

A Walking Tour of Irish Newport Tour 3: Bellevue Avenue (Self-guided)



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Open May—October and by appointment

The Irish in Newport

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

The 1700's saw the arrival of the noted 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.

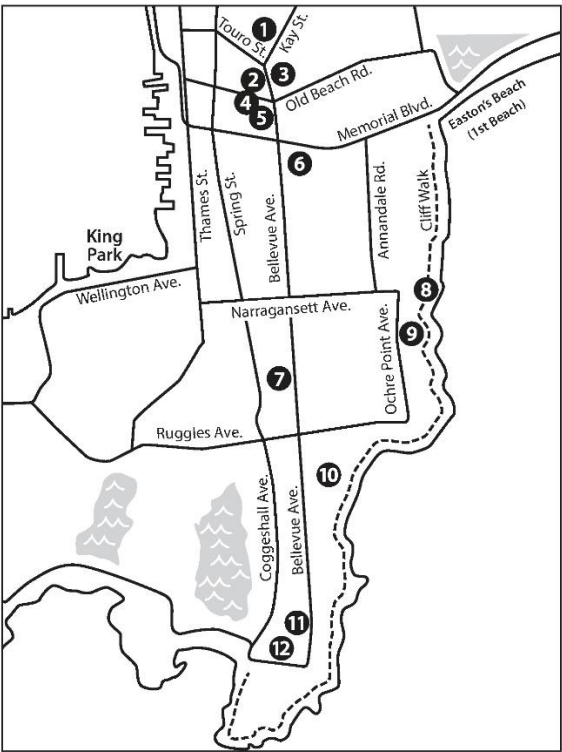
1778 saw the arrival of the French to Aquidneck Island to support America, with the Irish Regiment under Count Dillon, some of whose ranks stayed behind.

The next wave of immigration occurred in the 1820's 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 1840's drove thousands to come to America.

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

Through the 1800's and 1900's 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 eleven (11) mayors of Newport of Irish descent.

1. **2 Kay St.: "Hilltop" Inn, Former home of Newport's Judge Florence Kerins Murray**, first woman Judge in RI. Courthouse at Washington Sq, named in her honor. Born and raised in the 5th Ward at 18 Narragansett Ave., close to The Museum of Newport Irish History.
2. **29 Bellevue Ave.: The Reading Room (yellow building, adjacent to Viking Hotel)**
 - Home to the Men's "400 Org", wealthiest 400 in NYC.
 - The Reading Room founded 1854 by William Wetmore (China Trader) and several Southern Planters and Yankee Traders who summered here.
 - Members included Washington Irving, Senator Clairborne Pell, Vincent Astor, Pierre Lorillard, Cornelius and Harold Vanderbilt and James Gordon Bennett.
 - James Gordon Bennett Jr., publisher of NY Herald Tribune and a wealthy Irishman, wagered polo buddy British Cavalry Officer Captain Augustus "Sugar" Candy to ride his horse up the stairs into the club at lunchtime.
 - Bennett and Candy were expelled from The Reading Room. Bennett then built (in spite) Newport Casino at Memorial and Bellevue!



3. **38 Bellevue Ave.: "Unsinkable Molly Brown" House (no longer exists), Located in parking lot beside and behind the former Muenchinger-King (MK) Hotel**
 - Born into poverty 1867 of Irish immigrant parents, Margaret Tobin was from Hannibal, MO cotton fields.
 - Moved to Leadville Pa. (mines) as a young girl with two siblings where she worked in department store, met and married JJ Brown (also poor) who later became a wealthy miner. They moved to Denver, CO. where she founded Denver Women's Club.
 - Separated in 1909, she moved to NYC, summered in Newport, RI. Became philanthropist but shied away from active socialite scene.
 - Survived the 1912 Titanic sinking after assisting others to be rescued. Her good friend, John Jacob Astor IV, died in the sinking.
 - 1960 Broadway Musical, starring Tammy Grimes, was named after her. Margaret "Maggie" died 1932 in her sleep in NYC hotel.

4. Touro Park (corner of Mill St. and Bellevue Ave.): Commodore Mathew Perry Statue

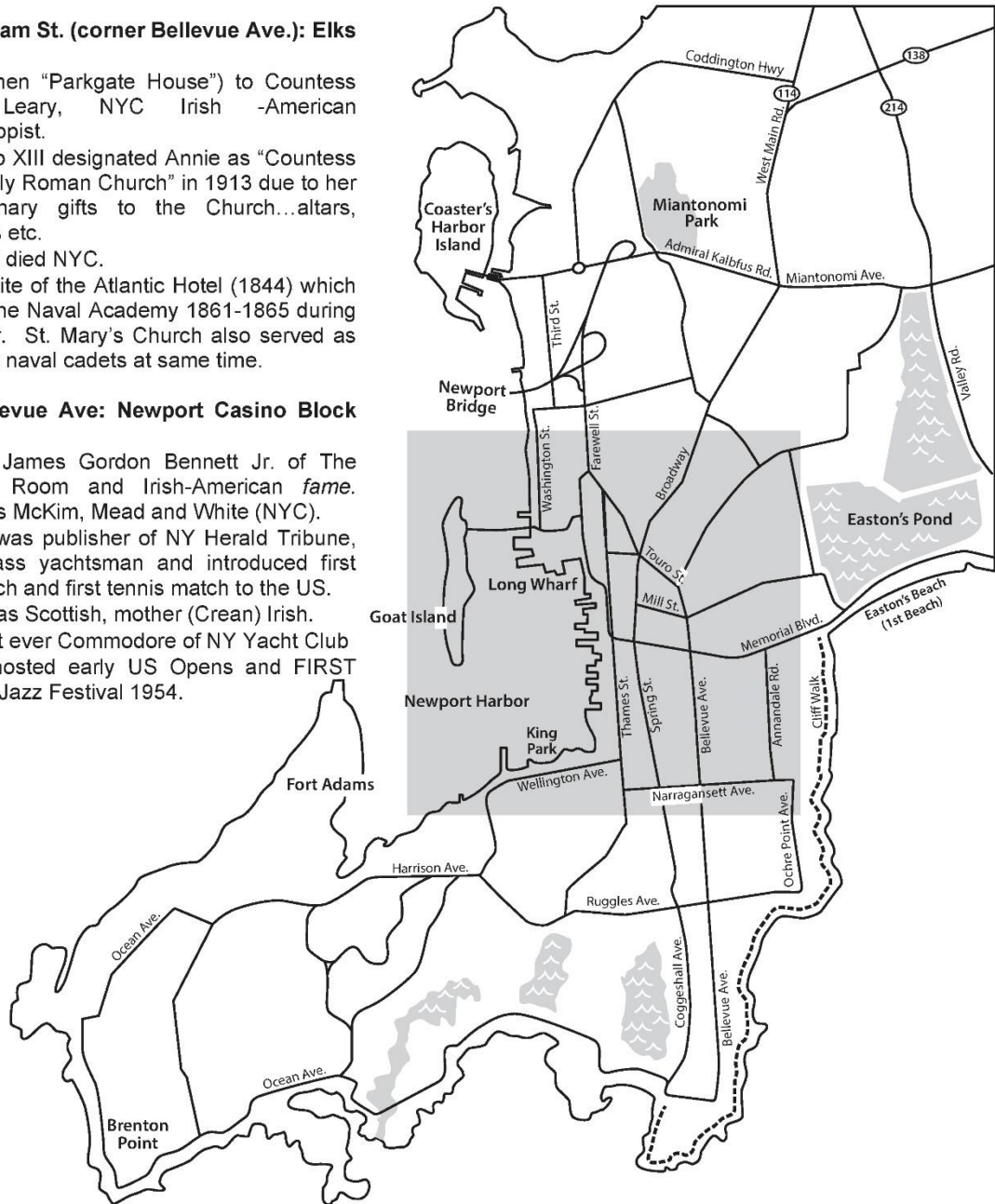
- Perry fought in War of 1912; opened Japan to Western Trade Routes 1852-1854.
- Considered to be "Father of the Steam Navy".
- Son of Irish parents. Father was RI Navy Captain, captured by British in Revolutionary War, interred in Newry, County Armagh/County Down, Northern Ireland. There met his wife (Mathew's mom), a nurse, whom he later married and returned to Newport.
- Other son was Oliver Hazard Perry, older brother of Mathew and hero of Battle of Great Lakes (Lake Erie 1812). His statue is in downtown Newport at Washington Sq. in front of Old Colony House.
- Perry Home of 1794 is located at Second and Walnut Streets in "Point" section.
- Both brothers buried in Island Cemetery, Newport.
- Statue's stone mason was an Irishman, Patrick McGowan.

5. 141 Pelham St. (corner Bellevue Ave.): Elks Club

- Home (then "Parkgate House") to Countess Annie Leary, NYC Irish -American philanthropist.
- Pope Leo XIII designated Annie as "Countess of the Holy Roman Church" in 1913 due to her extraordinary gifts to the Church...altars, sacristies etc.
- Born and died NYC.
- Former site of the Atlantic Hotel (1844) which housed the Naval Academy 1861-1865 during Civil War. St. Mary's Church also served as chapel to naval cadets at same time.

6. 194 Bellevue Ave: Newport Casino Block (1880)

- Built by James Gordon Bennett Jr. of The Reading Room and Irish-American fame. Architects McKim, Mead and White (NYC).
- Bennett was publisher of NY Herald Tribune, world class yachtsman and introduced first polo match and first tennis match to the US.
- Father was Scottish, mother (Crean) Irish.
- Youngest ever Commodore of NY Yacht Club
- Casino hosted early US Opens and FIRST Newport Jazz Festival 1954.



7. **Bellevue and Howe St. (now vacant lot): Timmy "The Woodhooker" Sullivan's home**. He was infamous as a junkyard dealer in the midst of the Newport high society neighborhood. His story was covered by the NY Times and is located at the Interpretive Center.

8. East end of Narragansett Ave.: Forty Steps on the Cliff Walk.

- Social center site for Irish "Help" on "Nights Off" from working at gilded "Cottages".
- Many marriages had first courting at the weekly dance sessions.
- Featured at Interpretive Center right front window. Steel structure destroyed in Hurricane of 1938, replaced by stone stairs.
- Dancing at 40 steps re-enacted each year during March Irish Heritage Month.

9. 100 Ochre Point Ave.: Ochre Court (1892), Salve Regina University on Cliff Walk

- Second largest of mansions in size, only Breakers is larger.
- Architect Richard Morris Hunt.
- Family estate of Ogden Goulet, NY banker, investor and international yachtsman.
- Although used only 8 weeks per year. required 27 servants, 8 coachmen and 12 gardeners full time.
- Donated to Sisters of Mercy in 1947 by Goulet family. Sisters of Mercy founded in Dublin, Ireland. First building of Salve Regina College (University).
- *Lore? In 1977, Norah Connolly O'Brien, gave a speech at Salve Regina University which stated that, on the night her father, James Connolly, Easter Uprising leader and hero 1916, was to be executed at Kilmainham Gaol, he implored his wife to flee to US with Norah. They came to Ochre Court where they were cared for by the Irish servants – "the Help".* *Factual: She escaped Ireland via Edinburgh after James Connolly's execution to Boston area where she met her husband and married.*

10. 548 Bellevue Ave.: Rosecliff

- Built by James Fair as a wedding present for his daughter, Theresa "Tessie" Fair Oelrichs. The daughter "Tessie" came East to marry into society

- Father was James Fair of Belfast who made fortune as one of 4 partners in Comstock Lode Mines, Nevada
- She became one of the top 3 "socialites", along with Mrs. Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont (Belcourt Castle) and Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish (husband President Illinois Central Railroad).
- Designed by Stanford White and modeled after the Grand Trianon at Versailles.
- Site of many famous movies to include: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Betsy*, *True Lies*, *High Society* and *Amistad*.

11. 657 Bellevue Ave.: Belcourt Castle (1892)

- Built for \$3.2M by Oliver Hazard Perry (OHP) Belmont, son of August Belmont, a NY banker and horse magnate.
- Architect: Richard Morris Hunt (Ochre Court, Breakers, Marble House)
- Grandfather was Commodore Mathew Perry whose mother was born in Ireland.
- OHP Belmont lived in Belcourt alone as a bachelor. It was a one bedroom 60,000 square foot cottage with room for his horses to roam.
- Hired Thomas Hughes of Dublin as his horse trainer/groomer who was killed here in 1911 of, ironically, a horse kick!
- Later married Alva Vanderbilt (Mrs. OHP), who immediately redesigned entire home!
- Belcourt was designed so horses and carriages could drive directly into castle from the side street. (check it out)
- Bought by Tinney family for \$25K in 1956 and they lived there for more than 50 years. (Harle Tinney is still living in Middletown)
- Purchased in 2012 by Carolyn Rafaelian (Alex and Ani jewelry founder) for \$3.6M (same as build cost in 1892) who spent more than five years remodeling Belcourt into destination wedding site.

12. 719 Bellevue Ave.: Inchiquin (1887)

- Built by John O'Brien, direct descendent of Brian Boru, high king of ancient Ireland ruling families. Boru credited with driving Vikings from Ireland
- Inchiquin modeled after baronial estate Inchiquin (15th Century) in Newmarket on Fergus, County Clare. Now site of Dromoland Castle, five star plus luxury vacation venue. Room rates to \$1700 per night in March !