



THE NEWSLETTER OF

THE MUSEUM OF NEWPORT IRISH HISTORY

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IRISH LANDSCAPE GARDENERS IN 19th CENTURY NEWPORT

Martin Murphy III



Landscapers at work in the Bellevue Avenue area, Circa 1890. The well-dressed "supervisor" in the long, stylish coat just to the right of center is identified as John Martin who was the head landscape gardener for the Vanderbilt estate in Portsmouth. (The picture was supplied by Tim Brown.) Perhaps someone could identify some others in the crew moving the huge tree?

When one thinks of the early Irish in Newport, the stone-masons quickly come to mind. After all, look to Fort Adams and the building of St. Mary's Church on Spring Street.

Continued Pg. 2

Irish Landscape Gardeners cont'd.

Then the not-too-lucrative Portsmouth Coal Mines surface. This is not the end of the story. The back-breaking labor trade was laden with hard working Irish and within this category lie the gardeners.

Thinking romantically of the Irish, one tends to dwell on the writers, the poets, the political leaders in Ireland of the past. It is difficult to focus on a deprived Ireland sending off its young and hopeful to a strange land in search of freedom and an opportunity to earn a living. In 19th century America, Irish poets, writers and political leaders were not only not in demand, the Irish were not even considered equals. But America would welcome the back-breaking work of this hungry surge of immigrants, keeping them in their place armed with pick and shovel. The Irish took up the challenge and with their talents, they added gardening to their list of contributions.

Of the earliest gardeners were designers of the grounds of the early large estates, while others worked for head gardeners and a smaller group actually began and built lasting and profitable landscape and nursery businesses, lasting two to three generations. In the middle of the 19th century, several Irish immigrants come to mind to fall within the latter category. Thomas Galvin began what became a successful nursery on Spring Street which took up the whole block bordered by Holland and Dearborn Sts. He was born in either Ireland or England and in 1842, he came to the United States. As with most immigrants, he worked where he could to save money for his future plans. With his father, he worked in New York for three years, saving \$500.00 - a grand sum for those days - to purchase land on Spring St. where they established their nursery. Their specialty was in the growing of trees, many of which grew to maturity on the estates.

In 1867, the Newport Directory lists more than 20 Irishmen who claimed "gardener" as their occupation and many served apprenticeship with the larger, successful nurseries, some of whom branched out into their own businesses. Others became estate superintendents, the likes of John Carey, Jr. was one. These men lived a great deal better than their fellow immigrants, as the head gardeners lived on the estates in "Gardener's Cottages."

Michael Butler of Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, arrived in Newport in 1848. At the time there were only two well known gardeners in the city: James Case, employed by the King family and Thomas Galvin, father of Thomas Galvin, Jr. He began working in this industry, most likely as an apprentice, eventually branching out for himself and establishing a growing florist and landscape business. He first went into business with a partner, Samuel Smith from Jamestown, and as often happens, the partnership dissolved with each one continuing on their own to further their goals in the industry. Like many Irish gardeners, Butler was involved in the designing and laying out of many of the gardens of the early estates. His business lasted two generations.

When Galvin and Butler arrived in Newport, the entire Cliff Walk and Neck areas were occupied by farms and Bellevue Ave. was known as South Touro St. extending only as far as Bellevue Court. From this point, only a narrow farm road gave entrance to the southern part of the city. It is in this area that Michael Butler had a prominent part where his talents were used in the beautifying of the many mansions. Butler and his wife were the first to be married in the new St. Mary's Church on Spring St.

The Irish gardeners left their mark on this island, much of which has passed into history without the recognition so richly deserved.

*Irish-American Gardeners in 1867 Newport Directory

NAME	ADDRESS
Michael Butler	9 Perry St.
Thomas Callahan	12 Farewell St.
Michael Curran	Callender Ave. near Tanner St.
George Dillon	286 Thames St.
Dennis Duffy	10 Dennison St.
Bernard Fagan	12 Dearborn St.
Michael Farrell	W.N. Perry St.
Thomas Galvin	Spring and Dearborn Sts.
Patrick Hogan	Green Lane near White
William Mahar	Bellevue near Neck
Thomas McGill	End of Coggeshall
Michael Murphy	Bellevue near Marine Ave.
Patrick Rafferty	Bellevue Abe. near Mann Ave.

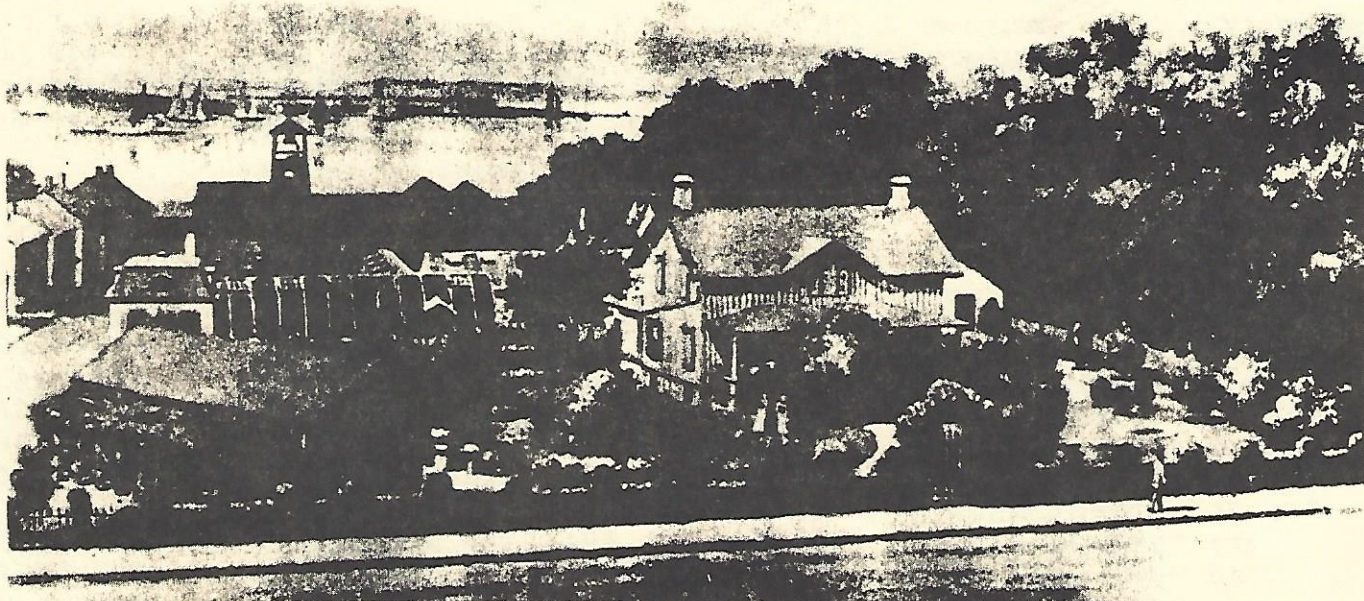
Landscape Gardeners advertising in 1867 Newport Directory:

Thomas Galvin	Spring and Dearborn Sts.
Samuel Smith	South Touro opposite Prospect Hill

Landscape Gardeners advertising in 1880 Newport Directory:

Michael Butler	27 Berkeley Ave.
Wm. H. Mahar	Coggeshall opposite Wheatland Ave.

Irish American Gardeners listed in 1900 Newport Directory total approximately 182 or more Irish Americans listed!!



Thomas Galvin Nursery, Spring Street between Dearborn and Holland streets; nursery founded in 1845. Painting by E. Bierstadt published in Bayles' *History of Newport County* in 1888. Holland Street, the Holland Street fire bell tower, Newport harbor and Ft. Adams are in the background.

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Museum had its first 'historic' Annual Meeting on March 8th at the La Forge Casino Restaurant, with a social breakfast starter, followed by the business meeting. Following the meeting, Rep. Paul Crowley (and, of course, our host) talked to the gathering about his recent trip to Kinsale, Ireland, where a group from Newport visited that fine town to discuss a new proposed "Sister City" relationship.

The first year's events were described to the assemblage of 25 and included the Museum's "kick-off" with Al Klyberg, Director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, as our honored guest; our first 'open' meeting with Ed Connelly as speaker; the fundraiser for the Cemetery in September with Governor Garrahy as honored guest and the first, successful, bus tour of 'Irish Newport' conducted in March. All in all, a good first year's start.

The new year will include a continuing effort to restore and preserve the 'Barney Street Cemetery', work on another bus tour and renewed effort to complete a 'draft' of a TV documentary on the Irish in Newport County.

I would be remiss not to give a hearty thanks to Chris Behan for his sterling efforts in getting the Museum the coveted IRS 501 (3) 3 ruling, which now enables us to apply for grants from various foundations and trusts.

VINCE ARNOLD
President

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MEMBERSHIP

HERE IS OUR FINAL PLANK OWNERSHIP LIST
(LIFE MEMBERSHIPS for those who signed up in 1977)

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A hearty Welcome to these new members who have joined recently !!!!

Mike Reidy	Washington DC
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Mr./Mrs. John Panaggio	Middletown
Mr./Mrs. John Geoghegan	Warren
Dana Fleming	Newport
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Beverly Roach	Tiverton
Patricia Livernois	Exeter
Jean MacCormick	Middletown
Michael & Beth Cullen	Newport
Brian G. Sullivan	Exeter

Note: If we have misspelled your name or inadvertently left someone out, please notify us!

NEW BOOKS DONATED TO THE LIBRARY

Through the generosity of Kay O'Brien, the Museum library has two 'new', historic books:

IRISH LIFE AND LANDSCAPE

J. Crampton Walker; The Talbot Press, Dublin (1925)

This book contains many Irish landscape paintings and sketches by Irish artists such as Nathaniel Horne, the great Irish painter; George Russell (AE); G.F. Kelly; Keating and Tuohay. The works are from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

ATLAS AND CYCLOPEDIA OF IRELAND

Murphy and McCarthy, New York (1903)

This book contains beautiful, old, historic pictures, maps and coats of arms, with a history of Ireland.

BARNEY STREET CEMETERY PROJECT UPDATE

Since our last Newsletter, our Committee is working along to start our restoration project. A drawing showing the fencing arrangement has been completed and we have received and commented on, a lease from the Diocese of Providence. The final lease is expected shortly, so that we can apply to the Historic District before we start any work. John Booth has joined the Committee and is "raring to go". Welcome aboard, John! We plan to have an important announcement about the first of August regarding this project -- watch the local news for our "kick-off" !!!

HELP WANTED

HELP WANTED !!!!

- *** We need help to start to properly catalogue our small but growing library. Just a little time is needed now to start this off correctly. Please call 847 - 2890.
- *** Another important job -- to do on your time is to start our Oral History program. This can be a very rewarding project, as there is so much history "out there" just waiting to be gathered. (We'll supply the recorder and suggestions.) Again, call 847 - 2890.

OTHER NOTES --- ODDS AND ENDS ::::

Thanks to Board member Pat Murphy who found in his research the following item in the Newport Daily News dated May 11, 1874:

ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS

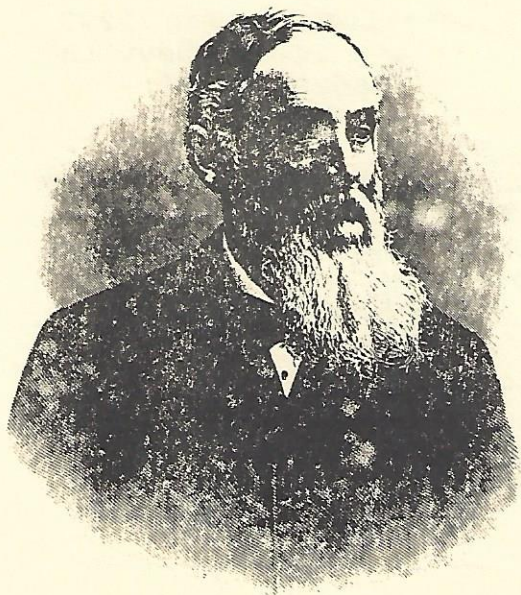
Our Irish fellow citizens have organized another society whose principal purpose is of a benevolent character -- the "Ancient Order of Hibernians." This order is an extensive and prosperous one and is productive of much benefit to its members throughout the United States. A few weeks since the order was organized at Smith's Hall, on Levin street, and has so steadily increased in numbers as to warrant its members in organizing the society permanently by the election of a fine set of officers the 4th inst. :
President.....Jeremiah Sullivan.
Vice President.....John Bailey.
Secretary.....C. S. Currian.
Recording Secretary.....Wm. P. Sullivan.
Treasurer.....Morris Houlihan.

This article then dates the founding of the A.O.H., Division #1 Newport, to May, 1874, two years before that organization received its national charter (1876).

** Thanks to new member Beth Cullen for the very nice article she put in the bulletin of the Point Association, Spring 1998, entitled "The Irish Have Come". The article talks about the founding of the Museum and how to join. Thanks, Beth!

** Recommended reading: the companion book to the PBS video series, "The Irish in America", is in your local library (I hope) and is excellent. It has much more information than the video series and a great number of pictures.
(Vince Arnold)

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The courtly gentleman at the left is Thomas Galvin, Newport's best-known Irish-born landscape gardener, whose residence was at 417 Spring Street.

This picture is from Bayles' History of Newport County (1888).