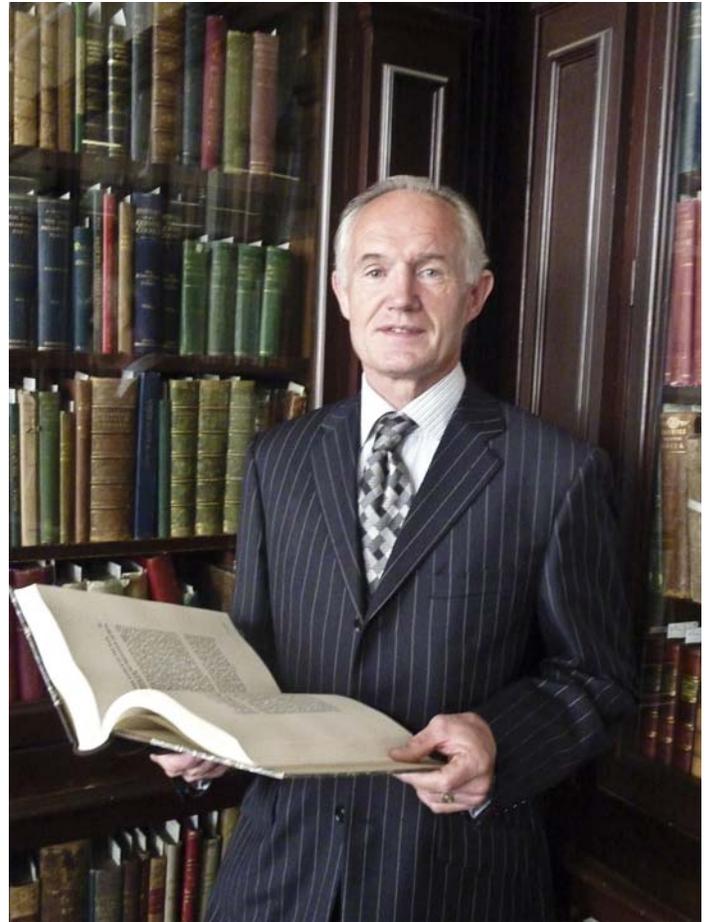


The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress  
presents  
the Benjamin Botkin Folklife Lecture Series  
**AN ACQUISITIONS & PRESENTATION PROJECT**

**BELFAST'S LINEN HALL LIBRARY:  
"EXCITING A SPIRIT OF GENERAL ENQUIRY"  
IN IRISH FOLKLORE,  
HISTORY, POLITICS,  
AND RELIGION SINCE  
THE 18TH CENTURY.**

**JOHN KILLEN**



**Tuesday  
November 29, 2011  
12 NOON - 1:00 PM  
Mary Pickford Theater  
Third Floor, James Madison Building  
Library of Congress  
101 Independence Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC**

**FREE AND OPEN  
TO THE PUBLIC**



Metro: Capitol South  
First & C Streets, SE  
(one block south of  
Madison Building)

Request ADA accommodations five days in advance at (202) 707-6362 or ADA@loc.gov  
For more information contact Thea Austen 202-707-1743

# BELFAST'S LINEN HALL LIBRARY: "EXCITING A SPIRIT OF GENERAL ENQUIRY" IN IRISH FOLKLORE, HISTORY, POLITICS AND RELIGION SINCE 1788.

The Linen Hall Library in Belfast, Northern Ireland, was founded in 1788. Its mission statement, written in 1795, outlines its goals: "the collection of an extensive Library, Philosophical Apparatus and such productions of Nature and Art as tend to improve the mind and excite a spirit of general enquiry; the society intends to collect such materials as will illustrate the antiquities, the natural, civil, commercial and ecclesiastical history of [Ireland]."

Some of the treasures of the Linen Hall Library include the following books.

## Religion

The first book to have been printed in Belfast was *An Answer to the Bishop of Derry's Second Admonition to the Dissenting Inhabitants of his Diocese; especially at to matters of fact, relating to the public worship of God, wherein his Misrepresentations are again disclosed*. The author was Robert Craghead, and the book was printed in 1698. William King, D.D. had been confined as a prisoner in Dublin Castle during the reign of the Catholic James II, and was the preacher on the day of public thanksgiving when the Protestant William III made his triumphal procession to St. Patrick's Cathedral after the Battle of the Boyne. King was appointed Bishop for having "distinguished himself in the ...Roman Catholic controversies."

The first book to have been printed in the Irish Language in Belfast (and the province of Ulster) was *The Church Catechism in Irish, with the English placed over against it in the same Karacter*. Printed by James Blow in 1722, it had the avowed purpose of converting the Catholic population on Rathlin Island to the Anglican church. The religious controversies of the 18th century are brought to life by this rare piece of local printing. The fact that the Irish words were written phonetically, to aid the Ministers of the Established Church speak to the islanders, provides modern researchers with valuable evidence about the sound of Ulster Irish as spoken in 1722.

## Politics

In the aftermath of the United Irishmen's Rebellion of 1798, a "pamphlet war" broke out on the subject of a parliamentary union between Great Britain and Ireland. The virulence of argument produced hundreds of pamphlets, published in England and Ireland. Linen Hall's collection includes such valuable publications as *Observations on the Commercial Principles of the projected Union... to appropriate Ireland, and for ever, as a Consuming Colony to the British Manufacturer*, published in London in 1800, which likens the situation in America before the Revolution with the consequences of the proposed Union.

## Ethnicity

The role of the Scots-Irish (or Ulster Scots) in American history is well represented in the collections of the Linen Hall. In

the eighteenth century there were five great waves of Ulster emigration to the New World. These skilled, hardworking, religiously austere people brought with them an independence of spirit, which formed one of the mainstays of the colonies. George Washington acknowledged this when he said, "If defeated everywhere else, I will make my stand for liberty among the Scots-Irish of my native Virginia..." That the hardy people of Belfast kept faith with their cousins across the sea is evidenced in the first catalogue of the Library, which records possession of Jefferson's *Notes on the Present State of Virginia* (London: 1790).

## Musicology

In 1792, members of the Linen Hall Library organised the Belfast Harpers' Festival, with the avowed aim of "reviving and perpetuating the Ancient Music and Poetry of Ireland." "In order to carry this project into execution," they wrote, "it will be necessary to assemble the Harpers, those descendants of our ancient Bards, who are at present almost exclusively possessed of all that remains of the Music, Poetry and Oral Traditions of Ireland..." The Library commissioned musician Edward Bunting to transcribe the music played by the harpers, and in 1796, it published *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music, containing a variety of Admired Airs never before published, and also the Compositions of Conolan and Carolan; collected from the Harpers &c. in the different Provinces of Ireland, and Adapted for the Piano Forte with a Prefatory Introduction by Edward Bunting*. This inspired act by a small independent library resulted in the preservation of the ancient music of Ireland, and the seminal work has served as a resource for composers and musicians from Beethoven to the Chieftains.

The collections in the Linen Hall tell the story of Ireland, the divisions in its society, its trials and tribulations, its successes and failures; and, throughout, they tell of the spirit of a people. All books tell a story; but the stories behind the books can be equally important. They show the inter-connectivity of human experience in different but similar communities; similar because the human spirit is shared by all.

The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and placed at the Library of Congress to "preserve and present American Folklife" through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, reference service, live performance, exhibition, public programs, and training. The Center includes the American Folklife Center Archive of folk culture, which was established in 1928 and is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the United States and around the world. Please visit our web site: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>.

