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**At Home in Hartford: Catholic Assertions and
Protestant Responses in Mid-19th Century Hartford**

By Andrew Walsh

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“The ground on which St. Joseph’s convent and chapel have been erected was purchased by Bishop MacFarland of James Goodwin, Esq. in July 1872, for the sum of \$70,000. Up to that time the site had been known as the old Morgan homestead.

Its purchase for Catholic purposes caused some talk among the neighbors. The words exchanged were less friendly than those of Ossian in his address to the Sun, and have been forgotten.¹”

With these oblique comments, the Rev. Joseph Reid inscribed the first page of the baptismal register at the newly organized St. Joseph’s Cathedral parish in Hartford in 1872. For Reid and many other Catholics in Hartford, the purchase of the Morgan homestead was a delicious moment. The property, owned by Hartford’s largest landowner, stood in a prominent spot on Farmington Avenue in Asylum Hill, a city neighborhood then developing rapidly as an elite suburb happily removed from the clatter and congestion that had taken over the old heart of the city, a mile to the east. For many of the prosperous Yankees then building houses on its shady streets, one of Asylum Hill’s chief charms was that it recalled the reassuring atmosphere of bygone days, of an earlier Hartford that was quiet, homogeneous, and largely free of the strains caused by a generation of industrialization, urban growth, and the immigration of a swelling flood of strangers.

Reid and his co-religionists were not simply celebrating a good real estate deal, they

¹ The allusion is to James MacPherson’s celebrated literary fraud, *The Poems of Ossian*. As far as I can tell, Reid refers to a long declamation at the end of the poem “Carthon,” which presents a sort of reverse Celtic Oedipus story in which a heroic Briton is slain in single combat by his unwitting father. The Celtic hero, Fingal, orders his bards to compose an ode to the fallen Carthon. “Exalt then, O sun, in the strength of thy youth! age is dark and unlovely; it is like the glimmering light of the moon; when it shines through broken clouds, and the mist is on the hills.” James MacPherson, *The Poems of Ossian* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1877) 233-34. Perhaps Reid wishes to compliment the Irish, who forgive their opponents. Maybe.

basked in the chagrin of their Protestant neighbors. Francis McFarland, Catholic bishop of Hartford, bought the Morgan property partly because he wanted to build his new cathedral in the best part of town.² But he also wanted to make a decisive political and social statement: Whether the Yankees liked it or not, they now had to deal with the rising strength of Catholics, and particularly Irish Catholic immigrants. Forty years after a small group of impoverished Irish ditch-diggers scrapped together enough money to buy an abandoned Episcopal church on the city's East Side, Hartford's Catholics—overwhelming Irish immigrants and their children—had become a force to be reckoned with.

To ensure that he could make his grand gesture, McFarland took care to buy the property on Farmington Avenue secretly. He commissioned the city's only prominent Catholic lawyer, Thomas McManus, to find a Protestant intermediary who could negotiate with James Goodwin without arousing suspicion. McManus arranged for George Affleck, an Asylum Hill nurseryman to make the purchase and resell the property to him for conveyance to the Catholic church.³ McFarland made his first priority for the site the construction of a motherhouse for Connecticut's Sisters of Mercy, which included a large chapel that served both the sisters and the small congregation that could be gathered for the cathedral parish. For decades, most of the cathedral's

² The Catholic Diocese of Hartford was created in 1843, embracing both Connecticut and Rhode Island. Until 1872, its bishop resided in Providence. When the Diocese of Providence was created in that year, McFarland moved to Hartford and launched the campaign to procure a new cathedral. For Hartford's Catholic history see, James H. O'Donnell, *History of the Diocese of Hartford* (Boston: D.C. Hurd Co., 1900); Thomas S. Duggan, *The Catholic Church in Connecticut* (New York: The States History Company, 1930) and Dolores Liptak, *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1989).

³ The arrangement is described in McManus' privately printed "Sketch of the Catholic Church in Hartford." The incident is also discussed in an unpublished Trinity College seminar paper by Anita Marchant, May 1994, 10.

parishioners lived in other neighborhoods of the city. When the cathedral established a parish school it was located on Broad Street in the Frog Hollow neighborhood, almost a mile away.⁴ An episcopal residence followed and then, in 1879, a “basement church” enclosed by the foundations for an immense brownstone Gothic cathedral designed by the prolific Brooklyn architect Patrick. Keeley.

Reid, McFarland, and others gloried in the day and relished their subterfuge, but, in fact, the day of real Catholic power had not yet arrived in Hartford. It took the Catholic bishops, priests and people of Hartford almost 20 more years to construct the brownstone cathedral that loomed over Protestant Asylum Hill.

* * * * *

Like many New England cities, Hartford experienced remarkable demographic transformation over the course of the 19th century. An initial wave of migrants from rural Connecticut and northern New England had posed a significant initial challenge in the early decades of the century. While that left the city larger, more commercial, and with more diversity among its Protestant residents, the city’s elite felt comfortable about local society through the mid-1830s. “Where, two centuries ago, naught was to be seen but a `waste, howling wilderness, we know behold flourishing towns, the busy mart, with all the accompaniments of a free, enlightened and Christian population,” the Rev. Joel Hawes remarked in a bicentennial address commissioned by the city government.⁵ Hawes didn’t perceive Catholics as a threat to the city

⁴ The only Catholic residents of the neighborhood in 1872 were servants. “The site was chosen with an eye to the future, and not to meet any immediate demand,” Duggan allowed in his history of the diocese, 110.

⁵ Joel Hawes, “An Address Delivered at the Request of the Citizens of Hartford on the

and its inherited culture. Indeed, he didn't even mention them. The largest social problem discussed in detail was Sabbath breaking. But 1835 was about the last moment when a Yankee could make such an utterance in Hartford. Indeed, although the Catholic population numbered fewer than 200, some of the city's Protestants were already sounding the alarm.

Horace Bushnell arrived in Hartford in 1835 to take up the pastorate of North Church. His first published sermon, based more on things he had experienced in New York than on any major change yet evident in Hartford, sounded the first of a long series of warnings.

Romanism has set in with a new enterprise upon our liberties....Popery, we have supposed, was such an extravagance as could not be inflicted upon the American people; we have been confident of Protestantism. But we hear of such advances...that we can close our eyes no longer.... Catholic emigrants are pouring into this country, in a manner altogether unexampled.⁶

In the same sermon, Bushnell raised the specter of Catholic political power as a threat to Yankee democracy, "Have not the priests a power over their people that is nearly absolute? Can they not lead them after whatever candidate they please?" It was not necessary to have large numbers of actual Catholics on the ground to trigger local expressions of hostility. The reservoir of inherited anti-Catholic sentiment was immense, and native-stock Hartford Protestants produced a stream of anti-Catholic and anti-Irish invective even before a large immigrant presence developed. In 1836, for example, one of the seminal anti-Catholic texts of the antebellum period issued from Hartford. Theodore Dwight, editor of the *Hartford Courant*, distributed and probably wrote *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, with its lurid picture of convent life.

9th of November 1835, *The Close of the Second Century From the First Settlement of the City*," (Hartford, Belknap & Hammersly, 1835) 6. Hawes' booklet is the first published attempt to present and analyze Hartford's history.

⁶ Horace Bushnell, *The Crisis of the Church* (Hartford: 1835), 22.

Tensions accelerated as actual immigrants began to arrive in significant numbers. In Hartford, this took place during the later 1840s. The Irish population of the region had begun growing in the late 1820s, and the state's first Catholic parish was organized in Hartford in 1829, with about 75 members. By the mid 1840s, the Irish population began to surge: a parish census recorded more than 400 immigrants in 1844, and the 1850 Census showed an Irish-born population of more than 2,000 in a population of 13,555. The number of Irish-born in Hartford then tripled over the course of the 1850s, reaching 6,432 in 1860.

So, rather suddenly, by 1850, Irish immigration was a salient feature of the city's life. Immigrants clustered in a congested area of Hartford's East Side, between Main Street and the Connecticut River, close to Holy Trinity Church on Talcott Street. In the East Side, some stores and a large number of saloons and boarding houses already served the Irish population. To the native stock, immigrants, who lived in extremely overcrowded housing, seemed to fill the streets at all hours of the day and late into the night.

Even though large-scale Irish migration was commonplace in American cities in the Northeast during these years, the dominance and persistence of Irish migration to Hartford seemed remarkable to natives. And in the middle years of the nineteenth century, at least in the view of the articulate Yankee elite, the words immigrant, Irish, and Catholic were substantially interchangeable.⁷ Many of Hartford Yankees experienced the late nineteenth century as a wholly unwanted and unexpected disruption of a familiar and homogeneous society. Nevertheless, the city's native-stock Protestants clung tenaciously to social and political control. And, through the

⁷ Irish-born residents made up 73 percent of the city's foreign born in the 1860 census, 69 percent in the 1870 census, and 65 percent in the 1880 census. By 1860, the total number of Irish born (6,432 in a population of 29,150) was already exceeded by the number of children born of Irish parents. As in most American cities of the time, in Hartford the immigrants and their children were considered a distinct segment of the population.

1890s, they kept decisive political control of the city just beyond the grasp of the city's Democrats, who were mostly "immigrants" (although the party's leadership was still mostly composed of native-born Protestants). But the control exercised by the Yankees was neither monolithic nor total, and, over the course of the decades, two large, self-conscious, and well-organized groups conducted an incessant discourse over Hartford's transition from a homogeneous, Protestant, small town into a pluralistic urban center.

The 1850s were an especially contentious decade. Reacting to the surge of immigration, Connecticut became a major center of nativism—one measure of its rise was the destruction of Hartford's Holy Trinity Church was in a suspicious arson in 1853. Egged on by Protestant leaders, nativists frequently mobilized the power of the state to harass Catholics. For example, after extended litigation, in 1855, Connecticut courts upheld a Protestant husband's trespass complaint against Waterbury's first Catholic pastor, who had been called to administer the last rites to the man's Catholic wife.

Hartford itself was already a major antebellum center of "benevolent reform," guided by figures like Horace Bushnell. The city's well-organized Protestant leadership hoped that Protestantism would remain the undiminished source of social cohesion and values. A cluster of missionary and benevolent organizations they developed between the 1830s and the 1850s sought to redirect and "improve" the new urban poor, both native-born migrants and non-Protestant immigrants. These organizations were animated by the optimism of revivalism and by post-millennial confidence in the perfectibility of society. In 1850, for example, four young men founded the Congregational City Mission Society hoping to alleviate "the Temporal necessities of the destitute, strengthen the religious interests of the poor, gather children into Sabbath

Schools and provide free religious services each Sabbath.⁸

For more than a quarter century, the society was led by David Hawley, a former farmer who set the tone for the society's work. Hawley roamed the city's laboring district, distributing religious tracts, clothing and food. Resolutely evangelical in mood, technique, and purpose, he hated drinking. When the city's poorest neighborhoods took on a strong immigrant and Catholic character, Hawley did not shift his methods or presumptions. His unswerving, if rarely realized, goal was to convert the Catholic poor to evangelical Protestantism, to cultivate in them new Protestant identities, and to encourage conformity to Protestant and middle class mores and values.

Hartford's antebellum Protestant reformers allowed no compromise with Catholic interests or Catholic identity. Their approach was resolutely confrontational. Supporters of the city's very active common school movement of the 1850s insisted on Protestant texts for the schools and the tone of Sunday school, temperance, and charitable workers was relentlessly conversionary.

Despite their energetic activity and commitment to benevolent reform, few of the city's mid-century Protestant leaders were ever able to overcome their sense of the radical otherness of the new immigrants. Barbara Cross, Horace Bushnell's biographer, notes that during the 1840s and 1850s Bushnell ultimately "rationalized the prevailing contempt for religious or racial aliens" in Hartford. "Blurring distinctions among them, he treated them with all practical neglect

⁸ "Charter of the Congregational City Mission Society," Cited in Robert Decker, Hartford Immigrants: A History of the Christian Activities Council (Congregational) 1850-1980 (New York: United Church Press, 1987), 11.

and theoretic derogation.⁹" As time passed, like many of his parishioners at North Church, Bushnell responded to mass migration by personal withdrawal, by refusing to acknowledge the changes happening before his eyes or by moving away from the city center. "Our range of life is so walled up by the respectability of our associations, that what is on the other side of the wall is very much a world unknown," he admitted in a sermon published in 1858.¹⁰

Containing Catholics:

The elite Protestant policy of trying to keep Catholics out of sight and out of mind did give immigrants a certain room to maneuver and develop their own institutions, most notably the institutional infrastructure of the Catholic church. Catholics asserted themselves repeatedly and aggressively, but until the Civil War years they could find few signs that they would ever find an equal footing in Hartford.

The *Hartford Courant*, in particular, showed an almost endless shower of scorn on the Irish. Before the early 1850s, the newspaper served as the chief voice of Connecticut Whigs, then it became the leading Know Nothing newspaper, and closed the decade as the voice of the new Republican Party. Throughout the period, the *Courant* poured out a relentless stream of complaints about the Irish: about their drinking, political corruption, extreme poverty, disorderliness, stupidity, family size, and laziness. The Irish neighborhood emerging on the East Side was routinely referred to as Pigville. Long lists of "Paddys" and "bogtrotters" arrested for public drunkenness were published regularly.

⁹ Barbara M. Cross, Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 40.

¹⁰ Horace Bushnell, Sermons for the New Life (New York: 1858), 330. Cited in Cross, Horace Bushnell, 40.

In the decades before the Civil War, only one major Yankee institution, the Democratic Party, showed much openness to Catholic immigrants, and even then, its chief interest was finding votes to end the party's perennial minority status. not to embrace the goal of Catholic equality.

So, in the years between the 1830s and roughly 1860, Catholic immigrants to Hartford experienced local versions of most of the classic problems and controversies that characterized the first great wave of Irish Catholic immigration to the United States: daunting poverty, illiteracy, social isolation and discrimination, disenfranchisement, and inability to control critical communal issues such as the education of the young. The three major episodes of inter-group conflict in the city are laid out below.

1) In the 1830s, tensions arising out of competition for jobs and religious differences led to frequent conflict between African-Americans and Irish immigrants in the East Side. In July of 1834, there was what amounted to a three-day race riot in the area around Talcott Street, with unrest apparently triggered by verbal exchanges that took place after a mass at Holy Trinity Church.¹¹

2) As the city's Irish immigrant population rose rapidly in the late 1840s and 1850s, serious tensions developed in local politics, especially as immigrants were naturalized and began active participation in city elections, overwhelmingly as Democrats. Anti-immigrant sentiment crystallized in a strong nativist movement in Connecticut. The secretive American or Know-Nothing Party organized in the state in 1853 under the title, the State Council of Connecticut. Its

¹¹ Mentioned in Glenn Weaver, Hartford: An Illustrated History of Connecticut's Capital (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1982), 94.

constitution stated that the party's object was "to resist the insidious policy of the Church of Rome, and all other foreign influences against the institutions of our country, by placing in all offices in the gift of the people, whether by election or appointment, none but native-born Protestant citizens."¹²

One factor that pushed nativist Protestants to support the new party was the common perception that the Democratic Party was acting increasingly vigorously on behalf of immigrants. Before 1850, immigrant participation in city politics was discouraged by the fact that Hartford's aldermen and city councilors were all elected at large. But in that year, under Democratic majorities in the General Assembly, Hartford's state-chartered form of government was altered to mandate elections through a new system of wards. In the city elections of 1851, the Sixth Ward, located on the East Side moved permanently into the Democratic column. In 1852, it elected the city's first Catholic councilor, James Mulligan, a foundry worker. In 1853 and 1854 Irish voters on the East Side played a key role in electing Democratic mayors.

As a reaction to developments of this sort, in 1855, the Know-Nothing candidate for governor, William A. Minor, won election, along with a working majority in the General Assembly. Immediately, Minor denounced immigrants as unfit for citizenship and proposed a 21-year residency requirement for naturalization. He then moved briskly to disband six state militia companies composed of Irish Catholic immigrants. In 1856, the General Assembly also passed legislation that required all church property to be held by local congregations, a practice that struck directly at Catholic doctrine and customary practice. To add insult to injury, the act explicitly exempted Episcopal, Methodist, Shaker and Jewish groups from the restriction. An

¹² Albert Van Dusen, *Connecticut* (New York: Random House, 1962), 221.

amendment to the state Constitution passed restricting suffrage to men able to read the state Constitution and laws, as did an act forbidding the state courts to naturalize aliens.

3) During the 1850s, the city's Protestant leadership also moved to criticize informal practices that had led to *de facto* public funding for parochial education at the common school level. Horace Bushnell and educational reformer Henry Barnard pushed for a reorganization of the city's publicly-funded schools to eliminate Catholic control of some of the city's schools. (Between the 1830s and 1868, Hartford had improvised a system in which minority groups received some funding, largely salaries for teachers, for schools conducted in or by churches. This practice began when African-Americans asked to remove their children from the common schools and asked to receive public support for teacher's salaries. Segregated schools were then formed at the Colored Congregational Church on Talcott Street and the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Pearl Street. Catholics took advantage of this precedent to demand and obtain similar support for schools at Holy Trinity Church on Talcott Street, and eventually at St. Patrick's Church on Church Street, and at St. Peter's Church on the South Green. The two key factors that permitted this blurring of the boundaries between church and state were the decentralized system of public education that prevailed and the overlap between city-funded common schools and Protestant-dominated Sunday Schools. Until the end of the 19th century, each of the Town of Hartford's common school districts had its own elected school board that hired and fired teachers. (Hartford had wholly separate Town and City governments until 1897.) Education fell under the purview of the town selectmen.¹³ A district board could be and often

¹³ Hartford's very complex local political and governmental history has not yet been disentangled. Many of these remarks are preliminary assessments.

was set up to meet the needs of a particular population group dominant in a neighborhood.

Full-scale political conflict broke out in 1865 and 1866, as Protestant reformers pushed for a tighter system of school administration that would be less friendly to Catholics. The major confrontation took place in St. Peter's parish, which had been organized in 1859 to serve Catholics living south of the Park River, which then bisected downtown Hartford. Bishop Francis McFarland staked out an impressive and controversial location for the new church, directly on the city's South Green, the central public space in an emerging, elite Protestant neighborhood. The parish school, initially located in a disused Masonic hall, opened a school with 200 pupils in 1860. The school's staff included a principal, John Gaffney, and three lay Catholic women. All received salaries from the local district committee.

For several years, the district committee continued to employ an all-Catholic teaching staff at St. Peter's. But by the mid-1863, the composition of the district board had changed and half of the teaching staff was composed of Protestant women. They began to insist on using the King James Version of the Bible in classroom lessons and devotions, rather than the Catholic Douay Version. (It was taken for granted by both Catholics and Protestants that the school's curriculum should include religious lessons and devotions).

In 1865, Father John Lynch, pastor of St. Peter's, denounced the King James Version as a "secular book," and pressed the district committee to forbid its use at St. Peter's, or, failing that, to transfer the Protestant teachers. When the district committee failed to act, Lynch mobilized Catholic voters to eject the district committee at that fall's town election. That prompted a Protestant counter-mobilization, and, before leaving office, district committee signed contracts with several Protestant teachers, most notably Emily Parsons, who began her lessons each day

with lengthy prayers and readings from the Protestant version of the Bible.

Lynch and Parsons went head to head in the classroom, and in the public prints, but Lynch was unable to oust the resolute Parsons. He decided, instead, to remove all her pupils, and so Parsons conducted her lessons in solitude until the spring of 1866. At that point, the city's priests announced the removal of publicly-funded teachers from both of the city's parochial schools. The city's parishes then sought to locate religious sisters who could take over Catholic school instruction. The feud rumbled on into the late 1860s, eventually leading the *Hartford Times* to denounce "the insane bigotry of a few hotheads in the South School District."¹⁴

The Parades:

Parading by immigrants in Hartford emerged in this climate of inter-group tension.¹⁵ The secondary literature suggests that parading had important political significance. "In the classic

¹⁴ *The Hartford Times*, 27 July 1868, pg. 4.

¹⁵ The literature on St. Patrick's Day parades is now fairly large, with articles and longer monographs on 19th century parading in New York, Worcester, Lowell, and Toronto. These include Marie Fitzgerald's SUNY dissertation, "St. Patrick's Day Parade: The Conflict of Irish American Identity in New York City, 1840-1900" (1994), Michael Cottrell's "St Patrick's Day Parades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto: A Study of Immigrant Adjustment and Elite Control," *Social History* (Canada) 1992 25(49): 57-73; Sallie Marston's "Public Rituals and Community Power: St. Patrick's Day Parades in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1841-1874," *Political Geography Quarterly* (Great Britain) 1989 8(3): 255-269; Timothy Meagher's, "Why Should We Care For a Little Trouble or a Walk Through the Mud": St. Patrick's and Columbus Day Parades in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1845-1915," *New England Quarterly* 1985 58(1): 5-26. Kenneth Moss, "St Patrick's Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity, 1845-1875: *Journal of Social History*, 1995 29(1):125-148. Most of these treatments rely too heavily, as does this paper, on newspaper accounts. Meagher's paper on Worcester is based on a remarkably full set of primary sources.

parades of the mid-nineteenth century, constituent groups in the polity actually presented themselves, rather than abstract symbols for public view. The parade re-presented the urban population, forming a detailed, descriptive portrait of the urban social structure,” Mary Ryan argued in her 1989 essay, “The American Parade.” At a time when parades were important civic events, Ryan and others argue, the St. Patrick’s Day Parade shifted the focus from proclamation of civic unity to assertion of sub-group identity and rights. “The Irish, in a particularly obstinate way, forced Anglo-Saxon Protestants to acknowledge them as members of American culture, as well as citizens. They actively demonstrated that an ethnic parade, not a melting pot, would be the most fitting symbol of a multi-ethnic society.¹⁶”

Hartford’s first St. Patrick’s Day parade took place in 1852, a relative latecomer by the standards of New York, or even Worcester, where the first parade took place in 1845.¹⁷ It was sponsored by the 160 members of the St. Patrick’s Society. Based at St. Patrick’s Church and led by its formidable pastor, the Rev. John Brady, the cultural and benevolent organization was an ardent public advocate of both immigrant rights and temperance. The *Hartford Times* reported that, “the St. Patrick’s Society of this city came out in large numbers to day in honor of the birthday of the Patron Saint of Ireland. They were accompanied by the Washington Brass Band,

¹⁶ Mary Ryan, “The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth Century Social Order,” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press: 1989) 137, 153. Ryan regards the St. Patrick Day parades as “reflexive expressions of American pluralism.”

¹⁷ The scholarly literature on parades has grown substantially over the last decade. Major treatments include: Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (1986), Simon Newman’s *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (1997), Len Traver’s *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (1997) and David Walstreicher’s *Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*.

and a large and appropriate banner was carried in the procession. Two or three hundred members of the Society marched in the procession, and a very large number, male and female, followed upon the walks. They made quite a lively appearance and their numbers showed that the Society is in a prosperous condition.¹⁸

Events and connections stressing Catholicism punctuated the day, which began at 6 a.m. with a band serenading Father Brady at his house on Talcott Street in the heart of Pigville. The parade itself began an hour or so later, with a procession from State House Square to St. Patrick's Church, where the members of St. Patrick's Society entered the church in a body to attend Mass. (Hartford is the only city on record where the paraders marched into church, attended the Mass, and then reformed afterwards to continue. In other cities, masses preceded the parades, which were often routed to pass by important churches.)

The parade then "marched through the principal streets." As was often the case in this period, Hartford journalists were interested in the performance of the bands that accompanied public processions. The *Times*' 1852 coverage ended by observing that "a great many persons from out of the city joined in carrying out the celebration. Stack's Band performed their part to admiration and drew forth many compliments on their beautiful new uniforms."

The 1853 celebration expanded to fill the entire day. It kicked off with another 6 a.m. serenade for Fr. Brady. In a paragraph, the *Times* reported that "The Catholics of this city have celebrated (the day) in admirable style by a long and well-arranged procession with three Bands of Music, by addresses, &c, and they will have a grand entertainment this evening at the American Hotel. St. John's (Sick and Burial Society) and St. Patrick's societies were out with their emblems." Coverage in the *Times* expanded dramatically over the course of the 1850s,

¹⁸ *The Hartford Times*, March 18, 1852

eventually including lists of the order of march by the groups participating in the procession and details of the program at St. Patrick's. The newspaper also launched a strenuous defense of the parade and its participants, a defense more against the stereotypical Yankee complaints about the occasion than a rebuttal of particular charges of Irish disorder, secrecy, and debauchery.

The parade was creditable to the different societies, and everything was conducted in the most quiet and respectable manner. The long line of stalwart men, with their happy faces, dressed in their best and clothed with their national colored regalia, presented a pleasant appearance, as they marched through the streets to the popular air of 'Old Ireland.' Their neat and orderly appearance surprised many of our citizens, for they have looked upon the celebration of this day by the 'Sons of Erin' has being nothing more or less than a bacchanalian bout.... The members of these societies are not associated together for any secret purposes, but for their own mutual benefit and improvement. They are entirely of a benevolent and charitable character and are composed of some of our best and most industrious adopted citizens. Their object of association is as much for mutual improvement as for the assistance of each other in times of sickness and need.

The *Courant's* coverage in 1853 was much less enthusiastic, failing to mention the parade at all and radiating the sense that the celebration was an unwarranted day off from work. "Yesterday being St. Patrick's Day, it was generally observed by the Irish population of this city; and from the large numbers in the streets, we should judge that with them it was a general holiday. So far as we could learn, everything passed off pleasantly."

Coverage of the 1854 celebration was also full in the *Times* and perfunctory in the *Courant*. For the first time, an all-Irish militia unit, the Emmet Guards, marched in the parade. The unit was commanded by Edward McManus, a member of one of the Irish community's "first families," and a key organizer of communal activities. "The Guards made a fine appearance on this their first parade in our public streets, and showed by their marching and drill that they were under good officers and instruction," the *Times* reported.

The newspaper's account also suggests, for the first time, what the parade sounded like.

Two bands participated, playing a brief program over and over, one calculated to stress both Irish identity and Irish commitment to the United States. “The national tunes of Yankee Doodle and Hail Columbia were played alternately with “Saint Patrick’s Day in the Morning” and “Erin Go Brah.”

As usual, the mass at St. Patrick’s received attention. “The Church was crowded with people and presented a fine appearance. The address was an eloquent and able effort.”

Throughout the 1850s, the Catholic identity of the celebration was stressed above all other elements. The symbolic emphasis was heightened in the middle of the decade when St. Patrick’s church began to confirm the children of the parish as part of the complex of events. There was no discussion in the city newspapers about why Brady and the parish chose to initiate this practice, but it is mentioned repeatedly by the *Times* in subsequent years.

The tensest years in Hartford were the late 1850s, and the tone of coverage varied strikingly in the two dailies. The *Courant*, in particular, remained terse. Upon occasion, however, the *Courant*’s stiff upper lip did quiver. By 1859, the *Courant* had completed its lengthy transition from serving as the mouthpiece of the Whig, then Know-Nothing, and finally Republican parties. Its main domestic preoccupation was also shifting from the problems of immigration toward the problem of slavery. Nonetheless, in that year its single paragraph on the parade concluded with a startling sneer. “‘St. Patrick’s day in the morning’ was yesterday celebrated in this city by the members of “St. John’s Society and Burial Society” who marched through the principal streets, headed by the Hartford Coronet Band. Mass was held at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, and a large number of persons were confirmed. It was well for the procession that Commerce Street was not laid down in the line of march, as it would have been

apt to have thrown cold water on the procession.¹⁹”

By 1860, the St. Patrick’s Day celebration was a mature event, the benevolent societies organized around St. Patrick’s Church were familiar to newspaper readers, as were the men who served as marshals and public spokesmen. The parade attracted 800 to 1,000 marchers annually and many times that number “attended upon it.” Even the *Courant* was struggling to take things philosophically. “While the English have their feast of St. George; the Scotch their St. Andrew; the Dutch their St. Nicholas; and the puritans their Forefather’s Day, it is all right and proper that men who have an hereditary right to venerate St. Patrick should perpetuate his memory and stand by the traditions of their ancestors. Here’s a health to St. Patrick!” The *Courant’s* editor even publicly thanked the benevolent societies that organized the parade and dinners for inviting him to participate (which he respectfully declined).²⁰

The events of the early 1860s, both local and national, also produced a shift in climate toward a somewhat warmer embrace of Irish Catholic immigrants. In 1861, the Democrats reclaimed control of the city government for the first time in a decade. More importantly, the Civil War created an ongoing emergency that generated a deep undercurrent of Yankee anxiety about the role of immigrants, who now, with their children, made up perhaps as much as one-third of the city’s population.

¹⁹ *Hartford Courant*, March 18, 1859. Commerce Street lay just east of the Connecticut River and was one of the main streets in the city’s new riverside factory district.

²⁰ *Hartford Courant*, March 17, 1860. The era of mudslinging was not entirely in the past, however. In the same column as the annual St. Patrick’s Day paragraph, was an outraged report condemning a dispatch in the previous day’s *Times* as “a wilful and deliberate lie.” In a reversal of stereotypes, the *Times* had reported that a group of Republicans had returned by train from a rally in Waterbury and marched through the midnight streets. “Their drunken and noisy behavior on the streets at their return this morning at 2 or 3 o’clock, was such as would disgrace a party of rowdies, and the watchmen were almost compelled to arrest a dozen or so of them and put them in the watch house.”

In 1862, the first celebration of St. Patrick's Day after full wartime mobilization, there were dramatic changes. For most of the preceding decade, the parade had stepped off at State House Square and wound around downtown before returning to the square. That route remained much the same, but in 1862, when the parade returned to the State House the marchers processed inside, where a meal for 500 was served. Surrounded by a host of Catholic priests, Governor Thomas Seymour and Mayor Ronald Flowers were, for the first time, in attendance. Both responded at length to the day's toasts. The *Times* reported 15 toasts, beginning with "The Day we celebrate," passing on through toasts in honor of George Washington, the Governor, the memory of Andrew Jackson, and concluding with "the Press."

Fr. John Cahill in his toast in honor of Bishop O'Reilly,

"congratulated the St. John Sick and Burial Society on the honor they had in entertaining his Excellency Thomas H. Seymour, the Governor of the State, his honor the Mayor, and other distinguished guests. It proved clearly to his mind that the Irish men of Hartford were good citizens and upright men. Gov. Seymour returned the compliment by embracing Irish nationalism. He toasted "IRELAND: her back turned to Britain, her face to the West; may the day soon come when she shall break the rod of the oppressor and, redeemed from thralldom, `take her stand among the Nations of the Earth."²¹

By 1863, the parade itself had swelled to triumphal proportions. Until then, those participating had marched through the East Side and to St. Patrick's Church, then wound back through the downtown. The construction of the immense new St. Peter's Church on South Main Street created new possibilities for public display. So the announced parade route for 1863 was expanded accordingly. Mass, now at the new St. Peter's Church, remained the central focus of the procession, but the parade route wound through virtually every part of the city. For the first time, the line of march included the middle class and elite Yankee neighborhoods springing up to

²¹ *Hartford Times*, March 18, 1860.

the south and southwest of the old downtown.²² The 1862 parade lasted about two hours. The 1863 version was scheduled for six hours of marching before returning to the Old State House for what amounted to a Democratic Party rally, replete with a long address from Mayor William Hammersly and toasts running the gamut from “the United States, the home of our choice, and the land of our adoption” to Pope Pius IX. Even the *Courant* reported on Father Peter Kelly’s long speech in praise of Pope Pius without comment. Kelly said he thought the health of Pope Pius the IX was a toast that every man as well as every priest could and should respond to heartily. The *Courant* also noted that the parade was routed to pass the offices of the city’s major newspapers. “In front of the *Courant*’s office, the line of march was stopped for a few moments, and three cheers given for the paper.”

The parades of the Civil War years marked the highpoint of that form of very pointed, politically freighted, public assertion by masses of Irish Catholics in Hartford. St. Patrick’s Day parades continued into the 1870s but growth stopped. By the late 1870s, both Catholic officials and official representatives of the Irish nationalist movement were actively discouraging the parade. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the mainstay of the parade in New York, Worcester, and other places, came late to Hartford (1879), probably because of the strength of the parish-based benevolent and temperance societies that dominated organized Irish social life in Hartford.

²² *Hartford Times*, March 16, 1863. According to an advertisement taken by parade organizers, the line of march for 1863 subsequent years was: Around the north side of the State House to Main Street. Down Main Street to St. Peter’s Church, where the Societies will attend Divine service; after which the Societies will reform in front of the church and march around the South Green, up Main to High, down High to Ford, down Ford to Trinity, down Trinity to Washington, down Washington to Park, down Park to Main Street, up Main to Arch Street, down Arch to Front Street, up Front to Morgan, up Morgan to Main, up Main to Trumbull, down Trumbull to Pearl, up Pearl to Main, up Main to State, down State to Front, up Front to Temple, up Temple to City Hall, there to partake of dinner.”

In 1881, the *Connecticut Catholic*, a new Hartford-based weekly, remarked that St. Patrick's Day "was celebrated in a quiet manner. High Mass was celebrated in the three Catholic churches at 9 o'clock, and in each a sermon on the life and works of St. Patrick was delivered. The congregations were large, as becometh the religious fervor of the race. There was no parade or outdoor celebration."²³

The *Connecticut Catholic* rehearsed the case against parades several times during the 1880s, and the parade was not revived in Hartford. The standard arguments of the period were that money spent on parades should be used to support the Irish poor, especially in the Land League movement. But there was also a sense public demonstration was no longer necessary. "It now seems most proper for us," it editorialized in 1886, "to assemble in our respective parish churches and there honor our noble exemplar by appropriate prayers and invocations. In the evening, we can assemble in public halls or society chambers and give expression to our sentiments in song, music, recitation, and speeches."²⁴

If the St. Patrick's Day Parade seemed to be losing its utility in the 1880s, Irish Catholics in Hartford certainly did not abandon the parade as a form of celebration or self-assertion. Parades remained an important part of the repertoire of collective behavior. And in Hartford, the emphasis on Catholic identity seems stronger than in other places that have been studied. There was, for example, an immense parade to honor the rededication of St. Patrick's Church on November 26, 1876. Processions from other neighborhoods converged on the church, which was rebuilt after a devastating fire. There were also significant parades at each step of the process of

²³ *Connecticut Catholic*, March 19, 1881.

²⁴ *Connecticut Catholic*, March 13, 1886.

constructing the new St. Joseph's Cathedral.

The cathedral's cornerstone was laid on April 29, 1877, an occasion for the gathering of Catholic hierarchs from across the nation and clergy, religious and lay people from around the state. "Trains from all parts of the state brought societies and throngs of people who lined the sidewalks from Asylum Street to Sigourney Street," the *Times* reported. "The procession formed at the depot and included 15 societies and nearly 2,000 men. It was the largest gathering of Catholics that ever assembled within the limits of Hartford, a number estimated at 15,000. After the arrival of the procession, the clergy proceeded from the Pro-Cathedral (St. Peter's) to the porch of the Cathedral." That winding clerical procession covered almost two miles of city streets.

Another, far less formal, parade took place to honor the completion of the project. In November of 1891, Bishop Lawrence McMahon, who had raised \$500,000 to build the 2,200-seat cathedral, returned to Hartford from a lengthy trip to Europe. McMahon was met at the train station by a crowd of people who marched him to the new cathedral, which had been completed in his absence. A torchlight parade covered the 10 blocks from the station to an illuminated cathedral. Newspaper accounts put the crowd along that relatively short parade route at 10,000 and reported that 4,000 crowded into the cathedral, along with McMahon, who was not expecting the event that greeted him.

The cathedral's consecration on May 8, 1892 brought an even larger parade, fed by trains converging on the city from every section of the state. There were also less formal, smaller scale events that indicate the continuing perceived utility of parading. There were, for example, a number of parades conducted to welcome parish priests back to the city after extended leaves. In

a city full of Irish immigrants and their children, stories of Irish-born priests returning home, often after decades away, to pay a final visit to their mothers, had enormous emotional resonance. In August of 1892, the long-serving pastor of St. Peter's Church returned to Hartford. He was greeted at the station by hundreds of parishioners and the Colt's Band. That event became a parade when the group placed the priest in a carriage and escorted him on a winding course through the downtown streets to St. Peter's on the South Green.

The Politics of Placement

Parades, however, were not the only public ways to assert a rising Catholic public presence. From, an early point, Catholic leaders followed an aggressive strategy for siting and building new churches. The secret purchase of the site of St. Joseph's Cathedral was not an anomaly, and neither was the conscious decision to locate the church in an elite Protestant neighborhood. It was the culmination of a pattern that developed in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, certainly in Connecticut, but probably in many other cities, too.²⁵

Catholic leaders didn't follow this practice from the very beginning. When the Bishop of Boston purchased Holy Trinity Church in 1829, the structure was moved off Main Street and into the very small Catholic community then taking root on the East Side. But when that church was outgrown in the late 1840s, its pastor, the Rev. John Brady bought land half a mile east of the Talcott Street site to build a new and imposing brownstone parish church. The church, renamed in honor of St. Patrick, opened in 1851 at the corner of Church and Ann streets, in a neighborhood of large single-family houses owned by prosperous Protestants.

²⁵ The land for St. Mary's Church on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven and St. Michael's Church in Springfield, Massachusetts were both purchased through similar stratagems at about the same time. Both were also located in elite Protestant neighborhoods.

In 1860, Bishop Francis McFarland, who later chose the Asylum Hill site for St. Joseph's Cathedral, bought a site for the city's second Catholic parish church on the South Green. St. Peter's Church, too, was located blocks away from any large Catholic residential district, but dead center in a developing Protestant mansion district.

In other words, as middle and upper class Protestants abandoned the city's oldest residential districts to immigrants, the Catholic Church chased them out into the new suburban districts, where it erected enormous new churches. By the 1880s, St. Patrick's, St. Peter's and St. Joseph's each reported weekend congregations of more than 4,000. These attendance figures dwarfed the memberships of the city's elite Protestant churches, usually by a several multiples. Attendance at St. Peter's alone surpassed regular attendance at all ten of the Protestant congregations that shared its Main Street address. And Catholics knew that the Protestants were aware of their strength.

Hartford's Catholics, from the bishop down to the unskilled laborers marching in the street, pressed and pressed. After the Civil War, Catholics noted with pleasure the climate of increasing opportunity, but felt no sense that the city's Protestants were inviting them to participate as equals in the city's religious, public, or economic life. "Except where Catholics are strong in numbers and consequently powerful in influence, it is ordinarily regarded as presumptuous in them to aspire to civic prominence," an editorial in the Hartford weekly, *The Connecticut Catholic*, observed after the 1892 elections (which brought in a Democratic governor with an electoral margin of 1,100 votes). "It would matter little what their capacity may be, or what their public service may have been; their ambitions are met with the condescending

assurance that success is doubtful for them because of their Catholic affiliation.²⁶”

One of the reasons for this skepticism was the continuing reluctance of Yankee voters to authorize a change in the city’s electoral districts. The 1850 plan with six wards persisted until 1897, an approach that guaranteed immigrants in the Sixth Ward representation on the Board of Alderman and City Council, but not very much. The wards were drawn as geographical entities, and did not provide proportional representation. As a result of the crush of immigration, by the late 1880s almost 40 percent of the city’s population lived in Ward Six, but was entitled to only one sixth of the aldermen and councilors. The reforms of 1897 created ten, more equitably drawn, wards. The balance of political power began to shift, leading to the election of the city’s first Irish mayor in 1902 and a second in 1910. (However, true Democratic and Catholic hegemony over the city’s politics did not arrive until 1935.)

As Hartford’s Catholics approached the gates of political dominance in the 1890s, their leaders began to practice the rhetoric of American civil religion. In 1894, when the Rev. Michael Tierney was chosen to replace Lawrence McMahon as Bishop of Hartford, he selected George Washington’s Birthday as the date for his consecration. Another large parade ensued. After it that, during the consecration ceremony, Tierney seized the occasion to preach on the civic role and promise of American Catholics, arguing, in particular, that the Irish were just as loyal and authentic Americans as were the Yankees. He urged that the city Irish-Americans, as a sign of their political maturity, give up the tradition of raucous and assertive parades on St. Patrick’s

²⁶ *The Connecticut Catholic*, 16 April 1892, pg. 4. In rejecting Republican rule, the editor wrote on November 12 of that year, “Connecticut has been true to herself in giving us such a grant and glorious Democratic victory. She has placed herself where she really belongs, outside the pale of the doubtful states, in the list of sane Democratic communities.”

Day in favor of “banquets and other intellectual exercises.”²⁷”

Nevertheless, there were lingering reservations about the potential damage that assimilation could do to the city’s emerging Catholic subculture. In the 1890s, the city’s Catholic leaders still expressed grave concern about the potential allure of the liberties of the Protestant world. Clergy and Catholic journalists still policed the perimeters vigorously. In the middle of singing the praises of the new St. Joseph’s Cathedral, for example, the editor of the *Connecticut Catholic* paused in 1892 to wish that if “those Catholics who make a practice of resorting to the religious meetings of Protestant denominations when some itinerant ‘evangelist’ is announced to speak or sing would attend their own church, they would have less reason to be ashamed of themselves. Dull indeed must be the musical tastes of those who prefer the ditties of these meetings to the beautiful chants of the mass and vesper services.”²⁸”

Well into the twentieth century, Hartford’s Catholic political and religious leaders continued to sing this sort of tune. They wanted immigrant and Catholic political power and social prominence, and so they pressed hard. But they also wished to preserve strong boundaries for their subcultures and preferred, in the last analysis, to maintain an enclave.

One other factor may be worth noting. Despite the high volume of rhetoric and even of nativist action against Catholic immigrants, even in the 1850s, Irish Catholic immigrants never faced the sorts of implacable resistance faced by, for example, African-Americans. And even in the tensest days of conflict, there remained points of human contact that blunted conflict. One was humor. In 1858, just as things were looking up for opponents of nativism in Hartford, the

²⁷ *Connecticut Catholic*, February 30, 1894.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 March 1892, pg. 8.

Hartford Times resumed the extensive coverage it had given to St. Patrick's Day in the early 1850s. It carried this report of the dinner of St. John's Sick and Burial Society that closed the celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

The Chairman called upon the father of St. John Society, our old and respectable fellow citizen, James McManus. Mr. McManus gave a history of the society. When he came here there were only 17 attendants upon the church to which he belonged. He alluded to the time when Henry E. Ellsworth, Esq. built Central Row corner, then the best building in the city. There were then a very few Irish laborers in the city, and one of them was carrying a hod, when a gentlemen stepped up and inquired 'who is building this block?' 'Ellsworth, Delany & Company,' was the reply. Mr. Ellsworth heard of this reply and asked the hod carrier who Ellsworth, Delany and Co. were. "Why," said he, "you are Mr. Ellsworth, I am Mr. Delany, and the Company are all over the building at work. It takes all of us to build this block, you furnish the money, I carry the hod, and others plan and do the work. It would never be built if you, Mr. Ellsworth, had to carry the hod, nor, in fact, if you depended on me to furnish the money. Mr. E was much amused and acknowledged the mutual relations of laborer and capitalist, and the dependence of one upon the other."²⁹

²⁹ *Hartford Times*, March 18, 1858. McManus, a laborer, arrived in Hartford in 1828. His sons James and Edward both achieved careers as professionals that were exceptional for their cohort of second generation Irish Catholics, one as a lawyer and the other as a dentist. Both were extremely prominent lay Catholics. But at this moment, both young men were already leaders of the Catholic community. Edward as an officer in the Emmet Guard and perennial grand marshal of the St. Patrick's Day parade and James was a Civil War hero and the Catholic church's chief local legal advisor.