



## History of the Irish Echo

In 1993 the Irish Echo celebrated its 65th anniversary. We asked Claire Grimes, the publisher, to provide our readers with a short history of the paper and she graciously submitted the following article and graphics.

While no one has ever claimed the *Irish Echo* whitewashed a story, back in 1928 the paper was delivered by horse and wagon borrowed from Spic and Span Laundry Service. And snapping the reins galloping down icy cobble-stones were Bill Burke and Pat Beasty, two of the best friends of Monaghan-native Charlie Connolly, a typesetter-cum-publisher of the newest Irish newspaper in New York town. These self-designated "circulation managers" worked gratis, delivering *Echoes* each week from the printing plant at 121st Street and Lexington Avenue in Harlem, to dance halls, meeting places, bars—everywhere the Irish congregated during that first freezing winter.

paper (in 1955) it took on new dimensions. The paper became really well respected. Paddy had a hell of a lot of friends and nobody was ever going to keep him down."

The first *Echo* publisher was sometimes referred to as "Smash-the-border-Connolly" and while the headlines referring to Northern Ireland persist to this day, the editorial policy now is a moderate one espousing a diplomatic resolution to "the troubles" while eschewing violence.



Connolly began the *Echo* to fill the vacuum of the U.S. dailies which then—as now—gave little ink to matters Irish. The second publisher, Patrick J. "Paddy" Grimes from County Offaly, bought the *Echo* to promote Grimes Travel Agency located then as now in Columbus Circle, but the weekly, under the aegis of son, John, became a very viable property.

When county organizations flourished in the 40s, 50s, and 60s, the *Irish Echo's* printing plant produced most of their journals. It was a time when large hotel ballrooms in New York City were alive with the sound of Irish music, particularly around St. Patrick's Day. With the dearth of emigration from Ireland, most county organizations lost membership which eventually ended the need for large journals along with the *Echo's* commercial printing plant.

John Grimes, who had served as general manager since 1957,

The late Bill Burke, back in 1978, filled us in: "Charlie Connolly was a tough man, who would rather lead a parade of three men than be behind thousands. He started the *Echo* almost at the same time as the Depression. It wasn't easy. Connolly realized how popular Gaelic sports were at the time, so he covered the games at Celtic and Innisfail (Gaelic) Parks. When Paddy Grimes bought the



Photo Courtesy of Charles Harbutt/Actuality, Inc.

*This photo is dated March 1959. It features Irish Echo columnists Terry Long and Edward Brennan (standing) and editor John Grimes. The original caption describes the Echo as a "weekly newspaper founded by rebel orator Charles Connolly in 1928 to be the "voice of Ireland in America." "*

became the third publisher of the *Irish Echo* upon the death of the elder Grimes in 1978. He guided the *Echo* from "hot type" to photo offset, and a desktop publishing system was initiated by him. John Grimes designed a new format for the weekly, introduced special newsprint supplements, and watched as the circulation and advertising line rose dramatically.



When ethnic weeklies suffered a dearth of new immigrant readership in the 60s, 70s and into the 80s, the *Echo* thrived on a new image which Grimes designed for second and third generation Irish Americans. In 1981 he launched the *Boston Irish Echo*, a sister publication of the New York-based paper. In 1987, upon his sudden death at age 54, his wife, Claire O'Gara Grimes assumed responsibilities as sole owner and fourth publisher.

The diverse content of today's *Irish Echo* accommodates its multi-dimensional readership of first generation immigrant to fourth generation Irish American. Full color options and a section-

alized format were implemented in 1989 which includes new Business and enlarged Entertainment and Sports sections. "IE" the *Echo's* periodic magazine supplement introduced in 1990, features World Cup soccer, Irish travel, giftware-for-Christmas, business, arts and lifestyle and every St. Patrick's Day selects the *Echo's* Man or Woman of the Year. Past honorees were Dr. Anthony J.F. O'Reilly, Noel Pearson and John Hume.



In 1988 a national profile was implemented which resulted in the closing of the then-redundant *Boston Irish Echo*. The newspaper is now sold on newsstands in Florida, Chicago, New England, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and is also available in Ireland. It enjoys a 50-state subscription base. Circulation is 61,000 with the New York tri-state area its primary market.



Charlie Connolly 1928



Patrick Grimes 1955



John Grimes 1978



Claire Grimes 1987