MORE than a generation ago, Marcus Hansen, a pioneer in American immigration studies, wrote that "people are the natural carriers of culture." 1 Until quite recently, though, few students of American immigration actually heeded Hansen's advice2 and this is still true of Irish-American scholars. The story of nineteenth-century Irish America largely begins on this side of the Atlantic and focuses on the painful adjustment of "Paddy" to a modern, industrializing America. To understand the complexity of Irish America in terms of class and culture, historians need to study all aspects of migration — the old world as well as the new world social settings, the preemigration as well as the American experiences.

The purpose of this article is to remedy this conceptual imbalance. Its aim is to describe and to analyze the regional origins, the migra-

tion patterns, the work and neighborhood settings, and the associational ties of Irish-Catholic immigrants in mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh.

Lying at the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers where they join to create the Ohio, Pittsburgh by 1850 had evolved into a major manufacturing center. In that year it boasted 718 industrial establishments which employed nearly seventy-four hundred workers and produced an endless stream of finished goods valued at nearly nine million dollars.\(^3\) Fully one-fourth of the city's male work force consisted of factory hands and artisans, while another one-third worked as laborers.\(^4\) Most of these men worked in the sprawling patchwork of rolling mills, iron foundries, machine shops, and glasshouses flowing out from the downtown district along the banks of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers. Iron- and glassmaking were the foci of this industrial world. Combined, they employed about two-fifths of the industrial work force and accounted for one-third of the value of manufactured goods produced in 1850.\(^5\)

As a magnet of industry, Pittsburgh had lured thousands of work-starved Irish immigrants during the late 1830s and 1840s, including the first sizable influx of Catholics. By 1850, there were roughly ten thousand Irish immigrants living in the city and, as the largest foreign-born group, they comprised over 20 percent of the city's population.\(^6\) The great bulk of these strangers — about four-fifths — were Catholics and most of them belonged to the laboring classes.\(^7\)

Where these immigrants came from in Ireland is a perplexing but critical historical question because it casts considerable light on the "styles of life" — the unique but changing cultures — they brought with them. Unfortunately, the study of the cultural origins of Irish

\(^3\) Calculated from the manufacturing manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
\(^4\) Calculated from a one-seventh stratified sample of the male labor force in the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
\(^5\) Calculated from the manufacturing census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
\(^6\) Calculated from the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
\(^7\) I arrived at the estimate on the proportion of Irish Catholics in this fashion. The combined population of Irish immigrants in Pittsburgh and Allegheny City in 1850 was 12,700. The total Catholic population was about 18,000, while the German share was between 7,000 and 8,000. Thus, the Irish-Catholic population was roughly 10,000 to 11,000 or between 79 and 87 percent. See Monsieur O'Connor, Enreque de Pittsburgh, a les Directeurs de L'Association pour la Propagation de La Foi, Lyon, 26 Juillet, 1850, letter #M8 at the University of Notre Dame Archives.
Americans is seriously impaired by the nature of existing source material. Population manuscript census schedules, city and church records, and naturalization papers — at least those for Pittsburgh — seldom, if ever, specified the county or provincial origins of Irish immigrants. Nonetheless, it is possible to chip away at this impediment by employing a surname analysis. In 1894 the British government published a special parliamentary report of the registrar-general of Ireland that listed by province and occasionally by county the surname distribution of Irish births in 1890. From the 1850 population manuscript census schedules I colinked the surnames of the Irish male work force with those listed in the registrar-general’s report. Admittedly there are conceptual difficulties in using this source, but if used with discretion and supplemented with available literary evidence, it does allow the scholar to arrive at a crude estimate on the origins of Irish immigrants.  

8 See, for example, Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society, A List of Immigrants Who Applied for Naturalization Papers in the District Courts of Allegheny County, Pa., 1798-1879, 4 vols. (Pittsburgh, 1978); Department of Public Health, Pittsburgh Death Records, 1878-1905; Register of Wills, Marriage License Dockets for Allegheny County, 1875-1925. None of the baptismal and marriage records of the Catholic churches at this time specified the county or provincial birthplaces of their Irish parishioners.  

9 The registrar-general’s report is reprinted in A Genealogical History of the Milesian Families of Ireland (Dublin, 1968). In employing a surname analysis there are three basic problems. First, province is an arbitrary political boundary which does not conform to distinctive geographic regions in terms of economic and cultural characteristics. No province uniformly and exclusively represented a distinctive rural economy, landholding pattern, cultural and linguistic heritage, or emigration rate of intensity. Differences in these variables existed within and across provincial boundaries. To remedy this conceptual difficulty I broke mid-nineteenth-century Ireland down into five regions on the basis of the above-named criteria. They were: East Leinster, the Midlands and Golden Vale, the West of Ireland, East Ulster, and West Ulster.  

A second problem is the difference in time between my period of study and the date of the registrar-general’s report: roughly a forty-year gap. After a thorough investigation of the British Parliamentary Papers, I concluded that the surname distribution by province did not shift dramatically over the intervening period. Permanent intercounty migration outside of parts of East Leinster and the Midlands, specifically counties Dublin, Kildare, Meath, West Meath, Queens, Carlow, and Wicklow, consistently ran below 10 percent on a decennial basis. See: The Census of Ireland . . . 1851, General Report, Pt. VI, H.C. 1856, (2134), XXXI, 52; Census of Ireland . . . 1861, General Report, Pt. V, H.C. 1863, (3204-iv), LXI, xxxix; Census of Ireland . . . 1871, General Report, Pt. III, H.C. 1876, (c-1377), LXXXI, 94; Census of Ireland . . . 1881, General Report, Pt. II, H.C. 1882, (3365), LXXXVI, 266.  

Finally, there is a third and more difficult problem in using a surname analysis. Given the widespread practice of chain emigration among the Irish, were their destinations selective? Undoubtedly they were and there is no way fully to resolve this problem. As a consequence, I have replicated the proportional distribution by province as found in the registrar-general’s report to reduce the margin of error.
The vast majority of the city's Irish immigrants had come out of a milieu that was in the throes of decisive economic and cultural change. Based on the surname analysis, over one-half the Irish working men in 1850 were from the single province of Ulster in northern Ireland (see map and Table 1). East Ulster, which encompassed north Armagh, northeast Derry, Antrim, and nearly all of Down, was prefamine Ireland's sole industrializing region. By the 1830s, a thriving linen industry, based on the wet-spinning process, had developed there. The mechanization of spinning had completely revolutionized all aspects of linen production including weaving. Increasingly, the industry shifted its geographic focus from the country to the towns in the Lagan and Bann valleys and, in the process, doomed the time-honored cottage crafts of spinning and weaving. Thousands of farmer-weavers and their families faced the grim option of either migrating to these towns to purchase machine-spun yarn or of emigrating to the United States. Thus, throughout the 1820s and 1830s, emigration was comparatively heavy in East Ulster with the sole exception of county Antrim. Most of these emigrants


### Table 1

**Province Origins of Irish Male Work Force**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leinster</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munster</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulster</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connaught</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>432</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: one-seventh sample of Irish male work force listed in population manuscript census schedule, Pittsburgh, 1850, colinked with surname distribution by province published in registrar-general's report of Ireland.
1983	ACROSS "THE BIG WATHER"
were Presbyterian farmer-weavers and village artisans dependent upon the purchases of the former.\textsuperscript{11}

In West Ulster, a region fanning out from the Lough Neagh Basin, the mechanization of flax spinning had only a ripple effect upon the rural economy. More important in terms of explaining emigration was the poor terrain and dense population. Sizable pockets of West Ulster, especially the south-central counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh, and south Armagh, were sparsely vegetated uplands and badly drained lowlands that were unsuitable for farming. As a consequence, competition for arable land was intense. Unlike much of East Ulster, though, the presence of a Catholic majority lent a strong sectarian cast to the struggle to attain land. These south-central counties were a core area of emigration, and rural disturbances, competition for land, and the mechanization of spinning were the principal causes.\textsuperscript{12}

Another one-fifth of Pittsburgh's Irish labor force had come from the province of Leinster. Like East Ulster, this province was relatively prosperous. East Leinster, which stretched from central Louth to the northern tip of Cork, was an area of fertile river lowlands and valleys where commercial farming, mainly wheat and barley growing, thrived. The string of port cities and market towns along the seaboard — Wicklow, Cork, Dublin, and Dundalk — acted as entrepots between the commercial hinterlands and the English market. And these commercial hinterlands were the areas of heaviest emigration from East Leinster. Here, middling and prosperous farmers, anxious to capture an expanding town market, grew increasingly reluctant to redivide their holdings among surplus tenants and sons.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13} Freeman, \textit{Pre-Famine Ireland}, 191, 194-95, 200; T. Jones Hughes, "East Leinster in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," \textit{Irish Geography} 3 (1958) : 230-31;
The Midlands, in turn, was a richly endowed pasture region that encompassed much of central Leinster. Drained by the rivers Boyne and Liffey, it was free of hazardous bog and ideal for fattening cattle and sheep. With the drop in grain prices after the Napoleonic Wars, strong farmers and landlords in central Leinster began to convert their tilled fields into cattle ranches in order to corner the growing demand for beef and mutton in England's burgeoning industrial cities. This shift to a pasture economy strained relations between proprietors and tenants. To clear their estates, landlords and more successful farmers — most of whom were Anglicans — often refused to renew the leases of their Catholic tenants. As a consequence, an increasing number of smallholders and cottiers began to emigrate from central Leinster, often with the assistance of their former lessors.14

Another one-sixth of Pittsburgh's Irish had come from the province of Munster. The northeastern part of this province included much of Tipperary, northern Cork, and east Limerick. This area, which was known as the "Golden Vale," boasted some of the most fertile farmland in all Ireland and it was the locus of a thriving dairy and butter economy that had developed after the Napoleonic Wars. Here, prosperous farmers, like the Midland graziers, increasingly refused to renew the leases of their Catholic tenants in order to consolidate their farms.15

A final one-tenth of the city's Irish work force had been born in the province of Connaught. Most of this province, along with counties Clare, Kerry, and southwestern Cork in Munster, hugged the Atlantic seaboard and differed appreciably from the rest of Ireland. Dominated by rainsoaked bogs, mountainous peninsulas, and rock-barren hills, much of this area — which historians call the West of Ireland — was uncultivable wasteland. Here, smallholders and cottiers continued to live in the ubiquitous mud cabins on tiny re-

———


divided holdings, grew the bountiful potato, and spoke the ancient Gaelic of their forefathers. A world sealed off from the outside by impassable moors and mountains, the West of Ireland, especially west Connaught, still lay beyond the orbit of a modernizing Anglo-Irish market economy and culture. Emigration here, as expected, was negligible until the last six years before the famine when recurring potato crop failures forced some of these native Irishmen to cross “the Big Wather.”

It appears, then, based on the surname analysis, that the great majority of the Irish immigrants to mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh had come from the more modern areas of eastern and central Ireland. Only a minority of these immigrants had emigrated from the more congested and impoverished areas of western Ireland where the Great Famine had raged most fiercely. Unlike major American ports of entry, particularly New York City and Boston, Pittsburgh’s inland location had evidently shielded it from the immediate reverberations of that tragic event.

The population manuscript census schedules listed the place of birth of all family members, including children, and, based on this evidence, it is possible to recreate a rough facsimile of the migration routes of Irish immigrants to Pittsburgh. The great majority of these newcomers — possibly as high as four-fifths — had apparently funneled through the mid-Atlantic ports of Philadelphia and New York City (see Table 2). Perhaps no more than one-tenth of the Irish destined for Pittsburgh had disembarked from ports of entry lying to the north and south of this mid-Atlantic belt. These other wayfarers landed at either one of the Maritime Provinces, principally New Brunswick, and then drifted down the New England coastline or they arrived at the port of Baltimore and then followed the route of


17 There is little discussion in the local press about an influx of Irish famine refugees into the city. For one exception, see *Pittsburgh Catholic*, July 17, 1847.

18 The proportion of Irish immigrants who came to Pittsburgh via Philadelphia is disproportionately high because an indeterminate number of the Irish family heads undoubtedly came by different routes but did not stop long enough along the way to have children. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that single Irish men and women took different routes than their married counterparts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Port of Entry and Region</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia — Mid-Atlantic(^a)</td>
<td>1,283</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City — Upper Mid-Atlantic(^b)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore — Southeast(^c)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston — New England(^d)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans — Deep South(^e)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick — Canadian Maritime Provinces</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown(^f)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,562</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: population manuscript census schedules, Pittsburgh, 1850. Based on the place of birth of the eldest four children of Irish heads of family. Children born in England, Wales, or Scotland were excluded from the tabulation.

\(^a\) Pennsylvania only.
\(^b\) Includes New York, New Jersey, and Delaware.
\(^c\) Includes Maryland, West Virginia, District of Columbia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia.
\(^d\) Includes Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island.
\(^e\) Includes Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Arkansas.
\(^f\) Includes inland states like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Michigan.
the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad into the Monongahela and Ohio valleys. An even smaller proportion — certainly under five percent — migrated to Pittsburgh by way of Boston. Most of these migrants probably journeyed to Pittsburgh accompanied by family and kin. In 1850 nearly three-fifths of the Irish household heads in Pittsburgh were living in a nuclear family setting while less than one-fourth of them lived as boarders in nonrelated households. In sum, then, the low proportion of immigrants from the West of Ireland, the scarcity of Irish migrants from Boston and Canada, and the prevalence of nuclear family households strongly suggest that the Irish of mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh were not part of a famine-ridden flight to the new land.

Although the great bulk of the Pittsburgh Irish were not refugees from the “Great Famine,” many of those who were “pennyless and unfriended” faced the grim ordeal of finding immediate employment in a sometimes begrudging industrial order. Based on a one-seventh stratified sample of Pittsburgh’s male work force, some 52 percent of the Irish in 1850 earned their livelihoods as unskilled laborers, boatmen, and dock- and yard hands (see Table 3). Laboring dwarfed all other occupations; it alone accounted for 48 percent of the total Irish work force.

Little is known about the working lives of Paddy laborers in mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh. How many were common day laborers, millworkers, quarrymen, coal wheelers, or dockhands remains a mystery as do their annual earnings, rates of underemployment, and nature of toil. Wages for common laborers were low — about seventy-five cents a day — hours long and irregular, and work, as always, sporadic and controlled by a network of hiring “bosses.” Gangs of day laborers, faced with the exigencies of freezing winters, worked about two hundred days out of the year. Pay likewise was unpredictable, since private parties and even the city government regularly delayed or even defaulted in paying contractors. About the

19 Calculated from the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
21 See Pittsburgh Catholic, June 22, 1844.
plight of the laborer, a successful Irishman penned this sympathetic doggerel in 1849.

Who is thine enemy — the high
In station, or in wealth the Chief!
The great who coldly pass thee by,
With broad step and averted eye?

TABLE 3
ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION IN THE CLASS STRUCTURE
PITTSBURGH, 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number / Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-White Collar</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low-White Collar</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skilled</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi-Skilled</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unskilled</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unclassifiable</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: one-seventh stratified sample of male work force in the population manuscript census schedules, Pittsburgh, 1850. Note: the sample is selected from 75 percent of the work force in the most commonly held occupations. See Theodore Hershberg et al., "Occupation and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth-Century Cities: A Collaborative Inquiry," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 7 (June 1974) : esp. 175.

*Includes English, Scottish, and Welsh immigrants.

Nonetheless, low living costs, the practice of boarding, especially among single unskilled Irishmen, and the employment of children helped to ease the struggle to survive on subsistence wages. Fuel in the form of coal was cheap, and gangs of children were frequently seen scavenging for it. Rents were also comparatively low, especially in the working-class neighborhoods east of the more fashionable downtown First, Second, and Fourth wards. Often no more than shabby cottages, single-family dwellings there rented for as low as six dollars a month. Boarding was common among unskilled Irish immigrants,
many of whom were young and single. Roughly two-fifths of the city's unskilled Irish household heads in 1850 were boarders. Like the landless agricultural laborer in the old country, poverty in industrial Pittsburgh precluded early marriage. Another one-fifth of the unskilled Irish household heads relied upon the earnings of working children.

Over ten percent of the Irish men were employed in a variety of semiskilled jobs, chief among them being teaming and peddling. Drivers and teamsters comprised 7 percent of the Irish work force in 1850. Although driving a team held out a meager existence, it nonetheless offered the hope, unlike casual laboring, of joining those who were self-employed. Through hard work and avoidance of crippling injuries, enterprising Irish lads could and did save their hard-earned dollars to invest in a team and wagon and set up their own small-scale businesses on the docks. This trade was so appealing to strong-armed Irish men that, more than any other occupation, they literally dominated its ranks, accounting for 75 percent of all the men employed in this occupation.

Another equally attractive occupation to indigent Irish men was peddling. Although only 2 percent of them followed this itinerant trade, they nonetheless dominated it, accounting for 53 percent of all the peddlers in the city. The easiest ingress into petty commerce, the trade required no permanent place of business, a minimal investment of capital, and only a passing familiarity with prevailing business practices. The Irish shared this calling with other humble immigrants, especially Germans, hawking their stocks of goods to fellow countrymen in Market Square.

A sizable number of Irish men — 20 percent — were skilled construction and industrial workmen and journeymen artisans. By economic sector, roughly 8 percent of them were employed in construction, 7 percent in the artisan crafts, and 5 percent in the skilled metal trades. The Irish were underrepresented in all of these eco-

22 Calculated from the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
24 See William Murphy, Allegheny City, to Hugh Donnan, Belfast, county Antrim, May 12, 1873, Sept. 17, 1873, Feb. 5, 1874, Letters #D279512/2, ... /5, ... /6, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.
25 See Pittsburgh Catholic, July 17, 1847.
This arose from a number of factors. First, as immigrants from a predominantly rural society where the bulk of the population continued to eke out a living as smallholders, cottiers, and agricultural laborers, most Irish immigrants simply lacked the skills and experience to enter these trades. Second, all the trades in apparels, food and beverage, and wood and wood products operated out of small workshop settings in which entry as an apprentice was frequently regulated by an informal family and kinship training and hiring system. Distilleries, cap- and hatmaking firms, bakeries, boot- and shoemaking shops, tailoring concerns, and tobacco and cigar-making shops all employed between two and six workmen each. More important, the labor force in the apparel and food and beverage crafts was disproportionately German — 38 and 43 percent respectively — while the majority in wood and wood products — 53 percent — were native-born whites. Third, most of these shops, with the exception of shoemaking and tailoring, were seldom patronized by Irish Catholics because their wares were strange in terms of taste and style. Consequently, it is quite possible that upwardly mobile Irish men eschewed them, preferring the more familiar proprietary callings in saloonkeeping and grocerying. Unlike their German rivals, the few Irish men who did venture into the artisan crafts located their shops on the periphery of the downtown central business district where they catered essentially to a non-Irish clientele.

The Irish comprised a larger proportion of the work force in the skilled construction and metal trades. Again, explanations for this pattern are obscure, and until historians are better informed about the nature of work in nineteenth-century America and the attitudes of a highly diverse labor force any analysis is formative. It is not improbable, though, that the relative absence of an unskilled German labor pool and the nature of the work eased Irish entry. Unlike the German-dominated artisan crafts, the skilled construction and metal trades were predominantly native-born in composition. In both, native-born whites comprised over fifty percent of the respective work forces in Pittsburgh in 1850. Thus it is quite possible that the

26 Unlike either peddling or teaming, the Irish did not dominate these skilled pursuits; rather, they formed a distinct minority. In the construction trades, they made up 28 percent of the male work force; in the skilled metal trades, 20 percent; in the apparel and woodmaking handicrafts, 15 percent; and in the food and beverage crafts, 12 percent.
27 Calculated from the manufacturing manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
28 Calculated from a one-seventh stratified sample of the male labor force in the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
29 Ibid.
English language posed a barrier to German employment while facilitating Irish entry. The Germans in both of these sectors of the city's economy constituted only about ten percent of the labor force.

Equally important, construction contractors, machine shops, iron foundries, and rolling mills employed laborers and helpers. As an example, the bulk of the Irish living in the heavily industrialized lower Strip (Fifth Ward) had learned skilled ironwork as hired helpers. A sizable number of them had mastered skills like puddling and heating in England and Scotland before immigrating to the United States. Others — undoubtedly a majority — had learned these skills after hiring on as helpers in Pittsburgh's fledgling but rapidly growing iron mills. In either case, the growth of the iron industry, its voracious appetite for labor, and most important the intercraft nature of production had allowed a small minority of Irish men to ascend into the skilled ranks.

The Irish in the skilled metal trades earned their livings principally as iron puddlers, heaters, and rollers. Like the artisans in the consumer crafts, these workers were paid by the piece, usually the ton, but unlike a number of handicrafts, the expansion of the iron industry had meant full employment at competitive wages for those fortunate enough to escape work-induced injuries. Highly skilled, well remunerated, and intensely proud, these workers were part of an "aristocracy of labor." They controlled the means of production, hired their own helpers, and commanded top wages. In 1850, puddlers in Pittsburgh earned more than $13.00 a week after deducting wages for their helpers, while heaters received $15.00.

Little is known about the nature of work in the artisan crafts and construction trades of mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh but if other eastern cities like New York City and Philadelphia are any indication, a significant number of them were being undermined by changes in the organization of work, production methods, and authority relationships. The manufacturing manuscript census schedules, how-

30 A helper was not a laborer but an apprentice and employee of a skilled ironworker.
31 This analysis is based on the place of birth of children of Irish-born puddlers listed in the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850, Fifth Ward.
33 The classic statement on the debilitating effect of "merchant capitalism" upon a craft still is John Commons, "The American Shoemakers, 1648-1895," Quarterly Journal of Economics 24 (1909): 39-83. See also Norman J. Ware, The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860 (Boston and New York, 1924), esp.
ever, did enumerate the earnings of male and female workers in particular industries and, although these data obviously obscure very real wage differentials by skill and the vicissitudes of piece pay, they strongly suggest that workers in the city artisan crafts, like their eastern counterparts, labored under the onus of a depressed wage system. The city’s male tobacco workers in 1850 earned a paltry $4.07 weekly, while those in baking and brewing made $4.29 and $4.78, respectively, a week. Workers in the city’s boot- and shoemaking shops fared better, earning $5.19 a week, and those in cigarmaking averaged $5.25, those in tailoring, $5.80, in chair and cabinetmaking, $6.11, and in distilling, $6.13 a week.14

Eleven percent of the Irish labor force were petty shopkeepers, artisan manufacturers, and nonmanual wage earners. These shopkeepers were small neighborhood proprietors, principally greengrocers, food dealers, and saloon and innkeepers who owned less than twenty-five hundred dollars in real estate.35 Their modest establishments greatly depended upon the patronage of an immigrant working class, usually but not exclusively those of their own nationality. Often former workmen themselves, they dealt intimately and directly with the Irish community, carrying familiar foodstuffs and spirits, and acting as friend, confidant, and creditor. The great majority of Irish artisan manufacturers, in turn, were the owners of small shoemaking, tailor, and blacksmith shops. Usually located in Irish neighborhoods or along key thoroughfares, their workshops daily hummed with the sound of industry as the master and from two to four workmen busily assembled wares. Finally, nearly all of the Irish nonmanual employees were clerks employed in either downtown financial firms, retail shops, or family businesses.

Only about five percent of the Irish work force held jobs in the more rewarding commercial and professional pursuits. Most of these respectable Irishmen owned successful retail stores, dry and fancy

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14 Calculated from the manufacturing manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.

35 I have arbitrarily selected this amount to distinguish between large-scale and petty shopkeepers listed on the population manuscript census schedules, Pittsburgh, 1850. Only 8 percent of the city’s family heads in that year owned $2,500 or more in real estate. In fact, property ownership itself was a characteristic of a very slim minority of the city’s adult population. Only 14 percent of the family heads owned real estate.
goods shops, and inns in the downtown central business district. As the hub of the city's retail and financial world, the central business district catered primarily to a prosperous Yankee-Protestant middle class, and the Irish, like their ethnic rivals, eagerly sought their patronage. Most of these successful Irishmen were probably Presbyterians from Ulster.

As with most European immigrants in other nineteenth-century American cities, the Irish lived in widely scattered regions in mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh. Roughly three-fifths of those sixteen years or older lived in the Third, Fifth, and Sixth wards (see map and Table 4). In none of these wards did the Irish constitute a majority of the inhabitants. Instead, they shared these wards with native-born whites, especially in the Third Ward, and to a lesser degree, with German and English immigrants, particularly in the Fifth Ward along the Allegheny River. Within these wards, however, Irish Catholics tended to cluster around their respective parish churches. By 1850, three distinct Irish-Catholic neighborhoods had emerged, and each of them differed in terms of social setting, ethnic composition, and class structure.

**TABLE 4**

**ETHNICITY AND RACE OF ADULT INHABITANTS BY WARD**

(16 years or older)

PITTSBURGH, 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Native-Born</th>
<th>Irish</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Other Immigrant</th>
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<td>197 12.5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>61 8.6</td>
<td>30 9.6</td>
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<td>6.8</td>
<td>34 4.8</td>
<td>50 15.9</td>
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<td>290 18.4</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>119 16.8</td>
<td>43 13.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>219 13.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>204 12.9</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>253 35.7</td>
<td>47 15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>291 39.1</td>
<td>60</td>
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<td>59 4.9</td>
<td>26 3.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>48 4.0</td>
<td>54 7.6</td>
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<td>172</td>
<td>1580 100.0</td>
<td>1212 100.0</td>
<td>709 100.0</td>
<td>314 100.0</td>
<td>46 100.1</td>
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Source: one-seventh sample of inhabitants 16 years or older from population manuscript census schedules, Pittsburgh, 1850.

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36 In the Third Ward, the Irish comprised 31 percent of the adult inhabitants; in the Fifth Ward, 27 percent; and in the Sixth Ward, 38 percent.
ACROSS "THE BIG WATHER"
A sizable Irish-Catholic community had settled around St. Paul’s Cathedral at the corner of Fifth and Grant streets on the eastern fringe of the downtown business district in the Third Ward. The presence of the cathedral and its proximity to the rolling mills and foundries on the outlying riverbanks and to the retail stores and small artisan workshops in and around the central business district had attracted many Irish immigrants to this area. Most of them lived in a neighborhood bounded by Diamond Alley on the west and south, Market and Liberty streets on the west and north, Strawberry Alley and Tunnel Street on the east, and Pennsylvania Avenue on the south.

Amid this neighborhood of busy shops and crowded streets was an assemblage of people divided by ethnicity, class, and religion. Juxtaposed next to the downtown business district, the great bulk of the male work force — nearly two-thirds in 1850 — labored at a multiplicity of skilled trades and the commercial and professional callings. Laborers, dock men, and stable hands, in turn, made up less than one-fourth of the labor force.

As expected, the Irish were the largest single ethnic group. They constituted about two-fifths of the male work force. Although a large proportion of these Celtic immigrants — 42 percent — earned a living as common laborers, boatmen, and stable hands and another 12 percent worked as draymen, hucksters, and carters, a significant minority also earned their livelihoods as skilled construction tradesmen and journeymen and master artisans. Twenty-nine percent of the Irish living here were skilled workmen, shoemaking, tailoring, and carpentry being the most commonly held occupations. Another 14 percent were engaged in nonmanual pursuits, chiefly as clerks and grocers and, to a lesser degree, as merchants and lawyers. Most of these respectable Irish men lived on the more fashionable front streets, especially Fifth Street, Diamond Alley, and Grant Street, and daily commuted to their places of business or employment in the downtown business district.

Native-born whites also comprised a significant proportion — slightly less than one-third — of the work force. As expected, they gravitated toward the skilled trades and commercial and professional callings. Other ethnic groups were quite small in size. German immigrants comprised only one-seventh of the community’s work force. The

37 See Paul Campbell, “The First Bishop of Pittsburgh,” in Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Catholic Pittsburgh's One Hundred Years (Chicago, 1943), 31-33.
38 Calculated from the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
great bulk of these immigrants — 75 percent — were skilled workmen and most of them continued to follow their time-honored crafts in the apparel, leather, and food and beverage industries. English, Scottish, and Welsh immigrants, in turn, represented only 8 percent of the labor force and the majority of them were in the skilled trades, especially tailoring, machine-making, and iron molding.41

By 1850, a large pocket of Irish had also settled on “The Hill” overlooking the smoke-ridden and heavily industrialized lower Strip (Fifth Ward). Most of the Hill Irish lived in an area bordered by Herron Hill on the north, Washington Street on the west, Fulton Street on the east, and Wylie Avenue to the south. Located on the outskirts of the city in the Sixth Ward, this neighborhood was far removed from the industrialized riverbanks and as a consequence, the Irish living here, like the other inhabitants, were poor and often unemployed. In 1850 70 percent of them toiled as unskilled laborers, primarily on the house construction gangs and public works projects. Only 13 percent were engaged in the skilled trades, mainly as “green-hands” in the construction crafts, tailoring, and shoemaking. The other Irish men worked as draymen and teamsters or as petty shopkeepers, primarily in the grocer-ying and food dealer trades.42

Many of the Irish living here were single men, and their indigency impeded the development of an Irish-Catholic institutional life. Indeed, the only Catholic institution existing in this vicinity at mid-century, St. Paul’s Orphan Asylum on Webster Avenue, had been founded and financed by the parishioners of the cathedral to train young boys in the virtues of farm and vocational labor. It was not until 1853 that the Irish on the Hill raised the necessary funds to build their own church — a simple red-brick edifice appropriately named St. Bridget’s.43

This neighborhood boasted the heaviest concentration of Irish in the city. In 1850 more than one-half the male work force was Irish by nativity. As a consequence, other ethnic groups, unlike the downtown community, were underrepresented. Native-born whites constituted only about one-fifth of the labor force. Germans likewise were overshadowed by the Celtic presence. They made up but 8 percent of the male workers and the bulk of them — nearly three-fifths — were common laborers. The neighborhood also boasted a relatively large black

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
population that was largely employed at unskilled labor and public service jobs like cooks, barbers, and stewards. Distinct in terms of color and victimized because of it, these people clustered along Wylie Avenue in a segregated area known as "Hayti" which cut through the Third, Sixth, and Seventh wards.44

Another large Irish community lived on the lower Strip in the Fifth Ward. The hub of this community was St. Patrick’s Church located at Factory and Liberty streets at the foot of Herron Hill. Built in 1811, this church had initially boasted a large German-speaking congregation, but the completion of the Pennsylvania Canal west of Johnstown in the early 1830s had altered the character of this parish by attracting large numbers of Paddy laborers to the Strip. The influx of Irish-Catholics led to repeated clashes with their German co-religionists who left the parish and in 1842 built their own church — St. Philomena’s — a short two blocks away.45

Most of the Irish on the lower Strip lived in an ethnically diverse community bounded by Canal Street on the west, Liberty Street on the south, the Allegheny River on the north, and Factory Street on the east. As the dominant ethnic group, the Irish comprised about two-fifths of the male work force in 1850.46 Native-born whites and Germans, in turn, were well represented too, accounting for roughly three-tenths and one-fifth respectively of the neighborhood’s male work force. Similarly, a large pocket of English, Scottish, and Welsh had settled on the cramped, soot-covered streets of the neighborhood. Comprising 12 percent of the labor force, they were, in fact, overrepresented compared to their proportion of the city-wide work force.47

This ethnic diversity was a consequence of the Strip’s highly industrial character. As the most industrialized quarter of Pittsburgh, it teemed with rolling mills, foundries, ironworks, and glasshouses which had attracted an army of toilers from many different countries. Like their native-born and British neighbors, the great majority of the Irish living within the shadow of St. Patrick’s steeple were industrial workingmen. In 1850, 40 percent of them were skilled workmen and at least 60 percent of these men were ironworkers, especially puddlers

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44 Calculated from the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850. See also Holt, Forging a Majority, 27.
45 See Edward Joyce, “The Roots of the Diocese” in Catholic Pittsburgh’s One Hundred Years, 93-95; Lambing, Brief Biographical Sketches, 86-87; Lambing, History of the Catholic Church, 106-10.
46 Calculated from the population manuscript census schedules for Pittsburgh, 1850.
47 Ibid.
and heaters. Another 50 percent of the Irish living in the lower Strip were unskilled laborers; most of them were employed in the iron industry.48

Densely populated with a working class fragmented by nationality and religion, the lower Strip bristled with ethnic antagonisms and rivalries. Brawls between political gangs and rival hose and engine companies were common events, while St. Patrick’s Day and the Orangemen’s Parade on the Twelfth of July were “days of terror.” More important, the Strip was a bastion of support of Mayor Joseph Barker’s militant “Anti-Catholic and People’s Party” campaign in the early 1850s.49

What conclusions, then, can be drawn about Irish-Catholic community life in mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh? First, the Irish-Catholic community was a relatively undifferentiated world in terms of regional origins, migration patterns, and, to a lesser degree, class structure. The bulk of these immigrants had apparently come from the more modern areas of eastern and central Ireland which were characterized by commercial farming, communications with the outside world, and large numbers of English speakers. Most of them had immigrated to the United States via Philadelphia and to a lesser degree by way of New York City and Baltimore.50 Few had migrated from outside of this mid-Atlantic belt—that is, from the Canadian Maritime Provinces, New England, or the South Atlantic states. The development of a statewide railroad network, the growth of the iron and mining industries, and the existence of family and kin lured many of these work-starved newcomers to Pittsburgh.

The transatlantic voyage and journey to Pittsburgh did not shatter the matrix of a traditional Irish-Catholic culture. Most Celtic immigrants continued to live in nuclear family households and to remain involved with their church. Nonetheless, as recent immigrants often unskilled and mobile, their immediate quest was earning a

48 Ibid.
50 As a port of entry, Philadelphia relied predominantly upon female and skilled male labor. In 1850, a disproportionately high number of the Irish — 42 percent — were skilled workers compared to only 20 percent in Pittsburgh. Thus, unskilled Irish men had little occasion to remain in Philadelphia. See Dale Beryl Light, Jr., “Class, Ethnicity and the Urban Ecology in a Nineteenth Century City: Philadelphia’s Irish, 1840-1890” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979), 17-18.
livelihood, not the creation of a cohesive community infrastructure. In 1850, there were only three Irish-Catholic parishes and a limited number of beneficial and fraternal organizations to accommodate some 10,000 Irish Catholics living in Pittsburgh and its neighbor, Allegheny City.51

In part, the dearth of associations among the Irish reflected their estrangement from a dominant Protestant culture. Mid-nineteenth-century Pittsburgh was a storm center of militant anti-Catholic nativism. Catholic churches were the targets of numerous cross burnings, arson attempts, acts of vandalism, and torchlight processions. Street preachers daily ranted against the evils of the "popish church," and nativist societies like the American Protestant Association secretly hatched plots to burn down all of the city's Catholic churches. The Irish, in turn, because of their poverty and connections with the Catholic Church, were victimized by this outpouring of nativist prejudice. By the early 1850s, the Catholic community was, in the words of its leader, Bishop Michael O'Connor, "dispersed, beaten, discouraged without the means to unite." 52

Equally important, though, the survival of a traditional Irish folk culture had impeded the development of associational ties. A case in point: Father Theobald Mathew, the famed temperance priest, visited Pittsburgh in July 1851, and his two-week tour drew large crowds. Many of Father Mathew's pledge signers were the Irish-Catholic laboring poor who believed that he possessed supernatural powers that would protect them from evil and misfortune.53 Passive and capricious, they flocked to the crusade more out of deference to Father Mathew than out of a commitment to organized personal reform. As a consequence, the cause quickly faded in its appeal after Father Mathew's departure.

51 As an example, there were only two orphan asylums, two temperance societies, a hospital — Mercy Hospital — a newspaper — the Pittsburgh Catholic — an indigent-aid home — the House of Industry — and four parochial schools in 1850 and some of these institutions addressed the needs of the German community.


53 See Patricia Simpson, "The Drunk and the Teetotaler: Two Phases in Temperance Reform Among the Irish Working Class of Pittsburgh" (unpublished manuscript, 1977), esp. 67, 82-87.
The opening of Mercy Hospital in 1847 evoked a similar reaction on the part of the Irish-Catholic poor. Built largely with middle-class Protestant funds, the imposing brick edifice on Boyd’s Hill was a forbidding sight to these people, reminiscent of the hated workhouse. Rather than enter the hospital, many of them continued to rely upon traditional medical practices and faith healers.54

A final example was the “Paddy funeral.” The American equivalent of the Irish “wake amusements,” the Paddy funeral was often a ribald affair in which a “long line of carriages filled with mourners” and followed by the hearse drove through the streets — sometimes recklessly — to the deceased’s church for the Mass of the Dead. The spirit drinking, loud talk, hilarity, and comical antics which attended these funeral processions were ritualistic expressions of a transplanted Irish folk culture. Through their performance, the mourners not only masqueraded their sense of tragedy but, more important, they sought to propitiate the mischievous spirits of the “other world.” 55

It appears, then, that many of the city’s Irish Catholics, especially the laboring poor, continued to cling to a traditional rural folk culture despite their origins from the more modern English-speaking regions of eastern and central Ireland. Uprooted more by the reorganization of a rural economy than by the horror of the Great Famine, they brought a culture that was at fundamental variance with that of a modernizing America; a heritage that was bound by the restraints of a communal past and the legacy of historic poverty. To a people who saw life as a preordained fate beyond their control, the creation of associational ties beyond family and church had little concrete relevance.56 Not until the 1870s and 1880s would the Irish-Catholic community of Pittsburgh create a rich institutional life reflecting a commitment to its adopted land and a belief in secular change.

54 See Monsieur M. O’Connor, Enreque de Pittsburgh, a les Directeurs de L’Association pour la Propagation de La Foi, Paris, Letter #F115-5865, n.d. at the University of Notre Dame Archives; Sister M. Cornelius Meerwald, Mercy Hospital, 1847-1959 (Pittsburgh, n.d.), 45; Campbell, “First Bishop of Pittsburgh,” 34.

55 See Pittsburgh Catholic, Feb. 19, 1847 (quote); see also Sean O. Suilleabhain, Irish Wake Amusements (Cork, 1967).

56 For a thorough treatment of this theme, based on an extensive collection of Irish-Catholic emigrant letters, see Miller, “Emigrants and Exiles,” passim. At a later date I intend to visit Ireland to look at the emigrant letters from the Western Pennsylvania region at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and other research institutions in order to test the application of Miller’s interpretation to the Irish-Catholic community of the Pittsburgh environs.