

Giving the Scotch Irish their due

By Geoffrey Cobb
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You have to give it to writer Turlough McConnell and Artistic Director George Heslin of the Origin Theater Company- they sure know how to put on a show and their lively and enjoyable production of "The Land of Promise" at the Sheen Center Tuesday April 16 made learning about Scotch-Irish history highly entertaining. The show featured a plethora of great song and dance routines. It also featured two endearing English newsboys who injected much needed humor into the show. McConnell is keenly aware of when his audience is reaching information overload and then the show deftly shifts into song and dance mode.

I found the copious amounts of information in the show interesting, but a bit one-sided and almost bordering on propaganda. We learned about how the Ulster Scots arrived in Ulster and how the dominance of the Church of Ireland and droughts pushed them on to America where they settled the country, helped write the Declaration of Independence and almost singlehandedly won the revolution. We also learned about the many presidents of Scotch Irish background, their huge presence in both armies in the Civil War and of their success as entrepreneurs.

Although the show reminded us of the America's original sins: the Scotch-Irish role in slavery, it made several omissions, most prominently that other American original sin, their role in Native American genocide and the actions of that Scot-Irishman Andrew



Niamh Hyland in "The Land of Promise."

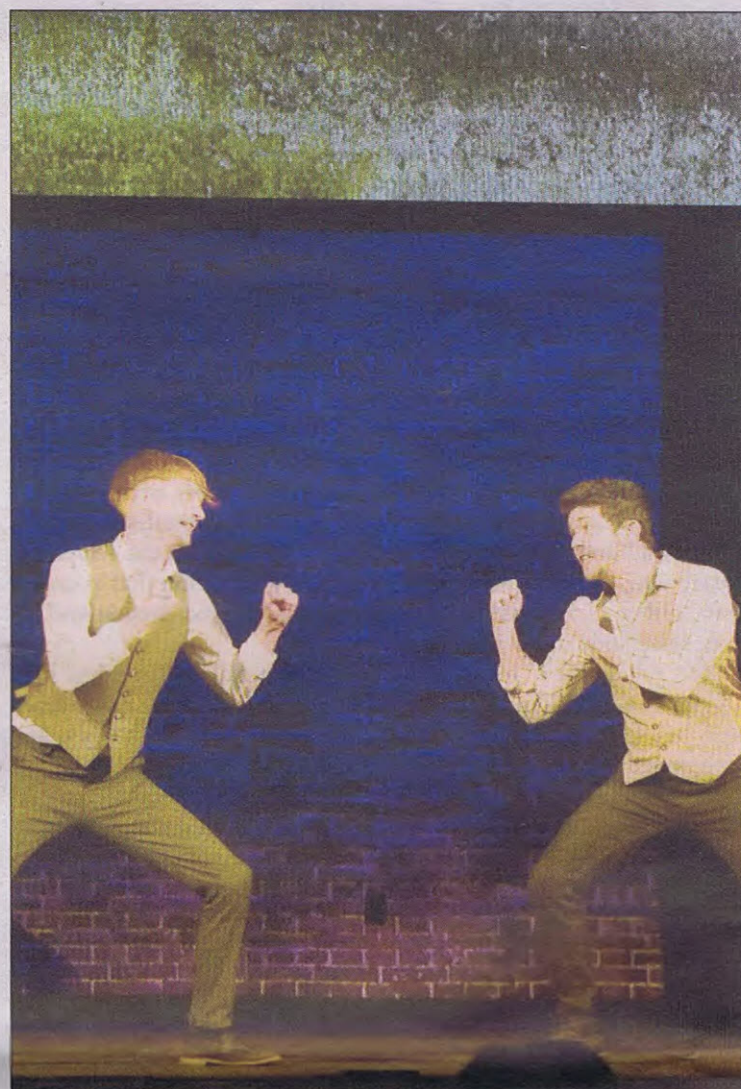
Jackson in driving Natives off their land and onto the Trail of Tears.

The show did mention that the roots of country music stem from Northern Ireland, but sadly, the it did not include bluegrass tunes amongst its many musical numbers, an omission that Scots-Irish people today living in Appalachia might label as a slight. We learn

that country luminaries like Dolly Parton and Hank Williams have Ulster roots, but we don't hear any of their great songs.

One area of history that the show omitted was the important contribution of the Scots-Irish in bringing whiskey and bourbon making to America. The show failed to mention that the Whiskey Rebellion was largely a Scots-Irish rebellion against the taxes imposed on alcohol by the new government.

It did focus on the Ulster Scot contributions to New York City featuring the massively successful Alexander Stewart from Lisburn who started the city's first great department stores, but it



Jake Rose and Tim Palmer in "The Land of Promise."

failed to mention other equally important contributors to New York City such as William Sampson who some claim won America's first Civil Rights case, Thomas Hunter who founded the CUNY school named in his honor and John McSorley whose beloved ale house is a New York landmark.

Watching the show as a Catholic, I became uncomfortably aware that the Ulster men and women the show lauded seemed to be predominantly Protestant. The last time I heard the word Ulster repeated so much was probably at some distant celebration of the twelfth. Why was there no mention for example of Dagger

John Hughes who established the Catholic Church in America against ferocious Nativist bigotry and who helped build one of the great New York landmarks, St. Patrick's Cathedral?

"Land of Promise" earnestly reminds the audience of the many contributions Ulster Protestants made to America, but it also makes some glaring omissions. Still, all in all, the show is an entertaining way to recall those important Ulster legacies.

Geoffrey Cobb is the author of "The King of Greenpoint," a biography of the 20th century Brooklyn politician Peter J. McGuinness.

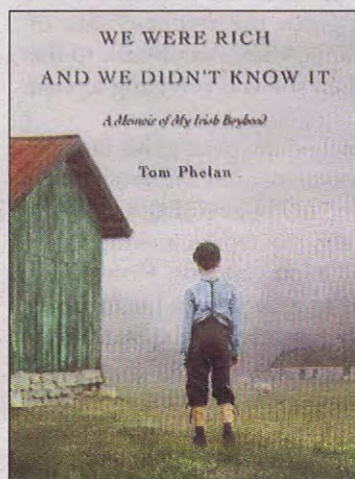
Irish Family History Forum

What do you do when a great-grandfather disappears, his siblings abandon their farm and emigrate for destinations unknown, and the paper trail turns up no firm answers?

Michael Carragher, past president of the Irish Family History Forum and of the DNA Genealogy Group of Long Island, will explain how DNA matches and genetic genealogy can provide the clues to solve the riddle, on Saturday morning, May 25, at Bethpage Public Library, 47 Powell Ave., Bethpage, NY 11714.

Prior to that 11:15 presentation by the featured speaker, Kathleen Magee will present Genealogy Tips and Tricks at 10 a.m. and at the refreshment break, during which attendees can have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with an experienced genealogist to ask questions.

There is ample parking directly opposite the library. The Bethpage Long Island Railroad Station is nearby. Directions: www.ifhf.org. For further information, contact Pat via email: programs@ifhf.org.



Phelan reading

Tom Phelan will talk about and read selections from his latest book, "We Were Rich and We Didn't Know It, A Memoir of My Irish Boyhood," at Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington, N.Y., on Thursday, May 30, at 7 p.m.

"Phelan's memoir of his boyhood is exceptional," said the Minneapolis Star Tribune reviewer. "Phelan's prose has an unpretentious beauty. With rich detail and sensitivity, 'We Were Rich' translates for us a rural world that has disappeared."