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Mitchell, Brian C. *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821–61*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 247. Black and white plates, maps, tables, index

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Mitchell, Brian C. *The Paddy Camps: The Irish of Lowell, 1821-61*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 247. Black and white plates, maps, tables, index.

The character of the labour-force in New England textile mills underwent significant change in the middle decades of the 19th century. By 1850 the Yankee, youthful, and female work-force was rapidly being replaced by one of overwhelming Irish identity. Nowhere was this transformation more evident than in Lowell, Mass. Mitchell's book takes a logical step in the further exploration of this topic. Given the wealth of research that has been provided on female textile workers in ante-bellum New England, Mitchell turns to identifying the Irish who replaced them.

The Irish first came to Lowell, the "model industrial town," in the 1820s as labourers on its canal system. Most were single men, part of a large pool of unskilled Irish labourers who travelled throughout New England in the early 1800s in search of employment. The paddy camps were two adjacent shanty towns which sprang up according to factional loyalties. One housed "Corkonians," the other "Far Downers." Despite Old World differences, a sense of community developed among the Lowell Irish in the 1830s, which achieved more permanence as wives and children joined their kin.

From the beginning the immigrants attempted to recreate the institutions and movements of Ireland. Not surprisingly, they began with the erection of a church, in 1831. The construction of St Patrick's, according to Mitchell "defined the Irish presence in Lowell for the Irish themselves." The support of a temperance movement echoed Father Theobald Mathew's efforts in the "old country." Moreover, the formation of a Lowell Repeal Association in 1841 lent moral and financial support to Daniel O'Connell's cause.

Irish women had made significant inroads into mill work by the late 1840s. The paddy camps, with their internal divisions blurred by the growth of the community, became known as "The Acre" — a squalid tenement settlement. It threatened the image of the Yankee model industrial city and the stake the pre-famine Irish persisters had invested in American society. The schism between the local Yankees and the Irish widened appreciably in the 1850s. The flood of famine emigrants brought to Lowell a great increase in disease, crime, and public drunkenness. The Irish were symbols of the deterioration of the "pretty sister of industrialization."

The Yankee response to the plight of Lowell was embodied in the nativism of the Know-Nothing Party. Open violence polarized the two communities in the 1850s as Yankees expressed frustration at their inability to assimilate the Irish quarter. By the late 1850s that specific nativist movement had died a nation-wide death and left a solidified, cohesive, and self-identified Irish community in Lowell.

Mitchell views his topic from three different historical perspectives and, correspondingly, from three different bodies of literature. The first of these perspectives, immigration history, has been shaped by Oscar Handlin and subsequent researchers who have studied the immigrant colony based on the premise that it had a life of its own. Much influenced by this school, Mitchell focuses "upon cultural transmission, internal community dynamics, and the outside environments." He sees the paddy camps not as a ghetto that acted as a way station en route to assimilation but as a spatial entity on its own, continually changing terms. Lowell's Irish negotiated their ethnicity among themselves in the face of an alien, often hostile, social and economic environment.

The second perspective that Mitchell uses as a focus illuminates the Irish by connecting their experience to the larger history of

Lowell in a way that is meaningful for scholars interested in urban industrial development. How the middle-class authorities of America's model industrial city coped, or failed to cope, with rising disease, crime, and social unrest is one of the central questions of urban American history and is equally central to Mitchell's analysis.

Finally, the author's focus is undeniably on the working class. He provides insight into the collective relationships that characterized unskilled, itinerant labour at this time. Mitchell depicts operations of the family economy in mid-19th-century Lowell and the central role that the mills played in the lives of Irish men, women, and children.

Indeed, it is because of its scope that Mitchell's work will have a major impact on the historiography of urban ethnic America. J. C. D. Clark has recently noted that in historical writing we move from the particular to the general and then back to the particular. Given the large amount of Irish-American history written in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s dealing with the Irish in a broad national context, *The Paddy Camps* is a natural shift in this process. This work is useful because it puts the Irish-American experience back under the microscope to retest the wider assumptions that its precursors articulated. In light of Mitchell's study, generalizations on the urban Irish in North America stand up remarkably well. The retention of Old World loyalties and institutions, patterns of religious nominalism, and the persistence of socio-economic subordination as themes of Irish life in urban America are reflected in this book. Mitchell puts names and identities to those involved in this process in a distinct urban locale.

The historiographic bases from which the author's work comes are clear. What the book lacks, however, are clues as to how this research will eventually contribute to a better understanding of Irish-American history. In this sense, it is backward looking and seeks to confirm historiographically what

is already "known." In short, *The Paddy Camps* may not be asking the right questions of the urban ethnic past in order to offer new insights into this historical phenomenon. Collective histories are indeed important, but, unless Irish pre-famine migration is seen as many individual "migration projects" (each carefully contemplated and planned), the historian of urban ethnicity must be content with writing a merely broad descriptive narrative. Moreover, Mitchell's work provides little insight into the Irish-American rural/urban dichotomy. The differences between Irishmen who chose to be urban and their rural counterparts cannot be approached in a study of this nature. In the end, the scope of *The Paddy Camps* permits it to provide needed detail, but at the same time the limited conceptual framework diminishes its analytical potential for new, challenging questions and directions for the study of urban ethnicity.

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McCaffrey, Lawrence J.; Skerrett, Ellen; Funchion, Michael F.; and Fanning, Charles. *The Irish In Chicago*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Pp. xi, 171. Maps, table, black and white plates, index. \$19.95 (U.S.)

The configurations of Irish-American urban history have become somewhat clearer in recent times as two distinct patterns have emerged. Ideographic studies have sought to identify the peculiarities of the Irish-American experience in various locales, while other more general studies have documented the common themes from this group's past. *The Irish in Chicago*, a collaborative work, is a curious combination of these two approaches. Although the essays contained within this book carefully point out things both Irish and particular to Chicago, so too do they attempt to relate these aspects to a broader urban, Irish, and American overview.

Though never explicitly stated, the purpose of this collection is quite clear: the 1980s signal the end of an era for the Irish in Chicago. In terms of political control, strict Catholic observance, and indeed, ethnic cohesiveness, Irish Chicago is in decline.

This book trods the well-worn path of Irish-American urban historiography. It retraces the familiar narrative of this ethnic group's past: economic pauperism, the presence of the Roman Catholic Church, and Irish-American political prowess. These themes are emphasized in the book's individual essays. In Professor McCaffrey's "The Irish-American Dimension," the economic position of the Irish in the social structure of Chicago in the 19th and 20th centuries is the focus. Two themes emerge in his analysis. The first is the characterization of the Chicago Irish as conscious seekers of social mobility. Lacking sufficient agricultural skills, he claims, the Irish settled in cities as "proletarian pioneers of the ghetto" — they were "the paradigm of the American ethnic experience." After fighting nativism and economic subordination, the Irish in Chicago eventually succeeded in their quest for "respectability." By the end of the 19th century their social mobility was manifest. Literacy and political footholds gave the Irish opportunities in Chicago that had been denied them in business. By 1900 the "lace-curtain" Irish had appeared with their standing firmly planted in middle-class circles. McCaffrey's second theme derives from his first. As the Irish increased their affluence and social position, they also moved away from the city core. Geographic mobility, in part due to the encroachment of blacks upon Irish neighbourhoods, accompanied Irish social mobility.

Ellen Skerrett's "The Catholic Dimension" explores the role of the church in the lives of Chicago's Irish. The city never had one central Irish settlement, but rather a series of Irish-dominated enclaves. In each of these a Roman Catholic parish occupied a central position. "At its best," Skerrett writes, "the

parish filled important religious and social needs and became the heart of Irish-American community life." The parish symbolized ethnic space. The large amounts of money donated by the Irish community in Chicago are evidence of the church's honoured role. Charitable societies and parochial schools accompanied the growth of these neighbourhoods. By 1920, however, an Irish-Catholic identity had given way to a strictly Catholic identity.

Other traditional Irish themes fill "The Political and Nationalist Dimensions," in which M. F. Funchion documents the Irish-American affinity for Democratic civic "machine" politics in Chicago. From the close of the Civil War to 1976 the Irish had a dominant role in local authority. This capacity was rooted in Irish adeptness at operating a civic "spoils" system. Ward bosses such as "Hinky Dink" Kenna and "Bathhouse John" Coughlin controlled areas of the city through patronage and payoff. While many Irish saw personal gain in city politics, an identifiable communitarian aspect existed among politicians as well. Funchion also describes Irish nationalist politics and notes that Chicago supported a branch of O'Connell's Repeal Association in 1842, a Fenian brotherhood in the 1860s, a Clan Na Gael chapter in the 1870s and 1880s, and a United Irish League of America group in the early 1900s. While nationalist fervour grew after the Easter Rising of 1916, it has steadily declined since the end of the Anglo-Irish War.

Charles Fanning in "The Literary Dimension" explores a cultural area not often available to the urban ethnic historian. Chicago had four main Irish writers whose work focused on the communities from which they came. The depiction by Finley Peter Dunne (1867-1936) of the Bridgeport of publican Martin Dooley marked "the first fully realized ethnic neighbourhood in American literature." In more than 300 columns in *The Evening Tribune*, Dunne described Irish life in Chicago in marvellous "inside" detail. Kate McPhelim