The Irish in New Orleans, 1845-1855

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THE IRISH IN NEW ORLEANS, 1845-1855

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by

Ruby Nell Gordy
B.A., Northwestern State College, 1957
August, 1960
MANUSCRIPT THESSES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her thanks to Dr. John Duffy, under whose leadership the research for this project was begun, to Dr. Merl Reed for his helpful suggestions, and particularly to Dr. Edwin Davis under whose guidance the study was written.
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ABSTRACT

Between the years of 1845 and 1855 over one and a quarter million of Ireland's population fled to the United States in order to escape dire poverty and almost certain death in their native land. Only a small percentage of these immigrants settled in New Orleans, but this minority group played a significant role in this period of the city's history. The purpose of this study was to determine how the Irish of New Orleans lived, what social and political problems their presence created, and in what ways they contributed to the growth and development of the city. Newspapers, census records, state government documents, and travelers' accounts are sources of information on this national group.

These immigrants suffered many hardships on the long voyage to America, and many arrived with typhus and other diseases, which quickly spread through the squalid, filthy tenements in which they settled. The Irish worked hard during the day and congregated at night in the coffeehouses of the Irish Channel, where they drank and fought. Bloody riots occurred as the Know-Nothing Party tried to keep political power out of the hands of the
Irish. Although these rowdy immigrants endangered the health of the city and threatened its political order, they constituted an invaluable source of labor for the commerce of the city and for the construction of badly needed canals, levees, and railroads.
American development and progress from colonial times until World War I is closely related to the migration of thousands of Europeans from the Old World to the New. From the scattered, seventeenth century settlements of Englishmen along the Atlantic seaboard, colonial America grew and prospered as other European nationalities journeyed across the ocean, increasing in numbers as the eighteenth century progressed. While Huguenot Frenchmen sought refuge from persecution in the English colonies along the coast, their Catholic countrymen carved out an inland empire in America. During this period, Scotch-Irish and Germans added to this stock their divergent variety of customs and cultural traits, making an indelible imprint on American life.

As the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed the migration of still more Germans, another group, the Irish, began settling in America. In the 1840's and 1850's the waves of Irish immigration brought to American shores over one and a quarter million of these people
from their ancestral homeland on the Emerald Isle. Many factors motivated this great movement. British control of the country, highly resented, led to futile rebellions, religious conflicts arose between the Catholic nation and her rulers, and from a system of absentee landlordism came the evils of high rents, low wages, and unemployment. The lot of the Irish peasant was indeed hard, and his chief motive for immigration to the New World was economic. Many of the poor farmers never tasted meat and lived in one-room houses with no windows and often with no chimney, where the pig shared the single-room habitation with the family. There were practically no educational opportunities, and the peasants had no vote.

People of the lowest economic level usually did not immigrate until faced with the choice between flight and death. Irish immigration before 1830 came chiefly from the farming class which stood between the gentry and the peasant laborer, but Irish affairs reached a crisis during the "Great Famine" in the late 1840's, and the peasant had no choice but to flee or starve. Friends and

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relatives in America encouraged prospective immigrants, and gifts of money which many of them received were evidence that there was hope for a better life in the New Country.

The Irish traveled to America in both English and American merchant ships, whose human cargoes of immigrants merely supplemented their regular shipping runs. Ship owners not infrequently placed misleading advertisements in newspapers telling of "beautiful ships" which sailed "remarkably fast" with abundant supplies of food and water, while actually the ships were often old and undermanned, with brutal treatment the rule rather than the exception. Most of the Irish immigrants went to Cork; from there they were ferried to Liverpool, where they boarded transoceanic ships. In this passage there seemed to be a never-ending chain of plots to exploit them. In Liverpool boarding houses and passenger brokers overcharged and deceived the immigrants, and on arrival in America, the rounds of cheating and abuse began again.²

Once in America, most of the Irish, arriving in New

York first, either settled there or pushed westward. However, some traveled southward, although the numbers were relatively small compared with the overall immigration. Those who went to the South and settled generally entered one of three southern ports, Baltimore, Charleston, and New Orleans, while a smaller number arrived in Savannah and Galveston. But the South never attracted large numbers of immigrants. Concentrating on agriculture, it lacked industrial development and skilled jobs. The immigrant was forced to compete with slave labor, a system which he opposed on economic rather than moral grounds, for it precluded his renting of land for personal use, and the plantation system of farming required a greater capital outlay than the average immigrant could possibly amass.

Some immigrants avoided New Orleans because the voyage lasted two or three weeks longer than the journey to New York, the ships sailing there were inferior, and New Orleans' reputation as the city of yellow fever, cholera, and other diseases was well known. Nevertheless, New Orleans received thousands of Irish immigrants, more

3Caroline MacGill, "Immigration to the Southern States," in Julian A. C. Chandler and others (eds.) The South in the Building of the Nation, 13 vols. (Richmond, 1910-1913), V, 596.
in fact, than any other southern city.  

The Irish had been settling in New Orleans long before the waves of immigration which began in the 1840's. Numerous nationalities settled in New Orleans during the French and Spanish colonial periods and continued to arrive during the early years following the Purchase of Louisiana in 1803. While few Irish families migrated to the colony during the French period, a larger number began to arrive from Spain or her colonies after the coming of Governor Alejandro O'Reilly in 1769. By the end of the 1820's such men as Daniel Clark, Oliver Pollock, Maunsel White, and Alexander Porter had become prominent in the economic and political life of the area, and numerous Irish merchant families prospered on Canal Street and in other business sections. The great majority of the Irish immigrants, however, were very poor, and in 1826 Reverend Timothy Flint wrote feelingly of the "multitudes of the poor Catholic Irish, with their ruddy faces, without proper nursing, in crowded apartments . . . swept away with unpitying fury" by epidemic and other

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4Page, "The Transportation of Immigrants," 736.

diseases.  

An important wave of Irish immigrants came to New Orleans in 1832, when construction began on the New Basin Canal, which was to connect Lake Pontchartrain with New Orleans. Serious labor shortages during this period, caused by thousands of deaths from yellow fever and cholera, led the Canal Bank and Trust Company to actively encourage the importation of Irish and German labor. Slaves were considered too valuable for such dangerous work.

The average wages of workers on the canal was $20 a month plus living quarters, food, and all the whiskey the men needed. Tyrone Power, the Irish actor, spoke of his countrymen working "under fierce sun, in pestilential swamps . . . wading among stumps of trees . . . mid-deep in black mud, clearing the spaces pumped out by powerful steam-engines; wheeling, digging, hewing, or bearing burdens it made one's shoulders ache to look upon." They lived, many with their families, in open log

6 Timothy Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years (Boston, 1826), 299-300.

shelters half submerged in the swamps, "worse lodged than the cattle of the field..." They ate the coarsest food and drank heavily. The mortality rate was extremely high, and the priest was the laborers' only comfort. 8 Simon Cameron, later to become Secretary of War in Lincoln's Cabinet, directed the construction of the canal. 9

The Irish inhabitants of New Orleans before the late 1840's were few, however, in comparison to the large numbers who came with the heavy waves of Irish immigration during the Great Famine. Though many of these arrivals continued their journey up the Mississippi, others remained, and in 1850, the Irish constituted 20,200 of the total New Orleans population of 129,747. The Irish were the largest immigrant group in the city; the Germans were the second largest. 10

Though a minority, the Irish in New Orleans were of great significance in the social, political, and economic life of the city. The "Irish Channel," where many of the

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9 Times Picayune, July 18, 1837.

10 James De Bow, Compendium on the Seventh Census, (Washington, 1854), 399.
Immigrants settled, was a notoriously dangerous section of town, and more than one policeman was killed there. Political conflicts over the illegal use of the Irish vote precipitated bloody riots in the city. The health of the citizens suffered as the Irish brought in dreaded diseases. In spite of the problems presented by the thousands of newcomers to the city, they made a valuable contribution to the labor force at a time when workers were greatly needed for internal improvements.

The Irish in New Orleans were in many ways typical of their fellow countrymen in the United States. The most significant difference was the greater suffering from severe epidemics which the Irish who settled in the marshy, disease-plagued southern city experienced. In other respects, however, the problems and contributions of the Irish in New Orleans and those in other large cities of the nation were much the same. They had left their homeland for the same reasons and had endured similar hardships on their voyage to the new country. On arrival they congregated in filthy slums, where they did not forget their native land, for they joined Irish organizations, kept abreast of events in Ireland, and, in spite of their poverty, sent generous contributions back to their homeland. Participating in politics, they became the target of the Know-Nothing Party. The Irish
In New Orleans, like those in other areas of the United States, came to America at a time when laborers were needed and helped to fill that need.
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE IRISH

The story of the immigrants' voyage to America is not a pleasant one. Food was scarce, and the fresh water supply usually did not last the entire voyage, though none was allowed for bathing. Passengers were crowded into a small, poorly ventilated area, and, under such conditions, disease spread rapidly. Both Britain and the United States passed laws for the purpose of improving conditions on the immigrant ships, but such regulations were poorly enforced and easily evaded. In 1819 the United States passed a law which allowed only two passengers for every five tons of space, but since the passengers were in addition to the ship's cargo, overcrowding continued.

The trip from Liverpool to New Orleans often lasted fifty days and sometimes took longer than two months. Usually a ship captain leased an area of the ship to an emigration agent and assumed no responsibility for the passengers, leaving the agent free to crowd in as many immigrants as he could, without regard to age, sex, or health.1 English ships in the 1840's had wooden bunks

with straw-filled mattresses, on which the passengers often ate. Most of the immigrants of this period brought their own food. They lived largely on oatmeal porridge, which they sometimes sweetened with molasses, while their main meal consisted of herring and potatoes. The Liverpool vessel America, which sailed to New Orleans with 493 passengers, had only one cooking hearth, five by three feet, for all of its passengers, so that each family was allowed to cook its meals only once in four days.

Conditions on the immigrant vessels were generally wretched, but particularly callous treatment on certain ships brought strong protests from American citizens. In 1852 the British ship Imperial contracted to bring 521 passengers from Liverpool to New Orleans, with the agreement that steerage passengers could remain on board for forty-eight hours after the arrival of the ship. When the vessel reached Balize, the passengers were put into a towboat, where they remained without proper shelter from 2:00 P. M. until 8:00 A. M. the following morning, when they were landed on the levees. The case

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2Carl Wittke, The Irish in America (Baton Rouge, 1956), 15-16.

3Louis Voss, History of the German Society of New Orleans (New Orleans, 1927), 76.
was taken to court, where the judge ruled that a British ship on the high seas did not come under the court's jurisdiction and that any action on the matter had to be taken by the British consul.4

In the spring of 1851 two British vessels from Liverpool were seized in New Orleans by the United States marshall. One of these, the Blanche, arrived with approximately 500 passengers and reported 25 deaths on the voyage; eventually 11/4 of the remainder were taken to the Charity Hospital. The ship's captain refused to accept the blame for conditions on the ship and gave assurance that things were not as bad as they might seem: "Of all this number I lost 25 by death—certainly not an excessive mortality under the lamentable circumstances," he stated, "and it ought to be remarked that not one English passenger died; though under the same circumstances, and having the same diet as the rest, who were from Ireland. Nor did I lose one of my crew . . . ." The captain suggested that the mortality of the Irish might have resulted from the effect of "debility and previous habits." 5 The reaction of their countrymen in New Orleans to this

4 *True Delta*, December 16, 19, 1852.
5 *Ibid.*, April 1, 5, 1851.
statement can easily be imagined.

Another ship seized by the United States marshall was the Otilla. The condition of the passengers who landed from the ship was described as impossible to imagine. "The male passengers glided along ghastly, wild, and idiotic; and the females, married women and girls, reeled like drunken creatures, half-naked, filthy, gaunt, spectral looking things, with eyes sunk deep in their bloodless socket, expression disordered, language strange and incoherent..." 6

John Maginnis, Irish immigrant editor of the New Orleans True Delta, who felt toward England much as other Irish did, declared that "more filthy and disgusting wretches do not disgrace the form of men" than the British captains engaged in the immigrant trade.7

According to law, the Otilla and the Blanche could be declared forfeit and the captains fined $50 for each excess passenger and imprisonment for not more than one year. However, President Fillmore issued a warrant of remission on condition that the owners pay $50 for each excess passenger.8

6Ibid., June 13, 1851.
7Ibid., December 17, 1852.
8Ibid., June 29, 1851.
When the immigrants reached New Orleans, they were deceived by "inhuman, avaricious boarding-house keepers and runners." Runners for boarding houses and for Mississippi River steamers, who received fifty cents for each boarder or passenger they secured, sometimes boarded the ship at the mouth of the river and plied their trade.

The immigrant who decided to continue his journey up the Mississippi found conditions on the river trip similar to those on his ocean voyage. Though some of the ship captains were humane, others crowded passengers together into a small space for the nine to twelve day journey with no regard for privacy and no provision for medical aid.

Many of the immigrants did not journey up the river but remained in New Orleans. These new arrivals, particularly the Irish and Germans, supplied the city with a large labor force. Walt Whitman, who saw, on a Sunday morning, Irishmen on the way to church in "quaintly cut blue coats and tarnished black buttons," remarked that

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9ibid., April 24, 1851.
10Voos, The German Society, 77.
11Picayune, April 3, 1847; True Delta, May 15.
many of the Irish were "tolerably well off." Although some of this immigrant group did prosper, they were a minority. Irish-born citizens owned grocery stores, coffee houses, book stores, drayage outfits, and millinery stores. On the downtown edge of the Irish Channel was St. Mary's Market, which was Irish for eighty-six years; there more than one merchant became prosperous and moved to Canal Street.

The small businessmen were lost sight of, however, in the large numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers. The occupations most frequently listed by the Irish in the Census of 1850 were "laborer," carpenter, boatman, and drayman; others were cab drivers, clerks, waiters, shoemakers, barkeepers, blacksmiths, servants, and stevedores, while a smaller number had become brick layers, plasterers, and contractors. Almost all of the nurses who assisted the Sisters of Charity at the Charity Hospital were Irish males, and the cooks at the institution were Irish women. The servant staff at the St. Charles

12_ Cresc e n t, May 15, 1848.
13_ Baudier, St. Patrick's. 11.
14_ John Chase, Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children, and Other Streets in New Orleans (New Orleans, 1949). 221-2. The market was closed in 1922, and the site of the market is today a parkway. Ibid.
Hotel was composed largely of Irish men and women.\textsuperscript{15}

Watchmen and police jobs appealed to the Irish. In 1854 the First District police force was over 80 per cent foreign-born; out of a total force of 150, 98 were Irish. In the Second District most of the police were immigrants, and 26 per cent of the total number were Irish. In the other districts the forces were similarly proportioned.\textsuperscript{16}

The unskilled Irish laborers dug drainage ditches, built railroads and levees, and built and cleaned out canals. Work was done on the Carondelet Basin and on the Melpomene Canal during the period of heaviest immigration. Contractors, facing a growing labor problem, met almost every immigrant ship that arrived in New Orleans, and soon gangs of husky foreign laborers were a common sight in the lower Mississippi Valley, where they worked winter and summer. The Irish, strong, unlearned, and credulous, easily fell into the hands of labor contractors.\textsuperscript{17} Most

\textsuperscript{15}Seventh Census of the United States, 1850 (Unpublished, on microfilm in Louisiana State University Library), Schedule I, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.

\textsuperscript{16}W. Darrell Overdyke, \textit{The Know Nothing Party in the South} (Baton Rouge, 1950), 242.

\textsuperscript{17}Robert W. Harrison, "Levee Building in Mississippi before the Civil War," \textit{Journal of Mississippi History}, XII, 70.
of the Irish and the German laborers worked by the day, but some contracted for a week, a month, or even for an entire year. 18

Dr. E. H. Barton spoke of "the poor . . . the immigrant . . . that class that has raised the city from the swamp and made it what it is--that has cleared the land and drained it--made the streets--constructed the dwellings, and done so much to develop its destiny. . . ." 19

The concentration of Irish immigrants in the cities brought housing problems, and they were advised to seek farms, 20 but, in contrast to the Germans and Scandinavians, only a small percentage became tillers of the soil. The Irish knew almost nothing of American farming methods and agricultural implements, many of them arrived penniless and needed jobs that would yield immediate cash, and since farming experience in Ireland had not been pleasant, they did not wish to repeat it. The city, with its church and its close neighbors, was more attractive to the gregarious Irish. 21

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20 True Delta, May 27, 1852; Picayune, April 25, 1849.

21 Wittke, Irish in America, 62-3.
The average daily wage without board in Louisiana by 1850 was one dollar for unskilled workers and over two dollars for skilled workers, and there is evidence that New Orleans laborers often received more than these amounts. A railroad contractor advertised for workers at $1.75 per day, a New Orleans sugar refinery paid an average wage of $35 a month, Lead's Foundary paid its unskilled laborers $1.50 a day and its mechanics $2.50, and painters and carpenters made as high as $3 a day. Irish firemen on the river boats made from $30 to $40 a month, and sometimes $60. It was the custom, one of them told Olmsted, to work three weeks and then spend one week on land for "liquid refreshment."

Though wages were higher in New Orleans than in other parts of the South, the high cost of living in the

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23 *True Delta*, March 23, 1854.

24 *De Bow's Review*, VI, (October, 1848), 296.


city reduced purchasing power, and there was little the laborer could do to increase his earnings. In the 1850's there existed in New Orleans only two labor unions in the modern sense of the term, the New Orleans Typographical Society and the Screwmen's Benevolent Association. Sometimes efforts were made for higher wages. Because labor was scarce following the Epidemic of 1853, riots occurred as workers demanded, and received, higher wages.

In August of 1854 workers on the Custom House went on strike for higher wages. In that month stevedores reduced the wages of cotton screwmen to $2.50 a day, and the laborers stopped work, demanding $3.00 a day. When the stevedores employed Negroes, a group of 150 workers went to the wharf and ordered them to leave. Newspaper accounts of what happened vary, depending somewhat on the paper's attitude toward the immigrant, but apparently violence was threatened, if not employed, and twelve of the workers, all Irish, were arrested and

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28 Ibid., 114-5.
30 Ibid., August 3, 1854.
brought to court. Four were dismissed; eight were fined $25 each and in default of payment were sentenced to thirty days in the workhouse.31

The immigrant in the South had to compete with Negro labor, both slave and free. For dangerous work the Irish were always used instead of slaves. A steamboat pilot explained to a traveler on his way to New Orleans that in worn-out steamers slaves could not be used in the boiler rooms, because every time a boiler burst a considerable amount of money would be lost, but an Irishman could be hired for a dollar a day, and if the boiler blew up, only one dollar was lost.32

In competing with the Negro in New Orleans, the immigrant was largely, but not entirely, successful in replacing him. Charles Lyell, who visited New Orleans in 1847, was told: "Ten years ago . . . all the draymen in New Orleans, a numerous class, and the cabmen, were colored. Now, they are nearly all white. The servants at the great hotels were formerly of the African, now they are

31 True Delta, August 3, 1854; Crescent, August 3, 1854.

32 Edward Sullivan, Rambles and Scrambles in North and South America (London, 1852), 216.
of the European race."\textsuperscript{33}

The increase of white labor in the city is shown in the census reports. In 1810 the percentage of slaves in the population of Orleans Parish was \(\frac{3}{4}\); the percentage of free colored was 23. In 1820 the proportion of slaves and free colored was \(\frac{3}{4}\) and 17 respectively; in 1830, 32 and 24; in 1840, 23 and 18; in 1850, 16 and 9; in 1860, 8 and 6. The percentage of whites in the total population advanced from 33 to 86 in the half century.\textsuperscript{34}

There was much ill-feeling between whites and colored who competed for the same jobs. One traveler, in describing a Negro who yelled joyfully as he watched a large number of Irish draymen fighting, spoke of "the poor Negro, whose true position the Irish labourer has usurped, and who hates an Irishman as he hates death."\textsuperscript{35}

Slave-holders encountered great difficulty in trying to persuade whites to work with Negroes, and usually only the Irish and the Germans would do so.\textsuperscript{36} The Irish

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Lyell1849}Sir Charles Lyell, \textit{A Second Visit to the United States}, 2 vols. (New York, 1849), II, 125.
\bibitem{Phillips1929}Ulrich B. Phillips, \textit{Life and Labor in the Old South} (Boston, 1929), 187.
\bibitem{Durell1845}Charles Durell, \textit{New Orleans As I Found It} (New York, 1845), 16.
\bibitem{Olmsted1856}Olmsted, \textit{A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States}, 588.
\end{thebibliography}
resented the presence of slaves and free Negroes in occupations superior to their own.\textsuperscript{37} Olmsted spoke of Irish laborers carrying bricks on mortarboards to Negro masons on Canal Street. One morning when a Negro saw another carrying mortar, he hailed him with a loud laugh: "Hallo! you is turned Irishman, is 'ou?"\textsuperscript{38} Even when the Irish were successful in driving the Negro from his job, the employer could threaten to hire Negroes if the immigrant went on strike, and as has been pointed out in the case of the screwmen's strike, he sometimes carried out that threat.

The Irish in Louisiana, as well as those in other parts of the United States, were suspected of being abolitionists. This suspicion was unfounded, at least in regard to the majority of the Irish. The Irish True Delta declared that the Irish had always supported preservation of the Union and opposed abolitionism.\textsuperscript{39}

The Irish laborer, like other poor whites of the South, suffered because of slavery, for that institution kept power in the hands of the planter class. The white

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{37}Lyell, A Second Visit, II, 125.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{38}Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, 588-9.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{39}True Delta, November 30, 1850; June 28, 1854.}
worker suffered from indirect competition with slaves because the chief advantage of the system lay in the fact that, for all but dangerous occupations, it was cheaper than free labor for tasks requiring skilled or unskilled workers.  

In spite of the fact that the immigrant and other poor whites of the South were economically harmed by slavery, they were not abolitionists. Members of this class did not realize that they suffered from competition with slavery. The Negro and the Irish had come to feel hatred and contempt for one another, and, having competed with the free Negro on the labor market, the immigrant feared the emancipation of the slaves. The poor white of the South developed a class-consciousness; he was higher on the social scale than the slave, and in his mind, the destruction of the barrier between slave and free men would have brought social as well as economic dangers.  

A rural newspaper asserted that had the immigrants been less ignorant and better able to organize, they would have fought slavery. "The great mass of foreigners

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40 Snugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 90-1.

41 Wittke, The Irish in America, 125-6; Paul H. Buck, "Poor Whites of the Old South," American Historical Review, XXXI, 54.
who come to our shores are laborers, and consequently come in competition with slave labor. It is to their interest to abolish Slavery. . . . they [the immigrants] entertain an utter abhorrence of being put on a level with blacks, whether in the field or in the work-shop. Could Slavery be abolished, there would be a greater demand for laborers, and the prices of labor must be greatly enhanced."^2

Since the Irish arrived in the United States with very little money and worked for low wages, those who owned any personal real estate were indeed rare.\footnote{Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.} Many, however, were able to save money to send to Ireland. A newspaper said of Irish generosity: "they work as hard, scrape together as tidy a little sum, and are as ready to shell it out to their distressed countrymen as anyone. . . ." and added that they would do so quickly and cheerfully.\footnote{Picayune, January 12, 1849.}

The Irish sent personal contributions to friends and relatives in Ireland as well as donations to funds

\footnote{42 Morehouse Advocate, quoted in Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, 590.}

\footnote{43Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.}

\footnote{44Picayune, January 12, 1849.}
for the relief of the country during the famine and aid for the revolution in 1848. Immigrants arrived at New Orleans, having had their fare paid by Irish already there, and saved money to send for relatives left in Ireland. 45

Notices of firms promising to remit sums of money to people in England, Scotland, or Ireland, and to issue certificates granting immigrants passage from foreign ports, appeared daily in New Orleans newspapers. The True Delta, charging that in a twelve months' period more than a quarter of a million dollars in remittance of small sums to Ireland was lost because of the failure of express and immigrant agencies, advised the immigrant to send money only through the Bank of Louisiana and certain other dependable agencies. 46

During the "Great Starvation" in Ireland in the late 1840's, Americans made generous contributions. At a meeting held at the Commercial Exchange in New Orleans on February 4, 1847, to discuss aid to Ireland, Henry Clay and Sergeant S. Prentiss, noted criminal lawyer and orator, spoke. The Rev. Theodore Clapp later commented on the contrast between that meeting and a discussion in the

45True Delta, April 21, 1851.
46Ibid.
House of Commons concerning relief to the country. The members of Parliament discussed the problem without feeling, he observed, while the orators at the New Orleans meeting caused people in the audience to weep.  

The population of New Orleans made various contributions during the famine. Since money purchased more in New Orleans than in England, it was decided to buy the supplies in America and transport them to Ireland. On June 28, 1847, the Irish Relief Committee of New Orleans sent to Londonberry 450 barrels of corn meal. Corn meal from the United States was boiled and dished out as corn-meal mush to the starving poor in hastily improvised soup kitchens in Ireland. The provisions sent in 1847 by the New Orleans Committee had a total value of $50,000. Most of the money collected by the committee came from the city and the state, but liberal donations were also received from Mississippi and other states. It is uncertain how much of this aid came from natives of Ireland and how much came from sympathetic native Americans; it is certain that both contributed.

When news of the French Revolution in 1848 reached

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48 Picayune, August 29, 1847.

49 Niles' National Register, XII (July 17, 1847), 306.
Ireland, where rebellion against England was chronic, young patriots were inspired to rise up against British rule. News of the uprising was received hopefully by countrymen in the United States, who determined to aid the revolution financially. In response to pleas to contribute to national drives, the Ermet Club of New Orleans gave £1:40, and other organizations made donations. Because the Irish revolution was poorly organized and haphazardly planned, and because its leaders, though enthusiastic, were un-coordinated and indecisive, the rebellion was easily quenched and was contemptuously referred to in British history as the rebellion of the widow McCormack's cabbage patch.

When the rebellion ended before most of the funds could be sent to Ireland, the national fund-raising organization, the John Mitchel Association, decided to use the money to aid Irish immigrant females awaiting domestic employment.51

Although the two major fund-raising campaigns were for food during the famine and for aid during the revolution, there were other instances in which the Irish in

50 *Picayune*, August 3, 19, September 6, 1848.
New Orleans made contributions to the homeland, such as in 1850 when a member of the Order of St. Francis visited New Orleans while in the country to collect funds for schools in the poverty-stricken region of West Ireland.  

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52 *True Delta*, January 31, 1850.
SOCIAL CONDITIONS

At the time of the Irish invasion, New Orleans was three cities in all but name. In the original French town below Canal Street the Creoles lived in houses of white and yellow stucco along narrow streets. Adjoining the Creole district was the more prosperous American section with its red brick buildings, a district that had built up with the Mississippi River trade. The marshy outskirts area, "half-village, half-city," was inhabited by German and Irish immigrants.¹

Each of these three areas was an independent municipality, which controlled its own affairs. The French Quarter was the First Municipality, the American section the Second, and the area on the outskirts of town, where large numbers of Irish settled, was the "Old Third." So many settled in the Second Municipality in the area between Constance Street and the river extending from St. Joseph Street to Louisiana Avenue, however, that the section came to be called the "Irish Channel." Various

stories are told of how the section got its name; probably it was so called because of the large number of Irish living there. Many of this nationality also settled in the bordering city of Lafayette, which was later to be incorporated into New Orleans.

Many of the new arrivals lived in boarding houses. Some of the keepers of these dwelling places were trustworthy, but others, who were unscrupulous, tempted the immigrant with liquor, robbed him of what little he had, and obtained a fat premium from his sale to a labor contractor. There were boarding houses in which an Irish family lived and rented rooms to a number of men; in some instances nearly all had the same occupation. Often all or almost all of the inhabitants were Irish, but in many such houses there were men of various nationalities and occupations. Sometimes several families lived in a boarding house, and many families who did not run such a business took in related families.

Tenements were filled with Irish and German immigrants. Poorer natives, as well as the foreign-born, lived in "rotten rows, hidden from the streets by buildings

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3Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.
of some pretensions, yet populous as bee hives," and on "blind alleys which lead into lots absolutely crowded with ... tenements, where whole families occupy a single room." Stagnant cesspools in the yards emitted foul odors. There were "hundreds of old shanties, tottering with decay, admitting the wind and rain ... filled with dirt and vermin," where "the avarice of some landlords will never suffer improvement as long as people will occupy, pay rent, and die in their ... hovels." "These miserable rookeries, which the avarice of landlords consecrate by the name of houses for the poor," were a breeding place for sickness and disease.

The housing problem was not the only one which the immigrant faced. Since he arrived penniless, and there were times when jobs were hard to find, an able-bodied man begging on the streets was not an uncommon sight. Friendless young females, "often destitute of means to pay for room and board," were "exposed to every outrage and deception of the unprincipled and vile."

Perhaps the most serious problem confronting the

4Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 40, quoting the New Orleans Creole, January 29, 1857.
5True Delta, December 19, 1849; February 10, 1850.
6Ibid., December 31, 1851.
immigrant was disease, for the city was ravaged by typhus, cholera, and yellow fever epidemics, whose impact was most severely felt by the newcomer. Immigrant ships brought in disease; so closely was typhus fever associated with immigration that the disease was called "ship fever." When epidemics occurred, the newspapers emphasized that the diseases were confined largely to the "houseless, penniless" immigrants, who were subject to attack, they reasoned, because of "habitual exposure, impudent diet, and vitiated habits." The "reckless and impudent" nature of the immigrant was believed to endanger his health. Newspapers, not wishing to hurt the commerce of the city, played down the news of epidemics until they became too fatal to be ignored. At the height of the epidemics, businesses closed and streets were deserted.

In most of the years between 1845 and 1855 more than 1,000 victims of typhus were admitted to the Charity Hospital; in 1848 there were 1,882 admissions, and there

7 *Picayune*, January 2, 1849.
8 *Bee*, January 8, 1849.
9 *Picayune*, August 1, 1847.
10 *Bee*, January 8, 1849.
11 *Board of Administrators of the Charity Hospital, Annual Reports, 1845-1855* (New Orleans, 1846-1856).
were many other victims who did not enter the institution. In many years the death rate from this disease was twenty per cent or higher. Cholera epidemics which occurred in New Orleans in 1848 and 1849 resulted in high death rates; 1,122 of the 1,607 victims admitted to the Charity Hospital in 1849 died.12

There are many accounts of immigrant ships, especially those from Ireland, arriving with passengers ill with typhus and reporting deaths on the voyage. On August 30, 1847, a ship from Cork landed with 160 immigrants, twenty of whom had the fever, and reported three deaths on the journey.13 The Erin's Queen arrived on February 10, 1848, fifty days from Liverpool, with 255 passengers; the former captain and sixteen passengers had died from the disease on the trip.14 In February of 1849 the British ship John Garrow from Liverpool came into port with nineteen cases of typhus.15 The cases of the Blanche and the Otilla which experienced severe typhus outbreaks have already been discussed.

Other newspaper accounts reveal that ships brought

12 Ibid., 1848, 1849.
13 Pionyune, August 30, 1847.
14 Ibid., February 11, 1848.
15 Ibid., February 29, 1848.
in the dreaded cholera. On November 26, 1849, the British ship *Gipsy*, fifty-three days from Liverpool, arrived with 309 Irish, Scotch, and English immigrants. Although nineteen passengers had died from cholera on the voyage, an investigator declared the ship remarkably clean "for an immigrant vessel." On November 27, 1849, the British ship *Fingal*, fifty-one days from Liverpool, arrived with 325 Irish immigrants. Thirty-seven had died on the journey, probably from cholera and typhus. The ship was filthy, with foul odors.16

An old-fashioned sailing vessel once visited by typhus, cholera, or smallpox often carried the germs for years.17 In 1848 the General Council of New Orleans passed a regulation requiring that vessels arriving with cases of typhus be thoroughly cleaned, ventilated, and fumigated, and forbidden to proceed to the city without a permit from the Board of Health.18

The influx of typhus victims was greater than the Charity Hospital was equipped to handle, for at times there were more than 1,000 patients, about half of them

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17 Page, "The Transportation of Immigrants," 739.
18 See, February 29, 1848.
with typhus, in the hospital, which was supposed to accommodate 375, a condition which necessitated leaving no space between beds and placing many patients on the floor.\(^{19}\)

During the nineteenth century the dread of yellow fever hung constantly over New Orleans, for in each summer of the years 1819, 1847, 1853, 1854, 1855, 1858, 1867, and 1868, the number of yellow fever deaths exceeded 2,000,\(^{20}\) with the severest epidemics occurring in the summer of 1853. Apparently the fever was brought to New Orleans on a ship, but which ship is uncertain. In early May the Northampton from Liverpool, bringing several hundred Irish immigrants, arrived with sickness aboard and reported several deaths on the journey. The Camboden Castle, which had lost several crew members by yellow fever, arrived. When a crew sent to unload the Northampton quit because they found her foul with traces of black vomit, another was hired, and several of these men fell ill. The same day the Augusta arrived from Bremen, and soon there were five vessels in port, all infested with yellow fever. Immigrants and crews from

\(^{19}\) *Picayune*, January 11, 1846.

these ships went ashore.  

The first death from the disease was James McGuigan, an Irish immigrant, who had been on the crew that unloaded the Northampton, while the second to succumb was one of the Augusta's crew. The disease became epidemic, and the number of deaths each day grew steadily larger. August 21, when 230 deaths occurred, was called "Black Day," although some reports listed as many as 254 deaths on the following day. It was estimated that one out of five of the Irish in New Orleans died during this epidemic, as the fever prowled "Lynch's Row and other blocks and courts in the filthy Irish quarters of St. Thomas and Tchoupitoulas Streets."  

A member of the Howard Association, the most active organization which cared for the victims of the epidemic, described his experience with Irish and German immigrants in "two nests of ship fever," one in a crowded area on Magazine Street and another on a lot across from St.  


24Barton, Yellow Fever, 40.  

Thomas Street. The former was occupied by Germans and Scotch immigrants and the latter by Irish and English, who lived in a row of one-story brick tenements, one hundred and fifty feet long. The German and Scotch area was orderly and clean, while the Irish and English tenements were disorderly and dirty.

The tenements on St. Thomas Street were faced by an alley about six feet wide. In this alley was daily thrown offal and refuse of every description by the tenants, which waited for a rain alone to carry off. In the mean time, the stench arising from it added its influence in propagating disease. It was my first effort to induce the inmates to correct this objection, but without success. Day by day I sent out victims from both places to the hospitals as fast as they would receive them.  

When the hospitals could not accept the patients, the association took care of them. One night a worker examined the tenement:

By the light of a lantern I explored each room. As the door of each was opened to me, the concentrated essence of breath and animal effluvia nearly stunned my consciousness. . . One mattress, in many instances, served the purpose of a pillow to six or eight adults, while the very youngest occupied the middle of it.  

Confusion resulted in over-crowded cemeteries, and to

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26 Robinson, Diary of a Samaritan, 81-2.
27 Ibid., 82.
counteract the foul odors arising from unburied bodies, tar was burned. Many of the Irish were buried in St. Patrick's Cemetery, where, during the month of August the number of interments usually ranged from thirty to forty-five daily. Citizens complained that laborers in the cemetery were blasphemous, drunken, and disorderly, and when the chairman of the Board of Health visited the burial place and found over a dozen corpses awaiting interment, the Board took control of the cemetery, dismissed the employees, and hired new men to dig the graves; an action which Father Mullon, rector of St. Patrick's Church, protested.

In July of 1853 a quarantine was established at Slaughterhouse Point, where each foreign vessel was inspected by a physician for cases of yellow fever and the ship's captain required to pay a fee of $5.00 before proceeding to the city. The quarantine, with the city in the midst of an epidemic, was declared to be as ridiculous as "shutting the stable door after the horse was stolen."

28 Ibid., 150-3.
29 True Delta, August 1-31, passim.
30 Ibid., August 23, 25, 1853.
31 Ibid., August 24, 25, 1853.
After the epidemic had passed its height, federal officials offered the use of Forts St. Philip and Jackson as receiving points for immigrants, and the city accepted the offer. 33

As a result of the epidemics many homes were left fatherless, orphanages dotted the city, and starving immigrants, unable to work, begged for food on the streets. 34 During a siege of typhus there were found in a small house on Dauphin Street fifty immigrants, worn almost to skeletons, some of them eating straw from the streets. 35

That the immigrant, particularly the Irish, was the chief victim of yellow fever, typhus, and cholera can be induced from the number admitted to the Charity Hospital during the epidemics. Remittent and intermittent fever were also prevalent during the 1845-1855 period, with the death rate from diarrhea and dysentery surprisingly high. The following chart shows the number of patients, the total number of immigrants, and the number of Irish admitted to the hospital in the years 1845 through 1855.

33 Picayune, September 2, 4, 1853.
34 Ibid., February 23, 1848.
35 Ibid., April 30, 1847.
Since most of the patients in the Charity Hospital were foreign-born, the immigrant was a heavy financial burden on the hospital, a fact which resulted in the legislature's passing a law which required every adult immigrant arriving in New Orleans to give bond for $1000 that he would not seek aid from a charitable institution within

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36Charity Hospital Reports, 1845-1856.
the next five years, and in lieu of bond to pay a small head tax. The tax was $2.00 on each adult over fourteen years of age, until the legislature in 1853 raised it to $2.50. The law required that the tax be used only for medical treatment and care of the sick. Because owners of vessels and ship captains were sometimes able to avoid paying the full amount of the tax to the hospital, more stringent laws regulating the collection of the revenue were sought.

The passenger tax supplied the largest source of revenue for the hospital, while a state appropriation furnished the second largest amount. In most years the passenger tax paid from one-half to two-thirds of the total operating expense of the hospital, with the largest amount of money from the tax being collected in 1854, when it amounted to $76,961.51. The total income for the hospital in that year was much larger than usual, $117,688.98. In 1855, with a decrease in immigration, the passenger

38 True Delta, May 22, 1853.
39 Charity Hospital Report, 1854, 3.
40 True Delta, April 9, 1853; Charity Hospital Report, 1853, 7.
tax income dropped more than $35,000. 41

The impact of the Irish immigration was felt not only in the hospitals, but also in the jails of the city. Fighting and drinking were wide-spread among the Irish in the Old Country, 42 and there could be little hope that they would change as long as they endured the hardships of the lowest economic class in the New. Crime was certainly not unknown in New Orleans before the coming of the Irish, and it would not have disappeared had they all moved west, but the Irish were one of the most lawless groups in the city.

The Irish Channel was frequented by the St. Mary's Market Gang, the Shot Tower Gang, the Crowbar Gang, and other bands of hoodlums. 43 Newspapers listed large numbers of Irish names in accounts of such crimes as fighting, assault, wife-beating, and petty thievery, and the workhouses of the city contained extremely high percentages of Irish-born. At the time of the Census of 1850, 17 of the 26 inmates of the workhouse in the third representative district were Irish—9 of the prison officials

41 Charity Hospital Reports, 1845-1856.
42 Wittke, The Irish in America, 6.
43 Chase, Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children, 222.
were also Irish. At one time there were in the Second Municipal Workhouse 239 persons, of whom 105 were women. Thirteen of the women were natives of the United States, 4 were English, and 88 were Irish. Of the total number of inmates, 54 were natives, 160 were Irish, and 27 were of other nationalities. All but 18 of the inmates were described as "habitually intemperate," and most of them could not read or write.

The proportion of Irish in the state penitentiary was also high. Although the Irish constituted less than 9 per cent of the total free population of the state in 1850, 40 of the 266 inmates, or approximately 15 per cent, were Irish. Almost 40 per cent of the inmates were foreign-born while the ratio of the foreign-born to the total population was 24.3. Almost all of the Irish in the penitentiary had been convicted of larceny, for which the sentence was one to five years.

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44 Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.
45 True Delta, January 31, 1852.
46 De Bow, Seventh Census, Compendium, 117-8.
47 Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.
48 De Bow, Seventh Census, Compendium, 117-8.
49 Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.
50 Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 61.
If one may judge from the newspaper accounts of the period, a fight was regarded by an Irishman as a form of recreation, rather than as a crime. One traveler described Irish draymen on the levee "cursing and railing, lashing their poor beasts, and not infrequently, and with more propriety, lashing each other." When two of the Irish began to exchange insults and a fight ensued, other Irishmen joined in the struggle, and as the combatants increased, "Irish draymen spring up armed from the ground, and take sides by instinct."

The coffee-houses (saloons) were favorite meeting places for the Irish. Ballrooms in the Third Municipality were scenes of rows, which sometimes resulted in death, and in 1849 the Municipal Council was forced to outlaw masked balls. The Irish mixed recreation with charity, as balls were given by philanthropic organizations and military companies to benefit orphanages and other charities. The social event of the year for the Irish was the military ball of the Emmet Guards. St. Patrick's Day was usually celebrated by a parade, in which military,

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51 Durell, New Orleans As I Found It, 16.
52 Picayune, February 18, 1849; True Delta, March 20, 1851.
philanthropic, and nationalistic organizations marched to Irish tunes performed by a band. When night came, various organizations held balls.53 The Irish supported baseball teams, on which many of them played.54

Irish theatrical performers often visited New Orleans. A blind Irish harpist appeared at the Temperance Hall in the Irish Channel in 1848, and Barney Williams, Samuel Lover, John Collins, and other Irish actors and entertainers performed in New Orleans theaters in plays which included "The Bashful Irishman," "Born to Good Luck," "The Irish Ambassador," and "The Irish Tutor."55 Barney Williams (Bernard Flaherty) was unrivaled for his presentation of "the genuine Paddy, the true Irish peasant," while John Collins, who had an excellent singing voice, also specialized in Irish character parts.

The Irish plays presented caricatures of the Irishman and used such Irish words as shillelagh, colleen, begorra, smithereens, and Erin go bragh, which soon found their way into the English language. The plays included

53 Notices of such events appeared regularly in New Orleans newspapers.

54 Baudier, St. Patrick's, 14.

55 Notices of these appearances appeared often in newspapers. See, for example, the Picayune, March 17, 1848, December 14, 1847.
practical jokes, rough comedy, melodramatic effects, and simple, romantic plots with lilting popular tunes, jigs, and reels.  

The Irish brought to America their idea of homage to the dead. A member of the Howard Association marvelled at the

... sacred fidelity [with which] the Irishman perpetuates in this country his national custom of nightly vigils, with intoxicating draughts and pipe, around the corpse of one of his countrymen. He will pawn his shirt but that the material should be forth-coming to wrap him in Elysian dreams, and do fitting honors to the spirit that hovers around its late tenement. But that is not all. At a sacrifice of many home comforts, his family must be entailed with the expense of a carriage to increase the length of the mourning cortege. ...  

And so the Irishmen who settled in New Orleans lived in penury of squalor, caught epidemic diseases and ordinary ills, fought singly or in groups with bare knuckles or with mighty shillehaghs from the old sod, organized gangs and committed crimes of lesser or greater import, went to church on Sundays or slept off the ravages of Saturday night drunks, enjoyed the company of their fellows in coffee houses, back alleys, and ballrooms, danced

56 Wittke, The Irish in America, 254-6.
57 Robinson, The Diary of a Samaritan, 83.
jigs and reels, attended theatrical performances where they watched other Irishmen play Irish roles, grafted onto the America speech patterns words and phrases from the far-distant Emerald Isle, engaged in sports which emphasized the rough and tumble of body contact, and brought to their new homeland that effervescent Irish spirit so characteristically of their nationality.
The arrival of thousands of Irish immigrants brought political strife to New Orleans. Unlearned, credulous, and inexperienced in self-government, the newcomers were easily manipulated by politicians, and many native Americans viewed the influx of the foreign-born with alarm, fearing that politicians would seize power through control of the immigrant vote. Although this attitude resulted partly from a selfish desire to retain control of the government, opposition to the abuses and the corrupt use of the immigrant vote was indeed justified. Bloody riots occurred in 1854, 1855, 1856, and 1858, as native-born Americans clashed with immigrants.

The spirit of the period is reflected in the following advertisement in the classified section of the True Delta.

Voters wanted for an adjoining Parish, on Monday at 11 o'clock, giving ample time to cast votes for friends in the city FIRST. One dollar for each will be paid, and transportation free. Buttons for the hat, lagniappe. Apply at the public corners about. 1

1True Delta, October 30, 1851.
The Irish, who loved politics, were easily persuaded to participate in party affairs. The Louisiana Hotel, opposite St. Mary's Market, was the permanent meeting place of the Democratic Club of the Third Precinct. The Democratic Party posed as the true friend of the Irish. The True Delta labeled the intense love expressed by certain politicians for the immigrant "hypocritical and disgusting," while the Crescent, a Know-Nothing paper, asserted that the Irish were in "a union with demagogue natives—who indeed are the true criminals, while the Hibernians are but the dupes and victims."

In the Election of 1844 John Slidell turned the tide for the Democrats by shipping down the river to Plaquemine two steamboats of Irish to vote a second time. In the convention which formed the Constitution of 1845 the patriotism of the immigrant was questioned by certain delegates and defended by others, including the Creole leaders Bernard de Marginy and Pierre Soule. Planters

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2 True Delta, October 10, 1855.
3 Ibid., September 28, 1851.
4 Crescent, March 29, 1854.
5 Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 128.
feared the effect on agriculture if the immigrant vote was controlled by city politicians. The abuses of naturalization laws were discussed, and an effort made to write nativistic principles into the Constitution of 1845. The convention adopted W. C. C. Claiborne's old plan for a two years' residence after naturalization as a prerequisite to voting.

Residents of the American section in New Orleans saw their fear of a Creole-immigrant alignment justified in the election of 1852. In 1836 New Orleans had been divided into three municipalities by act of the legislature, but this separation had not proved successful, for while the Second (American) Municipality prospered, the finances of the First (Creole) and the Third (immigrant) became steadily worse, until both municipalities bordered on bankruptcy. Businessmen in the city became alarmed, as a city in such a financial condition was a threat to their well-being. The inefficiency of the system was discouraging, and public opinion favored reconsolidation. The Second Municipality at first defeated the proposition to

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7Ibid., 106.
8Ibid., 165-89.
9Ibid., 87-94; 176.
consolidate the city, as plans for dividing New Orleans into three districts would enable the Creole and immigrant sections to combine to outvote the Americans, but citizens of the Second supported a proposition of consolidation which would incorporate the neighboring city of Lafayette, as it was primarily an American settlement, and the two districts could outvote the Creoles and immigrants. The plan was adopted; the American section became the First District, and the French Quarter the Second. The former city of Lafayette became the Fourth District, and the Third Municipality the Third District.

After the consolidation of the city, a political realignment took place. A victory for the Independents (Democrats) in the Election of 1852 confirmed the American's fear of an alliance between the native French and the foreign-born, for the greatest independent strength lay in the Second and Third Districts, while the Whigs were strongest in the First (American). 10 In that year the Whigs also lost the presidential and the gubernatorial races in the state. 1852 marked the beginning of the decline of that party in Louisiana. 11

In the Constitutional Convention of 1852 the Whigs temporarily shifted to the defense of the immigrant and led in reducing the state residence voting requirement from two years to one, but there was a "joker" in the Constitution, declared the True Delta, by which the Whigs hoped to "hold power for thirty years." Slaves were to be counted in determining representation in the legislature; immigrants were advised, therefore, to vote against this Constitution which "degraded white labor."  

As the fall election of 1853 approached, the Democratic Party affected the naturalization of immigrants, particularly the Irish. In the Sixth District Court scores of immigrants were naturalized daily, while police officials remained on hand to identify applicants, some of whom, though swearing to have lived in the United States for five years, could not speak English. After naturalization papers were made out, they were taken by an elected official, who held them until election day.  

In tempo with the political philosophy of the time, in seventeen of the twenty-one precincts of New Orleans the polls were located in coffee houses. When six hundred

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12True Delta. August 8, October 26, 1852.
13Crescent, October 21, 1853.
citizens petitioned the Board of Assistant Aldermen that the polls be located elsewhere, one member moved to refer the request to the Committee on Education, and another suggested the House of Refuge Committee. Eventually the request was sent to the Police Committee, which, needless to say, was not expected to take action.

When the election occurred, additional frauds were committed. Charles Gayarre, the historian, who ran for Congress in the first district on an independent ticket, asserted that he could prove arithmetically that the election was corrupt. The Whig candidate had withdrawn in favor of Gayarre, who was defeated. Of the 13,103 votes supposedly cast, 4,000 were fictitious, he reasoned, as such a large number had never before been cast in a New Orleans election; only 9,604 votes had been cast in the gubernatorial race in 1852, and the yellow fever epidemic, which decimated the population, had preceded the 1853 contest.

The election frauds led to the organization of a reform party in the winter of 1853, which took the name of the American, or Know Nothing Party, after the March

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14 Ibid., October 31, 1853.
election. Its members were predominantly Whigs, although others, including Gayarre, were Democrats. 16

The chief principles of the national American Party were extension of the residence requirement for naturalization to twenty-one years; hostility toward Roman Catholic influence in government; removal of the foreign-born from office; and elimination of sectionalism by avoiding discussion of the slavery issue. In Louisiana the local organization had ruled that native-born, non-confessional Catholics might be admitted, and the membership denied that the party opposed Catholics, 17 but the state and national parties were destined to conflict over the religious issue.

It was the Irish immigrant whom the Know-Nothing Party opposed most strongly. Is it right, asked the Crescent, for foreigners to rule the city? "Can this be just? . . . Are we inferior to even the most uneducated class of the two nations that chiefly lord it over us—the Irish and the Germans? . . . The Germans and Italians are quiet and only raise a row now and then: but the Irish are forever kicking up rows and breaking heads,

17 Democratic Advocate, January 25, 1855.
getting up mobs, making our elections scenes of violence and fraud; turning . . . the right of suffrage into . . . a hell's holiday of drunkenness and perjury and bludgeons . . . . We Speak warmly. How can we forbear? Who does not know that the abuses we are now complaining of have become intolerable."\(^{18}\)

The True Delta, comparing the number of immigrants and natives holding public office, denied that foreigners ruled the city. For example, only four of thirteen aldermen and nine of twenty-seven assistant aldermen were immigrants; Irish-born officials included three state legislators, the chief of police, a port warden, three police attendents, and two clerks of court.\(^{19}\) The number of naturalized citizens elected to office, did not give a complete picture of their influence, however, as they were influential in the election of other officials.

The first of a series of serious riots between the Know-Nothing Party and the immigrants occurred in the spring election of 1854. A law required registration of all voters, but an attached clause provided that a person who declared under oath that he was registered might vote.

\(^{18}\)Crescent, March 21, 1854.

\(^{19}\)True Delta, March 23, 1854.
This provision, of course, nullified the law, and, under the circumstances, made fraudulent voting and bloody conflicts almost inevitable.

The Democrats organized the Irish into bands and marched them to the polls, where Democratic election officials allowed them to vote. These officials ignored plural voting, the "Independents," or Know-Nothings, protested, and bloody clashes resulted. When several members of the predominantly foreign-born police force assisted the Irish, one of them, along with several Irishmen, was killed, and Chief of Police O’Leary received two bullet wounds. When the polls closed, the Democratic Party seized the ballot boxes and proceeded to count the votes without the assistance of the Independent commissioners. A mob gathered outside the coffee house, and when it was reported that 750 votes more than had been registered were counted, the group seized and destroyed the ballots. In the final count the Know Nothings won control of all municipal offices except the mayoralty and three recorderships (judgeships). Because of the destruction of the ballots in the Seventh Precinct, the mayor called a new election for the three aldermen from the

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20 *Picayune*, March 9, 1854.
First District. 21 The Know-Nothings won all three offices.

Bloodier riots occurred in September of 1854 when rumors circulated in coffeehouses that the Know-Nothings intended to slaughter the Catholics. Under the influence of liquor, immigrants believed the stories, and arms were distributed. On Saturday, September 9, three citizens passing by a coffeehouse were greeted by the yell, "A hundred dollars for the head of a Know-Nothing." Insults were called, and the three citizens escaped with slight wounds as several of the men started firing. That night a judge was attacked as he tried to break up a group of 150 armed men he found on the street; four men were wounded, and one was killed. The civil power seemed paralyzed; the mayor's actions were weak and vacillating as he inefficiently used the police force to try to regain order.

On Monday, September 11, armed bands congregated on St. Mary's Market and Lafayette Square. The mayor went to a large group of Irishmen, told them that the other group did not plan to attack, and asked them to disperse. Some were willing to do so, but a druggist, Dr. J. J. Meighan, armed with gun and saber, refused. A rumor spread that the Know-Nothings were marching to destroy St. Patrick's Church. Dr. Meighan led two hundred armed

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21 *Crescent*, March 28, 29, 30, 1854.
Irishmen to defend it, and on meeting a party of men coming up the street, opened fire. A general fight resulted in the death of two men and the wounding of others.22

About midnight on Tuesday, September 12, a disorderly crowd which had assembled around City Hall earlier, started to Tim Duffy's Coffeehouse. In the violence which ensued, the coffeehouse was shot up, at least two men were killed, and another was injured.23 Other conflicts occurred during the week. Citizens deputized by the mayor patrolled the streets, and by September 18 the town was more orderly.24

The close of the year 1854 found the Know-Nothing Party entrenched in New Orleans and growing throughout the state. In June of 1855 Louisiana sent five delegates to the national convention of the American Party in Philadelphia. One of the delegates was Charles Gayarre, a Catholic, who had joined the organization because of disapproval of the corrupt use of the immigrant vote. Gayarre was sent to test the national convention's attitude toward Catholicism. After a

23 True Delta, September 14, 1854.
discussion, the convention voted against admitting the delegate, and his four colleagues refused to attend the meetings. This stand of the national party was most disconcerting to many of the Catholic Know-Nothing in Louisiana. About three months later Gayarre withdrew from the party.

The municipal election on March 26, 1855, was quiet, as polls were carefully watched so that no frauds could be committed. The Chief of Police and his captains watched their subordinates carefully, and in the Second District two of them were arrested and suspended from the force for trying to interfere with the election.

As the fall election of 1855 approached, naturalization outrages continued, and on one day the First and Fourth District courts naturalized eighty-six persons. For the first time on record the courts remained opened on All Saints' Day, a holiday of importance to Catholics, so that naturalizations might continue. A dispute arose involving the conflict between the state constitution which provided that certain courts in New Orleans were authorized to hear only specific types of cases at certain

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26 Crescent, March 27, 1855.
times, and the Federal naturalization law which granted certain courts the additional power of naturalization. State courts of original jurisdiction were granted the power of naturalization by federal law, but the state of Louisiana had assigned certain courts jurisdiction only in criminal cases. The Know-Nothings argued that naturalization was not criminal procedure and therefore papers granted by such courts were not valid.

After the question was taken to prominent lawyers, carefully selected by the parties, and both sides heard what they wanted to hear, the American Party leaders declared that the commissioners had the authority to decide whether or not a person was qualified to vote.

When election day arrived the majority of the citizens went to the polls armed, the undisciplined because they liked to fight and the decent citizens because they feared for their lives. The American Party members were supposedly armed to "protect the ballot boxes," but the Democrats accused them of using force to keep the opposition from voting. One man was killed as he tried to make his way to the polls with his naturalization papers in one hand and a pistol in the other, and further casualties resulted. With many people in cramped quarters, jostlings occurred, which frequently led to fighting. At one polling place a Know-Nothing was
stationed so that he could look over the polls and see which way the vote was cast; if it was Democratic, he yelled, "Initiate him!" and as the man emerged he would be beaten. 27

When an American Party commissioner refused to recognize naturalization papers, the immigrants used protest boxes and slips which were printed before the election. The Know-Nothings declared the boxes illegal. Fraud was committed by both parties, by the Democratic minority because they needed all the votes they could get, and by the opposition, as they were just as determined that the foreigners not vote.

On election night while the votes were being counted, a mob gathered before the Ninth Precinct poll and destroyed the ballot box; within an hour the ballots of the Seventh Precinct were seized and scattered. Both of these precincts would probably have given heavy Democratic majorities. The American commissioners of the polls refused to make returns even though a writ of mandamus ordered them to do so, on the grounds that to make such a statement when the votes had not been counted

would be perjury. 28

Immediately after the election the Democrats began to contest it by entering suits throughout the state. In one case, involving the clerkship of the Fourth District Court, two hundred witnesses were called who had voted the Democratic protest slips. Many of the witnesses were under eighteen, numbers had obtained papers just before the election—sixty-nine at one court, sixty-one at another, and others could not produce naturalization papers at all. Three of the witnesses had never themselves appeared in court to seek naturalization, but had had the papers brought to their homes, one without the knowledge that he was a candidate for citizenship. More than twenty had incomplete papers and forty-seven had signed the protests without reading them. American commissioners justified their rejection of valid votes on the grounds that the situation was corrupt and decadent. 29

The Democratic House of Representatives appointed a committee on contested elections. The Democratic majority of the committee summoned witnesses, but denied

28 Ibid., 244, quoting from the Crescent, November 14, 28, 1855.
29 Ibid., 244-6, quoting the Crescent, February 6, May 19-June 4, 1856.
that right to the minority, who objected to much of the evidence considered. Several seats were declared vacant by a vote of the majority members.

The majority report, which the minority complained that they did not see until a few minutes before it was submitted to the Senate, charged that organized gangs of armed desperadoes prevented the Democrats from voting in New Orleans elections. It asserted that since hundreds of citizens were not admitted to the polls, their votes should be counted Democratic. 30

Other bloody conflicts occurred between American Party members and the immigrants in 1856 and 1858, but by 1860 the Know-Nothing Party had passed into history.

The arrival of thousands of Irish, Germans, and other national groups within a few years created a problem which neither the natives of New Orleans nor the foreign-born were able to solve within so short a time. Conflicts were inevitable, and neither side can be entirely blamed that the clashes were so bloody, nor can either side be completely absolved from guilt. It should be remembered before condemning the immigrant for his actions which seemed to make a mockery of democracy that he was

30 Ibid., quoting from the Crescent, January 22-29, February 15, 16, 1856; Journal of the House of Representatives (Louisiana), 1856, Th-21; Report of the Committee on Elections (Louisiana), passim.
often the tool of the conniving native-born, rather than the designer of corrupt schemes. Many of the Irish were illiterate, with no experience in self-government and no understanding of the responsibilities that accompany the ballot box; their tradition of rowdiness and drunkenness and their group consciousness as a significant minority worsened the situation. As members of the underprivileged class they were easily led into rebellion against the more stable elements of society. The desire of the Americans to guard the purity of elections was commendable, but all too often rather than opposing the abuse of the immigrant vote, they opposed the immigrant. Just as Democratic politicians could manipulate the unsophisticated Irish, Know-Nothing politicians appealed to the racial hatred of rowdy native citizens, and though many members undoubtedly supported the party to secure honest elections, such goals as a twenty-one year requirement for naturalization and removal of the foreign-born from public office were evidences of prejudice against foreigners, fear that they could not be assimilated, or an awareness of the danger of loss of control in a class struggle, rather than a reasonable desire to protect the ballot box from the excesses of the immigrant vote.

George M. Stephenson has written: "Nativism has
been called a disease, but it is hardly that; it is rather a symptom of disease in the body politic." 31 The huge influx of foreigners into New Orleans in the forties and fifties created problems in assimilation and acculturation which neither the native citizens nor the immigrants of that period could be expected to solve. The process was to take time.

31 George M. Stephenson, "Nativism in the Forties and Fifties with Special Reference to the Mississippi Valley," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, IX, 188.
The Irish immigrant had to adjust to a new country while he continued to feel a kinship with the old; the church, the school, and various organizations helped him to make this adjustment. Early Irish immigrants in New Orleans found no parish church in their area. The first Catholic place of worship above the French Quarter was St. Theresa's Chapel on Delord Street, which is listed in the city directory of 1822. Though some of the Irish of the Faubourg St. Mary and the sections beyond attended church in the chapel, most of them went to the Cathedral or the Ursuline Convent, where sermons and instruction were always in French. The English-speaking newcomers desired a parish of their own, and in 1833 Governor Roman signed an act of incorporation for St. Patrick's Church, to be located in the suburb of St. Mary.

After the edifice was built, the frame building proved inadequate for the increasing number of immigrants, and the trustees desired a church to rival the St. Louis Cathedral, so in 1837 construction of a new place of worship was begun. In February of 1840, though the
interior was unfinished, services were held.¹

The first pastor of St. Patrick's was Rev. Adam Kindelon, a native of Ireland, who, after a service of more than a year, gave up that position to establish an orphanage and school for boys with a large sum of money which he had inherited. Rev. Theodore Clapp spoke highly of Father Kindelon,² who was succeeded by Rev. James Ignatius Mullon. Born in 1793 in Londonberry, Ireland, Father Mullon came to the United States at an early age and was to serve as rector of St. Patrick's from 1834 until 1866. He opposed St. Patrick's Day parades on the grounds that they resulted in censure and criticism and constituted no help to the Faith or to the Church, but the parades continued. Assisted by two priests, one a native of Ireland, the other of France, Father Mullon was regarded most highly by his parishioners.

Enthusiasm for building the new church waned as the stark facts of meeting the payments was faced. The Charter of 1833 had placed temporal control of the church under three trustees, two elected annually by the pewholders, under whose leadership the church had borrowed

¹Baudier, St. Patrick's, 55-62.
so heavily that it had reached a state of bankruptcy. In 1845 Philip Rotchford, a wholesale grocer and trustee, filed suit against the church, which the sheriff then seized and put up for sale, excepting the pews and the organ, which had already been seized. Then Rotchford bought the church through a system of notes and guarantees and transferred rights, titles, and interest to the Bishop, who passed control of the temporal affairs of the church to Father Mullon.

The area which St. Patrick's served was dismembered when in 1848 St. Theresa's Parish and in 1851 St. John the Baptist Parish were established, also for Irish Catholics. In 1848 the Irish in the Faubourg Marigny requested a church in which the sermons and instructions were in English, so an Irish priest was appointed to organize the church. In 1850 the visiting minister Rev. Theobold Matthew dedicated St. Alphonsus Church, which was built for the Irish of Lafayette.

Protestant groups displayed much interest in the Irish; in 1854 the American and Foreign Christian Union had more than 120 missionaries and lecturers placed at


strategic points, such as New Orleans and New York, to seek the conversion of Catholic immigrants to Protestantism. One of the anti-Catholic papers which sprang up in the nation in the early 1850's was the New Orleans Creole.5

American educators pledged for stronger public schools so that the immigrant might become Americanized. E. L. Godkin of the New York Nation saw the newcomer as a challenge to education, which would prevent his becoming a tool of the demagogue and undermining the nation's republican principles.6

Many of the Irish in New Orleans were poorly educated, as could be expected, since there had been little educational opportunity in their native country, where the elementary "hedge-schools" taught by Roman Catholic priests were often limited to religion and folklore. The percentage of white illiteracy in the state of Louisiana in 1850 was 8.3%, while that of the foreign-born was 15.28.7 A check of 540 Irish adults whose names


7De Bow, Seventh Census, Compendium, 152.
were selected at random from the census returns reveals that 28.3 percent were unable to read and write, a fact which indicates that the Irish as a group were more poorly educated than other immigrants.  

In 1850 there were in the schools of New Orleans only 8,761 white pupils, with most of the city's children not attending any school. In the five to fifteen-year age group, 57.16 percent of the native and 34.63 percent of the foreign-born whites attended school in the year 1850. A check of the census returns suggests that the proportion of Irish children in educational institutions did not vary greatly from that of other immigrant groups.

The un-coordinated schools systems of New Orleans left much to be desired, as each municipal district had its own school board, which seemed to know and care more about pleasing the electorate than about administering the institutions professionally. The schools in the Third Municipality (later the Third District), which was largely populated by immigrants, were the worst. There

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8 Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.
9 True Delta, June 3, 1852.
10 De Bow, Seventh Census, Compendium, 152.
was no high school, and since little or no money was furnished by the locality to supplement the state allotment, the school board was often penniless. After a visit in the district, the State Superintendent of Education suggested that the board build sheds for the students rather than to leave them in the unwholesome atmosphere of the classrooms.\textsuperscript{11}

The best public schools in New Orleans were in the Second Municipality, where the local system substantially augmented the small amount of support furnished by the state. A report of the State Superintendent of Education in 1848 declared that the schools compared favorably with those anywhere, providing a high school for both boys and girls, scientific equipment, and free textbooks.\textsuperscript{12}

Though better than the other systems in the city, the Second Municipality Schools were still in a formative stage, as shown by the fact that at one meeting of the board, teachers complained that their salaries had been almost a month late, and a member of the Board of Health reported finding one hundred children in a small room at

\textsuperscript{11}Piozanne, May 4, 1847, July 7, 1848; True Delta, May 14, 1853.

\textsuperscript{12}Henry Rightor, \textit{Standard History of New Orleans} (Chicago, 1900), 237-8.
one of the schools. 13

An opportunity for the immigrant was provided by the night schools of the city. In May of 1850 there were more than 12,000 pupils enrolled in the evening classes of the four districts of New Orleans. In the First District (formerly the Second Municipality) in 1853, out of a total number of 704 boys in the night schools, 313 were natives of Ireland, 51 of Germany, and 33 of England. An age range of the students of ten to thirty-three and the fact that a number of them were carpenters, foundry workers, shoemakers, and tailors, indicate that some of the older immigrants as well as the younger ones desired an education. 14

A controversy of importance to Irish Catholics arose in the Second Municipality schools. Though the public school policy was to provide no sectarian instruction, teachers were instructed to read a Biblical passage daily, without comment. A certain Mr. Barry, a Catholic, asked for the dismissal of a teacher who had punished his child for leaving the room while the Bible was being read. The situation was complicated by the fact that

13 *True Delta*, June 2, 1850.
John McDonough's will, which left a large sum of money to the schools, had provided that the Bible be used as a text. Finally the morning scripture reading was dispensed with, but in 1855 a Know-Nothing member of the Board renewed the controversy. 15

This problem did not assume the proportions in New Orleans which it did in certain other cities where large numbers of Irish settled, notably in Boston, where, in 1859, several children were expelled from public schools because their fathers forbade them to read the Protestant Bible. 16

St. Mary's Catholic School in St. Patrick's Parish was originally free of charge, but after it was closed in the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 and reopened as a tuition school, there was no free church school in the parish until the Christian Brothers opened St. Patrick's School for boys in 1858. 17

The epidemics of the city left many children homeless, and the names of many Irish as well as other foreign-born children were listed in orphanages on the census records. The most outstanding humanitarian

15_Ibid., November 8, 1850, October 5, 1855._
16_Wittke, _The Irish in America_, 99.
17_Baudier, _St. Patrick's_, 113.
associated with the orphanages of the city, and probably the most widely remembered of the Irish immigrants, was Margaret Gaffney Haughery. This dedicated woman assisted the Sisters of Charity at the Poydras Orphanage, which after the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 was too small for all of the orphans which it received. A second institution, named after Saint Vincent de Paul, was then built, largely with funds received from the state as well as with money made at fairs held by the sisters. The institution came to be called St. Patrick's Orphanage and was granted a yearly allotment by the legislature. 18

Margaret Haughery, whose name has almost become a legend in New Orleans, was born in 1813 in Killashandra County Cavan, from where she immigrated to America at the age of five. Margaret married another native of Ireland and moved to New Orleans; there her husband and their child died. Margaret then joined the Sisters of Charity at the Poydras Asylum for orphaned girls; she organized the women of the Irish Channel into an auxiliary which made clothes for the orphans, and went from door to door begging for food for the children, first on foot and later in a cart pulled by a donkey. Joining the staff of the St. Charles Hotel, she apparently was

successful in getting donations from the guests, for she bought interest in the D'Aquin Bakery and eventually became the sole owner. Funds from this source and income from a dairy she had started while the children were sheltered in an old plantation house helped to operate the orphanage, and at her death in 1882 her savings of $30,000 went to charity.

A present-day woman's organization in New Orleans is named for this dedicated worker, and each year its members give a Christmas Party in her memory for the orphans. Not far from St. Patrick's Church is a statue of a woman and a child in pure Carrara marble, and on the seven foot pedestal is inscribed the single word, "Margaret." Other orphanages in the city included the Orphan Boys' Asylum in the Third District, which was managed by the Sisters of Charity, and the Brothers of St. Joseph, and the Catholic Female Orphan Asylum in the Second Municipality. Another charitable endeavor of the city

19 Baudier, St. Patrick's, 97-102.
20 New Orleans City Guide (Boston, 1952), 356.
21 Baudier, St. Patrick's, 102.
22 True Delta, May 20, 1852; Seventh Census, An Enumeration of Free Inhabitants.
was the founding of St. Ann's Asylum for Destitute Females.  

Sometimes the proceeds from balls held by Irish organizations went to orphanages or other charities, as is illustrated in the following newspaper advertisement of St. Patrick's Total Abstinence Society:

A BALL will be given on SATURDAY EVENING, November 1st, at the LOUISIANA VOLUNTEER ARMORY, on Baronne st. for the BENEFIT of the CHARITY HOSPITAL. . . . Price, $1.50; Ladies free.

The friendless immigrant arriving in New Orleans was beset with many problems, particularly in times of epidemics, when disease not infrequently destroyed every member of a family but one. The municipal councils, benevolent associations, and individuals distributed medicine and funds to disease-stricken immigrants. The most outstanding of the relief societies was the Howard Association, which received large sums of money from other parts of the nation. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1847, citizens of Baton Rouge contributed

23 True Delta, January 10, 1855.
24 Picayune, November 1, 1845.
25 Ibid., February 23, 1848.
26 Ibid., May 12, 1847.
$125.71 for the relief of destitute and sick Irish immigrants.27

To meet the need for a permanent organization to aid the newly arrived, the German Society was organized in 1847, 28 and in late 1849 and early 1850 Irish Union Immigrant Societies were formed in the Second and Third Municipalities.29

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul of St. Patrick's Church, a charitable organization which first met in 1852, helped provide 223 families with doctors' care, medicines, rents, clothing, food, and burials during the year 1853. Part of an international organization, the local group dispensed funds received from other institutions in the United States.30

The group-consciousness of the Irish immigrants was seen in both their organizations and their devotion to the mother country. The Irish True Delta was outraged at President Fillmore's refusal to impose the most stringent penalties of the law on the owners and captains

27 Ibid., May 11, 1847.
29 True Delta, December 19, 1849, January 6, 1850.
30 Baudier, St. Patrick's, 103-6.
of the two British ships seized by the United States Marshall in New Orleans for violation of the passenger laws, and called his reduction of the penalty without the case being brought to court "executive usurpation of judicial powers." 31

The contributions of the immigrants to Ireland during the Revolution of 1848 demonstrate their interest in the cause of the country's independence. Daily newspapers carried sympathetic, detailed accounts of the struggle. When the patriot Thomas Francis Meagher escaped from the British penal colony in Australia, mass meetings of celebration were held in New Orleans. 32 In 1853 Meagher gave a series of lectures at the Odd Fellows' Hall in the city. 33

Mob violence resulted when the ship Hanna, from Liverpool, arrived at the Third Municipality with about four hundred immigrants, for it was rumored that five or six were "informers." Within a few hours the wharf at which the ship was moored was crowded with Irish residents. One of the alleged betrayers, who was caught as

31 True Delta, June 6, 1851.
32 Ibid., June 23, 1852.
33 Ibid., April 9, 1853.
he tried to leave the ship, would have been killed instantly had not the police intervened and taken him to jail for safety. The crowd increased during the day, and in the afternoon the authorities were barely able to save the life of another of the suspected individuals, who was caught and beaten.34

The Irish of New Orleans could truthfully be labeled "joiners," as they formed numerous organizations. There were military companies, nationalistic societies, temperance orders, and philanthropic organizations, including the Emmet Guards, the Louisiana Greys, the American Friends of Ireland, the Society for the Relief of Irish Immigrants, the Hibernians, St. Patrick's Total Abstinence Society, and Father Matthew's Temperance Society.

The statement that "Temperance societies blossomed among the Irish like marigolds in a bog" 35 is as true of the Irish in New Orleans as of those in other cities. In 1849 Father Theobold Matthew of County Tipperary came to the United States. Though he was interested in various causes in Ireland, including workhouse reform and boys'
and girls' industrial schools, he was best known for his dedication to the fight against liquor. By 1841 he had administered the "teetotaller" pledge to half of Ireland, he reported, and when he came to the United States he traveled over 37,000 miles and may have received as many as a half-million pledges of total abstinence, in spite of the opposition of influential Catholic leaders, who objected particularly to his association with Protestants. 36

Father Matthew arrived in New Orleans on March 23, 1850, where he preached temperance sermons in St. Patrick's Church and administered the total abstinence pledge to more than 9,000 persons, many of them his countrymen. Father Matthew was well-liked in New Orleans, and after he left the city, a substantial amount of money was collected for him. 37

36 Wittke, The Irish in America, 49.

37 True Delta, March 24, 26, April 13, May 19, 1850, February 19, 1851.
SUMMARY

Life for the peasant in Ireland was trying at best, for his country was plagued by a succession of famines, a series of fruitless rebellions, the abuses of absentee landlordism, unemployment, high rents, low wages, and perennial agrarian, political, and religious quarrels, but when the potato blight appeared in Ireland in the late 1840's, conditions in "The Land of Sorrow" reached a crisis, and many thousands of poor laborers knew that they must flee the country or starve. Many of them had heard stories of how, in the New Country, a man could make more money than he could ever dream of possessing in Ireland, so with hopeful hearts they packed together a few belongings, grasped the money for the voyage to America, said goodbye to friends and relatives, and set out for the port which would mark the first step of their long journey.

The departing immigrants could scarcely imagine the hardships which they were to suffer before they reached the promised land—long days of confinement in crowded quarters, where one thought wistfully of the clean, fresh air of his native island; a monotonous diet of oatmeal.
porridge, herring, and potatoes, the longing for a sufficient supply of fresh drinking water, and, most terrible of all, the fear of deadly diseases which ravaged the ship and threatened the lives of loved ones. The hardships of the immigrants usually did not end when they reached their destination, for most of them had no friends in this strange city and had little or no money on which to subsist until they found jobs. Tenement owners, scheming labor contractors, and other unscrupulous persons were eager to exploit the unlearned newcomers, who worked for low wages, lived in crowded, unsanitary hovels, and fell prey to the typhus, cholera, and yellow fever epidemics which decimated the immigrant population.

The typical Irishman worked long hours in the hot sun; fought frequently, with little or no provocation; saw that the memory of his deceased friends was honored with an Irish "wake;" joined Irish organizations, used his ballot or his fists for the cause of the Democratic Party; threatened the life of anyone who might dare to harm St. Patrick's Church, danced Irish jigs and reels; and was never so poor that he could not contribute money to fellow countrymen in need.

The arrival of thousands of poor, homeless Irish immigrants, many of them seriously ill and unable to work, presented an unprecedented social problem to the city
of New Orleans. Bringing in typhus and other diseases, the newcomers endangered the lives of residents, and as they came under the control of self-seeking politicians, native-born Americans sought to curb their power, and bloody riots disrupted the order of the city. Although the arrival of so many uneducated, credulous Irish immigrants made serious social and political problems inevitable, the Irish supplied the labor force which built levees, canals, railroads, and other public works; they built churches and contributed generously to philanthropic causes in the city and in their native land; and they imparted to the city that effervescent so characteristic of their nationality.
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Candidate:  GORDY, RUBY NELL

Major Field:  HISTORY

Title of Thesis:  THE IRISH IN NEW ORLEANS 1845-1855

Approved:

[Signatures and names of approving officials]

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Names of committee members]

Date of Examination:

26 July 1960