

**THE FIGHTING IRISHMEN:
A CELEBRATION OF THE CELTIC WARRIOR**

**EXHIBITION OF IRISH BOXING LEGENDS AT BURNS LIBRARY
NOW THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2008**

CHESTNUT HILL, MA -- The widely popular exhibition "**Fighting Irishmen: Celebrating Celtic Prizefighters 1820 to Present**" makes its Massachusetts debut at Boston College, fresh from long runs at New York City's Irish Arts Center in 2006 and South Street Seaport Museum in 2007.

Presented in collaboration with the Irish Arts Center and exhibit curator James J. Houlihan, the exhibit, which is free and open to the public, is on view at BC's John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections through September 5.

"Fighting Irishmen" is comprised of an eclectic collection of boxing artifacts, including prints, photographs, paintings, robes, gloves, boxing bags, films and other items that offer "a veritable stroll down memory lane for fight fans and historians alike," exhibit organizers say.

Photo: (L-R) Mass. State Auditor and former professional boxer Joseph DeNucci; Burns Librarian Robert O'Neill; Jay Tunney, son of world heavyweight champion Gene Tunney, and exhibit curator James Houlihan, at the opening reception April 1.



New England boxers are prominent in the exhibit, including legendary world heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan of Roxbury, Mass. -- who reportedly attended Boston College for a short time -- and three-time New England Golden Gloves winner "Irish" Micky Ward of Lowell, who is the subject of a 2007 biography by WCVB-TV and ESPN sports anchor Bob Halloran and of the upcoming feature film "The Fighter."

"The Center for Irish Programs at Boston College and the Burns Library are pleased to be able to host this extraordinary exhibit. It offers visitors a unique glimpse at the role prizefighting played in the history of Irish America, especially as seen through the Boston connection from John L. Sullivan to 'Irish' Micky Ward," said Robert O'Neill, director of BC's Burns Library.

"All the major Irish boxers from the 19th century to the present are represented in the exhibit," O'Neill added. "In addition to names like Sullivan, 'Gentleman' Jim Corbett, James 'Cinderella Man' Braddock, Gene Tunney, Jack Dempsey, Billy Conn and Gerry Cooney, the exhibit even includes material on Mohammed Ali, who has Irish ancestry."

Among the artifacts and pictures on display are be John L. Sullivan's fur coat; a blazer specially made for Jack Dempsey; photographs from the archives of Sports Illustrated magazine; Charlie

Nash's Olympic jersey when he was fighting for Ireland; photographs of the classic Micky Ward vs. Arturo Gatti trilogy; and historic photos of heavyweight champs Sullivan and Corbett (who gained fame as the man who knocked out Sullivan in 1892), Braddock, Tunney, Dempsey, Cooney and Jerry Quarry, world Featherweight champion Barry McGuigan, nicknamed "The Clones Cyclone"; light-heavyweight Billy "Pittsburgh Kid" Conn, and Bobby Cassidy, who was ranked number one in the world as a light-heavyweight in 1975, among others.

The new and expanded exhibit also includes: a heavy bag from Gene Tunney's training camp; equipment from current female fighter Maureen Shea, used for training actress Hilary Swank for the acclaimed film "Million Dollar Baby," and fight equipment from Ireland's John Duddy. The exhibit also displays three original oil paintings from the Tunney collection by the artist Mahonri Young, Brigham Young's grandson.

Certainly, the most unique item in the exhibit is the mummified right arm of 19th century Irish prizefighting legend Dan Donnelly, the first Irish-born heavyweight champion, whose victory over



the English champ George Cooper in 1815 sparked a national celebration, O'Neill said. After Donnelly's death, his corpse reportedly was exhumed for medical study. His right arm eventually was retrieved and placed on view in a number of pubs across the country as a symbol of Ireland's pride, most recently at the Hideout Pub, County Kildare, which displayed the icon for some 50 years. Today considered to be one of the oldest and rarest pieces of sports memorabilia in existence, it is on loan to the exhibit by the pub's former owner, Josephine Byrne.

Maggie, John and Owen - children of State Archivist Dr. John Warner and his wife Ann - examine fighter Dan Donnelly's mummified arm. (Photo by Justin Knight)

In addition, visitors are able to view video of historic fight films provided by the Boxing Hall of Champions during their tours of the exhibit.

"The bravery and tenacity of the Gaels, especially as heroic warriors, are renowned throughout history," writes "Fighting Irishmen" curator James J. Houlihan in the exhibit catalog. "The champions we celebrate in [this exhibit] exemplify this great tradition. Their dedication, perseverance and triumph over adversity have set fine examples for those who follow in their footsteps."

"What particularly interests me," writes New York's Irish Consul General Tim O'Connor, "is Jim (Houlihan)'s point that the story of Irish American boxing is also the story of Irish America itself. Back in earlier decades, as the Irish sought to find their feet here, boxing was often a quick passport to a better life for those who had a talent for it."

Curator Jim Houlihan, Dr. Wilbur McClure, who was light Middleweight Olympic boxing champion at 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, and local boxing publicist Bob Treiger at the opening reception. (Photo by Justin Knight)



The exhibit catalog is chock-full of essays by luminaries of the boxing and sports journalism worlds, including acclaimed Irish actor Liam Neeson, himself a former fighter, who serves as honorary chair of the exhibit. "Watching two great fighters, evenly matched, is, for me, one of the great visual poems you will ever see," notes Neeson, who has selected memorabilia from his own boxing days on display in the exhibit.

The John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections at Boston College is named in memory of the Honorable John J. Burns, a 1921 BC alumnus who was one of its principal benefactors. It houses more than 200,000 volumes, 15 million manuscripts and impressive holdings of artifacts, maps, paintings, photographs, ephemera and architectural records -- including Boston College's Irish Collection, considered to be the premier, most comprehensive collection of Irish research material in the United States. The Irish Collection documents the history, life and culture of the Irish people, and maintains strong holdings in Irish history, religion and politics, as well as significant collections related to some of Ireland's greatest writers.

Located on West 51st Street in the heart of Hell's Kitchen, the Irish Arts Center was founded in 1972 to celebrate the Irish and the Irish-American experience. Today, the Irish Arts Center continues to be the leading non-profit Irish organization in New York, bringing Irish culture to people of all backgrounds and ages. For more information, visit www.irishartscenter.org.

Through September 5, 2008: "Fighting Irishmen: Celebrating Celtic Prizefighters 1820 to Present" an eclectic collection of boxing photography, video and artifacts, including such items related to John L. Sullivan, Jack Dempsey, "Irish" Micky Ward, James J. "Cinderella Man" Braddock, "Gentleman" Jim Corbett, Billy Conn, Jerry Quarry, Gerry Cooney, Barry McGuigan and Bobby Cassidy -- including the mummified arm of the late, great Irish fighter Dan Donnelly. On view at the John J. Burns Library at Boston College, in collaboration with the Irish Arts Center of New York. Curated by James J. Houlihan. Burns Library is located at 140 Commonwealth Avenue, Chestnut Hill, Mass. The exhibit is free and open to the public. Hours: Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (except holidays) or by appointment. Venue is handicapped accessible. For information call: 617-552-3282 or visit www.bc.edu/burns

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