

McKeon's Farm

Welcome to McKeon's 43 Acres

(Originally 135 Acres when purchased in 1938)

Daniel M. McKeon:

Sometimes known as the "Squire of Ridgebury," Daniel McKeon was probably the best-known resident of Ridgebury during the last half of the 20th Century. The Yale graduate, who operated one of the last working farms in Ridgefield, was a leader in town government, in the Catholic Church, and in local and regional conservation and organic farming movements for more than 60 years.

A native of New York City and son of a family that helped establish St. Patrick's Cathedral, Daniel Manning McKeon was born in 1906.

He graduated from Yale in 1928 and was a stockbroker for many years, with a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, retiring in 1965.

He and Louise Hoguet were married in 1935 in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

In 1938, the McKeon's bought a 135-acre farm on Ridgebury and Old Stagecoach Roads, naming it Argideen after a river in County Cork. The farm was steeped in history, parts of it having been granted by the colony to one of Connecticut's early physicians in the late 1600s, French troops camped there in 1781 and the house, built in 1782 by Revolutionary War veteran Captain Henry Whitney, was once a stagecoach stop and later the home of the one-armed Civil War veteran and selectman Samuel Coe. (The house was moved northwesterly to the corner of Ridgebury and Old Stagecoach Roads in 2009, and was replaced by a new but similar-looking home).

The McKeon's maintained a herd of as many as 45 Brown Swiss dairy cows over the years, and sold unpasteurized milk for many years. The dairy operation, Ridgefield's last, closed in August 2000, causing much sadness among Ridgefielders so accustomed to seeing cows in the fields along Ridgebury and Old Stagecoach Roads.

McKeon was best known locally for his long service in planning and zoning, starting in 1958 when he was appointed a charter member of the new Planning Commission. A year later, he was elected its chairman, and when the Planning and the Zoning Commissions were combined in 1962, McKeon went on to serve 25 more years with the commission, retiring in 1993.

McKeon had been considered a possible Eisenhower appointee as U.S. ambassador to Ireland in 1952.

Like their parents, the McKeon's were closely involved in the Catholic Church. In 1975, the McKeon's flew to Rome to attend the canonization of Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton as the first American saint. Later, they were

instrumental in the establishment of St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Ridgebury, where McKeon served as a trustee and on the parish advisory council. In 1983, he was made a knight of the Order of St. Gregory the Great, a papal honor that was conferred on him at St. Augustine Cathedral in Bridgeport.

Throughout their lives, the McKeon's had a deep interest in history, perhaps inspired by their old farmstead. Dan McKeon was considered an expert on early Ridgebury and was especially interested in the role French soldiers played in the American Revolution. In 1781, French troops under Comte de Rochambeau and Duc de Lauzun camped on the McKeon farm and it's believed that the first Catholic mass ever celebrated in town took place there. For many years, McKeon was a part of an American regiment that portrayed the French troops, and he took part in the re-enactment of the Battle of Yorktown at its 200th anniversary in 1981.

Both he and his wife, who died in 1993, were involved in the preservation of the Keeler Tavern, and in the establishment of historic districts in the village.

A lifelong environmentalist, McKeon was appointed to the Connecticut Conservation Commission in 1950. He also later served on the Fairfield County Soil and Water Conservation Board of Supervisors, and had been active in the organic farming movement starting in 1947.

In the spring of 1971, when a huge outbreak of gypsy moth caterpillars was expected, the selectmen hired a helicopter service to spray the town with insecticide. McKeon led other conservationists in threatening to sue the sprayer, arguing that the spraying would certainly kill useful insects and might also harm people. The sprayer backed out, and the caterpillars eventually died of a natural disease. McKeon died in 2001 at the age of 94.c