### A Study Of Two New York Irish-American Newspapers In The Early Nineteenth Century

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The following article was written in 1980 as a Master's thesis by Mr. McShane for an MA degree in history from Columbia University. It is included in the bibliography created by Roundtable members, which is how we discovered it. Currently Mr. McShane is vice president of marketing for Duff & Phelps Credit Rating Co. in New York City.

The late American humorist, Will Rogers always began his monologues with the statement, "Well, all I know is what I read in the papers." The readers of this essay might be able to conclude the same with regard to the early Irish immigrants to New York City. This essay is an attempt to describe some issues that were important to New York's Irish community between the years 1816 and 1830. The major Irish-American newspapers of those two years, the Shamrock and the Truth Teller, respectively, will be studied. The years that are to be considered have been chosen because, in both, the Irish-American press faced up to a challenge presented to its community. In both instances, they responded admirably and tenaciously. An aspect of the Irish-Americans that can be determined from a study of these two periodicals is the changing image they possessed of themselves, their adopted country and the conditions of the homeland they had left behind.

In order to understand the world in which the early nineteenth century Irish immigrant operated, it would be helpful to review the world he left behind. Ireland's ancient Gaelic heritage had been all but destroyed by English domination. Although the English had maintained a presence in Ireland since 1172, it was not until the seventeenth century that their influence could be said to have been pervasive. English Protestant armies led by Oliver Cromwell helped to destroy most of Ireland's Catholic political hierarchy. The final collapse of the traditional Catholic leadership took place in 1691, when they were forced to surrender to William of Orange's English army after the siege of Limerick.

At this same time, Anglo-Irish landlords, members of the Protestant Church of Ireland, came into possession of large parcels of land confiscated from Catholics under Tudor and Stuart persecutions. Also, large numbers of Scottish Presbyterians were resettled in eastern Ulster.

To protect their favored status in Ireland, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy petitioned the English Parliament for a series of Penal Laws to keep Catholics in a subjugated state. Laws which prohibited free worship by Catholics, denied them civil or military office, forbade them to enter the professions and limited their right to hold leases of longer than thirty-one years, were enacted between the years 1695 and 1746. As a result, the ascendancy controlled the land as well as the political and financial systems. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the majority of these laws began to be repealed. However for all intents and purposes, most of the power within Ireland resided in the Ascendancy.

Through all this, Irish Catholic peasants lived a barely marginal

existence frequently on plots of less than an acre. Between 1780 and 1840 the Irish population jumped from 5 to 9 million. Obviously, there was some pressure to emigrate in order to improve one's ability to earn a living. However, the early years of the nineteenth century were years in which transatlantic passage was neither plentiful nor cheap. A fare of about ten guineas for passage on a returning Canadian or American flaxseed or lumber boat "guaranteed that more of the Irish entering America were people of at least moderate means."

Therefore, the majority of immigrants from Ireland who arrived in New York in this era would, of necessity, not have been as destitute as those who arrived later as a result of the Famine. With regard to their religious affiliation, it has been estimated that these early immigrants were about evenly divided between Protestant and Catholic.<sup>3</sup>

The establishment of the first Irish-American newspaper in New York City was an accomplishment of no small import, although it occurred at a time that has been largely ignored by most immigration historians. The great majority of works in this field, when dealing with Irish-Catholic immigration to America, tend to begin in 1815 and thus, ignore a significant, albeit small by 1845 standards, community of Irish-Americans that grew steadily from the late eighteenth century on.

During the early nineteenth century, Irish Catholic immigrants suffered intense and deepseated prejudice, which was scarcely ameliorated by the efforts, not always successful, of a small group of dedicated Irish-American journalists. To prove that these immigrants were the targets of religious and ethnic intolerance required only a cursory glance at their periodicals. Their newspapers in this context were partly a defense mechanism, prompting one writer to explain that, "As citizens of the United States, the Irish were frequently called upon to defend their faith against the attacks of those who misunderstood them. Misrepresentation called for retort..."4 This area was not far removed from 1777, when John Jay proposed that the New York State Constitution bar a Catholic from holding land or enjoying any of the civil rights of the state citizens until they took an oath in court denying allegiance to the Pope or priests.<sup>5</sup> This anti-Catholic feeling was widespread on both sides of the Atlantic a generation later, resulting in the Lord George Gordon riots in London and a variety of xenophobic acts in America.

Into this arena came an ever-increasing number of Irish-Catholic immigrants. Following the turmoil of the French Revolution, the Irish Rebellion of 1798, and the Napoleonic Wars, about six thousand Irish a year came to America between 1800 and 1802.6 While the majority of these were Protestants, many-both Catholic and Protestant-were Irish Nationalists who were united in their distaste for Great Britain and Anglophiles everywhere. To divide Irish Nationalist loyalties along strictly religious lines would be a mistake; the movement counted Protestants such as Theobald Wolfe Tone, Henry Grattan, and Robert Emmet among its national heroes. The immigrants were driven by English oppression from their homeland

to many countries, "but to none more than our own, and here to no state more than to New York." Though not a large proportion of the American population, by the end of the colonial times "Irish names were becoming common." From 1815 onward, a large percentage of Irish immigrant ships sailed for New York. In 1815, 30 of the 35 ships that sailed for America from Londonderry, Belfast, Dublin, Waterford and Limerick had New York as their terminus. A study of the announcements of arriving ships shows that approximately 40 persons came on each vessel. The number is small when compared to the number of Irish immigrants that arrived in the next three decades, but it was significant to a city whose population was just reaching 100,000. In 1815 the Catholic population, including Irish and Germans, was about 15.000.

This was the community in which Edward Gillespy began editing and publishing the first Irish Nationalist newspaper, the Shamrock or Hiberian Chronicle in December, 1810. Little is known about Gillespy prior to this moment other than this support for the causes of Irish independence and Catholic emancipation. His dual sympathies are clearly represented in his newspaper. In the prospectus contained in the first issue. Gillespy pointed out the need for a forum in which the important events taking place in Ireland could be presented to Irish-Americans "without taint of fiction or prejudice."12 It is natural to assume that the exploits of Napoleon in Europe kept events in Ireland out of the general press-to the consternation of the growing Irish-American community. According to historian William Joyce, the Irish-American press developed from the dual orientation of the immigrant community's interests:13 Catholicism and Irish Nationalism. The orientation of the Shamrock was tilted more toward the latter. This is not surprising. since "Catholic" agitation was not yet as potent a political movement.

The Shamrock editorial offices were located in lower Manhattan at 24 William Street. The first Shamrock was offered for subscription on December 15, 1810 and was a four-page, fifteen by eighteen inch, issue. Each page had five columns. Gillespy's correspondence with newspaper editors in Dublin, Belfast, and Cork kept him informed of events in Ireland. The slowness of travel caused many of the dispatches to be printed up to six months after they were written.

The first issue contained news from Dublin about an Aggregate Meeting which discussed Repeal of the Union and the Catholic cause in Ireland. There was also a poet's corner, various public announcements, and regrettably, announcements for the sale of slaves. Afterwards, the protests of some subscribers "taught the editor a lesson, and he never again inserted such advertisements." The Shamrock printed very little domestic news.

The masthead depicted an eagle clutching a shamrock in its talons and holding an Irish shield under its wing. Beneath it were the words, "Fostered under thy wing, we die for thy defense." A year's subscription to the weekly cost three dollars in the city and fifty cents extra by mail. Listed in every issue were the names of the paper's agents in various American cities such as Albany, Washington, and Philadelphia, whose purpose was to collect from those subscribers who were behind in their payments. This points out two interesting facts about the *Shamrock*. One is that from the day it was first issued in 1810, through several interruptions in

publication and an 1813 price rise to four dollars per annum, until its demise in 1817, the *Shamrock* was always in poor economic condition. The other fact is that the newspaper appealed to an audience of Irish-Americans on a national rather than a local scale.

The size of the Shamrock's audience is not clear, although from reading most of the issues it seems that circulation could have been anywhere from 600 to 1500.\(^{16}\) This small number can be misleading in judging the Shamrock's impact on the Irish-American community. William Joyce, in Editors and Ethnicity, points out that ethnic newspapers were one of the prime avenues of communications between members of what he calls, "immigrant elites."\(^{17}\) He defines this term as those immigrant leaders whose attitudes toward the receiving society help to determine the relationship between the particular immigrant community and its host society. Editors of the ethnic press are to be considered members of these elites.\(^{18}\) Therefore, if a good deal of the Shamrock's audience consisted of Irish-Americans who helped to shape popular opinion within their community, the newspaper's circulation figures are not an accurate indication of its editorial influence.

The second issue of the *Shamrock* was delayed five days for financial reasons, but after that the paper began to appear regularly. Throughout the year 1811, the paper closely followed the English libel case between Lord Castlereagh and Peter Finnerty, an Irish journalist. Along with the continuing saga of Catholic emancipation in Ireland, the paper began to take notice of events in America. In 1811, the *Shamrock* accepted advertisements announcing the formation of private schools, the publication of books and journals, and rewards for runaway apprentices. Also, the newspaper gave long, detailed accounts of annual St. Patrick's Day festivities throughout the country. One issue illustrates the editor's advocacy of quick naturalization and assimilation for Irish-Americans; during the War of 1812 it advised them to "love and serve your country with the devotion of free men." 19

Irish-American involvement in that war stemmed partly from pro-American and partly from anti-English sentiments. The Shamrock of January 18, 1812, printed a letter which spoke of the coming war and how Irishmen should "exult at the possibility of doing England an essential injury."20 Every issue of the paper was filled with news about the war. Some subscribers complained that because of this information, the Shamrock "failed to give to the Irish news that time and attention which its prospectus so definitely outlines."21 Of course, the Shamrock was totally committed to the American cause and wrote proudly of the Irish contribution to it. The issue of April 20, 1811, told of the all-Irish brigade, the Irish Republican Greens, and their maneuvers prior to the war. The paper also described in detail the capture of Fort George, which was to become a rallying point of Irish-American pride, and of Fort York. The Shamrock carried constant pleas to Irish immigrants to enlist, which according to the issue of August 20, 1814, were successful.22 But much of the war was not covered because of Gillespy's failing health, and on June 5, 1813 the paper ceased publication. It did not resume again until June 18, 1814. Another reason for its temporary demise was the editor's inability to collect over four thousand dollars in unpaid subscriptions.<sup>23</sup> In his final issue before suspending publication, Gillespy wrote of his intention to renew publishing after the war. He apparently could get little news from Ireland during the hostilities.

# THE SHAMROCK;

HIBERNIAN



CHRONICLE.

" FOSTERED UNDER THY WING, WE DIE IN THE DEFENCE!

VOL. II

NEW-YORK, SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 1812.

NO. 26-WHOLE NO 78.

### SELECT ACADEMY.

No: 180, William-street, corner of Little George's-street.

Edward Cassidy, most respectfully informs his friends, Patrons, and the public, that he has removed his institution to the above place, where he continues to teach, as usual, the following Branches:

Orthography, Mercantile Arithmetic Elocution, Reading, Book Keeping, Composition, Penmanship, in various hands, English Grammar, Use of the Globs and Maps, with the practical branches of the Mathematics,

A few more pupils will be admitted by applying at the Academy, where prices of tuition may be known, FOR SALE.

THE Office and establishment of the Lady's Weekly Miscellany, also 40 or 50 volumes (bound) of the above work—For particulars enquire at 28 Frankfert-Street. Ma, 30.

#### SITUATION WANTED.

YOUNG man just arrived from Ireland who served his time and kept the books in a merca tile house there, wishes a situation—a respectable reference can be given. In the present state of affairs sallary would be no object—for particulars enquire of the editor of this paper.

Nay 30. 2w.

## UNION HOTEL Military Hall.

The subscriber having taken that sp.cious house, no. 68 William-street, known as the Union Hotel, respectfully acquaints his friends and the public that it is his intention to render it as reputable, in point of accomedations, as is within the limits of his power. His liquors shall be of the first quality, and his la. ler supplied with the best, the seasons can afford. The great hall seasons can amora. The bearing shall, as it was heretofore, apprepriated to public meetings, military parades, balls, &c. &c. The Lodgeroom, one of the finest in this city, shall be as usual eleg-ntly o namented and kept in the best order for its original purpose. In short, nothing shall be omitted which can render the Union Hotel respectable. /JAMES RYAN.

When publication resumed, Gillespy went into partnership with Thomas O'Conor. They dropped Hibernian Chronicle from the masthead and added another motto: "What a people can do the Americans have done. What a people ought to do the people of Ireland are considering."24 Gillespy retained the title of publisher, and O'Conor, a refugee of the 1798 rebellion, became the editor. O'Conor had previously edited a weekly newspaper entitled War for a short time. Prior to that he had written A History of the Revolutionary War in America, a work that gave generous praise to the Irishmen who had participated in the conflict. The newspaper was not smaller in dimensions but was now composed of eight pages instead of four. It contained news of such social and fraternal organizations as the Juvenile Sons of Erin, the Friends of Ireland, and the Saint Patrick Benevolent Society. (These groups, whose "proceeding bulked large in the early Irish-American press."25) Despite changes in its physical apearance, the Shamrock continued to keep the Irish-American community informed of Daniel O'Connell's speeches on Catholic emancipation and frequently spoke up for the local Irish community. It chided the New York Museum for "unreasonable sarcasms against the Irish."26 In an open address to the people of New York O'Conor lectured on

what the Irish immigrant had escaped from and deplored that "to

some of these narrow, infatuated, bigoted and illiberal men, a Hottentot...or a Japanese would be more acceptable than an Irishman."<sup>27</sup>

Edward Gillespy severed all connections with the newspaper on January 28, 1815. O'Conor took over sole control of a newspaper whose finances were still precarious because of its subscribers' negligence. Ironically, the newspaper "could boast of the largest patronage of any weekly paper in the city," but was hurt by its greatest source of pride. The paper would falter again in 1817, only to be revived in 1819 as a magazine that appeared intermittently until 1824. However, "one great contest was yet to raise the Shamrock before its final demise." That contest was the newspaper's vigorous opposition to Rufus King's aspirations to the New York governorship in 1816.

The Shamrock's opposition to King can be partially explained by his Federalism and by DeWitt Clinton's Irish background and Republicanism. However, this was not the whole story. The roots of the editor's hatred of King went back to his tenure as Ambassador to the Court of London from 1796 to 1803. To understand King's actions and Irish-American reactions to them, it would be helpful to explain the events that had taken place in Ireland during King's tour of duty in London.

From May through September 1798, the United Irishmen, led by Wolfe Tone, waged rebellion throughout Ireland. In the space of a few weeks, 30,000 peasants were killed. Tone and his followers had hoped to overthrow British rule with French help. They failed. Tone committed suicide in his cell, and other leaders of the United Irishmen were incarcerated in Ireland's Newgate and Kilmainham prisons. Some of these political prisioners were sent to Prussia, others to Botany Bay.30 In 1799 the remainder were to be sent to America, but King's opposition forced the British to keep them imprisoned at Fort George in the Scottish Highlands for another three years. When the British victory over Napoleon's forces at Trafalgar removed the possibility of French assistance to Ireland, the British released the United Irishmen. Some of them, such as Thomas Addis Emmet, Samuel Neilson, William Sampson, Henry Jackson, and Dr. William McNeven emigrated to New York. With the uproar over the rebellion and the French Revolution subsided, their entry went unopposed.

During the rebellion, King wrote repeatedly to Colonel Pickering, the American Secretary of State, saying in effect each time, "...that thousands of the fugitive Irish will seek an asylum in our country. Their principles and habits could be pernicious to the order and industry of our people, and I can not myself believe that the malcontents of any country will ever become useful citizens of our own." After the unsuccessful French Invasion of Ireland in September, 1798, King wrote to Pickering that, "...I have taken occasion to express my wishes that the United States might not be selected as the country to which any of the State prisoners should be permitted to retire." Perhaps the main reason for the opposition to their entrance to the United States was their alleged affinity for the revolutionary regime in France. The attempt to deport the prisoners occurred when relations between the United States and France were tenuous.

Henry Jackson, one of the United Irishmen's imprisoned leaders, wrote to King from his cell in Dublin's Newgate prison in the summer of 1799. He pleaded that, "...having obtained the Lord Lieutenant's permission to go to America, provided I go with your consent, I beg leave to refer you to the American Consul in this city for my general character." He went on to describe his financial condition, which was sound, and finished by stating that, "The 'Joseph', belonging to New York, is now here and intends sailing the 10th of next month; if I am so fortunate as to get a favorable answer to this application, I intend going by her." <sup>34</sup>

King answered Jackson on August 28, 1799. He claimed he had not the power to give or refuse permission to emigrate to the United States and went on to say:

Without presuming to form an opinion of the late disturbances in Ireland, I entertain a distinct one in relation to the political situation in my own country. In common with others, we have felt that influence of the changes that have successfully taken place in France and unfortunately, a portion of our inhabitants has erroneously supposed that our civil policy might be improved by a close imitation of the French,...I am sorry to remark, and shall stand in need of your candor in doing so, that a large proportion of the emigrants from Ireland, and especially in the middle states has

upon this occasion, arranged themselves on the side of the malcontents...This view leads me to state to you without reserve, the hesitation that I have felt in your case; on the one hand we cannot object to the acquisition of inhabitants from abroad possessing capital and skill in a branch of business that, with due caution, may be without risque or difficulty and with public as well as private advantage, be established among us; but on the other hand, if the opinion of such inhabitants are likely to throw them into the class of malcontents their fortune, skill, and consequent influence would make them tenfold more dangerous, and they might become a disadvantage instead of benefit to our country...

Your most obedient servant, Rufus King<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting that this letter appeared, in full, in the Shamrock on April 6, 1816, seventeen years after it was written. It was part of a three month, anti-King campaign mounted by the editor. The letter was prefaced by a paragraph written by Thomas O'Conor. The letter, he says, "is conclusive evidence of the part which Mr. King acted during the negotiations between the Irish State Prisoners and the Anglo-Irish Government; it is a strong call on every Irishman who loves and every Irishman who does not hate his native land to oppose with his vote and influence, the pretension of Mr. King, to the government of this state." <sup>36</sup>

To realize the depth of the anti-King animosity we must go back to the beginning of the campaign. In February 1816, the Federalists met in Albany to choose a candidate to run against Republican Governor Daniel D. Thompkins, a three-term incumbent. Unable to find a candidate that a majority could agree on, they almost adjourned, but John Duer then suggested Rufus King. He was chosen unanimously. At first King was "indignant at being nominated without his previous consent." He agreed to run only after many party leaders pleaded with him; one told him that his refusal would cause "an end to the Federal party in this state."

At the outset of publication, Gillespy had announced that his newspaper would not take part in local politics, but would concentrate on the affairs of Europe, particularly Ireland and England.<sup>39</sup> Apparently O'Conor, who had taken his oath as a United Irishman from Wolfe Tone himself, felt no similar compulsion. Rufus King's nomination was the subject of an editorial in the February 24, 1816, issue of the *Shamrock*. It read in part:

Nomination. By the Federal Party of New York. It was not my intention to take part, as an editor, in the discussions that were expected to precede the election for governor of this state. The nomination of RUFUS KING calls upon me not to be neuter. It calls on every citizen who is by birth an IRISHMAN NOT BE NEUTER. Let it not be forgotten that Mr. King was AMBASSADOR TO THE COURT OF LONDON at the time when Emmet, McNeven, Sampson, Bond, Jackson, Arthur O'Connor, and company were prisoners in Newgate and Kilmainham. The history of these days will be given before the day of election, in the meantime, the Irishman, who may be solicited to vote for King Rufus is recommended to meet the application by the significant words FORT GEORGE.<sup>40</sup>

On March 2, 1816, and for the next three issues, O'Conor pub-

lished a detailed account of the prison life of the United Irishmen's leaders, their negotiations with the Anglo-Irish government, and Rufus King's involvement with those negotiations. <sup>41</sup> These accounts, written by Dr. McNeven, filled more than two pages of each issue. Both O'Conor and McNeven thought that "without the votes of Irishmen, Mr. King will not succeed to the government of this state...he will not have a single Irish vote!"<sup>42</sup>

On March 9th, the Shamrock blamed King for the death of Robert Emmet. The editorial charged that if Emmet had been allowed to emigrate with his brother, Thomas, he would not have died in 1803 after leading a futile uprising in Dublin. The statement ended with the accusation that "...the name of Robert Emmet is now registered among the number of Irish martyrs whose blood stains the name and character of\_\_\_\_\_\_."43 Obviously referring to King, whose name appeared throughout the adjacent columns. In the issue of April 6, 1816, the paper printed a scathing editorial from the Troy Register, which attacked King and his actions as Ambassador. It asked the reader:

How...did Rufus King act when he had it in his power to save the lives of a number of unfortunate men, whose greatest crime was an imitation of Washington and other illustrious American patriots in attempting to emancipate their country from long continued oppression and unrelenting despotism?...He objected to the emigration of republicans to the United States, because republicanism was held in detestation by himself and the men with whom he cooperated...His supporters will, however, find it a more difficult task than they imagine to prevail upon the electors to vote for a man whose only claim to distinction is his abhorrence of the principles of the constitution and government they cherished as the sheet anchor of their civil liberities.<sup>44</sup>

As if this were not enough, the April 13th issue carried two letters of 1807 from Thomas Addis Emmet, the slain Robert's brother, to King. These letters, written five days apart, demand from King an account of his actions during his tour of duty in London and lay the blame for the death of Robert Emmet and others squarely on his shoulders. The editorial for that week claims that for New York, "King or not King' is to be the question."45 On the 20th of that month, O'Conor ran a three column lecture on ingratitude, aimed at King, pointing out that the Emmets were close relatives of a gentleman who had befriended him in his youth. In the last issue before the election, "A Son of Erin" warned Irish immigrants that the brutality of their life in Ireland would become the reality of America as well, if people such as King were elected to office. Alerting readers to "beware of an American King", the tirade concluded: "if you don't vote against King you are a slave."46

The Federalist Party had, by 1816, begun a period of disintegration that eventually led to its demise before 1830.47

By this time its greatest leaders were either dead or retired. Also, the Federalists continued to use political strategies that the changing American society had long outgrown. Unlike the Republicans, the Federalists lacked the highly organized political machinery in each state as well as the essential coordination between state and federal level candidates. With King as their candidate, the Federalists were hopeful that they could carry the state. Much more than the governorship was at stake.

As Timothy Dwight, a leading New York Federalist, said in a letter to King, "A great effort, certainly, is necessary to redeem this great state. Without the force and aid of New York, federalism cannot expect to make any serious advances." 48

It is obvious that the Federalists regarded New York as a stepping stone to regaining national power. In that same letter to King, Dwight wrote, "if we cannot get command of this state, we cannot expect to have an effectual agency in the presidential election. If we cannot make any impression upon the presidential election, this time, I see no hope for the future." With the Federal Party fighting for its life, it is no wonder that King sought to answer his critics with regard to his actions concerning the Irish State Prisoners.

King wrote to his attorney in Washington, David B. Ogden, on April 19, 1816. In the envelope he included a letter for the editor of the *National Advocate*, for publication, in which he stated, "Towards Ireland and Irishmen I have not, I never had either ill will or illiberal prejudices. Any attempt, therefore, that has been or shall be made to excite a contrary opinion is doing me manifest injustice." Claiming that Ireland's ally, France, was at war with the United States until September 1800, King maintained that his actions were ordained by the American Department of State. King wrote that although he was asked to allow the State Prisoners to emigrate, "this I was restrained by my instructions from doing." 51

Deny as he would, King's treatment of the Irish State Prisoner case must have loomed large in the minds of the voting public. The election took place from dawn on Tuesday, April 30th until sunset on Thursday, May 2nd.

It was difficult at first to determine just who won. Early returns from New York City were complete and on May 8, 1816, the New York Spectator, a Federalist supporter, printed those results. In New York County, Rufus King outpolled Daniel D. Thompkins by sixty-five votes, 1926 to 1861. The Federalists were jubilant. Buoyed by this result and inconclusive returns from around the state, the Spectator's Albany correspondent wrote back to his editor, "I am happy to congratulate you on the great exertions of our Federal brethren in every part of the State... The news from most of the wards is highly favorable to the Federal... cause." 53

According to the official voting results, however, the Federalists were beaten handily. Across the state, Tompkins polled 45,412 votes to King's 38,647. The margin of victory, 6,765 votes, was twice Tompkins' margin of 1813 and was his largest plurality ever. His vote total was the largest ever given a candidate in New York State until DeWitt Clinton's in 1820. Whatever strength the Federalists were thought to have, resided in New York City. Even here though, King won by a very slim margin: also all eleven assembly seats went to the Republicans.<sup>54</sup>

In his work, *The Immigrant Church*, Jay P. Dolan estimates that of the ten wards that existed in 1816, the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh were predominately Irish or were over one-third Irish. <sup>55</sup> An examination of the ward results of this election shows that King lost five of the ten wards in the city. Those wards were the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and tenth. The tenth ward was predominantly German. To make King's defeat even more disheartening, it seems that public disclosure, in April, that Tompkins had agreed to run on the Republican ticket for Vice-President had not hurt his performance a bit. In fact, Republicans claimed that New York State

property requirements, which applied only in state senatorial and gubernatorial races, had helped King considerably.<sup>56</sup>

Although King maintained after his defeat that he had not really desired the office, <sup>57</sup> he must have been somewhat disappointed for his party. Soon after, he was prompted to write, "It has probably become the real interest and policy of the country, that the Democracy should pursue its own natural course. Federalists of our age must be content with the past." <sup>58</sup>

By this time the Federalists were indeed a party of the past. Throughout the nation, they were losing support in election after election. Undoubtedly, their insignificant plurality in New York City killed any chance of making up their upstate deficit. In that sense, the Irish opposition to King can be said to have been successful. Historian William Forges Adams believes that the Irish were too few in number to count politically. He states, "...one must take with a grain of salt the claim that the Irish ward led by Emmet, swung the gubernatorial election against Rufus King." <sup>59</sup>

One must remember, however, that Adams was looking at Irish political power in terms of its later manifestation; that of urban machine control. A quick glance at the number of those casting ballots in this election reveals that a few hundred votes in certain areas is indeed enough to count politically. The *Shamrock* prophetically pointed out that without the votes of Irish-Americans, Mr. King would not succeed in his gubernatorial aspirations. The newspaper also tried as hard as it could to make this prophecy a reality.

Rufus King was an easy target for the Shamrock. However, one is led to believe that although any Federalist would be unacceptable to the editors, King hit a particularly raw nerve. It seems that Federalists, in general, made no attempt to attract Irish supporters, as did Clinton and his party. In fact, Carl Wittke points out that, "...many Federalists were outspoken in their criticism of the Irish refugees who sympathized with the French Revolution. To the more reactionary of the party, such radicals were Jacobins, 'wild Irishmen', 'the most God-provoking Democrats this side of hell', 'inflammatory agents' and disturbers of the peace.'

In its short life the *Shamrock* had done much to soften the prejudice against and "ameliorate the condition of Catholics and Irishmen in America." At its 1817 passing, the *Shamrock*'s contemporaries were silent, but the paper had done much to start the Irish-American citizen on his way to a successful, politically-active Americanization process.

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, several New York weekly newspapers were started to espouse the cause of Irish independence from Great Britain. Following the lead of the *Shamrock*, they also called for Catholic emancipation and supported the work of Daniel O'Connell in the English Parliament and his Catholic Association throughout Ireland and England. To understand the movement that these newspapers were started to support, it would be helpful to review some of the events that took place in Ireland and England in the three decades after the 1798 Rebellion.

As a result of that uprising, the English government decided to dissolve the Irish Parliament and bring Ireland closer to the British crown, under the 1801 Act of Union. At this point, the Irish question went from a problem of external British security to a persistent and emotional internal crisis. Irish Catholics, though virtually ignored by the largely Protestant Irish Parliament during its twenty

years of existence, lost even more ground as they were transformed from a disenfranchised majority in their country to a hated minority in the United Kingdom.

With regard to the general policy toward Ireland under the Union, it would be safe to generalize and say that agrarian Ireland was governed for the benefit of industrial England. One hundred Irish members of the 658-member House of Commons and twenty-eight peers and four bishops in the 360-member House of Lords, soon found that they had very little real power. Forced to align themselves with the English Whigs or Tories as situations demanded, "The Protestant patriot tradition kept fading." The Anglo-Irish Protestants found themselves dependent on the Union to maintain minority ascendancy.

The Irish-Catholic majority entered the Union as second class citizens. Therefore, it was much more difficult for them to develop the British loyalties that characterized Welsh and Scottish Protestants. Any attempts by a somewhat enlightened Commons to remove the remnants of the Penal Laws met opposition from the House of Lords, the British public, and both George III and George IV. Poverty and religion were two inseparable facets of the Irish question. The harsh agrarian system was a feudal remnant aimed at keeping the Catholic majority down. As the office-holding, land owning Protestant minority allied itself more and more with the English, religious differences began to chip away at the Nationalist movement. So at the same time that differences were becoming apparent between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, anti-Catholic sentiment in England was going to have more effect on the Irish as a result of the Union.

Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic lawyer from Kerry, took over the leadership of the Irish masses and, in doing so became "the greatest figure in the Irish freedom effort." Born in 1775, O'Connell was a product of the Enlightenment, "a philosophical radical, a disciple of Godwin, Paine, and Bentham." An ardent though non-violent, nationalist, O'Connell decided to use aroused public opinion as his vehicle for social reform and the issue of Catholic civil rights to galvanize the support of the Irish masses.

O'Connell came to power in 1815, when he took over the Catholic Committee. This political lobbying group was made up of well-to-do Irish Catholics, since dues were one pound a year. His organization's determined opposition destroyed Irish Protestant patriot Henry Grattan's plan for Catholic emancipation that same year. The plan called for Catholic civil rights in return for the Vatican's pledge to refrain from appointing unfriendly bishops to sees within the United Kingdom, a policy it followed in many Western European countries. O'Connell felt that his plan violated his liberal attitudes with regard to the separation of Church and State. As a result, the movement languished for seven years and the committee was dissolved in 1822.

The next year, O'Connell and others formed the Catholic Association. This organization had only minimal success until the dues structure was rearranged and the base of power widened in 1825. Then with annual dues of one shilling, payable through local churches at a penny a month, O'Connell was able to enlist huge numbers of peasants to support its work. In 1826 and 1828, the Association backed Protestant candidates who opposed retention of the Penal Laws. By that year, even members of the Duke of Wellington's cabinet had been defeated by Catholic Association

candidates, including O'Connell himself. The end result was the Catholic Relief Bill of 1829. This bill, although it stripped Catholic tenants of the franchise, it removed many bars to the professional, social and political opportunities of the middle and upper classes. The act was a beginning for the nationalist forces under O'Connell. One historian goes as far as to say that, "The Catholic Emancipation struggle in Ireland paved the way for Jewish and black liberation movements throughout the Western world." 65



Daniel O'Connell, from a picture in the Reform Club, London

The Catholic Relief Act helped to intensify anti-Catholic prejudice in England and also pushed the Irish Protestants closer to the English Crown. These results would have repercussions in Ireland as well as across the Atlantic, for the next century and a half.

In New York, the new Irish-American newspapers were aimed at the ever-growing Irish population of the city in particular, and Irish-Americans in general. These newspapers had the dual purpose of assisting in Irish acculturation, as well as helping them to maintain a distinctly Irish and cultural identity. The *Globe and Emerald* was one such paper. It began publishing in January 1824 and ceased in September 1827. Its failure can be ascribed to two sources: the cost of simultaneously publishing the newspaper in both New York and Philadelphia and the popularity of its rival, the *Truth Teller*.66

The Truth Teller was first published in New York on April 2, 1825 and from the outset was very different from its predecessors. Whereas the Shamrock and the Globe and Emerald were totally devoted to the cause of Irish nationalism, the Truth Teller was more religiously oriented. As a result, the newspaper was more accessible to Catholics of all ethnic backgrounds, thereby, expanding its potential audience somewhat. Although "religion had always been a vital part of nationalism", 67 never before in the Irish-American press had it been so central to the cause of Irish nationalists. The reasons for the press' new emphasis are numerous, but the major ones could be the accentuated Catholicity of O'Connell's movement in Ireland as well as the growing Catholic proportion of the Irish-American community here.

In America, this encouraged a new form of Irish nationalism which accentuated the immigrants' Catholicism rather than their Irishness. In the earlier era, the small Irish-American community had been approximately fifty percent Protestant. This can be seen in the makeup of the *Shamrock*'s contributors, many of whom were refugees of Wolfe Tone's deistic, nonsectarian United Irishmen. However, with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, immigration to the United States increased from an estimated 6,000 per year between 1790 and 1815<sup>68</sup> to about 10,000 per year. About one quarter of these earlier immigrants were Irish-Catholic. In the 1820s, close to fifty percent of Irish shipping landed in New York.<sup>69</sup> Since immigration statistics only become mandatory with the Passenger Act of March 2, 1819<sup>70</sup>, we can only approximate the size of the Irish Catholic community and its rate of growth.

In 1806, the Catholic population of New York City was 10,000.<sup>71</sup> Twelve years later, Bishop Connolly of New York estimated that, "At present there are here about sixteen thousand Catholics, mostly Irish."<sup>72</sup> In 1811, there were two Catholic churches in the City; in 1825, three.<sup>73</sup> Between 1820 and 1830 over 27,000 Irish landed in America<sup>74</sup>, over half of them in New York. It must also be remembered that large numbers of Irish took passage to Canada, which was cheaper and then headed southward to join family and friends in New York. Thus, at a time when New York grew by seventy five percent in nine years, the Irish, and more specifically the Irish Catholics, were the most numerous and fastest growing group of immigrants in the city.

With the shift in Irish politics to the emancipation movement and the growing number of Irish-Catholics, it was only natural that a newspaper would reflect this increasingly religious awareness. The *Truth Teller*'s first issue had on its masthead the paper's motto: "The truth is powerful and shall prevail." The newspaper was published in tabloid, with eight pages, three columns to a page. It was published by W.E. Andrews and Company, with offices at 95 Maiden Lane and printed by M. Toohey and J. McLoughlin at 11 Spruce Street. Subscriptions were four dollars a year, payable half yearly in advance. An inside page listed over twenty agents located throughout upstate New York and in various American cities as far

away as Louisville, Kentucky, and Savannah, Georgia. Surprisingly, no agents were located in Boston, a center of Irish immigration, or any of New England.

William Eusebius Andrews, the publisher, was an English Catholic who never set foot in America. He started a newspaper of the same name in London in September 1824. How direct or indirect his assistance in the venture was is not known, but after six issues the names of George Pardow, an English Catholic immigrant, and William Denman, a Scottish Catholic appear as proprietors. Apparently Pardow took care of the business pursuits until he left in 1830 while, at first, Denman served solely as editor. Very early on, the paper received the support of the Irish-Catholic community as a whole and the hierarchy in particular. The Rev. John Power, administrator of the Diocese of New York in 1825 and 1826, "encouraged the establishment of a Catholic newspaper." Many prominent Catholic laymen also made contributions to the paper, among them Dr. William J. MacNeven, Thomas O'Connor, and Thomas S. Brady.

Reflecting the interests of its first publisher, the *Truth Teller*'s first six issues were filled almost entirely with news of English Catholics and attacks upon the English secular press for defaming Catholics. Later, more Irish, European, and some local news was added. Regular reports on organizations such as the Roman Catholic Benevolent Society of the City of New York, as well as weekly poetry columns and literary news soon appeared. The front page carried reprints of English and Irish newspaper articles on topics such as Repeal of the Union and Emancipation, as well as full texts of O'Connell's speeches. Further inside were articles, continued from week to week, on subjects such as "Church and State", "Sectarianism", "History of Ireland", "The Irish Church", and "Manufacturing in Ireland".<sup>78</sup>

It is not surprising that the anti-English diatribes of William E. Andrews were soon replaced by more "hard news", for this was a period of rapproachment between the United States and Great Britain. The radically anti-British articles that earlier were so popular in the Shamrock were now sadly out of step with the feelings of the majority of native Americans who, during the War of 1812, had welcomed the Irish and the hatred of the English. The Irish-Catholic press was, at this time, much more defensive than it had been earlier. In Pioneer Catholic Journalism, Foik states that for years, "Federalists had made it their purpose to brand foreigners and especially Irishmen, as enemies of our free institutions. Defeated several times in attempts to beguile the people of this country into a policy which would give the Puritan element of the American population an ascendancy in Church and State, they...had to resort to new tactics."79 Foik describes their attempts to forge a political union of discontented factions to be held together by their common prejudices.

But this same, growing Irish-Catholic population that appeared so dangerous to many Protestant ministers and lay leaders, also began to realize its own strength. If the late 1820s can be called "The eve of the nativist attack", 80 it can also be called the time at which the *Truth Teller* "became by force of circumstances the mouthpiece of Catholics in New York City. 81 It could claim this position solely by right of its immense popularity. Six months after publication began, the publisher could boast a readership equal to that of any weekly in the city. 82 By 1833, the *Truth Teller* had a

circulation of over 3,000.

This is not to say that the *Truth Teller* had no competition. Throughout its long career, which lasted until a merger in 1855, the newspaper shared the field with many periodicals competing for the same audience. Only one, however, George Pepper's *Irish Shield and Monthly Milescan* had to be sued. It galled Pepper that prominent Irishmen would contribute to a newspaper run by an Englishman and a Scot when his paper was ready and waiting. Pepper turned his acid pen on the *Truth Teller* in 1827. All he got in return was a libel suit, which he lost, costing him four hundred dollars. Since he had only six paid subscribers<sup>83</sup>, he folded his newspaper and fled to Philadelphia.

A more serious challenge was issued to the *Truth Teller* by a newspaper called the *Protestant* in 1830. In his dissertation on the Irish-American press, Walter Willigan claimed that the Know-Nothing Party, which had its roots in the Nativist Movement, was a direct result of English-Irish hatred. The *Protestant* was an early manifestation of that movement. The year 1829 had been good for the *Truth Teller* in particular, and Catholics in general. Early in the year the newspaper cleared itself of charges of plagiarism. On July 4, 1829 the paper expanded to ten inch by fourteen inch folio size and also procured new type face.<sup>85</sup>

In May of that year, news of O'Connell's victory in Parliament regarding the Relief Act reached New York. A sacred day of thanksgiving was proclaimed for June 21. However, the enemies of American Catholics were not idle. On January 2, 1830, the *Protestant* appeared in New York. The paper was the concerted effort of seventy-three ministers attached to the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed Churches in the city, led by Parson William C. Brownlee. The paper was published weekly by the Reformation Society with offices at 12 Frankfort Street. A subscription cost two dollars a year, if paid in advance, and two and one half dollars, if paid at the expiration of six months.

In its first issue of eight pages, printed on ten inches by twelve inches, the *Protestant* printed a prospectus which stated that the paper would be an "antidote to the delusions of the Papal system." One of the papers many topics in this prospectus was the revival of the Jesuit order. The first issue also contained recommendations from prominent Protestants including Noah Webster. The motto on the masthead, written in Greek, stated, "Let him who has understanding count the number of the beast."

Although the *Protestant* was published for over eight years, with the exception of the publication of *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* in the newspaper in 1836, the paper received very little attention after its first year. However, it seems that during that first year, the *Protestant* was at its most vitriolic and the main topic of every issue of the *Truth Teller*. One subject that both newspapers debated was whether or not Sunday mail delivery should be curtailed. The *Truth Teller* stated it should be continued, the *Protestant* felt it was an abomination.

Throughout the first half of 1830, the *Protestant* printed articles revealing that St. Peter was never in Rome<sup>88</sup>, Ireland was the most crime-ridden nation on earth<sup>89</sup>, and Jesuits took an oath of fealty to the Pope promising to "depose all heretical kings, princes, states, commonwealths and governments, all being illegal, without this sacred confirmation..." Although it has been pointed out that "self-respecting Protestants spurned this paper" and many wrote

to the *Truth Teller* telling of their embarrassment over it, the *Protestant* did inflame some anti-Catholic prejudice. It is no accident that the period of growing anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant feeling began at this time.

During its publication history, the *Protestant* accepted long letters from "correspondents" in various American cities. Their reports were usually exposes of hideous, treasonable cabals aimed at subverting the government or leading good Protestants astray. Of course, in order to protect their sources, themselves and to be able to continue reporting, they signed their reports with code names. Names such as "Erin", "Zwingli", "Spy", "Orange", and "Jesuit" appeared fairly regularly. On Saturday, February 13, 1830, the *Protestant* printed their first report from a Philadelphia informer known only as "Cranmer", presumably named after Henry VIII's Archbishop of Canterbury, burned at the stake as a heretic.

The first report tells of secret schools in Albany and elsewhere that drill large numbers of children in Popish catechism. <sup>92</sup> Claiming that Jesuits are even planning to build a school in Georgetown, Cranmer ends by stating that there are more Catholics in America than one would think healthy. In the next few issues the paper printed lengthy articles on "Papal Infallibility", "Popery in Canada", and "The Reasons for Protestantism". Approximately once a month a new report from "Cranmer" would be printed, revealing some new insidious facet of Popery and drawing enthusiastic response from the *Protestant*'s audience. The editors remarked, "We have received a number of inquiries for our friend 'Cranmer' and in reply we are highly gratified to exhibit this genuine Protestant in the city of Penn in propia persona." Two weeks later a reader wrote in to remark, "Oh that we had such an observer in Baltimore."

To all this calumny, the *Truth Teller* reacted in a very angered yet subdued tone. Every week letters from outraged Catholics and embarrassed Protestants filled its back pages decrying the *Protestant's* policies. From January through June of that year, two series of anti-*Protestant* articles appeared in the paper on a semi-weekly basis. One, entitled, "To the Seventy-Three Calvinistic Parsons of the 'Protestant' "95, was written by "Fergus McAlpin", a pseudonym for Father Thomas C. Levins. Levins wrote those stinging satires of the parsons from the Sheet-Anchor Tavern in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In many of the issues in which a "McAlpin" piece did not appear, approximately twelve articles from an unidentified writer known only as, "A Catholic", were printed. These long, theological tracts, directed at the *Protestant's* editors, attempted to refute point by point the charges made by the other newspaper, with a large number of biblical quotations.

However, the one article which forever ended the *Protestant*'s quest for credibility was a full page revelation in the *Truth Teller* on July 8, 1830. Entitled "Cranmer Converted on an address to those 'ministers of the Gospel' who have recommended the "Protestant" to the patronage of the Christian public." In this article, "Cranmer" tells the editors of the *Protestant* that everything he wrote for them was false and he goes on to lecture them on their prejudice. "Cranmer" turned out to be Father John Hughes, later the Archbishop of New York. It appears that Hughes was "A Catholic" who had written that series of long articles for the *Truth Teller*.

Although the *Protestant* published intermittently for the next eight years, the "Cranmer" episode helped to soften its impact almost from its inception. Of course, the *Protestant* made attempts to forge new "Cranmer" letters to save face, however, these attempts were unconvincing.

Pardow and Denman's willingness to use their newspaper as a buttress for the Irish-Catholic community from the outrages of the *Protestant* proved within a few months to have been the correct policy. Their moderate tone only made the hateful and vicious style of the *Protestant* seem even more obnoxious and narrow-minded than it could have appeared if they had decided to match it, lie for lie.

Both the Shamrock and the Truth Teller represented the community they served in the larger society they sought to gain acceptance in. However, in the intervening years between their two publications' lives, that community's needs and self-perceptions changed. This change reflected events taking place in Ireland, England and the United States. This change, away from a strictly nationalist approach to Irish cultural identity and toward a more religious approach, can be seen by comparing the two newspapers. The Shamrock's campaign against Rufus King for what it considered wrongful acts against the Irish nation, and the Truth Teller's defense of Catholicism against the attacks of the Protestant, are representative of those different approaches to Irish cultural identity. Each was right for its time.

Appendix A
New York Gubernatorial Results (1807-1816)

		<u> </u>
1807	(R) Tompkins (F) Morgan Lewis	35,074 30,989
1810	(R) Tompkins (F) Jonas Platt	43,094 36,484
1813	(R) Tompkins (F) Stephen Van Rensselaer	43,324 39,718
1816	(R) Tompkins (F) Rufus King	45,412 38,647

Source: The New York Annual Register for the Year of Our Lord 1830. Edwin Williams (New York, New York, 1830) p. 77

Appendix B Results - 1816 New York Gubernatorial Race

<u>State</u>	<b>Tompkins</b>	King
Southern District	7,888	6,783
Middle District	11,241	9,739
Eastern District	11,108	10,471
Western District	<u>15,175</u>	<u>11,654</u>
Total	45,412	38,647

(Continued on page 71)

### (A Study of Two Newspapers... (Cont'd. from page 21)

### **Southern District**

	<b>Tompkins</b>	King
Suffolk	1,457	362
Kings	329	292
Queens	523	895
Westchester	989	1,015
Putnam	580	217
Rockland	429	30
New York	1,861	1,926
Dutchess	1,473	1,821
Richmond	<u>250</u>	205
Total	8,888	6,783

Source: N.Y. Spectator, June 12, 1816.

### **New York County**

	Population <sup>1</sup>	<u>Tompkins</u>	<u>King</u>
Ward 1	7,630	156	314
2	7,439	145	220
3	7,495	161	264
4	9,856	264	177
5	14,523	289	260
6	. 11,821	197	144
7	10,886	160	57
8	10,702	211	236
9	4,343	84	98
10	<u>10,824</u>	<u> 192</u>	<u> 161</u>
Total ,	95,515	1,861	1,926

1814

Source: Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825–1863, Robert Ernst, (New York, 1949), p. 191.

### **Footnotes**

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- 3 Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Apollinarius W. Baumgartner. Catholic Journalism: A Study of Its Development in the United States, 1789-1930 (New York, 1931), p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Elwyn A. Smith. Religious Liberty in the United States (Philadelphia, 1972), p. 97.
- <sup>6</sup> William Forbes Adams. Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World from 1815 to the Famine (New Haven, 1932), p. 70.
- <sup>7</sup> Dixon Ryan Fox. The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York (New York, 1919), p. 75.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
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- 10 Shamrock (N.Y.), January 12, 1816-May 11, 1816.
- <sup>11</sup> Jay P. Dolan. The Immigrant Church (Baltimore, 1975), p. 11.
- <sup>12</sup> Paul J. Foik, Pioneer Catholic Journalism (New York, 1930), p. 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Joyce. p. 12.
- 14 Foik. p. 14.
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- <sup>17</sup> Joyce. p. 4.
- 18 Ibid. p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Carl Wittke. The Irish in America (Baton Rouge, 1956), p. 203.
- <sup>20</sup> Shamrock (N.Y.). December 15, 1810
- <sup>21</sup> Foik. p. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 15.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>24</sup> Walter L. Willigan, "A History of the Irish-American Press from 1691 to 1835," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, 1934), p. 184.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 182-183.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 184.
- <sup>27</sup> Shamrock (N.Y.), January 13, 1816.
- 28 Foik, p. 16.

- 29 Willigan. p. 185.
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- <sup>32</sup> Rufus King. "Letter to Colonel Pickering" September 13, 1798, ibid., II, 639.
- 33 Henry Jackson. "Letter to Rufus King" July 22, 1799, ibid., II, 645.
- 35 Shamrock (N.Y.), April 6, 1816.
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- <sup>37</sup> Robert Ernst. Rufus King. American Federalist (Williamsburg, 1968), p. 348.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Wittke, p. 203.
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- 41 Ibid., March 2, 9, 16, 23, 1816.
- 42 Ibid., March 2, 1816.
- 43 Ibid., March 9, 1816.
- 44 Ibid., April 6, 1816. 45 lbid., April 13, 1816.
- 46 Ibid., April 27, 1816.
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- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Rufus King. "Letter to the National Advocate" April 19, 1816, ibid., V, 531.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 533.
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- 53 Ibid., May 8, 1816.
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- 56 Livermore, p. 32.
- <sup>57</sup> Ernst. p. 351.
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- 63 Ibid., p. 34.
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- <sup>70</sup> Bromwell, p. 11.
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- 89 Ibid., January 16, 1830.
- 90 Ibid., January 30, 1830.
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- 93 Ibid., June 12, 1830.
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