

Ireland: A Rich Cultural Heritage

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What comes to mind when you think of Ireland? Luck of the Irish, cozy music-filled pub, lovely scenery, tragic history, peat roofed cottages, or poetry and songs that stir the soul? When I traveled there in 2019, I wanted to prepare for my trip by looking into its literature and poetry, mythology, music, and history. I have listed a few books below with excerpts that illustrate the flavor and culture of Ireland available at Prince William Public Libraries.

From "The Irish Pub Cookbook" by Margaret M. Johnson (641.59417 Joh):

This book has lovely photos of pubs throughout Ireland and stories on Guinness, Sweet Irish Creams, Shop Front designs, Irish Pubs of Distinction, and much more. It also includes great stories about each food dish and its origins. There is a resource list in the back of the book for musical, literary pub tours, and where to find specialty Irish food. This quote from the book stood out to me:

"The Irish have always recognized the appeal of the atmosphere and attractive sociability of a pub, and now other nationalities have come to the same conclusion. The Dublin-based Irish Pub Company has built over 400 pubs in forty countries." (pg. 83)

I also wanted to try a dish before going across the pond. This recipe looked appetizing:

Seafood Mornay (pg. 169)

1 lb cod
8 oz smoked haddock
6 oz salmon fillet
Sauce
Homemade fish stock or bottled clam juice as needed.
4 cs milk
1 c dry white wine
2 T cornstarch
10 oz aged cheddar cheese grated
2 T Dijon mustard
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Butter 4 individual gratin dishes.
2. To cook the fish: In a medium skillet over medium heat, combine the cod and smoked haddock. Add cold water to cover, bring to a simmer, and poach for 10 minutes, or until no longer opaque. In a separate medium skillet over medium heat, add enough water to cover the salmon, bring to a simmer, and poach for 10 minutes, or until no longer opaque. Strain the fish and reserve the poaching liquids. Combine the fish in a large bowl, flake with a fork, and divide among the prepared dishes.
3. To make the sauce: In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine reserved poaching liquids and add enough fish stock or clam juice to measure 4 cups. Add $3\frac{3}{4}$ cs of the milk and the wine and bring to a boil. In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ c of milk and the cornstarch to make a roux. Stir into the sauce, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer, stirring constantly, for 4-6 minutes, or until the sauce starts to thicken. Stir in half the cheese, the mustard, and season with salt and pepper. Spoon the sauce over the fish and sprinkle with

the remaining half of the cheese. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, or until the tops are brown and the sauce is bubbling.

I was also drawn to Irish poetry and mythology. I enjoyed these titles in the library's collection:

"When You are Old: Early Poems and Fairy Tales" by W.B. Yeats (821.8 Yea)

"Irish Myths and Legends" by Lady Gregory (398.209415 GRE)

In "Celtic Memories" retold by Caitlin Matthews, illustrated by Olwyn Whelan (823.914 Mat), this collection has folk tales, songs, poems from the Celtic tribes of Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man and Brittany.

Here is "A Blessing for Travelers: from Celtic Memories" (pg 41):

May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields
And, until we meet again,
May you be held safe in the palm of God's hand.

From "Ireland's Love Poems" edited by A. Norman Jeffares (821.008 IRE), I was drawn to "Love Was True to Me" by John Boyle O'Reilly (pg. 173):

(first stanza)
Love was true to me,
True and tender;
I who ought to be
Love's defender,
Let the cold winds blow
Till they chilled him;
Let the winds and snow
Shroud him—and I know
That I killed him.

Whether you plan to travel to Ireland in person, or from the comfort of your armchair, visit PWPL and our Digital Library, pwcva.gov/digitallibrary, to experience the literature and culture of the Emerald Isle.