

THE HENGE OF KELTRIA

Public Edition

HENGE HAPPENINGS

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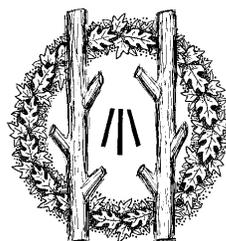
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Two weeks ago, the crocuses I planted last fall spread their delightful color across the south end of the grove, and the cows birthed eight healthy calves. Now that the crocuses are fading, the daffodils are in full bloom, and the swallows returned today. I saw the first swallow flitting in and out of the horse barn, preparing to repair his summer home, and my heart was glad, for that is one of the first signs of planting season here on the farm. Next week, we'll be planting acres of onion seeds in the still-chilly earth, and we always try to have them all planted before my brother's birthday (April 21st). Usually by Beltaine, it's safe for us to start planting potatoes. The cycle of life continues here on the farm as it has for centuries on farms everywhere. I always feel honored that I am allowed to be a part of it.

One of the definitive signs of Beltaine for us is the flowering of the hawthorns and dogwoods. There's nothing more exciting to me than to see a small tree here and there, discernable from the trunks of the other bare trees in the woods by their delicate mantles of white and pink. Every year I say to the Bear, "Oh, look, the hawthorns are flowering! It's truly Beltaine." And every year he smiles that gentle, tolerant smile and nods. He thinks I'm amusing when I get so excited about natural things that happen every year.

But I do get excited, and I must admit that this is one of my favorite times of the year (the other being Samhain). After a winter of being mostly cooped up indoors while the Cailleach rages outdoors, it delights me to smell the fresh scent of spring rain, to feel warm spring breezes caress my face, to see color and life renewed and manifesting everywhere. It invigorates me to toss off the jacket and shoes and run my toes through the emerald green grass. I look across the pasture, grass brightened by the rains, and I can almost imagine I'm back in Ireland. I want to get out and dig in the dirt, to plant and tend and enjoy my herb and vegetable gardens. It's a bit early for this region, but soon, very soon, I'll have new plants and new flowers and the unique sensuousness of dirt on my hands.

I'm also excited to see what spiritual things are sprouting from winter incubation. I believe that this spring, more than any other before, I am fully embracing a spiritual life. I am deepening my commitment to my faith and my loves, and truly following the path that sings to my soul in much the same way that the returning swallows sing to my heart.



Keltrian Druid Sigil

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *The Beat of a Heart, the Beat of a Drum*
- *Tree Meditation: Summer*
- *The Memory Tree*
- *The Nature Spirits*
- *Dandelion*

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President
Topaz Owl

Perhaps that is the reason I love this time of the year so, the intensely passionate time of Beltaine. It is the renewed passion of the Land that I see and feel all around me that lifts me and helps me renew my own passion for life, the creative passion that makes life worth living. I sink into it, fill myself up with it, dance with it, and become closer to who I truly am each spring than ever before.

May you dance with your passion this Beltaine season!

Beannachtaí,
The Topaz Owl

Secretary's Report
is available in the
Members Edition..

Treasurer's Report is available
in the Members Edition.

THE BARD'S PATH

THE BEAT OF A HEART, THE BEAT OF A DRUM

BY ANNE COFFEY

"I don't think it's as easy as it looks."

I am sitting on an uncomfortable folding chair, sweltering in a Memorial Day heat wave. The weather is always beastly for our annual pilgrimage to Irish Fest. If it isn't blazing hot and humid, it's cold and pouring rain.

My companion is distracted. He hasn't heard me.

"I don't think it's as easy as it looks," I repeat. I swipe a fly off my arm and take another drink of my Black and Tan. The smell of burnt funnel cake wafts on the air.

My companion shrugs.

"I don't know. I think it looks pretty easy. It's just beating the drum with a stick."

I sit back in my chair and regard the man who is the topic of our conversation. He is a bodhran player, performing in a group on the stage before us. For the past forty minutes, he has been battering disconcertingly moving reels and jigs out of his drum. He cradles the large, circular frame of the instrument in his left arm. He teases the beats out of the drum with a stick he holds in his right hand. The speed in his right wrist fascinates me, and the delicacy. His eyes are closed and his face is expressionless. He is sweating profusely with his labor.

My companion and I listen to the music in silence again.

I am surprised and mortified by the strength of the emotion rising within me. The drumbeats reach into my chest cavity, and suddenly there is no room for anything else. I am scooped clean. All of my muscles, sinews and tissues are replaced by the drum's voice. I want to dance, pound the ground with my fists, and weep, all at the same time. There are other people dancing, though I see none of them struggling to maintain their composure as I am. They look happy, a little drunk, in their *Pog Mo Thoin* t-shirts and shamrock hats. I do not join them. Instead, I duck my head, breathe deeply and concentrate on counting the blades of grass at my feet to keep from crying. Then I rub my eyes.

I look up at the bodhran player again, and wonder how he can keep from crying as he pounds out those perfect rhythms, those steady beats. Isn't this the heartbeat of the universe? This is the sound of Brigid's smiths hammering, the sound of Aonghus Óg's swan wing sweeping, the lapping of Manannán mac Lir's waves. This is the eternally moving, eternally creating rhythm that functions as the infrastructure of our existence. It shapes the tempo of our heartbeats, the pulse of our language, the architecture of our movement through space. And the bodhran player is alone in its creation. Doesn't he tremble at the responsibility of constructing that rhythm? Doesn't it terrify him to be alone in the creation of that cadence, to have all the other instruments looking to him, listening to his beat to define their own actions? It would terrify me.

Now I am the one who is distracted. My companion digs his finger into my arm to regain my attention.

"Ow! What?"

ANNE COFFEY IS CELTIC RECONSTRUCTIONIST PAGAN LIVING IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS. HER WORK HAS APPEARED IN "PANGAIA" AND "SAGEWOMAN" MAGAZINES. SHE IS MARRIED AND SPENDS HER TIME WRITING, KNITTING, AND RENOVATING HER VINTAGE HOME.



“I’m going to learn how to play a bodhran,” he says casually, “I’m going to buy one and learn how to play it.” I do not doubt his sincerity, buttressed though it is with much Guinness.

“You should learn, too. We could learn together,” he says.

I shift in my chair. I take a drink of my beer. Despite how moving I find the music the bodhran creates, it hasn’t occurred to me to actually play one. I am a dancer. I interpret the beat. I am at the mercy of the beat. I do not create it. I shudder a little at the thought of the responsibility of it.

I realize that I am uncomfortable with the thought of going near an instrument that releases such emotion within me. I am uncomfortable with the thought of being responsible for setting the measure that everyone must follow.

“Let’s go watch the dancers,” I answer, rising from my chair, turning my back to the performers onstage. I am ready to leave this music, this discussion, and the challenges they both present to me.

Irish Fest is three months past. And true to his word, my companion has bought a bodhran and learned how to play it. Despite my misgivings, he buys me one, too, and sits me down on a warm August afternoon to teach me how to do the same. I cradle the drum in the crook of my left arm, just as I have seen the musicians onstage do, and then grab hold of the stick, which I learn is called a tipper.

I am nervous as my companion shows me the first basic movements. My hand trembles a little as my tipper skips over the drum’s skin, easing its way into a gentle 4/4 rhythm, a reel. I listen intently to the practice CD that plays on the stereo. I find my way into the structure of the song, lose it, find it again. Playing the drum feels different than I expected. I expected to be required to lead. But rather than leading, the music asks that I practice a deep discretion and restraint. Suddenly I realize that I do not have to create the rhythm. I am participating in it, as the melody instruments set the beat. I do not have to be John Bonham. I do not have to swing out there on my own, driving the whole force, controlling it, creating it, setting the rhythm for all the other instruments to follow. I can listen, I can interpret, I can translate. I can dance with my fingers rather than my feet.

I take my bodhran and my learner’s CD home. When I practice, I dance. I dance for joy.

AUTUMN ROSE IS A
KELTRIAN
DEDICANT. A
FORMER NEWSPAPER
REPORTER AND
COLUMNIST, SHE
NOW DEVOTES
HERSELF TO
DOMESTIC
PURSUITS AND
CELTIC
SPIRITUALITY..

TREE MEDITATION: SUMMER

BY AUTUMN ROSE

Let’s take a few moments to silently observe our external surroundings. What is in front of you?.... What sounds do you hear?.... What odors do you detect?.... Close your eyes now, shutting all that out, and shift your attention to your internal environment, your own body... Notice your breath passing in and out of your nostrils as you breathe

Can you feel your pulse beating? Ask yourself, Am I comfortable?... If not, make yourself so. Adjust your clothing if necessary Adjust your posture. Stand (sit) erect but



Autumn Rose

relaxed We're going to take several deep, cleansing breaths now, and each time you exhale you will feel tension flowing out of your body. With each exhalation you will feel more and more relaxed. Beginning now, in.... out and relax ...in.... out and relax ...in.... out and relax ...in.... out and relax ...in.... out and relax....

You find yourself now standing at the edge of a wood on a bright summer morning. Although it is still early, the air is warm and humid, and a thin film of perspiration covers your face and neck and bare arms. As you enter the woods, the dark green leaves of the trees form a lacy canopy over your head, and the world is immediately dimmer and cooler. Even so, bits of sunlight manage to squeeze their way into the spaces between leaves, and the ground seems sprinkled with flecks of gold. You stroll among the trees, past waist high clumps of fern, kicking up dust from the dry leaf mold underfoot. A squirrel scolds at you from a high branch as you pass underneath, and a raven greets you raucously.

Ahead of you now you spy a tree among trees: a towering blue spruce, a magnificent specimen, tall and symmetrical and thickly grown. You walk toward it, drawn irresistibly by its beauty and majesty. Coming up to it, you stretch out a hand to touch it. As your fingers make contact with its needles, you feel a surge of power pass up your arm and into your body — and suddenly you are inside the tree, you are one with it. Your torso stretches up and up to fit the tall trunk of the tree. Your blood vessels are one with its vascular system. Your nervous system extends into all the tree's branches, into every branchlet and every needle, and down into its roots, which seem to be growing out of your feet. As you become aware of them, the roots begin to grow longer, spreading wider and reaching deeper into the earth, sending out new rootlets as they go. Down, down they probe, through the moist and pebbly soil, absorbing nutrients and water — down to the firm, supporting bedrock. You can feel the heat below the bedrock, where the mantle slowly swirls, warmed by the hot, beating heart of Earth. All this you draw up through your roots — this fertile, nourishing, warm, throbbing Earth energy. You feel it rise up through your trunk, then outward into your branches, your branchlets, your needles.

DRINK IN THE
HOT, BRILLIANT
ENERGY OF THE
SUN



Now you are aware of another pressure on your needles, a pressure from outside. You recognize it. The energy of the Sky is trying to enter into you. You open yourself to it, and your needles drink in the hot, brilliant energy of the Sun ...the insistent push of wind.. .the crackling jolt of lightning. This energy too spreads through your tree body —from needles, to branchlets, to branches, into your trunk, up to your topmost tip and down into your roots. The two energies mingle in you — the rich, warm, throbbing Earth energy and the brash, insistent, crackling Sky energy. You send some of the Sky energy down into the Earth, and broadcast some of the Earth energy out to the Sky. You throb and crackle-throb and crackle-throb and crackle. You are the tree, a conduit between Earth and Sky.

Now you become aware that your roots are entwined with the roots of other trees (take hands here), that the branches of other trees are brushing your branches. You open your eyes and find that you are but one tree in a grove of trees, all warmed by the same sun, all rooted in the same earth.

* * * * *

Take the hands of your neighbors on either side and close your eyes. You are still one tree in a grove of trees, your roots intertwined, your branches overlapping. Tree sap still courses through your vascular system, carrying the throbbing Earth energy up from your roots and out through your needles; carrying the crackling Sky energy throughout your body and down to your roots. But something outside you pulls at your awareness now, something it seems you left behind. You remember that there is a wider world than this grove: a human world full of human tasks and human pleasures. You feel a desire to return to it. Gently you pull your feet free of the tree's roots (Drop hands here.) Your elongated torso slowly shrinks down to its usual size.... You feel a brief sensation of compression, and then a sensation of release... You find yourself standing next to a tall spruce tree in a sun-dappled wood. You remember making your meandering way to this tree, and you look for the path your feet scuffed up through dusty leaf mold. Finding it, you begin retracing your steps ...under the dark canopy of leaves ...past the clumps of tall ferns ... catching the sounds of the scolding squirrel and the raven... You reach the place where you entered the woods. Now you begin to hear the sounds of the real world around you. Listen to them.... Become aware of your familiar human body... Feel your breath passing in and out of your nostrils as you breathe. Feel the pleasure of physical movement as you stretch your arms over your head higher ...and down again at your sides... Now open your eyes as one of a community of people.



THE MEMORY TREE

BY RANDI HENDRICKSON
(RUADH)

Many years ago, in a time when memory was young, a woman lived with her children in a little cottage on the edge of a great forest. This woman was not the prettiest of women, nor was she the smartest. But she was very happy living on the edge of the forest raising her children and tending her little gardens.

Each and every day of every season, she and her children walked in the forest and talked with the trees, animals and birds that made this their home. And as they walked, the woman would gather the herbs and plants that she used in cooking and healing and she taught her children the wonders of nature.

For many years she worked in the little gardens by her cottage and walked in the forest and was happy. Her children had long since grown to adulthood and moved into the village to raise their own families. And still, the woman stayed in the cottage and cared for the plants, trees, birds and animals that inhabited this wondrous place.

She walked the well-known paths of the forest, speaking to all that lived there and listening to their wisdom. The slightest breeze brought words of wonder and delight to her heart. The colors of autumn leaves in the forest were as bright and dramatic as the flowers of springtime. The summers brought welcome sunshine and warmth and thunderstorms that left the air crackling and sweet smelling. Even the snows of winter, which were never overly harsh, told her their secrets. As with all things in the cycle of life, she knew the winters to be as important as the summers because they brought a

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*SHE'S BEEN A
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FOLKLORE, TREES,
BIRDS, WEATHER,
STORYTELLING,
PAINTING AND
GARDENING.*



Ruadh



time of rest and the promise of the spring to come. During the cold and quiet of winter or the highest heats of summer, she stayed close to her cottage and read from her small store of books.

The woman's grandchildren and the other village children would often come to the cottage to hear her tell the old stories. They would clap their hands in delight when she told of the turtle that outsmarted the villagers who wanted to make him into soup. The birds in the trees would puff up with pride when she told how Raven got his black wings, and the trees themselves would lean in close to hear the story of why some trees lose their leaves in winter and why others stayed green all throughout the year.

Despite all the beauties and wonders of the forest around her, she began spending more and more time at her little cottage and less and less time in the forest. There was always so much work to be done. There were many ill or injured animals that needed care. The gardens must be tended if there was to be enough food for the winter. The cottage was always in need of repairs and there were healing teas and ointments to prepare for the villagers.

Each day, the children would come by to hear a story, or the creatures of the forest would come to visit, or the trees would bend their branches and gently tap the window glass whispering to her of the glories of the forest. Yet, more and more often, she declined, "Too much to do today! Perhaps tomorrow." she would say. And each day they would return, only to hear the same response from her.

After a while, the children stopped coming to visit, and the birds and animals no longer came to see her. Even the trees no longer whispered to her as they tapped their branches on the windows of the cottage. The winds still blew and the birds still sang and the seasons still passed, but the woman didn't notice them the way she used to. As each season passed, she noticed them less and less. She was always too busy.

The woman did notice that she no longer felt as happy as she once was. There was emptiness inside her ...something was missing. Deep in her heart she knew what was missing, but she didn't know how to get it back. She missed her friends in the forest - the trees and the birds and the animals. But try as she might, she could no longer hear the trees whispering, and the bird song no longer told her the old stories. The sound in the trees was just the wind blowing through the leaves and branches and although the birdsong was still sweet, she could no longer understand it.

She began taking longer and longer walks in the forest listening to the wind in the trees and the birds singing their songs and the animals calling to each other. But still, she felt that emptiness inside her heart.

One morning near the end of winter, she awoke with such a deep sadness and such a deep longing, that she decided to spend the day in the forest. So, she fed all of the animals in her care, bundled up in her warmest winter clothing and with a small pack on her back she set off into the forest. She walked and walked for hours. Sometimes she would stop for a while and close her eyes and listen to the sounds of the trees and birds and animals. The longer she walked, the more she felt drawn to something... something deeper in the woods...as if something were calling her. On and on she walked, up hills and down hills, deeper and deeper into the forest. The path she walked was no longer familiar to her. She had never been so far into the great forest!

...SHE FELT THAT
EMPTINESS INSIDE
HER HEART.



Then, near sunset and exhausted from her long walk, she looked up to see a crooked tree standing alone on top of a rocky cliff above the slow moving river. She felt her heart leap with excitement! It was a steep climb, but finally, the woman made it to the top of the cliff and was able to see the tree close up. The sight was well worth the effort she'd made to reach it! The tree was old, very old and its trunk was larger across than the woman was tall and it was bent from wind and weather and age. Despite the chill in the air and the patches of snow still on the ground, many of the branches wore flowers of white or pink or palest blue. Some branches were already in full leaf, while others had only the tiniest of new green leaves and still others bore leaves of autumn gold. Some branches were heavy with large nuts, and from others hung plump berries. There were branches that held dried and withered fruits and branches that were as bare as winter. It was as if this tree was made up of every kind of tree that had every lived and carried every season within its many branches!

The warmth and light of the sun was rapidly leaving the sky and the woman knew she needed to find shelter for the night...but she was reluctant to leave this wonderful tree. With the approaching darkness, she was worried that she'd get lost in the forest, so she gathered as many sticks and broken branches as she could find and built a fire for warmth and light. From the light of the fire, she saw that there was a large hollow at the base of the old tree – just large enough for the woman to curl up into for the night. So, she wrapped herself up in the thin blanket from her pack and crawled into the hollow. For the first time in many, many months, the woman felt happy – warm from the fire and snuggled safe inside the tree.

She closed her eyes and slowly felt herself sinking...sinking...sinking into the tree...until she became the tree. She felt her legs and feet changing into roots that reached deep down into the rich brown earth. Her roots twined around each other and around stones and rocks that were buried deep in the ground. She felt and heard the slow, deep thrumming heartbeat of the earth vibrating through her and a profound sense of peace and belonging came over her.

The woman, who was now the tree, could feel the water and food from the soil rising up into her from her thousands of little rootlets. Slowly up her roots it traveled... up, up into her trunk and onward into her arms that had become branches, reaching high into the air. On her outstretched arms and fingers she felt the touch of tiny feet as squirrels climbed up her torso to snatch away a mouthful of nuts and songbirds landed to carry away a berry or two or snuggle into a nest full of birdlings who squawked for more food.

A strong breeze then blew through her arms and she felt some of the nuts and berries shake loose to fall down over the edge of the cliff and splash into the river. She felt herself drawn into one of those nuts. The waters swept her along, the currents pushing her here and there until suddenly a fish swallowed her! Now, she was the fish swimming powerfully through the water, leaping and diving joyfully along with the current of the river, until, finally, she emerged into the sea and joined hundreds of other fishes in their dance among the waves.

From above, a hawk swooped down and captured her in its strong claws. The hawk flew up into the branches of a tree to eat its catch. As the hawk dined, the woman felt her fish self now becoming the hawk. Then, away she flew, up high into the air, pick-

SUDDENLY A FISH
SWALLOWED HER!



ing up the air currents and calmly gliding along for miles over the trees of the forest, over valleys...across the hills and mountains. Circling, circling, she flew and looked down upon the earth so far beneath her. So small it seemed and so distant! Onward she lazily flew, back to the cliff to land in the heights of the old and crooked tree.

Suddenly, she was no longer the hawk, but the mouse that scurried with fright into the hollow of the tree when the hawk shadow passed over. The woman felt herself leaving the mouse body and flowing back into the tree, into the trunk and roots and branches.

All the voices of all the trees and wild things of the forest - of the whole world - were brought to her in the freshening winds and the light rain that had begun to fall. The voices of distant places and distant times were carried to her through her roots, and her own heart beat in time with the deep, slow heartbeat of the earth.

For many, many years she had stood in this place, growing first from a tiny, fallen seed. She remembered each and every season that had passed - from the long sleepy winters and the awakening springs to the hot dry summers and the fullness of every autumn. She remembered the storms that brought the welcome rain and lightning that cleansed the air. Sometimes the lightning storms brought fires that burned away trees that had long since passed on. But the fires also took trees that had only begun their lives. Although the fires were destructive, they left behind a richness that nourished the earth and encouraged new growth. She also remembered every bird that had nested in her heights and every creature that had taken shelter from harsh weather beneath her sturdy branches. Each had touched her and left behind a part of themselves, just as a part of her went with them when they traveled on.

She now knew that this tree...that all trees...were a part of everything, connected to everything. Every bird and animal and plant and person that now lived...or had ever lived...contained within themselves a part of the trees of this earth.

With this realization in her mind, her roots shrank and shrank until they became legs and feet. Her many branches dwindled down and became her two arms and hands. As she opened her eyes, it was to find the first light of dawn creeping into the hollow of the tree.

Had she slept then? Had she only dreamed of being the tree and fish and hawk and mouse?

She smiled as she realized that it didn't matter if it was a dream or if it had really happened. Her heart was full from the lessons she had learned during her adventures.

With only the slightest thought, she could hear the trees whispering their secrets to her once again and she could share in the stories told by the birds and the animals in the forest. She never again wanted to lose the precious gift this beautiful old tree had given to her.

The telling of this story is done. But this story will go on, as long as trees grow and rivers run.

HAD SHE ONLY
DREAMED OF
BEING THE TREE
AND FISH AND
HAWK AND
MOUSE?



THE SEER'S PATH

THE NATURE SPIRITS - PART 4 OF 4

BY C. LEIGH MCGINLEY & MAURO BRUNO

[Ed. Note: The Henge of Keltria Correspondence Course is intended to assist members of the Henge to improve their understanding and practice of Keltrian Druidism. This is the last of four parts of Lesson VI of the Henge of Keltria Correspondence Course.]

ANCIENT DRUIDS AND THE NATURE SPIRITS

The classical Greek writer Strabo (c. 63BC to AD21) tells us that the Ovates (or Seers) were concerned with “natural philosophy,” while the Druids were concerned with both natural and moral philosophy. This indicates a knowledge of the natural world that certainly goes beyond the superficial, and we can see from the Celtic sources that the ancient Druids and *Fili* (poets) called upon the assistance of the Nature Spirits in many of their magical endeavors. One such working we have already seen in The Song of Amairgin.

We shall return to Amairgin to see another example of his skill in communicating with the natural world and the spirits inherent in it. The Sons of Mil had gone out beyond the ninth wave to await their battle with the Tuatha de Danann. The Druids of the Tuatha de Danann are said to have raised a great wind with their enchantments and so drove the Sons of Mil in their ships far from the shore. Amairgin countered the damaging Druid wind with an invocation to the Land of Ireland:

*“I invoke the land of Ireland
 Much-coursed be the fertile sea,
 Fertile be the fruit-strewn mountain,
 Fruit-strewn be the showery wood,
 Showery be the river of water-falls,
 Of water-falls be the lake of deep pools,
 Deep-pooled be the hill-top well,
 A well of tribes be the assembly,
 An assembly of the kings be Tara,
 Tara be the hill of the tribes,
 The tribes of the Sons of Mil,
 Of Mil of the ships, the barks,
 Let the lofty bark be Ireland,
 Lofty Ireland, darkly sung,
 An incantation of great cunning;
 The great cunning of the wives of Bres,
 The wives of Bres of Buaighe;
 The great Lady Ireland,
 Eremon hath conquered her,*



C. Leigh
McGinley

C. LEIGH
MCGINLEY
(TOPAZOWL) HAS
BEEN A MEMBER OF
KELTRIA SINCE
1991. SHE IS A
RING OF THE OAK
INITIATE, AND IS
THE CHIEF DRUID
OF GARRÁN AN
EICH ÓRBHUÍ.





*Ir, Eber have invoked for her.
I invoke the land of Ireland.”*

Immediately after this invocation, a tranquil calm came to them on the sea. Amairgin had invoked the Goddess of Ireland and her spirits to help them against the enchanted winds. Amairgin also eventually sang to increase the fish in the creeks.

Techniques that the ancient Druids used for divination and prophecy while working with the Nature Spirits are evident from the Celtic literature. The *tarbh feis*, or bull feast, is one such working. In this working, the Druid ate the flesh and drank the broth of a freshly killed bull, wrapped himself in its hide and lay down within it to obtain a problem-solving vision. It is described in *The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel* as being used to determine the future king. It is said that whomever the sleeper saw in his sleep during this incubatory ritual would be king, and the sleeper would perish if he uttered a falsehood. This ancient Druidic ritual had its Scottish equivalent in the *tarhairm*, where the diviner wrapped himself in a newly slaughtered ox-hide and lay behind a waterfall to seek the answer in both the roar of the water and the spirit of the slain animal.

The ritual incubation of *imbas forosna* (literally, “inspiration of tradition”) called for the cooperation of animal spirits as well. It has been suggested that the *tarbh feis* itself may be a form of *imbas forosna*. The meat of an animal was also employed in this technique, as described in *Cormac’s Glossary*. The poet begins by chewing a piece of flesh from a red pig, dog, or cat. Then, putting it on the flagstone behind the door, he pronounces an invocation over it and offers it to his spirits. He then “calls his spirits to him and if they do not reveal the matter immediately he sings incantations over his two palms and calls the spirits again to keep his sleep undisturbed.” He “lays his palms over his cheeks and so falls asleep in this posture.” In ancient practice, it was impossible to eat or use parts of an animal without also communing with its spirit.

The seventeenth-century historian, Keating, writes about the divinatory habits of Druids from the oral tradition. He mentions Druids “looking at their own images in water, or gazing on the clouds of heaven, or keep listening to the noise of the wind or the chattering of birds.” Diodorus also writes of the Celtic practice of ornithomancy, the observation of the flight of birds. Weather-watching was also a common form of divination. *Neldoracht* or cloud watching is described in *The Seige of Druim Damgaire*, where Druids from both sides watch the sky and the weather closely for information which will determine the day’s actions.

The Gaelic method of augury or *frith* was still performed by gifted people until relatively recently. Fasting, on the first Monday of the quarter, at sunrise, with bare head and feet, special prayers to welcome Mary and Brigid and to welcome the *frith* were said by the seer while walking deosil around the household fire three times. With closed or blindfolded eyes, the *frithir* then went to the threshold of the house with prayers to grant the request which occasioned the *frith*. Then, with open eyes, he or she looked ahead to the outdoors and noted everything that he or she saw. The signs are called *rathadach* (lucky) or *rosadach* (unlucky). This is an excellent example of employing the natural world and its spirits to divine the future. A preserved rhyme about seeing horses while performing the *frith* goes as follows:

DIODORUS ALSO
WRITES OF THE
CELTIC PRACTICE
OF
ORNITHOMANCY,
THE
OBSERVATION OF
THE FLIGHT OF
BIRDS



*“A white horse for land,
A grey horse for sea,
A bay horse for burial,
A brown horse for sorrow.”*

Of course, other animals would have other meanings; for instance, approaching birds would indicate news, or a duck would indicate safety for sailors.

Among the Celts, a great number of omens were taken from birds (though other animals could give omen as well). There are two scraps of early Irish folklore in a well-known codex concerning the use of the raven and the wren for omens, and some believe that the ancient Druids may have domesticated these birds just for this purpose.

Sacred herbs and their spirits were used for healing and magic. We are told that Miach healed Nuada’s arm (actually causing the flesh to re-grow) through the use of what seems to be an herbal plaster and an accompanying incantation. Lug mac Ethlenn sang Cúchulainn to sleep for three days and three nights so that his wounds might heal, and then dropped healing herbs and grasses into the sores while Cúchulainn slept. Healers are also described as dropping plants and herbs into the wounds of Ferdia.

Many more examples of the Celtic rapport with spirits of the natural world as well as the methods used to request the assistance of those spirits are available in the recommended reading below.

MODERN DRUIDS AND NATURE SPIRITS

The modern Druid also works closely with Nature Spirits. However, some methods that the ancient Druids used to enlist the aid of spirits would offend our modern sensibilities and conflict with our morality. After all, the world has changed, and so we also must evolve and adapt our practices to suit these modern times. Certainly we would not sacrifice two white bulls in order to harvest mistletoe, or wrap ourselves in a bloody bull’s hide in order to prophesy! Keltrian Druids believe that all life is sacred and should not be taken without deliberation or regard. Druids no longer believe that blood sacrifice is necessary to petition the Gods or to gain the assistance of a Nature Spirit.

Still, one might use the methods utilized by the ancient Druids, if not the specific tools. Certainly we can call upon the Nature Spirits to assist us in our lives, just as Amairgin did in ancient times, and continue to develop good rapport with the land where we live.

One way that Keltrian Druids develop and continue good rapport with the Nature Spirits is to invite them to our rituals, along with the Ancestors and the Gods. The invocation can be as simple or as poetic as the Druid or Grove wishes it to be. It can include spirits specific to your area by name, and/or spirits of nature in general. Many times an invocation to the Nature Spirits, besides taking care to include various general spirits, will include specific spirits appropriate to the working at hand or the season celebrated. For instance, at Samhain, one might be especially careful to invoke the Spirit of the Raven by name, because it is an animal that is sacred to the Morrigan, whom we honor with the Dagda at this time.



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NECESSARY





In addition to invocation, offerings to the spirits of the land and the Goddess Sovereignty, at a specific place designated for such, help to keep an individual Druid or an entire working Grove in favor with their particular area. A stream or pond, or even the base of a special tree, can be a wonderful place to designate for offerings to the Land. Some traditional Irish offerings to the Land Spirits that you might consider are pouring a few drops of whiskey on the ground, or milk, or perhaps leaving a bit bread.

Observation of the flight of birds, cloud watching, and weather or wind divination are all traditional Druidic methods that may still be used by the modern Seer. Many modern Druids have devised their own “system” to read such omens, based on knowledge of the normal patterns of their own area of the world and deviations from normal, as well as Celtic knowledge of the particular pattern, wind, or bird behavior. There are fragments and hints in some of the old literature (and remaining Celtic folklore) that could be incorporated into one’s system of modern Druidic divination. Ogham was one classification system used by the ancient Druids, a way to keep enormous amounts of knowledge straight in the Druid’s memory for such auguries and divinations. Ogham can still be used in this manner, and this is one of many reasons that some modern Druids consider the study of ogham imperative.

But what of techniques like the *tarbh feis* and *imbais forosna*? These methods use what moderns might consider some rather distasteful means. We must either forget them, or change them. Abandoning such techniques would be a shame and perhaps a great loss. Changing them isn’t that difficult once the Druid understands the intent behind the action. For instance, Golden Horse Grove has performed a variation of the *tarhairm* with great success, using a red Vellux ® blanket in place of the ox hide. It is likely that part of the effect was to recreate the individual’s time in the womb in a multi-sensory way. The child in the womb is the Ultimate Seer, since, having seen nothing he needs to see all. That pure desire enables him to see what others, in the distractions of their post-birthed days, cannot. This is an example of the method remaining true to the intent of the original Druids, but simply altering the tool slightly in order to abide by our modern sensibilities.

The Keltrian Druid studies and uses herbs and other plants for healing and magic, taking care to leave any plants used for gathering intact to continue the species from year to year. A good rule of thumb is to only take one-third of the plant for your use, leaving the remaining two-thirds of the plant to grow and propagate. Always thank the plant for its sacrifice and leave an offering in return. If you cannot gather, grow, and/or prepare your own plants (and some people can’t, for various reasons), then it is acceptable to purchase necessary oils and essences from a reputable herbalist.

Keltrian Druids may still have a totem animal or special Nature Spirit to work with, and Druids who are especially attuned to Nature Spirits sometimes choose their Druid name after such totems, plant or animal. Oftentimes the name will be in the Gaelic, in keeping with tradition.

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CONCLUSION

Celtic tradition offers us a wealth of information concerning Nature Spirits and the Druidic rapport with these spirits that share the worlds with us, both seen and unseen.

In this lesson, we have briefly examined the traditional Celtic beliefs about the Land and Nature Spirits, and perhaps have come to some realization of how important the ancients viewed their relationship with the land around them. Now that we have gained some understanding of that aspect of Druidic practice, we can apply our understanding of the ancient methods to our own modern practice, continuing the tradition in a manner by which our ancestors would approve.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Celtic Sacred Landscapes by Nigel Pennick

The Druid Animal Oracle by Philip and Stephanie Carr-Gomm

The Encyclopedia of Celtic Wisdom by John and Caitlin Matthews

Celtic Tree Mysteries: Secrets of the Ogham by Steve Blamires

A Druid's Herbal for the Sacred Earth Year by Ellen Evert Hopman

The Celtic Seers' Sourcebook edited by John Matthews

Animal Speak by Ted Andrews *

* - *This book is included here for animal lore that is general and not specifically Celtic, as such lore can sometimes be especially useful to the Druid living in America.*



Nione

Nione has been a nurse for 30 years. She is a Master Herbalist and a Certified Holistic Health Practitioner. She provides herbal health consulting as well as makes herbal preparations on an individual basis in the Adirondack Park of New York. She may be contacted through the Henge Office.

DANDELION

BY NIONE

Beltaine marks the beginning of the light half of the year, it is a time of great energy and renewal. What better time to rejuvenate and cleanse our bodies and our minds after our long winters rest. I can think of no better herb for this than the Dandelion.

The Dandelion, the bright little yellow flower that most feel is the bane of a perfect lawn. I say let them grow! What could be more beautiful than a field filled with the bright yellow heads bobbing joyfully in the wind or the joy on a child's face when they blow the light fluffy seed heads into the wind letting the "fairies fly".

The Dandelion majickly brings joy and gaiety to the heart and soul. It is a wonderful plant for our Mother Earth as well, as it is enriching to the soil and is found in almost every community on the planet. There are at least 100 different species of Dandelion around the world and they are originally native to Greece. Dandelion or *Taraxacum Officinale* in Latin is one of the Sunflower family (Composite). It is easily recognizable by its shiny toothed edged green leaves forming in a rosette near the ground, they have a stem 5-6 inches in length and each stem bears a single many petaled globed shaped yellow flower. When the stem is broken it will ooze a sticky milk white bitter substance. It can be found growing almost anywhere.

Most parts of the Dandelion can be used. The leaves when young are eaten raw in

salads or cooked as a delicious side dish of greens. The flower heads make a most excellent wine. I would suggest that the leaves be soaked in salted water for about 30 minutes twice to remove the bitter taste. Then simply saute in a little olive oil with some garlic until tender and enjoy. As a food source Dandelions contain more vitamin A (7000U) than carrots(1275U) and are extremely rich in vitamins B, C, and calcium. Due to their bitter nature eating Dandelions before a meal will greatly stimulate the appetite making them a wonderful addition to the diet of those who are ill or malnourished.

Dandelions have an opening and cleansing effect on the body, often being used as a diuretic. Due to their high potassium content they will rid the body of excess water and toxins while maintaining or increasing the amount of potassium in the blood stream. Herbalists routinely use Dandelion to cleanse and purge the gallbladder, the liver and the blood. They are also excellent for flushing and healing the urinary tract. It has also been discovered that with prolonged use of this safe and wholesome plant will aide those who suffer form rheumatism.

Because of the high vitamin and mineral content they are a marvelous spring tonic ridding the body of unwanted toxins built up over the long slow months of winter while giving us most needed nutrients. Dandelion has also long been use for afflictions of the skin such as eczema and scurvy. Used as a tea either internally or as a wash it is effective.

The most of the plant can be used from the flowers to the roots, the flowers as a wine, leaves as tea and a food source and the roots are mostly used in medicine. Before harvesting this or any herb, make sure that the area has not been poisoned with weed killer, insecticide or chemical fertilizer as these compounds will be found in the plant as well. Also never harvest herbs that are growing close to a road or highway as they will be poisoned by the exhaust from the local traffic and contain high amounts of carbon dioxide.

You can make a simple infusion of the fresh leaves or roots by chopping finely and using one cup of herb to one cup of boiling water. Let this steep for ½ hour and sweeten to taste with honey. This infusion can be drunk either hot or cold. The same infusion can be used as a skin wash, minus the honey.

Dandelion's gender is masculine, its element is air and its ruling planet is Jupiter. Jupiter rules over the liver, gallbladder, spleen, arteries, kidneys and food assimilation. Healing rituals done to help those suffering from ailments of the blood, lungs, heart and liver should contain Dandelion in their herbal mixtures. Dandelion will also aide in rituals for relief of depression as it gladdens the heart. Have you ever seen the look on a child's face when they pick a large bouquet for Mom, or the look of love and joy on the face of Mom upon having received such a heart felt gift.

There are a few rules when harvesting any herb. First, please sit among the patch of herbs quietly and exchange energies with them, let them know your need. Never harvest any plant without the permission of the spirit within. Most plants are happy to help you if they know your intent. Herbs are more effective as a medicine when they are harvested willingly. If you receive a negative response, thank the plant and simply move on to another patch and start again. Take neither the Grandmother (oldest) nor the young if you expect them to be there next year. Harvest only middle growth. A

DANDELION'S
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good rule of thumb is when you leave a patch it should look as if you have never been there. Harvest only what you need. Too many times have I seen or heard of people with little knowledge or respect harvest the entire patch for the dollars they will receive. An example of this is American Ginseng which is now on the endangered plant list and near extinction.

I have learned 8 principals for most excellent harvesting and I list them as follows:

1. Harvest only abundance
2. Exchange energy
3. Plant seeds
4. Become intimately aware of the life force in all things
5. Have fun
6. Hurt no one
7. Come from the heart
8. Dance and sing!

*And as always..... Walk with Wisdom
Happy Herbing!*

Dandelion Wine

- 1 qt. dandelion blossoms
- 4 qt. water
- ½ c. tepid water
- 1 yeast cake or pkg.
- 1 lb. Seedless raisins
- 3 lbs. Sugar
- 1 lemon
- 1 orange

Measure a quart of the blossoms, **DO NOT USE THE STEMS**. Put them into a large sauce pan with the water and boil for 30 minutes. Strain into a large pan or crock and when cool add yeast, sugar that has been dissolved in the tepid water, lemon and the orange cut into small pieces.

Stir everyday for 2 weeks, then strain and let settle for 1 day, Then strain carefully and bottle into clean bottles and seal. Let sit at least six months before drinking.

AMERICAN
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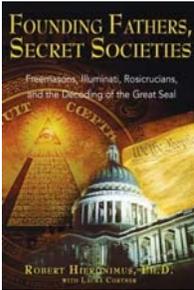


THE DRUID'S PATH

REVIEW: FOUNDING FATHERS, SECRET SOCIETIES: FREEMASONS, ILLUMINATI, ROSICRUCIANS, AND THE DECODING OF THE GREAT SEAL

BY ROBERT HIERONIMUS, PH.D

Review by Karl Schlotterbeck.



Certainly this is a book for anyone interested in American history or in the various secret societies that may have had an influence on America's founding. Dr. Hieronimus uses the development of the Great Seal and the relatively recent appearance of the reverse side of the seal as signifying a positive change in America's destiny.

Beginning with the way the Iroquois Confederacy was used as a model for the development of this country, he writes, "This rich Native American democratic tradition was the real source for the new Americans' distinctive political ideals. Indeed, centuries before Columbus arrived in the New World, democracy was alive and well, just waiting for the Founding Fathers to discover it." Also mentioned are pre-Columbian visitors to North America and legends of Masonic concepts and practices existing among Native groups – including the speculation of one writer that this may have come through Druids.

In his historical context of his subject, he includes the development of Freemasonry, Rosicrucians, various Illuminati groups, along with biographical information about Washington, Franklin, Jefferson (including their astrological charts) and lesser known players.

Of particular interest to Hieronimus is how both sides of the Great Seal were designed but only the one side was ever struck – the side we usually see with eagle, arrows, stars, etc. The reverse side (with pyramid and eye-in-triangle floating over it) was never struck and did not even come to public display until it was put on the one-dollar bill in the 1930's. Fundamentalists have objected to the design on the reverse with paranoid ideation linking (in their imagination) the pyramid with such nefarious organizations as the United Nations, Zionism, NATO, Communism, taxes and secret societies.

Hieronimus, if I read him accurately, makes a more indirect connection between the design and these groups, giving the design a much deeper and archetypal meaning that speaks of the Founding Fathers' dual vision for this country. The two sides, as he sees it, indicate their vision that included both physical and spiritual destinies. To that end, Hieronimus analyzes the symbols found on both sides, including the Latin phrases (which contain both Pagan and Christian origins). For example, he relates the pyramid to the sacred mountain and thereby the Great Mother, the floating eye to the Eye of Horus and the polestar, and the number 13 as representing transition - not just the number of states. The reverse side of the seal is more than a sign for some time-limited society; it is an archetypal image pointing to our self-realization and rebirth.

Further, Hieronimus asserts that the rise in interest in the reverse side of the seal during the last century paralleled the rise of feminine consciousness and may be "initiating a higher level of integration in the American consciousness. . ."

[THE GREAT SEAL] IS AN ARCHETYPAL IMAGE POINTING TO OUR SELF-REALIZATION AND REBIRTH.



Great Seal of the United States—Reverse

In Appendices to the main body of the work, Hieronimus also includes various theories about the age and meaning of the pyramids; and a discussion of the nature of talismans.

On a personal note, I knew Robert Hieronimus when, in the late 1960's and early 1970's, he taught classes in symbology and was well-known in Baltimore for his symbolic murals and other paintings. His interest and expertise in symbols is one of the primary cornerstones of his work.

Founding Fathers, Secret Societies is a rich feast of history, esoteric movements, symbology and psycho-sociology.

Founding Fathers, Secret Societies: Freemasons, Illuminati, Rosicrucians, and the Decoding of the Great Seal, by Robert Hieronimus, Ph.D., with Laura Cortner. Published by Destiny Books, 2006. **Recommended.**

Grove Reports are available in
the Members Edition.

THE HENGE OF KELTRIA

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DRUIDISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY™

KELTRIAN DRUIDISM IS A SPIRITUAL PATH DEDICATED TO REVERING THE NATURE SPIRITS, HONORING THE ANCESTORS, AND WORSHIPPING THE DEITIES OF OUR ANCIENT IRISH ANCESTORS. THE HENGE OF KELTRIA IS A NONPROFIT RELIGIOUS CORPORATION DEDICATED TO PROVIDING INFORMATION, TRAINING, AND NETWORKING TO THOSE WHO PRACTICE OR WHO ARE INTERESTED IN KELTRIAN DRUIDISM, DRUIDISM IN GENERAL, AND THE EVOLUTION OF MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT THROUGH A CELTIC IRISH CONTEXT.

KELTRIAN DRUID BELIEFS

*We believe in **Divinity** as it is manifest in the Pantheon. There are several valid theistic perceptions of this Pantheon.*

*We believe that **nature** is the embodiment of the Gods and Goddesses.*

*We believe that **Natural Law** reflects the will of the Gods and Goddesses.*

*We believe that **all life is sacred** and should neither be harmed nor taken without deliberation or regard.*

*We believe in the **immortality of the spirit**.*

*We believe that **our purpose** is to gain wisdom through experience.*

*We believe that **learning** is an ongoing process and should be fostered at all ages.*

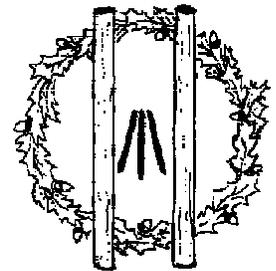
*We believe that **morality** should be a matter of personal conviction based upon self respect and respect for others.*

*We believe that **evil** is not a matter of inheritance but of intent, therefore actions are not in themselves evil. Rather, it is through the **intent behind actions** that evil can manifest.*

*We believe in the **relative nature of all things**, that nothing is absolute, and that all things, even the Gods and Goddesses, have their dark sides.*

*We believe that **individuals** have the right to pursue knowledge and wisdom through his or her chosen path.*

*We believe in a **living religion** able to adapt to a changing environment. We recognize that our beliefs may undergo change as our tradition grows.*



Keltrian Druid Sigil