

The Bronx Irish At Mid-19Th Century

BY HARRY M. DUNKAK, Ph.D., C.F.C.

While the number of persons of foreign birth is available by state in the various census counts done by the United States since 1790, there is still a scarcity of research on specific ethnic groups. To understand these groups more fully, there is a need to discover what is behind people's names and addresses, especially their motives for coming here and the details of their lives in America. The Irish migrated to the New World, especially to the United States, for economic, political, and religious reasons, and they played a significant role in development of America. This study of the Irish will concentrate upon their impact on the Bronx, New York in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially upon the areas of West Farms and Westchester Square.



To understand the condition of the Irish settling in the Bronx it is imperative to know something of the history of Ireland and the Irish people's relationship with England. In 1167 England began the invasion and occupation of Ireland. This marks the beginning of a long struggle that does not reach its end in the twenty-six counties in the Irish Republic until



Illustrations:
(Left) Oliver Cromwell commanded the English campaign in Ireland (1649–1652) during a period when harsher Penal Laws were passed against Roman Catholics and dissenters in Ireland. (Right) Edmund Burke was born in Dublin and served, almost continuously, in the House of Commons (1765–1794) where he spoke against the Penal Laws and their effects. Courtesy of National Portrait Gallery and Library of Congress.

independence in 1922. At first the English occupied only a narrow strip of land, referred to as the Pale, around the city of Dublin. In 1649 greater inroads were made with the invasion of Cromwell's army and the subsequent confiscation of land owned by Irish Catholics.¹

The year 1692 marks the beginning of harsher Penal Laws enacted by the Irish Parliament under the control of the established church—the Anglican Church or Church of England. The Penal Laws were aimed at Catholics and dissenters, that is, anyone not a member of the Anglican Church. Of course, Ireland was overwhelmingly Catholic, and Catholics were most affected by the more than twenty Penal Laws. Under these oppressive codes, Catholics were placed under a long list of restrictive measures. The laws were designed to reduce Irish Catholics to insignificant slavery and fitness for nothing except to hew wood and draw water.

Regarding effects of the Penal Laws on Irish Catholics there is the story of an incident in the British House of Lords. It is relat-

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ed that when a member of the House of Lords tauntingly referred to the Irish as “rude and ignorant,” Lord Byron promptly stated with that bitter sarcasm for which he was publicly noted: “Aye, well may you call them ignorant, my Lord, when you burned the schoolhouse and hanged the schoolmaster!” A fellow member of Parliament, Edmund Burke, a great humanitarian, described the Penal Laws as one of the most frightful engines of oppression that the perverted ingenuity of man could conceive. According to Burke, they were “fitted for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself. . . .”² Professor William Lecky, a noted English author, an Anglican, and an ardent British sympathizer, accurately summarized in his *History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (1913) the diabolical goals of the Penal Laws as follows:

*To deprive the Catholics of all civil life,
To reduce them to a condition of most
extreme and brutal ignorance,
To deprive them of their land that was
desperately needed for their very existence.*



THE PERIOD OF GREAT HUNGER IN IRELAND

The relationship between the Irish people with England was particularly significant in the early and mid-nineteenth

century. The potato had been introduced into Ireland by the wealthy as a garden crop, a minor supplement to their more than adequate diet. But, by 1815 the potato had become a year-round food for many poor Irish farmers. For poverty stricken Irish Catholics, it had become a staple crop for their very existence. If ever the potato was threatened, it would have a devastating effect on the poor of Ireland. On August 16, 1845, the *Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* reported that *phytophthora infestans*, commonly known as a blight of

unusual character, had struck the Isle of Wight. By September 13, the *Gardeners' Chronicle* announced the blight had reached Ireland. Crop loss for 1845 was estimated at anywhere from one third to as high as one half of cultivated acreage in Ireland. In 1846, it is estimated that three quarters of the potato harvest was lost to this blight. The Great Hunger had struck Ireland, with a devastating effect upon Irish Catholics.

The Great Hunger proved a period of mass starvation, disease, death and migration between the years of 1845 and 1852. Outside of Ireland it is known as the period of Great Famine. In the Irish language it is more correctly called *an Gorta Mor*, meaning “The Great Hunger.” The records show that during this terrible period of hunger there was sufficient food to feed all the Irish. Huge quantities of food, however, were being shipped from Ireland to Great Britain and elsewhere by the British authorities, while Irish Catholics were dying from lack of nourishment and from diseases caused by their hunger. Cecil Woodham-Smith, an authority on this period of Irish history, writes that huge quantities of food, such as meat, vegetables and grain, were being shipped to Great Britain. A portion of the following poem cited by historian Christine Kinealy aptly describes the scene for the poor Irish Catholics:

*There's a proud array of soldiers—what
do they round your door?
They guard our master's granaries from
the thin hands of the poor.
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?
'Would to God that we were dead—
Our children swoon before us, and we
cannot give them bread.*

IRISH MIGRATION TO AMERICA

These terrible outcomes of the relationship between Great Britain and the Irish people became main factors behind a surge in Irish migration to North America that had started centuries earlier. Starting with Sir Walter Raleigh's ill-fated experiment in Virginia in 1583, the Irish had not only come to America, but had come in considerable numbers. Down

Illustration:
The Gardener's
Chronicle and
Agricultural Gazette was
a periodical published
for nearly 150 years. It
began in 1841, not long
before the Great Hunger.
Gardeners and scientists
submitted reports and
other materials. Charles
Darwin and Joseph
Hooker were among its
contributors. Courtesy of
New York Public Library.



Illustration:
 After the dramatic increase in Irish immigration to North America following the Great Hunger, another surge occurred after what is sometimes called An Gorta Beag or "The Small Hunger," a time of hunger (1879–1890) largely in the west of Ireland. The front cover of Harper's Weekly for February 28, 1880 shows help arriving in Ireland from the United States. The caption reads "The Herald of relief from America." Courtesy of Library of Congress.

to 1790 it is difficult to determine the exact number of Irish who migrated to America. One source places the number in 1790 at 306,000. A more recent study claims that this figure significantly understates the number of Irish who came to America during the colonial period. Regardless of what figures are correct, there is no doubt that the Irish came in large numbers during the colonial period and played significant roles in colonial history and the American Revolution.³

However, in the second half of the 1840s and the beginning of the 1850s, the Irish migrated in greater numbers because of The Great Hunger, by far the most devastating event in the history of Ireland. Starting

in 1845 and continuing into the 1850s, the population of Ireland declined from 8,175,124 in 1841 to 6,552,350 in 1851. For the entire period it has been estimated that at least 1,383,350 people died and 1,445,587 emigrated. Families did not migrate in large numbers, but younger members of families did. The Irish immigrants starting a new life in a new land usually sent remittances back to their families which permitted other family members to migrate. In general, women migrated in similar numbers as men. The socio-economic conditions that brought on this catastrophe obviously were the terribly unjust distribution of land, the total dependence of many Irish upon the potato, and the



Illustration:
 Packet ships were designed late in the eighteenth century to carry mail and small pieces of cargo from England to its colonies. They were later used to transport passengers, sometimes in large numbers. Their design helped reduce time needed for trips, but crossing the North Atlantic, particularly in winter, remained hazardous.
 Courtesy of Library of Congress.

fact that the English were shipping more than enough food from Ireland to feed the Great Hunger Irish.

In this dramatic migration, people left from several ports of embarkation. Liverpool dominates for the period from 1846 to 1851, accounting for 76.6% of the departures. Smaller numbers, ranging from two to three percent, came from Belfast, Dublin, Glasgow, London, Cork, and Limerick. The popularity of Liverpool as a departure point can be attributed in part to the American-built packet ships which transported passengers from that seaport to New York City. These ships were large, carrying from 300 to 1,000 passengers. The cost was low, from three to four pounds in steerage, a sum of money no more, and in many cases less, than the rate for smaller vessels using Irish ports. The packet ships presented somewhat better accommodations, plus usually faster passage and better safety. The trip from Ireland to Liverpool cost little or nothing, since ships making that short trip took on passengers for ballast.

The Great Hunger Irish, upon arriving in New York and other American seaports, faced many obstacles and difficulties. In contrast to earlier immigrant Irish groups, most immigrants arriving during the famine years were near destitution upon arrival and possessed very few

skills. Many immigrants suffered from fever and various diseases as a result of the cramped and unsanitary conditions on board what became known as the “coffin ships.” One passenger, Stephen de Vere, who sailed in steerage in 1847, the year that saw the greatest emigration, later described conditions in steerage:

Hundreds of poor people, men, women and children of all ages huddled together, without much air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart; the fevered patients lying beside the sound, by their agonized ravings disturbing those around. The food is generally ill-selected and seldom sufficiently cooked in consequences of the insufficiency and bad construction of the cooking places. The supply of water, hardly enough for cooking and drinking, does not allow for washing. It has been estimated that perhaps as many as 40% of steerage passengers died either en-route or immediately after arrival. The authorities in America soon realized how disease-ridden the emigrants were, so they set up quarantine centers which held the emigrants until they were deemed fit to continue. Some went to the West of America, but the vast majority settled in the eastern cities, such as New York. In the eastern cities some found work in the poorest of jobs. Over the years some, but very few, did rise to some prominence, but most remained desperately poor.⁴

These are the people who came to America, many of whom settled and contributed to the development of the Bronx in New York City.

THE IRISH IN THE BRONX

Until the late nineteenth century the Bronx belonged to Westchester County. At that time Westchester County extended down to the Harlem River. However, in 1874 the towns of West Farms, Morrisania, and Kingsbridge were awarded to New York City by the New York State government, and in 1895 the towns of Westchester, Wakefield, Pelham and Eastchester were awarded to New York City. In



1896 City Island voted to join New York City. In 1898 the Borough of the Bronx was established, with some of the former towns enduring as sections of the Borough. The Bronx was the last of sixty-two New York State counties to be incorporated.

Attention to the Irish in the towns of Westchester and West Farms in the mid-19th century reveals interesting details. An examination of the census of 1850 for Westchester, at the height of the Great Irish Hunger, tells us a great deal about the conditions of the Irish in New York. In that town, out of a total population of 2,492 people, 524 were Irish with 254 females and 270 males, with about 103 married couples. The total number of female Irish 14 years and under was 28 and the total number of males 14 years and under was 42. The total number of females within the ages of 15-30 was 143 and the total number of males was 131. Some 121 females worked as servants, and 169 males were common laborers. Of the Irish 20 years of age or older, about 60 males and 70 females were illiterate. Only about 22 Irish in the town of Westchester were

property owners. Obviously, in the town of Westchester the Irish, in general, were struggling to live a decent life.

Regarding the town of West Farms, the 1850 Westchester County census reports that out of total population of 4,436 inhabitants, 946 were Irish with 432 females and 514 males, with about 180 married couples. The total number of female Irish under 14 years was 45, and the total number of males 14 years and under was 57. The total number of females within the ages of 15-30 was 256, and the total number of males was 281. The number of females working as servants was 179, and 271 males were common laborers. Only about 23 Irish in the town of West Farms were property owners. Obviously in the town of West Farms, with a larger population, conditions for the Irish were about the same as in the town of Westchester.

Most Irish immigrants in America had to struggle and lived a life bordering on poverty. Some Irish, very few in number, did fairly well by mid-nineteenth century. William Carr did not arrive during the Great Hunger

Illustration:

An idealized view of the American quarantine center in St. George, Staten Island. After surviving journeys across the Atlantic, Irish immigrants who showed signs of illness were sent to this quarantine station. Established in 1799, it grew in notoriety as more people arrived for "treatment" in the 1800s. Following a severe Yellow Fever outbreak on Staten Island in 1856, local inhabitants blamed the center. They attacked it and burned several buildings. The center closed in 1858. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



*Photo:
View of the Bronx River
in 1896. The River and
the county were named
for Jonas Bronck who
immigrated to New
Netherland in 1639.
Courtesy of the Museum
of the City of New York.*

years, but was in New York as early as 1838. In 1850, Carr, age 50, resided in West Farms. His occupation was not recorded in the census of 1850, but he possessed real property valued at \$3,500. On or about January 2, 1851, William Carr died without leaving a will. On January 22, 1851, his widow, Maria, residing in West Farms, requested in a document submitted to the Westchester County Surrogate Court that “the said intestate left kindred entitled to his Estate, whose names and places of residence are as follows: your petitioner his widow and Mary, wife of John M. Beck, his only child and next of kin, all residing in the said town of West Farms.” Maria Carr also requested that she and John M. Beck be granted “Letters of Administration of the goods, chattels and credits of the said intestate....” Maria Carr signed the document with her mark; she obviously was unable to write her name.

Henry B. Todd and James Valentine were appointed by the Surrogate Court to inventory the possessions of the deceased William Carr and presented their written report on January 28, 1851. The inventory was extensive, containing a room-by-room list of items in a two-story house: carpets, piano, tables, clock, blankets, sheets and quilts. There were also a barn and barnyard with sixty fowl, horse and carriage

and cows. Finally there were accounts due to William Carr. The entire estate was valued at \$1,417.46, excluding some items “exempted from Appraisement, to remain in the possession of Maria Carr, the widow of the testator, pursuant to Statute.”

On November 6, 1854, John M. Beck, who married Mary Carr (William Carr’s only daughter) and who by that time was the only surviving administrator of the estate, filed a supplementary inventory stating he discovered among the deceased’s papers two mortgages worth \$3,500 and \$1,000 respectively and a note of credit for \$33. The \$3,500 bond and mortgage was from Robert Weber and his wife on a house and lot at #222 Varick Street in New York City. The \$1,000 bond and mortgage were also from Weber and his wife on another house and lot at #54 Downing Street in New York City. Both were dated February 6, 1838, and were “to have been liquidated and settled, by existing offsets and accounts between Mary Carr and the owner of the said Houses & Lots, payable three years after date thereof, with Interest at six percent half yearly.” Beck also discovered “an account Existing as due the said William Carr in his lifetime by Wm. Hogg for wood sold to him by said William Carr, & which it is alleged was agreed to be liquidated by receiving Shrubs and ornamental Trees in payment thereof.” The wood was listed as having a value of \$33. There is no record as to whether these debts were paid or whether there was a resolution of any discrepancies between the parties involved.

Thomas Richardson was a wealthy resident of the town of West Farms. At the time of the census of 1850 he was listed as 34 years of age, a ship merchant whose real property was valued at \$30,000. On April 28, 1846, a Thomas Richardson, age 27, a merchant, arrived at the port of New York. Although there is a discrepancy in the ages listed in the census and the ship manifest, all other evidence indicates the same individual. Both entries indicate Richardson was a merchant. It is important to note that he arrived from

Liverpool on the *Great Western* which carried fourteen passengers: twelve merchants, one gentleman and one physician. The *Great Western* was a merchant ship, not a packet. Merchant ships were well equipped, carried only a few passengers who were accommodated in separate cabins, and naturally charged expensive fees for the passage. One obviously had to be wealthy for such a passage across the Atlantic, and Richardson was wealthy. The Hunger Irish, on the other hand, were forced to travel very cheaply and in terrible conditions in steerage by the hundreds in packet ships. There are no other Richardsons listed as Irish in the census of 1850, and Thomas Richardson was listed in that census as a merchant.

When Thomas Richardson died on March 3, 1865, his widow (no name given), who lived until January 29, 1890, "was appointed Executrix and Trustee together with other persons as Executors etc." Thomas Richardson was described in a document of February, 1893, as having possessed "large estates," of which a portion was in Great Britain and Ireland, and a portion in America. By his will he appointed executors and trustees in each country who were respectively to administer the several portions of the estate. From time to time after his death in 1865, the inventory record indicates that ships and bonds were sold, and loans totaling \$371,163.31 were made. Although born in Ireland and having arrived during the Great Hunger years, Thomas Richardson certainly was *not* one of the Great Hunger Irish.

Samuel Long, age 66, lived in the Morrisania section (presently in the lower Bronx, which at the time had a large Irish population) of the town of West Farms. He had real property valued at \$1,500, but there is no notation in the census for his occupation. On February 21, 1859, Long died intestate (in the census of 1850 there is no mention of a Mrs. Long). An estate inventory was submitted to Surrogate Court on March 23, 1859. There were articles such as spinning wheels, a stove, a family bible, and a cow that were declared "exempt from appraisal, to

remain in the possession of the Widow of the Testator, pursuant to the Statute." He owned "a two story frame house on Boston Road in the Village of Morrisania, built on property owned by Mary Mills and valued at \$650. There was a bond and mortgage, dated May, 1855, from Jane Sparrows, with a value of \$2,000. On January 10, 1856, Jane Sparrows also borrowed \$1,000 from Long. Finally there was a note dated August 18, 1852, from Samuel Long, Junior, for \$425. The entire estate was worth \$4,075, but there is no record of anyone claiming or receiving this estate, except for the "Exempt" items.

Patrick Curran, age 45, a resident of the town of Westchester (located in the northeastern portion of the Bronx), was a storekeeper whose real property was valued at \$1,800 in 1850. His wife, Mary, age 44, was also born in Ireland. They had a son, Michael, age 15, also born in Ireland before the family migrated to America. On or about April 7, 1877, Patrick Curran died intestate. Mary Curran had died previously, so Michael, now residing in New York City, requested that he be appointed by the Surrogate's Court as administrator of his father's estate. There were three other surviving children to share their father's estate: Catharine Skinion and Mary Jane Connally of Westchester and Ellen Bowhen of New York City. A rather brief, official inventory of Patrick Curran's estate included such items as a watch, two wagons, a loan and several bonds and mortgages; the total value was estimated at \$3,574.39. An interesting item in the inventory was a bill, dated July 9, 1877, from undertaker Isaac Butler, Jr. The casket and cloth cost \$130, five carriages cost \$6 each, and with interest of \$35 for late payment, the total bill for the burial of Patrick Curran came to \$263.80. The largest bond and mortgage, worth \$1,800, was from a Mary A. Mooney. The Census of 1850 includes two women named Mary Mooney. One Mooney, age 26, was working as a servant on a farm in the town of Westchester. The other Mary Mooney, age 36, lived in the nearby town of West Farms and was married to James Mooney, age 40, a



*Photo:
John Joseph Hughes
was born in County
Tyrone and served as the
fourth bishop and first
archbishop of New York.
He led the archdiocese
in New York from 1842
to 1864, a period of
dramatic growth and
volatile issues. Courtesy
of Wikipedia.*

laborer, who owned property valued \$1,800. With this information, one can determine to whom Patrick loaned the money; it is logical to assume that it was the latter Mary Mooney because her husband did own property.

John Lewis of the town of Westchester, age 35, was a laborer in 1850, with real property valued at \$700. He was married to Mary, also born in Ireland, age 34, with no children, at least none living in the town of Westchester. Both John and Mary were illiterate. Lewis died on November 28, 1879, leaving a will. His estate inventory, except for his property and house, was very modest. He left such items as four horses worth \$80, three sets of double harnesses, one hay wagon, one horse cart, two mowing machines, one calf and one plow, with a total value of \$237.50. On July 24, 1846, John Lewis had received a mortgage worth \$1,500 from Michael Cadmus and his wife

to buy Property in the town of Westchester at the corner of Henry Street and the road to Connells Mills. There is a map showing the location of this property, but there are no records to indicate how and when this debt was repaid.

THE IRISH AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Irish came to the Bronx, and to the rest of America, with a special relationship with their church. In Ireland, unlike much of continental Europe, both laity and clergy suffered under the tyranny of the state. This circumstance created a special bond that made many of the Irish and Catholicism inseparable. When the Irish arrived in the United States they first looked for Catholic priests for advice, leadership and assistance in their new and sometimes hostile environment. In return, the



poverty stricken Irish used every spare penny to erect churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and houses for the poor. At least one historian has noted that, in studying the Irish, one must also study the Catholic Church.⁵ Fortunately, during most of these exciting, difficult and turbulent years for them, the Irish Catholics of the New York area had a strong, active, and very capable leader in John Hughes (1797–1864) who became Bishop (in 1738) and then Archbishop (in 1842) of New York and remained in that office until his death. Hughes was born in County Tyrone to Patrick and Margaret (McKenna) Hughes, small farmers and linen weavers. During the Napoleonic Wars the family experienced economic difficulties and migrated to America. They lived for a time in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. While still in Ireland John had thought of the priesthood, so it was not surprising that he entered the seminary at Mount Saint Mary's College in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and was ordained in 1826. After leading a number of parishes, on January 7, 1838, he was appointed coadjutor-bishop of New York with the right to succeed the aging Bishop John Dubois. Knowing and experiencing the problems faced by the Irish, he threw himself wholeheartedly into their activities and problems in New York.

To remedy the shortage of priests for the growing Irish population, Hughes reported that Dubois had admitted foreign clergymen, some of whom were not reliable and many of whom did not speak English. Bishop Hughes, however, knew that most Irish immigrants knew some English or quickly learned the language and blended in, at least linguisti-

cally, without too much difficulty. In 1841 Bishop Hughes, therefore, established in the Fordham section of West Farms the College of St. John's, which also became the diocesan seminary. The college and seminary were under the Vincentian order of priests until 1845, when the Jesuits took control because the former group eventually could not supply a sufficient number of priests well-versed in the English language. Father Felix Villanis, an Italian Vincentian ordained in Rome in 1840 and possessing not much more than a rudimentary facility with the English language, had been appointed rector of the seminary, with the added enormous duties of tending to the spiritual needs of Bronx and Westchester county



Catholics, the vast majority of whom were Irish. Bishop Dubois also had assigned Father Villanis the monumental task of establishing in the Bronx (and for all of Westchester County) the first permanent Catholic Church. He began this task in 1842 by acquiring property on the corner of Tremont and Castle Hill Avenues in the Bronx. The first masses were held in a barn. By 1845 the first permanent Catholic church building in the Bronx was completed and was dedicated by Archbishop Hughes on August 31, the feast of St. Raymond, hence the parish's name. Father Villanis and the mostly foreign-speaking Vincentians did not remain long at St. Raymond's. The two pastors who completed the construction of St. Raymond's, although born in Ireland, were English-speaking and

Photos:
 (Left) Fordham University began as St. John's College, shown here in the 1890s. The College opened in 1841.
 (Right) St. Raymond's Church on Castle Hill Avenue, facing East Tremont Avenue, as it appeared in 1905.
 Courtesy of Flickr.com/ Jim Griffin.

were trained for the priesthood at St. John's College.

CONCLUSION

The Irish obviously suffered a great deal in Ireland under English rule. Many died and many migrated to America. Family groups, in general, did not migrate but individual young Irish females and males did come to America. Typically, they lacked many skills but worked hard at whatever occupations were open to them, as menial and difficult as these jobs were for most people. The Church was important to them and they relied upon priests, who would be educated, to assist them to live a better life than they were afforded in Ireland under British rule. They contributed a great deal to the development of America and eventually would fashion for themselves a better life than Ireland would have afforded them until Irish independence in 1922.

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Endnotes

- 1 When a general asked Cromwell what should be done with the now landless Irish Catholics, the reply was: "Send them to hell or Connaught." Connaught was in the western portion of Ireland and was the least arable of all the land in Ireland.
- 2 George Gordon, Lord Byron 1788-1824. Edmund Burke, 1729–1797. See Michael J. O'Brien, "Early Irish Schoolmasters in New England," *The Catholic Review*, vol.3 (April 1917–January 1918), pp.52–53.
- 3 The large Irish migration to the shores of America prompts an enquiry into the reason for this movement. Quite simply, a great ancient civilization was dying on the rack of English conquest during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A culture resplendent in literature, music, art, love of community and respect for the individual was being destroyed by an imposed English system through the Penal Laws.

Ireland was certainly not a paradise: the land was poor, the climate was not pleasant and poverty was never too far away. But with all these hardships, plus the Penal Laws, there still was the ancient Irish love of their magnificent culture and the fierce desire to maintain the freedom that the Irish long possessed and treasured. Many Irish consequently migrated to the shores of America.

- 4 The study of any nation includes an understanding of the various elements that have fashioned its historical development: This is especially important for America, a nation populated by many immigrant groups. The arrival of the Irish in America is certainly worthy of serious study. The arrival of the Celts started with the first aborted colonial settlements in the late sixteenth century. By the middle of the nineteenth century this trickle became a flood tide of immigration, many coming and settling in New York City. The Celts were the first to arrive in America in large numbers. Nothing is more fascinating and important than to examine and study the interaction and amalgamation of an alien culture with an existing one in a distant land.

The Celtic people, of which the Irish are a part, have had a long and glorious history. Long before the Romans under Caesar had met the Celts in the Gaelic Wars, a rich and glorious culture had developed. Descended from an Indo-European society which originated in an area east of the Carpathian Mountains, Celtic culture contained very significant Eastern influences, in that there is a very evident philosophical and mystical element in their approach to music, art and poetry. This philosophical and mystical component is found in the Celtic appreciation of the mystery of the Divinity within all of creation and the mystifying complexity and wonderful beauty of all creation. This is known as Celtic Spirituality. It is not confined to Ireland, but can be found, sensed and felt in the Hebrides (islands west of mainland Scotland). The Isle of Iona, after which Iona College is named, is located in the Hebrides and contains a mystical Celtic Spirituality. The great English author, Samuel Johnson, visited the Isle of Iona in 1773 and commented: "That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plains of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona." To understand the Irish one must be aware that they brought to America this Celtic Spirituality with its paradoxical tensions between the sense of the nearness and farness of God, the melancholy fleetingness

of all life, and the vanity of the world, yet the grandeur and wonder of creation in all its ecstatic and myriad loveliness.

The Celtic way of life was able to survive in Ireland, a relatively small island off the West coast of Europe, while most of Europe had been conquered first by the Legions of Romans and later by the Barbarian hordes from the North and the East. Such is the greatness of Irish culture that the European Renaissance began in Ireland and on the Isle of Iona six hundred years before the blossoming of learning, art and literature in France and Italy. There is an Eastern, oriental influence in Irish culture, as exemplified by the creation of intricately delicate, beautiful and mystifying figurines, motifs and circular designs contained in magnificent copies of the Bible, such as the Book of Kells (started on the Isle of Iona in 797AD to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Columba, the Founder of Iona), The Book of Kells is, perhaps arguably, the greatest illuminated manuscript produced by the Western World. From ancient times down to the present, Ireland and the Irish people are noted for their hospitality. Friend and stranger, without exception, are immediately offered upon entering a house the proverbial "cuppa" (tea, that is), with the attendant scones, butter and home-made preserves. For the Irish the key to social justice is generosity and the distribution of one's goods, no matter how meager and simple those things might be. Typical of this mentality and practice is an ancient poem that reads:

O King of Stars!

Whether my house be dark or be bright

It will not be closed against anybody;

May Christ not close his house against me.

- 5 Riforgiato, Leonard R. "Bishop John Timon, Archbishop John Hughes and the Irish Colonization: A Clash of Episcopal Views on the Future of the Irish and the Catholic Church in America" in Pencak, W., Berrol, S., and R. M. Miller (eds.), *Immigration to New York* (Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press, 1991), pp.53-54.