

Connaught Telegraph - Pauline's Washington poem

Written by Tom Shiel
Thursday, 24 March 2011 20:31



A poem extolling the beauty of Islandeady, the birthplace of Taoiseach Enda Kenny, written by an Islandeady woman, was quoted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, at the annual Friends of Ireland luncheon in Washington on St Patrick's Day. The House Speaker, John Boehner, was paying tribute to Enda Kenny on his election as Taoiseach.

He said many who came to America during the Famine period originated from the shores of the west coast of Ireland, near a small village in county Mayo called Islandeady.

"For Ireland's new Taoiseach, Islandeady is home," said the Speaker.

He said he recently read a poem about Islandeady, written by Pauline Rice.

It begins: "From the lake in Islandeady, there's a view of seven hills,

Near the ancient Churchyard ruin wherein the Maker tills,

Birds sing sweetly in the trees - waves wash on the shore,

And lap about the anchored boats as fish leap by the score."

The Taoiseach, who attended the annual dinner of Islandeady GAA Club, said he was surprised and delighted to hear the Speaker read out the opening verse of the poem which captured the beauty of his native parish.

Pauline, who is secretary of the Islandeady Heritage Action Group, said she wrote the poem nearly twenty years ago, and always believed the scenery of Islandeady equalled that of any place in the world.

The following is the full speech of Speaker John Boehne. It is titled: The luck and loyalty of the Irish.

Thank you all for being here today. There's luck in sharing, according to an old Irish proverb. Today, we thank our guests not only for sharing their national holiday with us. We also celebrate our shared values and ideals. We rededicate ourselves to shared priorities of peace, freedom, and prosperity. Hospitality has always been a trademark of the friendship between our peoples. Over the centuries, millions of Irish have come to America seeking a fresh start, and millions of Americans have gone to Ireland in search of a better pint.

Just as the proper pour takes skill and balance, so does governing in these challenging and uncertain times. So may I say Taoiseach, on behalf of the whole House, that we and the people we represent stand with you and your people.

"It is the least we can do, really. America, as you know, was founded on a beautiful idea - that all who God created free should be free and that men and women could, given freedom and liberty, advance their station and live out their dreams. And when that idea has been tested, as happens with ideas, we have been fortunate to count on the luck and the loyalty of the Irish.

"Because of the Irish, America is a richer, freer, and yes, a bit noisier country than it would have been. As a matter of fact, many who came over during the famine period originated from the shores of the west coast of

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Ireland, near a small village in County Mayo called Islandeady. For Ireland's new Taoiseach, Islandeady is home.

"I recently read a poem about Islandeady, written by Pauline Rice. It begins: "From the lake in Islandeady there's a view of seven hills, Near the ancient Churchyard ruin wherein the Maker tills, Birds sing sweetly in the trees - waves wash on the shore, And lap about the anchored boats as fish leap by the score."¹

These lines describe the beauty of a part of Ireland where St. Patrick once preached the Gospel, and as the legend goes, drove out all the snakes.

"I am Patrick," he said, "a sinner, the least learned of men, least of all the faithful, most worthless in the eyes of many. The Apostle of Ireland's teachings humble us and remind us we are mere mortals doing God's work here on Earth."

"Today we continue a tradition begun by one of my predecessors, Tip O'Neill of South Boston, a great-great-great grandson of Cork. Tip started this event as a show of solidarity at a time when darkness had fallen on parts of the Emerald Isle, and its people yearned for peace and unity.

In that same spirit, if you would all now join me in a toast:

To the Taoiseach and his new government, may it have every success;
And to the friendship between our peoples, may it continue and prosper;
May the good Lord take a liking to you, but not too soon.

To your health

Below is the full text of Pauline Rice's poem which was written in 1992.

Islandeady Hills

From the lake in Islandeady there is a view of seven hills

Near the ancient Churchyard ruin wherein the Maker tills

Birds sing sweetly in the trees - waves wash on the shore

And lap about the anchored boats as fish leap by the score

To view the woods of Rehins near the town of Castlebar

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And the lovely Isle of Bilberry like patchwork from afar

Proud Nephin Mor is peeping from behind Glenisland peaks

A pathway on this heather hill a happy wanderer seeks

The Reek is standing sentinal o'er Sheeaune to the west

It's pilgrim path winds clearly to this lofty peak so blest

The rolling Drimneen drumlins and Leitir and Fairhill

From high Kilfea to Greenhills you forget the world is ill

It's nice to be in safe keeping in this hollow of God's hand

As graceful swans are gliding in the quiet watered land

The Jacksnipe winging swiftly sounds like a kid goats cry

On a glowing Springtime evening as the sunset fills the sky

The golden rays shine on the Church in Rinaseer so grand

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It's Mass path trod for centuries along the fertile land

These gentle folk have all passed on to join the Angels high

To walk the roads of Heaven in their Kingdom in the sky

In Autumn bright reflections on calm lake waters glow

As russet birch and hazel groves produce a dazzlntg show

Holly berries - hips and haws - in every hedgerow swings

To keep the wild birds well fed as the merry robin sings

When my days are ended the mountains they will stand

Majestically all blue and gold around this lovely land

I'll make my last long journey to the spot the Maker tills

To rest in peace beside the lake among the seven hills

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*Pauline Rice (written 1992)

So there you are coming to the end of what has been an eventful month for Enda Kenny and, indeed, his native Islandeady. If the Obamas are ever looking for a Poet Laureate in the White House they need look no further than Pauline.