

The Shanachie

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New London Day photograph

Currachs—fishing boats whose history goes back to ancient Ireland—raced across New London harbor on July 29.

Summer at the shore

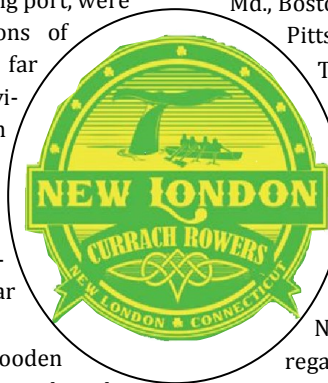
A time-honored Connecticut Irish custom

On Saturday, July 29, several dozen Irish currach rowers, turned the clock back to the 6th century on the waterfront at New London, a major New England seaport since the 17th century. The New London Currach Rowers, whose insignia, shown here, pays tribute both to Ireland's famous boats and New London's history as a whaling port, were keeping alive the traditions of Celtic fishermen going as far back as St. Brendan the Navigator. St. Brendan was born about A.D. 484, and Irish folklore has it that he and a crew of monks may well have crossed the vast Atlantic Ocean in a vessel similar to a currach.

The currach is a light wooden fishing boat, originally covered with animal skins, but today covered with canvas and tarred. Julius Caesar is said to have written of seeing hundreds of currachs in the Irish Sea during his preparations to

invade England with his Roman legions.

Currachs are still used for fishing off the western coast of Ireland. The crafts of currach construction and rowing are also kept alive in the United States by groups such as the New London Currach Rowers, which was organized in 2008, and by similar Irish seafaring enthusiasts in Albany, Annapolis, Md., Boston, Columbus, Ohio, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.



The scattered groups are united in the North American Currach Association, which was established in 1982 to promote both "currach racing and the Celtic maritime heritage." The association's rowing season runs from May to November with practices and regattas in some of our nation's most historic seaports and waterways: Chesapeake Bay, Boston Harbor, Lake Michigan, the Hudson and Ohio rivers and New London Harbor.

This year New London also hosted the

annual NACA business meeting in late March. "Always great getting together to take care of business and talk a little rowing," reported a posting on the NACA Facebook page. Plans were made at the meeting for seven regattas in 2017.

Rowers from Albany won the New London Regatta, according to the National Association on its Facebook page: "Windy conditions made for a tough day of competition that saw Philadelphia and Boston finishing close behind in second and third. Great efforts were also given by the host club from New London and Annapolis."

The boats used by the North American rowing groups are four-seated currachs, "naomhaig" in Gaelic. They are 25 feet long and weigh between 250 and 350 pounds. In Ireland today, traditional three-seat currach are used in Galway and four seaters are popular in Kerry and the Aran Islands.

Currach oars are long and slender blades with no paddle. That shape is designed for rowing in rough waters where the large

(Please turn to page 2)

Famed colonial statesman found rest, recreation at New London beach

The first Irishman fascinated by the Connecticut shoreline seems to have been Sir William Johnson, one of colonial America's most influential, productive and flamboyant characters, who came to New London 250 years ago to recuperate.

Born in Smithstown, County Meath, about 1715, Johnson was the son of Christopher and Anne Warren Johnson. On the paternal side, he was a descendant of a branch of the Gaelic O'Neill clan of County Armagh. His grandfather went by the name MacShane. On his mother's side, his ancestry was of the Norman-Irish Warren family and the Old English Aylmer family. Originally Catholic, he and many family members anglicized their names and converted to the Protestant faith in the 17th century.

Among them was William's uncle Peter Warren, who became a Protestant, rose to the rank of admiral in the English navy, settled in New York City and acquired a huge tract of land near Albany. Warren convinced Johnson to emigrate to America and oversee the settlement of his upstate land. Johnson jumped at the chance and when he sailed into Boston in 1738, he brought with him 12 Irish families. He soon was joined at what today is Johnstown, N.Y., just north of the Mohawk River, by numerous kinfolk and other Irish: his sister Catherine, his physician, Dr. Patrick Daly, his clerk, Robert Adams from Dublin; his farm

manager, Thomas Flood; his accountant, a Scots-Irishman, Thomas Shipboy; his lawyer, Bryan Lefferty; two of his croneys, Mick and John Byrne.; a schoolmaster, Edward Wall; a priest, Father Peter McKenna to attend for the spiritual needs of Johnson's many Catholic Irish and Highland Scots tenants.

In addition to contributing significantly to the Irish immigration to America, Johnson acquired thousands of acres of land, became rich through the fur trade, military supply contracts and lumbering, won the trust of the powerful Iroquois Six Nations in central and western New York, and served on the New York Governor's Council. During the French and Indian War, he was appointed British superintendent of



Indian affairs for the northern colonies, and even though not a military man, led successful expeditions against the French at Fort Edward on Lake George and Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario near Buffalo.

In the 1760s, when he was in his 50s, Johnson came to New London during the summer to rest and recuperate. In early summer 1768, the *New London Gazette* reported: "On Wednesday arrived in this Town from his Seat at Johnson Hall, Sir William Johnson, Baronet, a Gentleman well known for the great and important Services Render'd to his King and Country ..."

He was accompanied by his most im-

portant deputy in Indian affairs, Irish-born Col. George Croghan, a fur trader and agent to Indians in western Pennsylvania and the Ohio territory, and by his son Sir John Johnson, as well as others from Johnstown.

In a letter in April 1769, Johnson himself explained the situation: "The fatigues and anxieties I have had for many years now come heavily on me and increase my bilious disorder which reduced me to the lowest extremity last year and obliged me to go to the sea side (at) New London... I have been a good deal better ever since ..."

Johnson remained in the New London area until early July when the *Gazette* reported that he and his coterie "set out from hence for Johnson Hall in Order as we hear ... to open an important Congress with the Six Nations and other Indians by Direction of the King's Ministers."

His trips to New London apparently were regular for in 1773, a year before his death, Johnson wrote on June 30 that he was leaving for the shore for about two months. From Fishers Island, just off New London, he wrote a request suggesting his times at the shore were as much for pleasure as therapy: "Please to send me first opportunity 100 of limes or lemons, 1 dozen of porter if good, 2 gallons of best spirits ..."

He returned from the Connecticut shore in September that year and died on July 11, 1774, from a stroke suffered during another conference with Indians at Johnson Hall.

Sources: *Sir William Johnson papers, Fintan O'Toole, White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America, 2005; online Wikipedia.,*

In New London currachs preserve ancient traditions of Irish fishermen

(Continued from page 1)

paddles can get caught on the wave tops. Both women and men participate in the rowing, and according to the New London rowers, "New members are always welcome and an Irish heritage is not required, but a love of all things Irish is definitely a benefit."

Currach rowers are a hardy bunch. Flooding on the Ohio River forced the Pittsburgh Irish Rowing Club to cancel its 33rd Annual St. Brendan's Cup Regatta on June 24 this year. Unconcerned by such a minor setback, the club simply rescheduled to July 22. Philadelphia won overall, but Pittsburgh

had victories in both the four-man and two man/two woman events.

The preservation of an ancient Irish tradition by the currach rowers of New London is remarkable. More remarkable is the fact that currach rowing is only one of dozens of ways that Irish people over the centuries have been attracted to and connected with the natural beauty and lifestyle of Connecticut's 330-mile Long Island Sound coastline. This entire issue of *The Shanachie* tells a few stories about just some of those connections.

Sources: *Kathy Walburn of the New London Currach Rowers; www.nacarowing.org.*

Catholic Summer School enrollees mingled studies and vacations

Over the years and the centuries, New London has attracted Irish summer visitors with everything from water sports like currach racing to the prospect of healthy shoreline weather. In August 1892, the city was chosen to host a three-week summer educational program that drew an estimated 600 Catholics, most of them Irish.

The program was conceived at a meeting of the Catholic Educational Union in New York City in May that year. Impressed by the popularity of the Chautauqua movement which featured programs in summer camps throughout the nation, those at the meeting decided to organize a uniquely Catholic Chautauqua that would "foster intellectual culture in harmony with the Catholic faith by means of lectures and special courses."

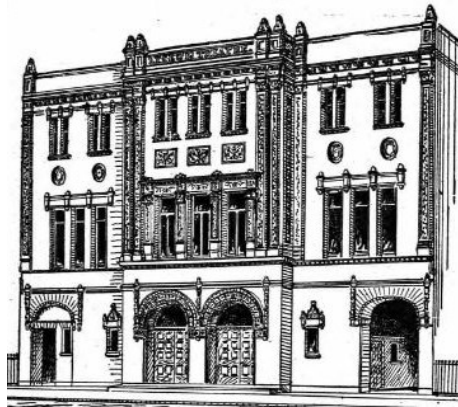
The program was named Catholic Summer School. A committee was appointed to pick a summertime site and plan a three-week session of university-level courses on topics ranging from religion to literature, science and art. Venues such as Newport, R.I., and an island in the St. Lawrence River were considered, but New London was chosen for its seaside location, its small city atmosphere, its access to railroad and steamboat transportation and its Catholic community which included: St. Mary Star of the Sea parish, St. John's Literary Society, two Ancient Order of Hibernians divisions, a Knights of Columbus Council, Hibernian Rifles militia company, Total Abstinence Society and Irish National Land League organization.

The St. John Literary Society got the school off to a good start with a reception for attendees on Saturday evening, July 30. Bishop Lawrence S. McMahon of the Diocese of Hartford gave it the church's seal of approval by celebrating a pontifical high Mass on Sunday, July 31, at St. Mary's Church. The Mass was only one of four that day and the church was filled again that evening for vespers with Father Morgan Sheedy of Pittsburgh, the president of the Catholic Summer School program, preaching about its purposes and the hopes and expectations for the future.

The next morning, Mayor Ralph Wheeler welcomed the visitors at the first lecture in

the Lyceum Theatre. Also speaking was former Connecticut Gov. Thomas M. Waller, a New London resident who was Connecticut's first governor of Irish ancestry.

Informality and variety were the hallmarks of the lectures that began that morning and continued until mid-August. The first speaker was Father P.A. Halpin, S.J., vice-president of St. Francis Xavier College in New York City, who spoke about ethics. Attendance at his lectures increased steadily because he encouraged questions and discussions.



The Lyceum Theatre in New London was the venue for most of the lectures at the Catholic Summer School in August 1892.

Another prominent lecturer was Katherine E. Conway, a poet, reporter and editor of the *Boston Pilot*, one of the oldest Catholic newspapers in America. Conway spoke about American literature. Another female speaker, Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Blake, gave a presentation on Mexico, while Miss K.A. O'Keefe attracted a large audience for her illustrated lecture on John Boyle O'Reilly, the famous Fenian and editor of the *Boston Pilot*.

Father Maurice F. Egan, professor of literature at Notre Dame University, gave a series of talks about William Shakespeare, the playwright. Father J. Loughlin of Philadelphia, editor of the *American Catholic Quarterly*, spoke about the early history of the papacy and Father Rene Holaind lectured on "The Relations of Capital and Labor."

All told there were lectures on about 50 topics. Occasionally an unscheduled talk slipped in at the request of students. Such was the case when the Shakespeare expert, Father Egan, lectured "by special request"

on St. Francis of Assisi as a poet and precursor of Dante.

The *New York Sun* praised the variety of topics, stating, "We cannot tell whether we would rather hear Father Hughes on paleontology ... Father Walsh on Egyptology or Dr. O'Leary on the Norsemen ... Father Searle on astronomy or Prof. Brophy on civil government."

Those attending classes stayed at summer lodges such as the Pequot House and townspeople went out of their way to make them comfortable. The public library allowed them to borrow books, and the St. John's Literary Society chartered a steamboat to take them on "the grandest excursion of the season."

Most attendees were Irish and from Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts, but some came from the Catholic University in Washington, D.C., Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind., Mount St. Mary's University, in Emmitsburg, Md., Detroit, Philadelphia, San Francisco, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville and Milwaukee. Several were from Antigonish and Arichat in the Canadian maritime province of Nova Scotia.

Among the Connecticut attendees were Mary Barry, Mary Caffrey, Margaret Daly, Margaret Duggan, Mary Dallagher, Nellie, Emma and Kate Ford, Pauline Rose Hughson, William Hackett, Joseph Keane, W.A. McWilliams, Mary O'Brien, Fannie Lynch, Anna Morris, Sarah Ward, Michael and Mrs. Hughson, all from New Haven; Lizzie Carroll, Mary O'Toole, Mary Flinter, Jennie and Margaret Gilhuley, Mary Reilly, Rev. Joseph Nihill, of Bridgeport; Mrs. Denis Crone, Margaret Casey, Derby; Ellen Moore, New Britain; Lizzie Donohue, Rev. J.B. Dougherty, Mystic; Kittie Duffey, Hartford; Rev. T.R. Sweeney, Portland; Rev. E. Cooney, Grosvenor Dale; Rose M. Cassidy, C.G. Kerrigan, Dr. Patrick J. and Mrs. Cassidy, Mary McCloud, Norwich; Rev. Thomas J. Preston, Danielsonville; Jennie L. Donovan, Southington; Grace and S.J. Mulrooney, Unionville; Annie McDonald, Noank; E.D. Coogan, of Windsor Locks; Rev. T.H. Carroll, Westport; Rev. J.A. Mulcahy, Waterbury; Mary A. Norman, Stonington.

Sources: New London Day, Irish American Weekly, Irish World, New York Sun, New York Tribune.

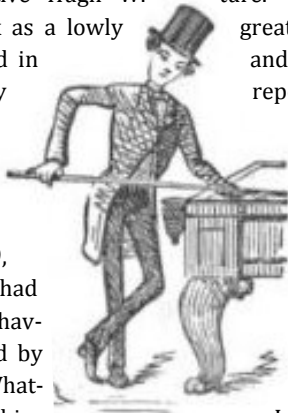
Billiards skills brought fame and fortune to Long Neck Point Irishman

County Waterford native Hugh W. Collender found work as a lowly journeyman when he arrived in New York about 1850. By 1872, he was able to purchase an estate in Darien on the Gold Coast of Connecticut.

Born in Cappoquin in 1829, Collender, it was rumored, "had the honor and distinction of having a reward set on his head by the British government ... Whatever his role was, something stopped him from ever seeing Ireland again; one visit to his family in Waterford involved them meeting in France instead."

Collender was employed first as a sash and blind maker, then began manufacturing billiard tables with Tobias O'Connor whose family ran a billiards parlor on Union Square, and subsequently with Michael Phelan, a native of Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny, an ace billiards player and technician.

"Phelan made to me some very important suggestions in relation to the improvement of billiard tables and cushions," Collender later wrote. Based on the suggestions, Collender designed a new "combination cushion, which he and Phelan began to manufac-



ture. "Their billiard tables acquired a great reputation from the elasticity and perfect action of their cushions," reported one newspaper. In addition

to his billiards ideas, Phelan also had a daughter Julia, and soon she and Collender entered into the permanent partnership of marriage.

Phelan died in 1871, but Collender continued to build billiards tables, bought the estate on Long Neck Point overlooking Long Island Sound in Darien, and in 1873 moved the business out of New York to Stamford. The 1881 Stamford directory describes H.W. Collender's Billiard Table Factory as "another of Stamford's most important industries. The building is of imposing dimensions and is located at the most convenient possible point for railroad and steamboat transportation. The tables, as well as the various outfittings of the billiard room, manufactured by Collender, are shipped to every civilized nation on the globe, and are more popular and better known in America than any others manufactured."

The estate Collender purchased in 1872 is at the very end of Long Neck Peninsula

which juts out into Long Island Sound and in early times was a landmark for navigators. The property became known as Collender's Point and its Irish owner busily "erected several beautiful buildings ... most unique was his massive manor house featuring intricate woodworking detail, which was crafted by Collender's skilled billiard table artisans. He also constructed a small Catholic chapel in the residence for use by his family and others for Mass ..."

The 1880 census lists the Collender Point family as including not only Hugh, age 50, and Julia Phelan Collender and their five children, but also five servants, all born in Ireland: Ann McCarthy, 30; Mary Heme, 22; Mary Murphy, 20; Elizabeth Shanahan, 22, and Ann Shanahan, 28, governess.

Hugh Collender died in New York City in 1890. His funeral was in St. Patrick's Cathedral, but his remains were returned to Darien for burial in St. John's Cemetery.

Sources: Patrick R. Redmond, *The Irish and the Making of American Sport*, 2014, p. 105. *Irish World*, April 12, 1890. *Darien News*, Feb. 18, 2010. Maggie Gordon, *The Gilded Age on Connecticut's Gold Coast*, 2014, p. 103ff. Michael Phelan, *The Game of Billiards*, 11th edition, 1873, pp. vi-x.

Ennis and Devitt made 'prettiest spot on the Sound' accessible to all

Since colonial times, Shippan Point in Stamford has had a reputation as one of the loveliest sites on the Connecticut shore. In 1822, Timothy Dwight in his *Travels in New England and New York* described the Shippan peninsula as "an elegant and fertile piece of ground ... The surface slopes in every direction and is encircled by a collection of exquisite scenery ... one of the pleasantest retreats in America."

In the 1880s, an Irish immigrant did his best to make Shippan Point accessible for the enjoyment of rich and poor alike. John Ennis was born in Co. Meath about 1842 and immigrated to Chicago in 1851 with his father Hugh Ennis. Like Hugh, John was a carpenter and became superintendent of the construction of St. John's Church when he settled in Stamford in 1879. After St. John's was finished in early 1886, Ennis looked to development of Shippan Point. On Nov. 12 that year, the *Stamford Advocate* reported: "John Ennis's patent bathing house and seaside restaurant on the extreme point of Shippan is enclosed and now offers a conspicuous new landmark to navigators on the Sound." Ennis then built a breakwater and a couple of docks with "ample depth of water ... to become a favorite landing place for excursion steamers." By 1890, large excursion steamships were docking at his "Enniston Park."

Another Irishman, Michael Devitt, built a second bathing house with an office where bathing suits were available. "Bathing is becoming more and more the fashionable caper for summer and every afternoon a large number of ladies and gentlemen can be seen at Shippan Point," reported the *Advocate* on June 27, 1890. In a letter to the editor on March 4, 1892, Ennis strongly supported a proposal for a public park at Shippan "making picturesque Stamford even more picturesque and giving facilities for healthful comfort and enjoyment to all classes ..."

Sources: Rosemary H. Burns, *A Concise History of Shippan*, www.stamfordhistory.org. www.ancestry.com. *Stamford Advocate*, Dec. 7, 1893, *Hugh Ennis obituary*.

Enniston :- Park

PAVILION

AND

Swimming Baths.

OPEN FOR THE SEASON.

THE FAVORITE

Steamer Julia

Will make Hourly Trips

Between Canal Dock and Enniston Pier,

SHIPPAN POINT.

Fare 10 Cents.

Telephone connection with Stamford.

Diocese built Niantic chapel for Irish servants of well-to-do vacationers

(Our thanks to The Catholic Transcript for giving us permission to reprint this excerpt and photograph from an article that appeared in its edition of August 2016.)

By Shelley Wolf

When you are away from home in the summer, finding a Catholic church to attend may be a minor inconvenience. But in Niantic, a village in the town of East Lyme, a little white sided Chapel near Crescent Beach makes it easy for summer visitors to find their way to Mass.

At 9 a.m. every Sunday from July 3 through September 4, St. Francis Chapel, which is under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Norwich, opens its doors to the summer crowd. Most in attendance are from the archdiocese of Hartford, but the seasonal Chapel is also popular with Niantic residents, who simply consider it part of their summer experience.

"In my estimation, 60 percent come from the suburbs outside of Hartford – Simsbury, Avon, Farmington, West Hartford, Glastonbury, Wethersfield and Newington," said Father Gregory Mullaney, pastor of the seasonal chapel. "Maybe 40 percent would be from our own parish," he said, referring to St. Agnes church in Niantic, where he is also the pastor.

According to Father Mullaney, the chapel also welcomes a sprinkling of visitors from farther afield — Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Not surprisingly, Father Mullaney is also happy to see Catholics attending Mass whenever they are on vacation or away from home for the weekend, rather than taking a week off as some do.

"Sunday worship – Sunday Mass – is a reminder that I am more than just an individual Catholic believer. I'm part of the mystical body of Christ, the core of which is the Catholic Church," he explained.

In fact, this connection between the Mass and the people was the driving force that led to the founding of St. Francis Chapel. The chapel was built by the archdiocese of Hartford in 1908 to bring the Mass to Irish Catholic immigrants who worked as maids, governesses, carriage drivers and grounds-keepers for wealthy summer residents, said Jane Brothers, a St. Agnes parishioner and



A postcard of St. Francis Chapel at Crescent Beach in Niantic during the early 1900s.

member of the Crescent Beach historical interest group.

Before the chapel, these Catholics had to travel to St. Mary's Church in New London via hired horse and buggy, the railroad or trolley. So they arranged for priests from the missionaries of our Lady of La Salette and later from St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield to celebrate at the Crescent Beach Hotel.

When the congregation outgrew the hotel, then Bishop Michael Tierney suggested building a chapel. "They saved their money bit by bit," Mrs. Brothers said of the Irish servants who donated a significant portion of the funds needed. "They not only donated their money but helped to build a chapel on their day off," she said.

Eventually, the seasonal chapel was manned by clergy from St. Agnes when that parish gained year-round parish status in 1922. In 1953, when the diocese of Norwich was created from four counties in the eastern half of the state, St. Agnes and St. Francis became the property of the Norwich diocese.

Today, the chapel serves its parish and others who weekend or vacation at cottages to visit the many popular beaches in the area, ranging from Black Point in Niantic to Sound View in Old Lyme. Summer visitors are also welcomed at nearby St. Agnes and at Christ the King Church in Old Lyme.

In 2008 through donations from parish-

ioners at St. Agnes and St. Francis, and under the guidance of pastor Father Mark O'Donnell, the Chapel underwent renovations – the addition of a vapor barrier to preserve its integrity, new siding, a new roof, interior painting and a cleaning of the rose window and the 1920s era chandeliers – and was re-dedicated for its 100th anniversary, Mrs. Brothers said. Air conditioning and carillon bells were also added.

On a recent Sunday morning in the chapel, which seats approximately 200 people, it was standing room only in back against the white bead-board walls. Mass-goers knelt on aqua blue kneelers in white-washed pews, while Father Joseph Castaldi celebrated Mass below the pink and blue rose window.

After Mass, the parishioners reflected on why they attend chapel. Peter Guerra, who was originally born in Hartford, said he enjoys the lifetime of memories and the close sense of community. He said that he and his wife Barbara bought a cottage at Crescent Beach more than 40 years ago because they came to the beach as kids. "It's the best place to be," he said, "and (in) this little chapel, our daughter was married."

Mr. Guerra serves as an usher, while his wife is a lector and extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. He is also one of the 'Muffin Men,' a group of 15 men from the chapel who for decades have gone out for coffee and a muffin at the food stand at Crescent Beach following Sunday Mass.

A summer resident & home-run king sparked Clinton's baseball team

Summer baseball on the Connecticut shore attracted Irish vacationers and one of the greatest ballplayers in American history. A 1909 newspaper account detailed the popularity of the "national pastime" at one seashore village..

"It's only 15 cents to see a game in Clinton," reported the *Hartford Courant* on June 29 that year, "... come early and avoid the rush, for this supposedly slumberous little town with its cluster of quaint houses and white steepled churches, curving about its portion of the Sound and conducting itself with a cheery Puritanic decorum, has become for several seasons past a baseball center The Clinton nine is no hit-or-miss collection of anyone who can toss a ball, but a carefully picked nine of men who hold baseball records and who play a swift, snappy game."

On that 1909 Clinton team was an 18-year veteran of the major leagues who was described as "the big, handsome Irishman with the handlebar moustache." His name was Roger Connor and he was born in Waterbury in 1857, son of Mortimer Connor, a brass factory worker, and his wife Catherine Sullivan, both natives of Tralee, County Kerry. Mortimer, or Murtie, and Catherine arrived in New York on the ship *Irvine* on Sept. 28, 1852. They married soon and Catherine gave birth to a daughter, Hannah, the first of their 11 children in 1853. Roger was the third child and first son of the Con-

nors. He learned baseball on sandlots in the mostly Irish Abrigador or Pine Hill section of the Brass City. In 1880, he signed as a free agent with Troy, N.Y., of the National League. After three seasons, he moved on to New York City where he became a star first baseman with the Gothams, who eventually changed their name to the Giants.

Competing in the "deadball" era, Connor at six feet, three inches tall and 210 pounds was a fearsome hitter. He batted above .300 in 12 of his 18 years with a high of .371 in 1885, and an overall .317 average. He had 2,467 hits and it was not until 1921, 24 years after Connor retired, that his home run total of 138 was surpassed by none other than Babe Ruth.

Connor hit major league baseball's first grand-slam home run on Sept. 10, 1881, with two outs and the Giants down by three runs in the ninth inning. And in

September 1886, he hit a home run clear out of the old Polo Grounds. A group of New York Stock Exchange brokers took up a collection and bought him a \$500 watch for that feat. The firefighters of New York City's Engine Company 21 paid tribute to Connor by naming one of their fire horses "Roger" in his honor.

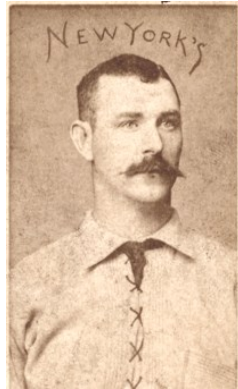
After retiring from major league ball, Connor became an owner and player for Hartford and Springfield, Mass., professional teams in the early 1900s. Later, he was employed by the Waterbury Board of Education as school inspector in charge of jani-

tors and contractors. A Waterbury sports-writer recalled, "Roger Connor was still a hero 18 years after he finished his major league career. Kids would stop in the streets and stand at respectful attention as he drove by in his horse and buggy in his daily inspection of the schools."

But baseball was in Connor's genes and he could not stay away from the game. Year after year he turned up on some roster. In 1908 he managed and played for the Waterbury Elks Club. A year later, at the age of 52, he signed on with the Clinton town team and was among those who improved the caliber of play of the shoreline village nine. On July 24, 1909, the *Hartford Courant* reported that Connor "has decided to take a backward leap into baseball (and) has joined the Clintons. He is summering on the East Shore and yesterday he accepted an invitation ... to join the ranks of that club for today's game with the Milfords ... Roger will be at first base ... Clinton has an unusually strong team this year and the strong Milford nine should push it to its limits."

That prediction proved right on target for a day later, the *Courant* reported: "Roger Connor, the former first baseman on the Giants, played for several innings on first base for Clinton against Milford yesterday afternoon and put one of his old-time hits over the stone wall. The score was 7-3 in favor of Clinton. A big crowd witnessed the game and the opinion is that Clinton is putting up better ball than ever before."

Sources: *Hartford Courant*, July, 1908, July 24, 26, 29, 1909; Wikipedia, Roger Connor; Baseball Reference online, Roger Connor.



Roger Connor

Hartford provided numerous shoreline ballplayers

One of the most avid ballplayers at the Connecticut shore in 1892 was the Rev. J.J. McCook, a professor at Trinity College in Hartford and one of the "Fighting McCook" Scots-Irish family of Civil War fame. McCook was the organizer and mainstay of the Crescent Beach team in Niantic. He could be seen, reported the *Hartford Courant* on July 11, "on any pleasant day out in the fields adjoining his cottage actively engaged in a game." In 1917, Westbrook on the shore had virtually a whole colony of Hartford Irish, some baseball players among them. Cottage dwellers from Hartford included: Misses Julia and Ethel Burke, Mr. and Mrs. John Quinn, Mrs. Louise Waldron and family, Mrs. Margaret Cleary, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Morrissey, Fred Flynn, Mrs. Frank Rooney, Mr. and Mrs. George O'Connor, Miss Claire Murphy, Mr. and Mrs. John Dwyer. On July 29 that year, the *Courant* reported that the vacationers baseball team had defeated a Madison Beach nine in a "bitterly contested" game. The Westbrook battery was "Burns and Smith," that of Madison, "Hughes and Kennedy." Hartford's Irish always flocked to the beach for swimming, sunning and baseball. On Aug. 6, 1875, the *Courant* reported: "St. Patrick's Benevolent Societies of this city and Windsor Locks went to Fenwick yesterday, filling 12 passenger cars, and had a pleasant excursion ... Not a drop of rain fell there, though a severe storm passed over Hartford. During the afternoon, a game of baseball was played ... and the Hartford nine won by a score of 23 to 11."

Thimble Island cruises for Irish began in 1880s, continue in 2017

In recent years, New Haven's Father McKeon Division 7 of the Ancient Order of Hibernians has sponsored a cruise to the Thimble Islands off the shore of Branford. Like so many events, the modern-day cruise had a 19th century predecessor — in this case by 130 years. In the 1880s, a primarily Irish New Haven organization, the James P. Pigott Association, enjoyed similar trips. In September 1887, the Pigott Association, named after an Irish lawyer in New Haven, "boarded horse cars early this forenoon for the dock to catch a steamboat for a day on the Thimble Islands."

Those attending included: Town Agent James Reynolds, who was a hero of the Catalpa rescue; Col. John Healy of Civil War fame; James J. Redmond of Wallingford, President James T. Mullen of the New Haven Fire Commission; Daniel Colwell of the Knights of Columbus Supreme Council; Hartford Aldermen Peter Chute, J. McGovern, P.H. Quinn and Daniel Mara; City Clerk Hig-



gins of Hartford; attorney James E. Walsh of Danbury; New Haven City Auditor John W. Lake; Peter Wren and four others from Bridgeport and a party of three from Meriden. Certainly it was no coincidence that the 1887 steamer was the *Ivernia*, a name derived from the Iverni, a Celtic tribe of early Ireland.

Source: New Haven Register, Sept. 14, 1887.

Irish rebel John Mitchel had dim view of Stonington

John Mitchel, an Irish rebel and eventually an American Confederate, wrote a letter to a Miss Thompson in Ireland in 1845 offering his views on Stonington where he had been "sojourning for two or three weeks enjoying the sea bathing." Born in County Derry, son of a Presbyterian minister, Mitchel was arrested for newspaper articles he wrote during the 1848 uprising in Ireland. He was sentenced to 14 years and imprisoned on Van Diemen's Land in Australia. He escaped and came to America in late 1853. The next summer, Mitchel, his wife Jennie and their children arrived in Stonington.

In his letter, Mitchel was generally critical about Stonington: "Imagine the southern coast of Connecticut, cold, bare ... indented by bays and river mouths and faced here and there by granite rocks ... on a bleak tongue of land ... stands a town of the neatest whitest trimmest wooden houses the streets shaded by maple trees; fishing vessels at the quay and a huge Noah's Ark of a steamer, without mast or sail, but with two funnels that goes up to New York every night meeting another coming down, both full of passengers, 300 or 400, discharged here twice a day ... for steamer bound for Boston per Stonington railroad, or from Boston per railroad, bound for New York per steamer ...

"This people is eternally traveling: ac-

cording to the old Hebrew implication they are made like unto a wheel, and in this new England at least, they do appear to be carrying this locomotive penalty under a curse, or as an atonement for sin, so solemn, so grim, so penitential look these sickly looking thin men and grim, meager, hard women ... intelligent they are ... Churches there are — Baptist, Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, in this Stonington, and about 2,000 dreary inhabitants.

"We live ... in a large hotel, with a public table the guests almost all descendants of the Pilgrim fathers, with a righteous horror of the South. They looked at me with a sort of obscure and grave horror at first ... Yet I have conciliated with some of the dismal folk and as for Jenny she is a favorite. Amusements (are) boating, driving in lurid conveyances to the neighboring Connecticut villages — all clean, prim, wooden as Stonington, bathing for which the beach is not very favorable; and by way of variety, there was last night a "fair" in the schoolhouse attached to one of the churches ...

"Jenny was ill about a month ago, and was confined to her bed ... She has now become strong and well again with the sea bathing, and the children are all flourishing.

"... We have a sort of circle here (besides many agreeable American acquaintances)

which enables us often to spend an evening in Ireland. In Stonington for instance, we have had the Dillons living in the same house with us, and they are both of them very choice Irish. Mrs. Dillon would be, I conjecture, very much to your taste. She is clever, lazy, accomplished and quiet in manner. A Catholic, but not an ultramontane papist and nearly as familiar with Germany, France and Rome as with Ireland. O'Gorman has lately married his cousin, a Miss Fox, of Dublin, very agreeable too. And they as well as my mother, brother and sisters live in Brooklyn quite near to us ... The boys have been at school ... in New York ... the little girls are schooled by one of my sisters. We have had a broiling summer here and a winter before it perfectly polar ...

"Beyond the Alleghenies are beautiful shady valleys and cheap land. ... Do not be astonished if you hear of our flying suddenly from the Atlantic Coast, and burying ourselves in the umbrageous West ... "

Mitchel eventually did move not to the West but to the South where he was a staunch supporter of slavery and of the Confederacy. In fact, all three of his sons fought for the South, two of them died during the war, the third lost an arm.

Sources: John Mitchel's letter to Miss Thompson is in the collection of the Connecticut State Library, 974.62, St7mit.

National Guardsmen spent work week at the seashore

For the many Irishmen who served in the Connecticut National Guard, a week at the shore always meant marching, drilling, tenting and passing inspection. Beginning in 1881, the state's National Guard regiments spent a week in August on an 80-acre training camp in Niantic. In mid-August 1891, for the first time, the Catholic guardsmen had their own chaplain — Very Rev. James Hughes, vicar general of the Diocese of Hartford — at the encampment. Hughes celebrated Mass for the troops at 8 a.m. on Sunday, Aug. 16. The press reported, "An altar was erected in the tent and all the vestments, candles, etc. were used." An indication of the significant numbers of Catholics in the state brigade was the fact that an estimated 500 soldiers and visitors attended the Mass, and "there was not room in the tent to accommodate all who came." Two of the outfits attended in a body: Co. B of the First Brigade, commanded by Col. J.F. Lawler, and Co. E of Bridgeport of the Fourth Regiment, commanded by Capt. Sheridan. Another first involving an Irishman at the 1891 encampment was the use of carrier pigeons for sending messages. Cpl. E.L. Maloney of Co. G of Waterbury handled the pigeons, sending them off to the *Waterbury Democrat*. When released, the birds "flew to a height of about 200 feet, when they flew in a circle over the camp, after which they took a direct line for Waterbury."

Sources: *Hartford Times*, Aug. 15-31, 1891; *New Haven Journal and Courier*, Aug. 22, 1891.



Very Rev. James Hughes

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

Padraic Pearse

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