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Kevin C. Kearns. *Dublin Pub Life and Lore: An Oral History.* Dublin, Ireland: Gill & Macmillan, 1996. 288 pp. $15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57098-164-7.

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Dublin is famous for its pubs and the vibrancy of its pub life. Many of the pubs that line its streets today–nearly 800 of them in a city of about a million residents–have roots that extend back hundreds of years. The city's oldest pub–the Brazen Head–dates from the thirteenth century. Other pubs have historical or literary associations that are still palpable today. For example, the Bailey was frequented by the Irish nationalist Charles Stewart Parnell in one era and the Sinn Fein leader Michael Collins in another; McDaid's, the archetypal Dublin literary pub, was the regular hangout of Brendan Behan and other well-known playwrights, poets, and artists in the 1940s and 1950s.

Dublin Pub Life and Lore is an oral, historical chronicle of pub life as it existed in the first part of the twentieth century. The book is divided into four sections. The first covers the history and evolution of Dublin's public houses. The second is a survey of Dublin pub culture and social life, covering topics such as the role of the publican in the local community, the presence of women in pubs, singing and literary pubs, illegal pubs, notable pub characters, and the transformation of the city's pubs in the decades since World War II. These sections provide a useful overview of the history and variety of Dublin pubs. However, the real reward for readers of this book is found in sections three and four, which contain over fifty oral testimonies by publicans, barmen (that is, apprentice publicans), pub regulars, and other observers of the pub scene. These brief accounts are wonderfully vivid descriptions of what it was like to work, socialize, and, sometimes, live in the pubs. They range from pubman Paddy O'Brien's account of first meeting Brendan Behan in McDaid's, to the musings of Eugene Kavanagh (owner of a pub popularly known as the "Gravediggers"' because it has traditionally served the men who work in Ireland's national cemetery) about why people go to pubs, to the recollections of Clara Gill, the daughter of a publican, about the role of publicans in the community.

The book's author, Kevin C. Kearns, a professor of cultural geography and social history at the University of Northern Colorado, has written several books about Dublin–particularly working-class Dublin–using this same oral history method. In this instance Kearns had done an excellent job of locating, recording, and presenting these brief accounts of pub life. Despite the liveliness of the stories that Kearns has preserved, a sad thread weaves its way throughout the book: the last twenty or thirty years has seen the wholesale destruction of Dublin's authentic pub heritage. (For example, of Dublin's 775 pubs, only about twenty retain an authentic Victorian interior and ambience.)

Dublin Pub Life and Lore is an invaluable contribution to the social and cultural history of Dublin. It would be of interest to scholars and students of Irish history and culture in general and of the cultural history of drinking in particular.

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