OUR VIEW

Irish history finally gets its own place

Two years ago in this space, we supported the Museum of Newport Irish History's efforts to establish a permanent museum at Fort Adams, which Irish immigrants helped to build.

When that did not come to fruition, the museum's members did not give up. Instead, they found another way to pay tribute to Newport's deep Irish roots.

That perseverance paid off last weekend, when the Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center opened in a storefront on lower Thames Street.

That location also makes sense; it is in the heart of the old Fifth Ward, the Irish-American enclave that retains its neighborhood nickname even though it no longer is a voting district.

The museum has packed a lot into a small area, which has been designed so exhibits can be moved in and out and shifted when more space is needed. The walls feature tributes to the Irish of past and present in Newport. One exhibit features photographs of mayors of Irish heritage, dating back to Patrick Boyle in 1895 up to current Mayor Stephen C. Waluk, who cut a green ribbon for Saturday's opening.

Another exhibit focuses on Irish immigrants' role in building Fort Adams, another section is devoted to the Irish who built railroad lines and canals on the East Coast. Other features include a DVD of Newport Irish history, along with a pictorial salute to Catholic churches such as St. Joseph's, St. Augustin's and St. Mary's, including photos of the marriage of then-Sen. John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier.

The center cost about $25,000 to open, with the money coming from fundraising events and grants — and admission is by donation, which will help keep it going.

"We've had some delays along the way. But I'm happy with the way it's turned out," said Vincent Arnold of Middletown, who came up with the idea for the museum in 1996. "It's smaller than we would have liked, but I think it works."

It sure does. We are glad a showcase for the work this worthwhile organization does to preserve and promote Irish history in Newport finally has become a reality.