

Ireland's Furthest Shores: Irish Immigrant Settlement in Nineteenth-Century California and Eastern Australia

MALCOLM CAMPBELL

The author is a member of the history department at the University of Auckland.

In the sixty years since the publication of Oscar Handlin's pioneering monograph *Boston's Immigrants*, scholarship on the Irish in the United States has focused overwhelmingly on the lives and experiences of immigrants who settled in cities along the northeastern seaboard. In particular, historians have concentrated their attention on the Catholic Irish who settled adjacent to the Atlantic coast between the onset of the Irish Famine in the late 1840s and the 1880s. Historians frequently portray the immigrants as hapless newcomers whose purported cultural disabilities left them ill-equipped for life in their new society. The historical orthodoxy is clear: Typecast as financially destitute on arrival and ill-suited temperamentally for the challenges posed by life in America, Irish immigrants lived mired in urban ghettos and were consigned to subordinate roles in the

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economy of their new homeland. Most accounts concur that only in the latter decades of the nineteenth century did a combination of acute political skills, intense Roman Catholic faith, and a strong sense of community diminish Irish estrangement and enable the group to move gradually toward middle-class respectability.¹

This sectional representation of the Irish experience in America has enjoyed remarkable longevity. Despite scathing criticism of its central tenets during the mid-1980s, few sustained attempts have yet been made to revise the orthodoxy, and many of its stereotypes and assumptions remain commonplace. In fact, while recent scholarship in the history and sociology of immigration emphasizes the agency and adaptability shown by long-distance immigrants and accentuates the primacy of the specific economic and social structures of the host society over more uniform models of adaptation, the dominant paradigm of Irish America remains curiously unaffected by these trends.²

1. The literature on the Irish in the United States is vast and can be referred to only briefly here. Significant works in the establishment of the eastern orthodoxy discussed here include Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (1941; Cambridge, Mass., 1979); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); William V. Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York, 1963); Oliver MacDonagh, "The Irish Famine Emigration to the United States," *Perspectives in American History*, 10 (1976), 357–446; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Washington, D.C., 1984); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York, 1985); and Lawrence McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1992). Significant writing on the historiography of the Irish in the United States includes R. A. Burchell, "The Historiography of the American Irish," *Immigrants and Minorities*, 1 (1982), 281–305; Donald Harman Akenson, "The Historiography of the American Irish," in Akenson, ed., *Being Had: Historians, the Evidence, and the Irish in North America* (Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1985), 37–75; and Akenson, "The Historiography of the Irish in the United States of America," in Patrick O'Sullivan, ed., *The Irish in the New Communities* (Leicester, Eng., 1992), 99–127; David Noel Doyle, "The Regional Bibliography of Irish-America, 1800–1930: a review and addendum," *Irish Historical Studies*, 23 (1983), 54–83.

2. The literature on the history and sociology of immigration is immense. On trends in immigration history, see Jon Gjerde, "The Social History of Immigration to and Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 18 (No. 4, 1999), 40–65; Rudolph Vecoli, "An Inter-Ethnic Perspective on American Immigration History," *Mid-America*, 75 (1993), 223–235; Ewa Morawska, "The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration," in Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, ed., *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, Politics* (New York, 1991), 187–238. On regional difference in immigrant experience, see, in particular, Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Mainstreams and Side Channels: The Localization of Immigrant Cultures," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 11 (No. 1, 1991), 5–20.

As striking as the model's resilience has been its geographic reach. Founded upon interpretations of Irish adjustment in several key cities on the East Coast, the grim representation of Irish immigrant adjustment acquired the status of a national narrative of the Irish immigrant experience. Writing in 1971, James P. Walsh pointed out that accounts of the American Irish drew so heavily on the experience of the Northeast that "the history of the eastern urban Irish has virtually been accepted as a national synthesis." He argued that when "variety is injected into this rather stultified concept of Irish American experience it is too often reduced to perceived differences between New York's Tammany Hall and Boston's James Curley."³ The national synthesis identified by Walsh has struck a sour note on the West Coast ever since. This has been not merely on account of its inappropriateness to the Irish experience in California, which most historians have interpreted as one of generally tranquil and successful adjustment to American life. Equally troublesome has been its power to overwhelm competing representations of the Irish experience in the United States and elide regional differences. Indeed, in 1992 Timothy Sarbaugh still complained that "[h]istorical scholarship has failed to give an accurate accounting of Irish-American influence in the settling and developing of the Western United States."⁴

Historians on the West Coast have understandably been determined to assert their own distinctive voice in the historiography of the American Irish and have devoted considerable energy to challenging the hegemony of the eastern model. However, those efforts to differentiate the western experience have tended only to draw historians into engagement with issues established by that flawed historiography and have failed to lo-

3. James P. Walsh, "American Irish: West and East," *Eire-Ireland*, 6 (No. 2, 1971), 25. Recent works have increasingly recognized diversity. See Dennis Clark, *Hibernia America: The Irish and Regional Cultures* (New York, 1986); Timothy J. Meagher, ed., *From Paddy to Studs: Irish-American Communities in the Turn of the Century Era, 1880-1920* (New York, 1986).

4. Timothy J. Sarbaugh, "The Irish in the West: An Ethnic Tradition of Enterprise and Innovation, 1848-1991," *Journal of the West*, 31 (No. 2, 1992), 5-8. See also Seamus Breatnach, "The Difference Remains," in James P. Walsh, ed., *The San Francisco Irish, 1850-1976* (San Francisco, 1978), 143-150; James P. Walsh, "The Irish in the New America: 'Way Out West,'" in David Noel Doyle and Owen Dudley Edwards, eds., *America and Ireland, 1776-1976: The American Identity and the Irish Connection* (Westport, Conn., 1980), 165-176.

cate fresh perspectives and insights on the experience of the California Irish in less obvious quarters. In fact, comparison with the experiences of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants who settled in Australasia promises to be much more illuminating to an understanding of the West Coast Irish than contrasts with America's eastern Irish. Such trans-Pacific comparisons also have the potential to advance our understanding of the Irish in Australia and New Zealand.

Although understandable in its historiographical context, the absence of a trans-Pacific dimension in present-day studies of the Irish in California and Australia is surprising, especially given the close connections that existed between Irish immigrants in the two societies in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, California and eastern Australia, together with New Zealand, were, for much of the later nineteenth century, part of a Pacific Irish emigrant world—locations separated by the vast distances of the Pacific Ocean but unified by complex exchanges of peoples, information, and goods. At present, these connections remain uncharted, while parallels in the Irish immigrants' experiences have until now been scarcely surveyed.

As a first step in exploring the Irish Diaspora in the Pacific, this article engages in a specific comparison of two sites within that Irish emigrant world—California and the mainland eastern Australian colonies of New South Wales and Victoria. In recent years several scholars have successfully explored connections between the histories of the American West and Australian East coasts, illuminating diverse topics, including urban development, environmental history, anti-Chinese agitation, and the significance of gold discoveries.⁵ But in this Pacific setting, as within the field of immigration history more generally, cross-cultural comparison of the experience of immigrant groups remains a rarity; such studies as have been conducted usually adopt the nation state as the pertinent level of analysis. This article attempts

5. Lionel Frost, *The New Urban Frontier: Urbanization and City Building in Australasia and the American West* (Sydney, 1991); David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York, 1990); Ian Tyrrell, *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian-Australian Environmental Reforms, 1860–1930* (Berkeley, 1999); Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying California and Australia, 1850–1901* (Sydney, 1979); David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s* (Sydney, 1994).

to move beyond the constraints of national comparison by adopting a mid-range level of analysis. This approach provides the opportunity to compare variations in experience across different points of settlement in much finer detail than is possible in nationally oriented studies. It also lends itself to a more precise assessment of the interaction of immigrants' backgrounds and local conditions in shaping post-settlement behavior.⁶ The comparison that follows indicates that the societies on the two Pacific coasts shared a range of common characteristics—demographic, economic, and social—that contributed to very similar receptions and opportunities for Irish immigrants in both locations. In both, the immigrant experience deviated widely from the experience of the Irish in the northeastern United States.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, California and the eastern Australian mainland colonies of New South Wales and Victoria were frequently identified as among the most favorable of all destinations for Irish emigrants. "Give me the South aye any part of it in preference to any of the northern abolitionist fire eaters, but above all give me California the land of speculation," wrote James Riordan to his sister in New Orleans in 1859, sounding a note of optimism and enthusiasm that is resonant in numerous other observations of Irish life in the Golden State.⁷ For example, in 1868, after an extensive tour of

6. For advocacy of comparison at this level, see Nancy L. Green, "The Comparative Method and Poststructural Structuralism: New Perspectives for Migration Studies," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 13 (No. 4, 1994), 13; also Marc Bloch, "A Contribution Towards a Comparative History of European Societies," in Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1967), 44–81. Alan O'Day has pointed out that comparison in studies of the Irish Diaspora remains a rarity. See O'Day, "Revising the Diaspora," in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds., *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London, 1996), 196. Examples include David Doyle, "The Irish in the United States and Australia: Some Comparisons, 1800–1939," *Irish Economic and Social History*, 16 (1989), 73–94; Donald Harman Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1815–1922: An International Perspective* (Kingston, Ont., 1988); Malcolm Campbell, "The Other Immigrants: Comparing the Irish in Australia and the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 14 (No. 3, 1995), 3–22; Campbell, "Immigrants on the Land: Irish Rural Settlement in Nineteenth Century Minnesota and New South Wales," *New Hibernia Review*, 2 (Spring 1998), 43–61; and Campbell, "Immigrants on the Land: A Comparative Study of Irish Rural Settlement in New South Wales and Minnesota," in Andy Bielenberg, ed., *The Irish Diaspora* (London, 2000).

7. James Riordan to his sister, New Orleans, Sept. 20, 1859, James Riordan Papers, C-B740, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

the United States, Irish journalist and politician John Francis Maguire wrote glowingly that “[t]here is not a state in the Union in which the Irish have taken deeper and stronger root, or thriven more successfully, than California, in whose amazing progress—material, social, and intellectual—they have had a conspicuous share.”⁸ Maguire’s general assessment was endorsed a decade later, when the Reverend Hugh Quigley published *The Irish Race in California*, an immense catalogue of Irish men’s achievement in Californian public life in the three decades after 1849.⁹

A wide range of evidence indicates that the Australian colonies were perceived in terms broadly similar to California as an advantageous destination for Irish emigrants. From the enthusiastic testimonials of Irish settlers collected by the pro-emigration campaigner Caroline Chisholm in the 1840s to the observations of visiting Irish nationalist politicians in the 1880s, the historical record supports the judgment that conditions in the colonies were mainly beneficent to newcomers.¹⁰ Australia’s Irish did not consider themselves subject to hardships and privations on a scale at all comparable to those present in the northeastern United States or Great Britain. For the most part, they celebrated their new homeland as one of opportunity and reasonable prosperity. Although the judgments of contemporaries on both sides of the Pacific that conditions were generally advantageous may now appear unduly impressionistic, nineteenth-century Irish immigrants in both locations were in fact keenly interested in, and well informed about, the progress

8. John Francis Maguire, *The Irish in America* (London, 1868), 262.

9. Hugh Quigley, *The Irish Race in California and on the Pacific Coast with an introductory historical dissertation on the principal races of mankind and a vocabulary of ancient and modern Irish family names* (San Francisco, 1878).

10. Caroline Chisholm’s testimonials are found in her pamphlets, including *Comfort for the Poor! Meat Three Times a Day! Voluntary Information from the People of New South Wales Collected in that Colony by Mrs. Chisholm in 1845–46* (London, 1847); for evidence from the 1880s, see speeches of delegates in *The Irish-Australian Convention* (Melbourne, 1883). For readings of the nineteenth-century Australian scene, see Patrick O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Sydney, 1993); David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994); Malcolm Campbell, *The Kingdom of the Ryans: The Irish in Southwest New South Wales, 1816–1890* (Sydney, 1997); Chris McConville, *Croppies, Celts and Catholics: The Irish in Australia* (Caulfield, N.S.W., 1987); James Waldersee, *Catholic Church and Society in New South Wales, 1788–1860* (Sydney, 1974).

and affairs of their compatriots elsewhere across the Irish Diaspora. Immigrant letters and Roman Catholic newspapers in particular were of crucial importance in bridging the vast distances that separated the Irish worldwide and facilitated pragmatic assessments of the most favorable destinations for settlement.¹¹

In the last three decades most historians have concurred with positive nineteenth-century judgments about the merits of life on the two Pacific coasts. In San Francisco, the Irish heartland in the West, the immigrants were, in Robert Burchell's assessment, "comparatively successful and fortunate." His later analysis of the situation in southern California confirms much the same picture, and other writers have extended the assessment to the Californian Irish in general.¹² Dennis Clark, for example, believed that the West provided for Irish immigrants "the most liberating influence in their experience of the new land," while for Timothy Sarbaugh the Californian Irish were "exiles of confidence."¹³ Evaluating the historical record in Australia, distinguished Irish historian Oliver MacDonagh concluded that Irish "diffusion, geographically, socially and even occupationally" was the outstanding characteristic of the Australian settlement. David Fitzpatrick made much the same point but differently: Rather than experiencing particular disadvantage, Australia's Irish were "unique in their ordinariness."¹⁴

11. On Irish immigrant correspondence, see Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*; Patrick O'Farrell, *Letters from Irish Australia, 1825–1929*, letters edited by Brian Trainor (Sydney, 1984).

12. R. A. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848–1880* (Berkeley, 1980), 184; Burchell, "British Immigrants in Southern California, 1850–1870," *Southern California Quarterly*, 53 (1971), 283–302.

13. Clark, *Hibernia America*, 139; Timothy J. Sarbaugh, "Exiles of Confidence: The Irish American Community of San Francisco, 1880–1920," in Meagher, ed., *From Paddy to Studs*, 161–179.

14. Oliver MacDonagh, "Emigration from Ireland to Australia: An Overview," in Colm Kiernan, ed., *Ireland and Australia, 1788–1988: Bicentenary Essays* (Dublin, 1986), 127; MacDonagh, "The Irish in Australia: a general view," in MacDonagh and W. F. Mandle, eds., *Ireland and Irish-Australia: Studies in Cultural and Political History* (London, 1986), 155–174; David Fitzpatrick, "Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century," *Irish Historical Studies*, 22 (1980), 136–137; Donald H. Akenon, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1993), 91–122. More negative assessments of the Irish experience in Australia may be found in two unpublished Ph.D. theses: Chris McConville, "Emigrant Irish and Suburban Catholic: Faith and Nation in Melbourne and Sydney, 1815–1933" (Ph.D. dissertation, Uni-

The wide difference between these assessments of Irish immigrant life along the two Pacific coasts and the more arduous experiences of their compatriots in New England or the Mid-Atlantic states poses a crucial question: What factors were distinctive or unique about the two regions of more recent European settlement? At least four factors may be identified as contributing to the markedly more benign experience of the Irish in California and eastern Australia. These are the immigrants' time of arrival; the backgrounds and prior experiences of the Irish in the two Pacific regions; the cosmopolitan character of both host societies; and the presence in each region of significant non-European immigrant populations.

Paramount among the factors that delineate the experience of the Irish on both sides of the Pacific from the eastern model is their time of arrival. Patricia Nelson Limerick has written of the American West, "in a society that rested on a foundation of invasion and conquest, the matter of legitimacy was up for grabs, and it remained up for grabs as long as a large sector of the population continued to be migrants from other regions and nations."¹⁵ By virtue of their early presence in California, the Irish secured a position of legitimacy in a society where the nascent political, economic, and social structures were fluid and keenly contested. Even before the Mexican War, the Irish were present in significant numbers in the small Californian population. The discovery of gold in 1848 provided the impetus for a rapid expansion in the territory's population and drew large numbers of gold seekers, including many Irish, to the American West Coast.¹⁶

The Californian population increased dramatically in the wake of the gold find, rising from around 14,000 in 1848 to

versity of Melbourne, 1984) and Pauline Hamilton, "'No Irish Need Apply': Prejudice as a Factor in the Development of Immigration Policy in New South Wales and Victoria" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New South Wales, 1979).

15. Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Will the Real California Please Stand Up?" *California History*, 73 (1994), 268. See also Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, 1987), 27. On the Irish in particular, see Walsh, "American Irish," 31; Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish*, 13; Breatnac, "The Difference Remains," 148; Sarbaugh, "Exiles of Confidence," 163.

16. See James P. Walsh, "The Irish in Early San Francisco," in Walsh, ed., *The San Francisco Irish*, 9–25; Roger Lotchin, *San Francisco, 1846–1856: From Hamlet to City* (New York, 1974), 102–103.

nearly 93,000 in 1850. Within this novel society, the Irish were strongly represented, accounting for 11 percent of the overseas-born population. Moreover, this figure takes no account of large numbers of second- or third-generation Irish who were present among the native-born population that journeyed to the West Coast. This group's presence was undoubtedly significant in shaping the tenor of life in California, but it is rendered near invisible by the absence of census data on ethnicity. The Irish influx into California in the decades immediately after the discovery of gold was so pronounced that by 1870 the Irish-born were the largest overseas-born group in the state, accounting for a quarter of all foreign-born residents in California and almost 10 percent of its total population. Thereafter, despite an increase in absolute numbers until 1890, the Irish-born proportion of the state's population gradually declined until 1920.¹⁷

Early time of arrival was also a key feature of Irish settlement in mainland Australia. Irish convicts were shipped to eastern Australia from the commencement of European occupation in 1788 until 1840, and the vast majority of these men and women remained as part of the ex-convict (emancipist) population following their period of servitude. From the late 1830s the Irish also figured prominently within the ranks of immigrants assisted to migrate to the colonies.¹⁸ By 1851 the Irish-born constituted approximately 15 percent of the total population in New South Wales and Victoria, a remarkable figure compared with other locations across the Irish Diaspora. As in California, the discovery of gold fundamentally transformed the demography of European settlement and with it the profile of the Irish component. Following the discovery of gold in 1851, over 100,000

17. See the U.S. Census Bureau, censuses 7–14; Patrick J. Blessing, *The Irish in America: A Guide to the Literature and the Manuscript Collections* (Washington, D.C., 1992), 288–292. On the absence of adequate census data on ethnicity in the United States, see Donald Harman Akenson, “Data: What is known about the Irish in North America,” in MacDonagh and Mandle, eds., *Ireland and Irish-Australia*, 1–17.

18. Approximately 40,000 convicts were transported from Ireland to Australia between 1791 and 1853; as many as one-fifth that number again are identified as Irish-born convicts tried before English courts. In addition, between 1836 and 1919 as many as 250,000 Irish immigrants arrived in Australia with assistance. For detail on these groups, see O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 23; Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 10–13.

Irish immigrants arrived in Australasia in the decade 1851–1860, although that great inflow led to only a small increase in the Irish share in the population of these eastern Australian colonies, from 15.4 percent in 1851 to 16.0 percent in 1861. In subsequent decades, as rural Ireland was transformed in the wake of the Famine, eastern Australia became an increasingly attractive destination for the Irish, both in absolute and relative terms. In the decade 1861–1870, 82,900 Irish immigrants arrived in Australasia, one in ten of those who left Ireland's shores; in 1871–1880, 61,946 came, 11.4 percent of Ireland's emigrants. Thereafter, as in California, the number of Irish-born in the population declined throughout the period until 1920.¹⁹

For the Irish who settled in California after 1848, unlike most of their compatriots who remained in the eastern United States, the openness of their new society offered substantial opportunities for social and economic advancement. From the outset, the immigrants were full and assertive participants in a society Hubert Howe Bancroft described as “a gathering without parallel in history.”²⁰ Certainly, measured against the less satisfactory standing of their compatriots elsewhere in the United States, Irish achievements on the West Coast were impressive. Quigley's *The Irish Race in California* provides page upon page of effusive detail of Irish successes in the state, and, despite its grating filiopietism, the book does plainly indicate substantial Irish penetration into the fields of commerce and government from early on.²¹ That advancement was not confined only to Irish men. Irish women also achieved positions of prominence in California's public sphere in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, Mary McHenry, American-born but of Irish Catholic descent, was the first woman to graduate from the Hastings School of Law and soon publicly contested the diminishment of women's status within the patriarchal family. Kate Kennedy, born in Meath in 1827, led the campaign for women's

19. *Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948–1954* (Dublin, 1954), 314–315; James Jupp and Barry York, *Birthplaces of the Australian People: Colonial and Commonwealth Censuses* (Canberra, 1995), 3–5, 17; O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 63.

20. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The History of California* (7 vols., Santa Barbara, 1970), 6: 221.

21. Quigley, *The Irish Race in California*.

promotion within the state's education system and for equal pay for female teachers.²² Although the wider dimensions of Irish women's experiences on either Pacific coast have as yet received limited scholarly attention, future research may well support the hypothesis that, for women as well as men, California offered far superior prospects to the alternatives of life either in Ireland or on America's eastern seaboard.

By 1870 Irish immigrants and their descendants were widely dispersed across California, although at mid-century their presence remained strongly centered in San Francisco. Indeed, 62 percent of the state's Irish-born resided in San Francisco and its five neighboring counties—Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Mateo, and Solano. San Francisco itself was by far the most populous Irish county in both absolute and proportional terms: 48 percent of California's Irish lived there. One in every six of the city's residents was Irish-born. Elsewhere, Irish immigrants were present in their greatest concentrations along an axis running northeast from San Francisco to the Nevada border and in coastal districts to the north and south of San Francisco. Relatively few Irish then lived in Southern California: Los Angeles County, for example, was home to only 471 Irish, or 3.1 percent of that county's population.²³

Across California, the Irish-born were from the outset an integral part of the labor force in the rapidly expanding economy. This was particularly evident in the 1860s, as the Civil War disrupted economic production in the East, causing the West Coast's economy to experience a decade of sustained growth. Large increases in capital investment and a fourfold rise in the value of manufacturing production were accompanied by a tremendous expansion in the size of the state's work force, especially in San Francisco.²⁴ The 1870 census reveals the Irish-

22. See Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900* (Cambridge, Eng., 1994), 326–336; Catherine Ann Curry, “Three Irish Women and Social Action in San Francisco: Mother Teresa Comerford, Mother Baptist Russell, and Kate Kennedy,” *Journal of the West*, 31 (No. 2, 1992), 66–72.

23. U.S. Census Office [Francis A. Walker], *A Compendium of the Ninth Census, 1870* (Washington, D.C., 1872) 28–29, 400–401; Burchell, “British Immigrants in Southern California,” 283–302.

24. See David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840–1890* (Berkeley, 1992), 238–242.

born to have been major participants in this period of economic, industrial, and urban growth [see Figure 1]. While the proportion of Irish-born employed in agriculture was lower than that of most other immigrant groups, the most notable feature of their participation was the strong concentration of Irish immigrants employed in the provision of personal and professional services.

The large number of Irish in this category reflected very strong Irish concentrations in the categories of laborer and domestic servant, both consistent with the group's strong presence in urban San Francisco. Elsewhere, the Irish were overrepresented in the ranks of the military in California, constituting 33 percent of the U.S. Army stationed in the state at a time when they comprised only 10 percent of the popula-

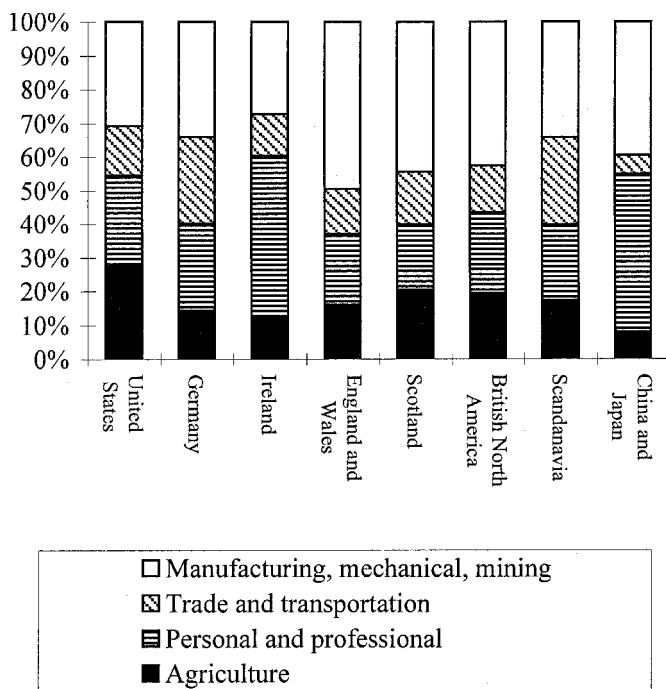


Figure 1. Occupational Distribution by Nativity, Selected Groups, California, 1870. Source: U.S. Census Office [Francis A. Walker], *A Compendium of the Ninth Census, 1870* (Washington, D.C., 1872), 598–602.

tion. Twenty-nine percent of California's stable keepers and hostlers and a quarter of its boardinghouse keepers were also Irish. Although this occupational profile, which points to significant numbers of Irish in unskilled or lowly skilled employment, puts to rest any notion of California as a land of unbridled opportunity, fuller analysis of Irish occupational mobility refutes the notion that the group was especially disadvantaged. As Burchell has demonstrated in his study of San Francisco, "taking first and second generations together, the Irish community was experiencing considerable mobility. If parents were disappointed in their own progress, they could take satisfaction from that of their children." Subsequent studies have tended to confirm this view.²⁵

Like their Californian counterparts, historians of the Irish in Australia assert the primary importance of time of arrival as a determinant of the groups' experience, emphasizing that the immigrants entered a society where economic structures were more fluid and less resistant. MacDonagh, for example, argued (overlooking California) that "full participation in the earliest developments of the new nation and the maintenance for so long of this participation on a very considerable scale, render Australia unique in Irish terms."²⁶ MacDonagh's general emphasis upon the benefit of early arrival is justified, but, in terms of the comparison of the two Pacific coasts, it requires an important qualification. The period of the greatest Irish inflow to Australia, during the years 1850 to 1870, came more than half a century after the establishment of the British penal colony at Sydney and translated into slightly different stages in the development of the eastern Australian colonies under study. In New South Wales, the foundation colony, the predominantly rural-

25. Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish*, 58. See more generally Patrick J. Blessing, "West Among Strangers: Irish Migration to California" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1977), 349–350; this study focuses on Los Angeles and Sacramento and points to social mobility among Irish immigrants who persisted in these locations. On Irish wealth in the West, see R. A. Burchell, "Irish Property-Holding in the West in 1870," *Journal of the West*, 31 (No. 2, 1992), 15, who concludes that his data show "a series of Irish-American communities already well placed to share in the social and economic development of the region. . . . [T]he census of 1870 shows a sizable body of [Irish] men and women engaged in capitalism with all its connections to late nineteenth-century regional life."

26. MacDonagh, "Emigration from Ireland," 133.

based economy was not open to all comers. Vast areas of pastoral land were by then concentrated in the hands of a small elite, and this was a source of enormous resentment for many newly arrived Irish immigrants. Indeed, some newcomers drew parallels between the situation encountered in the colony and the concentration of wealth in so few hands in their homeland. The introduction of land reform legislation in New South Wales in the 1860s ultimately did little to satisfy the aspirations of the new arrivals.²⁷

In neighboring Victoria, the southernmost mainland colony, the situation was more fluid. In 1847 pastoralists in occupation of crown lands in the Port Phillip District were granted fourteen-year leaseholds, which provided more secure tenure for landholders. As a result, the free-for-all atmosphere and rapid turnover of rural properties previously evident slowed: Landholders now had greater incentive to erect permanent dwellings and improve the land.²⁸ However, weighed against this consolidation on the land was the instability that followed the discovery of gold. Employment opportunities were initially available in the major town, Melbourne, as gold fever drew workers away in search of fortune. In this environment, Irish immigrants were well placed to gain a foothold.²⁹ However, for those unable to do so and for those who arrived in subsequent decades, opportunities were limited. The considerable sympathy that arose for the bush-ranging Kelly gang among Irish small landholders in Victoria reflected deep-seated resentment at the power and privilege of the large landholder class compared to their own precarious attempts to survive on the land. In other areas of the economy, the Irish also faced a measure of exclusion. In Melbourne, many Irish workers struggled unsuccessfully during the 1870s and 1880s to move beyond the ranks of the unskilled.³⁰

27. D. W. A. Baker, "The Origins of Robertson's Land Acts," *Historical Studies: Selected Articles* (Melbourne, 1967), 103–104; Bill Gammage, "Who Gained, and Who Was Meant to Gain, from Land Selection in New South Wales?" *Australian Historical Studies*, 24 (1990), 104–122; K. D. Buckley and E. L. Wheelwright, *No Paradise for Workers: Capitalism and the Common People in Australia, 1788–1914* (Melbourne, 1988), 116; John Hirst, *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy* (Sydney, 1988), 135.

28. Tony Dingle, *The Victorians Settling* (Sydney, 1984), 26–27, 36–37.

29. See Richard Broome, *The Victorians Arriving* (Sydney, 1984), 67–85 on the gold rush immigration; also Dingle, *The Victorians Settling*, 53–54.

30. Broome, *The Victorians Arriving*, 82–85, 102–104; Chris McConville, "Cath-

Yet, against such pessimistic accounts may be found conflicting evidence. In parts of the Victorian countryside, Irish farmers seem to have been as successful as their English, Scottish, or Australian-born neighbors, while numbers of Irish-born lawyers, doctors, and academics, mostly graduates of Trinity College, Dublin, achieved positions of status and privilege within Melbourne society.³¹

There was, then, a range of experiences for Irish immigrants in Australia's East Coast colonies. However, the crucial point is that, even though many Irish immigrants in the second half of the nineteenth century did enter areas where resources and opportunities were subject to considerable competition, other Irish—whether ex-convicts or free settlers—had been there from the outset. As a result, the legitimacy of the Irish presence in eastern Australia was well established: There were no structural impediments that worked very much more severely against the Irish than other European immigrant groups. There was, in other words, an openness about society, and the Irish role in it that much more closely resembled the American West Coast than the East Coast. Within this less constrained society, Irish achievement in the fields of politics and business were visible and proudly proclaimed, just as they were in California.

The first state census to cross-tabulate Irish nativity and occupation in eastern Australia was taken in New South Wales in 1901. It highlights the fact that significant structural differences

olics and Mobility in Melbourne and Sydney, 1861–1891,” *Australia 1888*, 2 (1979), 55–65; McConville, *Croppies, Celts, and Catholics*, 47–61; John McQuilton, *The Kelly Outbreak, 1878–1880: The Geographical Dimension of Social Banditry* (Melbourne, 1979). Overall analysis of the Irish situation in Victoria is provided in Oliver MacDonagh, “Irish in Victoria in the Nineteenth Century,” in James Jupp, ed., *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins* (Sydney, 1988), 578–582. However, MacDonagh's assertion that the colony's Catholic and Irish populations can be taken as “substantially synonymous” weakens his statistical analysis.

31. See Barry Smith, “Stalwarts of the Garrison: Some Irish Academics in Australia,” in John O'Brien and Pauric Travers, eds., *The Irish Emigrant Experience in Australia* (Dublin, 1991), 120–147; Laurence Geary, “Australia *felix*: Irish Doctors in Nineteenth-Century Victoria,” in O'Sullivan, ed., *Irish in the New Communities*, 162–179; Gordon Forth, “Anglo-Irish,” in Jupp, ed., *The Australian People*, 576–578; Geoffrey Serle, *The Rush to Be Rich: A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1883–1889* (Melbourne, 1971), 17–22; Ann Galbally, *Redmond Barry: An Anglo-Irish Australian* (Melbourne, 1995).

existed between the economies of California and eastern Australia. In 1901, despite strong industrial growth in the 1870s, 36.7 percent of male breadwinners in New South Wales remained employed in agriculture or the rearing of animals. In contrast, as early as 1880 the proportion of California's working population engaged in all forms of agriculture had declined to barely one in five.³² In 1901 pastoralism, agriculture, and dairying together contributed 20 percent of the value of Australia's Gross Domestic Product; manufacturing was of less importance and accounted for barely 12 percent of the total.³³ In New South Wales and Victoria, where industrial development was weaker and delayed compared to the Golden State, the Irish exhibited a markedly different employment profile from that of their American-based compatriots. Figure 2 shows the distribution of Irish-born males across the major categories of employment compared to other major nativity groups. The most striking aspect is in fact the close similarity in the profiles of all overseas-born groups in the colony. The Irish were spread across all employment categories and in proportions closely aligned with the English, Scots, and German-born. The Irish presence in farm work was marginally greater than among the other immigrant cohorts; in this respect, the Irish profile most closely mirrored that of the colonial-born population. This stronger propensity for rural life and work seems to have been a feature of Irish Australian settlement throughout the nineteenth century and challenges profoundly the arguments made repeatedly in the U.S. literature that the Irish were inherently incapable of or averse to rural life in the New World.³⁴

More distinctive is the occupational profile of Irish women revealed in the 1901 census [see Figure 3]. Although the majority of women in paid employment in each nativity group found work in personal or professional service, a greater pro-

32. T. A. Coghlan, *Results of a Census of New South Wales Taken on the Night of 31st March 1901* (Sydney, 1901), 770; U.S. Census Office [Francis A. Walker], *A Compendium of the Tenth Census, 1880* (Washington, D.C., 1882), 1359–1367.

33. N. G. Butlin, "Australian National Accounts," in Wray Vamplew, ed., *Australians, Historical Statistics* (Sydney, 1987), 133.

34. See, for example, Shannon, *The American Irish*, 27–29, and Lawrence McCaffrey, "A Profile of Irish America," in Doyle and Edwards, eds., *America and Ireland 1776–1976*, 81. In refutation of this position, see Campbell, "The Other Immigrants," 3–22; Akenson, "The Historiography of the American Irish," 37–75.

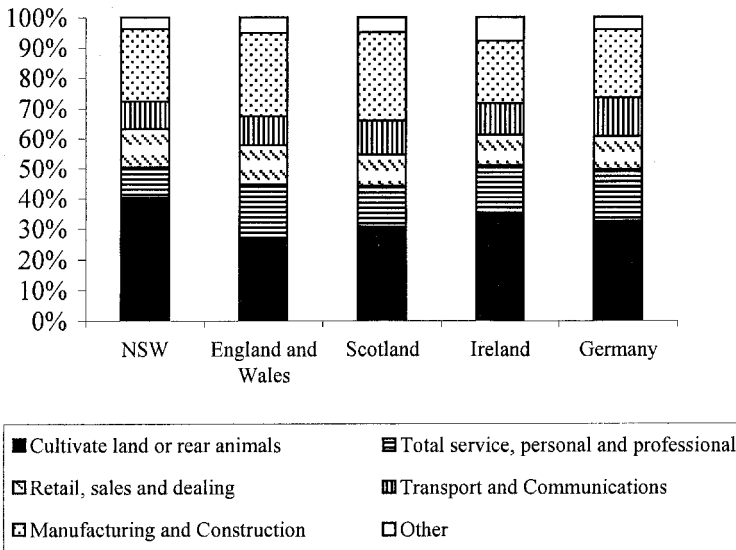


Figure 2. Male Occupations by Nativity, Selected Groups. New South Wales, 1901. Source: T. A. Coghlan, *Results of a Census of New South Wales Taken on the Night of 31st March 1901* (Sydney, 1901), 770–778.

portion of the Irish were employed in these occupations than any other group. More detailed examination of the census data provides several explanations for this, including the sizable number of Irish-born women engaged in what was classified as religious and charitable work. Over 4,000 Irish women also derived incomes from the provision of board and lodging, but the frequency of their employment in this field was consistent with the percentage of all women so employed. The other striking feature is the lower level of Irish women's participation in manufacturing industries compared to the other major nativity groups. More research will be required before this trend can be adequately accounted for, although one possible explanation may lie in the receptiveness of Irish women to clerical warnings about the moral and health threats posed by factory work.³⁵

35. For late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Roman Catholic views on a range of topics affecting Australian women, see Patrick and Deirdre O'Farrell, "The Status of Women: Some Opinions in Australian Catholic History c. 1860–1960," *Bulletin of Christian Affairs*, 2 (1975), 3–42.

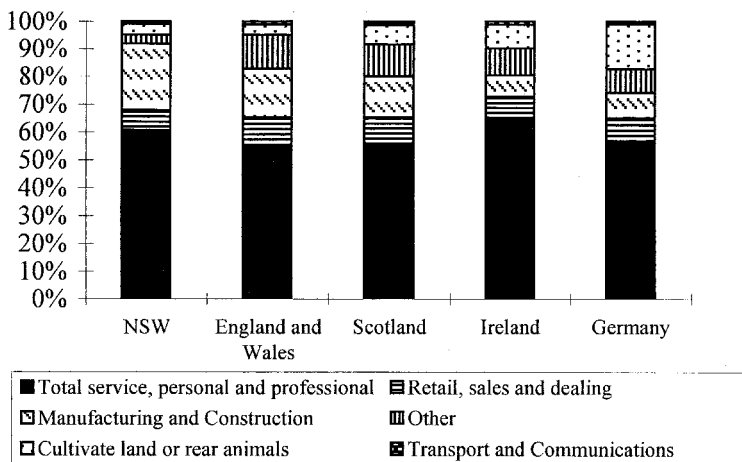


Figure 3. Female Occupations by Nativity, Selected Groups. New South Wales, 1901. Source: T. A. Coghlan, *Results of a Census of New South Wales Taken on the Night of 31st March 1901* (Sydney, 1901), 778–785.

Despite such points of distinction, however, the weight of evidence on Irish participation in the New South Wales labor force at the end of the nineteenth century supports the conclusion that Irish-born men and women were by then well-established participants in the labor force. They were dispersed across different fields of employment in proportions not very different from those of the other major immigrant groups. There is little evidence that Irish immigrants in general were locked into a narrow band of disadvantageous occupations or consigned disproportionately to the bottom rungs of the occupational ladder.

Time of arrival is therefore justifiably identified by historians as the paramount factor that contributed to the superior standing of Irish immigrants adjacent to both Pacific coasts, although it was certainly not the only one. Two decades ago Roger Daniels argued persuasively that well-grounded transnational comparison must also pay heed to the composition of specific immigrant cohorts in each destination in attempting to account for similarities and differences in experience.³⁶ Unfortunately,

36. Roger Daniels, "On the Comparative Study of Immigrant and Ethnic Groups in the New World: A Note," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 25 (1983), 401–404.

little data exist on the regional origins of California's Irish-born population. To be sure, David Fitzpatrick has convincingly demonstrated the greater preponderance of emigrants from the west of Ireland in the overall U.S. immigrant stream in the second half of the nineteenth century compared to other destinations in the Irish Diaspora.³⁷ However, there is no foundation for assuming that the origins of the Californian Irish mirrored those of the nation as a whole, and a study that traces the settlement trajectories of immigrants drawn from differing Irish regional backgrounds after arrival in the United States should be regarded as a high priority for scholars of the Irish in America today.

Despite these significant lacunae in the data, the origins of the Californian Irish-born are noteworthy in one important respect. In contrast to the East Coast, only a small proportion of newcomers came directly from Ireland to the West Coast. For example, in 1852 only 7 percent of San Francisco's Irish-born immigrants identified their previous place of residence as having been in the British Isles. Instead, California's Irish-born arrived on the West Coast after periods of residence elsewhere and were experienced New World settlers by the time they reached the Golden State.³⁸ Not surprisingly, the largest number of this group was those who had previously resided elsewhere in the United States. In 1852, 45 percent of San Francisco's Irish-born population had previously lived in the East, most in either New England or the Mid-Atlantic states, but also smaller numbers in states further west.³⁹ The other main source of Irish immigrants

37. Fitzpatrick, "Irish Emigration," 126–143.

38. R. A. Burchell, "The Gathering of a Community: The British-born in San Francisco in 1852 and 1872," *Journal of American Studies*, 10 (1976), 279–312. This pattern was repeated in neighboring counties, such as Sonoma, where only 6 percent of the Irish-born gave their last place of residence as Ireland. See Dennis E. Harris, ed. [Redwood Empire Social History Project], *California State Census—1852. . . Sonoma County* (Santa Rosa, Calif., 1983), 37.

39. On the movement of Irish to the West, see Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish*, 34–35; Peter R. Decker, *Fortunes and Failures: White-Collar Mobility in Nineteenth Century San Francisco* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 13, 19–23. On the operation of the Panama route, as well as alternative routes via Nicaragua and Cape Horn, see Bancroft, *History of California*, 6: 126–142; James P. Walsh, "James Phelan: Creating the Fortune, Creating the Family," *Journal of the West*, 31 (No. 2, 1992), 17–23. On the Irish in overland parties, see Gabrielle Sullivan, *Martin Murphy, Jr: California Pioneer, 1844–1884* (Stockton, Calif., 1974); Mary McDougall Gordon, ed., *Overland to California with the Pioneer Line: The Gold Rush Diary of Bernard J. Reid* (Stanford, Calif., 1983).



Figure 4. Place of Last Residence of Irish-born in San Francisco, 1852.
 Source: R. A. Burchell, "The Gathering of a Community: The British-born in San Francisco in 1852 and 1872," *Journal of American Studies*, 10 (1976), 279–312.

to California was Australasia. As Figure 4 demonstrates, in 1852 the number of trans-Pacific Irish resident in San Francisco was almost identical to the number who had relocated within the continental United States. Within Australasia, by far the greatest number of Irish came from Sydney or gave Australia as a generic label for their previous place of residence. In contrast, less than 1 percent of the immigrants indicated that they were previous residents of New Zealand.⁴⁰

This eastward migration of Irish to California is intriguing but has attracted only limited attention from historians. Most of the Irish arrived as part of the group known as the "Sydney Ducks"—gold seekers who met an adverse reception upon arrival in San Francisco due to their purported criminality (some were, undoubtedly, ex-convicts) as well as their reputation for gambling and excessive drinking. On account of their negative image, the "Ducks" became a particular target of the Committee of Vigilance in 1851. However, despite their reputation, the immigrants from Australia were not in fact primarily young, single, reckless men. The most careful demographic study to date

40. Burchell, "The Gathering of a Community," 282–283; Harris, ed., *California State Census*, 36–37.

shows these trans-Pacific migrants frequently arrived as part of family units. The average age of the men and women who disembarked in San Francisco was significantly above that for California as a whole, and the sex ratio of the group (152) far more closely approximated that of the entire United States (105 in 1850) than of California (1,214 in 1852). Irish immigrants arriving from Sydney in 1852 were represented across all major occupational categories, although, like their English-born counterparts, the majority was concentrated in laboring work.⁴¹

Overall, the statistics make clear that California received very few immigrants directly from Ireland, and those who did arrive without interludes elsewhere defy simplistic categorization as impoverished Roman Catholics escaping famine or poverty at home. The well-documented case of the Louth-born Protestant Thomas Kerr, who arrived with his brother-in-law in 1848 to seek his fortune in the goldfields, suggests the diversity in class and regional backgrounds to be found among California's Irish-born population at mid-century.⁴² In general, those who arrived on the West Coast were seasoned New World citizens—adaptable, experienced, worldly, and possessed of some degree of skill and savvy, men and women eager to seize the main chance.

Their ambition was nurtured by the presence of strong and effective community leadership. Through their involvement in business, public service, or the broader social life of the West Coast, California's Irish leaders guaranteed their compatriots a voice in the shaping of the community, publicly asserting the right and responsibility of the Irish to full and effective civic participation. James Walsh has demonstrated the influence of the Phelan family in San Francisco business and politics from the time of James Phelan's arrival in San Francisco in 1849 to his son's service as a U.S. senator for California from 1915 to

41. Sherman L. Ricards and George M. Blackburn, "The Sydney Ducks: A Demographic Analysis," *Pacific Historical Review*, 42 (1973), 20; Burchell, "The Gathering of a Community," 281–283.

42. Thomas Kerr, "Diary of Things Worth Notice—During My Voyage to Calafornia (*sic*)—& Remarkable Events There (Yes and a good many things not worth notice too)," MS 84/36C, Bancroft Library. Published as "An Irishman in the Gold Rush: The Journal of Thomas Kerr," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 7 (No. 3, 1928), 205–227, and serialized in *ibid.*, 7: 395–404; *ibid.*, 8 (1929), 17–25, 167–182, 262–277.

1921.⁴³ Other prominent Irish American leaders include Garret McEnerney, John Francis Neylan, and Kate Kennedy in law and public education, as well as Frank Roney, the labor organizer—and these few in San Francisco alone.⁴⁴ Historians are rightly wary about placing too much significance on individuals and obscuring the lives of the majority. However, the lives of California's Irish population were undoubtedly shaped by the extent to which their leaders—of all classes, dispositions, and political persuasions—engaged with their fellow citizens, as indeed those engagements were circumscribed by the broader soundings of Irish life in their new homeland. The characteristic of effective community leadership also proved a feature of the Australian scene. Numerous studies have shown the important roles played by Irish leaders there—Roman Catholic and Protestant, clergy and lay—and the conflicts and competition between them, in shaping the social relations of the Irish and their fellow colonists.⁴⁵

Much more is known about the specific regional origins of the Irish-born population in eastern Australia. While newcomers were drawn from across the entire island, clear concentrations arrived in mid-nineteenth-century New South Wales and Victoria from a band of south midland counties—Clare, Tipperary, Limerick, and Kilkenny—and from south Ulster.⁴⁶ But, in contrast to the situation in California, the great majority of Irish immigrants settling on the Pacific Ocean's western shore arrived directly from the British Isles, either embarking directly from Ireland or putting to sea after a short interlude in England. Most arrived with the benefit of state assistance. In Australia, which was less well known, further from Ireland, and more expensive to reach, the various colonial governments were

43. James D. Phelan, "The Services of the Irish People in the Cause of Freedom," Address to the Knights of Saint Patrick, Nov. 27, 1895, F858/P5/6/X, Bancroft Library; Walsh, "James Phelan," 17–23; Ethington, *The Public City*, 377–387.

44. See John Riordan, "Garret McEnerney and the Irish Pursuit of Success," typescript 73/122/C/No. 96, Bancroft Library. An edited version is published in Walsh, ed., *The San Francisco Irish*, 72–84; Roger Lotchin, "John Francis Neylan, San Francisco Progressive," in *ibid.*, 86–110; Frank Roney, *Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader: An Autobiography*, ed. Ira B. Cross (Berkeley, 1931).

45. See, for example, Campbell, *The Kingdom of the Ryans*; S. M. Ingham, *Enterprising Migrants: An Irish Family in Australia* (Melbourne, 1975); Gordon Forth, *Winters on the Wannan: A History of the Winter-Cookes of Murndal and Lake Condah* (Geelong, Vic., 1991).

46. Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation*, 15–16.

compelled to recruit, sponsor, and transport the immigrant labor necessary for economic expansion. A variety of assistance schemes operated through most of the nineteenth century, and, despite sustained criticism over the size of the Irish component, the colonies faced the stark choice of continuing to fund the passage of Irish emigrants or watching their economies contract. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, a staunch opponent of the large Irish component within the assisted immigration program, warned its readers in August 1840 that the Irish presence was not accidental but part of a sustained plot “to give ascendancy to the Catholic faith in this Protestant colony.” It further asserted that less populous Australia was especially vulnerable to such a development compared to North America. However, such considerations were more than offset by the insatiable demand for labor. The following year the *Herald* wrote, “the consequences of the want of labor are fearfully ominous at this time . . . we dread to think of them.”⁴⁷ In spite of criticism from Protestant church leaders and sections of the colonial press, the immigrant assistance schemes continued, and the Irish embraced them with enthusiasm.⁴⁸

47. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Aug. 21, 1840, Sept. 14, 1841. On opposition to Irish assisted immigration, see Paula Hamilton, “‘Tipperarifying the Moral Atmosphere’: Irish Catholic Immigration and the State, 1840–1860,” in Sydney Labour History Group, eds., *What Rough Beast? The State and Social Order in Australian History* (Sydney, 1982), 13–30; see also Hamilton, “‘No Irish Need Apply,’” 160–217. On sectarianism and immigration, see Mark Lyons, “Aspects of Sectarianism in New South Wales Circa 1865 to 1880” (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1972).

48. Robin F. Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor: Australian Recruitment in Britain and Ireland, 1831–60* (Basingstoke, Eng., 1997). Details of the gender composition of assisted immigrants in the period 1848–1860 are provided in Table 2.5, p. 32. The previous standard work on assisted immigration was R. B. Madgwick’s 1937 study, *Immigration into Eastern Australia, 1788–1851* (1937; Sydney, 1969). On assisted immigration and the Irish, see O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 65–66; Richard Reid, “Aspects of Irish Assisted Emigration to New South Wales, 1848–1870” (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1992). On assistance schemes and female immigration, see Janice Gothard, “Government-assisted Migration of Single Women from Britain to Australia, 1860–1900” (Ph.D. dissertation, Murdoch University, Perth, 1991); Richard Reid, “Dora MacDonagh and her ‘Sisters’: Irish Female Assisted Immigration to New South Wales, c. 1840–1870,” in Trevor McCloughlin, ed., *Irish Women in Colonial Australia* (Sydney, 1998), 64–91; Robin Haines, “Workhouse to Gangplank: Mobilizing Irish Pauper Women and Girls Bound for Australia in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” in Richard Davis, Jennifer Livett, Anne-Maree Whitaker, and Peter Moore, eds., *Irish-Australian Studies: Papers delivered at the Eighth Irish-Australian Conference* (Sydney, 1996), 166–178.

The higher level of direct settlement in eastern Australia marks a significant difference from California. Most of the West Coast's Irish newcomers arrived after a transitional period in which marketable skills or disciplines suitable to California's industrializing economy could be acquired. In contrast, most of Australia's Irish had no such opportunity to develop their skills. However, multistage arrival was arguably rendered less necessary for the smooth adjustment of the colonies' Irish immigrants by the operation of the assisted immigration schemes. These diminished the imperative of gradual adjustment to the New World because they provided a predeparture filter of the immigration stream. Robin Haines, who has studied literacy levels among government-assisted emigrants from the United Kingdom to Australia in the period before 1860, found the newcomers were "significantly more literate than their peers that stayed at home." This, she argued, supports the view that "government emigrants were enterprising, self-selecting individuals who took advantage of a scheme that allowed them to improve their employment prospects abroad." Indeed, "[t]he emigrants' ability to assess the relative merits of various destinations must have been enhanced by their relatively high degree of literacy which, in principle, enabled them, within the bounds of socioeconomic constraints, to choose a destination suited to their skills or temperament."⁴⁹ This assessment of the temper of the assisted immigrant schemes, which parallels much Australian historical writing about the quality of the gold rush immigrants of the 1850s, suggests a similarity to the informal selection processes through which a minority of the Irish in the United States deliberately relocated to California.⁵⁰

Yet, if differences in regional origins and variety of pre-settlement experience did not greatly affect the relative prosperity and well-being of the Irish on either side of the Pacific, it is likely that they did contribute to the immigrants' preparedness for the particular economic conditions they encountered

49. Robin Haines, "Indigent Misfits or Shrewd Operators? Government-Assisted Emigrants from the United Kingdom to Australia, 1831–1860," *Flinders University Working Papers in Economic History*, 61 (May 1993), 12–13.

50. On the historiography of gold rush immigrants, see Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, 10–11; also Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851–1861* (Melbourne, 1968), 46–47.

in their new host societies. California's Irish, many migrating onward from New York, Massachusetts, or Pennsylvania, were familiar with the routines and disciplines of urban life and came with skills learned in years of residence in those states. This interlude in the eastern states helps explain their propensity for settlement in San Francisco and the Bay Area; it also provides some of the strongest evidence for David Doyle's categorization of the Irish as America's urban pioneers.⁵¹ Yet, in eastern Australia, the Irish revealed no such tendency. Most of Australia's Irish, drawn heavily from the ranks of displaced rural laborers of the post-Famine period, had no such urban schooling. Without that background and cast into an economy that was considerably less developed industrially than California's, they displayed little compunction about moving out to the Bush. For them, unlike the archetypal Irish immigrant in so much of the eastern U.S. literature, the Great Famine left no indelible scarring to prevent new ventures on the land.

A third critical feature distinguishing California and eastern Australia from the eastern U.S. model was their more favorable ambience. California was from mid-century set apart by an elusive quality that Bayard Taylor long ago termed the "cosmopolitan cast" of life in the West.⁵² Commentaries on the diversity of city life in antebellum America are ubiquitous in contemporary writings, and the power of such rhetoric certainly proved advantageous to the Irish in California.⁵³ As early as 1855 Frank Soule wrote that in San Francisco "English, Scotch and Irish immigrants were also numerous, but their characteristics, although somewhat different, were less distinguishable from those of native Americans than were the manners and customs

51. Quigley, *The Irish Race in California*, 149; David Noel Doyle, "The Irish as Urban Pioneers in the United States, 1850–1870," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10 (No. 1–2, 1990–1991), 36–59.

52. Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado, or Adventures in the Path of Empire* . . . (New York, 1861), 103; see also Seamus Breatnac, "Should Irish Eyes Be Smiling?" in James P. Walsh, ed., *The Irish: America's Political Class* (New York, 1976), 28; Breatnac, "The Difference Remains," 150; Bradford Luckingham, "Immigrant Life in Emergent San Francisco," *Journal of the West*, 12 (1973), 600–617; Doris M. Wright, "The Making of Cosmopolitan California: An Analysis of Immigration, 1848–1870," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 19 (1940), 323–343.

53. Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1997), 52–56.

of other foreigners.” He went on to suggest that, “since the common language of the Americans and British [including Irish] is English, and their customs and habits of thought are generally the same, there seems no impropriety in calling them all in California simply Americans.”⁵⁴

To some extent, this process of Irish inclusion rested upon the society’s perception of itself as something new and different. On the West Coast, according to numerous contemporaries, the feverish arrival of newcomers and the conditions of life they encountered worked to diminish the differences between national groups and to instill common characteristics. “Our population, selected from the choice young men of all the most active nations of the world, has not been thrown together into the vast alembic of society, without developing many qualities, whose existence was hitherto latent,” wrote Casper T. Hopkins in 1854.⁵⁵ Admittedly, the notion that the force of the environment would produce common behavior was not always applied consistently, and sporadic criticisms of the Irish did occur.⁵⁶ However, despite occasional slippage into old prejudices—whether these were imported directly from the Old World or products of life back East—the belief that the materialism of the West would forge a new people was widely shared, and the position of the Irish was never so seriously challenged as on the Atlantic seaboard.

In a remarkably similar manner, writers in eastern Australia frequently invoked ideas of egalitarianism and openness as the principal defining characteristics of colonial society.⁵⁷ Moreover, as in California, the novelty of the society was a key ingredient in the way the European population in eastern Australia defined its identity, marking itself as different from the Old World. In both places, the arrival of large numbers of people in so few years demanded the rapid creation of new community identities, and in both the processes were similar, although the redef-

54. Frank Soule, *The Annals of San Francisco* (New York, 1855), 411, 484.

55. Quoted in Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque, 1999), 75, although for reaction to diversity, see pp. 75–76.

56. For example, Isabella Saxon, *Five Years Within the Golden Gate* (Philadelphia, 1868), 187, 193.

57. Serle, *The Golden Age*, 91–92.

inition, the establishing of distinctiveness, was struck against different parents—for Australia, the imperial center; for California, the East. But both societies, through their assertion of difference, paved the way for fuller participation of the Irish than existed elsewhere across the Diaspora, and this difference was celebrated enthusiastically by the immigrants.⁵⁸

One aspect of this ambience that proved advantageous for Irish settlers was the presence of a far greater degree of religious tolerance than characterized society either in the eastern United States or Great Britain. In California, the prior presence of Roman Catholicism and the diversity of faiths present after mid-century ensured that there was no fertile ground for the nativism that Irish immigrants confronted in the East. The *Monitor*, a Catholic newspaper, recognized the absence of religious enmity that distinguished life in the Far West:

[O]ur countrymen need not fear that they will have to encounter prejudices against their race or religion, that are such drawbacks to their settlement in many parts of the Eastern states. . . . Irishmen have made themselves a position here fully equal to any other nationality in our cosmopolitan population, and newcomers of the same race will find no prejudice to bar their advancement, unless what any fault of their own may rise [*sic*] against individuals.⁵⁹

In this environment, the Roman Catholic Church grew vigorously, providing an important institutional affiliation for the state's Irish Catholics and stimulating fraternal organizations that eased the path of immigrant adjustment.⁶⁰ However, unlike the situation in many cities on the eastern seaboard, where the Catholic Church responded stridently to the rising tide of evangelical Protestantism, the character of California's Roman Catholicism was not especially belligerent in support of an oppressed laity but took on a rather different and more accommodating character. Reflecting this less intense environment,

58. For an insightful discussion of differences in cultural tolerance between center and periphery, see Homi K. Bhaba, "Between Identities," in R. Benmayor and A. Skotries, eds., *Migration and Identity* (Oxford, 1994), 183–188.

59. Quoted in Patrick J. Dowling, *California: The Irish Dream* (San Francisco, 1988), 19. See also Lotchin, *San Francisco*, 114.

60. *Bishop's Directory of San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1875), 35–36; W. Gleeson, *History of the Catholic Church in California* (2 vols., San Francisco, 1872), 2: 281.

Hugh Quigley asserted that the clergy in the state “generally defend their own creed if attacked, but seldom, if ever, do they assail what they consider to be the errors of those who differ with themselves.”⁶¹ This is not to say that religious tensions were absent. The controversial campaigns of Roman Catholic priest Father Peter Yorke, including his attack on the unrepresentative composition of the Board of Regents of the University of California, provide ample testimony to the existence of a mild, underlying, sectarian edge.⁶² However, these were sporadic affairs, cast in the recesses of community life, rather than at the forefront of the everyday life of the Irish population.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, eastern Australia closely resembled California in the extent to which the Roman Catholic Church faced less vehement opposition than in the eastern United States. This had not been the case initially, and, in the first decades of the convict settlement, official suspicion of Catholicism and the absence of clergy restricted religious practice among Irish prisoners. But after this bitter and unpromising beginning, religious tensions in New South Wales gradually diminished. Key was the decision in 1836 of the Anglo Irish governor, Richard Bourke, to provide state funding to all religious denominations. Reinforcing that tendency, the English Benedictine leadership that controlled the Catholic Church in Australia presented to Protestant critics a more palatable and less confrontational alternative than American nativists recognized in New York’s Archbishop John Hughes. From mid-century on, anxieties could and sometimes did increase dramatically, as occurred after Irishman Henry James O’Farrell’s attempt to assassinate Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria, in Sydney in 1868.⁶³ There was, too, awareness

61. Quigley, *The Irish Race in California*, 420. See also Sarbaugh, “Exiles of Confidence,” 166; George T. Crowley, “The Irish in California,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 25 (1936), 451–462.

62. See James P. Walsh, “Peter C. Yorke: San Francisco’s Irishman Reconsidered,” in Walsh, ed., *The San Francisco Irish*, 43–57. Walsh is critical of Yorke in the University of California affair, suggesting the priest “allowed to pass a unique opportunity to chip the wall surrounding a ghetto mentality [of the Church].” *Ibid.*, 54. For an older account that emphasizes nativist hostility, see Joseph S. Brusher, “Peter C. Yorke and the A. P. A. in San Francisco,” *Catholic Historical Review*, 37 (1951), 129–150. See also Ethington, *The Public City*, 324–326, and Richard Gribble, *Catholicism and the San Francisco Labor Movement* (San Francisco, 1993).

63. O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 209–211; Keith Amos, *The Fenians in Aus-*

and considerable sensitivity among Irish Catholic leaders in Australia about the eastern American experience, and concerns about the threat of “Know-Nothingism” were sometimes expressed.⁶⁴ But, in the main, religious difference was not too dominant a feature of colonial life, and opposition to Roman Catholicism never enjoyed the currency it attained in the more hostile environments of Boston or New York. Overall, Hilary Carey best captured the temper of the eastern Australian scene when she wrote recently, “Australians lived in a sectarian environment in the nineteenth century. . . . In general, however, the sectarian tensions of colonial Australia remained a pale imitation of rival tensions in northern England, Ireland and Scotland or in other settler societies, including the United States.”⁶⁵

The fourth feature critical to the experience of the Irish on both sides of the Pacific was the presence of substantial nonwhite immigrant populations against whom community antagonism was directed. Where California’s Irish were from mid-century viewed within an assimilatory frame, as English-speaking and considered to have much in common with other new arrivals from the British Isles, the substantial Chinese population was not. Generalization here is fraught with danger, but, on the whole, the Irish on the West Coast seem to have been less fearful of and insecure about their standing as secure white insiders than was the case among their compatriots elsewhere in the United States. For example, the Irish in the West were less antagonistic toward abolition than their compatriots in either the East or the South. As a result, California’s Irish were spared much of the legacy of bitterness that resulted from the Irish American resistance to the antislavery cause.⁶⁶ This security did not translate into any special affinity with, or concern for, the

tralia, 1865–1880 (Sydney, 1988), 45–77. On Bourke, see Hazel King, *Richard Bourke* (Melbourne, 1971).

64. F. R. Freehill, “Colonial ‘Know-Nothingism’: A Reply to Mr. B. R. Wise,” *Centennial Magazine*, 2–3 (1889–1890), 226–231.

65. Hilary Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions* (Sydney, 1996), 94. The essential work on Catholicism in Australia in this period is Patrick O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History* (Sydney, 1985).

66. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); Gilbert Osofsky, “Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism,” *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), 889–912; Douglas C. Riach, “Daniel O’Connell and American Slavery,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 20 (1976), 3–25.

plight of the state's Chinese immigrant population—indeed, some contemporaries claimed that the Irish were particularly complicit in the marginalization of the Chinese. Mary Roberts Coolidge, for example, believed the high proportion of the Irish in the California population “a cause of the anti-Chinese movements there [and that the] preponderance of Irish names in the leadership of mobs, anti-coolie clubs, persons arrested for attacks upon the Chinese, and also among legislators and municipal officers, bears witness to the rapidity of their assimilation.”⁶⁷ Certainly, not all Irish in the West sympathized with the pervasive anti-Chinese sentiment of the late nineteenth century. Labor leader Frank Roney, born in Belfast in 1841, declared himself hostile to the more virulent opponents of the Chinese presence. However, irrespective of such individual Irish responses, the crucial point is that the Chinese presence served further to mark the Irish as mainstream players in their new society.⁶⁸

The Chinese presence also contributed to the Irish position as insiders in eastern Australia. However, its importance was less pronounced than on the American West Coast because of the half-century of European presence before the discovery of gold, a period during which the Irish had done much to carve out their niche in colonial society. For Australia's Irish, the presence of the Chinese served mainly to reinforce a preexisting tendency toward inclusion, but it did provide the Irish with a further issue on which to articulate publicly their demand for full participation in society. Ill feeling toward the Chinese that gathered strength during the gold rushes of the mid-1850s to early 1860s was to be a feature of Australian (and Irish Australian) colonial life for the remainder of the century. “Australia for Australians’ will be a principal plank of our platform,” declared the *Irish-Australian* newspaper in its first editorial in 1894, its demand echoing the radical *Bulletin* magazine's famous masthead “Australia for the Australians.” “We shall advocate it on generous lines, offering a hearty welcome to all who would become Australian by unreservedly casting in their lot with us [but] while doing this, we shall champion the claims of Irish-

67. Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (Taipei, 1968), 270.

68. Roney, *Irish Rebel*, 266–269.

Australians to perfect essential equality with their fellow citizens,” the newspaper explained.⁶⁹ That the Chinese did not fall within this privileged group was soon apparent when the *Irish-Australian* commenced a campaign against the “Chinese and other inferior European races” who, it claimed, had “usurped the public market places.” The newspaper demanded action by civic authorities to control the nonwhite population, and it noted the hearty congratulations it had received from readers for its campaign.⁷⁰ While such attitudes were widespread in the Australian press at the time, and the campaign by the *Irish-Australian* was certainly less vociferous than the anti-Chinese hysteria found in many other newspapers in the late nineteenth century, the point remains that the Irish were then strongly positioned on the privileged side of the color bar that increasingly dominated Australian national life.⁷¹

As this article has demonstrated, the experience of the Irish in California and southeastern Australia in the period 1840 to 1900 was similar in many respects. Both Pacific coasts played host to large and dynamic Irish communities that experienced relatively untroubled adaptation to the New World compared with the bleak conditions present in the eastern United States, and in each location the immigrants achieved satisfactory levels of prosperity within a generation. In both locations, similar forces can be identified as contributing to this outcome. These factors are early time of arrival, which ensured Irish legitimacy and access to resources; the immigrants’ preparedness for their new environment; the openness and diversity of the new society; and the presence of other immigrant groups against whom intense hostility was directed. However, significant differences existed across this matrix of factors, reflecting variations in time of settlement and organization of the migration process, the comparative development of each society’s industrial economy, and

69. *Irish-Australian*, Oct. 6, 1895.

70. *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 17, 1894; March 30, 1895.

71. On the Chinese in eastern Australia, see Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations* (Sydney, 1994); also Markus, *Fear and Hatred*. The situation on the Victorian goldfields is discussed in Broome, *The Victorians Arriving*, 82–85, 109–111; in New South Wales in C. N. Connolly, “Miners Rights: Explaining the Lambing Flat Riots of 1860–1861” in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus, eds., *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class* (Sydney, 1978), 35–47.

the differing propensities of the immigrants for urban and rural settlement.

This comparison of California and the eastern Australian colonies indicates that historians of Irish migration in both locations would do well to move beyond the constraints imposed by national narratives and to utilize also subnational comparison in exploring Irish immigrants' experiences on both sides of the Pacific. Such an approach will not enable all lines of possible inquiry to be exhausted, as national ideologies and nationwide developments undeniably affected the experiences of immigrants across the Irish Diaspora throughout the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, through a transregional focus on these, Ireland's furthest shores, historians will not only find confirmation of the presence of other well-adjusted and generally successful Irish communities but also be able to bring more sharply into focus the specific and distinctive features of Irish settlement in their own regions. More broadly, the range of issues and grounds of similarity and difference indicated here suggest possibilities for engagement between historians in California and eastern Australia on a far wider scale. Scholars on both sides of the Pacific have from time to time bemoaned the lack of critical attention their works have received. Greater dialogue between historians on these distant shores could do much to alleviate that sense of frustration and isolation as well as richly illuminate the histories of both regions.