



# A TRIBUTE



**Aloysius Purcell** was born in north Dublin and grew up in the midst of a thriving, piping household. His father, Leo, played both uilleann and highland pipes and instructed the latter at the Dublin School of Music. His father played in the St. Lawrence O'Toole Pipe band, Rush, Co. Dublin. Al had instruction early on on the piob mhór, or Highland pipes, as pictured here at about age 4.

The school of music also had uilleann pipes under Leo Rowsome, one of Ireland's all-time, great pipers, teachers and pipe makers. He was influenced by other students particularly Peadar Broe. Al played a concert pitch D set of pipes that were made by Leo Rowsome, his primary instructor from the age of 11.

Al would eventually become renowned for his mastery of slow airs. Al's brother (also named Leo) recalls a story of Al's youth indicating it was may not have always been so. Al's dad would leave the room with his pipes, Al would pick up Leo's pipes and start to play furiously, provoking Leo Sr. to roar ..."Forget da fireworks...get back to da tune".

Al eventually emigrated to the US in 1957, where he served in the US Air Force in Korea, graduated from University of Michigan and settled in to life in the Detroit area.

Al worked at General Motors Tech Center as a wood model maker, a skill that would definitely come in handy. GM to this day retains the honor of having hosted the repair work on more sets of bagpipes than any other auto maker in the world, foreign or domestic. Al was active in Union affairs working as a representative of the UAW Skilled Trades and was well respected for his knowledge and sense of fairness.



He married Ann O'Brien (first generation, Co. Clare), and they had three girls, Patti, Maureen and Aline. His daughters were accomplished dancers and Al would frequently be called upon to be judge at the Feis. Al was very kind and encouraging to young kids in competition, but had no patience for fools of any age who played "Irish" music without the respect it deserved.

Al had a great passion for the pipes which could occasionally test the patience of the non-piping family members. Al had a great sense of humor and would refer to "the affliction" of piping as if it were an incurable disease.

Throughout the 70's Al taught the pipes and whistle out of his subterranean headquarters which also housed his reedmaking workshop. Among his early students were Terence and Brendan McKinney, Scott Heinzman, Roy Livingston and many others in the Detroit Area. In those days Irish music was not popular and Al was part of the network of people you could count on. Pipers passing through the

Midwest U.S. would make the Purcell household a stop for tutoring, or assistance with distressed instruments.

He was keenly interested in history, and when occasionally performing in public at local schools, he provided lessons in both history and the pipes.

Philosophically, Al believed that the pipes should take their place among the great music of the world and that they deserved better than a noisy pub. Al was a purist and really wasn't too keen on ensemble playing. He believed the pipes were best suited as a solo instrument and that airs were the highest form of music on the pipes, as piobaireacht is on the Highland pipes. Al excelled at playing airs, and was quick to inform pipers of a younger generation, many who grew up listening to slickly recorded supergroups at supersonic speeds, to slow down and learn the traditional airs.

Even so, he did occasionally play in groups and in public around town "for the craic", and did record with a group of musicians of who had emigrated from Belfast to Detroit in the 1970's called Pat's People. The group became close personal friends of the Purcell's and Al played on their second album "Some Say the Devil's Dead" where he can be heard playing the slow air "Lament for Owen Roe O'Neill".

Purcell was an early member of the Green Fields of America ensemble, led by Mick Moloney, and recorded two tracks for the 1983 Rounder album "Light Through the Leaves". Not surprisingly, those two tracks were slow airs, for which Al Purcell was especially well known, playing them with a haunting vibrancy where he can be heard to play the slow air "Tá Mé i'm colodh" (I am sleeping).

After his retirement from GM, with the family launched, Al was able to devote more of his time to teaching uilleann pipes and promoting traditional Irish music. Al led weekly piping classes at the Detroit CCÉ Branch which had a large following, Brian Clancy, Tom Donohue, Brendan O'Leary, Tom Kennedy, Tim Miller, Sean Gavin, Colleen Shanks and Tyler Duncan among the regulars. Tyler won the All-Ireland piping championship in the 12-15 age group, winning the Leo Rowsome Memorial Cup in 1999 and 2000. Pat Cannady, Isaac Alderson who won the 2002 senior All-Ireland competition on pipes, flute and whistle, and many others who had traveled through the Midwest always found a warm welcome at the Purcell household.



Al was humble about his talents and achievements and believed it was never to late to learn. Al returned to university and receive another degree at age 60. He had been a part of the instructor staff Willie Clancy Week, the Sligo Summer School, North Hero Vermont Piping school and the Mississippi piping event as well as a valued judge at the Midwest Fleadh.



Al's sudden death in 2000 left family, his many friends and the larger world piping scene at a deep loss. His many students, family and friends and fellow pipers will fondly recall Al through the legacy of music, stories and many pleasant memories.

This award is appropriately bestowed on Al and accepted by his wife Ann, whose support enabled Al to do what he did for so many people. Al has been described as "the last of the generation of gentleman pipers".

- Terence McKinney



WDET Celtic Fest , 1979



"Purcell became a linchpin in the Midwest for providing instruction and encouragement to younger musicians in the Irish tradition."  
-Paul Keating, CCÉ Chair



**ORIGINAL ANNOUNCEMENT:**

**It is a huge shock and with a heavy heart that we have learned of the sudden passing of Al Purcell, a prince among men and pipers. Al succumbed to a heart attack, Thursday, September 28th, 2000.**

Al was the very heart of traditional Irish music in Detroit and piping in particular for decades. The Purcell household was a stopping point for countless pipers through the years searching for reeds, advice and encouragement, all of which Al gave generously.

Al led a large piping class on Thursdays at the club and was in great spirits this last week. All appeared to be well and the Tuesday night before, he had students over the house for lessons.

Al was a student of the great [Leo Rowsome](#) in Dublin, and there are many pipers in the U.S. today who owe some or all of their success to Al, who was eager to offer his time and talent. I personally owe a great debt to Al for any ability and opportunity to play the pipes.

If you had the good fortune to meet Al, you know he was a gentleman and a class act. Our sincere condolences to Al's wife, Ann, daughters Patty, Maureen and Aline and their families. We will all miss Al very, very much.

*- Terence McKinney*

On Tuesday, October 3rd, 2000. Al was laid to rest at St. Clemens cemetery in Centerline, MI. Afterwards, a reception was held for the large numbers of people who had been in attendance at the services. There was a rare huge session with musicians young and old. A parting reminder of how many people Al had touched through his life and music.

**Ann Purcell, daughters Patty, Maureen, Aline and their families would like to thank all those who came to the celebration of Al's life and passing. The condolences, whether online or in person, were very touching and much appreciated. Thanks to the musicians who played at the funeral home, church service, burial site and ceilidh.**

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"The music was wonderful, something Al would have been proud of especially because of the blending of master musicians with students. If you have not had a chance, read some of the condolences, it is a must.

We were really lucky to have had Al in the Detroit area. You can see by the many comments that he has touched many around the world. It is truly a heartbreak to lose him so young. Thank you to all CCÉ members who attended the funeral and came to the funeral home."

*- Carolyn Brazzil, Crotty-Doran Branch CCÉ*

*The family suggests memorials to:*

Irish Pipers Club  
15 Henrietta St.  
Dublin 1, Ireland

Irish Heart of Autism  
Society  
Windsor, Ontario  
3600 Curry Ave.  
Windsor, Ontario N9E 2T6



## Condolences...

It was and still is a shock to learn that he is gone his friendship and encouragement will be missed by me and many T'was only Sunday he played for a project for Autistic Children in Windsor, Canada and I had the pleasure of holding a mike to his lovely set of Uilleann pipes as he rendered full justice to the "Lark in the Morning" while he soloed for us. He endeared himself to many people and in Ireland I'm been constantly asked, "where is the piper or did you not bring the piper with you??" at the sessions in Portumna and Kilfenora and Loughrea . Slan Al ta tu ar deis lamh de anois.

- *Justin Manning, Windsor*



I am saddened. I will miss him. I always looked forward to our chats when we met at CCÉ conferences and Fleadhs. He was in great shape at Celtic Fest.

- *Noel Rice, Chicago*

Please pass on to the Purcell family the sincere condolences of all in the Irish Pipe Band Association on the death of Al.

- *Brian Mac Mahon (Honorary Secretary), New Ross, Co. Wexford*

Al has left a lovely legacy behind him. Terence and Brendan will carry on the tradition as will many more the young folks Al nurtured through the years on his short sojourn. He will be sadly missed. I said an old prayer for Al last night that came out of me last night that hadn't occurred to me since Angela had passed on. Heartfelt condolences to Anne and the girls.

- *Séamus McKinney, Port Richey, FL*

Hello to all in Detroit. My name is Patrick Davey, piper with Irish traditional group Craobh Rua. Tom Kennedy has just contacted me with the devastating news of the untimely passing of Al Purcell. Words cannot adequately express how shocked and saddened I am to learn of the passing of such a wonderful person & musician. I had the great fortune to meet Al in Dublin in 1996 when we were both students on the Comhaltas Teaching Diploma course. It was indeed a privilege and a pleasure to meet Al - his charm and friendliness were appreciated by all who met him during that week and his obvious love and understanding for traditional Irish music were an inspiration not only to me but to many others too. I will have a Mass said here in Ireland for the repose of his soul - I'm sure the sound of the pipes is to be heard in heaven this evening. With every good wish to the Purcell family and to everyone touched by the passing of a truly gentleman piper.

- *Patrick Davey Belfast, Ireland*

May he play before God.

- *Dean Karres*

Our deepest condolences to Al's wife, Anne, and to all the family. He will be sadly missed. He played, taught and enjoyed great music but he also loved the craic. He was never too busy for that, wherever he was. I met Al many times, over the years, at the Willie Clancy Week in Miltown Malby where he taught at the Summer School. We always enjoyed a great chat. Busy though he was in that mad week in Co Clare, he was generous enough with his time and his talent to come to our little party and play. Yes, we will miss him.

- *Anne McCallum Ian Reid, Windsor*

It was with sincere regrets that I learnt today of the passing of Al Purcell. I met Al for the first time this year at Willie Week. I enjoyed a long conversation in the warm Clare sunshine with Al, and I immediately felt very comfortable in his company as he told me lots of stories about his piping exploits both in Ireland and America, playing Jimmy Cagney's pipes, having Leo Rowsome as a tutor. I intended to team up with Al later that night for a few tunes but got sidetracked in the wonderful musical madness that is Willie Week. I was to see Al once more that week and he came over and talked very naturally as if we were old friends. I am very sorry that I will not again have the opportunity to talk to this very warm and charming man. I suppose it illustrates the mark of the man that I am very sorry to hear of his passing having met him on just two occasions Ar dheis De go raibh a anam uasal.

- *Martin Preshaw*

Many times we have had the pleasure of sharing Al's company at the home of David and Tina Bowen. And as many times, we have had the distinct pleasure of listening to Al play his pipes. Often we have pondered the good fortune bestowed upon us to keep the company of such a gentle man and be blessed with the gift of his music. Our hearts feel his loss and feel for the loss to his family.

- *Rick and Gloria Jones Midland, MI*

I'm very sorry for Al's family and friends. He taught me a lot about music and the Irish spirit in the short time I lived in Detroit (1975-78). I was honored to bring him to the Indiana Fiddlers Gathering in Battle Ground, Indiana in 1980. Then life intervened and I didn't see Al again until a couple of years ago when he came to play in the Chicago area. I got to hear him and visit with him after the concert. I just missed him again at Chicago's Celtic Fest because I had my own booking that day. In fact, we were playing in the large place -- Grant Park on the lakefront. I'm very sorry that I missed seeing Al again. I know you all will miss him every day. May God's mercy help you through these difficult days.

- *Paul Tyler Chicago*

Dear Friends, My sincere condolences on the passing of Al Purcell. I was fortunate enough to meet Al on two occasions through the Southern California Irish Pipers' Club. He was very kind and helpful to me in sharing his many musical gifts, and I know that he has touched many lives in the uilleann piping community, and we are all better people for having known him. Ar dheis DŽ go raibh a anam d'lis.

- *Larry Dunn Los Angeles, CA*

It is with deep sorrow that I have heard the news of Al's passing. I met him a few times in Ireland and more recently at North Hero. I shared a delightful meal with him, his wife and other pipers and found him as always to be a gentleman. My condolences to the family.

-*Bob Gardiner. Toronto.*

I met Al at North Hero a while back and for the last two years I had direct contact with him because I helped to organize the North Hero event. What a wonderful man. This sad news breaks my heart. I had hoped to see Al again and again. Thanks for posting the pics and forwarding the condolence email because it helps me grieve for him, and I hope it comforts his family.

*-Laurie Franklin*

Dear Ann and family, This is hardly a proper condolence, but as I just found out about Al's passing by email and web, and I'm sitting here crying over the keyboard, if it's not proper, then at least it's heartfelt. Al's passing seems almost unbelievable to me because I can only imagine him as lively and full of passion for music, sharing his gifts with those around him. I feel so lucky to have known Al even a little bit, heard his music and his ideas. I am so, so sad to think that I won't see him again. And you must be hundreds of times sadder. Please let me extend this cybernetic hug and wish you love during your time of grief. Bless you all,  
*- Laurie Franklin.*

My sincerest condolences to Anne, Maureen, Patty, Aline, and all of Al's family. I will always remember him as a kindly mentor and a great friend. I will miss him terribly.  
*-Patrick Cannady*

I was numbed by the news as I'm sure you all were. Al was one of the nicest people that I ever knew. I heard last night from al's brother in Ireland. It's nice to have the picture of him. Best wishes  
*- Kevin Rowsome*

I am very sad to hear that Al has passed away. I first met Al in 1996 when he taught the first piping class I ever had, at Miltown. I liked him straight away, and it was great to hear his stories and knowledge about pipes and piping. In 1998 Al taught me in two classes in Miltown and at Tubbercurry. I learnt a great deal just by listening to Al talk ,apart from the actual piping lessons. I met up with Al this year at Miltown again. I think of Al as a kind of Zen master of the pipes in that he was interested in the philosophy that lay behind piping and why certain people became pipers. I will really miss him not being at Miltown and Tubbercurry, but I'll always carry my memories of him. He was an impressive man, a real gentleman and a fine piper. take care  
*- Thomas Johnson*

Dear Anne, Aline, Patty and Maureen, I'd just like to let you know how deeply saddened I am. The 'scene' in Detroit will never be the same without Al. Al's warm encouragement was always appreciated and I will keep it with me always. The music itself is beautiful and the personal associations that develop as a result of it are equally so. I will always remember Al and we will remember Al and all of you in our prayers. God bless you  
*- John Sands*

I guess it's typical of Al that he should be bringing people together even in his passing. You and I (Terence) met at the North American Comhaltas convention in Detroit many years ago, in the company of my teacher Chris Langan. You may remember rehemping every joint on my set for me! I'm still at it, God help me. I've bumped into Al many times since, and his presence was always a welcome reminder of a more unhurried approach to piping and to life, and a reminder of how important it is to remember those who have gone before us. He was a veritable encyclopedia of piping history, and laughingly told me the lads in Dublin called him the Missing Link. And so he was: a throwback to a more gentlemanly way of being in the world, and an essential source of piping history. He remembered everybody, including those he knew now: I last saw him at North Hero. I blundered through his class having come in



through the back door. He was busy so we didn't get to talk then, and I had to leave the same day. But at Xmas a card arrived from Florida, sending his best. A lovely, understated piper and a lovely, understated man. He'll be sorely missed. Deepest sympathies to Anne and the family.  
- *Patrick Hutchinson*

Dear Mrs. Purcell, Although we are miles away and have never met, your husband made a deep impression on my family. My daughter had the privilege of having Mr. Purcell as a judge at the Midwest Fleadh a few years ago. She had not been playing long. She nervously stuttered over the music, he patiently listened. After awarding the medals he gave advice to the competitors. He shared his attitude toward practice, his belief that the air was an important form as it offered the listener an opportunity to hear and express the music. Clare worked hard, often without a teacher. She quoted the advice and I reminded her of the practice tips. Last year she was proud that she won a second place in "airs" in both the flute and whistle. She was most pleased however that "Al Purcell" enjoyed and complimented the style that he had inspired. I know we have less music on earth today but the heavens will be moved with it. We are truly sorry for your loss. God be with you,  
- *The Crites Family*

My name is Michael Dow and I am the chairman of The Pipers' Gathering Inc. For the last two years, Al has been one of our uilleann pipe teachers (along with Jerry O'Sullivan) in North Hero, Vermont and it came as a great shock to all of us to hear of his untimely passing. He was such a great person and wonderful instructor and we will miss him terribly next summer at our 2001 Pipers' Gathering. We were planning to use a few pictures of Al instructing on our up coming web site. Thanks again for your wonderful tribute. He was loved and respected by all that knew him Best...  
- Michael

Dear Ann, Aline, Maureen, and Patty, Returning home from Rocky Mountain National Park Saturday morning we were shocked to hear of Al's passing. Patti and I thought there must be a mistake, hadn't we just had two wonderful visits with Al and Ann this winter in Florida? Hadn't we just had a Guinness at the "Harp and Thistle"? Much has been said of Al's musical talent and his willingness to share his gift with so many others, as a musician, a teacher, a historian, and a craftsman. However, I'd like to touch on another side of Al Purcell. In the 40 plus years that I have known Al and the 35 plus years that I worked with him as wood model makers, he never wavered from his commitment to his fellow Union brothers and sisters.

Al and I shared a philosophy that put worker's rights first and Al spent many years as a representative of skilled tradesmen at Local 160, at the GM Technical Center. He was consistent in his respect for his peers' many skills and craftsmanship and dedicated to elevating their status within the General Motors Engineering Community. As giving as Al was to his beloved music community, he was equally as giving to those he worked with and represented. I know how Al compromised his own career to remain true to his trade unionist principles and I will always respect him for that. Al has been a "true" friend whether it be standing by me in the workplace, in my personal life, seeing me through some very dark days, or sharing his love of anything Irish. I have to smile through my tears as I recall Ann saying, as Al was sharing one of his Gaelic stories, "Of course you know that Jesus was Irish too".

The last thing Al said to me as we said goodbye at the "Harp and Thistle" this past January was, "I love you". I love you too Al and I will always remember what a wonderful man and friend you were! Play loudly up there in heaven so Patti and I can hear you down here! Our

heartfelt condolences to Ann, Maureen, Patty, and Aline and their families.  
- Ron and Patti Reedy, Colorado Springs, Colorado

To Patty and her family I lost my father a year and a half ago and still feel pain and sadness, he also played the pipes. It was a great love of his when he was younger. My prayers and thoughts are with you and your family "Oh sacred heart of Jesus I place all my trust in thee" From Sandra and family.  
- Kim from Virtual Ireland

I had the pleasure of meeting Al at the musical part of a festival at Michigan State Univ. a few years ago. Although I am originally from Co. Clare myself, The musical abilities of that Dubliner were obvious. Anyway, he can now chat with Sean O'Riada (my cousin) up in heaven .They have plenty of harpers there already, but obviously needed another fine piper.R.I.P.  
- Terry Carroll

My condolences for the loss of Al. I have spent some time with him at the last couple of N. Hero pipers gatherings and enjoyed my time with him. I have been in a state of shock for the last couple of days since the last time I saw him was just a short time ago and he seem so vibrant and alive. He was a kind and sharing person.  
-Ray Wall

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### IN TRIBUTE: ALOYSIUS PURCELL

With sorrowed heart I stand before the empty piper's chair,  
His grand old set beside there on the floor.  
The bellows, bag and boxwood stilled; No reel, nor march, nor air,  
For he shall sound the pipes again no more.

Old leather, tasseled velvet green, and ivory aged by years,  
And silvered keys that made the music soar  
From chanter, reed and drone lie silent;  
Thence from silence: Tears.  
The pipes we loved shall sound again no more.

I knew no gentler, kinder man whose music brought such joy.  
His favorite air: A tune we all adore.  
We loved him so that he became our own **Dear Irish Boy**;  
His pipes we loved shall sound again no more.

No piper better played an air, nor was so loved by all.  
Come, all good friends; your glasses full I'll pour;  
Then raise them high in honor; he has heard his Master's call,

Whose pipes of gold he'll sound forevermore!

- *David O'Neal Bowen, September 30, 2000*

I would like to offer our sympathy to Al's family at this time of their loss. I have known Al for over 40 years, but have not been able to see him very often because we lived so far apart geographically. I met him through my Aunt, Mary Rita Dean, who is Anne's sister. I have had the opportunity to see him play, mostly in his younger days. He was a very fine man and a great pipe player. Heaven will be a happier place when he starts piping there. Sincerely,  
- *Sean and Marie Dean*

My name is Sean Fukada. Actually, my name is "JUN" but Al gave me an Irish name as "Sean". My sincerely condolences to Al's family. I met him in 1997 in Willie Clancy Summer School when I've just got my own pipes and started piping. At that time, I didn't have much passion to Uilleann Pipes as well as my skill. But because of some luck, I happened to attend to the school. And Al was my teacher in beginner course. He taught me the basic of piping, not only technique, but also a philosophy about piping. I was strongly impressed with it. Before taking his lesson, I couldn't have a passion to piping because I couldn't even get any sound from it. But after Al's lesson, I was completely captured by pipes' attraction. I have my web site about Uilleann Pipes, and most of explanation are owned by him.

(<http://www.mars.dti.ne.jp/~junf/UP5e.html#top>) This year, I could attend to Scoil Acla (Achill Island Summer School) for 2 weeks. I always thought "How Al recognized my progress? Will he be glad with my progress?" But I miss the opportunity to get any advice from Al forever. Yesterday, I played pipes for Al during midnight alone. When I played 2 tunes which he taught me, *Saddle the Pony* and *Gander in the Pratie Hole*, I couldn't stop tears from my eyes. I hope my playing reached to his spirit -

- *Jun 'Sean' Fukada, Sapporo, Japan*

Give him a great send off. Our thoughts are with his family and his many friends.

- *The Pipers' Gathering Inc. - Michael Dow, Steve Bliven, Richard Shuttleworth, Laurie Franklin, Sandy Ross, Rick Damon - North Hero, Vermont*

Thank you so much for the message. I was just speaking of him nights ago in Dublin. this message is coming from Killarney and I am much saddened at not being able to be home in time for the funeral. my prayers are with his family.

- *Marylynn G. Hewitt*

Hello, I'm so sorry to hear of your loss. My family met Mr. Purcell at the Detroit and Windsor Feisianna this year. My children both competed in fiddle and dance there. Mr. Purcell awarded my daughter first place at the Windsor Feis. He was kind enough to ask her to play a third tune for him, he liked her so much, he wanted to hear another. She was thrilled. He also took a lot of time to talk to my son (12 years old) about who to listen to and how to play for his own enjoyment. We won't forget his kind gestures and his true love of music.

- *Julie Schrantz*

I was saddened when my student, Sean Gavin, prayed for Al in my History Class. He will be

missed. On the other hand, I'll bet heaven is a lovelier place now.  
- *Br. Jim Boynton, S.J. University of Detroit Jesuit High*

In 1973, 4 youngsters from Belfast paid a 6 week visit to Detroit to perform Irish Traditional Music at the Gaelic League. Among the first people we met during that visit were Al and his wonderful wife Ann. From that day forward we were forever friends. Not only did I respect Al for his deep and heartfelt knowledge of traditional Irish tunes and the art of performing them on uilleann pipes and tin whistle, I respected him for his candor, his wisdom and his genuine caring for others. Sometimes we wouldn't see each other for months at a time, but as with all true friendships, it didn't matter. Al was always there with a wise word of encouragement (often in the form of a wisecrack!), that impish grin and a pat on the back. Never did I leave a meeting with Al without feeling more fulfilled after it. So, I will sing and play for him at his funeral on Tuesday with a heavy heart, but a heart full of memories of a man who touched my life in a special way. To my dear friends Ann, Pattie, Maureen, Aline, and to the huge family circle: you have so much to be thankful for. Al's memory and legacy will be part of your lives forever. Let's all wish him a wonderful trip home.

- *Respectfully, Wallace Hood, Milford, MI*

Having met Mr. Purcell once, I was impressed by the genuine warmth and caring that came from him, I have great respect for him, and am sad to hear of your loss.

- *Dale A. Brown Jr. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA*

Patty, I was saddened to hear that your father had passed. May God help you and your family through this extremely difficult time.

- *Kathy (Wirtanen) Kelly, Dewitt, MI*

Words cannot express the loss we feel as we bid farewell to a true teacher, mentor, and friend. Always willing to share his deep knowledge and love of the tradition with us, Al was an inspiration to young and old players alike. The fine crop of young musicians in our midst are a living testament. He will be remembered for generations. For the music, to be sure, but also for his gentle



A library is burning somewhere  
Far upon the evening sky.  
I can see the flames from here  
Where I sit my window by.

Alexandria's trove is ashes  
Careless cast upon the air.  
Countless future generations  
Vainly seek to find it there.  
Gone the book and gone the story  
From our hearing and our sight.  
Gone the power and the glory  
Into everlasting night.

And here we sit, disciples all,  
Huddled in the upper room,  
Waiting for the dead to rise  
Bringing light unto the gloom.

The dead rise not, nor do they tell  
Their wisdom to the ones who stay.  
Best we hoist the flag of courage,  
Trusting upon a better day.

Now I smell the parchment burning,  
Scrolls and volumes gone to dust.  
All attempt and all creation  
Born to pass, as pass we must.  
Live as there were no tomorrow,  
Love to learn, and learn to love.  
Far a library is burning.

The smoke ascends to Heaven above.

God go with thee, Al Purcell.  
Know that we have loved thee well.

- *Glenn A Schultz*

spirit. With love,  
- *Jim, Cheryl, Dylan, Alison and Asher Perkins,*  
*Farmington. MI*

My deepest sympathies to the Purcell family.  
- *Liz (Morris) Marx*

Dear Anne, Ailene, Maureen and Patty, Annie and I wish to express our condolences. I first met Al in 1976 in Grosse Point at a Paint Creek Folklore Society picnic. Al captivated us all as he played, we fiddled and danced and I remembered. A few other times we met as he played with his students at a coffee house or at a workshop where he explained his instrument. I remembered. The seed was planted well and after a few years and a thousand miles away I started squeezing pipes too, wondering how Al would have played. A few years ago, twenty years after moving from Detroit, at North Hero a fella was buying lunch, like me, next door when I noticed from his shirt he was from Detroit. My number one question was, "do you know Al Purcell"? He smiled and said, "turn around, he's standing right next to you." I lit right up and turned around and there was Al. I grabbed Al's hand, reintroduced myself and we reminisced. It was like seeing a beloved uncle. Last year I was in one of Al's workshops where each tune was surrounded by 3-4 wonderful stories, a wink of the philosophy of life and playing that went from Al's heart directly to ours. What a man. What a teacher. Anne you know that Al will always be with us. The Lord gave us a wonderful man, friend and example of how we should share with others, in Al. It will be wonderful to play with him again someday. All our love, from an "East side" boy,  
- *Eddie and Annie Damm Bar Harbor, Maine*

Ann, Thanks for sharing this wonderful, noble man with the piping community. We'll never know how many hours you sat waiting for him to finish another tune, another conversation, another bit of advice. As you can see from these letters, the pipers are just now realizing the impact his playing and instruction had. My thoughts will be with you and the family on Tuesday, and in the coming months. It is sad to see him go, but I would have been much sadder to never have made his acquaintance, to never have been able to sit in a circle while he instructed, or sat at a nearby table as he played. May God bless you with understanding and the strength to carry through



**Follower**  
*Seamus Heaney*

My father worked with a horse-plough,  
His shoulders globed like a full sail  
strung  
Between the shafts and the furrow.  
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.

An expert. He would set the wing  
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.  
The sod rolled over without breaking.  
At the headrig, with a single pluck  
Of reins, the sweating team turned round  
And back into the land. His eye  
Narrowed and angled at the ground,  
Mapping the furrow exactly.

I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake,  
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;  
Sometimes he rode me on his back  
Dipping and rising to his plod.

I wanted to grow up and plough,  
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.  
All I ever did was follow  
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,  
Yapping always. But today  
It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away.

these days of great sorrow.  
- Rick Kemper

I had the honor of hosting Al on his first visit teaching at the Midwest Tionol in St. Louis. After our Friday night gathering, we drove back to my house and spent the wee hours discussing the history of the uilleann pipes, teaching and learning piping, Seamus Ennis, Leo Rowsome, and stories about people and places in Dublin. So many of his Dublin stories paralleled the stories my mother, a Dub, told me many a time. So, from the beginning, I found something very familiar and disarming being in Al's company. It was as if he were my uncle and we had known each other for years. What a night! After a few hours, the discussion turned to Irish literature and poetry. I pulled out a few books and read several selections. One in particular, *Follower*, by Seamus Heaney struck Al. Reading it now, I can see many parallels between the ploughman's skill and Al's patient, deliberate mastery of playing and teaching the pipes. As a new student of Al's, I quickly became his eager follower. As in the poem, I was probably a "nuisance, tripping, falling, Yapping always" as I tried to play. He told me to practice everyday and that, "It's better to play a little a lot than a lot a little." He taught me to never rush a tune. He taught me to really learn a tune fully and simply before adding ornamentation. He taught me that it is better to play a few tunes well than several tunes bad. He taught me to love the pipes. He taught by example. I shall forever be a student of his method. In grief, I am comforted knowing that Al will be forever with me, behind me, and I hope will never go away. My deepest sympathies and respects to Ann and the Purcell family. (see poem at right)  
- Edmund Tunney St. Louis, Missouri

I was away over the weekend and just heard the news from Bruce Childress. I just had the pleasure of meeting Al in the last few years meeting him first in Milltown Malbay and then in Los Angeles where he contacted me so we could have a few tunes, such generosity! We met again in Milltown after that and again in LA with Anne and Aline, and all the rest....there's an army of Purcells over here in California ;) To all of you I send my deepest condolences. I felt I had a lovely relationship with Al, maybe due to us both being from Dublin and now living in America? We shared a similar background I suppose. I think a lot of people felt this way about Al, he was a very easy person to get along with and was never at odds with anyone that I could tell. May you rest in peace Al, it was really great knowing you for the short time I did.  
- Patrick D'Arcy.

My deepest sympathies to the Purcell family. I have very fond memories of Al. He was a man who, without hesitation, invited me to his house just to talk about and play the pipes. Meeting his wife Ann at the door was another pleasant experience as she laughingly commented how Al was in the basement where he spent every free moment with his pipes. I'll always remember Al as a very generous man - sharing his time, experience, appreciation of music, and freely giving away chanter and drone reeds to troubled pipers. The piping community is robbed of a man who had a selfless motivation to teach the pipes. His piping will echo for years to come in the tunes of his many students and friends.  
- Bruce Foley, Pittsburgh, PA

I learned of Al's sudden death when I was at Tommy McCarthy's funeral in Milltown Malbay last Friday. I got to know Al over the last few years at WCSS. Al's wife has Mullagh antecedents like myself. I can only concur with others who have said that Al was an absolute gentleman.



He was always good-natured & great company. He had great stories about traditional musicians, among other things, but he was never unkind. Al & Tommy were both men you'd look forward to meeting at Willie Clancy week & I'll miss them both.

- *Stephen Scales Cromane Killorglin Co.Kerry*

To the musicians who knew Al Purcell, I must say that I feel a slight envy, for countless in-home lessons and festivals ideally positioned you to benefit from Al's concentrated time, attention, and mastery. For the rest of us, well, we were lucky to corner him at a party, to chat with him about favorite topics -- be it music or poetry, history or politics -- and let learning of a different kind begin. Over a course of years at such parties, often in my mother's house, Al Purcell became My Pal Al (as I called him), a person whom I admired for the discipline with which he mastered his music, for the humility with which he shared it, and for the genuine good nature with which he lived his life. All who had the honor of meeting him knew that he inspired by example, being always poised for the next note and the first laugh. To pipers everywhere - students and masters alike -- Al gave you the gift of music. To the rest of us, he gave us the gift of a life lived superbly. With sincere condolences to all the Purcells,

- *Marian Bouch Bloomfield Hills, Michigan*

I first met Al Purcell 25 years ago through playing fiddle with the Gilmour Brothers. In the last 10 years I had the pleasure to accompany Al, infrequently, through David Bowen's hospitality. As a threesome we even played a wedding reception together. I found Al to be a kind and gentle soul; always modest, sincere, yet ready to help others, like myself, learn and appreciate the music that was his life. His passing was a great shock to me, and I will miss him. I cherish the few occasions I was allowed to be with him. Know that his memory will live on in the music he played. Please extend my condolences to his wife and family.

- *Andrew Rogers - Bay City, MI*

It's a great shock and my condolences to yourself for the loss of a mentor and friend and to all of Al's friends and fellow musicians in Detroit who learned from him and shared music with him. Our thoughts are with you,

- *Pat O'Gorman, Toronto*

Dear Purcell Family, I met Al when I was a little girl and have heard many stories about the warm and loving relationship he had with my father, Ron Reedy. When I was visiting my Dad this summer he mentioned that he had seen Al in Florida and the last words that Al spoke to my dad were "I love you". It was a gift repeated a thousand times through Al's kind acts. Wherever you are Al, I thank you for the friendship you shared with my father. With loving thoughts to you at this time.

- *Aimee Michele Reedy*

Thursday was a clear, lovely late summer day here. That night the air became very still and we had a hard freeze, our first. In the early morning, every twig and leaf and every blade of grass was layered in white frost; the crickets were silent and nothing stirred in all the world. It was a sudden end to one of the most beautiful summers I have ever seen, and it couldn't help but feel oddly synchronous with the sudden passing of one of the finest men I ever knew. Al was generous, kind, supportive, fair-minded, and he made it all look effortless. I hope that he had some idea how much I loved and admired him, and I hope that all of us who were blessed with his example can go on and emulate him as best we can. None of us can even begin to comprehend your own loss, but please know that my heart and my thoughts are with you and

your daughters. Please also remember that if there is anything at any time that I can do, you have only to ask.

- *Benedict Koehler, East Montpelier, VT*

I believe that we are put on this earth for many reasons, one of which is to make a difference. Al Purcell made a difference with his music, his teaching of music and life, and his kindness. During our trip last August 2000 back to Ireland, we met Tyler Duncan's Dad. Tyler Duncan is the 1999 and 2000 All Ireland Champion of the Pipes for his age and a student of Al's. As we put together our Irish heritage and links, our common bond was Al Purcell. Tyler's Dad was carrying at the time, the special Cup which Tyler and Al had won. Although Tyler had competed for the Cup, The father still considered it Al's too.....AL was his teacher, his support and his best friend according to Tyler's Dad. Tyler's Dad shared so many wonderful stories of lessons, and competitions, playing at different occasions. It seemed as Al was a very special part of this mans family/life. I couldn't help thinking....I wonder if AL has any idea how much he meant to this family and this Young Man. Al you made a huge difference and have made our world a much better place. Al, You and your family will be remembered by many. With Fond memories,

- *Karen (Boyle) Fox*

We send our Love and Sympathy to the Purcell Family. Our Thoughts and prayers are with you at this time. Love,

- *Willie and Kathy Boyle Grosse Pointe, MI*

Our condolences to Al's wife Anne and their children. The music in heaven has just improved with the addition of the "Gentlemen Piper". We'll miss you Al, thanks for everything you've shared.

- *The Burke Family, Northville, MI*

I first met Al when he came down to St. Louis for our first Tionol in 1998 and he returned each year to work with the advanced pipers and he was a great hit at the concert. He was such a help and inspiration to me in so many ways that I couldn't begin to recount them. His cheerfulness and willingness to share his knowledge were legend among pipers and musicians everywhere. In every way he was the embodiment of the "gentleman piper" and I, for one, shall miss him sorely.

- *Mike Mullins, St. Louis MO*

I was "two weeks old" knowing no one in piping when I came to North Hero this year. I ventured into the Friday night informal session and saw a stately man playing a blond set of pipes. I stood, watched and listened. I felt a connection then. Later, I went to Al's beginners' class and he taught me "Eileen Aroon" in the "old way" rather than giving me notes to read. This was my first tune on pipes; up to then I had only struggled with scales and getting a sound. On Monday, at the close of North Hero, Al went through the group having everyone play. When it came to my turn, he looked at me, and with a twinkle in his eye, said "You have a new tune, why don't you play it for us!" I did and did so successfully. Loving kindness, respect, support and slow aires, that is what he taught me. I thank you for your laughter and sharing from North Hero. You added much to my great time on the Island. You and Al, in a very short time, made a tremendous difference in my life. Thank you. In this time of loss, remember to

eat, sleep, cry and let the piping world love you. May God bless you, Al and all your family.  
- *Michael O'Hanlan, Falls Church, VA*

I'm very saddened to hear that Al died. We had a very short friendship. A big miss for the world of piping.  
- *Andreas Rogge*

When I was serenaded by an Irish tune played on the fiddle through the halls this morning at U of D high, I had no idea what news would follow. I was told by a fellow teacher of the sudden passing of Al Purcell, a quick-to-be friend of mine through his dedication to Irish Music and to peace in N. Ireland. Al was one of the main links to an large number of Irish musicians in the area (and beyond!) who came together on two different occasions to perform as a fundraiser for the Metro Detroit Ulster Project. Al was the picture of physical and emotional health. His concern for others and his love for his Irish heritage were both an inspiration and a joy to me. He will be missed as many of us live on, lives changed, by the wonderful experiences Al invited us into. Thank you, Al!

- *Jean Murphy Past President of the Metro Detroit Ulster Project*

I deeply saddened to hear of Al's death. We had only spoken by telephone a few times this past summer, but I recognized quickly what a gentle and generous soul he was. I asked him to be a part of the Archdiocese of Detroit's Eucharistic Congress pre-mass program on Sunday Sept. 17 at St. John Center, Plymouth. He was honored to be asked and accepted, saying that he had attended the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin as a boy. He was unable to grace us with his talent because of difficulties with flight arrangements from Chicago the night before. He recommended to us one of his students, Tim Miller, who filled in beautifully for him. I had hoped that he would be a part of our Archdiocesan 300th anniversary celebrations next year. My prayers and condolences to all who knew and loved him, especially his wife and family. May he continue to fill our lives with the beauty of his new life in Christ!

- *Judy Holmes, Archdiocese of Detroit, MI*

Anne, Patty, Maureen and Aline (and to Al) I never really got the chance to thank all of you in the Purcell household for the profound effect your warmth, gracious hospitality and generosity had on me when Al took me under his wing as a novice musician. Despite the fact that Al played pipes and I concertina, he was still dedicated to teaching me the music with the same passion and detail he had for the pipes. People listening to me play then and now often joke that they never heard a concertina played like the pipes, slurring and popping notes, but that was Al's influence: giving my playing a unique soul and style, as others had handed it down to him. The wonderful hours I spent in those early days, playing music in the basement rec room, as the girls came and went, Anne popping down every now and again to chat or drop off tea, made me feel very special. The music parties that went on til all hours of the morning are still in my mind every time I play. But most of all, I remember the great ensemble of wonderful people that I met by just being at Al and Anne's house: Marty Somberg, Mick Maloney, Eugene O'Donnell, Terence and Brendan, Wallace Hood, Ray McGuire, Frank Kennedy, Mick Gavin, and Frank Edgley, just to name a few---You couldn't help but meet great musicians when you were around Al, and I know all of us will miss him greatly.

- *Matt Heumann, Ann Arbor, MI*

What a nice tribute. We only met him a few times, but he was always nice to see.

*- Angus and Marge Longphee Davenport, Florida*

Sincere condolences to all Al's family and friends. He was a great person who always had time for everyone. He passed on his great love for the pipes to many adoring students. With deepest sympathy

*- Robbie Hannan, N. Ireland*

I recently had the great pleasure of meeting Al Purcell...at the North Hero Pipers Gathering up in Vermont this recent August. In fact I am now finishing a short article on the event for The Bagpipe Society's newsletter, and I had chosen to include a paragraph on Al. I do not play the Uilleann pipes...yet. But I sat in on a few of Al's sessions in North Hero...and was so taken with his way of explaining things that I resolved to one day learn the UP. I can tell you that he seemed to connect with just about everyone who attended his sessions...from buttoned-down middle-agers to the free and easy college-age kids. It was quite apparent that he had a true gift...graced with a musician's love of his art and uncommon generosity of spirit. Yes, one can sense these things even on a first brief meeting...when the person is genuinely special. Al simply emanated that special quality. And so it is that I now feel quite lucky that my path crossed ever-so-briefly with Al Purcell's. I will take up the Uilleann Pipes...and I will do it sooner rather than later. May his family know this to be yet another way in which Al's legacy will grow. Please express my condolences on their loss...and my high regards for a most distinguished life.

*- Michael McWilliams, Cohasset, Massachusetts*

Since until recently there was no uilleann pipes teacher in Cincinnati, we only knew Al as the Fleadh judge who devoutly stood up for the tradition. In our eyes he was larger than life. When we competed, it was important to please Al...the right tempo, the right feel to the tunes... I value even more now our copies of his hand-written evaluation sheets. I am sorry that we never got to know him personally, and I am especially sorry for your and his family's tremendous loss. We just always need to focus on the fact that he has only gone through the door ahead of us. I trust he has joined Bobby Casey and Tommy McCarthy for an absolutely terrific session.

*- Susan Cross, Riley School of Irish Music*

I'm still stunned and upset at Al's death. He was wonderful company, a great Piper, and always enthusiastic and supportive. He came up to the Workshop at the Willie Clancy School to see me, and, typical of the man, stood in a queue of mostly beginners wanting reeds or leaks attended to, waiting his turn until I spotted him. A true Superstar unafflicted by ego or pretentiousness. I then had the great joy and privilege of putting Willie Clancy's old Coyne 'B' set on Al and listening to him play it for an hour or so. Another evening in Miltown Al agreed to play (but only after Mass) and I sat enthralled listening to Al play solo, and with Tom Clarke, Patrick D'arcy, and Mikey Smith. July in Miltown was just wonderful for me and spending happy hours with Al was a big part of that. My wife Patricia and I share your grief.

*- Michael Dooley*

Dear Ann and Family: I never really knew Al too well, our lives overlapping by only a few short months. It was easy to tell, though, not only by the actions and comments of others but from my encounters with him in the group lessons and the brief personal times we shared, that I had largely missed out on fully knowing and experiencing a truly wonderful man. I can

only imagine the loss experienced by you and others who had known Al for a much longer time. Even so, I count myself as one of the fortunate for having known him at all. From what I know, I would have liked to have grown up in your wonderful family, for it surely would have been a rich experience. Al was a great man and an inspiration in many ways. He has been, and will continue to be, missed.

*- Tom Kennedy, 7/13/07*

## A few photos of Al Purcell...



Left: Al, age 4 in Dublin on the "big" pipes. Al's father, Leo Purcell, was head instructor of the big pipes in Dublin.

Leo Rowsome was instructor for the uilleann pipes and Al was an early student.



Right: Al at about age 9 on the uilleann pipes. Al said that when his father set him up with the pipes to take the picture he was terrified that was going to drop them.



Wedding band for Terence & Moira McKinney 1986: Roy Livingston, Charlie Wilkie, Al Purcell, Wallace Hood, Jim O'Callaghan, Mick Gavin.





Al in saffron kilt, at a Medieval banquet for The Fraternal Order of United Irishmen charity event. There was a clever quip not too far behind the great smile.



At Terence McKinney's apartment in Windsor, circa 1979. Al put up with the beer bashes and general carry-on and was always a blast to be with at a Ceilidh.

Al could tell great stories.



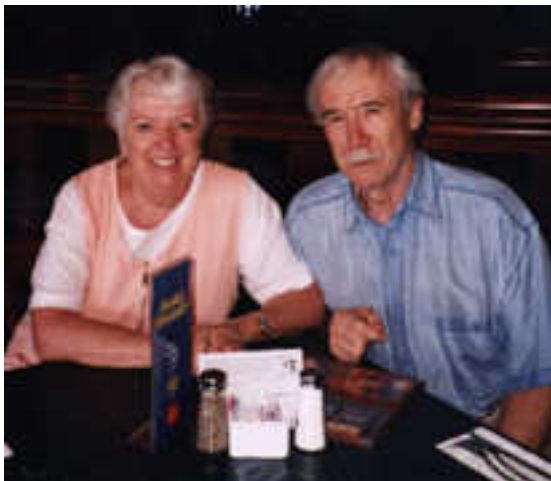
This was taken just a week earlier, on September 21st, at the club. Al was in great form and listening with great intensity to the students efforts. Al took his music very seriously and this was very much appreciated by his students. I have never met someone who had a more scholarly approach to piping. Al understood traditional music as few do.



Jim Price, who was Terence's first Highland piping teacher and a great friend of Al, sits on the bench listening in the background.

Al and I at Conor O'Neill's in Ann Arbor 1999. I will miss the tunes and the craic.

*-Terence McKinney*



Ann and Al in Florida, 2000

"Some photos from Al's trip to Los Angeles earlier that year. They were taken at my office in Santa Monica." Patrick Darcy listens .

- Photos kindly sent by Larry Dunn, Los Angeles.







Left:  
A very proud grandpa  
with grandson, Brien.

Right:  
Conor McKinney gets  
early indoctrination.

Al used to refer  
to piping as, "**the  
affliction**".



At the North Hero Pipers Gathering,  
Vermont

"Al doing what he so loved doing  
so much. Being in the company  
of pipers, encouraging them to  
be better and to have fun while  
doing it."  
- Michael Dow



A crowning moment. Tyler Duncan who studied under Al, won the 1999 All-Ireland Piping Championship in the 13-15 year old age group. Al took immense satisfaction in Tyler's success. The trophy was the "Leo Rowsome" Piping Trophy. Leo Rowsome was Al's teacher. Coincidence?

Fortunately, Al was with us long enough to see Tyler repeat his success and win the All-Ireland a second time at the end of August, 2000.



The Purcell household was always open to folks in need of assistance or instruction. Al never charged for lessons. He really believed he had a *duty* to carry on the tradition.

People at every level of the talent spectrum came to Al for help for lessons, repairs, reeds, advice or history. Al was a learned man and knew Irish, American and world history in great detail.

Some of his most engaging lessons didn't required a note be sounded.



From 1999, Al with Martin Hayes and at right with Paddy Keenan.

- Photos from Mike Mullins,  
St. Louis, MO



Al playing the Rogge B pipes at wedding of Jim McHale's daughter, Lake Orion, August 12th.

Below are 3 great photos of Al from Síobhan McKinney's First Communion party, May 9, 2000.

It was a great session in the sunroom and Al was in top piping form.

Closeup of da master.

Al had just polished off a plate of goodies and was recharged and ready to go.

