

# John William Gaffney

1841 - 1923

John W. Gaffney, one of Connecticut's most successful builders and contractors, was identified with the development of Waterbury for many years. He saw Waterbury grow from a sparsely settled village of a few thousand people to a city of over one hundred thousand.

Gaffney, who was born in Ireland in 1841, was brought to America at age two by his parents. Gaffney was educated in Waterbury's public schools, and at an early age he became interested in the contracting business.

Gaffney began his business career at age 22 when he became a partner of John Rutherford. This partnership dissolved in 1867 and Gaffney continued to conduct business alone. Gaffney's business talents and reputation were such that his business grew rapidly; eventually becoming the largest of its kind in Waterbury. In 1888, Gaffney admitted Daniel Cronan into his firm as a partner. This association lasted about a dozen years. In 1898 Gaffney's son, Joseph joined his father in the business, the firm becoming John W. Gaffney & Son.

A tireless worker, during his 55 year career, Gaffney erected a long list of businesses, residences, and other buildings in all parts of Waterbury and Connecticut, including Union City, Terryville, South Norwalk, New London and Litchfield (constructed the Litchfield Court House in 1888). These included thirty-two schools, four churches (built Saint Patrick's Church in the Brooklyn section of Waterbury), two convents, two armories, a hospital, newspaper office buildings, theaters, and the original Southern New England Telephone building.

Gaffney was instrumental in the development of many of the streets in Waterbury. He purchased the land, and erected and sold buildings on Easton Avenue, Park Place, Gaffney Place, and Center Street. As late as 1895, the area around what became Center Street was a tract of unimproved and almost vacant land. By 1897 Gaffney had constructed a brick paved street, with sewer, water, and gas pipes, both sides of which were built up with businesses.

One of the outstanding features of Gaffney's building record was the construction of the Wigwam Reservoir dam which was Waterbury's chief source of water supply. It was one of the largest masonry contracts handled in Connecticut at that time. Construction of the



dam, together with the laying of six of the thirteen miles of pipe line, took two years to complete.

Gaffney, one of Waterbury's most widely known and highly respected citizens, was a devoted member of the Immaculate Conception Church. Cheerful and seemingly never out of sorts he was loved and respected by all who knew him. An able, yet modest man, Gaffney gave much of his ability and knowledge that Waterbury might grow and prosper. With a view toward bettering the city he loved he worked constantly. His remarkable devotion to business and his attention to details made him a successful contractor whose services were ever in demand.

When Gaffney died May 16, 1923 at his home on Gaffney Place, a street on which he lived most of his life, and which was named after him, he left many monuments of his achievements.