

BELFAST MAINE: IRISH IDENTITY AND ACCEPTANCE IN A SMALL CITY ON PENOBSCOT BAY

BY KAY RETZLAFF

Retzlaff's article examines how stereotypes were applied to Irish newcomers in early Belfast, Maine, even by "old-timers," who also descended from Irish immigrants. Neither shared ancestry nor shared religion removed the stigma of these stereotypes, which complicated Irish identity in Belfast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as Protestant and Catholic newcomers alike sought to benefit from their ties to the Irish community while separating themselves from their Irish tropes. Kay Retzlaff is a professor of English at the University of Maine at Augusta. She earned her PhD from the University of Maine. Her MA and BA are from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She has taught at the University of Kentucky and the American University. She is writing the history of the Irish community in Belfast, Maine.

IRISH-BORN people and their children established the community of Belfast, Maine, just before the American Revolution. The earliest settlers came from Londonderry, New Hampshire, where Presbyterians from Ulster had emigrated in the early eighteenth century. They were farmers who lumbered, fished, and hunted to survive. Subsequent Irish immigrants and first-generation Americans who moved to the area after the War for Independence were merchants, teachers, and lawyers. In the decades after the War of 1812 until after the U.S. Civil War, a new generation of farmers, sailors, and laborers—Protestant and Catholic—came from Ireland to this burgeoning little city on the shores of Penobscot Bay. Some arrived poor and worked. Some bettered their economic conditions. Those with an education flourished; some even moved into local, state, and national politics. Some failed in the American system. Those who “made it” were connected to webs of commerce, family, and politics that stretched from Ireland to Belfast, Maine, and beyond to cities such as Boston, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco. Whatever their status, economic class, or religion, these people shared one trait—

they or their parents were Irish born. As a result, *all* were subject to Irish stereotypes. Ironically, those applying the stereotypes in Belfast, Maine, at mid-nineteenth century considered themselves “old-timers,” yet these long-established people also traced their lineages to Ireland.¹

The term *Irish* was used for more than a century to refer to supposedly Gaelic-speaking, poor Catholics from rural Ireland who were fleeing a famine caused by English political policy after the failure of the potato crop. This definition, however, limits any discussion of what it means to be Irish. The potato, for example, stereotypically associated with those Irish immigrants of the 1840s and 50s is a contested artifact. Descendants of Ulster Presbyterians who settled Belfast, Maine claimed the potato for their own, insisting that their forebears—the first generation of Ulster Presbyterians who settled in New Hampshire in the early 1700s—had introduced the root to New England. At the same time, however, members of this group argued they were not Irish.²

While the descendants of these immigrants from Ulster gradually felt compelled to separate themselves from the term “Irish” and its associated stereotypes, Belfast never bothered to separate Catholic from Protestant burials in the city-owned Grove Cemetery. In the 1840s, one of its residents won the state’s governorship amid an overt presumption of his Irishness. One of Belfast’s leading mid-nineteenth century citizens was proudly Catholic and served as the Catholic community’s lay leader. No one ostracized William S. Brannagan for his religion—or his Irishness. And Irishness did not always “ghettoize” recently arrived Irish in Belfast. In contrast, economic status and political activity allowed a degree of mobility. It was a community, after all, filled with people who traced their roots to the same island. Irishness was an identity that was danced around, used, discarded, lampooned, or embraced as needed. What seemed of most importance to the people from Ireland who found their way to Belfast was to become American.

When compared with all other European countries during the early years of the American Republic, Ireland provided the most immigrants to the United States. Between 1700 and 1820, a quarter to a half million Irish entered what is now the United States—thirty percent of all European immigrants during that period. From 1776 to 1820, Irish immigrants provided fifty percent of all European immigrants. Well-versed in English attitudes, the Irish consistently traveled in droves to Anglophone areas, especially the United States and Canada. While scholars may argue about whether the contested term “diaspora” applies to Ireland’s mass migrations or whether those peregrinations represented an exodus or a

banishment into exile, what remains clear is that the Irish immigrated to improve their economic lots in life as participants, willingly or otherwise, in English empire building.³

In America, *Scotch-Irish* denotes Presbyterians from the Province of Ulster, the northeast corner of Ireland, who came to American shores primarily in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Its Irish definition, however, was diametrically opposed—and much older. In Ireland, the Scotch-Irish were migratory practitioners of Roman Catholicism, speakers of Gaelic, and participants in an ancient clan culture who annoyed the English by refusing to remain stationary. Thus, the supposedly simple term *Scotch-Irish* carries centuries of historical freight. Why the term was co-opted by descendants of Protestant immigrants from Ireland in nineteenth-century America is a story of an era when race was defined not by skin color, but by ethnic origin and cultural practice.⁴ In an effort to escape anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic bashing fueled by the Know-Nothing movement, these people whose roots stretched to Ireland began to proffer a new designation—“Scots Irish” or, frequently, “Scotch Irish.” Soon, Belfast’s nineteenth-century historians were steadfastly maintaining that Belfast’s roots were in Scotland. Belfast, supposedly the closest the Scotch-Irish came to a plantation in Maine, has been all but ignored in studies of the Irish in the state’s history. The assumption behind this seems to be that anyone who self-designated as Scotch-Irish was not Irish. That assumption begs for closer analysis. What becomes apparent is that these supposedly “not Irish” immigrants to Belfast were *seen* as Irish and treated accordingly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵

In our current era, when diversity is often defined by skin color, it is easy to forget that whiteness does not necessarily mean ethnic, cultural, or religious uniformity. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, newcomers’ differences were duly noted and ridiculed, even when old-timers and newcomers shared a religion. Newcomers were seen as lazy, given to drink, prone to violence, and possessing loose sexual mores. Nineteenth-century Irish-born immigrants to Belfast, Maine, faced these stereotypes just as early eighteenth-century immigrants from Ireland did.⁶

A comparison of primary sources from the eighteenth century with those of the nineteenth century reveals that Irish-born immigrants, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, spoke Gaelic or English, or came from families of poor or middling means, tended to be given the same label. Even if it is true that Americans have “no enduring sense of

pure blood or culture,” as political scientist James A. Morone has argued, community old-timers never stopped measuring newcomers with a moralistic yardstick. Unwanted and feared, newcomers to America were often accused by their critics of suffering from four major moral failings: violence, laziness, drunkenness, and licentiousness, the last considered evinced by the large size of many Irish families. Critics of immigrant groups drew heavily on these stereotypes in the inflammatory rants that they produced. After these four cardinal vices were leveled at newcomers, a number of other lesser “sinful” stereotypes were often applied. The Irish in New England were also perceived as poor, diseased, and obstinate flouters of authority. Why, then, did these labels seem to melt away in Belfast, Maine?⁷

Ireland to Maine:

The majority of those who settled Belfast came from the Londonderry, New Hampshire, area, having descended from those Ulster Presbyterians who had sailed to Boston in 1718. Early settler John Mitchell was five years old when his family left Ireland on a ship filled with Presbyterians. His family landed in Boston in 1718, and the Mitchell family was among those who relocated to New Hampshire, settling within an Ulster Presbyterian community at Nutfield (later Londonderry). John Mitchell grew up there. In 1765, the governor of Massachusetts hired Mitchell to survey the Penobscot Bay region of the District of Maine, which was part of Massachusetts until 1820. Mitchell determined that the area was for sale, told his New Hampshire friends about it, and moved to Maine. (He later left the area after the British arrived and seized the town during the Revolutionary War, never to return.) By August 1769, the site was chosen and purchase money paid for a warranty deed from the heirs of Brigadier General Samuel Waldo, who held the patent. These settlers put down their roots where the Passagassawakeag River flows into Penobscot Bay. Water was the medium for most transportation and a good deal of commerce. Much of this water-borne trade was related to milling, as the area was heavily forested and there was money to be made in lumber. The place was settled in 1770, incorporated as a town in 1773, and incorporated as a city in 1853. The first settlers considered two names—Londonderry or Belfast. They settled the disagreement by a coin toss.⁸

Revising Identity:

In the decades during and after the American Revolution, professional men—lawyers, merchants, and teachers—flocked to Belfast. A number of these newcomers were first-generation Americans, their parents having been born in Ireland. By 1825, the town had its own distillery, owned by a Captain William Barnes and his partner from Boston. The one-hundred-by-fifty-foot brick building made up to five hundred gallons of rum per day and warehoused five hundred hogsheads of molasses. In 1827, the distillery produced 60,150 gallons, only 5,500 gallons of which were exported, leaving 54,650 gallons for local consumption. Distances as far away as Bangor were considered local in these figures. In this way, during the early years of the nineteenth century, Irish Belfastians helped quench America's powerful thirst for alcohol by continuing long-standing traditions that they had brought with them from Europe. This also, unfortunately, helped to perpetuate stereotypes about their love of drink, which would continue to affect subsequent generations of immigrants, most of whom had no connection to alcohol production. Maine temperance leaders estimated that Belfastians alone consumed 26,950 gallons in 1833 at eighty cents per gallon, collectively costing them an estimated \$21,500. Belfast's population in 1830 was 3,075. This means that, excluding children, the average adult consumed eighteen and a half gallons of rum per year. During this period, Belfast had thirty-one licensed retailers of liquor, twenty-seven of whom sold by the glass. William George Crosby, in his *Annals of Belfast for Half a Century*, regaled his readers with dozens of submissions printed in *The Republican Journal* in 1874 and 1875 that recalled a society well-oiled with alcohol.⁹

By the time Belfast was settled enough for retrospective musings and information gathering in the early nineteenth century, local historians sought to create an image of the settlers as republicans through and through. However, Belfast's other post-Revolutionary local writers, perhaps after a century of bearing the brunt of the negative Irish stereotypes, wanted to change the focus from their ancestors to a new collection of recent immigrants.¹⁰ One such author, William White, who wrote the oldest extant history of Belfast, Maine, took pride in the fact that the original settlers had set up a committee in 1777 to "lay before the General Court [the Massachusetts legislature] the misconduct of any person, by word or action against the [newly independent] United States." Belfast was eventually abandoned to the British during the Revolution. White argued that all settlers had chosen to decamp rather than

sign loyalty oaths to the British. Elaborating upon this point, he declared:

The spirit of freedom which had for so many generations warmed the blood of their ancestors was theirs by inheritance; and the proffer [of protection] was rejected, and such intrepidity left them no choice; to the last man they abandoned their homes, leaving their flocks in the pastures and the corn in the fields ready for harvest.

Belfast lawyer, judge, and amateur historian Joseph Williamson Jr., writing more than fifty years later, debunked White's patriotic hindsight, commenting that everyone involved with the committee reporting on anti-American rhetoric had, in fact, "been compelled to submit to an oath of allegiance" and that ten of eighteen heads of families living in Belfast during the Revolution capitulated.¹¹

The Bishop Visits Belfast:

It was an outsider, a visiting Catholic cleric, who made the first detailed description of Irish Catholics in Belfast, Maine. In July 1827, Bishop Benedict Fenwick, who was based in Boston, spent the night in Belfast while on a pastoral visit to his large and scattered diocese. The bishop's journey is discussed in his journal, which has been published. The bishop's journal was the source for the *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine* issue celebrating the history of Belfast's Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, as well as the Reverend William Leo Lucey's history, *The Catholic Church in Maine*.¹²

Fenwick reported in his journal that he asked his hotelier if there were any Catholics in the area and received a negative reply. Fenwick did not give up. Maybe he knew that Catholics had been living in Maine's Midcoast region as early as 1613. The first priest to visit Belfast did so in 1798, when the Reverend Jean-Louis Anne Madelain Lefebvre de [John] Cheverus traveled from Indian Island to Damariscotta via Belfast, describing his itinerary thus: "I suppose I shall go in a canoe to Belfast forty miles from here, and then go on horse back and follow the Post road." Cheverus, however, did not mention doing any pastoral work in Belfast, so perhaps he concluded there were no Catholics in Belfast in 1798.¹³

Nearly thirty years later, however, Bishop Fenwick ignored his hotelier's reply and went out on his own to the dockside. The bishop con-



This 1855 map shows Belfast's lower Main Street and Puddle Dock area, home to Belfast's Irish labor class. Photograph is used with permission from the Belfast Historical Society and Museum.

cluded that to find the Irish he would need to check the “low-rent” area nearest the docks. He found no Catholics. Evidently, he remained undaunted, for, after dinner, he made a second sortie, finding “a lady carrying a small child in her arms.” Fenwick identified this woman as Irish—simply by looking at her: “After dinner took another walk to the upper part of the town—had not proceeded far, when I met an *Irish woman* [emphasis added] coming into town from the country with a child in her arms.” He had no doubts that she was Irish. He bluntly asked her if she was Catholic, and she hesitated to respond. Fenwick wrote that she “[surveyed him] cautiously with her eyes some moments” before answering in the affirmative.¹⁴

How did the bishop recognize the woman as Irish, and why did he suppose an Irish woman would be Catholic? In other words, what were his cues as to her nationality and religious persuasion? It appears even the clergy drew on stereotype. In the years before the Irish famine of the



Puddle Dock in winter, ca. 1900. Photograph is used with permission from the Belfast Historical Society and Museum.



View from Primrose Hill looking toward the harbor in 1912. The massive shoe factory, which dominates the photograph, was located near Puddle Dock and was one of the first major industrial employers. Photograph is used with permission from the Belfast Historical Society and Museum.

1840s, Irish women wore hooded cloaks, generally colored blue, black, gray, or sometimes red. Irish peasant women also traditionally wore red petticoats and/or red skirts with shawls around their shoulders. Perhaps it was such attire that hinted to the origins of the woman walking the streets of Belfast with her infant and, if that is the case, then the bishop could “read” her clothing and/or mannerisms as Irish. We know he thought she was Irish by her appearance and surmised that, if she were Irish, she would also be Catholic. The writer of an article in *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine* insisted “[t]hat most if not all of these Irish emigrants [*sic*] arriving in Belfast on this occasion mentioned by Mr. [Joseph] Williamson [Jr.], were Catholics.”¹⁵

But, it seems, the Irish woman could not read the bishop’s attire nor even understand his dialect in his “performance” as Catholic cleric. When the bishop asked where she was going, she answered, “Mr. McGann’s.” When he asked her to let him accompany her, she pointedly responded, “‘No, for, what ha[s] **the like of [you]** [emphasis in the original] to do at Mr. McGann’s?’” She obviously saw the man before her as a threat. Fenwick wrote that he told her he wanted to meet all the Catholics in town. She sneered—the bishop described her as “arch”—and replied, “‘Surely you were not going to his house when I first saw you; why therefore do you wish to go to it now?’” When Fenwick explained that he wanted to give McGann “and the other Catholics a little good advice on the Sabbath day,” the woman said perhaps he was a “minister.” Fenwick replied in the affirmative; whereupon, the woman, wrote Fenwick, turned abruptly and said, “‘neither [McGann], nor his family, want to see **the like of you** [emphasis in the original].’”¹⁶

After more verbal sparring, the woman pointed him to McGann’s house. She did so out of exasperation and perhaps a bit of fear. When it started to rain, the bishop put his umbrella over the woman and her child and walked with them. She demanded to know what he was doing and why he was following her. When he told her it was his intent to accompany her to McGann’s, she told him that was not where she was heading. Fenwick wrote that he told her he would follow her until she told him where McGann lived. Finally, she pointed out the house near the wharves, so the bishop’s hunch that the Irish Catholics would be near the water was borne out. There is no record of a McGann in the Belfast census records; however, the bishop left a detailed description of what he found. The numerous stereotypes of the Irish “other” were clearly displayed. These people were poor, diseased, and had many children. The account reads as follows:

On entering a room of this house, I beheld on every side but objects of poverty and wretchedness, a sick woman groaning in a corner of the room, two other women with very poor clothes, seated on the floor, eight or ten children bunched around and only one man, and he also poorly clad. I soon learned from him that he and another had just arrived at Belfast with their families, that they had been able to get but little work since their arrival, that almost all of them had been, and some of them were, still sick, and that they were all perishing for the want of the necessaries of life. Seeing so much misery, I immediately informed him who I was, gave him money, and directed him to go without delay and purchase tea, sugar, bread, butter and milk, if he could find it at that hour of the day, and afterwards I should enable him to procure other provisions.

These newly arrived Irish were living a marginal existence near the wharves. The bishop had sought the Catholic Irish there in his first circuit through town; thus, it would appear that his definition of Irish included poor, newly arrived, and Catholic. Given the fact that the woman the bishop encountered was hesitant to define herself as Catholic or Irish, we can deduce that she may have felt that those two identifiers were dangerous labels in 1827 Belfast. She was also suspicious of him. When she remarked that perhaps he was “a minister,” she was also using pointed language. A “minister,” from her Irish perspective, was Protestant; therefore, the bishop was not “performing” Catholicism—or, in other words, he was not Irish. (Although Jesuits do use the term, it is in reference to the internal organization of the order. It does not appear that this is the woman’s meaning.)¹⁷

Fenwick, born in Maryland in 1782, almost certainly had an American accent. Even if he was wearing a clerical collar, the Irish woman, who evidently was using verbal cues to “read” people, did not perceive him as a priest. It would appear, too, that Fenwick did not notice the verbal clue when the woman referred to him as “a minister.” Fenwick used dialect differences to mark the woman’s “otherness” in his memoirs. When the bishop and the woman met again, it was at McGann’s. He teased her: “‘There,’ said I jokingly, ‘is an Irish woman and a Catholic, who when asked by a stranger to show the way to a friend’s house, refused to do it. She cannot be a true born Catholic.’” Fenwick gave her response as: “‘And surely it was because I thought it was no good you were after.’” The woman was flustered after being admonished by another woman who had informed her that she was speaking to the bishop, and he reassured her that her behavior had been perfectly prudent. This implies that it was wise not to acknowledge publicly one’s Catholicism. Once

again, he showed her difference by presenting her dialect: “No, no.... it is not for the likes of me to behave amiss to my own Clergy when I know them.” Thus, it appears that, although the American-born bishop shared religion with the recent Irish immigrants, he found these newcomers by applying stereotype. He chose to note difference in the use of English, which he perhaps found amusing.¹⁸

He urged the group he met with to go to Whitefield, where there was a larger, established Catholic presence. Whether the group took his advice or not, the group of Catholics in Belfast remained small. Over the years, Belfast Catholics were served, at various times, from Ellsworth and Winterport. Belfast may have also served as a staging area for recent Irish immigrants moving from New Brunswick south into the United States as the town became a transportation hub with frequent travel via sailing vessel to Boston. It was cheaper for Irish crossing the Atlantic to immigrate to Canada and then to travel overland to the United States.¹⁹

The Other Story:

While some scholars argue that pre-famine Protestant immigrants from Ireland were better off, the evidence in Belfast, Maine, suggests that such a smooth transition was not always the case. For example, Francis Banan, who died in October 1843 just northwest of Belfast in the town of Knox, began his American journey at harbor's side in Belfast, much like the aforementioned Irish Catholics, and his newspaper obituary gave a familiar story of deprivation. The Banan family, arriving in August 1819, a quarter century before the flood of famine refugees that would begin in the 1840s, was destitute when they landed. Francis Banan, according to the obituary, “was poor having spent all his substance in his emigration.” It recounted the story of his arrival, stating: “He was in a strange country penniless and forsaken, and was necessitated to spend his first night in this country in the open air on one of the wharves in Belfast village, having been rejected by those who had good homes and all the conveniences of this life.”

Here is the stereotype of the newly arrived Irish immigrant, a stereotype that, evidently, Bishop Fenwick only a few years later assumed meant Catholic. But Banan, a “native of Ireland” was a “systematic christian, [*sic*] a member and Leader in the Methodist Episcopal Church.” The writer of his 1843 obituary muses: “What must have been the feelings of that good man knowing himself so far away from his native country, poor, forsaken, and friendless, with no better comforts for a

night's rest than a cold, damp wharf, for himself, wife, and three infant children?" The 1819 arrival of the Banans is reminiscent of Bishop Fenwick's encounter with the poor Irish in 1827. However, the Banans, like many other Irish immigrants, were not Catholic.²⁰

By the eighteen twenties and thirties, a number of young men about town, members of the merchant and professional classes, could trace their heritage to Ireland. Nowhere in the written histories of the city are those Irish roots investigated. As discussed earlier, the earliest historians sought to create the idea of Ulster Irish being separate from Irish. William White wrote and published the first history of the area in 1827. His *A History of Belfast with Introductory Remarks on Acadia* was the first bound book to be published in Belfast. White took great care to establish that the first settlers were Presbyterian Scots who, although having lived in Ireland, were not Irish. In his words, these Presbyterian Scots colonized the "province of Ulster in Ireland," because it had "fallen into the crown by attainder of rebels, James I. of England, introduced companies of farmers from England and Scotland, to improve and enjoy the fertile section of the United Kingdom." Ulster was no longer Ireland; in White's language, it was now the United Kingdom. White, thus, was one of the first to separate Belfast in Ulster or Maine from anything smacking of Irishness.²¹

By the mid-nineteenth century, the trope that Belfast's founders were not Irish, but Scottish, was firmly in place. Because they were Scottish, even after a hundred years in Ireland, they were better educated and better off. For example, John Lymburner Locke, in his "Sketches of the Early History of Belfast," which dates from the 1850s, pointed out that the list of the early settlers from Ulster contained "two hundred and seventeen names, all of which save seven were subscribed by the persons themselves. Nine of this company were clergymen, and three others were graduates of the University of Scotland." Locke went on to equate "Irish" with uneducated and illiterate, stating "the fact that so large a proportion of [the Ulster Presbyterians] were able to write their own names, is a proof quite conclusive that they were intellectually in advance of the common class of emigrants [*sic*]." If Irish meant common, uneducated, and illiterate, who would want to be Irish? ²²

During the same time frame, however, Irish roots worked well for at least one Belfast first-generation American with political aspirations. Three-time Maine Governor Hugh Johnston Anderson's parents came from Castletwellan, County Down, one of the counties of the province of Ulster. They were, ostensibly, Protestant. His father John and his uncle



Governor Hugh Johnston Anderson used his Irish roots to move up the ranks in the nascent Democratic Party. Photograph is used with permission from the Belfast Historical Society and Museum.

Francis, both merchants, were members of a business network stretching from the north of Ireland to Liverpool, England, to Boston, Massachusetts and Belfast, Maine. Evidently, they took their Irish origins seriously, as both Anderson brothers were members of the Charitable Irish Society in Boston, an institution created in 1737 to “comfort and [console] ... Irish Emigrants, or their descendants, in distress, in proportion to our social ability or individual liberality.” After John Anderson’s premature death, his American-born teenage son Hugh moved from Wiscasset to Belfast to help Francis in the Belfast store. Francis, too, died prematurely, and teenage Hugh took over the shop and ran it for ten years. As a member of the merchant class, Hugh had his hand in a number of Belfast business ventures.²³

In the decade of the Irish famine, Hugh Anderson made a run for governor of Maine, then a position elected annually, and his Irishness

played an important role in his political life. For example, in his first run for governor, Anderson competed for the Democratic nomination with another first-generation American—Edward Kavanagh, a man whose parents also came from Ireland. The only difference was that Kavanagh, who was from Newcastle, Maine, was Catholic and educated at Catholic schools in Baltimore and Montreal. By happenstance, he had become the first Catholic governor in New England when, as president of the Maine State Senate, he succeeded a governor who resigned to take a federal post in early 1843. When Kavanagh ran later that year for the Democratic nomination for a full one-year term, he lost to Anderson.²⁴

The Republican Journal argued in that election season that, even though some people were saying Kavanagh had not been re-nominated because he was Irish Catholic, being Catholic was a non-issue. The newspaper asserted that Anderson's Irish credentials were bona fide—both his parents came from Ireland. But the newspaper refused to equate Irish with Catholic, side-stepping any such discussion. During the election season, the newspaper noted some Irish were disgruntled because an Irish Catholic did not win the Democratic nomination. The newspaper seemed to argue that reducing Irishness to Catholicism was not helpful. Though Belfast's Protestant Irish community was often loathe to identify as Irish, the political advantages of doing so generated some ambivalence in regard to ethnic identity. The newspaper, for example, emphasized that Irishness was more important a measure of suitability for office than being Catholic, stating the following:

The democratic party, which has ever been the firmest [of] champions of liberty of speech and of opinion would never proscribe a man for his religious opinions. The Waldo Signal, which is a good authority upon no subject, gave currency to and probably invented, this falsehood some weeks since. The Bangor Democrat, in the course of an excellent reply to this slander, observes...The very men who are attempting to excite a prejudice against [Mr. Anderson] and a sympathy for Mr. Kavanagh, or rather to prevent Irishmen from voting the democratic ticket, would have appealed to another class of citizens to oppose Mr. Kavanagh if he had been nominated because he was an Irish Catholic.²⁵

Anderson won the 1843 election—and two more (in 1844 and 1845). Even after leaving the governorship, he continued to evince an interest in Irish issues, presiding at a public meeting 23 February 1847 to “co-operate in measures then in progress for the famishing poor in Ireland.” The effort raised \$193, which was “forwarded to the treasurer of

the relief fund.” He then went on to serve two terms in Congress. Soon after, in 1853, when Democrat Franklin Pierce became president, Anderson was appointed United States Customs Commissioner in Washington, D.C. He later became commissioner of the San Francisco Mint. He retired to Portland, Maine, but after his death in 1881 his body was returned to the place he considered his hometown—Belfast.²⁶

The contradictions about being Irish displayed by Irish Protestants in Belfast played out in the pages of the local weekly. Hugh Anderson was a financial backer of *The Republican Journal*, as were some other first-generation Americans with Irish roots. The weekly, Jacksonian in politics, launched in Belfast in 1829. This paper covered events in Ireland in great detail, yet even as the paper reported “doings” in Ireland with much sympathy, it was not above lampooning the Irish immigrant—or reporting in great detail the “vices” of the Irish in America. The negative stereotypes of the Irish appeared as column “fillers” in *The Republican Journal*. These pieces ran several years before the influx of famine refugees flooded the port cities of the Eastern seaboard.²⁷

Male violence was depicted as deplorable, but Irish female violence was presented as even more egregious, for in addition to challenging middle-class female norms, it also contested the middle-class ideal of the male head-of-house. Humor made the point. One example ran in the 11 August 1843 paper: “DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE.—An Irishman being asked for a certificate of marriage, bared his head and exhibited a huge scar, which looked as if it might have been made by a fire shovel.—[sic] The evidence was satisfactory.” The paper also ran a number of news briefs that focused on crimes committed by Irishmen on this side of the Atlantic. An example of such ran in the 8 April 1841 issue. The item focused on the violence committed by an unnamed Irishman against the “local” Wingate, who was actually the perpetrator:

A man by the name of Edmund Wingate, about 45 years of age, was on Saturday last so severely beaten by an Irishman confined with him in the Houlton Jail, that he died on Sunday. Wingate was deranged and stated before his confinement that he came from Dixmont. The Irishman says that Wingate rushed upon him with an open knife, and he was obliged to beat him in self defense.²⁸

Irish Catholic/Protestant:

Born in the village of Curraha in County Meath, Ireland, William S. Brannagan arrived in Belfast in 1843 amid the tumultuous years of the

Know-Nothing movement. A Catholic, he left Ireland at age eighteen, sailing to Philadelphia, where he found work as a gardener. Impressed by his abilities, the woman of the house where he worked recommended him to her merchant husband, who was also impressed. The husband sent Brannagan to Boston to open a branch business and later shifted him to Belfast. While still in Boston, Brannagan witnessed the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, in 1834, so he well understood that anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment abounded in at least some areas of the United States. Yet, after arriving in Belfast, Brannagan made no secret of his religion or his ethnicity. The Philadelphia merchant's empire collapsed, leaving Brannagan seemingly stranded in Belfast. However, he was well received as the manager of the dry goods business, so a local merchant hired him.²⁹

Brannagan connected with the small city's Protestant businessmen while he worked diligently to support the religious life of Catholics in Belfast, offering buildings he owned as locations for Sunday Mass. By his own estimate, there were 150 Catholics in the city by the mid-1870s. Through his efforts, Saint Francis of Assisi Church was built in Belfast in the 1890s; he donated his money and land to the cause. When he died in 1901, Brannagan was buried in Grove Cemetery, where, "he lies, closely surrounded by the graves of his friends." Those friends were Protestant.³⁰ *The Republican Journal* obituary said Brannagan was "an honest, upright man, of pleasant and friendly disposition.... [who] had a host of friends, who honored him as a good citizen. In his friendships, he knew no distinction of religion or politics, although he held decided views in both." In Williamson's second volume of *The History of Belfast*, Brannagan merited a three-page biography, folded into the four pages devoted to the history of the Catholic community of Belfast. In the entry, Brannagan received a more detailed, personal description:

He is remembered by the present generation as a bright, active, dapper little figure, full of energy, though over eighty, always elaborately courteous, and habitually attired in a quaint black coat and a tall beaver hat: — [sic] by his inherent nature a true "gentleman of the old school." He had the quick wit and the sense of humor of his race, and was prepared to meet every comer with a ready answer. Always well supplied with the latest local news, he dearly loved a neighborly chat over a cheering 'cup,' and his none too frequent and ceremoniously short calls are still missed in more than one household of the older residents.

Brannagan's biography thus limns a more positive portrait of Irishness: dapper, quick witted, ready with quick rejoinders, a sense of humor, well informed on local gossip, chatty, and generous with drink. He worked as a salesman for nearly thirty years. He never married, managed his money wisely, and became firmly entrenched in Belfast's economic life.³¹

Distinguishing Irish Traits:

What is apparent when comparing the life stories of William S. Brannagan, an Irish Catholic who arrived poor, and Francis Banan, an Irish Protestant who also arrived poor, is that they warranted special mention at their deaths because they had "made it" in the Belfast area and in America. Banan appeared worthy, because his "true moral and intellectual worth" had become known in the community. His accumulations provided the evidence: "He finally settled in this town [Knox], and by his industry, prudence, and good economy, and the blessing of Providence, he accumulated a handsome property, which he left for the comfort of the afflicted family." Brannagan's achievements, too, were measured in possessions: "Since then he has lived at his ease on an ample property acquired by industry and frugality." His ability to give back to the community was also noted in his obituary:

Mr. Brannagan was a devout Catholic and took great interest in the local church. It was mainly through his efforts that the church was organized in this city, and the church edifice and parsonage were both gifts from him. He spent his money and time freely for the cause, and when old age came on made an arrangement by which he was to have a home in the parsonage.

Their ability to accrue property perhaps gave them the ability to form friendships with people of status. Belfast judge, lawyer, and historian Joseph Williamson's younger brother, George, for example, was one of the pallbearers at Brannagan's funeral, as was Irish immigrant James Haney, who first appeared in the United States Census in Belfast in 1870, where he was identified as a twenty-seven-year-old laborer born in Ireland. Haney had been involved in Brannagan's business life for more than a dozen years, selling to and buying properties from Brannagan in 1889. Thus, it appears that in at least this small New England city, class

distinctions, religious orientation, and ethnic background were not as confining as in larger urban areas.³²

Brannagan's funeral was a microcosm of Belfast's Irish heritage. The event brought together well-to-do, educated people from the established elite and working-class Irish immigrants. Protestant and Catholic pallbearers participated in the public ritual surrounding his death. The Roman Catholic hierarchy of New England celebrated the funeral Mass, and, no doubt, escorted the cortege to the city cemetery, where there was no separate Catholic burial space. Grove Cemetery, like the city of Belfast, was home to Irish-born immigrants and their descendants, both Protestant and Catholic. All of them played a part in creating the city of Belfast, shaping its character with their cultural and ethnic heritages.³³

Belfast, Maine, has no record of a March Saint Patrick's Day—or July Orange Day—celebration. These two Irish holidays of unity and opposition were ignored. It was as though these people chose to weed out all public demonstrations rooted in Ireland and its politics. The first celebrations—and, indeed, the only regular celebrations for most of Belfast's history—centered on the Fourth of July and the birth and death days of American founders, such as Washington, Adams, and Jefferson. Even later arrivals from Ireland were more interested in Fourth of July celebrations.³⁴

Stereotypes, those shorthand categories people create to talk about others, can be confronted, ignored, embraced, made fun of, or contested. A century after Belfast's settlement, the descendants of those newcomers used humor to make fun of themselves, perhaps, but they were still interested in the events transpiring in Ireland, given the column inches in *The Republican Journal* devoted to Irish topics throughout the 1840s. But religion, in at least one small Maine community, was not necessarily an issue or even a means by which to measure a person's Irishness. By the time of William S. Brannagan's obituary in 1901, Irishness was measured by a person's quick wit, sense of humor, repartee, love of gossip, and a quiet cup shared in the company of friends.

NOTES

1. Londonderry, New Hampshire, is also named for another Irish city. The original name of the Irish city was Derry, which was destroyed in the war with England in the seventeenth century. The city was rebuilt by London financiers, who renamed the conquered city Londonderry. The political divide came to these shores with the immigrants: Londonderry and Derry, New Hampshire, are

neighboring communities; Joseph Williamson, Jr., *History of Belfast in the State of Maine: From its First Settlement in 1770 to 1875*, vol. 1 (Portland: Loring, Short, and Harmon, 1877), 117.

2. For a discussion of the effects of the nineteenth-century famine in Ireland on the Irish immigrant community in the United States, see the following works: Timothy W. Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845–1852* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994); and *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion* (Houndsmills: Basingstoke, 2002); Timothy J. Meagher, *From Paddy to Studs: Irish-American Communities in the Turn of the Century Era, 1880–1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); and Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–1849* (New York: Penguin, 1991), reprinted from 1961; Williamson, vol. 1, 61; The Reverend James McGregor, petition to Massachusetts Colony Governor Samuel Shute, “The Humble Apology of the People of Nutfield”; John McMurphy, petition to the government of New Hampshire, cited in Kerby Miller, *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 127–129.

3. David Noel Doyle, “Scots Irish or Scotch-Irish” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, eds. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 151–170; For a thorough discussion of these terms, see Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also: Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish Disapora: A Primer* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1996) and Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

4. How Scottish settlers came to be in the province of Ulster is a long story, connected to the story of English invasion of its neighboring island, the seizure of land from the native population, and the plantation of settlers from the lowlands of Scotland. The Province of Ulster, which had been a thorn in the side of the English monarchy, was planted with Protestants after the flight of the Irish Earls to the Continent in 1607. Thus, many of those Scots colonists’ descendants who sailed from Ulster for the Massachusetts colony in 1718 had been four generations in Ireland. See: R.F. Foster, *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History* (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1984); and Sean McMahon, *A Short History of Ireland* (Chester Springs: DuFour Editions, 1997); The Potato Famine is no longer used to designate the Irish Famine of the 1840s, the argument being that it was not the potato, but rather English policy, that caused the famine. See: Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion*, British History in Perspective Series, Jeremy Black, ed. (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, 2002) and *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine 1845–52* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1994). For an earlier perspective, see Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*.

5. R. Stuart Wallace, “The Scotch-Irish of Provincial Maine: Purpooduck, Merymeeting Bay, and Georgia,” in *They Change Their Sky: The Irish in Maine*, ed. Michael C. Connolly (Orono: University of Maine Press, 2004), 56.

6. Robert Long, "Maine Slowly Gaining Cultural Diversity, But Three Largest Cities Still Some of the Whitest in the US," <http://bangordailynews.com/2012/09/10/news/state/maine-slowly-gaining-cultural-diversity-but-3-largest-cities-still-some-of-the-whitest-in-the-us/> (last modified September 10, 2012); Benedict Joseph Fenwick, S.J., *Memoirs to Serve for the Future: Ecclesiastical History of the Diocese of Boston*, ed. Joseph M. McCarthy (Yonkers: U.S. Catholic Historical Society, 1978), 206–207.

7. James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 12, 16–17.

8. Williamson, vol. 1, 63–65, 87.

9. Among this influx were Francis Anderson (merchant, born in Castlewella, County Down), Hugh Johnston Anderson (merchant, born in Wiscasset, Maine, son of John Anderson, immigrant from Castlewella, County Down), William Lowney (teacher, born in Ireland), Nathaniel Lowney (teacher and lawyer, born in Monmouth, Maine, son of William), and John Wilson (lawyer, born in Peterborough, New Hampshire, son of Robert Wilson, born in Ireland). See Williamson, vol. 1; Williamson, vol. 1, 683; *Annual Report of the Maine Temperance Society*, 23 January 1833, 30; William George Crosby, "Annals of Belfast for Half a Century" in *Early Histories of Belfast*, ed. Alan Taylor (Camden: Picton Press, 1989), 1–194.

10. Patrick O'Sullivan, ed., *The Irish in the New Communities*, The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity Series, vol. 2 (London: Leicester University Press, 1992), 10. O'Sullivan argues that "ethnic identity is a matter of personal choice, a matter of picking out the most attractive grandparents...Individuals belong to social groups, they strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem [and they] do this mainly by distinguishing their group from neighboring groups along some dimension which makes them feel superior" (10).

11. William White, "History of Belfast with Introductory Remarks on Acadia," in *Early Histories of Belfast, Maine*, ed. Alan Taylor (Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1989), 245–279 (quote on pg. 255); The British sought to create New Ireland on Penobscot Bay, hoping to attract loyalists to the area; Williamson, vol. 1, 172–173.

12. Fenwick, 205–207; William Leo Lucey, S.J., *The Catholic Church in Maine* (Francetown: Marshall Jones Co., 1957), 30; *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 3 (January 1917). The entire issue is dedicated to the history of Catholics in Belfast.

13. Fenwick, 205; Lucey, vii (quote on pg. 30); *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, 224.

14. *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, 225; Fenwick, 205; Lucey, 58; Fenwick, 205 (all quotes).

15. Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840–1930* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 13–14; For a discussion of performing ethnic identity, see: Norman K. Denzin, *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003); Diane Negra, ed., *The Irish in*

Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); and Graham Brand and Paddy Scannell, "Talk, Identity and Performance: The Tony Blackburn Show," in *Broadcast Talk*, ed. P. Scannell (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 201–203, 215–222; *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, 223 (quote).

16. Fenwick, 205.

17. Ibid.; *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, 226 (quote).

18. Fenwick, 205–206 (quote on pg. 206).

19. Ibid.; Lucey, 58; *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, 223.

20. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Education Facsimiles 121–140, "Introduction": "...although in the early part of the [eighteenth] century many of them could not afford the passage-money and had to work their way out by various means, as the century wore on there was a marked rise in the affluence and social status of the average emigrant"; *The Republican Journal*, vol. 15, no. 40, 3 November 1843 (all quotes).

21. Taylor, ed., *Early Histories of Belfast, Maine*, ii; Abbott's work remained in manuscript form until it was published in installments in *The Republican Journal*, beginning 25 January 1900; White, "History of Belfast," 252 (quote).

22. John Lymburner Locke, "Sketches of the Early History of Belfast," in *Early Histories of Belfast*, ed. Alan Taylor (Camden: Picton Press, 1989), 197. This is a reprint of the series that appeared in *The Progressive Age* weekly newspaper, published in Belfast, in sixteen issues, beginning 10 April 1856.

23. Edward T. McCarron, "Facing the Atlantic: The Irish Merchant Community of Lincoln County, 1780–1820," in *They Change Their Sky: The Irish in Maine*, ed. Michael C. Connolly (Orono: University of Maine Press, 2004) 73 (quote); Account Current with the Charitable Irish Society, 17 March 1810. The Anderson brothers were accepted as members by vote 17 March 1802.

24. McCarron, "Facing the Atlantic," 85.

25. "CATHOLICISM," *The Republican Journal*, vol. 15, no. 24 (11 July 1843), 2.

26. Williamson, vol. 1, 737 (quote); Joseph Williamson and Alfred Johnson, *The History of the City of Belfast, Maine*, vol. 2 (Somersworth, NH: New England History Press and Belfast Free Library, 1983), 408; "Death of Ex-Gov. Anderson," *The Republican Journal*, 2 June 1881, 2.

27. Williamson, vol. 1, 351. The Belfast paper was preceded by three earlier versions: *The Hancock Gazette*, which became the *Belfast Gazette*, followed by the *Waldo Democrat*. One H.J. Anderson advertised "a supply of rum" in the *Gazette's* pages in 1828.

28. The Irish community may have co-opted the stereotypes, using humor to rally the community—laughing at the laughers, perhaps; however, the use of co-optation of stereotypes is outside the scope of this paper; *The Republican Journal*, 11 August 1843 (first quote); *The Republican Journal*, 8 April 1841 (second quote).

29. *Maine Catholic Historical Magazine*, 254; For information on the burning of the convent, see <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/949.htm>.

30. Brannagan's grave is marked with one of two Celtic crosses in Grove Cemetery.

31. Williamson, vol. 1, 316; Williamson and Johnson, vol. 2, 61 (first and third quote); Obituary, "William S. Brannagan," *The Republican Journal*, 24 January 1901, 1 (second quote).

32. George Pratt, "Died," *The Republican Journal*, vol. 15, no. 40 (3 November 1843) (first and second quote); Obituary, "William S. Brannagan," 1 (third and fourth quote); The older Williamson brother was acquainted with Brannagan. Joseph Williamson Jr., Judge of the Police Court, came into contact with him over a stolen goods case. Rosalia Jane Norton had shoplifted from Brannagan's shop. Police Court Docket: City of Belfast, Commencing at the First Term of Said Court. March. 1853, case no. 112; Deeds under William S. Brannagan (also found under William H. Branagan and William S. Branagan).

33. Williamson, vol. 1, 522. First-generation Irish American Nathaniel Lowney helped lay out and fence the land that became Grove Cemetery in the mid-1830s. Lowney was a lawyer, who, with Anderson, moved into Democratic politics. He chose to stay in Maine, while Anderson parleyed his position into national politics. Lowney, Brannagan, and Anderson are buried in Grove, as is Irish-born, Catholic, laborer James Haney. See cemetery.cityofbelfast.org.

34. The current "Celtic Celebration" is recent, commencing in the past decade. St. Patrick's Day, observed March 17, currently considered an Irish Catholic celebration, was in the eighteenth century, at least for the Charitable Irish Society in Boston, an Irish celebration—given that the majority of the membership was Irish Protestant. Orange Day, July 12, celebrates William of Orange's triumph over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1689; Police Court Docket: City of Belfast; John Doran, Brian McCabe, James Clark, George Stevens, Josiah Wood, Antony Mally, Ava Burgin, and Lewis L. Ryan were all brought before the Police Court on July 4 and 5, 1853. All, save George Stevens, were fined. Wood was acquitted on one charge, but found guilty of intoxication and becoming quarrelsome. He was sentenced to thirty days in jail plus costs; however, he did not serve any jail time. July 4 must have been more sedate in 1854—only one appearance before the Police Court: Charles Johnson. Only John Doar appeared before the Police Court in 1855, on July 5.