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Needham History Center & Museum

1147 Central Avenue
Needham, MA 02492
781-455-8860
www.needhamhistory.org



Hours

Tuesday – Thursday,
10:00 am – 3:00 pm
or by Appointment.

Research, Events & Rentals

781-455-8860
or see our Website.

Appointments required
for Research & Archives.

“More of the Horror with None of the Hopes”

James Fintan Lalor, Irish self-government and land reform advocate, comparing the Great Irish Famine with the French Revolution.

– by *Steve Sauter*, in his *Gazette* debut!

St. Patrick’s Day is coming – March 17 – when it is said that “everyone is Irish”. I’m only one-eighth Irish, but I do feel 100% around this time. No green beer, please – but how about some Guinness stout, a Kelly green sweater, and some lively recordings by Tommy Makem, Robby O’Connell, or the Dropkick Murphys in one of the many Irish pubs in our region?

Massachusetts and New Hampshire have a higher concentration of Irish-Americans than any other state in the country. According to 2015 U.S. Census Bureau estimates, 20.2% of MA residents and 20.6 % of NH residents claim Irish ancestry. And while the South Shore is the most heavily Irish region in the state, Needham also went green (Kelly green, that is) compared to many towns in the Commonwealth. According to the 2015 Census estimates, 23.7% of Needham residents claim significant Irish ancestry.

Why the well-known Irish presence in the U.S. – and Needham? For that, we must begin with a grim nod to *phytophthora infestans*, the fungus that appeared in Ireland in 1845. But it’s more complicated than that. This was not the first potato blight in Ireland, and certainly not the first famine. But this fungus attacked when the Irish population was large (it had grown to 8 million) and densely populated. Plus, unlike the 18th century when the main variety of potatoes grew in soil carefully enriched with manure, and was combined with dietary supplements of



Irish and Italian workers at the George Wye Company mill in Needham, circa 1910.

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butter, grain, and milk products, the 19th century harvesters had only the "lumper" potato. The lumper thrived in the poor, exhausted soils worked by cheap, unskilled laborers. The lumper was the base food for many, especially in winter, and was even used as currency. No lumper, no life. Nearly 40% of the population relied upon the lumper for the majority of their sustenance, a meager and unbalanced diet that had left them malnourished and vulnerable to disease. Within a few years, the potato blight would decimate the lumper crop, contributing to widespread starvation, and a mass emigration.

During the Famine years, 1845-1852, more than one million Irish citizens died, and more than two million left the country. The poor left in desperation for England, seeking work in Liverpool and other cities of the British Midlands. But exploitation by the transport ships and the scam artists in Liverpool, Protestant-Catholic friction, and resentment by the English workers who feared "foreign" competition for jobs wreaked havoc. Fighting disease and hunger in Liverpool slums, many continued on to America, the cheapest of the international trips. Another international destination was Canada – in the crowded, disease ridden "coffin ships" that brought timber from Canada to England, and returned with poor Irish as ballast, who hoped in vain to leave cholera behind. Not inclined toward North America? There was also Australia; the former penal colony was desperate both for women and for a better reputation within the British Empire, and it was site of the latest gold rush.

The arrival of Irish immigrants in Needham followed this same basic trajectory, as some Irish immigrants looking for a new home settled in Needham Heights. The Heights was mostly farmland in 1850, but by the 1860s the knitting mills had begun to grow, turning the neighborhood toward an industrial economy. The first knitters were English, but as the mills grew, the Irish – and soon after, Italians, Poles, and Russians – provided additional labor for this growing industry. And as their numbers grew, so did their economic and political influence in the town.

The many subplots and details of the Irish-American journey could (and do) fill many a book. So, American/Irish history buffs, celebrate those determined U.S. immigrants on March 17, and for the other 364 days of the year, learn about all the subplots!

And no, it's not a coincidence that Evacuation Day is a holiday in Suffolk County!

Evacuation Day celebrates the end of the British siege of Boston in 1776, culminating in the withdrawal of British troops to Nova Scotia on March 17th. Evacuation Day was declared a legal holiday in 1938 with the strong support of Irish Boston – the bill was signed with both black and green ink! – giving the community an official opportunity to celebrate not only their beloved Saint, but also the expulsion of the British.

A Grant from the Foundation for MetroWest

We were very pleased to receive a grant from the Foundation for MetroWest to help support our catalogue and online exhibits. The Foundation serves the MetroWest area and provides grants to nonprofits to help build the visibility, connections, and expertise they need to deliver their missions. We thank the Foundation for the grant, and for its ongoing support of the nonprofits in our communities.



FOUNDATION FOR METROWEST

Welcome Steve Sauter to the Gazette!

As Gloria mentioned in our last issue, our old friend and long-time Ye Olde Editor, **Bob Hall**, has retired to the wilds of Northfield, MA. Gloria has been filling in, but is now so pleased to announce that **Steve Sauter** will be taking over the job as Featured Feature Writer of *The Gazette*. Many of you probably already know Steve from his participation in local organizations, and he has been a member of the History Center board since 2011. We haven't yet come up with a title – Ye New Ye Olde Editor? Ye Not-Very-Old-Yet Editor? We'll think of something.

The Sock Hop a 'swinging' success!

Members and friends gathered on February 3 for the History Center's largest fundraiser of the year. Together we raised over \$15,000 to help fund an overhaul of the History Center's technology, including an upgrade in managing our collections and membership data, WiFi access, and better equipment for public presentations. Thank you to our annual partner **The Needham Bank**, Event Sponsor **Dellbrook/JKS** and the many other generous businesses and individuals such as **Roche Bros, ARS Services, Century 21 Commonwealth**, and **Rep. Denise Garlick**.

Crafty Bastards!



Sunday, March 18 @ 2 PM

Join us for a talk and craft beer tasting, with **Lauren Clark**, author of *Crafty Bastards: Beer in New England from the Mayflower to Modern Day*. Brewing in New

England goes back four centuries, to the Pilgrims who dropped anchor in Plymouth because their supply of beer was running low. Toast the inimitable Yankee spirit that allows us to regularly produce some of the best beers in the nation. A craft beer tasting with Needham's new **Reveler Beverage Co.** will follow the lecture.

This program will be held at



Needham History Center & Museum (1147 Central Ave, Needham) and is free and open to the public.

What's Next?

There are more events on the schedule, so join us and enjoy! Events are at the History Center and free & open to the public unless noted below.

March 18, Sunday, 2 pm. Talk and Craft Beer

Tasting, with Lauren Clark, author of *Crafty Bastards: Beer in New England from the Mayflower to Modern Day*, followed by a craft beer tasting with Reveler Beverage Co.

April 6, Friday, 10am. Story Hour with Farmer Teri!

Join Teri Boardman of Volante Farms for a read-aloud, craft, and snack. This program is free, and open to children ages 0-6.

April 7, Saturday, 10 am – 3 pm. The 36th Annual Pansy Day.

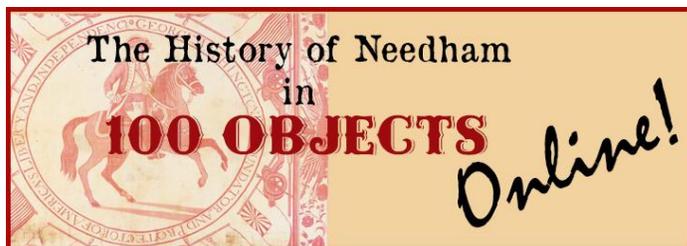
For kids and adults! Celebrate Spring, and Needham's official flower with food, gifts, workshops, games, and activities.

May 1, Tuesday, 6-9 pm – the Needham History Center's Annual Reception.

Tickets / information available in April.

May 6, Sunday, 2 pm – America's Kitchens.

Nancy Carlisle, Historic New England. At the North Hill Auditorium, 865 Central Avenue, Needham.



Hooray! Thanks to the good work of our Cataloguer/ Collections Manager **Susan Jarvis** you can now sample the Highlights of our **100 Objects** exhibit online. Want more? Come to the Needham History Center & Museum to see the rest in person!

With thanks for project support from the Needham Community Preservation Committee, the Dedham Institution for Savings Charitable Foundation, the Foundation for MetroWest, and the Eversource Foundation.

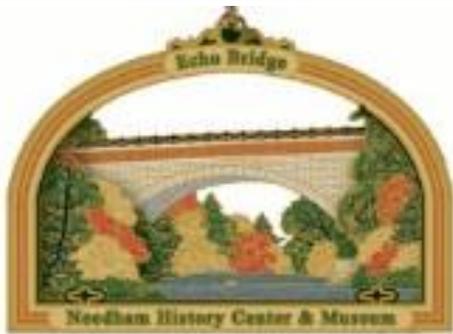
www.needhamhistory.org/current-exhibits

Pansy Day!

Ignore the calendar – Spring in Needham starts on **Pansy Day!**

We have a whole schedule of activities planned for kids and adults, including planting projects, sales, exhibits, games, crafts, and the return of the Pony Rides – and a whole lot more. Pansies will be on sale starting April 5th. More to come, so stay tuned.

Saturday, April 7th, 10a – 3p



← *Echo Bridge, sneak peek!*

So, where can you buy Needham Gifts?

Here, of course!

We have a large selection of unique Needham-related gifts, including Books, DVDs, Ornaments, and Note Cards.

BOOKS: Images of America: Needham, The Baker Estate

DVDs: Beautiful & Bizarre, Big Little Town, Return to Norumbega, The Millen-Faber Gang

Note Cards: Fuller Birds, Wyeth Pansies, Victorian Needham

Ornaments: Town Hall, the Blue Tree, the Town Seal, Memorial Park, and our newest addition – **Echo Bridge!**

And you never know what Treasures you will find in our

Heirloom Shop

Shop Tuesday – Thursday, 10am to 3pm
or Online at www.needhamhistory.org/shop



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