# ONE

A TRADITION
GROWS

On both sides of the Atlantic the Irish people have lived through the great transformations that have convulsed the modern era. Ten Irish generations over the last three centuries have experienced the reorganization of agricultural life, famine, and emigration. Political nationalism, guerrilla and civil war, and industrialization have swept through the life of this people. These movements have caused profound changes in their ancient island homeland and have scattered millions of Irishmen abroad. Beyond the seas the Irish concentrated in the cities of the new age, the enters of modernization with their novel patterns of human settlement and technical virtuosity. In these centers, especially the seaboard cities of Amer-ica, the people of Ireland found a haven from the recurrent tragedies that plagued their native land.

The city of Philadelphia is one of the urban centers to which Irish people came steadily, beginning in the seventeenth century. It is a city in which the kind of urban development that has been a central experience for millions of men in the modern world has been enacted. Beginning as a religious refuge and utopia, the city moved on to mercantile eminence, democratic revolution, and industrial greatness. Through it all the Irish continued to come, and their experience in the city constitutes a fascinating study.

To explore the growth of the ethnic tradition of the Irish in the city, it is necessary to review the conditions in Ireland that first compelled their emigration. The migration of the Irish to the American cities has been more than a change of place; it has been one chapter in a global development that has presented modern man with one of the most difficult problems of

his social experience—the transition from ancient folk cultures to the world of technology.

The Ireland from which a growing stream of emigrants parted for the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a deeply troubled country. Indeed, throughout most of the period during which the Irish have journeyed westward, the somber misfortunes and bitter struggles of Ireland have formed a grim background to the life of the immigrants in America. This is as true of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as of the nineteenth and twentieth. The history of national repression, poverty, and turbulence helps to explain the character of the Irish, their aspirations, and the stubborn idealism with which they defended themselves in the face of drastic challenges to their nationhood and to their very existence as a people. The characteristics of Irish society also conditioned the kind of adjustment emigrating Irishmen would make to other societies.

Few epochs of Irish history more morbidly illustrate human cruelty and distraction than the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the end of the Elizabethan period England, after repeated attempts at conquest, was on the verge of establishing full suzerainty over the Gaelic population that had doggedly resisted English rule for so long. In 1607 the chiefs of the Gaelic clans fled their native land, and the "Flight of the Earls" signaled the decline of a Celtic social order that had been ancient when the Romans had first encountered the men of Ireland at the fringes of their empire. The price of conquest was still to be paid by the common people, however, and its exaction tore the island asunder for many lifetimes. In 1611 the English Crown began planting the province of Ulster with Scots to displace the diehard Irish clansmen, and in 1641 the Gaels of Ulster rose in rebellion under the great Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill. There followed a repression so savage that the name of Cromwell the oppressor achieved a status of odium it has maintained among the Irish to this day.[1]

Again, at the end of the seventeenth century, the attempts of the Stuarts to regain the throne of England bred Irish rebellion and left Ireland with a heritage of religious hatred and a tortuous rack of penal laws that were a prodigious work of persecution.  Edmund Burke wrote of these laws as "a machine of wise and deliberate contrivance as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man."[2] All through this period the forces of oppression moved across the land, darkening the life of the country fearfully, and turning it, in the words of the Gaelic poet Aodhagan O'Rathaille, into "a land without stars."[3]  In 1641 Catholics still held 59 percent of the land; by 1688, 22 percent; by 1703, 14 percent.[4]  Families with venerable ties to Europe and a sense of historic power and prerogative were reduced to beggary and squalor in the 1700s.

The religious rancor that infected Ireland had its counterpart in England, and the Society of Friends was one of the groups upon which disfavor fell the most heavily.  Harassed and vilified in England, many Quakers sought refuge in Ireland, where their status, compared with that of the Roman Catholics, was relatively sheltered.5  But Neither in England nor in Ireland was there enduring security from the religious passion against Friends; hence America beckoned when their leader, William Penn, launched his "holy Experiment" of colonization.

William Penn himself had notable ties to Ireland.  He was converted to Quakerism there as a result of a sermon preached in Cork.  His view of the Catholic Gaels was distinctly critical in contrast to his general benignity.  Ironically, as a youth landing at Carreckfergus, his first impulse was to follow a military career in the turbulent island.  Later, as an alien landholder occupying areas that had been expropriated from Gaelic lords who had ruled them for ages, Penn found the Irish somewhat less than respectful of his property rights.[6]

Penn's American enterprise bore marks of the English experience in Ireland.  Even the Quaker reformer could not escape the influence of Irish struggles.  Philadelphia itself was laid out by Thomas Holme, who planned the town of Waterford, and the original plan with its streets and squares all at right angles was very like the garrison towns planted in military regularity throughout the conquered Ireland that England occupied.[7]  Although William Penn maintained a tolerant, even solicitous, view of the Indians, his successors and Pennsylvania non-Quakers took a harsher view that was similar to the prejudiced and bellicose English outlook on the Irish.  The Indians practiced the same kind of implacable hit-and-run warfare as the Irish, and their cultural difference and hostility lent itself to prejudicial interpretation.[8]

The record of Irishman as Philadelphian begins almost at the inception of the city as a settlement poised on the edge of the unexplored continent.  There were Irish Quakers and Quakers with Irish Catholic servants among the early colonists of Penn's enterprise.  Trade restrictions, crop failures, and religious disabilities induced Quakers to venture to America from Ireland.[9]  In 1729 the ship *George and Anne* made a grim passage from Dublin to Pennsylvania, with 100 of the passengers and crew dying on the voyage.[10]  In1736 an Irish captain complained of his ship's detention in Ireland prior to its passage to Pennsylvania; since destitute passengers owed their relentless landlords rent, the landlords had authorities detain the ship.[11]  Not all the immigrants were Quakers, or even Protestants.  There was in Ireland a brisk trade in the transportation overseas of convicts and other persons considered undesirable by the government.  Sheriffs of Irish counties received five pounds for each person transported but paid only three pounds for his passage.  They and other officials made a steady profit from this trade.  In an early case, the Philadelphia Court of Quarter Sessions was persuaded to free a girl named Anne Dempsey from her indenture when she was proved to have

been brought from Ireland illegally and against her consent and "Cruelly used on the Voyage."[12]

James Logan, the powerful agent of the Penn family, placed the following notice in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*:

> Run away from James Logan's Plantation near German Town the 28th Instant, an Irish Servant Lad, named Patrick, aged about 17 or 18 years, with straight dark hair, clothed with a double-breasted pea jacket, a brownish Kersey Coat, a pair of Leather briches, a good felt had, but he had other clothes with him.  Also a short Fowling Piece of a carbine length, or less.  He went in the company with one Miles Mac Ward.[13]

This well-equipped young man roving forth toward adventure in America was not unique.

The first Irish Philadelphians—servants, freemen, and runaways—were the beginnings of a long immigrant tradition. The first 150 years of the city's life stimulated and shaped this tradition, moving it through several phases before it was vastly enlarged by the immigration of the mid-nineteenth century. The colonial period with its servitude and strict class distinctions cast the Irish in the role of menials of a not-too-trustworthy character.  The period of the American Revolution, the building of the new nation, and the times of Jacksonian democracy would each make a particular contribution to the city's Irish tradition.

Philadelphia, with its reputation for religious tolerance, was attractive to many kinds of Irishmen.  In the eighteenth century the influx increased, and the vessels from Ireland were usually crowded with passengers.[14]  Among those entering Pennsylvania with alacrity were the so-called Scotch-Irish, a group that James Logan, administrator of the colony for the Penns, found very troublesome.  He called them "bold and indigent strangers."[15]  In the century and a half before 1850

most references to Irish people in Philadelphia refer to the
"Scotch-Irish," that is, Protestant, largely Presbyterian, emi-
grants from the North of Ireland.[16] These extraordinary peo-
ple exercised a strong influence on early American life, par-
ticularly on the frontier line from Pennsylvania south and
westward.  Having lived a garrison life in Ireland, they were
militant and restless.  Galvanized by a religious conviction that
stamped their character with perseverance and certitude, they
arrived in America whetted for the challenges of pioneering
life, most of them entering the country through Philadelphia.
Traduced by England into the perils of plantation existence
in Ireland, they had little love for the Crown, and when the
American Revolution occurred, they were quick to choose the
rebel side.  After the Revolution their exploits continued to
be part of a record of intrepid pioneer deeds.[17]

   The city that was to be the focus of much of the revolu-
tionary activity that would separate England from the richest
expanses of the New World was fairly large.  Warner esti-
mates that in 1776 the city and suburbs together contained
23,700 people.[18]  Only a small percentage of these were ser-
vants, among whom Irish Catholics were most likely to be
found.  That the Irish Catholics were, however, a recognizable
part of the city in pre-Revolutionary war years is indicated
by the presence of Irish taverns and churches.  The city con-
tained a number of Irish taverns by 1758, including Isabella
Barry's Faithful Irishman; the Jolly Irishman at Water and
Race Streets; and the Lamb, at Second and Lombard Streets,
owned by Francis O'Skullion.[19]   In view of Carl Briden-
baugh's judgment that the tavern was probably the most im-
portant and flourishing institution in colonial towns, the early
and lengthy role of the Irish as proprietors of taverns testifies
to the homely but significant socializing influences they ex-
erted.[20]  Houses such as that of Elizabeth McGauley on Nice-
town Road were used as informal chapels for itinerant priests,
but the Catholic Irish soon opened churches tucked discreetly
into the heart of the city.  Saint Joseph's Church was opened

in 1733 near Fourth and Walnut Streets; Saint Mary's, on Sough Fourth Street, in 1765.[21]   Thus, the city of Benjamin Franklin contained its modicum of Irish Catholics.

With the growth of antagonism between England and the American colonies, the disaffected Irish would find a cause to champion that was close to their hearts.  In Dublin the Protestant Ascendency class established a promising parliament between 1782 and 1800, and this body was an example of nationalist leadership  and eloquence that was not lost on alert men in the Irish provinces.  Beneath the Ascendency class was that "hidden Ireland," the landless, outcast Gaels.  If Anglo-Irish Protestants had grievances against England, the Gaels had enormous ones.  The American challenge to the Crown was a welcome inspiration to Irishmen in both Ireland and America, and Benjamin Franklin's visits to Dublin acquainted him with the widespread Irish enthusiasm for the American cause.[22]

In Philadelphia the Revolution had its epicenter, and the Irish in the city, both Protestant and Catholic, largely chose the rebel side.  It was not only the adventurous soldiers like Washington's young aide Colonel Jack Fitzgerald who responded, but businessmen like Thomas Fitz Simons and his brother-in-law, George Meade.  General Stephen Moylan as quartermaster general of Washington's army would labor long and hard to keep the rebels supplied with the materials needed to make war, while the tough Wexford-born sailor John Barry took the war against England to the high seas.  There has been considerable dispute about the part played by Irish Catholics in the Continental unit called the "Pennsylvania Line."   What is clear is that Irishmen of various religious persuasions formed from one-fourth to one-third of this unit, which was one of the most reliable that Washington had.  In addition to the local Irishmen, those form elsewhere were part of the Revolutionary ferment in Philadelphia.  General John Sullivan, on of Washington's most intrepid fighters, but also one of the most difficult subordinates, participated in the battle of Germantown when Washington sought to harass

the British during their occupation of the city. General Thomas Conway, whose name would long be associated with a suspected plot to oust Washington from command, was also at Germantown (Conway later had a brilliant record as a soldier in France). With such men, the Continentals held out until French assistance came, part of which consisted of contingents of the Irish Brigade under Berwick, Walsh, Fermoy, and Dillon.[23] The achievement of independence, and the role of Irishmen in attaining it, placed the Irish on a new footing in America. As time-tested foes of England, their traditional orientation against the interests of the Crown and colonialism endowed them with primary patriotic potential as citizens of the new republic.

The patriotism that later became such a strident characteristic of Irish-Americans owed much to the ardent deeds of the Irishmen of the Revolutionary war period. Almost alone among the groups that would later contribute multitudes of immigrants to the country, the Irish could count figures of their group in the dozens among the leaders of the Revolutionary period. This perhaps added to the distress they felt when in the nineteenth century they were accused of being subversive aliens or considered unwanted interlopers.

In the wake of the stunning success of the Americans, European notables came in growing numbers to view the marvel of the new republic. Some were unsympathetic. Thomas Moore, the once-liberal poet who became a Tory amid the flush of his success as a drawing room dandy, visited Philadelphia and penned,

> Alone by the Schuylkill the wanderer roved,
> And sweet were the flowery banks to his eye.

Moore, repelled by the raucous quality of life in the new nation, wrote,

> Take Christians, Mohawks, democrats and all
> From the rude wigwam to the congress-hall,

> From the savage, whether slav'd or free,
> To man the civilized, less tame then he—
> 'Tis one dull chaos, one infertile strife
> Betwixt half-polished and the half-barbarous life,
> Where  every ill the ancient world could brew
> Is mixed with every grossness of the new.[24]

Another visitor was Theobold Wolfe Tone, who came to Phila-delphia in 1796.  Tone's visit permitted him to negotiate fur-tively with French agents in behalf of his schemes for Irish revolution, but he feared he was being shadowed constantly in the city by English spies.  None, whose passionate devotion to Irish liberty and the ideals of the French Revolution would lead to his sacrifice of himself after a futile struggle against his country's English overlords, could not  help being inspired by the implications of the American achievement.[25]

If there were famous men who viewed America and left it, there were other men who stayed.  The new conditions of the busy city were expanding the aspirations of Philadelphians, and the opportunities of the country were bringing Irishmen of talent and conviction to the city.  These men were self-as-sured and competent; and, though contentious, they had con-siderable dignity.

Outstanding in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia was Mathew Carey, a publisher, a pioneer political economist, and an admirable person whose human sympathy was deeply aroused by the sufferings of the immigrant poor of the slums. Born in Dublin, the son of a well-to-do businessman, Carey early became involved in the radical republican plots of the 1780s.  He had to flee Ireland because of his writings against the government.[26]  Coming to Philadelphia, he began a long career of writing and publishing that addressed the foremost problems of his day.  His writings on economic policy helped to shape the commercial and industrial growth of the Com-monwealth of Pennsylvania.  His *Essays on Political Economy* set forth a detailed analysis of trade and argued for tariff

protection of American manufacturing.  In his *Emigration from Ireland and Immigration to the Untied States* he warned the Irish against dreams of an easy life in America.  His report "A Plea for the Poor," written in 1837, denounced the cruel conditions under which poor workers lived in the city.[27]  One critic denounced his democratic sympathy, saying, "The people, the people, the people, the people, I am tired of this unceasing and nauseating repetition.  If we are to have nothing but Paddy Carey played to us . . . let us have some variations."[28]  In addition to economics and politics, Carey was interested in the promotion of public schools.  His love of Ireland was memorialized in his book *Vindiciae Hibernicae; or, Ireland Defended*, a work written to refute the distortions of English historians dealing with his native country.  It is a furious, polemical book, fired with all the ardor of Carey's patriotism and learning.[29]  For all the force of his criticism and argument, Carey attained a stature that elevated him above the eccentric "agitators" of the time.  Such men, one of whom was Tomas Brannagan, were shrill figures well known in the city.  Born a Catholic, Brannagan was converted to evangelical Protestantism.  While a seaman he had seen the horrors of the slave trade, and he became one of Philadelphia's earliest abolitionists.  John Dougherty, a canal promoter and inventor, was the first to devise a scheme for transporting canal boats across the Allegheny Mountains.  Interested in many of the same questions as Mathew Carey, he became stigmatized as "Agitator Dougherty," an erratic rhetorician and disputant.[30]

Robert Walsh, son of Baron Shannon, became an admired figure among the educated elite of the city.  Walsh had French connections and a brilliant pen.  In 1820 he founded the *American Review of History and Politics*, on of the first learned journals in the country.  He also edited the *National Gazette*, a paper expressing strong abolitionist views.  Walsh served as professor of English and later as trustee of the University of Pennsylvania.  From 1844 to 1851 he was United States

consul in Paris.  As a writer and literateur he added considerable cultural distinction to Philadelphia.[31]

Another scholar, but a different kind, was Matthias O'Conway, a native of Galway City who had received some of his education in Spain.  O'Conway was a linguist and a translator, whose knowledge of French and Spanish took him to Havana and New Orleans.  After an unsuccessful attempt at Indian trading on the frontier, during which he learned Indian dialects, he settled in Philadelphia and worked as a poorly paid translator.  For years toward the end of his life O'Conway labored on a Gaelic dictionary, his chief interest, into which he poured his knowledge of Gaelic and seven other languages; it was the work of a scholar still linked to the splendid music of Gaelic poetry despite years of exile.[32]

In business some Irishmen managed to create rewarding careers for themselves.  One of these was Dennis Kelly, founder of Kellyville, Delaware County, six miles from the center of Philadelphia.  Arriving in America with the intention of going West, Kelly alighted with his wife from the westward-bound wagon because of the blaspheming of the driver.  He settled beside Darby Creek and after a period as a day laborer set up a weaving business.  His sales of bagging to the army in the War of 1812 enabled him to expand, and eventually he built a five-story mill and collected a whole village of weavers, spinners, and dyers around him.  The village of Kellyville was one of those mill villages in which the industrial revolution was enacted in miniature.  In the 1840s and 1850s Dennis Kelly and his son-in-law, Charles Kelly, conducted a thriving textile enterprise with a heavily Irish work force.  Both proprietors were great horse and cattle fanciers and breeders.  Living in their large houses, helping immigrants by the score with money and jobs, they were admired and respected.  They were more like easygoing landed gentlemen then capitalist manufacturers.  Each of the Kellys founded a Catholic parish in the area near his mill.[33]  From the poverty of their boyhood homes in Donegal, they rose to wealth in Pennsylvania.  With

other successful Philadelphia Irishmen such as Christopher O'Fallon, who had been born in Spain and had an estate in Delaware County, and Bernard McCredy, another cotton manufacturer, they made up a network of some affluence.

Some of the well-to-do Irish lived in the fashionable central area of the city. One of these was Baron John Keating, a veteran of the Irish Brigade, which had served the kings of France. The Keating family lived on South Fourth Street and had a large estate in Roxborough. John Keating was a confrere in banking with members of the Biddle family. Men like Keating were participants in the economic and cultural life of a city that was humming with activity as it moved toward industrialization. They were Irishmen quite capable of dealing with the wealthy and prestigious families of the Philadelphia upper class. They commanded the respect of the community, but their abilities and good fortune raised them above the difficulties confronting most of the immigrants. They formed their own circles for such occasions as the first reading in America, in 1806, of Robert Emmett's famous trial speech; they raised subscriptions for their Society for the Defense of the Catholic Religion from Calumny and Abuse.[34] The Keatings, Meades, Careys, McGills, and Kellys lived the good life of Philadelphia in the Federalist years.

The political life of the city was quickened by the assertiveness of Irishmen exploring and testing the limits of democracy for the first time. The ideals of the American Revolution, the ambitions of able men, and the grievances of those less able all contributed to Irish political involvement. The Irish of the city were generally allied with the Jeffersonian Republicans. Their disputes among themselves and with the Federalists produced fiery episodes. A riot occurred outside Saint Mary's Church in 1799 when Protestant Irishmen tried to get Catholics to sign a petition against the xenophobic Alien Act of 1798. This act and its companion, the Sedition Act were passed by the Federalists, who were frightened by the French Revolution and the Irish sympathy for its ideals.

Harrison Gray Otis, a Federalist champion, gave what was known as his "Wild Irish Speech," urging that America reject the entry of "the mass of vicious and disorganizing characters who cannot live peaceably at home," and warned of "hordes of wild Irishmen."  The term "Wild Irish" was usually applied to the Catholic Gaels, but Otis also feared the Protestant revolutionaries inspired by Wolfe Tone.  Uriah Tracy, a Federalist senator from Connecticut, found plenty of these in Pennsylvania; he called them "the most God-provoking democrats this side of hell."[35]

There ensued the Federalist prosecution of such tempestuous characters as New York editor John Daly Burk and the Vermont congressman Matthew Lyon, whose utterances in Philadelphia were inflammatory even in the context of the furious diatribes that passed for political commentary in those days.  There was also the trial of Patrick Lyon, no relative of the congressman, who was convicted under the Sedition Act. Lyon, a blacksmith, sued for redress and won reversal of his conviction and damages.  With a part of the compensation he eventually had John Neagle paint a full-length portrait of him in his smithy against the background of the Walnut Street prison where he had been unjustly incarcerated.  Such was the revenge of one civil libetarian.[36]  These episodes etched deeply the agitated image of the "Wild Irishman"; upper-class Philadelphians could agree with Sir Augustus Foster, a resident British diplomat, who wrote of "a motley set of imported grumblers from Dublin which is disgusting."  But in Philadelphia, "the insolence of the Boors" was restrained by the justices of peace, "who never spared them when they were to be fined for some act of Brutality."[37]

Despite the misgivings of such patronizing British visitors, the Irish responded with order when order was demanded. When the city was threatened by the British during the War of 1812, contingents of Irishmen numbering over two thousand assembled at five in the morning to march to Blockley Township across the Schuylkill where they labored without pay to

build the fortifications erected there for the city by the Committee of Defense.[38]

The impact of the Irish on the politics of the city during the early nineteenth century extended beyond alarms and agitation. They were adding a new dimension to politics, a dimension that was to help in the evolution of the party system. By 1800 there were over five thousand Irish-born in the city.[39] Many of these were veterans of the Irish Volunteers, a group that had led the rising in Ireland in 1798. With the failure of this insurrection, many of them had fled to the United States. John Binns was representative of this group. Born in Dublin, he had been arrested as a young man for revolutionary activity, and after two years' imprisonment, he came to the Untied States in1801. He first edited the *Republican Argus*, then the *Democratic Press*. Although a Protestant, his paper spoke to and for Irishmen of all backgrounds in its campaigns for the extension of democratic rights.[40] As another editor and publisher, Catholic Mathew Carey, wrote, concerning the case to be made for political liberty in Ireland and the United States, "There are in the United States thousands and tens of thousands of liberal and enlightened men, who only require to have the fair and holy form of truth placed before their eyes, properly authenticated, to have them clasp it to their bosoms."[41]   but this elevated doctrine was constantly being challenged by men whose sufferings or partisan interests drove them to frantic protests. Wolfe Tone had found the poorer Irish of the city "actively troublesome." Their political penchant and factious energy drew sharp criticism. As early as 1792 one H. H. Breckenridge felt compelled to place in his novel *Modern Chivalry* a passage headed "How the Bog-Trotter Is Nearly Elected to the Legislature." The satire tells of Teague O'Regan, an illiterate servant overly fond of whiskey, who confounds his master by being nominated for public office, and also by being invited to join the American Philosophical Society. The *Erin*, a well-edited Philadelphia newspaper, belied the illiterate image assigned to the Irish. It

sought in 1832 to expose "the machinations of those who have degraded the name and trampled the liberties of Ireland."[43]

The republic was building, and the work to be done strained the backs of immigrant and native alike. Frederick Marryat noted that the Irish might have been the most troublesome immigrants, but they were also the most valuable, providing the labor for those enterprises, called "internal improvements," that were extending the communications and gathering the resources of the new nation. He noted also of the Irish workers that they "hold themselves completely apart and distinct, living with their families in the same quarter of the city and adhering to their own manners and customs."[43] He found them a formidable group—clannish, politically sensitive, and intolerant of interference. In the alleys where they lived, conditions did not breed tolerance. In 1832 a citizens' committee found in a workers' area near the Delaware River fifty-five families without a single privy for their use. Mathew Carey wrote in 1829 that the hardest working among the city's poor earned only $58 a year and had to spend $39 of this for rent and fuel.[44] As early as 1818 Irish societies in the city had asked for land on which to settle immigrants, but the call went unheeded.[45] Crowding and misery increased as the tidy Quaker town changed into a raucous city.

The pressures brought to bear upon the Irish minority by the primitive industrialization of the city produced an acute crisis for them, and they responded with a rising turbulence that focused on religious, economic, and political issues. The disturbances began with a bitter religious dispute in the 1820s at Saint Mary's Church. The "Hogan Schism," as it was called, was led by Father William Hogan, who induced a group of parishioners to oust their bishop and install a lay-dominated trustee system for parish control. This was in part an attempt by Catholics to imitate the lay influence common among Protestant congregations. "Trusteeism" flamed into a major issue in the young American Catholic church, and its