



# The Museum of Newport Irish History MNIH

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## First talk of our 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Lecture Series

*Made possible by a generous gift from Virginia Pittsley, given in memory of her husband, Bill Pittsley & their son, Jay Pittsley*

## ***Toil and Trouble: The Irish in the Rhode Island Labor Movement: 1830s-1930s***

*Guest Speaker:* **Scott Molloy, PhD**

**Monday, September 22, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.**

**Wyndham Newport Hotel**  
240 Aquidneck Avenue, Middletown, R.I. 02842  
**and Live-Streamed via Zoom**

Irish immigrants to Rhode Island and elsewhere brought one valuable skill: strong backs. And work they did. Beginning in the 1840s, endemic Irish child labor became a lifetime sentence in factories and mills. Those strong backs barely held out as Hibernian laborers struggled to gain a foothold in the skilled trades over decades. They soon found the instrumentality to gain traction: the American labor movement.

Unions barely existed in the Old Sod due to a British-imposed prohibition on industrialization, the foundation of organized labor. England also muzzled public speaking and dissent. Ironically, in the United States, during and after the Famine exodus, public works, private construction, and government infrastructure required Hibernian hands. As work conditions deteriorated, the Irish immigrants learned about the union movement from, of all people, earlier English arrivals, much to the chagrin of the Yankee elite.

The Irish slowly moved into the skilled building trades, transportation operations, the rubber footwear industry, and textile employment. Irish females, often single and unaccompanied to America, toiled as domestic servants in the homes of the wealthy, where they learned the ways of local culture. Not only did the Irish catch the tail of the union comet, but they also learned to master public speaking despite general illiteracy in their ranks.

In this talk, Prof. Scott Molloy will discuss vignettes from Irish work life in Rhode Island, illustrated with photographs and graphics depicting people and events, including many from Newport.

**SCOTT MOLLOY** is Professor Emeritus at the University of R.I., where he was an award-winning professor at the Schmidt Labor Research Center. He previously drove a RIPTA bus, was a union activist, and was chief of staff to a U.S. Congresswoman. He earned his doctorate in American History from Providence College in 1991. A prolific writer, Molloy wrote, *Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line* (U. of N.H., 2007), *Irish Titan, Irish Toilers: Joseph Banigan and Nineteenth-Century New England Labor* (U. Press of N.E., 2008), and his latest book, *From the Front of the Bus to the Front of the Class: Growing Up a Baby Boomer in Rhode Island* (2022). Dr. Molloy was inducted into the Labor History Society Hall of Fame and the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame. The Molloy Labor and Transit Collections wing at the U.R.I. library houses Dr. Molloy's donated archive related to labor and transit in the Ocean State. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington is home to a 10,000-piece collection of labor memorabilia donated by Dr. Molloy and named in his honor.

Scott Molloy holds dual U.S.-Irish Citizenship and served as Grand Marshal of the 2018 Providence St. Patrick's Day Parade. We welcome him for this, his sixth speaking engagement with the Museum.

***Doors open at 5:30 pm. Light hors d'oeuvres & Cash Bar available***

\$5 Lecture Fee is payable at door via cash or check to "MNIH." No fee to Zoom.

### **Reservations Required for In-Person and Zoom Participation**

To reserve, visit [www.NewportIrishHistory.org](http://www.NewportIrishHistory.org), click "Lectures," then the appropriate link to reserve under the Sept. 22 listing (In-person or Zoom). You will receive an E-confirmation. If you do *not* see this email, check your spam. The talk will be videotaped, and a link will be available on our website's "Lectures" page after the event.

**Questions or Assistance with Registration:** Please contact Ann Arnold at (401) 841-5493, (917) 270-3372, or [tpm1@earthlink.net](mailto:tpm1@earthlink.net)

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