



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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## THE DONNELLY/O'DONNELLY FAMILY

There are currently about 10,000 "Donnelly" and "O'Donnelly" family listings in Ireland, and all are descended from the Ulster sept<sup>1</sup>, a branch of the O'Neill's. The name is taken from Donnghaile O'Neill who was 17th in descent from Neill the Great, ancestor of the Royal House of O'Neill. Originally situated in CO. Donegal, they established themselves in CO. Tyrone around Ballydonnelly, named after the Donnelly's. The Donnelly's were noted military men and were marshals of the O'Neill's forces. Donnell O'Donnell was killed in the 1603 Battle of Kinsale, and Patrick O'Donnelly fought in the 1641 uprising.

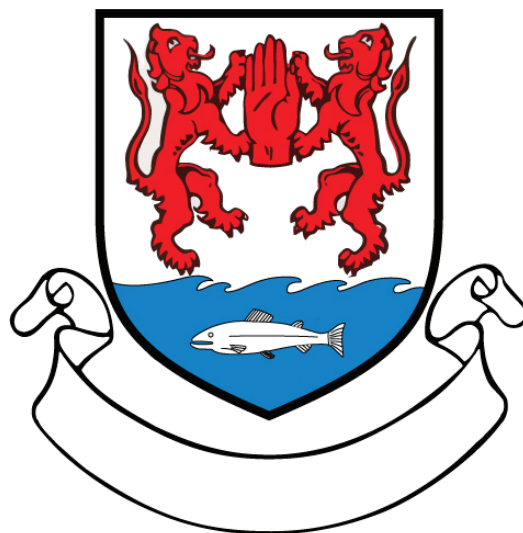
In America, one of the more interesting and colorful Donnelly's was Ignatius Donnelly (1831-1901), son of an Irish immigrant who served as Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota (1859-1863), was a U.S. congressman, lawyer and a writer. He was nominated by the People's Party in 1892 for Vice President of the U.S. and was an early supporter of women's suffrage. Donnelly is



Ignatius Donnelly

noted for his book *The Great Cryptogram* (1888), in which he maintained that the works of Shakespeare were actually

authored by Francis Bacon. He based this claim on word ciphers he allegedly uncovered in the Shakespeare plays and sonnets. Coincidentally, a newly published book by James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (Simon & Schuster, April 6, 2010), recounts the various writers who have tried to establish over the years that someone other than Shakespeare wrote the famous plays and sonnets. Shapiro devotes considerable time to Donnelly's book and theory.



## O'DONNELLY

*Continued on page 2*

## THE EARLY NEWPORT COUNTY DONNELLY'S

The first records of the Donnelly name appearing in the Newport area trace to three marriages in 1747: Elizabeth and John (May 5), John and Jane (Aug. 12) and another marriage on August 13, whose names are not discernable. (Source: Vital Records of Rhode Island 1636-1850, James Arnold 1898).

The 1774 Rhode Island Census lists John Donnelly with a family of 5, and a Terrence Donnelly with a family of 4. There are no Donnelly's listed in the 1790 US Census in the Newport area.

No Donnelly's are listed in the 1840 U.S. Census for the Newport area, however *The Newport Mercury* of January 22, 1842 printed the obituary of a Barney Donnelly, who died January 20, 1842. It is reproduced below:

In this town on Tuesday last. Elizabeth Cary, aged 81 years. —formerly of Charlestown, in this State.

In this town on Wednesday, Mr. Poleg Barker, in the 89th year of his age, —In a few hours after, on the same day, Mrs. Mary Barker, his wife, in the 84th year of her age — both formerly of Middletown.

At the Newport Asylum, on the 20th inst., of dropsey in the chest, Barney Donnelly, a native of Ireland, aged 40 years.

At Portsmouth, on the 13th inst., Borden Slocum, Esq. one of the Justices of the Court of Common Pleas for this County, aged 52.

In North Kingston, 1st inst. Gen. Peter B. Phillips, in the 52d year of his age,

*At the Newport Asylum, on the 20th inst., of dropsey in the chest, Barney Donnelly, a native of Ireland, aged 40 years.<sup>2</sup>*

The 1850 U.S. Census lists several Donnelly's. In Tiverton there are two farmers listed as heads of households with the names Joshiah and Edwin Donnelly.

The 1850 Census also lists a Michael Donnelly residing in Newport. No Donnelly names appear again until a Peter Donnelly of 16 William Street, with a stove store on Spring Street, appears in the 1867 Newport City Directory. Another hiatus in the appearance of the Donnelly name occurs until 1880 when the Newport City Directory lists four Donnelly's: James and Denis, gardeners, John a laborer, and William, a farmer on Bliss & Almy Streets. The Donnelly name appears 24 times in the 1927 City Directory, and currently there are 17 Donnelly listings in the local phone directory.

## NEWPORT'S MOST ESTEEMED DONNELLY

No article on the Donnelly name would be complete without a mention of Humphrey J. "Harp" Donnelly, who was Newport's mayor from 1971-1981. On page 3 are excerpts from *R.I. Senate Resolution R 149, 97-S 921*, passed on March 19, 1997, within days of Donnelly's death from cancer at age 66, on March 6, 1997. The resolution cited Donnelly's many contributions to Newport, and it was presented to his widow, Barbara Ann Donnelly.

*WHEREAS, Entering politics in 1969, when he won election to an at-large seat on the City Council, Harp Donnelly*

*was first elected mayor in 1971, and held that office until 1981, the longest tenure of any mayor under the city's present form of government; and*

*WHEREAS, During his lengthy service as mayor, Mr. Donnelly placed an important part in transforming Newport from an economically depressed city abandoned by its principal employer--the Navy abruptly withdrew its fleet in 1973--into a thriving tourist destination with a bustling waterfront and a rich architectural history. Under his leadership, the city switched gears and began to captivate tourists with such attractions as the America's Cup races and the Tall Ships in the Bicentennial year of 1976; and*

*WHEREAS, The first mayor to visit Shimoda, Newport's "sister city" in Japan, Harp Donnelly, the proud son of an Irish immigrant, welcomed Queen Elizabeth to Newport in 1976 for the dedication of Queen Anne Square<sup>3</sup>. Playing host to the Swedish royal family and such celebrities as Johnny Cash and Elizabeth Taylor, Harp also visited the White House during the Ford Administration, bearing an historic flag as a gift;*

*RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations hereby offers its sincere condolences to the family, friends and legions of admirers of the late Humphrey J. "Harp" Donnelly III. A distinguished and beloved ambassador, advocate and public servant for Newport for many, many years, Harp Donnelly was a kind, caring individual with an international heart of gold. A remarkable gentleman whose life was filled with good deeds, a magnanimous spirit and omnipresent good humor, he represented all that is best in Newport; and be it further*

Approximately one year after his passing, Newport's Transportation & Visitors Center at 23 America's Cup Avenue was renamed in Donnelly's honor, on March 1, 1998.<sup>4</sup> An article from the March 2, 1998 *Newport Daily News* noted that during the hour-long ceremony numerous dignitaries spoke of Donnelly's contributions to the City of Newport. Among them was U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy. Kennedy commented that Donnelly had come from a tradition of Irish Americans ascending into politics. The article quoted him as saying, "It is a tribute to Harp to have so many people jammed into this room today." Accompanying the article was a photo of Donnelly's son, Humphrey IV, and his widow, Barbara, unveiling a plaque renaming the center as the "Humphrey J. Donnelly III Transportation and Visitors Center".

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The word "sept" is a collective term describing a group of persons or immediate ancestors who have a common surname and inhabited the same territory.

<sup>2</sup> "Dropsey" is an archaic term referring to edema (i.e. swelling in the soft tissues), often associated with congestive heart failure, which may be what killed Barney Donnelly in 1842.

<sup>3</sup> The Queen's Bicentennial visit to Newport made the national news, and a United Press International/Associated Press story on her visit and the July 10, 1976 dedication of Queen Anne's Square quoted Donnelly as saying, "It's probably the highlight of my term as mayor. I've never met a queen before." (Source: St. Petersburg Times, July 10, 1976). Local lore has it that Donnelly introduced himself to the queen by saying, "Elizabeth II, I am Humphrey III", but Mr. Donnelly denied the story saying, "I tried to be the perfect host. I would never make an improper comment like that." (Source: Donnelly's obituary from SouthCoastToday.com, March 7, 1997)

<sup>4</sup> The newly constructed Newport "Gateway" Transportation & Visitors Center was officially opened at a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 19, 1988. It was renamed in honor of Donnelly nearly 10 years later, on March 1, 1998. This date also corresponded to the kick-off of the annual Newport Irish Heritage Month activities.

#### REFERENCES

- Your Irish Ancestors*, by L. Anderson Black (Paddington Press 1980)
- Irish Families*, by Edward MacLysaght (Crown Publishers, NY, 1972 (originally published in 1957)
- Vital Records of Rhode Island, 1636-1850 (James Arnold 1898)
- Newport City Directories, 1867, 1880 and 1927
- Rhode Island Census 1774
- United States Census 1790, 1840 and 1850
- The Newport Mercury, January 22, 1842
- The Newport Daily News, March 2, 1998

## SUMMER MUSEUM EVENTS

The 8th Annual Steak Fry to benefit the Museum was held at the Hibernian Hall on June 5th. One hundred Museum members and friends attended the sold-out event and enjoyed an outstanding meal and social. Museum members Tim Burns and “Wick” Rudd "worked their magic" at the grill, and Chef Alan provided all the fine accoutrements.

A special summer lecture was held July 14 to a standing-room crowd which included a large number of new members, drawn by the compelling subject matter and speaker. Barbara Crowell Roy presented an outstanding talk entitled “How to Obtain Your Irish Citizenship”. A corporate trainer and consultant, Barbara covered each step in the process of documenting one's Irish connections via a parent or grandparent in order to obtain Irish citizenship and, ultimately, an Irish passport. Barbara Roy welcomes Museum members to e-mail her and share their successes in obtaining their Irish Citizenship. She may be reached at: [broy@sunrise.ch](mailto:broy@sunrise.ch).



*Barbara Roy presents to Museum members on July 14.*

Museum members who were unable to attend the lecture may obtain an electronic copy of Barb's PowerPoint presentation and helpful handouts by contacting Ann Arnold at [tpm1@earthlink.net](mailto:tpm1@earthlink.net) or 401-841-5493.

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## SALVE REGINA HONORS ROBERT MCKENNA



Museum Honorary Director, past 1st Vice President, and ‘Plank Owner’, Dr. Robert McKenna, was honored on July 7th with the dedication of a new courtyard in his name adjacent to Miley Hall at Salve Regina University. McKenna, who is also a past mayor of Newport, was recognized for his 30 years of service to the University as a professor and administrator and for his long support of higher education in the State of Rhode Island. Among the speakers was former Governor J. Joseph Garrahey, who credited McKenna with the advances in support of higher education in the state. Congratulations Bob!!

*Robert and Mary Jean McKenna with President Jane Gerety, RSM, during the dedication of the Dr. Robert J. McKenna Courtyard outside of Miley Hall July 7. (photo courtesy of Salve Regina University)*

## ∞ IN MEMORIAM: BARBARA DONNELLY ∞

Barbara Ann Donnelly, widow of former Newport Mayor Humphrey J. Donnelly III, died peacefully, May 30, 2010, after a long illness. Born in Newport on September 16, 1932, she was 77 years old when she passed away. The Museum is grateful to Barbara for her support of the organization in her role as treasurer, a post held for several years following the death of her husband, who had been Museum treasurer up until his passing.

## MICHAEL F. CROWLEY LECTURE SERIES KICKS OFF OCTOBER 7

In October, the popular Michael F. Crowley speaker program will resume for the 2010-2011 season. Entering its 8th year, the series is made possible through the generous and ongoing support of the La Forge Casino Restaurant, which provides the venue for the lectures. Planning is underway for five or six lectures, the first of which is set for Thursday, October 7 at 6:00 p.m. Professor William Matthews will present this first lecture, titled "Eamon DeValera: The Man Who Was 20th Century Ireland". See enclosed flyer for details. Reservations are required. Save the date for the second lecture in the series, scheduled for Thursday, November 4. Details to follow.

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## MUSEUM EXHIBITS AT WATERFRONT IRISH HERITAGE FESTIVAL



The Museum participated in the popular Newport Waterfront Irish Festival over Labor Day Weekend. The Museum booth featured a display of historical information on Eamon De Valera, the subject of the October 7 lecture by Dr. William Mathews of University of Massachusetts, as well as a display of photos and information on the restored St. Joseph/Barney Street Cemetery, an ongoing initiative of the organization. Museum volunteers answered questions from the festival-goers who stopped by the booth and disseminated membership and upcoming lecture information. The Museum is grateful to Newport Waterfront Events for their generous donation of the booth space.

*Rick Kelly of WADK's "The Irish Hours" stops by the Museum booth for an on-air interview with President Vince Arnold*

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## WE WELCOME THESE RECENT NEW MEMBERS

(recorded since June 2010)

### FROM NEWPORT:

Eileen Brown  
Loretta Burke  
Family of Tim Burns  
Patrick J Cranson  
Sue & Jon Davies  
Marie Eckler  
Kealan & Patrick Faerber  
Helen Finn  
Nancy Flynn  
Erin C. Harrington  
Kacie F. Harrington  
Mary Jane Lane  
Jim Maguire  
Katherine Foley Martellino

Susan McDermott  
Mary Moniz  
Patricia Phelan  
Dolores Prendergast  
Barbara & Vance Roy  
Veronica A. Rynn  
Barbara A. Shea  
Patricia Sheehan  
Mary Jean Sherman  
Dalton Whitford

### FROM MIDDLETOWN:

Elizabeth Davis  
William Mackin  
Kathie Semenchuk

### FROM PORTSMOUTH:

John Cawley  
Richard Patrick Johnson  
Maryann Mastrorio  
William & Ann Marie McCann  
Peter Roberts  
Christopher Taylor  
Mary Moore Viens

### FROM ELSEWHERE:

Tom & Carolyn Breslin, Bristol, R.I.  
Mary McCormick & Sean Brennan,  
Warwick, R.I.  
Kathy Healy Minich,  
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

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Newport, RI  
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*Fall Lecture Series  
Begins Oct. 7  
(See page 5)*

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Check Membership: ☐ Individual (\$15/yr) ☐ Family (\$25/Yr) ☐ Business (\$50/yr)

☐ Individual Life (\$150) ☐ Family Life (\$200)

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Donations are tax deductible—a 501(c)3 organization)

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