

TENNESSEE'S IRISH, 1870-1890

by

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ABSTRACT

Irish immigrants in the state of Tennessee have received scant scholarly attention, and though their representation in the historical narrative is lacking, their presence in Tennessee is not. While many associate Irish immigration with the potato famine of the 1840s, the last decades of the nineteenth century saw another rise in the number of Irish immigrants, particularly young women, immigrating to the United States. Arriving in a southern state in the decades after the Civil War, the Irish in Tennessee were positioned in a unique setting as they adapted to their new surroundings. Tennessee's Irish played an important role in the state's story and history.

While the degree of adaptation and assimilation may have differed for Irish immigrants based on where they settled geographically in the country, those who made their way to Tennessee and the South found that work, family, and religion enabled them to thrive in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

Irish immigrants in the state of Tennessee have not received much attention from historians, yet are an area of study that deserves greater attention and examination. Typically, scholars who discuss Irish immigrants in the United States have focused on large metropolises such as New York and Chicago. While this northern, metropolitan emphasis is important and should not be downplayed, there are other areas of the country that deserve examination as well. These other locations include the state of Tennessee and are not solely limited to cities. Understanding the lives and experiences of Irish immigrants within Tennessee from 1870-1890 is critical to the overall understanding and interpretation of the state and region as a whole. The Irish immigrants who came to Tennessee seems to have had a somewhat different experience than the Irish who made their homes in other parts of the country. The Irish in Tennessee and the South may have adapted and assimilated more quickly, and often more easily, than the Irish immigrants in other areas of the country.

This study differs from other works on the topic due to its focus on the South, particularly Tennessee and thereby sheds light on a new dimension to the study of Irish immigrants. This study will discuss both Irish-born immigrants and some first-generation Irish Americans in Tennessee. The 1890 census showed that Tennessee was home to 5,016 Irish-born citizens and 5,781 first-generation American-Irish citizens.¹ These

¹ Marion Casey and J. J. Lee, eds, *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 689.

people formed a sizable minority of Tennessee's population, especially in the city hubs of Nashville and Memphis. Here, the Irish made their homes and livelihoods, and integrated themselves into the American culture and society. By tracing their history within the region and state, the historical study that follows will address numerous issues and areas related to Irish immigrant life. While the major cities in Tennessee, including Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville, often feature more prominently in sources, both primary and secondary, there were Irish immigrants in other portions of the state. Also, the experiences of the Irish in the metropolitan areas of Tennessee were not always the same, as they varied by the immigrant's age, gender, family, and occupation.

This analysis will look at Irish immigration in Tennessee during the years between 1870 and 1890. By selecting 1870 as a start date, this study addresses time that is over a decade removed from the economic disaster of the Irish potato famine and the resulting influx of immigrants who left Ireland for the United States. The start date also moves the discussion past the American Civil War and the Irish who fought for both sides during that conflict. The end date of 1890 closes the analysis before the start of the twentieth century, thus keeping the focus on the late nineteenth century.

The geographic focus and scope of this analysis is the state of Tennessee. The South in general has been underrepresented in the historical literature in terms of its Irish population, and when scholars do discuss the region, large port cities such as New Orleans and Mobile receive the most substantial amount of attention. Thus, the following study gives insight to a different region of the South, one situated away from the coastal cities. This means that many of the Irish examined will include those who had or made the means to finance their journey to the state. While this study will examine many places

in Tennessee, urban and rural, significant attention will be given to cities including Nashville and Memphis, due to the Irish immigrants' tendency to move to metropolitan areas.

Nashville in the late nineteenth century was a city of change, as the Civil War and industrialization had transformed the city. The city was founded in 1780, as Fort Nashborough and a frontier town. Historian Don H. Doyle estimates that by 1860 and the onset of the Civil War, Nashville had grown to a population of approximately 17,000.² In 1862, Nashville became the first Confederate capital occupied and controlled by Union forces.³ Though it sat in Union hands for several years, “of all major southern cities, Nashville emerged from the war with fewer physical and political scars and with advantages gained in the war that prepared it for a formidable role in the new order of things.”⁴ After the Civil War, industrial production emerged in full force in Nashville, just as in the rest of the state. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad, though it had been built in 1859, quickly emerged as a prominent industry in the city.⁵

Memphis founders John Overton, Andrew Jackson, and James Winchester established the city on the Mississippi River in 1819. By “dividing the bluff in to lots, the proprietors hoped to increase the area’s population through land sales, a stable

² Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

government and expanded trade.”⁶ The town quickly grew, and by 1829, it had become so large that “the U.S. Postal Department granted Memphis the same status as Nashville, which prompted the legislature to recognize the municipality as Tennessee’s second major town.”⁷ The city continued to grow, although it experienced setbacks including numerous bouts of disease, as in 1855, over one thousand Memphis residents fell ill with yellow fever.⁸ This would not be the last time the city fell victim to yellow fever or other epidemics. Along with the rest of the state, Memphis began to expand industrially in the mid-1800s, as “by 1860, companies were producing boots and shoes, bricks, carriages, cottonseed oil, doors and sashes, flour and corn meal, lumber and steam engines in Memphis.”⁹ The Civil War intensified racial issues within the city, as the war ended slavery, brought African American soldiers to the city as part of the Union occupation, and significantly increased the black population, all of which “was deeply resented by white Memphians,” including the Irish.¹⁰ The result was the 1866 Memphis Massacre, during which whites attacked black Memphians, their homes, and institutions.¹¹

⁶ G. Wayne Dowdy, *A Brief History of Memphis* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ For more on the 1866 Memphis Massacre, see: Stephen V. Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013); Barrington Walker, “‘This Is the White Man’s Day’: The Irish, White Racial Identity, and the 1866 Memphis Riots,” *Left History* 5 (November 1998): 31–55.

The city of Knoxville, situated in the eastern portion of Tennessee, had a history as distinct as its geographic setting. Originally White's Fort, the city of Knoxville came into being in the late eighteenth century. Founded as "a business enterprise," the city steadily grew in population and land accumulation throughout the nineteenth century.¹² Named in honor of Henry Knox, former Secretary of War, the city grew from 730 in 1810 to 2,076 in 1850, and 5,300 in 1860.¹³ The developing city attracted settlers from other states, as well as European immigrants. Foreign-born immigrants were not very welcome in Knoxville initially, especially in the eyes of William Brownlow. Later the governor of Tennessee, Brownlow saw the Irish and Catholics as "a special abomination," and expressed prejudice against them.¹⁴ As the decades passed, more and more people made their way to East Tennessee, encouraged by the region's industrial development.¹⁵

The state's population grew substantially throughout the nineteenth century, as more and more people, native-born and foreign-born, made their way to Tennessee. The four major cities in Tennessee, Nashville, Knoxville, Memphis, and Chattanooga, all experienced an increase in their population from 1860 to 1880. During those twenty years, Memphis' population increased from 22,623 to 33,592; Nashville's population went from 16,988 in 1860 to 43,350 in 1880; Knoxville went from 5,379 to 9,693; and

¹² William J. MacArthur, *Knoxville's History: An Interpretation* (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1978), 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8 and 20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

Knoxville increased from 2,545 in 1860 to 12,892 in 1880.¹⁶ In 1890, Nashville's population had risen to 76,168, with 3,794 being foreign-born, and the population of Memphis had risen to 64,495, with 5,400 being foreign-born.¹⁷

Primary sources analyzed for this study include census records, city directories, and newspapers. Census records and city directories suggest the social and cultural lives of Irish immigrants in Tennessee, by showing their ages, families, and occupations in different physical locations. Newspapers provide examples of how the rest of the state, and country felt about Irish immigrants. They also show Irish traditions and stereotypes, including celebrations of St. Patrick's Day and the American perception of Irish domestics.

Scholarship specific to Irish immigrants in Tennessee during the 1870-1890 time period is somewhat lacking. There is, however, a plethora of secondary sources for the Irish in the United States in general that discuss the time period of 1870-1890. While some of these mention the Irish presence in Tennessee and the South, even those do not provide information about the characteristics, experiences, and responses of the general Irish immigrant population that can be inferred to have applied to Tennessee. Some attributes probably crossed regional lines, such as the importance of religion as well as Irish women finding work in domestic service.

¹⁶ Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 15.

¹⁷ Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Table 19. Nativity of the Population for the 50 Largest Urban Places: 1870 to 1990," *U.S. Census Bureau*, October 31, 2011, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab19.html>.

Even those studies that do discuss immigrants to the South during the nineteenth century exclude some areas and time periods. In *The Irish in the South*, David T. Gleeson discusses the Irish throughout the southern states from 1815 to 1877, thus encompassing the antebellum years, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. However, his work does not discuss the 1880s, as this study will. Furthermore, with Gleeson focusing on the entire South, understandably, certain cities and areas receive more or less attention than others. This is true in his discussion of Tennessee, as Memphis is discussed more frequently than Nashville.¹⁸ Though Kieran Quinlan discusses a similar time period and geographic setting to Gleeson in his *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South*, Quinlan's work looks extensively at the relationship between the southern United States and Ireland. Two parts of his book focus on kin and kinship. Quinlan's book is a detailed work about relationships, personal and national, and discusses the Irish all the way through the twentieth century, focusing on the similarities and differences between Ireland and the American South, with an emphasis on literary works.¹⁹

One of the topics that have produced disagreement among historians concerns the emotions and sentiments of the Irish as they left their homeland and settled in America. For instance, in "Assimilation and Alienation: Irish Emigrants' Response to Industrial America, 1871-1921," Kerby A. Miller states that "much evidence indicates that a very large number of post-famine emigrants regarded themselves as homesick, involuntary

¹⁸ David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 26, 34-37, 52, 58, 70, 96, 110, 112, 136, 138, 143, 152, and 180.

¹⁹ Kieran Quinlan, *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

‘exiles.’”²⁰ On the other hand, historians such as Hasia R. Diner argue that “not only did women leave Ireland more willingly, but leaving involved very little emotional pining. They made the decision to leave with a relatively light heart.”²¹ Further disagreeing with Miller, David T. Gleeson argues that “this feeling of exile did not hinder Irish integration into southern society. The Irish did not wallow in their exile but used it as a means to various ends.”²² While there may have been some Irish who felt exiled by their immigration to America, Tennessee’s Irish seem to have fit more within the parameters of Diner and Gleeson’s interpretation; they came and quickly made a home for themselves in Tennessee.

Female Irish immigrants have received more attention over the past thirty years, as historians including Hasia R. Diner, Janet A. Nolan, and Margaret Lynch-Brennan have made strides to produce extensive analyses and examination of women in the Irish diaspora. Until the 1970s and 1980s, there was limited scholarship published that examined the role of Irish women in relation to their immigration to and experience in the United States. As historian Janet A. Nolan described the scholarly works discussing Irish immigration, “if they mention women at all, [they] see them as passive rather than active

²⁰ Kerby A. Miller, “Assimilation and Alienation: Irish Emigrants’ Responses to Industrial America, 1871-1921,” in *The Irish in America: Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*, edited by P. J. Drudy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 101.

²¹ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 19.

²² Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 6.

participants in the migration process.”²³ Nolan, along with others including Diner and Lynch-Brennan, gave female Irish immigrants a voice by examining their lives and experiences in the United States. Though these and other works are pivotal in bringing the experiences of Irish women in the United States to light, certain areas of the country still appear to fall through the cracks. A significant majority of works on women focus on the northeastern and coastal cities due to the large presence of Irish women who settled there after their arrival. Many of these women became domestic servants, as many works have thoroughly detailed, especially Margaret Lynch-Brennan’s *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930*.²⁴ In the South, Irish women worked in a variety of occupations, including domestic service, yet these women receive less attention in scholarly literature than their counterparts in the American Northeast.

Concerning the Catholic Church in Tennessee, very few secondary sources exist. Many of these sources are the work of church members and publications of Catholic presses.²⁵ These works help to show the prominence of Catholicism in the state, and

²³ Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women’s Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 3.

²⁴ Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Mother Frances Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Growth and Development of Saint Cecilia Congregation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Saint Cecilia Congregation, 2001); *St. Cecilia Academy: 150 Year Commemoration, 1860-2010* (Nashville, Tennessee: Eveready Press, 2010); and *St. Cecilia Congregation, Nashville, Tennessee, 1860-1985: Commemorating 125 Years of Saint Cecilia Dominican Life* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Congregation, 1985).

when coupled with other secondary sources, they show the importance of Catholicism in the lives of Tennessee's Irish immigrants. *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, written by Thomas Stritch, details a large amount of information on the Irish in Tennessee.²⁶ While the source is very helpful, it also only predominantly focuses on the Catholic faith, and therefore does not provide a description of life and work outside of the church.

Other works addressing Irish immigration and their experiences in Tennessee and the United States include those of Stephen V. Ash and Jeanette Keith that discuss individual events in Tennessee in which the Irish participated or had a role. Ash's *Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* includes information on how the substantial Irish immigrant population of the city played a part in the riot.²⁷ Keith's book, *Fever Season: The Story of a Terrifying Epidemic and the People Who Saved a City*, examines the yellow fever epidemic that broke out in Memphis in the 1878.²⁸ While these works on individual topics and events do not necessarily provide extensive information on the Irish or the state as a whole, they do help to fill in details to the overall story of the Irish in Tennessee.

Much of the historiography on the Irish immigrants in Tennessee, such as Ash's and Keith's books on Memphis, focuses around certain towns, cities, or communities where there was a large Irish presence. These are quite different from works on Scots-

²⁶ Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: Catholic Center, 1987).

²⁷ Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis*.

²⁸ Jeanette Keith, *Fever Season: The Story of a Terrifying Epidemic and the People Who Saved a City* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).

Irish immigrants. Blanche Bentley's "Tennessee's Scotch Irish Ancestry" looks predominantly at the Scotch Irish who came to the state in eighteenth and early nineteenth century and who were Presbyterian, as does Billy Kennedy's book *The Scots-Irish in the Hills of Tennessee*.²⁹ While these works are helpful for background and history on that particular setting and time, they do not provide information on the experiences of the Irish who came to Tennessee in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Disagreement about the perceptions of the Irish and their racial identity looms large in the historiography. There are two main groups of scholars who discuss the Irish and race: those who believe that the Irish immigrants experienced a significant amount of racial discrimination and had to work their way up in society to be considered white; and those who believe that, though there was some discrimination, it was not a substantial amount, and that the Irish were white from the start but had to become accepted in terms of their ethnicity and religion. One of the proponents of the latter is David Gleeson. In his book, Gleeson argues that the Irish did not become white, but became accepted members of southern society; therefore, race amongst the different white ethnicities was not a predominant or critical issue.³⁰ Gleeson varies markedly from other historians including Kerby Miller and Noel Ignatiev, who argue for the Irish working towards gaining white

²⁹ See, Blanche Bentley, "Tennessee Scotch Irish Ancestry," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 5, no. 4 (1920); Billy Kennedy, *The Scots-Irish in the Hills of Tennessee*, *The Scots-Irish Chronicles* (Greenville, South Carolina: Emerald House Group, 1996); and Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*.

³⁰ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 121.

racial statues.³¹ Furthermore, several historians relate the experiences of the Irish immigrants to those of African Americans, both as slaves and free people, arguing that both groups were looked down upon by the white citizens of the United States and that both performed the same forms of manual labor.³² Once again, David Gleeson is one of the staunch opponents to this notion. He argues that historians should not make these comparisons, or at least to the extent that they often are, because the Irish had a choice in where they lived and what occupation they chose. He states that Irish people's "white skin and their acceptance of slavery automatically elevated them from the bottom of southern society."³³

The distinction between the Irish in the United States making their new home in either the North or South is a difference of focus rather than interpretation among historians. These distinctions are especially clear in David Gleeson's work on the Irish in the American South. He points out several notable differences between the Irish experience in the South and their counterparts in the North, which include the reaction of the Irish to their new environment and society, as well as the reactions of the white

³¹ Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

³² George Bornstein, *The Colors of Zion: Blacks, Jews, and Irish from 1845 to 1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011); Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*; Lauren Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity: Celtic Soul Brothers* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd, *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Mitchell Snay, *Fenians, Freedmen, and Southern Whites: Race and Nationality in the Era of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

³³ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 121.

residents in the South.³⁴ Often, he argues, southern states allowed the Irish to become accepted members of society much faster, as the Irish mindset and beliefs often lined up with those of the native-born white citizens.

Another important difference between historians is their interpretation of the immigrants' connection to Ireland and its fight against British rule. The historians who discuss Irish immigrants in the South indicate a different perspective.³⁵ Irish in the American South, especially during and immediately following the American Civil War, felt a deep connection to the cause of southern independence. Identifying with a cause in their new home state, many Irish in the South quickly supported the push for the South to break free from the country. They saw this as a direct correlation to Ireland's fight to break away from Great Britain. Historian David T. Gleeson argues that the Civil War "gave the Irish in the South a great opportunity to display how well they had acclimated to their new home" and that "for many, it symbolized the consolidation of their integrated position in southern society."³⁶ Though there were likely some Irish who supported and sided with African Americans both before and after the Civil War, in the American South, the Irish in Tennessee appear to have seen the Civil War as stated above.

This study of Irish immigrants in Tennessee draws upon and offers suggestions for new scholarship on Irish and other immigrants. First, by addressing Irish immigrants in Tennessee, it expands awareness and documentation of the lives and experiences of the

³⁴ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 192-194.

³⁵ Ibid.; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 139; and Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 87.

³⁶ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 8.

South's Irish population. Second, it addresses a later time period, which as some historians have noted has received substantially less attention than when immigrants came during the colonial or Irish potato famine time periods.³⁷ The field would benefit from this and continuing study of Tennessee for further comparison and contrasts between the experiences of northern and southern Irish immigrants, and more attention to the roles, experiences, and perceptions of women as well as to the Catholic Church.

The information in the following pages is broken down into four chapters, each discussing particular aspects of Irish immigrant life. Chapter One examines concepts of race and ethnicity, and their effect on the Irish and their relationships with others in the South. Chapter Two details the role and place of gender and family within Irish immigrants' lives and how they differed from native-born American perceptions. Chapter Three discusses work and politics, detailing the experiences of the Irish as they lived and worked in Tennessee, furthering the idea of adaptation. Chapter Four examines aspects of religion and school, paying attention to how Catholicism was received by others in the South, and how Catholicism played a role in the Irish immigrant experience in Tennessee. This analysis, by linking the Irish in this state with those in other areas of the country, will identify differences in their experiences based on where they lived in the United States. Though often forgotten and marginalized, the Irish were important and prominent in the state of Tennessee, and their lives and experiences contributed to the state's history.

³⁷ Miller, "Assimilation and Alienation," 87.

CHAPTER ONE: RACE AND ETHNICITY

Upon arriving in the United States in the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants faced conditions that differed dramatically from their native Ireland, especially those who emigrated to the American South. In general, the physical landscape of the United States was distinguishable from Ireland, but the cultural and social differences were even more obvious. Adjusting to the American South and Tennessee posed a challenge, as the land and climate differed from Ireland's, and the Irish immigrants were thrown into racial and class issues left over from the antebellum period and the American Civil War and Reconstruction.¹ The Irish who resided in Tennessee in the years before the Civil War adjusted to changing American South, and the newly arrived Irish immigrants in the decades after the war had to become accustomed to and adapt to the rapidly changing South. Race and ethnicity shaped the Irish experience in Tennessee as they adapted and made a place for themselves in the state and community.

While Tennessee did not experience a lengthy period of Reconstruction, the state did have substantial changes to adjust to in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though Irish immigrants had come from a country where they were often subjugated and discriminated against by the British, in America they encountered a completely different system of race and ethnicity. While the Irish had been the recipients of religious persecution and discrimination back home in Ireland, the American South provided a

¹ Stephanie Cole, Alison M. Parker, and Laura F. Edwards, eds., *Beyond Black and White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station: Published for the University of Texas at Arlington by Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

radically different atmosphere. Compounded by the end of the Civil War and the freeing of African American slaves, the South was experiencing a time of drastic change. At their arrival, Irish immigrants were almost immediately cast as foreigners and outsiders. Being labelled as these placed the Irish in a separate category from the white, native-born Americans. This social stigma was due not just to their new immigrant status, but also to their ethnic background and religious views.

Irish immigrants seem to have quickly made a place for themselves in the state, city, and society that they had settled in. For those who came to the South and to Tennessee between 1870 and 1890, this meant navigating the social and cultural system that existed in the years after the Civil War. The Irish who immigrated to Tennessee in the years before the Civil War probably had the advantage of already being relatively adjusted to the South, but the ever changing late nineteenth century added and increased the need to navigate the southern climate. As in the North, American citizens in the South were initially skeptical of Irish immigrants, largely due to their differences from the white southern population. These differences were often expressed in terms of religion and cultural distinctions that set the Irish apart from the rising white, Protestant, middle class America. Despite this skepticism, these new Irish immigrants began to establish themselves in the region where some of their countrymen already resided.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants and their descendants made their homes in cities as well as small, rural towns across the state of Tennessee. During the ten years before the Civil War, Tennessee had experienced “the largest increase in its Irish population in all of the southern states and was in seventh position nationally. During this time, the Irish population in Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis increased

four times.”² Nashville’s Irish population grew to be even more Catholic as the 1800s progressed. By the mid-1800s, the Irish had become “the largest immigrant contingent” in the Nashville area.³ Within the city, the Irish often lived crowded together, inhabiting much of the city’s south side.⁴ By 1880, the number of Irish in Nashville had risen to one-eighth of the city’s population.⁵

² James Patrick Byrne, Philip Coleman, and Jason Francis King, *Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History: A Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 881.

³ George Zepp, “First Irish Left Their Mark on Nashville,” *The Tennessean*, March 15, 2006, sec. B, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/239765215?accountid=2804>.

⁴ “Parish History,” *Saint Patrick Catholic Church*, <http://www.stpatricksnashville.org/ParishHistory.html>.

⁵ Zepp, “First Irish Left Their Mark on Nashville.”



Figure 1.1: “Map of the City of Nashville and Vicinity” in 1877
 Source: Library of Congress

In the South, including Tennessee, white citizens were generally more accepting of Irish immigrants. Nativism was not as strong here as it was in the northern states. The American Party or “Know-Nothings” of the 1850s advocated a political platform that strived to “curtail immigration and, specifically, the influence of Catholics” and “the ideology of the party was rooted in anti-Catholicism and a deep-seated hostility toward immigrants.”⁶ This placed the Irish directly in the line of fire.⁷ In the South, however, the

⁶ Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 97.

⁷ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race, Ethnicity, and Urbanization: Selected Essays* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 260.

nativist sympathies of the Know-Nothings paled in comparison to the argument over the expansion and continuation of slavery.⁸ The southern immigrants did not feel the wrath of the Know-Nothings as strongly when it came to the issue of immigration. The party and mindset still existed in the South, as it “thrived in traditional Whig strongholds such as Vicksburg and Nashville.”⁹ Tennessee was home to two famous Know-Nothing affiliated candidates, Andrew Jackson Donelson, nephew of former President Andrew Jackson and Know-Nothing Party vice-presidential candidate in 1856, and John Bell who ran for president in 1860, though he never officially joined the Know-Nothing Party.¹⁰ Donelson in particular found he agreed with several principles of the group, including “their conspiratorial view of American politics, which identified Catholics, immigrants, and corrupt politicians as the source of the nation’s problems, [which] fit his own republican ideology.”¹¹

Race had a significant impact on how white southerners perceived Irish immigrants. Before, during, and after the Civil War, many Irish immigrants expressed sentiments that were closely aligned with the typical white southern mindset. During the war, the Irish immigrants had supported the Confederacy, as “they realized that its

⁸ David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 107.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰ Mark R. Cheatham, “‘I Shall Persevere in the Cause of Truth’: Andrew Jackson Donelson and the Election of 1856,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2003): 219-224; Jonathan M. Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 225.

¹¹ Cheatham, “‘I Shall Persevere in the Cause of Truth,’” 224.

existence was the key to their survival and prosperity.”¹² This idea stemmed from the notion that the Irish were white, and had situated themselves in a way that had garnered them acceptance among the southern white population.

That acceptance was in contrast to more extreme discrimination and racism that the Irish experienced in other parts of the country. Rhode Island, for example, “debated whether the Irish should be excluded from the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment, as they appeared to be a distinctly different race from both African Americans and the ‘white’ mainstream.”¹³ Thus the Irish, to some people in some areas of the country, did not fit into any existing racial category. They were neither white nor black, and constituted a racial classification of their own. This depiction as being in essence a race of their own follows the perception and stereotype that Irish immigrants were generally unskilled and willing to work for little pay.¹⁴ In general, however, Irish immigrants who arrived in the postbellum period often experienced a lesser degree of hostility and nativist feelings from American citizens than those who came earlier during the famine period.¹⁵ The reasons for this include Irish adaptation, both by the new immigrants and the continuing adaptation of the older ones, shifting mindsets among the native-born American population, and an influx of new immigrants. In the late 1800s, as more

¹² Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 121.

¹³ James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 4.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kerby A. Miller, “Assimilation and Alienation: Irish Emigrants’ Responses to Industrial America, 1871-1921,” in *The Irish in America: Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*, edited by P. J. Drudy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 99.

immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived in the United States, attitudes and discrimination previously used against the Irish shifted to these newer arrivals. This shift allowed the Irish to become more assimilated and more accepted as American citizens.¹⁶

The discrimination and prejudice that the Irish immigrants experienced came in a variety of forms. One form many scholars have analyzed is the terminology that nineteenth century Americans used when discussing the Irish. Irish men were referred to as Paddy, while Irish women were often called Bridget. These stereotyped characters and characteristics often depicted the Irish in a negative light, in a way that showed the Irish as being outside of American gender roles and norms. While these depictions of Paddy and Bridget did not always state that breaking the gender roles was what the Irish did, an analysis of what the two names often meant shows this to be the case. Though this will be discussed more later, the Irish men were said to be the “drunken, buffoonish, violent, and irreformable Paddy.”¹⁷ Irish men could also be referred to as Pat, short for Patrick. Bridget, the term most frequently used to refer to Irish women, quickly “became directly connected with Irish immigrant girls working in domestic service.”¹⁸ The term Bridget could be shortened to Biddy, while names including “Kate, Katy, Maggie, and Peggy” were used less frequently.¹⁹ Historian Hasia R. Diner discusses the stereotypical representations of both Irish men and women, stating “although the ‘Bridget’ of comic

¹⁶ Dolan, *The Irish Americans*, 104.

¹⁷ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 105.

¹⁸ Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), xviii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

strip and theater stage fame acted foolishly and impetuously, she clearly behaved more acceptably as an American than did ‘Pat’—always drunk, eternally fighting, lazy, and shiftless.”²⁰

Another form of discrimination came about in how the Irish were presented and represented in popular culture, including stage and press depictions. Portrayals of the Irish on the stage often depicted them in an unflattering light. The representation of the Irish Paddy quickly became a staple of the theatre. The character of Paddy became so popular “that others, including the Negro and Yankee, were dwarfed.”²¹ Part of the reason for this American amusement in Irish stereotypes stems from the differences between the two different cultures that theater poked fun at. These characters and performances would persist “as long as audiences considered Paddy’s deviations from American cultural patterns amusing.”²² Many of the portrayals of Irish women in theater followed a second area of stereotypes. Depictions the Irish female domestic servant, according to scholar Margaret Lynch-Brennan, “reinforced middle-class mistresses’ feelings of superiority to the Irish servants they employed.”²³ For the most part, these stereotypical depictions of the Irish remained throughout the nineteenth century, though they began to fade with the inclusion of the Irish in the American middle class towards

²⁰ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 66.

²¹ E. F. Niehaus, “Paddy on the Local Stage and in Humor: The Image of the Irish in New Orleans, 1830-1862,” *Louisiana History* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1964): 117.

²² *Ibid.*, 119.

²³ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 78.

the end of the century. In addition to a rise in the Irish middle class, the Irish also expressed “resentment of such stereotypes,” such as when one Irish man “jumped from his seat protesting that the onstage portrayal of an Irish serving girl drinking wine ‘was an insult to Irish womanhood.’”²⁴

Irish immigrants’ interpretation of the American Civil War as comparable to the conflict between Ireland and Great Britain forged a bond between them and other white southerners. The Irish allied themselves with their new white neighbors, because they saw many similarities between the Confederacy’s struggle and that of the Irish. These feelings of resisting a foe who opposed one’s desired independence resonated deeply in the hearts and minds of southern Irish immigrants. These sentiments had manifested themselves in organizations such as the Fenian Brotherhood. The history of Tennessee’s participation in the Fenian Brotherhood is not often discussed by historians of American immigrants. This organization pushed for Irish independence, and had a strong branch located in Nashville in the 1860s and 1870s.²⁵ The Fenian Brotherhood worked for “the overthrow of English rule in Ireland, with the American branch providing the much-needed money, arms, and battle-tested leadership for the strike for freedom.”²⁶ The love for their new country, as well as their old, also garnered acceptance for Irish in Tennessee. An 1875 *Republican Banner* article about that year’s St. Patrick’s Day celebration praises the dedication that the Irish maintained. The article quotes the speech

²⁴ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 78.

²⁵ Zepp, “First Irish Left Their Mark on Nashville.”

²⁶ DeeGee Lester, “Tennessee’s Bold Fenian Men,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1997): 263.

of M. T. Bryan, stating “now let it not be supposed that the Irish, because they love the land that bore them, and its people of kindred blood, are the less Americans for it. Indeed, the Irish, as a class, are intensively American, and are truly devoted to the land of their adoption” in part because of the welcome and equality they received in the United States as opposed to that of the English while they were in Ireland.²⁷

The presence of the Fenians in Tennessee shows a continuing connection with Ireland and Irish causes and organizations indicating that immigrants adapted rather than fully assimilating into the American South by maintaining aspects of their Irish identity. The Fenian Brotherhood had members on both sides of the Civil War, and the organization continued working towards its goal during the 1860s. In fact, “President Abraham Lincoln gave Irish-American activities a tolerant wink and wide berth throughout the Civil War as Fenian leaders recruited and drilled Irish regiments with an eye on some future war with Britain.”²⁸ Union Irish soldiers were even allowed to attend Fenian meetings during the war, partly with the purpose of improving the spirits of the Irish soldiers. The morale of the Irish fighting in the Civil War had fallen, and as historian DeeGee Lester explains, they “needed something to unite them, giving them a taste of home, a renewed sense of pride, and a reason to continue fighting. Fenian activities provided all three.”²⁹ By 1863, as the fighting raged around the country, parts of Tennessee had been under Union occupation for months. Tennessee became “the only

²⁷ “The Saint of Erin,” *Republican Banner*, March 18, 1875.

²⁸ Lester, “Tennessee’s Bold Fenian Men,” 265.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

southern state represented” at a July 1863 Fenian meeting in Chicago that established much of the organization’s structure.³⁰

The comparison between Ireland and the South was part of the reason why Irish residents in the latter half of the 1800s were often accepted at a faster rate in the southern states, as many saw a commonality between the Irish and the white southerners.³¹

Historian Kieran Quinlan explains that “Ireland is to England...as the American South is to the United States: both places have long been the ‘problem,’ if also frequently romanticized regions, of otherwise ‘progressive’ nations.”³² Furthermore, the issue of African American slavery in the South did not weigh heavily on a majority of the Irish population, stemming partly from their own sense of being “oppressed” as well as their own racism.³³ These sentiments were also reinforced by the fact that “the American

³⁰ Lester, “Tennessee’s Bold Fenian Men,” 265.

³¹ It is intriguing to note that while in the late 1800s, many Irish immigrants embraced the idea of the struggle of the American South being similar to that of Ireland, today a different analogy emerges. Kieran Quinlan discusses this shift that has not been explicitly mentioned in many other works. He brings up the differences between the two, stating that “from one perspective there is a massive difference between them: Ireland, or at least Catholic Ireland, is generally seen ... as a country that has had a wrong done to it over the centuries, whereas the American South...is thought of ... as a place that has done wrong to others.” That being said, while the comparison between the two was applicable and beneficial to those in the time period, a different reference would serve better. Ireland’s struggle for freedom against Great Britain bears more similarities to the American colonies’ fight for independence in the American Revolution. While this relationship was seen and expressed by many Irish in the United States, it was not one that necessarily brought them closer to their white southern neighbors as the Southern Cause did. Kieran Quinlan, *Strange Kin: Ireland and the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 10.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 47.

abolitionists had a long history of being anti-Catholic ... [and therefore] Irish Catholics in America had little cause to be sympathetic with the abolitionists' agenda."³⁴ Such attitudes helped Irish immigrants and Irish Americans become accepted members of southern society and created as a unique bond between native white southerners and Irish immigrants.³⁵

Violence also played into how the Irish were perceived and the degree to which they were able to adapt to their new homes and become accepted members of society. While it was not always present among every Irish immigrant residing in Tennessee, or elsewhere in the country, violence could help foster prejudice and the negative stereotype concerning the Irish. Many in the United States viewed violence by the Irish as being a direct result of alcohol and its influence. Although Irish men were more often branded as violent, Irish women were, at times, labelled the same. In her detailed analysis of female Irish immigrants, Hasia R. Diner posits that "contemporary observers ... believed that the Irish personality, both male and female tended toward violence because Irish society stressed fighting, aggressiveness, and combativeness."³⁶ The reasons that people believed the Irish to be violent differed based on gender, as poor circumstances surrounding women's lives pushed them towards alcohol and violence, while men more frequently used alcohol as a means of relaxation.³⁷ The violence in the lives of the Irish

³⁴ Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁶ Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 112.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

expressed itself both in the home, as well as to the rest of the community. Domestic violence was not an unknown occurrence and, as will be discussed later, this frequently led women to flee to charities such as the Sisters of Mercy. Hasia R. Diner argues many saw Irish women as becoming victim to “the effects of poverty, drunkenness, and domestic violence which propelled women into lives of crime.”³⁸ Irish women were also discriminated against because of their crime rate, as violence was not a characteristic of the American female that was present in the cult of true womanhood. Although the combination of violence and alcohol was present with the Irish in the southern states, it created more of a problem in “the more ‘refined’ societies of the Northeast.”³⁹ Irish violence, whether a result of alcohol or not, most often served as an alienating factor, with the native-born American distancing themselves from the unruly, drunk Irish.

One of the most famous episodes of violence associated with the Irish occurred in Memphis in 1866. Just as in other areas of Tennessee and the rest of the country, there was tension between the African American and Irish populations. In the antebellum period, the city had attracted a sizable Irish population. As Stephen V. Ash explains, “the census taker in 1860 had counted a little over four thousand Irish-born Memphians ... [and] an informed observer in 1866 might have estimated that the Irish numbered six or seven thousand, perhaps one-fifth or one-sixth of the total population,” making the Irish the largest ethnic and immigrant group in Memphis at the time.⁴⁰ One root of the

³⁸ Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 111.

³⁹ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 193.

⁴⁰ Stephen V. Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis: The Race Riot That Shook the Nation One Year after the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 51-52.

emerging conflict came from racial tension. Many Irish immigrants, especially those who made their way to the southern states, quickly embraced racial attitudes that were essentially identical to their native-born neighbors.⁴¹ While this acceptance of southern, white American racial attitudes helped them to adapt and become accepted members of southern society, it also fostered tension between African Americans and the Irish.

Job competition, as well as other issues including crime and politics, all held a place in the Memphis atmosphere in 1866, where black soldiers were part of the Union occupation force. Ash states that “most of the Irish, however, made no secret of their loathing of blacks—particularly those in uniform—and exempted none from it. Some Memphians who were familiar with Irish Negrophobia in other cities thought it more virulent in Memphis than in any other place they had seen.”⁴² In fact, the Irish treatment of African Americans in Memphis, as well as other areas of the South, closely mirrored the treatment of Irish immigrants in the northern states.⁴³ In the spring of 1866, Ash recounts, “conflict over public space ensued, as white Memphians sought therein to redraw racial boundaries, delegitimize black people’s public presence, and oppose the new power of differentials embodied in what they observed around them.”⁴⁴ Part of this focused on the fact that the Irish wanted to maintain their place in society, something they

⁴¹ Ash, *A Massacre in Memphis*, 52.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hannah Rosen, “‘Not That Sort of Woman’: Race, Gender, and Sexual Violence during the Memphis Riot of 1866,” in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 269-270.

had worked hard to obtain. Barrington Walker argues that for the Irish, “their hard fought class status was contingent upon the perpetuation of the composition of the civil government that emerged in postbellum Memphis ... their class position relied almost entirely upon the continuing role of the Irish ‘city fathers’ in Memphis.”⁴⁵ The Irish in the city were determined to keep their place in society, both in terms of social standing as well as occupational position and mobility.

As the month of May began, the tension within the city came to a head with a confrontation between African American soldiers and white policemen. A significant number of Irish men were employed as policemen or firefighters in the city.⁴⁶ Walker pits the conflict as being tension and hostility between the African American population in Memphis and the “predominantly Irish police force,” stating that “a few witnesses maintained that it was the actual beginning of the riots.”⁴⁷ A report filed in the United States House of Representatives about the riots documents that many policemen involved were Irish and had some of the city’s leadership on their side.⁴⁸ The fighting and riots became so intense that the military had to be called in to try and end the conflict. The report details the severity of the events, stating “the proportions of what is called the

⁴⁵ Barrington Walker, “‘This Is the White Man’s Day’: The Irish, White Racial Identity, and the 1866 Memphis Riots,” *Left History* 5 (November 1998): 44.

⁴⁶ Kevin R. Hardwick, “‘Your Old Father Abe Lincoln Is Dead and Damned’: Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866,” *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 1 (1993), 110.

⁴⁷ Walker, “‘This Is the White Man’s Day,’” 39.

⁴⁸ *The Reports of the Committees of the House of Representatives Made During the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1866), 2.

‘riot,’ but in reality the massacre, proved to be far more extended, and the circumstances surrounding it of much greater significance, than the committee had any conception of.”⁴⁹

Racial dominance and hierarchy played a key role in the events of 1866, as “much of the behavior of the mob served to emphasize and reinforce the powerless and dependent position of blacks ... [and] the Memphis riot was a brutal episode in the ongoing struggle that continued well past the actual moment of emancipation.”⁵⁰ In the end, forty-eight African Americans were killed and approximately seventy-five were wounded, along with a white policeman and fireman being killed.⁵¹ The raids also became the scene of gendered violence, as several African American women were raped during the riots.⁵² In addition, there were one hundred robberies, and ninety-one homes were burned.⁵³

The role played by Irish immigrants in the Memphis Massacre and the presence of an Irish independence group like the Fenian Brotherhood in Nashville indicate how the Irish gained more rapid acceptance in the racial hierarchy of the South as white while maintaining a distinctive ethnic identity. There are different interpretations of exactly where the Irish fell on the racial scale during the nineteenth century. This includes what the Irish were referred to as well as what they identified with concerning their skin color

⁴⁹ *The Reports of the Committees of the House of Representatives Made During the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress*, 5.

⁵⁰ Hardwick, “‘Your Old Father Abe Lincoln Is Dead and Damned,’” 122-123.

⁵¹ *The Reports of the Committees of the House of Representatives Made During the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress*, 35 and Hannah Rosen, “‘Not That Sort of Woman,’” 267.

⁵² Rosen, “‘Not That Sort of Woman,’” 267.

⁵³ *The Reports of the Committees of the House of Representatives Made During the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress*, 36.

and background, whether that be ethnic, religious, or class identification. The Irish were not considered white by some Americans for several reasons. First, their Catholic religion set them apart from much of Protestant America. Second, their willingness to take jobs that many regarded as the lowest possible positions, often those next to slaves, often ostracized them. Third, their relatively poor economic circumstances separated them from the white middle class. Many historians use the terms of the Irish moving from alien and foreigner to “white” to distinguish them from when they arrived in America to when they became accepted members of society. David Gleeson finds fault with these terms and argues that the Irish were always perceived as white, and had to move from “stranger” to “southerner” or “citizen.”⁵⁴

Though often a point of contention among historians, it appears the South held a different connotation of the Irish in terms of race. In the South’s racial system, Irish immigrants were not on the same scale and place as African Americans, both free and enslaved. This distinction allows the Irish in the South to step outside of the connotation of the term “white negro” that appears to have been applied elsewhere in the country.⁵⁵ This is not to say, however, that racism or discrimination was never experienced by the Irish in the South and in Tennessee, just that the racial classifications and standards apparently allowed the Irish to be considered white much faster than in other areas. Given the opportunity and the choice to make their own way, Irish immigrants were vastly different from the African American population. At times, the Irish even distanced themselves from a comparison with African Americans. This often came when

⁵⁴ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 8, 140.

⁵⁵ Dolan, *The Irish Americans*, 103.

competition for jobs increased, thus the Irish tried to move away from any similarities between the two groups.⁵⁶

While the Irish were sometimes the victims of racial discrimination, violence, and prejudice, they were also on the giving end as in the Memphis Massacre. Historian Jay P. Dolan posits that “at its best, this mind-set led Irish Americans to support integration and reform for other oppressed migrant peoples; at its worst, it became an excuse for racial and ethnic intolerance such as the Irish themselves had faced.”⁵⁷ This hostility and resentment expressed by the Irish towards other immigrant groups often came as a result of their own experiences. Many Americans saw numerous similarities between the Irish and African Americans. Given that both were often poor, and worked in jobs that had low occupational status, many saw “the two populations as almost interchangeable, using labels such as ‘niggers turned inside out’ for the Irish and ‘smoked Irish’ for the free blacks.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Barrett, *The Irish Way*, 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁸ Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 66.

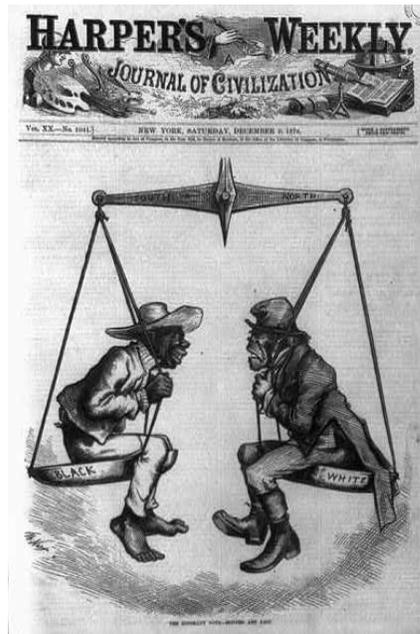


Figure 1.2: “The Ignorant Vote,” depicts stereotypes of black and Irish men in the December 9, 1876 edition of *Harper’s Weekly*
Source: Library of Congress

While Irish immigrants sometimes experienced racial or religious prejudice, they were also able to utilize southern racial aspects to their advantage. Though Irish immigrants and African Americans often competed for similar jobs and both sought acceptance in the larger society, the Irish were similar in appearance to the white southerners. While still skeptical of the Irish and their beliefs, many white southerners began to accept the Irish. This meant that native-born whites in the southern states often expressed very little prejudice or tension about Irish ethnicity or their Catholic religion. Although the Irish in the South did not experience as much discrimination based on their religion and views, there were, times when they encountered hostility. A portion of this came from their political aspirations and opinions, which did not always sit well with native-born Americans, such as when the Irish in Nashville voted against prohibition in

an 1887 “state referendum on prohibition” because they viewed it as “an assault on personal liberty and Irish culture.”⁵⁹

With the heightened racial tensions during and after the American Civil War, and “in confrontation with a large African American presence,” scholars such as Kieran Quinlan argue that “Irish ancestry has frequently faded into generic whiteness.”⁶⁰ Tensions also decreased due to the immigrants’ desire to become accepted as Americans by working hard to rise above their conditions. Because of this push to make their life the best they could, certain areas in Tennessee that had been designated as Irish soon became obsolete. This was the case for Nashville’s “Little Ireland” neighborhood. In the late nineteenth century, Little Ireland was “an area west of the railroad gulch ... filled with many substantial brick homes and apartments, [and] was ideally located close to the railroads, one of the major sources of employment for the Irish.”⁶¹ In the early twentieth century, as the Irish worked their way up, they moved out of Little Ireland and into more established communities and neighborhoods on West End in Nashville.⁶²

Through the process of adjusting to their new homes and surroundings, the Irish immigrants in Tennessee appear to have gone through a process of adaptation rather than total assimilation. This double culture probably stemmed from the fact that many attributes and values from their Irish culture had helped the immigrants to assimilate

⁵⁹ Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 102-103.

⁶⁰ Quinlan, *Strange Kin*, 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶² Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 103.

upon their arrival. These attributes could have helped them make a home for themselves in the United States, while still keeping many important and sentimental values and traditions from Ireland. Irish adaptation was also probably helped by their white, native-born neighbors and community members in Tennessee and other parts of the South. The racial system of the South seems to have provided the Irish with a means of adaptation and acceptance, as they proved themselves to be similar and likeminded to the native-born southern citizens.

CHAPTER TWO: GENDER AND FAMILY

Family was an important part of Irish life on both sides of the Atlantic. The economic factors that contributed to emigration did not divide the Irish family. Once they arrived at their new homes in the United States, many sent a portion of the money they made back to Ireland to help maintain the family farms and businesses, as well as to help secure passage for other family members who wished to emigrate. Whatever their motivations for leaving, Tennessee's Irish seem to have maintained and held onto many of their traditions and values concerning family and gender roles. Though they shared these values with the Irish in numerous parts of the United States, examining how Irish immigrants transferred gender roles and family practices to Tennessee allows us glimpses of the differences and distinctions between Irish and native-born Americans in society and southern culture.

Women made up a substantial portion of the Irish who came to the United States in the last decades of the 1800s. From 1885 to 1920, according to historian Janet A. Nolan's estimates, approximately "700,000 young, usually unmarried women, traveling alone" came to America from Ireland.¹ The sheer number of Irish women dwarfs the numbers of women in other immigrant groups. Irish women varied from other female immigrants for several reasons. The jobs they took and the high numbers in which they

¹ Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 2.

emigrated were distinctive to Irish women.² The only other immigrants that come close to the vast number of females among Irish immigrants were Swedish females, but they only came in such high numbers for a short five-year time period, whereas Irish women surpassed that by thirty years.³ This massive volume of female immigrants was something new for Ireland as well, as “even before the 1870s Irish emigration to the United States was unusual, compared with the emigration from other European countries, in its high proportion of females among all immigrants.”⁴ While there were women who left the country before the late 1800s, they were not the majority of the emigrants until the 1880s. In the last decades of the 1800s and the first of the 1900s, “females outnumbered males among the 1.4 million people leaving Ireland by almost twenty thousand ... [and] almost 82,000 more females than males aged fifteen to twenty-five left Ireland between 1885 and 1920.”⁵ The average age of the Irish coming to America decreased; they were often in their late teen years and early twenties. This change reflects the dire circumstances that they were leaving behind in Ireland, and the hopes for what they desired upon arriving in America.

Several reasons explain this significant increase in the number of young Irish women who left behind their homes and family to make their way to the United States.

² Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), xiv.

³ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 2.

⁴ Robert E. Kennedy, *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage, and Fertility* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 84.

⁵ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 49.

When the Irish potato famine hit the country in the 1840s, it also brought shifts in societal, cultural, and economic practices that affected the role and place of women in Irish society and family. The famine challenged women's place in Irish families and society, as numerous "changes had lessened these women's chances for becoming wives and thereby attaining adult social and economic status ... [while] the position of women deteriorated despite a rise in overall economic prosperity."⁶ The average age of marriage increased for Irish women, becoming the highest in Europe, and they were not able to make a decent living on the wages they were earning.⁷ Women were no longer able to achieve the same lifestyle and status that had been available to them in the decades before the famine. While women in Ireland were losing status, women in the United States and other areas were seeing increases in women's status and power, which would continue into the twentieth century with "the emancipation of women."⁸ Thus, the desire of many young, single Irish women who made their way to Tennessee, and the United States in general, arose partly because of their longing for a return to the economic freedom and gender roles that had existed in Ireland before the devastation of the famine.

Women's importance in society also diminished, as the famine took away several of the tasks that were designated to women, including motherhood and providing meals. As economic and marriage options decreased, these typically female roles lost some of their standing. In the late nineteenth century, the number of unmarried Irish increased,

⁶ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 2-3.

⁷ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 141.

⁸ Kennedy, *The Irish*, 84.

which left a significant number of young women without marriage prospects.⁹ The increase in unmarried Irish women resulted from the drop in Irish men obtaining suitable land and inheritance from their fathers, causing men to not have the means to marry until later in life. The economic conditions also resulted in a lack of dowries for Irish women upon their marriage. The lack of marriage prospects in Ireland directly affected Irish women's roles within family and society. In Irish culture, married women often "continued to be called by their maiden names after marriage [and] acquired authority through motherhood, as the head of the family."¹⁰ For the Irish, "marriage was the female equivalent to the male inheritance of his parent's estate," and without this, Ireland did not offer much to women living there.¹¹ The influence of parents and other family members could also act as a determining factor on deciding whether or not to immigrate to the United States. Concerning the parents of immigrants, Margaret Lynch-Brennan states that "some Irish families deliberately sought to have their daughters, rather than their sons, emigrate; they 'pushed' their daughters to emigrate. These families reasoned that daughters would be more likely to send home money, and would be less tempted to waste

⁹ Kennedy, *The Irish*, 84.

¹⁰ Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 34.

¹¹ Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 12.

their earnings, than would sons.”¹² Thus women felt their opportunities and chances were diminishing, and many decided to do something about it.¹³

Many young women chose to move to America, in hopes of a better future and more opportunity. Their determination and willingness to move across the world on their own shows just how dedicated these women were to establish a life for themselves in America. This mass exodus of young women out of Ireland shows that they chose independence and opportunity over their lessening status and poor conditions at home in Ireland. Though they chose to leave their homes and families behind, that does not mean that the decision to emigrate and the journey to America were not without hardships and mixed emotions. The ultimate choice to leave Ireland and begin a new life was the mixture of what many historians have referred to as push-pull factors, external and internal factors that both propelled and hindered these young women in making the choice to leave Ireland.¹⁴ The factors described above pushed women out of Ireland and into what many historians describe as a form of exile.¹⁵ The pull factors drawing the Irish to the United States include opportunities for work, marriage, and independence. Furthermore, Robert E. Kennedy also credits America’s “rapid urbanization” in the 1890s

¹² Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 50.

¹³ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 26-29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 12.

as attracting more young Irish women than men because of the greater economic opportunities for them in cities.¹⁶

Once they arrived in the United States, the experiences of Irish men and women varied. Gender roles differed across national and cultural lines, as Irish women were often more “self-sufficient beings, with economic roles to play in their families and communities,” while many American women followed or aspired to the gender roles outlined in the “cult of true womanhood.”¹⁷ Irish girls and women were often described as having “assertive behavior.”¹⁸ While this notion needs to be considered in relevant terms to the time period, it also needs to be acknowledged that this opinion was in terms of a comparison to American women who adhered to the cult of domesticity. Historian Margaret Lynch-Brennan, in her pivotal work *The Irish Bridget*, details these differences between Irish and American women in behavior, mannerisms, and actions. She states that, “unlike the mothers in rural Ireland ... middle-class American women had little actual power as wives and mothers; they had only their ‘influence’ to deal with the duties and obligations with which they were charged.”¹⁹ In American society, the ideal woman took care of the home and was subservient and submissive to her husband or father. Irish women did not fit this mold, as many worked outside of the home, and they maintained a sense of freedom and independence. Irish women were “feisty in decided contrast to the

¹⁶ Kennedy, *The Irish*, 83-84.

¹⁷ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, xiv; Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151–74.

¹⁸ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 116.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

ideal of the submissive woman.”²⁰ Through this lens, it becomes clearer why many native-born Americans considered Irish women to be vastly different from how women were supposed to behave.

Irish women were also labelled as assertive partly because as women who decided to move to America on their own, they were “the most spirited and ambitious of Irish women.”²¹ Irish women, often differently from American women, “viewed themselves as self-sufficient beings, with economic roles to play in their families and communities. The ways they migrated clearly established their ability to make decisions for themselves.”²² This gender differentiation and distinction between Irish and American women could lead to tension, especially for domestics. This tension, disapproval, and discrimination came from both non-Irish men and women, as the Irish often fell outside of the considered American gender roles and spheres. They were often labelled as being “‘insolent,’ ‘defiant,’ had a ‘temper,’ ... [and] known for being ‘impudent’ and for her ‘impertinence’.”²³ For many at the time, there appeared to be a difference in gender expectations by location—Ireland allowed one, while America demanded another.²⁴

²⁰ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 71.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, xiv.

²³ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 71.

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

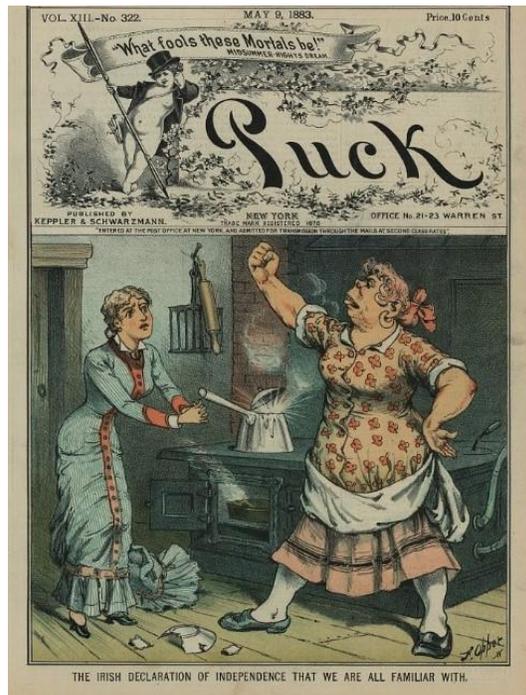


Figure 2.1: “The Irish Declaration of Independence that we are all familiar with,” offers a stereotypical view of the conflict between an Irish domestic and her employer in the May 9, 1883 edition of *Puck*
Source: Library of Congress

Migration to the United States often also resulted in a shift in gender roles among Irish immigrants themselves. Historian Hasia R. Diner states that after they arrived, “Irish men generally experienced a decline in status and power within their families as a result of migration, pushing women—wives and mothers—into authoritative roles far greater than they had experienced” before their migration to America.²⁵ While men often had to find jobs based on economic factors and availabilities within the United States, women had the opportunity to choose their occupations upon their arrival in the United States—and they frequently chose domestic service, especially in cities. Other occupations were open to Irish women, including work as seamstresses or in establishments like hotels.

²⁵ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 46.

This concept of the freedom of choice is present in many works on Irish immigrants, and shows that they chose what they wanted their lives to be like through their immigration and choices and decisions upon their arrival.²⁶ With economic opportunities like these, historian Hasia R. Diner reports, Irish women's "rate of economic and social progress seems to have outdistanced that of the women of other ethnic groups."²⁷

Evidence from Tennessee suggests that this was probably true in the South as well. In 1880, the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee employed approximately twenty-five women, fourteen of them natives of Ireland.²⁸ Many young Irish women were also employed at the Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville that same year.²⁹ According to the United States Census of 1880, the Maxwell House Hotel employed sixty people, with twenty-one of them women born in Ireland. While the jobs assigned to these women varied from cook to laundress to servant, they ranged in age from nineteen to thirty-

²⁶ For more on Irish immigrants and the freedom of choice, see: David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*; and Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*.

²⁷ Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, xiv.

²⁸ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDW8-95W> : accessed 20 April 2016), Chas B Galloway, Memphis, Shelby, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 139, sheet 100C, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1279; FHL microfilm 1,255,279.

²⁹ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDQB-MJ3>:accessed20April2016), Edwin Chapin, Nashville, Davidson, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 37, sheet 65D, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1249; FHL microfilm 1,255,249.

seven, with a mean age of twenty-four.³⁰ The hotel was also the place of employment of several children of immigrants, as twenty-three women employed there had parents born in Ireland. These female children of immigrants ranged in age from sixteen to forty, with a mean age of twenty-one.³¹ The high number of Irish women, both Irish-born and first generation American, employed at the Maxwell House Hotel, forty-four out of sixty, shows one way Irish women made a place for themselves upon their arrival in Tennessee.

One of the most popular forms of occupation among Irish women, in the United States and abroad, was domestic service. Scholarly work on Irish women frequently discusses the dominance of domestic service among the occupations held by Irish females, especially in the Northeast. While the nature of this type of work will be discussed below, domestic service needs examination in terms of gender. A plethora of domestic service positions were available to Irish women in the homes of middle class American families, including in Tennessee. Irish women who took these domestic servant positions were usually young, unmarried, Catholic girls.³² These women obtained this type of work because of and despite native citizens' disdain and unwillingness to work as domestics. Few native-born women, and some of other ethnicities "would take up low-status service work, whereas Irish immigrant women provided a pool of eager, if

³⁰ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBN-9VBK?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-YWS%3A1589414125%2C1589411183%2C1589396057%2C1589394807> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > Nashville > image 40 of 42; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 1.

generally untrained, workers willing to be employed as domestics. Their gender was deemed sufficient to make them eligible for this type of work.”³³

Although Irish domestics were very common in the northeastern states, they were not represented in as high numbers in the southern states, including Tennessee, where they competed against a traditional association between black women and domestic service. The Irish in Tennessee seem to have followed the patterns of the middle class, especially in the later nineteenth century, when women typically did not work outside of the home after marriage.³⁴ This was probably due partly to assimilation and adaptation, as many women were following the actions of their native-born counterparts. Furthermore, once married, it would have proved difficult to work outside of the home, especially while raising a family. For example, a search of United States Census records for women living in Tennessee in 1880 who were born in Ireland found sixty such women, most of whom were married and keeping house in their own homes.³⁵ Only six of the sixty were employed as domestic servants. These Tennessee domestics include Katie Caisey, who at seventeen years old worked as a domestic servant in Nashville for the McCabe family at their boarding house, as well as twenty-year-old Hannah Carter and thirty-year-old Bridget McHanley, both of whom were employed by the family of John Cochran in

³³ Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 69.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

³⁵ This search was conducted using the database available at <http://familysearch.org/>, and specifying the search to include females born in Ireland in the 1800s who were living in Tennessee in 1880.

Shelby County in 1880.³⁶ While Katie Caisey was employed in a boarding house, the other women were employed in single family homes. Hannah Carter and Bridget McHanely were employed as servants alongside Andrew Jackson, an eighteen year old African American male born in Tennessee.³⁷ Katie Caisey was the only servant in her household, though the family housed ten male boarders, two of them of Irish heritage. Katie's employers, Barney and Winnie McCabe, were both born in Ireland, though many Irish domestics in Tennessee were employed in households by native-born American employers.³⁸ Furthermore, census records for Tennessee show that Irish women employed in domestic service were frequently the only servant employed in the home.

³⁶ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDQB-NQD> : 13 July 2016), Katie Caisey in household of Barney Mccabe, Nashville, Davidson, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 41, sheet 124A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1249; FHL microfilm 1,255,249 and "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDWC-NJJ>:13 July 2016), Hennah Carter in household of John W Cochran, District 5, Shelby, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 119, sheet 95D, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1278; FHL microfilm 1,255,278.

³⁷ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YBK-QL3?cc=1417683&wc=QZ24-HYJ%3A1589414125%2C1589394945%2C1589399407%2C1589394816> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Shelby > District 5 > image 14 of 44; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

³⁸ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBN-9V9Y?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-YC2%3A1589414125%2C1589411183%2C1589396057%2C1589395208> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > Nashville > image 29 of 31; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

Though this was not always the case, a significant majority of homes in Tennessee in this sample that employed domestic servants had between one and three people employed in their home.³⁹

Irish women's work increasingly helped them become accepted members of society. Working in the homes of native-born Americans often created a bond of trust between native-born and foreign-born women. In this way, Irish women played an important role in pushing the Irish towards acceptance. This suggests that Irish women would have been an integral part of Irish adaptation and assimilation in Tennessee as they were elsewhere in the United States. Janet A. Nolan argues that Irish women's "successful adaptation to individualistic American life can be measured by their representation in the female work force, their children's rapid social and economic mobility, and their participation in public life—which was far greater than that of other female immigrants in the United States."⁴⁰

Historians' conclusions about Irish women in the United States raise additional possibilities that Irish women in Tennessee helped to further adaptation to American society while preserving ethnic ties. One way that female immigrants elsewhere maintained their Irish identity was by saving their money once they settled in the United States to aid their families back home, whether that be to support the family's farm or to

³⁹ "United States Census, 1870," database with images, *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>: 14 June 2016, citing NARA microfilm publication M593, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration and "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org> : 14 June 2016, citing NARA microfilm publication T9, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁴⁰ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 94.

fund another family member's journey to America. As early as the 1850s, Irish girls had been depositing their earnings in banks, saving up their money for the future.⁴¹ Their savings and financial assistance to their families back in Ireland helped to maintain Irish women's, and sometimes men's, connection to their home country and the families they left behind. Robert E. Kennedy estimates that the money and financial assistance going from Irish immigrants in America to Ireland "paid for at least three-quarters of all Irish emigration to the United States between 1848 and 1900, and without it Irish Catholic mass emigration across the Atlantic would not have been possible."⁴² Many Irish immigrants also kept up correspondence with their families and others back in Ireland, and the letters of Irish domestics in particular "indicated their continuing attachment to home and demonstrated that they maintained social lives that were partially anchored in Ireland."⁴³

Janet A. Nolan's work demonstrates that "Irish mothers pushed their children to Americanize, but not at the expense of their Catholic religion or their Irish identity" and evidence suggests that this was probably the case in Tennessee.⁴⁴ Their Catholic faith was a distinctive characteristic of Irish women immigrating to the United States, both in terms of religious practices and opportunities within the structure of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Priests and nuns made their way from Ireland and other

⁴¹ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 91.

⁴² Kennedy, *The Irish*, 22.

⁴³ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 121.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

areas of the country to meet the religious and spiritual needs in Tennessee. Women, including nuns, appear to make up a substantial portion of immigrants to Tennessee, as they founded, lived in, and worked in convents throughout the state.

One such example is the Home of the Good Shepherd, located in Memphis in 1880. The history of this organization and homes traces back to France, where in the seventeenth century, Father John Eudes “was interested in the spiritual and temporal well-being of women” though at that time there was no organization and means to do so.⁴⁵ Wanting to continue his pursuit of a place for women, he founded Our Lady of Charity in 1641, and though the charity experienced hard times during the French Revolutions of the 1700s, it reemerged in the early 1800s. The current name of Good Shepherd comes from the 1829 founding of another Our Lady of Charity house in another part of France. The first Sisters from the group in the United States came to Louisville, Kentucky in 1842, and the homes quickly spread.⁴⁶ Homes of the Good Shepherd were, and are, located across the United States, including Saratoga Springs, New York (1866) and Chicago (1859).⁴⁷

The Memphis Home of the Good Shepherd housed thirteen nuns, as well as fifty-one young women and girls. Though the convent was similar to another house in

⁴⁵ “Our History,” *Sisters of the Good Shepherd*, <http://sistersofthegood shepherd.com/our-history/>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. and “Our History and Beyond,” *House of the Good Shepherd*, <http://hgs chicago.org/historybeyond/>.

Missouri, many of the Sisters, and some of the students were natives of Ireland.⁴⁸ In 1880, shortly after its founding, the convent was home to thirteen Sisters, six of them having been born in Ireland, and another four having Irish-born parents.⁴⁹ Of the fifty-one females residing at the Memphis house, four were born in Ireland, while twenty-five had Irish-born parents. These girls and women ranged in age from two to forty, with the mean age being fourteen years old.⁵⁰ These numbers help to show how religion and religious motivations served as one of the pull factors to bring the Irish to Tennessee, as the Memphis Home of the Good Shepherd was just one of the Catholic organizations that helped those of Catholic and Irish descent.

Irish men also faced gender-specific ethnic and religious stereotypes. Perhaps the most prominent of these had to do with alcohol. Contrary to many American men and families, Irish men drank more and more often. Drinking was part of Irish culture, and at times was used for hospitality purposes. But Irish males were often labelled as “drunken louts, brutes, and wife beaters, with ‘drunken [used] as a modifier for Irish.’”⁵¹ Margaret Lynch-Brennan goes so far as to state that Irish men in the nineteenth century were

⁴⁸ *The Catholic Church in the United States of America: Undertaken to Celebrate the Golden Jubilee of His Holiness, Pope Pius X*, vol. 2, The Religious Communities of Women (New York: Catholic Editing Company, 1914), 223-225.

⁴⁹ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDWC-QX8> : accessed 20 April 2016), Mary St Lourdes in household of Mary St Soraphino, District 5, Shelby, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 119, sheet 109C, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1278; FHL microfilm 1,255,278.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 144.

actually what would be referred to today as “‘binge’ drinkers.”⁵² Historian Hasia R. Diner notes that “the Irish themselves, writers, clergy, publicists, and journalists recognized the high incidence of violence in the Irish home,” and that many Irish wives fled to the Sisters of Mercy “to escape the wrath of their husbands.”⁵³ In actuality, many Irish men were supportive of the temperance movement going on in the country at the time.⁵⁴ Many Catholic Church leaders, including Father Theobald Mathew, leader of the temperance movement in Ireland, drew attention to the cause by travelling through Ireland and the United States.⁵⁵

The issue of alcohol was already prominent in Tennessee, and the state soon became home to the American Temperance University in Harriman, Tennessee, and the founding of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union in the state in 1876.⁵⁶ When discussing the issue of temperance, *The Maryville Times* declared that “whiskey in the United States causes more than 1,300 funerals each day” and that “a memorial signed by 1,100 Irish magistrates complains of the excessive number of saloons as the cause of most of the

⁵² Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 145.

⁵³ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 57.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵⁵ For more information of Father Mathew, see Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*; John F. Quinn, *Father Mathew’s Crusade: Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and Irish America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

⁵⁶ Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 55 and “Temperance Matters,” *Daily American*, January 11, 1876.

crime and poverty in Ireland.”⁵⁷ The Catholic Total Abstinence Union had a chapter in Memphis named after Father Mathew, which would later be a source of aid during the Tennessee yellow fever epidemics of the 1870s.⁵⁸

Marriage was one of the push factors that drove Irish women to the United States, yet not all strove for this goal upon their arrival. As historian Hasia R. Diner explains, “although the Irish in America married younger than did their brothers and sisters who remained at home, they married later than German, French-Canadian, or Italian immigrants or their children.”⁵⁹ While not all Irish married other Irish or Catholics, most married those of similar ethnicity and beliefs. Finding a suitable marriage partner was not difficult, as evidenced by the Irish immigrants’ “early and universal marriage” in their new country.⁶⁰ Statistics found by Janet A. Nolan show that “after their emigration, Irish females maintained the high marital fertility of their predecessors and contemporaries at home.”⁶¹ Though some Irish women in the United States married later than women of other ethnicities, Irish women in Tennessee appear to have not had much of a problem when it came to finding a suitable husband. Marrying outside of cultural and ethnic lines could produce tension, as was seen in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1886, when a violent

⁵⁷ “Temperance Items,” *The Maryville Times*, August 28, 1889, Chronicling America.

⁵⁸ Joseph C. Gibbs, *History of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Penn Printing House, 1907), 51.

⁵⁹ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 47.

⁶⁰ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 76.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

riot broke out over the issue of an Italian man marrying an Irish woman.⁶² United States Census records indicate that Irish born women in Tennessee married at a variety of ages, with many Irish women married by their early twenties.⁶³ This early, and apparently relatively easy, marriage of Irish women in the state suggests the importance placed on beginning their own families.

Directly related to Irish marriage was the size of the average Irish, or Catholic, family. Both Irish immigrants in particular and Catholics in general tended to have relatively large families, which could garner them prejudice and disdain from native-born Americans, who often lived in smaller family units. In 1880, the average American household contained 5.04 members, and had decreased to 4.76 by 1900.⁶⁴ Many native-born Americans thought that the Irish were “reckless breeders,” and believed that Irish families were “too large ... [and that] their incessant childbearing [would] ensure an Irish political takeover of American cities [and] Catholicism would become the reigning faith.”⁶⁵ A newspaper article from *The Herald and Mail* in Columbia, Tennessee stated that “with people of Irish and German descent marriage is practically universal. The

⁶² “Riot Over A Marriage,” *The Rugby Gazette and East Tennessee News*, September 25, 1886, Chronicling America.

⁶³ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch*, <http://FamilySearch.org>:14 June 2016, citing NARA microfilm publication T9, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration.

⁶⁴ Robert Pear, “Average Size of Household in U.S. Declines to Lowest Ever Recorded,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/15/us/average-size-of-household-in-us-declines-to-lowest-ever-recorded.html>.

⁶⁵ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 62.

foreign elements of our population marry young and generally have large families” in comparison to many native-born Americans.⁶⁶

Gender also factored into the variety of family situations that Irish Americans lived in when they settled in Tennessee. While there were similarities that existed between the Irish in Tennessee and the Irish in the northeastern or Midwestern portions of the country, the family dynamic appears to have been very important to Tennessee’s Irish. While some of the children of families in the northeastern states appear to have lived with their parents until their early twenties, they were also employed at a young age in occupations ranging from laborer to domestic servant to mill worker.⁶⁷ In the Midwest, farming appears to have been a popular occupation for Irish immigrant men, and for the most part, their wives did not work outside of the home.⁶⁸

As in the western and northeastern states, Irish immigrants in the South typically had large families with several children. Several different family structures were prevalent among the Irish in Tennessee. The first of these was the nuclear family, consisting of two parents and their children. The nuclear family appears to be the most

⁶⁶ “Marrying and Unmarrying,” *The Herald and Mail*, April 14, 1876, Chronicling America, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

⁶⁷ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-DTLS-93V?cc=1438024&wc=92K5-T3D%3A5186_57101%2C518767301%2C518782001 : 22 May 2014), Massachusetts > Berkshire > image 124 of 281; citing NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁶⁸ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6WV9-Z3R?cc=1438024&wc=92KZ-92H%3A5186594_01%2C518725601%2C518735101 : 22 May 2014), Missouri > Clinton > image 18 of 50; citing NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

common among the Irish in Tennessee, followed by the extended family. The Ash family, who lived in Knoxville, Tennessee in the 1870s, is an example of this nuclear family structure. The Ash family consisted of parents Thomas and Johanna, age forty and thirty-five, along with their children Bartholomew, eleven; Gregory, ten; Kate, eight; and Johanna, three, all of whom had been born in Ireland.⁶⁹ Other nuclear families had some of their children born in Ireland before their migration, and the rest born in the United States. Those born after their family's move to America sometimes were born in several states before the family settled in Tennessee. The family of James Curley lived in Davidson County in 1870 and, though the parents were born in Ireland, their five children, Matt, nineteen; Michael, seventeen; Bridget, fifteen; James, thirteen; and Peter, eight, were born in New York or Pennsylvania.⁷⁰ Others seem to have quickly made their way to Tennessee, where all of their children were born. The family of John and Celia Evans, who resided in Nashville in 1880, had all five of their children—Thomas, ten;

⁶⁹ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDDZ-KFX> : 17 October 2014), Thomas Ash, Tennessee, United States; citing p. 27, family 222, NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 553,040.

⁷⁰ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD8P-63K> : 17 October 2014), James Curley, Tennessee, United States; citing p. 8, family 73, NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 553,022.

Susan, eight; Ella, five; Tony, three; and John, one—in Tennessee.⁷¹ These families are also representative of the relatively larger size of Irish families, with several more children than the average native-born, white nuclear families in urban America.

Another family structure is the extended family. This includes other family members as well as the nuclear family. One example is the family of twenty-six-year-old Pat Johnson, who were all born in Ireland, and in 1880 resided in Knoxville. His family at that time consisted of himself, his eighteen-year-old wife Sarah, his sixty-two-year-old father Pat, and his seventeen-year-old sister Rosa.⁷² Other extended families did not include a nuclear unit and were comprised solely of related individuals such as siblings. Often such households were made up of young women who were sisters. The Scales sisters are one example of this young female presence among Irish immigrants. In the 1880 United States Census, thirty-year-old Isadore Scales lived in Nashville with her two younger sisters, twenty-seven-year-old Kate and twenty-five-year-old Jennie. Isadore was employed as a milliner, while her sisters were both seamstresses. Also living at their residence was nineteen-year-old Minnie Gleaves, an African American woman who is

⁷¹ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDQ1-X2R> : 14 July 2016), Celia Evens in household of John Evens, Nashville, Davidson, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 59, sheet 416A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1250; FHL microfilm 1,255,250.

⁷² “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD7K-J84> : 13 July 2016), Pat Johnson, Knoxville, Knox, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 143, sheet 102A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1265; FHL microfilm 1,255,265.

listed as being employed as a domestic servant.⁷³ While it is likely that members of some extended families came to America and Tennessee through multiple voyages and waves of migration, some may have come together. Living with extended family demonstrates the importance of the family unit and how closely family was valued within Irish culture, though it could also serve as a cost saving measure, as those who were not capable of living on their own, due to financial or other means, were able to continue to live with their extended families.

The final type of Irish family and households can be labelled as the alternative family, and contains unrelated individuals who worked and lived outside of their own family's home. This includes women who were live-in domestic servants and others who lived apart from their immediate and nuclear families. While this study places domestic servants and others who lived with their employers in the category of the alternative family, their employers likely did not consider their Irish servants to be family. That being said, the Irish who resided in the homes of their employers fall into this category based on their formation of individualized families. These domestic servants still had their Irish community and their religion, which place them within the alternative family. It also includes those who simply lived on their own. In 1880, James Warren and Mary and Deilia Hollaran, who were all born in Ireland, lived with and worked for the Johnson family in Nashville, Tennessee. Fifty-five-year-old James was the gardener, thirty-year-

⁷³ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MDQB-7HS> : 13 July 2016), Isadore Scales, Nashville, Davidson, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 37, sheet 58B, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1249; FHL microfilm 1,255,249.

old Mary the cook, and twenty-year-old Deilia the house servant.⁷⁴ Anna Kelly, Celia Sweeny, Hannah Lee, and Kate Trotter were all listed as working for the Eagen family as servants in Memphis in 1870, and resided there as well.⁷⁵ Religious orders and convents, including the Home of the Good Shepherd and students at Catholic boarding schools also fall into the category of alternative families, as the community served as an extension and continuation of their families. The alternative family structure could provide the Irish with some of the same functions as the nuclear or extended family, although the latter provided the Irish immigrant with a family unit that embraced and practiced the same cultural and religious values and traditions.

Family and gender seem to have played critical roles in the lives and experiences of Irish immigrants as they adapted to life in Tennessee. Nuclear and extended families show the importance of the family unit, and the continuing and carrying on of traditions and values among the Irish. The substantial number of Irish women who made their way to Tennessee suggests that Irish immigration was not limited to men and families, however. Women came on their own, as is evidenced by the presence of single women working as domestics, in hotels, and other forms of employment. The fact that so many

⁷⁴ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD7M-Z9F> : 13 July 2016), Mary Hollaran in household of D R Johnson, District 10, Davidson, Tennessee, United States; citing enumeration district ED 70, sheet 160C, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 1251; FHL microfilm 1,255,251.

⁷⁵ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD87-D4T> : 17 October 2014), Kate Trotter in household of Chas Eagen, Tennessee, United States; citing p. 58, family 428, NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 553,062.

young, single Irish girls and women decided to make the journey to the United States and Tennessee shows their determination for a better life also. Gender roles and family structures helped to make and keep the immigrants both Irish and American during their lives in the United States.

CHAPTER THREE: WORK AND POLITICS

Irish immigrants held a variety of occupations during the late 1800s, ranging from skilled to unskilled forms of employment. While the majority of Irish immigrants were unskilled workers, some were able to rise above that classification. Children of immigrants rose above the social and economic status and conditions of their parents. In Tennessee, the occupations held by Irish immigrants ranged from domestic service to unskilled labor to working in stores and depended on their location within the state.

Though some Irish immigrants were able to rise above their initial unskilled, poor status, others struggled to secure jobs. James Joseph Flanagan pinpoints that “in the South, the Irishman fared no better than in the North. In fact, he was usually considered the inferior of the Negro, at least in the labor market.”¹ The Irish often had little or no skills that helped them in the American labor market, while former slaves sometimes held skills that had been used in the antebellum plantation South. This competition with the African American population was nothing new, as it had existed in the years before the Civil War. However, the end of the war and the new freedom of the former slaves only compounded the Irish predicament in the labor market. Now they had to compete with African Americans for jobs and wages. Many Irish immigrants arrived in the United States without the skills necessary to make a living in many of the middle class and skilled occupations available. A significant number of the Irish were transitioning from careers as farmers in Ireland to living in the American cities. Therefore, their skills

¹ James Joseph Flanagan, “The Irish Element in Nashville, 1810-1890: An Introductory Survey,” (master’s thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1951), 7.

learned from working the land in Ireland were of little use in bustling cities. Historian Kerby Miller states that “lacking skills and sophistication...unskilled Irish-Americans were easily exploited in factories, mines, and domestic service.”² Thus the Irish were in the bottom rungs of the workforce beside the newly freed African Americans. This resulted in competition for jobs and wages. Historian David T. Gleeson states that “despite an Irish presence in every sector of the urban workforce, monotonous physical labor was the norm for the largest group of Irish workers. Their employment stability was the most precarious and their working conditions the most harsh” aside from that of African Americans.³

One area of employment open to Irish men was on the state’s expanding railroad network. As noted in a study of Nashville’s Irish community, “the Irish that came to Nashville generally lived for a short time in the Northeast and travelled South with the construction of the railroads.”⁴ Employment on railroads also influenced where Irish families headed by railroad workers lived: in neighborhoods adjacent to railroad tracks within the state’s major cities. Living near their place of occupation, also provided access to other similar jobs. Historian Don H. Doyle states that in Nashville the Irish lived “close to their primary source of employment, the river and the Public Square, where unskilled day laborers gathered early in the morning six days a week to sell their labor to

² Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 504.

³ David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 46.

⁴ Pat Willard, “The Irish in Nashville 1880-1910,” (undergraduate thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1980), 3.

a foreman, typically for a dollar a day, ten hours—or more—a day.”⁵ In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Nashville’s Irish began moving away from the slum neighborhoods, which then became home to African Americans. They resettled in “an area west of the railroad gulch that by the 1880s came to be known as “Little Ireland” and was “ideally located close to the railroads, one of the major sources of employment for the Irish in the late nineteenth century.”⁶ Railroad companies needed a workforce, and many Irish quickly responded to the demand for their labor. Knoxville offered jobs in the late nineteenth century, and “the building of the railroads brought many Irish laborers to Knoxville, and for the first time Roman Catholics were numerous enough to form a parish.”⁷ With Irish men securing jobs with the railroad, they and their families often lived near the railroad tracks, creating their own ethnic neighborhoods.⁸

Kathleen C. Berkeley’s study of immigrants in the city of Memphis from 1850 to 1880 suggests that Irish immigrants to that city enjoyed greater social and economic mobility than for the South as a whole. Compared to David T. Gleeson’s findings in *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877*, Berkeley’s research shows a smaller percentage of unskilled labor in comparison to other occupations including entrepreneur and skilled

⁵ Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 101.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ William J. MacArthur, *Knoxville’s History: An Interpretation* (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1978), 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

laborer for Irish Memphians between 1860 and 1880.⁹ Berkeley compared jobs held by Irish immigrants to those of other ethnicities, particularly German and African American. The study shows a growth in several areas of Irish employment in Memphis between 1850 and 1860, most notably in entrepreneurial fields and semi-skilled forms of work. For example, the number of Irish-born residents running a boarding house increased from one in 1850 to thirty-two in 1860. Other new occupations by 1860 were as dairymen and foremen. Some areas of skilled employment increased as well. Increased numbers of Irish residents worked as blacksmiths, carpenters, and seamstresses. Yet unskilled labor still remained among the most common forms of employment for Irish in Memphis. The number of Irish employed as laborers rose substantially, from 163 in 1850 to 1,055 in 1860. Berkeley attributes this rise to the employment of Irish men on the Tennessee railroads instead of slave labor. Slave owners did not want to risk the “loss of life or limb” by having their slaves work on the railroads, thus “Irish laborers were brought from northern cities.”¹⁰ Washerwomen and servants are listed by Berkeley alongside laborers as the growing forms of unskilled employment among the Irish.¹¹ In 1870, five years after the end of slavery, the percentage of Irish Memphians holding unskilled jobs ranked very closely to that of black Memphians: 44% percent compared to 40% respectively.¹²

⁹ Kathleen Christine Berkeley, “‘Like a Plague of Locust’: Immigration and Social Change in Memphis, Tennessee, 1850-1880” (PhD diss., University of California, 1980), 187-189, accessed January 21, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52-54.

¹² *Ibid.*, 194.

Tennessee did not have to make a case for immigrants to come to the state before the Civil War, but the decades after proved more difficult. Throughout the last years of the 1860s, Tennessee's state government worked hard to attract new residents to the state. In 1867, Governor William Brownlow argued that "Tennessee's most pressing need was an increased productive population which would only ensue if Tennessee actively encouraged newcomers."¹³ Before the Civil War, Brownlow had been largely anti-Irish and anti-Catholic. The change in his opinions largely came from the fact that Tennessee needed to attract people for labor in order to boost the state financially and economically.¹⁴ Historian Constantine G. Belissary states that in the years after the Civil War "even Brownlow, who previously had regarded immigrants as the scum of city slums" changed his stance, as "he strongly endorsed the idea of inviting outsiders to help in the development of Tennessee's potentialities."¹⁵ The state founded an immigration board, the first of its kind in the state, in the hopes of attracting people to Tennessee.¹⁶ Part of the reason that Tennessee appeared undesirable to some newcomers after the war was due to "lack of economic appeal."¹⁷ Thus the state worked hard to attract immigrants and boost its business and economy, even deciding to pay "the sum of twenty-five dollars

¹³ Constantine G. Belissary, "Tennessee and Immigration, 1865-1880," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1948): 231.

¹⁴ E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson of the Southern Highlands* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 123.

¹⁵ Belissary, "Tennessee and Immigration," 231.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

‘for each able-bodied foreign emigrant from Europe, not less than fifteen nor more than fifty years of age, who shall be introduced into this State’.”¹⁸ The arrival of more immigrants to the state would boost the economy and increase production.¹⁹

In the late 1860s and early 1870s, Tennessee experienced a production turnover. Agriculture was becoming less profitable and less desirable, while industry and manufacturing were booming. Before the war, much of the state had been largely agricultural, something that the Irish were not pursuing upon their arrival, therefore, Tennessee’s change in production and increase in industry helped to draw the Irish and other immigrants to the state. In the late 1860s, “a legislative committee” had discovered that “Tennesseans were spending more than \$77,000,000 for imported manufactured goods.”²⁰ In an effort to decrease this spending, the state worked hard to establish industrial facilities. Different types of industry from cotton mills to iron and coal companies to sawmills were established across the state. The Tennessee Manufacturing Company, a cotton mill established in Nashville in 1869, “soon developed into one of the most profitable concerns in the South.”²¹ With the expansion of industry came an increase in the state economy. Historian Constantine G. Belissary states that “the census of 1890 reported the value of products manufactured in Tennessee at \$72,000,000, while

¹⁸ Belissary, “Tennessee and Immigration.”

¹⁹ Hermann Bokum, *The Tennessee Hand-Book and Immigrant’s Guide: Giving a Description of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: J.B. Lippincott & Company, 1868).

²⁰ Constantine G. Belissary, “The Rise of Industry and the Industrial Spirit in Tennessee, 1865-1885,” *Journal of Southern History* 19, no. 2 (1953): 197-198.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

the value of the state's farm products was estimated at only \$55,000,000. These figures indicate the occurrence of a revolution of economic life and credo" in the state in the years after the Civil War.²² This growth in industry and population explains how Tennessee became desirable to Irish in the late nineteenth century. According to one study, those who made their way from the coastal cities to Nashville "were probably made of sterner stuff than many others of their race who remained in the port cities," as many Irish often remained in the already industrialized coastal cities.²³ The Irish who came to Tennessee benefitted, as Nashville and the rest of the state "was beginning to boom, and its small industries were developing rapidly. This meant that opportunities for employment were very good."²⁴

Work varied by gender, and Irish females often found work more readily than their male counterparts.²⁵ Irish women often found work in the homes of middle-class American families as domestic servants. These positions were readily available, and the women filled the need for someone to work for these families. Most native-born women and even some immigrants of other ethnicities, especially in the northeastern states balked at the notion of taking on the role of a domestic. The women who looked down upon domestic service and refused to be employed in that line of work for several

²² Belissary, "The Rise of Industry," 193.

²³ Flanagan, "The Irish Element in Nashville, 1810-1890," 102-103.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 84; Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 49, 67.

reasons, including “the lack of opportunity for advancement, the monotony, the unsystematized approach of employers, the length and irregularity of hours, the limited freedom, the isolation and loneliness, the role of subordinate and servant, and the employer’s demand for deference and servility.”²⁶ Irish women, however, welcomed the opportunity to hold a job and earn their own money.²⁷ They also did not anticipate remaining in domestic service their whole lives, as marriage often became a reason and way out of service.²⁸ The Irish were so often employed as domestic servants, that the term “Bridget” came to be associated with their positions.²⁹ Furthermore, statistics show that “in most areas of the country, Irish-born women formed the largest single group within the foreign-born servant class,” especially in the years before 1880.³⁰ Irish women even wrote home about the availability of jobs as domestics.³¹

While Irish domestic servants were common in the northeastern states, Irish women worked in these jobs in the South as well, though not in as high of numbers. In the southern states, according to David Gleeson, “Irish girls made up the significant portion of the Irish population in more affluent neighborhoods” in the South as they lived

²⁶ David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 241-242.

²⁷ For more information, see Margaret Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), xiii, 88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

³⁰ Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 66-67.

³¹ Lynch Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 86.

and worked in the homes of their wealthier employers.³² In the southern states, native-born white, African American and Irish women all worked as domestic servants, though the latter two appear to have been employed as domestics more regularly, and often competed for domestic servant positions.³³

As a result, Irish female domestic servants in Tennessee and the South may not have experienced the ethnic stereotyping and criticism levelled against their sisters elsewhere. Though they were frequently employed as domestic servants, Irish women were not always well-suited or trained for their jobs. Their lives and livelihoods back in Ireland had not prepared them for the lifestyle and homes of the middle-class Americans that they would be working for.³⁴ This lack of preparedness and skills could result in tensions between the Irish servant and her American employers. Irish girls were not good cooks, and “American employers complained that the Irish Bridget was ‘ignorant...of the use of scrubbing brushes, since her floor at home was the hard earth’ and that she did not know how to light a fire in a stove.”³⁵ In 1871, an article in *Harper’s Bazar* advised Irish domestic employers to approach correcting the Irish servants’ lack of skills in attempts for improvement. The article also states that in the “in the United States, where many middle-class families could only afford a single ‘maid of all work’ to perform domestic labour, it was unfair to expect a ‘poor peasant girl just landed from a sea-voyage’ to

³² Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 46.

³³ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁴ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10, 12-13 and Andrew Urban, “Irish Domestic Servants, ‘Biddy’ and Rebellion in the American Home, 1850-1900,” *Gender and History* 21, no. 2 (2009): 263.

immediately perfect the many skills required of her.”³⁶ Complaints were also made about the attitudes and personalities of the Irish domestics, as they were more “impertinent and assertive” than their white native-born counterparts.³⁷ Newspapers and magazines from the 1870s recommended that if the Irish domestics “resisted designs for her personal improvement, then perhaps the solution was to look towards the Chinese” as a new means of domestic labor.³⁸ The press also frequently depicted the lack of skills and assertive behavior of Irish women in ways that “highlighted what they [Americans] considered to be their Irish servants’ crude qualities, savage disposition and masculine physique.”³⁹

The role of women as domestic servants provided Irish families with a link to the rest of society, and especially to their white, native-born employers and neighbors. The Irish domestic helped to make the Irish become accepted members of American society. Margaret Lynch-Brennan furthers this point, as she states that “credit is due to the Irish Bridget for pioneering the way for the Irish to become accepted by native-born Americans and for helping the Irish, as a group, move into the American middle class.”⁴⁰ Upon marriage or leaving domestic service, Irish immigrants strove to work their way up the social ladder and gain status within American society. Margaret Lynch-Brennan

³⁶ Urban, 264 and *Harper’s Bazaar*, vol. 4, New York: Hearst Corp., 1871, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015013264679;view=1up;seq=1>.

³⁷ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 35.

³⁸ Urban, “Irish Domestic Servants,” 264.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, xxii.

asserts that “by the 1870s, having a wife who did not work for wages outside the home was a signifier of membership in the American middle class,” and the Irish tried to join in this practice.⁴¹ On the other hand, historian Andrew Urban states that it was the Irish domestics’ employers who facilitated their rise in class and status. He argues that the American women “used the figure of Biddy, and the problems she allegedly posed, in order to align their reform efforts in the home with the broader goal of transforming Irish immigrants into useful members of society who respected Anglo-American authority and served middle-class needs.”⁴² While this might have been the case in some areas, in the American South the Irish heavily facilitated their own rise in status as they held onto many of their Irish and Catholic values and traditions while still being able to achieve elevated status and quickly come to be considered American citizens.⁴³

Irish women found work in other areas besides domestic service. Some Irish women found work at factories and mills.⁴⁴ They filled positions as seamstresses, teachers, nursing, and in religious orders. Irish women, particularly married women, ran boarding houses, which enabled them to earn money while remaining in the home.⁴⁵ Historian Hasia R. Diner argues that these jobs allowed Irish women to show that “they could succeed in the mainstream American competition for jobs. These women offered

⁴¹ Lynch-Brennan, *The Irish Bridget*, 155.

⁴² Urban, “Irish Domestic Servants,” 265.

⁴³ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 22.

⁴⁴ Nolan, *Ourselves Alone*, 77-78.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

some degree of proof that economic and occupational aspirations of the emigrating generation had been fulfilled—at least in part.”⁴⁶

Like their counterparts in the Northeast and other parts of the South, Tennessee’s Irish women seem to have varied in their occupations. The majority of Irish women employed outside the home identified in this study were single women, and while a majority was between the ages of seventeen and thirty-five, there were Irish women, older and younger, employed in the state of Tennessee. There were several instances of siblings being employed at the same business or by the same employer. The following are just a few examples of the types of employment that they held. In 1870, Mary Collins, a twenty-five-year-old Irish native, worked as a domestic in the household of Lucy Lynn in Memphis, Tennessee. Collins worked alongside William Dunlap, a nine year old African American, who was also employed as a servant in the Lynn home.⁴⁷ In 1870, Ellen Collins lived with her husband and two teenage sons in Memphis, where she worked as a seamstress.⁴⁸ Sister Maglius served as an assistant at an orphanage in Nashville in 1880.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 95-96.

⁴⁷ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QM9-FJ8?cc=1438024&wc=92K7-2JK%3A5186555_01%2C519273701%2C519336901 : 22 May 2014), Tennessee > Shelby > image 158 of 258; citing NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁴⁸ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6QM9-N56?cc=1438024&wc=92K7-2JK%3A5186555_01%2C519273701%2C519336901 : 22 May 2014), Tennessee > Shelby > image 159 of 258; citing NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

In Davidson County, Mary McLaughlin, fifteen, worked as a domestic servant for the Steger household alongside Maggie Hagerty, twenty-five, Mary Bailey, twenty-two, and Mary Farrell, fifty, all from Ireland.⁵⁰ Bridget Maloney, age thirty-one worked as the housekeeper for Richard Scannell, a Roman Catholic Priest. Her sister Julia, age twenty-seven was a domestic servant in the same Nashville household in 1880.⁵¹ The Mahan family also lived in Nashville in 1880, with twenty-three year old daughter Mary employed at a millinery store, and her twenty-year-old sister Johanna employed as a clerk in a store.⁵² In Memphis in 1880, thirty-year-old Julia Cummins worked as a seamstress,

⁴⁹ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YBC-W99?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-9RG%3A1589414%2C1589411183%2C1589399726%2C1589394882> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > District 9 > image 44 of 45; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁵⁰ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YBN-9J1T?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-YC2%3A1589414%2C1589411183%2C1589396057%2C1589395208> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > Nashville > image 4 of 31; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁵¹ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBN-9KQT?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-YWS%3A1589414%2C1589411183%2C1589396057%2C1589394807> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > Nashville > image 15 of 42; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁵² “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBP-HR?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-PYG%3A1589414%2C1589411183%2C1589396057%2C1589395190> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > Nashville > image 62 of 62; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

and boarded at the home of James O'Fee.⁵³ While her husband worked as a bookkeeper, thirty-five-year-old Mary Powers ran a boarding house from the family's home in Chattanooga.⁵⁴ In 1880, thirty-five-year-old Ellen Sweeney lived with her mother and daughter in Chattanooga and worked as a laundress.⁵⁵

These examples of Irish working women show the availability of jobs for Irish immigrant women in occupations besides domestic service, and suggest that they had choices when securing employment upon their arrival. The types of jobs these women in Tennessee held differ from northern cities predominantly in the relatively small numbers of Irish women working in factories in Tennessee. While domestic service, as well as some of the other occupations held by Irish women, were typical of Irish women in the United States as a whole during this time, Irish women in Tennessee do not appear to have been heavily employed in factory type work.

⁵³ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBD-9CX7?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-C2G%3A1589414%2C1589394945%2C158939539%2C1589394846> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Shelby > Memphis > image 38 of 47; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁵⁴ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YBL-D8G?cc=1417683&wc=QZ24-X2J%3A1589414%2C1589399637%2C1589401957%2C1589394750> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Hamilton > Chattanooga > image 47 of 52; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁵⁵ "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBL-DGW?cc=1417683&wc=QZ24-X2J%3A1589414%2C1589399637%2C1589401957%2C1589394750> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Hamilton > Chattanooga > image 19 of 52; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

Irish immigrants were also heavily involved in politics, both in Tennessee as well as the United States as a whole. The Irish in the South “benefitted from their participation in southern politics. Both their experience in Ireland and their ability to speak English gave them easier political access than was enjoyed by other immigrant groups, such as the Germans.”⁵⁶ Their participation in politics caused fear among the white, native-born Americans, and at times resulted in further discrimination and nativist sentiments against the Irish. In fact, historian David T. Gleeson argues that “in the South, nativism was linked to Irish involvement in politics.”⁵⁷ Many native-born Americans grew alarmed at the rapidly growing numbers of Irish, from both immigration and birth rates, and feared the swift and expansive participation of the Irish in politics.⁵⁸ Native-born Americans also found the Catholic faith of the Irish dangerous when it came to politics. Historian Jonathan M. Atkins states that “more ominous, Americans maintained, was the Catholic Church’s sponsorship of the recent influx of immigrants. That church’s hierarchical structure, nativists claimed, permitted the Pope and his minions to rule,” and that “their lust for even more power had made Catholicism the enemy of freedom everywhere.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 100.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁸ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America*, 63.

⁵⁹ Jonathan M. Atkins, *Parties, Politics, and the Sectional Conflict in Tennessee, 1832-1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 197.

The Democratic Party saw an advantage in the large number of Irish and immigrant voters, and often solicited their support throughout the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ This was especially true in the South in the years immediately after the Civil War, as Democratic politicians courted the Irish voters, as well as those of other ethnic groups, to counter the Republican votes of freed African Americans. This was appealing to the Irish, who “were used to a nonresponsive and callous government in Ireland.”⁶¹ Historian David T. Gleeson argues that for the Irish in the South, participation and inclusion in politics and the Democratic Party “had an added bonus in that it integrated them further into the southern mainstream ... [and] Irish southerners, therefore, understood that their position in the southern society depended on their participation in politics and, in particular, their continued support for the Democratic Party.”⁶² This acceptance into a political party gave them a sense of belonging and made them feel a part of southern culture.⁶³ Some native-born Americans saw the Democrats’ courting of Irish votes as a threat.⁶⁴ Consequently, historian Kathleen Berkeley writes, “from approximately 1850 to

⁶⁰ Kathleen Christine Berkeley, “Ethnicity and Its Implication for Southern Urban History: The Saga of Memphis, Tennessee, 1850-1880,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1991): 194.

⁶¹ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 94.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

1880, courting the ethnic vote, or attempting to minimize its influence, became standard operating procedure for a succession of political candidates.”⁶⁵

Even though they did not have as significant of a population as their fellow countrymen in cities such as Boston or New York, Tennessee’s Irish were still able to secure political positions and authority. When the Irish did not obtain political positions, they often still benefited from the actions and decisions of their local government. These benefits often manifested themselves in the form of “government jobs and contract,” which gave the Irish a sense of belonging, as “public jobs were vital to many new immigrants’ survival.”⁶⁶ Irish Democrats learned “to trade their loyalty to the party for places on the ticket and for patronage jobs,” and their Irish neighborhoods helped them in “ward-level politics.”⁶⁷ In Nashville, many Irish immigrants tended to vote for the Democratic Party.⁶⁸ In Nashville, the Irish constituted the majorities in several wards, and “for a time controlled the 4th, 6th, 9th, and 11th wards near St. Mary’s and St. Joseph’s churches.”⁶⁹

In Knoxville, some Irish immigrants were able to acquire their own businesses and positions of power. For example, Patrick Sullivan built a saloon at the intersection of Jackson and Central. The saloon was atypical, as it “welcomed men and women, blacks

⁶⁵ Berkeley, “Ethnicity and Its Implications,” 195.

⁶⁶ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 100.

⁶⁷ Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 102.

⁶⁸ Willard, “The Irish in Nashville,” 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

and whites together.”⁷⁰ The 1880 census shows thirty-two-year-old Sullivan listed as a bar keeper, and living with his wife, two sons, two daughters, his sister and brother-in-law.⁷¹ Other Irish Tennesseans in Knoxville combined business success with political power. Second generation Irish-American Martin Condon, a wholesale grocer, served as the mayor of Knoxville from 1888-1889.⁷² Throughout the course of his adult life, he worked his way up the occupational ladder. The son of John and Bridget Condon, Irish immigrants, Condon worked as a clerk in a store in 1880 before his political success later in that decade.⁷³ Condon would later move to Nashville, and then to Memphis, where he died in 1940.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Jack Neely, “St. Patrick’s Day in Knoxville,” *Knoxville Mercury*, March 10, 2016, sec. Knoxville History, <http://www.knoxmercury.com/2016/03/10/st-patricks-day-in-knoxville/>.

⁷¹ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBF-4NG?cc=1417683&wc=QZ2W-PVQ%3A1589414_125%2C1589400595%2C1589397_581%2C1589395957:24December2015), Tennessee > Knox > Knoxville > image 19 of 33; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁷² “City of Knoxville - Mayor’s Office - Knoxville, Tennessee,” *Tennessee Portrait Project*, <http://www.tnportraits.org/condon-martin-j-knoxmayor.htm>.

⁷³ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB2-9S3F?cc=1417683&wc=QZ24-DGT%3A1589414_125%2C1589400595%2C1589399801%2C1589395107:24December2015), Tennessee > Knox > District 12 > image 40 of 51; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁷⁴ “Martin J. Condon, Sr.,” *Find A Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=52896359>.

The Irish also rallied for Irish related causes when it came to politics. They were in favor of “campaigns for Catholic Emancipation and Repeal in Ireland” and those in the South advocated in favor of “Young Ireland, the Fenians, and the Catholic Church,” all of which thrust them into political arena of the United States.⁷⁵ These causes and organizations were near and dear to their hearts, and the Irish-American support of them was soon felt. Tennessee’s Irish showed their dedication to their Irish heritage through their participation in large, extravagant St. Patrick’s Day celebrations that helped to raise awareness and funds to promote Irish independence.⁷⁶ Irish men in Tennessee were involved in the Fenian Brotherhood and the Irish Land League. These organizations worked to raise funds, support, and awareness of the problems and issues going on in Ireland, as well as to advocate for Ireland’s independence from Great Britain. The Fenian Brotherhood had a substantial presence in Tennessee, and its existence in the state goes back to 1858. In addition to the organization having groups and supporters in the state, Tennessee also became home to several men involved in the leadership of the Fenian Brotherhood, including John Mitchel, who “escaped exile in Tasmania and problems in New York City” before coming to reside in Tennessee.⁷⁷ Just as in population numbers, the numbers of Nashville’s Fenians was less than those of the northeast, “but a study of Nashville members and their activities reveals a unique circle praised by James Stephens

⁷⁵ Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 94.

⁷⁶ “The Saint of Erin,” *Republican Banner*, March 18, 1875.

⁷⁷ DeeGee Lester, “Tennessee’s Bold Fenian Men,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1997): 264.

as ‘a splendid one,’ and noting that ‘friends here expect great things from it.’”⁷⁸ After Fenian raids into Canada, to protest and fight British control of Ireland, from 1866 to 1871, the Nashville newspaper the *Republican Banner* reported “there are fifteen Fenian prisoners still confined in Kingston penitentiary in Canada, and among them a Peter Ledwith, of Nashville. Can’t the Brotherhood here do something for him?”⁷⁹

The Irish Land League served a similar purpose to the Fenian Brotherhood. In January 1881, a “mass meeting of Irishmen” was held to organize and found a Nashville chapter of the Irish Land League, as it was “the only city in the United States where there is not a branch of the Irish Land League, notwithstanding its patriotism in the past.”⁸⁰ The *Daily American* article appealed to Irish sentiments stating “Irishmen, if you intend to stand by your countrymen in this great national struggle for life and land, be present at this meeting.”⁸¹ After its organization, the Nashville division of the Land League met at St. Joseph Hall.⁸²

Though the Irish were involved in politics during the last decades of the nineteenth century, there was one noticeable gap in their activism at the national and state level. Neither Irish men nor women appear to have been very much involved in the

⁷⁸ Lester, “Tennessee’s Bold Fenian Men,” 265.

⁷⁹ “Hard Fate of a Nashville Fenian,” *Republican Banner*, May 3, 1871, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnashvilletennessean/docview/952375492/3CC0A24BFD1D4368PQ/2?accountid=2804>.

⁸⁰ “Movement for a Branch of the Irish Land League,” *Daily American*. January 26, 1881.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Nashville Directory*, 1881, 538.

women's rights organizations of the period, the National Woman Suffrage Association or the American Woman Suffrage Association. Just as with many other issues and situations concerning the Irish, the reasons for this lack of participation varied along gender lines. According to historian Hasia R. Diner, Irish women did not feel the same need for rights and liberation that other American women felt. They had already been liberated in their move to America, and thus they had no strong desire to join the women's rights movement.⁸³ Irish men, on the other hand, opposed the push for women's rights for very different reasons. They had a fear of feminism as a threat to traditional Irish gender roles. This fear manifested itself in that "Irish men, long critical of their own women's independence ... [felt] feminism not only threatened the political power of Irish men, it threatened the very foundations of Irish culture and its delicate balance between the sexes."⁸⁴

Thus, the gender stereotypes and roles that had existed for decades in Ireland continued to carry over with the Irish voters in the United States. While many Irish did not support the efforts for women's suffrage, there were some in Tennessee who were heavily involved in the suffrage movement. One of these, Catherine Talty Kenny of Nashville worked tirelessly to advocate for woman suffrage. When Tennessee became the final state needed to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote, Kenny saw it as "an important tool for direct political power and influence. Suffrage was

⁸³ Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, 140.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

a necessary step if women were to become full participants in Tennessee's public life."⁸⁵ Kenny stands out as a suffragette because of her Catholic faith. She supported and promoted women's suffrage during "a time when many American Catholics opposed woman suffrage."⁸⁶

Irish involvement in work and politics seem to have helped them to adapt and become accepted and respectable citizens of Tennessee and the United States. Though both areas could garner them disapproval and discrimination from varying factions of the American population, some of Tennessee's Irish found jobs that provided them with a livelihood, something that both Irish men and women valued and desired. Their participation in politics allowed some Irish men to work their way into better political and occupational positions. Both of these areas were needed in order for the Irish to begin to become adapted to American and southern life, culture, and society.

⁸⁵ Carole Stanford Bucy, "Catherine Kenny: Fighting for the Perfect 36," in *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives: Women in American History*, edited by Kriste Lindenmeyer (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 197.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

CHAPTER FOUR: CHURCH AND SCHOOL

Of extreme importance to the majority of Irish immigrants, including those who made their way to Tennessee, was their Catholic faith. Religion provided a means of maintaining Irish heritage, traditions, and cultural values after their arrival in the United States. The immigrants' Catholic faith also gave them a sense of comfort, as it reminded them of home. Though Catholicism often set them apart from much of the Protestant, native-born American population and could garner them disdain and discrimination, it also provided a link to important attributes and qualities that were valued in American society. The terms Catholicism and Irish, while not always interchangeable, frequently are so in Tennessee's Irish history, as the Irish had a presence throughout the state. Schools and churches played a critical role in Irish life in Tennessee, as they provided places of refuge, comfort, and continuing culture.

Though Catholicism was the predominant religion of a significant portion of the Irish immigrants, there were some who were of Protestant faith. Many of those who came before the nineteenth century and the Irish potato famine were Scots-Irish and were Presbyterian. After the potato famine, immigration from Ireland was predominantly native Irish and Roman Catholics. Scots-Irish and Irish immigrants soon parted ways in the United States, Lawrence J. McCaffrey explains, "conflicts between nationalism and unionism fostered sectarian enmity in Ireland, and when American nativists, frightened

by waves of Irish immigration, focused on Irish Catholics as the main target of their anxieties, Irish Protestants disassociated themselves from Irish Catholics.”¹

Many Catholics met with discrimination and prejudice throughout the United States, those in southern states including Tennessee may have experienced this discrimination to a lesser degree.² The Irish in Tennessee seem to have had an easier time adapting to their new surroundings regarding race and religion than many of their counterparts in other areas of the country. Even if they were able to adapt relatively easily and quickly, they still would have faced some obstacles, especially regarding work and politics. The difference of religion does not seem to have been a main priority for many white southerners in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. They had other fears and worries, specifically concerning race relations within the South, and the changes brought about by the Civil War and Reconstruction. While it was not a complete acceptance of the Catholic religion, other factors involving the Irish, especially alcohol, took more precedence among native-born Americans in the southern states.³

Catholicism had been present in Tennessee from the country’s founding, and grew in correlation with the numbers of Irish immigrants in the state. One of the earliest Irish immigrants in Tennessee was Hugh Rogan. As explained by Caneta Skelley Hankins, Rogan made his way from Ireland to Pennsylvania in 1775, then he “traveled to North

¹ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 5.

² James Joseph Flanagan, “The Irish Element in Nashville, 1810-1890: An Introductory Survey,” (master’s thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1951), 91.

³ David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 193.

Carolina and, eventually, across the western frontier. He was among the nearly three hundred thousand pioneers who came to the Cumberland Valley between 1775 and 1800, making the area the second ‘seed-bed’ of Irish migration after Pennsylvania.”⁴ Many of Rogan’s reasons for leaving Ireland were similar to those of the Irish in the nineteenth century, including economic and religious motivations. As Catholicism was not well established in Tennessee in the early nineteenth century, the Rogan family’s home was “the meeting place for the area Catholics for over fifty years.”⁵ This practice of meeting in homes due to the lack of formal churches was not unique to the Rogans, as it occurred in other areas of the state, including the home of Eugene Magevney in Memphis, Tennessee.⁶ Settling in Sumner County, Tennessee, Hugh Rogan came to be “generally admired and respected, even considered somewhat of a legend” that lasted for generations.⁷

In the early nineteenth century, Tennessee Catholics were part of the Bardstown, Kentucky diocese, which included Kentucky and some western territory. In 1821, Father Robert Abell traveled to Nashville to pastor to one of the first Catholic churches in Tennessee. Father Abell, often called the “first ‘pastor’ of Nashville,” came from a well-known Kentucky family with Maryland roots, and came to Nashville numerous times

⁴ Caneta Skelley Hankins, “Hugh Rogan of Counties Donegal and Sumner: Irish Acculturation in Frontier Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1995): 309.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁶ Charles W. Crawford and Robert M. McBride, “The Magevney House, Memphis,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1969): 347.

⁷ Hankins, “Hugh Rogan of Counties Donegal and Sumner,” 312.

throughout the 1820s.⁸ This church did not gain permanent status until it was reconstructed from a wood frame to a brick building, and “the little brick Church of the Holy Rosary was left unfinished, and even unblessed,” after Father Abell was called away to Kentucky.⁹ “A proposition to establish a congregation in Nashville was made, and met with hearty approval from both Catholics and Protestants,” and even though the idea was met with enthusiasm, “it was not, however, until 1830 that a church was erected on the north side of what now constitutes the Capitol grounds.”¹⁰ This small church in Nashville was the only organized Catholic Church in the state when the Diocese of Nashville was founded in 1837.¹¹ While the diocese began in 1837, the first bishop of the diocese, Bishop Richard Pius Miles, “was consecrated bishop in the cathedral of Bardstown on September 16, 1838.”¹² At that time, the Diocese of Nashville stretched “42,000 square miles, running six hundred miles from northeast to southwest, without a single other resident priest.”¹³ Upon travelling the state, Bishop Miles reported that he found “Catholics in almost every part of the state, many of whom have for many years

⁸ Thomas Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee: The Sesquicentennial Story* (Nashville: Catholic Center, 1987), 32-34.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰ Goodspeed Publishing Co., *History of Tennessee from the Earliest Time to the Present* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1887).

¹¹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 41.

¹² “Bishop Miles Society (aka Catholic Foundation of Tennessee, Inc.),” *The Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville*, <https://dioceseofnashville.com/catholic-foundation-of-tennessee> and Stritch, 32.

¹³ *Ibid.*

neglected their duties, and in many instances have lost their faith.”¹⁴ An 1887 history of Tennessee stated that the Catholic population of Tennessee was “20,000 to 25,000 of which about 8,000 are residents of Nashville, and 10,000 or 12,000 of Memphis” and that “Chattanooga and Knoxville also have large congregations.”¹⁵ The Diocese of Nashville would remain the only diocese in Tennessee until the mid-twentieth century, when the dioceses of Memphis and Knoxville were established in 1970 and 1988 in response to the increased size of the Catholic population in the state in the later twentieth century, which went from 77,000 in 1961 to 120,000 in 1970.¹⁶

In the nineteenth century, additional churches sprang up within the diocese to accommodate the influx of Catholic immigrants. A history of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Knoxville states that “a small number of Irish Catholics were residing in the area [East Tennessee] when the city of Knoxville was established in 1794. By 1810 there was talk of establishing a Catholic parish and building a church,” however until the 1830s, a sporadic schedule of priests visiting the area became the only means of having a priest preside over a service.¹⁷

¹⁴ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 32.

¹⁵ Goodspeed Publishing Co., *History of Tennessee from the Earliest Time to the Present*.

¹⁶ “History of the Diocese of Memphis,” *The Catholic Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee*, http://www.cdom.org/CatholicDiocese.php?op=ARCH_History_Diocese_of_Memphis and “The History of the Diocese of Knoxville,” *The Diocese of Knoxville*, <https://dioknox.org/history-diocese-knoxville/>.

¹⁷ “History,” *Immaculate Conception Catholic Church*, <https://icknoxville.org/history/>.

<i>Denomination</i>	1890	1906	1916
Baptists:			
Regular	5,722	—	—
Southern	—	4,417	5,814
National (Black)	—	6,408	14,146
Other	440	706	140
Methodists:			
Methodist Episcopal	1,143	1,305	1,245
Methodist, Southern	7,094	8,413	11,216
Black Methodist Bodies	1,926	3,401	4,650
Other Methodists	41	—	—
Presbyterians:			
(U.S.) Southern	2,496	3,259	4,133
(U.S.A.) Northern	—	—	1,064
Cumberland	—	1,989	929
Other	1,123	—	—
Church/Disciples of Christ:			
Disciples	2,400	1,438	2,070
Church of Christ	—	2,662	3,946
Episcopal:	953	1,574	1,789
Other Protestants:	567	2,336	3,169
Roman Catholic:	6,000	5,865	5,845
Greek Orthodox:	—	150	—
Jewish:	290	275*	350
Total:	30,195	44,198	60,506

SOURCES: U.S. Census Office, Department of Interior, *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States at the 11th Census, 1890* (Washington, D.C., 1894), 112–13; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce and Labor, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, pt. I (Washington, D.C., 1910), 374–405; and idem., *Religious Bodies, 1916*, pt. I (Washington, D.C., 1919), 442–44.

*Jews in 1906 include “heads of families only” according to the census.

Figure 4.1: “Nashville’s Religious Affiliations, 1890, 1906, 1916”

Source: Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 123.

Just as in the rest of the country, the Catholic Church in Tennessee experienced hard times during and after the American Civil War. During the war, several buildings in Nashville owned by the Catholic Church had been utilized for the war effort. Among these, the Church of the Assumption in Nashville turned into a field hospital, while other buildings including St. Mary’s Orphan Asylum were destroyed.¹⁸ During the war, St. Cecilia Academy attempted to complete its foundational buildings, on which construction had started shortly before the war began. As the Civil War moved into Middle Tennessee, the Sisters at St. Cecilia watched as “[Federal] troops surrounded the convent, and at last

¹⁸ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 166.

while the battle of Nashville was in balance and the death dealing cannon boomed from morning sun until night, and the Sisters knelt at the alter [in their little chapel] and prayed.”¹⁹ Though the school survived, it felt the devastation of the war, as the economic impact caused a drop in tuition payments, with many not able to pay what they owed.²⁰ Throughout the late nineteenth century, St. Cecilia continued to grow and flourish, and in 1884, “the community had made its last payment toward the debt covered by the diocese. Now, increases in the numbers of both Sisters and students necessitated another building project and so the chapel and additional convent quarters were constructed in 1888.”²¹ The school survived many difficulties and trials during the nineteenth century, and still flourishes in Nashville.

The end of the war also brought about the appointment of a new Bishop of Nashville: Patrick Augustine Feehan.²² To say that Patrick Feehan had an impact on Nashville, as well as Tennessee, is an understatement. Soon after his appointment he became a pivotal force in working towards the advancement and improvement of Catholicism and its organizations. During his time in Nashville, Feehan facilitated the “organization in Nashville of the St. Vincent de Paul Society ... the rebuilding of the

¹⁹ Sister Aloysius Mackin, “Wartime Scenes From Convent Windows: St. Cecilia, 1860 Through 1865,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1980): 418.

²⁰ “Foundation in 1860,” *Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia*, <http://www.nashville.dominican.org/community/congregation-history/foundation-in-1860/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 167.

south Nashville orphanage ... [and] bought what is now Calvary Cemetery.”²³ He was supported in these endeavors by other Catholics, as on the day of the dedication of Calvary Cemetery, he was accompanied by “members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Society of the St. Mary’s Orphan Asylum, the St. Joseph’s Total Abstinence Society, the school children from the Sisters of Mercy School, and ‘carriages containing citizens.’”²⁴ Under his leadership, Tennessee saw the construction of six new Catholic schools and twenty-four new churches.²⁵ The sites of these included Nashville, Memphis, Gallatin, Clarksville, Franklin, Pulaski, and Jackson.²⁶ Many of these churches and schools had Irish members, including St. Patrick in Memphis, and St. Columba in Nashville.²⁷ Feehan would remain the Bishop of Nashville from 1865 until 1880.²⁸ According to historian Thomas Stritch, Feehan related well to the Irish population within the city, as he had been born in Ireland. The time period that Feehan served as bishop was prosperous and, Stritch notes, “an era of opening new schools, of going to church more regularly, of evolving urban ways of living, of emphasis on rule and regulation and authority, yet with growing awareness of the need for compassion and charity.”²⁹

²³ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 169.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 169-170.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “Former Bishops,” *The Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville*, <http://dioceseofnashville.com/former-bishops>.

²⁹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 174-175.

Following Feehan's departure, Nashville went without a bishop until 1883, when Joseph Rademacher was named as the new Bishop of Nashville.³⁰ Rademacher was of German heritage, which occasionally resulted in disagreement or disdain from the Irish Catholic population in Nashville. Historian Thomas Stritch posits that these tensions might also have been the result of other substantial changes, for "the war's aftermath, the first Vatican Council, the yellow fever, the new schools and religious orders and their institutions, made his episcopate eventful."³¹ It was not that Rademacher was not welcome, or that he did not accomplish much during his tenure, which lasted until 1893. Rather, he "built thirteen churches and five schools. He opened two cemeteries and helped establish three hospitals."³² These included St. Vincent's Hospital, Chattanooga; St. Genevieve's, Dayton; and St. Mary's, Memphis, as well as the renovation and expansion of older structures, including St. Cecilia Academy in Nashville.³³ Just as with Feehan, the institutions constructed during Rademacher's tenure were heavily populated by the Irish, especially St. Joseph's Church, which was predominantly Irish. Part of this might have been due to the time in which he was Bishop of Nashville, during the 1880s, which was a "time of quiet, of getting used to the new industrialism in the north and middle west, while the far west opened up and the south groped for a new identity."³⁴ Rademacher's duration as Bishop of Nashville occurred during a time period that did not

³⁰ "Former Bishops."

³¹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 207.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 207-208.

³⁴ Ibid., 207.

help much with the Catholic Church's advancement within Nashville, as the city and the state were recovering from the Civil War and Reconstruction

In Knoxville, Catholics formed congregations and built churches to provide places of worship for the large quantities of Irish who came to the city to find work on the railroad. In 1855, Immaculate Conception Church, located at the "corner of Vine and Walnut" became the "first Catholic church in East Tennessee."³⁵ As more Irish moved to East Tennessee after the Civil War to work on the expanding railroads in the region. Irish residents in Knoxville called for an additional church for their region. Thus, St. Patrick's Church was established in 1870, on College Street in Greeneville, northeast of Knoxville, which "was served by the staff of Immaculate Conception Church in Knoxville."³⁶ The establishment of a church had been so crucial to the Irish railroad workers that they raised the funds needed to build the church, and on the day of its dedication "the railroad granted half-fare rates so that Catholics of East Tennessee could attend the dedication. Former President Andrew Johnson, a resident of Greeneville, who had donated \$500 toward the construction, was himself seated on the front row."³⁷

³⁵ Jack Neely, "St. Patrick's Day in Knoxville," *Knoxville Mercury*. March 10, 2016, sec. Knoxville History, <http://www.knoxmercury.com/2016/03/10/st-patricks-day-in-knoxville/> and *Knoxville, Tennessee, City Directory, 1880*, Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line], Provo, Utah, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011, 175.

³⁶ "Notre Dame Parish History," *Notre Dame Catholic Church*, <http://notredamechurchtn.org/history.html>.

³⁷ *Ibid.* and Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 26.

Memphis became the home of another St. Patrick's Catholic Church in the decade following the Civil War. However, there was a Catholic and Irish presence in Memphis in the early nineteenth century. Perhaps the most well-known figure is Irish-born Eugene Magevney.³⁸ Magevney was instrumental in the founding of Catholic institutions in Memphis. In 1833, he founded a boys school, that became known for its "“excellent Irish gentleman and scholar”" reputation.³⁹ Magevney participated in, and largely orchestrated, the beginnings of the Catholic Church in Memphis, as the first Catholic Mass in the city served in the late 1830s on an "improvised altar" in his home, which was also the site of the first Catholic baptism, of his daughter, in 1841.⁴⁰ Memphis's first official Catholic Church began in 1841 with the construction of St. Peter's "at the corner of Third and Adams."⁴¹ Eugene Magevney died in the 1873 yellow fever epidemic that swept through the city, but the Magevney House stands as a historical site and a reference to the city's Catholic heritage.⁴²

Due to the large presence of Irish immigrants in Memphis, the Diocese of Nashville saw the need for another Catholic church. The church was located at "De Soto,

³⁸ Charles W. Crawford and Robert M. McBride, "The Magevney House, Memphis," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1969): 345.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 348.

southwest corner Linden” in Memphis.⁴³ St. Patrick’s was established in particular for the “numerous Irish” that had come to the city.⁴⁴ The church survived the racial turmoil and the yellow fever epidemic that wreaked havoc on Memphis. The city saw substantial growth in the years after the Civil War, as schools and churches were founded, and those already in business were doing well, as “St. Mary’s was thriving under the Franciscan fathers and sisters.”⁴⁵

Chattanooga experienced perhaps the largest and most substantial growth after the Civil War in terms of the Catholic population and industrial growth. During the 1870s, several institutions and buildings were built to serve the city’s rapidly growing Catholic population, including a “new church, rectory, and convent for the Dominican sisters from Nashville, who sent its first foundation to Chattanooga in 1876. They established there a select school for girls, on the model of Nashville’s St. Cecilia, named Notre Dame de Lourdes.”⁴⁶

Numerous Catholic churches stood in the city of Nashville. Among them was St. Joseph’s Church, which became a “symbol of the dominant Irish.”⁴⁷ The church was strategically located, near the railroad tracks that employed a significant number of Irish

⁴³ *Memphis, Tennessee, City Directory, 1880*, Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line], Provo, Utah, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011, 34.

⁴⁴ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 102.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

workers. Indeed, the need for a church closer to what was referred to as “Little Ireland” was the reason for its construction.⁴⁸ Opening its doors in 1886, the building functioned as both a church and a school. St. Joseph’s “seated nearly six hundred, which made it the largest in the city ... Most of all it was church and club for the Irish.”⁴⁹ A 1945 newspaper article published in *The Tennessean* detailed the history of St. Joseph’s. Referencing the church’s beginning, it describes the first Sunday in the new building located at Hynes and North McNairy, present day Hynes Street and Twelfth Avenue, as filled with “accents thick with County Kilkenny and County Cork.”⁵⁰ St. Joseph’s was located “in the heart of West Nashville’s ‘Little Ireland,’ as the logical choice for a new parish to serve the railroaders whose headquarters were the new Union Station.”⁵¹ The church closed its doors in 1943, and the land was soon purchased by Nashville Electric Service. Historian Thomas Stritch notes that “the Irish of the period from 1880-1920 loved St. Joseph’s and its setting as one loves his home place. It was there they became more prosperous, there they emerged more American than Irish, there they met and married one another ... [in] Nashville St. Joseph’s became a symbol.”⁵²

Catholic religious values inspired some Irish Tennesseans to form lay organizations that provided both spiritual and social benefits to their members. One

⁴⁸ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵⁰ “Parish with a Past,” *The Tennessean*, September 9, 1945, Newspapers.com.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 221.

Catholic organization directly affiliated with the Catholic Church in Nashville was St. Mary's Orphan Association, which stemmed from the Catholic run orphanage in Nashville. St. Mary's Orphanage was founded in 1864 as a result of the conflict and violence of the Civil War. Yet "less than seven months from the establishment ... the Sisters and children were forced to flee their new home on the night of December 1, 1864, taking refuge in the basement of Saint Mary's Cathedral for four weeks. The bombed-out orphanage was rebuilt in 1865" at the current location of Trevecca Nazarene University.⁵³ In the 1870s, the Orphan Association met "on the first Sunday of every month, in the basement of the Cathedral," according to the city directory, and the orphanage itself was "situated east of Murfreesboro Pike, about one mile from the Corporation Line. Under the charge of the Sisters of the Dominican Order."⁵⁴ An 1890 Nashville newspaper article describes the building as it was rebuilt after the Civil War, stating "it is a two-story brick building, spacious and substantially constructed, with ten large rooms and a well appointed chapel," and that approximately six Dominican Sisters were in charge. The article indicates how important establishments like the orphanage were to the diocese.⁵⁵

Schools were another area where Irish Catholics emerged in full force. Desiring that their children attend institutions that nurtured the Catholic faith, Tennessee Catholics

⁵³ Mother Frances Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Growth and Development of Saint Cecilia Congregation* (Nashville: Saint Cecilia Congregation, 2001), photos section 26.

⁵⁴ *Nashville City Directory*, vol. 10 (Nashville, Tennessee: Wheeler, Marshall, and Bruce Publishers, 1874), 80.

⁵⁵ "Miter and Crosier," *Daily American*, January 12, 1890, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpnashvilletennessean/docview/928251495/DD6731C3B2E14AC6PQ/1?accountid=2804>.

established many schools in the mid-to-late 1800s. While Catholic leaders tried to secure state aid for Catholic schools, for the more rural areas in Tennessee that had large Irish populations “the Catholic parochial schools were the public schools until well into” the twentieth century.⁵⁶ These schools were typically built and run by parish priests and nuns, who were members of teaching orders. The nuns often became the leading figures in Catholic parochial education, thus for a period there were more schools that catered to female students than to male students.⁵⁷ Most schools were single-sex as well. A second reason for the gender divide in Catholic schooling has to do with the geographic setting of the American South, which had a long tradition of “the cultivation of the feminine graces through women’s schools.”⁵⁸

This gender differentiation is especially clear in the number of Catholic schools present in the Diocese of Nashville. The city of Nashville did not have “an adequate Catholic high school for boys until the mid-1920s.”⁵⁹ The lack of secondary education for Catholic males forced them to find education in other locations, whether local public schools or Catholic boarding schools in other states.⁶⁰ This delay in Catholic education opportunities for males was not for a lack in trying, as “half a dozen religious communities of men were approached through the years ... All evidenced some interest,

⁵⁶ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 180.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

but none ever came to Nashville.”⁶¹ As the years went by, this changed completely, as Tennessee currently has numerous Catholic parochial schools for both male and female students.

Like churches, Catholic schools stood across the state but were concentrated in the city hubs of Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville. While they varied in size, the goal of the schools was to protect the Catholic youth from the influence of those outside of their faith.⁶² Many of these schools were directly affiliated with the Catholic Church, as they were shepherded by the Diocese of Nashville and the bishops there. Bishop Feehan himself believed that “the future of religion ... depended mainly on the Catholic schools,” and some of these Catholic schools were also established with a mindset to maintain an Irish, and Catholic, identity among their students.⁶³ Historian Don H. Doyle states that through St. Joseph’s Church in a largely Irish section of the city, “a church-sponsored school served the growing population of Catholic children, whose parents were suspicious of public school education.”⁶⁴ As they were denied state funding, they called upon their congregations and the Catholic population as one of the means of securing income for school operations. The church leaders were determined and “never wavered in their ideal of [having] every Catholic child in a Catholic elementary school, however

⁶¹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 183.

⁶² Timothy Walch, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 2003), 31.

⁶³ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 183.

⁶⁴ Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 102.

costly and impractical.”⁶⁵ Bishop Feehan advocated for schools, as when he left his position as bishop of the Diocese of Nashville, “every church with a resident pastor had its own parish school and the orphans had found a father in Bishop Feehan.”⁶⁶

One of the most well-known Catholic schools in Nashville is St. Cecilia Academy. St. Cecilia was founded in Nashville in 1860 by the Dominican Sisters. Four Sisters from Somerset, Ohio came to Nashville in 1860 with the purpose of founding the school.⁶⁷ Several of the Catholic leaders in Nashville associated with St. Cecilia, were natives of Ireland. These included Bishop James Whelen, Father Joseph Augustine Kelly, Father Michael Dominic Lilly, and Bishop Patrick Augustine Feehan.⁶⁸ Though the formation of the school was affected by the Civil War, the school was able to continue, and the construction of its building in 1862 made it the “only nonmilitary building completed [in the area] during the war.”⁶⁹ St. Cecilia served as a boarding school in the nineteenth century, and soon acquired many students. In 1874, the school was listed in the *Nashville City Directory* as “St. Cecilia’s Academy for Young Ladies ... situated at Mt. Vernon near Nashville ... [with] Mother Ann Hanlon Mother Superior.”⁷⁰ The 1880

⁶⁵ Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 181.

⁶⁶ “Story of a Church,” *Daily American*, July 29, 1894.

⁶⁷ *Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, Nashville, Tennessee: St. Cecilia Motherhouse, 2000, 12.

⁶⁸ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Growth and Development of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, photos section 23-27.

⁶⁹ *Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 13.

⁷⁰ *Nashville City Directory*, vol. 10 (Nashville, Tennessee: Wheeler, Marshall, and Bruce Publishers, 1874).

Nashville City Directory lists the school as being situated at “Mt. Vernon, N. Nashville.”⁷¹ St. Cecilia Academy was originally a boarding school, and still stands as a popular Catholic school within Nashville.⁷² The school itself states that “music and art were important areas of emphasis from the outset, as St. Cecilia is the patron saint of the arts. Early courses of study included painting, sculpture, pottery, piano and harp along with core courses in math, science, history, English, and religion,” showing that the female children of the Irish in Tennessee could receive an education that covered numerous areas and subjects.⁷³

⁷¹ *Nashville Directory*, vol. 16 (Nashville, Tennessee: Marshall & Bruce, 1880), 51.

⁷² “About St. Cecilia,” *St. Cecilia Academy*, <http://www.stcecilia.edu/page.cfm?p=604>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

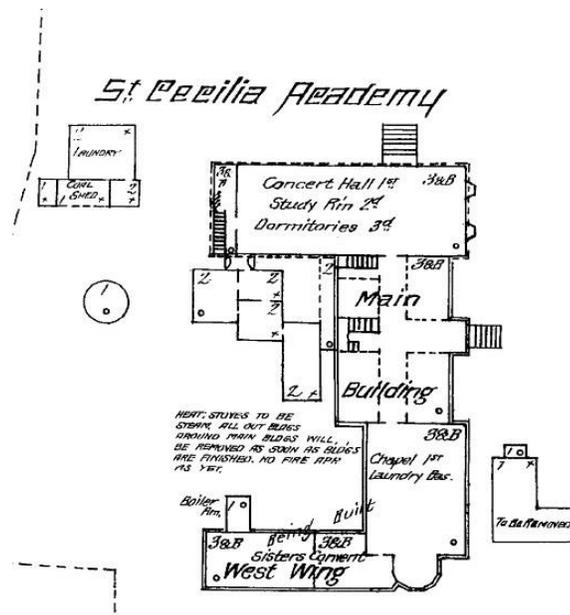


Figure 4.2: St. Cecilia Academy as depicted on an 1888 Sanborn Map
 Source: Digital Sanborn Maps, James E. Walker Library, Middle Tennessee State University

Many of the Catholics of Nashville and the surrounding area sent their daughters to St. Cecilia Academy, as “Catholic girls had been docile to religious instruction, zealous in frequenting the holy Sacraments, faithful in attending Mass and were thankful for the gift of Faith in the one true Church.”⁷⁴ While the school attracted many Catholics, it also drew in those of other religious denominations, as “three-fourths of the students were non-Catholics. There were Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists...all living together in perfect harmony.”⁷⁵ According to the 1870 census, St. Cecilia housed eleven Sisters, as well as Ann Hanlon as Mother Superior. Of these twelve women, seven

⁷⁴ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 24-25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

of them were Irish-born.⁷⁶ In 1870, the school housed nine students, with one having been born in Ireland, and five others had parents of foreign birth.⁷⁷ The 1880 census shows Ann Hanlon in charge of St. Cecilia. Fourteen teachers were employed by the school, teaching subjects including music, painting, languages, and fancy work. Only Ann Hanlon and Augusta Garry, a language teacher, were natives of Ireland. In 1880, twelve students lived at the school, and all were born in the United States. St. Cecilia also employed women to other positions including housework, seamstress, laundress, and handling domestic affairs. Of the ten women employed at the school, seven were Irish-born, as well as the two men who were employed there, one of whom was the janitor.⁷⁸

Members of the Catholic Church in Nashville frequently supported St. Cecilia. One example is Philip Olwill, who was heavily involved in the school, including serving as the President of the Saint Cecilia Academy Association. He became so close to the staff and students of the school that upon his death he was often called the “Orphan’s

⁷⁶ “United States Census, 1870,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-6SLB-HT?cc=1438024&wc=92KQ-PYM%3A518655501%2C518825001%2C518904801> : 22 May 2014), Tennessee > Davidson > image 84 of 116; citing NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “United States Census, 1880,” database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYBC-CQS?cc=1417683&wc=QZ27-18S%3A1589414125%2C1589411183%2C1589404963%2C1589395253> : 24 December 2015), Tennessee > Davidson > District 13 > image 79 of 91; citing NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

Friend.”⁷⁹ Philip Olwill was involved in the St. Mary’s Orphan Association, and was elected its president in 1871.⁸⁰ An 1896 Nashville newspaper article detailing the Catholic and St. Cecilia response and memorial to his death describes Irish-born Philip Olwill as “one of Nashville’s oldest merchants and best citizens” and that “he was one of the founders of that noble charity St. Mary’s Orphan Asylum of this city and contributed most liberally of his time and money to its support.”⁸¹ St. Cecilia did so well that “East Nashville applied for the Sisters to conduct its parochial school.”⁸² This request from East Nashville would lead to the establishment of St. Columba School, which was organized and run by the Dominican Sisters.⁸³ St. Columba Parochial School was located on S. Fifth, at the corner of Bass Street, while St. Columba’s Church sat at 520 Main Street in Nashville.⁸⁴ St. Columba’s Church formed out of St. John the Evangelist Church, 1871, Michael Meagher, an Irish native, was sent to help start St. Columba’s. St. Columba’s School opened in 1873, and in 1877 “St. Cecilia Dominicans staff[ed] the school.”⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, photos section 27.

⁸⁰ “The City,” *Nashville Union and American*, January 3, 1871, Chronicling America.

⁸¹ “Late Philip Olwill,” *The Nashville American*, June 20, 1896.

⁸² Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 85.

⁸³ Ibid., 141 and “The Catholic Parish of Edgefield (East Nashville),” *Holy Name Catholic Church*, <http://www.holyname nashville.com/15>.

⁸⁴ *Nashville Directory*, vol. 16 (Nashville, Tennessee: Marshall & Bruce, 1880), 435 and 506.

⁸⁵ “The Catholic Parish of Edgefield (East Nashville).”

In Chattanooga, Dominican Sisters from St. Cecilia began the Notre Dame School in 1876. The Sisters came to the city to establish a parochial school. Chattanooga was selected as the next area for Catholic education expansion due to its rapidly increasing population.⁸⁶ In 1880, the school sat at the “south side [of] Gilmer, east of Georgia Avenue” and was “for the education of young ladies and children.”⁸⁷ The enrollment and attendance at the school quickly grew, so much so that a new building needed to be built to accommodate the large number of students.⁸⁸ The school had to close for a time in 1878 due to the outbreak of yellow fever in the state.⁸⁹ Notre Dame School became a “co-educational parochial school” in 1898.⁹⁰ The school did so well in the years after yellow fever and cholera that “the only select school—Episcopal—in the city was compelled to close so great a number of its pupils had left and entered Notre Dame Academy.”⁹¹ The

⁸⁶ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 133.

⁸⁷ *Chattanooga, Tennessee, City Directory, 1880*, Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line], Provo, Utah, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011, 29.

⁸⁸ “History of Notre Dame,” *Notre Dame High School*, <http://www.myndhs.com/about/historyofnotredame.cfm>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 138.

school's mascot currently is the "Fighting Irish," showing the Irish presence that existed in the state.⁹²

Memphis was the home of another of the better known Catholic schools. Christian Brothers College opened in November 1871 at 282 Adams Street with the aim to educate "boys from the age of eight through college."⁹³ This school stood out as one of the few Catholic based schools dedicated to the education, especially the higher education, of boys. The city also housed St. Agnes Academy, which was formed in 1851, and sat at "Vance near Orleans" in 1880.⁹⁴ St. Agnes Academy's buildings and campus also housed orphans "until 1864 when the Dominican Sisters opened St. Peter's Orphanage."⁹⁵ Prior to 1882, St. Peter's Orphanage was housed on the "north side Henry avenue, east of Dunlap," and in 1882, it acquired a new location, and moved to "about two and a half miles out on the Poplar street boulevard."⁹⁶ Both Christian Brothers College and St. Agnes Academy survived the devastating yellow fever epidemic that engulfed Memphis

⁹² "Norte Dame Fighting Irish," *Notre Dame High School*, <http://www.ndchattathletics.com/>.

⁹³ "History of Christian Brothers High School," *Christian Brothers High School*, <http://www.cbhs.org/About-Us/History> and *Memphis, Tennessee, City Directory, 1880*, 28.

⁹⁴ *Memphis, Tennessee, City Directory, 1880*, 28.

⁹⁵ "A Look Back," *Saint Agnes Academy*, <http://www.saasds.org/page.cfm?p=508>.

⁹⁶ *Memphis, Tennessee, City Directory, 1880*, 29 and "A Noble Institution," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 13, 1882, *Chronicling America*.

in the 1870s. Sisters from St. Cecilia, Sisters Ann and Teresa, went to the Saint Agnes Convent in Memphis to help out there.⁹⁷

The Dominican Sisters who were involved in the founding of St. Cecilia and St. Agnes worked hard to establish other schools throughout Tennessee. These included, but were not limited to, St. Mary's School in Clarksville (1887) and St. Mary's School and Convent in Jackson (1889).⁹⁸ They were not the only female religious order active in the state. Bishop Patrick Feehan had lobbied for the Sisters of Mercy to establish a section in Nashville, which was accomplished in 1866.⁹⁹ This group was influential in founding and running Catholic schools. They established St. Mary's Parochial School in 1867, which operated until the 1930s. According to the *Nashville City Directory*, the school was "situated on Vine Street, opposite the west front of the State Capitol. The female and junior department [were] under charge of the Sisters of Mercy" and the school "taught, besides the ordinary English branches, Geometry, Algebra, Book Keeping, and Latin."¹⁰⁰ The Sisters of Mercy also acquired buildings for their own residence, and then opened St. Bernard's Academy.¹⁰¹ In 1874, the academy sat "on Cedar Street, opposite south of the

⁹⁷ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 67.

⁹⁸ *Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 17.

⁹⁹ Kathleen Healy, *Frances Warde: American Founder of the Sisters of Mercy* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973) and Kathleen Healy, *Sisters of Mercy: Spirituality in America, 1843-1900* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁰ *Nashville City Directory*, 1874.

¹⁰¹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 186.

State Capitol” and was “in [the] charge of the Sisters of Mercy,” and the 1880 *Nashville City Directory* gives an address of 116 Cedar Street.”¹⁰²

Catholic religious orders would provide critical humanitarian aid during the epidemics of yellow fever broke that out in Memphis throughout the 1870s.¹⁰³ While other southern and Tennessee cities experienced episodes of the disease, Memphis was hardest hit.¹⁰⁴ Many fled the city in hopes of escaping the disease, but Catholic priests and nuns rushed to help the sick and dying. The Irish population in Memphis was relatively large compared to other Tennessee cities, and many of these Irish immigrants were among the poorer, working classes. This meant that they often did not have the resources or ability to flee the city when the fever broke out, thus the epidemic struck them with especial force. In the 1873 epidemic, 2,000 died from the disease, approximately half of them Irish.¹⁰⁵ Many Protestant leaders fled with the general public, while the Catholic leadership “remained at their posts, nursing the fever victims, bringing them the last rites of the Church.”¹⁰⁶ The Catholic priests and nuns who stayed could not escape the wrath of the epidemic. Approximately fifty nuns and twenty-one priests

¹⁰² *Nashville City Directory*, 1874, 271 and *Nashville Directory*, 1880, 51.

¹⁰³ According to Thomas Stritch in his work *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 194: Memphis experienced 2,000 deaths from yellow fever in 1873, 5,150 in 1878, and 600 in 1879.

¹⁰⁴ For more information on the yellow fever epidemic in Memphis, see James L. Dickerson, “Memphis Almost Disappears,” in *Yellow Fever: A Deadly Disease Poised to Kill Again*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 2006), 61-102 and Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 193-202.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

succumbed to yellow fever epidemics in Memphis during the 1870s.¹⁰⁷ Five Sisters from St. Cecilia in Nashville traveled to Memphis to nurse the sick, having previously nursed Nashville's cholera victims in 1871.¹⁰⁸ In 1878, Dominican Sisters came to Chattanooga and set up a hospital for the yellow fever victims, while others set up a "detention camp" back in Nashville for those ill with the disease.¹⁰⁹ Approximately sixty orphans were sent from Memphis to Nashville's St. Mary's Orphanage around the time of the 1878 yellow fever outbreak.¹¹⁰

The epidemic hindered the growth of Memphis, in terms of population as well as prosperity. The city's population went from approximately 40,000 before the 1873 epidemic to around 19,000 afterwards.¹¹¹ The Catholic Church in the city was not exempt from this, as the city that had at one time been "the most Catholic city in the state," never again surpassed other southern cities in terms of Catholic numbers and growth.¹¹² Yellow

¹⁰⁷ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 197.

¹⁰⁸ *Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁰ "Foundation in 1860," *Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia*, <http://www.nashvilledominican.org/community/congregation-history/foundation-in-1860/>.

¹¹¹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 195-197.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 202.

fever had a significant impact on the state of Tennessee and the Irish living there, but other diseases played a role as well.¹¹³

Nashville fell victim to a cholera epidemic that swept the state in 1873. Just as with yellow fever, Nashville's citizen quickly fled the city with the outbreak of cholera, fleeing to the countryside while the Catholic nuns and organizations helped those who were suffering.¹¹⁴ With the wealthier citizens being able to afford doctors and hospitals, or leave the city, the poor were left without adequate care or attention. The Dominican Sisters at St. Cecilia's risked their own health and lives to take care of those who had no other options. The Sisters entered the quiet streets of Nashville to help the destitute, as "every where was the quiet of a graveyard. Not a sound, save the rumbling of wagons filled with coffins or boxes...it was said that on that day there were one hundred and twenty-five funerals in Nashville."¹¹⁵ The Sisters worked tirelessly nursing and caring for the sick. Mother Frances Walsh, in her account of the history of St. Cecilia recollected that "night and day the nurses worked and watched until they fell from utter exhaustion,"

¹¹³ For more information on yellow fever in general and in Tennessee, see Molly Caldwell Crosby, *The American Plague: The Untold Story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic That Shaped Our History* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006); S Rulin Bruesch, and Tennessee Medical Association, *Yellow Fever in Tennessee in 1878* (Nashville: Tennessee Medical Association, 1979); J. M. Keating, *A History of the Yellow Fever: The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878, in Memphis, Tenn.* (Memphis, Tennessee: The Howard Association, 1879); and Jeanette Keith, *Fever Season: The Story of a Terrifying Epidemic and the People Who Saved a City* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).

¹¹⁴ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 107.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

and several succumbed to both yellow fever and cholera.¹¹⁶ The efforts of these Sisters show the determination and devotion of those within the Catholic Church to protect and aid, not only their congregation, but their entire community and state as well. While those in Catholic leadership focused their efforts on nursing and ministering to those sick with cholera, newspapers throughout Tennessee published articles detailing methods for cholera prevention. *The Milan Exchange* featured a fifteen-step process for preventing becoming ill with the disease. These steps ranged from advice on cleanliness and sanitation to what to avoid if cholera infiltrated the community. The final step read “Do not be frightened. For one who dies of cholera in the worst years two dies every year of typhoid and similar preventable diseases. No one who gets into a panic gives himself a chance.”¹¹⁷

The state of Tennessee became home to many Irish and Catholic organizations as the nineteenth century progressed. The Knights of Columbus quickly found its way to Tennessee. The group began as Father Michael J. McGivney, of Connecticut, established the organization in October 1881 to address the need for a Catholic organization and sense of community.¹¹⁸ Similarly to other Catholic organizations including the Catholic Knights of America, the Knights of Columbus strove to keep men from falling prey to other groups whose premise strayed from the beliefs and goals of the Catholic Church, as

¹¹⁶ Walsh, *A Short Sketch of the Foundation and Growth of Saint Cecilia Congregation*, 114.

¹¹⁷ Tennessee State Board of Health, “The Cholera and How to Prevent It,” *The Milan Exchange*, August 2, 1884, *Chronicling America*.

¹¹⁸ “The Founding: 1882-1899,” *Knights of Columbus*, <http://www.kofc.org/en/todays-knights/history/1882-1899.html>.

it endeavored to “unite men of Catholic faith and to provide for the families of deceased members.”¹¹⁹ As a Catholic organization, the Knights furthered traditional Catholic values and beliefs, and their meetings served as a place for Catholic, and Irish, men to congregate. A leader of the organization believed the Knights should encompass words like patriotism and charity, combining Catholic and American values.¹²⁰ Historian Thomas Stritch details the Tennessee branches of the Knights, stating “the Nashville #1 branch was followed in quick succession by many others; in a dozen years the membership grew to seventeen thousand.”¹²¹ Nashville was the home for two branches of the Catholic Knights of America in 1880, which met each Sunday. Branch One met “at Odd Fellows Hall,” while Branch Three met “at Neylan’s Hall.”¹²² By 1881, the organization had grown, and Nashville became home to Branch Sixty-Eight as well, with it meeting at two Sundays a month at the “Catholic School-house, E. Nashville.”¹²³

Other organizations included the St. Joseph’s Total Abstinence Society, which predated the Knights of Columbus. The Nashville chapter was founded in 1868, and the organization quickly grew and spread to other Tennessee cities. The organization seems to have been particularly popular in Tennessee and among the Irish, and until the 1880s

¹¹⁹ “The Founding.”

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 176.

¹²² *Nashville Directory*. 1880, 516.

¹²³ *Nashville Directory*, vol. 17 (Nashville, Tennessee: Marshall & Bruce, 1881), 535.

“made up the most active lay society.”¹²⁴ St. Joseph’s Total Abstinence Society met on the “second and fourth Sunday of every month, in the Cathedral basement” in Nashville in 1880.¹²⁵ The society even held a ball on St. Patrick’s Day in Nashville, beginning in 1869.¹²⁶

Women had their own organizations, including some that had similarities to their male counterparts, although there is less evidence for them in Tennessee than for the men’s groups. Irish women participated in female Auxiliary clubs that, like men’s, worked to raise money and support for Ireland and the independence movement going on there.¹²⁷ Janet A. Nolan states that “Irish-American women were also active in the cause of Irish independence, a political movement of great importance to the Irish both at home and abroad in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”¹²⁸

Historian Thomas Stritch posits that organizations like these “were very important in the Americanization process. They gave their members a sense of belonging to this strange new world ... The newly made citizens reinforced one another by their membership.”¹²⁹ Other activities that reinforced Irish identity bridged politics and

¹²⁴ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 176-77.

¹²⁵ *Nashville Directory*. 1880, 524.

¹²⁶ “St. Patrick’s Day,” *Nashville Union and American*, January 11, 1870, *Chronicling America*.

¹²⁷ Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women’s Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 86.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹²⁹ Stritch, *The Catholic Church in Tennessee*, 176.

religion. Irish immigrants continued to celebrate traditional Irish holidays such as St. Patrick's Day. The holiday held importance for the Irish, especially those who supported Ireland's freedom from Great Britain. The holiday served as a time to remember one's ethnic roots, as money and support were raised for Irish and Catholic causes and organizations in the United States as well as in Ireland. Nashville celebrated St. Patrick's Day, as an "annual affair ... as early as 1838."¹³⁰ In the city of Knoxville, the holiday was celebrated by the Irish Catholics, especially the Fenian society. In 1869, the Fenians led a group as they "marched around downtown Knoxville with red caps and green jackets, bearing the emblazoned 'God Save Ireland.'"¹³¹ Parades were held in Memphis as well, and in 1870, an advertisement for the Memphis celebration stated that "a collection will be taken up in the Church, as usual, on St. Patrick's Day for the benefit of the St. Peter's Orphan Asylum."¹³² The celebration of St. Patrick's Day in the United States strengthened and continued the ties between the Irish and their homeland.

Churches, schools, religious organizations, and ethnic celebrations provided Irish immigrants with a group setting that held the same beliefs as they did and upheld values and attributes that were recognizable to the general American public. While the organizations and societies were largely Irish in their membership, the values and attributes that they upheld were recognizable to the general American public. They paved the way to Americanization, at least to some degree, of the Irish immigrants as they

¹³⁰ Flanagan, "The Irish Element in Nashville," 89.

¹³¹ Neely, "St. Patrick's Day in Knoxville."

¹³² "St. Patrick's Day: How It Will Be Celebrated in Memphis," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 16, 1870. Chronicling America.

began to become accepted members of society. Religion provided them with a comforting sense of familiarity that reminded them of their Irish roots. Religious schools, especially Catholic schools, provided the Irish with an opportunity to educate their children according to their beliefs, something that had been around in the United States for a long time for other denominations. Irish and Catholic organizations and celebrations allowed immigrants to keep their Irish identity while at the same time embracing American goals and values.

CONCLUSION

Irish immigrants played an important role in Tennessee's history. They settled all over the state, from small towns to large cities, and left their mark in each. Many of these places that they settled have a lasting Irish legacy that is not often known outside of some people in the town. The Irish had been coming to the state since before the Revolutionary War, and proved to be instrumental in Tennessee's history from the start. Thus a deeper understanding of the impact and experiences of Irish immigrants in the state of Tennessee, as well as the South, is crucial for a complete and overall understanding and interpretation of its history and its people. The Irish were a distinct ethnicity and immigrant group, and their experiences in Tennessee suggest the ways that they assimilated into the culture and society of this country and yet kept many of the attributes and characteristics associated with their ethnicity and Irish identity. For the most part, the Irish in Tennessee and the South seem to have adapted rather than fully assimilated.

Evidence from Tennessee suggests how Irish immigrants and first generation Irish Americans in a southern state could hold on to many Irish cultural traditions and values, thus allowing them to continue to feel connected to their families and homeland. The fact that many Irish immigrants in Tennessee lived in family settings indicates that family continued to play an integral role in Irish life. Gender provided another cultural link for many Irish immigrants. Irish women worked hard to establish their own place in their new country, as reflected by the young, single Irish women who were employed in a variety of occupations in Tennessee. The large number of Irish men working on the

railroads in the South bears witness to the economic and occupational opportunities they felt they could have by moving inland to Tennessee.

Work was important to the Irish, as earning money was a way to show one's independence and work their way up the social ladder for both men and women. Politics also provided an avenue toward acceptance for Irish men. Aligning with political parties gave some Irish men in Tennessee the chance to obtain jobs or political positions themselves.

Religion provided the Irish with perhaps one of the most comforting aspects of their transition and assimilation into American and southern society. The growth of the Catholic Church in Tennessee, both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects the increase in the number of Catholics within the state. The Catholic religion of many of Tennessee's Irish allowed them to keep traditional Irish customs and aspects, and suggests how they merged these with the cultural expectations of others in Tennessee. Education, particularly Catholic education, also played a role in the lives of Irish immigrants. Tennessee bears witness to this with several Catholic schools, including St. Cecilia Academy in Nashville and Christian Brothers High School in Memphis. These schools, as well as the numerous others, bear witness to the desire of many in the Irish community to educate their children within the Catholic faith. For this reason, numerous schools and other organizations, including Catholic orphanages were established.

Families were able to send their children to parochial schools and worship at local Catholic churches, and not be substantially persecuted and discriminated against for doing so. Furthermore, newspaper records show the continuation of Irish tradition and

values, as holidays and organizations including St. Patrick's Day and the Fenian Brotherhood provided a place and gathering for those of similar values and sentiments.

As the twentieth century began, the Irish still held a presence in Tennessee though, as with the rest of the county, immigrants from other areas of Europe began to steadily increase. Throughout the twentieth century, the number of Tennessee residents born in Ireland steadily decreased, and the first-generation and second-generation American-Irish emerged as the substantial Irish population.¹ By this time, the Irish appear to have become accepted members of southern and Tennessee society and culture. While the degree of adaptation and assimilation may have differed for Irish immigrants based on where they settled geographically in the country, those who made their way to Tennessee and the South found that work, family, and religion enabled them to thrive in the region.

¹ Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 101.

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