

Paul O'Dwyer

DEDICATION

There were many accolades in the City's newspapers—all of them worthy—to Paul O'Dwyer upon his death this past June. But there was no hint of the man that the New York Irish History Roundtable knew and loved. We tried to remedy this with a brief insertion in the *New York Times* on 27 June 1998:

Paul O'Dwyer's interest in the history of the City of New York and his deep commitment to the preservation of archival source materials has encouraged and strengthened us. The New York Irish History Roundtable notes with sadness the passing of a unique friend, and extends deepest sympathy to his family.

Few know that Paul was directly responsible for the legislation that created the Municipal Archives, a division of the Department of Records and Information Services. Its mandate is "to maintain, catalog, and make available historic New York City government records." He was honored for this in 1988 with the Award for Outstanding Support of Archives by the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York. Every time we cross the threshold of room 103 at 31 Chambers Street, perhaps to search for a birth, marriage or

death certificate, we should remember and give thanks for the great gift to New York City that was Paul O'Dwyer.

Paul also had the inspiration for *The New York Irish*, Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, eds. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). As he wrote in the foreword to that historic volume:

When I looked through my library several years ago, it struck me that books had been written about the Irish in Boston, Butte, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Lowell, New Orleans, Philadelphia, San Francisco and St. Louis. Why wasn't there a history of the Irish in New York City?...In the 1980s certain events came to pass that allowed a financial and administrative collaboration between the Irish Institute of New York, Inc., and the New York Irish History Roundtable. Together we had the means to commission the best scholars in the country to undertake primary research. We asked them to examine our relationship to New York City honestly and to give us no credit but that which we deserved. This volume is the result. It is only a start—a collection of essays to help us better understand our history in this city.



In the three years since *The New York Irish* was published, the hard-cover edition has sold out and the paperback edition is in its second printing. Reviews have consistently praised the book as a major contribution to the historiography of the Irish in America. It was also adopted as a classroom text for the first time at New York University this fall.

The New York Irish, seven years in production, was made possible by a series of major grants from the Irish Institute. The Irish Institute is an organization founded in Paul O'Dwyer's Central Park West apartment fifty years ago and incorporated two years later, on 11 December 1950. It is dedicated to promoting the bonds of friendship between the people of Ireland and the United States by encouraging cultural pursuits. Its purposes are to promote Irish art, music, dance, language, law, history and folklore; to support the institutions and scholars who study, preserve and present these disciplines; and to mark and suitably record the accomplishments of Irish immigrants to the United States and their descendants. Since 1960 the Irish Institute has quietly pursued a policy of financial support for cultural projects in Ireland and America,

amounting to more than one million dollars. The Irish Institute building at 326 West 48th Street was the headquarters for hundreds of Irish American organizations until it was sold in 1982.

The New York Irish History Roundtable, which was founded in 1984, soon attracted Paul O'Dwyer's attention. Not only did he become a member, but on several occasions—through his influence and that of his protégé, Kevin Morrissey—the Roundtable was the beneficiary of Irish Institute support. The best example is their unhesitating funding of the printing costs for *The Irish Experience in New York City: A Select Bibliography*, Ann M. Shea and Marion R. Casey (New York: The New York Irish History Roundtable, 1995), published as a companion volume to *The New York Irish*.

The Roundtable humbly dedicates Volume 12 of *New York Irish History* to Paul O'Dwyer. The following pages are just the smallest of memorials to a giant of the twentieth century whom we had the privilege to call our friend.

Photo: Timothy J. Meagher, Kevin Morrissey, Dorothy Hayden Cudaby, Paul O'Dwyer, Angela Carter, Dennis Clark, James S. Donnelly, Jr. and Ronald H. Bayor at Harbor Lights, South Street Seaport, 11 January 1990, after the first planning meeting for The New York Irish. Photo by Tom Matthews. Courtesy of the NYIHR.