

10/10/94

Reader traces roots to 1887 wedding

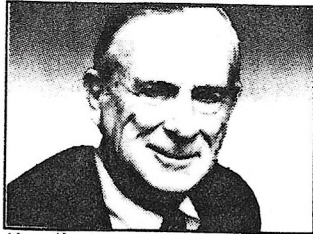
PORTSMOUTH'S FIRST CATHOLIC MARRIAGE cited in this column on Sept. 19 brought a letter from a Branford, Conn., reader, Thomas H. Duffy. The wedding took place on Feb. 10, 1887.

Duffy wrote, "I'm indebted to the Grist Mill article about the first Catholic marriage in Portsmouth. Timothy Connolly and Elizabeth Corcoran were my grandparents! I have spent countless hours poring through the archives at the Portsmouth Town Hall attempting to find their marriage records and Elizabeth's birth record — to no avail. However, the article put the pieces of information I had gathered together."

"The reference did not give the location of the ceremony," Duffy's letter continues, "but now I am convinced it took place in Elizabeth's home in the coal mine community on the West shore. Elizabeth was born at the coal mines in 1857 and was the oldest surviving native of that community at her death in Fall River in 1937.

"Her father was John Corcoran, reputed to be the chief engineer of the coal mines, and his home was used as the Catholic chapel for the Irish immigrant coal miners and their families. This chapel was under the administration of St. Joseph's Church in Newport. The Bishop of Providence would journey by horseback to celebrate Mass there on occasions. The Father Coyle who performed the ceremony was probably a resident at St. Joseph's at that time.

"John Corcoran and Hannah Harrington, Elizabeth's parents, were Irish immigrants. Timothy Connolly and Margaret Sullivan, Timothy's parents, were from the Townland of Glenora at the tip of the Beara Peninsula of County Cork. Timothy, the groom, was born in Glenora also." Duffy's letter notes there was a railroad station at the coal mines at that time "so it makes sense the newlyweds hopped aboard the train there for their honeymoon in Boston. My mother, Hannah Elizabeth Connolly, was born in Fall River in 1889," the letter



Grist Mill
Leonard Panaggio

said.

Duffy also said there was a "majority of Portsmouth residents who never knew about the existence of the coal mines and the Irish immigrant community that lived and worked there on the shores of Narragansett Bay in the mid- to late-1800s." Although the story of the coal mines has been featured in the newspaper in past years, and mentioned in articles from time to time, Duffy thinks "this event in Portsmouth history would make a very interesting article."

Duffy would like to know of sources other than the Newport Historical Society and St. Joseph's Church which have "vital information of Portsmouth residents in the mid to late 1800s so I could continue with my search." If you can help this gentleman in his serious pursuit,

you can communicate with him at 78 Quarry Dock Road, Branford, Conn., 06405-4656, or call 203-488-4999.

TWO FAMOUS YACHTSMEN, father and son, with close ties to Newport and Jamestown, were inducted into the America's Cup Hall of Fame at the Herreshoff Marine Museum in Bristol on Sept. 10. They were Edward and W. Starling Burgess.

Edward Burgess designed three successful America's Cup defenders. His first, the Puritan, defeated the Royal Yacht Squadron's Genesta in 1885. The next year, his Mayflower, which was built by Pusey & Jones, Wilmington, Del., beat the Galatea of the Royal Northern Yacht Club. The third, for the 1887 contest, the Volunteer, defeated the Thistle of the Royal Clyde Yacht Club of Scotland.

Burgess was a genius, as was his successor, who built the next victorious cup defenders. Nathaniel Herreshoff of Bristol, designed and built Vigilant, Defender, Columbia (won two contests), Reliance and Resolute. But Burgess was the only designer who had to come up with three winners for races that took place three straight years — the only time that has happened!

W. Starling Burgess spent

some of his boyhood years in this area. In 1892 he was in Jamestown where he was learning boating and swimming. He became involved with the three successful J-boats with their towering 165-foot-tall masts that won the contests of 1930, 1934 and 1937: Enterprise, Rainbow and Ranger. There is little doubt that Ranger was the most beautiful of the J-boats — and the fastest. The Rainbow caused some fingernail biting, however. It took six races to resolve the 1934 contest. The British challenger Endeavour beat Rainbow two straight. Then Harold S. Vanderbilt, whose yachting trophies are exhibited in a room in Marble House where he lived a while, took the next four.

W. Starling Burgess married Marjorie Young of Newport who was also involved in the designing of yachts and other types of marine craft. She now resides in Oklahoma City, and is the sister of Constance Andrews of Jamestown.

LOOKING BACK — Nov. 6, 1969: Naval War College opens two-day intensive public diplomacy session featuring experts in the field of public affairs and communications.

Leonard Panaggio is a Daily News columnist.

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