

O'Neill_1

Tip O'Neill, Senator Ted Kennedy, and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall discuss the Charles River cleanup

1966

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

Cleaning up the Charles River was one of O'Neill's first efforts as a legislator when he was elected to the Massachusetts House in 1936. His initial proposal, which was blocked by the Republican administration, was to add a large pipe along the river for sanitary drainage. "It seemed so simple: Uncle Sam would pay for it under the WPA program, and it would provide jobs," he recalled. By the 1950s, the River had the reputation of being a "foul and noisome, polluted by offal and industrious wastes, scummy with oil, unlikely to be mistaken for water." Popular swimming destinations in Cambridge, Magazine Beach and Jerry's Landing, were closed. It wasn't until the Kennedy Administration when Secretary Udall commissioned a study to clean up the river. It took several more decades for the Charles to be fully remediated and deemed safe enough to swim in once again.

O'Neill_2

Massachusetts Delegation, Democratic National Convention

July 1952

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

O'Neill_3

O'Neill for Congress Headquarters

1952

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

O'Neill_4

Tip and Millie O'Neill vote in North Cambridge, 1952

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

Tip and his wife, Millie, always went to the polls together on election day. Before leaving the house, Tip would say, "Honey, I'd like to ask you for your vote." "Tom," she would reply, "I'll give you every consideration."

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Cambridge Rindge and Latin Basketball State Champions, 1981

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

Future New York Nick's star Patrick Ewing is to the right of Tip O'Neill.

O'Neill_6

Tip and Millie O'Neill with JFK

ca. 1960

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

According to O'Neill, "Jack Kennedy was a great friend of mine, with a glamour and a charisma that people loved. Not just in our own country, either; during his three years in office, Kennedy inspired the entire world. I remember the first time I met Jack. He was a skinny, bashful kid, and it was hard to

imagine him as a schoolteacher, let alone president. But he grew like nobody I've ever known, and he went on to become one of the great political leaders of our time."

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St. John's High School Basketball Team

1931

Tip O'Neill (center), captain of the team

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

According to the St. John's 1931 senior yearbook, O'Neill was "never worried, never vexed, in one day and out the next." Sports, on the other hand, were like "a second religion" to Tip and his friends. His father, Thomas O'Neill, Sr. was such a fan of baseball, that as the head of the North Cambridge Knights of Columbus, he organized a semiprofessional baseball team of local men that "became the lifeblood of the community." "You'd go to a game on a Sunday and there would be twelve thousand fans there," Tip recalled. "The crowds were so big that some of the players were actually making more playing semipro ball than they would have in the major leagues." During the World Series, Tip and his friends would go to Tupper's drugstore on Yorktown Street. Two to three thousand people stood outside the store listening to Tupper announce every pitch over a megaphone. At the end of each half inning, Tupper would post the score.

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O'Neill Family Portrait, 1952

Photograph by Bradford Bachrach

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

O'Neill used this family portrait in his campaign literature during his successful run for United States House of Representatives in 1952. The campaign brochures read: "Where good cheer and happiness reign – the O'Neills make each day a new adventure and family fun places high on the list of daily musts. Here House Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. and Mrs. O'Neill are shown with their five children (from left): Christopher, 2 ½ on dad's knee; Thomas, 7; Rosemary, 9; Susan, 5; and Michael, 10 months being held by mother."

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Tip O'Neill with friend

Boston College Graduation, 1936

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

In his senior year at Boston College, Tip was voted both "class caveman" and "class politician." According to the 1936 yearbook: "He stands 6 feet, 1 inch, weighs 215 pounds, and is every inch the famous 'Tip O'Neill.' Last year he plunged into Cambridge politics and astounded the veteran Cambridge politicians by the run he made as candidate for Alderman. He was barely defeated. As that campaign was his first he is confident of success in the next. He intends to go to Engineering School and to keep active in politics until he is Mayor of Cambridge."

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Millie O'Neill, 1935

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

Millie O'Neill (nee Mildred Ann Miller) grew up in Somerville, the daughter of a "trainman" on the Boston Elevated Railway. Millie was "quick-minded and spirited" but nonetheless gave up her dream of becoming a dentist believing her working class background made college unattainable. Millie was described as the power behind her husband, raising five children and maintaining their home and presence in Cambridge, while Tip was in Washington. Although she remained out of the spotlight, Millie was a devoted community leader, volunteer, and public library supporter. In 1995, the North Cambridge branch of the Public Library was rededicated in her honor.

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Senior Photograph, St. John's High School, 1931

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

O'Neill_12

Thomas P. O'Neill and Mildred Ann Miller's Wedding Day, June 17, 1941

St. John's Church, Cambridge

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

Mildred, known to all as Millie, was one year behind Tip at St. John's High School. The two were introduced by their teacher, Sister Agatha, and became close during summer weekends at Nantasket Beach. Millie never suspected she was marrying a lifelong politician. "I was foolish not to realize it," she would say years later with a laugh.

O'Neill_13

Cambridge Treasurer's Office Staff 1942

Courtesy of the Cambridge Public Library Archives and Special Collections

After Tip's first legislation session adjourned in the summer of 1937, he and his fellow legislator, Cantabrigian, and future right hand man, Leo Diehl, got jobs in the Cambridge Treasurer's Office. For \$35 per week, they collected taxes at City Hall. Tip was a cashier. In 1942 when the city changed its government to Plan E, both O'Neill and Diehl lost their jobs.

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The Speaker's First Day

95th Session of Congress

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

Millie and his five children, the Barry's Corner gang, relatives from Ireland, state and local public officials, friends, housewives, lobbyists, and "a lot of priests" – over two hundred people packed into the House gallery to see O'Neill inaugurated as the 47th Speaker. "Few men," he said softly during his speech, "have the good fortune to see their dreams realized. But, thanks to you and thanks to the people of the Eighth Congressional District of Massachusetts, I am about to assume the highest office that I have ever aspired to."

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The Ever-Present Cigar

Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College

O'Neill_17

Thomas P. O'Neill, Sr., 1903

Courtesy of Rosemary O'Neill

Thomas O'Neill, Sr. gave up bricklaying for the New England Brick Company to open his own local contracting business. In 1901 he was elected to the Cambridge City Council and in 1914 became Cambridge's Sewer Commissioner. Every morning, the Sewer Department timekeeper would arrive at the O'Neill house on Fairfield Street with a horse and carriage. O'Neill, Sr. would join the man up front, place a fur blanket over their knees, and off they would trot to City Hall. Because of this daily habit, the neighbors called him "Lord Fairfield." Later he earned the nickname "Governor," because of his generosity, willingness to settle personal disputes, find the unemployed jobs, and, most importantly, because of his political connections.