

"TOMMY"—MASSACHUSETTS STATE SENATOR AND HANTS COUNTY BOY AT HEART!

*Why East Hants is proud to claim
Tom Kennedy as one of our own*

"...a remarkable tale of courage, love and endurance."

Francis Campbell (The Chronicle Herald, 9 July 2015)





Senator Kennedy with his wife Clare Holmgren (Photo by Sharon Connolly, July 1999, courtesy of Clare)

Massachusetts State Senator Thomas Kennedy

What connection does a Massachusetts State Senator have with East Hants, Nova Scotia? Why is Senator Tom (“Tommy” to his friends) Kennedy memorialized in a small rural museum on the Cobequid Bay shoreline? Read on to learn Tom Kennedy’s story—his intended vocation of the priesthood, the accident that changed all that, his triumphant struggle to live a life not defined by the accident, his unwavering dedication to a life of service to the public, and his devotion and contribution to the Nova Scotia home of his forebears.

Background...

Thomas Patrick Kennedy was born in 1951 in Brockton, Massachusetts, to Irish-American parents Robert Andrew Kennedy, Jr. and Mary Louise (Cruise) Kennedy. He was the youngest of four children—sisters Mary Kennedy Bardsley, M. Ann Kennedy Thibault, and brother Robert A. Kennedy III. He attended public school in Brockton at St. Patrick's School and Cardinal Spellman High School, graduating in 1969. His Roman Catholic upbringing led him to enter the Missionary Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in New York with the intention of entering the priesthood.



**Top: Tom with his mother Mary on St. Patrick's Day (Photo courtesy of Clare Holmgren)
Opposite: Tom with sister Mary Bardsley (Photo from *The Chronicle-Herald*, 9 July 2015)**

A Reversal of Plans...

In 1970 when Tom was 19 years old, a horrific accident changed the direction of his life. After he had entered the New York seminary, while washing windows one day, he fell from a third-storey window, breaking his neck. The fall left him a quadriplegic, unable to care for himself or use his legs, having only limited use of his left arm, confined to a wheelchair, and having to undergo extensive treatments and lengthy rehabilitation. That was the end of his plans for the priesthood.

His mobility, for the rest of his life, depended on his motorized chair and his long-time friend, caregiver, and eventually, wife Clare Holmgren, shown here with him. (Photo from *The Boston Sunday Globe*, 29 June 2008)



Not an End, But a Beginning...

People like Tom Kennedy set the bar high for themselves, and there are always those who recognize that determination and capability in them...

1974—the mayor of Brockton, David E. Crosby, invited Kennedy to become his ombudsman, a role to which he was well suited. This was the beginning of his public service career.

1978—Kennedy first ran for public office when he was elected city councillor for Ward 2 in Brockton.



1983—Kennedy was elected Massachusetts State Representative for the 9th Plymouth District in Brockton. He held this position for 25 years.

Shown here with a microphone, Tom did not allow his disability to detract from his political message. (Photo from *The Sunday Enterprise*, 5 July 2015)

(Not an End... cont'd)

2008—Kennedy won his State Senate seat for Brockton, Hanover, Whitman, Hanson, Halifax, and parts of Easton and East Bridgewater, which he held until his death.

(Photo from *The Chronicle-Herald*, 9 July 2015)



“If someone had the sense that a person with a disability would be consumed by it, when you meet Tommy Kennedy, he puts that myth to the fire.” Rep. Frank M. Hynes (Boston Sunday Globe, 29 June 2008)

“...a faith-filled man... perpetually guided and nourished by his Catholic beliefs. His faith informed all of his actions, many of which were known only to the recipients of his kindness.” (The Irish Emigrant, 6 July 2015)

*A true son of
Ireland and
Nova Scotia*

“Your courage, instincts and wit are admirable. You’ve been a great colleague but an even better person. I will miss you.” Sen. Steven C. Panagiotakos (In a letter to “Tom” on Panagiotakos’ retirement—22 November

“He never felt sorry for himself and he never wanted anyone else to feel sorry for him either,” said Brockton businessman George Carney, a lifelong family friend.” Maria Papadopoulos (The Sunday Enterprise, 5 July 2015)

His Government Roles...

House of Representatives...

- * Vice-Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee**
- * Chairman of the House Post Audit and Oversight Committee**
- * Member of Committees on Ethics, Government Regulations, Insurance, and Natural Resources and Agriculture**
- * Speaker of the House to the Special House Ad Hoc Committee on Adoption**

Senate...

- * Chairman of Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure, and Joint Committee on Election Laws**
- * Vice-Chairman of Veterans Affairs**
- * Member of Ways and Means Committee**
- * Special Senate Committee on Opioid Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Options**

His Accomplishments...

- * Undergraduate degrees from Massasoit Community College and Stonehill College**
- * Master's degree from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government**
- * 1978—named Honorary Oblate by the Missionary Congregation of Oblates of Mary Immaculate**
- * 2011—Irish Honors Award for Public Service (*Boston Irish Reporter*)**
- * Legislator of the Year—named by**
 - National Association of Home Health and Hospice Care**
 - National Association for Home Care**
 - Massachusetts Visiting Nurses Association**
 - Massachusetts Home and Health Association**

Elected to the House of Representatives in 1983, "he was the only one of 160 lawmakers in a wheelchair, but not the only member who had a disability, ... [and] added '[his] own voice and physical presence to serve as a reminder of what has been accomplished and what desperately needs to be advanced in the realm of rights for the disabled.'" Joseph Markman (The Sunday Enterprise, 5 July 2015)



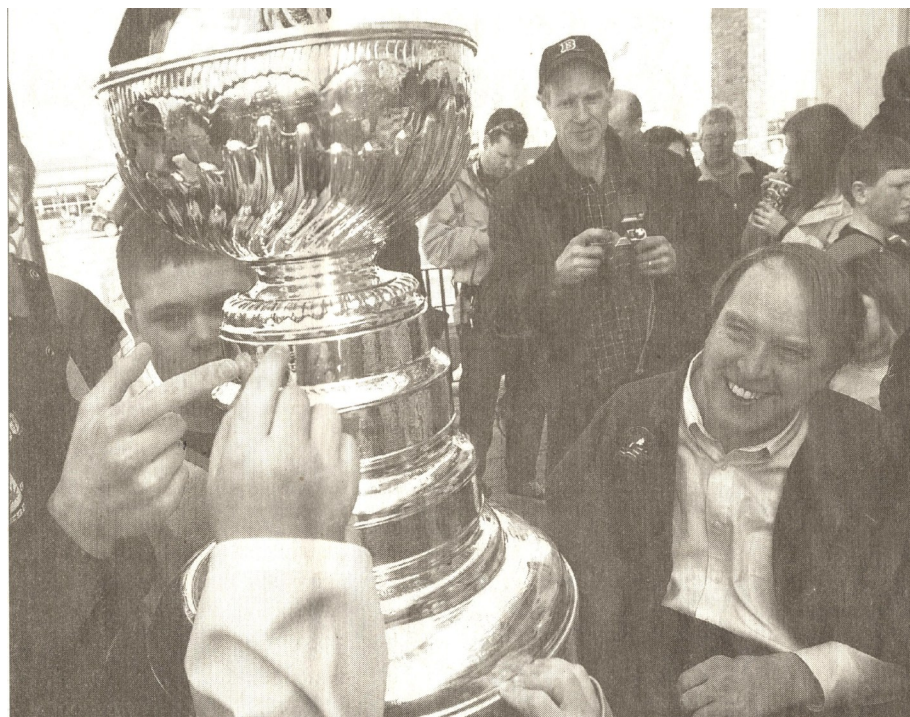
(Photo from *The Sunday Enterprise*, 5 July 2015)

Member of these Boards of Directors...

- * New England Board of Higher Education
- * New England Sinai Hospital
- * Trinity Catholic Academy
- * St. Joseph's Manor Nursing Home

"When you spoke to him, he listened. His eyes never wandered the room in case someone more important entered it." Norah Barry Mallory and Mara Mallory (The Chronicle-Herald, 9 July 2015)

"Tom Kennedy was good at politics. Not because he was a good politician, but because he was a good human being. If he asked your name, he remembered it the next time he saw you. He also remembered your children, your mother, and the problems you couldn't help but share with him." Norah Barry Mallory and Mara Mallory (The Chronicle-Herald, 9 July 2015)



"Sen. Claire Cronin: He was 'never one to self promote....He focused more on the work to be done, rather than the need to take credit.'" Joseph Markman (The Sunday Enterprise, 5 July 2015)

Left: Tom is shown admiring the Stanley Cup (Photo from *The Sunday Enterprise*)

Right: Sharing a laugh with former President Bill Clinton (Photo courtesy of Clare Holmgren)



Meeting Pope John Paul II in 1995

Senator Kennedy traveled to Vatican City in Rome to attend the canonization of French Bishop Eugene De Mazenod, founder of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Kennedy met the Pope twice on that occasion, first at the ceremony, and later, along with a group who were given a special audience.



Photos courtesy of Clare Holmgren

“Second only to his faith, Tom’s Irish and Nova Scotian roots were of paramount importance to him. The struggles and values of generations past instilled in him a profound drive to preserve and carry on their memories and places.” (The Irish Emigrant, 6 July 2015)

The Nova Scotia Connection

Tom Kennedy's grandparents left Admiral Rock, Hants County, and the Shubenacadie River, in the early 1900s for a better life in Massachusetts. They retained ownership of the Admiral Rock property, however; that ancestral tie as well as the St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cemetery in Maitland, some 20 kilometres north of Admiral Rock,



brought the Kennedy family back to Nova Scotia for regular visits to the home place. Tom Kennedy's legacy to this region of the world, however, is far more than merely owning property here and visiting it every year.

The old Kennedy home in Admiral Rock (Photo by P. Whidden)



Shubenacadie River, showing the tidal bore (Photo courtesy The Shubenacadie River Runners)



During the 1800s, a Roman Catholic chapel was erected on a hill on Robinson Road in Maitland, just off the highway. The congregation was never large, many of the families coming to Maitland and surrounding communities to work in the shipyards and forests, or to crew on the many vessels carrying cargo to New England, Europe, and beyond. When the age of sail gave way to steam and wooden shipbuilding petered out, so too the population declined as workers looked for employment elsewhere. The chapel was eventually moved to a different location and use, leaving only a cemetery to grow up in weeds and bushes.

Above: Entrance to St. Francis Xavier Cemetery

Right: Outline of the chapel marked by stones from the original foundation. Kennedy had hoped to rebuild it someday.

(Photos by P. Whidden)



Tom Kennedy's legacy was the rehabilitation of the cemetery. He hired the labour to clear the overgrowth, and he paid to have headstones restored or replicated. The family promise was to maintain the graves of their great-grandmother Mary Moore Kennedy and an aunt, Mary Louise Kennedy.



Left: Mary Kennedy's headstone. Above: A replicated headstone for the Kennedy children. (Photos by P. Whidden)



For almost 40 years, Tom Kennedy researched burials and oversaw the restoration process. The Nova Scotia Provincial Archives honoured him with a lifetime membership for the tenacity of his research efforts.

Senator Kennedy died at Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital, at age 63, June 28, 2015, from pneumonia and complications of cancer. Besides his siblings and their families, he was survived by his wife Clare Holmgren. A funeral mass was celebrated in his honour at St. Edith Stein Parish in Brockton and attended by over 1000 mourners. His remains were then transported to Nova Scotia where, on July 11, mass was said for him at St. Bridget's Roman Catholic Church in Shubenacadie, Hants County. He is interred at St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Cemetery in Maitland, Hants County, the cemetery he had lavished so much care on. This stone was erected in 2017, a fitting memorial for a remarkable man.

(Photo by P. Whidden)



Tom Kennedy—His Words

The Good Lord has blessed me far more abundantly than I ever could have imagined with the precious gifts of strong faith, devoted family and friends, and a rewarding career.

Mine has been a great life filled with all the joys and sorrows of the human experience. I've been enriched, encouraged and supported by the bonds of love and affection from the extended Cruise/Kennedy clans, coupled with a remarkable and outstanding array of friends. As a sinful man, I beg forgiveness from all who I have offended and I ask to be remembered as someone who tries to do good. I beg indulgence for my faults and failings.

I pray for forgiveness from almighty God and from all who I may have harmed in any way, shape or form. As one who was graced with the privilege of being born on the 15th of August, which is the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary's body and soul into heaven, I have enjoyed a great devotion, like my mother and many of the Irish, to Our Blessed Lady and her Holy Rosary. And through the strong influence and

example of the religious life of my uncle, Brother Tom Cruise, I was drawn to the priesthood as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate.

As the old saying goes, the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry. Apparently, it was not in the Divine Plan for my dreams of the priesthood to be realized. Instead, my life headed in a different and new direction. I only hope and pray that I have lived up to some—if any—of the goals of that Divine Plan.

In the old Irish Catholic tradition, I have always followed the practice and belief of the importance of praying for the dead. The second book of Maccabees 12:46 tells us "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from sins" and I share that sentiment. My one request of family and friends and any and all of you is that, in your charity, you consider offering a prayer for the repose of my soul.

With love and affection. God love you all!

Thomas Patrick Kennedy

Acceptance Speech—President's Award for Public Service Stonehill College—May 29, 1997

It is with a deep sense of gratitude and humility that I accept this prestigious public service award. I am honored to be singled out from so many worthy and dedicated public officials of this area who are far more credible than I to receive this honor.

Stonehill College has a remarkable record for developing a sense of public service in their students. The “Into The Street Program” that every incoming freshman participates in shows the scope of commitment the school expects from all of its students. The fact that hundreds from Stonehill volunteer their time and energy to extend a helping hand to Brockton’s senior citizens, working poor, and children of welfare recipients to improve their quality of life is a marvelous reflection on the values and commitments that are taught and instilled at this fine Institution.

Stonehill, which has always held a very special place in my heart, has a rich history of producing some of the finest and most caring graduates. People who chose careers of service rather than careers geared strictly to monetary gains. From one of the members of the first graduation class in 1952, my cousin Professor Jack Kelleher, who recently retired from a teaching career at the University of Illinois, to Joan Canavan, Valedictorian of the class of 1996, who worked as a Legislative Intern in my office and has also chosen a career of service in the noble role of educator becoming a third grade elementary school teacher.

Sandwiched between these two individuals are countless numbers who received education, guidance and inspiration from Stonehill College and through the exemplary role demonstrated by the

Fathers and Brothers of the Congregation of Holy Cross have truly received “Lux et Spes” “Light and Hope” and as a result have returned to society the priceless community of sacrifice and service extending to others light and hope.

As for me, I did not originally answer the call of serving my fellow neighbor through politics but rather began by following the call to Religious Life and entered the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, an Order very similar to the Congregation of Holy Cross. As Divine Providence would have it, rather than entering my 20th year of ordination to the Priesthood, I am entering my 20th year of service in Elective Public Office. Both have similarities, challenges and rich rewards.

I stress the phrase “Public Service” because that is what holding office has meant to me. It allows one to be able to utilize talents and energies in the service of, and for, the well being of others. I have tried, in my own way to live up to and ful-

fill the great responsibilities placed upon me.

Having served as Vice Chairman of the Ways & Means Committee I had the opportunity to advocate for issues that make a difference in the lives of college students. One issue I am very proud of, is the increase in State Scholarship funding to its current level of \$73m—a \$20m gain over the past five years.

More than 2/3s of these funds are directed towards students in private institutions such as Stonehill. This is one facet of the Legislature’s attempts to make higher education affordable and accessible. As a State Representative from Brockton the terms affordable and accessible hold great significance for the constituents of my district.

It has also been a great privilege to work closely with the Brockton Interfaith Community, a group of 16 parishes and church groups, including Stonehill College. I was pleased to be able to help pry \$500,000 from state bureaucrats to assist in

the after school/summer activity programs for city youth.

Another example of my attempt to respond to a need that was brought to my attention, was to author and sponsor the “Grandparent Rights Law.” The Massachusetts General Laws state that Grandparents now have the legal ability to be a part of the lives of their grandchildren when unfortunate family situations would otherwise prevent them from doing so!

These are but a few examples of my type of involvement in public service, for others there are more noble, greater and more meaningful achievements attained but no matter what is done or how it is accomplished, to be able to give of oneself—for the good of others is a most laudable goal.

All of us gathered here, as supporters of Stonehill College have to look no further for a sterling example of commitment to the service of

others than our own dear Fr. Bartley MacPhaidin. He has, as President over the past two decades, given so much of his time, extraordinary talents and untiring energies to this splendid School. We need only look out from this building across the beautiful Stonehill campus to view the fruits of his handiwork. He is unsurpassed in his achievements for the advancement and enhancement of Stonehill College.

As a lifelong friend and advocate of Stonehill and ardent admirer and friend of yours, Fr. Bart, I am honored to receive from you this “President’s Award.” God bless you! God bless Stonehill! God bless us all!

“...aides remember him as having a passionate voice and prominent role in helping to preserve gay marriage in Massachusetts, and noted that he lived just long enough to see it become legalized across the country.” (Boston Irish Reporter, July 2015)

Acknowledgments

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Pat Whidden, author

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The above sources, as well as photographs used in this work, are archived with The East Hants Historical Society.

