

PLYMOUTH COUNTY REGISTRY OF DEEDS

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NO END TO NOTABLE LAND RECORDS IN PLYMOUTH COUNTY

The Plymouth County Registry of Deeds is host to countless attorneys, real estate brokers, buyers and sellers who, upon arriving at the Registry's Obery Street address, are typically focused on the completion of a transaction that they have anxiously awaited for weeks or even months. And on any given day, scores of people making their way through the Registry's entrance, otherwise preoccupied with the business at hand, will nevertheless stop in their tracks to take in some of the rich, fascinating history of the region they call home.

Among the Registry's museum-quality displays, conceived by Register John R. Buckley, Jr. and a committee of industrious and creative volunteers, is an ever-evolving exhibit of records brought forward by title examiners, employees, committee members and other Registry users relating to Plymouth County's most celebrated people and places. The Plymouth County Registry of Deeds' Notable Land Records Collection continues to grow each month as new entries are literally showcased in the Registry's front corridor with a brief description of their significance.

The latest contributions, brought forward from the millions of documents on site in Plymouth, are as diverse as they are unique to our own communities: a natural seaside respite in Duxbury; a memorial to heroism displayed in the midst of a tragic fire in Brockton; local giants within the fields of architecture, shipbuilding and pugilism; and courageous men who came to Plymouth County to realize the promise of a new land – one on the Mayflower, another from a West Australian penal colony.

Duxbury Beach, owned by the Duxbury Beach Reservation, Inc. was selected by former Registry employee Carol A. Lloyd for its unique qualities as a recreational, scenic conservation area and home to countless species of wildlife. Duxbury is also home to the "King Caesar House", selected by title examiner and committee member Anthony M. Markella. The house was built in 1808 for Ezra Weston II, known as "King Caesar" for his worldwide preeminence in shipbuilding and recognized by Lloyd's of London as the largest shipowner in America. Purchased by the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society, the "King Caesar House" stands as a fine example of Federal Period architecture and is now maintained as a museum.

Consistent with an unintended theme of natural and architectural beauty throughout Plymouth County, title examiner and committee member Marilyn Dupuis submitted a 1940 purchase on both sides of Court Street in North Plymouth by renown architect Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr. Among his many varied accomplishments, Olmstead finished his father's design of Whitman Town Park in Whitman.

Olmstead was certainly not alone in his appreciation for and contributions to the natural and architectural beauty of Plymouth County. In 1925, as documented by Registry employee Lorna Vasapollo, Daniel Waldo Field donated 700 acres of parkland to the City of Brockton. A prominent industrialist, Field was an advocate of maintaining natural and architectural beauty in a city for the benefit of all its people. D.W. Field Park, located on the north side of Brockton extending into Avon, is described by many as "Brockton's Crown Jewel."

Brockton was also home to the Strand Theatre, known for the tragic 1941 fire that killed thirteen firefighters. Archie Gormley, President of Brockton Firefighters Local 144, recently submitted the lease for the operation of the Strand Theatre. On May 10 of this year, the Strand Theatre Firefighters Memorial Monument was dedicated at Brockton City Hall plaza, adjacent to the site of the former theatre.

A second submission by Anthony Markella highlights Duxbury's "Alden House." Then 20 years old, John Alden was the cooper aboard the Mayflower on its voyage to America. Through a 1627 grant recorded in Volume 1 of the Court Records of the Plymouth Colony, Alden received approximately 100 acres of land spanning an area that today includes the Duxbury Art Complex, the Public Library and the Duxbury Wildlife Refuge. In 1907, title to the remaining 2.5 acre parcel on Alden Street, including the Alden House, was acquired by the Alden Kindred of America who maintain the house as a public museum.

As researched by Registry employee Jim Tobin, John Boyle O'Reilly's arrival to our shores was no less dramatic than that of John Alden's Mayflower voyage. Having been convicted for activities in support of a united Ireland and sent to a penal colony in West Australia, O'Reilly escaped, made his way to Boston, and in 1880 purchased the Hunt Estate in Hull as a summer residence. In 1889 O'Reilly had the old house demolished and a new one built. The property is presently the Hull Public Library. A monument to O'Reilly, considered an important figure in helping Boston's Irish Catholic immigrants assimilate with its 19th century Protestant Yankee citizenry and respected poet, stands in the Fenway section of Boston.

Many Irish Americans made a life for themselves in the late nineteenth century and O'Reilly was certainly not alone in finding Plymouth County a comfortable home later in life. As outlined by County Commissioner Jeffrey M. Welch, "Boston Strong Boy" John L. Sullivan, the first modern heavyweight boxing champion of the world, was born to Irish immigrant parents in Roxbury in 1858. He held the heavyweight title from 1882 to 1892 and suffered his only loss, to "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, in 1892. After his loss to Corbett, Sullivan retired to a 60 acre farm at 704 Hancock Street in Abington until his death in 1918.

Register Buckley often invites visitors touring the Registry to share their communities' historic treasures by bringing the land records of note in their own back yards to his attention for submission into the Notable Land Records Collection. It is an invitation Buckley also extends to county employees and Registry users. With increasing frequency, it is an invitation that is being enthusiastically accepted. The Registry of Deeds is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call Lorna Green at (508) 830-9298.