

ERIN GO BRAGH – IT’S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN

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Well, with St. Patrick’s Day being only three days away, and with my last name being clearly Irish, the topic of this paper seemed inevitable. I am going to talk briefly about St. Patrick’s Day, as I experienced it growing up in Cleveland, and then, I will give a short overview of Irish history, and what led to the immigration of that benighted folk to America, and particularly, the settlement of the Irish in Cleveland. To some extent this paper will be autobiographical, but I will try not to be too self-indulgent.

My early life was not steeped in Irish ethnicity. My last name, although clearly Irish, is pretty rare. Although there are plenty of people whose names seem similar: Hoolihans, and Hanrahans, Hennahans, and Hooligans; even Monaghan seems close; but there are relatively few Honohans. In fact, if we held a meeting of the Honohan Clan, we could conveniently meet in a phone booth, as the saying goes. If you were to take the trouble to search through the phone books of the towns in Cuyahoga County, you would find just five listings for the name “Honohan.” Those would be for myself, my three children and my ex-wife. Outside of my immediate family, I have never met another Honohan. So, the Honohans are *rare avis*. A fact which was confirmed some years ago, when I visited Ireland. I checked the phone book in Dublin – which covers all of Ireland, and found only three listings for “Honohan” in the whole country!

I should probably explain why my father was no help on this lineage question. It was because he de-camped fairly early in the proceedings. In the 1930’s it was the depths of the depression, so jobs were scarce. My mother, Mary, and her sister, Frances, were both in their early twenties, and decided to seek their fortune on the stage. They both joined a dance troupe. While on the road my mother met and married William Honohan, a trumpet player with the band. A few years later, my mother was back with her family in Cleveland, pregnant with me, and William was no longer in the picture. Growing up, I never saw one picture, or any other evidence of my father’s existence, and he certainly never showed up on birthdays or other ceremonial occasions. My mother only spoke of him rarely, usually when prodded by me; and I gradually learned, growing up, that my father, if not a taboo subject, at least was not one my Mother was eager to discuss

That was all right with me. I never concerned myself with genealogy. Like most Irishmen, I assumed that I was descended from kings, and let it go at that. This “illusion of grandeur” on the part of Irishmen, by the way, may have more than a ring of truth to it. I base that statement on two facts: One historical and the other mathematical.

In ancient Ireland, the core of Celtic society was the clan. Traditionally, the members of a clan were all related, usually, with the same last name. The size of the clan was based on

fighting strength. Each clan was expected to field about 30 companies of 300 men –about the strength of a Roman legion. Each clan had a king or *ri*, and above the clans were over-kings or *ruiri*, who in turn, owed their allegiance to a High-King who presided over all of Ireland. As a result, there were literally hundreds of Kings in the history of Ireland, who produced God knows how many progeny. This fact would come as no surprise to anyone who has visited Ireland. The whole island is thick with ancient castles, many now in ruins but some still maintained as tourist attractions. A prime example of the latter is the castle at Blarney, which houses the famous blarney stone. Legend has it that if you kiss the blarney stone you will receive the gift of eloquence. I found that the same effect could be achieved by downing a couple of glasses of Guinness stout.

The second fact supporting the royal descendency of Irishmen is the simple mathematical fact of “doubling.” As you climb up through your family tree, the number of your lineal ancestors doubles at each generation. In other words, you have two parents, four grand parents, eight great-grandparents, and so on. If you go back twenty generations – about 500 years - you would find 1,048,576 ancestors at that level of your family tree. But, the whole population of Ireland back then, was less than 2 million. So, obviously, there had to have been a lot of inter-marrying of relatives among the Irish over the years; and I figure that most Irish today could probably boast descendency from the great King, Brian Boru himself.

Anyway, after that discursion, let me return to the point. I was speaking about my lack of knowledge of my Irish ancestry. The same paucity of facts about my paternal Irish ancestors was pretty much true also on my mother’s side. Her maiden name was McAtee. Besides my mother and her sister, and their parents, I have never met another McAtee in Cleveland. There are plenty of McAfees and even McEntees in Cleveland, but I am not aware that they have any kinship with my people. My maternal grandmother’s maiden name was Boyle, and there is no shortage of Boyles and O’Boyles around, but apparently none in Cleveland that claimed to be related to my family. Our Boyles lived in the Philadelphia area, but except for an occasional visit to Cleveland from my Aunt Agnes Boyle (a lovely lady by the way,) the Boyles seem to have kept pretty much to themselves, as far as we were concerned.

So, you get the picture: My family was not immersed in our Irish heritage. I never knew of any living relatives in Ireland. I don’t know when or why my maternal family lost touch with the “Auld sod”. But I suspect it was because Ireland had been such a “land of despair” that my people fled to America and never looked back. Probably my forebears were in the mass migration from Ireland which occurred after the great famine in 1845. (More about that later). I remember my mother telling me that one of my grandfathers fought in the Civil War, so I know that at least some of my relatives were here as early as the 1850’s. But, except for our Roman Catholic faith, which we adhered to pretty devoutly like most Irish; and our Irish names, we didn’t think much about our heritage. The notable exception being St. Patrick’s Day each year, when I, along with a good number of other Irishmen in Cleveland, would proudly proclaim our Celtic background and go downtown , either to watch or to march in the parade.

I never marched in the parade, by the way. I'm sure I would have, had I been allowed to join my high school's marching band, which was in the St. Patrick's Day parade every year; but my mother asked me not to join the band when I entered high school. She never explained why, but, in retrospect, I guess she was afraid if I learned a musical instrument, I might follow in my father's foot steps. Along the same lines, My mother also strongly suggested when I entered high school that it would be advisable for me not to drink alcohol, a suggestion which I honored all the way through high school and college. However, when I got to law school – well - let's just say - I made up for lost time.

My mother incidentally, was one of those “warriors” - a class of unsung heroes and heroines which was the subject of a paper Warren Scharf recently delivered to this group, As I reflect back, my Mother was a brave woman who met her frequently daunting quotidian obligations with resolute courage. There she was, a single mom in the depths of the depression struggling to raise a young child. But, to paraphrase what Ike Eisenhower once said, “if we were poor while I was growing up, I never knew it.” I went to St. Edward's high school in Lakewood; in fact, I was in the first graduating class. (1953). Every year the school would let us off on St. Patrick's Day so we could go down and watch the parade. The school's fondness for all things Irish is easily explainable: the school was run by the Brothers of Holy Cross; the same Order that founded the University of Notre Dame - of “fighting Irish” fame - in South Bend, Indiana. The “fighting Irish” nickname, by the way, which became a badge of honor during the Knute Rockne era, was originally a condescending term, coined by the press in an earlier age to denote the school being Catholic, which at the time, was synonymous with Irish. Based on its Notre Dame pedigree, my high school, St. Edward's, initially adopted the nickname “Irish” for itself. The school even sold green book bags in my freshman year, with “St. Edward's Irish” proudly displayed on the front. However, that didn't last long. The “powers that be” in South Bend, Ind., apparently decided that they didn't want the school identified with an ethnic group, which might send the wrong message to non-Irish, who might then be tempted to attend St. Ed's older, rival Catholic high school, St. Ignatius. So “Irish” was dropped and the more innocuous “Eagles”, was adopted.

I remember many a St. Patrick's Day, but I will tell you about one in particular, because it was typical. It was a beautiful day. “Luck of the Irish,” some might say. (Although in my experience, Irish luck was not so reliable, if the clemency of the weather on St. Patrick's Day was any indication. About half the time the Day would be cold and rainy or blizzard conditions.) But this day was warm, and sunny. I was standing on Superior Avenue near the Square watching the parade. The area was, as you can imagine, pretty much pandemonium in full swing. At the head of the parade was the Grand Marshall, looking resplendent in his high hat, green and orange banner and walking stick. (The “Grand Marshall” was selected annually, by some Byzantine process akin to the selection of the Pope.) Accompanying him were a bunch of dignitaries, local politicians and such, proudly strolling along down Superior Ave., similarly attired in sashes and high hats. Following them were the high school Bands, noisily marching by, strutting their stuff. (I always thought, by the way, that the East Tech band could strut better than any of them,)

Behind them were floats of every kind and description; some of them depicting typical Irish scenes, such as a simple Irish cottage; and many with appropriate banners, such as “Erin Go Bragh,” (which is usually translated as “Ireland forever.”) Some floats were strictly commercial, advertising businesses, such as “Chambers Funeral Home”; or with political signs, urging people to vote for some candidate for office, who would usually be seated on the float, waiving and smiling gamely. Interspersed among the floats were battalions of Cleveland’s finest: the policemen and firemen, marching in more or less military fashion. (Although with frequent looks and waives to the crowd.) They were accompanied by fife and drum corps, and, of course, the bag pipes. (I think bag pipes are an acquired taste. Some people react to the pipes by immediately clapping both hands over their ears. But I confess that my eyes always get a little moist when I hear the pipes play “Amazing Grace.”)

Observing the parade were throngs of people, gathered along Superior Ave., together with hucksters selling every item of Irish memorabilia imaginable. People were so jammed together along the curb, you could barely walk by on the sidewalk. Observers of the parade were standing or milling about, festooned with green garlands around their necks, cheap plastic green derbies on their heads, and large buttons pinned to their chests with various messages in green ink, such as : “Kiss me I’m Irish.” or “*Cead Mille Failte*” (which, in Gaelic, means “ A thousand welcomes.”) I don’t recall seeing any open containers among the crowds along the sidewalk - probably because there were cops everywhere - but it was obvious from the slow, deliberate way some of them were walking, that finding a drink had not been a significant obstacle for them. Anyway, I stood curbside, watching the parade, along side a father and his young son. At one point, the little boy, adorned with a shamrock sticker on his cheek, looked up at his father and asked: “Dad, where do all the Irish go, when it isn’t St. Patrick’s Day?” I thought it was a wonderful question. It conjured up in my mind the eponymous town in the musical *Brigadoon*, the mythical Scottish village which appeared for just one day every hundred years and then vanished. After the parade had finally tailed off, I joined some friends and we began a serious scientific inquiry into the question of whether Jamison’s¹ or Bush mill’s was the finer product. However, prudence and my desire to finish this paper on time, compel me to leave the details of this scientific study to another time.

I was born into a modest home at W.32 and Clinton Ave., in the heart of an Irish neighborhood in St. Patrick’s parish – the church on Bridge Ave., not the one in West Park - the former being the oldest Roman Catholic church in Cuyahoga County, founded in 1853 to meet the needs of the burgeoning Irish Community. It is a beautiful structure, of traditional gothic architecture, made of Sandusky blue limestone. The stone was donated by a parishioner who owned a quarry in Sandusky. All the parishioners had to do was go to Sandusky to get the stone, quarry it, and then haul it back by horse-drawn wagons to Cleveland. Parishioners were divided into teams. One group would leave after mass on Sunday, staying overnight at an inn in Lorain. They would then continue to Sandusky, where they would quarry the stone all week. Then, on Saturday morning, they would begin the long trip back home, where, upon arrival, they would

¹ Jameson’s made in Dublin.

unload the wagons. Meanwhile, another group of parishioners would cut and place the stone. The weekly trips to Sandusky took over two years to complete the project. What an awesome testimonial to a people's faith and dedication.

I said I was born into a home on Clinton Ave.; but that wasn't literally true; actually I was born at St. John's Hospital, located at W. 80th and Detroit. This venerable institution, together with St. Vincent Charity Hospital downtown, both run by the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, served local Irish and other denizens of Cleveland for many years. Charity Hospital was renowned for its Rosary Hall, one of the first in-hospital drug and alcohol rehab centers in the country. Many a man with an Irish last name was on a first name basis with Sr. Ignatia, the legendary founder of Rosary Hall. The Irish gradually disappeared from the near west-side and so did the need for St. John's Hospital, which finally closed in 1990, after one hundred years of service. Its tonier successor is St. John's West Shore Medical Center, located in Westlake, Ohio. Charity Hospital is still running on E. 21st Street, and still serving the poor of the community, although the Irish have been replaced by African-Americans, Hispanics and Appalachians.

A friend of mine (not Irish) once asked me why the Irish celebrate St. Patrick's day by showing off the least admirable traits of the culture, displaying the Irish penchant for drink and outrageous behavior, or, as one critic described it, a "mindless alcohol-fueled revelry." A fair, if impertinent question. St. Patrick's Day. started off as a purely religious holiday, to honor the patron saint of Ireland and to commemorate the bringing of the Christian faith to Ireland. Honoring its religious significance, even today, many organizations participating in the parade in Cleveland commence the day with attendance at mass (and, I am sure the same is true in many other cities). In Ireland, in the early 20th century, in keeping with the solemnity of the day, a law was passed requiring the bars and pubs to close on March 17th. The law (perhaps reminiscent of the unpopular law of prohibition in this country) was eventually repealed in the 1970's. Anyway, like Christmas, the religious holiday became a tremendously popular holiday throughout the world and "took on a life of its own," transforming St. Patrick's Day into a beloved tradition. So the holiday is a mixture of religious observance, and also, a kind of festival, in which, particularly in the United States, many people of various nationalities, not just the Irish, get together to "let go" for a day and simply have fun. For Roman Catholics it is also a day on which the Church grants dispensation from the Lenten restrictions on food and drink. (St. Patrick's Day, by the way, always falls during Lent.)

But that can't be the whole answer. Columbus Day, for example, which is also widely celebrated as a patriotic day and by the Italian-Americans as a day of ethnic pride, never became associated with wild drinking to the same extent as St. Patrick's Day. In the final analysis, the answer to why St. Patrick's Day is associated with drink must lie in the culture of the Irish themselves. Admittedly, among the Irish, any celebration, from wakes to weddings, usually involves drinking. Recent studies have shown that the Irish are still among the highest consumers of alcohol in Europe, at 14.2 liters per capita per year.(mostly beer), which doesn't sound like much, except when you consider that is an average, and there are many non-drinkers among the

population. In fact, Ireland also has the highest percentage of non-drinkers in Europe at 23%. So the answer to the question of why St. Patrick's Day is associated with drinking becomes clearer.

But, the more profound question is: Why do the Irish drink so much? Is it cultural or is it genetic, or maybe both?. The answers to these questions, although intriguing, are beyond the scope of this paper. The Irish have a saying that God invented alcohol to assure that the Irish wouldn't take over the World. To which I will add one final thought on the subject. The Irish immigrants to these shores, in the main, were not lawyers, doctors or men of letters. The Irish tradition of scholarship which carried the light of learning through the dark ages in Europe, for the most part got left at home. The immigrants who brought their traditions, including St. Patrick's Day, to this Country were in the main, rough, uneducated, non-literate people who came because they and their relatives were dying of starvation, or at least living in abject poverty, at home. They heard the call: "Give me your tired, your poor..." and so they came. But these same people also had the strength, the courage and the faith to believe they could make a better life in this Country. And so they did. In an astonishingly short time, the Irish-Americans succeeded in business, and especially in politics. They became cops and firemen, and then lawyers, from which it was not a far step into politics, to which the Irish took like fish to water. Marcus Hanna, a prominent Clevelander, known as the "maker of presidents" was alleged to have said of the Irish: "They're all natural politicians. They have the gift of gab and are devious as hell."

Well, enough on that subject; I want to move on to the principal subject of this paper: the immigration of the Irish. But, to understand the conditions which led to such a large emigration, we must first take a brief look at the troubled history of Ireland, which forged the collective character of its people and drove them to leave their homes and families for the promise of a better life in America. Finally, we will consider the history of the Irish immigrants in Cleveland. For many of you this may be familiar territory. Certainly, if you ever attended any of the numerous luncheons and dinners which are always a part of the St. Patrick's Day tradition, you would have heard someone – usually a politician - speak with seeming erudition about Irish history (as I am doing now;) and so, assuming the story is familiar to many of you, I will try to make it brief.

The history of Ireland has been a history of invasion: First, the Romans, then the Vikings, then the Normans and finally, the English. By the time Caesar's legions invaded Britannia, in 55 BC, civilized society in Ireland was already ancient. Through archeological findings, we find that Celtic settlements date back to at least 2000 BC. ("Celtic," by the way, is pronounced with a hard "C", unless you are referring to that odious basketball team from up north, which insists on calling itself the "Celtics" with a soft "C..) Anyway, what little evidence we have about the early Kelts indicates they were a war-like race which subdued the indigenous tribes of what later came to be known as Britain and Gaul. Their success in battle was not only due to their ferocious nature but to their superior craftsmanship and their iron armor. In ancient times, the Irish were pagans, observing druidism, a polytheistic religion, about which little is known. . The Druid society had no writing and hence no documented history or literature.

But they did have stone and left their mark in the archeological record with such magnificent remains as Stonehenge in England. Other ancient monoliths also survive. One example is the “sun cross,” a circle circumscribing a cross of equal-length arms. One legend has it that St. Patrick created the iconic Irish cross by combining the Druid sun cross with the traditional Catholic cross. This symbol became very popular, and in later years, these crosses would be engraved with intricate patterns of artistic design. The Irish cross, even today, is as much a nationalistic symbol of Ireland as it is a religious one. Speaking of St. Patrick, this legendary figure, now revered as the patron saint of Ireland, came to Ireland in the middle of the 5th Century, as a Catholic missionary and converted the island to Christianity. He is also reputed to have driven all the snakes from Ireland into the sea, thereby anticipating by several hundred years, a similar feat of pest control by the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Unfortunately for the legend, the scientific evidence strongly suggests that Ireland never had snakes – at least not since the ice-age. So, coming back to St. Patrick’s *missionary* duties, he tried to organize the fledgling Church in Ireland along “Roman” lines, with bishops as the leaders, much as the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is today. However, the Church soon became a system based on monasteries with Abbots as the leaders. The period from 500 to 800 a.d. was the golden age of the Irish Church. Many monasteries sprang up across Ireland. The monastery system was responsible for two things which impacted tremendously on the history of Europe. First, it sent missionaries to England, Scotland and other parts of Europe, which ultimately resulted in Europe, a loose-knit aggregation of separate nations, becoming a more cohesive group of Catholic nations, unified by their common faith, with allegiance, at least spiritually, to Rome. Secondly, the Irish monks preserved Greek and Roman learning during the dark ages. In Irish monasteries, art and scholarship flourished. One of the arts which the monks perfected was the making of illuminated manuscripts, beautiful hand illustrated books, principally copies of the Bible and other religious tracts. One of these illuminated manuscripts, which I have seen, is the Book of Kells, dating from around 800 a.d., which is preserved in the museum at Trinity College in Dublin.

Skipping ahead a bit to the 10th Century, we find Ireland again fighting for its survival, this time against the Vikings. Around 940 the legendary Irish High King Brian Boru was born. By that time the Danes had conquered most of the province of Munster in the southwest of Ireland. Brian became the chieftain of his clan, and defeated the Danes in several battles. In 968 he captured Cashel, the capital of Munster, and became the High King of Ireland. Finally, in 1014, in Leinster, Brian fought and defeated the Vikings in a famous battle at Clontarf, although Brian himself was killed. This victory ended the Viking threat to Ireland.

Irish freedom was short-lived. In the 12th Century, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, reorganized its structure along diocesan lines, with bishops at the head, and phased out the monasteries, at the behest of Pope Adrian IV (actually an Englishman named Nicholas Breakspear); but he was not satisfied. He was determined to bring the Irish Church to heel. In 1155 he gave the English King, Henry II, permission to invade Ireland. Henry II, also claiming title as the Duke of Normandy, commanded Norman knights to invade Ireland. Later, Henry II

himself landed with a large fleet at Wexford in 1161. And so began the struggle between England and Ireland, which continued - off and on - into modern times.

Over several hundred years of invasions by the English, under the Tudor Kings, including Henry VIII, and then his daughter Elizabeth I, English domination over Ireland grew and became more and more repressive. Queen Elizabeth I, continued to carry out a systematic usurpation of Irish land, called euphemistically, "plantation." These plantations were established, principally in Ulster and Munster, through a process of confiscation of land from Irish who had demonstrated some alleged non-loyalty to the British Crown. The lands thus seized were then given to English "planters."

British dominion over the Irish grew even more repressive during the 17th Century. Finally, the Irish had had enough and rebelled against the English King. In 1641 they rose up against the English occupiers of the lands which, in the Irishmen's view, had been illegally taken from them. The English retaliated forcefully. In 1649, Oliver Cromwell, a man whose name will always live in infamy in Irish hearts, landed in Ireland with a large, well-equipped army. By 1652, the conquest of Ireland was virtually complete. The English parliament published punitive terms of surrender,

. The Act of Settlement of 1652 stated that anyone who had borne arms against England would forfeit his land, and the rest – Irishmen who had shown no disloyalty to England – would nevertheless be forced to "trade" their lands for other lands in Connacht – a province in the west of Ireland. Connacht was a land which, although breathtakingly beautiful, was ruggedly inhospitable to farming. Cromwell's infamous quote about this arrangement was: "They can live in Connacht or they can live in Hell!" This Province, which includes the counties of Mayo, Sligo and Galway, is the principal region from which, centuries later, the Irish immigrants came to Cleveland.

As if things weren't bad enough in Ireland, in 1845 the great famine hit. A large portion of the Irish population at the time was living on a subsistence diet of potatoes and fish. It was an adequate but precariously vulnerable diet for a whole country to live on. So when the potato blight hit in 1845, the results were disastrous. The blight lasted for about 5 years, bringing famine to the already impoverished nation. Hundreds of thousands of Irish people, already weakened by the effects of privation, died each year of starvation, cholera, typhus and dysentery. England offered meager help. The English Prime Minister, Robert Peel, started relief works to employ the starving Irish. (Apparently he was loathe to simply give away the food to starving people- even food which had been produced in Ireland.) He also set up scientific groups to study the cause of the potato blight, which, unfortunately, they were never able to discover. Ironically, we now know that the potato blight was caused by a fungus, which caused the potato to appear black and loathsome, but which appearance was only skin deep. If the skin were removed, the potato itself was perfectly edible.

As a result of the famine, many people fled. In 1851 alone some 250,000 people emigrated from Ireland. (Sadly, many of them died of disease while on shipboard.) The population of Ireland fell dramatically, from over 8 million in 1851 to about 6.5 million the next

year, and it continued to fall thereafter. An estimated 1 million people died during the famine and untold numbers of people emigrated.

This brings our story (at long last) to the Irish immigration to America. Between 1800 and 1900 over 4 million sons and daughters of Ireland crossed the Atlantic to begin a new life here. Never before or since have the people of any nation immigrated to America in such numbers. In 1832, 65,000 Irish boarded ships, heading for these shores. Conditions on shipboard were barely livable. In fact, so many died - one out of five passengers - that the ships came to be known as "coffin ships." Many of the vessels were Canadian lumber ships, making a handsome profit for the ship owners, transporting Irish settlers to Canada and then taking on a cargo of lumber for the return trip to Europe. It was not a bad deal for the immigrants either - at least the ones who survived. The passage was fairly cheap, and walking across the border from Canada into the United States was an easy matter. As a result, New England, especially around Boston, began to look and sound like an Irish stronghold.

The emigration of the Irish, while steadily increasing after 1832, exploded with the onset of the great famine in 1845. From 1846, through 1850, 667,000 men, women and children made the crossing. In addition to those who came to America, many thousands also emigrated to Australia, New Zealand, various South American countries and even to England.

Unfortunately, what the Immigrants found when they got to America wasn't much better than what they had left behind. The United States, predominately Protestant in the 19th Century, did not welcome the Irish Catholics with open arms. Housing and work for the Irish immigrants were hard to find. Even tenement housing was often closed to the rag-tag Irish. "Irish need not apply" signs frequently appeared on factories and shops. The typical Irish boarding house in New York or Boston was a brick building three to six stories high, usually in bad repair, and frequently rat-infested. The people were packed in. Whole families of five to eight people would be given two small rooms. The death rate among the crowded tenement dwellers was alarming. These ghetto Irish became desperate to escape the tenements, which were nothing more than chanel houses, but they had nowhere to go, with no money, no skills and no education.

The opportunity for escape came by way of development of the Erie and Ohio Canals.. The Erie Canal was a vast construction project which stretched for 368 miles from Rome, New York, on the Hudson river to Buffalo on Lake Erie. It required huge amounts of labor, which the Irish were happy to supply. Despite the back-breaking work and the cheap pay, it was an opportunity to leave the horrors of tenement living. The Irish, 3,000 strong, poured out of Boston, New York and Baltimore at the first sign up call.

The dream of a better life, however, once again proved illusory. Working conditions for the men who were employed in digging the Canal were appalling. Twelve hours a day of back-breaking work, six days a week. The food given the men was barely enough to keep body and soul together. They lived in crowded surplus army tents. Untold numbers of laborers died of disease, and malnutrition. A big cause of death was malaria, spread by the mosquitoes which bred in the muddy swamps where the canal was being dug.

. The second such project, the Ohio Canal, was designed to connect Lake Erie with the Ohio River. The Irish, many veterans of the Erie Canal project, and also a good number of Irish immigrants fresh off the boats, settled at various ports along the path of the Ohio Canal which went in a divided route to Cincinnati on Ohio's western boundary and to Marietta on the Ohio River.

Whatever the toll it took in lives, the opening of the Ohio Canal was a big factor in Cleveland becoming an important city. It became a strategic commercial location receiving goods from the east and the South. Many of the Irishmen to settle in Cleveland were those who had signed on for work on the Canal or, later, those who had worked as "gandy dancers" on Commodore Vanderbilt's rail lines which were being laid from New York to Chicago through Cleveland.

The area where the Irish first settled in Cleveland was located along the Cuyahoga river in the flats, called the "Irish Bend." It encompassed roughly the area from W.25th Street east to the river North of Detroit Road. Because of their outcast status in Cleveland society, the Irish formed a close-knit, ghetto-like community. Later, in the middle of the 19th Century, the Irish settlement expanded to accommodate the large influx of Irish into the City. The "Irish Bend", which included Whiskey Island, eventually became known as "the Angle." In the 1860's, St. Malachi's Church was built to accommodate the burgeoning Catholic population that St. Patrick's could no longer handle alone. With continued growth, the Irish settlement expanded as far west as W.65th St., and added a third parish, St. Coleman's in the 1880's.

The Angle and Whiskey Island are well-known landmarks even today, but their present peaceful condition provides little clue as to their tumultuous beginnings as an Irish settlement. Whiskey Island had originally been inhabited by the Erie Indians. They eventually abandoned the swampy area which was a breeding ground for malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The Irish who succeeded the Indians appropriately, if not totally accurately, re-named the place "Whiskey Island". The "Whiskey" part was certainly apt. But the "island" part was not. The area is not an island, but a peninsula, about a mile long, and 1/3 of a mile wide at its widest point. At its peak, it boasted 13 saloons, an impressive figure, given the size of the area. Mostly it was filled with tar-paper shacks which the Irish called home. It is difficult to imagine today that, at its heyday, the area had 22 streets crisscrossing it

It was from the first and remained for many years, the wildest, bawdiest section of Cleveland. It was said by one observer that "most nights on Whiskey Island were lively ones and when the police answered a riot call, the horses would automatically head in that direction."

The Irish immigrants may well have been a hard-drinking, ill-mannered, lawless group. But given their history, and the hopeless and dire conditions they found themselves in, who could blame them? Well, the uphill battle from those early days to the gradual assimilation and eventual success of the Irish in this Country, we have already talked about.

I could go on about the Irish in Cleveland, but I think I have rambled on long enough. As an Irishman might put it: "I have had me say, and I thank you for your patience."

END

Acknowledgements:

Much of the material about Irish history, especially, the section on the settlement of Irish immigrants in Cleveland was taken from the book “Irish Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland”, by Rev. Nelson Callahan and William Hickey