

Valley Life

Local Irishman still dances the jig

*The Irish Dancer
I am of Ireland
And of the holy land
Of Ireland.
Good Sirs I pray I thee,
For of saint charite
Come and dance with me
In Ireland.*

-14th century

By Peggy Good
The Record

Patrick's Day brings to mind images of leprechauns, shamrocks and the color green. It means corned beef and cabbage for dinner.

But most of all St. Patrick's Day brings to us the feeling of the Irish spirit, because it's a national holiday in Ireland that celebrates the feast day of St. Patrick, a fifth century Christian missionary who founded many of Ireland's churches and schools.

The Rev. Paschal Hardy of Mission Hills sums up the Irish essence as "the aire of the tear and the smile." Hardy was born in Foxford County, Mayo, a town of about 400 people near the mouth of the Moy River. Although he came to the United States in 1952, he still speaks with a rich Irish accent.

Hardy is a fast-talking, outspoken gentle man who will tell you what he thinks about almost any subject. He surrounds himself with memories of Ireland, which he finds in the artwork and woolen goods of his boyhood.

Hardy was born in June of 1932 to Michael Joe and Emily Hardy. He was called "Paschal the Rascal" as a boy and he still carries a

twinkle of Irish mischief in his eyes.

"My mother was a humorous colleen-fieri too. I never talked back to my mother," he said. Hardy's mother owned a grocery store and Irish pub in the small town. She loved to tell ghost stories to her family in front of the warm glow of the hearth. His father died when he was 5 years old. A cousin, John Hannon, Foxford County's attorney, lived with his mother and brothers and became kind of a surrogate father to him. He has two brothers, Robert Emmett and Pat McGinnis, and is "sorry to say he never had a sister."

He was mischievous as a boy and loved a good prank. He poached two salmon from the nearby river once and had to be chased off by the people running the river. Across from his home in Foxford County was a church surrounded by a stone wall. In the winter, Hardy and his friends stood behind the wall, shouting and throwing snowballs, and then ducking down to protect themselves against revenge.

Foxford County was a small and friendly place, and the countryside was beautifully green.

"It was beautiful there in May. A glorious time. It was lovely to row up the river smelling the fresh cut hay," he said.

Hardy attended a small convent school for boys and girls until the third grade. He learned Irish folk dancing there, particularly the Irish Jig.

"I have never been blessed with a good memory and sometimes didn't do well academically," he said. Hardy remembers the time he sat in the window sill with a dunce cap on in the second grade, "feeling very stupid indeed."

Boys and girls were usually segregated during his childhood in Ireland, so in the third grade he was enrolled in a school for boys. He

attended St. Nathys High School and Mount Mallary Seminary, where he studied philosophy for two years.

As a young man, Hardy had an interest in social catholicism, the rights of workers and reconstruction. He even picketed the British consulate in Northern Ireland.

"I have always had a keen interest in politics, and I'm not a bit bashful about it either," said Hardy. In the tradition of a radical Irishman he "stood on the side of the underdog."

He inherited his love for speaking out on social issues from his mother, who was involved in Irish politics as well, and once had her shop closed by the British.

In Ireland, St. Patrick's Day is a holy day of obligation, said Hardy. After attending mass, the men of the town would visit his mother's pub for "a bit of Irish mist." As a child, he might celebrate with ice cream, a rare and special treat.

St. Patrick's day was also a time for Irish football and the wild and artistic game of "Hurley", an ancient Irish ball game, which uses a curved stick and a leather ball, with fifteen players on each team.

In the town, the best Irish dancers came from miles around to compete in folk dancing contests.

Hardy made the decision to leave Ireland while still in high school because of health problems. Once in the United States, he attended St. John's Camarillo seminary for four years before becoming a priest.

He said that Irish language and customs may fade because the people have no strong intellectual tradition. After 33 years in this country, however, Hardy holds onto his Irish roots. After all, in his Irish wool sweater and shamrock pin, he can still dance the jig.



DANCING A JIG—In honor of St. Patrick's Day, the Rev. Paschal Hardy dances an Irish jig. Hardy grew up in Foxford County and moved to America in 1952.