

LOCAL&STATE

Encounters with Hepburn, Auerbach in new memoir

Sean Flynn
Newport Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK

NEWPORT — “The Gilded Age” now premiering on HBO is set among the city’s mansions, but eight years ago, then-Newport resident Ken Dooley was all ready to go with a film, “Bellevue Avenue,” which was to portray life among Newport’s wealthy class in that era. A television series with the same name also was planned.

Dooley, the screenwriter and executive producer of the planned film, had lined up Richard Gere, Olympia Dukakis, and other notable actors to star in the film, but at the last minute, the financiers of the film, Giovanni Feroce, CEO of Alex & Ani, and Carolyn Rafaelian, founder and principal of the firm, backed out in early 2013. Feroce was fired as CEO that year and the firm went in another direction.

That story garners only a brief mention in Dooley’s newest book, *Dooley Noted: Tales of an Ordinary Man Fortunate Enough to Meet a Lot of Extraordinary People in His Life’s Journey*. Now 90, Dooley looks back on a long life filled with fascinating encounters with people from all walks of life.

For example, Dooley became close to Red Auerbach, the legendary coach of the Boston Celtics, when he directed the 1981 film “Dedication Desire, The Story of Red Auerbach,” and wrote the books, *MBA: Management by Auerbach* and *The Auerbach Dynasty*.

‘The Prettiest Girl on Bailey’s Beach’

Dooley lived full time in Newport from 2008 to 2020, when some health problems led him to living close his daughter, but his encounters with the city began at an early age. Back in the summer of 1939, when the Cooley family lived in Cranston and Dooley was 8 years old, his older sister, Eileen, got a summer job at the Newport mansion Seaweed as a parlor maid.

The first story of dozens and dozens in the 547-page Dooley Noted is called, “The Prettiest Girl on Bailey’s Beach.” One of the fringe benefits Eileen had as parlor maid was permission to swim at the exclusive beach. One day, a Providence Journal photographer took a photo of her at the beach and the cutline in a Sunday paper identified her as Eileen Dooley of Cranston.

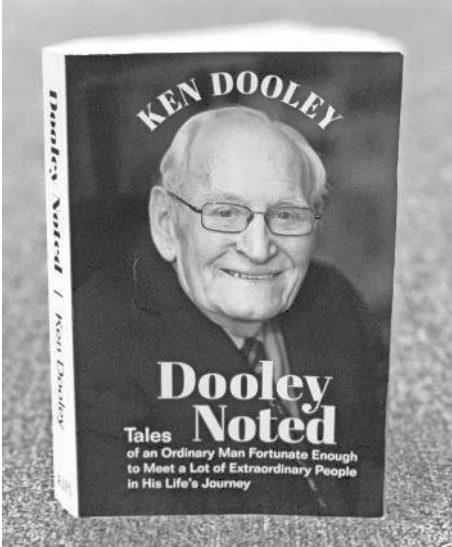
Some of Newport’s high society at the time asked why the Journal would publish “a photograph of a maid instead of one of the young society debutantes” at the beach. The managing editor looked into it and said “the photographer explained that he was told to take a picture of the prettiest girl on the beach. And that’s exactly what he did.”

Eileen Dooley’s time as a parlor maid was short. Dooley writes his sister was fired for joining an effort “to unionize the servants, who at that time, worked six-and-one-half days a week for little money.”

Dooley’s book is not chronological,



Ken Dooley, left, is shown with former state Rep. Peter Martin in 2015. PROVIDENCE JOURNAL FILE PHOTO



Former Newport resident Ken Dooley recently published his memoir titled “Duly Noted: Tales of an Ordinary Man Fortunate Enough to Meet a Lot of Extraordinary People in His Life’s Journey.”

SCOTT BARRETT/NEWPORT DAILY NEWS

but a series of fascinating snapshots of people with home he had run-ins. In some cases, they were brief.

In 1982, he was on the board of directors of the Ivoryton Playhouse in Essex, Connecticut. He asked Katharine Houghton to perform her one-person play, “To Heaven in a Swing,” there. Houghton was the niece of the late four-time Oscar winner Katherine Hepburn, who arrived for opening night. Dooley had reserved a front seat for Hepburn, who he received at the door.

“You will be here, Mr. Doo-lee, at 1 minute before curtain to escort me,” Hepburn told him. “At the end of the play, you will take me to the dressing room to see my niece.”

“She sounded like the character she played in ‘The Good Earth,’ and I was one of her Chinese friends,” Dooley writes. “I didn’t salute, but I followed her orders.”

Stories of conversations with other celebrities such as Lee Iaccoca at

Chrysler Corp. are more in-depth and meaningful.

Dooley’s work over the years has had an impact in multiple ways

He wrote and produced “The Murder Trial of John Gordon,” a play that ran for 21 performances at the Park Theatre in Cranston beginning in January 2011, when Dooley was living in Newport.

In *Dooley Noted*, the author writes about how the play came about. It’s one of the longer stories in the book, starting when he was a boy and his mother used to sing a folk song to him called, “Poor Johnny Gordon.”

Gordon, an Irish immigrant, was executed for the murder of Cranston industrialist Amasa Sprague on Dec.31, 1843. Dooley researched the case and the play’s portrayal makes the argument Gordon did not receive a fair trial and exculpatory evidence was ignored before his execution.

Then state Rep. Peter Martin of Newport, who said he saw the play seven times because he was so moved by Dooley’s work, introduced a bill into the General Assembly asking then Gov. Lincoln Chafee to grant a pardon, which the governor did later in 2011.

Robert “Bob” Thorpe, an older brother of one of Dooley’s Cranston friends Gil Thorpe, joined the 39th Fighting Squadron of the Fifth Air Force in World War II. The 20-year-old Thorpe was shot down on May 28, 1944, over New Guinea, crashing into the sea. The Air Force declared him “missing in action” and then “killed in action” after the war. The family never knew what happened to him.

Dooley, who writes about the Thorpe family in another of the book’s longer pieces, met Gil Thorpe again after a 40-year separation and started to dig. Using the Freedom of Information Act, he put together a 1,300-page dossier about Bob Thorpe’s death. He learned 2nd Lt. Thorpe had been immediately captured by Japanese forces on the island, interrogated, tortured and beheaded.

As a result of Dooley’s work, Bob Thorpe was awarded the state’s highest military honor in 2013 and a stone marker at the state’s Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Exeter.

Dooley, the author of 40 books besides his plays and screenplays, was inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame in 2018. In the foreword to *Dooley Noted*, Patrick Conley, the state’s historian laureate, writes that Dooley “offers the reader vignettes that illustrate the history and temper of our own times.”

“Our worst fear isn’t the end of life but the end of memories,” writes Dooley in his book. “That quote from Tom Rackman has special meaning for me. I have so many great memories of the people I have met these past 90 years.”

The book can be purchased at kendooley.org, and Dooley says he will autograph all copies bought through the website. He added that all proceeds from the book will be donated to Rhode Island nonprofit organizations.

Should RI change its election system?

Katherine Gregg
Providence Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

PROVIDENCE — Should Rhode Island scrap its Republican and Democratic primaries and have runoff elections between the top two vote-getters instead?

Or is it fine that the last two elected governors won Rhode Island’s top office with less than 50% of the vote — in former Gov. Lincoln Chafee’s case, only 36% of the vote?

That is the question a legislative committee considered Thursday night. And there was by no means unanimity around the answer.

On the one hand, there was Joseph Paolino.

The former Providence mayor and current Democratic National Committeeman does not believe anyone should be declared the “winner” of the election if a majority vote against them.

He headed into the hearing of the Committee on Government and Elections on House Bill 6622, sponsored by Rep. Arthur Corvese, with decades of examples of races where he believes “outcomes could have been different” if the top two vote-getters had gone on to the finals.

Among his more intriguing thoughts: Had there been runoff elections in the Providence mayoral race in 1974, he suspects “Buddy Cianci would never have existed,” because he would not have had the chance to beat incumbent Mayor Joseph A. Doorley Jr. on an anti-corruption platform.

Political consultant Guy Dufault, the one-time chairman and executive director of the Rhode Island Democratic Party, told The Journal earlier that he believes the bill would fix “a broken system.”

“In a contested five-way Democratic primary for Governor and no viable Republican or independent on the ballot, it is conceivable that 30% of the expected 120,000 voters in the Democratic primary will elect the next Governor,” he said. “That’s 36,000 out of 715,000 registered voters, or 5% deciding our next Governor. “That’s a broken system. My 2 cents.”

But Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea, who is the state’s top election official and a candidate for governor, is wary of any major changes in the way Rhode Island decides elections.

In response to a Journal query last fall about the call for runoff elections, she said: changes of this magnitude “need to happen through a constitutional amendment process.”

On Thursday, her legislative director, Aaron Gardner, wrote lawmakers to raise “questions regarding how this legislation would affect independent candidates and federal elections among others. We look forward to working directly with the sponsor on these issues.”

How does RI’s election system work now?

The Rhode Island Constitution says: “In all elections held by the people for state, city, town, ward or district officers, the person or candidate receiving the largest number of votes cast shall be declared elected.”

According John Marion, the executive director of the citizens’ group Common Cause:

“Our current system, sometimes called first past the post ... was put into our Constitution in the 1880s after five consecutive gubernatorial elections failed to produce a majority winner and therefore resulted in the General Assembly picking the governor.”

The Constitution does not, however, dictate how the Republican and Democratic parties conduct their own primary elections to choose nominees for the November general election.

What change is proposed for RI elections?

Since primaries are basically political party affairs, Corvese, the state

Firm hired to redraw Newport’s wards, precincts

Sean Flynn
Newport Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK

NEWPORT — The City Council awarded a contract to a consulting company to redraw the wards and precincts of the city for upcoming elections based on the 2020 Census.

The council took the action two weeks after the State Special Commission on Reapportionment voted to send its final drafts for the new state House of Representatives, state Senate and U.S. Congressional voting districts boundary maps to the General Assembly for approval.

Once the state takes action, the redrawing of ward and precinct lines takes place in all cities and towns every 10 years after the decennial census.

The council awarded a \$17,990 contract to redraw the local ward and precinct lines to ARCBridge Consulting & Training Inc. of Sterling, Virginia. The company provided redistricting services to the city in 2011 and has been

hired to handle the redistricting in Pawtucket and East Providence this year.

In its proposal to the city, ARCBridge said it has been working with redistricting and census data for more than 25 years.

“The vendor will come in, take our existing data, take the census data and provide alternate plans for redrawing our ward and precinct lines,” City Canvassing Clerk Tracy Nelson told the council Wednesday evening. “I expect them to hit the ground running the first week of February.”

Councilwoman Angela McCalla asked about the ability of the public to provide comment during the process. Under the awarded contract, the company will conduct two public meetings to present its proposed plans, Nelson responded. In addition, Nelson will hold an introductory meeting for the public to explain the process and give an overview.

Councilwoman Kathryn Leonard, who represents the Third Ward, had some words of advice for the consult-

ants. “When the last redistricting was done, Ward 3 today starts right at the bridge at Farewell Street and the lines are so strange all over” to Bridge Street, down Thames Street, all the way south to Ocean Drive, “and the line is not very easily designated for people,” Leonard said. “Hopefully when they redo this, they could look at maybe a geographical area not from one tip of town to the other tip of town. I’m just making that suggestion.”

Nelson said she would bring that observation to the consultant’s attention when they begin work.

The Canvassing Authority unanimously recommended the council hire the company after reviewing two proposals. The other proposal was from Election Data Services of Manassas, Virginia, to do the redistricting work for \$37,500.

There was no “evidence to support award to the high bidder, at over double the cost, and exceeding the budgeted amount of \$25,000,” Nelson wrote in a memorandum to the council.