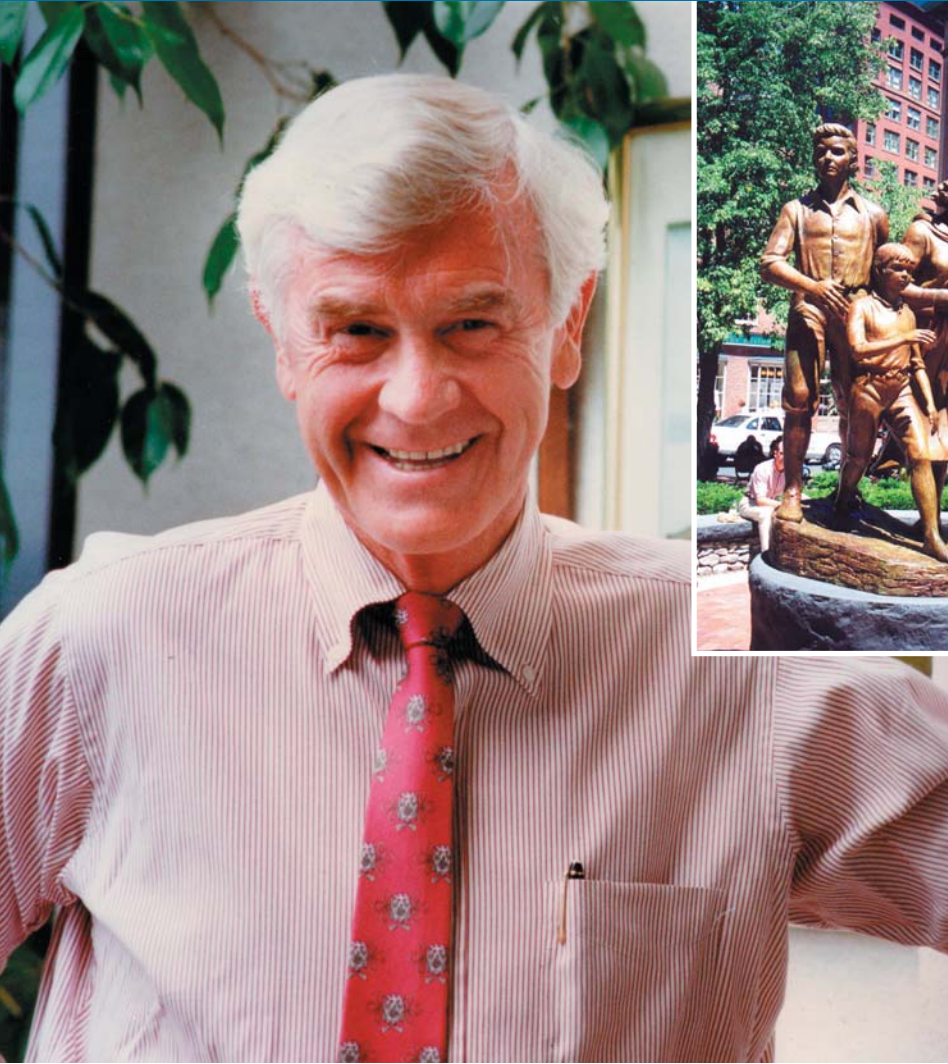


MEMORIAM - THOMAS J. FLATLEY (1931 - 2008)



He made a fortune in the process, but he always retained the common touch. He would gladly talk shop with a crane operator on the job site over an accountant any day.

Building the memorial allowed Tom to reflect on the terrible episode in Ireland's past, and to come face to face with the modern-day quagmire of hunger and suffering that still afflicts the world.

The inscription at the Famine Memorial park at the corner of School and Washington Streets captures this dilemma:

The commemoration of the Great Hunger allows people to reflect upon a terrible episode that forever changed Ireland. The conditions that produced the Irish famine – crop failure, absentee landlordism, colonialism and weak political leadership – still exists around the world today. Famines continue to decimate suffering populations. The lessons of the Irish famine need to be constantly learned and applied until history ceases to repeat itself.

It was ten years ago, on June 28, 1998, that Boston's Irish Famine Memorial was unveiled before 7,000 people on a bright, blue summer morning.

Many of the crowd came from Boston's Irish community to pay respect on the 150th anniversary of the Irish Famine, a catastrophe that caused thousands of Irish refugees flee to Boston, changing the course of the city, and ultimately the nation.

Present too were people from Boston's immigrant community, including young Rwandans who had fled from their own modern day famines. The family of a Holocaust survivor came to share some of the collective grief that never really goes away. There was an American Medal of Honor recipient from World War II, there to offer his respect for a storied tale about bravery and endurance.

Passing tourists stopped to watch the solemn ceremony, and shop keepers stepped

outside their stores encircling this tiny park shaded by empty office buildings on this Sunday morning in downtown Boston. Teachers brought their children into town that day to teach them a lesson about history and civic duty.

At the center of the project, but at the same time the man behind the scenes, was Tom Flatley, the Irish-born businessman and philanthropist who had been asked to jumpstart Boston's nascent Famine memorial project in 1996.

He said yes, without question, commenting to his best friend Mike Cummings, "If not us, then whom? If not now, then when?"

Tom was certainly the man to step up to the task, as he had done all his life. He arrived in Boston from County Mayo in 1950, with a suitcase full of ambitions. He used his searing intelligence and competitive drive to amass an empire of buildings scattered across New England.

Since the memorial unveiling, Tom spent these last ten years giving millions of dollars to various hunger relief agencies in Boston, across the United States, and in Ireland. These agencies bring food, clothing and medical supplies to impoverished people, mainly in the African nations but also to people hit hard by natural disasters around the world.

Flatley asked the agencies to keep his name out of the public domain. He wasn't looking for accolades, he was simply following his heart.

When Tom Flatley died on May 17, 2008 after suffering for nearly two years from Lou Gherig's Disease, most people outside of his cherished family didn't even know he was ill.

"That's the way he was," said Cummings, who was Flatley's point man on the Famine Memorial and many other projects for several decades.

"He was my friend, and my hero," Cummings said. And so he was, for so many of us. Rest in Peace Tom.