



## THE NEWSLETTER OF

# THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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Volume 2

Fall 1998

## THE EARLY IRISH IN NEWPORT COUNTY: THE 1600's

### RECORDS

OF THE

### COLONY OF RHODE ISLAND

AND

### PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS,

IN

NEW ENGLAND.  
PEOPLE'S LIBRARY.  
NEWPORT, R. I.



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TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED BY

JOHN RUSSELL BARTLETT,  
SECRETARY OF STATE.

VOL. I.

1636 TO 1663.

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

A. CRAWFORD GREENE AND BROTHER, STATE PRINTERS.  
1856.

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Most people tend to regard the Irish immigration of the mid 1800's or perhaps the earlier "influx" of the Irish workers brought over to construct Fort Adams in the 1820's and 1830's as "early" Irish settlers in Newport County. But if one does even modest research in our history, one can find clear evidence from documented state, city and personal records that the "early Irish" were indeed here in the 1690's and onward, and probably as early as the 1640's.

If we begin by looking at the Mayflower passenger list, we can find the names Martin and Mullin. Did not John Alden marry Priscilla Mullin? One has only to go to Little Compton Commons burying ground to find the grave of their first child, the first "white" child born in America. The name Mullins/Mullin is certainly Irish, coming from the Irish O' MacLain, very common in all parts of Ireland. There are many anglicized forms such as Mullane, Mullen, Mallin, etc.

### *Early Irish,....Continued from p. 1*

In his excellent work entitled "Pioneer Irish in New England", Michael J. O'Brien quotes records from the New England Historic-Genealogical Society which lists passengers from several ships arriving in Massachusetts between April and October 1633 which include the obvious Irish names of Bourke, Flynn, Plunkett, Pendergast, Crowley, Conway, etc. Later in that century we know that there were many Irish who moved to Rhode Island, drawn by our Colony's Charter granting freedom of religion.

During the thirteen years war in Ireland, 1641 - 1654, concluding with the notorious Cromwellian massacres and settlement, 40,000 Irish soldiers left Ireland for Spain, leaving behind many more thousands of destitute widows, orphans and families. The English Government set about to systematically "round up", capture and transport these thousands of Irish to the West Indies and North America as indentured servants - virtual slaves! For this reason., many of the records in the cities and towns of New England are silent as to these Irish "immigrants", referring instead to "a servant", never using the proper names. This mass "round up" went on until 1655, when the authorities, became too diligent and impressed England as well to meet their "quotas". All of this horrible episode can be found in the well documented work by Prendergast entitled, "The Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland".

This background information leads us to examine the records of the Colony of Rhode Island, and in particular, Newport County towns and villages. We specifically find that the "Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations" (Volume 1 covering the years 1636 to 1663) under the listing: "The Roule (roll) of Ye Freemen of Ye Colonie of everie Towne", one Edward Larkin listed as a Newport resident in 1655. Michael O'Brien's book shows that Larkin's father had come to Charlestown (Mass) in 1638. The O'Larkins were chieftains from Wexford and Galway. Later in 1663, Edward Larkin was appointed a commissioner from Newport in the General Court of Commissioners held in Providence. Eventually, Larkin moved to Westerly, and the history of the Larkin family is documented by Thomas Murray in the journal of the American Irish Historical society - "The Early Larkins of Rhode Island" - Volume 4, pp. 1110-2.

Another Irishman to become prominent in the area was Michael Kelly, who became a "freeman" in 1667 in Jamestown (Conanicut Island). One must recall that many of the Irish who came to New England in the early 1600's arrived as indentured servants, and had to earn their "freedom". In 1669 Michael Kelly and two others were commissioned by the "Council" to prepare the inhabitants against attack by the indians. In the will of ex-Governor Brenton, probated in 1674, "Michael Kelly is granted - 100 acres on Merrinack - and 2/3 - of 15 pounds due from Land -". (From "Irish Vanguard of Rhode Island" by Thomas Hamilton Murray in the Journal of the American.) Other Irish whose names are recorded in deeds and official recordings include Thomas Casey and his son, also Thomas, who witnessed a deed to Thomas Weaver of Newport in 1692.

## The Barney Street Cemetery: Progress

On Monday, October 26th, Dr. Geff McCafferty and a group of six students from Salve Regina University began an archaeological "dig" at the site. the purpose of this "dig" will be to locate the "footprints" of the original church and the second church, built in 1837. The group will also be looking for any artifacts relating to the first use of the original building, that was Eleazer Trevett's school.

Earlier, in August, at a brief ceremony marking the beginning of the Museum's project to restore and preserve the site, member John Booth, with assistance from Bob Finn, "unearthed" the memorial Celtic cross and transported it to the John Stevens Shop for restoration.

Starting in early November, you will begin to see work being done at the site. We will remove the stones to store and clean them, while the site will be leveled, granite posts installed and a wrought iron fence installed around the burial site. All of this activity will culminate in the spring when we reset the stones and the Celtic cross, and hopefully have a rededication ceremony.



*Onlookers watch john Booth prepare to load the celtic cross onto his truck at the 12th of august ceremony at the St. Joseph/Barney Street Cemetery. The cross will be restored at the John Stevens Shop. (Nick Benson is on left.) photo taken by board member Maris Carroll.*

*Early Irish,..... continued from previous page*

In Michael O'Brien's book, "Pioneer Irish in New England", he lists over 600 Irish names recorded in official Colony, City and Town records. I list here several names from around what is now Newport County:

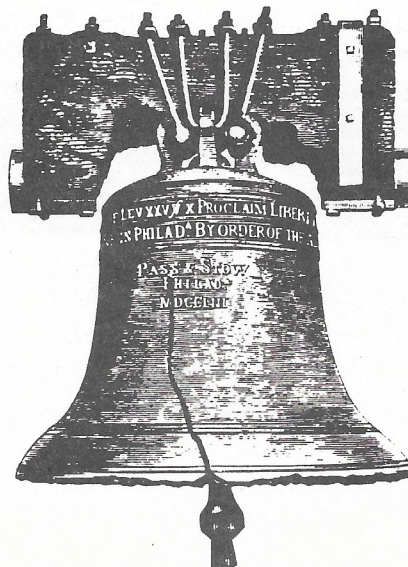
<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE RECORDED</u>	<u>YEAR</u>
Edward Larkin	Newport	1655
John Larkin	Newport	1655
Timothy McCarthy	Newport	1700
Peter Reynolds	Little Compton	1696
Owen Higgins	Newport	1699
Richard Higgins	Newport	1697
William Heffernan	Newport	1676

Finally, Braintree, Mass. Town records show that Jael Sullivan married William McIntosh in 1660. (The New England Historic-Genealogical Register, Vol. 67, p. 24) indicates that she was among a ship load of Irish "Captives" sent to New England in 1654. Gael Sullivan and William were among a group of Braintree citizens who came to Block Island in 1661 to colonize that island (once a part of Newport County). Many of Block Island residents can trace their lineage to the McIntosh/Sullivans.

So, we can see that the Irish were here in Newport County from the very beginning of our history, and even then making contributions to the society and fabric of Newport.

In the next issue of the Newsletter, we will discuss the Irish immigrants of the 1700's and early 1800's.

By: Vince Arnold



## Membership and Fundraising

We received great news in July with the announcement that the North Family Trust had awarded a grant of \$4,700 to the Museum for work on the Cemetery. The first \$1,175 payment has been received. The museum also received a \$250 donation from the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Division #1 Newport, and several individual donations of \$100. We are now in a financial position to proceed with the first phase of our restoration project, to restore and fence in the inner burial site, which will commence shortly. (*see the article "Barney Street Cemetery: Progress"*). We are also pleased to have three new life members, John McNeely, Jack Sweeney, Tom Callahan, and an anonymous individual.

## Visits Scheduled for Two Irish Immigrant Sailing Ships

Details are still being worked out, but some time next August the reconstructed ship Dunbrody will visit Newport. this ship is an exact replica of the ship built in Quebec by immigrants for her New Ross, Ireland owners, and used extensively to transport Irish exiles to the U.S. and Canada. The ship is being built by the JFK Trust in Ireland, and it will be a self-contained heritage center, with exhibits on the immigration experience, history and the ship's construction, etc. This should be a great experience and we'll have much more detail later.

And another Irish "immigration ship", the Jeanie Johnston, is also being built in Ireland, near Tralee. This ship had a distinguished career in that not one single person was ever lost to disease or the sea during its long history of transporting immigrants. This ship will come to Newport as part of the Tall Ships project in the year 2000. More about this next year!

## Recent Acquisitions by the Museum

We have an excellent video, "The Voyage of St. Brendan". This video, by NVT-TV, Washington, D.C., examines the great saint's voyages to North America, and most interestingly describes and shows the Celtic Ogham inscriptions found along the East Coast of the U.S., especially in Connecticut and West Virginia, rather convincingly proving the existence of Irish in these parts in the mid-500AD time. Call 847-2890 to borrow this video.

## GREAT IDEA FOR CHRISTMAS GIVING !!!

How about giving a gift that keeps giving all year? Give a membership to the Museum! A single membership is only \$10. Just fill out the form on the back, send it in along with a check, and we'll send a gift card for your presentation...

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