

A PLACE FOR ALL THINGS IRISH

San Francisco Irish Societies at the Turn of the 20th Century
and their Dream of Building an Irish Hall



The story is told through a series of posters and memorabilia of the Irish Societies at the turn of the 20th Century

Exhibit on display at the United Irish Cultural Center,
2700-45th Avenue, San Francisco, CA

Main Exhibit-Series of Posters
Open Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday
11:30 am – 9 pm

Memorabilia in Library
Open Thursday, Friday, Saturday
1:30 pm -4:30 pm

In 1896, one third of the population of San Francisco was made up of Irish and Irish Americans. Although they were more welcome in the booming new City than back East, life could be difficult for the working class Irish who lived South of the Slot, as South of Market Street was known to its residents.

They formed many societies-benevolent associations, secret protective societies, and social clubs-who welcomed newcomers and provided monetary support during hard times. Although most of the members were from the working class, the societies drew members from all classes of Irish society in San Francisco. The lives of the working class Irish centered around the various societies and the Catholic parishes - all of which held weekly picnics, balls and whist parties.



Photos Courtesy of O'Brien Family of San Francisco

TEVIS & CO.,
MANUFACTURERS,
Front Street, S.F.


DIXON, BORGESON & CO., SHOW CASES.
 37 Market Street, S. F.,

84
Secret Societies.
CROCKER-LANGLEY DIRECTORY.
Secret Societies.

CALIFORNIA CASTLE No. 1. Meets every Wednesday evening, N. S. G. W. Building, 414 Mason street. Oscar Hocks, N. C. W. O. Macdougall, M. of R., 123 Stockton street.

KNIGHTS OF TARA.

A secret Irish organization, the object of which is known only to the members. Meets at K. R. B. Hall, corner of Mason and O'Farrell streets, the second and fourth Mondays of each month.

KNIGHTS OF THE RED BRANCH.

Thomas Desmond, Superintendent. Meets every Wednesday at their Hall, 230 Mason street.

LEGAL FRATERNITY OF PHI DELTA PHI.

Pomeroy Chapter, Hastings College of the Law, University of California. Established 1883. Meets weekly during the college year. There are Chapters in twenty-five of the leading colleges of the United States and Canada.

To provide for the relief of sick and distressed members and their families.

To provide a benefit fund, from which, upon the death of a member, a sum not exceeding five thousand dollars shall be paid to such beneficiaries related to the deceased member by consanguinity or affinity, as may have been designated by the member, in accordance with the laws of the order.

Certificates are issued in amounts of \$1,000, \$2,000, \$3,000, \$4,000 or \$5,000.

Councils of the order are established in cities and towns of the healthy portions of the United States and Canada, there being now over 780 Councils in existence, with number of members, January 1, 1897, 50,000.

THE SAN FRANCISCO CABINET, N. U. Meets the fourth Friday of each month in Harmony Hall, Red Men's building, 530 Post street. F. H. Hastings, President; J. N. Bunting, Secretary, 927 Market street, room 618.

YOSEMITE COUNCIL No. 33, N. U. Meets the first and third Mondays of each month in Excelsior Hall, Foresters' building, 102 O'Farrell street. Geo. S. Dodd, President; W. W. Peck, Secretary, residence, 1137 Guerrero street.

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL No. 530, N. U. Meets the

The Irish societies met at a variety of places throughout the City. The Irish American Benevolent Society (1860-1890), formed to help sick members and to intern deceased members, built the Irish American Hall at 818 Howard Street, between 4th and 5th Streets. A meeting place for a variety of organizations, it also served as a magazine for the Meagher guard of the California State militia in 1871.

In 1875, many Irish nationalists were meeting at the Irish Confederation Hall at 751 Market Street. An article in Daily Alta California, March 24, 1875, relates that they were organizing a memorial ceremony there for John Mitchel, leading member of Young Ireland & the Irish Confederation, in collaboration with the other Irish societies in the City.



Tallest man in picture holding the rifle is Tom Desmond, Commandant of the KRB and one time Sheriff of San Francisco

There were four KRB* Halls. After the second one was destroyed in the Earthquake and Fire of 1906, a temporary one was used from 1906-1909 and finally the building at 1133 Mission St. was constructed where many Irish and Irish Americans met their future spouses. The fourth KRB hall was destroyed by fire in 2007.

None of these locations were adequate enough to accommodate the growing Irish population. A new place was needed, inspiring the societies to build such a hall.

*Knights of the Red Branch, California Branch of Clan na Gael

"The Hall would be the meeting place of all the Irish societies in SF."

Irish Fair of 1898 program

April 8th 1913

Resp. Submitted
Juby Coew
Rec See.

Inv. Dr. Clem.

Hibernia Hall
454 Valencia st
April 3rd 1914

On ~~of~~ Friday eve April 3rd 1914
a regularly called meeting of
P. C. L. A. took place -
All officers present -
a bill for Hall rent 3-00
" " postals 5-00
moved by Sister Coew duly seconded
that bills be taken up under new

umbers have two well-furnished living

The San Francisco Call, December 15, 1895

CELTIC UNION'S PROJECT

Twenty - Six Irish Societies
United to Build a Grand
Hall.

They Desire to Have a Home That
Will Cost a Quarter of a
Million.

The Celtic Union will hold an important meeting this evening in K. R. B. Hall for the purpose of taking further action in the project of building a handsome hall. It was stated yesterday by many of the enthusiastic supporters of the hall proposition that success is certain. Anyhow the various Irish societies of San Francisco are as a unit on it, and for that reason decisive progress is expected to be made at the meeting to-night.

There are twenty-six Irish societies in the Celtic Union, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Knights of St. Patrick, which are among the chief supporters of the enterprise. They were brought together mainly through the efforts of Jeremiah Deasy, Thomas R. Bannerman and other prominent Irishmen of this City, and now that the union is a reality the main object for which it was called into existence will be taken up with a will.

The plan as now outlined in the rough, is to form a corporation with a capital stock of \$250,000, to be divided into shares of a par value that will enable men of moderate means to become subscribers. A large share of this stock, it is proposed, will be taken by the societies. Besides, several of the bodies in the Celtic Union are considering grand excursions into the country and entertainments in town to raise funds to be presented to the corporation. Then when sufficient stock has been subscribed to warrant the actual commencement of buying a lot and building a hall, the corporation will begin business operations.

A wide and pretentious scope is given the project, for nothing but a building that will be an ornament to the City and up to date in all its appointments is at present considered. The building is to be finished in modern style, according to the plans of its projectors, and to contain lodgerooms for the societies, a large theater, or meeting-hall, clubrooms, offices, a banquet-hall, etc. The name may be Irish-American Hall or Celtic Union Hall, more likely the latter, which is now most in favor. The hall will be the meeting-place of all Irish societies in San Francisco, their headquarters as well, and in it all affairs connected with these organizations will be held.

"its purpose was to build an Irish Hall."

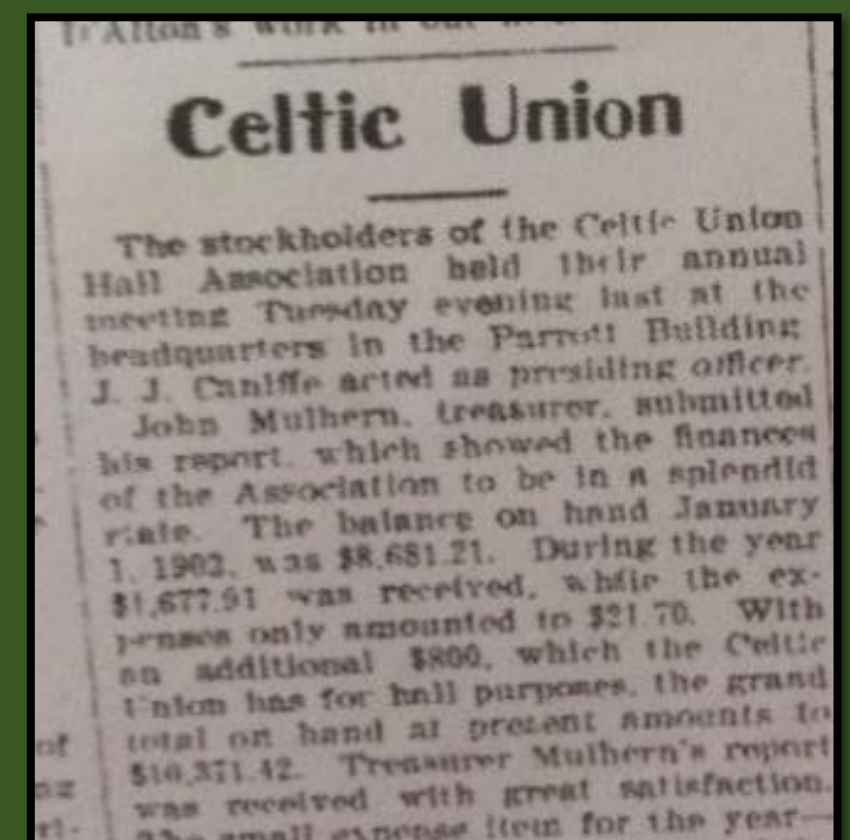
Irish Fair of 1898 program

In 1896, a number of San Francisco Irish societies banded together and formed the Celtic Union. For many years the Celtic Union was the leader of the Irish societies in San Francisco. The Union organized or participated in a myriad of events – including Wolfe Tone celebrations, Pan Pacific Irish Day, and Robert Emmet remembrances. They were organizers of the St. Patrick's Day Parade and of the Irish participation in the State Jubilee celebration. By 1910, their heyday as a leader of the Irish community was over, although their fundraising efforts continued for more than 20 years.



Postcard depicting the San Francisco Chutes-site of a Celtic Union fundraiser

The Celtic Union set a fundraising goal of \$250, 000 for the purchase of land and construction of a hall. They raised money by selling stock and by holding events like picnics in Glen Park and whist parties throughout the City. The individual societies held their own events. Proceeds from the events like the Knights of Tara picnic in 1897 and a St. Patrick's Convention were donated to the fund.



The Leader newspaper, May 23, 1908

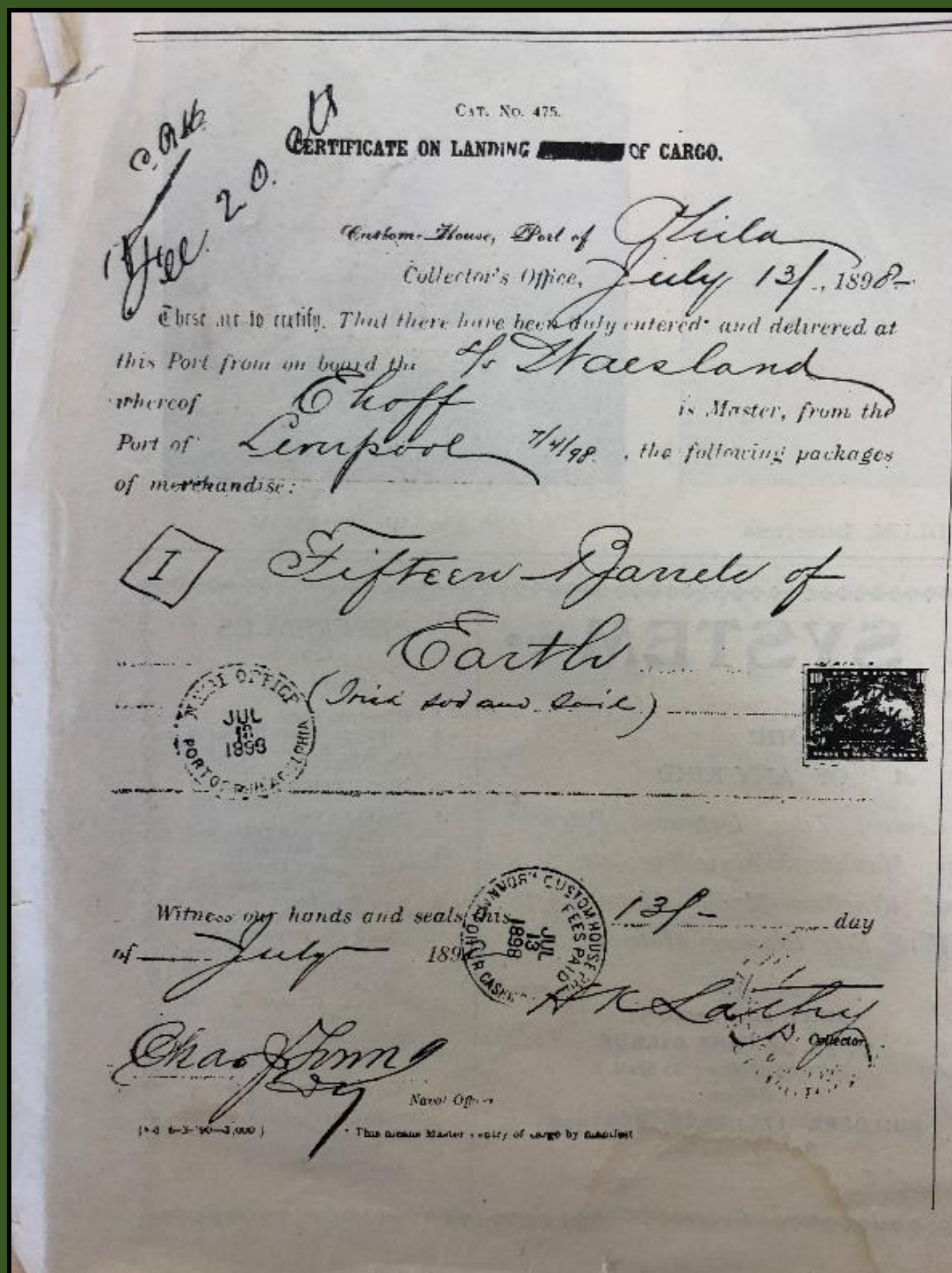


In August of 1898 the Irish Fair, a major fundraising event for the Celtic Union, was held at the Mechanic's Pavilion located in the San Francisco Civic Center. It was modeled after a similar fair that was held in New York in 1897. The Patrick J. Dowling Library at the UICC has an original copy of the Fair's program. According to World Cat, the world's largest bibliographic database, it is one of only three libraries holding a copy.



"Funds to be Devoted towards Building a Hall for United Irish Societies"

Irish Fair of 1898 program



Bill of Lading For Sod, Irish Fair of 1898 program

Like the fair in New York the year before, the Celtic Union imported sod from each of Ireland's 32 counties. The sod was laid down at the Mechanic's Pavilion in the shape of a map of Ireland. Homesick Irish men and women could stand on the "the old sod" once again. For a modest amount, they could take a jar of it home.



Picture of Ship Transporting Sod, Irish Fair of 1898 program

BOOTH COMMITTEES

BLARNEY CASTLE BOOTH

MRS. ROBERT FERRAL MRS. C. D. FLANAGAN MRS. S. McFADDEN
MRS. O'SHAUGHNESSY MRS. A. AHERN

LEMONADE BOOTH—CONG ABBEY

MRS. F. B. LORIGAN, Chairman
MISS LOUISE SJOVALL, Secretary
MISS NORA DWYER, Treasurer

MISS N. BRADLEY
MRS. THOS. BURNS
MISS ELIZA CASEY
MISS ALICE C. DUNN
MRS. CHAS. B. FENN
MISS ANNA GEARY
MISS MINNIE GEARY
MRS. P. A. GIANNINI
MISS BLANCHE BARRETT
MISS JULIA DUNN

MISS IDA LEARY
MISS NELLIE McMAHON
MISS ANNIE O'SHAUGHNESSY
MISS MOLIE O'SHAUGHNESSY
MISS ALICE SMITH
MISS MARTHA SMITH
MISS MAY SPRINGER
MISS FANNIE SPRINGER
MISS CONNOLLY
MISS P. GORTAM

MISS FLORENCE MAGUIRE

OFFICIAL SOUVENIR PROGRAMME BOOTH

MRS. J. E. INSKEEP AND MRS. A. J. CASEY, Chairmen

MISS MAY GAFFNEY MISS ROSE ANTHONY MISS LILLIAN BYRNES MISS MINNIE CORRIGAN
MISS WINIFRED GAFFNEY MISS LILLIAN MONAHAN THE MISSES LONG

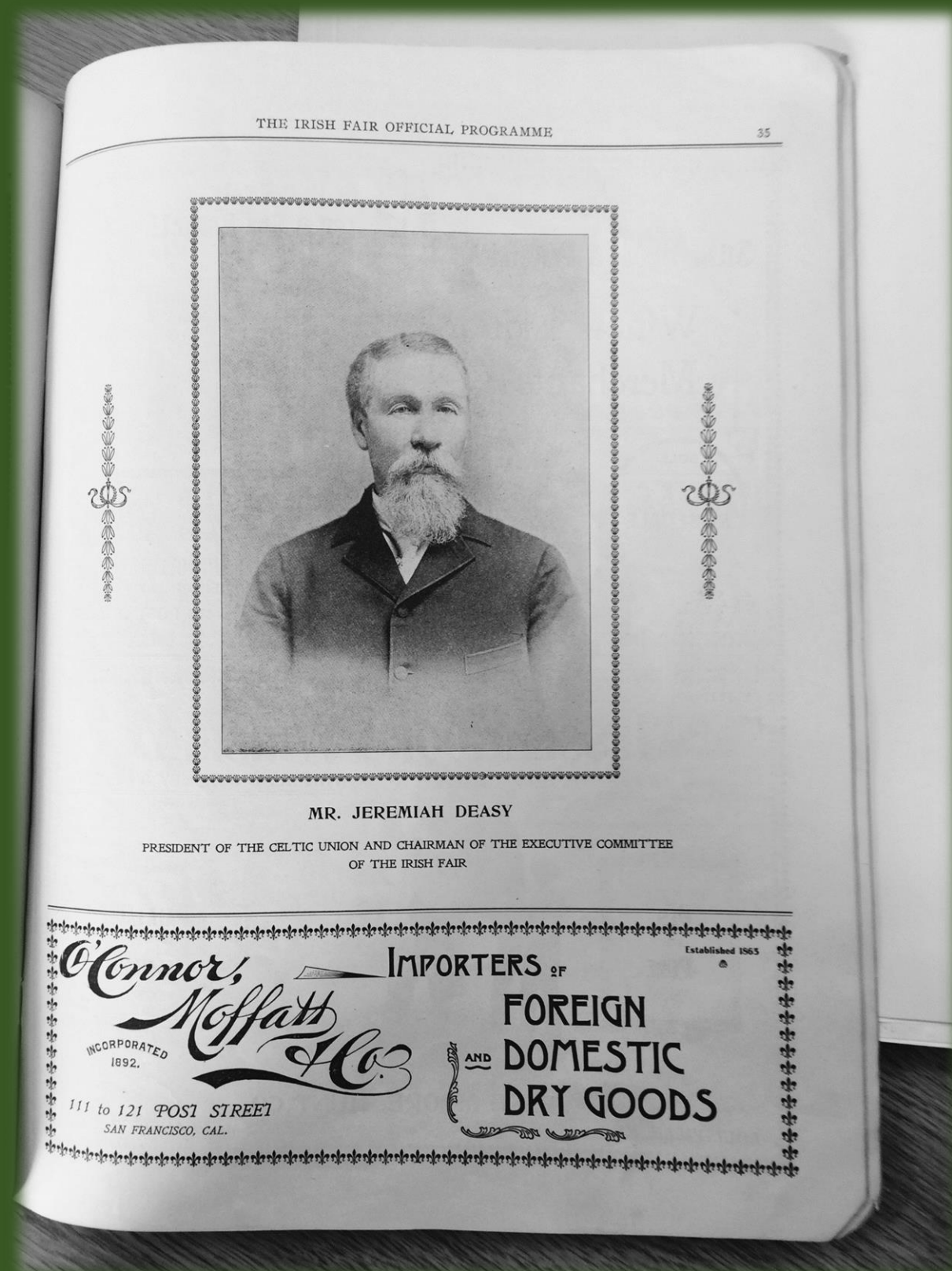
LAKES OF KILLARNEY BOOTH

MRS. P. E. McCARTHY, Chairman
MR. JAMES HART HOOKER, Treasurer
MISS RUTH McCARTHY, Secretary

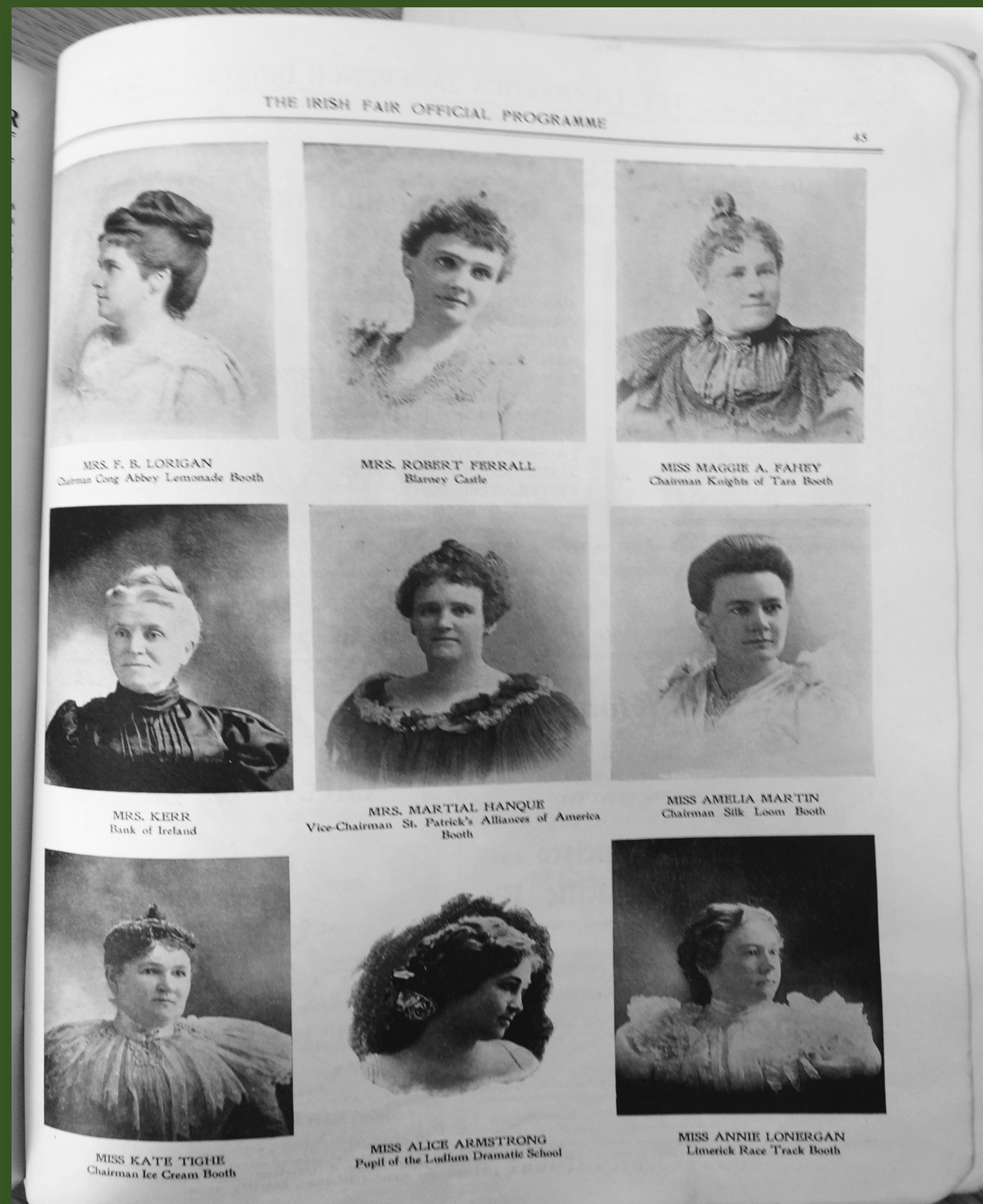
MISS LUCY CROLL
MISS MARY BURNS
MISS MAY WALSH
MISS NONIE MURPHY
MISS F. EDITH WHITEFIELD
MISS REGIS MCCARTHY
MISS FLOESSIE WHIPPLE
MISS EVA MURPHY
MISS MARIE BEARNARD
MISS JOSEPHINE MCCARTHY
MISS CECILIA WALSH
MISS MATTIE MEYER

MISS M. WALSH
MR. BENJAMIN MCKINLEY
MR. CHARLES H. BEARDSLEY
MR. ROBERT D. DUKE
MR. JOHN JARDINE
MR. MILTON BEARNARD
MR. HARRY J. GRADY
MR. STUART MURDOCH
MR. LOUIE MEYER
MR. DANIEL C. B. MCCARTHY
MR. CHARLES MCCARTHY

A celebration of Irish culture, the names of the booths in the Mechanic's Pavilion included Lemonade Booth-Cong Abbey and the Lakes of Killarney Booth, reflecting the patriotic fervor of the organizers.

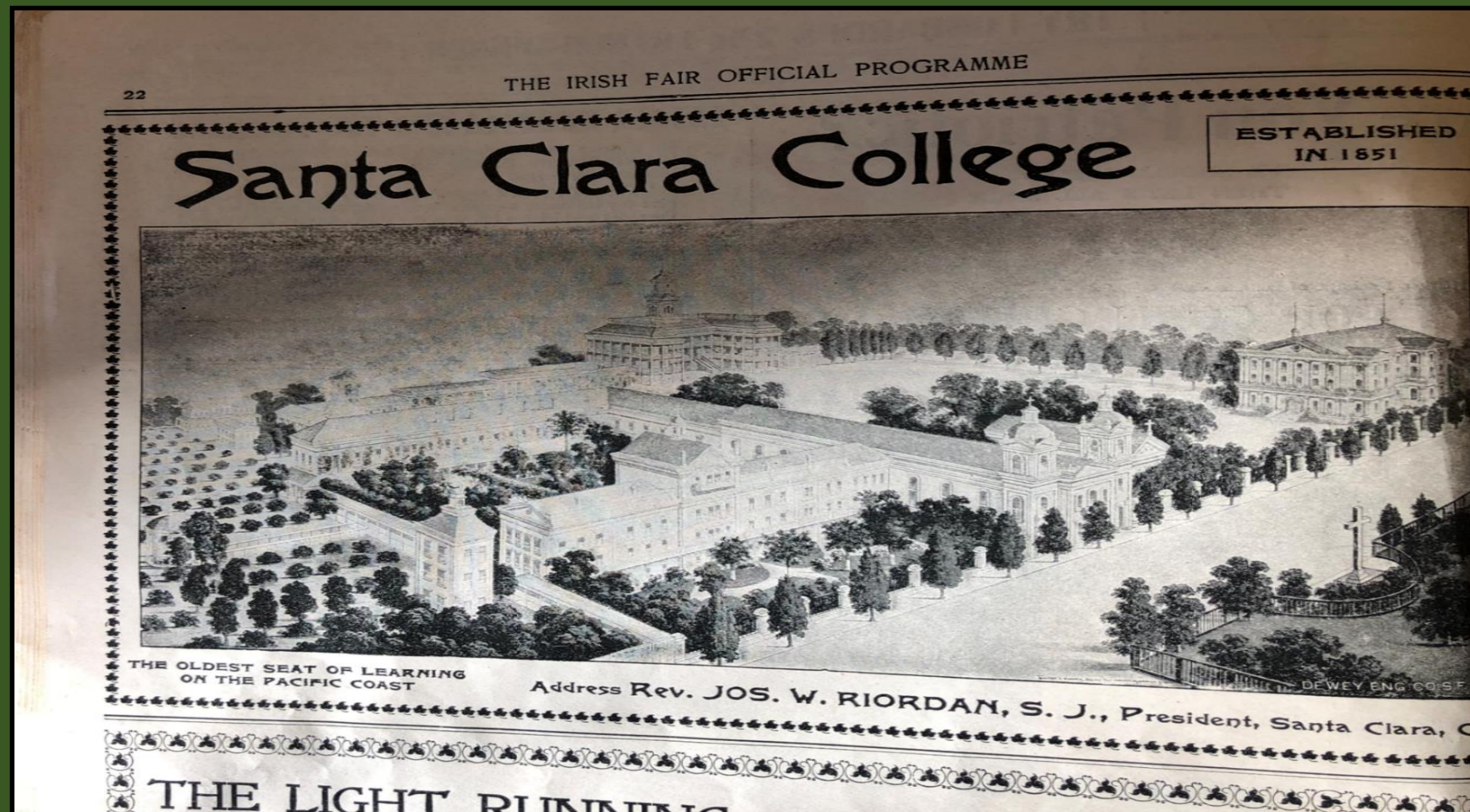


Irish Fair of 1898 program



Irish Fair of 1898 program

The organizers and sponsors of the Fair were a Who's Who of the Irish community including Jeremiah Deasy, President of the Celtic Union, and a number of prominent women in the community who contributed to the fair.



Irish Fair of 1898 program

Over a 100 years later some of the businesses who advertised in the Irish Fair of 1898 program are still in existence – some with the same name and some under new names.

St. Mary's Hospital - St. Mary's Medical Center

McAvoy & Co. - McAvoy O'Hara & Evergreen Mortuary

Santa Clara College - Santa Clara University

Pacific Gas Improvement Co. - PG&E

St. Ignatius College - University of San Francisco

Carew & English - Halsted N. Gray and Carew & English

Gundlach Bundschu Winery - same name

Shreve & Co. - same name



Irish Fair of 1898 program

Approximately 234 Businesses Advertised in the Irish Fair Program

- 6% (14) were restaurants
- 7% (16) were undertakers or stone monument makers
- 9% (21) were alcohol related (bottling, brewery, merchant, bar)
- 12% (27) were horse related (horseshoers, stables, carriage makers)
- And 2 typewriter dealers, 2 corset makers, 1 needlework instructor, 1 gun powder manufacturer, 1 dentist, 1 optician, and 1 eyeglass maker.

Numerous people in the societies that made up the Celtic Union were supporters of the many movements for Irish independence over the years. The San Francisco societies showed their support by sending donations of money and guns back to Ireland before and after the 1916 Rising. In 1902 & 1903 former San Francisco Sheriff Tom Desmond was selling stock for the Celtic Union. Then, Commandant of the Knights of the Red Branch, a branch of Clan na Gael, he was one of the participants in the famous Catalpa incident during which six Fenians from West Australia were rescued. *The 1897 Irish Fair in New York City*, an essay by Deirdre O'Leary, notes that the New York Fair was organized by the Clan na Gael and an Irish Volunteers Regiment.

**AMNESTY FOR
IRISH PRISONERS.**

**Local Societies Will Help
Their Country-
men.**

ALL FORCES ARE UNITED

**A Great Outburst of Sympathy
for Those Already
Set Free.**

MANY PLANS TO RAISE MONEY

**Those Just Turned Out of British
Jails Will Get Much Aid From
San Francisco.**

Amnesty of the great of Times and

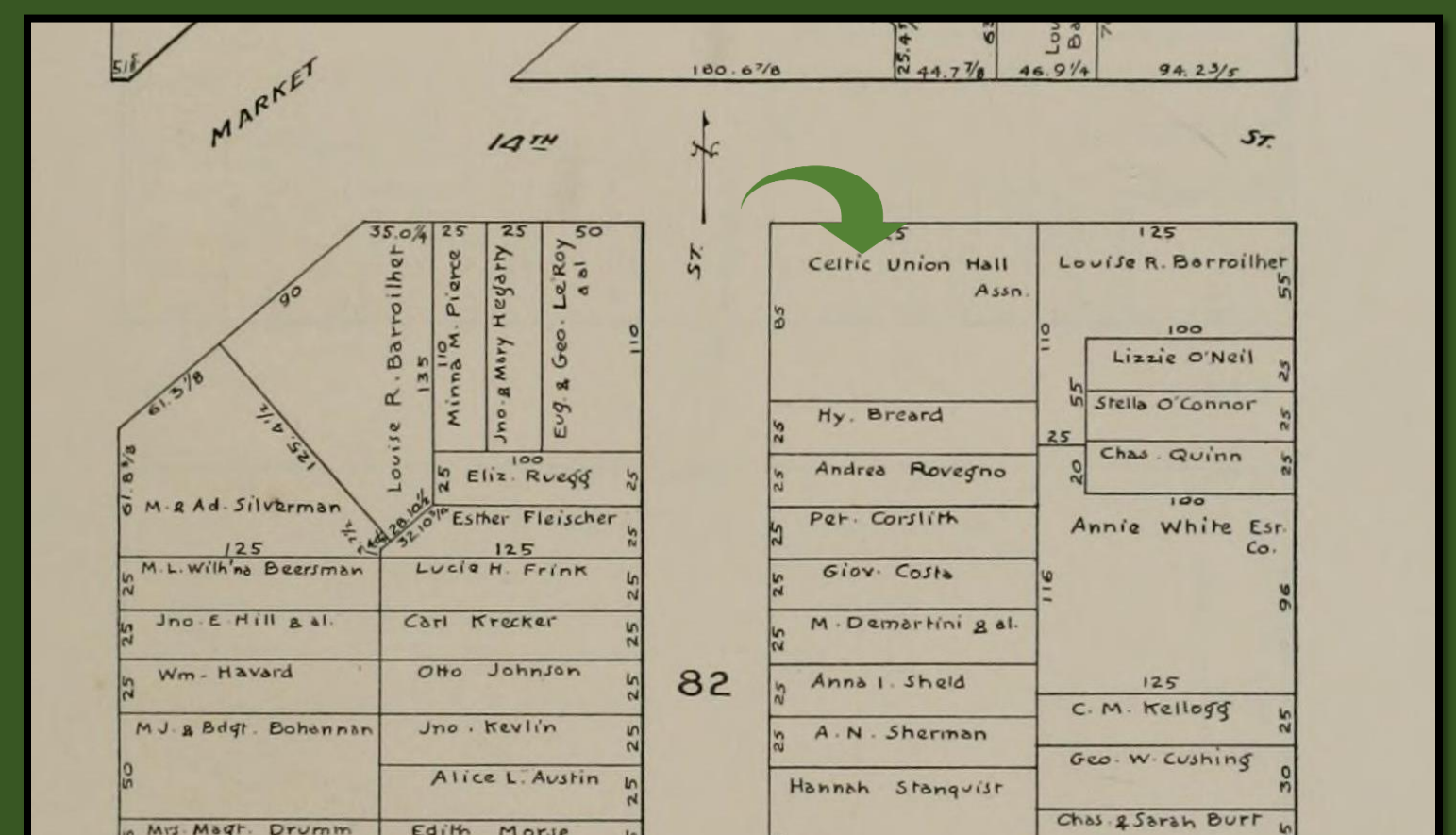
San Francisco Call , September 16, 1896



The Leader Newspaper, April 25, 1908

*"IRISH HALL NOW AN ASSURED FACT
A Site Procured for Suitable Structure"*

In a January 1901 article, The Leader claimed that the Celtic Union was reported to have \$10,000 in their coffers earmarked for the construction of the Irish Hall. In 1908 they purchased a site at 14th and Landers Streets. The Celtic Union continued to hold annual meetings and sell stock well into the 1930s but never reached its fundraising goal. According to San Francisco County records, by 1940 the building had been sold. Currently there are flats at this site.



San Francisco County Block Book, Showing Site of Lot

Erect an Irish Hall

CELTIC UNION.

Friday night, February 18, the Celtic Union will give a whist party at 1254 Market street. The committee is composed of the following: Miss Ma-
ley, chairlady; Mrs. Dergan, John Don-
ohoe, Mrs. Trahey, Charles Warden,
Mrs. McLaughlin, Thos. F. Alford,
Mrs. K. Gormley, George J. Lowe,
Mrs. A. Kramer, D. Shea, Mrs. J.
Wrenn, T. P. O'Dowd, Mrs. W. J.
Dunne, J. Donovan, Mrs. M. Lyness,
John Catter, Miss J. McDovitt, J. B.
Hagerty, Mrs. J. Maguinness and
James Wrenn, who have made great
arrangements for a pleasant evening.
and assure every one of a good time
and good prizes for the lucky winners.
Admission, 25 cents.

The Leader newspaper, February 12, 1916

***"Many years ago
so long ago that it
is now ranked as
ancient history, a
movement was
started to erect
an Irish Hall
here."***

***"We want an Irish
Hall in San
Francisco and we
want it as soon as
we can get it."***

Editorial of the Leader Newspaper, January 22, 1910



The idea of **A Place for All Things Irish** in San Francisco hibernated for another 30 plus years until a new group of Irish men and women banded together in the early 1970s and built, with their own hard earned money and labor-

THE UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER OF SAN FRANCISCO

Presentation produced by the History/Heritage Committee at the United Irish Cultural Center of San Francisco

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