

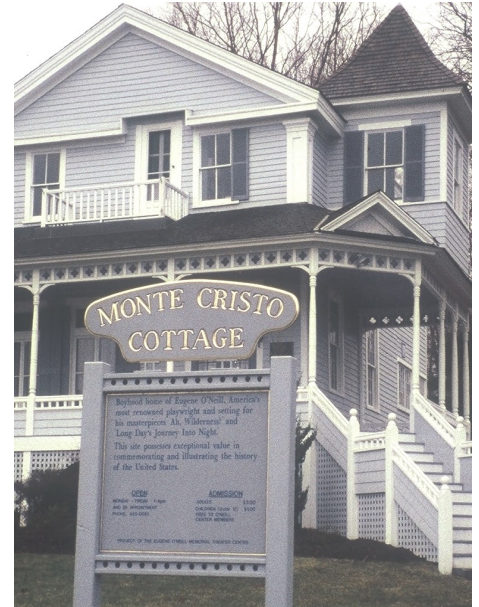
www.ctirishheritage.org



The iron industry flourished in northwestern Connecticut from colonial times on. The Beckley Furnace, above, which today is a museum, was built in 1847 in Canaan. The 1850 U.S. census lists dozens of Irish immigrants, and their families, working as furnace men, colliers and miners in Canaan and other Litchfield County towns.



George Keller, born in County Cork in 1842, designed Connecticut's most significant Civil War monument, the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Hartford. Keller also designed the U.S. soldiers monuments at the battlefields at Gettysburg and Antietam, and numerous monuments and churches in Connecticut.



Monte Cristo Cottage in New London was the boyhood summer home of Eugene O'Neill, the first United States playwright to receive a Nobel Prize for Literature. Born in New York City in 1888, O'Neill was the son of James O'Neill, an Irish immigrant actor and his Irish-American wife Mary Ellen Quinlan.

Irish footprints abound from one end of Connecticut to the other

Anyone interested in the history of the Irish in Connecticut should visit www.ctirishheritage.org. It is a new website set up during 2019 by the Connecticut Irish-American Historical Society with the assistance of grants from the Irish government and the state of Connecticut.

The immediate purpose of the website is to provide online an easily accessible album of more than 100 sites of Irish footsteps across Connecticut. Timewise the sites range more than 300 years from the 1600s when Irish were brought to Connecticut as domestic workers in near servitude to the mid-20th century. The long-range purpose is to preserve the history of one of the largest ethnic groups of Connecticut's history.

The website was assembled by Jamie Rude of Humanitects web

solutions, a firm that specializes in development of online sites for non-profit organizations. Rude was assisted by CIAHS Vice President Vincent McMahon, a retired computer and website specialist.

Today, our Land of Steady Habits is one of the most Irish of the United States because generation after generation of Irish have settled and left their marks as well as their descendants here. Connecticut is one of nine states with 17 percent or more of their populations of Irish descent, according to IrishCentral.

Visitors to the website have the option of sitting comfortably in their living room just browsing this heritage website or using the pictures and information for historical research or to plan daytrips

(Please turn to page 2)



Erin Street in Middletown is near St. John's Catholic Church. Irish settled there in the early 1800s and worked in the stone quarries along the Connecticut River. In the 1870s & 1880s a number of Irish farm families settled along Dublin Hill Road in Middlebury. Today such markers are not only street signs, but historical landmarks of Irish presence across Connecticut.



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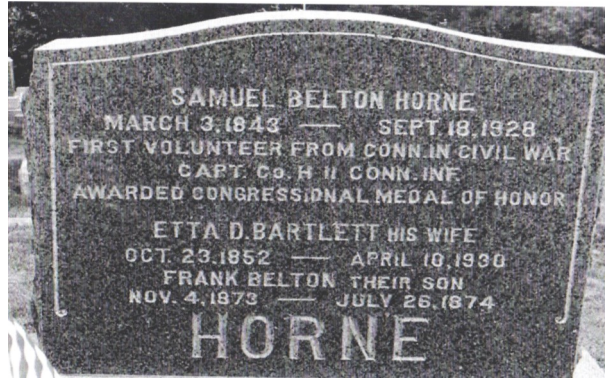
or vacations to Irish Connecticut. The sites are sprinkled throughout the state in much the same way as were Irish emigrants over the centuries.

One of several mistaken stereotypes which have dogged Irish-American history is that Paddy and Bridget all settled in cities. A more accurate picture of their choice of location is that they went wherever there were jobs. The website corrects that stereotype by demonstrating that Irish emigrants have always settled not only in cities, but in rural hamlets and small towns.

On the home page of the website is the title "Connecticut Irish-American Heritage Trail" inscribed on the green, orange and white colors of the flag of the Irish Republic. Beneath that are pictures with categories: History of the Irish in Connecticut, Secular Structures, Religious Structures, Monuments & Other Sites, Parades & Events, Societies & Clubs.

Clicking any of the titles brings up individual sites, each illustrated and with a brief written description. By clicking on the (*more*) at the end of the description, a viewer will bring to the screen a map of the site's location and a more detailed description. By clicking again on *Search*, visitors to the site can use a map of the state to find all the sites in each of Connecticut's eight counties.

Perhaps the best feature of the new website is that it is not a finished product. The 100 or so sites are only a beginning and more sites are already being researched for addition to the Connecticut Irish trail — so stay tuned!



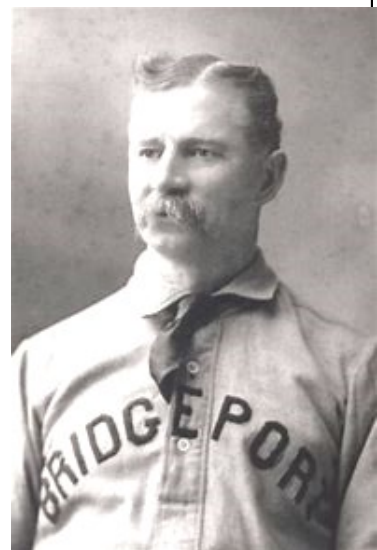
Irish firsts in state history

The gravestone above in Forest View Cemetery, Winsted, commemorates the first Connecticut volunteer in the Civil War: Samuel Belton Horne, a native of Tullamore in County Offaly, Ireland. He enlisted at a town meeting in Winsted on April 14, 1861, one day after the fall of Fort Sumter in South Carolina. The town meeting was held even before President Lincoln issued a call for volunteers. Residents at the meeting voted to start enlisting then and there. Horne was the first to step forward. He served through the entire war and won the Medal of Honor for bravery.

The town seal of Berlin, Connecticut, top right, commemorates Scots-Irish brothers, Edward and William Pattison, natives of County Tyrone. The brothers immigrated to Berlin in the 1740s and established what is believed to be the first tinsmith shop in the American colonies. The Pattisons marketed their tin products traveling by horse and wagon and becoming among the first of the Connecticut Yankee Peddlars.

Mother Frances Warde, right, a native of County Laois, led six other Irish Sisters of Mercy to America in 1843. After establishing convents in Pittsburg and Chicago, she accepted in 1851 the invitation of Bishop Bernard O'Reilly of the Hartford Diocese and led Sisters M. Josephine Lombard, M. Paula Lombard, M. Camillus O'Neill and M. Johanna Fogarty to Connecticut where they established the first convents in Hartford and New Haven.

The son of Irish immigrants who settled in Bridgeport, James O'Rourke, became one of the superstars of 19th century professional baseball. He began his career with the amateur Bridgeport Pembroke, a team named for the street on which the players lived. On May 22, 1876, O'Rourke, playing for the Boston Red Caps, got the first hit in the first-ever National League game, a 6-5 victory against the Philadelphia Athletics. O'Rourke went on to a 20-year career, playing the game professionally past the age of 50. During that time, he enrolled in the Yale Law School in the off-season. When he retired from baseball, he practiced law in Bridgeport, managed that city's baseball team in the Connecticut League and became that league's president. His nickname was "Orator Jim" in recognition of his eloquence with the spoken word both on and off the field. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1945.



Windham County immigrants

Scots-Irish colony blossomed in the 1720s ...

While individual Irish came to Connecticut in small numbers as early as the mid-1600s, the first wave of refugees from Ireland washed up in the state in the 1720s. That wave was of Scots-Irish Presbyterians from the north of Ireland. It was part of a floodtide of about 200,000 immigrants from the province of Ulster.

These Scots-Irish left Ireland for basically the same reason that more hundreds of thousands of Irish of all backgrounds left throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The Rev. Hugh Boulter, the Church of Ireland archbishop of Armagh, wrote of how he watched ship after ship filled with Ulster Presbyterians sailing from Belfast harbor to America. Most of the immigrants, he wrote, "can get neither victuals nor work at home." Boulter said that 3,100 men, women and children, all Protestants, went from Ireland to America in 1727 alone and 4,200 during the three previous years.

The reason there were no jobs was that in the latter 1600s, the English government shut down what was a growing textile industry in Ireland to protect its own textile industry. Parliament first prohibited the export of woolen goods from Ireland to England, then the export from Ireland to English colonies, and finally in 1699, from Ireland to any other country.

Another factor that drove Scots-Irish from Ireland were the penal laws with respect to religion. The laws were harshest against Catholics, denying them the very right to practice their religion in any way. The laws against Scots-Irish Presbyterians were less severe, but included such restrictions as that they must pay tithes for the support of Church of England clergymen.

The largest number of these early Scots-Irish immigrants to America settled in Pennsylvania, but there were clusters of them in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut. One shipload of Ulster Scots arrived in Boston on Aug. 4, 1718. Five more shiploads followed in 1719 and 1720.

Among the Scots-Irish who settled in Windham County in eastern Connecticut

were John Jameson and his wife, Roseanna, who arrived in 1718. Their story and that of others is told in *North America Family Histories*, a large collection of colonial genealogies on ancestry.com.

John was born about 1680 in Leith, Midlothian County, Scotland, and migrated with his family to Omagh, County Tyrone, Ireland. There he learned the trade of linen weaver and in 1705 was married to Roseanna Irwin, an Omagh native. They arrived in America with John's brother William and his family. William moved to Falmouth, Maine. John and Roseanna settled first near Boston in Milton, Mass. Then in 1726, they purchased land in Voluntown, Connecticut, where John presumably engaged in his trade of linen weaving. Both John and Roseanna died in Voluntown between 1731 and 1734.

Voluntown was a 20-mile-long, four-mile-wide strip along the border with Rhode Island. It had been set aside by the Connecticut General Assembly some years before to be parceled out to volunteers who fought against the Indians in King Philips War in the 1670s. The strip, which at that time was in Windham County, covered the modern-day municipalities of Voluntown and Sterling and was described as "rough and hilly and its soil of moderate fertility."

Another Scots-Irish family that settled in Windham County was that of Alexander and Jane Gordon and their children who sailed from Belfast in 1719 on a ship commanded by a Capt. Dennis. They arrived in Boston in November that year, lived in Dorchester, Mass., until 1722, and like the Jameson's bought farmland in Plainfield just west of Voluntown.

Another family, John and his son Alexander Gaston, who came from Ballymena in County Antrim, settled in Windham County. They were ancestors of William Gaston, who was born in Killingly in 1820 and elected governor of Massachusetts in 1875.

Adam Kasson, was born in 1681 in Carrickfergus, Antrim. He learned the trade of wheelmaker and emigrated to Voluntown



Photograph: Danielle (Perreault) Routh on Find A Grave

First woman patentee was of Ulster descent

Mary Dixon Kies, whose gravestone in the Old South Killingly Cemetery is shown above, became the first American woman to receive a patent from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Among the Scots-Irish who settled in Windham County in the early 1700s were three Dixson/Dixon brothers — Robert, Archibald and John. Natives of County Antrim, they arrived in Boston in 1719.

John Dixson was a leading farmer and citizen in colonial New London, Voluntown and Killingly. He became first selectman of Voluntown and was elected to the Connecticut General Assembly. In 1735, he purchased and moved with his family to a 100-acre farm in Killingly. He purchased additional acreage and made his living as a husbandman.

A widower when he arrived in Connecticut, John remarried twice. His third wife

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Puritan settlers were suspicious of Ulster Presbyterians

(Continued from page 3)

with his wife Jane Hall in 1722. He died in 1752 and his descendants followed his trade in Windham County for many years. His son, Adam Jr. born in Ireland, was a major in the Windham County regiment during the Revolutionary War.

One of the ships that arrived in Boston from Belfast in 1719 carried a young Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Samuel Dorrance. He was the son of George Dorrance, who in 1663 paid a hearth tax in Ballaway, parish of Desertoghill, in the Barony of Coleraine, Londonderry Country, Ireland.

Two of George's sons, John and George Jr., immigrated to Boston in the autumn of 1718 with their brother Samuel following in the spring of 1719.

Born in Ballaway in 1685, Samuel graduated from the University of Glasgow and received a license to preach in 1711. He crossed the ocean in the company of, or closely following, not only his brothers but members of the Dixon, Campbell and Kasson families.

In May 1721, in response to the growth in population, the Connecticut colony General Assembly designated Voluntown a municipality with the privilege of having its own government, taxing residents, supporting a minister and building a meetinghouse.

At the first town meeting on June 21 that year, settlers elected a town clerk, selectmen and a constable. They also voted to call a clergyman to minister to the spiritual needs of the town's 37 residents, a number that apparently meant not the total residents but the 37 landowners or heads of households. Voluntown was in Windham County until 1881 when county lines were redrawn and it became part of New London County.

The first Voluntown efforts to find a pastor were unsuccessful. The Rev. Joseph Watson declined an invitation and a Mr.

Billings agreed to preach on Sabbath days in the winter of 1721, but then accepted a call from another town. Finally, the name of the Rev. Samuel Dorrance was brought to the attention of townspeople. He had only recently arrived in Voluntown and his background and credentials were good.

In the Congregational custom, Dorrance was asked to come preach so that towns-

The invitation was signed by 30 townsmen and no objection was expressed. In fact, a number of residents offered special and very practical gifts that would help Dorrance settle among them: John Smith, 5,000 shingles, Thomas Cole, three pounds money in shingle nails, John Campbell, 200 clapboards, Thomas Gallup, breaking up of two acres of land. Eight other parishioners offered their labor.

A committee of residents met with the Congregational association in Groton to make sure Dorrance's credential were examined and all was in readiness for his ordination and settlement, major events in the life of the new community. A fast day was proclaimed for Oct. 15, 1723, and the ordination to follow on Oct. 23.

While no opposition was expressed initially, there were grumblings among some settlers who were leery about the Westminster Confession of Faith sub-

scribed to by the minister. In those days of precisely crafted descriptions of faith, the Westminster Confession was a Presbyterian dogma not pleasing to some Puritan English settlers.

Thus, when the council of ministers of eastern Connecticut met in the days just before the ordination, a number of protesters submitted a petition in which were mingled religious concerns and strongly nativist opinions.

"We whose names are underwritten," the petition said, "do agree that one of our New England people may be settled in Voluntown to preach the gospel to us, and we will be satisfied, honored gentlemen, that you choose one for us to prevent unwholesome inhabitants for we are afraid that Popery and Heresy will be brought into the land; therefore we protest against settling Mr. Dorrance because he is a stranger and we are informed that he came out of Ire-



*This photograph of the historic Dorrance Inn at Sterling, which was formerly a part of Voluntown, was published in 1937 in the book *Old Inns of Connecticut*, edited by Marian Dickinson Terry.*

people might assess his pulpit skills, his theology and his compatibility with parishioners. He did well on all counts and was asked to serve as pastor on a trial basis beginning in December 1722. So pleased with him were townspeople that at a town meeting on April 17, 1723, they voted to ask him to become their permanent pastor.

The invitation stated: "We the inhabitants and proprietors of Voluntown, having by ye providence of God had for some considerable time ye opportunity to experience your ministerial gifts and qualifications, by which we have received such satisfaction and are so well contented that it has pleased God to incline us to give you a call to settle with us in ye work of the gospel ministry and in case of acceptance agree to give you 60 pounds a year for the present and also 50 pounds in such specifics as shall be suitable to promote your building or settlement."

land and we do observe that since he has been in town that the Irish do flock into town and we are informed that the Irish are not wholesome inhabitants and upon this account we are against settling Mr. Dorrance for we are not such persons as you take us to be, but desire the gospel to be preached by one of our own and not be a stranger for we cannot receive any benefit for neither soul nor body and we would pray him to withdraw himself from us."

The petition caused ministers in eastern Connecticut to equivocate on the issue. They contacted Connecticut Gov. Gurdon Saltonstall and others of the colony's leading ministers to ask their opinions.

Those authorities found the call to Mr. Dorrance to be in order and suggested the question be brought back to eastern Connecticut and put before the ministers of nearby parishes in Preston, Windham and Canterbury. Those clergymen pointed out that no objections had been raised when Mr. Dorrance was proposed and suggested that the ensuing opposition was the work of "the Devil and wicked men." They ruled that the ordination should go forward, and it did.

Dorrance proved to be a keeper. He served as minister for 48 years, not retiring until 1771. In 1726, he married Elizabeth, the daughter of John Smith, one of the early members of the parish. The Dorrances had six sons and one daughter.

Still standing in the town of Sterling and on the National Register of Historic Places is the Dorrance Inn, also known as the Samuel Dorrance House. The inn is thought to have been built in 1722, the very year that the Rev. Samuel Dorrance came to Voluntown.

Sterling was the name given for the northern portion of Voluntown and in 1794, the General Assembly split that area from Voluntown and made it the town of Sterling. The first town meeting was in the home of one of the Dixson Scots-Irish immigrants.

The Dorrance Inn played a role in the Revolutionary War. In July 1780, a 12,000-man French army commanded by Comte Jean-Baptiste de Rochambeau landed in Rhode Island to aid the Ameri-

can colonists fighting for independence from England.

That autumn one of Rochambeau's top aides, Comte Francois Jean de Chastellux, came to Voluntown to map out a route for the French army to follow the next spring to join Gen. Washington's Continental Army in a decisive campaign against the British.

Chastellux brought with him two aides, one of whom was a 25-year-old Irish officer in the French army, Capt. Isidore Lynch. They spent an evening and the following day at the Dorrance Inn. In his diary, Chastellux described the occasion. He wrote that Dorrance was an old man and a native of Ireland. He admired Dorrance's family and his library of 45 or 50 books, mostly the works of classical authors.

The French general also said that he shared two bottles of wine with Dorrance and that "the reading of some English poets and the conversation with Messrs. Lynch and Montesquieu and the good people of the house, made me pass the day very agreeably."

Most likely some of the conversation included recollections of Ireland between the old Irish innkeeper and young the Irish lieutenant.

That autumn and winter, a number of French officers and soldiers passed through Connecticut along that route. The Dorrance Inn apparently was a favorite for one other Frenchman wrote: "Coming out of the forest, you reach Voluntown ... a small group of houses, two of which are taverns. Dorrance's Tavern, on the right side of the road as you enter, is the better one; the other one, which is on the left on leaving, is called Dexter's."

While it is certain that the French preferred the hospitality of the Dorrance fireside, it appears that the old Irishman who greeted them was not the Rev. Samuel Dorrance, but another of the numerous immigrants of his family because the clergyman's gravestone in the old Sterling burying ground is inscribed that he "Departed this life November 12th 1775 age 90 years."

Early victory for women's rights

(Continued from page 3)

was Janet Kennedy, the daughter of another of the Ulster Scots-Irish in Windham. They were married in the summer of 1751 and their daughter, Mary, who was born on March 21, 1752, was the youngest of the family's five children.

John died in 1759 at the age of 81, and is buried in the graveyard at Oneco. In his will, he bequeathed his land to his older children, but left £16 to his seven-year-old daughter, Mary, with the stipulation that it be passed along to her only when she became 18.

Mary was married twice, first to Isaac Pike of nearby Canterbury, and after he died about 1772, to John Kee/Kies of Killingly in 1797.

Shortly after the beginning of the 19th century, Mary Dixson Kies became one of the first of numerous American women who began to tear down barriers that prevented them from equal rights. Her contribution was in the field of industry, specifically the textile industry.

At that time, Killingly was the greatest cotton manufacturing town in the state of Connecticut and the largest municipality in Windham County with a population of 3,865. Prior to 1790, only men could protect their inventions in the United States. The Patent Act of 1790 extended that right to women.

In that era, the government had begun to encourage domestic manufacturing. Straw hats were in demand both for workers in the fields and for dress-up occasions. Their manufacture became an important industry in New England. In 1807, one of the earliest cotton yarn mills was opened in Killingly.

Two years later, Mary Dixon Kies applied for a patent. Her invention was a method of using silk or silk thread instead of another piece of straw to hold cross hatching on bonnets together. The silk thread was very sturdy and the process was cost effective making it possible to mass produce hats.

The patent for Mary Dixon Kies was signed by President James Madison on May 5, 1809. First lady Dolly Madison is said to have written a complementary note to Mary for her invention.

Two samples of Mary's straw fabric with silk thread are in the collections of the Danielson Public Library.

Mary later went to live with her son Daniel in Brooklyn, Connecticut, where she died in 1837.

Windham County immigrants

... Irish-born governor flourished in the 1960s

In January 1960, John N. Dempsey became the first foreign-born governor of Connecticut since the 1600s when several Puritan settlers born in England had held that position. The Puritans probably would have been shocked to think that the day would come when a Celtic Catholic from Ireland would sit in the governor's office in Hartford. But, they probably also would have eventually come to think highly, as did most Connecticut people, of the kind of governor Dempsey became during his 10 years in office.

Born in the town of Cahir on the River Suir in the south of County Tipperary, John Noel Dempsey was the only son of Edward and Ellen Luby Dempsey.

Ellen's father was the proprietor of a boot and shoe business in the village. Known as Ned, Edward was a veteran of 21 years service in the British army, including tours in India and Africa. He was a sergeant major in the 16th Queen's Lancers, an outfit stationed at the British barracks in Cahir. After his discharge from the Army, Ned worked as a supervisor at a flour mill in Cahir. Their son John was born at their home on Lower Abbey Street in the town in January 1915.

In 1925, when John was just 10 years old, the Dempsey family pulled up stakes and immigrated to Connecticut. Theirs was a typical family-chain migration with them following in the footsteps of Ellen's sister and brother who had immigrated to Connecticut and had found employment in a woolen mill in Putnam.

The Dempseys rented a home near St. Mary's Church in Putnam. Ned worked at the woolen mill and John easily adapted to the public schools in Putnam, starring in track and basketball as well as debating and literature. After only one year, he dropped out of Providence College in Rhode Island, and took a \$22.50 a week job at the Putnam woolen mill because of his father's poor health and the financial im-

pact of the Great Depression. In 1940, he married Mary Frey, and they had three sons and a daughter.



Gov. John N. Dempsey

The story goes that Dempsey entered politics quite by chance. A street light near the Dempsey home died out and neither phone call nor letter led to its replacement so young John went before the town Board of Aldermen. He made such a convincing case that the aldermen not only replaced the bulb but also suggested that he run for alderman. A Democrat, he followed

that suggestion and was elected in what became just the first step in a 35-year career in public service.

"Politics and government to some people are like food and water ... Some just revel in the political arena ..." wrote *Hartford Courant* political columnist Jack Zaiman. "... That is Gov. Dempsey. All his life he has spent in politics ... He started off when he was 19 as an alderman in Putnam and he has been at it ever since ..."

After serving as a Putnam alderman, Dempsey was elected in 1948 to the first of six consecutive two-year terms as mayor of Putnam. In 1949 he was elected also to the House of Representatives in the Connecticut General Assembly. He served three terms, two as leader of the House minority, while continuing to serve as Putnam's mayor. In 1953, he was voted by newspaper reporters covering the General Assembly's session as the most capable legislator in the House of Representatives.

In 1954, Abraham A. Ribicoff, Democratic nominee for governor, picked Dempsey as his running mate for lieutenant governor. Ribicoff won, but Dempsey lost for the first time. After that election, however, Ribicoff selected Dempsey to be his executive secretary. In 1958, Ribicoff and Dempsey ran again as a team for governor and lieutenant governor. This time both were elected.

During that term, Dempsey became governor on Jan. 21, 1961, when Ribicoff resigned to accept appointment as U.S. secretary of health, education and welfare in the cabinet of President John F. Kennedy.

Although he arrived in the governor's office without being elected, Dempsey soon demonstrated not only that he was comfortable there, but that he was a prudent, creative and trustworthy manager of public business as well as a favorite of the people.

In 1962, he won a full four-year term as governor by a margin of 66,175 votes. In 1966, he won another four years with a margin of 115,000 votes. All told, he served as governor for nine years, 11 months and 21 days, the longest tenure of any Connecticut governor since the 1820s.

During the 1962 campaign, the interim governor cautiously spoke of the opportunities and potential pitfalls of a full term. "It is essential," he said "that the Democratic Party which represents the administration that has given the state responsible and forward-looking government for the past seven years reflect its continuing fiscal responsibility ... I am convinced this can be done and that new programs can be offered within our present tax framework."

As Dempsey settled into his first four-year term, however, it was evident that his goals extended far beyond simply maintaining the status quo. Years later, Connecticut's state historian, Walter Woodward, stated, "Gov. Dempsey presided over a complete transformation of our state and its government."

To some degree, the changing times led to that transformation. In the early 1960s, for example, a U.S. Supreme Court decision in a Tennessee case led to a U.S. District Court ruling that the House of Representatives in Connecticut's General Assembly must be reapportioned on a population basis. That in turn led to the calling of a Connecticut Constitutional Convention in July 1965, and a referendum in December that year in which the state's voters approved by a 2 to 1 margin the fourth constitution in Connecticut's history.

Beyond such an extraordinary case, however, it was mainly the vision and determi-

nation of Gov. Dempsey that drove the vehicles of change during his 10 years as governor. He forged advances in state involvement in mental health, highway safety, corrections, civil rights, environmental issues, education, youth programs and drug abuse.

Under his guidance, enrollment at the University of Connecticut and the four state colleges rose to 37,000 full-time, and 14,000 part-time students. State spending on all education increased more than 100 percent and the education grants to towns and cities doubled.

Similarly, it was Gov. Dempsey's Clean Water Task Force that in May 1966 announced six major proposals and a \$150 million state, federal and local bond issue to reverse the pollution of the state's streams and drinking water. That initiative won nationwide acclaim and Connecticut became one of the first states to enact legislation to deal with environmental issues that endangered the health and welfare of Americans.

Dempsey's clean water initiative won him an endorsement from an unlikely source. The *New Haven Register*, which had not endorsed a Democrat for 30 years, praised Dempsey in 1966 both for the clean water initiative and his efforts to assist the struggling New Haven Railroad. "The governor's administration may be undramatic," wrote the newspaper, "but it is buttressed both by experience and in the day-to-day operations of Connecticut government and by an attitude of general prudence and practicality as to goals and procedures."

Throughout his tenure as governor, Dempsey had many irons in the fire to meet the needs of all of Connecticut people. He initiated a program for elderly homeowners who were caught in a squeeze between limited incomes and increased tax levies on their property. He tackled the special problems of care and treatment for the mentally ill and retarded, proposed a state conference on human rights, lobbied for a state school of veterinary medicine and for initiatives in marine science "to help bring to

O'Dempsey outfoxed Normans

The roots of the Dempsey family that produced an outstanding governor of Connecticut run 800 years deep in the Midlands of Ireland. The O'Dempseys — O'Diomasaigh in Gaelic — reigned in the district of Clanmalire which included the baronies of Geashill, Philipstown and Ballyowan in County Offaly and portions of neighboring County Kildare and County Laois. The clan's main castle was at Geashill near Tullamore.

The O'Dempseys also were one of the few Celtic families that stood its ground against the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the 12th century. The invasion began in 1169 when 600 Anglo-Norman mounted knights, foot soldiers and archers landed at Bannow Bay in Wexford. A year later, Richard Fitzgilbert de Clare, known as Strongbow, landed with more troops at Passage East on the County Waterford shore. In 1171, Henry II, the Normandy-born king of England, came to Ireland with still another invasion force of 400 knights and 4,000 soldiers. Most of the chiefs of Irish clans throughout southeastern Ireland readily surrendered and offered hostages to appease him. One of the few who refused was Dermot O'Dempsey, the chieftain of the district of Clanmalire. O'Dempsey would not swear loyalty to nor even parley with the Anglo-Normans.

Responding to O'Dempsey's stand, Strongbow, now commander in chief of the invaders, along with his son-in-law Robert de Quincey, marched a powerful force into Offaly. After plundering and burning the countryside, they retired toward Kildare, but O'Dempsey prepared a trap in a wooded defile. He allowed Strongbow and the vanguard to pass through, then fell upon the rear division. De Quincey was slain and his troops were routed with great slaughter.

"After this," wrote one historian, "Strongbow made no further attempts to subdue O'Dempsey nor does he seem to have been particularly anxious to repair defeat ... The English never held an acre of the territory during Dermot O'Dempsey's time ..."



fruition the economic and recreational potential of one of our great natural resources, Long Island Sound." He invited the New York Stock Exchange to relocate all or part of its operations to Connecticut, and he studied the feasibility of constructing a bridge from Connecticut to Long Island.

Not everyone was pleased with the ambitious agenda of the Dempsey administration. Some critics complained that the state on Dempsey's watch was a sprawling administration that boomed in the good years between his start in 1961, when unemployment was high and taxes had to be raised, and his retirement in 1971 when unemployment climbed again and taxes had to be raised by his republican successor, another Irishman, Gov. Thomas Meskill.

Dempsey had a way about him, however, that made friends even of those who disliked his policies. Robert K. Killian, who served Dempsey as attorney general, said, "There was no attitude of confrontation ... John Dempsey created an unusual era of good feeling. He created it himself; it was the way he lived his life."

On a recorded monologue about Dempsey, state historian Woodward said, "I am here today to tell you that John Noel Dempsey was in fact the real deal, a good man who cared deeply about people and who became a great governor of the state I love ... John Dempsey may have been the best governor Connecticut had. He certainly was one of the most popular ... He was that rarest of politicians, a man who even opponents liked and admired. He possessed great charm and fast wit, was a gifted orator, a tireless worker for causes he believed in, an extraordinary manager. He was a person above all with a great compassion for humanity and a sense that God put him on earth to do good ..."

Gov. Dempsey surprised the entire state when in 1970 he announced that he would not run for election again. He said it was a family decision and ruled out a campaign for U.S. senator or any other office.

Hartford Courant political reporter Jack Zaiman wrote, "Dempsey is a soft-hearted, emotional and friendly man. He could be hard and tough when he had to. But, essentially he is warm and sensitive. These are qualities that reached down to the people who gave him a Horatio Alger political career. We shall miss him."

On Jan. 7, 1971, those comments were proven correct when Dempsey left his office

(Please turn to page 8)

Gov. Dempsey's legacy

(Continued from page 7)

in the capitol for the final time as governor. He did so "with tears streaming down his cheeks, his voice cracking with emotion and he embraced one friend after another as he came down the stairs from the second floor of the capitol from the governor's offices to the revolving outside doors he had use thousands of times as governor."

In retirement, John and Mary lived on the Connecticut shore at New London. He returned to Putnam to fish with friends from his youth there. And he still wrote to some boyhood friends in Cahir in Ireland.

A few months after retiring, John wrote a letter indicating what he would like most to be remembered about his administration: "For me, the real meaning of government has been people, which when translated into action means ... new or expanded facilities for the retarded, the blind, the handicapped, the mentally ill and others who must look to their government for the help they cannot provide for themselves."

John N. Dempsey died of lung cancer on July 19, 1989. He was treated in his last months at the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, known as the John Dempsey Hospital because it was one of his projects as governor.

In death, he was praised, as he had been in life, as much by political opponents as

political allies. "There was decency in everything the man fought for, then did ...," said Republican U.S. Senator and Connecticut Governor Lowell P. Weicker, "I first came into politics when he was governor. His example had as great an impact on me as any one ... Kindness and decency was his personal style which was translated into his legislative bequest."

Gov. Dempsey is buried in the family plot in St. Mary's Cemetery in Putnam. His gravestone is yet another memorial to how Connecticut has been good to Irish immigrants in their time of need, and how those immigrants have replied in contributions of all kinds to their adopted state and country.

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*In Ireland, a Shanachie is a folklorist,
historian and keeper of the traditions of the people.*

"We have kept faith
with the past;
we have handed
a tradition
to the future."

Padraic Pearse

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