

THE GARDEN SPOT



Photo: Peter J. McGuinness, son of Greenpoint.
Courtesy of Geoffrey Cobb.

Greenpoint, in northern Brooklyn, is one of the dynamic neighborhoods in New York City. Sometimes referred to as "Little Poland," it once was home to large numbers of Irish and Irish Americans who took advantage of its location and resources. Who were these Irish, and why did they settle in Greenpoint? To find out the surprising details, join us and historian Geoffrey Cobb on Saturday, February 27 at 2 p.m. in the McCloskey meeting room in the Parish House for the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, 263 Mulberry Street, Manhattan. A reception will follow. Suggested donation: \$5.

Given the name "Garden Spot of the Universe," Greenpoint today is a heavily Polish and gentrified area, but by the late 1800s it was home to a large and growing Irish-American community. Much of this community came as a result of Greenpoint's waterfront businesses. The McAllister family, for example, emigrated from Cushendall, Co. Antrim, and started a tugboat and lighterage firm that became the largest

in New York harbor. Today, it is one of the largest tugboat companies in the world. The McAllisters brought over many friends and relatives from their hometown, so Greenpoint's population had a much heavier northern Irish component than other areas. Many descendants of these Northern Irish immigrants worked along the waterfront. And two Ulster men would lead the congregations of local churches. Fr. O'Hare, for many years pastor at St. Anthony of Padua, was from Newry, Co. Down and led a congregation of ten thousand, while Fr. McGoldrick of St. Cecilia's was from Donegal and led a congregation of equal size.

Greenpoint's famous Irish son, Peter J. McGuinness, gave his area the Garden Spot name. McGuinness was one of the most colorful aldermen in New York City history. His Brooklynese speech, wit, and outlandish opinions, attracted not only Greenpoint constituents but also much of Brooklyn. Born in 1888 as one of fourteen children, he never finished high school, but he mounted an independent campaign that defeated the Democratic Party's machine to become alderman and later district leader.

Influenced by the "Boss" of the Bowery, Big Tim Sullivan, McGuinness ran Greenpoint for nearly three decades as the last Tammany-style ward boss, but his reign was not

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The 1916 Rising: A NY Walking Tour

On Sunday, May 15, Roundtable president and historian John Ridge will lead a walking tour of locations in lower Manhattan important in the preliminary activities and subsequent actions related to the 1916 Easter Monday Rising in Dublin 100 years ago. This will be a special opportunity to see these New York sites through the perceptions of a widely recognized expert on the history of the New York Irish. The tour will begin at the Nathan Hale Statue at City Hall near Broadway and Murray Street on Sunday, May 15, at 2 p.m.. Participants should prepare for continuous walking and standing. The tour will last approximately 75 minutes. For Members & their guests only.

New York City was a center for secret preparations for the Irish Rebellion in 1916. Many of the sites associated with Irish-American support for the militant nationalists in Ireland are located an easy stroll from New York's City Hall and can still be seen today. On this special tour, stops will include the old Gaelic American newspaper building where fervent Fenian John Devoy helped plan the insurrection and where 1916 martyr Roger Casement visited. Also included will be the headquarters of the Irish Relief Fund where money was raised for victims of the Rising, and the Thomas Addis Emmet and Dr. William MacNeven monuments at St. Paul's Chapel where the secret society Clan na Gael annually commemorated

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The Garden Spot

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marked by Tammany-style corruption. McGuinness charmed his Greenpoint constituents, journalists, and even political opponents. Mayor Jimmy Walker called him his favorite alderman. Peter J. McGuinness was an effective legislator who succeeded in bringing improvements to Greenpoint, and many important civic landmarks in Greenpoint are results of his political ability.

Geoffrey Cobb is a Brooklyn historian who teaches at the High School for Service and Learning on the historic Erasmus Hall Campus. He has recently published *Greenpoint: Brooklyn's Forgotten Past* and is currently working on a second book about Peter J. McGuinness titled *King of Greenpoint*. Mr. Cobb has lived in Greenpoint for more than two decades. He is married to a Polish woman and in addition to speaking Polish, he speaks Russian, German, Spanish, and French.

Save the Dates

THE GARDEN SPOT
Geoffrey Cobb
Saturday, Feb. 27, 2016, 2 p.m.
McCloskey Meeting Room
Parish House of the Basilica
of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral
263 Mulberry Street, Manhattan
Reception to follow.
Suggested donation: \$5.

**THE 1916 RISING:
A NY WALKING TOUR**
Led by John Ridge
Sunday, May 15, 2-3:15 p.m.
Meet at Nathan Hale Statue
City Hall Park
Near Broadway & Murray Street
For Members & their guests only.

The new Roundtable website is now ready for use. Give it a try at www.irishnyhistory.org. Watch for more details in our next newsletter!

The 1916 Rising

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the 1798 Rebellion. A walk down Chambers Street will recall Irish exile O'Donovan Rossa whose 1915 burial in Dublin signaled the emotional rebirth of militant nationalism just a few months before the Rising. Other sites associated with 1916 such as the Irish Race Convention site, the *Irish World* newspaper building, and the offices of Jeremiah O'Leary, prominent lawyer and Irish-American activist, whose sensational "treason" trial became a symbol for free speech, will also be visited.

John Ridge is president of the New York Irish History Roundtable. He is the author of many articles and several books on the Irish in the New York City area. His last article, "World War II and the New York Irish," appeared in volume 27 of *New York Irish History*. His book, *Celebrating 250 Years of the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade*, was published in Spring, 2011.