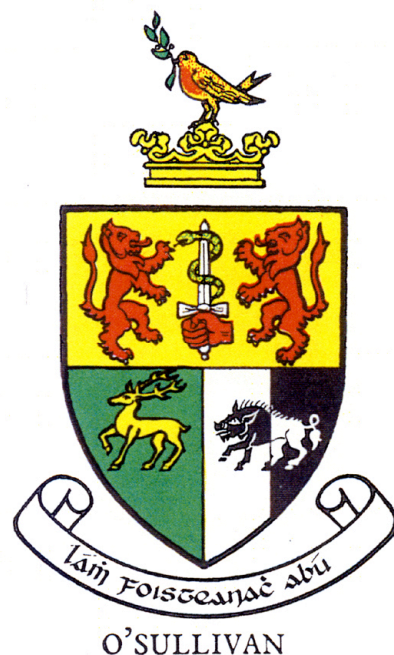# THE SULLIVAN– O'SULLIVAN FAMILY

From time to time the newsletter will explore Irish names, both common and uncommon, in Newport County.[1] In this issue we'll look at "Sullivan" (or "O'Sullivan"), as it is the most prevalent Irish name in the county.

Historians agree that the Sullivans originally were settled in County Tipperary, but were forced out during the original Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the 12th Century, settling in West Cork and South Kerry. Their origin is illustrious. According to MacLysaght's *Irish Families*, they descended from Eoghan (Owen) Mor, the father of the famous Oilioll Olum, and were one of the leading families of the Munster Eoghanacht (clan). They became very powerful, dividing into several branch septs[2] of which O'Sullivan Mor (the great), and O'Sullivan Beare were the most important.

In Irish history, Donal O'Sullivan Beare was particularly famous for his incredibly hazardous march to Ulster after the battle of Kinsale (1601). His nephew, Philip O'Sullivan Beare, was a soldier in the Spanish army, but is better known as a historian for his *Historiae Catholicae Iberniae Compendium*, which recounts the Elizabethan wars of the 1500s.

O'SULLIVAN

Coats of arms.
See related discussion on page 4.

O'SULLIVAN BEARE

Other famous O'Sullivans (or Sullivans) include Owen Roe O'Sullivan (1748–1784) and Tadhg Gaolach O'Sullivan (d. 1800), distinguished Gaelic poets and, in later times, Sir Arthur Sullivan (1824–1900) of the Gilbert & Sullivan operettas. John L. Sullivan (1858–1918) was one of the best known prizefighters of all times, and, of course, there was famous Irish-American actress Maureen O'Sullivan (1911–1998).

In *Irish Families*, Edward MacLysaght discusses the Irish prefixes "O" and "Mac", indicating that the "Mac" prefix showed the person to be the son of the first man to bear that name, while the "O" designates a distant relative of one bearing the surname. He further points out that the "Mac" and "O" usage, which began with the adoption of hereditary surnames in Ireland around 1000 AD, was gradually phased out due to the successive invasions of Anglo-Normans and establishment of English "plantations", as well as the widespread use of the English language and English control of politics in Ireland. As the Sullivan immigrants came to America, the "O" prefix was dropped for ease of spelling or due to mistranslation.

It is interesting to note the many variations of the Sullivan name with branch names derived from trades or professions, such as Seer (boatwright) and Saor (a tradesman), e.g. Saor admaid (a carpenter). Branch names also derived from various chieftains such as McAuliffe (in Beara), which comes from Amhlaoimh (Humphrey) Sullivan. O'Sullivan branch names also came from locations, colors, and adaptive names[3]—quite confusing in the context of our American "system" of names!

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[1] This article is not intended to be an exhaustive research paper on the subject, rather an article about one of the many Irish families of Newport County.

[2] 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. (Source: Edward MacLysaght, *Irish Familes*: Dublin, 1991).

[3] *Irish Family Name*s, Ida Grehan: Roberts Rinehart, 1993

LOOKING FOR EARLY SULLIVAN/O'SULLIVANS IN NEWPORT COUNTY

Searching old records for the elusive "first" Sullivans, it would appear that the earliest Sullivans here in Newport County are buried in the St. Joseph/Barney Street Cemetery in Newport. Here are buried: Mark Sullivan (son of Torence and Catherine, from Co. Cork, b. 1821, d. 1839); Bridget O'Sullivan (from Limerick, b. 1834, d.1853); John Sullivan (from Co. Cork, b. 1796, d. 1848); Timothy O'Sullivan (from Bere Haven, b. 1782, d. 1836). Four Sullivan gravestones from the Barney Street Cemetery are pictured on the back cover.

Our research turned up many records of the early Irish throughout New England. The earliest recording of a "Sullivan" in New England is from New Haven, Connecticut records of 1650 (Mary Sullivan). While there were also many Sullivans listed in Massachusetts and New Hampshire from the 1600s and 1700s, the first record for Newport County is much later, and it is the 1830s gravestone of Timothy O'Sullivan, found in the Barney Street Cemetery, mentioned above.

It is also interesting to note that the Federal Census for 1800 lists "Kelly", "Fitzgerald", "Murphy", "Casey", and "Flanigan", but not "Sullivan" (or "O'Sullivan"). The first Sullivans (in Newport County) appeared in the Federal Census of 1830, which listed: Daniel Sullivan and four children; Cornelius Sullivan and three children; Dennis Sullivan and three children; and Florence and Timothy Sullivan (two listings), both with children. The 1840 census lists Timothy, John and Patrick Sullivan. It must be remembered, however, that it was not until the Federal Census of 1850 that persons other than "heads of households" were listed individually. Previously, non-heads of house-

holds were listed simply as "a person aged 35" in the household (or on a farm). Consequently, there may well have been Sullivans in Newport County prior to the 1800s.

Sources: *Civil & Military Lists in Rhode Island 1617–1800* (Joseph Jenks Smith); *The Pioneer Irish in New England* (Michael J. O'Brien, PJ Kennedy, 1988); *The Irish at Bunker Hill* (Michael J. O'Brien, Devon-Adair Co, 1968); Census records of 1774, 1790, 1810, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850 and 1860.

THE LATER YEARS

As Irish immigration grew in the 1800s, the Sullivan presence in Newport County increased dramatically. The 1850 census shows 12 adult men (11 married) and 13 children in Newport, 4 adult men and their wives and 13 children in Portsmouth, and 5 adult males and their wives and children in Tiverton. All of the adults listed were born in Ireland.

The 1858 Newport City Directory lists 37 Sullivan names, the 1865 directory lists 67, the 1871 directory lists 84 names, and by 1890 there were 226 Sullivans listed, including 3 O'Sullivans. Patrick Murphy, Newport City Historian and Museum of Newport Irish History researcher, compiled a complete list from the 1860 census (not including children) and found the following:

- 164 Sullivans/O'Sullivans were listed
- nearly all were born in Ireland; 6 were born in Rhode Island, 3 in other states, 1 in Canada
- most resided in Newport, 25 resided in Portsmouth, 20 in Fall River (then part of Tiverton), 6 in Jamestown, and 3 in Middletown

The 1918 Newport City directory lists 383 Sullivans and 10 O'Sullivans (remember, this is only a family listing, with no children or wives counted. Women were listed only if widowed or single). After Sullivan, the most often recorded Irish family name was Murphy, with 125, and then Kelly (including Kelley) at around 100. Since the late 1800s, Sullivan has been the most preponderant of the Irish surnames in Newport, and Sullivans have been represented in every facet of life in the County: lawyers, doctors, businessman and women, teachers, carpenters, firefighters, police, etc. Today, the Sullivan/O'Sullivan surname is the most common of any listed in the Newport phone book. In an obituary file included in the collections of the Newport Historical Society, the Sullivan surname is, by far, the most represented, with over 450 entries.

SO MANY SULLIVANS

The plethora of Sullivans seems to have necessitated the use of nicknames to keep them straight. Pat Murphy has researched Sullivan nicknames and found hundreds! Also, the "Grist Mill" column in the *Newport Daily News* has listed many nicknames over the years, as recalled by writers E.E.E. and Leonard Panaggio. Grist Mill columns from 1934, 1993, 1994 and 1995 list such Sullivan nicknames as "Little Jerry", "Maggie the Bull", "Mike the Cow", "Mexican Mike", "Slippery Mike", "Tim the Count", "Big Eddie" (a former police chief), "Black Jack", and hundreds of others. Francis John Pershing Sullivan (a.k.a. "Sully") who ran Sully's Public House, compiled a list of about 160 Sullivan nicknames published in Panaggio's Grist Mill column. It included: "Sleepy John", "Little Tim", "Accordion Dick", "Dan the Bull", "Moon", and "Black Mike".

In 1934, the Grist Mill ran the following poem about the Sullivans, written by Anne Akelleher:

Everywhere that I go
  There are Sullivans.
On land high or land low
  There are Sullivans.
By the Mountain or Sea
By the Lake or Sea
There are Sullivans

And they're good folks to know
  Are the Sullivans.
Ev'ry one tells you so.
  Of the Sullivans,
The Lord knows they are good,
So He made all He could
Of the Sullivans.

It can't be you've no friend
 Name of Sullivan!
If you haven't I'll lend
  You a Sullivan.
But you must give him back
For my life would be black.
  Short one Sullivan.

There's no traitor yet "ore"
  The name Sullivan.
But heroes by the score
Are called Sullivan.
Munster rolls that I know
Carry row after row
  Of men, Sullivans
There is only one place
  With no Sullivans,
And it hasn't a trace
  Of a Sullivan
Now its name I'll not tell

For you all know it well
  There's no Sullivan.
There are places that wait
  For the Sullivans.
Straight through St. Peter's Gate
  Go the Sullivans.
I'll be glad when I go
If I stay in the row
  With the Sullivans.

THE IRISH ARMS
OF THE SULLIVANS

The O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan Beara arms depicted on page one are the official arms from the Irish Office of Arms (Genealogical Office). The office was established in 1552, under the British, and it was transferred to the Irish Government in 1943, some twenty years after the establishment of the Irish Free State.

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Rhode Island Roots, Volume 17, No. 4, December 1991, *Irish Cemetery Records in Newport*, transcribed by Bertram Lippincott III

Castletown Press, web site: http://www.Castletown.com/SullivanHistory.htm

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Museum welcomes recent new members

From Newport:
Charles Byrne
Maureen & Tim Harrington
John & Barbara McGinty
Angela Vars

From Middletown:
Steve Lepley
Martha Koziara

From Portsmouth:
Paul & Maxine Gallagher

From Elsewhere:
Dean & Barbara Robinson - Barrington, R.I.
Helen McGowan Gardner - Mattapoisett, Mass.
Raymond W. Houghton, Ph.D. - Dublin, Ireland

WELCOME TO ALL AND THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

FIRST ANNUAL FUND DRIVE

Fifty Museum members have already contributed over $2,500 to the Museum's first Annual Fund Drive, but there is still time to contribute and help close the books on this successful appeal. The objective of this first Annual Drive, kicked off in October, is to raise funds to support the planning and creation of an interpretive site at Fort Adams.

The Museum of Newport Irish History is an IRS-certified 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are tax deductible and corporate matching gift forms are encouraged. If you did not receive an appeal letter in the mail and would like to contribute, please send your check to: Museum of Newport Irish History, P.O. Box 1378, Newport, R.I. 02840 and indicate "For Annual Fund".

If you are not a member and would like to join, please visit our website, www.newportirishhistory.com, and download the membership form. If you do not have Internet access, please contact Membership Chair, Shannon Buss at (401) 846-4341.

THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY
P.O. Box 1378
Newport, RI 02840

INSCRIPTIONS FROM SULLIVAN GRAVESTONES – ST. JOSEPH'S/BARNEY STREET CEMETERY

Bridget O'Sullivan
Sister of Johanna & Ellen O'Sullivan
d. May 14, 1853 Aged 19 years
Parish of Ballindwand
County Limerick   Ireland

John Sullivan
d. Apr. 1, 1848 Aged 52 years
Also his son
Timothy Sullivan
d. Dec. 6, 1842 Aged 6 years

Mark Sullivan
Son of Torence & Catherine Sullivan
d Aug 4, 1830 Aged 18 yrs 8 mos
Native of Herch County Cork
Ireland

Timothy O'Sullivan
Native of Garlnish
Bere Haven
County Cork   Ireland
d. Mar 27, 1836 Aged 54 years