

John Boyle O'Reilly

Author, Poet, Editor, Irish Patriot

1844-1890



John Boyle O'Reilly



O'Reilly Home at 30 Winthrop Street (*to right of Fire House*)
On far left is St. Mary's Church, Where John and
Mary Murphy Wed

An Irish patriot, John Boyle O'Reilly was born at Castle Dowth on the banks of the River Boyne. A gift for language attracted him to newspaper work but the pay was low. To increase his income he joined the British Army but kept secret his membership in the Finean Order, a militant group in the struggle for Irish independence. When found out, this affiliation was deemed treasonous and O'Reilly was condemned to death by a court martial, a sentence soon commuted to life imprisonment, and later, to twenty years of penal servitude.

After serving three years in British prisons, O'Reilly was shipped out to an Australian prison colony. With the help of a sympathetic priest, Father Patrick McCabe, he later escaped aboard an American whaler. Making his way to the U.S. via a succession of American ships, he landed safely in Philadelphia on November 23, 1869.

Making his way to Boston, he reentered the newspaper field by going to work for the Pilot, the major Irish newspaper in America. Settling down in Charlestown, he bought a house at 34 Winthrop Street and married a town girl, Mary Murphy, with whom he had four daughters.

In 1876, O'Reilly and the Catholic Archbishop of Boston became co-owners of the Pilot. O'Reilly used its pages to champion Home Rule for Ireland. Grateful for the freedom and opportunities of his adopted land, he frequently also wrote of the responsibilities of American citizenship.

A prolific writer, O'Reilly completed four collections of poetry, two novels and a book on boxing and manly sport reflective of his enthusiasm for athletics. Dedicated to his writing, sports, family, friendships and the Irish cause, his strenuous life sent him to an early grave. He died at age 46 from overwork and insomnia, much loved and greatly mourned by all who knew him.