

The Irish Influence in Naugatuck  
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During the late 1840s and the early 1850s, Ireland underwent the greatest trauma of its long and often sorrowful history. Famine and disease killed or drove more than a million men, women, and children overseas and to American shores for a chance at a better life. They came searching for streets they believed were paved with gold. They found only unpaved walks, or streets not paved at all. And so, they paved the roads, built the railroads, the bridges, and the canals, as well as many city skyscrapers.

The first Irish Catholics arrived in Salem Bridge (the former name of Naugatuck) in 1842. They were Patrick and Anne Butler Maher and Patrick Conran. The St. Francis Centennial publication of 1966 lists several Irish surnames that arrived after the Mahers. They include: Kelly, Moran, Burns, Healy, and Hynes.

Patrick Maher worked as a laborer in the Goodyear rubber industry in Naugatuck, and is credited for making “the first varnish used in vulcanized rubber.” The most well-known Maher was the youngest child of Patrick and Anne, Josephine A. Maher. She was a Naugatuck teacher who established the “Josephine A. Maher Award,” a scholarship that is still awarded annually.

The Irish who came to Naugatuck settled in the south end of town around the area of Cherry Street. The area was commonly known as “Kelly Hill.” These Irish immigrants formed the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) in 1871. Their meeting hall was located at 28 Church Street. Patrick C. Lodge was the first president. He was known as a master mathematician and philosopher. He was also chairman of the Board of Education.

Before the Catholic Church was established in Naugatuck, Catholics traveled to Waterbury and New Haven to attend mass. Mass was later held in the homes of Patrick Maher and Patrick Conran. In 1856, land was purchased on Water Street, and a small, white, wooden church was built there. It was called St. Anne’s Church. The first resident priest was Father Hugh Brady. Later, a new and larger church was erected on Church Street. It was called St. Francis of Assisi. The Reverend James Fagan, who is buried in front of the church, became the pastor in 1876, and served for 17 years. Father Fagan served Naugatuck in many other ways. He was a member of the Board of Education, and was instrumental in acquiring and erecting the Civil War Monument on the Naugatuck Green. The year before he died, he purchased the first tract of land for St. James Cemetery. Father Fagan died in 1893.

Irishmen can be found in many businesses, education, politics, and public service throughout Naugatuck’s history.

Andrew Brennan founded the Union City Coal Company in 1880. It was located where the Big Y stands now. The Brennan homestead was across the street, where Auto Zone stands today.

Sweeney is a well-known Irish name in Naugatuck Business. James E. Sweeney established his own insurance company in 1892.

John M. Sweeney, brother to James, was an attorney. His offices were located in the Odd Fellows Building on Maple Street.

Edward J. Sweeney operated as stationery store on Water Street in 1880. He dealt with picture frames, glazier materials, stationery, cards, etc. The store moved to Church Street in 1907. His son, Eugene, carried on the business until the 1960's.

John J. Gorman was a leading builder and contractor. He also performed the duties of Town Clerk in 1892 and 1893. He was elected Selectman in 1894 and 1895. Gorman Street, located on the west side of town, carries his name.

William Kennedy, Esq., was admitted to the bar in 1879. He served Naugatuck in many capacities. He was chairman of the Democratic Town Committee, he was clerk of the Borough Court, and, in 1895, he was appointed borough attorney.

Henry McCarthy was the first Treasurer of the borough of Naugatuck, being elected in 1893. He also ran a business on Water Street, in which he established, in an "ell" entirely separated from the store, another business dedicated wholly to undertaking. This business later relocated to Cedar Street.

Patrick Daly ran a grocery store on Water Street. With a horse and buggy, he would make daily rounds to the Irish families on "Kelly Hill." Former Superintendent of Schools, Raymond Dowling, is his grandson.

Jeremiah Duffy owned a restaurant and boarding house on Water Street, which was established in the early 1900s. His grandson carries on the business today.

John J. Linskey owned and operated a grocery and general store on Spring Street in Union City. He also ran a livery business on North Main Street. He was appointed Postmaster of the Union City Post Office.

Wilson F. Clark owned and operated a trucking business on lower Cherry Street. An ad in the city Directory of Naugatuck boasts that it was the only moving business equipped to move pianos. Wilson's grandson, Charles F. Clark, had the distinction of being the last Warden and the first Mayor of Naugatuck, when the title of Warden was changed to Mayor, following the Flood of 1955.

Thomas J. Neary was a local businessman in Naugatuck. He owned and operated a wholesale and liquor business, located on Water Street. The Thomas J. Neary building on Church Street was constructed through the efforts of Neary's son, William, a borough lawyer. Construction began in 1906 and was completed in 1911. It remains a lasting legacy to Thomas J. Neary.

Education did not lack for Irishmen. In 1854, the Naugatuck Board of Education appointed three Irishmen to the Board: Reverend Father Brady, Reverend Father O'Gorman, and Reverend Father Fagan.

From 1919 to 1930, Andrew Brennan, John McDonough, and Henry Freeman were named to the Board. Many of the teachers found in local schools were Irishmen, such as art teacher Mary Penrose, and coach and physical education teacher Peter J. Foley. Foley's son, Raymond, went on to become Naugatuck High School Principal and Superintendent of Schools. School nurses of Irish descent included: Elizabeth Neary, Catherine Brooks, and Kathryn Cronin.

Political positions held by Irishmen were many. Borough attorneys included: William Kennedy and Joseph Talbot. Both of these men also served as State Congressmen. James Patterson was elected to Congress in 1946. He held the longest term in office in the 5<sup>th</sup> District, thirteen years. His term ended in 1959.

There were four original postal clerks appointed in 1894. Two were Irishmen: Daniel Welch and Matthew Maher. Postmasters of Irish descent included: W. Ahern, Frank Green, and Edward Hanley.

The Police Department, established in 1893, boasted many Irishmen. John Kennedy was the second Police Chief, followed by William "Pip" Morris, Vincent Skelly, John J. Gorman, and Anthony Malone, to name a few.

Through the years, a long list of Wardens and Mayors had Irish names. They included: John J. Gorman, Thomas O'Laughlin, William J. Neary, John J. Carroll, John F. McDonough, Frank Green, Leo Brophy, Jack Sheridan, George Fellows, and Charles F. Clark.

Court Judges of Irish descent include the names of Thomas J. Leary, Martin and Leonard Caine, Joseph Talbot, and John F. McDonough.

From the day when the first Irish settlers arrived in Salem Bridge until the present, the Irish continue to influence the history, growth, and development of Naugatuck.

Irishmen, be proud of your heritage!