

Eight great Irish Americans

We've all heard that the Irish 'built America', but what else did they do? Here we profile some of the most successful Americans with Irish heritage.

John Malone – the biggest landowner in the US (above)

John C. Malone (born March 7, 1941) is an American entrepreneur, landowner and philanthropist. He is the largest individual private landowner in the US, and also owns about €200 million worth of fine houses, castles and properties in Ireland. He admits buying land is a slight addiction.

He started his career at Bell Labs but made his fortune by turning a small Denver cable firm, Tele-Communications Inc, into the biggest cable operator in the States. He sold the business to AT&T for \$59 billion in 1999. He lives a low-key life away from the spotlight. He loves the great outdoors and riding his horses. His ancestors came from Cork. Two brothers emigrated to the US at the time of the Famine. One, his great great grandfather, settled in Pennsylvania and fought in the Civil War.

Edmund McIlhenny – the inventor of Tabasco sauce

Edmund McIlhenny, whose predecessors hailed from Donegal, was a banker in Louisiana in the 1840s. Between 1866 and 1868 he began experimenting with a pepper sauce, inspired by an earlier sauce he had tasted in New Orleans. Using peppers from a family garden he created what was to become the Tabasco brand pepper sauce. In 1870 McIlhenny patented his sauce which he packaged in cork-top two-ounce bottles with diamond logo labels. The Tabasco brand made McIlhenny and his family a vast fortune.

Donal Sullivan – a New York builder on a different scale

Kerryman Donal Sullivan's company Navillus Construction won the bid for the largest contract to build the memorial on the site of the former Twin Towers destroyed on 9/11.

Many Kerry men and Irish men are employed by Sullivan. There were so many men from Kerry working in the World Trade Centre it was nicknamed the 'Kerry Tower'.

Sullivan left Ballinskelligs in South Kerry in the 80s and went to work in construction in New York. Navillus now employs up to 1,000 people.

Chuck Feeney – billionaire philanthropist

Chuck Feeney is one of the most legendary Irish-Americans. The founder of The Atlantic Philanthropies is a hero to many. As Warren Buffett said, "Chuck has set an example. He is my hero and Bill Gates' hero. He should be everybody's hero." Feeney made his fortune as the co-founder of the Duty Free Shoppers Group. He started giving it away. It is estimated he gave away \$8 billion to good causes. [Read more](#) about this legend.

By the end of 2016, Atlantic Philanthropies had donated \$1.3 billion to educational, human rights and other projects in Ireland. Chuck Feeney's ancestors hailed from County Fermanagh.

Henry Ford – car maker and controversial industrialist

Born on July 30, 1863, in Michigan, Henry Ford created the Ford Model T car in 1908. He went on to develop the assembly line mode of production, which revolutionised many industries.

Henry Ford's father was born in Ballinscarthy, West Cork and went to America as a 21-year-old farmer and carpenter in 1847.

Dan Rooney – Ambassador and American football magnate

Dan Rooney is the former US Ambassador to Ireland. He served from 2009 – 2012. He is chairman of the Pittsburgh Steelers American football team, which was founded by his father, Art. He has led an interesting and [very colourful life](#) but remains one of the most influential Irish Americans of all time.

His grandfather, also called Dan Rooney, was born in Newry, County Down.

Don Keough – Coca-Cola

Don Keough went to work for Coca-Cola in 1950. He retired as president, chief operating officer and a director of the company in 1993. He was a ‘champion of Ireland’ who promoted Irish studies and encouraged American firms to invest in Ireland. In March 2013, he received the Presidential Distinguished Service Award (honouring members of the Irish diaspora). He died, aged 88 in 2015.

His great-grandfather, Michael Keough emigrated from Co. Wexford in the 1840s.

Michael Flatley – Lord of the Rings

Michael Flatley was born to Irish parents, Michael and Eilish, on the South Side of Chicago in 1958. He began dancing lessons at age eleven and at age 17 was the first American to win a World Irish Dance title at the World Irish Dance Championships. He became famous (and very wealthy) for dance shows including Riverdance, Lord of the Dance, Feet of Flames and Celtic Tiger.