



A message from **THE PRESIDENT**



Today we celebrate the indomitable spirit and the inspiring achievements of Ireland and its citizens throughout the world.

Named after Ireland's patron saint, Saint Patrick's Day was first observed in New York City in 1762. Over the centuries the Irish and Irish Americans have played a crucial role in building NYC. Like so many of those who came to these shores in search of a better life, Irish emigrants bravely faced prejudice and discrimination and, over the course of time, found their footing in the new world. They have distinguished themselves in every imaginable field, from politics to fashion to the arts and sciences and beyond.

As the world comes to grips with growing numbers of political, economic, and environmental emigrants, we are reminded that those who were once considered strangers and enemies are now numbered among friends and family. Historically one of America's greatest strengths is its willingness to embrace all who seek shelter here, providing a home from which marvels can ensue. Irish America is one of many communities offering glorious proof of this fact.

I am astounded by – and grateful for – the range and productivity of Ireland's poets, writers, and dramatists. Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, Maeve Brennan, Samuel Beckett, Edna O'Brien, Brendan Behan, Eavan Boland, and Paula Meehan are only a few artists who have explored the highs and lows of human experience in their work. They continue to illuminate to this day.

I'd like to leave you with a poem by Anthony Raftery (1779-1835), a blind poet-musician born in County Mayo, Ireland. The story goes that, at one dance or another, he was asked who he was and what he did. This was his spontaneous answer:

I AM RAFTERY

By Anthony Raftery (translated by Douglas Hyde)

I am Raftery the poet,
Full of hope and love,
With eyes that have no light,
With gentleness that has no misery.

Going west upon my pilgrimage,
By the light of my heart,
Feeble and tired
To the end of my road.

Behold me now,
And my face to a wall,
A-playing music
Unto empty pockets.

I wish you all a safe and joyous Saint Patrick's Day!

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