

The Windows of St. Michael's

A brief history about those who donated the stained glass windows of St. Michael's, or in whose memory they were given.

Window Symbol: Crossed Keys

The crossed keys are a symbol associated with the Petrine ministry of the Popes and also the power to forgive sins. As we read in Matthew 16:19, Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Given by: John B. O'Connell

A number of John O'Connells were in the parish at the time. However, research leans toward John Berkley O'Connell as the donor of this window. If anyone knows this to be incorrect, please let us know.

John Berkley O'Connell was born June 24, 1846 in the parish of Valentia, County Kerry, Ireland, son of Michael O'Connell and Mary Ann Berkley. He was one of at least four brothers (Thomas, Michael Berkley, John Berkley and Theodore O'Connell) who immigrated to Pawcatuck. John arrived July 20, 1867 in New York and lived for a while with his brothers Michael B. and Theodore O'Connell on Cross (Robinson) Street.

On February 29, 1876 John Berkley O'Connell married Catherine B. "Kate" Hurley in St. Michael parish. Her sister Ellen had married John's elder brother Michael some years earlier. Like many Irish immigrants, John worked as a stonecutter in the granite quarries and was a part-time farmer.

The O'Connell brothers were somewhat of a star-crossed family. John's brother, Theodore O'Connell, drowned in the Pawcatuck River. Three of Michael B. O'Connell's children died of disease in their early 20s. Two more died by suicide, hanging themselves in a family barn exactly one month apart. John B. O'Connell and Kate Hurley suffered their own agonizing tragedy. Kate gave birth to five children and all of them died in childhood.

After a number of years in Pawcatuck, the O'Connell brothers took their families over to Westerly and settled in the East Avenue and Woody Hill areas, where they continued to farm and to work as stonecutters in the quarries. John B. O'Connell died on August 19, 1912 in Westerly. His wife Kate died in 1923. They're probably buried in St. Michael Cemetery.

Descendants

Descendants of this O'Connell family may include members of the **O'Connell, Connell, Hurley** and **Blackler** families. Although John Berkley and Kate O'Connell have no direct descendants, John's brothers Thomas and Michael B. have many. They include farmers, two dentists, schoolteachers, a member of the Rhode Island State Legislature, Representative to United States Congress from Rhode Island, Exalted Ruler of the Lodge of Elks, Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus, and a number of stonecutters in the granite quarries.

