

May 12, 2014

Prof Begins History Project with Irish American Immigrants

Gerald F. Reid, *Sacred Heart University*



Prof Begins History Project with Irish American Immigrants



From left, Irish American immigrant Ned Foley is interviewed by students Jade Barber and Alyssa Varnum.

News Story: May 12, 2014

Jerry Reid, professor of anthropology and sociology and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Sacred Heart University, recently began an oral history project with students on the lives of Irish American immigrants. With the help of students from his “Ethnography of Ireland” class, Reid records student interviews with Irish-American immigrants using high-quality digital audio recorders. The recordings and transcripts will then be archived with the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society and, hopefully, at the University as well.

“This is a unique opportunity for students to learn about 20th-century Irish emigration and the social, economic and cultural factors that generated emigration from Ireland,” said Reid. “This is also a great opportunity to partner with the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society and help contribute to their mission and goals while engaging my students.”

Reid has been interested in the general topic of social and cultural change in Ireland for quite some time. His interest in Irish American immigration in the 20th century grew out of this general interest and through a course that he teaches every other year. His partnership with the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society came about through his role as director of the Center for Irish Cultural Studies. The historical society first asked Reid to write a letter of support for their effort to get state funding for an Irish-American heritage trail project in Connecticut. Out of this initial connection, Reid began talking with officers and members of the organization about other projects where they could work together. The oral history project was one of those ideas.

“This project is so important because it captures a slice of history that is disappearing,” said Vincent McMahon, vice president of the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society. “I came from Ireland, and it’s a very different country now than it once was. Farming, which was once prevalent in Ireland, has since gone out of business, and some of the culture of Ireland has changed. This project will provide material for future researchers about life in Ireland and about

Irish Americans during that time in history and will allow them to hear the stories of those who came to America from Ireland.”

Kura O’Driscoll ’14 from Yonkers, N.Y., agreed that this project has been a worthwhile endeavor. “It has been really interesting to have the opportunity to meet with these individuals and have them share their past with us,” she said. “This project has been a unique experience and it has been great putting together what we are taught in class with the stories of those we interviewed.”

“Being associated with Sacred Heart University on this project has been fantastic,” said George Waldron, president of the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society. “To have the opportunity to develop this project at this level has been great. We are so pleased to be associated with Sacred Heart and Dr. Reid.”

“I hope that through this project, my students will have had an interesting and successful learning experience,” said Reid. “I also hope that we will have assisted the Connecticut Irish American Historical Society in its efforts to promote appreciation and understanding for the Irish American experience in Connecticut and that, through this partnership, ties can be built between the University and our larger community.”