

## “Monstrous Parades” and “Patriotic Celebrations”: Dynamic Cultural Identities of the Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Century Butte Irish

In his seminal book on the Irish community in Butte, Montana, historian David Emmons briefly describes Butte’s rather singular Saint Patrick’s Day parade of 1915. Emmons depicts this particular parade, the first St. Patrick’s Day since the Great War began, as curiously weaving specifically through the German and Austrian neighborhoods of Butte. The large Irish community marched alongside a smaller, but no less enthusiastic, cohort of German immigrants: “In this annual festival of an Irish saint... German, Irish, and American flags were carried, prompting one Butte newspaper to report... ‘for the first time in the history of the world, perhaps,’ the flags of three nations were flown on St. Patrick’s Day.” Most notable of all, Emmons points out that the following year, 1916, was the first in over a decade in which Butte’s St. Patrick’s Day festivities were canceled because of negative reactions from the previous year’s overt expression of Irish-German community alliance.<sup>1</sup> While Emmons used this anecdote to explain the relationships between the Irish and German immigrants in Butte at the start of the Great War, the incident also speaks to the dynamic nature of the Butte Irish community’s cultural identities.

Parades and public celebrations are particularly revealing of public values and interests in Butte, as evidenced by the Irish community’s renegotiation of their relationship with their German neighbors throughout the Great War. Two specific celebrations, St. Patrick’s Day and the Fourth of July, uncover significant information about the identities and values of the Irish community from the late nineteenth through early twentieth century. Using newspaper articles as well as archived letters and invitations, this paper examines the role of St. Patrick’s Day and Fourth of July public celebrations in negotiating the identity of the Butte Irish. The paper argues two conclusions: first, that the Butte Irish used these celebrations to continuously revise their ethnic identity over time, and second, that the Butte Irish community trended towards a proudly blended Irish American cultural identity as opposed to solely an Irish or American identity.

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Emmons. *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 348.