

## **Irish American Hall of Fame Selects Inaugural Class of Inductees**

The Irish American Hall of Fame (IAHOF) was established in 2010 with the goal to preserve and promote the stories of the Irish in America and the ongoing links between Ireland and the United States. That objective is being fulfilled, with the announcement of the organization's inaugural class of inductees.

The Hall of Fame was founded by members of the Chicago-based Irish American Heritage Center (IAHC) and operates under the Center's auspices. The IAHOF is overseen by a separate governing committee and has a national focus.

Eleven outstanding Irish Americans in seven categories were selected as the 2011 IAHOF honorees. They were voted into the Hall of Fame by a national body of distinguished individuals representing academia, government and Irish-affiliated organizations from across a wide range of disciplines.

### **Standouts in the Arts & Humanities**

**Maureen O'Hara** (born Maureen FitzSimons on August 17, 1920) is an Irish film actress and singer. The famously red-headed O'Hara was born in an area of Dublin known as Ranelagh. After arriving in Hollywood in the early 1940s, in addition to her accomplishments in film, O'Hara became the first naturalized citizen to be recognized as Irish by the United States and granted dual Irish-U.S. citizenship, a testament to her force of character and personality in swaying the judge to identify her on her papers as Irish.

Widely considered to be America's greatest playwright, **Eugene O'Neill** authored 45 plays, among them "Long Day's Journey into Night," "The Iceman Cometh," "Strange Interlude," "A Moon for the Misbegotten," "The Emperor Jones," "Ah, Wilderness!" "Desire Under the Elms," and "Mourning Becomes Electra"—classics all. He was recipient of both the Pulitzer (twice) and Nobel Prize. O'Neill's father was born in County Kilkenny and arrived in the United States during the Great Famine.

Born in Tralibane, near Bantry, County Cork, **Chief Francis O'Neill** became a Chicago police officer and collector of Irish traditional music. O'Neill showed an early appreciation for the music of local musicians, and later, in addition to serving as Chicago's chief of police from 1901 to 1905, he collected and eventually published tunes from major performers and a wide variety of primary sources. It is said that, had Chief O'Neill not taken on the monumental task of publishing traditional Irish music, it could well have been lost to future generations.

### **Business & Industry Scion**

**Henry Ford** was born on a farm in Greenfield Twp., Michigan. His father, William, hailed from County Cork. Working in his spare time from his job at Edison Illuminating Company, Ford invented the Ford quadricycle, a self-propelled gas engine vehicle. After establishing the Ford Motor Company in 1903, he was instrumental in developing the assembly line technique of mass production as well as a system of lowering costs for quality goods.

### **Dedicated to Public Service**

**Richard J. Daley** served for 21 years as the mayor and undisputed Democratic boss of Chicago and is considered by historians to be the "last of the big city bosses." Despite criticism of his well-organized Democratic Party political machine, Daley is remembered for his efforts in ensuring

that Chicago avoided the declines that other Rust Belt cities, like Cleveland, Buffalo and Detroit, experienced during the same period. Daley lived his entire life in the working-class, heavily Irish American Bridgeport neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.

**John F. Kennedy** was born of Irish American parents Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., and Rose Fitzgerald in Brookline, Massachusetts. Having become the first Roman Catholic president of the United States, in 1963 Kennedy joined with Irish President Éamon de Valera to form the American Irish Foundation, whose mission was to foster connections between Americans of Irish descent and the country of their ancestry. Before his tragic death by an assassin's bullet in 1963, Kennedy initiated economic programs that launched the country on its longest sustained expansion since World War II, he took vigorous action in the cause of equal rights, and he brought American idealism to the aid of developing nations.

Born to an Irish father and a Lebanese mother, **George Mitchell** is one of the most diversely qualified and accomplished living Irish Americans. Following his tenure in the U.S. Senate from 1980 to 1995, including eight years as Senate majority leader, Mitchell was appointed the U.S. special envoy to Northern Ireland by President Bill Clinton in 1995 and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and Liberty Medal for his role in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Peace Agreement in 1998. He continues to distinguish himself in the areas of law, politics, academics, business and philanthropy.

### **Legendary Sports Figure**

An American boxer, **William Harrison "Jack" Dempsey** held the world heavyweight title from 1919 to 1926. Dempsey's aggressive style and exceptional punching power made him one of the most popular boxers in history. In September 1926, Dempsey fought—and lost to—Irish American and former U.S. Marine Gene Tunney in Philadelphia, an event that recorded the largest attendance ever for a sporting event outside motor racing and soccer. A rematch with Tunney took place in Chicago on September 22, 364 days after Dempsey lost his title to Tunney in their first bout, generating an amazing \$2 million gate. It is said that Al Capone offered to fix the rematch for Dempsey, but he would not hear of it. Dempsey's ancestry was reported by Sports Illustrated to be Irish on his father's side and Irish and Cherokee on his mother's.

### **Exemplary Religious Leader**

**Sr. Rosemary Connelly, RSM**, has served as executive director of Misericordia Heart of Mercy Home for more than 40 years. When she began her appointment in 1969, Misericordia only cared for children under age six. Today, the home serves more than 600 children and adults with developmental disabilities. In that time, as well, she has helped to transform people's attitudes about disability and enabled thousands of children and adults to live with dignity, respect, challenge and beauty. Sister Rosemary is Irish and is a Sister of Mercy, an Irish order founded in Dublin by Mother McAuley. She received the International County Mayo People's Award in Castelbar, Ireland (1996), and was the first woman to serve as grand marshal of the City of Chicago's St. Patrick's Day Parade (1994),

### **Education Trailblazer**

**Fr. Patrick Francis Healy** was born to an Irish American plantation owner and a biracial slave in 1830. Because of the discriminatory laws in the South prohibiting the education of slaves, Healy was sent to live in the north, where he was educated by the Jesuits, eventually becoming the first African American to earn a PhD, the first to become a Jesuit priest, and the first to become president (Georgetown University, 1873–1881) of a major university in the United States.

### **Innovator in the Scientific Arena**

An American engineer and inventor, **Robert Fulton** is widely credited with having developed the first commercially successful steamboat. The son of an Irish emigrant, as a boy he showed great interest in all things mechanical. Turning to art at age 17, he painted portraits and landscapes as well as houses and machinery. He moved to Paris and met the U.S. ambassador to France, Robert Livingston, and together they constructed a steamboat. Although that boat sank, Fulton and Livingston persevered, building the first commercial steamboat in the United States, which carried passengers between New York City and Albany, NY.

### **About the Hall of Fame and the Selection Process**

The IAHOFF announced its call for nominations at the IAHC's Irish Fest in July 2010. As of September, more than 75 candidates had been nominated, and by the end of the nomination period in November, an impressive list of more than 300 nominations had been submitted.

The slate of candidates was narrowed down by a screening committee composed of a specially selected, diverse group of individuals representing an extensive array of disciplines, which reviewed and vetted each nomination.

The IAHOFF's initial emphasis will be to provide information electronically and online, and the inaugural inductees will be commemorated with a display at the IAHC. The vision is for a bricks-and-mortar museum to be founded as the IAHOFF grows.

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### **IRISH AMERICAN HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES FOR 2011**

**Arts & Humanities:** Maureen O'Hara, Eugene O'Neill, Chief Francis O'Neill

**Business & Industry:** Henry Ford

**Public Service:** Mayor Richard J. Daley, President John F. Kennedy, Senator George Mitchell

**Sports:** Jack Dempsey

**Religion:** Sr. Rosemary Connelly

**Education:** Patrick Francis Healy

**Science:** Robert Fulton