

Slide 1: The Celtic Team Genevieve McGlinchey and Wallace Mathison

Newport Community Leaders from the 1950s to 1980s

Good evening. Thank you Deana, Ann Arnold, Dan Titus, and Frank Furtado for your support for my presentation tonight. I want to start by saying that I have been in Newport since I was four years old and I have spent every summer for 7 decades here. All three of my books, two on the Banisters and the biography of Justice Murray, are about Newport.

When Ann Arnold asked me last year if I had any other Irish stories to share, I decided to go through the scrapbooks my mother made during the 1950s and 1960s, when we three girls grew up in Newport, and her folders for the 1970s and 1980s, when all three daughters were married and not always living in Newport.

Yes, there was a story of this amazing couple who did so much for Newport. That is what I will share with you today with the help of the Newport Collection at Newport Public Library and newspapers.com. I will begin by explaining just a bit about their Celtic heritage.

Slide 2: Map of Donegal in Ireland and Inishowen

Genevieve McGlinchey's ancestors were Famine immigrants arriving in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts between 1847-1850. Included were Dohertys, Kellys, McGowans, McElroys, and McGaffigans all from the wild and rugged northernmost peninsula of Ireland, the Inishowen, in Donegal.

From Buncrana, Carndonagh, Clonmany, the Isle of Doagh they departed Moville for Liverpool and America.

Genevieve's ancestor, Eliza McGowan McGlinchey ran a boarding house on Winthrop Street near Harvard Square and taught girls how to be domestic servants. In those years, the menfolk of the family worked as laborers. They saved their money for their children to complete **parochial grammar school** and public high school.

Education was the way to success.

Slide 3: Here is the McGlinchey homestead in **Meendacalliagh (Donegal)** compared to their 1867 home near **Harvard Square of Cambridge**

Genevieve's Famine immigrant grandfather, who was successful as a book binder for the Riverside Press, raised his family in a three-decker home he built near Harvard Square and across the street from St. Paul's Catholic Church. That is where Genevieve lived.

[Genevieve's father helped to put two younger brothers through Boston College, 1902 and 1906, with both becoming priests. Father Joseph McGlinchey was a pastor in Lynn and head of the Propagation of the Faith (1911-1928). Another uncle of Genevieve's, Harry McGlinchey, became a Jesuit Missionary and died in India. Aunt Elizabeth McGlinchey graduated from Radcliffe in 1899, so Gen saw her goal.]

Slide 4: Genevieve McGlinchey age two, Radcliffe, and MIT Radiation Lab

In the summer of 1919, when Irish freedom fighter, Éamon de Valera (1882-1975) came to Boston, her mother took her on the subway in town to see him. Gen was 8!

As a young person, Genevieve enjoyed the benefits of toe dancing and Irish step dance lessons and learning to play the banjo. At Cambridge Latin Genevieve excelled in both history and science, and debate team and she was fast and accurate on her mother's typewriter. She played in the orchestra in 1924; LeRoy Anderson composed music for the group!

She lost her 50-year-old father to a heart attack during her senior year at Radcliffe. Graduating at the height of Depression in 1932, she took on multiple jobs as she became the mainstay for her mother, aunt, and 2 younger sisters. **Her role gave her a toughness to provide for others.**

While the School Committee appointed her to teach at Cambridge Latin, she pursued her master's degree in physics at Boston College. During World War II she worked at Radiation Laboratory at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge. They hired women and men, who were "intelligent, energetic, and young."

Slide 5: Scottish Highlands and Lochalsh, Wester Ross

The Mathisons came from the Scottish Highlands near the Kyle of Lochalsh, (Strait of the Foaming Lake). They were farmers and herders. In the early 1800s, they were among the exiles because of the Highland Clearances, when the open, common fields were blocked to former tenants, and they were evicted.

They moved south and departed Glasgow, arriving in Connecticut.

Slide 6: Donan Castle, Scotland and Mathison household Cromwell, Connecticut River

One claim to fame is that William Wallace Mathison's ancestors on his dad's side assisted the McDonalds in building Eileen Donan (Isle of Donan) Castle. Wallace was named after the famous 13th century Scottish hero.

The Mathisons arrived in America, by 1851. **Skilled as molders of silver and as quarrymen**, they found work and helped to found St. John's Catholic Church. Wallace's Irish grandparents, Mary and Patrick Gaffney on his mother's side, were from Galway.

Slide 7: William Wallace Mathison age two, Boston College, MIT Radiation Lab

Wallace's youth was among the many cousins of his Irish and Polish families. When his mother tested positive for tuberculosis, in 1918, his father took her by car, one he built from a kit he purchased in Waltham, MA. They drove 400 miles roundtrip to the chapel of St. Joseph's Oratory, Montreal to visit with miracle worker Brother André who lived from 1845-1937 (known as Saint Andre Bissette today). They hoped the saintly man could heal her. Brother Andre told them that he did not have the power to cure, but to pray to St. Joseph. Anna, Wallace's mother, did not win her battle even though she spent a year at Gaylord Farm Sanatorium, Wallingford, Connecticut, where Eugene O'Neil conquered his TB. My father, Wallace, lost his mother to tuberculosis when he was ten. That is why in the 1960s Wally and Gen participated in TB testing in Newport.

As a teen, my dad Wallace lived in Windsor, Vermont and became a downhill skier, mountain climber, hiker, angler, and built his own

canoe. Wallace graduated from high school in Wilson, NC and went first to Loyola College in Baltimore intending to be a physician. When he transferred to Boston College, he pursued both his bachelor's in chemistry and master's degree in physics before joining the engineers at Radiation Lab MIT for the war years.

Slide 8: Wedding at St. Paul's Cambridge, MA 27 Dec 1944

The couple met at a dance sponsored by the Boston College Alumni Council.

Joined in Holy Matrimony at Christmastime in 1944, the couple started their collaboration on common goals, a constructive interaction that would continue until the unexpected passing of Wallace decades later. At MIT Radiation Lab my dad's work was with **airborne beacons and radar**, Mom's group worked on the **magnetron and microwaves**.

Slide 9: China Lake, CA 1946 and Dante's View, Death Valley 1949

As Radiation Lab closed, they had the opportunity to head west to China Lake, California Naval Ordnance Test Station (called NOTS) My dad worked on what would be called in the 1950s the Sidewinder Missile. Genevieve worked at the Michaelson Lab doing calculations and directed the science program for K-8. They lived with 10,000 civilians at a navy base in the desert of Death Valley. It was the largest naval station in the world- it was the size of the state of Rhode Island!!

Six years at China Lake allowed the couple to enjoy the West and its National Parks, fishing, rock hounding, and hiking with their daughters.

1951 ended the first chapter of their lives.

Slide 10: at work, Gould Island testing torpedoes and living on Coggeshall Ave.

By the way my mom was a city girl in 1946 when they left Cambridge, driving south to Florida, then west through the American Southwest. When they drove east in their 1938 Cadillac in 1951, both parents had a job as physicists at the newly opened Naval Underwater Ordnance Station (called NUOS), Newport, RI. **Testing and evaluating torpedoes** was their job. Genevieve was **the first woman physicist** hired at the Navy Base, paid the same as the men at the GS rating, earning \$4600 per year.

Here we see on the left the Gould Island testing site where my mother spent many years evaluating the paths of torpedoes. The image on the right is of our ranch house on Coggeshall Avenue which was a street of gardener's cottages and mansion stables with our very own fire station. That's our Woody in the driveway and my grandfather's Chevy.

Slide 11: Newport Life

We three girls enjoyed island life: sailing, ice skating outdoors at St. George's, Gladding Dance School, horseback riding at Sandy Point, Rocky Farm Girl Scout camp, (mom was a Girl Scout leader!) Sheila Winters, my dancing teacher is here tonight!

[Civic Music Association concerts like the Vienna Choir Boys, dressing up to see actors from New York and Hollywood at the Newport Casino Theater, Saturday mornings would find us at

People's Library or Redwood Library selecting the books we would read that week.]

Slide 12: It's Only Just Begun-Genevieve and Wallace –they were in their forties. Their legacy of the next 40 years of community leadership would be in five areas.

I suggest at the onset of this talk that this Celtic Team was in some ways unique in the 1950s. Genevieve McGlinchey Mathison had two degrees in science. She had **worked since 1932 – 20 years – very unusual and earned her own salary.** Without being in politics, an officer in the military, a professor, school superintendent, or judge, as her good friend Justice Florence Murray, she recognized that a woman's contribution to the community was visible and meaningful when she participated in local or national organizations.

Community leaders, like my parents, have vision, talents, and innovation, but leadership requires the support of a larger team of volunteers to meet the goals of an organization. Leaders also became workers in the field.

And so began the Newport decades and nearly 40 years of community service.

Slide 13: The first area of Mathison Leadership in the Community was Education through the PTA, Science, and Engineering Society

Slide 14: PTA Slide of yearly programs

While they worked 8 to 5 as scientists at NUOS, Genevieve and Wallace Mathison joined the local Parent and Teachers Association at Carey Elementary on (Narragansett Ave.) and Thompson Jr. High

(on Broadway) from 1954 to 1958. Why? Quite frankly, as with many other families, the education of their children was important.

“Parents are partners. Communication with teachers is essential.”

My parents stayed in touch with our teachers, monitoring closely what we were learning in school.

Genevieve rose to positions of leadership in each organization, becoming President of the Aquidneck Island PTAs from 1962 to 1964. My father attended meetings at our schools and took responsibility for his three girls at home when mother was doing on the island talks or in Providence with the state organization.

Genevieve’s forté was setting up a speaker’s series of programs for parents on how to best work with their children’s teachers and continue the education of their children at home. Topics included: Reading Problems and Solutions, The Future of Science, The Gifted and the Handicapped, The Family in Education.

Slide 15: Thompson PTA leaders [Sam Kusinitz, Rev. Simmons, Pat Carroll, Principal, Mrs. Paul Tubley, Mrs. Louis Virgadamo, Mrs. Richard Butler, and Joe Weaver]

Significant to the health of the Newport community, PTA leaders took on the role of organizing the Newport rollout for distribution of the Sabine oral polio vaccine in the schools in the early 1960s.

Slide 16: Science education--first woman science department head at Rogers

Then in 1957, Genevieve Mathison was appointed the first woman science department head at Rogers High School and that meant also the elementary and junior high science program for Newport,

including. curriculum, equipment, and texts. Her salary \$7600 was equal to what she had attained at the Navy Base.

Slide 17: Genevieve's was happy as a teacher especially when you have an outstanding student to support, such as Paul Bamberg, who became Rhode Island's First Westinghouse Science Scholar, went on to a Ph. D at Harvard and 40 plus years of teaching there.

Slide 18 Science and Science Fair News: Some of the outstanding students enrolled in Newport high school science can be seen in this photo. All three of these students, Victoria Nalle later Johnson, pictured here with John Herald and Nick Logothets Jr., spent years educating others. Not only was Vicky Johnson the first black woman principal of a RI high school, she continues to serve the Newport community, providing college scholarships yearly to students and joining a vibrant community effort to recognize the achievements of descendants of African Heritage.

One of the duties for Genevieve was to direct the Aquidneck Island Science Fair. Earlier, from 1953-1956, the Mathison couple were judges of the Newport citywide science fair, so they were familiar with the process and goals. Why are science fairs needed? Students learn **the scientific method and the skill of critical thinking** to present their projects. In other words, both parents pushed for a rigorous course of study in science.

Life was to throw a boomerang into the mix when two years into her role as Chairman, Gen suffered a concussion, falling on the icy sidewalk at Rogers High School on 24 February 1959.

The show had to go on. On the 18th of March 1959, with the largest number of entries(450) in the 15-year history of the Science Fair, Wallace took over as lead. My father said that mom had it all organized with great chairmen of each committee. They all did their jobs, for awards, publicity, hospitality, judges, and made the Fair a success. But Wally saw it through to the finish line.

Some names of the winners you may recognize: Sandra Flowers, Tom Conrad, Patsy Gleason, John Dugan, Chris Connell, David Kerins, Tom Kelly, and Janie Newbury.

At this point, it is accurate to say that the 1959 concussion had a transformative effect on Genevieve. It would take one year of bedrest before my mom could read again without headaches. The accident would be life changing, as she had finished all her course work for her doctorate in education at Boston College. She was hoping to become a School Superintendent. ABD (all but her dissertation) – After nearly 30 years working, earning a salary, she did not return to a full-time career. Instead, she poured her energies into Newport from the 1960s onward.

Slide 19: Newport Engineering Society honoring science students for excellence

There was another way to support science education in Newport. When they joined the Newport Engineering Society in 1952, Wally served as President, Vice President, or chairman of a committee. In this photo, Jonathan Pardee, Douwe Rienstra, Mary Ferreira, and Veronica McConnell are honored as new members. The Society also raised money for student scholarships through Dollars for Scholars.

Slide 20: Speaker topics and new officers. In this 17 Jun 1971 *Newport Daily News* photo, Gen is noted as Secretary, a position she held from 1964-1971.

[Other officers are Navy Cmdr. John McGoff, Charles Hatch, Charles Barker, and Carl Rex.]

During the nearly twenty years of their membership, the Society always had a speaker on a current topic in engineering, technology, or science at their dinners. They awarded high school students for their excellence in science, providing membership in the organization, and scholarships from 1961 for young women and men.

Slide 21: A second area of commitment for the couple was Charity through their Catholic Faith, which was true of American families in the 1950s and 1960s.

Slide 22: Wallace was a Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus from 1949 until his death. Dressed in black cape, plumed admiral's hat, and carrying a sword, he served as an honor guard at funerals and Masses with the Bishop attending. The Knights provided insurance for family members, monetary relief for immigrants, and promoted Catholic education.

As a member of the Father **Junipero Serra Club** which met at Salvé Regina in the 1960s and 1970s, Wally and the other men raised funds for young men to go to the Seminary to study for the priesthood.

At the **Father's Council** at Salve Regina, my dad was the Treasurer. The dads planned the Father-Daughter Weekends and fundraising for the college.

Having served as **race committee chairman at the Newport Yacht Club for about 10 years, my dad was instrumental** in getting the new **Salve Regina Sailing Club of 1967**, which I started when I was at Salve, the use of the Newport Yacht Club Turnabouts, dinghies so we could practice for the collegiate circuit of races in 1967 through 1972 when two of us, Betsy and I were at the college.

Slide 23: St. Augustin Church on Harrison Ave. was the Catholic parish of Wallace and Genevieve Mathison. While Wally served on the **financial council**, Gen joined the **St. Augustin's Mother's Guild** in the 1950s.

[Mesdames Charles W. Schanel, John S. Dugan, Arthur J. Halliday, Joseph O'Malley, Godfrey Moffitt.]

She helped to bring speakers or activities to the monthly meetings, as well as collaborate with other women to raise money for **unmarried mothers and assistance to the community for disabled people and the needy.**

Slide 24: Outreach Slide As Grand Regent of the Catholic Daughters of America in 1962, the women held two fundraisers, a talent show and a tea, again raising money for women in need. That led to service on the **Diocesan Council of Catholic Women** from 1968 to 1971, for anti-poverty programs and new immigrants.

Slide 25: In 1977-1978, Genevieve was also President of the **RI Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians**. Gen represented RI at the international conference in Killarney in 1978. She was the Chairman of fundraisers for Irish American Scholarships for young women in the community. My thanks to **Kathryn Brady and Kathleen Diulus**, who helped me find wonderful information on my mom's service **from 1976 -2001**.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many of us had parents as our role models; we learned that in life **our responsibility was to achieve in school and help others**.

Moving beyond school and church, the Mathison couple became involved in historic preservation in Newport.

Slide 26: Newport Redevelopment Agency

After World War II, the federal government passed legislation that was designed to remove urban blight in downtown areas and to create jobs. Each city had to form a **Redevelopment Agency**.

Key leaders in Newport were Executive director William H. Leys, Chairman of the Commission, William Cocoran (1929-2021) and later Chairman Thomas Perotti.

There were **key components for urban renewal in the master plan that the city approved in 1965**. Let us recall what Newport looked like.

West Broadway based on the 1942 WPA study-more than half of the 300 homes did not meet code.

The proposed Long Wharf-Market Square had 15 vacant stores. Arsons set fire to some on Thames St. Businesses had moved to Middletown or out of the city center. The fire station and the Brick Market were left standing near the future Market Square

Goat Island, the Navy gave up the Torpedo Station. The Newport Redevelopment Agency purchased the island in 1964 and built a cause way from Newport. Of course that meant tearing down brick, steel, concrete, mortar.

(dumped into the ocean, creating three more acres-nothing new, original GI was only 16 acres not 32 as it is today.)

America's Cup Avenue connector was to be built with underground utilities and the creation of Queen Anne's Square. That meant demolition of Thames Street West and East to Long Wharf. **-67 families were displaced--** to build the Gateway Center, hotels, and residential units

Thanks to former **Commodore of Newport Yacht Club, Pam Barter**, I learned that the Yacht Club had to move to its present location on the other side of harbor to create the Perotti Park docking space for cruise ship passenger ferries.

Historic Hill was to include preservation of colonial and Victorian homes. Banister's and Bowen's Wharf would be developed.

(Landscaping, and utilities. Four parks and 2 parking lots.)

****Although the Newport Bridge** was not under the Redevelopment Agency, the General Assembly passed an act to build it at the same time. Beginning in April 1966 and completed by June 1969 it

connected with America's Cup Avenue bringing tourists into Newport.

****Also, the new **Newport Public Library** built between 1966 and 1968, decided by forward thinking townsmen who knew federal funds were forthcoming if the location was on Spring Street in an area coordinated with HH development.**

[Those on the building committee included familiar names: Harrington, Hambly, McCarthy, Shea, Coristine, Sheffield, and Alofsin.]

Slide 27: In reaction to the plans of the NRA, citizens formed organizations to voice what they wanted to happen to their neighborhoods. **The Mathisons joined each of the following organizations: Point, Operation Clapboard, Historic Hill, and Meeting House Inc.**

Slide 28: In 1955, the **Point Association**, a neighborhood group formed out of Old Port Association of 1928. Their goal was to save the historic area and in 1957 they first published *The Greenlight*, a Quarterly, which they sent to their hundreds of members to keep them aware of the situation for the neighborhood. **In 1962 members published their plan. There were going to be nearly 60 families displaced by demolition by the Redevelopment Agency.**

So began a movement in Newport by people who loved their homes, or wanted to buy a colonial house, or preserve the neighborhoods without destruction.

Slide 29: This slide shows a house tour brochure of Operation Clapboard in the 1970s which includes my parents house at 199

Spring Street outside. Operation Clapboard began in 1963

(although not incorporated until 1969) with Richard B. Sheffield, Nadine Pepys, and Patrick Kirby.

Guides I recall for these house tours were Mary Rummel, Mary Jean McKenna, Lillian Gee (later Lillian Dick), Carole (Frank) Hale, and my sister, Betsy Mathison.

The goal was to save architecturally valued houses especially in Thames Street, Historic Hill, and the Point from destruction(**28 in the first year!!**) The idea of Operation Clapboard was to sell shares at \$25 each; when they accumulated \$10,000, buy a dilapidated but architecturally valued house. Then someone would buy it from OC. They assisted owners with purchase, rehabilitation, and deed research.

By **1974 fifty houses** on the Point and Historic Hill proudly displayed the acorn sign of Operation Clapboard, showing that the property had been historically researched.

Gen and Wally were highly visible in the organization for nearly a decade. **Wally served on the Clapboard Board of Directors from 1968 to 1976** with Elizabeth Morris Smith, Gwendolyn Armstrong Rives, John Millar, Robert Foley, Stephen Snell, and Francis Comstock. **Genevieve was the last secretary from 1972-1979.**

In July 1966, the couple bought a colonial house, Loyalist Thomas Banister's property on 199 Spring Street. The confiscated house became the home first for John Kerber in 1785, Hessian armorer who joined the Americans, and then Dr. John Preston Mann in 1803.

With help from their daughters the team renovated back to the original --walls plastered with cow's hair and shells, two-foot-wide oak floors, and bayberry painted wainscoting, nine-inch beams throughout. The home was noted for its exterior corner quoins and fanlight over the door.

The research on house histories continued until 1980, when Operation Clapboard ended, recognizing that Newport Restoration Foundation could more easily purchase and restore houses.

*Just a note my mom sold 199 Spring in 2003 a year before her passing. The acorn sign disappeared. The new owner as of 2024 painted it black-even the quoin trim!! My dad was on the Newport Historic District Commission for most of the 1970s and would not have allowed that.

Slide 30: Historic Hill, On the left is a photo of mom and dad in their work clothes at the 199 Spring St in Historic Hill. On the right is the first letter of the Hill Association showing Frank Lane, which no longer exists as it was eliminated to create Queen Anne's Square.

Historic Hill Association was founded in 1970. Along with Gen and Wally, Patrick G. Kirby, Esq., Ruth and Capt. USN Ret. Jack Myers, May Wharton, and Joseph B. Going, Esq., they wrote the constitution and by-laws. Thirty-five residents joined in this new endeavor "to promote the common good, initiate programs for the community."

The group soon became the voice for the Hill in matters of **zoning, redevelopment, vandalism, and beautification**. While serving on

the Hill my dad also was on the **Newport Taxpayers Association**, a watchdog over the Town Council and Redevelopment Agency. He also served on the Newport Historic District Commission for nearly a decade.

They worked with Doris Duke's Restoration Foundation to secure the removal of a gas station, Registry of Motor Vehicles office, and Egan's Laundry.

Also, they proposed the city start sticker parking for residents.

In 1974, Lillian Gee, later Lillian Dick, organized a plan for gaslights, like those on Beacon Hill in Boston, which took hold in both HH and the Point then Bellevue Ave.

(Initially, 60 lights were purchased through monies of the NRA, the city, the gas company, Newport Historical Society, Preservation Society and Brick Market Place developers.)

Slide 31: Historic Hill Map In 1970 the bounds of the Hill included residences inside the bounds of Touro to the north, School and Division to the east then Bellevue, William St Golden Hill and Brewer to the South and the Thames Street waterfront and wharves from north to south: Bowen, Banister, Sayer, Scott, Commercial, Hammett, Perry Mill and Cottrell shipyard.

[Today, the members of HHA still plan activities for the neighborhood: potluck gatherings, picnics in Touro Park, garden tours, and elected neighborhood block captains.]

Today it is again called Historic Hill Association as seen on their 2024 Newsletter online.

Slide 32: Gen and Wally **joined Meeting House, Incorporated in 1970** by Richard Sheffield and Ward Harvey to acquire and restore the Congregational Church of 1735 of Ezra Stiles on Clarke Street. It was falling apart and they hoped it could be restored and used by the city for a performing arts center.

In this photo from the *Newport Daily News* you see Ed Connelly, Bob McKenna, and Antoinette Downing, who sought federal money from the 1966 Historic Preservation Act. In 1975, they completed the first renovations, the Bicentennial Commission leased from St. Joseph's for ten years.

[Gen and Wally joined Patrick city housing inspector, Donald Dodge, AIA, Mrs. Ruth Myers, and Pastor John Dorney, United Congregationalist. The consultants were Orin Bullock AIA, Mrs. Antoinette Downing, and Mrs. Gladys Bolhouse. They raised money to match the \$10,000 grant from the US Dept of the Interior.]

But the group never raised the \$80,000 necessary for other repairs. It sold to a private investor who transformed the building into condominiums.

A fourth area of the commitment was to community cultural celebrations in the 1970s.

Slide 33: Leadership in the Community via Cultural Celebrations in the 1970. Many in Newport reflected on the traditions of the past, how to build links to spiritual and democratic foundations of America, as well as immigrant contributions to American society.

Slide 34: Christmas in Newport

How did they contribute to **Christmas in Newport**? From 1970, Wally and Gen were among a core of residents, like John Lauth of the Artillery Co. and Bart Dunbar who bought Bowen's Wharf, joined Ruth Meyers' and her brainchild of a return to the typical eighteenth-century gatherings for Christmas.

Dorothy Fillebrown was a mighty force who organized Christmas on the Hill with a single candle lighting in the windows of homes. The Point had a dedicated group with Florence Archambault, Kit Hammett, the Weaver, Benson and Covell families from those early days.

Although neither Gen nor Wallace took on a top leadership role they were involved with the **publicity** for years. Gen would confirm the non-profit activity requests that came in by phone and lay out the December calendar for printing.

One unique event in the 1970s John Millar, who built the HMS Rose for the celebrations of 1976, shared:

"Ruth & Jack Myers and your parents (the four M's) were good friends and pretty much carried the early years of Christmas in

Newport. One commemoration of Newport colonial days was the Turtle Frolic of 1752. A musket salute by the Artillery Company of Newport commenced the event, followed by the enjoyment of English country dancing.”

Those first years set the pace and involvement of local churches, theaters, libraries and merchants, sponsoring chorales, plays, films, foods of the season, and the reading of C. Clement Moore’s *Twas the Night Before Christmas* at Moore’s house in Newport.

[Frank Hale, Bob McKenna, Fred Kirby, and John Lauth headed the committee to have a Catholic Mass said in French in the Old Colony House in honor of General Rochambeau.]

Over five decades later there are still hundreds of volunteers, a lantern tour, house tour, holiday stroll, boat parade, the Gingerbread House at the Mariott, and the Nutcracker Ballet. A special shout out to Bart Dunbar who invited Tree Lighting, caroling, and other activities to Bowen’s Wharf.

Slide 35: The couple were leaders of the **RI Independence Commemorative at Newport** [hereafter RIICAN] from 1972 until 1976, with the focus on a year of activities centered on our state’s role in the 200-year history of the United States. Newport was a part of a statewide organization under Patrick Conley, Esq. Democratic Senator Bob McKenna was the representative for Newport.

In 1975, the group decided to **create memorial medallions** to raise funds for the Bicentennial Year events. Designed by John Benson with the motto, “Undaunted by Tyrants We’ll Die or Be Free,” the *Newport Mercury* motto, surrounded the Liberty Tree. The first Liberty Tree was planted in 1764 during the Stamp Act protests.

Produced in bronze, pewter, and silver, they sold individually as a necklace or as a set of three boxed medallions. My dad was Treasurer of RIICAN and my parents sold these medallions at every event for several years.

(The bronze was \$3, the pewter \$6 and the silver cost \$25)

On the 4th of May, the 1776 RI declaration of independence, the first in the nation, was read from the State House steps (Old Colony House). The activities for the days of May filled the month: Liberty Tree lighting with a fife and drum corps, concerts, ballet, essay contests, military demonstrations by the Artillery Co and the Black Regiment in Eisenhower Park, and the visit of the Tall Ships. Local Ndewport organizations received funds for these commemorations.

Officers and board members of RIICAN through the yearlong celebrations in Newport include to name just a few, Frank S. Hale, John Lauth, Virginia Covell, Larry Newsome, Ed Connelly, Paul Sullivan, Steve Lepley.

My mother and father also chaired The Independence Day Ball, which was on 3 May 1976 at Rosecliff.

Slide 36 How did Genevieve and Wallace learn about **Newport Irish Heritage Association**

When I interviewed **Jim Mahoney** in July of this year, he told me that he and the other founders, Paul Crowley, Rick Kelly, and Rick O'Neil, were in La Forge Restaurant one night in 1977, having finished writing the charter. Wally and Gen happened to see us and asked

what we were doing. “When I told her, forming the NIHA, Gen said, “I am Boston Irish, and I would like to join you.”

Slide 37: Monthly Calendar Jim said, “I recall that your mother worked on the bus tour to sites in Newport where the Irish left their mark, such as Rosecliff, Fort Adams, St. Mary’s St. Joseph’s, and the Forty Steps. That was one of our first endeavors for March activities, to connect the Irish to Newport history.”

Rick Kelly added, “along with your folks, Barbara Booth, Al MacAloon, Bob McKenna, Eileen O'Reilly, John Chatty, and others, they expanded our vision of awakening Newport to its rich Irish heritage and culture way beyond what we had initially discussed doing.” Groups filled every day in March with celebrations of the Irish bread baking contests, dance, music, theater by Irish playwrights, film, poetry, art, and Celtic and American history. The Newport economy, hotels, restaurants, schools, and historical organizations joined in. We all can remember Cherish the Ladies and Robbie O’Connell.

In 1996 many members moved into our present-day organization, the Museum of Newport Irish History with broader goals to include an interpretive center, lecture series, restoration of the Barney Street Cemetery, connections to a sister city (Kinsale), and a focus on the legacy of the Irish on institutions in Newport.

Slide 38: Fifth area of commitment was Tackling issues in the Community

Some problems related to health and safety, others to citizen rights.

Slide 39 TB Testing in Newport Public Schools

In 1962, after the General Assembly passed a law (in 1956) for all adults working in school settings to be tested for tuberculosis, Genevieve worked with local medical personnel, the school department, the Rhode Island Lung Association (then called the Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association), and Newport Public Health Nursing Association to initiate tine testing of students in grades 1, 6, and 11.

A disposable Tine Test made four tiny pricks in the forearm. Within 48 hours, it was evident if someone had been exposed to TB. Some key locals were Geraldine Nagel, Mildred McDonald, Paula Donovan, and Agnes Sullivan.

The testing continued yearly until 1973, when the Navy pulled out of Newport. Between 8 and 20 students a year tested positive out of the 1200-1800 students evaluated each year. The free service was available to adults at sites in Washington Square, Park Holm, and Bellevue Avenue Shopping Center. There was follow-up with those who tested positive to have an x-ray to determine if they needed medicine. The testing reduced the incidence of TB from 11% to 1%, after the **12-year program**.

[Never more than 88% of parents agreed to the testing. What was the incidence? For example, in 1963 9 positive cases out of 1,971

tested. In 1964 8 cases out of 1,628 tested, 1965 there were 20 out of 1,587 tested.]

American Red Cross swimming instruction

My parents saw a need among young people in the city for swimming instruction. My dad asked, “How do we live near the water and not insist that Newport’s children know how to swim?”

In the 1950s decade, Genevieve and Wallace were scientists at the Base. Why not ask the Navy Base Commanding Officer, (Capt. John H. Brandt, also a member of the Npt Engineering Society) for the use of the pool for swimming instruction for Newport youth?

He agreed to set aside Wednesday night, 7 to 9 pm, for nine-week sessions at the pool in Building #307 on the base for students ages 7-17 to advance their swimming skills. From 1958, about one hundred students signed up per session (3 sessions per year) from all over Newport County, Little Compton, and Tiverton Schools.

Some of the swimming instructors were: Ruth Earle, Barbara Chapman, Everett Woods, Thelma Grenon, Joe Segerson, and Roger Caswell. 300 a year or about 3000 young people advanced their swimming skills over the ten years of the program. This was a program that kept giving as many older students went on to teach swimming at summer camps or lifeguard at island beaches.

Slide 40: Red Cross First Aid Instruction and Boating Safety courses

Most of us know of the importance of the Red Cross in American Life: for its Blood bank, hurricane Assistance, hospital Volunteers,

Gray Ladies and Candy Stripers, water safety and boating safety instruction.

When Genevieve joined the American Red Cross in Newport in the 1950s, she was a first aid instructor with Charlie Donovan for firefighters, police, high school students (would be lifeguard and camp instructors), and for Girl Scout leaders.

Slide 41 Rights of Way to the Water: Bailey's Beach and the Cliff Walk, Thames, Washington St

Slide 42 Right of Way to Access Bailey's Beach and the Cliff Walk

A controversy between Spouting Rock Beach Association (1897) and the city of Newport was over who owned the east end of the beach where Bellevue Avenue met Coggeshall Avenue. **On the map notice that Bellevue extended right to the Beach and that was the public right of way to the water.**

In the fall of 1959 the beach association put up a high chain link fence to prevent people who were not members from wandering onto the beach and into their private bathhouse area.

A citizens' group of neighborhood folks along Coggeshall Ave. called for the city to get the beach to remove the fence because it denied their ability to swim, fish, and walk. My parents signed the petition of 83 citizens, taking their first step toward support of the public Rights of Way to the Water.

RI courts upheld the rightful ownership of the city's land based on an agreement of the year 1852.

Finally, in a 1970 agreement with SRBA, the eastern 8000 sf of beach and the cliff walk were re-opened. The city agreed to resolve safety and health issues posed by bathers. Fifty years later there are problems.

Slide 43 Coastal Resource Management Council 1971

Still exists to monitor and control

Slide 44: Fifth Ward Improvement, Inc.

Formed in 1973, the Fifth Ward Improvement Association, Inc. looked at issues like the proposed sewer system, removing billboards, putting benches in the parks, stopping the runoff from homes into Almy Pond. They also noted streets of the waterfront locked to prevent public entry.

Gen and Wally joined in 1977 with Donato D'Andrea, Charlie Donovan, Thom Sheseky, Wayne Kraus, Jim Mahoney, Helen McLeish, and Robin Morse and many others.

Genevieve, my mom, served as Secretary for 10 years, while Wallace, my dad, was on the leadership team often as Treasurer over the same decade of the 1970s.

As for concerns about developments on the waterfront, Joe Paolino and others from Providence bought the Gas Works next to Hibernian Hall on Wellington Ave and planned condominiums and a hotel on Richmond Street. Contaminated soil was a concern.

Other investors wanted to develop Waite's Wharf which had for years had Mobil gasoline deliveries into oil tanks. Were there spills on land as well as in the nearby water? There were already problems

for swimmers who experienced oily substances on their skin after swimming at King Park.

The city coal yards were on Brown and Howard Wharf, while Richmond Manufacturing and the Newport Shot Lead Company on Howard Wharf left their waste on those wharves.

Fifth Ward Improvement members wanted to know what standards the developers would be held to by the city for cleanup of chemical wastes.

Slide 45 The City and State Response

On the left-hand page, mom's notes as Secretary of Fifth Ward Improvement, described the work that she and my dad did in searching the colonial records to see if the city had given up rights. What they found is that the wharves were always public rights of way and they presented certified titles to the deeds.

The page on the right are Gen's secretary notes explaining that nobody listened and their efforts did not produce support from the City Manager, Town Council, City Solicitor, the CRMC, or the courts by 1982, to take action. So the Mathisons joined their research of the deeds with the new organization, Friends of the Waterfront.

Slide 46 Friends of the Waterfront

In 1982, Friends of the Waterfront formed to reopen access for residents to the waterfront, especially along Thames Street, but also along Washington Street and the Cliff Walk.

Early members were Mary Ferrazzoli (1928-1994), Victor Farmer, Mary Burnham, George Gordon, Theresa Salter, Anne Canole, Gen, and Wally Mathison.

Recently, **Vic Farmer** who did the public relations for decades for the Friends of the Waterfront told me, “Genevieve was the serious player, who dug into the land records and combined the history of the era to tell the whole story of the wharf lands. She put it all together and sat beside Mary with the answers to questions posed. I did not attend those meetings but knew from Mary that Genevieve drove her to Providence or Newport City Hall, wherever she had to go to defend the public Rights of Way [hereafter ROW].”

Some may not know this, but Wally and Gen did the deed research together sitting at City Hall or NHS going through the deeds. You see, in 1983, my dad retired with 40 years federal service and the couple began a new team effort when they were in their seventies!!

The personal computer was yet to be in every person’s household, never mind in their hands. Who had a cell phone in the 1980s? The information Wally wrote with a careful hand on index cards, the bounds, and dates for each property on the streets of Newport on the wharves. My mother donated those records to the NHS.

Never one to shy away from speaking, Gen stood up and gave testimony at the hearings of the Coastal Resource Management Council between 1982-1987, until the CRMC decided not to allow ordinary citizens to present evidence. As **Kate Leonard**, having served Newport in the town council for nearly two decades told me recently, “Your mother was smart, outspoken, and thick skinned to face the opposition and do what was right.”

[Rhode Island Attorney General Arlene Violet and Fordham University historian Elaine Crane also substantiated that the city never gave up the land and therefore retained the ROW.]

Slide 47: CRMC agreed that the following six wharves were rights of way for the public to the harbor: Brown and Howard, Lee, Howard, Sission, Waites and Spring on the Map

Slide 48: FOW Rights of Way declared by the state of RI with these brass medallions into the macadam at the beginning and end of each street. In the Point section, twelve streets were marked where the street ends at the shoreline. Also marked were five rights of way to the Cliff Walk from Seaview to Ledge Road. The city finished marking these ROW in **1997, about two decades** after developers tried to take land from public access.

Today, at 40 + years, the FOW is stronger than ever with the 2.8-mile-long Harbor Walk clearly marked, yearly community cleanups, and a summer concert series in King Park. As a watchdog they take a role in each new development of condominiums or hotels regarding public access to the water.

Slide 49 Gen service on the Newport School Committee

It was not until **Genevieve was seventy years old** that she received an appointment by the city council to serve the remainder of Dave Carlin's term of office from 1980-1981. She was elected to serve on 5 Nov. 1986 to a four-year term 1986-1990, and on to 1994.

Many issues arose with cycles of recession in the 1980s. School Committee members had to find creative ways to keep programs,

while balancing the school budget and financing federally mandated programs.

Her mantra in running for office as a septuagenarian, “It isn’t age. It is experience. You support the contract you make with the teachers. You spend taxpayer dollars on reading, writing, and arithmetic at all grade levels and for all students. Communicate and empower parents to contribute.”

My dad was my mom’s best support. He sat through all those meetings, campaigned for her, and debated with her over the content of her monthly letters to the editor of the *Newport Daily News* about her views on what needed to be done to improve education. Unfortunately, Wally died on 1 October 1988.

Slide 50-What kind of people were my parents, Wallace and Genevieve Mathison? This image is from Mother’s Day 1988 at Christie’s on the wharf.

They loved adventures in Newport, with my sisters and later with seven grandkids hopping into the station wagon and heading to boogie board at Easton’s Beach, fishing from the Fort Adams pier, crabbing at Green End Bridge, painting at the Art Association, taking environmental science at the Norman Bird Sanctuary, summer programs at the Newport Library, sailing out of Newport Yacht Club (Wally was Race Committee Chairman for a decade on Bill Nagle’s boat). Special times include breakfast at the Bellevue Avenue Creamery after Sunday Mass, “song nite” at LaForge Restaurant, “all you can eat shrimp and mussels on Friday nights at the Pier.”

My parents Gen and Wally were quite frankly larger than life. They complemented each other. When one became strong-willed, the

other knew how to support with flexibility. Each of them had an intellectual grasp of the issues and had a vision of what needed to be done; jointly they researched and worked to accomplish whatever goal they faced.

My dad Wally was kind, gentle, and giving. He accomplished what needed to be done quietly without seeking headlines. It is fair to say that Gen never shied away from controversy or communicating her views through the public speaking forum or by writing letters to the editor of the *Newport Daily News*. She was democracy writ large, but then again, she had sixteen more years than my dad to take her stands and help the Newport community.

But what a team they were for four decades!

Wallace had a generous spirit, love for life, respect for others, and a ready hand as well as a ready smile. Genevieve with her incredible memory, integrity, devotion to family, was ever young at heart. Yet both were intelligent, sincere, and driven in achieving goals for the Newport community, using evidence to resolve problems.

Slide 51: In these five areas education, charity, culture, historic preservation, and community issues, Genevieve and Wallace together worked as a team to enhance life in the Newport community. It is hard to believe all that was accomplished in forty years.

They believed that citizens could check the forces of greed. Watch, pay attention to where the money goes, and get involved.

My parents would be the first to say that it was a cast of hundreds who used their time, talent, and cooperation to find solutions and made successful outcomes possible for the residents of Newport.

Reading from the slide:

They made their contributions to the Newport community in

Education: PTA, Science Fair, Engineering Society

Charity: Catholic Faith organizations, Knights of Columbus, AOH

Culture: Christmas in Newport, RIICAN, Irish Heritage Society

Historic Preservation: Operation Clapboard, Historic Hill, the Point

Community Issues: TB, Swimming Instruction, Rights of Way,
Schools

In their life's work they sailed through storms and sunshine, steady on the tiller. They kept their faith. In God. In Themselves. In their Celtic heritage. In the Newport community of fellow citizens. And in our American values. Thank you.