

The O'Dea Gathering 1990, July 6th - 10th

Ireland is gripped with feverish interest in tracing the origins of Family Clans. One of the pitfalls of such research is keeping the 'bull' at bay. There is always the temptation of trumpeting, banging one's drum in the hope that one's family would somehow, someday, emerge superior to most other families. The O'Deas are singularly fortunate that the chief architect of the rallying of this far-flung tribe is a man who has not a drop of O'Dea blood in his veins. He is a qualified Archaeologist as well as a teacher (in Ennis) - Risteárd Ua Croinin - known as Dick. Of a Cork (Cobh) father, and a Donegal mother - both settled in Ennis for many years. Dick is luckily and happily married to an intelligent and vivacious partner, Helen (Guilfoyle) Murphy. They grew up next door neighbours and now live beside Dysert O'Dea Castle off the road from Ennis to Corofin.

In early 1980 a genial giant from Wisconsin, one Jack O'Day, driving through Clare discovered a sign pointing to Dysert O'Dea. He came on the ruin of a Castle - heard it was for sale, bought it, and carried out some preliminary restoration.

In 1986 he met Dick Cronin who was keenly interested in complete restoration. Dick was joined by a colleague teacher, one John Kearney. Together they pressed the American who accepted their proposal to found the Dysert O'Dea Development Association of which he was, later, a member. He gave them an indefinite lease of the Castle and his blessing to go ahead.

Together with a few local volunteers they began with pick and shovel and barrow - chip by chip, holidays and long Summer evenings, sweat and muscle, brawn and brain. This modest effort attracted the attention of Bórd Fáilte; Clare County Council, who made the short entrance road; Ireland Fund who supplied the very striking signs. And so we have back again into history the 'Dysert O'Dea Castle', focal point of the world-wide O'Dea Clan, the Phoenix risen out of the dust and from now on into the two thousands, a serious Archaeological Centre, linking past, present, future.

The widow of J. F. Kennedy was asked at his tenth anniversary if she could, in one sentence sum up his strongest conviction, she replied: "*The power of one man doing what he believed was right and sticking to it*".

Dick Cronin, stand and take your bow - the generations of O'Deas, and those who are not, will whisper a prayer for your dream, and for your pluck in making it real, and for the example of one man doing what he believed in, with muintreas, simplicity, modesty and good humour.

They were there from the four points of the compass. The first-ever assembly of O'Deas, from Mullinahone, Uachtar Árd, Kilnaboy, Killarney, New Zealand, Lissycasey, Ranelagh, Brisbane, Vermont, Cheshire, London, Roscommon, Cora Caithlin, Arlington - Virginia, Wiltshire, Dungarvan, Clontarf, Pallasgreen, Foxrock, Kilmihill, Belfast, Lydican (Galway), Ballyboden, Paris (France), Connecticut, Shannon, Colorado, Kilfenora, Greystones, Kilrush, Antrim, Caherdavin (Limerick), Liscarroll (Cork), Ohio, Killiney, California, Knockbeg (Clare), Essex, Dundrum

(Dublin), Wisconsin, Ballsbridge (Dublin), Illinois, Perth, Ennis, Adelaide, Canada, Florida, Rathgar, Alaska - 125 in all.

Friday, July 5th - official opening of Castle - A full programme, meetings, lectures, entertainment, day and night, tours of Burren, Ennis town, etc. The week-end opened at the Old Ground Hotel by a formal welcome by the Chairman of Ennis Urban Council, Mr. Peter Considine. Followed by a sherry reception sponsored by Clans Office of Bórd Fáilte. The opening talk by Risteárd Ua Cronín was a well-researched rapid history of the 'ancient Clare O'Deas'. Professor Edward O'Dea of Illinois University spoke with real clarity of the difficulties of tracing the O'Deas throughout America. Michael O'Dea, Foxrock, told us of his uncle, Jimmy, comedian of golden memory; Gerard Kennedy, Director of the Clare Heritage Centre, told of the help to be found there for tracing family trees. These talks were chaired by one James O'Dea, teacher in Clontarf - under his guidance the speakers were short, to the point, and easy to follow.

Sunday - there was an O'Dea Mass at the Cathedral in Irish - which Father Vincent O'Dea, Ohio, and I concelebrated. Sunday night the colourful and full-of-humour election of the Clan Chieftain. The hot favourite was Jack O'Dea from Wisconsin, who met friendly opposition from Michael O'Dea, Foxrock, who was nominated Tánaiste. Chairman of Clan selected was James O'Dea, Dublin, secretary, R. Cronin, joint treasurers, Damien O'Dea, Dublin, accountant (ex Kilrush), and Garda John O'Sullivan, Ennis, married to Celia O'Dea, Kilrush.

A six foot Professor Anthony Angelini of St. John's University, Flushing, New York, brother of an Archbishop in Vatican City was an 'outstanding' figure - He was married to a June Marie O'Dea. By the end of the session he said he had O'Dea lore coming out his ears: "*Gee, I'm in a hurry back to Long Island to be 'de-O'Deaised'*". A hearty man. Jean O'Dea invited me to Alaska where she came from - I said I would go. "*When I had fixed the puncture in my bike'*". John O'Dea from Brisbane was coloured (copper-skinned). His grandmother was an aboriginal (the rest of the O'Deas have to make do with being just original) and his wife Kay (same colour) from Sri Lanka was daughter of a McMahon - same as my grandmother. John has researched his forebears best of all - his grandfather's great grand-father had gone to Australia from Cooraclare.

In all it was a most enjoyable weke-end, it reminded me of Hilaire Belloc's nice thought:

"From quiet beginnings out to undiscovered ends there's nothing worth the wear of winning but laughter and the love of friends".

Sunday night was given over to a hilarious Banquet at Bunratty. In the entire gathering there was the note of warmest welcome, much relieved by the absence of any trace of wind-beggerly, flim-flam or paddy-whackery. It was decided to repeat the get-together every three years.

*Dom. Bernard O'Dea, O.S.B.
Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick.*