

# The Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center

648 Lower Thames Street  
Open May - October  
and by Appointment



History

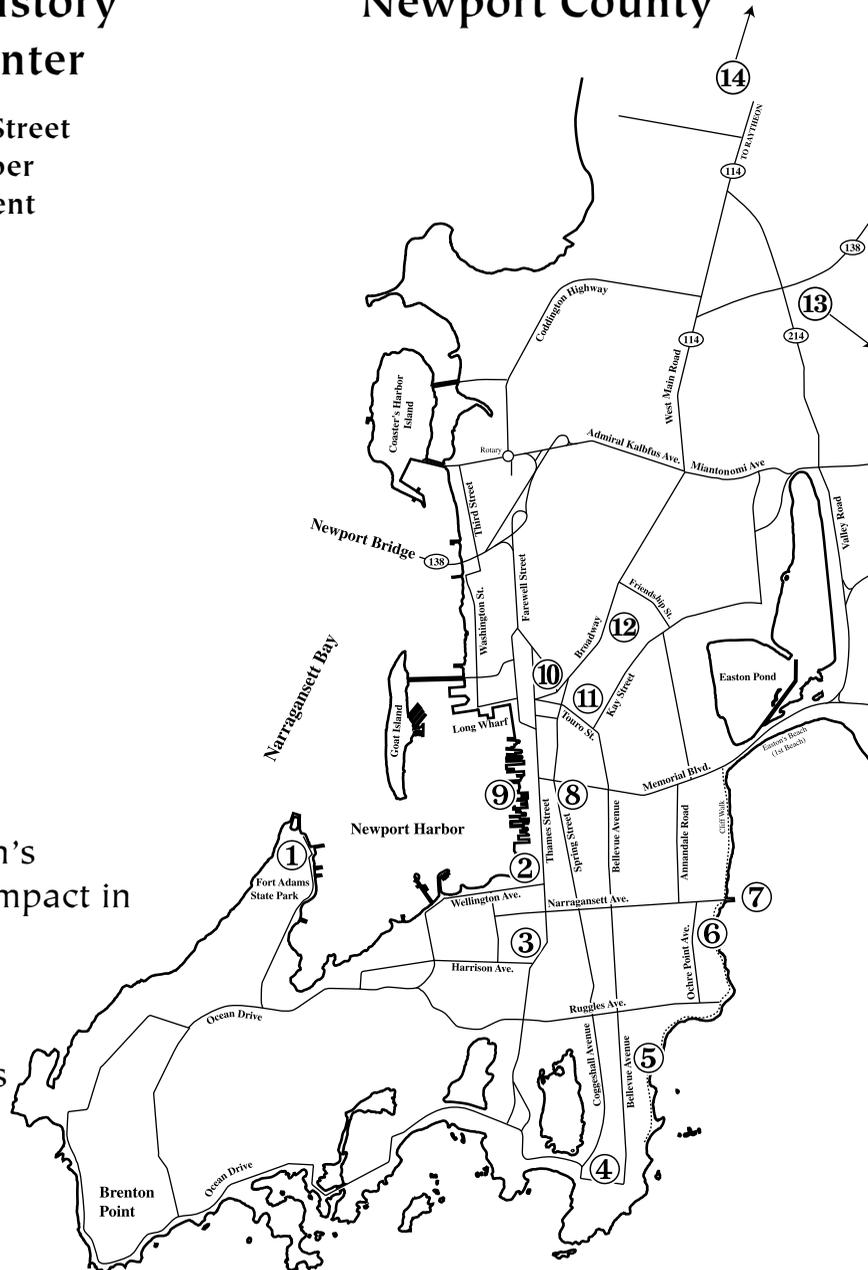
Heritage

Irish Immigration's  
Social and Economic Impact in  
Newport

Displays, Maps  
& Video



## Map of Newport County



## The Irish in Newport

The first Irish immigrants to Newport, in the mid 1600s came as the result of English policies and Cromwellian brutality toward Ireland.

The 1700s saw the arrival of the noted Irish philosopher, educator Dean George Berkeley, and the involvement of many Irish in the Revolutionary War. Documentation is very incomplete, but we know the names of Fitzgerald, Burke, Morris and Flanagan fought in that war.

1778 saw the arrival of the French to Aquidneck Island to support America, with the Irish Regiment under Count Dillon, some of whose ranks stayed behind.

The next wave of immigration occurred in the 1820s as the result of the difficult economic times in Ireland, and the first of the potato crop failures in 1818 and 1822. Of course, the huge potato crop failures of the 1840s drove thousands to come to America.

In the 1800s many skilled Irish worked in diverse fields including the Portsmouth coal mines, the gardens and houses of the Newport mansions, and the construction of Fort Adams.

Through the 1800s and 1900s the Irish established themselves as a rich, diverse group that has contributed to the fabric of this area. The names of O'Connell, McCormick, Walsh, Horgan, Butler, Galvin, O'Neill are familiar, and since 1895 there have been fourteen (14) mayors of Newport of Irish descent.

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# A Tour of Irish Newport



## The Museum of Newport Irish History



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① **Fort Adams:** One of the largest seacoast fortifications built in the United States, Fort Adams provides a visual record of military history from the 1820s to the end of World War II. A fort was begun on the site in 1793, and the fort as we see it now was begun in 1824, and completed in 1857. In 1830 the U.S. Army began recruiting laborers from Ireland. Irish workers continued to work on the site for the 33 years it took to complete. At times there were three generations of men from the same family working on the Fort. Many of the gravestones within the Fort's cemetery attest to the Irish who worked on the Fort as well as those who served in the Army. Many of these same workers helped build St. Mary's Church (See tour stop ⑥ below.) Fort Adams is situated in Fort Adams State Park, and the Fort is open for tours mid-May through mid-October.

② **Hibernian Hall:** Near the corner of Wellington Avenue and Thames Street, this building was originally a Protestant church, and was purchased by the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1906. This Hibernian division, the oldest in the state, was established in 1876 and currently has over 600 members. The Hibernians (from the ancient Roman "Hibernia" name of Ireland) are an organization of men and women of Irish descent whose goals include the fostering of the ideals, traditions, and history of the Irish people. Their motto is "*Friendship, Unity and Christian Charity*". (The building is open to members and friends only.)

③ **5<sup>th</sup> Ward Square:** So named by the City in 2007 to honor the area of the city settled in large part by Irish immigrants who worked both at Ft. Adams and the nearby mansions on Bellevue Ave. Here is also St. Augustin's Church.

④ **Inchiquin:** This estate on Bellevue Avenue was built in the 1890s by James O'Brien, a direct descendent of Brian Bóru, the 1st King of All Ireland. He named his estate Inchiquin, after the baronial home of Tieve O'Brien, King of Thomond in the 1400s.

⑤ **Rosecliff:** According to some, this is the most refined and classical of the Newport Mansions. It was owned by Theresa Fair Oelrichs. She was the daughter of James Fair, a Belfast immigrant. He took part in the California Gold Rush of 1849. Ten years later Fair and three others struck the Comstock Lode, the richest deposit of silver to be uncovered. Fair was an instant millionaire. He sent his daughter, Theresa, East to "more elite" society.

⑥ **Ochre Court:** Nora Connolly O'Brien, the daughter of James Connolly, one of the leaders of the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, spoke at Ochre Court on the present conditions of Ireland. In February 1977, she reflected on her surroundings at Ochre Court, the administration building of Salve Regina University, and stated that in the winter of 1916-1917, after her father had been executed, she and her mother left Ireland on her father's urging to escape possible British action against them. They came to Newport and were put up in Ochre Court by the Irish staff who had charge of the great house during the off season.

⑦ **The Forty Steps:** In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was a favorite gathering spot for the Irish who lived and worked in Newport. Informal dances were held on Friday nights. Entertainment was often provided by an accordionist, Dick Sullivan. "*They'd pass the hat to pay for the music.*"

⑧ **St. Mary's Church:** A National Historic Site, the foundation for this church was laid in 1848, and the building completed in 1852 to meet the needs of the growing Catholic population. The parish was originally called St. Joseph's, and had its church in a former schoolhouse on the corner of Barney and Mt. Vernon Streets. The cemetery, also on that site, was the first Irish cemetery in the State (See tour stop ⑩). St. Mary's Church was built with the aid of many Irish stone masons who were working on Fort Adams. Take time here to read the sign outside the Church, the wedding site of John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier.

⑨ **Newport's Waterfront:** Home to the first Irish immigrants, and many of the Ft. Adams workforce of masons and laborers.

⑩ **Kerry Hill:** In the late 1700s and into the late 1800s the Irish moved into this area. Nearby is the St. Joseph / Barney Street Cemetery.

⑪ **St. Joseph / Barney St. Cemetery:** This historic cemetery, located at the corner of Barney Street and Mount Vernon Street, was begun in the 1830s, when the property adjacent to the Church, established in 1828, was purchased. Thus, this was the first Irish cemetery established in the State of Rhode Island. There are many interesting gravestones which can be viewed. They were laid down a number of years ago, protecting them from vandals and weather, so many are in good condition. The museum restored the cemetery in 1999, and installed an informational plaque. Spend some time inspecting the stones, noting that most show those interred were born in Ireland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Other Sites in Newport County

③ **St. Augustin's Church:** Carroll Avenue, Newport. Has beautiful stained glass windows reflecting the Irish Heritage of many of its parishioners. The Parish celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2011.

⑫ **St. Joseph's Church:** Rhode Island's first Catholic parish was established on Barney Street on the site of the cemetery. It was called "St. Joseph's Mission". The "*new*" St. Joseph's Church is on Broadway near City Hall. It opened in 1912 and was consecrated in 1922.

⑬ **Whitehall Museum House:** The home of Bishop George Berkeley from 1729-1731. Berkeley was an Irish philosopher, educator, and Bishop of the Church of Ireland. Maintained by the National Society of the Colonial Dames in Rhode Island. Tours late June - August. Five miles from downtown Newport at 311 Berkeley Ave, Middletown. WhiteHallHouseMuseum.org

⑭ **Portsmouth Coal Mines:** Many Irish worked these mines until the early 1900s (The site is not open to the public.) The entrance was directly below the new condominium tower at The Carnegie Abbey Club.

## Join The Museum of Newport Irish History – Support Irish Heritage

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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Amount Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Donations are tax deductible – a 501(c)3 organization)

Checks payable to MNIH Mail to: The Museum of Newport Irish History, P.O. Box 1378, Newport, Rhode Island 02840 or join online at [www.NewportIrishHistory.org](http://www.NewportIrishHistory.org). Click "membership" and pay with a credit card.