

# *Irish Landmarks in Downtown New York*

BY JOHN T. RIDGE

In 1939, a Columbia University professor named A. J. Reilly wrote a booklet called *Irish Landmarks in New York*. It was reprinted at least once, but it today remains a scarce collector's item. While Reilly wrote about Irish landmarks, most of those he described had long since disappeared, so his booklet is a bit disappointing. Already in 1939, many of the best things that were significant in Irish New York history were gone.

For over thirty years I have been conducting Irish walking tours in New York, mainly of those landmarks that are still standing, but many of these will probably soon fall to the inevitable expansion of Gotham. Recently, in streets like the Bowery that were once full of Irish landmarks, a wave of unprecedented demolition has changed them forever. The Bowery was once the second commercial street of the city and was full of places that recalled old Irish businesses and meeting venues for Irish societies, but sadly many of them have disappeared in the last few years, seemingly overnight. Consequently, I have taken the downtown section, roughly the area from City Hall to the Battery, and outlined a sketch of what still stands today. But historic Irish New York is like the will-o'-the-wisp and is disappearing fast.

## *Castle Clinton/Castle Garden—Battery Park*

The massive circular stone building in Battery Park still looks very much like the fort it was constructed to be in 1807. Castle Clinton, almost obsolete as a military installation within a few years of its construction, never fired a shot in hostilities. In



1824 it was converted into Castle Garden, a venue for concerts, speeches, entertainments and fancy balls which endured until 1851 when the old fortress was converted into the immigrant reception depot for New York, the biggest one in the United States.

Some of the most notable Irishmen of the time were formally received at Castle Garden with impressive welcoming ceremonies. Father Theobald Matthew, the Cork-born apostle of temperance, began his organizing tour of the Irish communities in America here on July 3, 1849. Following his escape from British imprisonment in July, 1852, Thomas Francis Meagher, future commander of the Irish Brigade in the Civil War and already a renowned Irish political figure, reviewed the Irish-American military companies of the city, then numbering about a thousand men, at a reception in his honor in the Garden.<sup>1</sup> American President Millard Fillmore and Daniel Webster were greeted there by similar display of the Irish-American military in May 1851.<sup>2</sup> Besides the Irish volunteer military, Castle Garden hosted the annual ball of the Hibernian Benevolent Burial Association for several years beginning in 1849, as well as events of some of the predominantly Irish labor unions like the Longshoremen's Society.<sup>3</sup>

Its establishment as an official place to receive immigrants was in answer to the terrible conditions that immigrants faced upon arrival in New York where a large

criminal class waited to prey on the newcomers, overcharging them for accommodations and railroad tickets and tricking many of the more naïve ones into lives of crime. Particularly vulnerable were the young farm girls who were in many cases held as virtual captives and forced into prostitution.

In the years before its use as an official immigration depot, there were many Irish associations with the building. In Castle Garden, all immigrants were, at least, initially separated from the predators. They received within its walls the opportunity for advice and aid from agents of the Irish Emigrant Society (officially recognized by the immigration authorities to perform this duty) and other charitable agencies. A labor exchange was also maintained that offered Irish immigrants the prospect of employment immediately, although the work was usually back-breaking work on construction projects for men or domestic service for women. But Castle Garden did not provide perfect protection for immigrants. The criminal element continued to wait for immigrants as they were released into the city.

Far more Irish passed through the portals of Castle Garden than through the now more famous Ellis Island. The huge number (2,541,148) of Irish entering the country up to 1891, however, was still almost a million less than the number of Germans (3,425,208) who entered during the same period.<sup>4</sup>

### *Immigration Reception Depot—Ellis Island*

Ellis Island, operated by the federal government, took over the processing of immigrants entering through the port of New York in 1891. By this time, the number of Irish immigrants was in relative decline in comparison to the rest of the new arrivals



from Europe; just under 600,000 Irish passed through its doors before the Island depot was closed in 1954.<sup>5</sup> Overall, only 12 million of the 24 million immigrants coming to the United States passed through Ellis Island during the years 1891–1954 when the facility was in use. After 1924 many of the Irish bound for New York were pre-examined in Ireland, and in New York they disembarked directly from

steamships, never having set foot in Ellis Island. While the present day museum on the island is interesting, its treatment of the Irish is very much understated.

Nevertheless, the great hall of the old reception center and the other rooms and buildings, many almost completely unchanged, invoke a strong impression of what the first days in America may have been like for immigrants.

According to a report written in 1911 by Father Michael Henry, director of the Home for Irish Immigrant Girls, Ellis Island had in some ways improved the conditions for immigrants over Castle Garden. He pointed out that officials themselves assumed more of the general responsibility for immigrants while at the same time obligating steamship companies to meet costs of maintenance for those immigrants who were detained. Father Henry pointed out where Ellis Island had been successful, but warned that immigration to the United States for the Irish may lead to unanticipated problems:

*And here it may be well to mention that happily the United States is no longer an asylum for the unfit. Immigrants showing symptoms of imbecility or insanity, contagious disease, intemperance and so forth, in fact, all who may be*

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*classed as undesirable and likely to become a public charge are excluded. How many Irish boys and girls admitted would be far better off at home. They come to live in cities to compete with other immigrants accustomed to lower standards of living or, in the more attractive fields of employment, to enter lists with the trained product of American schools and colleges.<sup>6</sup>*

### *The White Star Line—9 Broadway*



The White Star Line was a long-time competitor of the Cunard Line and liked to advertise itself in the New York Irish weeklies as the “Irish Boats” because all their ships were built at the Harlan and Wolfe Shipyard in Belfast. Irish New Yorkers were very familiar with the White Star Building when in 1912 some of them purchased tickets here to bring relatives over from Ireland on the ill-fated *Titanic*. Dramatic scenes took place here as news trickled in after the vessel’s collision with an iceberg. Thousands of frenzied relatives and friends, including many Irish New Yorkers waiting and watching for news of the survivors, crammed the building’s steps and spilled across the sidewalk into Broadway itself.

### *Cunard Building—25 Broadway*

Opened in 1921 to replace an earlier headquarters, the Cunard Building incorporated features recalling the company’s long maritime history, including the coat of arms of many of its principal ports. Prominently displayed among them on the façade is the arms of the port of Queenstown (now Cobh) in Co. Cork, from which so many of Ireland’s immigrants left for America. No longer occupied by the steamship line, the building retains on the Battery Place side separate entrances for “First Class” and “Cabin Class” passengers, a reminder of the strict class differences that existed among the passengers. As with other British passenger lines, the Irish trade was a big and necessary part of its income from the Atlantic routes. Cunard depended on the business of Irish travel agents in Ireland and in New York where approximately a dozen Irish-born agents funneled business to the line, often organizing group excursions of former immigrants back to the old country.



### *Home for Irish Immigrant Girls—7 State Street*



The Mission for Irish Immigrant Girls, established in 1883 thanks to the preliminary work of Irish humanitarian Charlotte Grace O’Brien, was perhaps the most successful institution ever established in New York to help the Irish community. The organization’s Home for Irish Immigrant Girls worked closely with immigration authorities until Irish immigration practically

ceased in the late 1930s and the need for such an institution had faded. In the busy years of immigration, from the Home's founding until the early 1930s, it met thousands of young women at immigrant depots and on board ships, and then sheltered the newly arrived girls, mostly from right off the farm, at its comfortable quarters. Although most of the immigrants stayed for a night or two and rarely for a week or more, many others were merely brought to the Home until relatives around the city could bring them to their homes. Besides the devoted priests who ministered to the arrivals, an experienced staff of Irish-born men and women, some of them Irish-speaking, worked tirelessly to ensure that the newcomers did not fall into the hands of the many predators waiting to exploit them just beyond the immigration depot. After the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912, some 40 survivors of the more than 100 Irish on board gathered at the Home on April 28 on the occasion of the distribution of funds collected for their relief. Although over 100,000 girls had been already helped by the home, the Irish saved from the *Titanic* represented a profound tragedy in the history of Irish emigration. As the Director of the Home reported, the principal function of the Mission was not just the temporal but the spiritual care of the Irish immigrant girls:

*The priests of the Mission were able to render these (immigrant girls) welcome and substantial assistance. They met them at the pier on the arrival of the steamship Carpathia, visited them in the hospital, received them at the Home, served in their interest in their power to console them and relieve their distress. Nor was this without reward, for we were edified beyond word by the Christian spirit they exemplified. They had lost their relatives, companions, clothes, money, but belief in the mercy of God was still theirs in abundance.<sup>7</sup>*

### *Fraunces Tavern—54 Pearl Street*

The old tavern with its close association to George Washington and other Revolutionary War leaders has had a long history as a place of refreshment since it was first built in 1719. An early Irish society called the Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick celebrated here with a dinner on March 17, 1771.<sup>8</sup> On that occasion they exchanged greetings with another society of the period meeting nearby in another neighborhood tavern, the Sons of Liberty. The Sons of Liberty was the most important patriotic society of the period, with similarly named groups in many of America's colonial cities. Without the work of the Sons to bring to public attention the injustices of British misrule, the American Revolution would probably never have taken place. The Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick was not the city's first Irish society. The French Huguenot John Fontaine, who was raised in Co. Cork, mentioned in a diary entry in 1716 that he attended a gathering of "the Irish Club" in a New York tavern.<sup>9</sup> For many years, both before and after the American Revolution, the Irish organizations of the city were almost entirely composed of upper middle-class dinner societies whose principal function was to gather their members together for convivial social evenings.



### *Old Cotton Exchange/India House—1 Hanover Square*

The old Cotton Exchange Building is the only building known to be associated

with the Irish Parliamentary Party and Irish home-rule leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, and his visit to New York in January, 1880. On January 9, Parnell was well received by more prominent members of the Exchange and was invited to address all members after the closing of business. Already committed to talk to



the members of the New York Stock Exchange, Parnell left the friendly surroundings of the Cotton Exchange and walked to the New York Exchange where its president announced that Parnell would address the members after closing to present a non-political charitable appeal relating to the near famine in Ireland. While there were cheers, many others shouted “No! No!” This response was

accompanied by a chorus of hisses. Nevertheless, Parnell later made an eloquent address to the brokers and employees.<sup>10</sup> Subscriptions for Irish Relief were opened in both exchanges.<sup>11</sup>

The Cotton Exchange Building in the 1890s served as headquarters for W.R. Grace and Co., the export/import firm and steamship line with extensive trading contacts to South America. William Russell Grace, born in Co. Cork, was elected as the first Irish-born and Catholic mayor of the city in 1881. Among his philanthropic contributions was the Grace Institute, an educational institution designed specifically to give women practical educations in business and science. It continues to this day.<sup>12</sup>

### *Trinity Church—75 Broadway*

Trinity Church, originated in 1696, was the first Anglican (Episcopalian) congregation to be founded in the city. Although known in the colonial days as the



“English” Church, thanks to the work of historian Michael J. O’Brien we know a great deal about the many Irish who appear in the parish records, some of whom are buried in the churchyard. O’Brien found over a thousand names of Irish persons associated with Trinity Church in colonial and post-colonial times. In the churchyard tombstones could be found bearing such distinctive Irish surnames as Kearney, Lynch, McCarthy, Murphy, and Ryan. The memorial stone erected by the Exempt Firemen’s Association on Church grounds records the Irish surnames of firemen killed while in service during the Civil War.<sup>13</sup>

### *John Street Methodist Church—44 John Street*

The John Street Methodist Church owes its existence to a number of Irish Palatine immigrants who sailed from Limerick in 1760. Phillip Embury and his cousin Barbara Heck were the descendants of Germans who settled in Limerick from the Pfalz (Palatine area) region of Germany. Although the present church dates from 1841, the original chapel was dedicated in 1768. A small museum under the sacristy has a collection of artifacts from the time of the original founders including a pulpit built by Phillip Embury himself as well as his inscribed bible. A bronze marker, presented by the Irish Institute and the American Irish Historical Society commemorates the church's Irish connections.



### *Gaelic American/John Devoy and Roger Casement—165 William Street*

This unimpressive building was the headquarters of the Irish-American weekly newspaper, the *Gaelic American*, and its editor and founder, John Devoy. A native of Co.



Kildare, Devoy was an Irish rebel leader and activist for more than sixty years of his life. He was an organizer in Ireland for the militant Fenian movement, and was arrested and imprisoned in 1866. In 1871 he was released with others on the condition he would leave Britain and Ireland. He arrived in New York to a hero's welcome. In 1875 Devoy organized the extremely complicated escape of Fenian prisoners in Australia by arranging to send a New England whaler, the *Catalpa*, on a journey that took more than a year. A venture at publishing a rebel newspaper in New York in the late 1870s and early 1880s was attempted while he served as the long-time leader of the secret Irish nationalist organiza-

tion, *Clan na Gael*. Sensing that a war with Europe was approaching, he forged an alliance with the leaders of the German-American societies in America to keep America at least neutral in the coming hostilities. Devoy's *Gaelic American* contained expert analyses of foreign affairs, missing from most papers of the day, that were written by Devoy himself, whose career had included service in the French Foreign Legion.

In 1914, Irish leader Roger Casement was met here by two members of the New York Irish literati, Padraic and Mary Colum. Mary Colum recalled that Casement's distinguished appearance, resembling Sigmund Freud, made everyone else in the room appear drab and plebian. Nevertheless, the former British diplomat was never completely trusted by the secretive world of the Irish exiles who had him trailed by a detective during his stay.<sup>14</sup> Padraic Pearse, leader of the 1916 Rising, accompanied by another nationalist leader from Ireland, Bulmer Hobson, convened a meeting in the office in February 1914. Joseph Plunkett, another martyr of the 1916, visited Devoy here in 1915.<sup>15</sup> Other possible visitors to the *Gaelic American* office were John McBride, another executed 1916 leader, and his wife Maude Gonne, one of Ireland's most prominent modern political figures.

Philomena Plunkett, sister of Joseph, was one of several couriers who traveled to and from Ireland before the Easter Rising in 1916 with secret messages and sometimes large drafts of money. Plans for German support for the Irish rebellion in 1916 were coordinated with the German Consulate, but a careless mistake by the staff left one of Devoy's coded letters out in the open during a raid by the United State Secret Service. As a result, the British were forewarned of some of the plans for the insurrection.

The *Gaelic American* newspaper carried on a bitter fight with the *Irish World* that was brought to a head at the outbreak of the Irish Civil War in 1922. The two New York papers continued their support for the rival factions right up to the 1950s when, ironically, the decline in the Irish population brought about the merger of the two publications.

### *Sadlier Publishing Co./Thomas D'Arcy McGee—164 William Street*



D. and J. Sadlier, Denis and James Sadlier, were two brothers from Co. Tipperary who established one of the earliest Catholic and Irish publishing firms in New York in 1836. The company is today one of the oldest continuously publishing firms in the United States, but it no longer publishes material of Irish content.

In the 1850s, many of its book titles were Irish histories, and Mary Anne Sadlier, wife of James and author of more than sixty books published during the second half of the nineteenth century, was the most prolific writer of Catholic novels in the United States. Mary Anne (née Madden) was also

born in Ireland and almost all of her novels told the story of Irish immigrants facing the challenges of preserving their faith in a Protestant America.<sup>16</sup> For a while the Sadliers published a Catholic weekly, *The Tablet*, which included a large Irish content. Prior to that, the company had ventured into a new, more explicitly Irish newspaper called the *American Celt* between 1854 and 1855.

The editor of the *American Celt* was Thomas D'Arcy McGee, a refugee of the 1848 failed rising in Ireland and still a militant Irish nationalist. McGee soon gave up the paper and headed to Montreal where he found a place in politics and became an important leader in the movement to forge Canada into a nation. He is honored today in Canada as one of the "Founders of the Canadian Confederation" in 1867. He was assassinated a year later on a dark city street in his adopted city, but no trace of the assassin was ever found. It has been long suspected that his opposition to the Fenian movement was the motivation for his murder.

## *Irish Relief Fund/First Irish Consulate—119 Nassau Street (5 Beekman Street)*

Built by Co. Tyrone-born banker and financier Eugene Kelly beginning in 1881, this building was the headquarters of the Irish Relief Fund, a group set up to raise funds for the survivors and their families of the 1916 Rebellion. Through a series of lectures, con-



certs, and public demonstrations thousands of dollars were collected from American sympathizers, including many from German-American organizations, and forwarded to Dublin for distribution.

The first Irish Consulate was established here in 1920 while Irish Republicans were still fighting for independence. During the Civil War that began in Ireland in late 1922,

the consulate was seized from supporters of the Free State Government on December 27 by Irish Republicans, who held it for three days. Among the leaders of the Republican occupation was Muriel MacSwiney, the widow of martyred Cork Lord Mayor Terence MacSwiney, and Robert Briscoe, later a long-time member of the Irish parliament and Dublin's first Jewish mayor. Despite the Republican sides superior numbers on site, the Free State was finally able to secure the premises in the first days of January, 1923.<sup>17</sup>

## *Irish World/Jeremiah O'Leary—38 Park Row*

The Irish American weekly, the *Irish World*, was one of the largest weekly newspapers in the United States. In 1878, it had more than 90,000 circulation, more than four times its closest rival, the *Irish American* at 20,000.<sup>18</sup>



Under the direction of Galway-born Patrick Ford, the paper preached the cause of Irish nationalism, the working man and temperance. Ford was influential in both American and Irish politics. British authorities were said at one point to ask Irish-Americans arriving in Ireland from the United States if they had any imports to declare by asking, "Coffee, tea, or *Irish Worlds*?" In 1887, the *Irish World* established its book publishing branch, Ford's National Library, here in the recently constructed Potter Building. All the books were relatively cheap paperback editions of fiercely Irish nationalist histories and expositions of the history of British misrule, often featuring lurid covers of atrocities or rampaging British lions.

The offices of Jeremiah O'Leary, Irish nationalist and advocate of American neutrality before World War I, were in this building. O'Leary, born in upstate New York of parents from Co. Cork, had come to the city after 1900 and became active in Irish-American societies like the Gaelic League, the *Cumann Ceoil*, an Irish music society, and above all the secret Irish nationalist society, *Clan na Gael*. He organized the American Truth Society in 1912 because he felt there was an organized effort to bring

the United States out of its neutrality and into a European war on the side of Britain. After America did indeed enter the First World War, he was charged under the Espionage Act. O'Leary's allies regarded the arrest as little more than a political witch-hunt conducted by the Wilson Administration and an attempt to stifle Irish-American support for militant nationalists following the Easter Rising. The allies rejoiced in 1919 when, after a sensational trial, he was acquitted of all charges.

### *St. Paul's Chapel— Broadway at Fulton Street*



Even before one enters this oldest church building in Manhattan, the three most noticeable monuments at the left, front, and center of the church commemorate three Irish-born leaders of the community. At the left (southside) is a memorial to Thomas Addis Emmet (1764–1837), a native of Cork, brother of Irish martyr Robert Emmet. At the center is the grave and memorial to General Richard Montgomery (1738–1775), a Raphoe, Co. Donegal native, one of the commanders of the American forces killed while attacking Quebec at the beginning of the American Revolution. On the right (northside) is the memorial to Dr. William James MacNeven (1763–1841), a Galway native who is considered to be the “Father of American

Chemistry” and, like Emmet, a refugee following the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland. The inscriptions on the monument for Emmet and MacNeven are written in Latin, English, and Irish, although the wording is severely eroded on the Emmet monument. The Irish inscription on the MacNeven monument was composed by John O'Mahoney, a militant Irish nationalist and later one of the founders of the Fenian movement.

The building itself was constructed in 1766 as a chapel of Trinity Church and is affiliated with the Episcopalian community. As soon as one enters the edifice, visitors are greeted by fourteen impressive Waterford cut-glass chandeliers, made in 1802.<sup>19</sup> The Irish tri-color, as well as those of other nations significant in the history of the parish, hangs from the choir.

There is a long tradition on the part of various New York Irish societies to lay wreaths annually on the Emmet, Montgomery, and MacNeven monuments that goes back to the nineteenth century. For many years, it was the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee that took this commemoration upon itself, but most commonly it was Irish republican supporters who recognized the sacrifices of these individuals. Oddly enough, both Emmet and MacNeven are buried elsewhere and, remarkably in the case of MacNeven, a Roman Catholic all his life, his memorial occupies this prominent position as a measure of the high esteem held for him by the members of this venerable Episcopal congregation.

### *St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church—16 Barclay Street*



St. Peter's was the first Catholic Church established in New York, with its first edifice being constructed in 1786 following the success of the American Revolution. While the Irish predominated in its congregation, the early parishioners were a mix of several European nationalities. In 1806, when St. Peter's was still the only Catholic parish in New York, the first anti-Irish disturbances occurred in the city when a mob gathered outside the church doors

and threatened "to pull down the houses inhabited by the Irish." The parish became increasingly more Irish and working-class when many of the more prosperous parishioners moved further north in Manhattan. An early pastor, Father Whelan, considered it necessary in a letter to the Papal Nuncio in Paris to remind him that "It is necessary for a priest in this place to know at least Irish, English, French and Dutch since our congregation is composed of people of these nationalities as well as Portuguese and Spaniards."<sup>20</sup>

The present church building dates from 1836 when the number of Roman Catholics and parishes in the city began a period of rapid expansion. In 1876, the parish even had its own Ladies Rifle Team that competed against "representatives of Irish, Scotch, Americans, Canadians, really the First Ward against the Fifth Ward."<sup>21</sup> St. Peter's became more Irish in character, which was strongly reflected in the content of the public entertainment events hosted by the church. School programs commonly featured Irish songs, excerpts of Irish history, recitations, and poetry, while performers like Irish concert singer William Ludwig (Ledwitch) appeared in benefits for the parish at Cooper Union. In later years, increasing commercialization of the neighborhood ended the old Irish character of the neighborhood as parishioners simply moved out between the World Wars.

On the front of the present church, a memorial tablet, presented by the Knights of Columbus, commemorates the achievements of Co. Kildare-born colonial Governor of New York Thomas Dongan. A Catholic, he was ahead of his time as an advocate of both religious and democratic rights for citizens. The dedication of the memorial was a huge event in 1911 with prominent government and church officials on hand to unveil what was the first historical marker ever placed on a Catholic Church in the city.

### *Woolworth Building—233 Broadway*

Except for the legend that few Irish Catholics were employed by the builders during the construction of this one-time tallest building in the world, there is only one Irish event of importance connected to the Woolworth Building. Padraic Pearse, a leader of the 1916 Dublin Rising who was destined to be martyred for his efforts, visited the Woolworth Tower during a short visit in New York to raise funds for the Irish Volunteers as well as for his Dublin school. The Irish Volunteers were a nationalist force then



organizing in Ireland to counter the massive rush to arms by unionists. Although Pearse's Woolworth visit was just the typical visit of a tourist to a big city attraction, it has taken on some importance because there is apparently only one other place left in Manhattan that is still associated with his only visit to the city. The famous picture of Pearse, taken by a commercial photographer in his top of the Woolworth Building studio, shows the determined-looking Irish patriot in profile wearing a somewhat peculiar pork-pie hat.

### *City Hall—City Hall Park*

The number of Irish associations with City Hall would surely number into the thousands, and in the four-hundred year history of the city there have been hundreds of individuals of Irish birth or descent who served New York as elected representatives, some of them in this building. Three individuals, William R. Grace (1885–86), a



native of Co. Cork, Thomas F. Gilroy (1893–94), a native of Co. Sligo, and William O'Dwyer (1946–1950), a native of Co. Mayo, were actually born in Ireland.

Many events related to Ireland and the New York Irish took place in and around City Hall. In response to an appeal during the War of 1812 published in the Irish weekly *The Shamrock*, Irish volunteers marched from each of the city's wards led by

their colorful banners to report for duty in City Hall Park. (A force of 1,500 strong of these volunteers offered to serve in Brooklyn to help construct the defensive works at Fort Greene, necessary to defend the city from a feared British attack.) Many of the early parades on St. Patrick's Day passed directly through City Hall Park for a review by the mayor and the council on the steps of City Hall before the downtown parade ended in the 1890s. When the great Irish political leader, Daniel O'Connell, died in Ireland in 1847, the Irish societies of New York staged a commemorative funeral in City Hall Park (see illustration) that featured a mock hearse decorated in mourning colors. The great apostle of Irish temperance, Father Theobald Mathew, used a City Hall room put aside for him by the mayor to issue the abstinence pledge to thousands of New Yorkers during his visit in 1849. Irish political leaders, Thomas Francis Meagher in 1852 and John Mitchel in 1853, received welcomes as heroes when they were given official receptions in City Hall after their escapes from British imprisonment in Van Diemen's Land. Irish troops of the 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment passed City Hall on the way to the Battle of Bull Run during the Civil War. (The Regiment received many reviews and receptions here in the years following.) Thousands gathered in 1871 for a mayoral reception in City Hall for a number of Fenian prisoners released from British imprisonment. The great Irish bandmaster, Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore, regularly played on New Year's Eve to crowds cramming every space and tree limb in City Hall Park until 1891. A contingent of Irish volunteers marched by City Hall in 1900 on the way to South Africa to help the Boer fight for independence. After days in hiding after being smuggled into the country from Ireland, the exiled head of the Irish

Republic made a sensational first public appearance in City Hall Park in January, 1920 before a sea of supporters. In 1928, Captain Fitzmaurice, the Irish aviator who accompanied two German fliers in the first successful east to west crossing of the Atlantic by plane was officially welcomed in City Hall. Another flier, Douglas “Wrong Way” Corrigan got his own welcome here in 1938. In the late 1920s and 1930s, a succession of All-Ireland championship teams made the journey to New York for formal receptions on the steps of City Hall. Later, when New York hosted the first and only All-Ireland Football championship in 1948, both the Cavan and Kerry teams appeared on the steps of City Hall surrounded by throngs of excited Gaelic sports fans.

While in recent years, receptions for Irish visitors have been on a smaller scale, New York’s welcome mat at City Hall continues to honor visitors, from Irish marching bands to Irish mayors and government leaders, from the old country.

### *Stewart Building/Friends of Irish Freedom—280 Broadway*

Alexander T. Stewart, the Belfast-born merchandizing genius, opened his department store here in 1848. He came from a wealthy family and attended Trinity



College in Dublin before beginning his business career in New York. From a visit to Ireland, he brought back with him a shipload of Irish lace and sold it at a big discount in a rented New York storefront. So successful was the move, and thanks to the sometimes eighteen hour days he kept, he expanded from one year to the next before opening the department store on Broadway which became the model for the American retail trade for years to come. During the early years of the developing Irish famine in 1846, he chartered a ship to bring a cargo of relief supplies to Ireland while offering to bring back free of charge any man or woman wanting to emigrate. But he was not particularly well known as a philanthropist, except for an uncompleted home for women

and a few pieces of art donated to upper class clubs like the Union League. He had amassed a fortune estimated at between forty and fifty million dollars by the time of his death in 1876.<sup>22</sup> He hired staff without any discrimination to their religious background, enabling many Irish immigrants to learn the retail trade and to branch out in business for themselves—some along the great commercial street of the time, the Bowery. An often repeated story was that a lady looking to buy writing materials asked a clerk one day, “Are you stationery?” He answered, “Madame, if I was stationary, I wouldn’t work here very long.”

After 1868, the Stewart Building had many tenants such as the daily newspaper, *The Sun*, which from time to time had a large following among the New York Irish. School-girl Virginia O’Hanlon’s letter to that newspaper at the turn of the century, inquiring about the existence of Santa Claus, has become a classic tale of Christmas time. Following the Easter Rising, the building was the headquarters of the Friends of Irish Freedom, an organization which reached hundreds of branches across the

country and popularized the cause of Irish freedom. Among the meetings held here was one in 1919 with prominent Irish revolutionary leaders Diarmuid Lynch, Dr. Patrick MacCartan, Liam Mellows, and Harry Boland. Mellows and Boland were destined to die in the Irish Civil War a few years later. An early Irish diplomatic office, the Irish Republican Mission, occupied Room 404 while the Irish Victory Fund also had space in the building in the period 1919–1920.

### *Emigrant Savings Bank—51 Chambers Street*

The Emigrant Savings Bank was an outgrowth of the charitable Irish Emigrant Society when eighteen individuals came together at the urging of Bishop John Hughes to create a financial institution that was based in the New York Irish commu-



nity. The bank was founded in 1850 and, in a short time, it also reached out to other ethnic groups, especially the Germans and German-Americans. Consequently the early records reveal many nationalities, including British, among the early depositors. The well-kept Emigrant bank records were donated to the New York Public Library where they form the greatest single information resource on nineteenth-century Irish New Yorkers. Details such

as the exact places of origin, lists of relatives, personal emigration histories, names of family members, and physical descriptions are available in the records and are invaluable to genealogists and other researchers. The building shown here is no longer in use by the bank, but its impressive appearance gives an indication of its significance and its proximity to City Hall and other centers of power. It was once the largest savings bank in America and remains among the top ten such banks.

The Emigrant long maintained close connections to the Irish community with many New York Irish weeklies carrying its advertising. In the days when hundreds of Irish societies met and were centered in Manhattan, most of them kept their organizational accounts with the bank they knew best. For many years, the offices of Judge Daniel F. Cohalan (second only to John Devoy in the Irish revolutionary activity in New York before 1916) was located in the Emigrant building. Cohalan, the son of Co. Cork immigrants, immersed himself into the activities of Clan na Gael and offered a respectable face to the movement for Irish independence. He paid a high price for his dedication, suffering the constant enmity of those supporting the British interest in Ireland.

### *Newsboy's Lodging House—53–55 Warren St.*

In the nineteenth century, the bulk of the city's Irish population included many who were on the edge of poverty. Hazardous working conditions and the prevalence of endemic diseases and lack of access to medical care resulted in a high mortality rate. Often, the loss of one or more parents left behind many young people without any caregiver, or a caregiver who was chronically ill. Not a few of these youngsters became part of the large class of newsboys who earned meager livings selling newspapers on the city streets, particularly downtown, where their only nighttime shelter was a doorway or alleyway. John Drumgoole, a native of Co. Longford, had come to St. Mary's

Parish on Grand Street with his parents at the age of eight in the 1830s and became well acquainted with the conditions prevailing for many orphaned or semi-orphaned children.

As an adult, Drumgoole was devoted to his neighborhood and city, and after returning to New York following his ordination to the priesthood, he received the assignment to do something about the appalling conditions faced by children. With initial support from the weekly newspaper, the *Irish World*, Father Drumgoole rented this former commercial building as a place of refuge for the newsboys. He established the St. Joseph's Union that, through yearly 25-cent subscriptions, soon enabled him to purchase larger quarters at Lafayette Street and eventually on Staten Island where more than a thousand orphans, both boys and girls, were given a home.



### *Lappin Irish Tea Company—188 Duane Street*

Although tea is not grown in Ireland, Irish tea drinkers like and demand tea to be blended to their taste. The Lappin Irish Tea Company was founded by Irish-born (possibly in Co. Armagh) James Lappin in 1890 in Paterson, New Jersey.<sup>23</sup> He was soon advertising and distributing his tea with the slogan “the kind of tea they use in Ireland” in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. By 1906, he had established a branch to 188 Duane Street after a fire had destroyed his store in Paterson in 1902. He was a regular advertiser in the *Gaelic American* and *Irish American*. The *Gaelic American* wrote that the tea brand was “appreciated and strongly recommended, particularly by old country people, who, once they get it, are not alone delighted, but tell their friends how it is.”<sup>24</sup> In 1932, James Lappin, who had retired from the tea business, passed away at age seventy-seven, still the active as president of a local New Jersey



bank.

The Duane Street building is an amazing survivor and still, after over one hundred years, the name and slogan “the kind of tea they use in Ireland,” can, with a little patience, be deciphered.

### *Great Irish Hunger Memorial—Vesey Street at the Hudson River*

The memorial is an incredible monument to the millions of Irish lost to death and emigration from the tragic years of starvation in Ireland, the Great Hunger, between 1846 and the early 1850s. Plans were laid in 2001 to bring an actual ruined Irish farm house from Co. Mayo and reassemble it on a quarter acre of ground in New York City, and surround it by stone walls, potato furrows, and wildflowers. What sounded like a fantastic idea was successfully completed and dedicated the following year. It resulted in a striking re-creation of a scene out of post-famine Ireland, described by observers as stark, realistic, and “marvelously out of place.”<sup>25</sup> The memorial's setting in busy downtown New York makes it all the more poignant for visitors. Problems with poor drainage on the site and the effects of Hurricane Sandy created a serious need for repairs, and periodically the memorial was closed for long periods of



time. Some of the modern materials used to set it up proved less hearty than those used in the original construction. Thankfully, repairs have been completed, and this impressive Irish landmark is now open daily to visitors.

## ***Endnotes***

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- 2 *Irish American*, May 17, 1851
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- 11 *Daily Globe*, St. Paul, January 10, 1880
- 12 *New York Times*, June 30, 2002
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- 24 *Gaelic American*, May 26, 1902
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