

The Immaculate Conception School's Grade Three students embarked on a day-long walking tour of historic Newburyport to enjoy some wonderful weather and their beautiful city.

Led by Newbury native and ICS teacher Suellen Welch, the students began their tour with clipboards and a multi-page questionnaire. Beginning at the corner of Washington and Green Streets, the characteristics of a Federalist home were identified. A visit to Brown Square, with the statue of Henry Lloyd Garrison and the Veteran's Memorial, supported Social Studies curriculum regarding abolition, civil rights, and military service. The students proceeded to City Hall, meeting Mayor Donna Holiday and City Clerk Richard Jones. Occupying City Councilor's desks, original to the founding of Newburyport, students learned more about the Mayor's duties, constituent services, and the City Clerk's responsibilities. They observed the renovated tribute to Newburyport servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice, including IC graduate 1st Lt. Derek Hines, who lost his life in Afghanistan. Students learned that many mayors of the City of Newburyport have been graduates of Immaculate Conception School.

Students walked to the Mall and Frog Pond to discover more about architect Charles Bullfinch and the Superior Courthouse. From there, a private tour of the c. 1720 Dalton House on State Street intrigued the students. Amazing paintings of renowned visitors such as George Washington and a basement bowling alley extending under State Street were surprising discoveries. Across the street at the Newburyport Public Library, the stories of wealthy sea captains, trade routes and note-worthy visitors to the area continued. Many politically significant events throughout Newburyport's history were discussed as students visited the exact locations where they occurred. At nearly every location, the furnishings, paintings, woodwork and antique glass original to the sites were explained to the students.

The Cushing House Museum, with its elaborate fencing, and a stroll further long High Street provided Welch the opportunity to contrast Federalist and Victorian architecture. Historic building preservation and changes over the centuries was discussed.

Commercial fishing vessels, moored for the day, were of great interest to the students as they traveled the Boardwalk along the Merrimack River. Welch's extensive knowledge of the Harbormaster's operations, the Sailors Monument, Coast Guard operations and the history of the river was a great introduction to their next stop. The Monument marking the site of the founding of the US Coast Guard, located behind the Custom's House Maritime Museum, was the site of a leisurely picnic lunch. Students then enjoyed the Museum's extensive tour of ship logs, tools and equipment, paintings, and more maritime and shipbuilding history of Newburyport. Students learned about tax collection and tax evasion in the newly formed United States, including the location of secret tunnels to the waterfront. Throughout the day, Welch supplied a constant commentary on building architecture and construction, shipbuilding and social and political history. Students learned that Newburyport was once one of the four most prosperous cities in America.

Before long, the questions had been answered on those lengthy hand-outs. Joining the throngs of local school children finishing the last days of school, the students of ICS gained a wealth of local history and an appreciation of the historic city they call home.