



"A High-Class Operator": Mansfield Football Legend Don Currivan - by Andy Todesco

Mansfield has produced many local football legends. But none have eclipsed Donald Currivan, the two-way end who played for Mansfield High, Boston College, and several National Football League teams.



MHS 1938 Yearbook photo

A son of John and Mary Currivan of Shawmut Avenue, Don Currivan made an impact as a sophomore in 1935. In his junior year Mansfield High went undefeated with six wins and two ties. With his stellar play on both sides of the ball and his polite and humble manner, Don was elected a captain as a senior.

Mansfield finished that season with a record of 5-3-1.

Graduating with the Class of 1938, Don furthered his education with a preparatory year at Coyle High School in Taunton while playing football with the Mansfield town team. The following year Boston College called on Don and his illustrious college career began.

BC was among the nation's powerhouse football teams at that time. Don quickly stood out on the offensive side of the ball, where his play at end consistently ranked him among the best in the country. Don maintained his humility during his rise to fame, telling Boston sportswriter Harold Kaese, "when you think of my family and the way they follow sports—you know, I wouldn't be playing football this fall if it weren't to please my father."

By his senior year Don stood at 6'1" and weighed 200 pounds. His highest collegiate honor came when legendary sportswriter Grandland Rice chose Don as one of his All-American ends. Rice described Don as big, fast, and alert. "Currivan is a deadly blocker, a savage tackler, a high-class operator on the receiving end of a pass," Rice wrote.

Don Currivan soon turned pro, playing seven seasons for the Chicago Cardinals, Card-Pitt (a temporary merger of the Cardinals and Steelers), the Boston Yanks and the Los Angeles

Rams. Over that time he played 75 games, made 78 receptions for a total of 1,979 yards, and scored 24 touchdowns. In 1947 Don averaged 32.6 yards per reception, an NFL record that still stands today.

Despite his outstanding collegiate and pro play, the Boston fans let Don hear it at Braves Field when he dropped a pass in the Giants end zone. Despite a "chorus of throaty boos," Don took it in stride. "The crowd booed? Well, we get paid not to hear that," he told reporters. "And I'm not going to be a prima donna, like some baseball players, and work myself into a lather over the incident. I can catch them and will."

Don played his final two seasons with the Rams. By then he married Katherine Rockett of Sharon, with whom he had a son and a daughter. They settled in Foxborough where Don would become active in civic affairs. With his brother Bob he opened the Don Currivan Insurance Agency, which had offices in both Mansfield and Foxborough.

He took up golf, which he played to a respectable handicap. He was among the founders of Foxborough Country Club. On the morning of May 16, 1956, Don Currivan rode to Cape Cod with fellow golfer and Mansfield furniture store owner Ed Torrance to play in a Pro-Amateur golf tournament at Oyster Harbors Club in Osterville. Don told Ed he never felt better. They discussed his children and their education. Don said his insurance business was doing well.

But the day soon took a tragic turn. Don collapsed on the 14th fairway at Oyster Harbors. Fellow golfers rushed to his side, and an ambulance arrived within minutes to bring Don to Cape Cod Hospital. His wife, brother and parents were notified



BC football photo of Don Currivan that hangs in the QMS gym foyer

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Recent Donations

East Mansfield Post Office

by Diane O'Brien

An Open Thank You Letter to 02031:

Many of you know my dad, James O'Brien, as the personable and accommodating postmaster in East Mansfield from the late 60's until his retirement in 1979. During this time, all six of his children had flown the coop; some starting little families of their own, others pursuing secondary education or careers. That void was quickly filled by his new family - his postal customers and friends of East Mansfield. He knew most of you by name, often chatting with you about your family struggles, applauding your children's accomplishments and listening to neighborhood squabbles, much like a family.



The old worn out chair in the front window of the tiny post office gave him the perfect vantage point of the entire community square,

so he always saw you coming. Whether it be neighborhood kids on bikes, coming to get the family mail, moms stopping by to buy stamps to mail letters and packages to their children in the military, the local farmers dropping in with some of their fresh produce to share, or a dad stopping by for a chat when picking up the mail on the way home from work - he loved you all. You all became a huge part of the very fabric of his life. Embracing him in this heartfelt way brought him so much happiness and provided a sense of community that was somewhat missing. He actually looked forward to going to work and seeing all of you. It was not even work to him - more like going to see some friends for the day. I even got to witness this first hand while living in the tiny ranch behind the post office for a few years. (The photo captured here was taken by myself as I watched him paint his little post office with pride.)

The new Mansfield may not have the same sense of community that we were so fortunate to be a part of, but the essence of Mansfield is still there - in the richness of the local stories of our shared past.

With Sincere Thanks,
Diane O'Brien

Post Office Sign and Photo donated by Diane O'Brien



Postmaster James O'Brien

Pennant Earrings donated

by Michele Baptiste Kaplan

In 1969 I was a junior at Mansfield High School. My friend and neighbor was a senior. She had a relative that

worked at Swank in Attleboro.

This relative had two sets of Mansfield Sr. High School pierced earrings made there for my friend and me. The earrings are sterling silver and are the only two in existence. I wore them in high school. I am donating my earrings to the Mansfield Historical Society as they are a piece of Mansfield's history.





(Continued from page 1)

and they hurried to his bedside. Sadly, Don never regained consciousness, dying of a cerebral hemorrhage five hours later. He was just 36 years old.



Plaque at the entrance to the QMS gym.

The towns of Mansfield and Foxborough joined the family in mourning. Tributes poured in from around the country for the humble man from Mansfield who became a gridiron legend. Over 250 people attended his funeral at Saint Mary's Church in Foxborough. Don Currivan was laid to rest in Saint Mary's Cemetery, Mansfield.

A new Mansfield High School (now Qualters Middle School) opened two years previous. Members of the MHS Class of 1938 petitioned the school committee to dedicate the gymnasium to the memory of Don Currivan. Father Maurice Dullea represented Boston College at the dedication ceremony. "He possessed the wonderful combination of having surpassing athletic skill and deep modesty," Father Dullea said. "In future years, no man could provide a better model than Donald Currivan for the young Mansfield High School athletes who will come into this gymnasium."



The Mansfield Historical Society Newsletter

Nancy Breef-Pilz, Editor

Lou Andrews, Editorial Designer

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Historic Marker Program

The Historic Marker Program was established to honor and celebrate the history of the town of Mansfield and to create visibility, awareness, and interest in the individuals and families who helped shape our community.

Many people are curious about the house where they live and visit the Historical Society to find out more about their home and the many diverse people and places that made Mansfield what it is today.



An article about the Skinner House will be featured in the next newsletter.

The Historic Marker Program is a way for residents to share that knowledge with the broader community by purchasing a custom-made, dated sign that helps preserve the story of Mansfield.

[For details click here to visit our website.](#)

The Mansfield History Center now includes VENMO for payment.



The **Mansfield Historical Society** was founded in 1951 by local historian Jennie Copeland and a group of devoted charter members. We are 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation dedicated to "preserving material relative to the history of Mansfield."

In 2023 the Society started doing business as the Mansfield History Center. We welcome new members.

Visit our [website](#) to join.

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Christmas at 53 by Nancy Breef-Pilz

I look around 53 Rumford Avenue and imagine Christmas in this house. Now the Mansfield History Center, it was the home of our founder and Mansfield historian, Jennie Copeland from 1909 to 1956. Long gone are the decorations that Jennie and her mother would have used. Remaining are some lovely holiday cards and reference books she probably used to research her articles for the Mansfield News. Jennie's weekly column, **Mansfield in Other Days**, accounts living and working in this town, but in 1932, Jennie penned an additional article in the December paper to share the history of the holiday of Christmas. Each year after that, until her death in 1956, Jennie wrote an article featuring a Christmas custom or tradition, and its history. Sometimes she even recounted memories from her past holidays. Even back then, they shared a history lesson on Christmas traditions and how life and customs change. For those who were lucky enough to exchange Christmas cards with her, they would have received a printed version of this article in pamphlet form, hand-colored and signed. You can see the full set at the Copeland House.



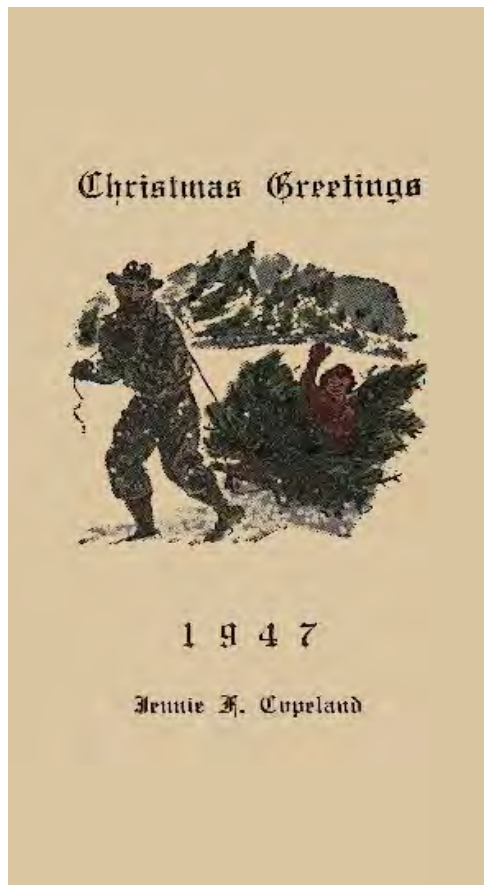
Jennie Copeland

Ms. Copeland must have cherished many of the holiday cards she received since they are still here in the house after all these years. It's interesting to see how the styles have changed. Included here is a sampling of Jennie's Christmas cards: unusual cards adorned with feathers, as well as the "family photo" very popular today.

Stop by the Copeland House (Monday 6-8pm & Saturday 10am-noon) from now until February to see the display of Christmas greetings.



Jennie's handmade card to her aunt with photo of her front door



Part of the Jennie's 1947 "card" featuring Christmas Trees.

MEMORIES—The Christmas Tree

Everyone cherishes some Christmas memories. Mine are Christmas trees. I believed in Santa Claus, hung up my stockings, and had a good dinner with all the fixings, but none of these made a lasting impression.

I can see now the school tree, the church trees, and the tree in the corner by the east window of our sitting room.

Not one of these trees cost anybody a copper cent. Modern children will scorn a tree not imported from Maine, or maybe from Oregon or Washington and paid for with money. Their elders side with them.

There was snow in the air. "Maybe a storm is coming. Better get the Christmas trees before the weather gets bad," said my father as he selected his favorite and sharpest ax. My mother fixed me up warm. Off we started for the far pasture.

The lot was bristling with little trees, here and there were bigger ones, straight and proud. They were my kind of Christmas trees,—red cedars. No other evergreens were plentiful, except pines, and pines would not do on account of the pitch.

First, we picked out a tree for the house, with thick branches and just the right height,—a tall one cut down to size would not do. If it had dark blue berries on it, so much the better. From long experience my father seemed to know just what was right. I stood by while the red chips flew.



Christmas card trimmed in feathery fringe.



Jennie's 1931 Christmas card

A Mansfield 250th Celebration Event

Multi-Cultural Celebration

As we close out a year of celebrating Mansfield, let's come together for a day of honoring our Town's cultural heritages that have shaped our community through the years. Featuring international food trucks, music, dance, and family fun.

Now Seeking Cultural Vendors and Performers

JOIN US FOR THIS FINAL 250TH CELEBRATION EVENT!

DECEMBER 13 12 - 3 PM

Robinson School Cafeteria 245 East Street, Mansfield



1955 illustrated postcard greeting from Clarence Barnes, Jr. from a popular Mansfield family. His father, also named Clarence Barnes, was former Attorney General of Massachusetts. See more at Copeland House.



Bewildered?

Can't think of the RIGHT GIFT for Christmas?

**GIVE SOME MANSFIELD HISTORY
YOU CAN'T GO WRONG!**

*Here Are Some Suggestions
That We Think Will Fit The Bill*



*Adapted from an original ad for
Birmingham Upholstery Studio, Mansfield
News, December 8, 1955*

250TH SOUVENIR ENVELOPE

with stamp & postmark.....\$5

VINTAGE POSTCARD

various designs\$5

MANSFIELD STICKER SHEET\$5

BOOKS

Mansfield Memories (Todesco)\$25

This Old Town: Revisited (Chase)\$20

Images of America: MANSFIELD (McNatt & Todesco) ...\$20

Everyday But Sunday (Copeland)\$20

TOKIE BARNES PRINT

painting of downtown parade featuring MHS Band\$20 or \$30

HISTORIC HOUSE MARKER

(includes research, plaque, and membership).....\$100

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP.....From \$15 to \$500

See our website for details WWW.MHSMa.ORG

Prices exclude shipping charges

Shop online or stop by the History Center.

MANSFIELD HISTORY CENTER

COPELAND HOUSE

53 Rumford Ave. (across from Fulton's Pond)

OPEN MON 6-9 PM & SAT 10AM -12 NOON