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The Irish in Rochester An Historical Retrospect

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

The Rochester visit last April of Robert Briscoe, Lord Mayor of Dublin, and the ceremonies staged in his honor both at the Chamber of Commerce and at Berith Kodesh Temple revived some tantalizing local memories. The cordiality with which Catholics, Jews and Protestants joined in these festivities and the favorable impression left by this Irishman who is at the same time an Orthodox Jew have prompted this effort to explore the role of the Irish in Rochester. The spirit was not always so friendly, neither here nor for that matter in Dublin, but a study of outgrown prejudices is often instructive. Perhaps this review of the hardships and animosities encountered by the Irish in Rochester many decades ago and of the methods by which they surmounted them will shed light on the city's history.

The Irish in the Flour City

Although several of the earliest pioneers in the Rochester region were of Irish descent, few gave it a thought. The major division at first was between the Yankees on the one hand, who hailed from New England and generally supported the Presbyterian Church, and on the other hand those who came from New York, Pennsylvania or Virginia and frequently identified themselves as Episcopalians. There were small contingents of other sects, including a few French Catholics from Canada, but they attracted little notice until a new influx of Irish Catholics by way of the St. Lawrence strengthened that last group. Curiously

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enough, the rise of this new minority terminated the earlier rivalry between Yankees and Yorkers and prompted them to develop a broader though still limited sense of unity.

If those pioneers whose ancestors hailed from Ireland had largely forgotten that fact in the excitement of establishing a new nation, the early settlers who migrated afresh from the Emerald Isle were eager enough to perpetuate their traditions. It was in the year of Rochester's incorporation as a village that the first of these arrived. They came by way of Canada with the initial wave of cottagers driven from the land by the enclosure movement and other changes in agriculture and land tenure. Craftsmen from the towns also joined the trek, some moving across the Irish Sea to the rising cities in Britain, others taking the longer passage to America. Many who followed the latter course blamed their hardships on the English, and even those who landed in Canada hastened to push on to an independent settlement in the States. Thus the Dowlings, the McDonalds, the Storeys, the Cochranes and others who reached the Genesee port in 1817 and after represented the vanguard of an epic movement.

Many arrived, like other settlers, with their resources depleted by the expense of the journey, but James Dowling, Patrick McDonald and Moses Cochrane each had sufficient funds to make a \$10.00 down payment on an acre of forest land on the east bank of the gorge, just north of the Main Falls. The sites they chose, valued at \$100.00, contained no water power or other urban advantages comparable to those at Rochesterville a half-mile to the south or at Carthage a mile further north. But their plots and that of John Campbell from Dublin, who arrived in 1820 and bought an acre where Platt Street runs today, bordered the road that joined the two settlements and mounted in value with the city's growth. The first log cabins they built served for a season or two until these enterprising men could erect frame houses nearby, when the cabins sheltered later migrants from Ireland. Soon a settlement, popularly known as Dublin, grew up in that vicinity, attracting so many newcomers that in 1823, when the village of Rochester extended its borders east of the river, it annexed the entire district.

The building of the Erie Canal attracted many of these workers, and its opening in the mid-twenties provided a new and convenient route for their entry. Some found jobs in the lumber and flour mills, many

more in the accessory cooper shops where they manufactured barrels for the millers or staves for shipment to distant ports. The Irish pioneers at Dublin increased to thirty families within a decade and more than doubled again before the city was incorporated in 1834. Some Irish families established homes elsewhere in the village, particularly to the south bordering the canal and on the westside near the site of St. Patrick's chapel erected in 1823 on Platt and Frank Streets. Although no accurate count is available, the Irish-born exceeded those from any other country and must have comprised a majority of the 800 alien males of 1830 when only a few of them had as yet secured citizen status.

Many of these newcomers were eager for full participation in community affairs. Their first organizational effort, the establishment of a church, commenced in 1820 when a visit by an itinerant priest spurred the creation of a board which supervised the construction of a chapel 42 by 38 feet in size. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 and of several other construction jobs during the next two years left many workmen unemployed, particularly among the poorer class of Irishmen. Some of their more fortunate countrymen and several whose early arrival had given them a firm start, banded together, in June 1828, to form an Hibernian Benevolent Society. The twelve charter members chose William Toen as chairman and John David Welsh as Secretary. Their purpose, as reported in the *Daily Advertiser*, was to raise a fund and designate agents to assist Irish newcomers find jobs and meet other emergencies.

The "other emergencies" soon absorbed the attention of Irishmen in Rochester and throughout the country with more controversial matters. A small group of zealots who had founded the Rochester *Observer*, a weekly religious paper, opened an attack on "Popery" in 1829. They were influenced, perhaps, by a similar agitation in New York City a few months earlier. When the *Observer* refused to publish the reply sent by Father Michael McNamara of St. Patrick's church, another young Irishman, Henry O'Reilly, editor of the *Advertiser*, gave him all the space he required in that daily. O'Reilly also took the lead among local supporters of Jackson in their efforts to withstand the onslaught of the anti-Masonic forces. Although O'Reilly and his cohorts, many of them of Irish birth, were unable to swing the village into the Jackson camp, they gave their opponents some alarm. Feelings rose to a threat-

ening point on both sides when vandals broke into St. Patrick's vestry in 1830, prompting the organization of a company of Irish Volunteers for self defense. In a lighter mood several families gathered for supper and dancing on St. Patrick's Day that March, a celebration which grew in popularity in succeeding years until two halls were required to hold the throngs by the end of the decade.

With increased numbers, the Irish were able to assume an active part in many community affairs. O'Reilly promoted and became a member of a canal enlargement committee which finally achieved its goal in 1838. He joined others in a campaign for improved public schools and helped to establish a Young Men's Association of which he became first president. Not in any sense an ethnic organization, that group welcomed young men of any background and soon joined with the Athenaeum and the Mechanics Association in the maintenance of the city's first library and lecture series. Few of his fellow countrymen achieved the early success enjoyed by O'Reilly, who became postmaster at Rochester in 1838 and wrote and published that same year the first historical book on the city — *Sketches of Rochester and Western New York*. Before he left for Albany and New York in the early forties, O'Reilly helped to bring forward some talented Irishmen, notably Patrick Barry the nurseryman who took an active interest in the Athenaeum among other broad community efforts. Barry, with his German-born partner George Ellwanger, also made Rochester the leading center in America of their important new industry, winning it the title of Flower City.

Under O'Reilly's leadership the Irish of Rochester had made rapid progress toward integration in the community. His address at one of the 1840 assemblages on St. Patrick's Day had in fact expressed gratitude for the cooperation of several English and Scottish residents in that celebration. Moreover the recently organized Hiberian Temperance Society was collaborating with other local groups in that earnest cause, and the Irish Volunteers marched with other militia units in the parade marking the Fourth of July in 1839.

Perhaps O'Reilly's political ambitions had helped engender this spirit of conciliation, but events abroad soon injected a new and disquieting issue. The revised Irish poor law of 1838 had subjected peasant land holders to such high taxes that a new era of distress and migration ensued. A wave of indignation swept through the Irish settlements in America, prompting a revival of such organizations as the Irish Vol-

unteers and the Hibernian Benevolent Society. These and other groups held meetings at which addresses attacking British tyranny took the place of earlier expressions of accord. The indignation was widespread and increased in intensity when Daniel O'Connell, who had founded the Loyal Association of Dublin to resist such acts, came to America to seek relief support. Rochester sent two delegates to a convention called in 1841 by the Irish societies of Philadelphia, and the delegates recommended, on their return, that Rochester maintain close ties with such groups in other cities. When, three years later, news arrived that mass meetings had been banned in Dublin and that O'Connell had been thrown into jail, a new outburst of indignation swept America. A plea for defense funds brought the first of a long series of Irish subscriptions in Rochester. Patrick Barry, George Dawson, John Allen (all friends of O'Reilly, now a leader in the movement at Albany) took the initiative in forming a local branch of the Irish Repeal Association and raised \$90.00 for O'Connell's defense. The announcement of his release brought a jubilant celebration at Rochester the next October.

Unfortunately this increased self-consciousness among Irish Americans sparked an outburst of resurgent nativism. The rivalry between Protestants and Catholics, in Rochester as in other growing cities, accentuated this division. Although not all immigrants, even from Ireland, were Catholics, their number was increasing rapidly. They had replaced the original St. Patrick's chapel by a larger one in 1830, but the new structure, built of stone in the Gothic style with a 13-foot cross surmounting its 110-foot tower, was soon, in its turn, so overcrowded that new churches were needed. The German Catholics built two, St. Joseph's and St. Peter's, and the Irish their second, St. Mary's, all during the forties when they also erected two parochial schools and an orphan asylum.

This thriving activity alarmed some zealous Protestants. A city-wide canvass by the Sabbath School Union brought out the astonishing fact in 1846 that the heads of nearly 4,000 of Rochester's 7,500 families were foreign born. Of these, over 45 per cent were Irish — more than any three other nationalities combined. The state census the year before had not separated the various strands that comprised the 5,813 Rochester residents from the British Empire, but a rough calculation based on the Sunday School survey suggests that two thirds of them must have hailed from Ireland. Although the native born numbered 19,500, the

majority of these were children, including many of foreign parents particularly in the lower-age brackets. The managers of the survey expressed great concern for the proper education of these youths.

The Irish as the most numerous immigrant group naturally occasioned the greatest concern. Their active participation in politics had already secured the post of First Judge of Monroe County for Patrick G. Buchan, and that of Whig alderman from the Fifth Ward for Joseph Cochrane, son of one of the Dublin pioneers and the only candidate able to break the Irish Democratic hold on that district. When the Irish societies renewed their drive for relief funds in the summer of 1847, the receipts reached \$2,647.06 and included Mayor Joseph Field's donation of \$100.00. The cause was the welfare of Irish peasants stricken anew by a devastating potato famine, but it had also become politic for a Democrat as mayor to head such a list.

The collections were renewed the next winter as the plight of those in the Old Country worsened. Some residents in Rochester were eager to send passage money to relatives or friends in Ireland, and John Rigney, who operated a grocery and liquor store at No. 13 South St. Paul Street (now South Avenue), established connections with the Royal Bank of Ireland at Liverpool to which he remitted these payments. Among those in Rochester who could now afford to send such drafts, enabling their friends in Ireland to secure tickets on the Black Ball line to New York, were the Kirleys, Philip and James, tanners who had purchased a lot on Main Street in the early days and were ready to erect the Kirley Block there in 1849.

Partly as a result of the widespread contributions, a new wave of migrants headed for America and many stopped off at Rochester. The city's total growth between 1850 and '55 was approximately 7,500 and more than half of these came from Ireland. Indeed the Irish-born doubled in these five years and with their children comprised a fourth of the population. Their number, with those from other strange lands, gave new alarm to some old residents who joined a nativist movement faintly disguised as the Know Nothing party. Dr. Maltby Strong, as its candidate, won the mayoralty in 1854, but Rochester escaped the outbursts that afflicted some other places under that regime and soon turned the city back to the Democrats among whom the Irish were becoming increasingly influential.

The impact of the Irish appeared in other fields as well. When Jeremiah O'Donovan an Irish poet reached Rochester during his travels in 1855, he characterized the city in his diary as "the promised land." Possibly that phrase was inspired by his recollection of an earlier visit to Rochester as a young immigrant two decades before. Now he marveled over the physical changes the years had brought and rejoiced to find some of his former acquaintances in happy circumstances. He was in quest of orders for his book on the history of Ireland and as an inveterate writer kept notes on those he interviewed. His comments on a score of them, as later published in a second edition of his history, reveal that one Irishman had risen to the head of the largest store in the city. He described another as the founder of a large clothing firm, and identified several more as grocers, meat merchants, furniture dealers and a variety of other tradesmen. O'Donovan found one Irish doctor in Rochester, and if his list had not been restricted to those who purchased his book, it could have included a few additional professional men. Meanwhile the poet's literary tastes drew him especially to Patrick O'Meara, a butcher whose great learning in history, philosophy and Irish literature had started a rumor that he was a refugee nobleman in disguise. A great reader, he had in fact been a member of the Young Ireland revolutionary clique which fled to America in 1847, but his talents were still unrecognized in the community at large.

The Irish in the Civil War and After

It was the Civil War that finally dispelled the anti-Irish feeling in Rochester. The enthusiasm with which many of them enlisted for the defense of their adopted country won new respect. Several companies in the 105th and the 140th New York State Regiments were composed at the start almost exclusively of Irish volunteers recruited by popular leaders of the colony in Rochester.

In the first instance Father Daniel Moore of St. Mary's Church requested a release from his pastoral duties to serve as chaplain of an Irish brigade to be enrolled in the city. The enlistments were proceeding with satisfactory speed when an urgent need for additional troops prompted the state to consolidate the first units of the projected brigade with those of another forming at nearby LeRoy into the 105th New York State Regiment. The Irish comprised three full companies headed by John McMahon, Patrick Bradley and Thomas Purcell as captains, and

Howard Carroll, a graduate of Dublin University, as Lt. Colonel. The 105th participated in several sharp battles in 1862, and Carroll, who had become Colonel, suffered a fatal wound at Antietam. The decimated regiment was consolidated with the 94th of New York the next March and served at Chancellorville, Gettysburg and on several later battlegrounds. In August, 1864, McMahon, now a Major, led 200 of his men, including twenty-one of Rochester's original Irish volunteers, in a brilliant charge that was credited with saving the entire division at Weldon Road.

Although the Irish at Rochester made no further attempt to recruit an exclusive company, they joined with others in many of the units raised in the area, including the 140th, popularly known as the Rochester Regiment and led by Colonel Patrick O'Rorke. O'Rorke had come to the city as a lad of nine two decades before. He had graduated at No. 9 school and had received one of two scholarships awarded by the newly opened University of Rochester. While he was debating the propriety, as a Catholic, of attending a Baptist college, his father, a laborer, was killed in an accident and his mother, who needed his help, persuaded him to take a job. After working for two years he received an appointment to West Point where he graduated at the head of his class in June 1861. As a captain he distinguished himself in several posts and was chosen to head the new regiment recruited in his home town in September 1862. Colonel O'Rorke led it with ability at Fredericksburg and Chancellorville, and at a crucial point in the battle of Gettysburg he rushed in with his men to hold Little Round Top and halt the southern onslaught at a cost of 37 lives including his own. Rochester's joy over that victory turned to grief on the receipt of this news, and the whole city mourned when Colonel O'Rorke's body was brought back twelve days later for a military funeral at St. Bridget's Church.

Other men, many of them Irish, carried the war to its ultimate triumph, but in Rochester the Irish had already won their victory. They indignantly repudiated the charge that most Copperheads were Irish-born and rejoiced when the Mason and Slidell affair turned many in the North against Great Britain and enabled their spokesmen to interpret the Union cause as anti-British. When a poor crop aggravated the famine in Ireland, Rochester responded generously, contributing almost \$5,000, which brought a new influx of emigrants, some of whom

promptly joined the armed forces. It was no longer popular to deprecate these hardy folk, and Washington Hall welcomed Professor McEvoy who exhibited the "Cyclorama of Ireland" for several weeks there in 1862 and returned two years later with his pictorial tour of that island, billed as "The Hibernicon."

Unfortunately the Irish pushed their cause too far for Rochester when some zealots formed a local Fenian Brotherhood and endeavored to enlist recruits for an invasion of Canada. Their objective, they maintained, was to strike a blow for freedom against Great Britain, not to injure the Canadian people. While only a few from the city participated in the expedition of June 1866 and the fiasco which followed, sympathetic supporters there raised \$1200 to defend the luckless adventurers. Responsible businessmen, led by Alfred Ely of Rochester, pledged a total of \$65,000 in bail for the thirty-one held as prisoners by the Federal authorities. Among them were Captain Reilly, Joseph P. Cleary and Alexander Connolly—Rochester veterans of the Civil War whose Irish ardor had now outrun their judgment. When their cases were finally dismissed, all were glad to forget the incident, and the local Fenian circle contented itself during the next few years with an occasional picnic or other meeting.

The Irish of Rochester had their attention redirected to local matters by the arrival in 1868 of Bernard J. McQuaid as first Bishop of the newly created Diocese of Rochester. Born of Irish parents in New York City, McQuaid contributed strength and dignity to the second generation Irish as well as to the Catholic Church. This is not the place to review his many services to the latter, but two major policies based on religious doctrine had a great effect on succeeding generations of Irish in Rochester. Most important was the emphasis he placed on the duty to provide a parochial school in each parish. Since his own youth, after the death of his parents, had been spent in an orphan asylum and at church schools, he had a staunch faith in such institutions and helped to foster their growth in Rochester. He endeavored however to keep them tied to the church, and the same feeling inspired his hostility to secret societies not similarly affiliated. His efforts to ban membership in these organizations brought him into conflict with some strong Irish groups, as we shall see, as well as such bodies as the Odd Fellows and other fraternal orders, which attracted Catholics as well as Protestants. In tardy recognition of the social impulses these institutions gratified,

he established church-sponsored societies and orders that increasingly absorbed the time and interest of active members of his Irish flock.

The Irish loyalty to the church had already been demonstrated by the contributions they made to the building fund of St. Patrick's cathedral. Patrick Barry had taken the lead in this effort when in 1863 a committee which he headed approved an expenditure of \$150,000 and chose a New York City Irishman, P. B. Kelly, as architect. The huge structure, the largest at Rochester in its day, was completed in time for Bishop McQuaid's ordination five years later.

The Irish were only indirectly involved in the controversies arising over religious instruction in the schools and other public institutions. However, that dispute may have helped to solidify the support of Irish as well as other Catholic families for parochial schools. Although Edith O'Gorman, the "escaped Nun" who visited Rochester at this time to spread her sensational story, was Irish, her verbal attack on the Bishop had no apparent effect on her fellow countrymen. Nor could the activities of the local branch of the Evangelical Alliance have had much impact, despite its indictment of "Romanism," for Catholic institutions continued to prosper. Indeed, William Purcell, veteran of the Irish brigade and editor of the *Union and Advertiser*, was able with the support of his bishop to persuade the board of managers of the Western House of Refuge, of which he was a member, to engage a Catholic as well as a Protestant chaplain in 1874.

The position of the Irish in Rochester, even within the Church, was greatly affected, in turn, by the coming of many new immigrants from other Catholic lands. The Germans, who had begun to arrive in large numbers before the Civil War — scarcely a step behind the Irish — finally surpassed the latter during the seventies. While they were less exclusively Catholic in faith, their devotion soon gave the churches they attended a vigor that the Irish, despite their strength among the clergy, had difficulty in matching. Lacking the bond of a separate language, which united the German, the French-Canadian and later the Italian parishes, the Irish became more ubiquitous than any immigrant group except the English and Scottish. And just as their early arrival had eased the tension between the Yankees and the Yorkers, so in the eighties the rising tide of newcomers from the Continent pressed the outnumbered Irish into the ranks of the older Americans.

The migration from Ireland had slackened by this date and barely supplied replacements for those who died or moved on. Inevitably their American-born children came to dominate the earlier generation. While those born in Ireland had tended to concentrate in unskilled occupations and outnumbered other immigrants as laborers and personal or domestic servants in 1870, their children abandoned such jobs to the newer immigrants and sought widely for employment in the factories, trades and the civil service. Some rose to positions of influence as founders and owners of productive firms, notably James E. Cunningham the carriage manufacturer, or as managers of large enterprises, among them Walter B. Duffy. Others scaled the social ladder or attracted political favor, such as that enjoyed by Michael Curran as Mayor and James O'Grady who eventually reached Congress. Still others achieved distinction in the professions, none more than Joseph O'Connor as an editor, essayist and poet, one of Rochester's most accomplished gentlemen.

The Irish and Eire

Yet the Irish escaped complete assimilation chiefly because of the continued troubles of their relatives and friends in the Old Country and their undiminished ardor for its independence. The Irish benevolent societies multiplied during the seventies, and a dozen of them participated in the St. Patrick's Day parade of 1874. Bishop McQuaid drew those affiliated with the churches into an Irish Catholic Benevolent Union, headed by John C. O'Brien an able attorney and the favorite speaker on many occasions. A less tractable group, led by Patrick Mahon, responded with greater enthusiasm to lectures on "Home Rule for Ireland" among other subjects not always approved by the Bishop.

Efforts in behalf of Ireland, discredited by the Fenians, had suffered a slump during the seventies until a new and more conciliatory leader arose toward the end of that decade. It was in 1879 that Charles S. Parnell organized the Irish National Land League at Dublin with two major objectives. First it sought funds to assist destitute peasants threatened by starvation; second it pressed for a reduction by legal means of the exorbitant rentals demanded of the poor Irish cottagers. Most Rochesterians approved these objectives, and Bishop McQuaid authorized Catholic benevolent societies to join with other Irish groups in extending Parnell an invitation to visit Rochester. A large throng gath-

ered at the station to greet the Irish patriot on January 27, 1880; many lined the streets to cheer him and packed the council chamber in City Hall where he spoke that evening. The city contributed \$2000 during these ceremonies, and subsequent donations almost trebled the sum. However, Parnell in his speeches attacked all of Ireland's absentee landlords, including the bishops, which gave McQuaid some qualms and prompted him to refuse permission to collect relief in the churches, though he did not, like some Catholic bishops, ban such collections altogether.

The enthusiasm Parnell aroused prompted a revival of Irish-American societies. William Purcell drew both Mahon and O'Brien together in Rochester to form a local branch of the Land League, one of the first in America. Others were quickly started elsewhere, and Purcell attended a convention of their delegates at New York later that year at which the American Irish National Land League was organized, with Purcell as vice-president.

Some Irishmen, in Rochester, as elsewhere, urged a refusal to pay any rents, but Parnell's moderate compromise, asking only a twenty per cent reduction in rates, attracted greater favor and secured Parliamentary approval in 1881. Unfortunately, Gladstone's coercion act, passed at the same time, sent Parnell to prison and stirred widespread and violent protests in America. The Rochester branch of the Land League began immediately to raise a defense fund and launched a drive for relief as well. Numerous meetings in the Irish wards and among sympathetic Protestant and Jewish friends brought additional sums and many supporting resolutions. Bishop McQuaid, fearful that a radical minority within the league would commit it to the anti-Catholic views of Michael Davitt, Parnell's colleague but rival, sent a pastoral letter warning Catholics against the secret oaths that circulated within the league but denying any opposition to its published objectives. Patrick Cox, a leading shoe manufacturer and treasurer of the Rochester branch of the league, made a trip to Ireland in 1882 to inspect the practical distribution of the relief funds and returned to report that great improvements had resulted in some depressed districts.

As relief and reduced rents eased the economic situation in Ireland, the emphasis there and in America shifted to the demand for home rule. The 1883 convention of the American branch of the Land League voted after a sharp debate to admit scattered Irish National Leagues to its fold

and to change its own name to that more forthright form. The Monroe County league promptly adopted the change on the return of its delegates, but Bishop McQuaid again took precautions to check the influence of an intransigent minority. The flare up came in 1886 after the first defeat of the home rule bill in Parliament stirred dissatisfaction with the moderates. The Bishop's prompt action, at a High Mass on July 28 at which he denounced such secret groups as the Republican Brotherhood, held the few extremists in the Rochester branch at bay. Conservative men such as Joseph P. Cleary, now chief of police, Martin Barron, alderman, H. P. Mulligan, salesman, and James Fee, wholesale liquor dealer, as well as Cox and Purcell, provided local direction during succeeding years. The city made a generous response to repeated pleas for Irish relief, and one report in 1887 tabulated the total donations over the previous eight years at \$18,000. Several Irish patriots and some of their friends in Parliament addressed Rochester audiences during American visits in these years, and Mayor Parsons as well as other distinguished citizens of varied backgrounds generally appeared on the platform on such occasions.

The cause of Irish home rule was set back somewhat in Rochester, as in many other places, by public concern over Parnell's love life in 1890, but the local branch of the Irish National League determined to maintain the campaign and sent a telegram to Parnell affirming its position. Several Rochester groups joined the next May to welcome a delegation of Parnell envoys who addressed a large gathering at City Hall and received a purse of \$2500 for the cause, to which an additional \$500 was later contributed. Dr. Richard Curran, who presided at several of these meetings, called his fellows together again the next October to pass resolutions of mourning on the death of Parnell. Agitation for home rule continued, in Rochester as elsewhere, during succeeding months as Parliament debated the issue. When Gladstone submitted his compromise measure, the Rochester *Herald* found most articulate Irishmen reasonably satisfied, but its final rejection by the House of Lords disillusioned the radicals and discouraged the moderates.

The Irish National League, which had waged an unceasing but temperate campaign for more than a decade, gradually disintegrated after that defeat, but the more radical Ancient Order of Hibernians quickly took its place. Bishop McQuaid's earlier fears of that body had diminished as the futility of the more conciliatory position became apparent.

He actually addressed an annual gathering of Hibernians from all New York state chapters and welcomed their convention to Cathedral Hall in June 1894. Five divisions had already formed at Rochester, and two more soon organized as the old league members hastened to join the fraternal order. Only the Celtic Club, which dated from 1874, maintained an independent existence. The St. Patrick's Day celebrations acquired a regular place on the Catholic Church calendar in the nineties and assumed a less boisterous character partly because of the Bishop's opposition to lavish banquets and other ceremonies during the Lenten period. It was not until after his death in 1908 that some of the earlier customs revived. Even then the colorful parades with a dozen or more Irish units marching in line, each accompanied by a brass band, were only a memory. In their place had come the popular "wearing of the green," preferably green shamrock leaves, by all citizens of good will.

The mellow cordiality which most of the Irish in Rochester enjoyed after the turn of the century was only in part a result of their declining representation in the city. The flood of such migrants in the 1850's and succeeding decades had dwindled to a trickle and failed to supply replacements. The Irish-born dropped from nearly 6500 in 1890 to 2,724 in 1940 — a decline from first to seventh place among Rochester minorities. Even the second generation was dwindling in number, and the third and fourth were so mixed with other ethnic strands that the attempt to preserve ancient traditions required a scholarly temperament and zeal.

Yet the Irish question remained, and Rochester acquired a strange and unexpected link with it in the 1920's. One of the humble newcomers of the nineties was the Irish widow of a Cuban Spaniard named De Valera. She had sent her young son, Eamon, back to Ireland to be raised by her relatives, and had married Charles E. Wheelwright, a coachman of Rochester. Even after the Sinn Fein uprising at Dublin in 1916, during which young DeValera was captured and sentenced to death, few in Rochester were aware of the presence of his mother. It was only after his escape and his subsequent rise to leadership in the revolutionary movement which induced Lloyd George to establish the Irish Free State in 1921 that his indirect connection with Rochester became known to the press.

The concessions Britain made at this point might have brought joyful acceptance at an earlier date, and in fact most Americans who

cherished Irish traditions did in fact rejoice, in Rochester as elsewhere. But DeValera and those who had carried the brunt of the fight could not endorse the clause which pledged "allegiance to the crown." It required another year of bloodshed to convince DeValera of the futility of that method. But after a quarter-century of patience as leader of the political minority, during which period he visited his mother in Rochester, he finally emerged as president and by unilateral action changed the name of the Free State to Eire and asserted its complete independence. Unfortunately the bitterness of earlier battles had long before split off the five northern counties which continued to maintain their loyalty to the crown despite either the threats or the wiles of the youthful Eire.

But these more recent aspects of the Irish question, while distantly in the background of Rochester's consciousness, have been obscured by other issues. The Ancient Order of Hibernians continued to provide the most active rallying point for the Irish born and their descendants. Even the Celtic Club, after a half century of varied fortunes, finally expired, and a new organization, the Knight of Equity, carried on for only a few brief years, attracting chief attention on St. Patrick's Day in 1940 when its banquet at the Powers Hotel rivaled that of the Hibernians at the Seneca. Another group, known as the Gaelic Literary and Musical Association, endeavored for several years to promote a revival of the songs and customs of pre-Cromwellian Ireland, but their efforts attracted little interest since none, even of the oldest residents of Irish ancestry, could recall such traditions. Most Rochesterians of Irish antecedents regarded these researches with little more than idle curiosity, and many of them had difficulty in mustering sympathy for Eire's attacks, verbal and otherwise, on North Ireland which had battled so heroically on the Allied side in both the First and the Second World War. Thus it seemed fitting to the Hibernians to center their attention instead on one of the first Irishmen to be identified with the American Revolution, and Commodore John Barry has accordingly replaced Robert Emmett, Daniel O'Connell, Charles Parnell and Eamon DeValera as the symbolic hero on St. Patrick's Day.

In Rochester, however, many of the old local names persist. The city still has its Dowlings, its Cochranes, its Campbells, its O'Reillys and O'Rorkes, not to mention others that could have been named much earlier in this account, such as the Lambertons and the Cunninghams.

But it generally requires a second thought and sometimes a delicate inquiry to determine the Irish antecedents of these citizens when meeting them for the first time. No one thinks of Mayor Barry, James P. B. Duffy (or any of the others who sat at the speakers table during the Chamber's salute to Lord Mayor Briscoe) as Irish or even Irish-Americans. They have shared far too many experiences with the rest of us to retain a distinctive ethnic label. Fortunately, each has his individuality too, which may encompass much ancestral heritage, but in the case of the Irish the long process of integration has reached fruition.