

Irish Arizona with Janice Ryan Bryson Transcript

Lisa: Dia dhuit! This is Podcrawl Podchroal, the podcast from the McClelland Library. I am your host Lisa, the Librarian. Today's special guest is Janice Ryan Bryson. She is the co-founder of the Irish in Arizona Project, a collection of stories from those of Irish birth and ancestry who came to Arizona from territorial times through the present day and it is currently on display at the McClelland Library. She also co-authored the pictorial work *Irish Arizona* with Kathleen Wood and it can be viewed at the library. Janice was selected as an Arizona Culturekeeper in 2008, and she is the recipient of the Irish Cultural Center's Anam Cara award for her Irish research. Welcome, Janice!

Janice: Thank you, glad to be here today.

Lisa: What sparked your interest in learning about the Irish in Arizona?

Janice: Actually, I've been interested in Arizona history from the time I was a young child because 4 3 of my 4 grandparents came here in territorial days, and 2 of them came in 1881, 2 of those families to Navajo and Hilo County, and then my southern South Carolina ancestors came through Texas and on to Arizona and to Cochise County. And my last grandmother came in 1913 to visit a friend and met a certain cowboy and came back the next year and married him. So I but the interest really in Irish started because when I was around 20 years old, a friend of my grandparents, Jess Hayes, wrote a book called *Apache Vengeance*, and it was about the Apache kid. And it mentioned my relative, Jerry Ryan, who was a cousin of my great grandfather's, and he was appointed sheriff after Glenn Reynolds was killed by the Apaches.

He was taken to prison. And in the course of it, Glenn Reynolds' widow returned with her children to their family in Texas, and Jerry wrote them letters. And so I have some letters from 1889-90 that he wrote, and that

really gave me the interest in the Irish. And I really started checking out my family more as where I started with them.

Lisa: That's amazing to have those records.

Janice: Right. There are there are records so many places if you just have patience and keep looking, and it's a blessing now to have Ancestry because I had an aunt that way back in the, I guess, the 1960s was doing genealogy, and I have her stuff. And she would have to write everything down, all the census records, everything. She would go out to the Mormon Family Center. And just to think now, you know, the availability we have of everything, even the old Arizona newspapers are online.

Lisa: How did you and Kathleen decide to publish *Irish Arizona*? And how did you discover all the photographs and the family members who are represented in them?

Janice: Well, that's an interesting fact of how we started that. When I read in the newspaper they were building an Irish cultural center and they were going to study the Irish research the Irish in Arizona, I was so excited. And I came down here right away, and I volunteered at some events and attended them.

And but this was, like, 2 years or something goes by, and finally, I asked one of the members. I said, when are we gonna start researching the Irish in Arizona? And he said, my dear, hardly any Irish came to Arizona. And, oh my goodness, I knew that was wrong because I knew they came to all the mining towns particularly. And so I asked Julie, who was editor of the Shamrock newspaper, if I could write a column.

And so from starting in 2004 until the newspaper dissolved, I wrote a column called Irish Tales in Arizona Territory just to prove there were lots of Irish here. And the thing of it is, of course, I I was very lucky with my family because most of them had stayed here, so I had access to a lot of pictures and information. And the newspapers are wonderful because they have

even little things, like somebody had a card party or a children's birthday party, it just tells you what these families were doing. And then there were books like Who's Who in Arizona in 1912 and 1913 and there's those were all along territorial days, books like that were published. And at that particular time, people seemed to be very proud of whether they came from Germany or Ireland or wherever.

And even whether they, you know, were in a Confederacy unit or the Union, you know, they were still still doing that in by the time we came to statehood. And people at the Irish Cultural Center I talked to, they were very happy to share their information. And from writing my article, I did have people come to me and say, well, my family came here, can we do a story about my family? But Kathy and I are also [?]. That's why we made ourselves a 501c3, because we paid a lot of the pictures are in the book.

And fortunately, like the, the Arizona Historical Foundation, which no longer exists. It's a part of the historical society now. They had a contract with Arcadia Books through December of the year. And we we that's why they signed us the last week of December to do our book because we still could have free access to there. So I probably have about 30 pictures in the book that we got, and then that we didn't have to pay to publish, which is a great help.

Lisa: Yeah. Is there a story or an image from the book that has stayed with you all these years that you'd like to share?

Janice: I really thought about that when you sent me the list of questions, but I think more maybe is what is not in the book because in doing all of my research, it's just amazing. I didn't mention that children had to work and, you know, different things, but it's just amazing the cholera and the porphyria, things that would sweep through the communities and the people that died of typhoid because of the uncleaned wells.

And it's just so sad, and of course, mining was a dangerous job, and it left many widows and young children, and and we would find kids that were 7

years old washing dishes in a restaurant. Just the hardships that they went through to raise their children was very amazing to me. And that's something that I remember in my research.

Lisa: And mining was the only job out here?

Janice: A lot of them came to cities like Jerome and Bisbee and Globe and Tombstone because they could take unskilled laborers to work. And like my great grandfather, he never worked in a mine, but he had raised himself up to night foreman at the Old Dominion smelter. And they were all dangerous jobs. I read where he was actually visiting a friend and somebody dumped the molten metal on his friend's feet. And it just, you know, was very dangerous. And another story I found, the reason my great uncle, Dennis Murphy, did not want to work in the mines as he worked in the one day. And as they were coming up the elevator out of the shaft, a man fell out of it. So it was just and explosions happened. It was really a sad thing.

And they, you know, they did other things too. And when the territory was beginning, it was great to be an entrepreneur like my family, not just the mining, but they raised cattle. And in later years, they established a drugstore that was 32 stores when they sold it to Revco [big chain drugstore at the time] in the 1960s. And so they did a lot of other things like that and investing in mining and but it's just that that was not an easy job, but you can make yourself rich if you're prospecting. But, of course, they still had the American Native American problem in the 1880s and everything. And so they they had to fight, and Arizona was kept on being a state a number of years because they thought we were too wild and full of criminals.

But when I read the census and voting records, there are many, many. Irish here not so much in the Phoenix area, but like I said, most of them in mining. A lot of women had boarding houses because a lot of them, you know, were single, and they appreciated having a little nice meal.

Lisa: Why did you and Kathleen start the nonprofit Irish Arizona project?

Janice: Well, the reason we started it, Kathy was writing articles for the Shamrock also, and so we kinda got together and talked. And it was basically her idea to start that. We'll give her credit for that. And we worked together, we applied for a nonprofit. And our original idea was that we wanted to be able to make displays that we could put in museums and to speak to school children. And we did when we still had the Irish festival in September or October.

We had a and display I think, 3 different years. But then, unfortunately, Kathy became ill. And, then after that, my daughter became ill of the same thing, unfortunately. And so that kind of got put to the wayside, but but we did everything we had done before, we kind of put up with our own money. Not that it was horrible expenses, but we had her husband Len was creative in helping us out. But I got the idea when we had the Arizona Centennial that we should participate in it, and so I approached the Saint Patrick's Day Parade and Fair if we could put a display in the Great Hall, and they said yes, as long as I joined the board, which I'm still on. So, we had a great exhibit. We had all a lot of the research we found, a lot of people here helped me put it up, and it was just really a wonderful display, and we did it for 2 years, [20]11 and [20]12. So that was, you know, kind of a good result of our project as well as the book.

Lisa: What can you tell us about Nellie Cashman and Hugo O'Connor, both of whom have displays in the Irish in Arizona exhibit in the library?

Janice: I'll do Hugo first. Okay. It's a shorter story for me. I did, of course, know about him and as far as Kathy and I could tell, he's the first Irishman actually recorded of being here. And so, actually, I have a book called "The Red Captain", which goes over all of his details. And, in Ireland, he was known as part of the royal peace, not officially.

In 1691 at the Treaty of Limerick, Irish soldiers that were Catholic were in used to go to France to fight, and they were called the royal peace. And, of course, because of England ruling Ireland for almost 800 years and you

weren't supposed to be Catholic, they would go and there was nothing for the young men there, and they would go fight for the Catholic kings of Spain in France. And Hugo went to fight for the king of Spain. He already had an uncle that was very prominent in the army and he was first in Cuba and then they set him for Texas and he really worked hard. He was appointed governor of Texas by the Spanish advisory of new Spain in 1767 and it's recorded that he rode over 10,000 miles on horseback and, of course, conducting his duties. And he was at Tubac, and he was asked to find another presidio along the way, and that's when he found the city of Tucson on behalf of the king of Spain in August 1776.

And then, he was sent down to Merida, which is down along the Caribbean. And I did happen to visit that city once. It's a beautiful city. It was a city where all the gold from the South American mines and everything came to be put on Spain on ships to take them to Spain. And he was a governor there for a while, and he died there in 1779. And we're very lucky that [Dr.] Marie [Leoutre] did all of the research that she did because we have lots of extra stuff to add. And there is a statue of him in Tucson that was privately put there. It used to be a reception area. And now it was bought by a health care place, and they have a lot of doctors' offices and stuff. And I took Marie to take pictures, and now they had all these tree branches hanging down under the statue. It was easy to see it, but luckily, it was when I took pictures. It was used in my book.

So he really was, you know, a very important person as far as helping grow things in Arizona where we have a Spanish influence.

And then Nellie Cashman, what can I say about her? I'll have to make this short because of the fact that I could do a whole presentation probably of her. She's absolutely amazing. She was born in Ireland. She came to America, to Boston. Then she, her mother, and her sister went out to San Francisco, which she and her and her sister got married there. So she and her mother went on to Nevada, and she saved some miners there. She was always doing charitable work. They went back to San Francisco, and then they went ahead and headed to I'm just gonna concentrate kind of on the Arizona part because of how long her story is. So they came to Tucson

first and opened a restaurant, then she went on to Tombstone. And at this time, also, her sister's husband had died and her sister and her children were there. And her sister did pass away, and Nellie raised the 5 children. They were the Cunningham children, and one of them was later associated with the Brophys and the founding of the Bank of Bisbee. So that was a very important thing, and she was always raising money.

She helped build the Catholic church, which I have seen pictures of the first one, and it was just an Adobe building, but it was more than they had before, and the priest even lived in what was a part of the church. And, she was called the Angel of Tombstone because she always helped miners and she raised money for nuns and for the schools and for the hospitals. And she even the very first ball they held in Schieffelin Hall that was built in Tombstone was for the land leave in Ireland, so she was still thinking of the country.

And then one story is the Bisbee massacre by well, 4 men. 5 men went to rob the Castaneda Goldwater store in Bisbee. Bisbee was a very small town then because a payroll was supposed to come in. But they got there too early, and the payroll was not there yet. And unfortunately, a gunfight ensued and several people were killed, including a pregnant woman. So people were very upset over the situation. And it took them a matter of weeks.

They hung who they thought was the planner and the other 4 did, but they arrested them, and 2 of them were Irish immigrants. And even though they were going to be hanged, Nellie did take care of them. She got the priest to see them. She visited them in jail. So helping fellow Irishman was very much in her sight.

And she she did boarding houses all around the state. And she later ended up going to the Yukon and to Alaska. I mean, this woman never stopped. And there's many other places she was. And she did die up in Seattle after her health went bad they sent her down to a convent. But she just she was a a woman in a day when most women were married, and you could not

get anywhere by yourself. And she was able to take care of everything, take care of other people. Many books have been written about her, and there was even a US postage stamp in her honor when they were doing heroes at the west. So she's really an inspiration to us.

Lisa: As far as educating the future [about] the past, what would you like to see kids today learn about Arizona history?

Janice: You know, I really when I was in 8th grade, which since I'm 80 was many years ago. In 8th grade, we always studied the US Constitution and the government, and we studied Arizona history. And of course, because I was already a history buff, that was a joy for me to do. But most of us, I grew up in Mesa, which was very predominantly Mormon, and so most of them are very aware of Ancestry because they do genealogy. And so they all all of us seemed pleased to be doing that. But my grandchildren, I had told them when they graduated from 8th grade that I will take them each back to Washington, DC. And I had noticed in the 12 years between the oldest and youngest that everything has changed. They were less and less studying the constitution and even the history of our country and not too much about the history of Arizona. And I know my grandson, I just checked with him again on the phone, it was 3rd grade when they did it, which is pretty young, and I did a presentation at high school. I did 2 presentations to 2 classes, and I geared it a lot more back to the youth and stuff growing up in the territory, the Irish youth. And I will usually, I have an interest in the audience, but I felt like they were just just listening, you know, because they had to be there for the lesson.

But I I think school is just becoming so maybe political now, which I wish people to go back to reading and writing. And I think it is important to know of your past. And I don't think many so many people are new to Arizona, and I don't think they know much of our history. No. In fact, I worked for American Express, which is headquartered out of New York, and a lot of people transferred from there.

And they were even amazed that I was born in Arizona, because in Phoenix, you don't find so many. But when you go to the smaller towns like Globe and Bisbee and Jerome, the people that are still there well, those two towns have a lot of tourists, but they a lot of them have family members that have been here for a long time. And I just really wish people would realize what we did and even what the Irish, of course, contributed because we did contribute a lot. We had governors and mayors of towns and just everything. Even in the book, I have a page from, a newspaper in Jerome about what the Irish contributed to their community.

And so I think people, we need to know our past to know our future. At times, it doesn't seem to resonate anymore. I think when you have fast things with, you know, they say the kids now have to have everything instantly, and we need to have patience to really study the history of the state.

Lisa: I'm from New York, and I don't really recall learning about Arizona in-depth like that. So it would just be more about, like, the US states, the country Yeah. More of just a generic overview. And I didn't know about the Irish here either, not until I started working here a few years ago. You know, it might be geographically too. Like, maybe yeah. Like, I'm sure in your own state, you learn more about that than you were in the other states.

Janice: Right. And what used to drive me crazy growing up when I was in school is to me living in Arizona, you know, the Spaniards came here in very early on, right when the time of the colonies and and actually on my should I say the English side of the family? The one that came in 1913. Her ancestors actually came in 1640 among the shipload of people starting in the city of New Haven, Connecticut. And but still, I maybe because my family was into ranching, both sheep and cattle, and I considered myself as a kid part of the wild west maybe or something.

I didn't so much care. I was glad to know that, and I had genealogy and stuff in there, but it was really Arizona because when when I graduated from high school the year I was a senior, the Phoenix Rodeo parade was was our 50th anniversary, and that was the 50th anniversary celebration

period. So when I was born in [19]44, we were still a very, very young state. And it used to drive me crazy, though, that they never hardly talked about the Spaniards that came up to found, you know, New Mexico, part of Texas, Arizona, and California. It was all the thirteen colonies or nothing else. You know?

Lisa: Yeah. Yeah.

Janice: And I always wish they would have done more in that history.

Lisa: Exactly. It's the thirteen colonies and the rest was just territory.

Janice: Yeah. Exactly.

Lisa: You know? And you're seeing big topics or whatever, but nothing any deeper than that.

Janice: Yeah. And you're right. And even the Midwest doesn't get a lot of, you know, stuff and they still don't.

Lisa: Is there anything additional you would like to share with us?

Janice: I guess just I I am so happy we have this Irish Cultural Center, and, it's just it's a pleasure to come down here. I don't as much now maybe due to my age and, some health issues I've had, but I really enjoy it here. I'm so glad it's here, and I'm glad we're having younger people because I think all of us that are here volunteering at first are getting older, and we need new ideas all of the time. And, Marshall Turnbull, who was our state historian, really complimented Kathy and I because he said he wrote the foreword for our book, and he said that no one had ever really studied that group.

And I think in there are other groups here, you know, all the Hispanics, and and even I know there's a book on Greeks in Phoenix. And and I don't think there are many. And that was our they actually turned us down originally in our book, and we found out about that. And so then we had to tell them all

about the Irish all over Arizona, you know, and all the mining camps and everything.

And so they did. And, of course, they, you know, stopped and raised cattle and sheep and everything. And it's just fascinating to read the census records and see where everybody was from, not just Ireland, but you look at some of the mining towns. There's people from from Germany and Mexico, and it's just amazing because our state really was a melting pot. And so I'm thankful we have this to celebrate, and then we have events that people can come.

Lisa: Yeah. It's funny. Lots of people, when they walk by, they don't know what we are. And once they come in and we explain to them, they're lots of times, like, they're just in awe that this place exists, that it's in Phoenix. That you know? So it it it does, evoke questions, Like, why is this here? Why in Phoenix? And and, you know, that prompts us to answer. But and then sometimes I'll I'll get, like, but I'm not Irish. Is that okay? It's like, of course. You know, like, you have to be Irish to to learn if you like history.

Janice: My son's wife is Hispanic from from from Mexico. She's a teacher here now, but she was helping at the [cultural center's] gate one time. And we it was one time we had this huge crowd, and everybody was teasing her because we have a lot of Hispanics come to listen to the music and everything, and so she would tell them, oh, you know, my husband's Irish, and I'm the one working. Yeah. And I just, yesterday, actually had my haircut by a woman that was talking about having her DNA done, and she is Hispanic and, from one of the Indian tribes at Yuma. And so she said and then she said, I am, like, 9% Irish in her DNA, and I said, wonderful.

And and I'm excited to see you guys starting doing these printouts that you had when I was here for the Irish Fair. That makes me excited to get to see that. I especially like that timeline. I know you guys worked hard on that.

Lisa: Yeah. So we have, an Arizona timeline. And then on the other side is Ireland timeline. So it it goes through from evidence of people all the way. Ireland goes to start World War 2.

Janice: I just finally I've had some of my relatives visiting here. I've been blessed to go to Ireland three times, but, you know, I never had anybody come here. I'm so excited that they came in.

Lisa: That's one of, like, the biggest feedbacks, is that when somebody is native to Ireland and they come here and they are impressed. Like, it just it makes everything that much more special.

Janice: And, yeah, I I'm sure it would. Yeah. Because, you know, like me, it was my great grandparents. So and I've been lucky that I've been able to go there and see where they came from.

Lisa: Thank you for joining us Janice, and thank you for listening to Podcrawl Podchroal! We hope to see you soon at the McClelland Library! Slan!