

Scott County Historic Preservation Society, Inc.



ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION **"A History of Irish Music"**

Featuring Dr. Frank Claudy

Dr. Claudy has played the Irish flute and whistles for over 30 years. He recently traveled to Kerry and Galway to capture the sound of authentic Irish music on his soon to be released Irish music CD. Dr. Claudy regularly performs at jam sessions at Mac's Tavern on the first Saturday of each month.

March 11, 2010 at 7 P.M.
Front Street Brewery, Beer Cellar Room
208 E. River Drive, Davenport, Iowa

(Optional Dinner hour: 6-7 P.M., Menu offerings at www.frontstreetbrew.com)

Bring friends and help celebrate!

If Davenport has a communal soul, it could be best found while sitting shoulder-to-shoulder in LeClaire Park as music floats out across the river, transporting the faithful who gather there to that higher better place where we all aspire to be. While science might explain such rapt attention in an audience as being a just a response to a "clarion call to our reptilian brains," Davenport's earliest Irish and German founders would be quick to point out that music is the universal language of immigrant displaced populations, whether Irish or German. It is the cultural legacy which Davenport has successfully handed down for 174 years, from one generation to the next.

From the first day an immigrant covered wagon floated across the Mississippi River and rolled to a stop to bivouac on the Davenport levee, voices could be heard raised in song. On the same hallowed ground where we sit toe-tapping to the beat of the Bix fest today, our great-grand parents once held their own impromptu music concerts, rendering rousing foot-stomping renditions of the their favorite ballad of their new adopted home in the America "Far, far, West"---*"Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight. Come out tonight. Come out tonight. Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight and dance by the light of the moon."*

For the Irish immigrants, in particular, the cultural tradition of shared public folk music became nothing short of a national anthem after the British forbid them to speak their native gaelic language. Music became a way to preserve Irish oral history. The importance of music in everyday life first manifested itself when Davenport's founding father, Antoine LeClaire, himself a master fiddler of the French voyager-style, offer to donate not only the land and money to build St. Anthony's Church, but to donated the all important piano to make sure the city's only public hall was

March 2010 Newsletter

**Next SCHPS meeting,
March 11th 7:00pm
Front Street Brewery**

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filled with music. The cost of the donation of such a luxury item out in the middle of a remote frontier became apparent when local newspapers reported that LeClaire had commissioned yet a second “piano forte” for his own use at the astronomical cost of \$1,000---all in a day when a rich piece of prime prairie farmland cost \$1.25 an acre!

Long before Davenport enjoyed the luxury of its first paved street, sewer or even running water, its citizens had already banded together to build the much more important 1,200 seat opera house. Its forty foot domed ceiling reverberated with the soaring strains of Schubert operas and Mendelssohn violin concertos. The Chicago Grand Opera Company, Russian dancers and world famous performing artists struggled across mud roads to reach the banks of the Mississippi River. There, German farmers and shopkeepers filled the concert halls seats in testimony to the German mantra for the common man---“*Art and Music For The Masses.*”

Just outside the door of that grand domed Turngemeinde Opera House at 3rd and Scott Street, the Concordia Society and German Strasser’s German Marching Band (formed in 1856) marched its way through the Civil War (adding “Union” Strasser’s Marching Band to its name), to well past the turn-of-the-century. In 1915, it emerged as the full blown Tri-City Symphony Orchestra. (Of the one hundred seventy members of that Symphony, one hundred fifty were German musicians.) Davenport, Iowa was not only the smallest city in the nation to ever support a symphony orchestra, but could proudly trace its parentage back to being the home of the oldest organized music group in America which ever formed a symphony orchestra

In 1891, by the time the classically schooled music master Captain John Streckfus’s decided to convert his failing fleet of Mississippi River packet steamboats into a flotilla of floating crystal palace dance halls, the saloons and theatres of nearby Bucktown had conveniently provided him with an endless supply of top-notch musical talent. Davenport had become the most important performing music and vaudeville venue this side of Chicago. Those few blocks of the Bucktown riverfront launched the singing career of Al Jolson and piano marvel Fate Marable. Frequent headliners were such national sensations as Sophie Tucker, Little Fatima, Mark Twain, Sarah Burnhardt and many other notables of the day. Bix Beiderbecke was just a boy when he began sneaking away from his home on Grand Avenue to steal away to Davenport’s busy steamboat landing. There, he learned to blend the strains of New Orleans jazz, black soul music and blues into his own unique form of world famous Mississippi Riverboat jazz.

Help SCHPS celebrate Davenport’s 174 year love affair with shared communal music. Bring your friends for a night of fun at the Front Street Brewery on March 11th, in heart of Bucktown, overlooking the levee where it all began. Dr. Claudy’s informative program on the history of our Irish musical heritage is sure to lift the spirits as we all gather together to-- -“*Come out tonight and dance by the light of the moon.*”

Karen R. Anderson

Many Thanks- To Chef David Pai for his spectacular Valentine’s Day Dinner at SCHPS February meeting!

Preservation Awards in May- Renovation nominations welcomed. Call Karen, 324-0257

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

March 12, Henry Farnam Dinner at the i wireless Center. Topics will include the formation of the Weyerhaeuser & Denkmann Lumber Company and the founding of Augustana College. The featured speaker is Tom Rasmussen, the great-great grandson of Frederick and Sarah Weyerhaeuser.

March 26 and 27, Workshop: Mortar Matters, in Ames, IA on Friday and Mount Vernon, IA on Saturday. Information and registration: www.cityofames.org.

April 1st Rock Island Arsenal Historical Society Dinner Meeting, 6:30 P.M.,
RIA Officer's Club, Civil War program (\$11.50, Reservation-Belfer/563-324-7779)

April 3 and 10, Presentation / Demonstration at the German American Heritage Center (GAHC) on their new exhibit: “Amana Colonies: The Move to City Life”.

April 8th Scott County Historic Preservation Soc., Inc. Meeting, 6:30 P.M., Tour of the
J.M.D Burrows mansion, 1533 Clay Street

April 11, Presentation at the GAHC by Giles Weigandt: “What Your Handwriting Reveals about You & A Look at Gothic Script.”

May 3, Day trip to historic Kalona, IA. Bus departs/returns at the GAHC. Reservations at 563-322-8844 before April 26.