



Randy Ritter posted the following information and picture related to Island Park and it's owner John F. O'Sullivan as part of a series of stories for the City of Derby's 350th birthday in 2025. You can find it and many others on the Derby 350 Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61571412399993>.

1934 Aerial photo of Island Park. Mr. O'sullivan was responsible for having the island connected to the end of Caroline Street.

From Derby Historical Society: February 26, 1932 – J. F. O'Sullivan Had Active Life

The death of John F. O'Sullivan, former representative from Derby to the General Assembly and owner of Island Park, notice of which was carried in these columns last night, came as a surprise to many people in this city, Shelton, and Ansonia, where Mr. O'Sullivan was exceedingly well known. It is true that Mr. O'Sullivan had been ailing for a considerable period of time, but throughout his long illness he had exhibited remarkable

recuperative powers that carried him through some of the several serious attacks of his ailment. There were at times when he was at death's door, but he rallied and was even able to be up and about although for the past two years he had seldom been down the street.

Mr. O'Sullivan succumbed yesterday afternoon at 12:30 o'clock. His long ailment had taken a toll of strength and vitality which had rendered him unable to cope with the fatal attack. He had been in critical condition for the past several days and on Thursday grew steadily weaker until the end came. Most people, although aware that Mr. O'Sullivan was seriously ill, nevertheless were greatly surprised when the news of his death became known and there were many expressions of regret together with those of sympathy for his family.

Had Many Friends

The deceased was a man of many pleasing traits and had a wide circle of acquaintances in this and the surrounding cities. He made friends easily and retained them. He had his own ideas about matters and, as to those involving public questions, he did not hesitate to express them. He was a man of high character and devoted to his family. His work was such, during his career, that he was brought constantly in touch with the people and all spoke very well of him. As a newspaperman, a businessman, insurance agent, representative in the General Assembly, and finally, as the promoter of sports and amusements at Island Park he had been more or less in public life through his many years of activity.

A Good Newspaperman

Mr. O'Sullivan was engaged in newspaper work in this city for about five years. He was a member of the reportorial staff of The Evening Sentinel and previously had worked in a similar capacity for the Derby Transcript, which has long since gone out of existence. Mr. O'Sullivan was engaged in newspaper work at a time when Charles C. Jump, former Mayor Alfred F. Howe, the late James W. Reilly and Frederick W. James and Mayor Michael J. Cook, the only one of the group presently engaged in newspaper work, were actively engaged as editors and reporters. Mr. O'Sullivan was an exceptionally good newspaperman and had an intimate knowledge of what was going on in the years he was engaged in news writing.

Developed Island Park

Mr. O'Sullivan, a number of years ago, conceived the idea of establishing a public amusement place on the island at the end of Caroline Street, which has since become Island Park. To him alone is due the credit for the changes that have taken place there. The process was slow, discouraging, and at times burdensome, but Mr. O'Sullivan worked unceasingly with the purpose in mind of turning the island into a public park. He acquired possession of the island and sought to interest others in its development. Over several

years he worked to carry out his plans, and, at length, was successful in having a road built from the end of Caroline Street connecting with the island. Much of this work he did with his own hands and under the greatest difficulties the new road passed under the trestle and, at the time, the railroad company was not any too anxious to grant its permission. At length, the connecting road was finished and Mr. O'Sullivan then commenced the task of trying to interest people in a public park. A racetrack was built on one part of the island and several driving races were held there. The lower part of the island he transformed into a field for baseball and football and this became known as O'Sullivan Field. The difficulties which beset Mr. O'Sullivan's efforts continued even after he had constructed the road to the island and had laid out time and money to make the island a public park. During the past few years, however, the island has increased in popularity and is now the playing field for most of the leading baseball and football teams of the city besides being used for the same purpose by the Derby High School teams. It was Mr. O'Sullivan's purpose to make the island a public park along the lines of the old Housatonic Park, but financial support was lacking, and he was content during the last few years to rent the island to traveling carnivals and athletic teams.

Active in Politics

Mr. O'Sullivan was active in politics for many years and was a prominent figure at democratic party gatherings. For years he acted as secretary at local caucuses and conventions and in 1924 he was elected to represent the city in the General Assembly. He served in the session in 1925.

Born in Baltic

Mr. O'Sullivan was born in Baltic, in the town of Sprague. He was the son of the late Dennis O'Sullivan and Catherine O'Donovan O'Sullivan. His father came to this country as an attaché of the British consulate in Boston where he remained for a few years before going to Baltic. Mr. O'Sullivan attended the grade schools in Baltic and later entered the Holy Family Academy there, but did not complete his course of instruction owing to the fact that the family moved to Shelton.

After serving as a newspaper reporter, Mr. O'Sullivan joined the New York Grocery Store as a clerk and in a few years became manager of the business which was then located in the store now occupied by Carl Dektor's shoe store on Main Street.

Mr. O'Sullivan was connected with the roller skating rink on First Street, in the years in which roller skating was at the height of popularity. He was associated with William Maltby, a trick bicycle rider. Mr. O'Sullivan became proficient as a fancy roller skater and with Mr. Maltby he went about the country giving exhibitions.

He was married in Baltimore to Miss Mary Bain, who survives him together with two sons, Dennis O'Sullivan, district manager for Logan Brothers' stores, and Dr. John Reynolds O'Sullivan of New Jersey.

Leaving the New York Grocery Store, Mr. O'Sullivan joined the agency staff of the Prudential Life Insurance Company and was engaged in this business for about 20 years until his retirement because of ill health several years ago.

The funeral will take place tomorrow from his late residence at 75 Cottage Street at 8:30 o'clock and at St. Mary's Church at 9 o'clock.

Internment will be in Mt. St. Peter's

Sept. 1921 - PLANS FOOTBALL TEAM FOR PARK

John F. O'Sullivan Announces That Well-Known Local Players Will Be in Lineup

Derby-Shelton Team Has Opportunity for Franchise in State League—O'Sullivan Field Being Prepared for Grid Combats—Announces Probable Lineup.

John F. O'Sullivan, owner of Island Park, intends to put a football team on the gridiron this season that will bring glory and a long string of victories to Derby and Shelton between now and Thanksgiving. He told a representative of this paper yesterday afternoon that he has been assured of the services of a number of the best players in the sister cities and he already has men at work putting O'Sullivan field in condition for the anticipated encounters.

The class of team that Mr. O'Sullivan plans to put on will be of sufficient strength to compete with some of the strongest teams in the state, such as the New Haven Boy Graduates, the YD team of New Haven, and the Hilltops of that city, the All-Stars of Naugatuck, and the Savin Rocks, and teams from Bridgeport like the Rosebuds, the East Sides and West Ends, and combinations representing Torrington, Meriden, Manchester, Hartford, Waterbury and other cities.

Two Franchises Open.

At the present time, there are two franchises open in the Connecticut State Football League, and Mr. O'Sullivan has been approached with proposals to take up one of them. He has not yet decided whether he will do so, as it will make his team play more than one

game a week and he may wish to arrange only for Sunday games, but industrial conditions may cause him not to do so. Although he has in no way indicated whether he will or not.

Mr. O'Sullivan said yesterday that he hopes to play the first game, whether the Derby-Shelton team is in the state league or not, on Sunday, October 9. He said that he had been assured of the support and cooperation of some of the best known players in the two cities and that the first practice will probably be held early next week.

"Sporty" McEvoy, of Bridgeport, one of the best known and hardest players in the state, will be the backbone of the team. McEvoy is known as "Cannibal" and "Cannibal" McEvoy and he is regarded as one of the premier players of Connecticut.

In the Lineup.

Others who Mr. O'Sullivan says have agreed to play on the local team are George Smith, an ex-service man and formerly with the Hamilton Club team of New Haven. Mike Smith, an ex-service man from Bridgeport formerly of the St. Charles team; and "Red" Nolan, the Cavanaugh service man who is well known as a very fast and sure tackler. There will be two others, Walt Case, one of high school fame, Eddie Lobert, Billy and Ed. Haydn, George Hudson, who played with D.H.S. and the Plainfield, N.J. team; Joe Maletron, once of D.H.S. and Manny Brock who has played some football. From Shelton are J. D. Browning, who played fullback with the Ajax team in the army, and at Newport, and George Garland, also an ex-army player.

Mr. O'Sullivan believes that with such material at hand, the football fans of the two cities can be provided with football that will give them plenty of thrills and that the aggregation can tackle anything of its class in the state and get away with it. Local fans realize that with the men mentioned above in the lineup any opposition would be stacking up against a pretty tough proposition.

Mr. O'Sullivan will make an announcement next week whether he has decided to take one of the state league franchises or whether the Derby-Shelton team will play independent football, and he will also keep the fans in touch with developments concerning the inter-city team.