

Ambassador's visit renews vigour of Canada-Monaghan bonds

The strong historical, cultural and twinning bonds between Co Monaghan and the Irish-identifying populations of Canada were powerfully reinforced by the visit here on Friday last of Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth.

An expansive itinerary with an accent on the county's signature visitor attractions saw Ambassador Smyth familiarise herself with Glaslough, Monaghan Town, Clones, Castleblayney and Carrickmacross on her maiden visit.

The Covid-19 period had delayed Her Excellency, who presented her credentials to President Michael D Higgins in June 2021, following in the footsteps of a series of her predecessors by being formally received by Monaghan Co Council.

The Ambassador's eagerness to make up for lost time was evident in the engaged manner with which she approached her full schedule of Monaghan stops.

In Glaslough on Friday morning at the start of her itinerary, she conveyed the good wishes of the people of Prince Edward Island – the maritime province twinned with Monaghan – to her hosts and commented on how enthused the PEI government had been by the news that she was visiting.

The Ambassador also assured Monaghan that the Canadian Government stood ready to render assistance to PEI and the other parts of her country then bracing themselves for the arrival of post-tropical cyclone Fiona (on Canada's east coast see separate story).

On arrival at Castle Leslie, Ambassador Smyth, who was accompanied by her political advisor Jackie Ellis, was greeted by the Cathaoirleach of Monaghan Co Council Councillor Seán Conlon, Monaghan Municipal District Cathaoirleach Councillor Raymond Aughey, and Councillor Aidan Campbell, Cathaoirleach of the Carrickmacross-Castleblayney Municipal District. The welcome entourage also included Senator Robbie Gallagher, Acting Co Council Chief Executive Cathal Flynn and other elected and executive local authority representatives.

In the Oriel Room of the Castle Lodge, Ambassador Smyth was told by Cathaoirleach Conlon that the occasion of her visit represented the renewing of what had been a long tradition of interaction and outreach between her embassy and their location in Co Monaghan.

The Co Council Chair referred to the historic twinning associations Monaghan had enjoyed with Prince Edward Island and Miramichi in New Brunswick over the past three decades, which, he observed, was only a snapshot of the relationship that had endured over a period that pre-dated the Great Hunger of 1847 but intensified during and subsequent to that time.

Councillor Conlon said the very focused migratory pattern between North Monaghan and specific locations in Canada

had been identified by historians and researchers. Family names had been transported across the Atlantic and the connection was also preserved and commemorated in village names and place names such as Emyvale and Kelly's Cross in the parts of Canada where Monaghan people had made their home.

Recalling his own visits to Prince Edward Island, the Cathaoirleach said that standing in a graveyard in PEI one could imagine they were in a graveyard in North Monaghan because of the close correspondence of family names. The people of PEI held their heritage precious and this manifested in festivals and occasions of remembrance.

Some events of history were incredible to recall and realise that they happened – in 1847 the population of Toronto was 20,000 people, but by early October of that year 38,000 Irish people had arrived in the Canadian city. Many of them were suffering disease and illness contracted on the journey and received the aid of Toronto care workers and doctors – Ireland had so much to recall and be thankful to Canada for.

"In Co Monaghan we make our own humble effort to sustain that relationship and we are delighted to have the Ambassador present," Cathaoirleach Conlon concluded.

WILLIE MCKENNA
Adding his own voice of welcome to that of Councillor Conlon, Monaghan Municipal District Cathaoirleach Councillor Raymond Aughey referred to the strong twinning connections that had been initiated by his former local authority colleague, the late Fianna Fáil councillor Willie McKenna.

Councillor Aughey recalled that Willie had been an influence on his decision to go to America in 1984, and both himself and Councillor Conlon had spent many years there. While in the USA he had visited cousins in Canada in 1992.

Referring to the significant and enduring links between their two countries, the Cathaoirleach told the Ambassador that he would be returning to her country in the coming weeks when Glaslough represented Ireland in the Communities in Bloom competition which Canada was hosting. He said the competition judges had recently seen the village in its full splendour with all facets of the community working together.

"I will be quietly confident that Glaslough will do really well in the competition, and I am looking forward to seeing what we can learn," Councillor Aughey remarked.

"Ireland and Canada are one," he added. He hoped the Ambassador had a wonderful day, and could take the time to have a look at the beautiful village of Glaslough, where Paul McCartney had been married in 2001.

LESLIE FAMILY WELCOME
Kevin Kenny, Castle Leslie Deputy Manager, welcomed Ambassador Smyth to Glaslough on behalf of the Leslie family.

Mr Kenny explained that Castle Leslie was one of the



Welcoming the Canadian Ambassador Ms Nancy Smyth to County Monaghan is Cathaoirleach of Monaghan County Council, Cllr Sean Conlon and Cathaoirleach of Monaghan Municipal District, Cllr Raymond Aughey, when she met them at The Castle Leslie Estate. Pictured are (L-R) Senator Robbie Gallagher, Liz Brannigan, Monaghan County Council, Mary McGarvey, Monaghan County Council, Kevin Kenny, Castle Leslie Estate, Cllr Aidan Campbell, Cllr Raymond Aughey, Cathaoirleach of Monaghan Municipal District, Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth, Cllr Sean Conlon, Cathaoirleach, Monaghan County Council, Cathal Flynn, Director of Services, Monaghan County Council, Donal McElwain, Coordinator, Monaghan Municipal District and Louise Duffy, Glaslough Tidy Towns. Photo Rory Geary

major tourist attractions in Co Monaghan and told the Ambassador something of the history of its founding family.

He pointed out that the reception was being hosted in the Gate Lodge of the estate, the function of which had changed considerably over the years – it was once occupied by nuns, and in a later manifestation had operated as a night club for a time.

He hoped that Ambassador Smyth would have an opportunity to experience in the future all that Castle Leslie had to offer.

COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM
Louise Duffy, Chairperson of Glaslough Tidy Towns Association, explained to the Ambassador how Glaslough had set a national and international benchmark in the Tidy Towns competition.

Ms Duffy said Glaslough was one of many villages in Co Monaghan which participated in the national contest and they had won the national title twice and had been county winners for the last 14 years. Glaslough had previously represented Ireland in the Entente Florale competition and in the cross-Border Pride of Place competition.

This year Glaslough was travelling to Canada to represent Ireland in the world of Communities in Bloom competition. Their preparations for the event had commenced in 2019 but had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, although communications had continued during that time through online information sessions, workshops, webinars and knowledge-sharing.

"This competition is not just about the community that represents their country but the municipality it belongs to," the Tidy Towns Chairperson noted, describing the great relationship her village had with Monaghan Co Council and how they had worked together on many joint projects.

She said that a lot of work, discussion and effort had gone into Glaslough's preparations for Communities in Bloom, which was not just about how an area bloomed horticulturally but concerned everything that belonged to the community. The judges were very impressed on their recent visit and were given a full presentation.

"We are looking forward to travelling to Canada and are very proud to be representing Ireland there," Ms Duffy added. **A WONDERFUL RECEPTION**
"What a wonderful warm reception – thank you very

much," was Ambassador Smyth's initial response to her welcome to Co Monaghan.

Stating that it was wonderful to hear of the background to the relationship between her country and Monaghan, the Ambassador recalling receiving a message of congratulations from Monaghan Co Council upon her appointment and a warm invitation to come to Monaghan.

She said this letter had stayed with her throughout the Covid-19 times and she often reminded her staff about it.

"I would have hoped to have gotten here earlier but the timing has turned out to be fantastic," Ambassador Smyth stated.

Referring to "the power of personal connections", she said that coast to coast there were 4.5 million Canadians who claimed Irish heritage, and an Irish Heritage Month had recently been staged in Canada for the very first time.

"Often in this job I have been told of what Canada has done for Ireland," the Ambassador remarked. "This is an opportunity to thank Ireland for helping to create the Canada we know and love."

She said that Prince Edward Island had a particular place in the Canadian federation and it was the ancestors of Monaghan people who went there and helped establish the community. She had been in touch with Prince Edward

Island to let them know her visit was taking place and they were very pleased that this relationship was being rekindled.

The Ambassador noted that as they spoke Storm Fiona was approaching Canada from the Atlantic and her country was making preparations to assist the areas that would take its impact, including Prince Edward Island.

Again thanking Monaghan Co Council for the warm reception, Ambassador Smyth said she was looking forward to the day ahead.

"Ireland seems to be about community – that is the word and the thought I often have, and you have displayed a phenomenal sense of community here."

Remarking on Glaslough's Tidy Towns success and their hopes for further success in Communities in Bloom, the Ambassador joked that she had "better get my booking in early" for a return visit to Castle Leslie. She said that she hoped to return there for some downtime in the future and enjoy a more extensive tour of its facilities.

FLAG RAISED IN MONAGHAN

Following a brief tour of the Castle Leslie attractions and an opportunity to see the work of the Glaslough Tidy Towns volunteers, Ambassador Smyth proceeded to Monaghan Town



Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth, speaking to the group that met her at Castle Leslie last Friday morning. Photo Rory Geary

for the symbolic centrepiece of her visit – the raising of the Canadian flag at the forecourt of Monaghan Courthouse in Church Square, a moment applauded by a gathering of her local authority hosts and a number of people from Monaghan and the wider area with Canadian connections.

Prior to the ceremonial, the Ambassador had enjoyed talking to customers and stallholders at the Friday morning Farmers Market in the town centre, with several stalls bedecked in the Canadian flag and national colours.

Travelling on the Clones, Ambassador Smyth was received at the Ulster Canal Stores by Cathaoirleach of the Ballybay-Clones Municipal District Councillor Hugh McElvaney, and heard a presentation from Waterways Ireland on the progress of the Ulster Canal restoration project. Following a photocall at



Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth, meeting with Seánie McCleary from Blairstown, when she visited the Monaghan Farmers Market. Also included is Cllr Sean Conlon, Cathaoirleach of Monaghan County Council. Photo Rory Geary

Castleblayney's Conra Wood Golf and Country Club, the Ambassador was given a guided tour of Carrickmacross

Workhouse and later lunched at the Shirley Arms Hotel in the town.



The Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Ms Nancy Smyth (left), being presented with items of clothing by Chief Administrator Ms Annette McMahon, during Ambassador Smyth's visit to Conra Wood Golf and Country Club last weekend. Photo © Jimmy Walsh



Henry McMahon (left) presenting CD's and copy of songs to the Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Ms Nancy Smyth, during her visit to Conra Wood Golf and Country Club on Friday last. On right is Cathaoirleach County Monaghan Sean Conlon and in background is Senator Robbie Gallagher and MD Cathaoirleach Aidan Campbell. Photo © Jimmy Walsh



Willien Steenson, making the presentation of a pen and holder that he hand-carved specially for Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth, to the ambassador when she visited the Monaghan Farmers Market last Friday. Also included is Cllr Sean Conlon, Cathaoirleach of Monaghan County Council. Photo Rory Geary



Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth, centre, with some of the people that met her during her visit to Co Monaghan last Friday. In photo are (L-R) Brenda Clerkin, Cllr Sean Conlon, Cathaoirleach, Monaghan County Council, Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Nancy Smyth, Sean McKenna, Ulster GAA and Brian Clerkin. Photo Rory Geary



The Canadian Ambassador to Ireland Ms Nancy Smyth, on her visit to Conra Wood Golf and Country Club last weekend. From left: MD Cathaoirleach Aidan Campbell, Ambassador Smyth; Conra Lady Captain Chris Monahan; Senator Robbie Gallagher; Vice Lady Captain Patricia Hamill; Director Paul Shortt; Song-Writer Henry McMahon; Monaghan County Cathaoirleach Sean Conlon and Conra Wood Club Captain Frank Nolan. Photo © Jimmy Walsh