

The Orange Legacy in New York

BY JOHN T. RIDGE

In the 1790s, rural County Armagh was a hotbed of Protestant and Catholic sectarianism. Friction between the two groups culminated in a fierce pitched battle at the Diamond, a country crossroads near the village of Loughgall in 1795. Immediately afterward,

became dormant by the time of the Civil War. In 1868 its rebirth officially came about when a handful of members conducted a small parade through the streets of New York. *The Irish-American*, a New York weekly co-published by Catholic Irishman Patrick Lynch and Protestant



Illustration: The riot in 1870 at the Orange picnic held at Manhattan's Elm Park was only a taste of what was to come in the following year. Courtesy of John Ridge.

the victorious Protestant faction came together to pledge themselves in secret fraternity and formed what became known as the Orange Order. The Orange Order was then (and remains so in the present day) sworn to maintain the Protestant position in Ireland and to keep Ireland linked with Britain. Immigrants from Ireland have brought the order to many countries around the world.

PRESENCE OF THE ORDER IN NEW YORK

Although the Orange Order was present in New York as early as 1824, the organization had

Irishman William L. Cole, was at this point in time able to laugh off the Orange procession:

But alas for human weakness! When the time for its accomplishment arrived, the brethren were not "there." Two or three score of ridiculous looking creatures composed the "imposing display," which was "headed by a banner which bore on its front a truly curious jumble of Masonic emblems, while in rear it displayed a figure which might be either King Billy, Sheamus a hacca, the Duke of Marlboro, or Wouter Van Twiller, for anything "a dis-

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cerning public" could tell. By most of those who saw the motley gathering at all, it was taken to be a procession of very odd fellows, going to the funeral of a "dear departed." And they were not very wrong; for this insane attempt to give embodiment to bigotry in its worst form in this free Republic has buried Orangeism under a heap of ridicule it will never shake off.¹

The tiny procession of 1868, however, was followed by two more parades in 1869 and 1870 at which there was increasing violence. In 1871 a tug of war raged between New York's mayor Oakey Hall and New York's governor John Hoffman over whether the Orange march should be allowed, but in the end the governor won and permission was given to go ahead. On July 12, a small number of Orangemen, escorted by a large military escort, proceeded to make their way down Eighth Avenue. Suddenly, part of the escorting state militia fired on the crowd in the vicinity of Twenty-ninth Street. When the smoke cleared there were fifty-four dead—almost entirely bystanders.

In most of the initial reports of the daily press the Orange Order was extolled editorially as a brave organization standing up for its rights, while the forces aligned against the Orangemen—the Irish societies, like the Ancient Order of Hibernians, were demonized as an alien force organized to destroy American freedom. As the newspaper hysteria abated in the months after July 12, 1871, however, questions began to

emerge about just how responsible the anti-Orange parties had been for the loss of life.

Although the Orangemen had certainly exercised their right to parade, many other citizens began to believe it was senseless provocation. A formal New York City Health Department report in 1872 on the riot repeated the allegations of missiles thrown and shots fired at the Orangemen by some bystanders, but detailed analysis of the pre-riot activities of the individuals killed seems to indicate that few were anything but innocents:

As the result of this examination, we present a brief and authentic history of all facts known to have influenced the presence at the scene of the riot of every individual victim. The following summary of this table may be interesting. The ages of those killed varied from 12 to 73 years; and among them were 2 females—the girl Mary York and the woman Sarah Kenney. There were 27 Irish, (who predominate among the population in the neighborhood of the riot), 15 Americans; 4 Germans; 3 English; 1 Scotch; 1 Australian; 1 Canadian and 2 not identified, one of whom was apparently an American, and the other an Irishman; 30 were Catholics and 22 Protestants; 3 were soldiers of the 9th Regiment, supposed, but not proven to have been shot by rioters; 1 was a colored man; and another a deaf mute; 3 were school children; 13 were common laborers, many of whom started from home in the morning with the intention of going to work, but were either driven away by gangs of evilly-disposed men, or were discharged for the day by their "bosses." Only 4 were known to belong to Roman Catholic societies. In all probability but 12 out of the whole number were engaged in the attack, and even some of these cases are hypothetical. The rest were mainly innocent spectators like a hundred thousand others upon the line of march; and quite a number were in the neighborhood for a business purpose.²

The 1872 report went on to individually note the culpability of each of the dead. Although the Ancient Order of Hibernians had been frequently cited as the principal organizer of

Illustrations:

Above right—Orange Headquarters on the corner of Twenty-Ninth Street and Eighth Avenue in 1871.

Above left—Orange Headquarters building of 1871 as it looked late in the twentieth century. Both courtesy of John Ridge.

the alleged attack on the Orangemen, only one, D. McMahon, of the fifty-two identifiable victims was determined to have been a member. McMahon, an Irish-born resident of 119th Street and Second Avenue, died from gunshots to the hip and abdomen. The report proclaimed him a "rioter" under the category "Probability whether Rioter or Not" based on the following: "Went to work in the morning, but was discharged for the day by his 'boss;' came home, changed his clothes, and left at 11 a.m." The other alleged rioters had similar evidence presented to determine their guilt, such as in the case of J. Riley, a laborer of Sixtieth Street and First Avenue. Riley's was judged by the circumstance that he "came home from work in forenoon; changed his clothes and left again around noon."³

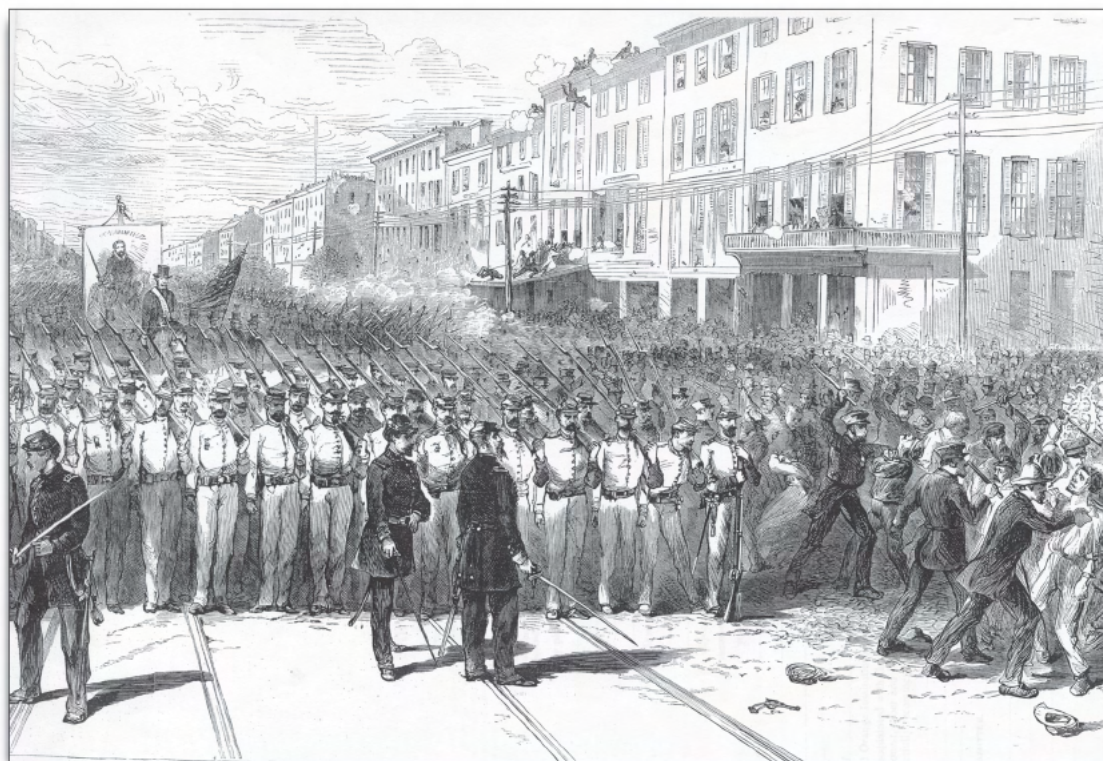
In 1872 the Orange Order predicted five-thousand parade participants, but fewer than three hundred actually turned out. They were escorted by five-hundred police at an estimated cost to the taxpayer of \$2.50 each. Sympathy for the Orangeman's troublesome parade was beginning to diminish and a typical change of attitude came in the comments of the *Brooklyn Eagle*:

The procession of last year, wherein he "vindicated his rights as a citizen" by

going about between files of soldiery, outside of whom were layers of women and children to take the bullets which might be billeted upon him, exactly met his views. The women and the children and the militiamen were killed and maimed, but not a hair of his head was harmed. If he could have such a glorious day every year he would be paid for his pains in parading, and he would parade to an unlimited extent. But when nobody is hurt, and he has not even the satisfaction of embroiling the authorities of the city where he lives in with any class of his fellow inhabitants, he will cease to erect his Ebenezer in streets which he cannot hope for the satisfaction of seeing reddened with the gore of other people. After such a tame Twelfth of July as yesterday we may hope for a cessation of the annual attempts to renew old squabbles in a new land, and to stir up strife among people who have not even a hereditary interest in those squabbles with which this scurvy society of Orangemen have so long disgraced and insulted us.⁴

William Johnston, a British member of Parliament for Belfast and a leading Orangeman,

Illustration:
In 1871 the militia opens fire (background) on the crowd on Eighth Avenue between Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Streets. Courtesy of John Ridge.





tried to bolster the Orange cause in a major address to Orangemen at Cooper Union on August 12, 1872, the anniversary of the Relief of Derry. Johnston, after praising England as the birthplace of religious liberty, called on his New York listeners to unite in solidarity with Britain based on ties of kinship, religion and fraternity. The Belfastman stated that

...he could assure the Orangemen of America that there was in England the most cordial sympathy and love for them. He supposed that they did not want to go to war with England; and he could assure them England did not want to go to war with them, but the gentlemen who wanted to create discord between them were not men who would have supported William of Orange, but would have helped James Stuart. They were men who adored the Jesuit flag of tyranny. [Cheers, vehement and prolonged.] The speaker then reviewed the events of Europe, and the bright outlook in Spain, France and Italy for civil religious liberty, and in conclusion thanked the audience for the superb welcome they had given him, which he accepted, not as an individual but as the member of a society bound to spread civil liberty and evangelical truth throughout the world. And above all he begged them never to be separated, in word nor in thought, from their Protestant brethren on the other side of the water, and to remember that both had common heroes and common lodges. Let them put down the trading politicians here who shrieked for war between the two countries, as the Orangemen on the other side the Atlantic would put down their trading politicians too. Here many persons cried out, 'Don't forget Belfast,' 'Don't forget Derry,' and he good naturedly went on with his speech for some minutes, making pleasant allusions to both places, and saying that above all he would not forget New York, nor the welcome that they had given him. He trusted that on their part they would never forget the Bible and the Protestant religion.⁵



When only two hundred members turned out on July 12, 1873, formal parades were discontinued until 1890. It was decided instead to mark the July holiday with a religious service held at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity on Forty-second Street and Madison Avenue. Thereafter, services were held at either Episcopal, Methodist, or Presbyterian Churches where sympathetic ministers were in charge. A short procession from a nearby meeting hall to the church was often part of the day's events, but it was always without banners, bands, or Orange regalia. Many of the clergymen were Irish-born, but among the American-born clergy were some who were not of Irish background, including the Reverend Stephen J. Tyng of Holy Trinity, who came from an old Philadelphia family. In 1874 a Grand Orange Lodge was organized to link lodges around the State of New York, including those in industrial cities with large north of Ireland populations like Troy and Newburgh.

EX-CATHOLIC CLERGY AND THE ORDER

While there was virtually no contact between the Orangemen and local Irish Catholics, an exception to this rule was the occasional invitation extended to ex-Catholic clergy who had become vocal opponents of Catholicism. One of them, Father J. V. McNamara, who conducted the "Irish Catholic Church" at 342 Water Street in

lower Manhattan, claimed to work closely with the Orange Order. McNamara seems to have detected a political change, perhaps just wishful thinking, in the monarchist Orangemen. Father McNamara informed his congregation that

*...he was authorized by the heads of Orange lodges in the United States, and by the representatives of the Young Britons of Canada, to say that they fully sympathize with the efforts now making to produce harmony and a fraternal spirit among all classes of Irishmen. The Young Britons declare they are not alone responsible for the recent riots in Toronto, and the Orangemen say, according to Father McNamara, that, as soon as they can be assured their Catholic fellow-countrymen have lost the will to cut their throats in obedience to commands from Italian spiritual masters, they will join in the effort to relieve their country from the dominion of Great Britain, proving as good fenians as any now in existence.*⁶

Another former Catholic working with the Orangemen, Reverend E. H. Walsh, an ex-Trappist monk and pastor of the Reformed Catholic Church on Brooklyn's Cumberland Avenue, witnessed a similar transformation. In 1893 at the Lafayette Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, a favorite gathering place for the Orange Order, Walsh delivered prayers during the annual Washington's birthday observance. The Reverend David Gregg then followed Walsh and preached a sermon that presented a new republican form of Orangism:

*A king, a pope – both of these are anti-American. The American idea demands independent thinking in both state and church. Let us see that we make public sentiment so true and so American that every foreign thing, man, school, institution, church shall be absorbed and assimilated by republican principles and purposes or else shall be openly and unequivocally rejected as un-American and akin to treason.*⁷

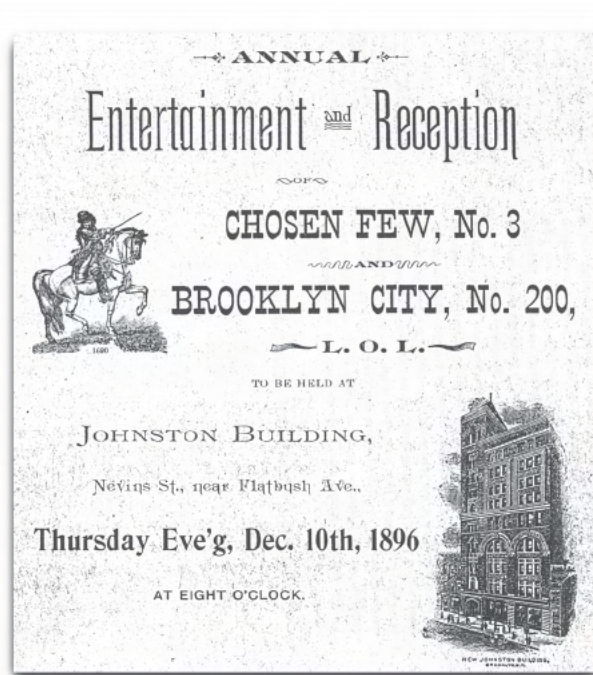
Revisionist thinking was not always tolerated. One local minister, addressing an Orange picnic at Brooklyn's Ridgewood Grove, surprised his listeners with some startling observations, according to a report in the *Brooklyn Eagle*:

*Among the speakers was the Rev. Madison C. Peters of the Bloomingdale Reformed church and the liberality of his expressions when referring to the Catholic Church greatly surprised his hearers, one of whose principal tenets is opposition to Catholicism. "I believe we shall soon have an American Catholic church," said he, "and I thank God for it. Though there are bigots among the Catholics, Protestants are not free from bigotry, but they should be able to learn the lesson of organization that the Catholic Church teaches, for in it has lain the success of that faith in America and if the Protestants expect to keep pace with the growth of population in New York and not retrograde as they are now doing they will have to take a leaf from the Catholic Church."*⁸

Illustration:
Detail from an Orange Order membership application from the 1890s includes both qualifications and disqualifications. Courtesy of John Ridge.

DISQUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP.

No person who is, or has ever been, a Roman Catholic, or who shall educate, or cause to be educated, his children or any children in his charge, in any Roman Catholic school, convent, nunnery or monastery, shall ever be admitted to membership in the Orange Order. And no person who is engaged in the wholesale or retail sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage, or who is an habitual drunkard, gambler, or shall follow any questionable occupation for a living, shall be eligible for membership.



*Illustration:
Cover from a
souvenir program
for a Brooklyn
Orange reception
in 1896. Courtesy
of John Ridge.*

According to the same report, the chairman of the Orange meeting, Joseph T. Waring, however, took immediate exception to these remarks and rose to repudiate them to "cheering that was tumultuous." Waring remarked that "Roman Catholicism has never been a success, though the dominie (sic) has just told you that it was."

EXCURSIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

An annual Orangemen's excursion up the Hudson on or about July 12 was started in 1874. The boat made landings in Manhattan as well as Brooklyn, often in Greenpoint, which had a large north of Ireland population of both Protestants and Catholics. On these excursions the more extreme Orange anti-Catholic "party songs" were saved until the boat left the pier.⁹ Upwards of fifteen-hundred members and their families joined these cruises, but on occasion an air of fear surrounded the trip. In 1879 when the Irish revolutionary O'Donovan Rossa was discovered on board, it was rumored he had "sanguinary purposes" in mind until it was discovered that he was legitimately employed as a newspaper reporter.

The excursion boat in 1886 passed Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island) where the "lunatics" working the fields responded with friendly waves

until the women began waving their orange handkerchiefs. The inmates promptly began aiming their hoes, apparently wishing they were rifles. This event seemed to heighten the anxiety on board about a conspiracy and a "rumor that some Roman Catholics were at the excursion. In less than a minute revolvers were revealed, and the wildest excitement followed for a few minutes. The hunt after the doomed Roman Catholics was unsuccessful, as there was none."¹⁰

On one excursion in 1887 the Orangemen began to feel the effects of a day of beer and "liberty gave way to license." Enlivened by their anti-Catholic songs they turned on the crew which was apparently predominantly Catholic. They "began to amuse themselves by dropping chairs and campstools on the heads of the firemen and such deck laddies as happened to be below." When remonstrated they threatened to throw the crew overboard and when mate James Donovan undertook to quell the disturbance, "he was set upon and severely beaten."¹¹

THE ORDER AND THE AMERICAN PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION

In 1890, to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, the Orange Order resumed formal parades on July 12. Beginning at Madison and Thirty-fourth Street in Manhattan, seven lodges from Manhattan and the Bronx, four from Philadelphia, two from Brooklyn and one from Yonkers paraded making a total of fifteen-hundred men. Initially, the annual parade alternated between Manhattan, Brooklyn and Jersey City, but by 1900 it was only between Manhattan and Brooklyn. About a thousand members paraded on average, but as many as five thousand gathered later at picnic grounds like Jones' Wood in Manhattan or Ridgewood Park in Brooklyn. The number of Orange lodges in Manhattan and the Bronx varied from eleven to sixteen, and in Brooklyn from four to six in the period between 1895 and 1916. In addition there were as many as six ladies Orange lodges in Manhattan and three in Brooklyn during the same period.¹²

Although the Orange Order was sometimes perceived as the voice of Irish Protestants, it only attracted a minority of them. Many Irish

Protestants had strong nationalist convictions and even among those that did not, only a few seemed interested in the order. Patrick Ford, founder and publisher of the largest Irish-American weekly, the *Irish World*, in an 1894 interview boasted of good relations between the different religions:

*Right here in New York this can be demonstrated in the Irish Brigade Association, which, though about 95 per cent. Catholic, almost always has a Protestant for the chief officer. In Ireland it is only where the Orange element exists that there is any trouble. The great body of Irish Protestants despise the Orangemen, of whom the A.P.A. is a worthy offspring, as heartily as do the Catholics.*¹³

The Orange Order faced a period of bad publicity in the mid-1890s largely as a result of its connection with the A.P.A. (the American Protective Association), an anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant society. Mayor Schieran of Brooklyn, certainly no ally of the Irish Catholics, banned the order's Brooklyn parade in 1894 by refusing to allow a permit. Citing the explosive conditions in the country because of labor agitation and unemployment, Brooklyn officials argued that the sectarianism of the Orangemen and their alter ego, the A.P.A., might set off a dangerous riot. Further complicating the Orange image were the frequent reports of Orange rioting in Canada and the north of Ireland. A scandal then erupted in 1896 over a court case in which a Massachusetts Orange lodge had used whips, beatings and brandings at initiations.¹⁴

The *New York Times* uncharacteristically led the attack on the bigotry of the A.P.A./Orange combine in a series of major articles appearing in 1894. In a *Times* interview with the Reverend G. T. Lemmon of Troy (who was to address the July 12, 1894 picnic in New York at Brummer's Park at 133 Street and Second Avenue), the Methodist Episcopal churchman and Deputy Grand Master of the Orangemen admitted that the A.P.A., which bound its members neither to vote or do business with a Catholic, was the brainchild of the Orangemen and, specifically, of the Past Supreme Grand Master of the Loyal Orange

Institution, W. J. H. Traynor:

*"Because," replied the clergyman, with the most cheerful frankness, "American citizens, it was found, would not join the Orange lodges. They had prejudices against them. They did not understand them. It became necessary, then, in order to give the anti-Catholic movement inaugurated by the Orange lodges force, to make it a power, to make it possible to combat the growing influence of the Catholics in politics; it became necessary to give it a new name, one that would enlist the support of the mass of the American people. So Mr. Traynor and other promoters of the A.P.A. hit upon the present name, and the movement swept, as you have seen, all over the country."*¹⁵

THE ORDER IN LATER TIMES

It was reported that since the 1871 riot, the Orangemen had managed to attract few to their ranks but Canadians and north of Ireland immigrants. The names chosen for several local lodges strongly suggest a north of Ireland origin for many of the members. Although the locations like Derry, Monaghan and Stewartstown were chosen for lodge names, no name outside of Ulster was used.

Although the daily newspapers frequently recorded detailed news of the activities of individual Orange lodges in their fraternal columns before World War I, much of the political activities remained secret. In 1886 it was reported that New York Orangemen were organizing support for Ulster, but it was not until Home Rule for Ireland became a real possibility that the order became more outspoken. In 1912 at the picnic at the Manhattan Casino grounds at 155th Street and Eighth Avenue, a resolution was passed expressing "sincere hope that the Home Rule bill will be rejected."

A split occurred between the Orangemen in the city over the British government's proposal to settle the Irish problem by a convention in 1917. Disunity seems to have been compounded after a serious breach in the ranks two years earlier when Brooklyn and Manhattan held separate July 12 parades. The Manhattan Orangemen had been put out of the order "because of non-payment of

dues and offences against discipline.”¹⁶

One of the most vocal opponents of Eamon DeValera was the Reverend David Duncan Irvine, a Bangor-born Methodist who had headed congregations in Brooklyn and Queens. Irvine had been a leading orator at Orange gatherings for several years. He had pursued DeValera during his American visit in 1919–1920, but was never able to get on the same platform with him. Reverend Irvine’s problems became more serious when he was accused by Father Thomas A. Nummy of Richmond Hill, Queens, of attacking the Catholic Church and the Knights of Columbus. Some members of Irvine’s own congregation resigned over his involvement with Irish politics. In 1921, following allegations of improper advances filed by several women, he was denied citizenship papers by a judge of the New York State Supreme Court on the grounds “his character was immoral.”¹⁷

Faced with the deaths of many of its leading members the order took on a less public role in the 1920s. In 1932, 2,500 members from around the country paraded in Bath Beach and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn and on to a picnic at Ulmer Park. In 1936, about five hundred members, headed by the Ulster Flute Band, marched in a short parade in Manhattan in the West Fifties. The last known parade occurred in 1958, when about a thousand members marched twenty-two blocks from a national convention held at the Hotel McAlpin on west Thirty-third Street to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. One lodge still remains to the present day in New York.

While the Orange Order succeeded in establishing itself in America and New York City in the nineteenth century, it was not able to spark much sectarian feeling in the ranks of the general American population. Most Americans were not interested in European religious grudges and even less interested in the supposed benefits of British rule. The Orange legacy consequently appears to be a strange one. The order was an organization born in Ireland, but with little or nothing Irish about it, and an organization transplanted to America, but with little or nothing in common with its republican principles and traditions of tolerance.

NOTES

- 1 *Irish-American*, July 18, 1868
- 2 *Second Annual Report of the Board of Health of the Health Department, City of New York, April 11, 1871 to April 10, 1872*, Gildersleeve, New York, 1872, p. 232–233.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.238–239.
- 4 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 15, 1872)
- 5 *New York Times*, August 13, 1872
- 6 *New York Times*, April 15, 1878)
- 7 *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 27, 1893)
- 8 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 13, 1893
- 9 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 12, 1879
- 10 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 13, 1886
- 11 *Brooklyn Eagle*, July 13, 1887
- 12 *Brooklyn Eagle Almanac*, Brooklyn Eagle Publishing Co., Brooklyn, 1895 through 1916
- 13 *New York Times*, July 1, 1894
- 14 *New York Times*, July 13, 1894 and July 15, 1894
- 15 *New York Times*, July 13, 1894
- 16 *New York Times*, July 11, 1915 and July 12, 1917
- 17 *New York Times*, May 21, 1921