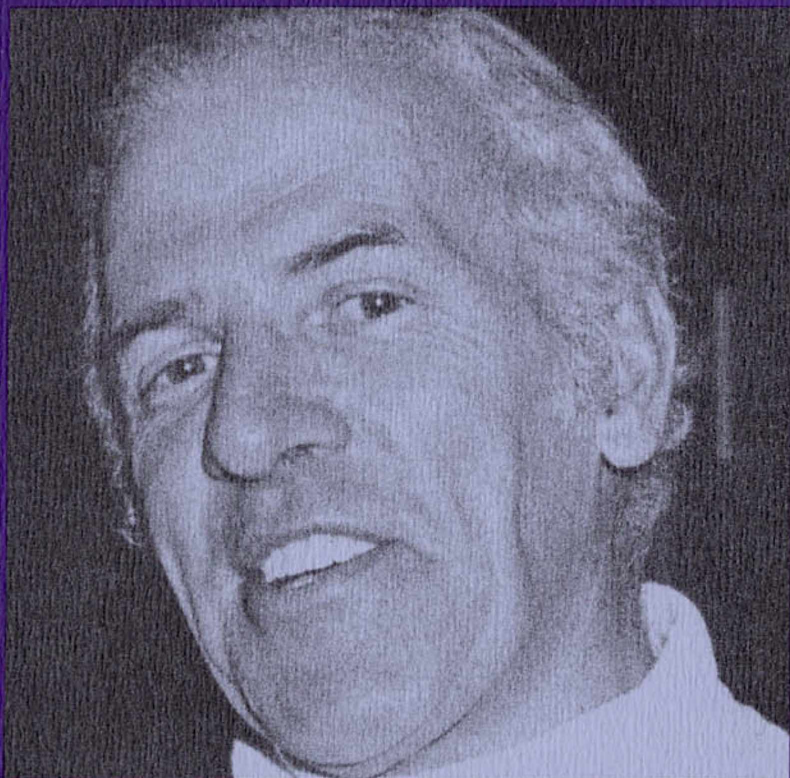
THE IRISH



IN CANADA

David A. Wilson

Canada's Ethnic Groups　　Canadian Historical Society

ISBN 0-88798-114-3 *Canada's Ethnic Groups*
ISSN 1483-9504 *Canada's Ethnic Groups*
(print)
ISSN 1715-8605 *Canada's Ethnic Groups*
(Online)

CANADA'S ETHNIC GROUPS

Published by the Canadian Historical Association with the support of the Multiculturalism Program, Government of Canada.

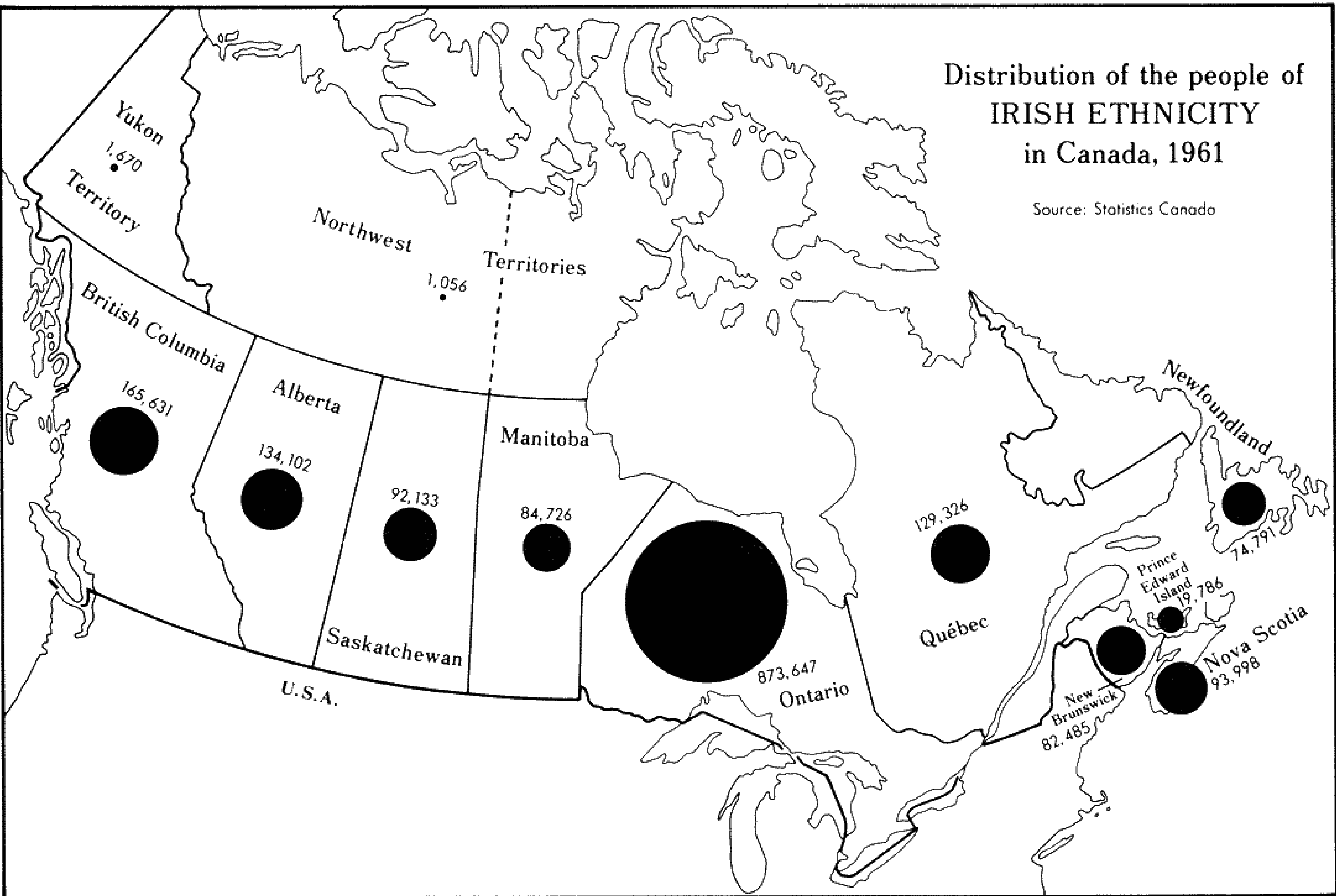
Ottawa, 1989

Booklet No. 12

Printed by Keystone Printing & Lithographing Ltd., Saint John, N.B.

THE IRISH IN CANADA

DAVID A. WILSON



Distribution of the people of
IRISH ETHNICITY
in Canada, 1961
Source: Statistics Canada
Yukon Territory
1,670
Northwest Territories
1,056
British Columbia
165,631
Alberta
134,102
Saskatchewan
92,133
Manitoba
84,726
Ontario
873,647
Québec
129,326
Newfoundland
74,791
Prince Edward Island
19,786
Nova Scotia
93,998
New Brunswick
82,485
U.S.A.

THE IRISH IN CANADA

David A. Wilson

I. THE IRISH BACKGROUND

The Irish who crossed the Atlantic during the 19th century came from an overcrowded, overwhelmingly agricultural country. Apart from Belfast and its environs, Ireland was not directly affected by the Industrial Revolution, and farming was much the most common occupation. Irish agriculture was highly labour-intensive; farmers depended mostly on human labour, rather than on machines or animals. Most farms were small and were worked only by family members. In 1845, 24 per cent of all holdings were between 1-5 acres, and another 40 per cent were between 5-15 acres. Largely because of the heavy planting of potatoes, five acres of land could support a family of up to eight people. From one perspective, Irish agriculture could be seen as remarkably efficient; it had one of the highest rates of nutrition-per-acre in Europe, and actually produced more food per acre of cultivated land than do present-day Canadian farmers. Yet the system was inherently unstable. With a low age of marriage, a high birth rate and the increasing subdivision of holdings, the pressure of population on the land was reaching dangerous levels. By the mid-1840s, Ireland's population was accelerating towards 8 1/2 million, double the size it is today. With excessive reliance on the potato, much of the population was held hostage to a good potato crop. But the crop failed partially or totally 14 times between 1816 and 1842; hunger and disease stalked the land.

Not surprisingly, many contemporaries viewed emigration as a safety-valve which could relieve the pressure. There were sporadic state-sponsored attempts to encourage emigration, such as Peter Robinson's transplanting of over 2,000 tenants from crowded estates in North Cork to vacant land in Upper Canada during the early 1820s. For the most part, however, the Irish voted with their feet and left of their own accord. It has been estimated that between 1780 and 1845, some 1 3/4 million got out of the country. Most went to Britain, but a large number after 1815 headed for North America; of these trans-Atlantic migrants, roughly twice as many landed in Canada as in the United States. Yet such emigration was a symptom of Ireland's structural problems, rather than a cure for them. Irish agriculture remained a disaster waiting to happen.

The much-feared disaster struck with a vengeance in the Great Famine of 1845-49, the most traumatic event in the history of modern Ireland. During these years, one million people died and a further million emigrated. The pain, loss and suffering are incomprehensible and incalculable. A social revolution which accelerated tendencies already under way, the Famine facilitated the landlords' policy of clearing their congested estates, and resulted in the consolidation of farms. Between the Famine and World War I, the number of farms between 1-5 acres dropped by two-thirds, the number of farms between 5-15 acres was cut in

half, and holdings between 15-30 acres gradually declined. In contrast, there was an increase in farms over 30 acres, including the emergence of large graziers with commercial operations of 100 acres and up. Such consolidation was closely connected with a shift from labour intensive tillage towards labour extensive pasture and dairy farming; in this situation, there was little or no place for landless labourers.

Nor was there much room for family members who were excluded from farm ownership. After the Famine, there was a movement from partible to impartible inheritance; instead of subdividing their land, farmers would now bequeath it to one heir. And that heir might have to wait a considerable time before being in a position to inherit the farm and to marry. From a country with a low age of marriage and a very high birth rate, Ireland became a land with a high age of marriage and a lower birth rate. This pattern persisted well into the 20th century. In 1945-46, the average age of marriage for women in the Republic of Ireland was 30; for men it was 39. The Irish had become the most sexually repressed people in the world.

This combination of factors resulted in emigration on an unprecedented scale. Between 1851 and 1921, over 4 1/2 million people left Ireland for North America and Australasia. More than 80 per cent of these emigrants went to the United States; in contrast, only about 7 per cent landed in Canada. Back in Ireland, the population continued to fall steadily until 1911, when it stabilized at around 4 1/3 million. But it was not until the 1960s that the demographic curves began to turn upwards. For a brief period, there was even a net migration into Ireland. Nevertheless, with severe economic problems facing the country in the 1980s, emigration has once again become a major part of the Irish experience.

It is clear that the social and economic background of any particular group of Irish migrants to Canada depended to a considerable degree on when they emigrated. One must also recognize that Ireland was a country of sharp regional variations; the way of life in County Antrim was as different from that in wildest Connemara and from that in County Wexford, as that of present-day Montreal is from that of Yellowknife. This diversity is critically important when making historical observations about Irish migrants to Canada. Unless one knows, for example, the geographical origins, the economic position and the social status of the migrants, one cannot judge the relevance of Irish conditions in determining the actions of these people once they came to Canada. Unfortunately, Canadian historians have as yet very little knowledge of the specific background of most Irish Canadians.

Nevertheless, some generalizations can be made. To begin with, the decline of the Irish language meant that most Irish migrants had already learned English before they left home. Although Gaelic remained the first language of many, by the end of the Napoleonic Wars the Irish could generally speak English, even if only as a second language. The erosion of Gaelic was hastened by the Famine, which hit the Irish-speaking west of Ireland the hardest. As the 19th century

TABLE I

IRISH IMMIGRATION TO BRITISH NORTH AMERICA, 1825-1869*

1825-29	53,463
1830-34	185,952
1835-39	73,245
1840-44	134,956
1845-49	230,094
1850-54	116,833
1855-59	18,165
1860-64	15,724
1865-69	22,693

*Data are not available for the period before 1825. The figures given here are estimates based not only on emigration from Irish ports but also Irish emigration from ports in Britain such as Liverpool and Glasgow.

progressed, the proportion of English speakers grew rapidly. Moreover, Irish data indicate that most emigrants were young and single, and that female emigration was higher than that of other 19th century migrant groups. Before the Famine, women constituted 40 per cent of Irish emigrants; afterwards, they were usually in the majority. With diminishing marriage prospects, few employment opportunities and a subordinate social status at home, emigration offered a potential escape route from a bleak existence as a single unemployed woman in rural Ireland. Although more research is needed, it is probable that this general sex ratio of emigration was reflected in specific immigration to Canada.

What can be said of the Irish who crossed the Atlantic is that, like other long-distance migrants, they were not typical of the country which they left. This was particularly true in the 18th and early 19th centuries, when the long journey to North America was generally made by those people who were especially ambitious and adaptable, and who had the necessary financial resources. Because the Irish immigrants who landed in Saint John or Quebec City frequently looked in terrible shape, it was often assumed that they came from the most ignorant and poverty-stricken stratum of Irish society. That assumption

TABLE II

POST-CONFEDERATION IRISH IMMIGRATION TO CANADA
1870-1978

Years	Total immigration into Canada	Irish immigration* into Canada	Irish immigration % of total Canadian immigration
1870-79	328,876	24,520	7.5 %
1880-89	849,615	46,941	5.5 %
1890-99	372,474	11,390	3.1 %
1900-09	1,398,989	21,341	1.5 %
1910-19	1,860,269	43,249	2.3 %
1920-29**	1,264,220	88,500	7.0 %
1930-39	252,044	19,814	7.9 %
1940-49	428,733	24,185	5.6 %
1950-59	1,555,966	65,619	4.2 %
1960-69	1,366,025	27,645	2.0 %
1970-78, inclusive***	1,332,821	23,064	1.7 %
Grand Total. 1870-1978, inclusive	9,677,211	396,898	4.1%

* Irish immigration includes that from both Northern and Southern Ireland.

** Figures for 1926-59 include persons of Irish birth who came to Canada from the United States.

*** Irish figures not available after 1978.

was generally incorrect. After the Napoleonic Wars, many Irish immigrants crossed the Atlantic crowded in ships designed for carrying timber; the food was often inadequate and the water was frequently contaminated. In these unsanitary, overcrowded conditions, diseases like cholera and typhus spread through the passengers. The death rate was high, particularly during the famine-induced emigration of the 1840s, and thousands ended their journey across the Atlantic at graves in Grosse Isle in Quebec or Partridge Island, off Saint John, where the immigrants were quarantined after their arrival in Canada. But even the Famine migrants were usually above the Irish average in commercial acumen and in

TABLE III

PEOPLE OF IRISH ORIGIN IN POST-CONFEDERATION CANADA

Year	Male	Female	Total Irish Population	% of Canadian Population
1871			846,414	24.3
1881			957,403	22.1
1891	Ethnicity data not collected in compatible form			
1901			988,721	18.4
1911	540,279	510,105	1,050,384	14.6
1921	565,402	542,415	1,107,817	12.6
1931	630,495	600,313	1,230,808	11.9
1941	646,823	620,879	1,267,702	11.0
1951	724,352	715,283	1,439,635	10.3
1961*	881,091	872,260	1,753.351	9.6

* After 1961, federal census officials no longer permitted "Irish" as an ethnic category; the Irish were lumped in with the English, Scottish and Welsh.

Reprinted with permission from Donald H. Akenson, *Being Had: Historians, Evidence and The Irish in North America* (Port Credit: P.D. Meany, 1985).

social and technological adaptability. The poorer groups in Ireland could not, on the whole, afford the trans-Atlantic voyage. They either made their way to Britain, or stayed at home and hoped for the best.

Most 19th century Irish immigrants who came to Canada, then, had a strong desire to improve their material conditions, and many were motivated by a strong desire to acquire more and better land than they could have had at home. In pursuing these goals, they moved from a system where land was scarce and labour was plentiful to one where labour was scarce and land was plentiful. The price was a greater degree of isolation than rural life offered in Ireland, but it was one that most were willing to pay.

As well as considering the social and economic background of the immigrants, it is also important to remember that Ireland was — and still is — marked by deep ethnic, religious and political divisions. Ethnically, the country was split between people of "native Irish" origin, and those whose ancestors at some time in the distant past had come from England (the "Anglo-Irish") or from Scotland (the "Ulster-Scots"). Relations between these groups were tense and sometimes violent. The native Irish resented the Anglo-Irish and Ulster-Scots for pushing them aside and grabbing most of their land between the 15th and 18th centuries; the Anglo-Irish and the Ulster-Scots, for their part, looked upon the native Irish

as potentially rebellious and therefore dangerous. These ethnic divisions corresponded roughly with religious differences in Ireland. The native Irish, who comprised around 80 per cent of the population in the 19th century, were overwhelmingly Roman Catholic; the Anglo-Irish, at about 12 per cent of the population, were largely Anglicans; and the Ulster-Scots, with 8 per cent of the population, were generally Presbyterian. Along with the wide gulf separating Catholics and Protestants, there were also tensions within Protestantism. The Anglicans viewed the Presbyterians as potential schismatics, while the Presbyterians saw the Anglicans as supporters of an arrogant state church and as being tainted with Romanism.

Political developments in Ireland were closely connected with these ethnic and religious tensions. The most striking feature of 19th century Irish politics was the gradual improvement of the Catholics' political position after their subjection under the Penal Laws of the previous century. In the 1820s, Daniel O'Connell organized one of the most sophisticated political movements of its era to develop a nation-wide grass-roots campaign for Catholic Emancipation. By 1829 he was successful; Irish Catholics were now eligible to sit in Parliament. Building on this base, many Catholics began to agitate for repeal of the Act of Union with Britain and to press for a measure of Home Rule for Ireland. Towards the end of the century, the Irish Parliamentary Party had converted the British Liberal Party to Home Rule, but still faced the opposition of British Conservatives and Irish Protestants.

Faced with the growing power of the Catholics, the Anglo-Irish and the Ulster-Scots closed ranks to resist what they perceived as a common threat. A major vehicle of Protestant political organization was the Orange Order, which mediated between Anglicans and Presbyterians, which proclaimed loyalty to the Crown, the Empire and the union with Britain, and which denounced the Catholics as disloyal troublemakers. When Home Rule for all Ireland appeared imminent just before World War I, the Protestant Unionists of Ulster organized themselves into a people's army which was prepared if necessary to fight Britain to remain British. Following the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-21, the island was partitioned between the six counties of Ulster which remained British, and the remaining 26 counties which secured a degree of independence. Partition roughly reflected the geographical distribution of the ethnic, religious and political divisions within Ireland, with the important exception that one-third of the population in the six counties of Ulster were Catholic and Nationalist — a fact which lies behind the present conflict in Northern Ireland. Irish immigrants carried these political and religious divisions full-blown across the Atlantic to Canada, where Protestant Irish Canadians outnumbered their Catholic counterparts by a ratio of two to one.

II. SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

When considering the data about the Irish in Canada, it is important to

distinguish between immigration and ethnicity. An immigrant group consists of people who were born outside this country but who eventually settled here; such people are often referred to as "first generation" Canadians. An ethnic group, in contrast, spans several generations, and comprises the children, grand-children and further descendants of the original immigrants. Within different ethnic groups, it is possible to perceive persistent and particular patterns in religious belief, political allegiance and family life, often long after later generations have ceased to feel consciously their ethnic heritage.

The roots of Irish ethnicity run deepest in Newfoundland. By the early 18th century, Irish migrants from Waterford and Wexford became frequent seasonal visitors to the coast of Newfoundland, working in the fisheries in the summer and returning home in the autumn. This seasonal migration provided the basis for longer-term settlement, as an increasing number of migrants spent several years or their entire adult lives in the colony. Close trade links developed between Ireland and Newfoundland, with the south of Ireland producing much of the pork, butter, salt beef and tallow for the Newfoundland economy. This commercial relationship, which weakened but did not fade entirely during the 19th century, sustained a direct contact between the Irish emigrants and their descendants on the one hand, and the Old Country on the other. With the pull of the Atlantic prevailing over the pull of the continent, Newfoundland established closer and more immediate ties with Ireland than did most other parts of Canada.

There was also an Irish presence in Nova Scotia, Cape Breton and New Brunswick during the 18th century. A number of Irish migrants to Newfoundland trickled into Cape Breton, and still more moved to Halifax where they played a prominent role in the fisheries. As early as 1786 the Irish community in Halifax found institutional expression in the Charitable Irish Society, the first of its kind in British North America. In a separate development, immigrants from Ulster settled around the Nova Scotia outports of Truro and Onslow during the early 1760s. Irish migrants also lived in Saint John, New Brunswick, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Nevertheless, this first phase of Irish immigration pales into insignificance when compared with the massive influx of Irish men and women into the Maritimes and central Canada after the Napoleonic Wars.

In the movement of people from the British Isles to British North America after 1815, the Irish were much the largest contingent. Well before the Famine, when Irish immigration reached its peak, the Irish exceeded the total of English, Welsh and Scottish migrants combined. Their numbers began to fall significantly after 1854, but it still took migrants from England and Wales more than another decade to catch up, and the Scottish did not consistently outnumber the Irish until the 1890s.

The sheer scale of Irish immigration meant that the Irish became not only the largest immigrant cohort but also the major non-French ethnic group in British

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE OF IRISH ORIGIN IN POST-CONFEDERATION CANADA

Total Number (and %)

Year	Atlantic Provinces*	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	British Columbia	Northern Territories
1871	163,494 (19.3)	123,478 (14.6)	559,442 (66.1)			
1881	192,766 (20.2)	123,749 (12.9)	627,262 (65.5)	10,173 (1.0)	3,172 (0.3)	281 (0.1)
1891	Ethnicity data not collected in compatible form					
1901	160,086 (16.2)	114,842 (11.6)	624,332 (63.2)	66,223 (6.7)	20,658 (2.1)	2,580 (0.2)
1911	148,714 (14.2)	103,148 (9.6)	608,139 (57.2)	149,062 (14.8)	40,642 (4.1)	679 (0.1)
1921**	143,125 (12.9)	94,947 (8.6)	590,493 (53.3)	224,446 (20.3)	54,298 (4.9)	475 (-)
1931	141,024 (11.4)	108,312 (8.8)	647,831 (52.6)	261,633 (21.4)	71,612 (5.8)	396 (-)
1941	152,560 (12.0)	109,894 (8.7)	665,339 (52.5)	255,884 (20.2)	83,460 (6.6)	565 (-)
1951	220,582 (15.3)	110,189 (7.7)	723,888 (50.3)	259,162 (18.0)	124,098 (8.6)	1,716 (0.1)
1961	271,060 (15.4)	129,326 (7.4)	873,647 (49.8)	310,961 (17.7)	165,631 (9.5)	2,726 (0.2)

* Prince Edward Island statistics are not included until 1881; Newfoundland statistics are not included until 1951.

** A slight anomaly in census processing resulted in the national total being marginally different from the column sums.

Reprinted with permission from Donald H. Akenson, *Being Had: Historians, Evidence and The Irish in North America* (Port Credit: P.D. Meany, 1985).

North America. Their presence was registered in the pre-Confederation census data, which demonstrate that before the Famine the Irish had already become the largest foreign-born group in Ontario and Quebec and that they occupied a similar position in New Brunswick and Newfoundland by at least the late 1850s. They almost equalled the Scots in Prince Edward Island; only in Nova Scotia, where Scottish immigration clearly predominated, were the Irish considerably under-represented. Accurate data on ethnicity are harder to come by, but the Irish were almost certainly the single largest ethnic group in English Canada from the 1830s to the late 1880s. The first Dominion of Canada census of 1871 showed that 24.3 per cent of all Canadians were of Irish ethnicity, in comparison to the English with 20.3 per cent and the Scottish with 15.8 per cent. English-speaking Canada had a significant Irish accent.

Most Canadians of Irish ethnicity were Protestant. Although the exact figures are not known, a large-sample restudy of the 1871 census by Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein puts the Protestant component at just over 60 per cent. Nevertheless, the largest single religious affiliation was Roman Catholic, since the Protestants were splintered into several denominations. In Darroch and Ornstein's sample, 38 per cent of the Irish were Catholics; the next largest group was the Anglicans, with slightly under 23 per cent of the total. As might be expected, these religious proportions varied from province to province. In Ontario, Donald Akenson has shown that the Protestant-Catholic breakdown was roughly 2:1, and that this ratio remained remarkably stable both before and after the Famine. It is also likely that the Protestants formed a substantial majority in south and central New Brunswick.

Probably from the early 1830s, a significant majority of the Irish in Canada settled in Ontario. Shortly after Confederation, two-thirds of Irish Canadians lived in the province, with Quebec a far second and New Brunswick a close third. Not surprisingly, the proportion of people of Irish ethnicity who lived in the original four provinces of Canada diminished as the country expanded. By 1961, the last year for which data on the Irish are available, Ontario's share of the Irish in Canada had fallen from two-thirds to just less than one-half. The proportion of the nation's Irish in Quebec dropped from 14.6 per cent to 7.4 per cent between 1871 and 1961; in the same period, the figures fell from 11.9 per cent to only 4.7 per cent in New Brunswick, while Nova Scotia went down from 7.4 to 5.4 per cent. Offsetting this relative decline, Manitoba had 4.8 and Saskatchewan 5.3 per cent of the Irish in Canada by 1961, and the proportion of Irish in Alberta had climbed to 7.6 per cent. British Columbia has been particularly attractive to the Irish; in 1961, 9.5 per cent of people of Irish ethnicity lived there, giving it, after Ontario, the second largest provincial concentration of the Irish in the country.

In the first decade after Confederation the number of people of Irish ethnicity was proportionately largest in Ontario and New Brunswick, where they comprised almost one-third of the population. They were probably equally significant in

Newfoundland, although the rudimentary nature of Newfoundland's census procedures before it joined Confederation in 1949 has hampered an accurate assessment of the extent of Irish ethnicity. The Irish constituted close to a quarter of Prince Edward Island's population in 1881, and almost 15 per cent of the population of Nova Scotia and of Manitoba towards the end of the century. During the 20th century, they have formed roughly a tenth of the population of the Prairie provinces and of British Columbia. The sharpest change in the Irish component of any provincial population has occurred in Quebec. Whereas one in ten Quebecers in 1871 were Irish, only one in 33 were in 1961.

The decline of the Irish presence in Quebec mirrored in an extreme form a more general pattern in post-Confederation Canada. Throughout the country, the Irish gradually declined in importance as an ethnic group; from comprising almost a quarter of the population in 1871, they dropped to slightly under a tenth in 1961. One reason for this was that more and more Irish migrants chose to settle in the United States rather than Canada. This was partly a result of changes in the transatlantic fare structure which made it considerably cheaper in the 1850s to sail to New York than to Canadian ports, and may also reflect an unwillingness among many Irish Catholics to continue living under the British flag. But apart from the preference of Irish immigrants for the United States, it must also be remembered that during the 20th century, and particularly since World War II, the total number of people emigrating from Ireland diminished in comparison to the number leaving other European countries and Third World nations. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Irish proportion of the population fell amid the influx of new ethnic groups into Canada.

III. ACCULTURATION

It has often been assumed that the Irish adapted poorly to Canadian life; one reads of hard-living, hard-fighting and hard-drinking Irishmen trapped in urban ghettoes, working as unskilled labourers, and lacking the foresight and self-discipline to succeed. And yet, when one examines the statistical evidence, and compares the Irish with the general Canadian population on such matters as place of residence, patterns of occupation and occupational success, a very different picture emerges. The stereotypical image of the "wild Irish" is, in fact, a severe distortion of reality.

If we take residency as an indication of acculturation, it is clear that the Irish quickly adapted to Canadian norms. During the 19th century, they followed the national pattern of predominantly rural settlement; the proportion of Irish people who lived in the countryside was very close to that of the Canadian population at large. There were, of course, exceptions. In the mid-19th century, and particularly in the immediate post-Famine period, many first-generation Irish Canadians crowded into places like Halifax, Hamilton, Kingston and London. But their experiences were not typical of the Irish as a whole. In 1871, for example, three out of every four Irishmen lived in the countryside, a primary indication of their adaptation to the largely rural Canadian social and economic

system of the time. And when the Irish did become an urban people after World War I, they were simply participating in a trend which applied to the Canadian population in general.

Farming was the single most important means of supporting 19th century Irish households, Protestant and Catholic alike. In this respect, as with residency, the Irish experience paralleled that of the overall population. Yet there were also significant religious and regional differences. Generally speaking, the proportion of farmers was higher among Irish Protestants than Irish Catholics. In 1871, 53.8 per cent of all Canadians were farmers compared with 58.3 percent of Irish Protestants, while Irish Catholics lagged behind at 44.3 per cent. This gulf was widest in the Maritimes, where less than one-third of Irish Catholics were farmers, but where Irish Protestants remained close to the national average. In contrast, Irish Catholics in Canada were twice as likely as Irish Protestants to be semi-skilled workers and labourers. While 14.7 per cent of Irish Protestants and 18 per cent of all Canadians in 1871 fell into these employment categories, the figure for Irish Catholics was 28 per cent. Again, there were marked provincial variations; Irish Catholic over-representation among semi-skilled workers and labourers was most pronounced in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia in 1871, semi-skilled workers alone actually outnumbered farmers among Irish Catholics. In this sense, the Irish experience in Nova Scotia probably had more in common with that in Massachusetts and New York than with other provinces in Canada.

The reasons for these differences in Irish Protestant and Catholic occupational patterns in 19th century Canada have yet to be adequately explained. Any historian exploring the problem would have to take into account such factors as the Irish background of specific groups of Catholic and Protestant immigrants, the timing of their departure from Ireland, the relationship between occupation and length of residence in Canada, and the possible role of the Orange Order in facilitating Protestant access to the land. Similarly, the provincial variations also await analysis. As Darroch and Ornstein have argued, studies of the interaction between the Irish as an ethnic group and the local political economies in which they found themselves will throw much light on the subject. But it is important to bear in mind that taking Protestants and Catholics together, Irish patterns of occupation were fairly close to the overall Canadian average. And although a sizeable minority of Irish Catholics were semi-skilled workers and labourers, the Irish Catholics as a whole cannot be equated with an urban proletariat. Nor, for that matter, is there any evidence that they formed a rural proletariat.

Along with patterns of residence and occupation, the degree of occupational success experienced by an ethnic group is another useful measure of acculturation. One way of judging this is to compare the proportion of Irish Canadians engaged in bourgeois and skilled occupations with that of the general Canadian population. The results of such a comparison are quite revealing. In 1871, the percentage of Irish Protestants and Catholics who were merchants, manufac-

turers, professionals, white collar workers and artisans was virtually identical to that of the population at large. Moreover, there was little appreciable difference between Protestant and Catholic experiences; only in the professions did the Protestant Irish have a significant edge over the Catholics. As is always the case, there were provincial variations. In Quebec and Nova Scotia, for example, the proportion of Irish Catholics who were merchants and manufacturers comfortably exceeded that of both the Irish Protestants and Canadians as a whole, while in Ontario Irish Catholics were more likely to be in the professions than were Irish Protestants. The national pattern, however, clearly indicates that by 1871 the Irish were closely acculturated to Canadian norms as far as place of residence, type of occupation and occupational status were concerned. When one remembers that those immigrants who arrived after 1846 had been deeply affected by the trauma of the Great Famine, this achievement appears all the more impressive; their recovery had been remarkable.

Yet the Irish did more than adapt to Canadian patterns; in a very real sense they actually helped to define and shape those patterns. Unlike more recent ethnic groups, the Irish in the 19th century were not a small minority of the total population. On the contrary, they arrived in such large numbers, and were such a significant economic, social and political force, that in many ways Canadian society had to adapt to them. The Irish who arrived in Canada during the 19th century, in common with the English and Scottish immigrants of that time, did not encounter a fully developed or articulated society. In the half-century before Confederation, English Canada was a highly malleable cultural entity, within which the Irish, English and Scottish shared the basic assumptions that English was the language of everyday life and that some form of the British tradition of representative government was desirable. Operating under these premises, the Irish, English, and Scottish worked out a kind of mutual cultural accommodation, with each group contributing to and drawing from the economic, social and cultural characteristics of the others. They helped establish the larger society to which later immigrant groups would themselves have to acculturate during the 20th century.

IV. THE IRISH DIMENSION

The process of mutual cultural accommodation among the Irish, English and Scots was extremely complex. Within thousands of individual communities, the interaction of local farmers, storekeepers and artisans of varying ethnicity brought about molecular patterns of change. As a result, the precise influence of any particular group in the final amalgam is impossible to pin down. Nevertheless, one can identify certain ways in which Irish behaviour and Irish institutions helped shape the development of a distinct English Canadian outlook.

One of the most striking things about the Irish in Canada is their high degree of political activism. This was not confined to an elite; it permeated the entire ethnic group, whether rich or poor, rural or urban, Catholic or Protestant. Such

political awareness and engagement stemmed directly from Ireland. The Irish Presbyterians had developed a kind of "settler radicalism" in the homeland. On the one hand, they favoured democratic forms of government far in advance of those provided by the political constitutions of the time, and they believed firmly in each man's right to political involvement. On the other hand, they frequently feared and looked down upon Catholicism as a religion inimical to civil and religious liberty, and felt threatened by the "native" Catholic Irish. The Irish Anglicans came to Canada with the collective experience of having been the controllers of local government in much of the Old Country. And the Irish Catholics who arrived after 1820 were well acquainted with the political methods by which Daniel O'Connell had achieved Catholic Emancipation and which he began to employ in his attempt to repeal the Act of Union. When the Irish in Canada began asserting themselves politically in the 1830s, it was not simply through their sheer weight of numbers, but also because they had a widespread knowledge of how to organize collectively to achieve political ends.

During the 19th century, the ideological assumptions and organizational experience of the Irish were transmitted to Canada and transmuted into part of the domestic political scene. In this way, a man like Ogle Gowan, a Protestant immigrant from County Wexford, became the founder of the Orange Order in British North America, built on the base of Irish Protestants in eastern Ontario to enter Canadian politics, and blended the hyper-loyalism of his Irish constituency with earlier Canadian loyalist and conservative traditions. Similarly, the Protestant Irish in New Brunswick appropriated that province's loyalist image, emphasized their common allegiance with New Brunswickers to the constitutional monarchy and the British connection, and injected a significant strain of anti-Catholicism into the region. At the other end of the political spectrum, a radical-liberal Irish Catholic newspaper like the Montreal *Vindicator* drew parallels between the unjust treatment of French Canada and Catholic Ireland at the hands of the British, perceived remarkable similarities between "Irish Orangemen" and "Canadian Tories" and hailed Louis-Joseph Papineau as the "O'Connell of Lower Canada". Indeed, Dr. E.B. O'Callaghan, the editor of the *Vindicator*, became assistant leader of the *patriotes* and participated in the Lower Canadian rebellion of 1837. In Nova Scotia during the 1840s, Irish Catholics who had come to prominence in their ethnic community through actively supporting O'Connell's campaign to repeal the Act of Union linked up with the Reform Party in a common attempt to dislodge the entrenched local and provincial oligarchies and in New Brunswick in 1864-66 Timothy Warren Anglin led the opposition to Confederation. Modern studies have shown that Irish Protestants have tended to lean towards conservatism and the Catholics towards liberalism, although there was of course no exact correlation. In fact, the Irish were so highly political that they energized the entire political system.

The Irish political and social institution which made the deepest impression on Canada was undoubtedly the Orange Order. In a country with a deep con-

servative, loyal and Protestant tradition, the Orange Order found ideal conditions in which it could flourish. Towards the end of the 19th century, Orangeism contributed to the English Canadian imperialist vision of a strong Canada playing an active and dynamic role in the British Empire, and Orangemen called for Canadian unity under one flag, one language and one school system. Unlike most other ethnic societies, which are limited to people of a particular ethnic background, the Orange Order expanded beyond its Irish origins to embrace all sections of Canada's non-Catholic population. At its peak, one in three of Canada's Protestant adult male population was a member. Englishmen and Scotsmen were bonded with Irishmen in an institution whose cultural and political tenets had been largely determined in Ireland.

Local Orange Lodges served a variety of functions. They operated as mutual benefit societies, social clubs and job-finding agencies, and took root in growing frontier regions as well as urban centres like Toronto. Indeed, Toronto in the 19th century was so "Orange" in complexion that it was known as the "Belfast of Canada". In the Maritimes, Orangeism spread east from its base in New Brunswick, and penetrated long-established non-Irish communities in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. It also became particularly popular among Protestants of English ethnicity in Newfoundland. Carried west from its heartland in Ontario, the Orange Order became an important force in Manitoba, and made its presence felt in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Only in British Columbia, among the western provinces, did it fail to get off the ground. Appealing to a wide range of English Canadians and upholding conservative political and social values, the Orange Order was the Irish-made mechanism through which large numbers of English, Scots and Irish came to agree on what it meant to be British, Protestant and Canadian.

With its prohibition of Catholics as members, its anti-Catholic oaths, toasts and jests, and its evocative damnations of the Great Whore of Rome, the Orange Order also brought severe sectarian prejudices into Canada. Believing that Catholic loyalty to the Pope was incompatible with loyalty to the Protestant Crown and the Empire, Orangemen viewed Catholics with at least grave suspicion and at most downright hostility. In some areas of Ontario, Protestant bully-boys like the Town Line Blazers tried to ensure that Catholics were kept out of Protestant townships. And in Saint John, the fragile unity which existed between Protestants and Catholics during the 1830s was fractured in the following decade as Orangeism ran headlong into the rising force of Irish Catholic ultramontanism.

For their part, Irish Catholics seem to have been equally prejudiced against Protestants, although their minority status in most communities made them more circumspect in expressing their views. Anti-Protestant feeling took its most explicit form when Catholics campaigned against their children being taught in the same schools as Protestants. The agitation began in the 1850s, and drew directly on the promulgations of the Catholic bishops of Ireland at the Synod of Thurles in 1850. Adopting tactics that had been employed successfully

in Ireland, the Catholic authorities in most parts of Canada eventually won government agreement for some degree of support for a Catholic confessional denominational school system and achieved educational segregation.

Given the tensions that existed between Irish Protestants and Catholics, it is not surprising that riots between them flared up from time to time. There were clashes in Perth and Kingston in Upper Canada in the 1820s, and serious conflicts in Woodstock and Saint John in New Brunswick two decades later. During the mid-19th century, Protestant and Catholic riots became regular features of Toronto life around each July 12th, when Orangemen celebrated the victory of Protestant King William III over Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. And in Newfoundland, sectarian violence was so common in the mid-19th century that comparisons were frequently made with the situation in Ireland. Nevertheless, although these altercations were a major source of civic strife in Canada, they were relatively quiet affairs compared with their counterparts in places like Belfast, and gradually faded away towards the end of the 19th century.

Although Irish Protestants and Catholics were divided among themselves, both groups contributed to the anti-French element of the English Canadian outlook. Irish Protestants in the Orange Order vigorously opposed the Riel Rebellion of 1871, and actively encouraged Protestant emigration to Manitoba to prevent French Catholics from dominating the province. In New Brunswick, Protestants of Irish ethnicity directed much of their anti-Catholic feeling towards the French-speaking population, and in eastern Ontario the Orange Order fought against French Canadian expansion into Prescott and Russell counties amid fears of a popish plot to transform the province into a French Catholic stronghold. Such fears have found a secular expression in more recent times, when Federal bilingual policies were interpreted in some quarters of English Canada as part of a "bilingual today, French tomorrow" conspiracy. French Canadians did not fit with Orange notions of what it was to be Canadian; the Conscription crises of both world wars appeared to demonstrate that French Canadians were not committed to Crown and Empire, and French Canadian dissatisfaction with the union flag only seemed to confirm the impression. And while the Orange Order itself has virtually died out, some of the anti-French sentiments it articulated — along with some of its other views such as hostility to Communism and opposition to non-British immigration — have not entirely disappeared from the Canadian scene.

Not only Irish Protestants but also Irish Catholics believed that English was the best language for the True Faith. During the second half of the 19th century, the Catholic church in English-speaking areas became dominated, although not exclusively controlled, by Irish priests and bishops, many of whom had been trained in the Old Country. In districts where the Catholic constituency was of mixed Irish and French ethnicity, relations were often uneasy. Although the French and Irish could cooperate when arguing the case for Catholic denomina-

tional education, there were also fierce struggles for the control of individual parishes and dioceses, and in many parish churches the relative amount of time given to sermons in French or in English was a matter of lively dispute.

Irish and French Catholics in some areas also clashed over the language of instruction in denominational schools. During the New Brunswick schools question of 1871-75, the Irish Catholic leaders of the campaign against non-sectarian schools were not interested in protecting the use of French in the province's education system. In the Manitoba schools controversy, the Catholic Irish were much less enthusiastic about denominational schools than were the French, since they feared that they would come under French control. More divisively, from the 1890s to the 1920s the Irish-dominated Catholic church in Ontario fought against French-language schools in that province. For many Irish Catholics, the battle against Franco-Ontario actually took precedence over Protestant-Catholic quarrels. One student of the question has argued that as a result of the struggle for control of the Catholic separate schools, Francophobia and racism were more prevalent among Ontario's Catholics than they were among the Anglo-Protestant majority of the Ontario population.

While the Irish participated in Canadian political and social controversies, Ireland itself supplied models of social control which were adopted in British North America. It is clear, for example, that the dominant form of law enforcement in Canada followed Irish precedents. In 19th century Ireland, the special circumstances of widespread agrarian violence required special forms of policing. Unlike England and Scotland, where local municipalities dealt with disorder within their own boundaries, a centrally controlled police force was established in Ireland during the 1830s. The Royal Irish Constabulary was organized along military lines, housed in barracks, and was armed. In contrast to community-based agencies where citizens collectively imposed law enforcement upon themselves, it imposed law upon local communities from outside. When, in 1870, John A. Macdonald looked for a way to establish order in the Northwest Territories, he specifically requested information from London on the organization of the RIC, and this was the model which was accepted when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was formed in 1873. And although there have been many later local influences on law enforcement, the RCMP, evolving from Irish origins, has been the primary police force in much of Canada.

Similarly, the Irish system of education became enormously influential in British North America. In Ontario, the content of the school curriculum was imported directly from Ireland. Since 1831, Ireland had developed a system of mass education built around a remarkable set of school books, the Irish National Readers, which have been described as the best series of elementary school texts in the 19th century English-speaking world. When the educational reformer Egerton Ryerson took control of the Ontario school system in the 1840s, he introduced these texts into Ontario's schools. By the time of Confederation, virtually all young people of English, Scottish and Irish ethnicity in that province

acquired their ideas of political loyalty and were taught moral values through a curriculum that had been designed specifically for Ireland. The Irish National Readers were also widely used by individual schools in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. These books from Ireland did not include Irish history, language or folklore; instead, they attempted to reflect and reinforce British cultural and political values.

In addition to its curriculum, Ontario's educational structure was also taken from Ireland. Ryerson adopted the Irish system of a strong central authority that controlled what was taught in schools, that operated a "normal school" to train teachers, and that attempted to improve teacher qualifications. At the same time, Ontario followed the Irish pattern of giving local school boards day-to-day control of the schools and of teacher employment policy. As in Ireland, the Ontario structure of education combined a strong central educational authority with a good deal of local control and a virtual absence of middle management. This system was transmitted to British Columbia by John Jessop, who had studied in Ryerson's normal school in Toronto during the 1850s, when that school was run by masters who themselves came directly from the central Irish normal school in Dublin. Largely through Jessop's work, British Columbia's public school act of 1872 was based on Ryerson's Ontario legislation of 1846-71. The Ryerson system was also followed in the Northwest Territories and in Manitoba, giving the Irish model considerable indirect influence.

It is worth noting that the Irish-Canadian connection was not a one-way street, and that Canadian models — particularly in politics — were often highly significant in Ireland. Many Irish Home Rulers in the mid-19th century, for example, looked to responsible government in British North America as a precedent for increased Irish autonomy within the British Empire. And when British Prime Minister William Gladstone drew up the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, he did so with the example of Canada very much in mind, and drafted the bill along the lines of the British North America Act of 1867 which established Confederation. Moreover, Canada also provided a model for the Dominion status of the Irish Free State in the 1920s. If Irish institutions helped shape Canada, Canadian institutions also contributed to political developments within Ireland.

V. A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Irish experience in 19th century Canada was very different from that of 20th century ethnic minorities. In contrast to many recent immigrant groups, the Irish spoke English, were familiar with British political, social and cultural traditions, and formed a substantial proportion of the population. Compared to ethnic groups from India and the Pacific Rim, the Irish were quickly and easily assimilated into the Canadian mainstream; indeed, they played a significant role in shaping that mainstream. It is true, of course, that anti-Irish sentiments were voiced in 19th century Canada, and that many Irish Protestants looked down on

Irish Catholics as inferior beings. But the Irish did not experience anything like the institutionalized or informal racism which operated against immigrant groups such as the Sikhs, Chinese and Japanese for much of this century. And the Irish themselves — both Protestants and Catholics — were as capable as other white ethnic groups in Canada of harbouring racial prejudice and of attempting to keep non-white immigrants out of the country. Unlike some 20th century immigrants who came to Canada with a view to making money and returning home, the 19th century Irish generally stayed in North America, although large numbers who arrived in Canada went on to the United States. It also appears that Irish immigration to Canada contained a much higher proportion of women than that in more recent ethnic groups. And yet, in linking the 19th century Irish Canadians with 20th century ethnic groups, we are not really dealing with comparable entities. The Irish are best understood as a 19th century "charter group" which helped to establish the dominant society to which later immigrants would have to adjust. In this sense, it is more valid historically to compare them with the 19th century English, Scots and Americans in British North America rather than with 20th century Asians, West Indians or Ukrainians. Unfortunately, the historical literature is not yet well enough developed to make such comparisons possible.

The only comparison that can be made at present that is both historically apposite and involves a deep enough historical literature is between the Irish in Canada and the Irish in the United States. And here, we run into a fascinating historical contrast: after the Famine, the Irish in the United States were often vociferous supporters of Irish nationalism, whereas the Irish Canadians, with relatively minor exceptions, were at most mildly interested and generally neutral or opposed. Why was this the case?

It was partly because Canada contained a much higher proportion of Irish Protestants than did the United States. Given the sectarian divide in the Old Country, involvement in Irish nationalism, whether in Ireland or in North America, was largely confined to Catholics. But even among the hundreds of thousands of Canadians of Irish Catholic ethnicity, only a tiny minority showed much interest in Irish nationalism. While the revolutionary Irish nationalist Fenian Brotherhood acquired significant support in the United States, it was unable to gain a foothold in British North America; the attempted Fenian invasion of Canada in 1866, for example, fizzled out in failure. There were two principal reasons for the weakness of Irish nationalism in Canada. First, proportionately more Irish-Canadian Catholics lived in rural areas than did Irish-American Catholics. The Irish-Canadian Catholics' dispersal among the larger rural population meant that the attainment of the critical mass necessary for political agitation was harder to achieve. Second, Irish-Canadian Catholics were generally more successful economically and socially in dealing with the New World than were their counterparts in the United States. This is crucial, for Thomas N. Brown has shown that Irish-American nationalism was largely a reaction to the obstacles and discrimination which the Catholic Irish encoun-

tered in the United States. Because America was a republic — which Irish nationalism defined as the ultimate goal for the homeland — Irish-American resentment had to be channelled against another target. And this was the government of the United Kingdom.

There is, then, no equivalent in Canada to the influential Irish-American pressure group in the United States which still concerns itself closely with events in Ireland, and particularly in the North. For most Canadians whose Irish ethnicity runs back to the 19th century, Ireland is very much a place apart, the subject of often vague and conflicting images. It might appear as a land characterized by an anachronistic religious or "tribal" war, utterly inexplicable in terms of modern Canadian preoccupations. Or it might be viewed through a sentimental haze, as artificial as the embarrassing public rendition of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" performed by Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan at the so-called "Shamrock Summit" of 1985. These are distant images, and their distance demonstrates the extent to which the 19th century Irish evolved into 20th century Canadians. By this century, the Irish had become such an integral part of Canadian society that they were invisible as an ethnic group. The Irish in Canada had achieved their ultimate objective; they were no longer Irish.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Among the many histories of Ireland, the best and most comprehensive for the modern period is F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London, 1971). On the socio-economic forces which lay behind the massive emigration from Ireland, see Robert E. Kennedy, *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility* (Berkeley, 1973), and the concise analysis by David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration, 1801-1921* (Dublin, 1984).

There is no modern history of the Irish in Canada, and Nicholas Flood Davin, *The Irishman in Canada* (London, 1877) is the only attempt at a comprehensive history. A. Gordon Darroch and Michael D. Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Occupational Structure in Canada in 1871: the Vertical Mosaic in Historical Perspective", *Canadian Historical Review*, 61 (1980), pp. 305-33 reveals a great deal about the degree of Irish acculturation in the middle third of the 19th century. Donald H. Akenson, *Being Had: Historians, Evidence, and the Irish in North America* (Port Credit, 1985) shatters many traditional assumptions about the Irish experience in Canada and challenges the standard interpretation of the Irish in the United States. For an example of the new approach which links Irish immigration, settlement and subsequent internal migration, see Bruce Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montreal, 1988).

A number of modern specialized studies have thrown light on the regional experiences of the Irish in Canada. John Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada: A Study of Cultural Transfer and Adaptation* (Toronto, 1974) discusses pre-Famine Irish settlements in Newfoundland, New Brunswick and southern Ontario. Mannion, *Point Lance in Transition: The Transformation of a Newfoundland Outport* (Toronto, 1976) and Terrence M. Punch, *Irish Halifax: The Immigrant Generation, 1815-59* (Halifax, 1981) are useful casè studies. A.A. MacKenzie, *The Irish in Cape Breton* (Antigonish, 1979) is colourful and impressionistic. For the Irish in 19th-century Saint John, see the chapter on "Irishmen and Bluenoses" in T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto, 1985). Also useful is William M. Baker, *Timothy Warren Anglin, 1822-96: Irish Catholic Canadian* (Toronto, 1977). On the Irish in Central Canada, D.C. Lyne, "The Irish in the Province of Canada in the Decade Leading to Confederation" (M.A., McGill, 1960); Dorothy S. Cross, "The Irish in Montreal, 1867-1896" (M.A., McGill, 1969), and William M. Nolte, "The Irish in Canada, 1815-1867" (Ph.D., Maryland, 1975) are worth consulting. Irish rural settlement in Ontario has been analyzed by Donald H. Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever happened to the Irish?" *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, 3 (1982), pp. 204-56 and *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Montreal, 1984). Other studies on the rural Irish in Ontario include R. Cole Harris *et al.*, "The Settlement of Mono Township", *Canadian Geographer*, 19 (1975), pp. 1-17, and Glenn J. Lockwood, *Montague: A Social History of an Irish Ontario Township, 1783-1980* (Smiths Falls, Ontario, 1980). Enoch Padolsky and Ian Pringle, *A Historical Source Book for the Ottawa Valley*

(Ottawa, 1981) is also useful. The Irish presence in western Canada has generally been ignored by historians, but two exceptions are Bruce Proudfoot, "Irish Settlers in Alberta", *Ulster Folklife*, 15-16 (1970), pp. 216-23, and Margaret A. Ormsby, "Some Irish Figures in Colonial Days", *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, 14, nos. 1 and 2 (1950), pp. 61-82.

Several studies have been written on the role of the Irish in Canadian political, social and cultural life. For a good analysis of the Orange Order, see Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto, 1980), and the chapter on the Order in Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto, 1980). Works which examine the Irish in the Canadian working class include H.C. Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860* (Toronto, 1981), Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 12 (1965), pp. 19-40, and Michael S. Cross, "The Shiners' War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s", *Canadian Historical Review*, 54 (March, 1973), pp. 1-26. The literature on the Fenians is synthesized in Hereward Senior, *The Fenians and Canada* (Toronto, 1978). On the position of the Catholic Irish in the separate schools question, see Peter M. Toner, "The New Brunswick Separate Schools Issue, 1864-1876" (M.A., University of New Brunswick, 1967); Richard P. Davis, "Irish Catholics and the Manitoba School Crisis, 1885-1921", *Eire-Ireland*, 8 (August, 1973), pp. 29-65; and Marilyn Barber, "The Ontario Bilingual Schools Issue: Sources of Conflict", *Canadian Historical Review*, 47 (1966), pp. 227-48.

For a comparative perspective, see Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 1966); Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York, 1985); and Lynn H. Lees, *Exiles of Erin: IrishMigrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, 1979).

Canadian Historical Association