



THE IRISH ROUND TOWER IN MILFORD

One of the most distinctive Irish landmarks in America is the Irish Round Tower in Old St. Mary's Cemetery in Milford, MA, unveiled in 1895.

Some 65 feet high and 16 feet in circumference, the Round Tower pays tribute to Irish immigrants who settled in Milford throughout the 19th century, starting in the 1830s and continuing through the Irish famine decades.

The tower was the brainchild of an energetic and beloved Irish priest, Fr. Patrick Cuddihy, pastor of St. Mary's Church for more than four decades. Born in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary on March 17, 1809, Cuddihy was a Franciscan priest who worked in local parishes in Waterford before emigrating to America in 1852. He spent several years in Western Massachusetts, helping to build churches in Great Barrington, North Lee and North Adams, before moving to Milford in 1857.

In Milford, Cuddihy built a new St. Mary's Church, which opened on Christmas Day, 1869, and later a grammar school. When he purchased six additional acres in the 1880s to expand St. Mary's Cemetery, he was inspired to build an Irish round tower. He traveled back to Ireland for three months in 1894 and visited

several Irish round towers before deciding to model the Milford tower after the famous Glendalough Round Tower in Co. Wicklow.

Dating back to the 9th century, Irish round towers were monastic structures, likely used by monks for defense from invaders, for solace and contemplation, and for storing valuable objects such as bells, religious artifacts and hand-written manuscripts. Because of their slenderness, many towers were destroyed by lightning, high winds or by the ravages of time. Today there are about 65 round towers in Ireland, and several of them are well preserved as historic architecture or sacred sites.

The Irish Round Tower in Milford was highly praised when it was unveiled in 1895, with *The Boston Post* noting, "The tower is the first of its kind ever built in this country and will stand for ages like a sentinel watching over the city of the dead."

The Milford tower was built by Irish and Italian stone cutters who were working in the nearby Milford quarry. Milford pink granite is a high quality, particularly beautiful stone also used on the Boston Public Library, New York Public Library, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and the Lafayette Monument in Paris, France.

At the top of the Milford tower is a large

shamrock carved in granite, and at the base is a door leading to a maze of ladders reaching the top of the structure. When Fr. Cuddihy died in December 1898, he was buried at the base of the tower.

Fast forward a century, when a volunteer group called The Friends of Old Saint Mary's Cemetery formed in 1998. Led by Barbara A. Minnihan, the Friends spent years identifying and fixing up old tombstones that had been obscured by time. The cemetery has between 8-10,000 Irish graves, according to the Friends.

In May 2011, the Friends unveiled the Milford Irish Famine Memorial, dedicated to the Irish who died shortly after arriving in America, too sick, malnourished or traumatized to survive the Irish Famine.

Leading up to 2026, Boston's Irish Heritage Trail is expanding to more than 120 landmarks across Massachusetts, including the Irish Round Tower as well as public monuments and buildings, statues, churches and communities where Irish immigrants settled dating back to the 18th century. Find more information at IrishHeritageTrail.com.