



A Few Murphys From Brockton

Kevin Murphy

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This is the tale of a son and daughter of Ireland, who emigrated at the turn of the twentieth century. They met and married in Brockton, Massachusetts. The “shoe city” was at its peak with almost 100 shoe and boot factories. The average worker earned \$3.75 a day, the highest wage in the world. Mary Ann Sullivan grew up in a dirt-floor, stone hut in Derrylea, County Mayo. One by one, Mary Ann’s father put his seven children on Cunard liners bound for America. In 1908, it was Mary Ann’s turn and, soon enough, she became a domestic servant in Brockton. Denis Murphy was from Killarney, County Kerry, and sailed to America in 1894 with his mother and three siblings. His father went on ahead to work at R. B. Grover Shoes in Brockton. Eventually, Denis Murphy became a hoseman with the Brockton Fire Department. In 1918, Mary Ann met Denis at a dance. Two years later, they married and birthed three boys—Thomas, Robert and Edward. By dint of native intelligence and hard work, the boys all became medical doctors. Brockton’s shoe industry was a tree lying across a raging river that allowed a few Irish-Americans to reach higher ground. Soon enough, the water tore the tree away, just as Brockton’s 100 chuffing, snorting shoe factories relocated or closed their doors. Today, every last one is gone.

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