynam Band," Andy Cooney, Rich Sulzer and the Spice of Life and Dermot O'Brien. Even "Eddie and the Edsels," a 50's rock-n-roll band, made an appearance around Christmas in 1994. Later, in 1996, "Eddie and the Edsels" would return for an "old car night" arranged by Peggy Needham.

March of 1994 saw the Club hold its first "Pub Quiz," hosted by Maggie Richter. Years later, the pub quiz concept would be revived and be extremely popular under the direction of Ben Clingain, on Friday nights.

The marching units were very successful in 1994, with the WSIA Sr. Fife and Drum Corps and the Ladies Drill Team earning first place honors on St. Patrick's Day. Improvements at the Club grounds continued with the effort to construct a playground adjacent to the pavilion. In a creative effort to raise funds for the construction, Kathy Drellishak, Ann Stefancin and Anne Gallagher, with the help of others, created a cookbook that was sold, with the proceeds funding the playground construction. On November 13, 1994, "Kidsfest" was held to the delight of many. The *Taste of Cleveland* cookbook was available in November of that year. Another playground fundraiser was the traditional "pancakes with the Easter Bunny" event held each spring. Sean and Agnes Fox, longtime club activists, saw their children work tirelessly with many volunteers to make these events successful and ensure the playground was completed. The Fox-Stefancin family was often at the forefront of WSIA activities involving children.

On October 7, 1994 Kay Hough and Kay Forrey chaired the first ladies-only reverse raffle. While the Ladies Drill Team had held reverse raffles in the past, this was a Club-wide event involving the women of the Club. The event would eventually take on the name "Kay Forrey Ladies Only Reverse Raffle."

In late 1994, Irish politics returned to the forefront of discussions at the WSIA. A series of pronouncements were reprinted in the WSIA bulletin from the Provisional IRA, the Irish government and a combined statement from Albert Reynolds, John Hume and Gerry Adams regarding an IRA ceasefire and the beginning of talks that would later lead to the Good Friday Agreement. It was a time of great hope for members who had followed the struggle over the past generation and had attended countless events at the Club in support of the Catholic population in the north. On May 16, 1995, following the Provisional IRA ceasefire, Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein made an appearance at the WSIA to inform Irish Americans about the prospects for peace in Ireland.

In 1995, the Club welcomed its new Chaplain, Father John J. Kline, a longtime Club supporter. Father Kline said a special Mass on March 12, 1995, followed by a brunch and a concert by the Barleycorn.

On December 21, 1995, John O'Brien was elected Club President. In 1996, Club dues were \$12 for a senior single and \$20 for a senior couple. Regular single memberships were \$25, and regular family memberships were \$50.

The late 1990's saw a variety of entertainment come through the Club, including The Whole Shabang, the Wavelengths, Tony Kenny, Declan Nerney, Cherish the Ladies, Trish O'Brien, Irene and the Irishman, Jerry Hanlon, Dublin City Ramblers, Paddy Reilly, Foster and Allen and Oasis.⁶³ In the late 1990's, the Club also began to feature

⁶³ This "Oasis" was the local Cleveland band, not the world famous "Oasis" from Manchester, England, featuring the Gallagher Brothers.

a monthly “ceili” often held on Friday nights and arranged by Tom Hastings. These events returned traditional Irish music to the Club.

On October 6, 1996, the Club held its 65th Anniversary dinner dance. The program was arranged by Nora Carr, Mel and Mary Falle, John and Eileen Lackey, Maureen Lavelle, Helen Malloy, Pat and Ann Murphy, John Patton Sr. and John and Eileen O’Brien. Music was by Sean Moore. *The Plain Dealer* did a story on the 65th Anniversary, featuring John “Mahoxie” Patton and Colletta Masterson Jablonski.

In the late 1990’s the Club finally established what had been talked about for nearly a generation. A library was finally created, bearing the name of longtime Club secretary Kathleen McNeeley. Maeve Campbell had long pushed for a library at the old Madison Ave. location, but it was never realized in her lifetime. Finally, in the late 1990’s, it came together through the efforts of Lonnie McCauley, Midge Gannon and a core of volunteers who to this day work tirelessly to provide an educational format to the entertainment-related WSIA activities. The library committee members deserve great praise, along with longtime membership secretary Pat Gerron, for saving many of the Club’s original minutes and records. Bill and Diane Luther especially saw to it that many of the early records were saved and transcribed for future generations.⁶⁴

One of the last major improvements before the dawning of the new century was the addition of forty-eight parking spaces and a modern driveway to the rear of the hall. Often these physical improvements went unnoticed by many Club members. A solid crew of tradesman often worked diligently to make these improvements out of the average Club member’s sight. Some of them, at various times, included Eddie Campbell, Pete Kelly, Sean Gannon, Pat McHugh, Maurice O’Grady, Sean Fox, Pat Leneghan, Jim Sherry, Dave Lavelle, Pat Hughes, Neil Hartnet, Pat McNamara, Jimmy Deane, Mike Holian, Franny Kelly, John O’Brien, Mike Chambers, John O’Donnell, John Lavelle, Pat Finnegan, John Duffy, Dennis Dunne, John Hayes, Dick Zaun, and, of course, John Togher. Often times these members were sustained with lunch by the likes of Corrine Ginley, Mary Ann O’Malley, Bridie Joyce and Helen Malloy, to name just a few.

The Club closed out the decade and the century with a New Year’s Eve celebration featuring the Deirdre Reilly Showband. Tickets were \$60 each or \$120 per couple. The Club was now ready to embark on a new century of progress and growth.

The new millennium and beyond...

In the first year of the new millennium, the WSIA was finally able to honor an individual who had given virtually his entire adult life to the Club, former President Steve Mulloy. Mulloy was honored as Man of the Year in 2000, joining Woman of the Year, Sara McLaughlin, and I.A. Queen Shannon Deane. Mulloy was representative of a small and unique group of individuals that had seamlessly transitioned between the early Pat Lynch era and the 21st Century WSIA. These individuals, like Mulloy, were the key to the Club maintaining its ties to the past.

In 2001 the Club celebrated its 70th anniversary with a concert on October 19th featuring Ciaran Sheehan, Marie O’Brien, Eily O’Grady and Eanan Patterson. The theme was Ireland in song. The event was so successful the Club brought Ciaran Sheehan back for a 71st anniversary concert on October 5, 2002. The September 2002 bulletin outlined all the WSIA committees, which included Forever Young, Erie Og, Fish Fry, Bartending, Maintenance, Cleaning Teams, Ad Book, Library, Bulletin Ads, 50/50 Drawing, Membership Drawing, Good and Welfare,⁶⁵ I.A. Store, Thanksgiving Raffle and the Gerry Lavelle “300” Club.

⁶⁴ The WSIA as an organization has a wealth of records. The minutes and bulletins are a source of great information. Unfortunately, in some eras, these records are at best limited or nonexistent. While no formal records exist before 1936, surprisingly many recent records encompassing the late 1980’s and 1990’s are missing.

⁶⁵ For years, the legendary Celia Gallagher handled “good and welfare” items, which involved sending get-well cards or expressions of sympathy to Club members. Since Celia Gallagher’s death in 1999, Mary Flannery has handled this important duty.

President John O'Brien, with the other leaders and volunteers, worked to improve the physical structure on the WSIA during the past ten years of his presidency. While many focus on the highly visible events and dances of the period, improving the grounds and the physical plant was still a critical area of concern. These efforts became the benchmark of John O'Brien's presidency. Along with the parking lot and back drive improvements, the Club completed an ambitious plan for construction of new storage garage to house small and heavy equipment and building materials. This was no small feat. Today, Jack Flynn keeps much of that equipment in working order. Likewise, on the inside of the hall, Bill and Maureen Rice see to it that the bar is kept in good working order. The ingenuity of volunteers is often surprising. An engineer by trade, Bill Rice installed the draft beer system in the pub and made and installed all the wainscoting around the stage, the hall bar and the eleven pillars in the main hall. Rice also designed and made the oak liquor cabinet in the hall bar.



In 2001, construction on the gazebo began on the day of a world-changing event. John O'Brien, Pat Lenehan and John O'Donnell began digging the foundation on September 11, 2001. They went into Berea that morning to select stone for the base. While there, they heard that a plane had hit a building in New York, but were completely unaware of the full scale of events unfolding in New York. Upon returning to the site they worked well into the afternoon, only to later discover the full story of what had happened at the World Trade Center after finishing for the day. September 11, 2001 would have a significant impact on the WSIA. Many members were very proud of the stories emanating from Ireland regarding the support the Irish were showing for America and the American tourists stranded in Ireland by the day's events. The Club would create a commemorative tee-shirt showing its support for those lost on September 11, 2001. By 2002, the gazebo was

finished and a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held featuring music by the band "Brace Yourself Bridget." Eddie Campbell cut the ribbon on behalf of the Club.



Another major physical improvement to the Club, not immediately recognized, in this era was the arrival of city water lines to the Club. For years the Club had relied on well water from two wells located outside the back entrance of the Club. These required storage/filtration tanks that were inside the Club adjacent to the kitchen area. For years many Club members and visitors would comment on the quaint "Irish cottage" that remains visible from the pavilion looking toward the lake. Few realize that this "cottage" is actually a pump house that holds a \$40,000 pump for water in the event of a fire at the Club. With the arrival of piped city water, the pump is no longer

required. Its existence, however, shows the great lengths Club members went to in an effort to fully develop the Club grounds.

Additional physical improvements in the new decade included replacing the original ceiling, constructing a new "walk-in" cooler and finishing a complete remodeling of the Club hall with a new dance floor, wall trim and carpeting.

Entertainment at the Club in the early 21st century included the Whole Shabang, the Emigrants, Deirdre Reilly, Mary Agnes Kennedy, the New Barleycorn and Fiona Murphy.

Perhaps the most significant event added to the list of Club activities since the dawn of the new century has been "The Claddagh Ball." The Ball is a beautiful affair featuring the very best in food and entertainment. The theme has been a "night to remember," and the Claddagh Ball has lived up to that standard since its inception in 2003. Dan

Chambers, with the help of others, has largely been responsible for creating the event as a new approach after the traditional “Emerald Ball,” held at St. Clarence and later at the I-X Center, ended. The event is an annual sellout.

The WSIA played a pivotal role in formalizing the Cleveland-Mayo Twinning ceremonies that took place in Ireland in August 2003 and in Cleveland in October 2003. Mayor Jane L. Campbell attended the formal twinning dinner at the WSIA held on October 24, 2003. The “Twinning,” from the American perspective, was the result of years of work by past WSIA President Steve Mulloy. The event symbolized the longstanding ties and union between the Parish of Achill and the Cleveland area.

The WSIA is now a well-established cultural institution in the Cleveland area. Today, it has 3,132 members. It has remained true to its roots. The spirit of the volunteer lives on as it did in the early 1930’s. Today, quietly, behind the scenes, as they have done for generations, volunteers are busy accomplishing things that are unseen by many. These volunteers ensure the Club’s ongoing legacy. The regular “Tuesday night cleaning crews,” are the best example of the current efforts by volunteers to improve the Club. These ‘crews’ meticulously clean the entire complex, maintaining the outstanding reputation for cleanliness that the Club enjoys. It is their efforts that best symbolize the true of history of what is the West Side Irish American Club.

Author’s note: It is impossible to mention everyone who has contributed to the Club in this limited writing. I humbly apologize to those omitted from this initial effort. It is my sincere hope that a subsequent publication, containing additional names and information, will be made available on the Club’s website, or in hard copy through the Library Committee. Further, some individuals may be unduly credited more than others with respect to certain events or accomplishments. Again, I apologize. In any event, if you see an oversight, error or omission you believe needs to be corrected, please contact me or a member of the Board, so it can be addressed in any subsequent publication.

Special thanks to Michael Chambers and Maureen Joyce for their assistance in compiling this record. Additional thanks to Bill and Diane Luther, as well as Pat Gerron, who saved many of the early records from destruction. I would also like to thank everyone who shared a story, picture or memento from the Club’s past that aided in compiling this record. Lastly, I would like to thank the WSIA Board for entrusting me with the responsibility to complete this history. It was an honor I shall always cherish.

This record is compiled from Club minutes, monthly bulletins, news articles and personal recollections of a number of individuals too numerous to mention here. I am deeply grateful for everyone’s cooperation and input.

– Judge Sean C. Gallagher