

## An Agnostic View of the Historiography of the Irish-Americans

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[See table of contents](#)

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# CRITIQUE

## An Agnostic View of the Historiography of the Irish-Americans

D.H. Akenson

### I

IN HISTORY, AS IN MATHEMATICS, elegance is an attribute that distinguishes a humdrum exposition from one of real excellence. The presence of this quality is contingent upon the veracity of the proof or exposition being presented, but mere accuracy is not enough to produce real elegance. In the field of American social history there has developed, through the individual works of several score, indeed hundreds, of scholars, a generally agreed upon explanation of the behaviour of the Irish in America. When viewed as a synthesis of their work, this accepted explanation seems elegant indeed.<sup>1</sup>

The question of how sound this explanation actually is should be of concern to historians of labour in North America, for the Irish have comprised a significant proportion of the working class of Canada and of the United States ever since the onset of industrialization. It makes a great deal of difference to the historian's view of the behaviour of Irish persons in urban working-class communities if the urban Irish workers were merely an incidental subset of the entire Irish ethnic population or if, instead, being an Irish person in North America meant that one was urbanized, virtually automatically. In all fields of

<sup>1</sup> The agreed upon explanation which follows in the text is derived from my reading of the work of the 50-plus authors of general works on the Irish as set forth in *The Irish-American Experience. A Guide to the Literature* by Seamus P. Metress (Washington 1981), 1-5, and of most (but certainly not all) of the more specialized studies done in the last 40 years. In choosing to quote from specific works of synthesis in the text which follows, I am using those volumes which are either best known and widely read, or most respected in the scholarly community. This is not to say that the authors of those syncretical works always have read accurately the specialized studies on which their general expositions are based, but that is irrelevant: the generally agreed on explanation has become an historiographic reality in itself.

history the matters of perspective and context are crucial, and before discussing the Irish as a strand in the fabric of the American working class in the nineteenth century it makes sense to discover whether, from the perspective of their own ethnic culture, the urban Irish constituted a social norm or actually were deviates from that norm. Further, labour historians can profit from some awareness of the question of religious identity among persons of Irish ethnicity. The nature of Irish behaviour in early labour collectivities will be better understood if one has some idea whether "Irish" was a simple equation for "Catholic" or whether there was a significant sectarian cleavage within the Irish ethnic group that potentially inhibited a corporate identity among the Irish. In arguing below that the accepted interpretation of the Irish in the United States is wrong, I am not denigrating the scores of relevant discussions of the Irish in the rise of American labour, but am suggesting that the context within which those discussions must be read is a radically different one than is usually adopted.

"The history of the Irish in America is founded on a paradox. The Irish were a rural people in Ireland and became a city people in the United States."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in an often-quoted summation of the Irish-American experience, does William V. Shannon pose what has been taken as the central problem of Irish-American social history: why did they become an urban people? Lawrence McCaffrey observed in a lapidary phrase, that the Irish "had the painful and dubious distinction of pioneering the American urban ghetto. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Implicit in most general discussions of the Irish-Americans as an urban ethnic group is the notion that in the United States there was a two-fold deviation in their behaviour from certain norms. These were, first, that in becoming a city people in America they veered sharply from their rural background in the old country, and second, that they deviated from the norm set by contemporaneous immigrants to the United States from other countries in that the Irish had a much higher propensity to settle in cities than did other ethnic groups.

In explanation of this surprising urban orientation on the part of the American Irish, several related points are generally accepted by historians. Each of these points reinforces the other, and together they form a virtually seamless explanatory structure. For convenience, I am enumerating each fact as a distinct entity, but the reader should not lose sight of the fact that they dovetail, the one into the other, like a series of mortise and tenon joints. First, it is generally accepted that the Irish landed in America so broke that they could not immediately leave the Atlantic seaboard cities and take land in the interior. "Most of them had arrived penniless and had been 'immobilized' in the port where they landed,"<sup>4</sup> is a summation of the experience of the Boston Irish and

<sup>2</sup> William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York 1963), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington 1976), 62.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Witke, *The Irish in America* (New York 1956), 26-7. The importance to the synthesizing historians of Oscar Handlin's *Boston's Immigrants. A Study in Accultura-*

it is frequently generalized to describe the situation throughout the New England and middle Atlantic seaboard. The Irish immigrants were not permanently impoverished, however, and once they had accumulated cash they could have left the cities and moved to farms. Here a second explanatory tenet enters:

Lack of skills was far more important than a shortage of funds in determining the Irish-American decision to become city dwellers. Because manorialism and serfdom had not encouraged agrarian skills or knowledge, Irish peasants were among the most inefficient farmers in Europe and were not equipped for rural life in America.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, even when they had money in hand, the Irish in America were too technologically backward to farm. Third, it is generally believed that even had they possessed the agricultural skills, the Irish would not have chosen to farm, because the famine had so seared them that they would not go on the land again. "The Irish rejected the land for the land rejected them," was William V. Shannon's epigrammatic observation.<sup>6</sup> Another popularizer has put it this way:

To the Irishman, the land had become a symbol of oppression; for him, farming did not connote the Jeffersonian image of the noble yeoman enjoying abundance, independence, and contentment. Rather, it meant poverty, long, arduous, unrewarding labor, dependence on an alien master and, possible starvation and eviction.<sup>7</sup>

But what about those migrants who came either before, or well after, the Great Famine? They, in common with the famine migrants, shared a characteristic that is the fourth component of the accepted explanation of Irish behaviour in the new world. They were culturally unadapted to rural American social life: "The Irish temperament, unfitted for lonely life, shuddered at the prospect of a wilderness clearing without Irish fellowship."<sup>8</sup> Several general historians either quote or paraphrase a letter by an Irish immigrant who had done well in Missouri, but who looked back regretfully to the old days in Ireland, where after work:

I could then go to a fair, or a wake, or a dance, and I could spend the winter nights in a neighbour's house cracking the jokes by the turf fire. If I had there but a sore head I would have a neighbour within every hundred yards of me that would run to see me. But here everyone can get so much land, and generally has so much, that they calls them neighbours that lives two or three miles off — och! the sorra take such neighbours, I would say. And then would sit down and cry and curse him that made me leave home.<sup>9</sup>

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tion (Cambridge 1941) and to a lesser extent, of Stephan Thernstrom's *Poverty and Progress* (Cambridge 1964) is so obvious as not to require comment, except to note that one cannot fairly hold against either author the fact that their findings often have been over-generalized by later synthesizers. Each author made the limits of his data clear.

<sup>5</sup> McCaffrey, *Irish Diaspora*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Shannon, *The American Irish*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> John B. Duff, *The Irish in the United States* (Belmont, California 1971), 16.

<sup>8</sup> George Potter, *To the Golden Door. The Story of the Irish in Ireland and America* (Boston 1960), 171.

<sup>9</sup> This letter, taken from the *Belfast News-Letter* of 17 April 1821 was first printed in

In practical terms this need for close and compatible neighbours meant that the Irish-Americans preferred cities. Even those who by virtue of superior skills or financial acumen could live anywhere chose to live in cities. And, "when the Irish finally did begin to move west, most of them preferred places like Chicago, St. Louis, St. Paul, and San Francisco to farms."<sup>10</sup>

These, then, are the four main components of the agreed on explanation of why the Irish-Americans became city people. The components dovetail nicely one with another. Of course there are bits of scholarly filigree that cross-tie the main elements,<sup>11</sup> but in its four-square simplicity, the basic agreed on explanation covers the main question in a fashion so clean, clear, and simple as to be truly elegant.

Like any edifice, this structure requires certain invisible foundations, and there is nothing wrong with that, provided that the foundations are compatible with the structure which rests on them. In this instance, these, too, are four-fold. Implicitly, all recent synthesizers agree that the years from the famine to roughly 1920 form the crucial period in Irish-American history. Second, it is assumed that after mid-nineteenth century, Irish-Protestant migration to the United States was virtually non-existent. Third, to the extent that Protestant migration is noteworthy, it is assumed that it was the Ulster-Scots (the "Scotch-Irish") who prevailed, that is, people of Presbyterian origins in Ulster whose major migration is believed to have been completed before the nineteenth century began. And, fourth, it is tacitly concluded from the three preceding assumptions, that one can justifiably limit the term "Irish-Americans" to persons of the Roman Catholic faith. Since these four assumptions are fully compatible with the agreed on explanation of Irish-American behaviour, one is predisposed to accept them as being both reasonable and apposite.

William Forbes Adams' monograph *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine* (New Haven 1932), and is quoted directly in Witke (62), Duff (16), and Shannon (27). In each of the last three instances, it is employed to help to explain the post-famine behaviour of the Irish Catholic migrants to America, a usage which loses some of its force when one considers that the letter was written a full quarter century before the famine and was almost certainly written by a Protestant. (At that time, the *News-Letter* was a rabidly anti-Catholic paper, and its columns were not generally open to Roman Catholics.) Rather more apposite, would be the very revealing book of poems by a Kansas priest who had been a curate in Wicklow: Thomas Butler, *The Irish on the Prairies and Other Poems* (New York 1874).

<sup>10</sup> McCaffrey, *Irish Diaspora*, 63.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the ingenious attempt to tie together Catholicism, Gallic linguistic patterns, and Irish-American economic behaviour by Kerby A. Miller, Bruce Boling and David N. Doyle, "Emigrants and Exiles: Irish Cultures and Irish Emigration to North America, 1790-1922," *Irish Historical Studies*, 22 (September 1980), 97-125.

## II

WHAT, THEN, IS THE PROBLEM: why am I an agnostic concerning the generally accepted view of the Irish in America? Let me approach that question in stages and, at first, indirectly. As an initial step, I suggest that American historians overcome their fear of the forty-ninth parallel and their inherent provincialism and briefly consider a case from Canadian history.

Until recently it was believed that the Irish in Canada had followed the same pattern of urbanization that is posited for the Irish in the United States and that the reasons for their becoming city people were similar, indeed nearly identical. Granted, there is much less scholarly work on the Irish in Canada than in the United States (which is hardly surprising, as Canada has fewer historians), and also granted, it was conceded that there was a goodly number of Protestants among the Canadian Irish, but basically the pattern of urbanization and its accompanying explanations were the same as those which I have described for the United States.

Then, recently, two separate studies looked at the primary data and suddenly the entire house of cards came tumbling down. The first, done by Professors A. Gordon Darroch and Michael D. Ornstein of York University, used the 1871 census to investigate occupational stratification and ethnicity. The 1871 census of Canada is an especially useful one, for it included, for the first time in Canadian official records, an indication for every person not only of their place of birth, but of their family background: that is, what their ethnicity was. Darroch and Ornstein took a very large random sample from this census — 10,000 heads of households — and cross-tabulated ethnicity with several variables. The surprising discovery as far as the Irish were concerned is that they, as was the case for the members of every other major Canadian ethnic group, were more likely to be farmers than anything else, and this held both for Catholics and Protestants. Nationally, 53.8 per cent of the Canadian sample consisted of farmers. The farming figures for persons of Irish ethnicity was 58.3 per cent for the Protestants and 44.3 per cent for the Catholics. Thus, the belief that the Irish mostly settled into an urban proletariat was destroyed. Moreover, concerning those Irish Catholics who settled into urban occupations (the group most comparable to the "Irish Americans" as usually defined), the proportion of individuals in bourgeois occupations, in the professions, and in artisanal work was virtually identical to that of the total labour force. Granted, there inevitably were lumps of disadvantaged Irish in several cities, but taking the national pattern into account, these people were no bigger a proportion of the Irish ethnic group than they were of most other groups. The Irish in Canada, both Catholic and Protestant, were most apt to be farmers, and overall, were not occupationally disadvantaged.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A. Gordon Darroch and Michael D. Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Occupational Structure in Canada in 1871: the Vertical Mosaic in Historical Perspective," *Canadian Histori-*

The second study, my own on the Irish in Ontario, showed that whether one considers all individuals born in Ireland, all persons of Irish ethnicity, or separate Catholic and Protestant sub-groups, the picture is the same: that they settled in the countryside. For example, in 1851, 78.9 per cent of the Irish-born persons living in Ontario (that is, Irish immigrants) lived in rural areas. In 1861 the percentage was 74.4 per cent. Further, if one considers all persons of Irish ethnic background (something which becomes possible with the 1871 census), one finds that 66.3 per cent of the Irish-descended Catholics and 83.2 per cent of the Irish-descended Protestants were living in rural areas. Obviously, the difference between the Catholics and Protestants warrants investigation, but the key point is that *neither* group was an urban one. Both Protestants and Catholics were quite able to stand the loneliness and isolation of pioneering life and both were able to meet the technological requirements of frontier farming.<sup>13</sup>

I am not suggesting here that the reader accept the Canadian and the American cases as being perfectly comparable. There are significant differences between the United States and Canada cohorts, but instead of throwing up roadblocks, let me plead that social historians of the United States consider the possibility that perhaps, just perhaps, the Canadian case is sufficiently relevant to raise at least two questions concerning their elegant edifice of explanation about Irish-Americans. The first of these is: does not the Canadian data make one question the validity of the cultural assumptions that the Irish-Americans were technologically unable to adapt to frontier farming and incapable of bearing the loneliness of pioneering? And, second, and much more important: is that data base concerning the Irish in America really trustworthy? Conceivably, the task of explaining why the Irish in America became a city people is not the right one at all.

### III

LET US LOOK AT THE PRIMARY data and see what it does *not* reveal.

1. Initially, it is crucial to recognize the distinction between migrant groups and ethnic groups. The generation which was born in Ireland and which migrated to the United States is usually denominated "first generation Ameri-

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*cal Review*, 61 (September 1980), 305-33. The one exception to the general pattern of Irish Catholics being farmers was Nova Scotia, because of the existence of a large group of urban Catholics in Halifax.

<sup>13</sup> Donald H. Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?" *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 2 (1982), 204-56. This has been expanded into a forthcoming book-length study (McGill-Queens University Press).

can" by U.S. social scientists.<sup>14</sup> This group, distinguished by its foreign birth, is the foundation layer of the ethnic group. Their children, born in America, become the "second generation,"<sup>15</sup> their grandchildren the "third," and so on. Ultimately, the number of people with a sense of ethnic identity will be several times the original foreign-born cohort. Of course the sense of ethnicity diminishes as the old country recedes, generation by generation, but ethnicity is a perduring cultural characteristic and it has empirically demonstrable characteristics — in such things as religion, voting patterns, and family structures — and these characteristics often operate even after a person has consciously stopped feeling Irish, Italian, Swedish, or whatever.

With this as background, note this fact: there exists *no* body of basic demographic data on the Irish (or any other group) as an ethnic group in the United States. None. Until 1969-70 none of the decennial censuses of the United States asked a question concerning the ethnicity of the individuals whom they were enumerating, and the census is the only potential source of such data. Granted, in the late 1920s the American Council of Learned Societies tried to rework the 1790 census data to give an indication of ethnicity at the end of the colonial period, but this effort failed miserably.<sup>16</sup> No further comprehensive attempt at dealing with ethnicity was made until 1969-70, when the census bureau asked an ethnicity question. Unhappily, the collection of the data was bungled and no firm conclusions came from it.<sup>17</sup> In 1980 the ethnicity question was again asked and one hopes that this time it will be processed competently.<sup>18</sup> But even if the census bureau is successful, we will have information on the Irish ethnic cohort only for 1980, a date somewhat too recent to

<sup>14</sup> This terminology, stemming as it does from American melting-pot ideology is somewhat misleading, for it implicitly minimizes the degree of cultural transfer and of resistance to assimilation by the foreign-born, by simply re-defining the foreign-born as "American."

<sup>15</sup> That certain historians have labelled as "second generation" not only the American-born children of the foreign-born, but also children who were very young when the immigrants arrived in the United States and thus were educated almost entirely in the States, confuses matters somewhat. This labelling further diminishes the apparent "foreignness" of the foreign-born children so denominated, and implies a greater degree of subsumation by the dominant American culture than usually is justified.

<sup>16</sup> The methodology of the ACLS re-study of the 1790 census is treated in detail in Donald H. Akenson, "Why the Accepted Estimates of the Ethnicity of the American People, 1790, are Unacceptable," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, 41 (1984), 102-19.

<sup>17</sup> The problem was that persons returning more than one ethnic origin were lumped into an "other" category which embraced roughly half the population! See Charles A. Price, "Methods of Estimating the Size of Groups," in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge 1980), 1033-4.

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, it appears that the mistake of 1970 was repeated for the 1980 census. Individuals were again allowed to list multiple ancestries, rather than a single dominant one, so that 48 per cent listed two or more. *New York Times*, 5 June 1983.



help our understanding of a process of migration and adaptation to the new world that was primarily a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

2. *Never* have the United States census authorities collected information on the religious affiliation of specific individuals. The census bureau once, in 1957, asked a religion question of a voluntary sample group, but this met with so much opposition that the attempt never was repeated.<sup>19</sup> This refusal to deal with religious persuasion except by querying the various denominations for their alleged total number of adherents, seems so perverse to non-American historians as to be almost pathological. But whatever the reasons for this refusal to enumerate individuals by religion,<sup>20</sup> it means that we cannot demonstrate that, as Lawrence McCaffrey has stated, Catholicism is "the banner of Irishness."<sup>21</sup> The equation of Irish-American with Irish-Catholic-American may indeed be accurate, but there are no comprehensive data that actually establish this point.

3. Given that there are no comprehensive data either on Irish ethnicity or upon the religious persuasion of individuals of Irish background in the United States, it follows *mutatis mutandis* that there are no cross-tabulations extant which relate either ethnicity or religious persuasion of persons of Irish background to such fundamental characteristics as their place of residence and occupation. Granted, there are several, indeed dozens, of valuable studies of the Irish in various cities of America, but in none of them is the matter of ethnicity and of religion defined for the entire population of the town or city with which the authors deal and for none of them is it established where in the total content of the Irish in America their study-group fits. This is not the authors' fault; the census data are lacking. But, unfortunately, because of the lack of data defining the entire Irish profile ethnically and religiously, historians have studied the sub-groups on which data come most easily to hand — Catholics in large cities — and have given the impression that the characteristics of these easily-researched Irish were universal in America.

4. But, surely, there must be some pieces of comprehensive data about the Irish. There are. Beginning with the 1850 census of the United States, we know, at decennial intervals, the birthplace of everyone in the population.<sup>22</sup> This is useful indeed, as long as one remembers three points: first, that the data

<sup>19</sup> Price in Thernstrom, ed., *American Ethnic Groups*, 1040.

<sup>20</sup> For a fascinating discussion of this fear of collecting religious data, and especially of the trouble which arose when it was proposed to include religion on the 1960 census, see William Petersen, "Religious Statistics in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1 (1965), 165-78. This article also discusses the census bureau's suppression (!) of the data it had collected in the 1957 voluntary-sample study.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence J. McCaffrey, "A Profile of Irish America," in David N. Doyle and Owen D. Edwards, eds., *America and Ireland, 1776-1976. The American Identity and the Irish Connection* (Westport, CT 1980), 82.

<sup>22</sup> A very useful version of that census was compiled by J.D.B. Debow, superintendent of the U.S. census, *A Statistical View of the United States . . .* (Washington, DC 1854).

on the foreign-born in general, and on the Irish in particular, are information on immigrants, not on the bulk of the ethnic group; second, that the data on the Irish include both Catholics and Protestants, with no effort having been made to distinguish the respective proportions of each denomination; and, third, that the earliest data we have on the Irish reflect the situation after the extraordinary migration induced by the Great Famine had been several years in full spate. In other words, we have no demographic base line which allows us to determine what the character and extent of Irish migration to the United States were before the famine. This is especially crippling, because, although it is quite clear that there was a heavy Irish migration to the United States before the famine, the U.S. immigration statistics before 1855 are not trustworthy. (On this point see below, section IV [3].)

Manifestly, the material available on the number of Irish-born persons among the American population from 1850 onwards is much better than no information at all, but it is not until 1860 that one finds even rudimentary cross-tabulation of the data on Irish-born persons with residence in various cities and not until the 1870 census are data on occupation and on place of birth cross-tabulated. As will be discussed later (section IV [1]) these data on the Irish born immigrants come so late in the collective history of the entire Irish ethnic group in the United States that their value is severely limited.

5. In 1870 the census authorities asked individuals whether or not they had foreign-born parents, but the information was elicited only in the form of a yes-or-no answer, not what country the parents were from. The next census, that of 1880, asked the specific origin of those natives of the United States who had foreign-born parents and cross-tabulated this material in a refreshingly useful fashion. This quasi-ethnicity item was as close as the census bureau ever came in the last century to dealing with ethnicity in the true sense. As one authoritative study conducted in the early 1920s lamented, "The foreign stock can be traced back only one generation. . . . Beyond this the population must, in most cases, be treated as an undifferentiated body of 'native stock.'"<sup>23</sup>

By now it should be apparent why the four assumptions that underlie the agreed upon explanation of the Irish in America — that the really important migration began with the Great Famine, that the Protestants played no significant part in the flow after mid-century, that the only significant band of Irish Protestant migration to the United States were Ulster Presbyterians who crossed the Atlantic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and therefore, that Irish-American is a synonym for Irish-Catholic-American — have been kept discreetly implicit. There is an absence of systematic demographic data on all of these points.

<sup>23</sup> Niles Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children. A Study based on Census Statistics relative to the Foreign born and the Native Whites of the Foreign or Mixed Parentage* (Washington, DC 1927), 2.

## IV

THE PRECEDING POINTS OF NECESSITY have been *negative ones*. Now let us take up a more positive outlook and thereby begin to escape from the evidentiary vacuum that underlies almost all general discussions of the Irish in the United States. The key is to adopt a set of new perspectives.

1. First, and easiest to do, historians would do well to agree that at whatever moment in time we are discussing the Irish, our ideal is to deal with them as an ethnic group, not merely as a single generation of immigrants. This means that if our data are limited to only one or two generations, we will make it clear to the reader that there are other generations, third or fourth, which also are part of the Irish ethnic cohort. If we must acknowledge that we have reliable and conclusive data on, for example, only the immigrant generation in 1870 and that we know virtually nothing about the second, third, and fourth generations who comprised the majority of the ethnic group, then so be it. Admitting what we do not know is the first step in getting the story right.

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 Irish Immigration, 1820-1900

Decennial Period	Number
1820-30	54,338
1831-40	207,381
1841-50	780,719
1851-60	914,119
1861-70	435,778
1871-80	436,871
1881-90	655,482
1891-1900	388,416

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2. Second, one must define the time period that is most crucial in the history of the Irish in America and concentrate on that period as a first priority. Because demographic data became more and more extensive and accurate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is tempting to concentrate on those years; but merely because research is easiest in that period, does not mean that those were the crucial years.

In point of fact, much of the Irish migration to the United States occurred well before the Great Famine. If one accepts for a moment the U.S. immigration records for the first half of the nineteenth century (as will be discussed later, they are, if anything, a serious underestimate of actual early Irish migration to the United States), then it is clear that the Irish migration has to be studied not, as in the usual case beginning with the Great Famine, but at minimum, starting in the early 1830s.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, despite the absence of records before 1820, it may fairly be suggested that the end of the Napoleonic Wars is the proper time to begin focusing on the Irish in the United States. That census data are absent for the period is irrelevant; the Irish were there, even if the census takers were not.

This pre-famine group formed the foundation of the Irish ethnic cohort in the United States, and, if even a two-fold multiplier was in effect (a very conservative estimate) for each Irish migrant of, say, 1830, one can expect there to have been two second-generation offspring in 1850-60 and four third-generation descendants in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But recall that until 1880 no record was kept of the "Irishness" of the offspring of Irish migrants and that the U.S. officials did not in the nineteenth century ever record the ethnicity of the grandchildren of immigrants. Thus, from mid-century onward, there was a large, unrecorded, and demographically invisible Irish ethnic population which traced its roots in North America to the pre-famine, not the post-famine period.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Derived from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service *Annual Report, 1975*, as found in Patrick J. Blessing, "Irish," in Thernstrom, ed., *American Ethnic Groups*, 528.

<sup>25</sup> The example in the text is simplified for expository purposes. If one wished to try to calculate the "ethnic multiplier" for the first and second generation, one can try to relate these two facts: in 1880 there were 1,854,571 persons in the United States who had been born in Ireland; and in the same year, 4,529,523 persons in the U.S. reported having (either dead or alive) an Irish-born father and 4,448,421 having an Irish-born mother. See *Compendium of the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) compiled pursuant to an Act of Congress approved August 7, 1882* (Washington 1883), Vol. 1, 485, and Vol. 2, 1407-8. Actually, it is reasonable to suggest that the multiplier was higher for those who arrived earlier in the nineteenth century than for those who arrived later. It has been shown that the number of children under five years of age per 1,000 persons (a crude indicator of family size) dropped from 976 in 1810 for the entire U.S. white population to 835 in 1840 and then declined regularly during the nineteenth century, ending at 541 in 1900. (The figure for 1930, to give a twentieth century example, was 386.) See Yasukichi Yasuba, *Birth Rates of the White Population in the United States, 1800-1860* (Baltimore 1962), 26. Further, Yasuba's study suggests that fertility rates were higher in places where new land was easily available and lower where it was not. Which is to say that, if the Irish followed the national pattern, those who arrived earlier and were more apt to settle into pioneer agriculture were more apt to have larger

If the end of the Napoleonic Wars is the proper time to begin the history of the Irish in the United States, when does one stop? The history of the group is fascinating and well worth taking right up to the present day, but a first priority should be to deal with the group up to the point when its major components were set. There are several logical and practical possibilities. One is to stop at the period in which the total absolute number of Irish-born in the United States reached a plateau, 1870-90.<sup>26</sup>

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### Total Irish Born in the United States

1850	961,719
1860	1,611,304
1870	1,855,827
1880	1,854,571
1890	1,871,509
1900	1,615,459

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After 1890 the number of the Irish born in the United States fell rapidly, which is to say that the foreign-born component of the Irish ethnic population was dropping. From the time of the 1870-90 plateau onwards, one is dealing with an ethnic group whose characteristics are less and less influenced by infusions of Irish culture from the homeland and increasingly determined by the group's experience within American society.

Another logical cut-off point would be 1860, for it was in that year that the Irish-born proportion of the United States population reached its peak.<sup>27</sup> This *terminus ad quam* coincides with the onset of a decrease in the decennial increment in the Irish-born population.<sup>28</sup>

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families and thus to be a disproportionately larger portion of the ethnic group than their immigrant numbers would suggest (see Yasuba, 186-7).

<sup>26</sup> Compiled from: DeBow, 117, *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington, DC 1864), Vol. I, xxix; *The Population of the United States . . . 1870* (Washington, DC 1872), Vol. I, 340; *Compendium of the Tenth Census . . .*, Vol. I, 485; *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, DC 1903), Vol. I, xix.

<sup>27</sup> Arnold Schrier, "Ireland and the American Emigration, 1850-1900," Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1956, 231.

<sup>28</sup> See census rate in the text, above. The drop in the rate of decennial increase was from 67.5 per cent for the decade 1850-60, to 5.2 per cent for the decade 1860-70.

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Year	Irish Born %
1850	4.15%
1860	5.12%
1870	4.81%
1880	3.70%
1890	2.80%
1900	2.13%

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By stretching a point, one could argue that the end of the famine migration marked the culmination of the crucial phase in Irish migration to the United States, for after the 1850 census, each succeeding enumeration showed that the Irish-born were a declining proportion of the foreign-born population of the United States.<sup>29</sup> And, considered as a proportion of the total immigration to the United States, the famine generation was the end, not the beginning, of a trend:<sup>30</sup>

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Year	Irish-born as % of Foreign-born
1850	42.8%
1860	38.9%
1870	33.3%
1880	27.8%
1890	20.2%
1900	15.6%

Year	Irish as % of Total Arrivals
1820-30	35.8%
1831-40	34.6%
1841-50	45.6%
1851-60	35.2%
1861-70	18.8%
1871-80	15.5%
1881-90	12.5%
1891-1900	10.5%

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<sup>29</sup> Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children*, 79; Schrier, "Ireland and American Emigration," 231.

<sup>30</sup> Taken from U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service *Annual Report, 1975*, as found in Patrick J. Blessing, "Irish," in Thernstrom, ed., *American Ethnic Groups* 528.

The substantive point behind my mention of these various possible stopping points is that one must focus much earlier than is usually done if one is to capture the formative stages of the Irish-American polity. In practice, the two generations spanning the period from the end of the Napoleonic wars to roughly the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century were the crucial ones for the Irish-Americans. In these years the immigrants and their children formed the base population from which the multi-generational ethnic group later was formed. This several-generation group as it evolved in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries deserves much more attention than it has received; but a first priority must be to focus on the pivotal years, roughly 1816-75, for unless the foundation group is accurately defined, the evolution of later generations cannot be measured.

A fortunate side effect of concentrating on the years before 1880 is that it helps scholars to define more precisely one aspect of the "two-fold deviation" of the Irish from the American norm, in this case the imputed tendency of the Irish immigrants to settle less often into rural life than did immigrants from other groups. There is no question whatsoever that in the twenty or thirty years after the Great Famine the Irish immigrants were different from the rest. For example, the 1870 census indicates that, considered as a percentage of foreign-born persons who held jobs, the proportion in agriculture was as follows:<sup>31</sup>

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Immigrant Group	Percent in Agricultural Employment
Entire foreign-born population	22.9%
Irish	14.6%
English and Welsh (combined)	25.6%
Germans	26.8%
Scandinavians	46.0%
Italians	14.3%

---

The Irish immigrants and those from Germany, Scandinavia, and Great Britain (often lumped together in American ethnic history as the "old immigrants") were different indeed from the Irish. But during the 1880s the source of immigrants to the United States began to shift towards Italy, Russia, and Austro-Hungary, a change which accelerated in the last decade of the nineteenth century until, finally in the early twentieth century, the "new immi-

<sup>31</sup> Computed from *The Population of the United States . . . 1870*, Vol. I, 704-5.

grants" eclipsed in number the old.<sup>32</sup> Significantly, the Irish immigrants of the later period did not deviate much from the norms set by the "new immigrant" wave. In fact, save for the Bohemian-Moravian group with its high commitment to farming as an occupation, the Irish were more apt than most of the new immigrants to farm. A study of the foreign-born white male population who were ten years of age or above in that year (meaning that in the median case they had entered the United States in the year 1900), showed the following percentages as engaged in agriculture.<sup>33</sup>

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Immigrant Group	Percent in Agricultural Employment
Irish	13.5%
Russian	4.1%
Bohemian-Moravian	77.6%
Italian	0.9%
Polish	14.1%
Slovak	2.5%
Yiddish	0.6%

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Therefore any discussion of the Irish as a unique band of immigrants should centre on the migrants who came before the 1880s. Thereafter, the Irish migrants behaved in occupation (and residency)<sup>34</sup> much like other immigrants, and their behaviour in matters of choice of occupation and choice of residence can be explained by factors common to all "new immigrant" groups. It is only in the era of the "old immigration" that one is justified in determining the Irish as ethnic deviants, and thus it is in that era that one should search for those cultural and economic determinants which made the Irish an unusual people in the new world.

3. Third, paradoxically, one will break out of the evidentiary impasse concerning the Irish in the United States only by abandoning the United States as one's sole focus of attention and by adopting a North American perspective. There are several reasons for this, each one compelling, but the most important is that Canadian government sources provide data relevant to the Irish in the

<sup>32</sup> See Table 2-1, in David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants* (New York 1971), 53.

<sup>33</sup> Carpenter, Table 130, *Immigrants and Their Children*, 286. On the likely median age of arrival, see 38, n. 12.

<sup>34</sup> The residency question is discussed at great length in Carpenter, *passim*.



United States that is not available from American sources.<sup>35</sup> In particular, Canadian data are necessary if one is to escape from the vast dark area of Irish-American history, from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until the census of 1850.<sup>36</sup>

Part of the American problem is that, until 1855, U.S. immigration statistics are much less help than one would expect. The immigration act of 1819, effective in 1820, required that all ships bringing migrants to the United States should prepare passenger lists or manifests giving the sex, age, occupation, and the "country to which they severally belong," of all of their passengers. The data thereby collected suffered by virtue of incomplete enforcement of the laws (and, thus, undercounting) and by an ambiguity in the definition of nativity: it was not made clear whether the country to which someone belonged meant their country of birth, of citizenship, or of last long-term residence. These matters were corrected by the immigration act of 1855, but that is too late to throw light on the crucial dark ages of the Irish migration into America.<sup>37</sup>

But even if the pre-1850 U.S. immigration data had been trustworthy, one still would need to adopt a wider, North American perspective. Why? Because before the mid-1840s, when changes in the navigation laws removed the price advantage of sailing to St. John's, Newfoundland, Saint John, New Brunswick, or to Quebec City, the cheapest way to get to the United States was by way of Canada. Hence, even had they been accurate, U.S. port-arrival data would seriously have underestimated the actual number of Irish-born persons who eventually fetched up in the States. One mid-nineteenth-century authority estimated that in the 1820s (when most migrants from the British Isles to Canada were Irish), 67,993 immigrants therefrom came to the United States through Canada and that in the 1830s the number was 199,130 (again, at a time when most migrants from the British Isles to Canada were Irish).<sup>38</sup> This same authority estimated that U.S. immigration totals should have been increased by

<sup>35</sup> My comments here are intended for American historians. Similar remarks on the utility and superior quality of the Canadian census data have been directed towards historians of the British Isles by C.J. Houston and W.J. Smyth, "The Irish Abroad: Better Questions through a Better Source, the Canadian Census," *Irish Geography*, 13 (1980), 1-19.

<sup>36</sup> For convenience, I am using modern terminology, referring to Canada and not to British North America, to Ontario, rather than Upper Canada, and so on.

<sup>37</sup> E.P. Hutchinson, "Notes on Immigration Statistics of the United States," *American Statistical Association Journal*, 53 (December 1958), 968-79. I am here leaving aside entirely the problem involved with the counterflow from the United States to various foreign countries. Net migration data are what one requires, but in the absence of records on alien departures from the U.S. there is no way of measuring net immigration before 1908. Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Estimate found in J.D.B. DeBow, *The Industrial Resources Statistics etc. of the United States* (New York 1854), Vol. 3, 396 and 424, cited in Hutchinson, "Notes on Immigration Statistics," 975.

50 per cent to allow for arrivals from Canada. A rather more conservative estimate was made in the early 1870s and suggested that the number of foreign-born persons coming to the United States via Canada was as follows:<sup>39</sup>

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1815-20	12,157
1820-30	26,524
1830-40	56,364
1840-50	90,718

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Given that from 1825 onwards (when data become available) the Irish migrants comprised considerably more than half of the migrants from the British Isles to Canada,<sup>40</sup> it is highly likely that most of the persons in the above estimate were Irish-born.<sup>41</sup>

Were these individuals not recorded in U.S. immigration statistics? No. Efforts at recording land-border crossings into the United States began, and then fitfully, only in 1853 and were completely abandoned during the American civil war. The practice was reintroduced in 1865, but abandoned as being unsatisfactory and without a legal basis in 1885. The counting of migrants from Canada and Mexico to the United States did not begin again until the fiscal year 1908.<sup>42</sup> An indication of the data thus lost is found in a study showing that for the years 1879-1885, the very incompletely recorded immigration from Canada and Mexico together totalled more than one-seventh (almost 14.6 per cent) of all recorded immigration into the United States (99.4 per cent of this Canadian and Mexican total was Canadian). And since the Irish were a larger proportion of the immigrant population in Canada than they were in the U.S.,<sup>43</sup> then one

<sup>39</sup> Edward Jarvis, "Immigration," *Atlantic Monthly*, 29 (April 1872), 456, quoted in Hutchinson, "Notes on Immigration Statistics," 976.

<sup>40</sup> Compare Table 1 and 2 in Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?" Migration from non-British Isles sources to Canada was proportionately so small in the 1815-50 period as not to affect the conclusion that almost certainly most of the foreign-born cross-border migrants to the U.S. were Irish-born.

<sup>41</sup> I am here avoiding the virtually insolvable question of how great was the counter-flow of British Isles-born persons who shipped to the U.S. and came from thence to Canada. Undoubtedly, it was much less than the flow from Canada into the U.S., but whether it was 2 per cent or 20, 3 per cent or 30, no one really knows (see Hutchinson, "Notes on Immigration Statistics," 976).

<sup>42</sup> Hutchinson, "Notes on Immigration Statistics," 974-5, 980-1.

<sup>43</sup> Computed from Hutchinson, *ibid.*, 981. For instance, the Irish-born constituted 4.81 per cent of the U.S. population, while in 1871 the Irish-born constituted 6.2 per cent of the Canadian population. Compare the text above, section IV (2), with *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931* (Ottawa 1936), Vol. I, 517.

can reasonably guess that more than one-seventh of the Irish immigrant flow was entering the United States unrecorded, and that at a very late date. Early in the process, before 1845, the proportion of flow from Canada must have been considerably higher, the Canadian flow comprising perhaps as much as one-quarter of the total Irish-born influx into the United States.

Thus, if one is to make any headway in understanding the fundamental mysteries of pre-1850 Irish migration to the U.S., one must think in terms of a *North American* pool of migrants from Ireland, some of whom sailed to Canada and stayed, others of whom migrated directly to the U.S. and settled, but others of whom arrived in the U.S. and moved to Canada and many more of whom disembarked in Canada and subsequently moved on to the States.

There are two statistical series which try to define the primary dimensions of this North American pool of Irish migrants. Both of these series were put together during the late 1940s and early 1950s and they are far from being in agreement. Unfortunately, having been compiled roughly coterminously, each was published in isolation from the other with the result that neither addresses its disagreements with the other. The first of these appeared in 1953 and was done on behalf of the General Register Office of the United Kingdom by N.H. Carrier and J.R. Jeffery. In its approach it was comprehensive, being a complete study of all of the available statistics on external migration from the British Isles from 1815 to 1950, the Irish data, which began in 1825, being one subset of the larger British Isles information base. The compilers were scrupulous in discussing the limits on the reliability of their data. In particular however, it must be emphasized that the direct data on emigrants given below (ultimately based on ships' muster rolls, whatever the intermediate source), dealt only with migrants from Irish ports.<sup>44</sup>

But of course Irish emigration was not limited to Irish ports. Many Irish left for the New World from Liverpool and from Greenock and from a few other British ports. Until 1853, however, precise data on Irish on British-originating ships are not available, so some compensation has to be made. This is done in the second major emigration-series, that published in 1954 by the Republic of Ireland's Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems. This body added to the Irish total two-thirds of the number of persons who sailed overseas from Liverpool in the period 1825-40 and for 1840 onwards made some considerable augmentations in the Irish estimates but did not tell us on what basis these were done. ("The statistics based on the sources [the Reports of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners]... contain elements of estimation, the bases of which varied from time to time.") The resulting series purported to be a complete estimate of the Irish emigration to the New World.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Compiled from General Register Office, *Studies on Medical and Population Subjects, No. 6. External Migration. A Study of the Available Statistics, 1815-1950* by N.H. Carrier and J.R. Jeffery (London 1953), 95. For a discerning discussion of the limits of the data see 137-9.

<sup>45</sup> Compiled from *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems*,

TABLE I

## Migration from Irish Ports to North America 1825-1850

Year	To U.S.A.	To Canada	Total
1825	4,387	6,841	11,228
1826	4,383	10,484	14,867
1827	4,014	9,134	13,148
1828	2,877	6,695	9,572
1829	4,133	7,710	11,843
1830	2,981	19,340	22,321
1825-1830	22,775	60,204	82,979
1831	3,583	40,977	44,560
1832	4,172	37,068	41,240
1833	4,764	17,431	22,195
1834	4,213	28,586	32,799
1835	2,684	9,458	12,142
1836	3,654	19,388	23,042
1837	3,871	22,463	26,334
1838	1,169	2,284	3,453
1839	2,843	8,989	11,832
1840	4,087	23,935	28,022
1831-1840	35,040	210,579	245,619
1841	3,893	24,089	27,982
1842	6,199	33,410	39,609
1843	1,617	10,898	12,515
1844	2,993	12,396	15,389
1845	3,708	19,947	23,655
1846	7,070	31,738	38,808
1847	24,502	71,253	95,755
1848	38,843	20,852	59,695
1849	43,673	26,568	70,241
1850	31,297	19,784	51,081
1841-1850	163,795	270,935	434,730
GRAND TOTAL 1825-1850	221,610	541,718	763,328

1948-1954. *Reports* [Pr. 2541] (Dublin 1954), 314-6. The quotation above in the text is from 316 n.

TABLE TWO

Number of Overseas Emigrants from Ireland (32 Counties),  
Classified by Destination, 1825-1850

Year	Destination		Total
	United States	Canada	
1825	4,387	7,031	11,418
1826	5,447	10,669	16,116
1827	10,372	9,229	19,601
1828	7,573	6,816	14,389
1829	9,583	7,935	17,518
1830	12,467	19,877	32,344
1825-1830	49,829	61,557	111,386
1831	13,240	42,221	55,461
1832	14,675	39,184	53,859
1833			n/a
1834			n/a
1835	13,039	9,818	22,857
1836			n/a
1837	21,702	23,856	45,558
1838			n/a
1839			n/a
1840			n/a
1831-1840	62,656	115,079	n/a
1841	3,893	24,089	27,982
1842	6,199	33,410	39,609
1843	23,421	13,578	36,999
1844	37,269	16,485	53,754
1845	50,207	24,713	74,920
1846	68,023	37,889	105,916
1847	118,120	98,485	216,605
1848	151,003	23,543	174,546
1849	180,189	31,865	212,054
1850	184,351	25,264	209,615
1841-1850	822,675	329,321	1,151,996

The main troubles with the Republic's series were, first, that unnecessarily large gaps were left in the estimate for the 1830s (the data, as the U.K. series

indicated, were available), and, second, the procedures by which the compilers corrected the raw data for the 1840s were not recorded.

In any case, for the 1825-30 period, it is virtually certain that even the Republic's augmented estimates of migration to the new world were low, because the compiler only corrected for the probable Irish emigration from Liverpool. In fact, in addition to the Liverpool route (which was used almost exclusively for the U.S. trade from the south of Ireland) there was in many years a greater number of migrants from Greenock and Glasgow who went mostly but not exclusively to Canada. (That the Republic's commission ignored this trade from the north of Ireland is culturally diagnostic.) Second, children were undercounted, sometimes not being kept on ships' muster rolls, sometimes being counted as equal to one-third an adult, sometimes one-half.

Here is not the place to try to resolve these problems, save to call attention to the work of William Forbes Adams which, despite its having been done half a century ago, still stands as the only partially successful attempt at grappling directly with the fundamental problems concerning the data on the Irish migrants to North America. The field desperately requires someone with Adams' sense of proportion and skepticism concerning data and who is willing to work once again step by step through the primary sources.<sup>46</sup>

In arguing that one can discuss sensibly the size and nature of the Irish migration to the United States in the nineteenth century (and, most especially, in the years before the first census of the foreign-born in 1850), only by adopting a North American context, I am of course discussing only the migrants, the so-called first generation. There is more to the point than that, however. Recall that ultimately historians of the Irish in America would like to be able to deal not only with immigrants, but with the entire ethnic group. Hence, it is worth noting that in all probability, of these second- and third-generation Irish in America a significant component were the children and grandchildren of migrants who had settled not in the U.S., but in Canada. In the absence of direct studies on this matter, the point has to be drawn inferentially from the facts that (a) the Canadian-born were a large element in the U.S. population (for reference, comparative figures for the Irish are provided),<sup>47</sup> and (b) that persons of Irish ethnicity composed the largest non-French ethnic group in Canada until the late 1880s or 1890s.<sup>48</sup> Hence, unless

<sup>46</sup> William Forbes Adams, *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine* (New Haven 1932). See especially his appendix, "Statistics of Irish Emigration, 1815-1845," on which my comments in the text are largely based.

<sup>47</sup> Compiled from Leon E. Truesdell, *The Canadian Born in the United States. An Analysis of the Statistics of the Canadian Element in the Population of the United States 1850 to 1930* (New Haven 1943), tables two and seven, 10 and 19, and from the sources detailed in notes 27 and 29.

<sup>48</sup> The precise date is problematical. The Irish were the largest Canadian ethnic group in 1881, but the English had surpassed them by 1901. Unfortunately, the 1891 census did not yield ethnicity data in a form comparable to that provided by the censuses of 1881

one wishes to postulate a much lower propensity-to-migrate for Canadians of native Irish ethnicity than for other groups, one has to infer that a significant proportion of the Irish-American ethnic cohort actually came, most recently, from Canada, and was of Canadian nativity.

Year	Number of Canadian-born in U.S.	% of U.S. Pop.	% of Foreign-born	Irish-born	
				% of U.S. Pop.	% of Foreign-born
1850	147,711	0.64%	6.6%	4.15%	42.8%
1860	249,970	0.79	6.0	5.12	38.9
1870	493,464	1.28	8.9	4.81	33.3
1880	717,157	1.43	10.7	3.70	27.8
1890	980,938	1.56	10.6	2.80	20.2
1900	1,179,922	1.55	11.4	2.13	15.6
1910	1,204,637	1.31	8.9	1.47	10.0
1930	1,286,389	1.05	9.1	0.75	6.5

Finally, in arguing the absolute necessity of dealing with the Irish in the United States only within the context of all of North America, one should note that there are certain sources of data on the Irish in Canada that are not paralleled in the United States. For instance, most Canadian provinces conducted censuses, some of them quite thorough and accurate, well before the famine. Those of the early 1840s are especially important, particularly that of Ontario wherein the bulk of the Irish in Canada settled.<sup>49</sup> These pre-famine censuses are crucial, because they give us the only baseline we have for measuring the changes which took place among the Irish cohort as a result of the massive famine migrations. Further, from the early 1840s onward, various Canadian censuses enquired not only into nativity but into religion. (That these items must be cross-tabulated by researchers is vexing, but much less unfortunate than the U.S. case, wherein there is no religious data to tabulate.) And, as mentioned earlier, from 1871 onward, the Dominion of Canada census authorities inquired not only about each person's religion and place of birth, but about ethnicity as well. (As in the case of the earlier data, researchers must do their own cross-tabulation.) So, given that in some instances there will be comparability between certain sub-populations of the Irish-Canadians and the Irish-Americans, and given then the high probability that large numbers of the children and grandchildren of Irish migrants to Canada eventually went to the United States, and given further the virtual certainty that large numbers

and 1901, so one necessarily must be vague. For the data see *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931*, Vol. 1, 710.

<sup>49</sup> On the inferences concerning the Irish which one can draw from the Ontario census of 1842, see Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?," 212-7.

of Irish migrants themselves settled in Canada only for a time before going to the States, there is only one conclusion: one who does not the Canadian data know, knows not the Irish in America.

4. Fourth, scholars must overcome an unfortunate piece of cultural blindness embedded in the historiography of the Irish in America, namely, that the Protestants from Ireland are not part of that history. This notion, seemingly shared by Protestant and Catholic historians alike, has a long, if not entirely honourable history, and one cannot pin its origin on modern historians. Prior to the massive migrations from Ireland to the U.S. during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the Irish Protestants had been quite willing to be designated as Irish. The practical disadvantages of being associated with the influx of poor Roman Catholics, however, led to many Protestant affirmations of separate group-identity in the United States.<sup>50</sup> With this came the American neologism "Scotch-Irish" for the group who in Ireland were known simply as Scotch-Presbyterians, or in the twentieth century, as Ulster-Scots:

The term "Scotch-Irish" is an Americanism, generally unknown in Scotland and Ireland, and rarely used by British historians. In American usage, it refers to people of Scottish descent who, having lived for a time in the north of Ireland, migrated in considerable numbers to the American colonies in the eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

Mark the last phrase, "in the eighteenth century," in the above definition provided by the most recent historian of the group, the sociologist James G. Leyburn, for it accurately summarizes the state of the historical literature, if not the historical reality. And, for historians of all stripes it provides the basis for three massive (and misleading) simplifications:

A. that the Scotch-Irish and the Irish-American Catholics existed in different historical moments in U.S. history, the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for the Scotch-Irish and the second half of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries for the Irish-American Catholics;<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See the "Editor's Introduction," by E.R.R. Green in *Essays in Scotch-Irish History* (London 1969), ix-xi.

<sup>51</sup> James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish. A Social History* (Chapel Hill 1962), xi.

<sup>52</sup> The two classic books on the subject which set the framework for the continuing emphasis on the eighteenth century and upon a virtually racialist view of the differences between the Ulster Scots and the Irish Catholics were: Charles A. Hanna, *The Scotch-Irish, or, the Scot in North Britain, North Ireland, and North America* (New York 1902), 2 vols., and Henry Ford Jones, *The Scotch-Irish in America* (Princeton 1915). In a summary of his own book, written for a popular audience, James G. Leyburn stated categorically that "there was almost no further influx from northern Ireland after the Revolutionary war." ("The Scotch-Irish," *American Heritage*, 22 [December 1970], 99). The one major dissentient from the consensus view that the Ulster Scots were a significant group in the eighteenth, but not the nineteenth, century is Maldwyn A. Jones, whose "Scotch-Irish" in Thernstrom, ed. *American Ethnic Groups*, 895-908, is a succinct, but dramatically revisionist view that deserves to be widely read by American ethnic historians. The substance of R.J. Dickson's *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775* (London 1966) is a dispassionate, thorough, and convincing



B. that the Scotch-Irish and the Irish-American Catholics also were so distinct geographically and occupationally as to be virtually segregated: that is, the Scotch-Irish were frontier people, the Catholics urbanites;<sup>53</sup>

C. that the meaning of "Protestant" among the Irish migrants to the United States is confined to persons who in the old country were Presbyterians of Scottish origin, and who, in the new world were Presbyterians, Methodists, or Baptists. Emigrating Protestants were not, it is believed, of English origin and not Anglican by denomination.

Actually, simplifications (A) and (C) almost certainly are not justified and (B) is, at best, unproved and probably erroneous.

Why? Let us look at the available data. Again, the U.S. material is of no help, but data from Ireland and from Canada are germane. First, examine the Irish census material. Is it true that virtually all of the emigrants from Ireland from the famine onwards were Catholics? If this is so, one should find some crude reflection in the census data. Specifically, one would expect (a) that the absolute number of Catholics in Ireland would have decreased considerably; (b) that the absolute numbers of Presbyterians and Anglicans would stay at least constant and (c) consequently, the Catholic proportion of the Irish population would have dropped dramatically and the Presbyterian and Anglican proportions would have risen with countervailing rapidity.<sup>54</sup>

If we take the first Irish religious census (that of 1834), and compare it to the next one (1861), something rather different seems to have happened:<sup>55</sup>

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monograph. The author's introduction, however, repeats the assertion that there were two distinct groups of people who emigrated from Ireland to the United States: "the hundreds of thousands of Irish emigrants to colonial America who have been overshadowed by the millions who emigrated from Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century." (ix)

<sup>53</sup> The counter-tradition — that is, the presentation of the Ulster Scot as an urban settler is thin indeed. Its two poles, chronologically, are set by Joel Tyler Headley's journalistic history of the New York Orange riots of 1870 and 1871 in his *The Great Riots of New York, 1712-1873* (New York 1873) and, by Christopher McGimpsey's "Internal Ethnic Friction: Orange and Green in Nineteenth-Century New York, 1868-1872," *Immigrants and Minorities*, 1 (March 1982), 39-59.

<sup>54</sup> This use of census data, admittedly quite crude, is loaded against suggesting that the Irish Protestants emigrated quite frequently: presumably the Catholics, being overly represented in the pauper class, more frequently starved or died of famine-related diseases than did the Protestants; therefore, much of their population loss was from those causes, not solely from emigration.

<sup>55</sup> The residual population in each year's figures consists of Other Protestant Dissenters (especially Methodists), Jews, Atheists, and Unknown. Sources: *Derived from First Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, 9-45 [45], H.C. 1835, xxxii, and from *Report and Tables relating to Religious Profession, Education and Occupations of the People*, 28 [3204-III], H.C. 1863, lix. The 1834 data were later "corrected" by various governmental authorities but not always convincingly and not to such an extent as to change by more than a few tenths of a percentage point the figures taken from the primary document. Religious percentages in Ireland before 1834

Year	No. of Catholics	% of Pop.	No. of Anglicans	% of Pop.	No. of Presbyterians	% of Pop.
1834	6,427,712	80.9%	852,064	10.7%	642,356	8.1%
1861	4,505,265	77.7	693,357	12.0	523,291	9.0

That is, although the Anglican or Presbyterian proportions of the total Irish population rose, they too experienced a considerable decrease in their numbers. Moreover, if one adds to the statistical series the data for the remainder of the nineteenth century, the results are striking:<sup>56</sup>

Year	No. of Catholics	% of Pop.	No. of Anglicans	% of Pop.	No. of Presbyterians	% of Pop.
1871	4,150,867	76.7%	667,998	12.3%	497,648	9.2%
1881	3,960,891	76.5	639,574	12.4	470,734	9.1
1891	3,547,307	75.4	600,103	12.8	444,974	9.5
1901	3,308,661	74.2	581,089	13.0	443,276	9.9

Of course there is a myriad of possible hypotheses that would explain these trends in the census data,<sup>57</sup> but certainly there is a *prima facie* case for social historians investigating these two: that in the second half of the nineteenth century the Irish Protestants in general emigrated in large numbers and that this Protestant emigration was not solely from among the Ulster-Scots but, even more from among the Anglican population (which, for convenience, if not with perfect accuracy, we may identify as the "Anglo-Irish").

Unlike the Anglicans, who were distributed, at least patchily, around the entire country, the Presbyterians were concentrated in Ulster. Thus, the data on

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are highly problematical. For a sensible, although not definitive, attempt to deal with the earlier situation, see "Appendix B. Statistics of Religious Affiliation in Ireland in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin 1982), 281-3.

<sup>56</sup> *Census of Ireland, 1901*, Part II, *General Report* p. 50 [Cd. 1190], H.C. 1902, cxxix.

<sup>57</sup> For example, one might hypothesize that the drop in the Protestant population came from a lowering of their family size (and thus of religious-specific fertility), while the Catholic drop in population came chiefly from emigration. Actually, however, the opposite is most likely to have happened. That is, the brunt of the famine having fallen on the Catholic poor, the limits on marriage that developed in the post-famine era, described for example in Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland* (Cambridge, MA 1968), probably fell most severely on the Catholics. Again, I am presenting the census data in such a way as to minimize the possibility of our having to accept the idea of large-scale Protestant emigration; and even so, that hypothesis emerges as one most needful of being tested.

post-famine emigration from Ulster are illuminating, if somewhat sketchy.<sup>58</sup> From 1851 onwards, the United Kingdom government collected information on country and province of origin of Irish emigrants to various overseas destinations. These reveal that the historical province of Ulster (nine counties) was the second major provincial source of emigrants.<sup>59</sup>

1851-1900	Emigrants	%
Munster	1,346,889	36.8
Ulster	1,015,737	27.7
Leinster	683,209	18.7
Connacht	616,439	16.8
Total on whom information is available	3,662,274	100.0

<sup>58</sup> As David Fitzpatrick points out in "Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century," *Irish Historical Studies*, 22 (September 1980), 127-8, from 1851-76 the data are wobbly, but not without worth. In 1876 the method of making the count was revamped to abolish local anomalies in the collection method. This is the appropriate point to call attention to a remarkable series of articles by the historical geographer S.H. Cousens. Taken together, these suggest that for the period 1812-61, inclusive, migration from Ireland was especially sharp from north-central Ireland, that is from Ulster and the neighbouring counties of Connaught and Leinster, and from certain localized pockets of Protestants, such as small textile communities in the south of Ireland. Cousens' view is that the dissolution of the link between the poorest Catholic peasantry of the south and west of Ireland and the land occurred quite late, roughly in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This coincides quite well with the point made earlier in this text, that, from approximately the middle 1870s the Irish immigrants to the United States exhibited basic patterns of behaviour in occupation and residence similar to that of the "new immigrants," who in origin were mostly drawn from similar groups amongst the European peasantry. Cousens' most important articles are: "The Regional Variation in Emigration from Ireland between 1821 and 1841," *Institute of British Geographers, Transactions no. 37* (1965), 15-30; "Regional Death Rates in Ireland during the Great Famine, from 1846 to 1851," *Population Studies*, 14 (1961-61), 55-73; "The Regional Variation in Mortality during the Great Irish Famine," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Vol. 63, sec. C, 127-49; "The Regional Pattern of Emigration during the Great Irish Famine, 1846-51," *Institute of British Geographers Transactions*, 28 (1960), 119-34; "Emigration and Demographic Change in Ireland, 1851-1861," *Economic History Review*, 2 ser., 14 (1961-62), 278-88. For a useful table covering 1846-55, based primarily on some of Cousens' data, see Oliver MacDonagh, "The Irish Famine Emigration to the United States," *Perspectives in American History*, 10 (1976), 419-20.

<sup>59</sup> The table does not include 110,668 emigrants whose origin in Ireland was unspecified. Derived from data in *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems, 1948-1954*, 314-16, and 325. One has to derive the figures indirectly as the Republic's governmental commission that produced this study apparently did not wish to highlight the high proportion of overseas emigration which came from what is now Northern Ireland.

And, to take a mid-point in this period, 1871, the religious composition of Ulster was as follows:<sup>60</sup>

Catholic	47.8%
Anglican	21.8%
Presbyterian	25.9%
Other	4.5%
	100.0%

Granted, this does not prove that Protestants of whatever stripe migrated in large numbers, but note two facts: first, that 70 per cent of the emigrants from Ulster in the 1851-1900 period came from the six counties, that is from the predominantly Protestant part of Ireland,<sup>61</sup> and, second, that within the historical nine counties of Ulster, the largest outflow in absolute terms came from the most Protestant counties, Antrim and Down.<sup>62</sup> No one would suggest that this proves that there was a major Protestant exodus from Ulster: a cynic might suggest that conceivably all the migrants were Catholics who were shrewd enough to leave at the first opportunity. But, cynicism aside, the hypothesis that large numbers of Ulster-Scots and of Anglo-Irish (both from Ulster and from the other provinces), left Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century seems reasonable, given the available Irish data.

That, however, is as far as the Irish sources take us. From the Canadian sources, though, comes absolute proof that Irish Protestants in large numbers actually did emigrate. This is shown in my analysis of the Irish in Ontario, which indicated that roughly two-thirds of the ethnic group in 1871 was Protestant,<sup>63</sup> and, more important, in Darroch and Ornstein's Canadian national sample for the same year which showed that 38 per cent of the Irish ethnic group was Catholic, 34.3 per cent Anglican, and the remainder split among various Protestant denominations, the largest of which was Wesleyan Methodist (13.3 per cent).<sup>64</sup>

At this point an Irish-American historian who is absolutely determined to keep the Protestants out of the history of the post-famine Irish in America might argue that, yes, the Canadian data are fascinating, but they are also irrelevant because all of the Irish Protestants went to Canada and only Catholics entered the United States. Although inherently improbable, this idea cannot be directly disproved. However, remember that there was a massive influx of people born in Ireland into the United States via Canada and, further, there also were large numbers of individuals of Irish parentage who were born in Canada but who

<sup>60</sup> W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick, eds., *Irish Historical Statistics, Population, 1821-1971* (Dublin 1978), 59.

<sup>61</sup> Derived from the same source as specified in note 59 above.

<sup>62</sup> See Vaughan and Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics*, 311-32.

<sup>63</sup> Akenson in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. III, 222 and 231.

<sup>64</sup> Darroch and Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Occupational Structure," Table 1, 312.

later entered the United States. To keep the no-Protestants-need-apply barrier up, our zealous American historian also would have to posit that all the Protestants stayed in Canada and that only the Catholics left Canada for the United States. Manifestly, this kind of argument is silly. Much easier to contemplate is the suggestion of Maldwyn A. Jones that not only were the Ulster-Scots a considerable element in the pre-famine nineteenth-century emigration to the United States, but they also constituted a smaller, but considerable element (perhaps 10 per cent) of the total famine exodus from Ireland, and that most of the post-famine exodus from Ulster (90 per cent of which went to the United States) consisted of Protestants of all denominations.<sup>65</sup>

This discussion of the probable continuing nature of Protestant migration to the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century deals only with the migrant generation. Realize here that one really should consider the probable character of the second, third, and fourth generation if one wants to deal with an ethnic group, and then the necessity of including the Protestants becomes clearer. Given that, as Jones argues, Protestant immigrants were apt to be a higher proportion of the total flow in the years before the Great Famine than they were after it, Protestants would have formed a much higher proportion of the total ethnic group in the decades after the famine than their numbers among more recent arrivals would suggest.

If one wants to get the story right, clearly one cannot segregate the Ulster-Scots from the Catholics in terms of chronology. Granted, the Ulster-Scots well may have been proportionately a larger part of the migrant flow to the United States before the famine than after, but both groups, Presbyterians and Catholics, were intermingled in the formative years of Irish-American history, 1816-75.

Equally clearly, one cannot segregate the Anglo-Irish out of the migrant flow to the United States. The Anglicans seem to have migrated out of Ireland in even greater numbers than did the Presbyterians — they certainly settled in substantial numbers in Canada — and one has the same compelling reasons for inferring that they moved to the United States in large numbers that one has concerning the Ulster-Scots.

And, finally, one should remain skeptical of the attempt to segregate Protestant and Catholic Irish in the States by occupation and residence: the Protestants as farmers and rural shopkeepers, the Catholics as an urban proletariat. There are as yet no direct demographic data that would validate this contention for any moment in the nineteenth century.

## V

ADOPTING A SET OF NEW PERSPECTIVES is a necessary pre-condition of breaking out of the evidentiary vacuum surrounding the Irish in America, but it

<sup>65</sup> Jones in Thernstrom, *American Ethnic Groups*, 904-5.

is not enough. New data must be developed which provide at least some hint at what the characteristics of the over-all Irish group were in the crucial years between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The data must relate to the entire ethnic group, not just immigrants, not just Catholics, and not just city dwellers.

A simple, radical change in data collection is a necessary first step. Instead of taking as a focus, or set of foci, a specific geo-political unit (New York City, Boston, or whatever) and studying the Irish as a subset of that unit, one should *focus on the migrants themselves*, without preconceptions or discriminations concerning their occupation, religion, and eventual points of settlement. A migrant who settled in the Ozarks is just as important in determining the overall ethnic profile as one who set down in Philadelphia, and a member of the Plymouth Brethren is just as significant historically as is a Catholic.

Given that simple conceptual breakthrough, there are five studies deserving high priority. The first of these is to do for the Irish in America what the Ontario census of 1841-42 did: establish a baseline concerning the size and religious affiliation of the Irish-born population in the new world prior to the famine. The most promising source for beginning such a study is the National Immigration Archives in Philadelphia which contain over 30,000 names of pre-famine Irish passengers to the United States. These data are not complete (they cover North America for some years, but only Boston and New York for others),<sup>66</sup> and these immigration records must be combined with information for other ports. But, certainly there are enough data to draw an adequately-sized sample. The real problem, the daunting one, however, is that of *linkage*. Given the lack of United States data on religious affiliation, religious persuasion can most accurately be derived from sources in the homeland. This implies that to create linkage, historians must employ the methods used by the too-often despised genealogists. A fortuitous side-effect of using these methods, however, is that when successful they provide information not only on religion but on place of origin in Ireland (an important and open question about the Irish in America is where they actually came from in the old country). Certainly establishing such linkages is hideously hard work, but it can be done.<sup>67</sup>

A second, closely-related study necessarily would be a duplication of the first, but for the famine and post-famine years, 1846 to roughly 1875.

Third and fourth, using the same data bases as in the first two efforts

<sup>66</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Cormac O'Grada of University College, Dublin, for passing on his knowledge of the immigration archives. For an example of an interesting use of the immigration archives, see C.J. Erickson, "Who were the English and Scots emigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth century?" in D.V. Glass and Roger Revelle, eds., *Population and Social Change* (London 1972), 347-81.

<sup>67</sup> An excellent example of the standard of evidence and of documentation required when making transatlantic geographic linkages is J. Richard Houston's *Numbering the Survivors: A History of the Standish Family of Ireland, Ontario, and Alberta* (Agin-court, Ontario 1979).

delineated above, we desperately need to know what happened to these immigrants in America. It is no use following them only to the American east-coast cities and saying that this means much (where else, after all, could they have gotten off the boat?). The record-linkage process must not only go backward to the old country, but must chart the immigrants' move forward into the new, establishing for the sample population the various individual migrations in America, and the occupations followed, and the dispersal patterns of their children. Once again, this is daunting, but successful prototype projects among migrant populations already have been done.<sup>68</sup>

Fifth, a large-sample study of the Irish migrants from Canada to the United States (both Irish-born or the children or grandchildren of Irish immigrants to Canada) is a high priority. Here too, prototype studies on Canadian migrants are being conducted.<sup>69</sup> In doing this study, the record linkages in Canada will be relatively easy to forge, as the Canadian manuscript censuses are in good order; the work south of the border will be very difficult, however.

Only when these studies are complete will historians have before them the basic demographic data concerning the Irish in the United States. One will know, then, within the limits of the sampling procedures employed, who the Irish in America actually were: their religion, geographic origin in the old country, their occupation in the new, and their pattern of settlement throughout the country.

## VI

HAVING BEEN PERHAPS EXCESSIVELY prescriptive about what needs to be done if we are to escape from the elegant ignorance enshrined in the existing historical literature on the Irish in America, let me speculate about what the results of a set of serious studies such as are suggested above will show. These are merely informed guesses, but I am framing them in the form of hypotheses which can be tested empirically.

1. In the pivotal period of Irish-American history, 1816-75, it will be found that the Irish in America were not predominantly a city people, although the most visible lump of immigrants did indeed settle in cities. Precisely what constitutes a city, a small town, and a rural area is a difficult historical question and can become a methodological thicket. But for the sake of the present argument, let us assume that in mid-nineteenth-century America there were three sorts of places of settlement: (1) rural areas, defined (by a definition used by the U.S. Bureau of Census through 1940) as any empty land, agricultural land, and any hamlet, or village under 2,500 in population; (2) cities, which I

<sup>68</sup> See Darrell A. Norris, "Migration, Pioneer Settlement, and the Life Course: the First Families of an Ontario Township," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, IV (1984), 130-52.

<sup>69</sup> Most notably by R.W. Widdis of the Department of Geography, of the University of Manitoba.

am here defining as any concentration of population of 25,000 or more persons, certainly a very liberal lower limit; and (3) small towns, consisting of any municipality of 2,500-25,000 persons.<sup>70</sup>

Where did the Irish settle? If one considers only the Irish-born, not the entire ethnic group, and at quite a late date, 1870, one discovers that if one takes the 50 largest cities in the United States, the smallest of which had a population of 26,766, 44.5 per cent of the Irish lived therein.<sup>71</sup> Or, to put it another way, well over half of the Irish immigrants did *not* live in cities.

This statement, though, actually overstates the degree of urbanization of the Irish, because it deals only with the migrant generation and not the entire ethnic group. When earlier generations came to the States, they were more likely than those immigrants surveyed in the 1870 census to have settled eventually in rural areas or small towns. First, the nation to which they came was much less urban than was that of 1870 (the United States was roughly 75 per cent rural in 1870, but had been 85 per cent in 1850, and 91 per cent in 1830).<sup>72</sup> Second, the pre-famine migrants, a substantial group, came with resources in hand and not reeling from the trauma of the famine. Presumably they were more apt and more able to move out quickly into the countryside and into rural and small town occupations.<sup>73</sup> And, third, the considerable number of Canadian-Irish who joined the Irish ethnic cohort in the United States were likely to be largely rural in distribution.<sup>74</sup>

Now, if it is true that the Irish in the United States up to 1870 were not a city people — and the census data are quite unequivocal on this point concerning the first generation — how does it come to be that in the twentieth century the Irish finally did indeed become a city people? This occurred for reasons that have little to do with their particular ethnicity, but with general causative factors affecting the entire U.S. population. The children and grandchildren of earlier Irish immigrants who had settled in small towns and in the countryside, joined the urban drift that was common throughout the late nineteenth and early

<sup>70</sup> These three categories are the ones used in Carpenter's study (see, for example, page 23), an official census monograph.

<sup>71</sup> The data on the fifty cities is found in *The Population of the United States . . . 1870*, Vol. I, 388-9.

<sup>72</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States (1975)*, series A203.

<sup>73</sup> The specific case of the Irish aside, Carpenter's study of the 1920 census data may be relevant: it showed that throughout the population there was an inverse relationship between recency of migration and propensity to live in the countryside. "It is probably due mainly to the presence, in the rural areas, of sons and daughters of an earlier generation of immigrants who settled on the land more numerous than is the case at present, but may be due also to the moving out from city to country of sons and daughters of later immigrants." (22)

<sup>74</sup> As late as the 1920 census, the Canadians were being cited (together with the Mexicans) as being the "outstanding exceptions" to the generalization that immigrants always have been heavily represented in the cities. Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children*, 147.



twentieth centuries in American society. David Ward, in *Cities and Immigrants* notes that, "the large proportion of 'new immigrants' from abroad with urban destinations was probably no greater than among native-born Americans who migrated after about 1875. In some areas, a large segment of the latter were the children of immigrants who had settled on the land earlier in the century. . . ." <sup>75</sup> There was nothing unusual or paradoxical in the Irish eventually becoming a city people: virtually every group did.

2. In the pivotal period of Irish-American history, 1816-75, it will be found that the process of settlement in the United States was not a simple matter of the Irish being debouched at the ports and of their finding the way to the local Irish ghetto. Instead, it was a complex, multi-staged process that involved most immigrants in several moves during their lifetime in the new world. Almost certainly a pattern of "step-wise migration," as the historical geographers denominate it, will have been found to have prevailed.

And how can it have been otherwise? Given that most emigrant-boats docked at large port cities, but that most Irish immigrants did not live in cities, a complex intermediate process must have occurred. Individuals may have disembarked at New York or Philadelphia, but they found their way, in each case through an individual odyssey, to locales all over the United States. Granted, the atypical urban residual did plunk down virtually where they got off the boat and did stay generation after generation (Oscar Handlin's Boston Irish are the best example), but these were a small minority. It is likely that the average Irish immigrant and his children and their children were just as restless, just as mobile, as were their counterparts among other ethnic groups.

3. Whatever the details of the occupational-profile of the entire Irish ethnic group actually were, there will be no way of describing the Irish as an urban waged proletariat. The pattern of residence makes this equation virtually impossible, but there is more to the argument than that. Recall here the earlier datum, that in 1870 14.6 per cent of the Irish immigrants over ten years of age who were employed and on whom there was occupational information, were directly engaged in agricultural work. This is a very significant minority. Additionally, however, farmers, agricultural labourers, ranchers, and the like, were served by a wide variety of ancillary trades, most of them located in small towns, ranging from blacksmiths to coopers to millers to storekeepers, occupations which, though not tallied as agricultural in the census, actually are part of the rural economic network. If one makes the very conservative assumption that for every Irishperson in an agricultural job there was another one in a related occupation in the rural economy, <sup>76</sup> then 29-30 per cent of the Irish

<sup>75</sup> Ward, *Cities and Immigrants*, 56.

<sup>76</sup> The standard volume on the work force in the United States in the nineteenth century is Stanley Lebergott, *Manpower in Economic Growth: The American Record since 1800* (New York 1964). Unfortunately, it appears that the matter addressed in the text — concerning a multiplier that could be applied to agricultural occupations as defined in the nineteenth century census in order to obtain the size of the comprehensive rural

immigrants in 1870 actually were in the rural sector of the economy.<sup>77</sup>

The Irish-born immigrants of course were only part of the Irish ethnic group, and the crucial point is that the second and third generations who were living in the United States in 1870 were much more apt to be engaged in agricultural activities than were the immigrants. For the overall United States population, of those individuals who were born there, who were ten years of age and above, were employed, and on whom we have data, 54.1 per cent were engaged in agriculture in the direct, narrow sense, whereas the corresponding

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economic sector, including not only farmers and agricultural workers, but smiths, millers, coopers and so on — has yet to be dealt with by economic historians. The difficulty is two-fold. Farmers support local blacksmiths, millers, and coopers, but the millers and coopers also demanded the services of blacksmiths (and so on), so how does one partition them? Secondly, there is a problem of location. A variable amount of grain, for example, could have been sent overseas to be milled in Liverpool, depending on communication access to the sea and the state of overseas geopolitical relations. During the 1850 and 60s regional economists did a fair bit of work on the "local employment multiplier" which essentially asked, for example, how many local jobs would be created if one created an additional farm job. The answers, unhappily, were highly variable, their multiplier running from 1.3 to about 9.0. Twentieth-century estimates of national employment multiplier for the United States would place the multiple in the range of 3 or 4. By using a multiple of 2 in the text, then, I am probably underestimating the number of Irish persons who were actually employed in the rural economy. (I am grateful to the economic historian Marvin McNinnis for sharing with me on this point his wide knowledge of agricultural history.)

<sup>77</sup> The chief exception to the ignoring of the Irish in agriculture in major general studies of the American Irish is Carl Wittke's chapter VII, "The Irish as Farmers," 62-74. He argues that the Irish who distributed themselves on farms from coast to coast were a minor element in the total Irish immigration (63), and explains in detail why they could not have been successful farmers. One unpublished study, an exception to the usual view of the Irish as urban labourers, is Kieran Denis Flanagan, "Emigration, Assimilation, and Occupational Categories of the Irish-American in Minnesota, 1870-1900," M.A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1969. This bears special note. It shows that even prior to the Catholic colonization movement in Minnesota, the Irish were strongly overrepresented among farmers. In 1870 53 per cent of the Irish-born in Minnesota were farmers, as against a 42 per cent total population average. This was a proportion higher than that for any other immigrant group. In 1890 the Irish proportion was 40 per cent, against a general average of 31 per cent. Interestingly, the 1900 census showed that the second generation of Irish in Minnesota had a lower than average propensity to farm (see especially 224ff). Which is to say that in the case of the Minnesota Irish, the first generation experienced an extreme attack of farming fever, and that the second underwent an equally extreme case of leave-the-farm blues. Also useful is Patrick J. Blessing, *The British and Irish in Oklahoma* (N.P. 1980), which illustrates the step-wise migration of the Irish into a region of rural employment. For sidelights on the Irish as farmers, see Elfrieda Lang, "Irishmen in Northern Indiana before 1850," *Mid-America*, ser. 1, 36 (1954), 190-8; Alice E. Smith, *The Sweetman Irish Colony, Minnesota History*, 9 (1928), 331-46; Philip L. White, ed., "An Irish Immigrant Housewife on the New York Frontier," *New York History*, 48 (1967), 182-8; Joseph A. King, *The Irish Lumberman-Farmer: Fitzgeralds, Harrigans, and others* (Lafayette,

figure for the foreign-born was 22.9 per cent.<sup>78</sup> So even if one assumes that the ratio of the percentage of U.S.-born persons of Irish ethnicity, as compared to the Irish immigrants' percentage, was only two to one, then nearly 30 per cent of the American-born persons of Irish ethnic background were directly in the farm sector, and far more than half of them in the rural economic sector, broadly defined.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, a reasonable speculation is that when the entire Irish cohort is surveyed for the years 1816-75, the results will show that (1) a large body of Irish persons, both immigrants and American-born of Irish background indeed were locked into the urban waged proletariat; but (2) that an even larger group was engaged in the rural economic sector, broadly defined, and (3) that the remainder found themselves in middling towns and in skilled trades and the professions. The really interesting point will be to see the relative size of the various sectors.<sup>80</sup>

4. Throughout the seminal period of Irish-American history, 1816-75, I

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CA 1982). Historians of the American-Irish are not the only scholars who have ignored the rural component of their ethnic group. Indeed, it can fairly be argued that the entire field of American ethnic studies is based on a series of urban models which have little explanatory value in dealing with rural groups. On this point see the discerning article by Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Historical Approaches to the Study of Rural Ethnic Communities," in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln, NE 1980), 1-18.

<sup>78</sup> Computed from *The Population of the United States . . . 1870*, Vol. I, 704-5.

<sup>79</sup> Actually, one would expect the Irish population in agriculture to more likely triple, rather than double, as between the immigrant generation in 1870 and the native-born of Irish extraction in 1870. This is because the national pattern would dictate a doubling-and-a-half, and also because the Irish figure should exceed that national percentage: as discussed earlier in the text, the Irish of the immigrant generation were underrepresented as farmers compared to other immigrant groups up through 1870, so that any shift between the second and third generations will increase the multiplier much more than in the case of, say, the Swedes or Germans, who were farmers to begin with. Essentially, I am here loading the case against overstating the proportion of the Irish in agriculture. If one wanted to push, one could easily suggest that as high as one-third of the first immigrant generation were in the rural economic sector broadly defined, and that up to three-quarters of the U.S.-born persons of Irish extraction (the second, third, and fourth generations) were in the rural economic sector, broadly defined, in 1870.

<sup>80</sup> The reader may have noticed that I have not employed the data collected by the U.S. immigration officials on the occupations declared by immigrants upon arrival on the U.S. shores. This is because, first, the reporting was very incomplete (ranging from 40 per cent to 56 per cent in the nineteenth century), but was in any case valueless. Asking immigrants what their future occupations will be in the new world produces only information on what they think the "right" answer is, when faced by an immigration official, or on what misinformation they have been fed before migrating. For examples of credulity concerning these data, see: Robert E. Kennedy, Jr., *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility* (Berkeley, CA 1973), 75-6, and Richard A. Easterlin, "Immigration: Social Characteristics," in Thernstrom, ed., *American Ethnic Groups*, Table 6, 482.

believe that it will be found that Protestants comprised a significant continuous minority of the immigrant stream, and an equally significant proportion of the entire multi-generational ethnic cohort. How big? I think that if one wanted the most convenient crude indicator of what the likely Protestant proportion of the immigrant stream probably was in, say, any ten-year period or of what the Protestant proportion of the Irish ethnic group was, one would simply determine what the Protestant proportion of the population was in Ireland at the census immediately at the beginning of the relevant decennial period. Which is to say, an estimate of roughly 20 per cent (meaning approximately 18-22 per cent) of the immigrant stream having been Protestants and 20 per cent of the ethnic group having been Protestant would hold for the 1816-75 period.<sup>81</sup> This includes the years of the massive famine exodus.<sup>82</sup>

5. It will probably be found that despite all the mythology concerning the Scotch-Irish, in the period 1816-75 a slight majority of the Protestant migrants to the United States were Anglican by faith and Anglo-Irish by descent. Anglicans outnumbered Presbyterians in Ireland throughout the nineteenth century, and, further, their absolute numbers declined more quickly than did the Presbyterians. This suggests their having had a higher propensity to emigrate.<sup>83</sup>

6. In the two fundamental matters of choice-of-residence and in patterns-of-occupation, Protestants and Catholics will be found to have been very simi-

<sup>81</sup> For the exact figures for 1834 and 1861 see the estimate above, p. 147.

<sup>82</sup> Maldwyn Jones (in Thernstrom, *American Ethnic Groups*, 905) estimates that Ulster Presbyterians (who comprised roughly one-half of the Irish Protestant population) constituted roughly 10 per cent of the famine exodus from Ireland. The reader may think that I have inadvertently ignored the fact that the Protestants were overrepresented in the emigration to Canada, and thus presumably underrepresented in the United States so that the percentage of Protestants in the U.S. Irish cohort would be below the Irish national average. This possibility is counteracted, however, by two factors: (1) almost certainly the Irish Protestants had a higher propensity to migrate than did the Catholics in Ireland. This can be inferred from the census data on p. 147, and also from the fact that they tended to be higher on the economic scale and thus less likely to be poverty-immobilized paupers; (2) the flow of migrants from Ireland to the United States by way of Canada was so large that even if Protestants were overrepresented in Canada, they were perforce overrepresented in their secondary migration to the States. Jones' suggestion concerning the importance of Protestant migration during the famine period is given credence by Cormac O'Grada's study of American immigration records, which show that in 1847-48, 40.6 per cent of the Irish migrants to the United States via New York City were from Ulster. See "Across the Briny Ocean: Some thought on Irish Emigration to America 1800-1850," paper given at the second conference of Scottish and Irish Social and Economic Historians, University of Strathclyde, September 1981, 18.

<sup>83</sup> See data in the text, p. 147. Undoubtedly, dealing with the Anglican migrants to the United States will be very difficult because of their near-invisibility in U.S. society. Similar problems were encountered by R.T. Berthoff in his study of British immigrants and his monograph will repay study. Rowland Tappan Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America, 1790-1950* (Cambridge, MA 1953).

lar. Whatever differences there were between the two major Protestant groups and the Catholics will be found to be primarily ascribable to differences in economic position in the home country, not to religion per se or to the cultural appendages that are attached to religious systems in Ireland.

The only relevant study done with a substantial data base (10,000 cases), that of Darroch and Ornstein (discussed earlier) for Canada in 1871, showed that Catholic and Protestant Irish were remarkably similar in occupational patterns and achievement. Culture undoubtedly is extremely important in the history of any people, not only the Irish, but to see culture as determining economic sub-structures is either perverse or wishful thinking. Protestants within the American immigrant stream will probably be found to have been slightly better off in terms of occupational status and slightly more rural in terms of residence, because they were more apt to have been raised on larger farms and in successful trades in the old country than were Irish Catholics. In other words, the slightly differing profiles in the United States will be seen to have been a function of the differing profiles in the homeland and to have nothing whatsoever to do with the two opposed Irish religious systems.<sup>84</sup> Put graphically, it would be a brave or naive scholar who would predict that the behaviour of an emigrant publican-cum-gombeen man from the Dingle peninsula would more closely resemble that of his fellow religionist, say, his parish priest, than it would that of another publican-cum-gombeen man, a black Presbyterian from Ballymena.

## VII

### ELEGANT?

No, the results of a serious restudy of the Irish-Americans will not be elegant. Instead of the Mondrian-like clarity of the presently-accepted description and explanation of the Irish in America, one will have a disorderly snarl of historical threads. In the right hands, these will be the makings of a Bayeux tapestry. The Irish ethnic group will be found to have been marvelously complex in its cultural roots, geographical origin in Ireland, and its settlement pattern in the United States; it will be found to be extraordinarily diverse in its migratory routes to the new world and in its step-wise migration through that world. In place of the artificial crystalline clarity of our present lens, we will

<sup>84</sup> Irish historiography being what it is, one can at this point become lost in a dizzying infinite regression. Someone might suggest that the reason the Protestants had a higher occupational-economic profile in the old country was because they had persecuted the Catholics under the eighteenth century penal laws. But then, someone else might suggest (à la Froude) that the Protestants obtained this coercive power over the Catholics by view of their peculiar culture. And so on. To break out of the spiral, one would do well to experiment with the usage of class and occupation in the old world as an independent variable and with occupation and residence in the new world as dependent variables.

come to see the Irish as amazingly variegated and, therefore, infinitely more fascinating.

Most important, the Irish Catholic migrant will be found to have been much quicker, more technologically adaptable, more economically alert and less circumscribed by putative cultural limits from the old country than is usually believed; and, simultaneously, the Irish Protestants will be shown to have been a much more important part of the Irish-American experience than anyone — and especially they themselves — has wanted to admit.



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