



Cinegaele's 2018 dates
and the FIS winter party

Description

Montréal's Irish Film Festival announces 2018 dates / Federation of Irish Societies holds seasonal celebration

By **Byron Toben**

Montréal's **Cinegaele Irish Film Festival** (apparently the largest in the world outside of Ireland itself) celebrated its 25th anniversary 2017 season with its usual array of nine evenings and a bonus party of occasional Special Members Nights.

This year's special bonus night was held, as usual, at Hurley's pub on September 13. Featured was a preview of Halifax filmmaker **Kevin Moynihan's** TV special, ***The Famine Irish and Canada's First Responders***.

This tied in nicely with our local campaign to erect a memorial near the Black Rock site at the Victoria Bridge. This campaign, to honour the 6,000 Irish immigrants who are buried at or near the site, had earlier efforts going back to 1909 but picked up steam here about five years ago. Both Toronto and Ireland have related memorials, so it is high time for Montreal, which, with Quebec City, bore so many casualties.



From *The Famine Irish and Canada's First*

Responders

Speaking at the event were **Victor Boyle**, head of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which organizes the annual March to the Rock, monument proponent **Fergis Keyes** and Cinegael head **Tim Hine**. Some representatives from Hydro Quebec, which owns the land involved, also attended.

Mr. Moynihan introduced his film. While there have been other films depicting the origins and consequences of the Irish Potato Famine (I and others prefer to call it the Great Hunger as although the staple potatoes suffered a blight, there were other foods, grains and livestock, unavailable to the peasants because of commitments to foreign buyers), he focused on the selfless reception of Montrealers, both Protestant and Catholic, high and low, to alleviate the sufferings of the survivors of the arriving “coffin ships”.

These were, in a sense, early low-tech first responders. Many of these also perished from diseases transmitted by the victims.

Cinegael’s schedule for 2018 is set for **January 12 and 26, February 9 and 22, March 9, 30 and 31, April 20 and May 3**, plus the Special Members Night or two.

Full details are expected soon at cinegaelmontreal.com

Federation of Irish Societies winter party 2017

The **Federation of Irish Societies (FIS)** held its seasonal winter party at – where else? – the Irish Embassy Pub and Grill on December 18. The FIS is an umbrella entity consisting of some 35 long established Irish organizations ranging from sports to business to cultural groups.

It is currently organized by the ubiquitous **Paul Loftus**, who had co-founded and was president of the Ireland-Canada Chamber of Commerce (ICCC) from 1991 to 2013. He then helped rejuvenate the FIS, which had become quasi-active over the years. Much of this rejuvenation consists of seasonal parties incorporating music, snacks and visits by local or visiting dignitaries.



Luc Gagnon, Kathleen Weil, Paul Loftus, Geoffrey Kelly Image: Avy Loftus

At the winter party, three political representatives were present. Quebec MNAs **Kathleen Weil** and **Geoffrey Kelly** attended, as did federal MP **Marc Miller**. At past events, now retired Irish ambassador to Canada Ray Bassett spoke, as did current Ambassador **Jim Kelly**.

The much in demand singer **Carole McCormick** warbled wonderfully well, the assemblage often joining in, as the **GAA Musicians** supplied toe-tapping chords. As with the annual St. Patrick’s Day events, non-Irish friends



and guests were also warmly welcome.

Paul Loftus and I share the same favourite Montreal Canadiens hockey player. Go on and take a wild guess... Who can that be? This may be revealed at the Spring FIS party, when weather permits the festivities to spill over onto the Irish Embassy's spacious back yard. Keep tuned.

Feature image: from The Famine Irish and Canada's First Responders

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Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.



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